

CALL FOR PAPERS

Interdisciplinary Webinar Series & Edited Volume

American Islam at 250:

Community, Authority, and Futurity in the American Muslim Experience

Hosted by Florida International University and The East-West Foundation

Series Director: Iqbal Akhtar, PhD

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Proposal Deadline: May 1, 2026 | Series: July – December 2026 | Virtual

Submission Link: <https://go.fiu.edu/250>

Overview

As the United States marks its 250th anniversary, the American Muslim community stands at a pivotal juncture. Comprising one of the nation's most racially, ethnically, and theologically diverse religious communities, American Muslims are navigating intersecting crises of political polarization, institutional underdevelopment, contested religious authority, and the aftershocks of the Gaza conflict — all while confronting persistent Islamophobia and a rapidly shifting national landscape under the second Trump administration. Yet this same community possesses enormous, largely untapped resources for democratic renewal, interfaith bridge-building, and the construction of durable institutions that could sustain communal flourishing for generations to come.

This interdisciplinary webinar series convenes historians, political scientists, religious studies scholars, sociologists, anthropologists, legal scholars, theologians, and public intellectuals for a rigorous, eight-episode examination of the American Muslim community as it is today and as it might become. Rather than proceeding chronologically, the series is organized *topically*, with each episode addressing a defining dimension of contemporary American Muslim life. Accepted papers will be presented in the webinar series and revised for publication in a peer-reviewed edited volume timed to the Semiquincentennial.

Intellectual Framework

The series is structured around three interlocking orientations:

Diagnosis: Rigorous, evidence-based analysis of the present conditions of American Muslim communal life — its internal diversity, institutional landscape, political formation, theological debates, and civic positioning — without romanticism or defensiveness.

Contestation: Honest engagement with the tensions, fractures, and unresolved debates within the community: racial divisions, competing claims to religious authority, the accommodation (or exclusion) of secular and heterodox Muslims, and the ideological fault lines exposed by recent political crises.

Futurity: Constructive, forward-looking visions for what American Muslim thriving could look like: institution-building, endowment development, seminary formation, rational religious language, interfaith solidarity, and broad communal representation adequate to the challenges of the next 250 years.

Episode Themes

The series comprises eight episodes, scheduled biweekly from July through December 2026. Each episode will feature two to three paper presentations (20–25 minutes each), a designated respondent, and moderated discussion.

Episode 1: One Ummah, Many Creeds — Religious and Theological Diversity in American Islam

American Islam has never been monolithic. Sunni, Shia, Ismaili, Ahmadiyya, Nation of Islam, Ibadī, progressive, and nondenominational communities coexist alongside a growing population of secular, cultural, and religiously unaffiliated Muslims whose identities are shaped more by heritage than by practice. Yet communal discourse, institutional leadership, and public representation overwhelmingly default to a narrow Sunni orthodoxy that leaves vast segments of the community invisible. This episode invites papers that map the full creedal landscape of American Islam, interrogate the politics of theological boundary-drawing, and ask what genuine intra-Muslim pluralism would require — institutionally, intellectually, and liturgically. How are heterodox, minority-sect, and secular Muslims accommodated or excluded? What would it mean for American Muslim institutions to represent the community as it actually is?

Episode 2: Race, Ethnicity, and the Unfinished Work of Solidarity

The American Muslim community is among the most racially and ethnically diverse religious communities in the United States, encompassing African American, Arab, South Asian, African, Southeast Asian, Latino, White convert, and other constituencies. Yet this diversity has as often produced tension as solidarity. African American Muslims — the indigenous foundation of American Islam — have persistently raised concerns about marginalization within immigrant-dominated institutions. Anti-Black racism, class stratification, ethnic insularity, and competing narratives of authenticity fracture communal life. This episode seeks papers that examine the racial and ethnic dynamics of American Muslim community formation, the legacies and unresolved tensions between Black and immigrant Muslim communities, models of interethnic coalition-building, and the prospects for a genuinely multiracial American Muslim solidarity.

Episode 3: Who Speaks for Islam? — Religious Authority, Interpretation, and Intellectual Culture

The question of religious authority in American Islam is both urgent and unsettled. The disproportionate influence of Salafi literalism and legalistic approaches — often supported by transnational funding networks — has in many contexts displaced Sufi, philosophical, mystical, and rationalist traditions that historically characterized the breadth of Islamic intellectual life. Meanwhile, the absence of established American Muslim seminaries means that religious leadership is largely trained abroad, often in contexts far removed from the American experience. This episode invites papers on the

formation of religious authority in the American context, the influence and contestation of Salafism, the revival of Sufism and Islamic mysticism, the development of rational and contextual religious language for American Muslims, the seminary question, and the cultivation of an indigenous American Muslim intellectual tradition.

Episode 4: Institutions, Endowments, and the Infrastructure of Permanence

Despite comprising an estimated 3.5 to 4.5 million people, American Muslims remain dramatically under-institutionalized relative to peer religious communities. National organizations often lack broad representational legitimacy; philanthropic infrastructure is nascent; endowment culture is underdeveloped; and the community's considerable professional and entrepreneurial wealth has not been systematically channeled into the durable institutions — universities, seminaries, think tanks, media outlets, foundations, and endowed community centers — that sustain long-term communal flourishing. This episode seeks papers that assess the current state of American Muslim institutional life, analyze the gap between community resources and institutional capacity, examine models of endowment and philanthropic development from peer communities (Jewish, Catholic, Latter-day Saint), and propose architectures for the next generation of American Muslim institution-building.

Episode 5: Political Awakening — Ideology, Elections, and the American Muslim Voter

The 2024 election cycle marked a watershed in American Muslim political consciousness. The community's response to the Gaza crisis, disillusionment with both major parties, the “Uncommitted” movement, and the complex dynamics of the Trump II era revealed a constituency in ideological ferment. This episode invites papers that examine the political formation of American Muslim communities, the tension between domestic priorities (education, civil rights, economic opportunity) and international concerns (Palestine, Kashmir, Uyghurs) in shaping voting behavior, the role of religious institutions in political socialization, and the emergent ideological diversity within Muslim American politics — from progressive activism to conservative-traditionalist alignment. What are the prospects for a coherent American Muslim political voice, and what would genuine political maturity look like?

Episode 6: Palestine, Gaza, and the Fracturing of Interfaith America

The Gaza crisis that began in October 2023 has profoundly reshaped American Muslim civic life, interfaith relationships, and political engagement. Jewish-Muslim dialogue networks — painstakingly built over decades — have been strained to breaking point. University campuses have become sites of intense contestation. Muslim Americans have mobilized at unprecedented scale while facing accusations of antisemitism and political marginalization. This episode seeks papers that analyze the impact of the Palestine question on American Muslim identity and politics, the state of Jewish-Muslim relations in the post-October 7 landscape, the challenges and possibilities of interfaith solidarity under conditions of asymmetric power and grief, and the long-term implications for American Muslim participation in the broader interfaith and civic ecosystem.

Episode 7: Islamophobia, Polarization, and the Polycrisis

American Muslims navigate an era of compounding crises: resurgent Islamophobia amplified by social media and political rhetoric; national polarization that instrumentalizes Muslim identity from both left and right; immigration restrictions that threaten the community's demographic renewal and transnational ties; surveillance regimes that persist two decades after September 11; and a global polycrisis — climate disruption, democratic erosion, technological displacement — that exacerbates every existing vulnerability. This episode invites papers that examine the structural dimensions of anti-Muslim prejudice in contemporary America, the effects of political polarization on Muslim civic life, the long-term consequences of immigration limitation on community development, and strategies of resilience, adaptation, and coalition-building in an era of overlapping crises.

Episode 8: What Does American Muslim Thriving Look Like? — Visions for the Next 250 Years

This culminating episode turns from diagnosis to aspiration. If the previous sessions map the challenges, this one asks: what would it look like for American Muslims to truly thrive — not merely survive — as a community at the heart of American pluralism? Papers should offer constructive, forward-looking visions addressing any dimension of communal flourishing: the establishment of accredited American Muslim seminaries and institutions of higher learning; the development of a rational, contextual religious language adequate to the American experience; endowment-building and philanthropic infrastructure; broad and representative institutional governance; economic empowerment and professional networks; cultural and artistic production; interfaith and interracial bridge-building; and models for nurturing the next generation of American Muslim scholars, leaders, and citizens. What lessons from America's first 250 years can guide the community's next chapter?

Submission Guidelines

We invite proposals from scholars at all career stages, including advanced doctoral candidates, working across the humanities, social sciences, law, theology, and related fields. Interdisciplinary and comparative approaches are especially welcome, as are proposals drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, survey data, community-based participatory research, digital humanities methods, and practitioner perspectives.

Proposals should include:

- An abstract of 300–500 words clearly stating the argument, methodology, evidence base, and the episode to which the paper is directed
- A brief bio with contact information including institutional affiliation and email address

Important Dates

Proposal Deadline: May 15, 2026

Notification of Acceptance: June 1, 2026

Webinar Series: July 2026 – December 2026 (biweekly, virtual, schedule TBA)

Draft Papers Due: Two weeks before scheduled episode

Revised Papers for Edited Volume: March 1, 2027

Anticipated Publication: Late 2027 / Early 2028

Publication

All accepted papers will be presented in the webinar series and subsequently revised for inclusion in a peer-reviewed edited volume. The volume, tentatively titled *American Islam at 250: Community, Authority, and Futurity in the American Muslim Experience*, will be submitted to a leading academic press. Contributors will receive editorial guidance and peer review feedback to ensure publication-quality manuscripts.

Cross-Cutting Themes

While each episode has a defined focus, we encourage submissions that engage one or more of the following themes across episodes:

- The tension between transnational Islamic authority structures and the development of indigenous American Muslim religious leadership
- The accommodation, marginalization, or exclusion of secular, cultural, and heterodox Muslims within communal institutions
- The influence of Gulf-funded Salafi and literalist movements on American Muslim religious culture and the displacement of Sufi, philosophical, and rationalist traditions
- Comparative institutional analysis: lessons from Jewish, Catholic, Latter-day Saint, and other minority religious community-building in America
- Gender, sexuality, and generational change in American Muslim communal norms and governance
- The political economy of American Muslim life: professional achievement, entrepreneurship, philanthropic capacity, and the endowment gap
- Immigration policy, demographic change, and the long-term viability of community renewal
- The development of American Muslim seminaries, chaplaincy programs, and institutions of higher learning
- Interfaith relations under duress: Jewish-Muslim, Christian-Muslim, and broader coalitional dynamics after October 7
- Media representation, cultural production, and the narration of American Muslim identity in the public sphere
- The cultivation of a rational, contextual Islamic religious language adequate to the American democratic experience

Contact & Submissions

To apply to be a speaker or to join as a participant, please fill out the form:

<https://go.fiu.edu/250>

To view our work on developing American Muslim interfaith thought leadership, visit:
interfaiths.substack.com

This series is developed in conjunction with America's 250th Anniversary commemorations with support of the Interfaith Alliance and the National Endowment for the Humanities.