

Muslim Holidays: Fact Sheet

Updated March 5, 2025

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R45003

Introduction

Islam is one of the three major Abrahamic faiths, alongside Judaism and Christianity. According to the 2020 U.S. Religion Census, the number of followers of Islam in the United States is 4.5 million.¹ Muslims annually observe two major holidays: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. This fact sheet describes the two holidays' significance and American Muslims' observance of them and addresses the ways the holidays have been recognized by elected officials. The fact sheet also briefly describes two other widely celebrated Muslim holidays.

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to Islamic holidays. It contains sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential proclamations and remarks, and selected historical and cultural resources. This is part of a series of Congressional Research Service fact sheets on religious holidays in the United States.

Major Holidays and Observances

Muslims have been celebrating Eid (Muslim festival) holidays for the past 1,400 years.² In general, Muslims observe two key holidays: Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. The dates for these two holidays are determined by tradition according to the Islamic or Hijra calendar, which follows the lunar year and is determined by the sightings of the new moon with the naked eye.³ The dates for Muslim holidays change every year. Following the Hijra or lunar calendar, the holidays move forward approximately 11 days each year on the Gregorian calendar.

Eid al-Fitr (Festival of the Breaking of the Fast)

Eid al-Fitr is often celebrated for one day each year at the end of the approximately 30-day month of Ramadan,⁴ during which many Muslim adults fast daily from sunrise to sunset and give charity to the poor and needy. Fasting for Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam.

Eid al-Adha (Festival of the Sacrifice)

Depending on the country, Eid al-Adha is celebrated from 4 to 12 days at the end of the Hajj (pilgrimage, the fifth pillar of Islam)⁵ to Mecca and Medina. Annually, nearly 2 million Muslims participate in the Hajj from approximately the 10th to the 13th of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, the last month in the Islamic calendar.⁶ Eid al-Adha commemorates the dream in which God appeared to Ibrahim (known as Abraham to Christians) and asked him to sacrifice his son Ishmael as an act of obedience. According to religious tradition, God intervened and requested that a sheep be sacrificed in Ishmael's place. Muslims generally consider Eid al-Adha the holiest festival on the Islamic calendar.⁷

¹ U.S. Religion Census, "Press Release 2020: U.S. Religion Census Shows Both Stability and Change in Congregational Life," accessed March 4, 2025, <https://www.usreligioncensus.org/node/1641>.

² Al Islam, "25 interesting facts you should know about Islam," accessed March 4, 2025, <https://www.alislam.org/articles/25-interesting-facts-you-should-know-about-islam/>.

³ Economist Intelligence Unit, "Saudi Arabia: Basic Data," *EIU Country Reports*, March 3, 2020, at <http://country.eiu.com/saudi-arabia>.

⁴ Fiqh Council of North America, Islamic Calendar, accessed March 10, 2025, at <https://fiqh-council.org/calendar/>.

⁵ Ibrahim, *A Brief Guide to Understanding Islam*.

⁶ Fiqh Council of North America, Islamic Calendar, accessed March 10, 2025, at <https://fiqh-council.org/calendar/>.

⁷ Blain Auer, "Eid al-Adha," in *Encyclopedia of Islam in the United States*, ed. Jocelyn Cesari (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp. 209-210.

Nature of Eid Celebrations

For the Eid holidays, homes are often decorated and, after communal prayers, Muslims wear their finest clothes. Muslims in the United States may sacrifice an animal or purchase an animal that was sacrificed according to halal standards in observance of Eid. The meat may be given, along with other gifts, to family, friends, neighbors, and the less fortunate. This is known as zakat, a religious obligation for Muslims, and it is the third of the five pillars of Islam. In Arabic, zakat means charity, purification, growth, and blessing. Paying zakat is meant to remind Muslims to appreciate the blessings that Allah has bestowed upon them and help empower those who have less.⁸

At the completion of both Eids, people may say “Eid Mubarak” to one another. This is an Arabic salutation meaning blessed Eid or blessed celebration. Muslims often wish each other Eid Mubarak after performing the Eid al-Adha prayer and may hug each other three times.⁹

Other Muslim Celebrations

This section provides selected examples of Muslim celebrations. The Guibord Center–Religion Inside Out provides a list of Muslim celebrations, along with descriptions of their significance.¹⁰

Ashura

For Shi’a Muslims, Ashura commemorates the murder and subsequent martyrdom of Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad, on the 10th day of the Islamic lunar month of Muharram.¹¹ It is generally observed through wearing black clothing, engaging in lamentation (and sometimes self-flagellation), and fasting.¹²

Mawlid

Mawlid celebrates the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. Its legitimacy has been a topic of intense debate within the Muslim world, but it is recognized by most denominations of Islam and is a national holiday in most Muslim-majority countries, with the exception of Saudi Arabia and Qatar.¹³ Mawlid is celebrated during Rabi’ al-awwal, the third month in the Islamic calendar.¹⁴

Recognition in the United States

Observance of Muslim holidays in the United States is determined at the local level. For example, some school districts close on the two Muslim Eid holidays. In 2015, New York City became the first large metropolis in America to recognize the two Eids as official holidays and closed its

⁸ Auer, “Eid al-Adha,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam in the United States*.

⁹ Aisha Stacey, “Ramadan Concludes ... What Happens Now?” at <http://www.islamreligion.com/articles/1777/ramadan-concludes-what-happens-now/>.

¹⁰ The Guibord Center–Religion Inside Out. *Muslim Holy Days and Observances*, accessed March 9, 2025, at <https://theguibordcenter.org/faiths/islam/muslim-holy-observances/>.

¹¹ Fiqh Council of North America, *Islamic Calendar*, accessed March 10, 2025, at <https://fiqh-council.org/calendar/>.

¹² Sohail Shakeri, “Ashura,” in *Encyclopedia of Islam in the United States*, ed. Jocelyn Cesari (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2007), pp. 90-91.

¹³ Reda-Hachlaf, “Eid Al Mawlid Annabawi: History and Significance,” *Morocco World News*, September 27, 2023, at <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2023/09/28751/eid-al-mawlid-annabawi-history-and-significance/>.

¹⁴ Gottfried Hagen, “Mawlid (Ottoman),” in *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God*, ed. C. Fitzpatrick and A. Walker (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014).

public schools in observance of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.¹⁵ Municipalities in Maryland,¹⁶ Massachusetts,¹⁷ Michigan,¹⁸ Minnesota,¹⁹ New Jersey,²⁰ Pennsylvania,²¹ Virginia,²² and other states have similar observances.

In 2001, for the first time in American history, the U.S. Postal Service issued a U.S. postage stamp commemorating both Eids. Since then, there have been subsequent issues of Eid stamps, with the last one issued in 2016.²³

Legislation

This section provides a selection of proposed legislation regarding Muslim holidays.

H.Res. 61 (2025)—Expressing support for the recognition of January as “Muslim-American Heritage Month” and celebrating the heritage and culture of Muslim Americans in the United States.

H.Res. 1128 (2024)—Recognizing the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, commending a month of fasting and spiritual renewal, and extending best wishes to Muslims in the United States and across the globe for a joyous and meaningful observance of Eid al-Fitr.

H.Res. 556 (2023)—Recognizing the religious significance of Eid al-Adha and wishing Muslim Americans and Muslims around the world a prosperous holiday.

H.Res. 1221 (2022)—Recognizing the religious significance of Eid al-Adha and wishing Muslim Americans and Muslims around the world a prosperous holiday.

S.Res. 361 (2021)—A resolution expressing support for the recognition of July as “Muslim-American Heritage Month” and celebrating the heritage and culture of Muslim Americans in the United States.

¹⁵ Michael M. Grynbaum and Sharon Otterman, “New York City Adds 2 Muslim Holy Days to Public School Calendar,” *The New York Times*, March 4, 2015.

¹⁶ Donna St. George, “Students in Maryland School System to be Off on Muslim Holiday- and Lunar New Year,” *Washington Post*, December 4, 2019, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/students-in-maryland-school-system-get-muslim-holiday-off--and-lunar-new-year/2019/12/03/1a400086-1613-11ea-8406-df3c54b3253e_story.html.

¹⁷ Borck Parker, “Cambridge Public Schools Mark Islamic Holiday,” *Boston Globe*, November 7, 2011, at <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2011/11/07/cambridge-public-schools-mark-islamic-holiday/BGyGm35kW70zi3wqnrpt6L/story.html>.

¹⁸ Lori Higgins, “Detroit Schools to Close for Muslim Holiday Eid al-Fitr for First Time,” *Detroit Free Press*, April 20, 2019, at <https://www.freep.com/story/news/education/2019/04/20/detroit-schools-close-muslim-holiday-eid-al-fitr/3522641002/>.

¹⁹ Becky Z. Dernbach, “For the First Time, some Minnesota School Districts Add Eid to the Calendar,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, February 19, 2022, at <https://www.startribune.com/for-the-first-time-some-minnesota-school-districts-add-eid-to-the-calendar/600148563/>.

²⁰ Megan Burrow, “Teaneck Schools to Close for Muslim Holiday Eid Next Year,” *NorthJersey.com*, June 10, 2018, at <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/bergen/teaneck/2018/06/10/teaneck-nj-schools-give-off-muslim-holiday-eid-next-year/673692002/>.

²¹ Office of the Mayor of Philadelphia, “City Announces Intention to Officially Recognize Islamic Holidays,” press release, May 31, 2016, at <https://www.phila.gov/press-releases/mayor/city-announces-intention-to-officially-recognize-islamic-holidays/>.

²² Allison Klein, “Fairfax County Adopts School Calendar with More Religious Holidays,” *Washington Post*, January 29, 2022, at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/01/29/fairfax-schools-calendar-religious-holidays/>.

²³ United States Postal Service, *Postal Service Commemorates Two Most Important Muslim Festivals With New Eid Greetings Stamp*, June 10, 2016, at https://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2016/pr16_049.htm.

Related CRS Products

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus.

CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*, coordinated by Jacob R. Straus.

CRS Report R48065, *Congressional Recognition of Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Selected Statements and Speeches

Elected officials often deliver speeches, make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays and observances. Below are selected examples:

Representative Debbie Dingell, “Dingell, Tlaib, Carson Introduce Resolution Recognizing Eid al-Fitr,” April 10, 2024. Retrieved from the official website of Representative Dingell.

Representative Suzanne Bonamici, “Muslim-American Heritage Appreciation Month,” remarks in the Extensions of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, vol. 169, no. 69 (April 25, 2023), p. E351.

Senator Richard J. Durbin, “Ramadan (Executive Session),” Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 167, no. 62 (April 12, 2021), p. S1859.

Representative Yvette D. Clarke, “Rep. Clarke’s Statement on Eid Marking the End of Ramadan,” accessed March 5, 2025. Retrieved from the official website of Representative Clarke.

Representative Gwen Moore, “Ramadan Mubarak,” accessed March 5, 2025. Retrieved from the official website of Representative Moore.

Selected Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

Although the two major Muslim holidays are not recognized as official federal holidays, recent Presidents have noted the importance of these holidays to Muslim Americans and Muslims around the globe by making remarks or press statements. Examples from the past few presidential administrations include the following:

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks—Donald J. Trump (2025-)²⁴

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks—Joseph R. Biden (2021-2025)

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks—Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)²⁵

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks—Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks—George W. Bush (2001-2009)

Presidential proclamations and remarks from 1993 to the present are available through the GovInfo service on the U.S. Government Publishing Office website. Earlier remarks (including some audio and video clips) are available through The American Presidency Project, established by the University of California, Santa Barbara.

²⁴ Link provides access to proclamations and remarks made by President Trump during both of his nonconsecutive terms, where available.

²⁵ Link provides access to proclamations and remarks made by President Trump during both of his nonconsecutive terms, where available.

Historical and Cultural Resources

Numerous resources provide information on the history and culture of Muslim holidays, and on the Muslim-American experience in general. Some of these include the following:

Arts & Culture Center at the Middle East Institute promotes Middle Eastern artists through its art gallery and guided conversations.

CNN, “A Ramadan etiquette guide for non-Muslims,” April 2, 2022.

Collections: South Asian and Himalayan is a collection of over 1,200 objects at the Smithsonian: National Museum of Asian Art.

Digital Library of the Middle East is a joint effort between Stanford Libraries and The Council on Library and Information Resources and makes accessible data about collections from around the world.

Islamic Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art highlights a collection of art from across the Islamic world.

Middle Eastern Studies offers relevant online databases at the Library of Congress.

Middle Eastern Studies is an illustrated guide to resources available at the Library of Congress.

National Museum of African American History & Culture, “Muslim Artifacts at the National Museum of African American History and Culture.”

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