

Introduction:

Islam, the world's second largest and the fastest growing religion remains a mystery to many of the nations in the west and east. In the past decade it has been put on a bigger spotlight, yet little is known about it to most of those outside the religion. Much of what is known about Islam and Muslims is a mix of stereotypes and misconceptions, which has contributed to fostering an atmosphere of fear and suspicion. This atmosphere has pushed some Canadians to fear for their security and their way of life which in turn pushed Muslims to fear being singled out and targeted. It is therefore crucial to clarify these misconceptions in order for Canadians to dispel these fears. This paper will provide an analysis on a survey conducted in Canada with the goal of shedding light on the attitudes of Canadian Muslims. The study will reveal that Muslims have many positive contributions to offer Canada and are not very different from mainstream society. It will also reveal some of the challenges and concerns many Muslims have.

Methodology:

The data in this report is based on a survey that was conducted between December 2008 and February 2009. The survey was conducted both online and on paper to allow a broad base to participate in the survey. Muslims were approached in mosques, Muslim organizations, businesses, and areas where they comprise the majority of residents. The goal of the survey was to outline the state of the Canadian Muslim community so that stereotypes can either be confirmed or refuted. The Muslim community can also use the information to learn more about itself. The survey focused on four areas: education and professional life, social life, political attitudes and activity, and the concerns and challenges Muslims are facing in Canada.

Education and professional life

Education defines the level of development of any nation. Crime rates, economy, quality of life and many other aspect of development are all directly linked to the level of education. A look into the level of education of Muslim community can clarify how big of an influence and how much of a contribution Muslims have on Canada and its growth.

The majority of respondents over the age of 25 years completed their highest level of education at the post-graduate level (43%) and undergraduate level (32%). While 10% completed their college diploma, 6% received a university certificate below the bachelor level, 2% completed an apprenticeship or trades certificate, making 93% of the respondents above the age of 25 with at least a degree above high school level. Comparing this to the general Canadian population where only 60% of the adults aged between 25 and 64 had completed some form of postsecondary education¹ showcases the great value the Muslim community puts on the pursuit of education.

One of the most popular stereotypes about Muslims, particularly women, is that they are uneducated. A female respondent stated: *“people think I am illiterate because I wear hijab”*. When some people learn that a Muslim women is educated and intelligent they view it as an exception rather than the norm. It is important to emphasize that 86% of females completed some form of post-secondary education.

Despite possessing higher education, Muslims were split across the middle in terms of their ease in finding employment; 40% of them had difficulty finding a job, whereas 40% did not. The remaining respondents did not try to look for a job. Landed immigrants were the most likely (67%) to report difficulty in finding work, compared to 39% of Canadian-born Muslims who reported the same. This may be related to the often cited reason for not hiring new immigrants due to their lack of Canadian experience. Many would still be in the process of getting their Canadian accreditation in regulated occupations. Just over half (51%) of Muslims who immigrated and became full citizens reported that they did not find difficulty getting employment. This indicated that for some immigrants finding employment may become easier but for a large segment of the group ease does not come with time. While they may know more about the Canadian labour force and its requirements, it is not necessary that getting the experience would be easy or lead to employment, especially better employment. This is a difficult reality especially for older employment seekers who may not want to start from the bottom.

Some respondents cited racism as a reason for not getting employed or for lack of advancement in their career. One respondent stated that *“It might not be hard for all Muslims to*

¹ <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-560/p1-eng.cfm>

find a job, but the darker your skin the harder it is. This is true for non-Muslim people of colour too, but it seems most Muslims are dark-skinned so yes, it's harder for us to find a job regardless of our qualifications". Another respondent noted that there is *"implicit racism in work environment. A non-Canadian, non-white is rarely on the top of an organization. Total disregard for foreign qualified & experienced people"*.

Of those working, 63% like their job a lot, 28% like their job a little, 9% dislike their job (3% dislike their job a lot, 6% dislike it a little). Job satisfaction does not appear to be a major issue with Muslims. However, 51% feel that they are underutilized in their work. Again, landed immigrants are the most likely (67%) to feel underutilized at their work and only 35% of Canadian-born share the same sentiment. Due to the difficulty in finding employment, landed immigrants may be settling for jobs they are overqualified for and thus feel they are underutilized as their foreign credentials are not recognized. It may take them longer to reach the position they want as they have to work their way up while they gain Canadian experience. Canadian-born Muslims may not face this problem as much since most of their work experience would be in Canada and they would have a smoother transition in employment than new immigrants. Job satisfaction and feeling underutilized at work do not seem to be related as the majority of people are satisfied but believe that they are qualified for more work.

The majority (59%) of respondents believe that Canadians value hard work and effort. They therefore believe that Canadian society is a merit based society, that if one works hard enough they can progress and improve their lives. The other 41% may have lost hope that they will advance despite their hard work or qualifications.

Social life

Free time:

Allocation of free time can highlight what people value in their life and how their thinking is influenced. More than 50% of the respondents stated that they spent time with family and friends, on the computer, watching TV and movies and reading books.

Volunteering is another activity for which some Muslims allocate free time. Almost 2 in 5 Muslims (39%) reported that they give back to the community by volunteering their free time. This is consistent with the finding that those who are more educated and who have strong religious affiliation are more likely to volunteer². Volunteering is a significant element of social identity. It is an important way to interconnect with others which strengthens the social fabric of the society. Many Muslims view volunteering as an important part of their religion since volunteering is considered a form of charity and thus a form of worship. The act of volunteering symbolizes the values and ideals the person holds such as wanting to make a difference in society. Leaders must continue to encourage Muslims to volunteer as it is a way to connect with the larger community and a way for civic engagement that encapsulates what it means to be Canadian.

Mosque attendance:

In a time when attending religious services is declining and religious affiliation is weakening, some are puzzled and even threatened by Muslims' religious activities as 37% of respondents go to the mosque more than twice a week, 31% go once a week. Some (15%) of the respondents attend the mosque only for special programs, 16% go to the mosque only on special occasions such as Eid, and 2% of respondents never go to the mosque. The mosque for Muslims is not just a place of worship; it is a place to connect with the community. When new Muslim immigrants arrive to Canada and do not know anyone, the mosque is very likely the place for them to go to meet other Muslims. Historically, the mosque was regarded as a community centre where not only religious classes were offered but also secular classes, and imams were regarded not only as spiritual leaders but as counsellors who can guide people even in their personal life. This is still carried on today to some degree. Many mosques in Canada function as places of worship as well as private Islamic schools. Some mosques offer services even to the larger Canadian community, such as hot soup days for the needy and distribute food to families in need. Some mosques also have gyms where people can play various indoor sports.

² <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/090608/dq090608a-eng.htm>

There are some big differences between men and women in terms of mosque attendance. Fewer women (17%) go to the mosque more than twice a week compared to of men (52%). And 23% of women and 38% of men go to the mosque once a week. Women (27%) are more likely than men (7%) to go the mosque only on special occasions such as Eid and 29% of women and 3% of men go to the mosque only for special programs such as Quran study. This is due to the fact that Muslim men are obligated to attend at least once a week whereas attendance is optional for women.

Even those who do attend the mosque regularly do attend when there are special programs that they think they will benefit from. It is important to take advantage of this for educational purposes because mosques are vehicles through which Muslims are socialized and their attitudes are shaped. This is why there is a greater demand from Muslims to have imams who are qualified to deal with the challenges the Muslim community is facing in Canada.

Politics

Since the mosque can play a role in socializing Muslims, some Canadians are concerned about how the mosque contributes to the development of anti-Western and anti-democratic values in the Muslim community. It is interesting to examine Muslims' political views and activity, especially because the majority of respondents in this study attend the mosque regularly, and whether concern about Muslims' political attitudes is legitimate.

Political interest:

It is theorized that interest is a prerequisite for knowledge on politics. Knowledge in turn leads to action and the confidence individuals have in bringing about change³. The percentage of Muslim Canadians who are often or sometimes interested in Canadian politics paints a fairly rosy picture where 44% of the respondents reported that they were often interested in Canadian politics and 38% reported that they are sometimes interested, whereas only 18% reported lack of interest. While the percentage of those who state that they are rarely or never interested is not negligible, it remains low enough. This indicates that a sizable majority do pay attention and care about what is happening in the political sphere.

³ <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/Thomas-Young.pdf> (p.8)

Men are more likely than women to be interested in Canadian politics, 86% of men and 76% of women reported they are often or sometimes interested in politics. This gender division also exists in the broader Canadian society where women are less likely than men to be interested and participate in the political arena⁴. Political socialization may explain to a certain extent why Muslim women are less likely to be interested in politics than Muslim men. Boys may be raised to be interested in politics while girls may not view it as important. The lack of female role models in politics may also play a part in discouraging women to be interested in politics⁵.

Political activity:

Contacting political officials and participating in demonstrations are some of the indicators of political activity. 47% of respondents reported that they have contacted a political official in the past and 50% attended a demonstration. This is close to the general Canadian population where 55% of Canadians aged 15 and over had been involved in at least one political activity in 2002⁶. The two indicators signify that despite the majority of Muslims being interested in politics, their political activity remains low. The high interest indicates that most respondents are not apathetic, but they may believe that political activity is not very effective and thus are less likely to be active politically.

There is a big difference in this respect between men and women, 55% of men contacted a political official compared to 38% of women who did the same. There was no major difference between men (51%) and women (49%) in attending demonstrations. In terms of gender division 58% of men and 52% of women reported being involved in at least one political activity in 2002. This goes in line with the division between Muslim men and Muslim women in terms of contacting a political official. However, there was not much of a gender division in the Muslim community in terms of participation in a demonstration. Given that fewer Muslim women are interested in Canadian politics than men, it is understandable that fewer of them have the knowledge of Canadian politics to allow them to participate in political activities. When it comes to activities (i.e. contacting an official) that directly involve the Canadian government, Muslim

⁴ <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/Thomas-Young.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.cpsa-acsp.ca/papers-2006/Thomas-Young.pdf> (p.5)

⁶ <http://www4.hrsdc.gc.ca/.3ndic.1t.4r@-eng.jsp?iid=68>

women are less likely to be more active than Muslim men. However, when it involved voicing their opinion about a political issue of interest to them in the form of a demonstration or a march, they were nearly equal to men.

Governing party and person:

Eighty-Eight percent of respondents stated that it matters to them who is in power. Men (87%) and women (88%) seem to agree on this matter. This is especially important when one analyses the differences between men and women. While it is almost equally important to both who is in power, for women it seems to have a greater impact because of political socialization and representation. As previously stated, it is argued that when women are candidates in an election, other women are more likely to show more interest and have more knowledge on politics than if there were no female candidates.

Voting:

The survey also asked people about their past voting patterns.

Of those who reported that they vote, 97% vote in federal elections, 87% vote in provincial elections, 59% vote in municipal elections and 25% vote in school board elections. One may presume that men and women are more likely to have greater knowledge of federal politics than provincial and even less so for the municipal level⁷. Federal and provincial politics make headline news more than municipal politics, therefore it is understandable that Canadians may not know much about municipal politics unless they made a real effort to learn more about local issues.

When asked on what basis they voted for one candidate over another, the majority (65%) of respondents reported they voted for the candidate because of the party s/he belongs to. And 40% stated that they voted for the best candidate regardless of the party s/he belonged to. 21% of the respondents depended on recommendations from other people on who to vote for. One respondent for example reported that s/he depends on the Canadian Islamic Congress for recommendations on who to vote for.

⁷ Gidengil, E; Blais, A; Nevitte, N. Citizens. (2004).

Of those who reported that they vote, 86% voted in the past federal election. The majority (68%) voted for the Liberal party, 22% voted for the NDP, 5% voted for the Conservative party, 4% voted for the Green party and 1% voted the Bloc Quebecois. More men (71%) voted for the Liberal party than women (62%). More women (26%) voted for the NDP than men (20%) and 6% of women voted for the Green party compared to 3% of men. There was no difference between men (5%) and women (5%) who voted for the Conservative party. Women in Canada are more likely than men to support leftist parties, thus voting more for the NDP. Many of them also vote for the centrist liberal party.⁸ It is important to note that many studies are still debating the issue of gender realignment whereby women are moving towards the left from their traditional center-right voting. So based on today's trend of general Canadian women voting for leftist parties, Muslim women are similar.

Reasons for not voting:

Those who reported they do not vote were asked for the reasons for not voting. The majority (63%) of those who do not vote reported that they are not eligible either because they are too young or because they have not attained their citizenship yet, 13% reported that they did not know who to vote for, 12% reported that they were too busy, 9% reported that voting is useless, 7% said politics is too complicated for them to understand, and 2% stated that it was unislamic to vote. Some respondents chose more than one reason for not voting. Unlike those who state that voting is useless, those who stated that they do not know who to vote for show interest in voting and presumably would vote if they were more informed. In the general population, 57% of those who didn't vote in the last election blamed "everyday situations" such as being too busy, family obligations or work schedules⁹.

Women (8%) are more likely than men (5%) to report that politics is too complicated for them to understand as a reason for not voting. Men (13%) are more likely than women (7%) to report that voting is useless. There was no major difference between men (12%) and women (14%) who reported that they did not know who to vote for.

⁸ <http://everything2.com/title/The+electoral+gender+gap+in+Canada>

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http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20090626/vote_online_090626/20090626?hub=TopStories

Muslim Canadians are closer in their reasons for not voting to the rest of Canada than some may presume. All of reasons are often cited by people from different backgrounds, socio-economic condition and faith groups as reasons for not voting. Surprisingly the number of Muslim Canadians who do not vote for reasons other than lack of eligibility is quite small. There is the idea that the more practicing Muslims are the ones who do not support democratic values. One would therefore expect that those who go to the mosque often would call for isolation of Muslims, would discourage political participation and encourage limiting activities in the public sphere. But Muslims who hold these beliefs are a very small minority. Therefore this is a great misconception that is perpetuated to keep Muslims in the position of “other” and “different” because they supposedly oppose democratic values.

Faith in the Political System:

Many of those who do not vote stated that they have lost faith in the political system. One person stated “*I don’t think politicians bring change to my life*”. They do not believe that voting will make a difference. Many stated that they do not vote because the options of candidates are limited and they do not agree with their policies. Not voting because one has lost faith in the Canadian political system and party leaders is not a reason unique to Canadian Muslims, 36% of Canadians cited negative attitudes toward politics or political parties, including 14 per cent who said they were too apathetic and 8% who said they were too cynical to bother voting¹⁰. It would not be surprising to find that even those who vote do not have strong faith in the Canadian political system.

The fact that some Muslim Canadians believe that the political system has failed to offer them representative options is not entirely surprising since there are very few examples of Muslim men and even less so for Muslim women running in the federal election. This might be more severe in the case of Muslim women. However, there are more Muslims running for

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http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20090626/vote_online_090626/20090626?hub=TopStories

political positions today. But if these Muslims go along with the current policies it may not make much of a difference.

Concern about foreign policy:

The high involvement of the West in Muslim countries keeps Muslims worried about Canada's foreign policy. Muslims view the government negatively when it supports what Muslims perceive as injustices in the Muslim world. Some Canadians demand that once immigrants arrive to Canada they should disassociate from "back home". Some Canadians may fear that Muslims' loyalties lay outside Canada when they are concerned about events overseas. This is an unrealistic demand since one, whether Muslim or not, cannot separate themselves from people they identify with.

Sometimes what happens abroad affects how Muslims are treated in Canada. When Canadians see certain images of Muslims in the media they extrapolate those images to Canadian Muslims. Making such inferences impacts Muslims in their everyday life, thus making Muslims even more concerned about what happens abroad.

Challenges and concerns

It is important to look at the challenges Muslims are facing in Canada in order for these challenges to be addressed. The better the needs of a minority group are met, the easier they will integrate into society.

A sense of belonging:

Many Muslims find comfort in the Muslim community, 67% of respondents admire the brotherhood and sisterhood among Muslims from diverse backgrounds. Muslims are as diverse as the general Canadian population. The comfort that many expressed when they are around other Muslims has to do with the space to be who they are without having to explain themselves to others and practice their religion without shame. As one respondent stated that being around Muslims "*allows me to belong to a community and feel comfortable practicing my faith*". It is natural to feel a sense of belonging with people one can identify with. Another respondent stated that Muslims "*can relate to, understand, and assist one another much better than others can in*

general". This comfort zone is especially necessary for Muslims when they are faced with stereotypes and pressures to explain themselves to those who are unfamiliar and hostile to Islam and Muslims.

This comfort can have a negative consequence when Muslims feel comfortable only in their community and limit their interactions with the general public. They remain enclosed in a shell that does not allow others to get to know them and they do not venture to get to know others. Thus they always remain comfortable only with other Muslims. This can lead to a divide between Muslims and the general Canadian population.

Disunity in the Muslim community:

Despite Muslims' appreciation of the diversity within the Muslim community, many divisions remain within the group and most of these divisions are along ethnic lines. Well over half of the respondents (57%) reported that they did not like that Muslims are disunited. (The remainder may not think the Muslim community is divided or they may think it is divided but do not see it as a problem). One respondent stated: *"I do not believe we have a homogenous community. We are made of many Muslim communities who lack strong leadership and encouragement and unity"*. It is definitely difficult to speak about one homogenous Muslim community as there are many differences between Muslims. Perhaps one can argue that there is one large Muslim community that is made of smaller very diverse groups. One can observe right away that many mosques are divided along ethnic lines. Even though anyone can attend the mosque, the leadership is usually compromised of a specific ethnic group that do not allow Muslims from other ethnic groups to have a big say in the affairs of the mosque. Converts to Islam are facing their own set of challenges when integrating into the Muslim community. One convert stated that Muslims can be *"very judgemental of reverts, make it difficult to feel sense of belonging"*. This can have a great impact on reverts, especially since they may feel ostracized by their family after accepting Islam and find no support from the Muslim community.

Muslims tend to bring back nationalism and sectarianism from their country of origin and continue to operate using these same paradigms which clearly do not work in this new environment. Even though Islam is a source of identity for many Muslims, in many cases ethnicity and culture play a bigger role than religion. Unity of Muslims will depend on their

identity, whether they derive their identity primarily from Islam and their ethnic identity takes second place or if they place their racial identity before their religious identity. In mainstream society, one may presume that Muslims see themselves first and foremost as Muslims because their religious identity is what is being challenged, but within the Muslim community their ethnic identity may be of more salience. This hinders work between Muslims because they remain in competition with each other for authority instead of cooperating with each other for the common good. The good news is only 21% of respondents believe that it is impossible to put the Muslim community on the track for success. This means that the majority have hope that the Muslim community can move forward and work out the challenges it is facing. One can predict that future generations may have a weaker attachment to their ethnic identities as they are more likely to think of themselves only as Canadian but their religious identity may be more important especially if it continues to be challenged.

“Us” versus “them” divide:

Getting accepted in the larger Canadian context was a major theme that many brought up. One respondent stated *“feeling like I have to prove ‘I’m a normal person/just as Canadian as you’”* and another stated *“I always feel like I have to explain myself ALL THE TIME about everything. It seems unfair”*. And a third respondent shared a similar sentiment: *“This is a challenge because when someone else defines what your religion is to you, you have to address them and correct them. Now to do this ad nauseum makes life in Canada challenging. Muslims are like anyone else, and to constantly tell others that (since they have negative preconceived notions) is frustrating and makes life difficult”*. Many Muslims do not appreciate the pressure that is placed on them to prove that they are Canadian enough which creates a divide between Muslims and the larger Canadian population. Due to the pressure, some Muslims feel discouraged to interact with the general Canadian population beyond what is necessary because of fear of being misunderstood.

Some Muslims do not feel the pressure to prove anything. One respondent stated that she feels respected and included because of her own attitude: *“people have been very warm and welcoming of my beliefs and I think that has more to do with me rejecting a “me versus them” way of thinking”*. And another respondent made a similar comment: *“I don’t see any main*

challenge living here, but the main challenge comes from within. That is to be proud of who you are and the values you hold within. When you respect yourself, religion, and culture, Canadians will respect you back!” Many stated that they did not like how some Muslims separate themselves from the rest of society creating an “us” versus “them” divide. One respondent stated that *“too many think that you have to choose between being Muslim or Canadian”*.

The more Muslims perceive a threat in their mind, whether the threat is real or not, the more they are likely to shrink back from mainstream society because they believe that there is no place for them here. Those who do not perceive or experience a threat are more likely to interact comfortably in the general context.

While part of a Muslim’s own attitude does impact their interaction with the general society, the messages in mainstream society also have an impact. Sometimes Muslims that hold strongly to their religious values are regarded as a threat to Canadian society. Muslims that are referred to as “conservatives”, “traditionalists” and “fundamentalist” are seen as the most threatening, while “secular” Muslims are viewed as the most acceptable section of the Muslim community. Sometimes “secular” Muslims take the lead in perpetuating misconceptions about other Muslims. The mainstream acceptance of “secular” Muslims has more to do with the similarity of lifestyle to mainstream society, whereas the fear of the more “conservative” sector has to do with lack of familiarity with how they live, think and act rather than a real threat that they pose. Therefore, Muslims are sometimes asked to abandon their religion in order for them to be accepted as real Canadians.

Muslims try to search for a balance between trying to assimilate in order to be accepted by mainstream society and the need to assert a distinct religious and cultural identity. The intensity of these pressures varies depending on the threat they face from the outside. When Muslims feel that their identity is not being threatened and there is space for them as equal citizens in the society, they will find it easier to integrate into society. But when their values and identity are under threat they will enclose around themselves in order to protect that and they will shrink away from interacting with the mainstream society and they will leave their interactions to the bare minimum thus creating a divide. This is harmful both to Muslims and the rest of society. Different groups will be suspicious of each other and they will fear each other which will cause tension in society. It will not allow society to function smoothly. They will compete with each other and may even seek to obliterate each other rather than work together. As long as Muslims

remain mysterious and do not interact more with their environment, they are more likely to be viewed with suspicion. Some people may exploit this to create and maintain fear of Muslims.

Discrimination:

Racism is one of the major factors that contribute to the divide between Muslims and the general Canadian population, even though many Muslims (62%) admire the openness and tolerance of Canadians. Many respondents added that they liked the diversity in Canada and the focus on multiculturalism. Some stated that Canadian society is open and they appreciate the freedom Canadians have. Despite this positive outlook on Canadian society many do not appreciate the racism in the society, 46% of respondents were concerned about racism and 15% reported that they were treated badly because of their religion. The greater concern about racism versus the actual experience of racism may stem from the impression received from what happened to other Muslims and the possibility that they may experience racism themselves in the future.

Women (50%) were more likely to be concerned about racism than men (42%) and 17% of women and 13% of men reported being treated badly because of their religion. Women (58%) were less likely than men (66%) to believe that Canadians are open and tolerant. This difference is certainly not surprising since Muslims women are usually more visible than Muslim men. Women, especially those who wear the hijab, have been facing a lot of pressure. There have been many incidents where women or girls who wear a scarf were excluded from certain activities. Hijab is attacked because it is such a visible symbol of Islam. This attack sends Muslims a message that there is something wrong with their religion and something wrong with them.

Holding strongly to such visible symbols as the hijab is not understood by many. Some people are puzzled by why some Muslims refuse to dress and act more like their non-Muslim counterparts. Some are even threatened when Muslims make demands from the government to accommodate them, they become afraid that Muslims will change their way of life. The fact that Muslims make demands is a good thing, it means they want to integrate and live in Canada, it means they view themselves as Canadians who belong to this country and who are entitled to rights that accommodate their religious beliefs. When Muslims view themselves this way they develop loyalty for Canada as a country rather than viewing themselves as foreigners who are

not entitled to anything. There should not be a problem with that as long as Muslims are not infringing on other people's rights.

Muslims are not concerned about Islamising Canada, or overthrowing democracy and replacing it with other values. When asked what their major concern was about living in Canada, the highest ranking concern (53%) was buying a home without interest. Muslims are trying to make ends meet just like everyone else, they want to practice their religion freely in a pluralistic and democratic society where they fulfill their responsibilities as citizens and not have their rights infringed upon by those who do not agree with their lifestyle.

The government must play its role in diffusing racism. When the government shows that it does not care about its Muslims citizens, such as those who are detained and tortured by foreign governments, despite these cases not being widely spread in numbers, they still make an impact on the Muslim community. They send Muslim citizens a very clear message; that they are not equal citizens because of their religious beliefs and they are therefore not entitled to the same rights as other Canadians. Muslims also feel less secure when they know that their government does not support them in times of need. This kind of discrimination can influence civic engagement. Some people may respond by fighting back and others may respond by pulling away and going into a shell. This does not benefit Canadian society as a whole. If Muslims gain the impression that they are second-class citizens, their allegiance to Canada, to the law and social norms may also weaken.

Muslims in the media:

The media can play a central role in perpetuating stereotypes that fuel racism. Many of the respondents complained about the negative representation of Muslims in the media. Muslims are usually portrayed as backward people who follow an archaic religion and thus incapable of adapting to Canadian society. Another popular stereotype that is perpetuated by the media is that Muslims are intrinsically violent and do not share the same values of freedom and democracy as other Canadians. Muslim men are portrayed as irrational and oppressive with Muslim women, while women are pitied and portrayed as oppressed and unable to think or speak for themselves and therefore need to be saved from their male relatives. Muslims who attack Islam and Muslims receive more publicity and face time than those who speak positively about it.

Not all depictions of Muslims in the media are negative, there is some positive exposure of Muslims such as coverage of Muslims helping the disadvantaged in their communities. But this positive coverage does not make-up for the stereotypes that are perpetuated. Some of the respondents place the onus on the media for the limited positive representation of Muslims, while others are blaming their own community for not representing themselves in a better light. Both Muslims and the media should play their roles in presenting Muslims in a more balanced way. The media has a responsibility not to sensationalize events concerning Muslims and should try to reach all Muslims, not only the ones who are ready to attack Muslims. While Muslims should make themselves more accessible to the media.

No long term vision:

The lack of a common goal that unites everyone is missing and is part of the reason why Muslims are not united. They all wanted different things for themselves and not for the community. More than half of respondents believe that it is problematic that Canadian Muslims have no long term vision. As long as Muslims are not united and do not create a vision for how to move forward they will not be able to deal with the problems the community is facing.

Muslims need to put a plan in place that allows them to be more effective in Canada and offer more to the country as a whole. Muslims need to challenge themselves and each other to look at the issues they are facing. They should examine to what extent some problems exist such as domestic abuse, sexual abuse, drug abuse, violence. These solutions must come from within the community. Muslims leaders should work with mainstream organizations to battle these problems. They need to look at how youth are coping in the society and how they are dealing with identity issues before they are exacerbated and get out of hand. Muslims leaders must agree to work together rather than in competition with each other. Only then will they be able to move forward as a heterogeneous community. This does not mean that they have to agree on everything. Having some disagreement is not a negative thing as long as doors for discussion are not closed. This is the only way to answer the many unanswered questions Muslims have about living in the West, such as buying homes without interest. Joining their efforts will take them a long way.

Muslim leaders should allow the community to have more of a say in choosing their leaders. A more democratic process should be applied in Islamic institutions such as allowing community members to make decisions for the community and to have more transparency in the way things run.

Concerns about the future

Respondents were asked what challenges Muslims might face in the future. The majority (53%) were concerned about increased discrimination and loss of privacy and 45% were concerned about an increase in hate speech and backlash. This concern stems from incidents where Muslims are detained abroad, Muslim women are asked to remove their hijab, hate-crimes against Muslims and Muslim institutions. This concern also illustrates that Muslims appreciate the same ideal that most Canadians highly value. Many of the Muslims who immigrated to Canada do not take these values for granted. At the same time Muslims want to keep practicing their religion. More than half of the respondents were concerned about the erosion of Islamic values and the difficulty to raise their children to be good Muslims. Since religion is a vital source of identity for Muslims, this may be fear for who they are. They do not view their religion as conflicting with democratic values. Therefore most Muslims believe that they can hold on to their faith while living in a secular society that honours its democratic values.

The way forward:

Muslims are a positive force in Canadian society and they have so much to offer. Most of the stereotypes are created in order to create fear in people and divide society. There does not appear to be a concrete reason for Muslims to be feared. Muslims must reject feeling like second-class citizens because that will hold them back from becoming more effective. There is no purpose for Muslims to feel like victims or to be apologetic for who they are. Being Muslim and Canadian goes hand-in-hand and as long as Muslims are fulfilling their responsibilities as Canadians citizens there should be no reason for them to fear standing up for their rights. They should not create fear in their mind of the mainstream society and they should increase their

interaction with mainstream society rather than remain enclosed within the confines of the mosque and home.

Muslims must take the lead in creating meaningful opportunities for dialogue between Muslims and other Canadians to increase knowledge about the other group. Learning about each other will eliminate the fear all groups have of each other.

Conclusion:

When asked about the challenges Muslims might face in the future, a small minority (11%) believed that challenges will decrease in the future. Let us prove these optimists right by working together to decrease the challenges in society, not only for Muslims but for all Canadians. We must make a conscious decision to do so and take the appropriate action.