

Number of mosques in US grows, but Black mosques in decline

by [Joseph Hammond](#) in the [June 30, 2021](#) issue



Socially distanced worshippers bow in prayer at the mosque of the Islamic Society of Boston on April 16. (AP Photo/Charles Krupa)

Increasing numbers of Black American mosques are closing, while the overall number of mosques in the United States continues to grow, according to a new report.

*The American Mosque 2020: Growing and Evolving*, released June 2, shows key changes in Muslim demographics as they relate to places of worship. The report, jointly published by the Islamic Society of North America, the Center on Muslim Philanthropy, and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, was written by Ihsan Bagby, who produced similar survey reports in 2001 and 2010.

“In 2020, the US Mosque Survey counted 2,769 mosques, which is a 31 percent increase from the 2010 count of 2,106 mosques,” said Bagby. “Undoubtedly, the primary driving force for the increase of mosques is the steady expansion of the population of Muslims in America due to immigration and birth rate.”

The report finds congregational prayers held in mosques on Fridays (a practice known as *jumu'ah*) averaged 410 attendees prior to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, an increase over the 2010 figure of 353. Seventy-two percent of mosques recorded at least a 10 percent increase in *jumu'ah* attendance during the reporting period.

The 2010 survey found that 17 percent of US mosques were in urban centers. That number decreased to 6 percent in the 2020 survey due to the growth of new mosques in suburban and rural areas and the closure of many Black American mosques in larger cities. The majority of new, purpose-built mosques in the United States are found in suburban areas. The shift reflects the demographic footprint of Muslims in America.

A number of factors are leading to the closure of Black American mosques, including the death of former Nation of Islam leader Warith Deen Mohammed, one of the founders of the African American Sunni Muslim movement.

A first wave of conversions in the 1960s and 1970s created new Black American Muslim communities. A secondary wave of conversions occurred in the early 1990s, spurred by globalization, the prominence of some Muslims in hip-hop culture, and the Spike Lee film *Malcolm X*. As members of the first wave get older, many Black American mosques have struggled to remain open.

“African American conversion, while it is ongoing, has plateaued, especially in African American mosques,” Bagby said.

The report does not include mosques used by Muslim minority groups such as the Nation of Islam, Ahmaddiyya, or Ismaili congregations, in part, Bagby says, because he was unable to obtain relevant data.

Attendance at mosques remains strong—especially among the 18-34 age demographic, where it is much stronger than worship attendance among Jewish and Christian groups, according to Bagby.

“My colleagues who work on Jewish and Christian congregations say to enjoy it while it lasts, that this (is) not sustainable,” he said. “I think it is too early to say a long-term decline is unavoidable or predetermined.” —Religion News Service