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“MUSLIM AMERICAN POLITICAL BEHAVIOR”

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A FIELD PAPER TO FULFILL THE REQUIREMENTS OF  
A SELF-DEFINED FIELD IN

“RELIGION AND POLITICS”

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## I. Research Focus

Religion has a central role in the United States. Unlike other countries where one or two faiths occupy much of the public and private spheres, the American religious tapestry constantly changes. “In the United States, religions restlessly shift, split, and spread in a kind of ecclesiastical uproar,” wrote Morone (2003, 3). “The nation develops not from religious to secular but from revival to revival.” Unfortunately, these religious “realignments” don’t happen organically; rather, they are often a consequence of public unhappiness over immigration; “new people keep arriving, and each new immigrant stirs fear of moral decline” (3). This phenomenon arises because Americans don’t look at religions merely as doctrine or as “intellectual abstractions, but as particular sets of embodied practices and material engagements” (Weiner 2014, 159). Almost every wave of immigration to the United States, has triggered a nativist movement that has claimed that the new arrivals are not only *not* American, but have religious practices that don’t fit into the understanding at the time of good religion. In a prescient warning, Morone (2003, 495), writing two years after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, asked, “Who might it be this time? Moslems? Arab Americans? Critics of the patriotic majority?”

The American Muslim community is extraordinary diverse. For Smith (2010), it is “a unique blend of immigrants, African Americans, and other American-born populations ... [and] is becoming increasingly heterogeneous as it both grows and takes its place as a recognized religion in the American cultural milieu” (28). There are now “more Hindus than Unitarians, more Muslims than Congregationalists, and more Buddhists than Jews” (Waldman 2008, 190). As of 2001, there were as many Muslims in the U.S. as there were Episcopalians, and Presbyterians (Hutchison 2003, 224). For Khan (2005), “American Muslims have reached a

critical mass. This gives them a presence that promises influence in the mainstream society, and a visibility that also attracts a backlash, as people fear its growth and influence” (127).

While Muslims have lived in America since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, initially brought to America through the West African slave trade, the debate over the inclusion or exclusion of Muslims from the civil body politic has only been a focus of academia since 2001 (Curtis 2009). Bukhari et al. (2004) identify five stages of the development of Islam in America: “the pre-Columbian, the antebellum, the postbellum up to World War II, the postwar period up to September 11, 2001, and the post-9/11 periods.” The terrorist attacks on 9/11 coupled with the televised appeals of President George W. Bush to publicly state that the terrorists were not acting in the name of Islam followed by the American Muslim response to his presidency (Naber 2008b, Ayers 2007, Khan 2005), engendered the mobilization of the American Muslim community: “the events of 9/11 put the onus on Muslims, irrespective of gender, religiosity, or national origin, to reassess their collective presence in the United States” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2005, 26). A wave of scholarship also effectively created Muslim American political behavior as a subfield of study. This is not to say that American Muslims were not studied before 9/11, but there was a new need to understand this community. For Moore (2014a, 138), “Although they make up a remarkably small percentage of the overall population, the way Muslims are viewed by the general public is vitally important, and the level of attention paid to American Muslims belies their modest number.”

The purpose of this field paper is an attempt to locate, evaluate, and critique the extant literature on Muslim political behavior with the objective of creating a basis for future hypothesis generating. I have two primary research questions. First, how does Islam fit into American religious and political history, particularly in debates on religious freedom? Second, what are the

consequences of Muslim religious affiliation, identity, and internal divisions when it comes to political behavior and how can these indicators help us to create hypotheses that can be used to explain the behavior of Muslim voters, as well as candidates? What makes this topic even more salient is the diversity of the Muslim American<sup>1</sup> community, split and fractured as it is along racial, ethnic, linguistic, and gender lines. Borrowing from Mazrui (2004, 117), how have Muslims in the United States handled the “three cultural crises relevant to their roles as citizens: the crisis of identity, the crisis of participation, and the crises of values and code of conduct”?

This field paper begins with a discussion of Islam in an American historical context, followed by a focus on Muslim American political participation, before and after 9/11. I distinguish between individual political participation and some of the acts it might entail (including voting, campaign donations, and running for office), and group-based political participation (at the mosque level as well as among interest groups and PACs). Then, borrowing from Mazrui (2004), I present four nodes of interpreting Muslim American political behavior: national origins (for immigrants), religious affiliations, racial categories, and questions of identity, with a special discussion of the post-9/11 phenomenon of racialization that has deeply affected the Muslim community’s identity. Each of these nodes presents a unique lens through which American Muslim political participation can be viewed. I conclude by discussing the recent resurgence of Islamophobia and reflect upon the Muslim American community’s political progress, fifteen years after the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001.

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<sup>1</sup> I will be using “Muslim American” and “American Muslim” interchangeably, while avoiding the hyphenated “Muslim-American” and “American-Muslim.” It is important to mention that Na’im (2014) drew a distinction between “American Muslim” and “Muslim American,” arguing that the former better denotes “citizens who self-identify as Muslims” (4).

## II. Islam and American Religious Pluralism

To understand the political behavior of American Muslims also requires a baseline understanding of how Islam “fits” into American pluralism political culture. *Before* 2001, Muslims were seen as members of the pluralistic society, who may still have been understood, but were at least respected as having a historical presence in the United States dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Hammer and Safi 2013). *After* 2001, it was as if Islam had never existed in America. “Islam enters the American imagination as a ‘strange’ thing,” wrote Bilici (2012, 2). “It appears as a distant thing that has been brought near. It causes anxiety and fear.”

Some might also say that evaluating the politics of American Muslims is also an attempt to explore the not-so-gentle ways in which pluralism, both religious and political, exists in the United States. For Weiner (2014), religious boundaries “have been carefully regulated throughout U.S. history, both overtly through punitive legal measures and more tacitly through widely shared social norms” (3). Further, he said it is the government, whether at the local, state, or federal level, through laws and legal action, which has decided throughout American history that certain groups would be given more religious space in America, and “ensuring that religion would happen only in those times and places authorized by the state” (7).

Islam has a long history in the United States. In his detailed work on the subject, Curtis (2009) uses the biographies of several Muslim slaves brought from Africa to the American South to illustrate the presence of Islam in slave-holding areas. Men like Omar ibn Sayyid, Job Ben Solomon (né Ayuba Suleiman Diallo), and Abd al-Rahman Ibrahima were not only Muslim, but were also learned scholars who had often memorized Qur’an as well as studies other Islamic topics. Their scholarly upbringing had an impact on public opinion towards not only slavery, but

also Islam. The other consequence of Islam's arrival in the South was its manifestation in local religious practices. According to Curtis (2009), "One of the difficulties more generally in reconstructing religious life among African American slaves is figuring out when and where African Americans transformed certain African practices to suit their new environment or to meet new social needs. At times, it is clear that slaves combined the old with the new" (19).

Issues of Muslim citizenship and political practice were discussed even by Thomas Jefferson, who often referenced Muslims as a religious group to whom, he believed, should be given the same rights as others. For Spellberg (2013, x), "The concept of the American Muslim as citizen is quintessentially evocative of our national ideals. Indeed, the inclusion of Muslims as future citizens in early national political debates demonstrates a decided resistance to the idea of what some would still imagine America to be: a Christian nation." Writing about John Locke in 1776, Thomas Jefferson penned, "[He] said 'neither Pagan nor Mahamedan [Muslim] nor Jew ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion'" (Spellberg 2013, 3). Hammer and Safi (2013) and Spellberg (2013) mentioned the 1788 North Carolina Ratification Convention where the issue of Islam also appeared, and in the context of the possibility of a Muslim president. On July 30<sup>th</sup> of that year, William Lancaster of North Carolina, mentioned the possibility of "Mahometans" running for president, and being okay with it (Hammer and Safi 2013, 1). While Spellberg (2013) noted that colonial references to Islam were drawn from European texts, and not because of any specific interest in Islamic thought, it is important to recognize that Jefferson, as one of the architects of American independence, was at least aware of Islam. Anti-Islamic sentiment has also been in America for a long time. Spellberg (2013) recounted a 1788 speech by a Worcester, Massachusetts-based Anti-Federalist, who said,



“There is a door opened for Jews, Turks, and Heathens to enter into publick office and be seated at the head of the government of the United States” (159).

Moving past early colonial history, Curtis (2009) does recount several examples of events and/or people in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century who constantly renewed American public interest in Islam over time. Figures like Alexander Russell Webb, Inayat Khan, Ahmed Osman, Fazlur Rahman, Shamim Siddiqui, and later, Amina Wadud and Eboo Patel, all form part of the American Muslim tapestry that Curtis (2009) might argue “proves” the essential Americanness of Islam.

The right to religious liberty, as specified in the First Amendment, is usually the first point mentioned whenever a discussion about the right for a religious group arises. But how is religious liberty or freedom defined and why does that matter? According to Gill (2008), “religious freedom is a matter of government regulatory policy and can touch on issues as diverse as citizenship requirements and land-use restrictions” (10). But the deeper question, he posited, is how can we tell if a country has religious freedom to begin with. The problem is that we often conceive of the freedom of religion as “a simple dichotomy – that is, it is something that a nation either possesses or does not possess ... in reality [it] is a large umbrella concept that covers a wide array of policies that affect worshipers, clergy, and spiritual institutions” (9). Taken from this new understanding, he argued that one of the oft-repeated tropes about early American history is false – the myth of early American religious freedom – which sets the stage for later beliefs, also false, that religious liberty has always existed in the United States, and has been applied equally to all groups. While some of the earliest American settlers arrived with the goal of establishing a religious colony, the real story is that England used immigration to populate the American colonies with “religious nonconformists” (Gill 2008, 92).

Another myth related to that era was that Americans of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries saw commonality in faith (Waldman 2008). By 1820, in fact, the landscape was already quite diverse, and church attendance was already low! Accordingly,

“To modern eyes, colonial America might seem uniform. Except for an inconsequential smattering of Jews, everyone was Christian. But to the colonists, the influx of exotic new faiths and the schisming of old meant a highly fragmented religious landscape. It would take a while to sink in, but patriot leaders came to understand the facts on the ground: There was no dominant faith, and there likely would never be one” (2008, 44).

In her work on pluralism in the United States, Moore (2007) defined it in the following way:

“A particular set of social processes emanates from the demand of modernity that we embrace diversity while maintaining a common life. This can be understood as pluralism as a normative ideology of inclusion and tolerance” (117). However, she continued in that piece to say that in the post-9/11 landscape, Muslims were, in fact, stuck in the situation of experiencing “pluralism under exceptional circumstances” (119). First, the American Muslim community is in the unwanted situation of being targeted by the government and public as the source of a major and invasive form of domestic terrorism. This has created a state of exception where Islam has been excluded from the popular reckoning of civil religion as a decidedly uncivil one. Second, American Muslims must contend with the understanding that both Islam and American-style liberalism are both universalistic and both claim to be defining and singularly dominant worldviews. For Moore, “How can a worldview that is considered to be totalizing and universal accommodate another worldview of similar conceit?” (2007, 119).

This matters, Moore (2007) has argued, because post-9/11 Muslim American identity will be as much of a product as intra-community dialogue as it will be the “convictions and behaviors ascribed to Muslims by others” (123). Perhaps the most dominant frame in the literature on this topic is the seemingly intractable belief that Islam is, at its core, antithetical to American popular

culture. In the opinion of Spellberg (2013), “American Muslims were in fact victimized twice by the attacks: once by the criminals who profaned their faith by their violent actions, and a second time, by many of their fellow citizens who suspected their loyalty” (280).

One incident that painfully illustrated this inimical belief was the 2004 Hamtramck controversy over a Michigan mosque’s desire to broadcast the adhān (Muslim call to prayer) over loudspeakers. In his discussion of the petition by the al-Islāh Islamic Center in Hamtramck, Weiner (2014) interviewed locals and nicknamed the most vocal opponents of the adhān issue the “Exclusivists.” They simply wanted Islam, and its adherents, out of Hamtramck. “Their objection to this particular public sound was inextricably linked to their animosity toward those who produced it ... the adhān could not be allowed to sound, they argued, if the Islamic ‘threat’ was to be contained. To permit its practice would be to capitulate to those who sought America’s demise” (171). Weiner (2014) distilled their arguments to the three points: Islam was a reminder of 9/11, Islam is a significant change in America, and “opposition to the adhān was linked to their belief that Islam posed an existential threat to America’s Christian heritage and identity” (173).

If Islam wasn’t understood before 9/11, then the event has created as much knowledge as it has tension. This has resulted in the “social distance” seemingly insurmountable between Muslims and non-Muslims, with the latter seeing the former as a domestic threat to a certain way of life (Cainkar 2010, 179). Bukhari et al. (2004) have gone so far as to say that “the events of 9/11 have revised the patterns of assimilation of immigrants into American culture and society” (xix).

### III. Muslim American Political Participation

#### a) Introduction

Every religious minority in the United States has struggled to create its own identity in terms of the degree to which political involvement is sanctioned by religious authority. What makes the political “story” of American Muslims so intriguing is the dilemma they faced, particularly after 9/11, when they were ostracized for not speaking out against terrorism, but then silenced when they attempt to do said speaking (Smith 2010, Haddad and Ricks 2009, Khan 2005). “How, they wonder,” asked Smith (2010, 32), “is it possible to speak out when they disagree with certain U.S. policies without being branded as terrorists or asked by fellow citizens why they don’t ‘go home.’” For Khan (2005),

“The determination of the American Muslim community to make an impact on the political, theological, and cultural scene on North America, and the growing fear and prejudice against Islam and Muslims in the United States, has created a unique situation for Muslims. Unlike Protestants, Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and others, American Muslims do not yet have a place in American society” (128).

The first waves of Muslim immigrants to the United States were not politically active. For Smith (2010), the lack of participation was not due to a lack of interest, but religious doctrine: “Often unsure whether Islamic law actually allowed them as minority Muslims in a majority secular culture to engage in political activity, they often chose not to vote and rarely ran for political office” (Smith 2010, 33). Leonard (2003) has also suggested that early opposition to political participation usually came from African American Muslim groups as well as Arabs who placed ethnic identification over a religious one. McCloud (2006) is one of the rare voices that firmly disagrees with this sentiment. Immigrant Muslims did not get involved in politics, she has argued, because they were too focused on recreating their homelands *in* the United States. They were active, but only in setting up a Muslim religious presence in America, when they could

have been building a media and government presence as other communities have done (131). In her words, “Many immigrant Muslims came to America as transnationals without any specific plans to participate, or to engage publicly, in the society. What they found out, however, was that nonparticipation in American society is unwise since it is a society where religions compete for recognition and political clout” (131).

Pre-9/11 scholarship tended to focus on the behaviors of specific groups like Arab Muslims (Johnson 1991), internal divisions within the American Muslim community (Esposito 1998, Khan 1998), or in Muslim communities in specific locations (Johnson 1994). In a rare discussion of voting and partisanship during the Clinton era, Haddad (2001) has remarked that Muslims had a love-hate relationship with President Clinton. First, Muslims saw Clinton as being too pro-Israel, which contrasted with President George H. W. Bush, who was supportive of “good Muslims” versus the “bad Muslim” (i.e. Saddam Hussein). Later, they changed their opinion after the first Muslim chaplain was commissioned in the military in 1993, followed by the nomination of the first Muslim ambassador and then federal judge, and lastly, personal invitations to prominent Muslims to attend *Eid iftars* at the White House. But, Muslim public opinion shifted again after Clinton gave Executive Order 12947, which made it illegal for U.S. citizens to donate money to Palestinian organizations, and after Clinton signed into law the 1996 Anti-Terrorism and Affective Death Penalty Act (Haddad 2001).

In one of the rare discussions of American Muslim identity *before* 2001, Esposito (1998) pondered that even though most Americans still were unsure if Muslims belonged, “many Muslims have not solved the problem of the relationship of their faith to national identity either: will they remain Muslims in America or become American Muslims” (3). The challenge facing the remarkably diverse community was dealing with “the push and pull, tension and conflict,

between tradition and change” (4). Yet, there was still a sense of optimism leading in the community, culminating in the 2000 presidential election. American Muslims had convinced themselves, said Khan (2005),

“their votes had made the difference in Florida, and Muslims were primarily responsible for placing George W. Bush, their choice, in the White House. Many American Muslims believed it was just a matter of time before the American Muslim population would outpace other groups in American society. Thus, they believed they would soon become a very powerful political force, enabling Islam to manifest itself in its truest form in America” (137).

The 9/11 fallout for American Muslims was swift and unprecedented. Their “courtship” with President Bush ended quickly, despite his September 20<sup>th</sup> speech, where he said, “We respect your faith. It’s practiced freely by many millions of Americans. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah.”<sup>2</sup> In the weeks, months, and years following 9/11, Muslims responded to a series of issues that that affected them more than other groups; these included the passage of the PATRIOT Act; wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; the establishment of “enemy combatant” status; the Abu Ghraib prison scandal; and abuse and Qur’an desecration in the Guantanamo Bay prison (Abdo 2005). America became, for all intents and purposes, “anti-Saracen (anti-Arab, anti-Muslim)” (Haddad and Ricks 2009, 22).

In much of her work, Jamal (2010) has pointed out the double standards set for Muslims. They not only have to defend Islam from those who would slander and libel their faith, but must also play the game of assimilation to be accepted as Americans. Worse, Muslim Americans must represent *all* global Muslims, even as the foreign actions only lead to more stereotypes of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/quotes/george-w-bush-addresses-muslims-in-the-aftermath-of-the-9-11-attacks>

Muslims at home. Identification matters: “It is assumed that Muslim Americans who characterize themselves primarily as Muslim are more likely to lack loyalty to American democracy” (Jamal 2010, 99). As Moore (2002) has cogently stated it, “While the *intent* of the American creed may be to offer sanctuary for the world’s exiles and refugees, and to uphold equal treatment, the *outcome* of public policy, and of the public will, is altogether less generous” (40).

a) Individual Political Participation

If the American Muslim community was regarded as disorganized or chaotic before the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, then the adjective to describe the group since would have to be “unified” – it gave recognition to Muslims “as a political group” where none existed (Ayers 2007, 188). According to Mazrui (2004), American Muslims surprised many by not cowering in the corner after 9/11, and becoming more involved. They “cannot afford to be political neutral ... they should reward the party that has helped them and punish a party that betrays their interests” (129). The post-9/11 American Muslim political movement has been so powerful that it has been viewed as a revival of sorts for the whole community, and one that was already underway but has mirrored a “worldwide Islamic revival” (Abdo 2005, 9). One of the sources of this new strength has also been the role played by American-born Islamic scholars (Abdo 2005, Leonard 2002). Perhaps the most prominent of them is the White convert to Islam, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf (born Mark Hanson), who, along with others, “are searching for ways to apply the holy texts to the modern conditions in which they live in the West” (Abdo 2005, 11).

Not all scholars agree with the notion of post-9/11 unity. Khan (2005) argued that there were at least *three* types of behaviors exhibited by Muslims after the terrorist tragedies. He referred to the first type as “Muslim Isolationists”; they regarded any foreign policy by the U.S. as just an extension of a history of imperialism, and wanted nothing to do with the U.S. government. This

group actively also tried to prevent the second type, the “Muslim Democrats,” from participating in the political process. This group, wrote Khan (2005), were not so named because of their support for the Democratic Party, but more because of their desire to become involved in American politics because they supported this country’s view of democracy. The third group was identified by Khan as the “Muslim Assimilators,” and they represented “those American Muslims from the senior generation who chose assimilation, i.e. ‘normalization,’ into mainstream American culture, rather than challenging what assimilation entailed” (2005, 138). Of these three groups, Khan (2005) alleged that it was the “Muslim Democrats” who were the most successful because they adopted a version of Putnam’s (1988) “two-level games.” While the original theory was one of international negotiation and the two stages of negotiation (first and ratification (second), Khan (2005) did a nice job of applying to Putnam (1988) to the issue of post-9/11 Muslim participation. In this case, the “Muslim Democrats” first engaged in “internal debate about its [their] self-identity, norms, and values ... who it is (identity) and what it wants (interests)” (144 – 145). Then, this group succeeded in the “transmission of the identity and interests to the Civic Public Form” (145).<sup>3</sup>

(i) Partisanship and Voting

Of all presidential elections, the 2000 contest between George W. Bush and Al Gore seems to have been the tipping point for Muslim American political participation. There is almost a consensus among scholars that 2000 represented the first time the American Muslim community voted as a bloc to elect a candidate, Bush, seen as most beneficial to the community’s interests (Smith 2010, Barreto and Bozonelos 2009, Abdo 2005, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2005, Khan 2005, Leonard 2002). Why were Muslims so keen to support Bush’s

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<sup>3</sup> The Civic Public Forum is “the realm for legitimate government action and the forum for public debate about the extents and limits of legitimate government action” (McGraw 2005, 14).



first campaign? The literature points to two possibilities. First, American Muslims have tended to be more socially conservative than other religious minorities. Mazrui (2004) and Leonard (2003) noted that American Muslims have historically seen themselves as keen supporters of “family values”-oriented candidates and campaigns, and in the 2000 election, led to their identification with evangelicals, Baptists, and Mormons (103). A second theory is that Muslims put their support behind Bush because he, and the Republican Party, were seen at the time as less supportive of Israel (and consequently, Israeli policy towards Palestine) compared to the Democratic Party and Gore with his past voting record and his choice of Senator Joseph Lieberman as his running mate (Barreto and Bozonelos 2009, Haddad 2001). In the opinion of Barreto and Bozonelos (2009, 204), “If any one issue has the ability to unite Muslim-Americans of all backgrounds, it is the plight of the Palestinian people and the status of the Occupied Territories.” Haddad (2001, 91) has claimed 90 percent of Muslim voters in Florida supported Bush. Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2005) wrote, “Given the close vote count in Florida, the Muslim diaspora in the United States claimed credit for putting George W. Bush in the White House” (16).

The Muslim love affair with Bush ended quickly. By some estimates, Muslims already felt cheated by Bush and Cheney’s empty campaign promises by the summer of 2001, a few months *before* 9/11 (Haddad 2001). By the time the dust settled on September 11<sup>th</sup>, Muslims had lost their influence on the presidency, which would only return in the 2004 election when the community saw a vindication of sorts in the Kerry campaign. Barreto and Bozonelos (2009) examined Muslim party identification between 2000 and 2008 in seven surveys and the data is devastating. While the same sizes ranged, Muslim American identification with the Republican Party dropped from 72 percent in 2000 to eight percent in 2008; Democratic identification shot

from eight percent to just under fifty percent; and independent or non-identification also rose, but only from 19 to 36 percent (205). In the same study, Barreto and Bozonelos (2009) also fielded an original survey to Muslims in four states to examine what factors predicted party identification. Their findings indicated that increases in perceptions in linked fate, and income separately, were inversely proportional to Republican identification; and being foreign-born, as well as education level, were directly proportional to Democratic identification.

Ayers (2007) compared two datasets: a 2000 Pew national survey (conducted by Zogby), which asked respondents if they had voted for Bush, Gore, Pat Buchanan, or Ralph Nader; and Georgetown University's 2004 Muslim Americans in the Public Square (MAPS) Project, which was fielded before the general election that year, and asked respondents if they would vote for George W. Bush/Dick Cheney or John Kerry/John Edwards. Ayers (2007) examined religion-related independent variables including religious commitment, traditionalism, and salience, all coded dichotomously, to see if there was some correlation between religious beliefs and partisan support. His findings were staggering. Not only did 96.7 percent of Muslims who voted for Gore said they would vote for Kerry, but Ayers (2007) calculated an 84.1 percent shift in support from Bush to Kerry.

Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2005) also used the 2004 MAPS Study, and compared it with the 2001 Zogby Poll of Muslim Americans. In the 2001 poll, 79 percent of the Muslim Americans polled said they had registered to vote, and self-identified their partisanship as 40 percent Democrat, 28 percent Republican, and 32 percent Independent. By 2004, 88 percent of respondents said they were *likely* to vote, 50 percent identified as Democrat, and only 12 percent Republican. Further, only 7 percent said they would vote for Bush/Cheney, compared to 76 percent who intended on voting for Kerry/Edwards (25).

Jamal (2010) analyzed 2007 Pew data on Muslim Americans and determined that demographics play a huge part in understanding voting behavior. “Specifically, those Muslims who are older, more educated, born in the U.S. are more likely to have exercised their right to vote,” which is a pattern seen with other immigrants as well (103). But, she has indicated two sets of finding that are *contrary* to other studies. First, she argued that three factors often posited as being positively correlated to increases in participation – level of religiosity, self-identification, and experiences with discrimination – were *not* significant (103). Second, and perhaps most startling, “Muslims born in the United States are less satisfied with life in the U.S. than are immigrants ... what emerges in this analysis is a story about dissatisfaction among those groups that, according to our conventional wisdom, should be more satisfied” (105).

Using a combination of national data (a 2004 Zogby poll) and local interviews, Jalalzai (2009)’s work offered a thorough understanding of American Muslim political participation. First, her analysis of the national data revealed the following patterns. While Muslim women and South Asian Muslim men *and* women were less likely to visit political websites, and follow politics in general, being American born was the greatest predictor of interest in political websites and politics, as well as likelihood of identifying with a political party, attending a rally, signing a petition, or volunteering on a campaign. Higher levels of education were also positively related to participation via rallies, petitions, and campaign volunteering (174). For her local interviews, she visited four, St. Louis-area mosques – two with mixed South Asian and Middle Eastern congregations, one majority Bosnian, and one majority African American – and conducted 45 interviews as well as attended prayers and lectures (180). Her findings among the St. Louis Muslims revealed additional important information. First, while a few of the South Asian respondents self-identified as Republican the majority said they were Democrats. Second,

most Black Muslims did *not* experience the shift in partisanship after 9/11 that has been such a staple of the literature, while South Asian and Middle Eastern Muslims did. In fact, some of her respondents were unaware of the 2000 “Bush bloc” (186). Third, most of the Bosnians she interviewed did not feel like they still understood American politics, and had not been in the United States long enough. Fourth, some of the respondents said they were also *not* influenced after 9/11 as most of the literature also suggests, or that their enthusiasm faded. Per one Syrian American woman in her sample: “I used to be really interested in politics, and especially right after September 11<sup>th</sup>. But then there was a kind of disappointment that things really don’t change ... How was I going to change things? Others have tried before, and I figured that I could spend my energy on other things that led me closer to Islam” (184). Based on these results, Jalalzai concluded by saying that in her opinion, “September 11<sup>th</sup> made Muslims realize how absolutely vulnerable they are and how they have absolutely no voice in the political system or in the media or in academics” (2009, 188).

(ii) Running for Office

There is a small but growing literature on the experiences of Muslim Americans running for elective office, as well as the public’s responses, both actual and experimental, to the likelihood of support for Muslim American candidates. While 9/11 spurred Muslims into political participation, it also caused a dramatic drop in the number of candidates; from approximately 700 Muslims who ran for office in 2000, only a hundred attempted to do so in 2004 (Haddad and Ricks 2009, 23). 152 of the 700 Muslims who ran for office in 2000 were successful (with 92 winning local seats in Texas alone), but by 2002, there were only 70 candidates, nation-wide (Jamal and Albana 2013, 114-115).

How can Muslims win political office in a country where is so much voter ignorance and racism? Abdo (2005) uses the candidacy of Palestinian-American Maad Abu Ghazala to

illustrate this point. Abu Ghazala lost a 2003 congressional primary race for California's 12<sup>th</sup> district to Tom Lantos, a Holocaust survivor. When Ghazala's heritage became known to voters, there was widespread displeasure voiced by residents who refused to support him. Haddad and Ricks (2009) still see this as an excuse. 9/11 may have been an elephantine setback, but "until the time that Muslim candidates run and succeed with greater frequency, American Muslims will have to hope for non-Muslim representatives who are sympathetic to their interests and issues" (28). According to Jamal and Albana (2013, 115), "Strong Christian-Zionist groups attack pro-Palestinian candidates, while neocons/ Republicans/ conservatives attack on the premise of national security issues, claiming that Muslims may want to overthrow the United States government if they grow in strength. In most cases, Muslims are attacked because it works."

In a series of works, Sinno (2014, 2009) and Braman and Sinno (2009), have repeatedly asked if Muslim Americans have higher median incomes and levels of education than other immigrants, why has that not translated to running for office? Sinno (2009) defines a Muslim parliamentarian "if he or she is Muslim by faith or has at least one parent who is Muslim or belongs to a group that is traditionally Muslim" (70). In comparison to other countries like Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, the United States seems to have a woeful underrepresentation of Muslims. There were no Muslims in the 109<sup>th</sup> Congress (2005 – 2006), even though Muslims formed two percent of the total U.S. population (which he contrasts with Catholics who formed 13 percent of the total population, but formed 16 percent of Congress) By 2009, however, there would be one Muslim Member of Congress (Keith Ellison from Minnesota, who assumed office in 2007) and four state legislators (Sinno 2009, 78). As of 2013, there were two Muslims in Congress – Ellison and Andre Carson from Indiana.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/11/16/faith-on-the-hill-the-religious-composition-of-the-113th-congress/>

Sinno (2009) did provide a disclaimer that he did believe the Muslim community had or should have one common platform or that their interests would be better served, at least descriptively, by a Muslim versus a non-Muslim politician. But, he has repeatedly questioned in his work as to why there aren't more Muslims in elective office (2014, 2009). This is also surprisingly because there is a palpable, post-9/11 buzz in the Muslim community, especially in the context of voting and mobilization, but not with running for office (Sinno 2014). He suggested three possible barriers to Muslim American electoral exclusion: low political knowledge among Muslims; counterattacks by pro-Israel and evangelical lobbies; and general hostility towards Muslims. But, the combination is the insurmountable wall:

“I argue that while electoral systems and popular hostility toward Muslims alone do not explain much, the combination of large majoritarian districts with even a moderate level of popular hostility towards members of the geographically diffuse minority is sufficient to explain American Muslim underrepresentation” (Sinno 2009, 70).

Braman and Sinno (2009) devised an experimental design to test bias and discrimination. They created fictional biographies and policy statements about hypothetical Muslim and non-Muslim candidates for state attorney general and U.S. Senator. Using a sample of 54 undergrads, the authors examined several traits, including patriotism, that were most closely linked to support or lack thereof for the Muslim and non-Muslim candidates. First, respondents did not expect the Muslim candidates to be less patriotic than the non-Muslim ones. Second, the only issue many respondents had with the Muslim candidates was a prediction they would be lax in prosecution of terrorism cases. Third, respondents did believe that Muslims were likely to have “shared values” with the rest of the populace. Based on their design, it would appear that at least one subset of the population does believe that a Muslim could represent them in state or federal politics.

(iii) Campaign Finance

There has been an infinitesimal amount of work done on the campaign donation habits of Muslims in America, most of it in the form of isolated descriptions of donor behavior. Sinno (2009), for example, analyzed the campaign donations for Keith Ellison's 2006 congressional run and using a crude measure of "Muslim-sounding" names, approximated that 25 to 30 percent of Ellison's donors were likely Muslims. Nimer (2004) analyzed Federal Election Commission (FEC) data from 1995 to 2000 and matched it with CAIR membership rolls to determine that 5,653 Muslims donated approximately \$3,898,075 to political candidates in federal races (158).

b) Group-Based Participation

In the preceding section, I laid out the detailed ways in which Muslim Americans have begun to influence politics through individual (yet partisan) forms of participation. The focus on this section is through collective action. Muslim American group participation has reached a fever pitch due to what Moore (2014b, 376) recently dubbed the "the rising level of civic engagement and associational life." While the community was previously known for its often isolated, ethnic enclaves, the new Muslim American life is based on the role of "collective political advocacy", which has resulted in a "nationally networked constituency" (377).

(i) Interest and Advocacy Groups

There is ample research on the role that Muslim interest and advocacy groups have played in American politics (Moore 2014a, Jamal and Albana 2013, Leonard 2013, Bagby 2006, Nimer 2004, Unus 2004, Nimer 2002, Haddad 2001). While many of these groups became more prominent in the public eye after 9/11, most were established many years prior. Leonard (2013) has documented no less than 188 Muslim interest and advocacy organizations in the United States alone and lists the American Muslim Alliance (AMA), American Muslim Council (AMC),

Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), and the American Muslim Society (later The Mosque Cares) as the most prominent groups. Nimer (2004) has also made an extensive study of Muslim interest groups and determined that while there are many political action committees (PACs), most of them have received very little money, and spent even less. These included the Arab American Leadership PAC, National Association of Arab Americans, American League of Muslims, Pakistani Physicians PAC, and Albanian American PAC (159).

Unus (2004) surveyed Muslim Community Organizations (MCOs) and placed them into four categories: “worship and community life,” “welfare and relief,” “research,” and “advocacy” (351). Unus (2004) outlined the development of MCOs and traced their origins to African American Muslim organizations like the Moorish Science Temple, whose members would later merge with the Lost-Found Nation of Islam (later the Nation of Islam), and post-1965 immigrant-founded groups like Muslim Student Associations, which sprung up at American colleges and universities in the 1960s. These beginnings would provide the foundation for groups like the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), and American Society of Muslims (ASM) – all founded by immigrant Muslims.

The post-1965 early organizations were not focused on advocacy, but on integration. “Muslims were not in the U.S. to assimilate. They were in the U.S. to take their place in American society and be accepted” (Khan 2005, 130). Thus, there were two phases: “consolidation of the Islamic identity and ... making an impact on the American society” (130). Unfortunately, Khan (2005) points to two problems with this vision that Muslims realized soon enough: non-Muslims were not so ready to accept Muslims as part of the American fabric, and many Muslims themselves were not that keen to change to fit an American ideal. So, when 9/11



did occur, Khan (2005) has argued that many of these immigrant-founded organizations were blindsided by the prospect of having to rebuild themselves as civically-minded and engaged, and re-make their case for inclusion. In the wake of 9/11, “the two sources of Islam’s growth, immigration and conversion, were now both arrested” (137).

Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2005) interviewed the leaders of 60 Muslim community-based organizations (CBOs) to understand how their agendas and activities changes before and after 9/11. They found a remarkable difference. Before 9/11, CBOs primarily responded to the occasional piece of legislation they deemed offensive to Muslims or as a violation of due process; many of the respondents drew on the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1996 and the use of “secret evidence” to persecute Muslims with alleged links to terrorism. But after 9/11, the same CBOs underwent a sort of Kafka-esque metamorphosis, whose new activities included: “(1) condemning terrorism and distancing the groups they represent from it; (2) protesting government initiatives and profiling; (3) informing the American public about Islam and Muslims and, at the same time, educating Muslims about American civic engagement; and (4) participating in electoral politics” (2005, 17). In other words, “Muslim Americans framed their demands in the language of civil rights, using the discursive political opportunities provided by the Civil Rights Movement and invoking historical precedents” (17).

2000 proved a landmark year for CBOs. Following the 1996 debacle where interest groups voted against each other’s interests supporting the candidacies of Bob Dole *and* Bill Clinton (Jalalzai 2009), four CBOs/interest groups joined forces. The AMA, AMC, CAIR, and MPAC shared resources and members and became the American Muslim Political Coordinating Council (AMPCC) whose explicit interest was to elect a presidential candidate who would have the full support of the Muslim community (Barreto and Bozonelos 2009, Jalalzai 2009, Haddad

2001). That candidate was George W. Bush. It is also important to note that these organizations, though viewed as pan-Islamic, did not represent the interests of African American Muslims, but were geared to the policy agenda of immigrant Muslims (Jalalzai 2009).

The work of Moore (2014a) and Haddad et al. (2006) focused on the relationship between identity and political behavior with respect to female Muslims. They are in the precarious position of trying to balance identities as American Muslims, while simultaneously grappling with a new foreign policy doctrine – one that attempted to “save” Muslim women in Afghanistan and Iraq from “bad” Islam, while simultaneously denying social and political rights to Muslim women in the United States. Per Haddad et al. (2006), “The public roles being adopted by Muslim women are vital in the process of defining, and redefining, the meaning of American Islam ... by giving voice both to the pain that the community is currently experiencing and to the kind of commitment that they represent, these women are changing the face of Islam” (121). To accomplish these goals, Haddad et al. (2006) referenced to several Muslim women’s organizations who are actively involved better the community from the inside, and ameliorating the public perception of women Islam. They included the Muslim Women’s League (AWL); Association of Muslim Women in America (AMWA); and Sisters United in Human Service, Inc.

Moore (2014a) recognized Ingrid Mattson’s 2001 election as the first female vice-president of ISNA as a historic moment, followed by an even greater one – her election as ISNA’s first female president (2006 to 2010). This too was a direct consequence of the post-September 11<sup>th</sup> climate:

“After 9/11, the pronounced appearance of Muslim women in the American public sphere was a noticeable change in American Muslim associational life. Impelled by increased surveillance and indictment of some American Muslim charities and organizations, as well as the special registration program, men began to keep a lower profile, thus creating the opportunity for women to move into the vanguard and assume more responsibility for administering important Islamic institutions” (148).

But, Moore's (2014a) work also referenced the inherent contradiction that exists in any discussion of female Muslim political participation and representation: any "progress" must be couched in terms of the extant gendered structures of organizations, movements, and advocacy networks.

However, the post-9/11 efforts by Muslim interest and advocacy groups are part of what Moore (2014a, 2014b) and Corbett (2016) have described as a more prominent, national trend – focusing on a national identity versus a regional or localized one, and making political participation and public recognition of Muslims the number one goal. Corbett's (2016) recent work has explored community service initiatives by religious minorities as vehicles of participation and public visibility. She highlighted President Obama's 2009 announcement of the creation of the national service agency United We Serve as the impetus Muslims needed to make their community involvement national and more visible. ISNA responded to the president by asking Muslims to become involved in the first National Day of Service on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009, and the following year, ISNA, ICNA, and CAIR asked their members to becoming involved in local projects, but through the federal government's website, [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov) (Corbett 2016, 246 – 247). She also highlighted the 2014 ISNA Annual Convention as the most *recent* attempt at making community service and charity – a pillar of Islam – part of Muslim national identity.

Moore (2014b) highlighted ISNA, MPAC, CAIR, the National Association of Muslim Lawyers/Muslim Advocates, and the recently formed Assembly of Turkic American Federations (ATAF) as model organizations who understood and implemented this new paradigm of Muslim American organization life whose

“primary focus is on organizations claiming a national constituency dealing with matters that affect national policy or potentially impact Muslim Americans across the country ... primarily these organizations strive to determine which concerns receive attention as a ‘Muslim issue’ in the media, in government circles, and in the broader public debates in the United States. In recent years, these organizations have become proficient at responding to negative portrayals of Muslims and Islam in local and national media outlets, and have developed political channels to pursue a range of policy agendas” (Moore 381).

(ii) Mosques as Sites of Engagement

The mosque also occupies a central role in Islamic culture. It is more than just a place for prayer, especially the Friday *jumuah* services; “The local mosque remains the central institution of religious and cultural life for Muslim Americans, young and old” (Moore 2014b, 381). The earliest American mosques were established in the 1920s and 1930s and “mosque life” became mainstream by the middle of the twentieth century; President Eisenhower’s inauguration of the Islamic Center of Washington, D.C. in 1957 was a major marker of Islam’s recognition in public life (Moore 2014b).

As early as the 1950s, Abdo Elkholy noted in his research among Toledo’s Muslims that the mosque had a key part to play in American political socialization. “Muslims who actively participated in mosque activities, he [Elkholy] argued, were more likely to assimilate into middle class American culture than those who did not. Such findings contradicted the assumptions of some social scientists, who thought that “foreign” religions such as Islam prevented strong identification with American values and beliefs” (Curtis 2009, 57 – 58). In many ways, the growth of Islam in America, particularly after 1965, has been mirrored by the construction of mosques: slow growth in the 1960s and 1970s as Muslim immigrants struggled to adapt to new conditions in America and save money for communal institutions; rapid growth and expansion in the 1980s and 1990s; a halt after 9/11; and then a renewal afterwards (Bagby 2006). 9/11 forced

Muslim interest and advocacy groups to formulate a new agenda (Sinno 2009). Even though the community is divided along sectarian and national origin lines, the main ingredient of mobilization is still Islam, which provides “theological commonalities and a normative behavioral code” (Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2005, 9). Mosques also provide a diverse set of Muslims with “a public space for meetings and facilitate networks of activism, fundraising, and dissemination of information” (9).

While the role of interest groups and political action committees is a staple now of American political discussion, Khan (1998) also made the important point about the importance of individual *and* collective identity for Muslims. Taken another way, practicing Islam is as much a public exercise, as it is a private one:

“Through various symbolic activities, like performing the *salah* (prayer) on Fridays, fasting, celebrating festivals, wearing traditional garb, and frequenting community places such as the mosque, the restaurant, and the parochial school, the Muslim individual reproduces the community, and these distinct practices give the community its meaning or identity ... In reproducing an Islamic community, the individual also produces the Muslim personality” (Khan 1998, 107).

What is the exact process by which mosques factor into processes of political participation? In a series of works, Bagby (2011, 2006, 2004) has extensively analyzed this question through two waves of a national study of mosque leaders. The first study was conducted in 2000 through a random sample of 416 imams, directors, and board members. He conducted a follow-up study in 2010 – 2011, from which he completed 524 interviews (2012, 2). He hypothesized that if mosque leaders wanted their institutions to be active in the communities than they would be more likely to follow a model of civic engagement (2012, 2006, 2004).

In his first set of findings, Bagby (2004) determined that 96 percent of leaders overall wanted their *masaajid* (mosques) to be part of American society (325). There was a slight difference based on the majority ethnicity of the mosques i.e. 100 percent of Arab American-majority

mosques, 98 percent of South Asian-majority mosques, 97 percent of South Asian-Arab mosques, and 92 percent of African American-majority mosques (327). His study also revealed that leaders see their institutes of worship as more than places of theological discovery; rather, as sites of service to Muslims and *non-Muslims*, through programs like cash assistance, counseling, prison rehabilitation, food and clothing donations, tutoring, social advocacy, and in some cases, substance abuse counseling and child care (331). Bagby (2006) also asked mosque leaders if “Muslims should participate in the political process.” Among all types of *masaajid*, 82 percent of the leaders from Arab American-majority mosques strongly agreed with the statement, followed by 76 percent for South Asian mosques, 68 percent for South Asian/Arab mosques; 71 percent for other mosques; and lastly 66 percent for African American-majority congregations (33). He concluded by saying that while change often takes time, Muslim leaders in America were slowly, but surely, seeking to change the experience of Muslims in America by supporting a very American form of Islamic discourse that has allowed both to work in tandem with each other (40).

Bagby’s first study and his findings (2006, 2004) are somewhat prescient, conducted as it was *before* the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001. Instead of a longitudinal panel study, he took the temperature of another random selection of mosque leaders again, so to speak, in the 2011 American Mosque Project. Some of the findings are unsurprising, while others are quite unexpected. First, between 2000 and 2011, the percentage of leaders who believed that their mosques should be involved in American institutions edged slightly from 96 to 98 percent, and to involvement in American politics from 89 to 91 percent (Bagby 2011, 21). Second, only 25 percent of mosque leaders felt in 2011 that “American society is hostile to Islam” (22). Those interviewed believed that while there was intolerance, most Americans were not bad people.

Third, when asked to agree with the statement “America is an immoral society,” the percentage of leaders who agreed dropped from 56 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in 2011 (24). Lastly, less than one percent of those interviewed “strongly agreed” that Muslim youth in America were becoming more radical; “six percent agreed;” and 87 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed (25).

Jamal and Albana (2013), Patterson et al. (2012), Bagby (2009), and Jamal (2005) have also examined the relationship between mosque attendance and political participation. Using data collected from a 2002 national Zogby poll of Muslims, as well as face-to-face interviews with African American Muslims, Jamal and Albana (2013) pushed for a strong correlation between mosque attendance and community participation, and that the mosque serves as a sort of conduit between the Muslim voter and the “mainstream political process” (111). However, the authors point to a tragic irony in the situation, which does not seem too different from the feelings of alienation explained earlier in this paper. According to Jamal and Albana, “Unlike other religious institutions like churches and synagogues, American mosques are seen to hinder civic life in ways that undermine democracy. The mosque is seen as a threat, and the actions emanating from government officials reinforce the stereotype of mosques as security risks to American society” (2013, 111).

In another study of the attitudes and partisanship of mosque attendants, Patterson et al. (2012) echoed other findings that a strong correlation existed between Muslims’ socially conservative attitudes and support for the 2000 candidacy of George W. Bush. But, despite Kerry as not mirroring the social conservatism, Muslim Americans almost universally switched their

support to him by 2004, mostly in response to the Iraq War.<sup>5</sup> The authors also conducted an experiment with the same respondents to examine vote choice in a fictional election involving Candidate King (anti-war) and Candidate Smith (pro-war). They wrote, “These results tell us that being opposed to the Iraq war reduced the probability of supporting the pro-war candidate (Smith) and increasing the probability of choosing the anti-war candidate (King)” (301). Even more intriguingly, the variable “American Identification” was statistically significant and positively correlated with the pro-war candidate and significant, but negatively correlated with the anti-war candidate (303).

Bagby (2009) examined the political views of mosque participants in a national sample and opined that “mosques and mosque participants are pulled in two directions – adapt to the new environment of America but retain the core values and practices of their faith” (476). However, his findings suggest a community, though divided by differences of race or religious interpretation, had more commonality on opinion than previously understood. For example, 94 percent of all mosque-goers – contextualist, conservative, traditional and Salafi – believed that “women need a greater role in the mosque (480). However, there was a difference across religious groups when asked about political involvement: contextualists were most supportive (94%), followed by conservatives (87%), traditionalists (86%), and Salafis (75%). African American Muslims also lagged immigrant Muslims in terms of support for political involvement (78 percent compared to 91 percent) (Bagby 2009, 480 – 481).

Jamal (2005, 523) asked a pointed question: what role do “American mosques play in political mobilization”? Per her findings, mosques mobilize South Asian and Arab American

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that one of the methodological flaws of this study is that it was conducted only at mosques and only during Ramadan; as such, the sample is likely biased towards the most active Muslims in the communities of the 70 mosques where surveys were conducted.



Muslims more so than African American Muslims. But why? The answer is a varied one, brought on by the interactions between the nature of mosques, and the diversity of the Muslim American experience. To put it another way, American mosques mobilize Muslims differently through the intervening variable of the diversity of unique strands of political socialization.

According to Jamal (2005),

“Arab Americans have had a stronger tradition of political participation in the United States. They have a long history of political activity aimed at both improving their own standing in the United States and influencing U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. South Asian Muslims have played an active role in religious and civic life, yet until more recently, their spiritual and ethnic activities have not spilled over into the political sphere. African American Muslims, most of whom converted to Islam, remain more distant from the political sphere altogether ... the mosque does not necessarily serve as a vehicle of political incorporation among this subpopulation” (524 – 525).

Moore’s (2014a) work has also remarked on the idea of moving past the original uses and goals of mosques, and molding them to serve a new purpose, more in line with Jamal and Albana’s (2013) and Jamal’s (2005) hopes for the future. The key is viewing the current services provided by mosques as those needed for civic engagement. Accordingly, “While these institutions were created primarily to offer religious services, formalize and maintain religious doctrines and rituals, transmit the religion from one generation to the next, provide religious leadership for their congregants, and train clergy and develop their leadership skills, it is also equally unmistakable that the resources needed for political mobilization overlap considerably with the resources necessary to perform these religious tasks” (Moore 2014a, 142).

#### IV. Nodes of Interpretation

The focus of the previous section was to explain the variety of ways in which Muslim Americans engage in politics. However, what is missing from this discussion is a typology to interpret this group’s political behavior. According to Jamal and Albana (2013), “The vast

multiethnic nature of Muslim Americans makes it more difficult to gain intracommunal consensus and political clout in the United States” (98). If we now have a better understanding of *how* American Muslims participate politically, we still do not understand *why*. Borrowing Mazrui’s (2004) typology, I will present four nodes or ways of understanding Muslim American political behavior. While each node – country of origin, religious affiliation, racial or ethnic categorization, and identity dilemmas – could be further divided into sub-categories and sub-affiliations, I argue that they should all be viewed as a whole; such an exercise leads to the acceptance that American Muslims cannot and should not be reduced to one communal identity or belief system, and any attempt to do so is essentialism at its worst.

#### A) Country of Origin

The most divisive issue in the American *ummah* (community) is the question of who speaks for Islam. Part of this story is also the reconstituting by *non-Muslims* of Muslims in America as one, homogenous entity with obviously a single religion, Islam, and therefore a single perspective. We know that the American Muslim community is diverse, but the real danger in the belief of an “essential Islam” is that it prevents or obfuscates internal divisions within the religious community, effectively nullifying the voices of those who might disagree with the majority position, and worse, creating the image that one person, or one specific community or set of elites, can “speak” for the whole American Muslim community.

A point of contention relating to this issue is the exclusion of African American Muslims from much of the internal and external debate over Muslim American inclusion, especially when Black Muslim leaders have different opinions and policy objectives as compared to immigrant leaders (McCloud 2006; Bagby 2006, 2004). McCloud (2006) was harsh in her assessment of the post-1965 immigrant Muslims, whom she saw as responsible for the divisions within the

American Muslim community. Not only did she view the actions of immigrant Muslims as racist and exclusionary, especially towards African Americans, but she has also blamed them for their lack of interest in politics, and civic engagement, arguing that they did not even engage in volunteerism till much later because it is not something that is even done in the Muslim world, and that even when they did, their organizations were more focused on sending aid back to their countries of origin, and neglecting local problems (131). A particularly damaging aspect of the national origins debate has manifested itself in the *location* of new mosques; immigrants arrived in better financial positions than African American Muslims, and moved directly or soon after arrival to the suburbs, where they constructed places of worship in abundance. “Thus,” wrote Moore (2014a, 141), “mosques were built to serve local communities and were residentially segregated, with inner city mosques serving largely an African American constituency and suburban mosques by and large serving immigrant populations.”

One way to ease this situation, per McCloud (2004), would be to replace the common binary of “indigenous and immigrant” Muslims with “newer” (Arabs, Africans, and Asians) and “older” (Hispanics, Europeans, and African Americans) Muslims (74). Mazrui (2004), on the other hand, offered “indigenous” to refer to Muslims who have been in the United States “at least two centuries” versus “immigrant Muslims” who have been here “less than a century” (137).

#### B) Religious Affiliations and Divisions

Difference of theological opinion is hardly *only* a Muslim phenomenon, but due to the renewed interest in Muslim American political behavior, it is vital to engage in a discussion of how intra-Muslim religious “tension” affects political participation, or the lack thereof. Khalidi (2004) laid out an elegant subgroup-based understanding of why some American Muslims

oppose political participation. The first group sees the U.S. as fundamentally “a virtual Kufristan, a land of the unbelievers” (67). He identified Islamic revivalist organizations like the Tablighi Jamat as being involved in this ideology. Those in this group will oppose any attempt to be involved in American civic engagement because it is not rooted in the Qur’an or the Sunnah, the two primary sources of Islamic jurisprudence. Nimer (2002) has commented on this class of opponents as Muslims who believe that participating in American politics may “lend legitimacy to institutions and processes that do not follow Islamic precepts ... Muslims should not assimilate into the institutions of the unbelievers (*kuffar*)” (169). This group of Muslims also include members of Hizbul Tahrir, who also associate the United States with disbelief (*kufr*) and “believe that integrationist Muslims are naïve at best in believing that the *kuffar* (i.e. the Western powers) will ever be truly fair in accommodating the concerns of Muslims” (170).

Khalidi (2004) referred to the second group as isolationists; they believe that Muslims should focus solely on Islam, as well as an independent Muslim society separate from American society. The third group includes those who do believe in political participation, but only to grow Islam’s influence in America (67). Abdo (2005) has referred to this feature of American Muslim history as its “rejectionist movement ... seeking comfort in their own religious and social institutions from the hostility they feel from the general population” (8). An Indianapolis-based African American imam interviewed by Bagby (2006) for a national mosque project had this to say: “The Muslim has three choices in facing America: isolate, insulate, or assimilate. The best choice, he believes, is to insulate – retain Islamic values and practices as protection against the immorality of America and anti-America sentiments while remaining active in society” (24).

While his focus was on African American Muslims, Jackson (2005) has offered some theories to explain why American Muslims have disliked political participation. First, American

Muslims – and Americans period – must recognize that the U.S. Constitution was the result of compromise, sure, but compromise among non-Muslim actors seeking to establish a non-Muslim political entity. Second, some Muslims have doubts over accepting the U.S. Constitution as a source of law, since it is not grounded in the *Qur'an* or *Sunnah*. Third, Muslims have struggled with the concept of a separation between church and state because a similar idea does not exist in Islam. But, Jackson articulated all those points to build up a case *for* political involvement. Since Muslims do have many rights in the United States under the current constitution, why not take advantage of those opportunities instead of complaining about the process? “According to the Constitution, the U.S. government cannot force a Muslim to renounce his or her faith; it cannot deny him or her the right to pray, fast, or perform the pilgrimage; it cannot force him or her to eat pork, shave his beard, or remove her scarf” (148).

An additional, and unexpected challenge, facing the American Muslim community has been the emphasis on “good” versus “bad” Islam. At one level, it makes absolute sense that American Muslims would want to do everything they could to distance themselves from the Muslims who commit acts of terrorism. Yet that also came with a price, as the post-9/11 American government position became one of constantly pushing for an agenda that promoted “moderate” or non-extremist interpretations of Islam, and the role of “good Muslims” in the United States and among American allies (Leonard 2002).

The issue of Obama’s Muslim affiliations has received attention, but mostly from the angle that his repeated denials, which may have hurt American Muslims more (Jamal and Albana 2013, Williams 2013, Ali 2012). For Jamal and Albana (2013), the Tea Party attack on Obama and the White House’s timid response were “equally frightful” because the latter emphasized that Obama was Christian and not Muslim (109). “What if President Obama were Muslim? The

denials themselves have fed into the Islamophobic frenzy that dominated much of mainstream America” (109). Even four years after the “birther” movement became a topic of discussion, a November 2012 search for “Obama is a Muslim” on Google netted 226 million links (Williams 2013, 249). For Ali (2012), Obama’s lack of explanation of his heritage, was replaced instead with firm rejection that he was not Muslim. Obama, Ali (2012) argued, “did his best to distance himself from the Muslim community and choosing not to make any campaign stops in mosques or meet with any Muslim organizations during the campaign (despite making numerous stops at churches and synagogues)” (1051).

The divisions among the Muslim American community have manifested themselves not only in political behavior at the individual level, but also for groups. For Leonard (2003), political mobilization is as much an exercise in establishing coalitions as it is generating interests in issues that specifically appeal and apply to Muslims. This issue becomes even more complicated with the presence of minority communities *within* the Muslim community. Where do diasporic denominations like the Nizari Isma’ilis, Ahmadis, and Palestinians fit? How do they fit into the American Muslim hierarchy, and how does that affect their placement in political decision-making?

Takim (2014, 2002) has looked specifically at Shi’a Muslims<sup>6</sup> in America and the topic of political inclusion. At the time of the first work (2002), he remarked that it was hard for Shi’a communities in America to get involved because Shi’a don’t even get involved in the political affairs of their home countries. This is primarily due to “a hermeneutical structure that deems all governments in the prolonged absence of the twelfth Imam to be illegitimate” (227). He did

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<sup>6</sup> His work focuses on four groups: Zaydis, Bohra Isma’ilis, the Twelvers, and the Nizari.

mention a couple of Michigan-focused political issues where the Shi'a community was able to get involved on issues, which they saw as posing real religious problems – a November 1998 state proposal to legalize assistance suicide (which was defeated), and a proposal to create Sunni-Shi'a collaborations on local school boards (which was a success) (227-228). While he did highlight a couple of Shi'a organizations, he mentioned that they often lacked the political resources, and members either donated to other groups or joined the American Muslim Council (AMC) or CAIR. But his second work (2014) explored the 2002 creation of the first, post-9/11 Shi'a political advocacy organization – the Universal Muslim Association of America (UMAA). Takim (2014) believes that the Shi'a community always saw the potential and the successes of Sunni-majority organizations, going all the way back to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, but just never got involved. But after 9/11, UMAA “seeks to encourage Muslims to vote and participate in the political process, to coordinate with the media, to educate the public on issues relating to Islam, and to provide a common platform and forum for Muslim youths” (2014, 112).

### C) Racial and Ethnic Categories

The diversity of the American Muslim community is praised (as representative of the “melting pot”) as much as it is chastised (due to lack of a cohesive bond beyond religious affiliation). One unexpected consequence of this community’s heterogeneity is that American Muslims did not suffer evenly after 9/11. Howell and Jamal (2008) documented the “exceptional” situation of Detroit, where a heavily Arab Detroit was able to “insulate itself from a national public culture that sees Arabs (and Muslims) as a problem and has difficulty separating ‘good’ Arabs from ‘bad’ ... Michigan’s Arabs, through the work of many individuals

and the efforts of many successful ethnic institutions, have been incorporated to a remarkable degree into local structures of economic, social, and political capital” (48).

But Arabs don’t just live in Detroit, and not all Arab communities were able to escape the public’s wrath after 9/11. Despite having origins in the U.S. dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Naber (2008) highlights Arab Americans as moving from “invisible” to “visible,” but at a tremendous cost. The concept of “visibility” is a “power-laden project that has the effect of silencing critiques of state violence and the structural inequalities that produce hatred and racism – but also revealed the objectification that often accompanies ‘inclusion’” (Naber 2008, 3).

The deep and rich story of Arab immigration to the United States has also provided this sub-community with a connection to other previously marginalized groups in American history. More so than other Muslim sub-units in the United States, Arab Americans, by all accounts, have moved from immigration to naturalization to incorporation and are actively involved in civic engagement. In Cainkar’s (2010, 187) study of Arab Americans in Chicago, 69 percent of her interviews (70 of 102) said they felt positive about the future for Arabs and Muslims in the United States, while nine percent felt uncertain, and 23.5 percent had a negative outlook.

The story of African American Islam is altogether different from that of the Muslim presence created by the post-1965 wave of Muslim immigrants from Asia and the Middle East. While the majority of slaves were Muslim, they were often forcibly converted to Christianity, leaving a weak Muslim heritage. According to Jalalzai (2009), “Race and class struggles have heavily shaped African-American identity; Islam was an alternative to the Christian and white dominated structure” (166). However, Islam experienced a revival in the early twentieth century with the growth of what Jackson (2005) has dubbed “proto-Islamic movements” (5). In an earlier work, Jackson (2004) remarked that men like Noble Drew Ali and Elijah Muhammad were “early



Islamizers” who “were not so much *interpreting* Islam as they were *appropriating* it” (212). The focus was not on the actual practice of Islam, but on “raising the concerns and spirit of Black religion to a new level of respectability” (212).

Curtis (2009) does mention that these early Islamic movements that were targeted towards African Americans including the Ahmadiyya Movement, Moorish Science Temple, and Nation of Islam, were staggering successes because they transcended mere religious indoctrination and gave those Jim Crow-era Blacks a cultural awareness and pride that would provide the nascent foundation to what would later be dubbed the Civil Rights Movement.

Accordingly,

“The Nation of Islam appealed to African Americans on many levels simultaneously. It was, at once, a political, a social, and a religious organization. Like some other religious groups of its era, it encouraged the practice of a socially conservative morality, condemning sports, secular entertainment, sexual promiscuity, obesity, tobacco, and other vices. Good Muslims, the Nation of Islam taught, should be clean living—pure, hard-working, punctual, disciplined, and modestly dressed ... Men wore bow ties and dark suits; women wore robes and often a head scarf. Both men and women in the movement later testified that these activities made them feel dignified and proud” (38 – 39).

While “Blackamerican Islam”<sup>7</sup> underwent a revolution of sorts with the death of Elijah Muhammad and the rise of his son, W.D. Muhammad, who lead millions of members of the Nation of Islam to Sunni Islam in the mid-1970s, the real change took place when “Blackamerican Islam” became overshadowed by immigrant Muslims, who claimed to be better representatives of Islam, which led to a shift in the direction of more traditional Islamic scholarship for African American Muslims (Jackson 2005). For McCloud (2004), “They [Blacks] also see their efforts in Islam and its establishment in the United States being erased by the focalization in both the Muslim and larger plural public square on Islam = Arab and Muslim = immigrant” (75).

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<sup>7</sup> An original phrase coined by Jackson (2005).

There is also scholarship on the ability of African American Muslims to better adapt to Muslim crises as compared to immigrant Muslims. In her study of Muslim American organizations and interest groups, Leonard (2013) suggested that 9/11 gave more leverage to African American Muslim groups who could “stress their Americanness, contrasting themselves to immigrants whose cultural baggage constrains their full citizenship” (173). Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2005) have also commented on this issue by suggesting that converts to Islam, and African American Muslims in general, were *not* the targets of the “government backlash after 9/11” (9). The ability of African American Muslims to be “more American” is primarily a function of the sheer length of time their community has existed, which in turn has given them the ability to focus on issues of social justice and questions of patriotism, while “newer American Muslims are still engaged with the processes of immigration itself” (McCloud 2004, 75). 9/11 also pointed out what many did not want to address till they had no choice: the ethnic fragmentation of the community exposed the fact that African American Muslims simply had different policy concerns than immigrant Muslims. According to Sinno (2009), “The attacks of 9/11 made African-American Muslims more aware of the effect of world politics on their lives, and immigrant Muslims more sensitive to issues of social equity, civil rights, and civil liberties” (82).

Jackson (2005), however, has been very open in his criticism of African American Muslims, particularly on the issue of political isolation. Yes, it was dishonorable and self-righteous for immigrant Muslims to force African American Muslims out of leadership roles in interest groups and mosques. Yes, “Blackamerican Muslims” were under no obligation to “accept the integrationist/ ‘Americanization’ needs of immigrant Muslims because of historic inequities” (132). But, the stubbornness of Blackamericans to change has come at a steep price: “it has

undermined Blackamerican Muslims' ability to invest in their American citizenship. Voting, lobbying, and holding political office have all been frowned upon, when not proscribed. Second, it helps those who believe that Muslims don't know their own rights. Third, it keeps them more insulated" (132). "Blackamerican Muslims" may be spared the public scrutiny associated with "the popular and official imagination with fiery-eyed, olive-skinned peoples who drive airplanes into tall buildings," but it doesn't help if Blackamericans are seen as "opposing ... the American constitutional order" (133).

The effect of South Asian Muslim immigration to the United States in the post-1965 era has been profound (Mishra 2016). While immigrants from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and others from the subcontinent have shaped American culture over the last 50 years, the Islamic practices and beliefs they have brought with them have changed the practice of Islam in America, the creation and maintenance of mosques, the teaching of Islam to later generations, etc. According to Khalidi (2004), only Indian Muslim immigrants understand democracy *before* emigrating to the U.S. Between a lack of knowledge of democratic norms, and internal chaos due to conflicting Muslim and cultural beliefs, the American Muslim community lacks "in-group unity" (69).

#### D) Conflicting Identities

What does it mean to be American *and* Muslim? If this question had been a point of discussion – and contention – before 9/11, then it certainly became a mandatory concern after those events, and President George W. Bush's famous remarks at Ground Zero: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Haddad and Ricks 2009, 23). Truly, the question of identity for Muslims in America is what has formed the foundation of not only individual Muslims' political behavior, but is also likely the basis for much of the public's attitudes and

opinions *toward* American Muslims. Khan (2004) asked, “Who do they belong to? They are not part of the Western cultural mainstream and are also not a part of the Muslim political and social mainstream; they are on the margins of Western as well as Islamic civilization” (95). What makes the challenge of narrowing down Muslim identities so much more difficult compared to other religious groupings is that Muslims often have intersecting modes of identification. Mazrui (2004) has provided no less than four: national origins, religious affiliation, racial categories, and of course, American identity.

Interestingly, the literature does point to the fact that while brutal and irrevocable, Muslims in the United States had been under the gun and engaged in internal and external debates about identity well before 2001. Events like the 1967 Six Day War; the 1973 oil embargo; the 1979 – 1981 Iran hostage crisis; the 1989 publication of Salman Rushdie’s “The Satanic Verses;” the 1990 – 1991 Gulf War; and the 1993 WTC bombing had already set this debate in motion; (Curtis 2009, Haddad and Ricks 2009, Jamal 2009, Bakalian and Bozorgmehr 2005, Haddad 2001). But, argue Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2005), the 9/11 backlash *was* different; “thanks to ignorance of the culture, religion, and history of the targeted peoples, the ‘Other’ was reified as a homogenous group” (8).

The racialization of Muslims after 9/11 has been an important contributor to perceptions of their identities (Johnson 2015, Rana 2011, Jamal 2009, Naber 2008a, Naber 2008b). In this context, I use racialization to explain the concept whereby several religious, racial, and ethnic communities are combined and later reduced to one identity, which allows the collective identities to be punished because they are inferior to the rest of the population. Per Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2005), “American Islam crystallized after 9/11 as a distinct new category in the nation’s (unofficial) ethnic classificatory system” (8). My reading of Johnson (2015) contradicts

this belief: the racialization of American Muslims has its roots in domestic policy concerns from the 1930s, first with the Nation of Islam and similar movements, and later because of U.S.

foreign policy concerns in the Middle East. “In the wake of 9/11,” wrote Johnson,

“it became fully clear to scholars that the security state had racialized Islam. As with other forms of racialization, this elided the political realities of imperial domination. Instead of rendering invisible the material, political stakes of conflicts, defenders of U.S. imperialism pointed instead to the racial nature of Muslims or people of the so-called Arab world, who in turn vilified as enemies of the West” (2015, 388).

Racialization is a two-stage process that begins with a “moral panic,” which is then targeted at a group through a “racial panic” (Rana 2011, 53). Jamal (2009) also has it in two steps with the first a legal one, and the second when the “dominant social group claims moral and cultural superiority in the process of producing an essentialized, homogenous image of Muslims and Arab Americans as non-Whites who are naturally, morally, and culturally inferior to whites” (205). Naber (2008b) referred to the same idea in terms of the combination and conflict between two *types* of racism:

“I refer to ‘cultural racism’ as a process of othering that constructs perceived cultural (e.g. Arab), religious (e.g. Muslim), or civilizational (e.g. Arab and/or Muslim) differences as cultural and insurmountable ... I use the term ‘nation-based racism’ to refer to the construction of particular immigrants as different than, and inferior to whites, based on the conception that ‘they’ are foreign and therefore embody a potentiality for criminality and/ or immorality” (279-280).

One of the themes that comes up over and over in the scholarship is the notion of a split identity over the guilt/confusion of trying to separate religious from political allegiances. Grewal (2014) wrote that the origin of this “guilt” is due to the conflicting notions of citizenship, primarily “the gap between legal citizenship and social citizenship” (4). In other words, we think of the United States of America in terms of geographical boundaries and as a physical place, when in fact it is “also imagined ... and perpetually reproduced by a community of citizens who collectively imagine that they share a deep, horizontal kinship” (4). According to Pease (2009,

166), “A nation is not only a piece of land but a narration about the people’s relation to the land” (as quoted in Grewal 2014, 5). Since the United States is more than just a place, and it requires some sort of filial tie, how do Muslim Americans situate themselves into that kinship, especially when they are viewed as inherently un-American?

The dilemma is also complicated by the knowledge that Islam does *not* fit into political boundaries, seeing as it is considered a universalistic ideology. “In a sense,” opined Khan (2005, 138), “American Muslims are caught between the war on terror and what they see as a war on Islam.” Another issue is that Islam is not seen as headquartered in the U.S., so like past views of Catholicism, the religion is viewed as un-American (Williams 2013). When the “map” of Islam is attempted to be fitted over the physical, and fictive, map of America, there is a considerable deal of overlap. The only alternative, suggested Grewal (2014), is “mapping an alternative, transnational Muslim world imagined by American Muslims that includes them and the United States” (6). Part of this alternative vision is also accepting that Muslims belong in America, but also have “transnational moral geographies that tie them to the global umma” (127).

Accordingly, “American Muslims simultaneously reject the American mainstream and make claims to be recognized as Americans, but like religious outsiders before them, this contradictory process ultimately Americanizes them” (128).

But is this even possible? Bilici (2012) is not so sure. If we use the analogy of a building made of bricks, one could argue that regardless of the origin of these bricks, they still constitute a building. The same way, Americans understand that their social fabric is built by people who have called many places home, but that in the end, their plan was to still see themselves as part of this nation. However, in the case of Muslims, Bilici (2012) stated that 9/11 made Muslims appear to be strangers ... that too a set of strangers, many of whom were citizens, but who

belonged to the same religion as the 19 terrorists (3). Further, any attempts made by Muslims to repair the damage was never enough for Americans: “Both socially and mentally, people reached for each other felt closer; ‘united we stand’ was the motto. Meanwhile, Muslims appeared, more than ever before, as aliens within the body of the nation” (3).

Mosque leaders too have struggled with the push and pull of competing interests. According to Bagby (2006), “Muslim leaders also want to have a seat at the table of mainstream America, but many are not comfortable appropriating the rhetoric and symbolism of American patriotism” (24). Taken another way, how do Islamic leaders engage in the broader American culture while simultaneously acknowledging “what they see as the immorality of American culture and its hostility toward Islam and Muslims”? (24)

#### V. Fifteen Years Later: Islamophobia and the New Muslim American Politic

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, Muslims in America didn’t just deal with suspicion and profiling, but actual violence in the form of murders, and hate crimes. But how can we understand the rise of Islamophobia again, ten years later? Williams (2013) suggested that two events have triggered the most recent phase: the 2008 “birther” movement and its lingering effects, and the 2010 Ground Zero “victory mosque” controversy. Combined with current anti-Muslim hostility within the Republican Party, and media bias, Williams (2013) contends that this has spawned a new level of Islamophobia.

In a recent law review article, Ali (2012) contended that American history has gone through three distinct phases of Islamophobia. The first extended from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and was marked by the racist language and pejorative stereotypes, primarily of Arabs, that consumed American popular culture, particularly film and television. The second phase followed Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, and included a number of hate crimes against Muslims and those who “looked” Muslim, as well as the rapid emphasis and re-emphasis of the

Muslim and/or Arab as foreign. But the most recent wave only began in 2008, during and after President Barack Obama's candidacy for the presidency, and has persisted to the present day. McCloud (2004, 83) termed this a "conceptual war" where Muslims "have no weapons ... [and] cannot defend themselves or assert themselves in any sustained way."

One specific moment during the 2008 campaign reified this phase of Islamophobia. During an October stop, an elderly woman told Senator John McCain that she couldn't trust Obama because he was an Arab. McCain responded by saying, "No, ma'am ... [he's] a decent family man, citizen, that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues" (2012, 1057). "His response," said Ali (2012), "insinuated that an Arab or Muslim could not truly be a citizen, as they could not be identified with the traditional American nuclear family ... the entire exchange demonstrates how difficult it is for someone who is perceived to be Muslim to gain political office" (1057). The focus in the current phase has included repeated claims of Obama's secret Muslim heritage, which explain his allegedly treasonous alliances with world Muslim leaders, and the appearance of anti-Sharia legislation, which has the potentiality of depressing Muslim participation. "In this third phase of Islamophobia," wrote Ali, "mainstream discourse now explicitly challenges the notion that American Muslims deserve the same liberal notions of rights that other citizens enjoy" (2012, 1050). This has created a situation where Muslim "otherness" is an almost insurmountable barrier to entry into popular politics (Ali 2012). Wrote Cankar (2010, 192),

"Barriers to the social and political incorporation of American Muslims continue to be erected by groups identifying what Muslims must do to show that they deserve consideration for membership in American society. So frequently are these 'cleansing hoops' through which Muslims must jump tied to condemnations of the Qur'an and derisions of the Prophet Muhammed, that they largely require that Muslims become not Muslim at all to be legible."



Connecting back to the work of Morone (2008) with which I started this paper, one could argue that Muslim Americans, while not exclusively an immigrant population, continue to be perceived as such. Since they are viewed as not citizens, even if they are, they somehow fall beyond the scope of civil liberties and rights. While Morone's (2008) work looked at the history of nativist movements in response to Catholic, Jewish, Chinese, Mexican, and Japanese waves of immigration, to name a few, it is not difficult to apply his reasoning to explain the current nationalist-nativist movement in the United States, and why it has provided such support for a new phase of Islamophobia. In particular, Morone (2008) calls out a new class of Americans whom he pejoratively nicknames "The New Victorians," whose jingoism and "rally around the flag" frenzy fuel the fire for nativist movements in the United States. Their motto, he argued, would be, "We are only as good, and as strong, as our people and our families ... The basic moral message, already firing high, now gains another boost – with calls for inculcating strength, patriotism, manliness. This is no time to tolerate any weakness that subverts national resolve, that gives comfort to our enemies" (495-496).

Notwithstanding the tragedies of 9/11 and the moral, political, social, and cultural upheavals for Muslim Americans, it would be difficult after such a review of the literature to imagine the future as one devoid of hope. With the arrival of ISIS, as well as renewed Islamophobic incidents across the United States, the expectation is that the Muslim American community is now exponentially better equipped to handle the current controversies, by being able to build on the institutional memory over the last 15 years. 9/11, while tragic, made the American Muslim community political, and gave this community the courage to push for greater accommodations and expansions of the right to practice Islam (Abdo (2015). More so than just voting strength during presidential elections, Cainkar (2010) has stated that she is optimistic

about the future, and has said that Muslim Americans now have legitimate political capital, and that their “heightened level of civic engagement should provide them with better protection should another terrible event occur” (193).

Yet, despite the renewed interest in understanding the political attitudes and interests of American Muslims, there is still so much we don’t know. For Sinno (2014), there is an urgent need for more quantitative and qualitative work as to what motivates “choosing between joining Muslim organizations, ethnic associations, or broad civil rights groups; voting for and otherwise supporting marginal parties or established ones; and the type and purposes of alliances with which Muslims are comfortable on both the individual and organization levels” (328). Secondly, despite all the finger-pointing and defensive rhetoric on President Obama’s alleged Muslim identity, what has been the effect of his presidency on Muslim American political behavior? Have Muslims benefited from his two terms in office? Third, while we know that Muslims favor collective action, as much as individual behaviors, we still don’t know where Muslim Americans see themselves in the political process? As individuals, as an *ummah*, or through mosques? Fourth, and in the context of the United States, what are the political differences between Shia and Sunni? And lastly, why have mosques not become the sites of political idea exchange, political experimental, mobilization, and mass protest that has been observed and replicated from American churches and synagogues? Where is the disconnect, or the theory to explain how Islamic sites of worship just work differently in the context of civic engagement?

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