

YOUNG MUSLIMS IN CANADA

A story of challenges,
high expectations and hope.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

The Inspirit Foundation would like to thank our Research and Evaluation Coordinator Sanjeev Timana for the leading role he played in interpreting and validating the findings presented in this summary. We would also like to extend our appreciation to the Environics Institute for Survey Research and our four *Survey of Muslims in Canada 2016* partners -- The Tessellate Institute, The Olive Tree Foundation, Think for Actions, and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation -- as well as the insightful young Muslims who participated in this research process. Finally, special thanks to our board of directors for identifying Islamophobia as one of the organization's priority issues.

INSPIRIT FOUNDATION:

The Inspirit Foundation seeks to create a more inclusive Canada where differences are valued and everyone has equal opportunity to thrive both socially and economically. We achieve these aims by supporting young change leaders, funding media and arts for change initiatives, impact investing, and collaborating with organizations across sectors.

THE ENVIRONICS INSTITUTE:

Michael Adams established the Environics Institute for Survey Research (henceforth referred to as "Environics Institute") in 2006 to promote relevant and original public opinion and social values research on important issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how our society has been changing, and where we may be heading. The Institute surveys individuals and groups not typically heard from, and asks questions not normally asked. Integral to the Institute's methodology is: a) early consultation and engagement with populations to be surveyed, to ensure the research process is respectful; and b) broad dissemination of research findings to stimulate constructive discourse and informed responses to the findings.

Introduction

In early 2014, several foundations and community partners approached the Environics Institute to explore the possibility of conducting a national survey of Muslims living in Canada.

The Inspirit Foundation was interested in the prospect of participating in a collaborative research process, which would include leaders from Muslim-led organizations, scholars, journalists, and other supporters working towards creating a more inclusive society. We felt hopeful that by joining a wide range of stakeholders, we would be able to avoid harmful stereotypes while executing a comprehensive evidence-based process taking into account the full spectrum of Muslims' experiences. Over the past two years, we have collaborated closely with the Environics Institute and our valued partners (The Tessellate Institute, the Olive Tree Foundation, Think for Actions, and the Canadian Race Relations Foundation) to develop and conduct *The Survey of Muslims in Canada 2016*.

This brief summary should be read as a companion to the main survey report. It includes findings from the main survey, as well as information from an additional survey that the Inspirit Foundation commissioned independently. In this supplementary survey we asked 300 Muslims aged 18 to 34, to discuss their experiences in Canada.

The study's findings tell a complicated story — one that is, at times, almost contradictory. Muslim youth report higher levels of discrimination than their elders experience, yet they continue to contribute to Canadian society through exemplary rates of volunteerism. They express pride in their Canadian identity and at the same time feel as if they are kept at an arm's length by members of the wider community. What is clear about this research is that although there is a significant divide between young Muslims and other Canadians, the vast majority are civic-minded members of society. This summary highlights their **challenges**, their **high expectations**, and their **hopes for a better future**.



Andrea Nemtin
President and CEO



Gwen Joy
Director of Grants and Evaluation



Challenges

Muslim youth report experiences of discrimination at higher levels than their elders and other young people in Canada. These individuals report many dimensions of discrimination, including Islamophobia, fear of attack in public, and media stereotyping.

- Almost half (48%) of young Muslims report discrimination or unfair treatment of all kinds – this is significantly higher than the 28% of young people in Canada overall who say they have experienced discrimination or unfair treatment.
- Almost a third (32%) of young Muslims say they have experienced incidents of **religious discrimination** in a diverse range of public spaces, including streets, parks, schools/universities, stores/banks/restaurants, and the workplace. In comparison, 8% of young people in Canada overall report such experiences.
- Over four in ten (42%) young Muslims say they are “very worried” about discrimination against Muslims in Canada; this concern is most pronounced among young Muslims with some post-secondary education as well as young Muslims who are Canadian born. By comparison, older Muslims are less likely to be “very worried” about discrimination.
- Young Muslims are twice as likely as their elders to feel inhibited about expressing opinions about social or political issues because of their race, ethnicity or religion — 24% of young Muslims report such reservations compared to 12% of Muslims aged 35 and older.
- More than half of young Muslims identify the economy or unemployment as a primary concern for both themselves and their fellow Canadians. These concerns are similarly important to Muslims aged 35 and older.
- Forty-two percent of young Muslims assert that future generations are likely to face “more” discrimination when asked to predict the degree of discrimination that will face the next cohort of Muslims in Canada. This sentiment is less prevalent among Muslims aged 35 and older.



As an educator, principal, and mother, I find these statistics alarming. The urgency of creating a pathway to understanding and tolerance is best encapsulated in *'42% of participants believing future generations are likely to experience more discrimination.'* It's clear that as Muslim youth embark on their journey to discover their individual voices, their path will be worn with feelings of vulnerability, self-doubt, and fear. It is my hope that this data will help policy makers better understand and address Islamophobia. Bravo to the Inspirit Foundation for specifically focusing on young Muslims and beginning this very necessary conversation.

- FARRAH MARFATIA

M.ED. (CANDIDATE), B.SC., PSPQ1, TESL, RAQC



High Expectations

Many young Muslims were either born in Canada or immigrated here at a young age. They've grown up with the discourse of diversity and the promise of inclusion. They expect to be afforded the same freedoms and accommodations as their fellow Canadians, including the right to religious expression and the right to embrace multiple facets of their identities.

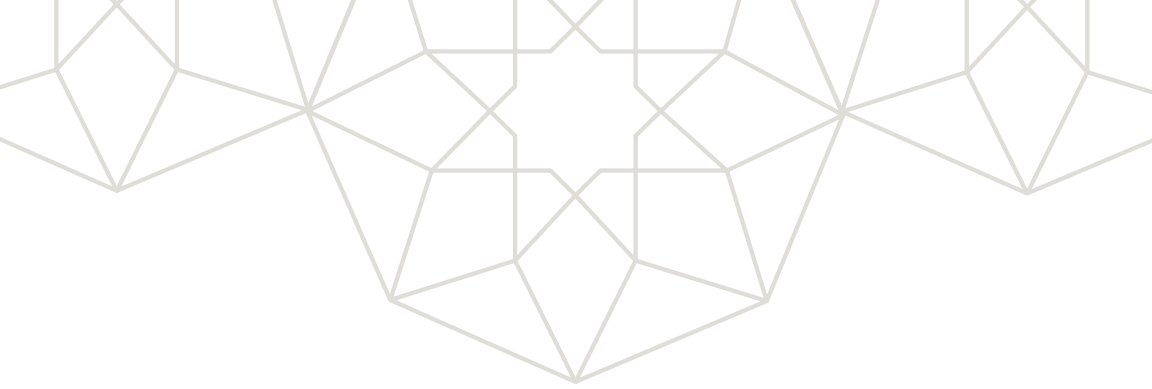
- Over four in five (81%) of young Muslims support the right to pray in public schools, compared to 60% of the general Canadian population. On this question, the responses of Muslims aged 35 and older fall in between these two groups.
- Almost three-quarters (73%) of young Muslims support the right of women to participate in citizenship ceremonies wearing a niqab, and 76% of young Muslims support the right of women to wear the niqab while receiving public services. The general Canadian population is split on this issue: 50% are in favour of Muslim women wearing a niqab when participating in citizenship ceremonies and 45% are against, while 5% are undecided.
- When asked whether they agree that “immigrants of different races and backgrounds should set aside their customs and try to blend into Canadian culture,” 49% of young Muslims disagreed. Muslims aged 35 and older are more likely to agree with this statement.
- Young Muslims who had experienced discrimination or specifically had difficulty crossing the border are more likely to follow the news on a daily basis.
- When asked about the anti-terror legislation known as Bill C-51, 49% of young Muslims agree that “it infringes too much on the civil liberties of ordinary Canadians.”



“

The expectations expressed by the young Muslims in this survey seem reasonable to me. Despite being an incredibly diverse demographic, the young Muslims I've encountered generally support wide freedoms for all citizens, and expect to be afforded those same rights by the society they live in.

- NORA FATHALIPOUR
RESEARCHER AND WRITER



Hope

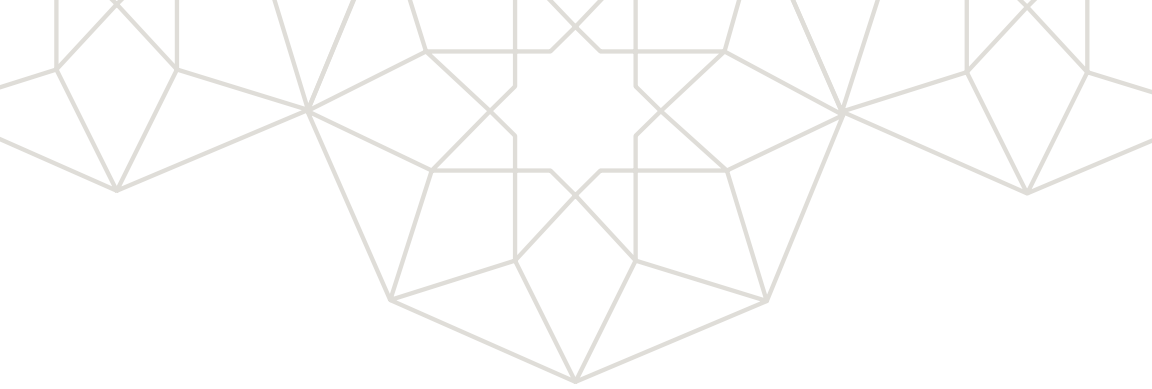
While they report a higher incidence of discrimination than both their elders and Canadian youth generally, Muslim youth haven't lost their faith in Canadian society. The surveys revealed that the members of this generation are civically engaged, strive to belong, and express a strong appreciation for inclusion.

- Ninety percent of young Muslims rate their sense of belonging to Canada as “very strong” (44%) or “generally strong” (46%). Older Muslims are more likely to report a stronger sense of belonging. The survey showed that 97% of Muslims aged 35 to 44 describe their sense of belonging to Canada as “very strong” (64%) or “generally strong” (33%).
- Seventy percent of young Muslims say they are “very proud” to be Canadian, while 22% describe themselves as “somewhat proud.” This sense of national pride is aligned with other young people in Canada: 72% report feeling “very proud” to be Canadian and 18% report are “somewhat proud.”
- One in two younger Muslims (51%) indicated that they had taken part in some sort of unpaid volunteer activity in the past 12 months. By comparison, 37% of young people in Canada generally indicated that they had volunteered in the same time period.
- When younger Muslims were asked about what is the greatest source of pride in being Canadian, 30% identify “multiculturalism/diversity.” Among older Muslims, the top response is “free country/freedom/democracy.” Both groups place an emphasis on the diversity that defines Canada.



I am invigorated and encouraged by these statistics. It is refreshing to see that despite recent events, young Canadian Muslims continue to feel connected to their communities. Hope, on both sides, can be a powerful force in creating connected communities and welcoming spaces for everyone. To ensure young people of all faiths and backgrounds have the opportunity to participate in community building, a focus on inclusive, quality public spaces that promote shared values is needed.

- HABON ALI
URBAN PLANNER



Methodology

As mentioned above, this summary includes data from two sources: *The Survey of Muslims in Canada 2016* (Environics Institute) and *The Young Muslims in Canada Survey*, which was commissioned by the Inspirit Foundation. The aim of the second summary was to build on the findings drawn from the 158 Muslims aged 18 to 34 who participated in the main survey. An additional 300 Muslims, aged 18 to 34, were asked questions from the main survey as well as an additional set of questions designed to go deeper into the Muslim youth experience. Specifically, we were interested in the civic engagement, volunteerism rates, media consumption and religious expression of young Muslims. Some of our queries were solely directed towards this younger group, while other questions were also posed to Muslims over 35 as well as young people in Canada generally. Equal weight has been applied to both surveys in the combined results presented in this report.



Conclusion

It is our **hope** that the findings in the overall survey, synthesized in this summary, create a nuanced and accurate snapshot of the attitudes of young Muslims in Canada in 2016. Suggested uses of this document include:

- Informing initiatives designed to create more welcoming spaces;
- Guiding policy and program development processes;
- Encouraging safety in public spaces, such as schools and workplaces;
- Engaging young change leaders across experiences to ignite conversations;
- Reflecting on personal attitudes and behaviours.

To learn more about the Inspirit Foundation's commitment to creating an inclusive society, please visit us at www.inspiritfoundation.org.

