

المشاركة المدنية للطلبة المسلمين في الجامعات الأمريكية

تعزيز التضامن الاجتماعي ومناهضة الإسلاموفوبيا

د. أوس عادل عبدالوهاب (*)

أغراض وغايات وتأثيرات وقيم وأهداف المشاركة المدنية من وجهات نظر شخصية وتنظيمية.

وقد وجدت الدراسة أن مشاركة الطلاب المسلمين في الممارسات المدنية تحركها عوامل دينية ووطنية وظيفية. إذ يمنح الإسلام محفزات أخلاقية ووجهات للأنشطة الاجتماعية والخدمية للطلاب في الحرم الجامعي وفي المجتمع، وعن طريق الأنشطة البناءة المختلفة، يؤكد الطلاب المسلمون وجودهم كمواطنين أمريكيين ويواجهون الخطاب والصور السلبية المتداولة حول هويتهم الدينية. وتفتح المشاركة في المنظمة طرقاً للطلاب المسلمين لإقامة علاقات إيجابية مع غير المسلمين، وإيجاد اتصال وتعاون بين الحرم الجامعي والمجتمع المحلي للمسلمين، وزيادة الوعي المدني، وتطوير مهارات القيادة المختلفة. ويظهر البحث ضمناً أن مشاركة الطلاب في الأنشطة الاجتماعية والتعليمية والتعاونية في نطاق الحرم الجامعي والمجتمع يمكن أن تعمل كدرع لحماية الطلاب من الانخراط في أعمال العنف وغياب التسامح والتعصب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المشاركة المدنية، الطلبة المسلمون، التضامن الاجتماعي، مناهضة الإسلاموفوبيا

الملخص

يدرس هذا البحث المستمد من أطروحة دكتوراه كيف يمكن أن تُسهّم المشاركة المدنية للطلاب المسلمين في جامعات الولايات المتحدة في التعايش الاجتماعي والفهم المتبادل بين الطلاب الذين ينتمون إلى خلفيات مختلفة. وقد وظفت (نظرية مجموعة الممارسة) كإطار مفاهيمي لاستكشاف العلاقة بين المعنى والممارسة والهوية والتنظيم للطلاب المسلمين النشطين في المشاركة المدنية عن طريق المنظمات الطلابية المسلمة في الحرم الجامعي. تم اعتماد المشاركة المدنية كجزء من الإطار المفاهيمي لمعرفة كيف يفكر الطلاب المسلمون ويقدمون الخدمة ويتعلمون ويتطورون عن طريق المشاركة في الحرم الجامعي وفي المجتمع المحلي.

تستعمل الدراسة منهجية مدمجة للتحقق من أبعاد المشاركة المدنية للطلاب المسلمين. في الجزء الأول من الدراسة، استكشف استطلاع مغلق أكمله خمسون طالباً مسلماً في ثلاث جامعات في الغرب الأوسط وعن طريق جمعيات الطلاب المسلمين الفاعلة (MSA) مجالات وأنواع وكثافة المشاركة المدنية. وفي البحث الميداني النوعي الذي تبعه، استكشفت المقابلات مع ١٢ عضواً من منظمات الطلبة المسلمين الثلاثة

(*) كلية الآداب - جامعة الموصل

aus.a@uomosul.edu.iq

Civic Engagement of Muslim College Student in American Universities :Enhancing Social Solidarity and Encountering Islamophobia

Dr. Aus Adil Abdulwahhab

College of Arts/ Mosul University

Abstract

This research derived from a doctoral thesis examines how civic engagement of Muslim college students in the United States can contribute to social co-existence and mutual understanding of different background students .The Community of Practice Theory is used as a conceptual frame to explore the relation between meaning, practice ,identity and organization for Muslim students active in civic engagement through campus-based Muslim Student organizations .Civic participation ,was adopted as part of the conceptual framework to see how the Muslim students think, serve ,learn ,and develop throughout the process of engagement on campus and in the local community .The study uses a mixed method design to investigate the dimensions of civic engagement of the Muslim students .In the first part of the study ,a close-ended survey completed by fifty Muslim students on three Midwestern college campuses with active Muslim Student Associations) MSA (explored the domains ,types ,and intensity of civic engagement .In the subsequent qualitative field research ,interviews of 12 members of the three MSAs explored the purposes ,goals ,effects ,values ,and aims of civic engagement from personal and organizational perspectives .The study found that Muslim students 'engagement in civic practice is driven by religious ,national, and conditional factors .Islam gives moral incentivizes and guides for students 'social and service activities on campus and in community .Through different constructive activities ,Muslim students affirm their presence as American citizens and encounter the negative discourses and images circulated about their faith identity .Engagement in the organization opens up ways for the Muslim students to establish positive relationships with non-Muslims ,create connection and collaboration between the campus and the local community of Muslims ,grow civically ,and develop various leadership skills .The research implicitly shows that students 'participation in social, educational ,collaborative activities within the scope of the campus and community can work as a shield to protect the students from engagement in acts of violence, intolerance ,and bigotry.

KEYWORDS :Civic Engagement ,Muslim Students ,Social Solidarity, Encountering Islamophobia.

Introduction

For a long time ,Islam—both as religion and identity—has been essentialized as a foreign ideology that is incompatible with the civil values of the West .Islamophobia, a manifestation of this misrepresentation ,is a thriving industry that has been creating division ,spreading false generalization and misinformation about Muslims through various powerful platforms.

An important area that occupied my mind is the meaning of citizenship ,the way that people practice their rights and duties as citizens ,and how they become civically engaged .Civic engagement is a concept that reflects the individual and the group willingness to interact actively for the common good .It provides means for enhanced connection among people ,makes them better aware of their interests and concerns, and creates venues for social ,communal ,and political participation.

I started to realize the significance of civic engagement to each citizen ,the multiple ways it can be practiced ,the many positive merits ,and its communal effect. While we did have some social patterns and versions of communal involvement and participation in Iraq ,they were not as organized ,institutionalized ,constructive ,or diversified as they are in the U.S .context.

This research argues that students ‘engagement in disciplined and orchestrated civic activities that matches their interests ,values ,and skills can have positive impact on campus ,community ,and themselves .Membership in faith organization and participation in set of humane oriented activities can enhance overall social stability and protect against the youth engagement in deviant social behavior and violence.

Through this research ,I examine the forms of Muslims college students ‘civic engagement and how the students make sense of it .Using this question as a point of departure ,I investigate the purpose ,the guiding vision ,the motive ,and the consequence of being engaged in civically oriented activities as members of a Muslim student organization .I also examine how these students affect the environment as a result of interaction with people and the way engagement affects them individually and collectively *in a reciprocal manner*. Giving attention to inclusive civic engagement that accommodates individuals across their distinct identities is thought to be an effective instrument to diminish divisions and even avoid bitter conflicts.

Background Studies

Conceptualizations of civic engagement in this research is guided by visions, philosophies, and treatises of pluralistic thinkers. Within the scope of democratic space those thinkers share comprehensive view of civic engagement. Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) believes that any understanding of citizenship’s meaning should acknowledge the constellations of racial, ethnic, and religious identities. Arendt advocates shared and interactive spaces where people can unreservedly express their needs. Having accessible and free spaces to speak differences and commonalities

allows the people to reach a joint understanding. Those free spaces are open domains for practicing democracy, initiating change, empowering citizens and enhancing a sense of citizenship. Within those spaces, communities are constructed to advance their economic and political demands (Evans and Boyte, 1992; Loidolt, 2014).

The American political scientist of comparative politics, Robert Putnam argues (2000, 2015) that stability, economic welfare and legitimacy of the governing system depend on wide and diverse social participation. Civic engagement also is about shared responsibility and collective obligation. He emphasizes that the cornerstone of the democratic system is the involvement of the public in the social and political process. Putnam thinks that involvement in a social organization should be evaluated based on the organization's civic value that furthers tolerance and equality. The other key criterion is the ability of the organization to interact and collaborate with diverse social entities, i.e., not to have an isolationist orientation. In addition, an organization is supposed to be able to solve tangible social problems or at least to make positive and useful contribution. Putnam also believes that there is a close relationship between education and civic participation. Those who are well-educated are more likely to take part and be civically engaged. This means that civic participation is dependent or is correlated with education, which should be equally provided to all citizens.

Those concepts about civic engagement resonate with ideas promoted by the Islamic philosopher Tariq Ramadan (2013). He thinks that civic engagement should be made with clear vision and mindfulness. Moreover, it is not about being compassionate toward your fellow citizens, but civic engagement is in fact an obligation toward the whole society. It requires being fully aware of the local, national, and global challenges and issues, and then making appropriate contributions.

Definition and Typology of Civic Engagement.

Whether within the scope of higher education or beyond, variation in the activities and purposes of civic engagement yield diversified views and definitions (Boland, 2012). Adler and Goggin stress the multidimensionality, complexity, and elasticity of the concept of civic engagement. The participation of a citizen to bring change in people's lives is pivotal. Diller views civic engagement through the lens of personal and group enrichment; "all activity related to personal and societal enhancement which results in improved human connection and human condition" (Diller, 2001, p. 22). Jacoby (2009) defines civic engagement as "acting upon a heightened sense of responsibility to one's communities. This includes a wide range of activities, including: developing civic sensitivity, participation in building civil society, and benefiting the common good" (p. 9). Simplicity and clarity characterize Jacoby's definition. It integrates elements related to the reason that incentivizes students to be engaged with their communities, underlines the multiformity of practice, and

points out the learning associated with civic participation.

Building on the essential elements of community of practice theory (Wenger, 1998) including the practice, organization, and identity, it could be said that higher education plays a major role in encouraging, mobilizing, and organizing efforts to promote civic participation. Higher education is expected to have an influence on shaping the growth of undergraduate students. This is especially true when it comes to developing mental capacity and academic knowledge that enables the students to think critically, adopt positions concerning social, political, and life issues by weighing out things independently.

The presence of Muslim students and students with other identities on any one campus provides a continuum for interaction and negotiation that does not necessarily yield a hybrid identity but narrows the gap of different perspectives which may consequently reduce constructed social divisions. It allows for a spectrum of identities to challenge and encounter their own presuppositions, myths or misconceptions. The dynamics of this interaction as explained by Bhabha is an occasion for cultural intersection, “the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new era of negotiation of meaning and representation” (1990, p, 211). Muslim students interact with students of other identities through activities they organize on campus and beyond.

Using the lens of Arvanitidis, dimensions of civic engagement are divided into formal/informal, paid/unpaid, or individual/collective. It has spaces, temporalities, location, and methodologies (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Sherrod, 2007; Torres, Rizzini, and Del Rio 2013). Another important component that should be carefully weighed when studying civic engagement is the profile of a community. Campbell-Patton & Patton (2010) argue that “The characteristics of a particular community, its unique cultural, social, economic, and political issues, and the youth and adults therein are core considerations in any civic engagement work” (p. 602). Each one of these complicated and interrelated elements needs to be considered in order to understand how a religious community of Muslim students thinks or behaves.

In summary, civic engagement is not a straightforward or clearly defined concept; it rather has several historical, cultural, conditional, and circumstantial entanglements. Civic engagement may also change over time because of the process of acquiring new meanings which makes it always worth studying.

University as the Engine that Generates Civic Engagement

One of the pronounced missions of higher education is to consolidate the connection of educational institutions with society through activities that enhance civic growth of students and alleviate social problems. Institutional factors that

influence the creation, encouragement, and sustenance of partnership regarding students' involvement with the community, include the campus agenda for civic engagement, curriculum, dynamic relations among different group students, and faculty (Astin, 1991).

Campus Compact, a coalition of college and university presidents of nearly 1100 institutions in the US, spearheads the institutionalized efforts to promote civic engagement in higher education. Through their mission, the coalition attempts to "to improve community life and to educate students for civic and social responsibility". They also envision the "colleges and universities as vital agents and architects of a diverse democracy, committed to educating students for responsible citizenship in ways that both deepen their education and improve the quality of community life" (Campus Compact Website, 2019). The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching introduced since 2006 the Community Engagement Classification to measure the nature and extent of an institution's engagement with the community. This classification reflects the institutional mission and designation in terms of its civic approach.

Crucible Moment (2012), a national report, examines the way colleges and universities can support democratic engagement. Using a global democratic perspective, the report calls upon the entire community of higher education to adopt a plural approach for civic engagement. The report argues that the different institutions of higher education should strike a balance between the curricular materials and the practical methods and programs of civic engagement, taking both national and international principles and objectives into consideration. The report envisions participation as not only embracing the economic or political aspect, but also bringing diverse people together.

Different scholars see various benefits to close partnership between campus and community. Mutual relations between the university and the community through shared projects and community service may contribute to solving some problems in the society. This relation represents a positive force that empowers the civic society to tackle issues and problems through cooperation.

Some scholars believe that reengaging faith is quite important to have a more productive relation between academia and the community. Faith is an important factor that drives engagement. Astin (1991) found a significant association between the students' willingness to volunteer and their faith identification; they reinforce each other. Adopting such an understanding, this study thinks of Muslim student organization as an organic entity that not only practices various forms of civic engagement, but also helps to build pathways of partnership between the campus it belongs to and the broader community.

Methodology and Method of Research.

Through the interactive process of participation that occurs on campus and across intersected boundaries, students internalize a myriad of meanings, construct certain understandings, and negotiate their identities. At the same time, students undertake outreach and community service that contribute to their civic presence. Community of Practice theory is used as a guiding model to explore the relationship between civic engagement and Muslim college students.

CoP was developed by Étienne Wenger (1998) as an informal learning theory to synthesize four key conceptual components of a process where meaning, practice, community, and identity come together to explain how learning takes place in diverse social settings. Learning is an outcome of being an active participant in activities that occur within the framework of an organized social entity that unites a number of individuals. Those individuals supposedly have or share a common objective, purpose, or passion that binds them together. Through engagement and establishing interaction both among themselves and beyond the scope of their organized entity, those individuals negotiate meaning, make certain sense of their participation, and formulate an understanding of their reality.

Using Weidman's model of interaction, Lott (2013) argues that processes of social interaction among different students help to enhance and develop civic attitudes and values. He examined eight variables that manifest civic growth: (a) influencing the political structure, (b) influencing social values, (c) becoming involved in programs to clean up the environment, (d) developing a meaningful philosophy of life, (e) participating in community action programs, (f) helping to promote racial understanding, (g) keeping up to date with politics, (h) becoming a community leader (2013, p. 4).

The study uses a mixed method to explore the multiple dimensions of civic engagement of the Muslim students. Using a mixed method provides a mechanism to learn about the interrelationship that combines meaning and practice as conceptualized by CoP. In the first component of the study, the forms of civic engagement of Muslim students were addressed by conducting a close-ended survey to identify the domains, types, and intensity of engagement. In the qualitative part interviews were conducted with the MSA members to explore the purpose, goal, effect, value, and aim of civic engagement.

The key question this study seeks to answer is: what is the nature of civic engagement for Muslim college students? There are two components embedded in this question; the 'what' part of civic engagement is covered initially quantitatively while the 'how and why' is covered qualitatively. Three campuses with Muslim student associations were included in this study with the aim of examining the different perspectives

of students across these three organizations. This allowed the researcher to make comparisons among the organizations in terms of different themes addressed in the study such the structure, the boundary of network and relation, and the domain and breadth of the practice of civic engagement. The individuals invited to take part in this study were Muslim students enrolled in the three campuses in the Mid-western region of the United States.

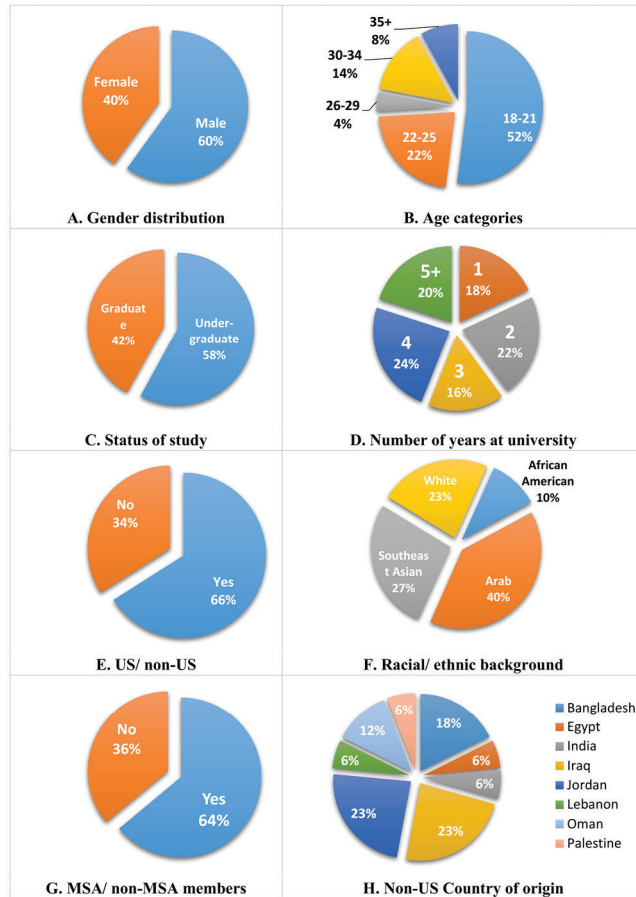
The statistical tool used to process the data is SPSS. Descriptive analysis was the method utilized to report and analyze the results of the survey. A univariate analysis provided an evaluation of variables and the frequency of all categories. Chi Square analysis was used to examine the relation between specific demographic characteristics and the survey questions to find any possible correlations.

The qualitative part of the study followed the survey administration. Students were asked to voluntarily participate in 60-90-minute interviews. The interview complemented the survey by exploring how the students conceive, understand, and make sense of the multilayered meaning of civic engagement. Through a semi-structured individual interview, students were asked to reflect on civic engagement. The interview questions explored the way the MSA members ascribe meaning to civic engagement. Those questions try to understand the structure, purpose, process, value, implications, consequence of being a member in this organization, and the way those members steer the course of action for the MSA. Although the questions introduced to the participants generated individual responses, the focus of the study was more on the organization itself.

The process of analyzing the qualitative data was guided by the general principles of thematic analysis. The epistemological grounds of this method are largely realist, constructionist, and essentialist. Using both deductive and inductive approaches, the researcher explored the topic as it exists in the context of inquiry. ATLAS.ti (QDA) was used throughout the process of analysis. This included the different cycles of coding, developing and revising themes, writing memos, and making comments and notes about the emergent themes.

Survey Analysis

The total number of participants in the survey was 50 Muslim undergraduates from across the three focal campus MSAs. Questions presented in the survey were closed ended. The participants were provided open-ended questions to add any additional forms of practice not covered by the researcher. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the students who participated in the survey.



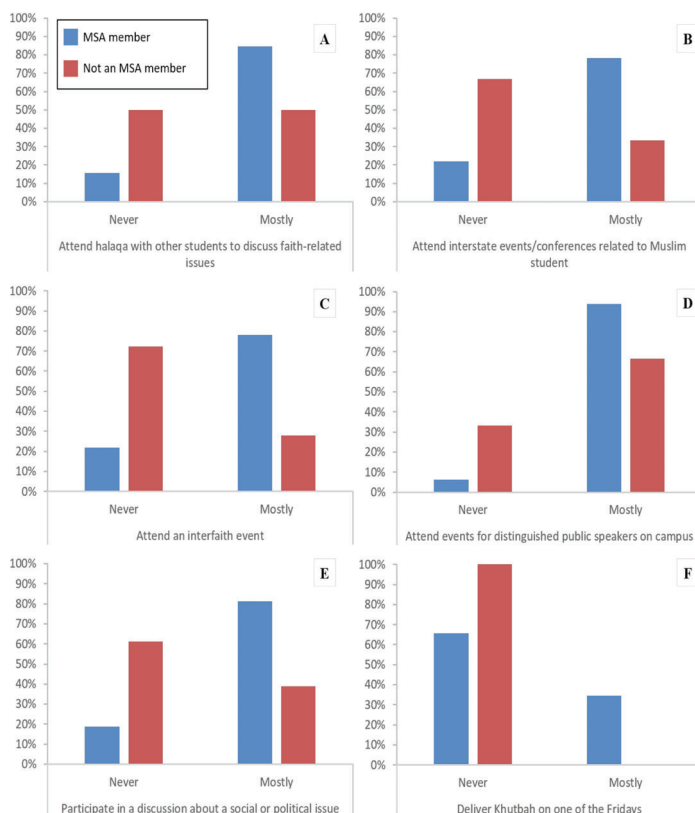
Aspects of practice have different manifestations. This research will focus on acts of educational/ awareness-related activities, charitable work, advocacy, and intercommunal/ organizational. The study research will also address points of variation between Muslim and non-Muslim students with regard to some civic practices.

The acts of charity practiced by the Muslim college students have material and non-material manifestations; it could either be through donating monetary funds or by providing support and helping to set up events. In this regard, the mosque is considered to be an important gateway to marshal efforts especially during the Friday prayer, which is an incumbent weekly ritual for Muslims. It is also interesting to note that the Muslim students in this sample are less involved in political activities. Their efforts are more directed towards the social service work. Numbers show that there is low engagement in volunteering for political campaigns or collecting signatures for petition drives or even promoting voting. Inter-community and inter-faith activities

are an important course of action that attract the Muslim students. They like to help people in need within the geographic scope of their cities by serving food or providing medical service. Few of them, however, are engaged in individual initiatives such as blood donation. And since Muslims have their own service centers, they are less involved in volunteering for refugee center.

The variable that revealed the most differences between the participating students is the MSA and non-MSA Muslim students. Out of the 44 items included in the survey, there have been 15 items that revealed significant correlation. The set of questions listed under the educational / awareness activities that take place within the scope of the campus showed 6 significant differences between the MSA and non-MSA members. For all of these six items, the results showed that considerable higher number of MSA students participate in those activities than the non-MSA members. Those six items are listed below (Figure. 1):

- Ø Attending halaqa with other students to discuss faith related issues, $p < .009$.
- Ø Attending interstate events/ conferences related to Muslim students, $p < .002$.
- Ø Attending interfaith event, $p < .00$.
- Ø Attending events for distinguished public speakers, $p < .01$.
- Ø Participating in discussion about a social or political issue, $p < .002$.
- Ø Delivering Khutbah on one of the Fridays, $p < .005$.



For the set of charitable works, one item (volunteer to distribute food) have significant difference in relation to membership in the organization, $p < .01$. Non-MSA students are less likely to be engaged in this activity than their counterpart of the MSA members. (See figure 2. A)

Several items in the set of advocacy related activities showed correlation with the membership in the MSA. Out of the 17 items in this group, the results revealed 5 of them are correlated. These results showed remarkable differences between the MSA members and the non-MSA across all of these five practices listed below (See figure 2. B, C, D, E, F):

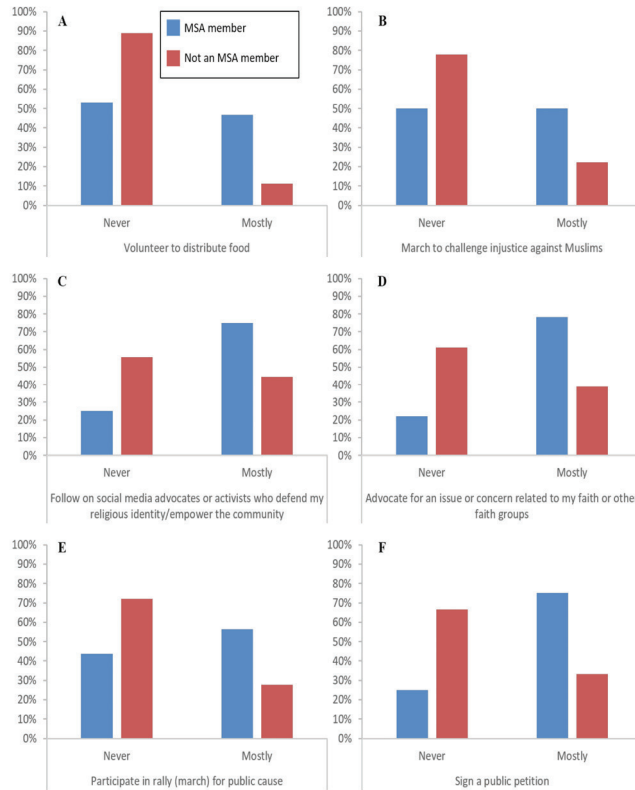
Ø Marching to challenge injustice against Muslims, $p < .05$.

Ø Following on social media advocates or activists who defend students' religious identity or empower the community, $p < .03$.

Ø Advocating for an issue or concern related to students' faith and other faith groups, $p < .006$.

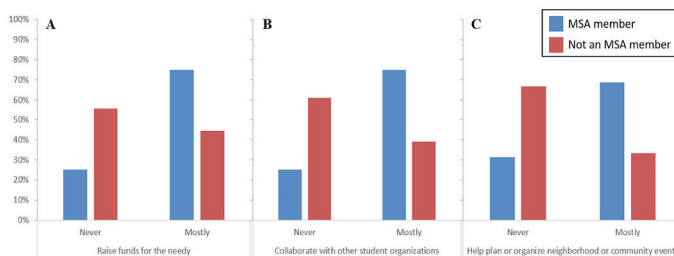
Ø Participating in rally (march) for public cause, $p < .05$.

Ø Signing a public petition, $p < .004$.



As for the inter-communal/ organizational activities that are based locally to a large extent, statistical significances appeared in 3 of 12 items in this set. For those three remaining items in this set of questions, the MSA members had comparatively higher counts than the non-MSA members (See figure 3. A, B, C). These three items are:

- Raising funds for the needy, $p < .03$.
- Collaborating with other student organizations, $p < .01$.
- Helping plan or organize neighborhood or community events, $p < .01$.



Interview Analysis

The campus represents a free space for those individuals to cluster together and to practice activities consistent with the moral and behavioral aspects of their faith. Moreover, presence of Muslims in the US—the Muslim students in this case –allows them to acquire and adopt democratically oriented behaviors derived from the context they live in.

Because it is situated in a country of immigrants, the MSA in the US combines diverse individuals who originally came from different destinations throughout the world. Living in a democratic environment encourages them to embrace and cherish the values of accommodating others across their racial, ethnic, and religious identifications. Across the different campuses included in the study, students consider diversity an important characteristic of the organization they are part of.

The students view their faith as a way of life, a mode of thinking, and a source of spiritual inspiration. Many of those engaged in the organization understand Islam as a service-oriented faith and they consider their organization as a gateway to translate that service into action. Senior members of the organization argue that to be a Muslim means that you must act upon the commitments of this part of your identity which means to work and do something positive. Othman from MPU uses the phrase ‘manifestation of Islam.’ He says that expression of identity comes through your behavior. If the students want to represent their Islam in the correct manner, then they need to do that through service to their community. He also underlines the point that the embodiment of the real spirit of faith comes through service.

The service provided to those in need in the community regardless of their background makes the religion more relevant and realistic to the youth. Talking about representing Islam to the public and countering the negative manufactured image, Othman thinks that Muslims should be “doing something with their faith”:

if we can express our religion, that's I think at least personally, that is one of the reasons the young Muslims believing their religion do not see relevance in it, because they never see any even positive, any manifestation or if they see manifestation, a negative one. So, this is a manifestation of doing something with their faith and that way, we are interacting with non-Muslims too, because the majority of people we are feeding are non-Muslims. And even on the lunch boxes that we give out. We have little stickers on top that would have a Hadith in English

of the prophet Mohammed (SAAWS), something about feeding the poor, something just you know a form of Dawah as well. You know, this is why we are doing this. So, that was I think most meaningful, the community service one was always.

A significant point highlighted by Othman is that service should not be provided to Muslims alone. Service and other aspects of help offered to the broader community especially non-Muslim of different racial backgrounds enhance the relationship with all sections of society.

The service-oriented understanding of religion by these students is linked to the way they perceive the concept of civic engagement from an Islamic perspective. Speaking about how the Muslims are supposed to present themselves and the reason they should focus more on the practical aspect of their faith, Suhaib from the SPU states:

So, you know go serve the homeless, is an expression of Islam and that help us to form our identity as Muslims, because we are doing something that our religion commands us to do. Not just doing whatever we are doing and just being Muslim while doing it, if that makes sense, because I think a lot of times that, even now, I think more so and so that, being Muslim is being a cultural think. It's not based on religion. It's just based on shared experience. And saying that yeah, we can do x y and z, but, if we are just a bunch of Muslims doing it. This is a Muslim Student Association. For me personally, if it is something that our religion telling us to do if it is, we are expressing our religion is some way, that can help build our identity .in a meaningful way

Translating the morals of Islam requires Muslims to be active and to serve their communities in every possible way. The above quote by Suhaib implies a concern that the religion turns into a set of cultural practices that distinguish a group of people who call themselves Muslims.

Membership in the organization and the activities they do provide the platform, space, and atmosphere to assert their identity as chiefly Muslims and to

maintain connection with their tradition. The members of the MSA have no specific definition or understanding of civic engagement; they consider the various activities whether social, communal, or political as being subsumed under that frame. Each member may have his or her own interest when practicing civic engagement; however, Islam is the main motive. Most of the students, however, understand CE as being directed towards serving the community.

An important aspect of the service the student organization provides for the community comes through Community Care Center (CCC, pseudonym). It is a community service organization that provides food, free medical service, and assistance to needy people.

The MSA gives a helping hand in philanthropic projects like Habitat for Humanity, where a group of volunteers give their time and efforts to build residences for the homeless people. Moreover, they volunteer at a state-level center that provides various kinds of care and service for the refugees. All these activities build stronger community relations and enhance sense of unity.

Othman speaks here about the Muslim community's tendency to have peaceful ties with the broader community. He considers this as a defensive mechanism adopted by Muslims who are always accused in the media as being a threat or a potential danger. They want to change this fabricated negative perception about their identity and show other non-Muslims that they are ordinary fellow citizens.

The whole experience for the students reveals a positive influence on their personalities. Students spoke about acquiring leadership skills, developing self-confidence, and learning to be critical and reflective. This development is an outcome of participating in different activities. Students also think that religious ethics stress and encourage self-discipline and commitment. Within the realm of the organization, students internalize religious ethics and morals because of interaction with other students who tend to stay connected with their faith.

In their narratives, students talked about the MSA's impact on the social environments in which they live, interact, and build relationship. Making the presence of Muslims felt, reconciling the Islamic and American identities, and combating Islamophobia are themes embedded in the students' accounts.

A central motive that drives engagement and the overall course of the MSA is the willingness to make contributions in different ways to bridge the gap between their two identities as Muslims and Americans. Civic engagement is considered the gateway for that purpose. The aggressive discourse against the Muslims have produced a conflict or division between the two national and religious identities. But, this young generation of Muslim students seems to be more aware of that conflict and they are keen on creating a harmony between these two parts.

As was mentioned earlier, MSA has shifted its concerns from transnational

concerns to local ones. Omar, whose sister previously served as an MSA member, observes that a considerable share of the organization's interest used to go towards the international issues concerning the Muslim world such as the Palestinian cause. But in recent years, MSA members became largely focused on the local challenges as US citizens and how to assert their identity as American Muslims.

Muslim students come together to combat the negative discourse against their identity. They organize events to counter approach or change the misconceptions and to educate others about Islam. Through positive communal actions, participants believe that they can counter the negative discourse that is pervasive in the media about Islam. Feeding the poor, distributing food for the homeless, and other social activities that are encouraged or promoted through the Islamic values send an opposite message to what is being circulated in the media. Besides, interviewed students believe that this sort of action is a neutral and more effective than engagement in political argument and conflict.

Muslims in the US in general have been in the spotlight due to national and global events relevant to their identity. Studies have documented the negative impact of Islamophobia and the negative discourse adopted by the powerful media platforms against the religion and its followers (Peek, 2011, Kazi, 2015, Alsultany, 2013). This has motivated the Muslim students to take a defensive position to confront this discourse and to change the perception in the minds of non-Muslims. Events held on the campus in which renowned Muslim speakers were invited to give talks to the public were one of the pathways to change misconceptions in the mind of the public. In fact, the sum of activities organized by the MSA including the social, community service, and other activities on social media convey messages of defying Islamophobia, consolidating peaceful relations and coexisting with different people.

Discussion and Conclusion

From an associational perspective, the study found that the MSA organization creates the platform for adopting civic practices, building and sustaining connections within the Muslim community, and collaborating with non-Muslim students on campus. The organization also mediates connection and collaboration between the university and the community of Muslims. The MSA is considered a religious organization concerned with cultivating Islamic identity and promoting Islamic practices. Greek, racial, ethnic, and religious are negatively viewed by some researchers who think of those organizations as monocultural enclaves that enhance a sense of victimization, prejudice, and ethnocentrism (Harper and Quayle, 2007, Sidanius, 2014). That does not mean that the MSA does not have an active role in furthering civic practice. A major part of the practices that were examined in the survey are civically oriented. The interviews also showed that the students were well aware of the value of their community service activities, fundraising events to

support philanthropic purposes, medical services provided through the community center, and other online activities that involve standing for justice or issues of common concern. Despite the misconception of student organizations as mere ethnic enclaves, other studies (Bowman et al., 2015, Lott, 2013, Engberg, 2007) show that faith-oriented organizations and their student members are valuable civic agents.

Being a constituent part of the campus body, the MSA organization also serves as a link between the university and the community of Muslims. It creates opportunities for collaboration or possible partnerships especially ones that foster social cohesion between Muslims and other identity groups in the local community.

The study showed that the MSA and the mosque have an organic relation of spiritual inspiration and guidance, mutual benefit and support, and civic oriented participation. The survey showed that most of the students attend the mosque to perform their prayers (*salat*) some days of the week and during the Friday prayer in particular. This presence enforces the organization's connection with the community and opens the way for increased awareness of the concerns and the problems the community may experience which incentivizes providing solutions. The study implicitly proves that students engagement in constructive civic activities via organized entities can act as a shield against involvement in violent or socially destructive acts.

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