



**ISLAMIC  
RELIEF  
USA**



**MUSLIM PHILANTHROPY  
INITIATIVE**

LILLY FAMILY SCHOOL OF PHILANTHROPY  
Indiana University Indianapolis

**ZAKAT**

# Analyzing Zakat Practices Among Muslim Americans: Patterns and Influences

— Authors —

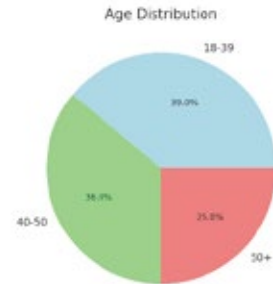
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## Key Findings:

The purpose of this study is to understand Zakat practices among Muslim Americans. A total of 261 respondents participated in this survey. Among them, 80% reported having at least a bachelor's degree. The sample was predominantly female (61%), with nearly half identifying as Asian (49%), including individuals of East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean), Southeast Asian (e.g., Filipino, Vietnamese, Thai), and South Asian (e.g., Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) backgrounds. In terms of age, 39% were between 18 and 39 years old, 36% were between 40 and 50, and the remaining respondents were over 50.



The majority (75%) identified as Sunni Muslims, while the rest affiliated with other sects, such as Shia, Sufi, and others. Additionally, about 60% of respondents were born in the United States. Regarding annual household income, approximately 40% reported incomes of \$100,000 or more, and around 26% reported incomes between \$50,000 and \$100,000.



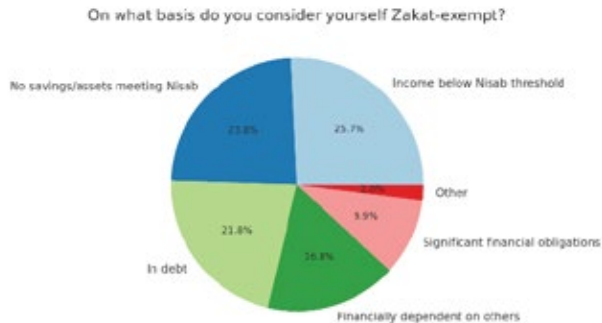
Approximately 64.4% of respondents indicated that they pay their Zakat during Ramadan, while around 22% reported paying Zakat at any time of the year, either when they have sufficient funds or when it is convenient for them.

Additionally, about 70% of respondents prefer to distribute their Zakat across multiple organizations or individuals,

rather than donating solely to a single individual or organization.

When asked about the most trustworthy institutions to donate their Zakat for disbursement, over 88% of respondents ranked local Muslim nonprofits (such as Islamic Relief USA, Zakat Foundation of America, and Helping Hands) as their first or second choice. In contrast, 48% of respondents ranked local secular nonprofits as a lower priority, placing them in fifth or sixth position. The top factors influencing trust and credibility in these organizations were organizational reputation and transparency of operations, respectively.

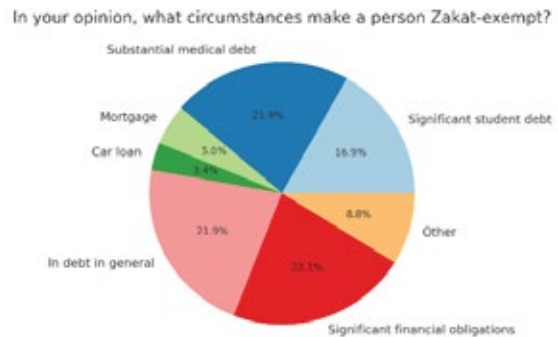
When asked specifically about Islamic Relief USA, 29% of respondents indicated that more frequent updates on project outcomes would enhance the organization’s credibility and trustworthiness among Muslim American donors. Additionally, 27% suggested that increased transparency in financial reports would strengthen their trust in the organization. About 28% of respondents mentioned that improved operational transparency would make them more likely to consider Islamic Relief USA as their preferred recipient for Zakat donations.



To explore our participants' knowledge about Zakat, we asked them on what basis they consider themselves Zakat-exempt. A total of 25.74% indicated that they consider themselves exempt if their income falls below the Nisab threshold (the minimum wealth required for a Muslim to pay Zakat) while 23.76% responded that they are exempt if they have no

savings or assets meeting the Nisab threshold. Additionally, 21.78% consider themselves exempt if they are in debt.

Additionally, we asked participants what circumstances they believe would make a person Zakat-exempt by bringing them below the Nisab threshold. Among the responses, 22.09% cited having significant financial obligations (e.g., family support, child support) as a reason for exemption. A similar proportion, 21.89%, mentioned substantial medical debt, while the same percentage indicated that being in debt in general would make a person Zakat-exempt.



In response to the question "How do you assess the Zakat amount you need to pay?" the majority of participants indicated that they either calculate it themselves based on their assets and savings (34.64%) or use online Zakat calculators (26.82%).

Most respondents (40.18%) were certain that Zakat cannot be donated to non-Muslims or to causes that don’t primarily benefit Muslims, while 25.89% believed it can. The remaining 33.93% responded with "maybe."

How do you assess the Zakat amount you need to pay?

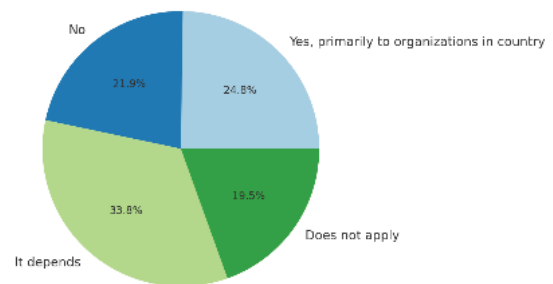


Most respondents were certain that Zakat cannot be donated to non-Muslims or to causes that don't primarily benefit Muslims (40.18%), compared to 25.89% who believed it can. Meanwhile, around 34% responded with "maybe." When asked why they might consider donating Zakat to causes that don't primarily benefit Muslims, the top two reasons cited were the belief that everyone is

Allah's creation and that some non-Muslim causes also benefit Muslims.

To explore participants' donation practices, we asked if they primarily donate to organizations in their country of origin when contributing to international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Among those for whom this question was applicable, 24.76% said "yes," 21.90% said "no," and 33.81% responded with "it depends."

Do you primarily donate to NGOs in your country of origin?



The top two methods for remitting money to these international NGOs were online payment platforms (e.g., PayPal) (46.41%) and cash sent through a traveler (18.23%). Additionally, when asked if the fear of government scrutiny affects their donation practices, 55.15% indicated "no," while 29.38% acknowledged that, although they are aware of this risk, it does not deter them from donating to whomever and wherever they wish.