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Muslims launch survey of American mosques

Omar Sacirbey Religion News Service | Jul. 20, 2010

Muslim-American organizations have launched what they say will be the most comprehensive survey of mosques in the United States in a decade.

?This is the biggest mosque survey since 9/11,? said Ihsan Bagby, an Islamic Studies professor at the University of Kentucky, who is leading this survey and worked on the last one in 2000.

Like that survey, the new one will provide figures for the number of U.S. mosques, the number of Muslims associated with those mosques, and attempt to ascertain the status of women in mosques.

In addition, new questions will focus on radicalization and whether it is considered a growing problem in Muslim communities. It?s ?a new concern within America and among American Muslims, an issue we're dealing with,? Bagby said.

The survey is sponsored by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Islamic Society of North America, and six other Muslim groups.

Researchers counted 1,900 mosques in a preliminary survey two years ago, and intend to call leaders of 600 mosques with questions between July and September. Bagby hopes at least 500 leaders will respond. Final results are expected next February.

Mosque leaders will be asked about prayer attendance numbers, social services, congregational demographics and views on whether Muslims should participate in American civic and political life.

In a nod to Muslim women who complain about having second-class status at mosques and being relegated to separate prayer rooms, the survey will also ask whether females sit on mosque boards and if they pray with men or in separate rooms.

Bagby said getting population estimates of U.S. Muslims, which now vary from 2 million to 10 million, was not a stated goal of the survey, but researchers might try anyways, depending on the level of reliable data.

?We'll probably take a stab at it, but to indicate a ballpark figure rather than a precise number,? Bagby said.

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