

Hirsi Ali: Beware of Michiganistan

Ayaan Hirsi Ali writes in [Abdi Nur](#) – the 20-year-old student who left south Minneapolis to join IS last year – suggests we may be.

Mainly as a result of postwar migrations, there are now [Pew Research Center](#), the Muslim population of the United States is set to increase from around 2.6 million today to 6.2 million in 2030, mainly as a result of immigration, as well as above-average birth rates. Although in relative terms this will still represent less than 2 percent of the total U.S. population (1.7 percent, to be precise, compared with around 0.8 percent today), in absolute terms that will be a larger population than in any West European country except France. Between now and 2030, the Muslim population of the United States will be growing faster than that of any EU member state (with two exceptions where the absolute numbers are tiny: Ireland and Finland). The annual growth rate will be more than double that of France.

As an immigrant of Somali origin, I have no objection to other people coming to America to seek a better life for themselves and their families. My concern is with the attitudes many of these new Muslim Americans will bring with them – and with our capacity for changing those attitudes.

Approximately two fifths of Muslim immigrants between now and 2030 will be from just three countries: Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Iraq. [survey](#) of Muslim Americans, about 8% of those surveyed said that suicide bombing and other violence is often or sometimes justified to defend Islam from its enemies. Indeed, more than a fifth of Muslim Americans say there is a great deal or a fair amount of

support for extremism in the Muslim American community. About 20% say that Muslim Americans want to remain “distinct from the larger American society.” Indeed, half say they think of themselves first as a Muslim, second as American, despite the fact that 81% of those polled were U.S. citizens.

Finally, there is a singular feature of American life that, for historical reasons, is not a factor in Europe: the high rate of conversions to Islam among African-Americans. Nearly a quarter (23%) of all Muslim Americans are in fact converts, many of them – just under two thirds according to [Ihsan Bagby](#), a professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Kentucky – African-Americans.

It has been more than fifty years since the heavyweight boxing champion of the world, Cassius Clay, astounded his audience by changing his name to Muhammad Ali and joining the Nation of Islam. Today, more and more African-Americans are following his example, though their route to Islam is a different one.

According to [Fouad al-Bayly](#), the Egyptian-born imam of the Islamic Center of Johnstown, PA – who in 2007 said that I deserved to die for “defaming” Islam – has been paid thousands of dollars by the Department of Justice to offer religious instruction to inmates in prisons. The European experience shows that radicalization is a serious problem, one that we ignore at our peril.

Who, then, can help build a better future for assimilation of Muslims in America? In 2011, when Pew conducted its detailed study of American Muslims, nearly half of American Muslims (48%) surveyed said that Muslim leaders in the United States had not done enough to speak out against Islamic extremists; only about a third (34%) said that Muslim leaders had done enough in challenging extremists. It is *these* Muslims – dissident Muslims, disenchanted with

the current “official” leadership of the American Islamic community, concerned about illiberal views held in their community – in whom I place my hopes for a better future. Such dissident Muslims include Asra Nomani, Zuhdi Jasser and Irshad Manji, all reformist Muslims who have clashed with “official” Islamic groups to reform Islam and grant greater equality to women. The reformers can help build a future of successful assimilation. But they cannot achieve it alone.

U.S. officials urgently need to choose better partners in the Muslim-American community – not the likes of Fouad al-Bayly. The assumption that Europe’s problem of failed assimilation “couldn’t happen here” just because American assimilation worked well in the past is much too complacent.