

# GLOBAL MUSLIM DIASPORA

Muslim Communities and Minorities in Non-OIC Member States



## ARGENTINA

*Country Report Series*



ORGANISATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION  
STATISTICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH  
AND TRAINING CENTRE FOR ISLAMIC COUNTRIES





GLOBAL MUSLIM DIASPORA:  
MUSLIM COMMUNITIES AND MINORITIES IN NON-OIC COUNTRIES



COUNTRY REPORT SERIES

# ARGENTINA



Organization of Islamic Cooperation  
Statistical, Economic and Social Research and  
Training Centre for Islamic Countries



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## Acronyms

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GMD	Global Muslim Diaspora
SESRIC	Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries
SSUA	Social Sciences University of Ankara
CIRA	Centro Islámico de la República Argentina
CCIAR	Centro Cultural Islámico ‘Custodio de las Dos Sagradas Mezquitas Rey Fahd’ de Argentina

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## Foreword

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The SESRIC has launched the Global Muslim Diaspora (GMD) Project - a comprehensive research effort trying to analyse challenges, attitudes, experiences, and perceptions on a range of issues related to Muslim communities and minorities living in the non-OIC countries. The main objective of the project is to provide a range of useful comparative statistics and insights, which can help identify issues, initiate cooperation forums and shape future policy.

Islam is not only present in all continents as a religion but also as a cultural and civilizational value. Starting with the *Hijrah* of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Muslim migrants have laid the foundations for the spread of Islamic values, ideas, and habits in the regions where they are settled thus contributing to the cultural richness and economic development of these societies.

Today, whenever we raise the point concerning Muslims communities and minorities living in non-OIC countries, we have in mind a context in which Islam is present through more recent migrations. However, we should keep in mind that many of these countries have been the homeland of Muslims for centuries. Despite the recent growth in literature on Muslims living in non-OIC countries, our knowledge regarding this subject remains limited and fragmented. The GMD project intends to fill this gap through engaging more closely with the representatives of Muslim communities and minorities in different countries.

In the context of GMD project, it is with great pleasure that I present to you the report on Argentina, which affords the political elites, policy makers, analysts, and general public the opportunity to understand how the Muslims in Argentina view the most pressing issues they face today. The report on Argentina is based on two basic pillars: desk research and fieldwork – conducted by traveling to Buenos Aires between November 12 and 17, 2018. Survey and workshops with representatives of Muslim communities and minorities and in-depth interviews with Muslim and non-Muslim public opinion leaders are the main components of this field study. The results of the field work are integrated throughout the report.

I would like to encourage the readers of this report to have a look at the GMD general report titled “*Muslim Communities and Minorities in Non-OIC Countries: Diagnostics, Concepts, Scope and Methodology*”, which inter alia provides a description of the methodology and research activities applied when preparing the report on Argentina.

The development of this report has involved the dedication, skills, and efforts of many individuals, to whom I would like to thank.

Amb. Musa Kulaklıkaya  
Director General  
SESRIC

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Nebil Dabur, Director General of the SESRIC, provided pivotal leadership during the preparation of the report. Several SESRIC members also contributed to the finalization of the report, including Dr. Kenan Bağcı, Acting Director of Economic and Social Research Department, and Dr. Erhan Türbedar, Researcher, who coordinated the report on behalf of SESRIC. Kaan Namli, Researcher, edited the report and Fatma Nur Zengin, Events and Communications Specialist, facilitated the fieldworks.

The SESRIC gratefully acknowledges local field workers and the institutions representing Muslim communities and minorities in Argentina for their cooperation and extraordinary support, without which this project would not have been possible.

## Executive Summary

Argentina is a country of immigrants. The legal and administrative structure has always been open to migrants. Yet, due to the highly secular nature of both the public and the private sphere, Muslims immigrants have undergone a significant level of integration, aggravated by acculturation and assimilation. Over time, this has reduced the visibility of the Muslim community. Today, in Buenos Aires it is not that easy to see a sizable number of Muslims, like women in hijab, on the street or on Fridays around mosques.

Despite the high level of integration and low level of visibility of Muslims, Argentina has the largest number of Muslims in Latin America. The literature on Argentine Muslims and the findings of this project's primary data provide conflicting numbers regarding the Muslim population size. Although the general literature states there to be 500,000 Muslims in Argentina, the primary data indicates there may be 70,000 "visible" Muslims in society. Around half of the Muslim population lives in Buenos Aires; the rest are said to be in Mendoza, Neuquén, Rosario, Córdoba, Tucumán, Salta, Santiago del Estero, and La Rioja.

Muslim immigration to the Argentina began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then there has been a plurality of associations and cultural organizations of Muslims. Muslim institutions of different sects and ethnicities carry out strategies to increase their own visibility but do not seek to unify the Muslim community. The community is quite diverse and fragmented. There are many confessional distinctions regarding the Islamic sects in Argentina: Sunni, Shia or Alawi. There are also many distinctions vis-à-vis ethnic origins and their relations with the state. The representative institutions and figures of the Muslim community are also diverse concerning their forms of association, myths of their origins, and level of public presence. The largest numbers of Muslim migrants derive from Syria and Lebanon. In the colloquial local language, they are referred to as "Turco(s)", since most of them came from ex-Ottoman Empire Territories. Argentina has one of the most active Islamic groups in Latin America, known as the Islamic Organization of Latin America. Owing to its larger Muslim population, Argentina has the largest mosque in South America: The King Fahd Islamic Cultural Centre in Palermo/Buenos Aires.

Due to the limitations of national censuses when determining the size of the Muslim population in Argentina, making an estimation, as mentioned above, would be inaccurate. Yet, one very accurate assessment is that the Muslim population in Argentina has been 'fading into insignificance'. The great majority of Muslim descendants' mothers are non-Muslims, which has been eroding their Muslim roots. This is intensified by the combined pressure of prejudice, which has heightened with the violence of fundamentalist terror groups such as ISIL or Al-Qaeda. There is also a clear distinction between Buenos Aires and the country's hinterlands regarding Islamic survival, which is much less problematic in the former. Since half of the Muslim population lives in the countryside, it is understandable that the above-mentioned insignificance continues. One exception to this is Buenos Aires' "Muslim neighbourhood" of San Cristóbal where Muslims continue to 'adhere to the religion' and some cultural features of their ancestors. Yet, this does not change the widely held view that there has been an 'undeniable drop'<sup>1</sup> in Argentina's Muslim population starting in the 1970s.

<sup>1</sup> For similar views see: Gladys Jozami, "The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina", *The Americas*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1996, p. 84; Interview with Kerem (2018).

There is a slow Islamic revival that began in the 1980s with the help of Islamic countries' (such as Saudi Arabia, Iran and Libya) efforts to build mosques and support Muslim organizations.<sup>2</sup> This revival has slowly accelerated in the new millennium with the influence of Saudi Arabia's investment in a cultural centre called Centro Cultural Islámico 'Custodio de las Dos Sagradas Mezquitas Rey Fahd' de Argentina. These efforts triggered a slim portion of third generation Muslims to revitalize their Islamic identity and traditions in Argentina.

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<sup>2</sup> Ignacio Klich, "Criollos and Arabic Speakers: An Uneasy Pas de Deux, 1888-1914, in Albert Hourani & Nadim Shehadi (eds.), *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, London: The Centre of Lebanese Studies, 1992, pp.258-259.

## 1. Introduction: Context and Background

If the diasporic Muslim community is accepted as a neighbourhood of diasporic religious microspheres, Muslims in Argentina are part of a global Muslim environment. Argentinian Muslims' microspheres are part of global symbolic space where signifiers such as the green star and crescent, figures/pictures of "holy places", and practices of prayer maintain similarities throughout the world. These signifiers provide the symbolic realm connected to common values and practices.

Figure 1: Argentina's map



Source: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Argentina>

Perhaps the key feature of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Argentina was its chronic instability. Frequent alterations in the system of government together with regime changes and crises within the dominant power cartels prevented the country from achieving a significant period of stability. The climax was arguably the country's military dictatorship between 1976 and 1983. When President Raúl Ricardo Alfonsín of Unión Cívica Radical (Radical Civic Union) began his six-year term in 1983, Argentina finally seemed to be entering a phase of political stability. Yet, in a short period, economic and political crisis re-emerged in the first half of 1989, and a new period of hyperinflation and political stalemate recommenced.<sup>3</sup>

The constitution of Argentina guarantees freedom of religion. It also emphasizes secularism in the official realm relying on the separation between the church and state. Yet, the Catholic Church still holds significant authority concerning social issues. In

<sup>3</sup> BTI 2018, Argentina Country Report, <https://www.bti-project.org/>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

general, this approach is accepted by the Argentinian society. According to Latinobarómetro 2015, 60% of citizens are convinced that the state guarantees all confessions.<sup>4</sup>

Democratically elected political representatives generally have the power to govern, but in Argentina's under-institutionalized political system, individual power groups can create their own separate domains or enact special-interest policies, albeit with changing fortunes due to political cycles. Four corporate actors have historically held a veto power. These are trade unions, big business, the financial sector and the military. Although the military in Argentina was once the most powerful actor, beginning in the early 1990s the military lost its veto power in political affairs on the country. Since the 1990s, the balance of power between the three branches of government decisively shifted in favour of the executive, resulting in a "presidential hegemony" continuing until the presidencies of Néstor Kirchner and his wife Cristina Fernández (2003-2015)<sup>5</sup>.

Argentina has the highest level of immigration in Latin America. In 2013, the country was the destination for nearly 140,000 permanent immigrants and approximately the same number of temporary immigrants. From 2010 to 2013, these figures increased 45% and 70%, respectively. In 2013, the foreign-born individuals represented 4.5% of the total Argentine population, unchanged since 2010. For the year 2013, Argentina received 612 asylum requests, mostly from Syria, Cuba and Colombia. From 2012 to 2013, the number of applicants decreased 58%. Today, Argentina has 3,295 refugees, mainly from Peru, Colombia and Cuba.<sup>6</sup>

Political and civic organizational rights are generally respected. Citizens are able to assemble freely. Civil society organizations are robust and play a significant role in society, although some periodically fall victim to Argentina's endemic corruption. Trade unions were strongly undermined during the Carlos Menem era (1989-1999)<sup>7</sup> by neoliberal reforms, corruption scandals and internal divisions; however, it gained negotiating power again with the economic recovery and the more flexible governing style under Cristina Fernández. Beyond the established forms of interest group articulation, there has been an emergence of basic organizations, self-help groups and other forms of self-articulation and protest. NGOs monitor and influence government policy on a variety of issues. They are generally free from legal restrictions and political pressure from the state.<sup>8</sup> Regarding Muslims, it has been more than a century since they have formed a community in Argentina. Although there is still no official history and statistical illustration of the dispersal of Muslims throughout Argentina's provinces, the Arab origin has a deep influence in the Argentinian Muslim profile.

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<sup>4</sup> Latinobarómetro 2015, <http://www.latinobarometro.org/latContents.jsp>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

<sup>5</sup> For a brief summary of the Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández era see: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cristina-Fernandez-de-Kirchner>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Argentina, General Index, SICREMI, Continuous Reporting System on International Migration in the Americas, <http://www.migracionoea.org/>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

<sup>7</sup> For a brief summary of the Menem era see: The Menem Era and the 21st Century, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Argentina/The-Menem-era-and-the-21st-century>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

<sup>8</sup> BTI 2018, Argentina Country Report, <https://www.bti-project.org/>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

In the literature, it is estimated that there are between 500,000-900,000 Muslims in Argentina. Yet, the numbers are conflicting. It is hard to achieve an accurate number since religious affiliation is not requested in the national census. According to Imam Mahmud Hussain,<sup>9</sup> there are currently about 450,000 Muslims living in Argentina and only 40,000 consider themselves believers. According to Mujamad Hayer, Director of the Oficina de Cultura y Difusión Islámica (Office of Culture and Islamic Diffusion), there are between 650,000 and 700,000 Muslims.<sup>10</sup> In 2010, the Pew Forum estimated Argentina's Muslim community to have grown to almost 1 million people, or 2.5% of the country's population of approximately 45 million.<sup>11</sup> Approximately 70% of this population is Sunni, while the Shiite community makes up the remaining 30%.<sup>12</sup> From the interviews undertaken for this study, it is estimated that the Muslim population is somewhere around 70,000-100,000.

The number of practicing Muslims in Argentina is decreasing for several reasons. First is related to cultural elements. In general, Muslim customs have been eroding, including food and drink. Second, Spanish publications about Islam's various features are very limited. Moreover, research and study centres for disseminating these features are also largely inadequate. Third, because of mixed marriages new generations are losing their links to Islam. Regarding the Muslim diaspora, Tobias Boos<sup>13</sup> uses the adjective 'diasporic' as opposed to the noun 'diaspora', indicating that 'communities are always embedded in social and cultural contexts, which gives each community a special quality'. For Argentina, this quality fits more into the term 'diasporic' since it is characterized 'by a sense of being oppressed and discriminated against, and of being a global community'. In Argentina, Muslims built 'fragmented communities that have to be recognized as integrated into the host society'. Therefore, as in many countries, there is no homogenous Muslim community in Argentina.

## 1.1. Argentina: A Brief Historical Context

A comprehensive history of Argentina is beyond the limits of this study. Yet some significant cornerstones and facts reflecting the politico-economic imbalances are necessary as a means to understand better contemporary Argentina. Argentina's name derives from the Latin word for silver, *argentum*, which underlines the very fact that the country is a great source of valuable minerals. Moreover, due to its production of livestock and cereals, Argentina was once ranked among the world's wealthiest nations. Much of this agricultural activity takes

<sup>9</sup> Imam Mahmud Hussain is ex-president of Asociación para la difusión del Islam en América Latina (Association for the Diffusion of Islam in Latin America), and director of Centro de Altos Estudios Islámicos de la Argentina (Centre of Advanced Islamic Studies of Argentina). See: Pedro Brieger, "Muslims in Argentina", *Isim Newsletter*, 60/00, p.33.

<sup>10</sup> Pedro Brieger, "Muslims in Argentina", *Isim Newsletter*, 60/00, p.33.

<sup>11</sup> Table: Muslim Population by Country," (The Pew Center, 27 January 2011), <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/01/27/table-muslim-population-by-country/>, accessed 21 December 2018; For Argentina's population estimate see: <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/argentina-population/>, accessed 21 December 2018.

<sup>12</sup> "International Religious Freedom Report—Argentina," (The United States Department of State, November 17, 2010), <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2010/148731.htm>, accessed 21 December 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Albrecht et.al., "Editorial: Conceptualising 'Muslim Diaspora'", *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 5, 2016, p. 6

place in the Pampas, rich grasslands that were once the domain of nomadic Native Americans, followed by rough-riding gauchos, who were in turn forever enshrined in the nation's romantic literature.

Despite the vast, arid Patagonian landscapes, Argentina is a largely urban country. The national capital Buenos Aires sprawls across the eastern Pampas with its ring of modern suburbs. It is among South America's most cosmopolitan and crowded cities. Argentina was first discovered by Juan Diaz de Solis in 1516 then developed under Spanish colonial rule, which was followed by British colonial rule until 1807, and then Napoleon invaded the country in 1808. Argentinians established their own government in 1810 and formally declared independence on 9 July 1816.

In both World Wars, Argentina was a non-belligerent. After the Second World War, Juan D. Peron won the presidential elections in 1946 and again in 1951. His second wife, Eva Duarte de Peron, particularly because of her popularity among the working classes, bolstered his political strength. Eva had never officially been in government but acted as the de facto minister of health and labour. Yet, Peron's increasing authoritarianism resulted in a coup. What followed was a long period of military dictatorships intersected with small periods of constitutional government. Peron returned to power in 1973 with his third wife Isabel Martinez de Peron, as the elected vice-president. After Peron's death, Isabel became the first woman chief of state. Under her rule, Argentina suffered economic and political collapse. In 1975, because of left wing and right wing clashes, 700 people died. In March 1976, General Jorge Rafael Videla's successful coup began a period of martial law.

The military instituted a "dirty war" to eradicate opponents and restore order. The Argentine Commission for Human Rights has charged the junta with 2,300 political murders, over 10,000 political arrests, and the disappearance of 20,000 to 30,000 people. In March 1981, Field Marshal Roberto Viola, who in turn was succeeded by General Leopoldo Galtieri, deposed Videla. On 2 April 1982, which to increase his popularity Galtieri invaded the British-held Falkland Islands, which were disputed over by both the United Kingdom and Argentina. However, the UK won a decisive victory, and Galtieri resigned. General Reynaldo Bignone assumed power on 14 June, amid increasing pro-democratic public sentiment. As the 1983 elections approached, inflation hit 900% and Argentina's crippling foreign debt reached extraordinary levels. After early 1980s, economic and political instability were the hallmarks of Argentinian political history. Although the new Peronist president, Carlos Menem came to power in 1989 to fix the economy with his austerity measures, Argentina entered its worst recession. In December 1991, with Fernando de la Rúa's presidency, Argentina was on the verge of economic collapse. At that time, Argentina defaulted on its payment of \$155 billion in foreign debt, the largest such default in history. During Néstor Kirchner and his wife Cristina Fernández de Kirchner presidencies, via well-orchestrated and aggressive reform programs, the economy stabilized somewhat and saw signs of improvement. Yet in 2014, Argentina defaulted on its debt again and the peso fell by 25% against the US dollar. Conservative Mauricio Macri, who assumed the presidency in 2015, continues to tackle the instability and volatile nature of Argentinian economy and politics.

Muslim immigration to Argentina began in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The first wave of Muslim immigrants came from today's Syria between 1850 and 1860 for hopes of better living conditions. Another two waves occurred between 1870-1918 and 1919-1926, when the



Ottoman Empire was partitioned following its defeat in the First World War. These first few waves of migrants were primarily of Syrian and Lebanese descent. According to the official censuses at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these two groups were the third largest ethnic group in Buenos Aires.<sup>14</sup> Despite these migrants being primarily Arabs, they were simply known as “Turco(s)” because they had come to the Argentina from the Ottoman Empire. By the 1950s, the number of migrants from the Middle East exceeded 100,000.<sup>15</sup> 70% of these migrants identified themselves as Christian. The 1960 census, the last census to officially note information on religion, showed that about 1/10 of Arab immigrants identified themselves as Muslims. Unofficial estimates in later decades suggested that the ratio was between 15-40%.<sup>16</sup> One main reason for such conflicting estimates is the quick integration of Arab immigrants. Predominantly through marriage, they adopted Roman Catholicism.

Throughout the 1950s, regardless of the considerable scale of migration from the Middle East, migrants were integrated into the general non-Muslim societal fabric of Argentina. In the 1940 and 1950s, the chronicles mention that it was rare for a Muslim Arab not to drink wine.<sup>17</sup> Islamic institutions began to emerge in the early 1970s. The most notable one was the Centro de Estudios Islámicos (Islamic Centre), founded by Imam Mahmud Hussain. Yet, none of the emerging Muslim institutions was visible until the 1989 elections when Carlos Saul Menem became the President.

Since Muslims constitute less than 1% of the Argentinian population, their history has been that of a religious minority.<sup>18</sup> In the period 1890-1980, Muslims had lived under strong Argentinian nationalism, which discriminated against all religions and Christian sects with the exception of Catholicism. This resulted in Muslims maintaining a low profile.<sup>19</sup> With Menem, a different story began. Menem’s parents were of Syrian origin. He did not refrain from openly stating that he was a Muslim until the 1994 Constitution demanded that the president should be a Roman Catholic. Following this, Menem embraced Catholicism but his wife never abandoned Islam. Menem in his public appearances always referred to Arabic cultural elements, with which Islam became much more visible in the public space. Developments in the international arena increased this visibility as well, particularly in parallel with the increased international media attention to the oil crises in the 1970s, and the Iranian Revolution in 1979. In this era, Muslims constructed public places of worship and Islamic cemeteries. The Centro Islámico de la República Argentina (CIRA) was also established in this

<sup>14</sup> M. David Sills & Kevin Baggett, “Islam in Latin America”, *SBJT*, Vol:15, No. 2, 2011, p.34; Club Libanés de Buenos Aires, ed., *Libro Púrpura de los Sesenta Años del Club Libanés de Buenos Aires: 1936-18 de Octubre –1996* (Buenos Aires, 1996), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Gladys Jozami, “El retomo de los ‘turcos’ en la Argentina de los noventa,” *Discriminación y Racismo en Latinoamérica*, eds. Ignacio Klich and Mario Rapoport (Buenos Aires: GEL, 1997), p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> Gladys Jozami, “El retomo de los ‘turcos’ en la Argentina de los noventa,” *Discriminación y Racismo en Latinoamérica*, eds. Ignacio Klich and Mario Rapoport (Buenos Aires: GEL, 1997), p. 80-81.

<sup>17</sup> Peralta, Santiago (1946), “Influencia del pueblo árabe en la Argentina, apuntes sobre inmigración”, Buenos Aires, 1946, 297.

<sup>18</sup> S. Montenegro, “Actualidad de los estudios sobre el Islam. Reflexión a partir de temas y abordajes globales y locales”, *Pensar. Epistemología, política y ciencias sociales*, Vol. 2, 2007, p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Y. Abboud, “Los árabes musulmanes” in *Sirios, libaneses y argentinos. Fragmentos para una historia de la diversidad cultural argentina*, Fundación Los Cedros (ed.), Buenos Aires, 2003, pp. 233-244. 2003, p. 233.

period and began to declare, with a moderate Islamic emphasis, that Muslims are an integrated part of society.

However, corruption scandals of the Menem family seriously affected his popularity and society's perceptions of Muslims. This became more aggravated by the March 1992 attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires that killed 29 people, and even more so when the July 1994 attack on the the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (Joint Jewish Argentinean Association) that killed nearly 100 people took place. These events served to create an atmosphere of distrust and fear around Muslims living in Argentina. In the 2010s, fear and distrust of Muslims had eased somewhat and Islam was more readily acceptable in Argentinian society. Some of the newer generation of Argentinian Muslims are becoming more interested in finding their roots and becoming more familiar with their histories.

## 1.2. Legal and Political Context

In the 1990s with the influence of the Menem administration, there have been legislature affirmations in Argentina. In local administration, there have been legislative actions for recognizing Muslim practices and culture. For example, Tucumán provincial legislature declared 'the Muslim new year (Hegira) and two other dates as non-working days for the local followers of Islam'.<sup>20</sup> Muslims received the attention of the legal administration, more specifically law enforcement, during the 1990s with the 1992 Israeli Embassy and 1994 Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina terrorist attacks. The Argentine government failed to bring the suspects to justice. During the 1990s and the early 2000s, Muslims have been on the receiving end of much unfavourable media attention. In 2011, with the Kirchner Administration, media attention eased and legislation allowing women to wear hijabs in public was proclaimed. This legislation extended freedom of religion and expression. With this new law, Muslim women were permitted to use photos of themselves wearing headscarves for their national IDs.

The relieved tension is reflected in the changes in the Argentinian public administration's outlook towards Muslims. In today's Argentina, there is less fear of Islam than in Europe. There are strong prejudices but much less fear. Waqas Syed, the Deputy Secretary General for the Islamic Center of North America stated that 'unlike Europe and North America, Latin America has been quite untouched with any of the anti-Islamic rhetoric and the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslim Latinos can be described as excellent and strong'.<sup>21</sup> In legal and political practices, Islam, or religion in general, does not have significant weight. The interviewees stressed that, in Argentina when entering any public or private establishment you are never asked the religion you practice. Public policy in Argentina is equally applied to the whole society, without distinction of religion. The state departments respect specific days of religion; the Eid of Ramadan for Islam is an example. These days are accepted as non-labour days. Concerning the legal requirements of employment in public or private sectors, religion is not an official criterion. No form of employment can ask about religion or ethnicity.

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<sup>20</sup> Gladys Jozami, "The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina", *The Americas*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1996.

<sup>21</sup> *The Atlantic*, 19 March 2013, Levitt, Matthew, "Hezbollah's 1992 Attack in Argentina Is a Warning for Modern-Day Europe".

Yet, these rights given to Muslims or the states secular nature does not mean there is no discrimination against migrants in general or Muslims in particular. In order to address forms of discrimination, Argentina established the Secretariat for Migrants, the Ministry of Human Rights, and the National Institute against Discrimination. Argentina also passed an anti-Discrimination Act and labelled discrimination a crime. Argentina's 25871 Migration Act defines migration as a human right and lays out a legislative basis for migration. According to this act, the Argentine government provides access to all social services regardless of whether the individual is a native or an immigrant. Therefore, all official and legal channels are open for any citizen or resident to appeal to the government against any kind of discriminatory act.

The interviewees have diverging views on the influence of the constitutional and legal framework. Some interviewees stated that the legal structure and its applications do not interfere with their ability to profess or practice their religion. They underlined that they enjoy their full rights and equal conditions just like any other Argentine citizen. Others emphasized that in theory Muslims have those rights guaranteed but in practice they treatment may show alterations according to the Argentinian government's conjectural relationship with Israel and the United States.<sup>22</sup> In other words, for these interviewees, there is a notable discrepancy between Constitutional guarantees and real life practice.

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<sup>22</sup> Argentina has the largest Jewish community in Latin America. For details see: Adriana Brodsky & Raanan Rein (eds.), *The New Jewish Argentina: Facets of Jewish Experiences in the Southern Cone*, Leiden: Brill, 2013.

## 2. Demographic Profile

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No definitive statistics exist for the Muslim population in Argentina. Numbers gathered from various representatives of the Muslim community in Argentina suggest that there are some 900,000 Muslims in Argentina. Other studies indicate lower estimates. For example, the Buenos Aires Office of Islamic Culture and Divulcation stated that the total number of Muslims living in the country is a just over 650,000<sup>23</sup>, specifically for Buenos Aires some estimates state that there are about 500 Sunni families, 400 Alawis, 200 Shias, and 500 Druze living in the capital. With four people living in each family, the total number would be around 4,500.<sup>24</sup>

An Islamic religious leader from Argentina, Imam Mahmud Hussein, estimated that the total number is 450,000, which he also admits could be inaccurate.<sup>25</sup> Delval and Wilkie et.al. estimated there to be 61,100 practicing Muslims in Argentina at the beginning of the 1990s. CIRA in 2008 and Montenegro in 2015 estimated this number to be 50,000 in 2008.<sup>26</sup> Kettani segregated the changes in Muslim population size since 1940s. (See Table 1)<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, the 1947 census, after which questions concerning religious affiliation were removed, indicated the number to be 19,000 or 0.1% of the total population. According to Kettani's estimates, in the 1960-70 period the Muslim population rose to 300,000 or 1.3%; in 1980 400,000 or 1.4%; in 1991 it increased to 520,000 or 1.6%; then decreased to 500,000 or 1.3% in 2010. Kettani assumes that the size of Muslim population will increase 0.05 percentage point per decade and expects it to reach 580,000 or 1.3% of the total population by 2020.

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<sup>23</sup>Gladys Jozami, "The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina", *The Americas*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1996, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, p. 158.

<sup>25</sup> "Islam in Argentina: A Report", *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs*, January 1992, pp. 272-278.

<sup>26</sup> Tobias Boos, "Muslim Atmospheres as Neighbourhoods of Religious Diasporic Microspheres, Muslims in Argentina", *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 5, 2016; S. Montenegro, "Institutionalizing Islam in Argentina: Comparing Community and Identity Configurations" in: Logroño Narbona MdM, Pinto PG and Tofik Karam J (eds.) *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, Austin: University of Texas, 2015, pp. 85-106, p.87; Raymond Delval, *Les Musulmans en Amérique latine et aux Caraïbes*, Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1992, p. 264; J. W. Wilkie, C. A. Contreras and C. Anders Weber, (eds.), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, Los Angeles: UCLA Latin America Center Publications, 1993.

<sup>27</sup> Houssain Kettani, "History and Prospect of Muslims in South America", *Social Indicators Research*, Vol. 115, No. 2, 2014, p.840.

Table 1: General Population – Muslim Population in Argentina -1869-2020

Years	Population -General-	Muslims	%
1869(a)	1,830,214	0	0.00
1908(b)	5,988,000	7,520	0.13
1924(c)	10,054,000	8,000	0.08
1947(d)	15,893,827	18,764	0.12
1970(a)	23,364,431	300,000	1.28
1980(a)	27,947,446	400,000	1.43
1991(e)	32,615,528	520,000	1.59
2001(f)	36,260,130	800,000	2.21
2010(g)	40,091,359	500,000	1.25
2020(h)	44,236,928	575,080	1.30

Sources. (a) (A. Kettani, *Muslim minorities in the world today*, London: Mansell Publishing, 1986); (b) estimate (M. Djinguiz, "L'Islam dans l'Amérique Centrale et dans l'Amérique du Sud", *Revue du Monde Musulman*, Vol. 6, No.10, 1908, 314-318.), (c) estimate (L. Massignon, "Annuaire du Monde Musulman, Statistique, Historique, Social et Économique", *Revue du Monde Musulman*, Vol. 53, 1923, 1-358); (d) census (United Nations, Department of International Economic and Social Affairs, Statistical Office, *Demographic Yearbook 1956*, New York, NY: United Nations, 1957); (e) estimate (B. Hunter (ed.), *The Statesman's Year-book*, London: Palgrave MacMillan 1992); (f) estimate (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, Washington, DC: Department of State, 2002); (g) estimate (United States Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, *Annual Report on International Religious Freedom*, Washington, DC: Department of State, 2012).

## 2.1. Immigrant Communities and Argentinian Muslims

Argentina has a long history of immigration with a great diversity of migrants. Argentines often refer to their country as "crisol de razas", or mix of races. Between the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, more than 6.6 million people migrated to Argentina, second only to the United States, which helped the country's population double every 20 years. Most Argentines are descended from several European ethnic groups, with more than 55% having Italian origins. The second-most common ethnic origin is Spanish. About 17% have French origins, and about 8% are descended from German immigrants. Today Argentina has a large Arab population, most of whom are from Syria and Lebanon. There are also about 180,000 Asian people, mostly of Chinese and Korean origin. Additionally, the Argentine government estimates that there are 750,000 residents without official documents, many of whom immigrated from Paraguay, Peru, and Bolivia.<sup>28</sup>

Between 1870 and 1914, relatively high local wages and economic prosperity together with sound public education and a liberal legal framework encouraged immigration from Europe. This European wave fluctuated in the years 1919-1939 and 1945-1960. European immigration, which in the 1960s was largely replaced by regional immigration. In the 1990s, several migration waves hit Argentina due to the favourable dollar-peso exchange rate. Yet, these new migrants from Paraguay, Bolivia and Peru faced restrictive migration policies. Towards the end of the 1990s, Argentina transformed into a two-tier society with a growing

<sup>28</sup> <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/argentina-population/>, accessed on 2 January 2019.

underclass with few or no rights. Many Muslims were located in this underclass, particularly African migrants of Senegalese origin. These migratory waves from Africa were the result of Argentina's open rights-based migration policy adopted in 2002. With the effect of this policy, Argentina has become the main destination for South American migrants as well. Among them, Colombians stand out with over 55,000. Concerning the Muslim population, the "recent" African immigration has changed the face of Islam in Argentina, particularly in Buenos Aires. In 2000, 'the average Muslim in Buenos Aires was a middle-aged man of Syrian descent. His primary language was Spanish, and he was a small business owner. Today, the average mosque attendee in Buenos Aires is a young Senegalese male. He is learning Spanish, but he speaks French and Wolof. He sells jewellery and watches from a briefcase on a busy street corner somewhere in the city'.<sup>29</sup>

In the interactions of immigrant communities and Muslims, one important concept has been containing for some time - the 'scientific' racism of positivism. It has been central in Argentine politics and culture for a long time. This allowed Argentinian ruling elites to 'formulate the concept of Argentinidad, which shaped and fuelled attitudes towards migrants'. According to this, non-European immigrants are 'inferior, diseased, and a contaminating presence in the land'. The elites' aim was to "whiten" and modernize Argentine society, which contradicted with the background of incoming migrants from the Middle East. This started a sharp contradiction between Arabs, European migrants and the elites.<sup>30</sup> What is exacerbating this has been the language barrier. Aysa (2018) stated that tensions in society were often the result of some Muslims' language, particularly the Senegalese because other members of society do not understand them. They speak English and/or French with a pronounced accent resulting in many people concluding, "Black people do not speak Spanish". Yet, this contradiction has been subtle, in other words, it has never been institutionalized or politicized. Our interviewees underlined that politicians at the local or national level do not add issues of immigration and religion to their speeches. In more general terms, there has never been a campaign or state policy against Islam.

Ahmed (2018) stated that there is good level of understanding among the Muslim, Christian and Jewish migrants of Argentina. He underlined that, Pope Francis reinforced this understanding during his duty as a Cardinal in Argentina by emphasizing interreligious dialogue. He also added that discrimination against Muslims is not strongly rooted in society and is based on ignorance and prejudice, which is fuelled by some media strands. The pressure on Muslims either by other migrant communities or the "host" society increases as conflicts in the Middle East intensify. Regarding anti-Muslim propaganda, Adnan (2018) underlined three media agencies: The Infobae internet portal and Clarín and La Nación newspapers as being heavily Zionist and anti-Islamist. Yet, in real reality, there are far fewer inter-community tensions. Adnan (2018) added that he grew up in a neighbourhood with Christians, Jews, and atheists, and always had excellent relations with them. He studied in an Evangelical school and never encountered any problems because of his Islamic identity.

Salma (2018) agrees with Adnan (2018) in her comment regarding Muslims' interactions with the rest of the society. She stated that she has a life like any other Argentinean citizen. She

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<sup>29</sup> M. David Sills & Kevin Baggett, "Islam in Latin America", *SBJT*, Vol:15, No. 2, 2011, pp. 34-35

<sup>30</sup> Fatima Rajina, "Islam in Argentina: Deconstructing the Biases", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2016, p. 404-405.

added that Argentinian society has a tendency to believe what is being said in the media. Therefore, when tragic terror attacks in the Middle East or in Europe are over-emphasized by Argentinian media, it seriously affects the non-Muslim's perception towards Muslims.

## 2.2. Ethnic Composition of Muslim Communities

A great majority of Argentinian Muslims are of Lebanese or Syrian descent due to the high level of immigration during the years 1890-1950 and the majority of immigrants from these two countries were Christians.<sup>31</sup> Of those who migrated from Lebanon and Syria, only 22% of them were Muslims.<sup>32</sup> Between 1950-1990, because of Argentina's political and economic instability and the rising prosperity of the Gulf countries, immigration to Argentina rapidly decreased. Immigration picked up again in the 1990s especially from Muslim majority African countries such as Senegal and Ghana along with migrants from Central, South and East Asia.<sup>33</sup> In addition to these waves, the number of converts from Christianity to Islam has been increasing in Argentina. Converts may constitute half the members of some Muslim groups.<sup>34</sup> Most of the interviewees emphasized that the majority of Muslims in Argentina are Arab descent, particularly Syrian and Lebanese. Others also underlined the increasing numbers of African Muslims from Senegal. There are also a relatively high number of Muslims from Bangladesh and Egypt. Since Argentinian official censuses do not mention race or religion, estimates cannot be precise.

<sup>31</sup> Gladys Jozami, "The Manifestation of Islam in Argentina", *The Americas*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 1996, p.70

<sup>32</sup> S. Bianchi, *Historia de las religiones en la Argentina: Las minorías religiosas*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 2004, p. 300.

<sup>33</sup> Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, *La comunidad musulmana en la Argentina*, *Todo es Historia*, 2003.

<sup>34</sup> S. Montenegro, "Institutionalizing Islam in Argentina: Comparing Community and Identity Configurations" in: Logroño Narbona MdM, Pinto PG and Tofik Karam J (eds.) *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, Austin: University of Texas, 2015, pp. 85-106, p.86.

### 3. Views on Migration and Integration

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Argentina has been one of Latin America's principal countries of immigration. The country has been a particular country of migration for Palestinians, Lebanese and Syrians. There were 180,000 entries from Mashriq in official Argentinian records from 1890-1950.<sup>35</sup> This underlines a very significant fact that most of the Argentinian Muslims are or have descendant from Lebanese and Syrian national identity together with other Arab minorities.<sup>36</sup> One major observation regarding Muslim migration to Argentina is that Arabs, the largest ethnic group of Argentinian Muslims, integrate into the non-Muslim social fabric very quickly. The high rate of intermarriage between Muslims and Christians in Argentina increases the pace of Muslim, at least Arab, integration. Despite the high level of integration, the 'subtle discrimination against Muslims is widespread among the Argentinian populace, manifesting itself more openly following terrorist attacks or controversial political events'. There continues to be a discourse in Argentinian media that Muslims in the country share affinities with Islamic fundamentalist terrorists.<sup>37</sup>

Another important element of Muslims' integration in Argentina, which is underlined by the interviewees, is family. Particularly for Shia members, Islam is more of a cultural code guiding their entire life, and family is the most important platform to practice these codes.<sup>38</sup> Women's groups, directories, commissions and youth groups are also important spheres where an Islamic environment is being reproduced. This environment is more general than ethnic. Particularly in mosques, ethnicity has a minor importance. In protecting their codes, atmosphere and the feelings of familiarity, Muslims use decorative items and photos of sacred places in Muslim organizations mosques and their homes. In this way, they create a communal feeling to withstand the continuing discrimination at the hands of other sections of the Argentinian population and media.

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<sup>35</sup> Ignacio Klich, "Sources on the Lebanese and other Middle Easterners in Latin America", Papers on Lebanon, Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, August 1995, p. 9.

<sup>36</sup> Ignacio Klich, "Introduction to the Sources for the History of the Middle Easterners in Latin America", *Temas de Africa y Asia*, 2, 1993.

<sup>37</sup> Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "La comunidad musulmana en la Argentina" in: *Todo es Historia*, 2003, <http://www.pedrobrieger.com.ar/publicac/p06.pdf>, accessed 10 January 2019.

<sup>38</sup> M.S. Valcarcel, "'Sierva de Allah': Cuerpo, género e Islam", *Revista Cultura y Religión*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2014, p. 66-70.



Figure 2: King Fahd Islamic Cultural Center, Argentina

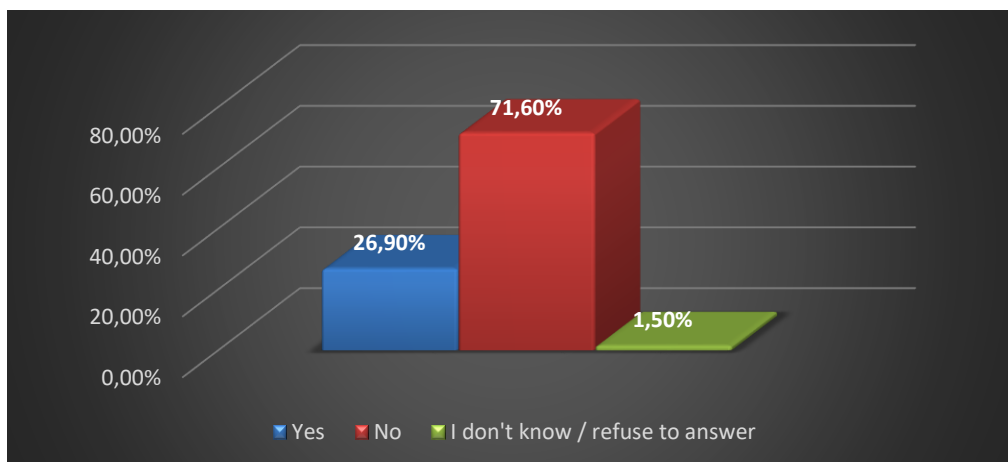


Source: <https://muslimvillage.com/2017/01/15/121767/islam-muslims-argentina/>

Many of the interviewees make the case that the Muslim community has been in Argentina for more than 150 years. They are an “ancient community” and they have greatly contributed to the development of the country. As migrants, the Muslim community up until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has integrated well into Argentinian society. The GMD Survey proves that Argentina has been receiving a great deal of Muslim immigrants throughout its history. A big majority of the respondents’ families have become established or see themselves a part of an established community (Graph 1). According to the Survey, 71.60% of the respondents’ family members were born in Argentina, in other words, they did not immigrate.

Graph 1: Family members immigrated to Argentina

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

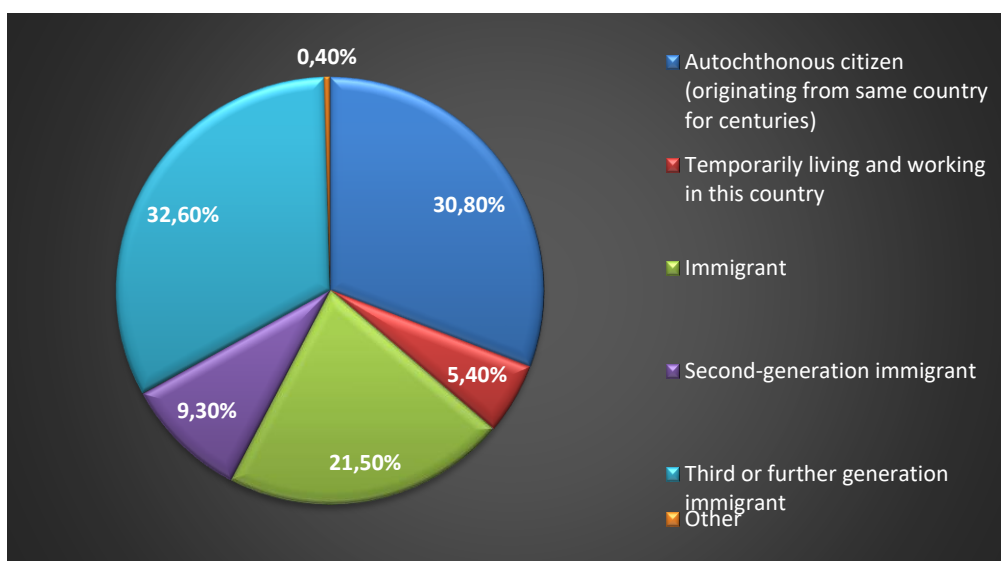


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Another proof of the long historical background of the Argentinian Muslims is their status in the country. The GMD Survey revealed that almost 65% of the respondents are autochthonous citizens and third or further generation immigrants. Yet, this does not mean that Muslim immigration to Argentina has slowed down nowadays. 21.5% of the respondents are new immigrants (Graph 2).

Graph 2: Status in the country

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

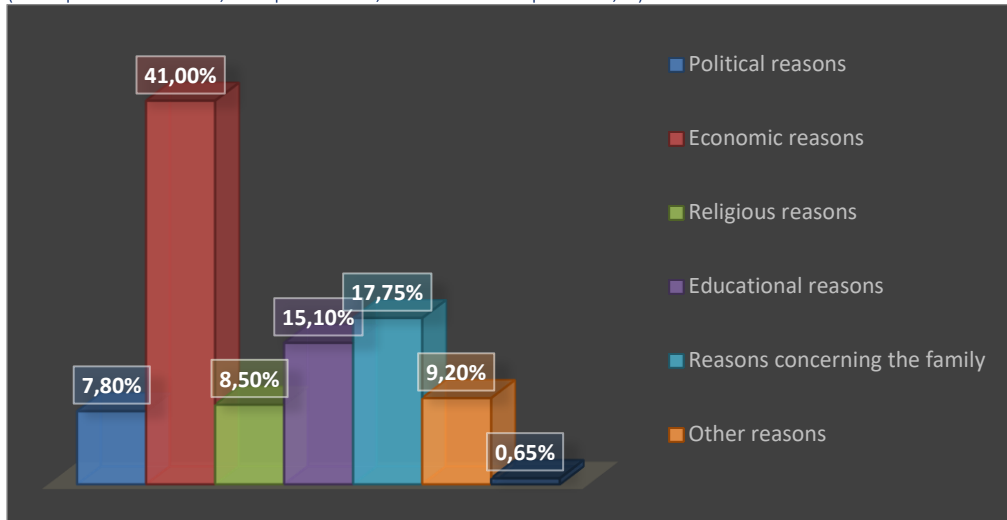


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The GMD survey also enquired the reasons for migration of previous Muslim migrants in Argentina. As stated in the history of the Argentinian Muslims, the most important reason for Muslims immigration is economic (41%). The above-discussed economic boom in Argentina was a magnet for Muslim immigration. The second and third significant reasons is related to social factors such as family concerns (17.75%) and educational reasons (15.10%) (Graph 3). In addition, the socio-psychological environment in Argentina is much more secure than in the Middle East for raising a family, motivating Muslims to immigrate.

Graph 3: Reasons for Migration of Previous Muslim Migrants in Argentina

(All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)

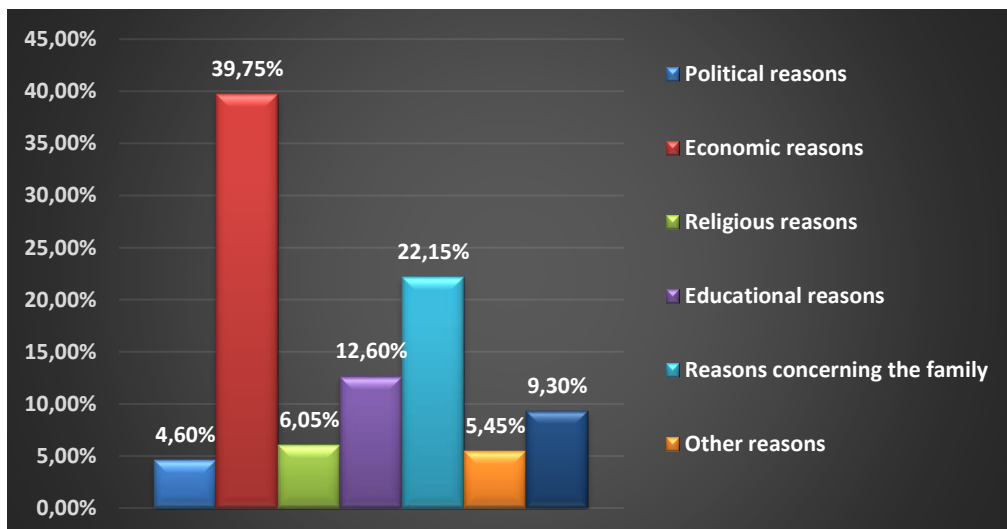


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

These reasons and even their ratios are pretty much the same for the survey respondents. Economy is still the dominating reason. 39.75% of the respondents stated that their reason for migration is economic. Family (22.15%) and educational reasons (12.60%) again follow it (Graph 4). This shows that Argentina, although its economy is not very robust these days, still attracts migrants from very low economic level countries, especially from the Middle East and Africa.

Graph 4: Reasons for Migration of Survey Respondents in Argentina

(All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)

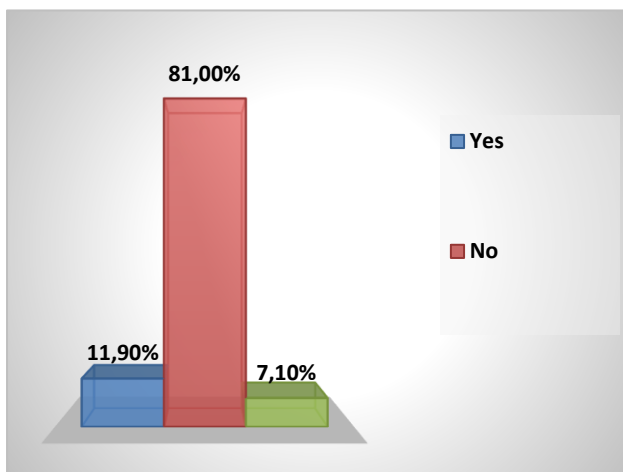


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

More importantly, the GMD survey highlighted that these immigrants did not face any significant problems in Argentina after their immigration. 81% of the respondents stated that they do not have any problems due to their immigration (Graph 5).

Graph 5: Have you had problems as immigrants in Argentina?

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



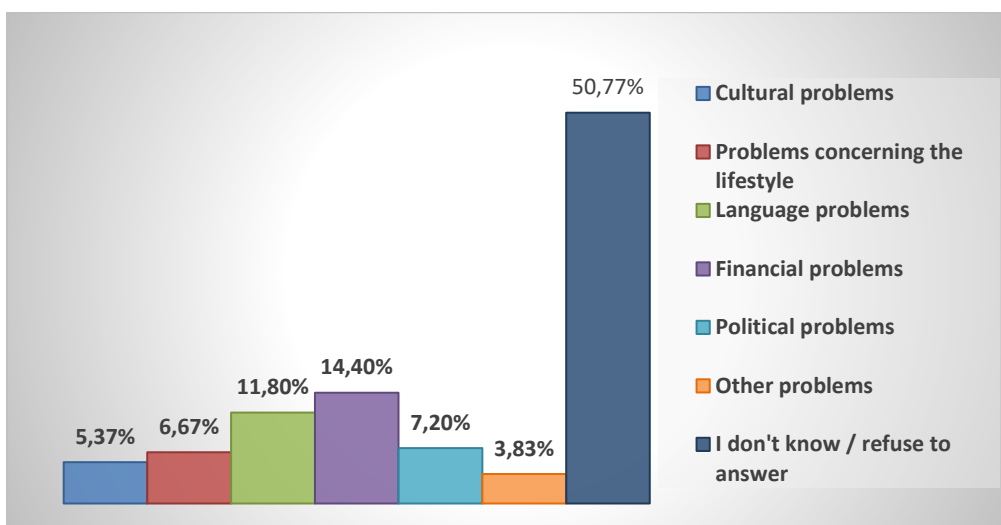
Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

This optimism of immigrants about Argentina naturally affects survey respondents' answers about their problems in Argentina. More than 50% of them stated that they do not have problems. Since their main motive to immigrate to Argentina is to increase their economic revenues, their main problem is financial, although its percentage is low (14.40%). For increasing their economic revenues, they need to be socio-economically well integrated into the society, which requires effective language skills. According to the survey, some

Muslims are still struggling with language barriers. 11.80% of the respondents' claim to have problems with language skills (Graph 6).

Graph 6: Main Problems Experienced by Muslims as Immigrants in Argentina

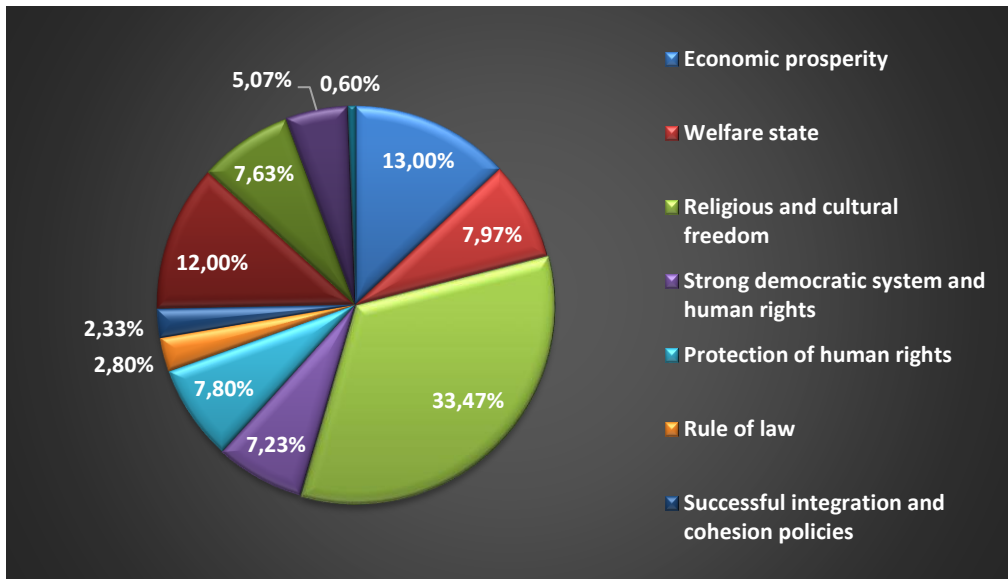
(All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The respondents underlined several advantages of living in Argentina. Although, it can be expected that they should firstly state that economic welfare as the main advantage, it turned out to be different. 33.47% of the respondents stated that the most formidable advantage is religious and cultural freedom. This is an important indication that there is almost no pressure for Muslim immigrants to leave their daily Islamic practices. As expected, the second advantage is economic prosperity (13%). The respondents (15.03%) together also express the protection of human rights and strong democracy as significant factors (Graph 7).

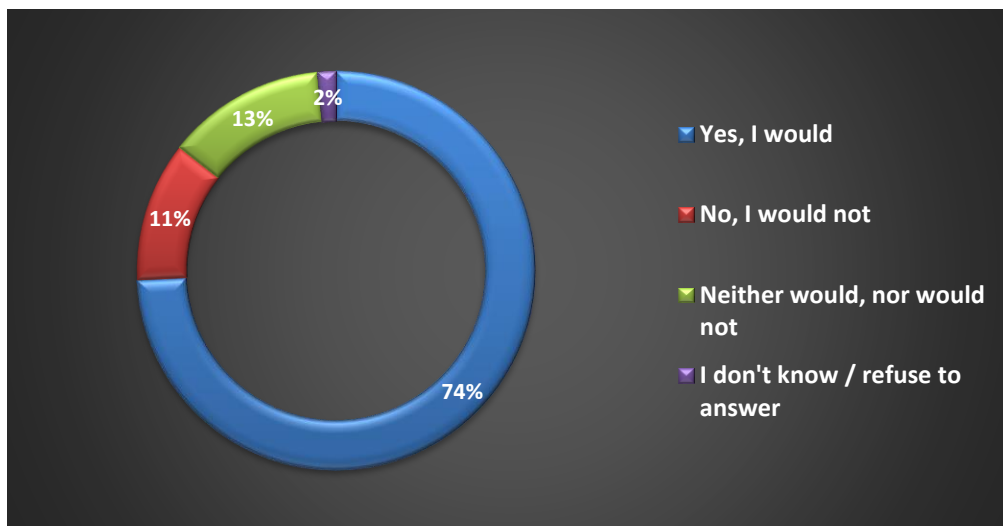
Graph 7: Advantages of Living in Argentina for Muslims  
(All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

This optimism of Muslim immigrants about Argentina naturally reflected on their views about advising Muslims to immigrate to the country. 74% of the respondents stated that they would recommend Muslims to immigrate and live in Argentina. Only 11% responded said that would not (Graph 8). This is another important indication for Muslim immigrants' comfort in Argentina.

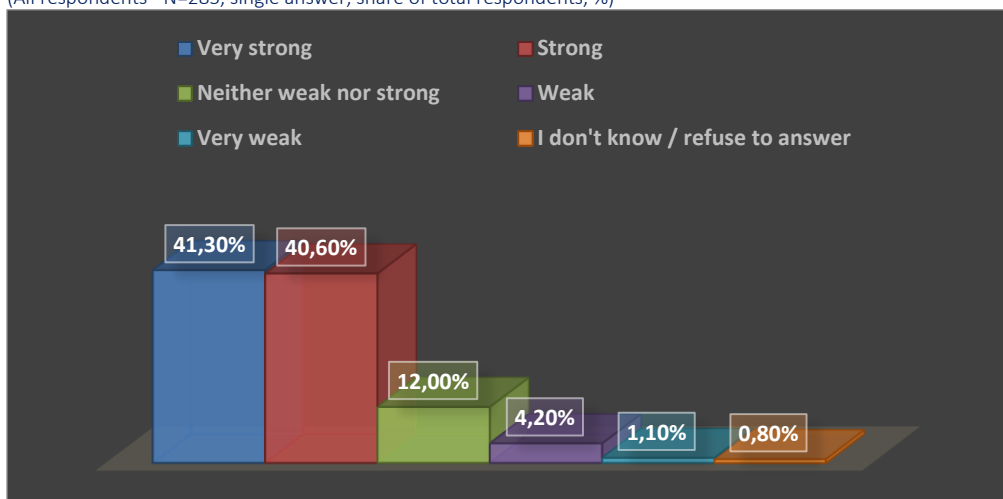
Graph 8: Would you recommend another Muslim to immigrate to and live in Argentina?  
 (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

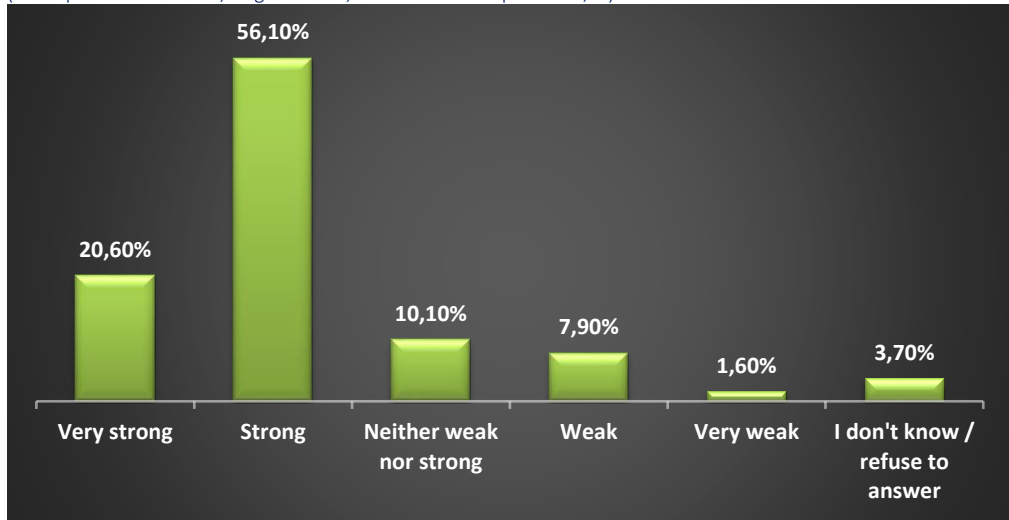
This comfort strongly influences Survey respondents’ sense of belonging to Argentina. Over 81% of the respondents stated that they have either strong or very strong belonging to Argentina (Graph 9). Yet this does not erode respondents’ belonging to their country of origin (over 76%) (Graph 10). This situation to an extent contradicts with the secondary literature, which claims that Argentinian Muslims are integrated to the Argentinian socio-culture so deeply that their Islamic bonds are diluted, which might affect their cultural bonds with their country of origin. Yet, the survey shows that their socio-cultural links with their home countries are almost as strong as their feeling of belonging with Argentina.

Graph 9: Sense of belonging to Argentina  
 (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

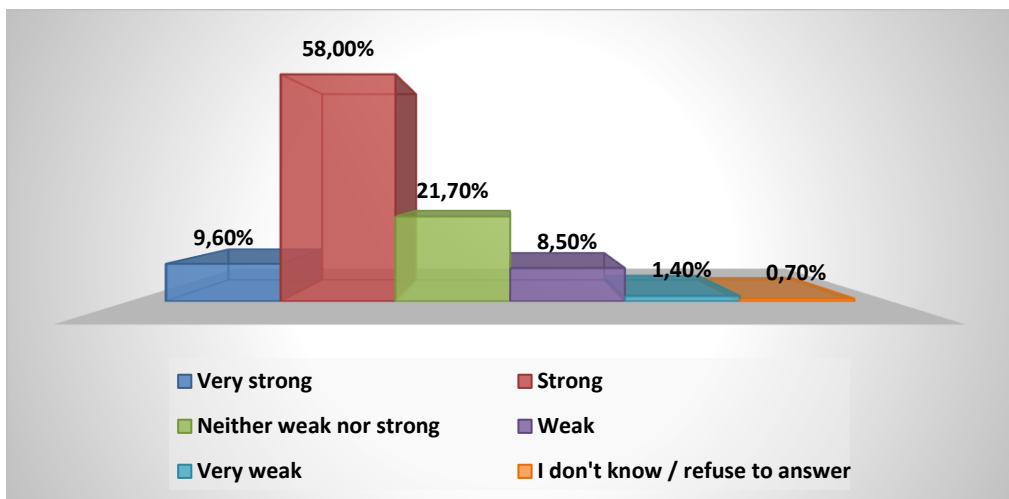
Graph 10: Sense of belonging to the country of origin  
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The above-mentioned claim about the integration level of Argentinian Muslims is underlined by the GMD survey. Argentinian Muslims do not live as separate entities of the Argentinian society; they rather have built up strong relations with the rest of the society. 67.6% of the respondents stated they have very / strong relations with the Argentinian society (Graph 11).

Graph 11: How strong are the relations between the Muslims in Argentina and the Argentinian society?  
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

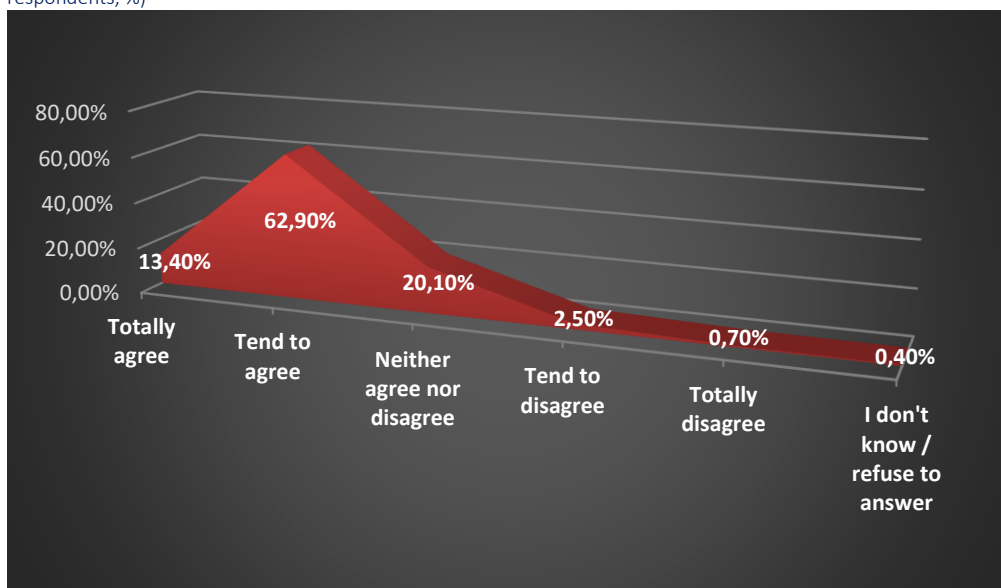


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

This high level of integration of the Argentinian Muslims influenced respondents' answers when they were asked whether they agree with the statement that most Muslims have

successfully adapted to customs and way of life in Argentina. 76.3% of the respondents either agreed or totally agreed with this statement. Only 0.70% of them totally disagreed (Graph 12). This again shows the harmony between Argentinian Muslims and the rest of the society.

Graph 12: To what extent do you agree that most Muslims in Argentina have successfully adapted to the customs and way of life here? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



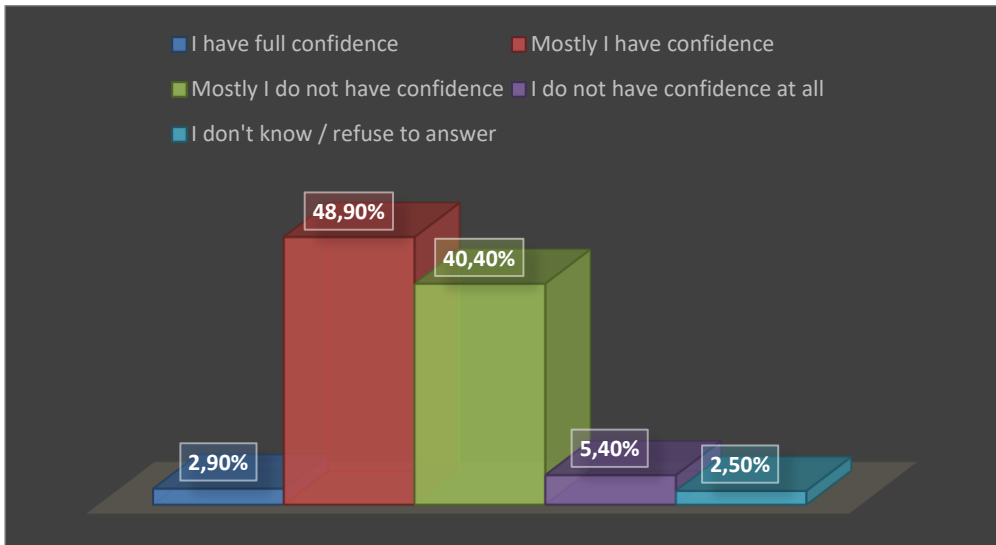
Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The harmonious relationship at the socio-cultural level does not exist when it comes to the official realm. Argentinian Muslims are divided almost in half regarding their confidence to the judiciary and security forces. 48.9% of the respondents answered that they mostly have confidence and 40.4% of them said that they mostly do not have confidence in judiciary (Graph 13). For the security forces, the respondents are around similar percentages. 45.5% of them stated that they mostly do not have confidence and 43% of them mostly do have confidence (Graph 14).



Graph 13: Level of Confidence in Judicial Institutions

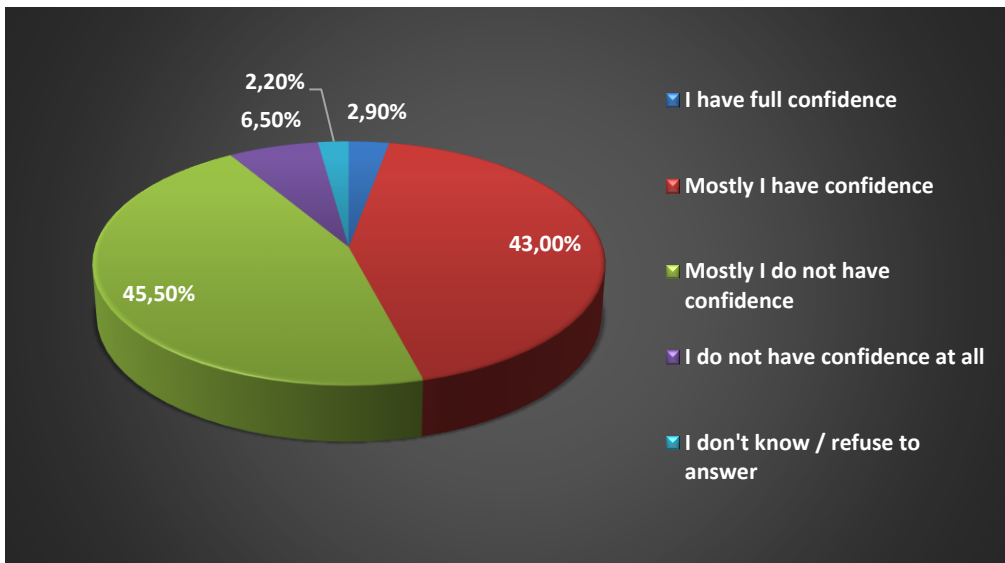
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Graph 14: Level of Confidence in Security Forces

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



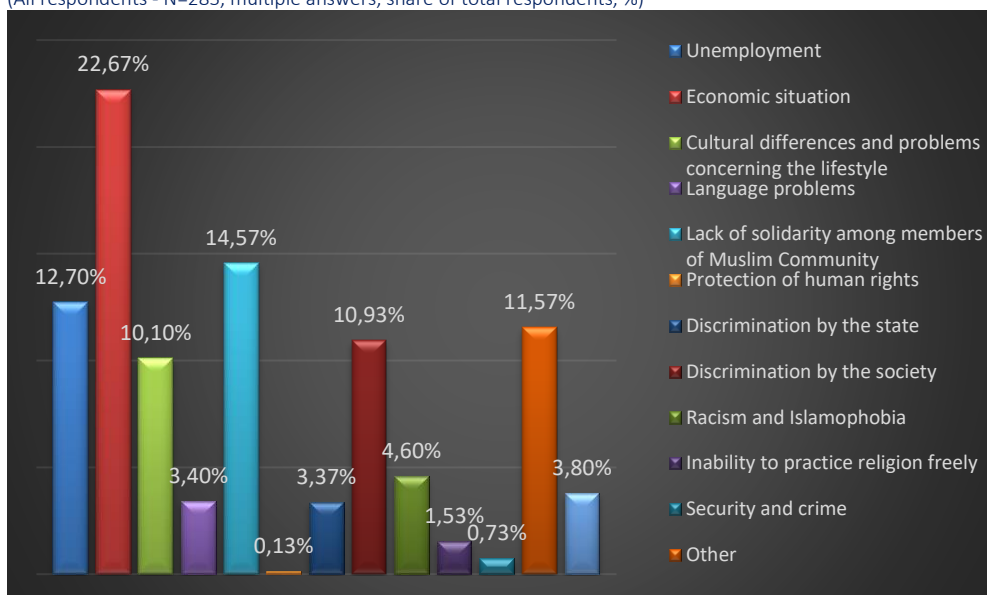
Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina

Generally, Argentinian Muslims seemed satisfied with their socio-cultural and economic status. When inquired about their most important problems the results were interestingly conflicting with this satisfaction. The highest percentage (22.67%) of the respondents stated that the economic situation is their biggest problem, although the above-examined questions

showed that the respondents are satisfied by their economic situation. The third highest percentage is also economy related. 12.7% of the respondents stated that the Argentinian Muslims have been negatively affected by unemployment. The second highest percentage is the lack of solidarity between Muslim communities. This is heavily related to the deficiencies in inter-community dialogue, which is very common in almost every target country of the GMD project. The other significant problem is another contradiction. 10.1% of the respondents stated that cultural differences and problems concerning the lifestyle is an important issue for Muslims (Graph 15). This shows that although relations between Muslims and the rest of the Argentinian society are strong, the differences in lifestyle still persist and affect Muslims' adaptability.

Graph 15: What are the most important problems of Muslims in Argentina?

(All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)

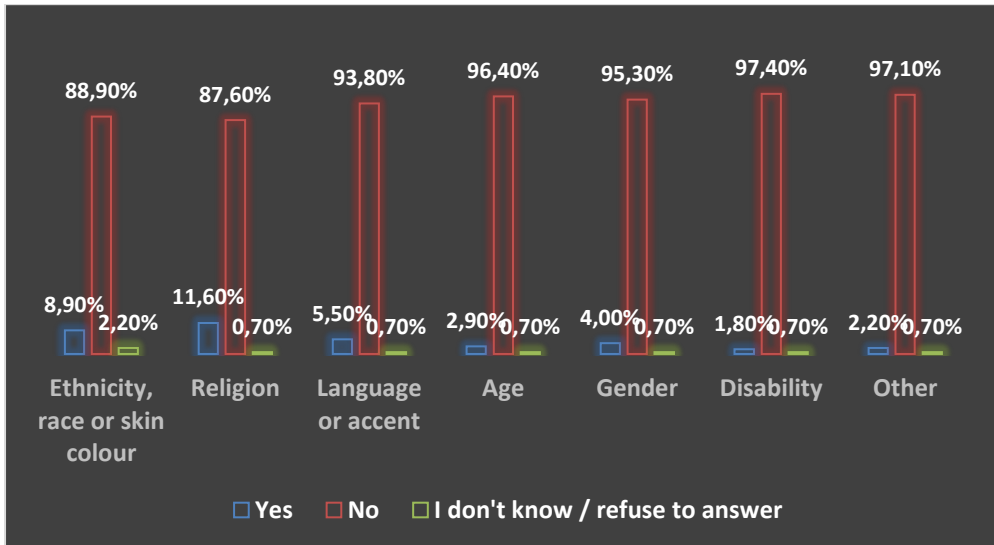


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The GMD survey also questioned under which bases Muslims in Argentina are discriminated. In almost every criterion, such as ethnicity, race, religion, language, age, gender, and disability, the respondents replied negatively. For all of the criteria at least 88.9% of the respondents stated that they did not feel discriminated against (Graph 16). These answers suit well with the general argument that Argentinian Muslims have been integrated into the society quite successfully.

Graph 16: Have ever been discriminated on the basis of the following factors?

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Argentinian Muslims are one of the most well integrated Muslim communities this study has examined. Their integration is so deep that it is very difficult to pick them out from the rest of society. They have a very extensive historical background, even older than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This makes them almost an ancient community. Many of them are from Syrian lands of the Ottoman Empire. The GMD survey's elaboration highlighted these very features of Argentinian Muslims from different angles. Firstly, due to their deep history they see themselves as autochthonous citizens. They also pointed out that their foremost reason for immigration is economic, although not all of them have been enjoying the same level of economic satisfaction. The other reason, which they are more satisfied about, is the ecosystem they raise their families in and particularly the education of their children. They also stressed the low levels of discrimination against them and the sense of belonging to the Argentinian society without too much of a hassle. Furthermore, Argentinian Muslims' high level of integration did not erode their belonging to their country of origin. They feel a sense of belonging to their home countries as much as they do to Argentina. Due to this balanced feeling, a great majority of them recommend other Muslims to immigrate and live in Argentina.

## 4. Perceptions on Socio-Economic Status

Muslims in Argentinian society are not only well integrated but also quite dispersed geographically, even within the cities. One exception to this is La Angelita, a town of 250 km away from Buenos Aires, which is believed to have the only Muslim majority concentration in the country. Buenos Aires, on the other hand, is a very typical example of Muslim integration, non-visibility and dispersal. In the city, it is difficult to identify a Muslim concentrated suburb. As a result, there are only two Islamic butcheries and one Muslim cemetery. Muslim attendance to Friday prayers is another indicator. The Al-Ahmad mosque of CIRA has around 100 worshippers and Al-Tauhid Shi'ite mosque and King Fahd Islamic Centre (Centro Cultural Islámico 'Custodio de las Dos Sagradas Mezquitas Rey Fahd' de Argentina - CCIAR) mosque has around 50 worshippers on Fridays.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 3: King Fahd Islamic Cultural Center in Palermo, Buenos Aires city, Argentina



Source: <https://secure2.pbase.com/image/136991533>

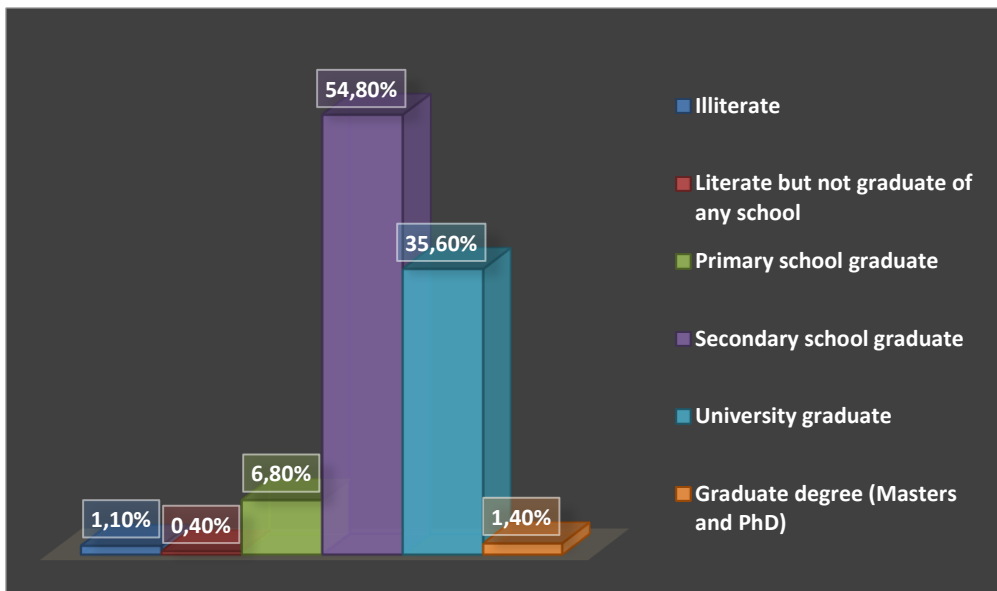
Inside the cities, Muslims tend to gather in certain suburbs corresponding to their country, community or origin. The majority of the Syrian Sunnis settled in Constitución, the Lebanese Shias tend to live in Flores close to Al-Tauhid mosque, Alawites have largely settled in José

<sup>39</sup> For a similar view see: Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, p.158

Ingeríos in Buenos Aires, while the Druze settled in Scalabrini Ortiz and Córdoba.<sup>40</sup> According to the interviewees, there exists a socio-economic difference between the new Muslim migrants and those who have lived in Argentina for some time. Immigration waves of those who have escaped armed conflicts or poverty tend to be found in the middle class. Members of the Syrian community that have lived in Argentina for decades, have integrated well and have an economic level of at least middle or upper middle class. The traditional Muslim community's socio-economic situation is constant, as they tend to constitute the lower to upper middle-classes of Argentinian society. This can be seen in their educational attainment. The GMD Survey showed that 54.8% of the respondents are secondary school graduates and 35.6% of them are university graduates. The illiterate segment is drastically low (1.1%). The graduate level is almost equally low (1.4%) (Graph 17). This is an important indication that the respondents are not focused on research and academia but give importance to university degrees. The high percentage of the population in the secondary school is also an indication that rather than continue their education, many Muslims, at least the respondents, shift to trade, small manufacturing and services sectors.

Graph 17: Level of educational attainment

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

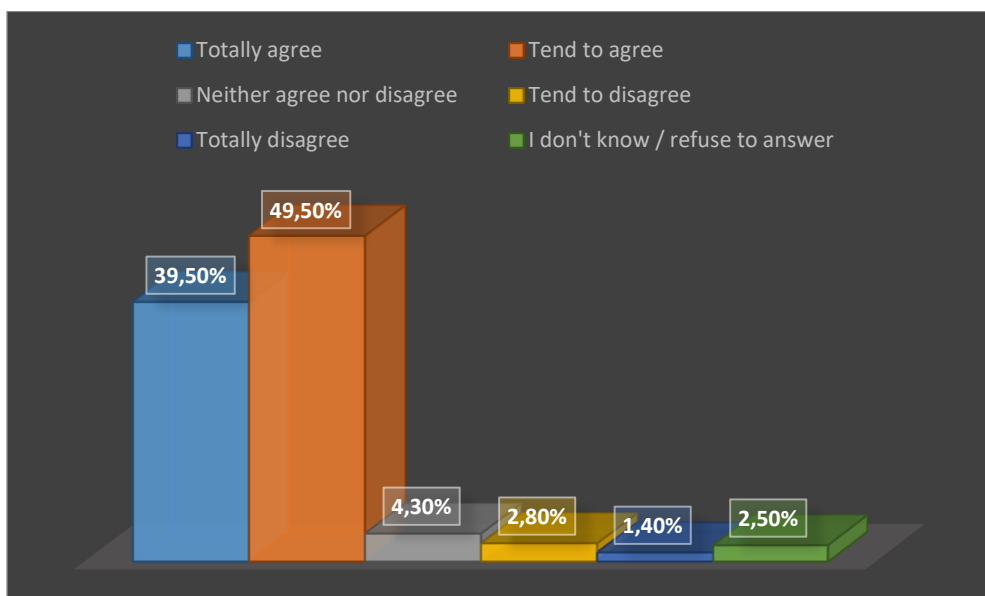
Although their educational attainment is not that high, Muslims in Argentina have a significant level of trust for their children to have equal chance of accessing quality education. 89% of the respondents stated that they agree with the statement that Muslim children have the

<sup>40</sup> Daniel Bargman, Gladys Jozami & Mirta Biaiogorski, "Arabs, Jews, and Koreans in Argentina: A Contemporary Perspective of Different Types of Social and Symbolic Insertion," *Anthropological Journal on European Cultures*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1998, 87-105. For details of Alawis in Argentina see: Silvia Montenegro, "Alawi Muslims in Argentina: religious and political identity in the diaspora", *Cont Islam*, Vol. 12, 2018.

same chances for quality education (Graph 18). This confirms the two main arguments stated above. First, the respondents confirmed that Argentinian Muslims do not feel discriminated in the socio-economic realm and secondly, they are satisfied in both their children's lifestyle and educational opportunities.

Graph 18: To what extent do you agree that Muslim children have the same chances for quality education as other children in Argentina?

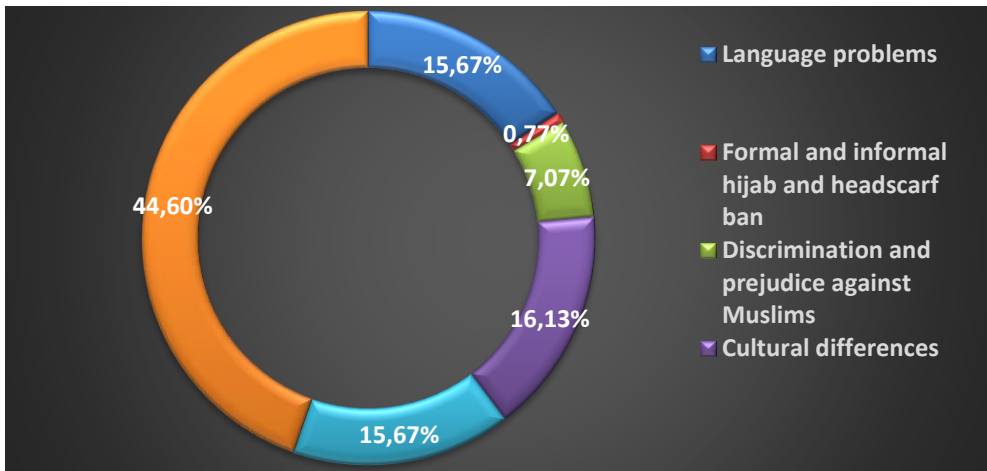
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The GMD survey aimed to figure out whether or not Muslim children are offered equal chance for a quality education. Confirming the question above, 44.6% of the respondents did not know what these inequalities would be. 15.6% of them tried to be more specific and stated that language could be a problem. Only a small percentage of 7.07 claimed that there is prejudice and discrimination against Muslims (Graph 19). As indicated in Graph 16, the respondents' percentage for discrimination regarding religion is close to this percentage as well. From this finding, it can be inferred that a small number of Muslims are facing discrimination.

Graph 19: Why do you think that Muslim children are not offered with equal chance for a quality education in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)

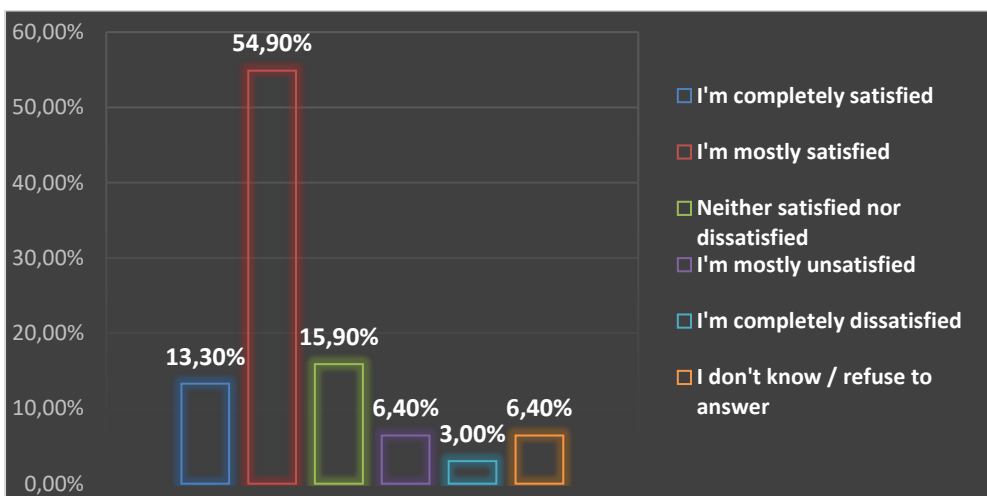


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

In general, 68.2% of the respondents stated clearly that they are satisfied with the quality of schools and education system in Argentina. The percentage of the dissatisfied is only 9.4%, again confirming the small number of Muslims facing discrimination in the socio-economic realm (Graph 20). This discrimination affects their children as well. The reasons behind the dissatisfaction cannot solely be attributed to discrimination but may be the result of other factors. Therefore, we can infer the percentage of Muslims who experienced discrimination to be even lower than those stating their dissatisfaction.

Graph 20: How satisfied are you with the quality of schools and the education system in Argentina?

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



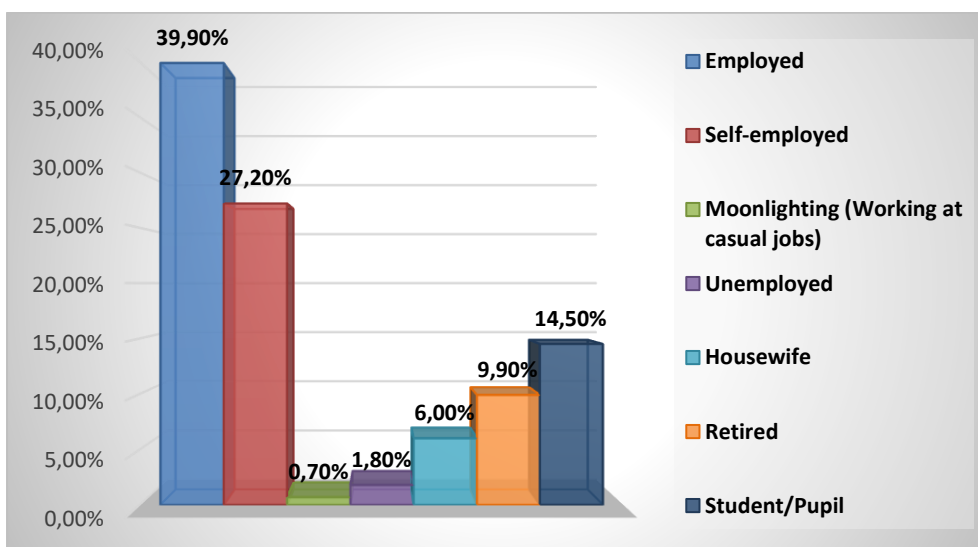
Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Muslim community members engage in a diverse range of businesses. Some are in the commercial and services sectors. Specifically speaking, most Syrian-Lebanese Muslims are part of the textile industry. They also run the open-air bazaars. Another significant sector Muslims descendants dominate is agriculture in small towns. Senegalese are predominantly street vendors in both in the centre and the outskirts of Buenos Aires. Senegalese interviewees expressed satisfaction regarding their revenues due to the exchange rate as they have the ability to save more money and send some of it back to their family in Senegal.

The GMD survey elaborated on the working status of the respondents to acquire a depiction of the general framework. The results show that the respondents are not suffering from unemployment. 67.1% of them are self and institutionally employed. Another important ratio to consider is the students. With 14.5%, students make up an important portion of the current working status of Muslims in Argentina. The unemployment rate amongst the respondents is quite low (1.80%) (Graph 21). Graph 22 highlights that most Argentinian Muslims are generally satisfied with their economic status. Reading the two graphs together (Graph 21 and 22), it becomes more explicit as to why Muslim in Argentina are generally satisfied with their economic situation. The high percentage of employment and educational opportunities most definitely affects Muslims economic satisfaction in Argentina.

Graph 21: Current working status

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

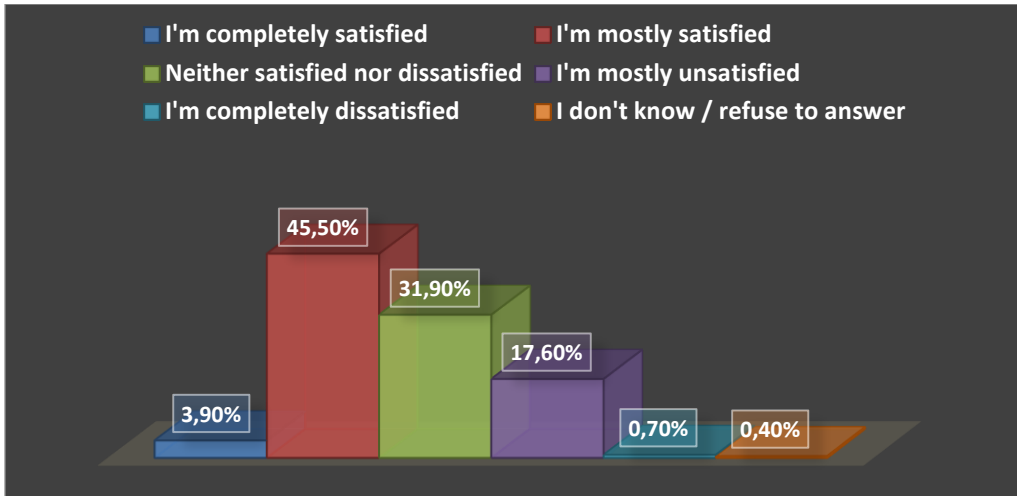


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

This satisfaction can be seen under two aspects. One is the financial satisfaction. The Survey asked about the financial satisfaction of the respondents' households. Almost half of the respondents (49.4%) stated that they are mostly or completely satisfied with their households' financial situation (Graph 22).



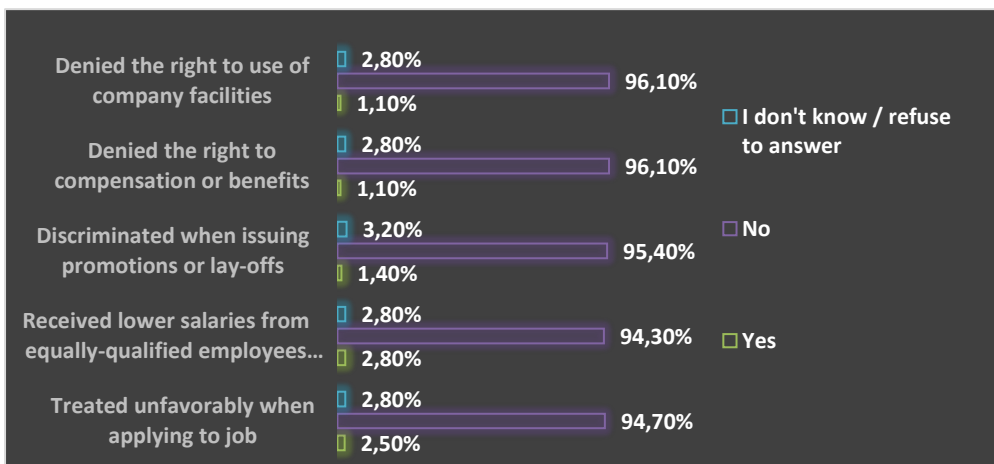
Graph 22: Financial satisfaction about the household  
 (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The other aspect to measure satisfaction is from the lens of the level of discrimination Muslims in the workplace face. Over 94% of the respondents stated that under each of the aspects elaborated by the question, such as being treated unfavourably during application process, receiving salaries lower than equally-qualified employees, discrimination during promotion, compensation, or the right to use of company facilities, the respondents were not discriminated against that (Graph 23). This shows again significant segments of the Argentinian Muslims are successfully integrated into the economic realm of society without struggling too much against discrimination.

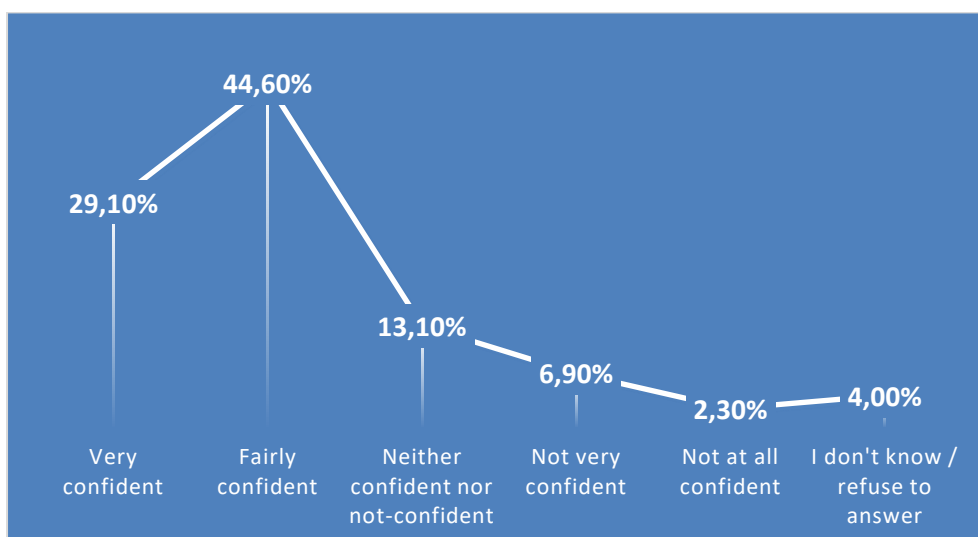
Graph 23: Have you ever experience discrimination in the workplace in the following ways?  
 (All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The Survey further underlined Muslims' satisfaction in the economic realm by asking about the respondents' confidence in keeping their job. 73.7% of the respondents are either very or fairly confident that they will keep their job in the coming 12 months (Graph 24). Although Argentina's economy is not booming or very stable now, Muslims are still enjoying stability in their economic revenues. Once again, it shows that Muslims are not discriminated against even during instability of national economy. Most commonly during economic downturns and instability, minority groups are targeted and blamed for the negative context. For example, in Europe this has often been the case for new and old immigrants. The economic decline intensified xenophobic political and social behaviour in several European countries. This does not seem to be the case in Argentina. Even though Argentinian economy has faced serious problems, a significant majority of Muslim respondents have stated that they have not experienced discrimination at their workplaces.

Graph 24: How confident are you that you will keep your job in the coming 12 months?  
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



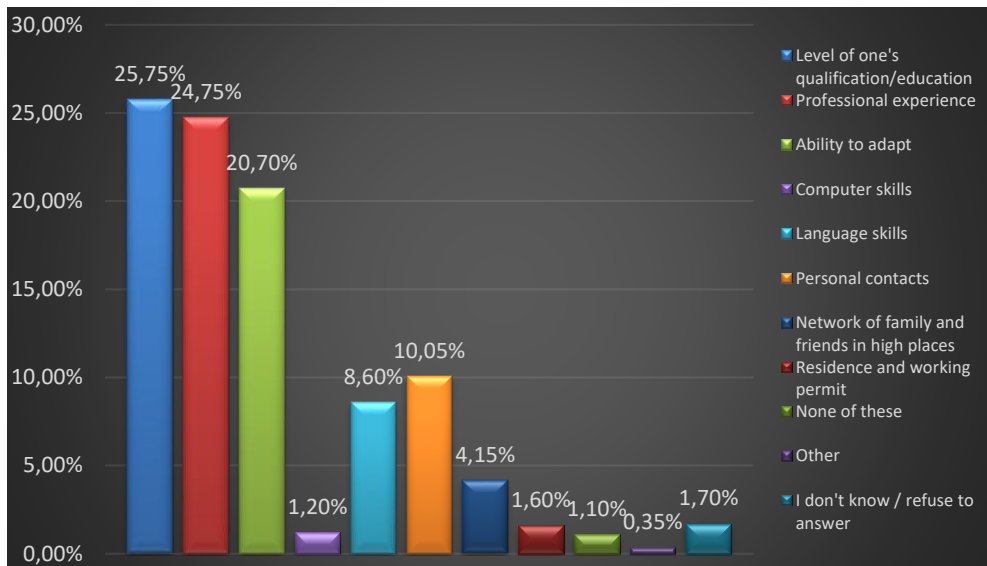
Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Adnan (2018) underlined that there are some niche areas in which Muslims can contribute. One Muslim researcher dedicated himself to the study of a disease peculiar to Argentina: Chagas. Another Muslim researcher in the Balseiro Institute invented the first blood density meter, allowing an easier method to draw blood. A Muslim scientist at the Institute of Industrial Technology invented an alloy made from zinc and nickel that is both harder and more malleable than steel. Other Muslim migrants from recent war-torn areas of the Middle East have obtained other significant positions in society such as university professors or white-collar professionals along with becoming lawyers, engineers, doctors, architects, and primary and high school teachers. These examples demonstrate that religion has yet to prove a hindrance to the economic status of Muslims in Argentina.

Regarding Muslims' employability, the GMD Survey also detailed the main assets for Muslims' employment in Argentina. The first two assets are education (25.75%) and professional

experience (24.75%), which are universal requirements. Yet, the third important asset is interesting. 20.7% of the respondents, which is not significantly lesser than the first two requirements, stated that their ability to adapt is also very significant (Graph 25). This is an important hint about the fact that a formidable segment of the Argentinian Muslims has a stable economic situation. Since many of them are well integrated, in other words adapted to the socio-cultural fabric of the Argentinian society, they do not face many difficulties or discrimination during their employment processes.

Graph 25: Have you ever experience discrimination in the workplace in the following ways?  
(All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

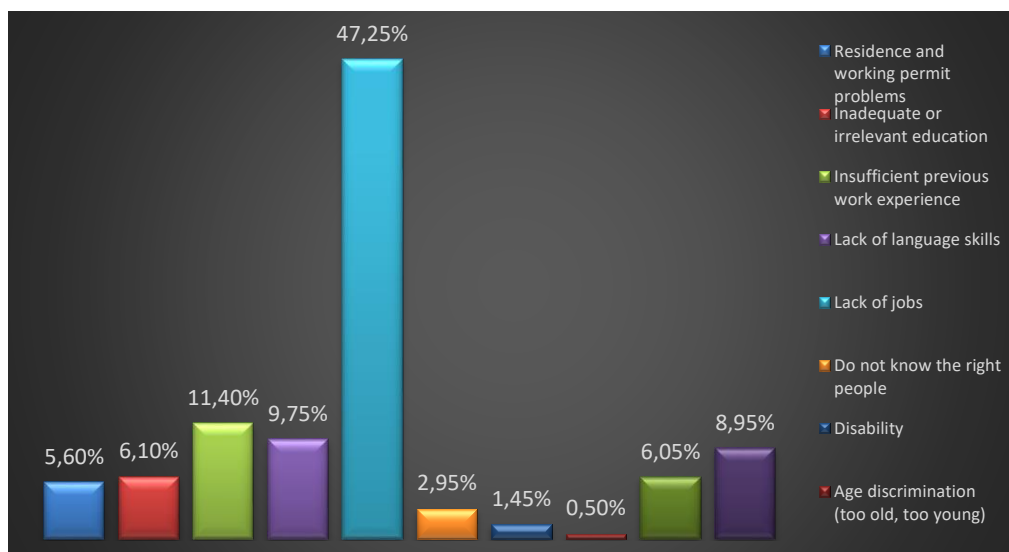
Although a large segment of Muslims is satisfied regarding their economic status, there are still some facing difficulties during their employment. In order to underline these difficulties, the respondents who were unable to find employment were asked about the two main obstacles they faced in Argentina. The responses brought up an interesting point. 47.25% of the respondents stated that there is lack of jobs. This means for some Muslims there is the problem of unemployment. (Graph 26).

The interviewees all emphasized the important role of the Muslim in contributing the socio-economic fabric of Argentina. In the social life, Muslims' contribution is quite deep regarding language and national folklore. Yet one very significant contribution of Muslim communities is the halal industry, which was initiated by the Muslim community of Flores. With this contribution, Argentina has been exporting serious levels of halal meat to Islamic countries, bringing substantial revenue to the national budget. In addition to direct export revenue, accessibility to halal food increases the number of tourists from Muslim countries, which indirectly increases tourism revenues. For example, In Buenos Aires, the City Government instructs tour operators to pinpoint where Muslim tourists can find halal food. The interviewees underlined another issue related to the socio-economy of Muslims in Argentina.

Some interviewees claimed that wealthy Muslims show little interest in contributing to the community and disadvantaged members of society. However, others stated that the charities of the Ahmadi and Shia communities have been helping the disadvantaged Muslims. These communities run fundraising projects to help children living in poverty and those affected by natural disasters and the on-going conflict in Syria.

Graph 26: Main obstacles before those who are unable to find a job in Argentina

(All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

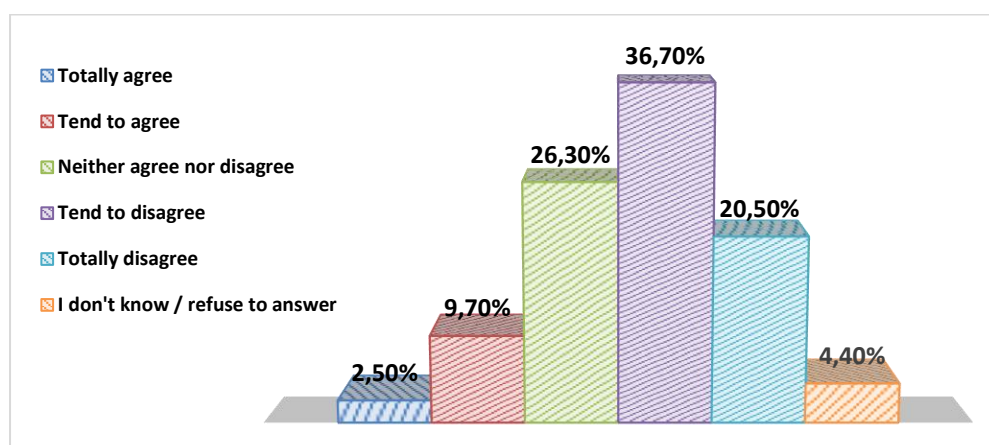
The integration patterns of Argentinian Muslims positively affected their socio-economic status. Since many of them immigrated to Argentina to boost their economic situation, they have successfully focused on it. Although socially they are not very significant in society, economically their contribution is much more significant. Regarding their socio-economic levels, there is a difference between the age-old Muslim immigrants and the new ones, except if the latter has a specific specialization that could bring more of a revenue, such as medical doctors and specific engineers. The Argentinian Muslims are mainly middle class (lower – upper). Although a significant number of Muslims are satisfied with their economic situation and do not face discrimination at the workplace, there is still a number of Muslims facing discrimination and unemployment. The Survey put forward a very significant fact that one major requirement of success and stability at work is the high level of adaptability. Although previous work experience and education are stated as top necessities of getting a job and keeping it, being a part of the Argentinian society bolsters the stability at work. Another reason for their immigration is education and family reasons, on which the GMD survey highlighted their satisfaction. Firstly, a significant number of them have Bachelors; only a tiny percentage is illiterate. Their satisfaction with the education system reflects their responses about their children's access to quality education. Significant numbers of Muslims believe that their children do not only get a good education but also that they are not discriminated against during their educational life.

## 5. Attitudes on Visibility and Representation of Muslims

The Muslim presence in Argentina dates back to the Arab migratory waves in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the majority were from the Christian faith, many were adherents of Islam as well. Due to their spatial settlement patterns, many Muslim institutions were relatively small and spread through towns and villages. Argentina's nation-building project aimed to homogenize religious and linguistic diversity via secular public education and a melting-pot socio-psychology. Therefore, most of these small institutions were unable to survive.<sup>41</sup> Muslims reconfigured their institutions during the second half of the 1980s by establishing new institutions. Some smaller organisations were absorbed under single umbrella institutions. In the same era, Shia institutions gained strength due to the support from the newly established Islamic Republic of Iran. With this increased visibility, Iran became a new religious symbol of reference.

In the 1990s, a local form of Islam and their representations gained visibility. Due to the terrorist attacks in Argentina in the 1990s, Shaykhs organizations received a significant amount of media attention. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, the dominant media narrative was to associate Muslims with fundamentalist terrorist organizations. The GMD survey also enquired respondents' outlook towards Argentinian media regarding the presentation of Muslims. The respondents were asked whether Muslims are well represented in the media in Argentina. 57.2% of them either totally or tend to disagree with the statement (Graph 27). This indicates that their deep history and developed skills for adaptability does not do much to ameliorate their media image.

Graph 27: To what extent do you agree that the Muslim Community is well represented in media in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

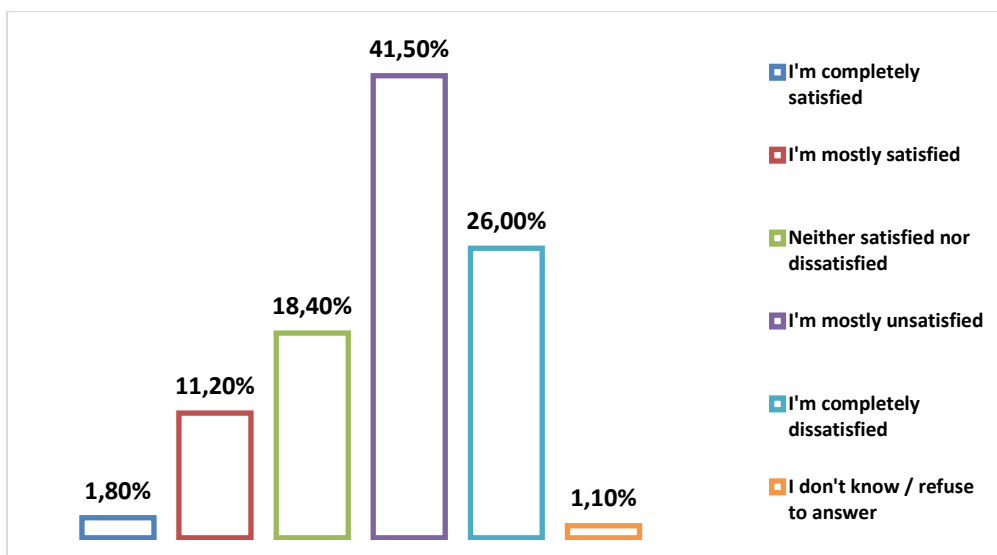


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

<sup>41</sup> For details see: S. Montenegro, "Institutionalizing Islam in Argentina: Comparing Community and Identity Configurations" in: Logroño Narbona MdM, Pinto PG and Tofik Karam J (eds.) *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, Austin: University of Texas, 2015, pp. 85-106.

In addition to representation, the respondents were also asked whether they were satisfied about the media's objectivity of reporting on Muslims. The answers are similar to Muslims' media representation. 41.5% of them are mostly unsatisfied, 26% of them are completely dissatisfied, and only 1.8% of them are completely satisfied, which seems negligible (Graph 28). Regardless of their integration level and equal treatment as citizens, the media can still target them negatively.

Graph 28: Are you satisfied with the objectivity of reporting on Muslims in general?  
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

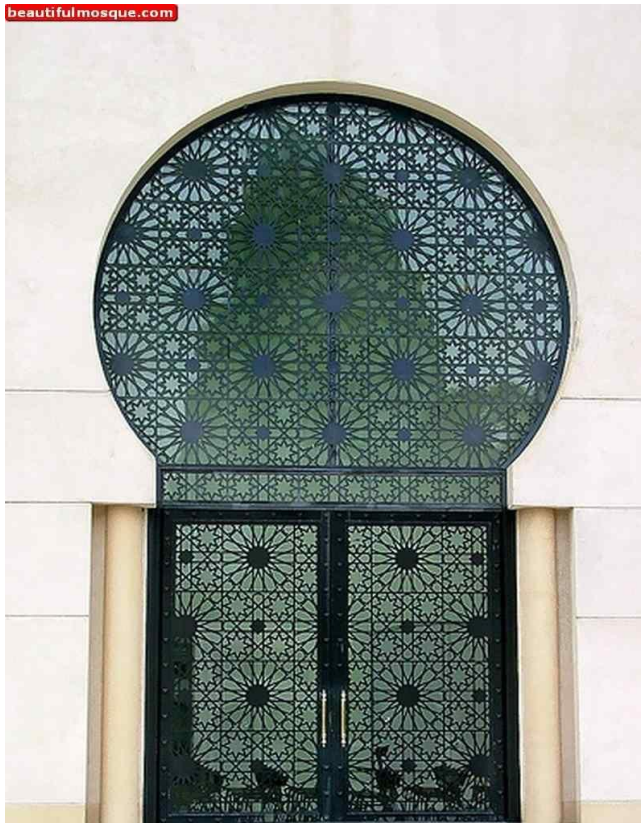


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

In addition to the deficiencies in the media, there are also inadequacies regarding their worship places. Argentina is not particularly rich when it comes to venues of Islamic worship. The first mosque in the country was built in Santa Fé. This was followed by the San Cristóbal mosque in 1933. There are three mosques in the capital: The Shia Al-Tauhid mosque -built in 1983 with the Iranian Embassy's help-; CIRA's Al-Ahmed mosque -built in 1986 through aid from the Saudi Arabian and Libyan governments'; and the CCIAR in Palermo- built by the Saudi royal family and opened in 2000-.<sup>42</sup> CCIAR is the largest mosque in South America. There are also smaller masjids of Pakistani and Indian origin in El Once, which receives funds provided by South African Muslims. On the Inclán Street in Buenos Aires, there is another smaller masjid predominantly attended by Turks and Egyptians. The Senegalese interviewees emphasized a lack of places of worship since they work and reside in the outskirts of Buenos Aires. On Fridays, they find it difficult to commute to Palermo to attend the Friday prayer because as street vendors they cannot leave their stands.

<sup>42</sup> Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, p. 159.

Figure 4: Windows with Islamic style decoration in a mosque in Argentina



Source: <https://www.pinterest.es/pin/424956914821814842/>

year.<sup>43</sup> In 1931, the Asociación Pan Islamismo (the Pan Islamic Association) was established in Buenos Aires. In 1940, the association changed its name to the Sociedad Árabe Islámica (Islamic Arab Society), and in 1957, it became the Islamic Centre of the Argentine Republic. In other provinces, organizations created by Muslim immigrants already existed: 'in Mendoza, the Sociedad Árabe Islámica (the Islamic Arab Society) was founded in 1926, in Cordoba the Ayuda Social Árabe Musulmana (the Muslim Arab Social Aid) in 1928 and in Rosario the Asociación Unión Islámica de Rosario (the Rosario Islamic Union Association) in 1932. In 1929, in Tucumán, Sunni Muslims and Alawites established the Asociación Cultural y Culto Pan Islámica (the Pan Islamic Cultural and Worship Association). In the province of Buenos Aires, in the region of General Arenales, in the town of La Angelita in the 1920s, Sociedad Árabe Islámica Alauita de la Angelita (the Alawite Islamic Arab Society of Angelita) was established. Meanwhile, the Alawites established institutions in Buenos Aires, the Asociación Unión Alauita (the Alawite Union Association) in 1936, and the Asociación Islámica Alauita de Beneficencia de José Ingenieros (the José Ingenieros's Alawite Islamic Aid Association) in 1943'. The aim of these institutions was to bring together 'immigrants whose ethnic and religious identities

Although they do not provide a full-fledged Islamic education, there are two Arab oriented schools in Buenos Aires: Colegio Argentino-Árabe (the Argentine-Arab School), and the Instituto Árabe Argentino Islámico (Arab-Argentine Islamic Institute). Both of them are open to the public with secular curricula and provide afternoon sessions on Islamic culture. Yet, only 30% of these students attend these sessions. Regarding media outlets, in the 1990s CIRA began to publish *La voz Del Islam* that quickly became the voice of Sunni Islam in Argentina.

Institutional representation of Muslim is weak in Argentina. The first Islamic association was established on the outskirts of Buenos Aires in 1917, followed by an Islamic centre inside the city within a

<sup>43</sup> M. David Sills & Kevin Baggett, "Islam in Latin America", *SBJT*, Vol:15, No. 2, 2011, p.34.

appeared juxtaposed and who intended to pass on their religious values and practices to the next generation through their descendants born in Argentina'.<sup>44</sup>

For more than fifty years, no federation was established to unify various Muslim institutions under a common representation. The institutions formed by the first wave of immigrants did not play a unifying role. Following the 1992 and the 1994 terrorist attacks, Muslim institutions in Buenos Aires were accused of supporting international terrorism. Muslim community became a focal point after the attacks. Argentinian media started to use Islam and terrorism almost synonymously. The newspaper Clarín is one example, which published a number of articles<sup>45</sup> emphasizing the Muslim community's fundamentalism and linking it with Islamic extremism. Members of the Argentinian Muslim community were forced to act individually to respond to local and international events regarding extremism and fundamentalism.<sup>46</sup>

CIRA has been the most significant Muslim institution established in 1986 to address the socio-economic problems of new Muslim immigrants. CIRA provides socio-cultural courses on Arabic and Arab cuisine to protect Arab cultural tradition. Although the CIRA administration claims that it is the "mother institution of all Muslims" in Argentina, the Shia community does not believe that CIRA adequately represents them. Although CIRA emphasizes that its doors are open to Shia Muslims, Druze and Alawites, in practice it is a heavily Sunni influenced institution. The Argentinian state does not recognize CIRA as the central institution for Muslim representation and the institution does not receive funding from the Argentinian government. Money is received from the Saudi and ex-Libyan governments.<sup>47</sup> CCIAR has the largest mosque in Argentina with the capacity to host 1,500 worshippers. The complex includes a kindergarten, two primary and secondary schools –for boys and girls separately-, library, sports and conference halls. The Centre's main representational activities are the guided visits organized on Friday afternoons to minimize the political connotations linking Islam with extremism.<sup>48</sup>

Due to the high-level of integration of Arab Muslims, over 60% of the second generation of Muslims are no longer fluent Arabic speakers. By the third generation, this ration falls down to 1/10.<sup>49</sup> Newspapers and journals run by Muslims were ceased to publish, and Muslim identity, particularly the women, was generally confined to the home.<sup>50</sup> A number of Muslims

<sup>44</sup> S. Montenegro, "Institutionalizing Islam in Argentina: Comparing Community and Identity Configurations" in: Logroño Narbona MdM, Pinto PG and Tofik Karam J (eds.) *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, Austin: University of Texas, 2015, pp. 85-106, 89.

<sup>45</sup> Pedro Breiger, "Some Reflections of the Diario Clarin and Fundamentalism", *MSANEWS*, 28.

<sup>46</sup> Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, p. 159-160; Ricardo Lopez Dusil, *Mercado*, No. 1000, March 2001.

<sup>48</sup> The King Fahd Cultural Centre's full name is The Islamic Cultural Center "Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Fahd in Argentina". For details see: <http://www.cciar.com/ingles/ienglish.html>, accessed on 3 January 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Abdelouhad Akmir, "La inmigración Árabe en Argentina", *El mundo Árabe y América Latina*, Tres de cuatro soles, UNESCO, 1997, pp. 87-95

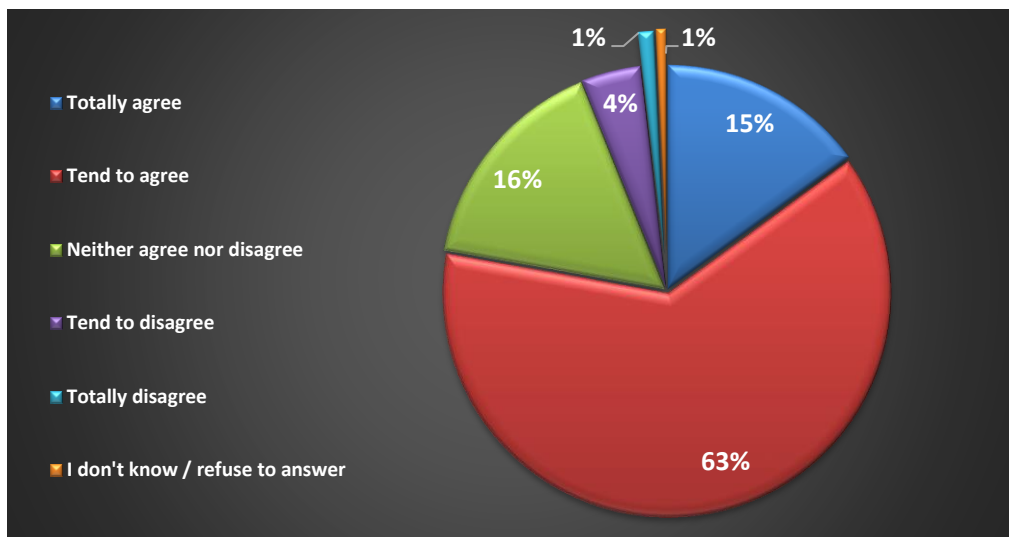
<sup>50</sup> Gladys Jozami, "El retomo de los 'turcos' en la Argentina de los noventa," *Discriminación y Racismo en Latinoamérica*, eds. Ignacio Klich and Mario Rapoport (Buenos Aires: GEL, 1997), p. 7



change their names either because they are difficult to pronounce in Spanish or because they want to fit in. Some interviewees stated that Jews are far more visible in society than Muslims. Usman (2018) said that ‘in the case of my Jewish friends I immediately knew they are Jews, but in the case of my Muslim friends, it takes me some years to know they are Muslims’.

The influence of Argentinian Muslims’ high level of integration is seen in the Survey respondents’ views about their position as being fully-fledged citizens in Argentina. 78% of the respondents agreed that Argentinian Muslim community is accepted and treated as fully-fledged citizens. Only 1% of the respondents totally disagreed (Graph 29). This view fits into the above-stated claim that a significant number of Argentinian Muslims are autochthonous citizens.

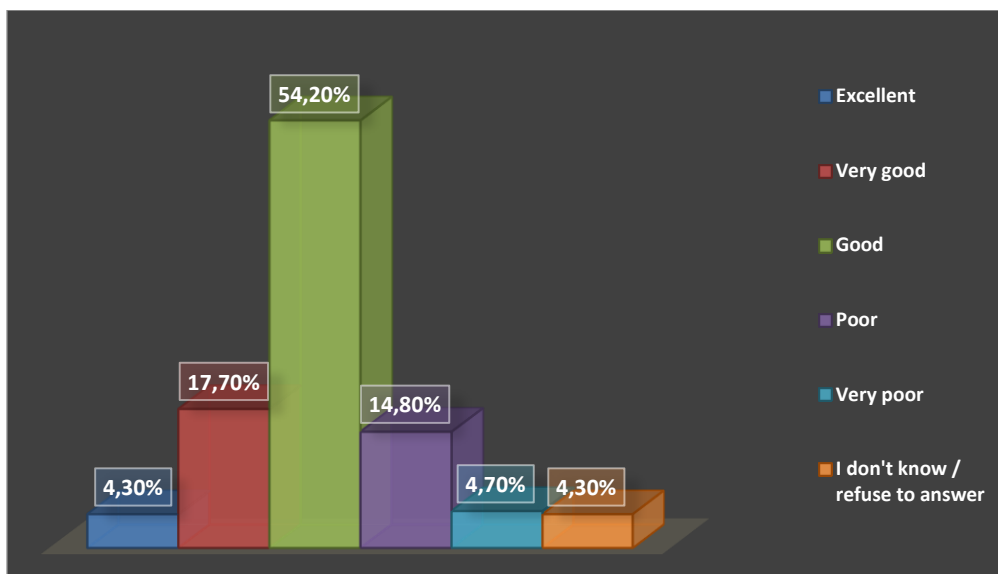
Graph 29: Muslim Community are accepted and treated as fully-fledged citizens in Argentina. (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Muslims’ acceptance as full citizens positively affect their engagement in public life. The Survey respondents mainly claimed that the level of Muslim engagement in public life is satisfactory. 54.2% of them stated that Muslims’ engagement is good, 17.7% of them said it is very good, and 4.3% said it is excellent (Graph 30). This is in parallel with their stable position in the socio-economic realm. Although a good number of them work in trade and crafts, the educated Muslims are engaging well with the public space.

Graph 30: How would you describe the level of Muslim engagement (effective participation) in public life in Argentina? (For example, as local mayors, state officials, lawyers, members of the university, teaching staff, etc.)? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

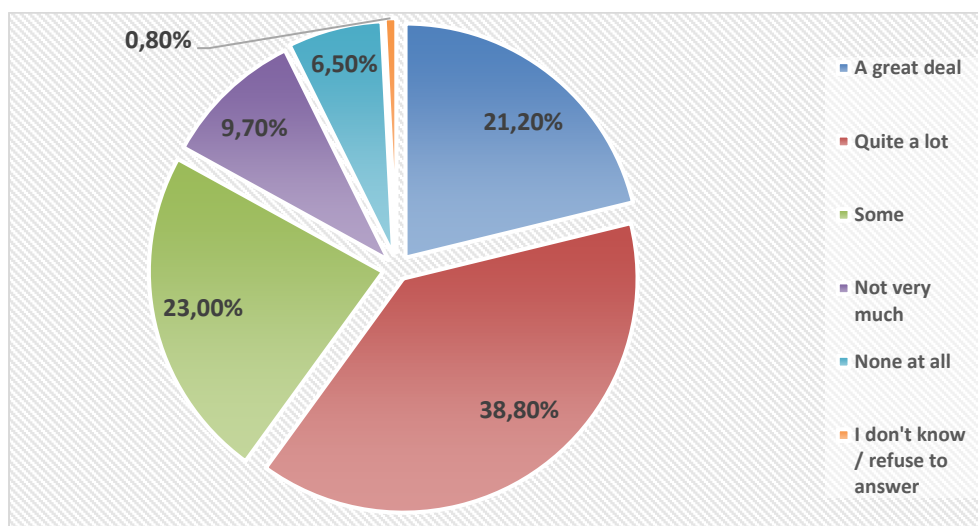
Argentinian Muslims' institutional representation is weak, which is largely the result of the first and second-generation Muslims' tendencies to integrate and even assimilate, in order to reduce the influence of some elements of faith that would distinguish them from non-Muslim society. Muslims institutions, especially CIRA, have been trying to amplify the third generation Muslims' interest to return to Islam.<sup>51</sup> Another significant fact of Argentinian Muslims' visibility and representation is the lack of well-trained indigenous Muslim leadership. Imams generally have a good Islamic education but do not speak Spanish and therefore their sermons are translated from Arabic. The interviewees underlined this very fact. Akif (2018) stated that education is key to uniting the detached members of the Muslim community in the country. He added that, education should present Islam in a manner that is easy enough for Argentinian Muslims to practice in their everyday life in a non-Muslim society. Kerem (2018) stated that imams come from Arabic countries and usually have no idea about the socio-religious fabric of the country. They work as public servants and do not mingle with the rest of the Muslim community outside of their particular ethnicity. Yet, this is more the case for Sunnis. Some interviewees underlined the growing popularity of the Shia community. This is because not only they were better established with better-educated leaders but they also present Islam with a less rigid and more philosophical approach. Regarding political representation at the national level, Salma (2018) underlined that even if there are legal frameworks and channels for Muslims to represent themselves, there is almost no political representation. The strength of Islam at the Argentine national politics is extremely weak. Abdul (2018) added that Muslims in Argentina have no interest in becoming involved in

<sup>51</sup> For a similar view see: Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, p. 160.

politics. Saudis separate themselves from the other communities and attempt to dominate the Muslims' national political arena but do not have the necessary incentives to carry out this task.

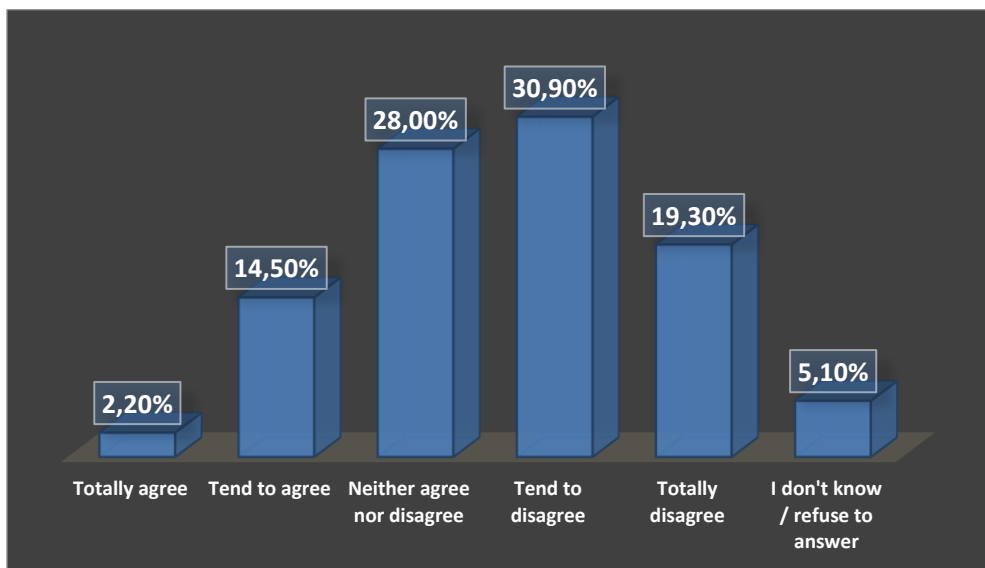
The GMD Survey enquired Argentinian Muslims' political participation regarding their interest in Argentinian politics. 60% of the respondents stated that they have a great deal / quite a lot of interest in Argentinian politics and only 6.5% of them have no interest at all, which is quite a small percentage (Graph 31). When it comes to their political representation and political engagement and participation, these percentages are reversed. Over 50% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that Muslim community is well represented in the politics of Argentina. Due to these deficiencies in political representation, 84.5% of the respondents stated that the communities would benefit greatly from Muslims' active engagement and participation at local and national level. (Graphs 32 and 33). This is an important indication that the Muslims are individually interested in politics but when it comes to be an active political representative, they are hesitant. This also affects their incentives and motivations to organize themselves in a political party. Due to this hesitation at the organizational level, Muslims cannot coalesce in a political party or create a clique in a political party to represent their communities' demands and rights.

Graph 31: How much interest do you have in politics in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



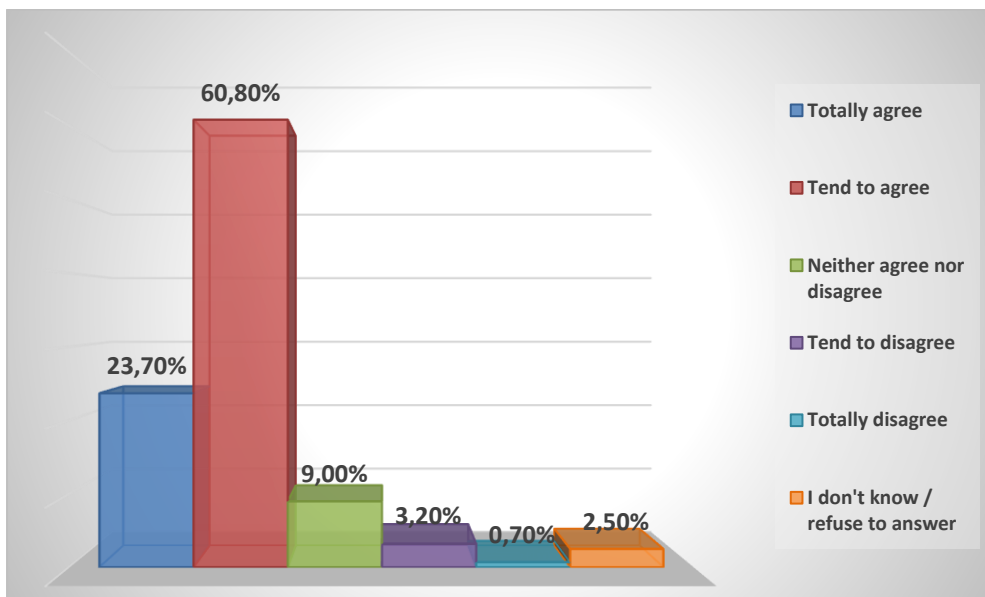
Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Graph 32: To what extent do you agree with the statement that Muslim Community is well represented in the politics of Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Graph 33: To what extent do you agree with the statement that Muslims' active political engagement and participation at the local and national level will benefit Muslim communities in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

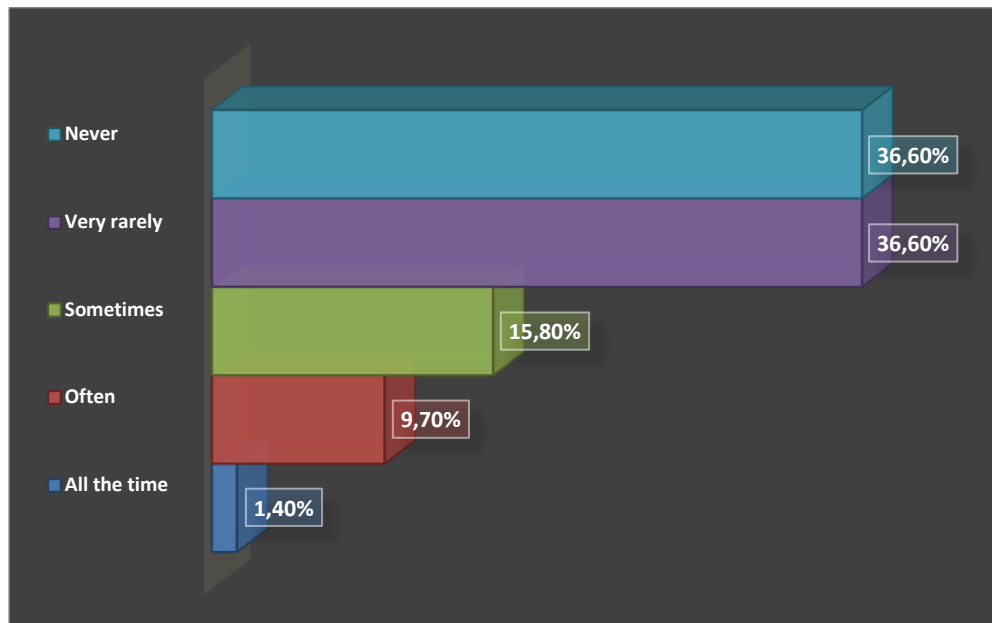


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

In order to depict respondents' individual participation in politics, the GMD Survey questioned their frequency of attending political events to identify the important indicators of Argentinian Muslims' political participation patterns. 61.2% of the respondents stated that they either very rarely or never attend political events with members of the Muslim community (Graph 34). As seen above, they are very interested in Argentinian national politics in theory, but when it comes to practice, they do not engage, especially together with the fellow community members.

Graph 34: How often do you attend political events with members of the Muslim Community in Argentina?

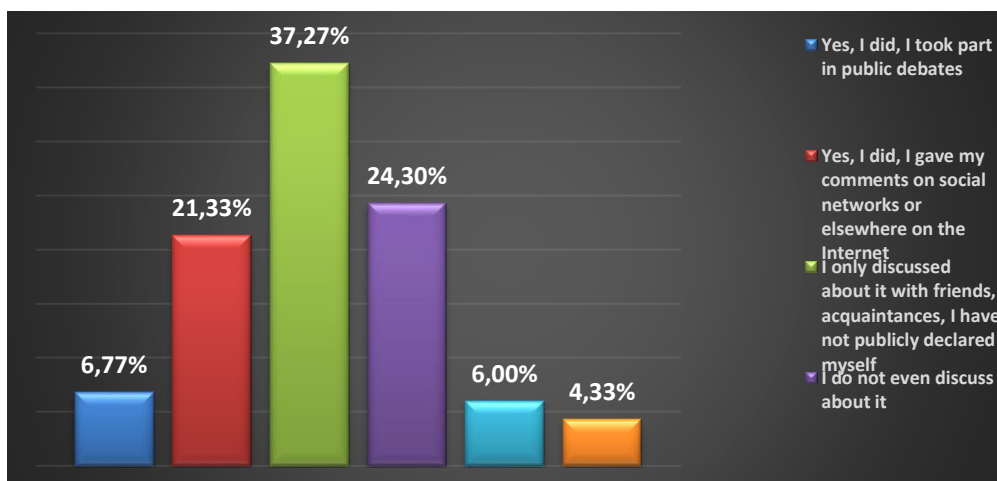
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

For a better illustration of the respondents' individual political engagement, the GMD Survey inquired whether they have ever done something that could affect any of the government decisions related to the needs of the Muslim community. The answers highlight that only 6.77% of the respondents took part in public debates. The rest of the participants did not take any substantial official steps to affect government decisions related to Muslim communities. 37.27% of the respondents only discussed these issues with their peer group and 21.33% expressed their concerns on social networks. 24.3% did not discuss about it (Graph 35). Again, these percentages show that Muslims' interest in politics is restrained in their own private sphere. They do not particularly engage with official apparatuses of national politics.

Graph 35: Have you ever done something that could affect any of the government decisions related to the needs of the Muslim Community? (All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)

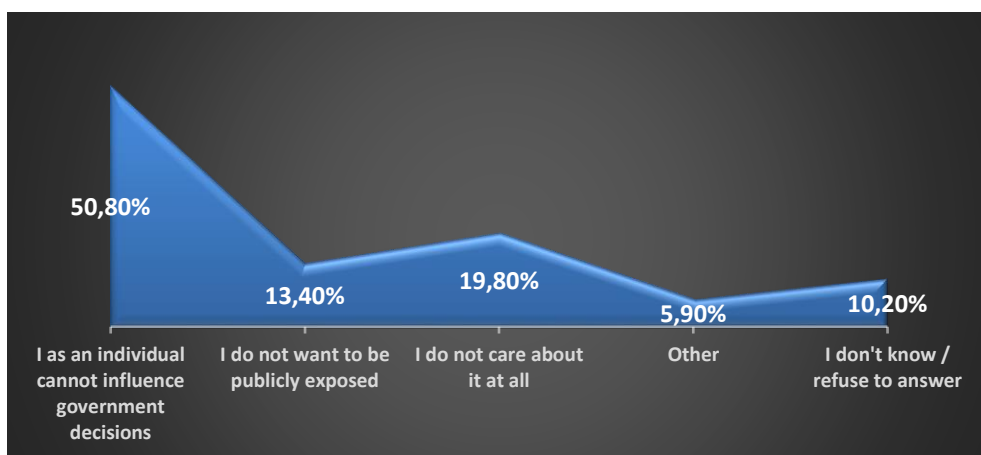


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

To understand the reasons behind this political disengagement at the personal level, the respondents were asked about why they are not actively involved in government decision-making. The main reason the respondents stated was that as an individual they do not believe that they can influence government decisions (50.80%). The second important reason is that they do not care about government decisions (19.8%). Thirdly, they stated that they do not want to be publicly exposed (13.4%) (Graph 36). These answers again show that, Argentinian Muslims’ interest in politics is mainly happening in their personal or close friendship groups’ spaces.

Graph 36: What is the main reason why you are not actively involved in government decision-making?

(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

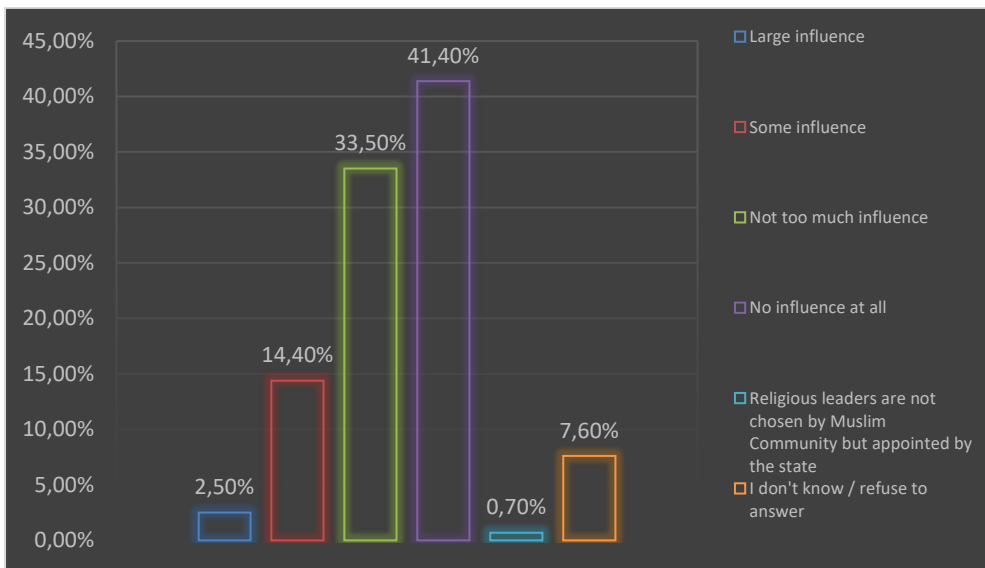


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Muslim representation through cultural institutions is also weak. Usman (2018) states that there are five big centres in Buenos Aires representing 300 active members, although this is slowly changing with the increasing number of Senegalese immigrants in the last 3-4 years, totalling around 10,000. They are opening new cultural centres. However, the Senegalese centres are homogenous and generally do not invite members of other ethnicities within their circles of communication.

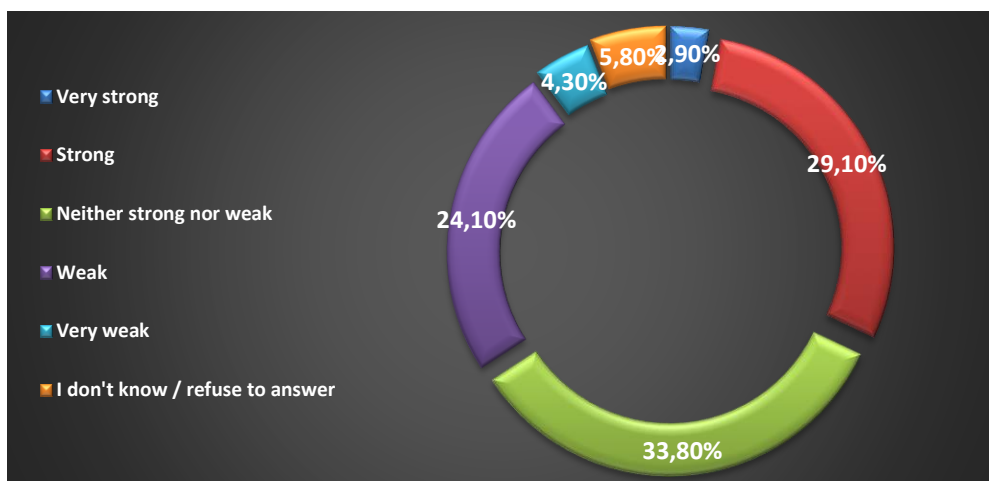
The GMD Survey enquired Argentinian Muslims' views towards official religious leaders. 41.4% of the respondents stated that official religious leaders have no influence at all on political matters in Argentina, 33.5% of them responded that they do not have too much of an influence and only 2.5% of them claimed that they have a large influence (Graph 37). When it comes to their trust in Muslim political leaders, the respondents are almost divided in half. 29.1% of the respondents have strong and 24.1% of them have weak trust. 33.8% of them have neither strong nor weak trust towards their leaders (Graph 38). This tells us why the members of Muslim community do not have a strong support for religious and political organizations. Although they have a certain level of trust in their religious and political leaders, they do not believe that these leaders can have an influence on Argentinian political matters. Once again, it depicts that the members of the community are interested in politics but not in real / practical terms.

Graph 37: In your opinion, how much influence do official religious leaders of Muslim Community have in political matters in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

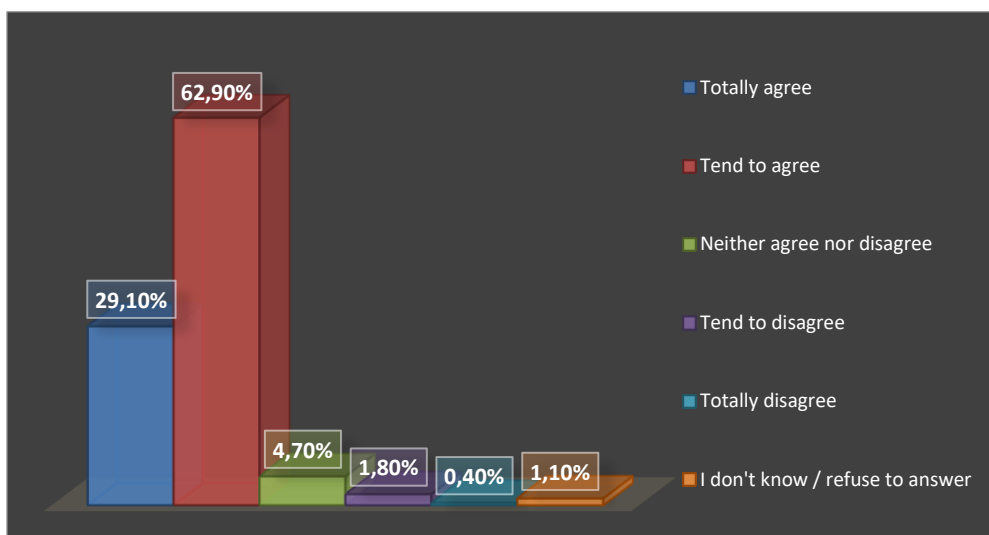
Graph 38 How would you describe your level of trust to political leaders of the Muslim Community in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Due these deficiencies in the visibility and representation of Muslims, the GMD Survey enquired respondents' views about the necessity to improve the public image of Muslims living in Argentina. 92% of the respondents agree/totally agree with the statement. (Graph 39) It illustrates that Muslims' are well aware of these deficiencies in their representation and the necessity to improve and increase their representation and influence.

Graph 39: To what extent would you agree that there is a need to improve the public image of Muslims living in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

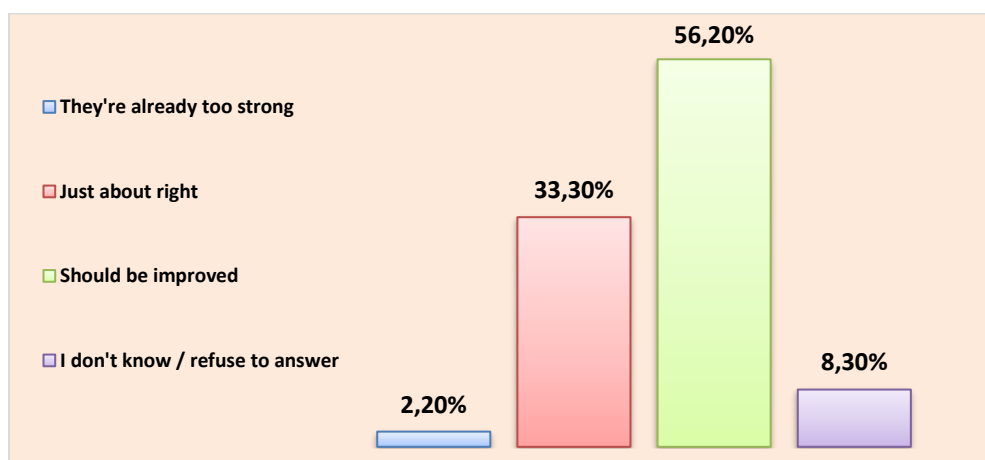


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.



To eliminate some of these deficiencies a major step could be increasing and developing novel cooperation between Muslim representative institutions and the state apparatus of Argentina. The Survey enquired respondents' view on the current level of this cooperation. 56.2% of the respondents stated that they should be improved. This is again an illustration of the awareness Muslims have about the necessity to eliminate these deficiencies.

Graph 40: How would you describe the level of cooperation between organizations representing Muslim Community and state institutions of Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Although Muslims have a deep historical presence in Argentina, their visibility in society is not very significant. One main reason for this, as repeated above, is their level of integration. Organizationally, they started to establish representational institutions in the 1980s, yet only with the support and motivation of the overseas Muslim countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Muslims established cultural and educational institutions as well, but they are far from providing adequate services in both cultural representation and Islamic education. Regarding dealing with the public space, Argentinian Muslims' individual engagement level is much higher than their institutional level. They individually are well engaged with the public space but organizationally they are not. This is an important indication that they have not developed strong organizational skills and ability to mobilize under a single framework. This trend is valid in public organizations as well as in national politics.

In national politics, there is a division between theoretical and practical/institutional interest. Theoretically, they are very interested in the national politics but when it comes to political engagement within political parties, they are unsuccessful. They neither organize themselves in a political party or as a faction in a party. Accordingly, their frequency of attending political events is also very low. Their deficiencies in socio-political realm contribute to the persistence of their unfavourable image in Argentinian media, which is highlighted from time to time. Despite their long history and deep integration, Argentinian Muslims still suffer from media's targeting them negatively and as a scapegoat for problem being faced in Argentina.

## 6. Confidence in Relations among Muslim Communities

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Inter-communal relations amongst Argentinian Muslims are not particularly strong. One exception is during Ramadan. During the great feast at the end of Ramadan, Muslims from different associations from Buenos Aires and San Miguel de Tucumán come together. During these occasions, associations circulate discourses, symbols and news to the Muslim attendees. The aim is to create a sense of a single community. Yet, there are deep fractions within the Muslim sphere in daily life and sharp boundaries between sects are frequently stressed.<sup>52</sup> There are divisions between ethnic groups as well. The main participants in Muslim events are predominantly Arab officials. Officials from Senegal, Ghana, Pakistan or India do not attend.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, there are divisions regarding race. Abdul (2018) stated that on Ramadan he attended the mosque in Palermo and saw African Muslims treated differently. He also added that integration problems exist in mosques. During Ramadan in his conversations with members of the Muslim community, he heard that Muslims do not come to mosque to bless each other or to make friends but only to pray.

At the institutional level, there exist several divisions. The first one is the sectarian divisions in the most formidable Muslim organizations. For example, Arab descended Sunnis are running CIRA, which discards an important deal of other sects. The second division is a result of the imbalance in the financial support Muslim organizations receives. For example, some Arab countries support their communities' NGOs and worship places much more generously than other countries. A third one is the preference of Muslims for place of worship, which prevents an inter-community mixing during prayer times. Muslims of Arab descent prefer to attend mosques supported by their own governments. For example, Iranian descent immigrants run the mosque Mezquita el Matir, Syrian and Lebanese descendants run the Asociación Pan Islámica, and these two groups do not worship or celebrate events together.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Y. Abboud, "Los Árabes Musulmanes" in Sirios, libaneses y argentinos. Fragmentos para una historia de la diversidad cultural argentina, Fundación Los Cedros (ed.), Buenos Aires, 2003, pp. 233-244. 2003, p. 238; Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, "The Muslim Community of Argentina", *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, pp. 158-159.

<sup>53</sup> Tobias Boos, "Muslim Atmospheres as Neighbourhoods of Religious Diasporic Microspheres, Muslims in Argentina", *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, Vol. 5, 2016, pp. 55-56.

<sup>54</sup> Tobias Boos, "Muslim Atmospheres as Neighbourhoods of Religious Diasporic Microspheres, Muslims in Argentina", *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 5, 2016, p. 56.

Figure 5: Minarets of the mosque against the sky, Buenos Aires, Argentina



Source: <https://www.deviantart.com/kassad86/art/Buenos-Aires-Mosque-minarets-47847412>

Due to the lack of well-trained Islamic leaders and scholars, generational differences and disputes are difficult to overcome with ease. Many of the older Islamic generation of individuals have received proper Islamic education while members of the younger generation claim to know not the meaning of Islam.<sup>55</sup> Some interviewees underlined generational conflicts between the older and younger generations regarding the differences in their ways of life. Furthermore, there is a lack of knowledge from both Muslim and non-Muslim members of society regarding Islamic values and teachings. Due to the lack of well-established and functioning Islamic research centres and schools in general, Muslims are unable to convey or understand Islam's true teachings. The high level of converts in Argentina creates another source of friction in the Muslim community. The friction arises between Muslim converts and the more "traditional" Muslim communities.<sup>56</sup> Arab Muslims in Argentina have 'cultivated long-distance nationalist ties with Syrian or Arab homelands' while 'non-Arab converts deepened their connection to Islam by studying in Saudi Arabia and Iran'.<sup>57</sup>

Conversion to Islam is a significant subject in Argentina that requires extra focus here. In Argentina, there are two types of conversions to Islam: syncretism and the symbolic battle. In the first one, the convert wields common elements between its past religion and Islam. In the symbolic battle, there is a process of transformation where there is clear rejection of some

<sup>55</sup> J. Wilsch, *Muslim Argentinians with Arab Roots in Buenos Aires*, Utrecht, 2009, p. 22-23

<sup>56</sup> S. Montenegro, "Institutionalizing Islam in Argentina: Comparing Community and Identity Configurations" in: Logroño Narbona MdM, Pinto PG and Tofik Karam J (eds.) *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, Austin: University of Texas, 2015, pp. 85-106, pp. 91-98.

<sup>57</sup> María del Mar Logroño Narbona, Paulo G. Pinto & John Tofik Karam (eds.), *Crescent over Another Horizon, Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015, p. 13

very elements of the past religion.<sup>58</sup> Especially regarding the latter, converted interviewees stated that they reject a large part of the Western society due to its overwhelming materialism. They see Islam as a road to salvation. Interpretation of gender roles is another source of division. Women are particularly excluded from the influential positions of Muslim NGOs. For example, in CIRA, only 3 out of 20 main committee officials are women. There are also regional or city-oriented separations within the Muslim community. Local Muslims from the same region or city tend to socialize with each other.<sup>59</sup> Most interviewees identified intra- (Muslim) community tensions and divisions as a “cold war”. They believe these challenges and conflicts to be the result of the issue of Islamic identity, which has been going through a process of change. With this change, some interviewees believe that certain Muslim countries and power centres play a manipulative role.

*Figure 6: People gather in "Paseo del Buen Pastor" a cultural, recreational and commercial center in Córdoba, Argentina*



Source: <https://www.shutterstock.com>

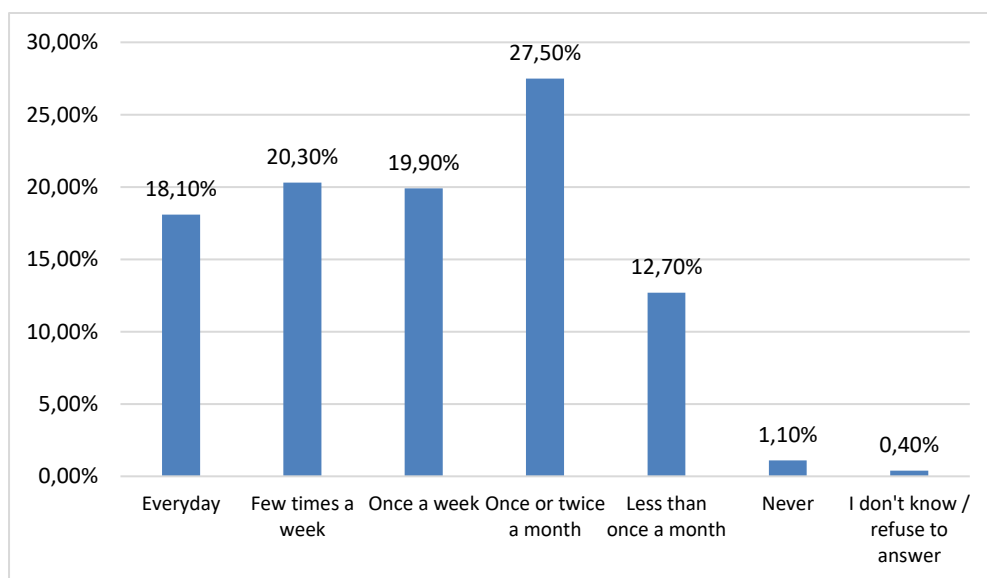
The divisions have been continuing because there is no umbrella organization established to minimize the inner fragmentations of the Muslim community. Muslim organizations, including mosques and cemeteries, address social issues and discrimination rather than looking to unify the different segments of the Muslim community. These organizations’ activities, such as workshops or media programs, are also a response to the local and global discrimination against Muslims. Their main aim has been to improve the image of Islam. Muslim countries’ support for their own “national” organizations contribute to the persistence of this divide. Akif (2018) confirmed this by stating that most of the divisions in the Muslim community are not the result of theological differences but rather political. Islam does not prohibit a Sunni or

<sup>58</sup> For details see: Silvia Maria Montenegro, “Formas de adhesión al Islam en Argentina: conversión, tradición, elección, reasunción y tránsito intra-islámico”, *Horizonte: Dossiê: Islamismo: religião e cultura – Artigo original*, Vol. 13, No. 38, p. 676-682.

<sup>59</sup> Pedro Brieger & Enrique Herszkowich, “The Muslim Community of Argentina”, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 92, 2002, p. 158 -159.

any Muslim to sit with anyone from a different community or religious belief. However, as an Ahmadi, Akif (2018) claimed that he is prohibited from speaking with a Shia due to political actors. The GMD Survey enquired the level interaction and confidence among Muslim communities from various angles. The first one was regarding the interaction among the members of the Muslim community in Argentina. The respondents were asked about their frequency of interaction with other members of the Muslim community. The percentages show that there is a certain level of interaction, although not significantly close and frequent. The highest percentage is for once or twice a month (27.5%), this is followed by few times a week (20.3%). Interestingly, their daily interaction is not significantly low either (18.1%) (Graph 41). According to these responses, it is difficult to develop a generalization for Muslims' interaction levels. Yet, it can be inferred that depending on the community the interaction level changes.

Graph 41: How frequently do you interact with members of the Muslim community in Argentina (excluding your family/relatives and co-workers)? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)

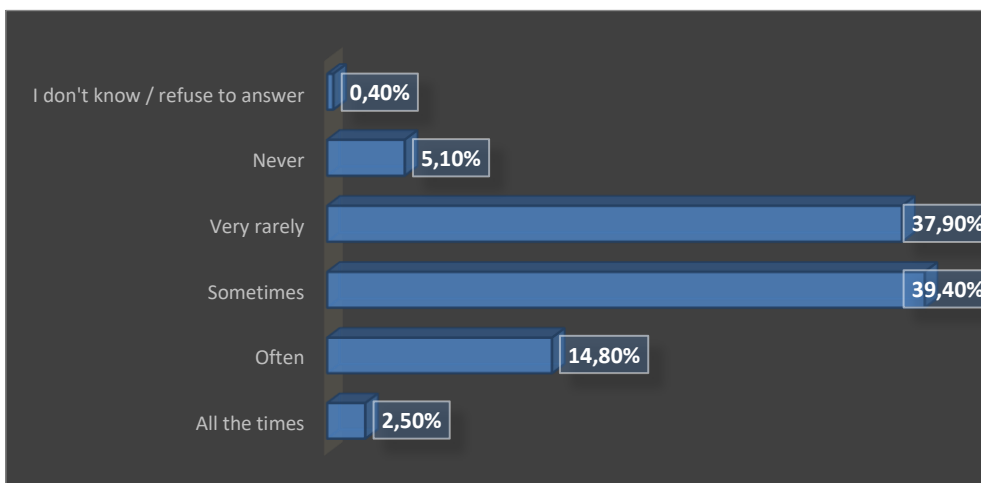


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

To expand and figure out the underneath reasons, the GMD Survey asked the respondents whether they attend social gatherings with the members of the Muslim community, such as language activities, educational events, lectures, debates, sports, theatre and other cultural activities. 77.3% of the respondents stated that they sometimes or very rarely attend these events (Graph 42). This gives more of an understanding about their community interaction patterns. The percentages show that Muslim community members mostly catch up with their close friendship groups, rather than larger community activities. In other words, large-scale community interaction seems weak.

Graph 42: How often do you attend social gatherings with members of Muslim Community in Argentina?

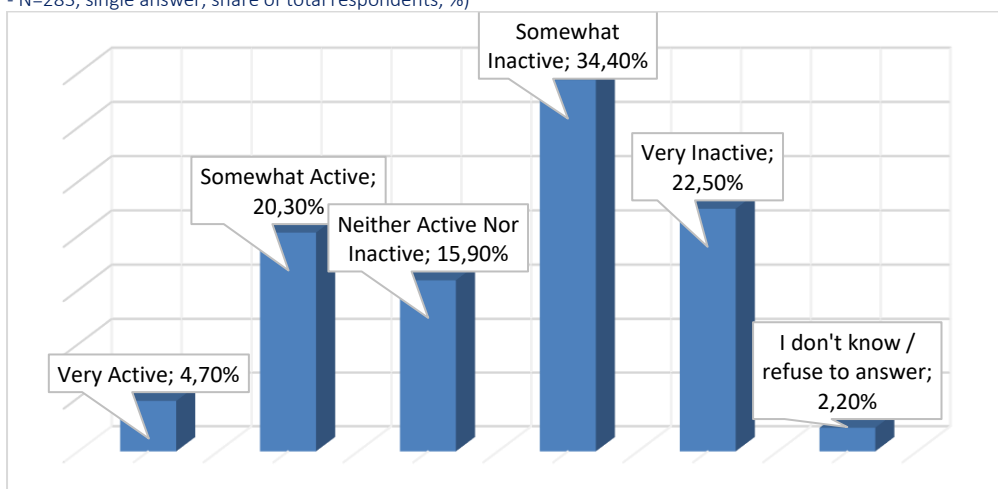
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

To understand Muslim community members' interactions with more organized congregations, the Survey asked about their engagements in the voluntary organizations of the Muslim community. Respondents' responses reaffirm Argentinian Muslims' limited engagement in these organizations. 56.9% of the respondents are somewhat inactive or very inactive. Only 4.7% of them are very active (Graph 43). Once again, it shows that Muslims in Argentina mostly engaged in their own private, family, or friendship spaces.

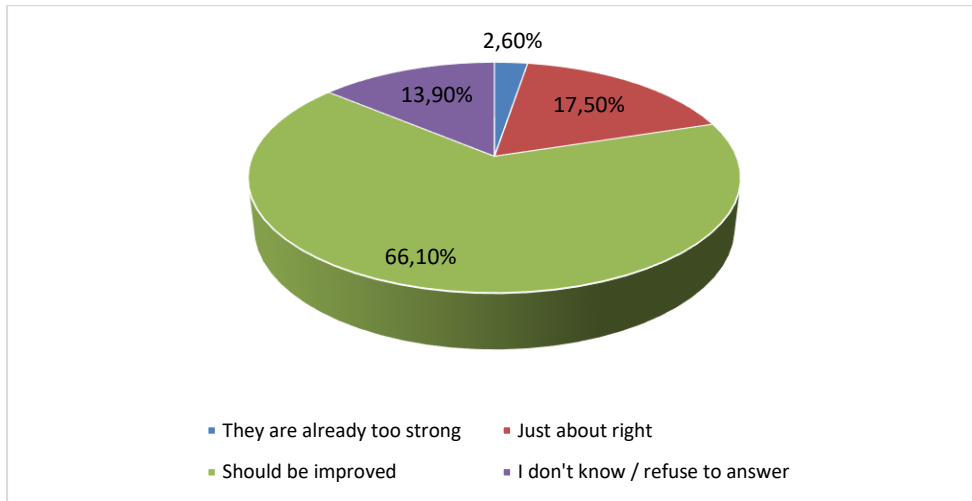
Graph 43: How engaged and active would you say you are in the voluntary organizations of Muslim Community registered in Argentina such as associations and charities? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The Survey additionally enquired the level of cooperation between different jamaats of the Muslim community in Argentina. The results re-confirm that the inter-jamaat relations are not particularly strong. 66.1% of the respondents stated that these relations need to be improved (Graph 44). Similar to the Muslims' interactions with their community members, Argentinian Muslim jamaats have limited engagements with each other.

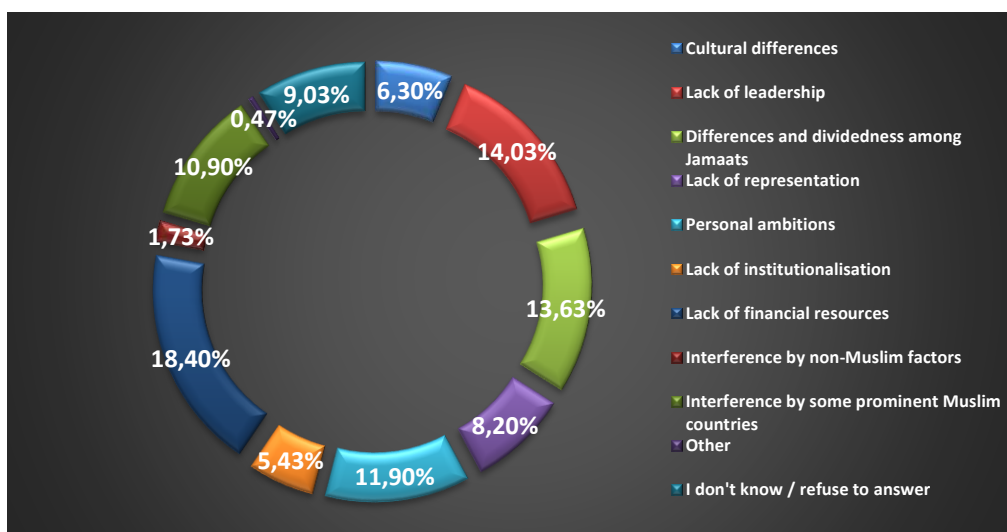
Graph 44: How would you describe the level of cooperation between different jamaats of the Muslim community in Argentina. (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

To unfold the respondents' views about the obstacles creating these limitations in inter-/intra-community interactions, they were asked about the main factors that work against greater cooperation and solidarity in this sense. Several important aspects came to fore under similar percentages. The foremost reason was put forward as the lack of financial resources (18.4%). It is followed by lack of leadership (14.03%) and differences and dividedness among jamaats (13.63%). In the third tier of issues, the respondents stated personal ambitions (11.9%), and interference by some prominent Muslim countries (10.9%) (Graph 45). All these reasons show that there are organizational, personal and faith-oriented issues. The Argentinian Muslims have not really been focused on organizing themselves comprehensively. Like in many other target countries of this study, Muslims in Argentina are divided and cannot bring up an effective leadership to ameliorated their fragmentation. Faith and culture-based dividedness is deepened with personality issues of leaders and lack of financial resources and the intervention of significant Muslim countries to monitor and control their communities overseas.

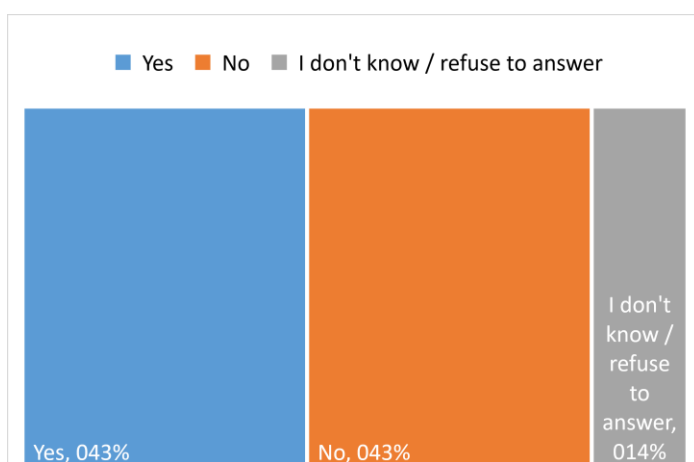
Graph 45: What are the main factors that work against the greater cooperation and solidarity of the Muslims in Argentina? (All respondents - N=283, multiple answers, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

The GMD survey elaborated respondents' consideration about the Muslim diaspora in Argentina. As in the other target countries, they are divided in the middle about the concept and its significance for Argentinian Muslims. 42.8% of them stated that they do not believe that there is a Muslim diaspora, and 42.8% stated that they do. Even for a very well integrated Muslim community, the understanding of Muslim diaspora is problematic and confusing.

Graph 46: Do you believe that there is a Muslim Diaspora? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



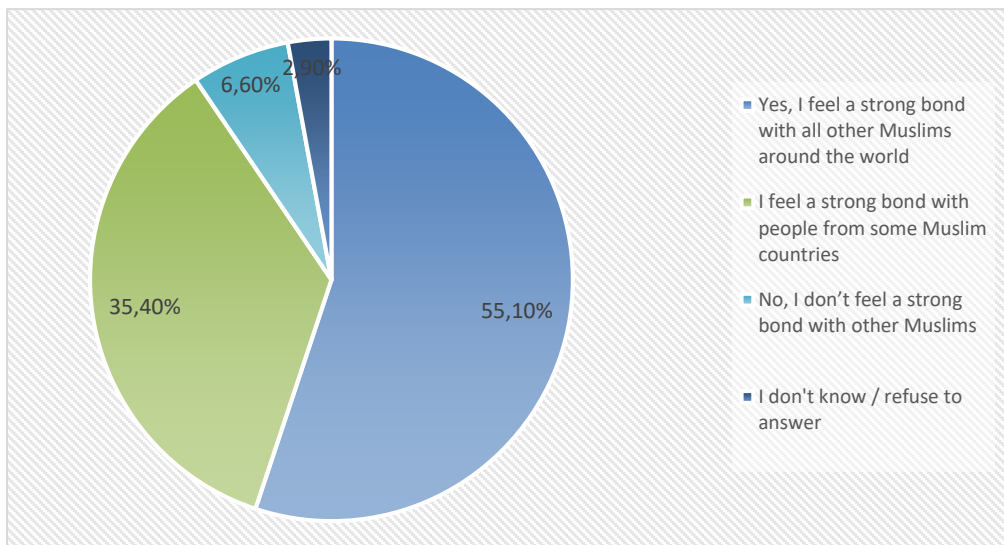
Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

To understand Argentinian Muslims relations with the other Muslims overseas, the Survey asked respondents whether they have a strong bond with the Muslims around the world. A dominant percentage of 90.5% felt a strong bond to the Muslims around the world (Graph 47). As



mentioned above, although they are deeply integrated to the Argentinian society, Muslims in Argentina did not lose their links with their country of origin. Regarding their bonds to the global ummah, they seemingly feel pretty much the same. In this regard, Muslims in Argentina do have a consciousness of Muslims in other parts of the world but they are not prone to consider themselves as part of a Muslim diaspora. This could be due to the highly integrated nature of Muslims in Argentina as well as the subjective meaning attached to the conceptualisation of diaspora. The fragmented and segregated nature of Muslims within Argentina might also be a factor influencing their views and beliefs about the existence of a global Muslim diaspora.

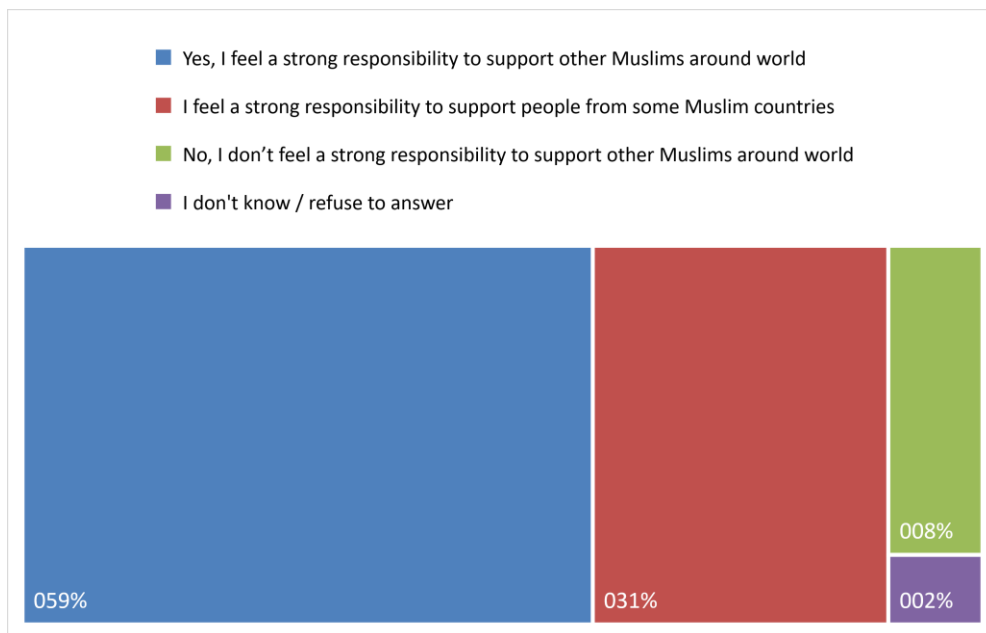
Graph 47: Do you feel a strong bond with other Muslims around the world? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

In addition to their feelings about the strength of their bond with other Muslims in the world, the respondents were asked whether they feel a special responsibility to support other Muslims around world. Again, a dominant percentage of 90.2% of the respondents stated that they feel a special responsibility to support other Muslims around the world (Graph 48). This is in line with their strong bond and affinity they feel with Muslims around the world. Yet, at the level of practical help, the Argentinian Muslims support to the Muslims in need is still unclear. In other words, despite their deep respect, sympathy and feeling of responsibility to the Muslims overseas, how much of an interaction Argentinian Muslims carry out with them or how much of a support they could provide to the Muslims in need is a question mark.

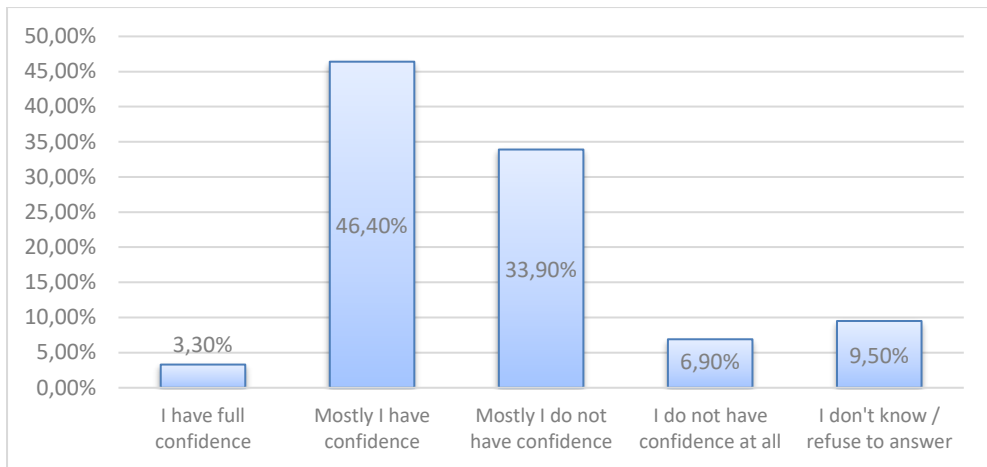
Graph 48: Do you feel a special responsibility to support other Muslims around the world?  
(All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

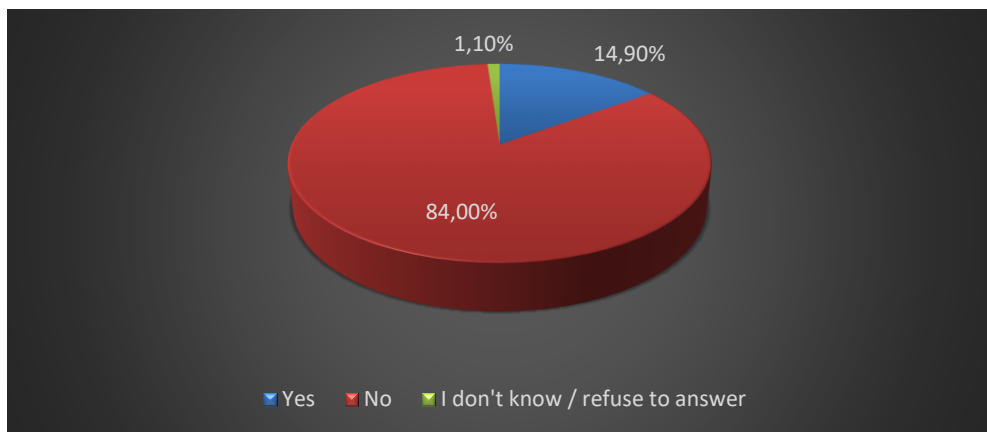
To elaborate on another international orientation of Argentinian Muslims, the Survey asked the respondents about their confidence in the leaders of Muslim countries. 52.7% of the respondents stated that they either have mostly or full confidence in the leaders of Muslim countries (Graph 49). Once again, the results highlight their bonding with the Muslims overseas. This confidence is also a result of the formidable Muslim countries and their leaders' investment and influence on Argentinian society. Since the most significant mosques and cultural centres are being financed and run by the Saudi and Iranian governments, the community has developed a natural confidence towards their leadership.

Graph 49: How much confidence do you have in leaders of Muslim countries? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Graph 50: Did you hear before about the Organization of Islamic Cooperation?

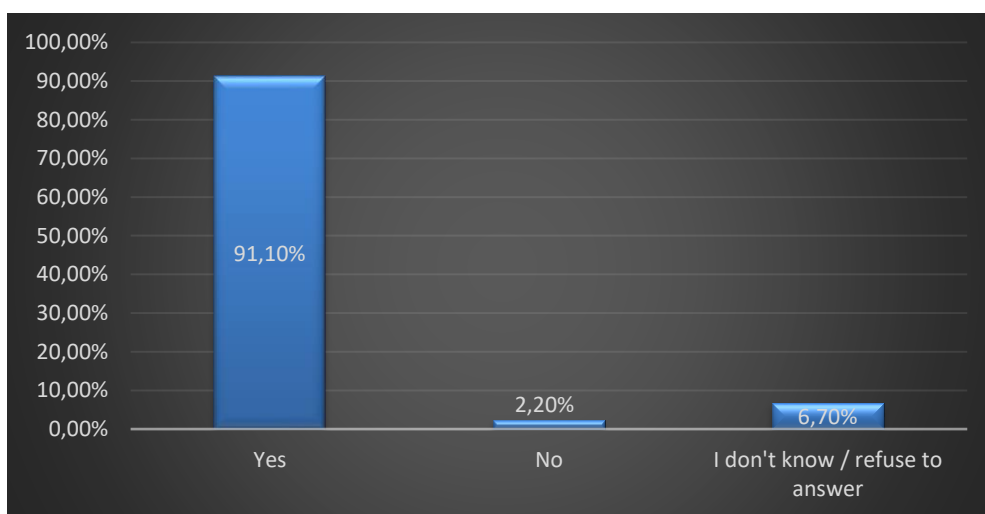


Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Since the OIC is a significant element of the global Ummah and the Organisation aiming to bring together the Islamic countries, the Survey enquired about the respondents' awareness about the OIC. The results are interesting. 84% of the respondents stated that they did not hear of the Organization or its activities (Graph 50). Yet, the respondents are also aware of the fact that the global Ummah needs more inner engagement. Therefore 91.1% of the respondents stated that the OIC should play a greater role both for representing the Muslims and increasing their cooperation (Graph 51). This should be taken as a signal that the OIC should intensify its activities in Argentina, even maybe through its members already investing in the Argentinian communities. The OIC is in a critical position here to bolster consciousness

and awareness of the global Muslim community. Just as in other target countries of this study, Muslim communities in various non-Muslim countries desire for greater solidarity amongst the Muslims in the world. However, it is also noteworthy to mention that most of the respondents in Argentina and other country case studies were not aware of an organisation such as the OIC, which represents the Islamic world. Therefore, greater efforts of the OIC to raise awareness of its mission, objective and activities would greatly serve to enhance the Muslim communities' expectation of Islamic solidarity, consciousness and cooperation.

Graph 51: Do you think that there is a need for Organization of Islamic Cooperation to play a greater role in representing globally the rights of Muslims and promote cooperation and security among them? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

As a well-integrated community, the members of Argentinian Muslims developed their own spaces, mostly as small pockets of family and friendship groups within their ethno-national communities. Although in theory, they feel a bond with their fellow Muslim members both within the country and overseas, in practice they engage within their tightly knitted pockets. There are several reasons behind this segregation. One very common reason is their deficiencies and disinclination in organizing themselves at large. No umbrella organization was actively operating in Argentinian Muslims' ecosystem. Although the foremost reason for these deficiencies was stated as the lack of resources, a seemingly evident reason is the lack of efficient leadership and the lingering cultural and religious fragmentation between and within Muslim communities. In addition, there are gender-specific and convert-related reasons bolstering this fragmentation. Internationally, Argentinian Muslims have strong emotional links with the members of global Ummah. Yet, these links do not turn into practical engagement. On the other hand, they expect the OIC to carry out this duty of increasing the interaction and cooperation within the global Ummah.

## 7. Future Projections

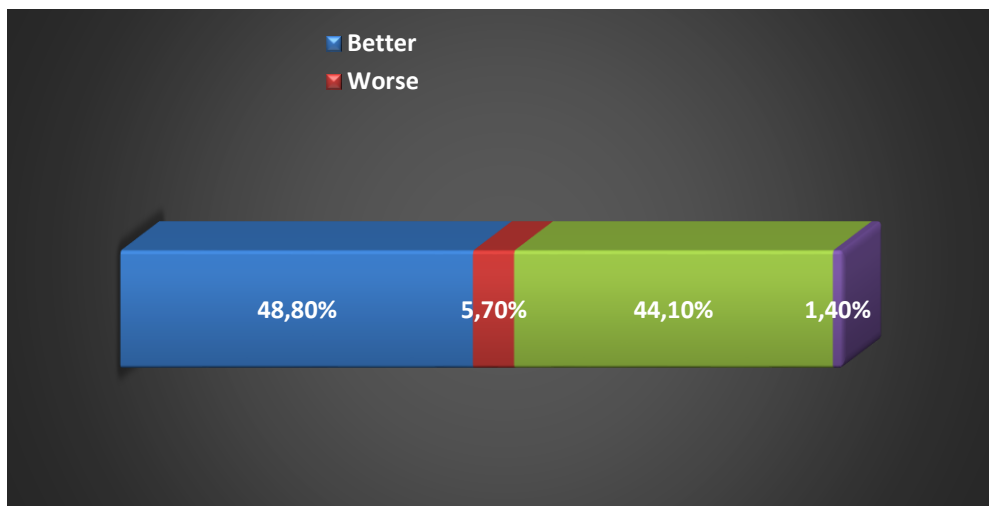
The size of the Muslim population in Argentina is decreasing. This is due to a number of reasons. First, there is a lack of learning interest in Arabic, Islamic culture and religion, resulting in the loss of important customs. Second, there is a lack of sufficient literature for native Spanish speakers on Islamic culture, customs and Islamic teachings. Third, the number of Islamic schools and study centres are insufficient or sparsely spread across the country. A small portion of third generation Muslims in Argentina are interested in learning about their roots and religion. Although the numbers are not large, some segments of the Muslim population in Argentina continue to follow the Islamic values that have been passed down for many generations, and they are optimistic about practicing their faith freely in the country. Many Muslims officials view Argentina as an ideal location where Islam has played and demonstrated a positive role in spreading the unbiased truth about Islamic values.<sup>60</sup> There is also a new tendency in Argentina for redefining Islamic discourse and activities. This involves a reconstruction of the histories of various Muslim communities. An international congress titled as *Dos siglos argentinos de interculturalidad cristiano – judeo – islámica* was organized in 2008 as the first international focus on the significance of Muslim presence in Argentina.

There is a programme to promote intercultural dialogue in Argentina. It is performed both in schools and in public administration as a means to promote the richness of diversity. In 2018, more than 10,000 people participated in this programme and official circles expect this number to double in 2019. The programme has the potential to improve the Muslim population's position in the work place and public space. The interviewees underlined that much more work is required on issues of Argentinian Muslims to improve their future generations' situation in society. Many members of society believe that this would be the most effective means by which to develop positive coexistence and diversity. The interviewees also stressed the need for greater focus on education, promotion, and training to develop this coexistence.

The GMD survey questioned the outlook of the respondents regarding the situation of Muslims in Argentina in the future. There is quite an equal division between positive and not that positive expectation of Muslims. 48.8% of the respondents considered Argentinian Muslims' situation will be better in the future and 44.1% of them stated that it would not change (Graph 52). It is not that easy to guess whether the latter group is already quite satisfied and therefore would prefer to keep their situation as it is or that their expectations of change are slim. This division shows that almost half of the respondents have good expectations about their future. In short, the picture does not seem gloomy.

<sup>60</sup> Vincent Lofaso, *Argentina's Muslim Minority*, Council of Hemispheric Affairs, 13 December 2016.

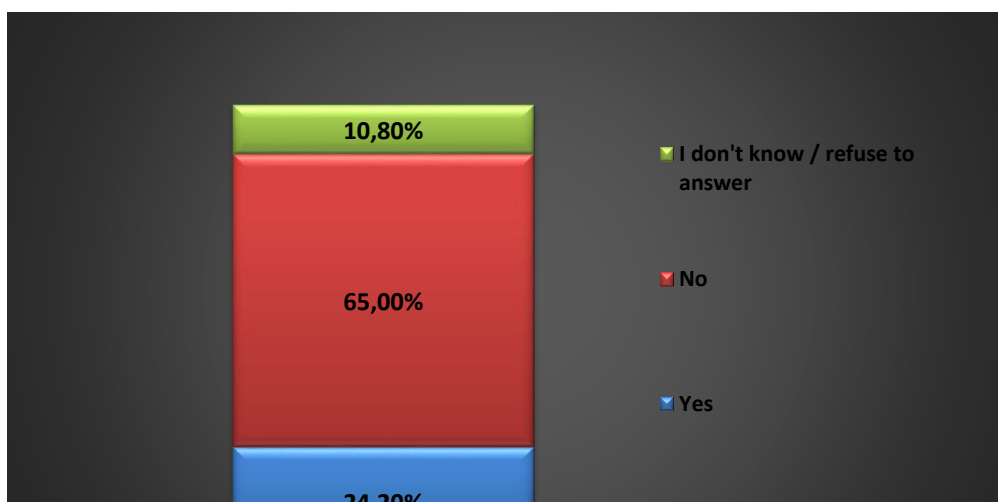
Graph 52: How will the situation of Muslims in Argentina be in the future? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

To figure out their level of satisfaction in Argentina, the respondents were asked whether they would consider returning to their country of origin. The results show that they have a significant level of satisfaction. 65% of the respondents stated that they would not go back to their country of origin (Graph 53). To an extent, this shows that some respondents, illustrated in Graph 52, stated that Muslims' situation will stay the same and they are happy with their current situation.

Graph 53: Would you consider going back to your origin country to live there? (All respondents - N=283, single answer, share of total respondents, %)



Source: SESRIC survey with members of the Muslim community of Argentina.

Similarly, some interviewees and workshop attendees underlined some positive developments boosting their satisfaction. One significant example is about Muslims' visibility in the media. The Muslim community has a TV program on the public channel. It is on Sundays at 8 o'clock in the morning. The community also has an internet TV channel. They are also broadcasting a well-known radio channel called El Islam. No other community except the Jews have such visibility. Some interviewees underlined the comfort they have been enjoying in Argentine society. Salma (2018) argued that one way to improve the Muslim position in society is for the Argentine decision-makers to adopt a more open stance towards Muslim immigration together with an acceptance of Islamic education institutions and places of worship. Other interviewees underlined the importance of unity in the Muslim community for a more promising future. The responsibility for a brighter future was with Muslim organizations' and Muslim leaders'. A more philosophical, life-style oriented, and anti-Islamophobic image of Islam should be emphasized by highlighting its humanitarian and universal ethics. In this way, not only would newer generation of Muslims be able to learn about the positive elements of their religion but also the Argentinian society and decision-makers would be in a position to learn about the Islamic teachings and values.

## 8. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

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The Argentina Country Report has shown that Muslims remain divided in Argentina for a number of reasons. A failure from Muslim communities of different ethnicities to integrate and put sectarian and ethnic issues aside is evident in the mosques and masjids that Muslims choose to attend. Furthermore, the existing discourse between communities and institutions also highlights the extent of the divisiveness of the Muslim community in Argentina. The lack of reasonable discourse is evident at organizational level as well, and a high level of distrust exists. Bringing together representatives from different sects and ethnicities remains a fundamental problem.

Regarding institutional representation, the influences of political and governmental institutions, such as Saudi Arabia and Shia organizations and national governments, result in Muslim organizations in Argentina operating with the political dividedness of policy-makers in Muslim countries. The Arab-Muslim community is still considered culturally distinct from other ethnic minorities. The term *Turco* is still being used to express their distinctiveness, and, to a certain extent, aloofness. There are obvious visibility issues regarding the Muslim community in Argentina. Particularly, their image and the manner in which they are portrayed in the media are heavily influenced by the negative rhetoric in other parts of the world.

Although Muslims have been in Argentina since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because of secular nature of public and private space, and the lack of religious leadership and institutional support, Muslims quickly integrated into the non-Muslim sphere. This is aggravated by acculturation and to a certain extent assimilation during the military dictatorship eras of Argentina. In today's Buenos Aires, it difficult to find a sizable number of visible Muslims, like women wearing the hijab on the street or Muslims gathered around mosques on Friday prayers. The continued acculturation and integration of Muslims in Argentina led to the decline of cultural homogeneity of the Muslim community.

The vast majority have been abandoning their culture and identity. This process of integration, acculturation, and even assimilation has paved the way for a reviving of Islam in Argentina. The first-generation Muslims' concerns for acceptance by and assimilation into local society have disappeared, particularly with the third generation, which began to look for its religio-cultural roots. Shia communities are slightly better organized in reviving and re-establishing their religio-cultural values when compared to other Muslim communities. Newly forming mosques and cultural centres, which could be traced back to Menem's era, indicate that the Muslim community is trying to build up a new consciousness relying on ethno-religious identities. Similarly, they are attempting to hold on to their roots and resurrect their binding cultural elements, at least within their own ethnic spheres.



## Annex: The List of Participants to the Interviews

	Pseudonym	Who	Gender
1	Ahmed	Muslim NGO Director	Male
2	Salma	School Teacher	Female
3	Adnan	Lebanese Muslim, Professional	Male
4	Usman	Director of a Muslim NGO and Imam of a Mosque	Male
5	Noman	Convert from security bureaucracy	Male
6	Aysa	Convert Senegalese teacher	Female
7	Akif	German-origin Muslim, Imam of Ahmaddiya Community	Male
8	Abdul	American convert living in Argentina	Male
9	Seyf & Adil	Senegalese Muslims -Private Sector	Male
10	Abbas	Senegalese Muslim-Private Sector	Male
11	Fadima	Argentinian convert-Private Sector	Female
12	Kerem	Turkish Migrant – working at Palermo mosque	Male
13	Aasim	Argentinian Muslim – Imam	Male

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\* Please refer to footnotes as well