

American Muslims in politics

1 - American Muslim political activism

Although the population of Muslims in America increased substantially by the 1970s because of massive immigration from the Middle East and South Asia but the new Muslim immigrants showed little interest in domestic issues. Instead, their focus remained on their homelands and U.S. foreign policy issues affecting the Islamic world such as the Palestine-Israel conflict; U.S. sanctions against Iraq; and conflicts in Kashmir and Chechnya. Their community activities were confined to the building of mosques and Islamic centers.

African American Muslims, on the other hand, generally tend to focus on domestic issues, such as urban development, education, and economic and racial justice. Given their disparate interests and priorities, formulating a united political platform between the two Muslim groups was not easy.

In the 1980s, as the Muslim Americans began to take the initial steps toward political participation, some questioned whether Islam even permitted them to participate in the political life of a non-Muslim country. That concern all but disappeared starting in the 1990s. Today this debate has taken a backseat as the majority of Muslim-Americans face the political reality that nonparticipation could lead to exclusion and denial of rights. (1)

For the first time, Muslim Americans flexed their political muscles in different constituencies in 1990s. In New York, Pakistani taxi drivers organized an alignment and campaigned to defeat Congressman Stephen J. Solarz. The nine-term congressman was the most vocal leader of the Indian lobby in Congress. He lost his congressional seat to some determined Pakistani activists who were still learning the ropes of politics in the Big Apple. Although his campaign fund was greater than the aggregate of all five opponents, he was defeated. Pakistanis' campaign against him paid off in favor of one of the Spanish candidates in a newly constituted seat. That was 1992. The first time, probably, when any Muslim group made a successful effort in any US election. (2)

In 1996 Bill Clinton (at least as compared with Bob Dole) had earned the vote of U.S. Muslims because he had gone further than any other president in U.S. history to give Islam some standing as an integral part of American society. But this was Clinton not as a Democrat but as a pro-Muslim initiator. He had started the process of going beyond the political convention of treating the United States as a Judeo-Christian community only. In personal behavior Clinton fell below Islamic standards of family values, but in official behavior he was a particularly ecumenical President of the United States. (3)

Under his watch, President Clinton recognized a major Islamic institution within the U.S. - the fast of Ramadan. He sent an open letter to believers wishing them a blessed fast. Under the Clinton watch, the White House for the first time ever celebrated Eid el Fitr to mark the end of Ramadan at which the first lady recognized the increasing expansion of the Muslim community within the United States and wished Muslims well. (4)

Under Clinton's watch the first Muslim chaplains of the U.S. military were appointed - with the major participation of the American Muslim Council. Under Clinton's watch Arab and Muslim Americans met with the President of the United States and discussed issues of Arab and Muslim concern. Under Clinton's watch Muslim representatives were received by Anthony Lake of the National Security Council and explored with him the implications of U.S. policy towards Bosnia. (5)

American Muslims in politics [2]

However, the Clinton-Gore administration did not come the rescue of Salam Al-Marayati, an American Muslim whose appointment to the National Commission on Terrorism was reversed due to Zionist pressure on Democratic Congressman Richard Gephardt? (6)

While in foreign policy Clinton was no less friendly to Israel than any other U.S. president, in domestic policy he was more Muslim-friendly than any other president in the history of the United States. Those Muslims who voted for him in 1996 instead of for Bob Dole might have taken some of such factors into account. (7)

In 1996 also, Muslims in New Jersey endorsed Richard Zimmer, a Republican candidate in an open Senate seat. But concerned about Jewish votes, Zimmer announced that he did not ask for the Muslim community's endorsement. Upon hearing this, Muslims withdrew their endorsement and put their support behind the Democratic candidate, Robert Torricelli. This candidate won the elections with a slight margin and publicly acknowledged that his success was due to the support of the Muslim community. (8)

Muslims in New Jersey, in 1990s, continued to make good electoral choices through their bloc votes. While doing that they have effectively created a counter voter bloc on which candidates can rely upon. Governor Christine Todd Whitman of New Jersey is a regular guest at Muslim events in New Jersey, of course with a scarf covered head. New Jersey was the first state in which Halal food laws were passed. (9)

"Muslims beginning to embrace politics" was the title of an article written by Mary Otto in Free Press Washington on October 31, 1998. He wrote: "America's millions of Muslims -- adherents to possibly the nation's fastest-growing religion -- are gradually learning to embrace politics. The change can be seen in the hopeful politicians who flock to meet voters in Detroit-area mosques and in California Islamic centers. At Muslim gatherings across the country, thousands of people have registered to vote. And, in a departure from the past, some Muslims are entering politics themselves, and the professionals among them are learning to exercise their financial clout."

In May 1998, four major American Muslim political organizations – American Muslim Alliance, American Muslim Council, the Council on American-Islamic Affairs and Muslim Public Affairs Council – formed the American Muslim Political Coordination Council (AMPCC) to coordinate their policies. And on January 23, 1999, a joint meeting of Council of Presidents of Arab Organizations and the American Muslim Political Coordination Council, in Washington, DC, brought together nine major political organizations which included: the Arab American Institute (AAI), the Association of Arab American University Graduates (AAUG), the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), the American Muslim Alliance (AMA), the American Muslim Council (AMC), the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Coalition for Good Government (CFGG), the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and the National Association of Arab Americans (NAAA). They identified 4 areas of coordination and cooperation: The future of Jerusalem; Civil and human rights; Arab and Muslim participation in the electoral process; and Access and inclusion in political structures.

The coalition of the nine American Muslim and Arab-American groups, in 1999, launched an effort to register Muslim voters in anticipation of the year-2000 election. The American Muslim Council has assembled a voter registration kit to facilitate the registration process. The American Muslim Alliance devoted its second annual leadership conference in Detroit to political education and to raising awareness in the minds of elected legislators of the presence of the Muslim community in America. They covered skills related to campaigning, critical evaluation of local politics, comparison of the political programs of the major parties and coalition building. (10)

But how should the Muslims vote?

According to a John Zogby poll of 2000, 46 percent of Muslims said they are Democrats, compared with 39 percent of all Americans, and 16 percent said they are Republicans, compared to 34 percent of all Americans. The number of independent Muslims, at 26 percent was almost exactly the same as among all Americans. The liberal, moderate, conservative and very conservative numbers, as well, mirrored the general American population.

Research shows that prior to 1990, Muslims voted overwhelmingly for the Republican Party and the American Muslims continue to display conservative tendencies on a range of economic and social issues. A 1996 survey commissioned by the American Muslim Council and the Middle East Broadcasting Company showed that just over 50 percent of those polled supported recently enacted welfare reforms while only 26 percent opposed the legislation. At the same time Muslims tend to be strongly pro-family, fiscally conservative, anti-abortion and do not oppose the death penalty. (11)

During the last six years, however, a significant shift has taken place in the voting habits of American Muslims. In 1996, most of the roughly one million who are registered have set aside their conservative inclinations to vote for Bill Clinton by a margin of two-to-one (in some polls the ratio was three-to-one). This dramatic shift should not be overstated, however Clinton's relative success among Muslims despite their natural antipathy towards his policies and values is the result of a vigorous campaign on the part of the White House combined with a sense of alienation by the Republicans. Muslim have, by and large, felt unwelcome in the Republican Party in recent years as a result of widespread, stereotypical and xenophobic attitudes towards Islam and Muslims at all levels of the Party. (12)

Dr. Ali Mazrui argues that the Muslims should avoid the mistake which African Americans have made for much of the twentieth century - that of being predictably for one political party and having nowhere else to go. In recent decades African-American votes have been too predictably identified with the Democratic Party - with the result that neither party has tried very hard to court their vote. They have simply tried not to alienate them completely. Muslim voters should behave differently. They should use the vote as a leverage to reward those who take Muslim concerns seriously and to punish those who ignore those concerns. In some years more Democrats may deserve Muslim support than Republicans; in other years the Republicans may turn out to be the more Muslim-friendly. (13)

Muslims, in keeping with traditional Islamic teachings, are usually conservative on moral issues. Muslims in America tend to oppose abortion and homosexual rights and espouse some version of the "family values" so often touted by American conservatives. However, many Muslims feel caught between the two major political parties. According to Sulayman Nyang, an African studies professor at Howard University and a frequent commentator on Muslim issues, "Muslims are Republicans on family values, but Democrats on social welfare." (14)

American politics is, at once, simple as well as very complex. The domination by the Democratic and Republican parties simplifies the ideological spectrum. If you are on the right, you go with the Grand Old Party (GOP), and if you are on the left, you go with the Democrats. As Muslims, we can be on both sides of the spectrum. Remember Amir Muawiyah (RAH) - he was very much on the right. And remember Abu Dharr (RAH) - he was very much on the left. However, the freedom that politicians enjoy to vote their conscience, while making the matter interesting, brings complexity and unpredictability to the system. To navigate through this unpredictability, we must not only closely follow the issues; we must follow the records of politicians too. (15)

The good news is that the deliberation over policy issues has become more and more publicized and inclusive. Candidates participate in literally hundreds of town meetings to present their views

and hear from the public. We as Muslims must go to these meetings and participate. Let the candidates hear our concerns. Most importantly, we must let them know that we are there and that we are as powerful as any other American. We must exercise our political rights and demand that they accommodate our needs and interests. (16)

In the 2000 presidential elections, Muslim Americans made history when, at the advice of their leadership, voted in bloc for George Bush. At the present moment, some Muslims support the social justice agenda of traditional Democrats while others support the Republicans' conservatism on social issues. Still others find that Green Party has the best policies, an excellent record and provides them with the protest vote option. However, if Muslims' voting choice is based solely on policy issues then their votes are bound to be divided. On the other hand, if the goal is to empower Muslims as one voting bloc, then Muslims will have to look at which vote will get them recognition as political players. A bloc vote does not mean 100 percent of Muslim votes. If Muslims are able to deliver 60 to 70 percent of their votes to any candidate, that will be a milestone in the process of empowerment of Muslims in America, whether that candidate wins or not. (17)

Encouraged by the 2000 bloc vote, the American Muslim organizations charted an ambitious plan to launch a massive registration campaign to register Muslim voters and contest at least 200 seats in 2002 mid term elections. However, after the 9/11 tragic attacks the Muslim community found itself besieged by profiling, official discrimination, negative media campaign and hate crimes. Consequently, the number of Muslim candidates in November 2002 elections was much smaller as compared to the 2000 elections. In 2000, 152 candidates for various public offices were elected out of about 700 candidates. In 2002, only ten candidates out of about 70 were elected to various public offices which include one State Senator and three State Assemblymen and one judge of the Superior Court. (18)

Gaining political influence requires three main steps: fundraising, recruiting candidates and voting. The American Muslim community's performance on fundraising for candidates and recruiting candidates to contest various offices was not appreciable in 2004 Election. However, the community was more active politically. This is the silver lining to 9/11, the Patriot Act and the mass detentions. It has pushed us to be proactive and take a stand, to be part of the political process. Now the Muslims are realizing that America's politics is about numbers: dollars you donate to your favorite candidates, or votes you can generate for them. Although their campaign fundraisers produced meager results but they were able to mobilize the community to get out and vote. Disenchanted by President Bush's policies, Muslims voted for Democratic candidate John Kerry. (19)

The seven-million-strong American Muslim community got a big political push when the Minnesota Democrat Keith Ellison was elected as the nation's first Muslim member to the US Congress in November 7, 2006 elections. Ellison's election was accompanied by a massive turnout of the American Muslim voters to make their voices heard. (20)

Throughout most of their American experience, members of the Muslim community have refrained from fully engaging in civic society. This is now changing. American Muslims are moving from the margins to the mainstream. At the beginning of 2008, we see that the American Muslims have overcome many formidable obstacles in their struggle for political enfranchisement. However, the journey is far from over.

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2 - American Muslim bloc vote in 2000 elections

American Muslims made history in 2000 presidential elections when they voted en bloc for George Bush. The American Muslim Political Coordinating Council Political Action Committee (AMPCC-PAC), a coalition of four major American Muslim organizations, only two weeks before the election announced its endorsement of George W. Bush for president, citing his outreach to the Muslim community and his stand on the issue of secret evidence.

In a post-election survey of American Muslim voters conducted by the Washington, DC-based Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), one of the nation's largest grassroots Muslim advocacy and civil rights groups, nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated that they had voted for Texas Governor Bush. Of these, 85 percent noted that the endorsement of Bush by the American Muslim Political Coordinating Committee Political Action Committee (AMPCC-PAC) was a factor in their vote. In this survey of 1,774 voters, 72 percent of Muslim respondents said they voted for Bush, 19 percent supported Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, and only 8 percent favored Vice President Al Gore. Muslims, therefore, became the only bloc vote for Bush.

The former Congressman, Paul Findley, in his book *Silent No More: Confronting America's False Images of Islam*, estimates that about 3.2 million Muslims turned out for vote and 65 percent voted for President Bush. Mr. Findley said: The importance of Muslim bloc voting arises from its magnitude as well as its focus. Best estimates put the national Muslim population at seven million, 70 as the percentage of those eligible to vote, and 65 as the percentage of those eligible who actually voted. This means that the national turnout of Muslims on Nov. 7 came to 3.2 million.

Here is an excerpt from Paul Findley's analysis of Muslim bloc vote:

George W. Bush should thank Florida Muslims for opening his way to the White House. Responding to a national campaign, they discarded normal Democratic Party allegiance and voted as a block for the Republican from Texas, providing him with a statewide net gain in Florida of more than 64,000 Muslim votes.

Had they not voted as a bloc, Vice President Al Gore would have emerged as the clear winner shortly after the polls closed on Nov. 7 (2000). There would have been no recounts, no long, divisive wrangling in state and federal courts. Even with dimpled ballots left uncounted, Gore's Florida total would have substantially topped the Texas governor's, giving the vice president the majority of the nation's electoral votes and quick certification as president-elect.

A June poll showed a slight national Muslim preference for Gore, but an intensive campaign that began on Sept. 3 transformed Muslim sympathies into a nine-to-one landslide for Bush when votes were counted. In Florida, the state that proved pivotal in the ultimate certification of the president-elect, Bush's Muslim margin was even greater.

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According to an exit poll of 1,774 Muslims, 72 percent voted for Bush and 8 per cent for Gore. This means an estimated 2.3 million Muslims voted for Bush and only 2576,000 voted for Gore, a national net gain for Bush in excess of two million.

The Muslim impact in Florida was even more impressive. Accepting the assumptions used in the national analysis and 200,000 as the Muslim population in Florida, 140,000 Muslims were eligible and 91,000 actually voted. If 80 percent - a conservative estimate - supported Bush, this means he received 72,000 Muslim votes. If 8 percent - a generous estimate - voted for Gore, his total vote came to 7,238. In Florida, the net Muslim vote for Bush topped 64,000. Of the total Muslim vote, 26,000 were from first-time voters. The national exit poll of Muslims showed that 36 percent cast ballots for the first time.

A December 1999 survey of Muslim voters showed only 25 percent for Bush

Muslims entered the presidential arena in earnest because they were troubled by challenges to their civil rights at home and to their interests in the Holy Land - especially Jerusalem. They responded to these issues rather than to party or personality. Early in the year, polls showed the Democratic Party more popular among Muslims than the Republican Party. Their hearts, however, belonged to Green Party candidate Ralph Nader, who condemned Israel for excessive force against Palestinian protesters and was the first Arab American to run for President.

Although sympathetic to a number of Gore's domestic positions, Muslims were upset over his attachment to Israel, particularly his unequivocal acceptance of Jerusalem as its exclusive capital, and what they perceived as his lack of concern for the plight of Palestinians. Muslims see Israel's control of East Jerusalem as a continuing threat to Haram al-Sharif, one of Islam's holiest shrines.

On election day, Muslims pinned their hopes for improved Middle East policies on Bush and were pleased when he promised to halt the use of secret evidence in deportation hearings, a policy Muslims considered especially offensive because they viewed it as directed mainly at their community.

The most important factor that led Muslims to vote as a bloc for Bush was the unity and perseverance of the leaders of four principal public policy organizations: the American Muslim Alliance (AMA), the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the American Muslim Council (AMC), and the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC). In participating, two of the leaders - Dr. Agha Saeed, founder and chairman of AMA and the chief engineer of Muslim bloc voting, and Salman Al Marayati, national director of MPAC - departed from their customary allegiance to the Democratic Party. CAIR was represented by Oman Ahmad and Nihad Awad and AMC by Yahya Basha, M.D.

Banding together at the American Muslim Political Coordination Council (AMPACC), they organized voter-education and registration drives early in the spring primary campaigns. In the late spring and summer of 2000, they sponsored workshops in major cities for candidates campaign volunteers and prospective voters.

Over Labor Day weekend at Chicago's O'Hare Airport, they won enthusiastic support for bloc voting for president from an audience of more than 10,000 Muslims. Hoping for personal interviews with both Bush and Gore, they delayed their recommendation for president until two weeks before Election Day.

Their decision followed an interview with Bush in Detroit on Oct. 5, during which he promised to listen to their policy concerns. Gore canceled a scheduled interview. News of their endorsement was circulated through e-mails, notices in mosques and Islamic centers, and sermons by imams during congregational prayers on the Friday before the election....

152 Muslims elected to local & state offices in 2000

According to American Muslim Alliance, about 700 Muslim Americans ran for various local, state and federal offices in the 2000 elections. At least 152 of them were elected to local and state offices. These individuals were elected as members of precinct committees, delegates to Democratic and Republican party conventions, city councils, state assemblies, state senates, and judgeships. Ninety-two of these were elected from Texas.

Mr. Saghir Tahir, President of the New Hampshire Chapter of the American Muslim Alliance – one of the leading American Muslim organization, was elected to the State Assembly from the 38 District. Mr. Larry Shaw, the highest-ranking elected Muslim in America, was re-elected unopposed in North Carolina. Judge David Shakoor was also re-elected to his judicial post. AMA New Jersey Activist Hassan Fahmy was elected to Prospect Park City Council.

American Muslim voter turn out exceeded the national average and, at least, 40% of the Muslims who voted in the year 2000 presidential election did so for the first time. As estimated through AMA's post-election telephone survey, more than 80% of the Muslim Americans cast their votes for George W. Bush. About 10% voted for Ralph Nader.

3 - Few Muslim candidates in November 2002 elections

Encouraged by the 2000 bloc vote, the American Muslim organizations charted an ambitious plan to launch a massive registration campaign to register Muslim voters and contest at least 200 seats in 2002 mid term elections. However, after the 9/11 tragic attacks the Muslim community found itself besieged by profiling, official discrimination, negative media campaign and hate crimes.

Consequently, the number of Muslim candidates in November 2002 elections was much smaller as compared to the 2000 elections. In 2000, 152 candidates for various public offices were elected out of about 700 candidates. In 2002, ten candidates out of about 70 elected to various public offices which included one State Senator and three State Assemblymen and one judge of the Superior Court.

According to the American Muslim Alliance, the 2002 candidates which included:

1. Three candidates for US Congress – Mr. Syed Mahmood (13th District CA), Mr. Maad Abu Ghazalah (12th District CA), Mr. Ekram Yusri (5th District, New Jersey
2. Three candidates for State Assemblies, three for State Senates
3. One for Governor (Washington State), Dr. Mohammad Saeed
4. One for Judgeship, David Shaheed - Indiana
5. One for County Commissioner, Nasim Ansari (Michigan)
6. 10 for city and township councils

The following candidates were elected:

Mr. Larry Shaw, State Senate, North Carolina

Ms. Yaphett El-Amin, State Assembly Missouri

Mr. Rodney Hubbard, State Assembly Missouri

Mr. Saghir Tahir, State Assembly, New Hampshire

Judge David Shaeed, Judge Superior Court Indiana

Mr. Wayne Smith, Mayor of Irvington, New Jersey

Mr. Nasim Ansari, County Commissioner, Michigan

Mr. Abdul Akbar, City Council Member, Georgia

Mr. Hassan Fahmy, City Council Member, New Jersey

Dr. Muhammad Ali Chaudhry, Member Township Council, New Jersey

4 - The tale of the American Muslim vote in Election 2004

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Evidently, whether intended or not, Muslims voted en bloc on November 2, 2004 presidential election, a behavior that is undoubtedly the outcome of personal and collective experiences, not a political strategy per se. The only reason for en mass Muslim and Arab vote for Senator Kerry was the civil rights issue as they endured much of the brunt of the Bush administration's transgression on the country's rights, and particularly their civil liberties.

At the same time, the Muslim community showed its eagerness to participate in the political process. This was confirmed by various studies and hundreds of media reports. A study, which surveyed Muslims in and around Detroit, Michigan -- an area that has the largest concentration of Muslims in the country -- demonstrated the growing perception that Muslim communities, which in the past have been viewed as isolated and inward-looking, are now seeking greater political involvement in the U.S. Over 60 percent of those polled cited civil rights issues as their top public policy concern, according to the study by Michigan-based the Institute of Social Policy and Understanding released in April 2004.

The mainstream media played an important role in highlighting the concerns Arabs and Muslims, particularly abridgment of their civil rights, the during 2004 election campaign. The media helped in motivating them to participate in the political process by registering as voters. It reported extensively about the voter registration campaigns by various local Muslim and Arab community organizations as well as Islamic centers and mosques throughout the nation.

A study of more than 100 media reports shows that the media stressed that civil rights was the defining issue for the Muslims and Arabs after the 9/11. For example, according to Seattle Post-Intelligencer (2/4/2004), Muslims in cities across the nation voiced concern over an anti-Muslim backlash after the 2001 terror attacks, and what they call the subsequent assault on civil liberties by the Bush administration. Of the more than 1,200 detainees caught up in the post-Sept. 11 dragnet, most were Muslims or people from Arab or southern Asian nations. An Agence France Presse report (2/6/2004) said: The three million Arab-Americans, who have felt ostracized since September 11, 2001, want to show they can be a mighty political force in this year's presidential election.

Civil rights was the major issue in 2000 presidential election when the American Muslim community voted virtually en bloc for George Bush. Ironically, four years later, civil rights remained the most significant issue for the Muslims who this time voted overwhelmingly for Senator John Kerry. An exit poll, on Nov. 2, by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) indicated that 93 percent of Muslim voters were casting their ballots for John Kerry. In a democratic system vote is the best instrument to express one's opinion. And Muslims joined millions of citizens to express their opinion about the Bush administration policies.

Muslim vote for a Democratic candidate is not new. In 1996, they voted for Democratic President Bill Clinton. According to Zogby Polls, more than 50 percent of Muslims were voting for

Democratic Party in nineties with only 16 percent committed to Republican Party. The first time Muslims tried to use bloc vote at the national level was in 2000. Traditionally, Arab-Americans and U.S. Muslims vote in large numbers. An estimated 79 percent are registered, and 85 percent of those say they vote, according to a 2001 poll taken on behalf of Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

As the American Muslim community grows, it is becoming increasingly aware of its social and political potential. American Muslims have distinct views on issues such as abortion, prayer in public schools, welfare reform, immigration, and civil rights. They seek to promote family values, prevent crime, combat drug abuse, and encourage other worthwhile social goals but it will not be an exaggeration to say that abridgement of civil rights was the single issue that galvanized the Muslim and Arab community. A barrage of post 9/11 discriminatory policies impacted them. This is not to say that the Muslims and Arabs were not concerned with other election issues. But obviously all communities are motivated by the issues that affect them most. A Democratic Presidential hopeful, Dennis Kucinich best reflected their sentiments when he said during a visit to a Florida Mosque: "The defining issue for Muslims is the restriction of civil liberties."

However, in this election, the American Muslim organizations apparently did not play any significant role in motivating the voters who from the very beginning of the election campaign were seen to concentrate mainly on the civil rights issue because they were affected by the biased policies of the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11.

Foreign policy issues remained the driving force of American Muslim politics. Except in the area of foreign policy, Muslims look at presidential candidates in the same way that non-Muslim Americans do. According to the Zogby International/Arab American Institute study, the administration's Middle East policy is a major reason for Bush's loss of support among Arab-Americans. In fact, two-thirds of them stated that the administration's Middle East policy was very important in determining their vote. When asked to evaluate Bush's handling of the Middle East, only 18% expressed approval – 78% expressed disapproval. And according to more than 50% of the Arab-Americans surveyed in the ZI/AAI poll, the administration's civil rights and civil liberties policies are also among their top concerns. The stated reason for this is their widespread concern with the administration's behavior. The civil rights issue even overshadowed the Middle East problem and the Muslims and Arabs supported Senator Kerry despite their reservations about his support toward Israel.

In the past, Muslims and Arabs have voted along social and ethnic lines, according to James Zogby, president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute. Many business-owning Arabs, for example, are Republicans, but African-American Muslims vote for Democrats, he said. "There is incredible diversity within ... the ethnic and racial groups of Islam and the religious community doesn't yet operate as a political constituency," Zogby said. This time, however, Zogby and others predict racial and conservative beliefs may take a backseat. The erosion of civil liberties, the unresolved Iraqi War and Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be front and center, according to the New York Daily News, August 9, 2004.

Besides becoming the most important election issue, the abridgment of the civil rights proved an important factor in motivating the American Muslims and Arabs for political activism. American Muslims have increased their participation in political and social activities since 9/11, according to a poll released on Sept. 10, 2003 by the Council of American-Islamic Relations. The poll said that roughly half of American Muslims surveyed say they have increased their social (58 percent), political (45 percent), inter-faith (52 percent) and public relations activities (59 percent) since the 9/11 terror attacks.

During the last one year, the Muslim and Arab political activism was extensively reported by the mainstream media with such headlines (few examples): Arab vote poses a challenge for Bush - Civil liberties concerns, foreign policy have cut support from 2000. (*The Dallas Morning News* -

October 18, 2003;) Muslim-American Activism: Enhanced Muslim Interest in American Politics. (*Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* – October 2003); *Arab-Americans organize to influence elections.* (*News Day* - December 13, 2003); Muslim vote may be shifting: Bush enjoyed support from Islamic community - before Sept. 11, terrorist attacks and wars. (*Dallas News* – January 9, 2004); New Jersey Muslims stressing political participation. (*News Day* - January 5, 2004); Muslim vote may shift to Democrats. (*Deseret Morning News* - February 09, 2004); *Arab-American group fights bias, rallies voters.* (*South Florida Sun-Sentinel* - February 7, 2004): - U.S. Muslims seek greater electoral clout. (*Seattle Post-Intelligencer* - February 4, 2004). While media reported Muslim and Arab political activism, opinion polls gauged the presidential candidates' preferences.

Preliminary results of an exit poll, on Nov. 2, by Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) indicated that more than 90 percent of Muslim voters are casting their ballots for John Kerry in today's election. In that early survey of 537 Muslim voters, 93 percent of respondents said they voted for Kerry, 5 percent favored Ralph Nader and less than 1 percent said they supported President Bush. In the key battleground state of Florida, a CAIR sampling of 335 Muslims who cast their votes on Nov. 2 or in early polling shows that 95 percent voted for Kerry and just 3 percent voted for President Bush. Ralph Nader received under 2 percent of Muslim votes. In Ohio, a similar sampling of 222 Muslim voters showed 86 percent voting for Kerry, 4 percent for Bush and 10 percent for "other" or a third party.

"We are seeing an unprecedented level of voter mobilization by the American Muslim community in this election," said CAIR Executive Director Nihad Awad. "I believe Muslim voters have come of age and will be a factor in all future elections." Muslims from almost every state responded to the exit poll, with the most responses coming from California, Virginia, Texas, Maryland, Illinois, New York, Florida, and Ohio. Surveys were faxed and e-mailed to Muslim individuals and organizations nationwide.

The last poll of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), released just 11 days before the election on Oct 22, finds that 80 percent of likely American Muslim voters said they plan to vote for Sen. John Kerry on November 2. The poll, conducted following the third presidential debate, also indicated that just two percent said they will vote to re-elect President Bush and 11 percent of Muslim voters favor Ralph Nader. Only four percent of the Muslim voters said they are still undecided.

At least a dozen polls since April this year showed that American Muslims and Arabs are leaning towards John Kerry despite some reservations about his policies on the Middle East. Taking queue from the opinion polls many American Muslim and Arabs groups had formally endorsed the Kerry-Edward ticket in October 2004, just less than one month before the election. The Muslim and Arab organizations that have formally endorsed Senator Kerry included: The Muslim-American Political Action Committee, an affiliate of Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation; the Arab American Political Action Committee (AAPAC), a major Arab American group that has supported George Bush in 2000, endorsed John Kerry; Muslims for a Better North Carolina and Najee Ali, director of Project Islamic Hope in Los Angeles, which represents African-American Muslims. The American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections (AMT), a coalition of ten Muslim organizations announced its belated qualified endorsement for Senator Kerry on Oct. 21, 2004.

However, endorsements of the Muslim organizations in October came too late to impact the decision of the Muslim voters who had made up their minds long before as was confirmed by various polls, studies and media reports. Apparently, it was the mood of the community that forced these organizations to endorse Senator Kerry. Michael Meehan, a Kerry campaign spokesman, has made this point very clear when he said endorsements were helpful, but "at this late point in the election cycle, we are trying to turn supporters into voters and recent polling shows we have support among American Muslims 10-to-1."

President Bush still had some support within the Muslim community. Muhammad Ali Hasan, co-founder of a group called "Muslims for Bush," said that Muslims can support Bush for bringing liberation and democracy to the Islamic world. Non-endorsement of any presidential candidate by the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) was also interpreted by many as an implied endorsement for Bush because the Muslim community was going to vote for Kerry.

American Muslim voters went to poll with a deep conviction that their vote is the best guarantee to safeguard their rights. During the last one year the Muslims and Arabs have shown great political maturity and enthusiasm to participate in the national political process. Their political activism was also reflected in dozens of voter registration campaigns during the last one year. The Muslim organizations had set a goal to register one million new voters.

However, the Muslims must realize that voting is not the end of the road, but the beginning of a long struggle that requires commitment, skill and resolve. In the next election round they have to be more active in elections at all levels, particularly local elections and campaigns. Also make alliances with other communities for outreach. Otherwise, after the election, their success will be confined to self-congratulating press releases by their organizations, filled with false victories and espousing equally false hopes.

In the final analysis, like the 2000 election, there is no reliable exit poll data about the Muslim vote in 2004. Only one exit poll was issued by CAIR on Nov. 2 which is touted as 93 percent Muslim vote for Kerry. Like 2000, the void is being filled by leaders claiming to have delivered a bloc vote which may not be convincing to many as the Muslim leaders claimed as much as 72 percent vote to Bush. But independent analysts gave a estimate - based on pre-and post-election surveys - that in 2000 Bush received about 50 percent of the Muslim vote, Gore about 25 percent, and Ralph Nader 10 percent. Muslim organizations bear the responsibility to make credible post-election surveys and studies about the Muslim vote and the Muslim candidates. The Arab American Institute (AAI) has issued its final post-elections poll results which showed that John Kerry received 63% of the Arab American vote, while President Bush won 28%. An AAI report indicates that forty-four Arab American candidates were on the ballot this year-from Ralph Nader's controversial independent bid for President to Mohammad Khairallah's successful bid to be reelected as city councilman in Prospect Park, NJ. Overall, 24 won and 20 lost. Five Arab American candidates in Michigan won, including two Democratic state representatives and one Republican sheriff. Mitch Daniels, a Republican from Indiana won his bid to become Governor of that state.

Ralf Nader factor: When Ralph Nader announced his candidacy in February 2004 as an independent candidate, there was a general perception among many Muslims and Arabs that he may again prove a spoiler in 2004 as he was in the 2000 presidential election. Arab American Institute President Dr. James Zogby's comments best reflected their views: "We must deal with reality. I have great respect for Ralph Nader. His service is legendary and his principled challenge is inspirational. But this election is not about Ralph Nader. The real choice in 2004 is between George Bush and John Kerry. For me, it's clear."

Democrats woo Muslim and Arab voters

Democratic convention

The number of Muslim and Arab delegates to the July 2004 Democratic National Convention had grown by 60 percent. Forty three Muslim and Arab delegates were representing 20 states at the 2004 convention, up from 25 Muslims at the Democratic convention four years ago.

The American Muslim Task Force, formed by a number of Muslim organizations in February 2004, held a hospitality suite during the Democratic convention in Boston. More than 200

delegates attended the AMT Hospitality Suite. It was great opportunity to secure their support in urging the Democratic Party to improve its position on civil rights and inclusion.

The AMT-initiated petition urging the DNC to insert the following language in the party platform as an addendum was signed by more than 200 delegate including the entire Hawaii delegation and most of the Texas delegation. The key part of the petition read:

"The Democratic Party reaffirms its commitment to due process, equal justice, freedom of religion, speech, assembly and privacy, protection from unreasonable searches and seizures, the presumption of innocence, access to counsel in judicial proceedings, and fair, speedy and public trial. We oppose ex post facto laws, secret proceeding and use of secret evidence, and we also seek repeal of those sections of the USA PARTIOT ACT deemed manifestly unconstitutional and un-American.

Democrats hold conference call with AMT leaders

On Oct. 14, 2004, representatives of the American Muslim Task force held a conference call with Senator Ted Kennedy, Steve Elmendorf, Kerry - Edwards Deputy Campaign Manager, and Mona Pasquil, Director of Communities. Dr. Maher Hathout, Senior Advisor to the Muslim Public Affairs Council, and Dr. Agha Saeed, Executive Director of the American Muslim Alliance, shared the issues that could determine the Muslim vote. A statement issued by the Kerry campaign said: "As Senator Kennedy stated, civil liberties and inclusion of American Muslims exist in the heart and soul of John Kerry and are issues that they both have fought for in the Senate. In response to Dr. Hathout's question Senator Kennedy mentioned that expanding the Cultural Bridges Program was one step or example of inclusion of talented and brilliant Muslims. Steve Elmendorf, Deputy Campaign Manager reiterated that a Kerry - Edwards administration will engage and involve Muslim Americans. Lastly, in response to Mr. Kareem, Sen. Kennedy stressed that we are in an ongoing dialogue to build trust within a community that has been trampled on for the past three years." George Kivork National Director of Ethnic Outreach

The American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections included: American Muslim Alliance (AMA), Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Muslim Alliance of North America (MANA), Muslim American Society (MAS), Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Muslim Student Association - National (MSA-N), Project Islamic Hope (PIH) and United Muslims of America (UMA).

Letter to Arab Americans

In Oct. 2004, in a letter to Arab Americans, senior Kerry adviser Rand Beers committed that a Kerry administration would do as much. Beers wrote:

John Kerry and John Edwards believe that bringing security and stability to the Middle East is vital to American national security, to the security of Israel and other countries in the region, and to the aspirations of the Palestinian people for a viable Palestinian state. In a Kerry-Edwards administration, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will not be an afterthought. . . .[Kerry and Edwards] will work tirelessly to achieve a stable, lasting peace with security in the Middle East and ensure that American leadership is a source of hope in the region. Beers went on to say that a Kerry administration would take steps to end and prevent racial profiling. The Ashcroft Justice Department has unfairly targeted Muslim and Arab-Americans and has selectively enforced the immigration laws against these communities. John Kerry and John Edwards will uphold constitutional rights and protections, and civil rights laws.

MPAC hosts American Muslim Activists and Kerry-Edwards Campaign meeting

In response to a request from the Kerry-Edwards campaign, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), on Sept. 16, 2004, hosted a meeting between former Governor Jean Shaheen (D-CT), Chairperson of the Kerry Campaign, and American Muslim activists throughout the country. Participants represented Muslims in the key battleground states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Iowa, and Florida as well as New York, California, Michigan, Texas, Virginia, and Washington, DC.

Dr. Maher Hathout, Senior Advisor to MPAC, articulated the following most urgent concerns of American Muslims on behalf of the attending leaders to campaign officials, according to a MPAC press release.

1. American Muslims expect of a future Kerry-Edwards administration to examine the Patriot Act in light of the Constitution and the general tenor of law enforcement in the past 50 years. We should maintain only those provisions of the Act which enhance our government's ability to defend the country, while strictly respecting the Constitution and freedoms available through other laws. Many elected officials allege that the Patriot Act was not fully debated. In a Kerry-Edwards administration, there must be such debate and America Muslims should be participants. American Muslims have the requisite expertise and willingness to offer intelligent insight on the course of our nation in this post-9/11 era.
2. American Muslims expect to be included in a future Kerry-Edwards Administration. Visits that lack substance and group pictures are insufficient. American Muslims expect to be offered policy-making positions dealing with issues in which they can offer expertise, with regard to Counterterrorism policy, Health, and Education in such agencies as the Department of Justice, the State Department, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and others. American Muslims are not asking for preferential treatment, we are only asking to be represented in positions that offer opportunities to make positive change.
3. A Kerry Administration must be determined to ensure the First Amendment rights of American Muslims to freely practice their religion. Exercise of the fifth pillar of Islam, Charity, is a Constitutional right of all Americans. American Muslims should have the right to offer money to any group of people around the world and within the US who use that money for a charitable purpose within the bounds of the law. Access to transparently legitimate institutions which can disperse such funds is the responsibility of the government, whether through a certification process or otherwise. Any certification process should not be burdensome or impossible to comply with.

According to MPAC, this meeting demonstrated a desire on the part of the Kerry-Edwards campaign to understand the needs of American Muslim communities, and clarify their position on issues critical to the voters. "MPAC encourage the Bush-Cheney campaign to extend similar opportunities for Muslims to voice their opinions and offer an expert, authentic voice on issues affecting America" the MPAC press release concluded. **(MPAC press release Sept. 16, 2004)**

Pelosi, Democratic leaders hold roundtable discussion with Muslim American leaders

On July 14, 2004, House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Congressman John D. Dingell (D-MI), Congressman John Conyers (D-MI), Congressman Charles Rangel (D-NY), and other Congressional Democrats were joined by national leaders of the Muslim American community in a roundtable discussion on issues of mutual concern to Democrats and Muslim Americans. The discussion centered on working together to defend civil rights and to restore civil liberties, a press release from Pelosi's office said.

"This discussion is only the first in an ongoing dialogue between Congressional Democrats and Muslim Americans," Pelosi said. "We share a fundamental principle - the belief that diversity is

the backbone of our communities. Generations of Muslims have made positive contributions in every aspect of American life. We must now work even more closely to navigate through the challenges we face as a nation."

"Since September 11th, many Muslim Americans have been subjected to searches at airports and other locations based upon their religion and national origin, without any credible information linking individuals to criminal conduct," Pelosi continued. "Racial and religious profiling is fundamentally un-American and we must make it illegal."

"When the Patriot Act was enacted, it was intended to be accompanied by strong Congressional oversight to prevent abuses of our civil liberties. That oversight has not occurred, particularly with the mass detention campaign ordered by Attorney General Ashcroft, which to date has led to more than 5,000 foreign nationals being detained since September 11th. Moreover, individuals' assets have been frozen on the basis of secret evidence that they have no opportunity to confront or rebut, and such processes are a fundamental denial of due process. We must correct the Patriot Act to prevent abuses of our civil liberties."

Working with Conyers, the Ranking Democrat on the House Judiciary Committee, Democrats have introduced legislation to end racial profiling, limit the reach of the Patriot Act, and make immigration safe and accessible. Leader Pelosi is a proud cosponsor of the End Racial Profiling Act, the Security and Freedom Ensured Act (SAFE), and the Safe, Orderly, and Legal Visas Enforcement Act (SOLVE).

"These measures are long overdue, and we call on the Republican leadership in Congress to bring them to a vote now," Pelosi said. "As we protect and defend the American people, we must protect and defend the Constitution and the civil rights that define our democracy. Ours is a country of great diversity and we must stand together as one America."

The following Democrats also participated in the discussion: former Democratic Whip David Bonior (D-MI), Congressman Gregory Meeks (D-NY), and Congressman Nick Joe Rahall (D-WV). The American Muslim groups represented at the meeting included the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Islamic Society of North America, Indian Muslim Council, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Muslim American Society, Association of Pakistani Physicians of North America, Muslim Bar Association, National Association of Muslim Lawyers, and the Universal Muslim Association of America. **(Press Release from Pelosi's office, July 14, 2004.)**

MPAC Convention

During the two day (Dec. 20-21, 2003) convention of the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) presidential hopefuls provided representatives, sent video presentations and called, by special phone connection, into plenary sessions to speak to Muslim attendees and their issues. In addition, a White House representative participated in a packed plenary session entitled "Iraq Beyond Saddam Hussein."

Candidates Howard Dean, Dennis Kucinich, and John Kerry all made special efforts to speak to American Muslims during plenary sessions from their campaign travels in the mid-west. "The efforts on behalf of the White House and Democrat presidential candidates to court the Muslim vote is a clear sign that they recognize and understand our issues and that they are taking us seriously," stated Salam Al-Marayati, executive director of MPAC.

During their phone calls candidates shared their perspectives on a range of American Muslim issues including the injustices of the Patriot Act, the Administration's unilateral decision-making regarding Iraq, the misguided immigration registration program, and their plans to advance a peaceful solution to the war in Iraq and the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. "I think that this November will see American Muslims coming to the polls in unsurpassed numbers to cast their vote. American Muslims feel empowered and more then ever included and

engaged in the political process of our nation," commented Al-Marayati. "This is due," he continued, "to actions our elected leaders took in response to 9-11 as well as the dramatic increase in voter registration drives and the large number of American Muslim youth who have become eligible to vote since the last presidential election."

Muslims launch website supporting Kerry

On August 10, 2004, a private group officially launched a new website encouraging Muslim Americans to vote for John Kerry in the November presidential election. The site <http://www.muslimsforkerry.com> featured news, articles, testimonials, forums, voter registration links and a blog. "Muslims voters in this election are a crucial demographic for the campaigns, because of their concentration in battleground states like Michigan and Ohio," said Shahed Amanullah, one of the founders of MuslimsForKerry.com. "In this election Muslim voters will come out in large numbers and vote for the candidate that offers this country the brightest future. That candidate is clearly John Kerry, and we believe that as Muslims weigh the various options in the months ahead, they will come to the conclusion that Kerry

American Muslim Task Force's role in 2004 election

On February 17, 2004, in Washington, a number of American Muslim organizations announced the formation of the American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections (AMT), to concentrate on helping Muslims become "full partners in the development and prosperity of our homeland," defending the civil rights of all Americans and developing alliances "on a wide variety of social, political, economic, and moral issues."

Task force organizers said they will put forward a "civil rights plus" agenda for the 2004 election cycle in which civil rights is the most important issue, but not the only issue. The AMT election plan states: "We remain equally committed to (the issues of) education, homelessness, economic recovery, environmental and ecological safety, electoral reform, crime, and global peace and justice."

The AMT, after eight months of deliberations, met in Washington on Oct. 19, 2004 to discuss endorsement of a presidential candidate. However, nine-hour marathon meeting failed to bring any results that led to speculations that the AMT will not endorse any candidate. After days of confusion, a split in its ranks and an intensive pressure from the Muslim community, the American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections - Political Action Committee (AMT-PAC) on Oct. 21, 2004 called on Muslims nationwide to vote for Sen. John Kerry. However it called its move as a 'protest vote' to safeguard civil rights of the Muslim community. An AMT-PAC statement issued in Washington stressed that "because pluralism is based on partial agreements, support for Sen. Kerry is premised on our overall effort to help restore liberty and justice for all."

The AMT pointed out that despite disagreements with Sen. Kerry on some domestic and international issues, including the war in Iraq, it is willing to work with him to help restore due process and equal justice in accordance with the U.S. Constitution. However, the AMT acknowledged the considerable outreach to the Muslim community by Sen. Kerry's campaign, particularly by his campaign co-chair Sen. Edward Kennedy and appreciated the ongoing dialogue with Muslim leaders about problems posed by the USA PATRIOT Act.

The AMT's belated endorsement was a welcome development because it responded to the aspirations of the Muslim community. However, the question remained, how the qualified endorsement of AMT influenced the Muslim voters, majority of whom had already made up their mind to support Kerry? *Michael Meehan, a Kerry campaign spokesman, has made this point very clear when he said endorsements were helpful, but "at this late point in the election cycle, we are*

trying to turn supporters into voters and recent polling shows we have support among American Muslims 10-to-1."

The AMT endorsement came after a major split in its ranks when the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) a major component of the AMT quit the coalition quietly after it refused to support endorsement to any presidential candidate. MPAC was one of the three organizations that envisaged, at the ISNA convention of 2003, the establishment of AMT as a successor to the American Muslim Political Coordination Council (AMPCC) that announced its support to Bush in 2000 elections. The other two groups were American Muslim Alliance (AMA) and Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

Apparently, a unanimous AMT decision was not possible in the presence of MPAC, hence it was forced to leave the coalition. Only one day before the AMT endorsement, the MPAC issued a long statement about its decision of not endorsing any presidential candidate saying: "An endorsement is far too important to give away without delivering solid promises to the community that their interests will be of paramount importance to the next President. Leaders of other religious and ethnic communities throughout our country do not endorse unless they receive such promises. We should not be any different."

Alluding to the many opinion polls and persistent media reports, the MAPC statement acknowledged that it trusts the political judgment and maturity of American Muslim voters and added: "In this election, Muslim voters must vote their conscience based on what is best for themselves, their communities and their country. Our decision not to endorse a candidate in the 2004 Presidential election must not be viewed as a directive for American Muslims to reconsider their decision. Rather it is a reminder that although candidates are willing to take our votes, they are not yet willing to announce such to the country."

Despite MPAC's departure, the AMT still maintained 10 members as a marginal group, Muslim Ummah of North America (MUNA), was quietly inducted to fill the MAPC slot. AMT includes: American Muslim Alliance (AMA), Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA), Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), Muslim Alliance in North America (MANA), Muslim American Society (MAS), Muslim Ummah of North America (MUNA), Muslim Student Association-National (MSA-N), Project Islamic Hope (PIH), and United Muslims of America (UMA).

The qualified endorsement of Kerry by the AMT stirred the Muslim community and drew sharp reaction from many intellectuals and writers. One analysis said: American Muslim Taskforce Insults John Kerry and Alienates George Bush. While another comment was entitled: Flip Flopping AMT (Alluding to the earlier reports that the AMT was unlikely to support any candidate.) The AMT leadership, following the qualified endorsement, spent all its energies in defending its decision and claiming that there was no rift among its ranks, despite disassociation of the MPAC, one of its major component. The AMT chairman Dr. Agha Saeed described the community reaction as a marginal matter. (The AMT is the successor to American Muslim Political Coordination Council (AMPCC) that supported Bush in 2000 election. However, the AMPCC ignored the Muslim community's opinion when it refused to endorse Syed Rifat Mahmood, a Republican Congressional candidate from California, apparently because he was not electable against the Democrat incumbent Pete Stark.)

The post-decision developments did not augur well for the AMT. The Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), a well-respected organization that included in the list of AMT components posted the following announcement on its website: "ISNA firmly stands by and reiterates its standing policy, in its capacity as a religious, not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization, to (1) not support, endorse or oppose the candidacy of any persons seeking election to public office, and (2) not permit any organization to support, endorse or oppose any political candidate in its name."

On the election eve, The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) urged every eligible Muslim voters to go to the polls and vote for the candidates of their choice. The CAIR statement issued in Washington, did not refer to the AMT endorsement of Senator Kerry. Apparently at the last moment the CAIR objective was to bring out maximum Muslim vote. Many Muslim organizations and Muslim intellectuals and analysts have been urging the community that the most important thing is participation in the political process. What counts, is your vote.

The politics of bloc vote

This discussion leads us to the issue of bloc vote politics. Many Muslim Americans are opposed to the politics of bloc voting which they believe will be harmful for the American Muslim community. But Many American Muslim leaders believe that the American Muslim community does not enjoy the same financial clout that is enjoyed by the American Jews. Therefore, the only alternative left for the Muslims to have an effective voice in the presidential elections is to vote in bloc. In 2000, African American Muslims, who are generally Democrat, were particularly upset that American Muslim organizations, instituted by the immigrant majority, had endorsed the Republican candidate without regard to their opinion and interests. In 2004, the AMT tried to address African American Muslims complaint and brought Muslim American Society into its fold. On August 11, 2004, the Chicago-based Institute for Social Policy and Understanding issued a paper the entitled: Presidential elections 2004: What Should American Muslims Do? The paper was written by Dr. Muqtedar Khan, the Director of International Studies at Adrian College in Michigan and a Non-Resident Fellow at Brookings Institution in Washington DC.

The paper pointed out that the African American Muslims have special relations with the Democratic Party. "The community must help and encourage them to develop and nourish this relationship further. Muslim organizations had developed links with the Republicans during the 2000 campaign. The community must renew and strengthen those links. It should avoid ridiculing or condemning those Muslims who may choose to work with the Bush campaign or the Republican Party."

The ISPU paper provided an insight into the pros and cons of a bloc vote and the role of Muslim political organizations and groups in the election. It enumerated the following advantages of a bloc vote:

- (1) In a close election, a community can play a decisive role in determining the outcome.
- (2) In close elections, voting blocs can actually coerce political parties to change their electoral platforms.
- (3) If the politics of bloc voting were correctly applied, it could help unite the community.
- (4) Bloc voting gives American Muslim Organizations and leaders greater influence and access in mainstream politics. Politicians and the media will seek them if they think these leaders are capable of manipulating and delivering the "Muslim Vote."
- (5) One symbolic advantage of bloc voting is the recognition of the community as a whole being an important political player. It gives recognition and awareness to their leaders, organizations and issues. Sometimes, the media attention to these issues can be dangerous, while on other occasions, it can be salutary. American Muslims achieved this in 2000; its necessity in 2004 is debatable.

The ISPU paper pointed out that while the advantages of bloc voting have been pervasively discussed within the community, especially given its prominence as an issue in the 2000

elections, the negative aspects of bloc voting are less studied and comprehended. According to ISPU, “the risks and dangers” of a bloc vote are likely to be:

- (1) The biggest danger of bloc voting is the likelihood of endorsing the eventual loser. In American elections the probability of doing so is 50%. By officially endorsing a single party or candidate, the community effectively alienates itself from the other party/candidate and in a way declares its opposition openly. In the eventuality of the defeat of the endorsed candidate, the community will then be vulnerable to reprisals or isolation from government access. If, for example, American Muslims officially endorse John Kerry, vote for him in huge percentages (92-93% as CAIR’s membership survey indicates) and George W. Bush still wins, the community could face further difficulty, given current administration attitudes toward American Muslims.
- (2) The community must learn to develop long-term and meaningful relationships with the two parties. Recent months have seen two parallel developments: American Muslim leaders’ rhetoric about the existence of a Muslim vote bloc and its use to vote against George W. Bush...Since American Muslims are not going to support the Bush-Cheney ticket, the Republicans may as well solicit - or manipulate - the American Jewish vote by appearing to be extremely pro-Israel. It is tragic that the Palestine issue divides the Muslim and Jewish communities into adversaries even though the two communities have identical interests on most domestic issues, such as defending America’s secular ethos by protecting it from the rise of Christian fundamentalism, strengthening the welfare state and the civil rights environment.
- (3) An additional risk for American Muslims if their leadership insists on bloc vote politics is the possibility of (a) exposing the absence of political unity within the community and (b) actually exciting existing minor fissures into becoming major cleavages. The marginalization of the African American Muslims through the endorsement of George W. Bush in 2000 likely led to the establishment of Muslim Alliance of North America (MANA), an organization that seeks to represent indigenous Muslim interests. The creation of MANA serves as an expression of a vote of no-confidence by indigenous Muslims in the legitimacy of the national organizations established and managed by immigrant Muslims.
- (4) American Muslims must recognize that the overall philosophies and political agendas of the two parties are pretty stable and enduring. Republicans stand for reducing taxes for the rich, pushing religiously motivated political goals – such as abortion; whereas Democrats seek to pursue social liberalization and strengthen the welfare state. If American Muslim values are stable then they too must have a long-term relationship with one party. Or there must be Muslim factions aligned with each party.
- (5) Excessive pontification about the power and impact of the Muslim voting bloc on American politics and policies may cause more anger, resentment and distrust within the general American population.
- (6) The issue of endorsement also presupposes the ability of the so-called national organizations to set the agenda of all American Muslims. Many American Muslims are very distrustful of the national leadership.
- (7) Bloc voting is a reflection of a superficial, instrumental understanding of, and attitude toward, democracy. Participation in democratic processes should not be viewed as a partisan engagement in a zero-sum game.

Muslim Americans elected to office in 2004

Many American Muslims have been elected to public offices in 2004 despite the wave of Islamophobic attacks and stereotyping of Muslims. Muslim candidates ran for a number of offices at local, state and federal levels.

No comprehensive data is available about the elected Muslim officials but fragmented media reports provide some information. According to Pakistan Times the following four American Muslims were re-elected in November 2004 elections:

Mr. Larry Shaw (Democrat), State Senate, North Carolina; Ms. Yaphett El-Amin (Democrat), State Assembly Missouri; Mr. Rodney Hubbard (Democrat), State Assembly Missouri, and Mr. Saghir Tahir (Republican), State Assembly, New Hampshire.

The successful candidates were voted in by a minimum of 60 per cent, which underlines the considerable support they enjoyed within their constituency.

Dr. Mohammad Ali Chaudhry was elected Mayor Bernards Township, New Jersey.

Two Muslim candidates, Akhtar Sadiq (Democrat-Georgia) and Abul Akbar (Democrat-Georgia), ran for state senate but did not make it this year. Ferial Masry, (Democrat-California), a Muslim woman for CA State Assembly also failed to make in November 2004.

Arif Khan (Libertarian-Wisconsin) and Dr. Mohammad H. Said (Democrat-Washington State) ran for US Senate. Mr. Khan lost in the general election while Dr. Said lost the primary. **(Source Pakistan Link December 3, 2004)**

5 - American Muslims in 2006 elections

The seven-million-strong American Muslim community got a big political push when the Minnesota Democrat Keith Ellison was elected as the nation's first Muslim member to the US Congress in November 7, 2006 elections. Ellison's election was accompanied by a massive turnout of the American Muslim voters to make their voices heard.

"Tonight, we made history," Mr Ellison said in a victory speech to supporters. "We won a key election, but we did much more than that. We showed that a candidate can run a 100% positive campaign and prevail, even against tough opposition."

Throughout his campaign Ellison, a criminal defense attorney who converted to Islam as a college student, focused on issues that resonate in his electoral District in Minneapolis. Ellison won 56 percent of the vote, defeating Republican Alan Fine and the Independence Party's Tammy Lee, both of whom garnered 21 percent of the vote.

Another Muslim, Ahmad Hassan, failed in his congressional bid on Republican ticket. In Texas District 18, Ahmad Hassan, an Egyptian American, lost to Democrat Sheila Jackson Lee who was re-elected with a massive 80 percent of the vote.

Before Ellison's election to the House, Larry Shaw, a Democrat State Senator of North Carolina, was the highest Muslim elected official in the United States. Larry Shaw, a corporate executive, was re-elected to the State senate on November 7.

It is not clear how many Muslim Americans contested in the 2006 elections but there are fragmented reports that dozens were candidate for various offices from US Congress, State Senate and assemblies to local bodies.

In New Hampshire, Saghir "Saggy" Tahir was re-elected for a third term of the State House of Representatives in Nov. 7 elections.

The number of Muslim candidates for various offices across the nation hit an all-time high of about 700 in 2000 but then declined dramatically, to about 70 in 2002 and about 100 in 2004, according to the American Muslim Alliance, a national organization.

In 2002, Maad Abu-Ghazalah, an Arab-American and Syed Rifat Mahmood, a Pakistani-American, made unsuccessful congressional bids from California. In 2004, Ferial Masry, a Saudi-born woman lost her bid for congress in California while, Maad Abu-Ghazalah also made another abortive bid.

The midterm elections witnessed an intensive voter registration and get-out-to-vote campaigns by the American Muslim groups. Consequently, in key elections throughout the country, candidates were beginning to realize the impact of the Muslim electorate which is the result of the increasing interaction of Muslim communities with elected officials and candidates.

The Muslim community demonstrated its importance in this election particularly in the states where it has large concentration of population. In states like Virginia which has substantial concentration of Muslim population, the Muslim vote became the critical vote in tipping the balance on control of the US Senate. In Virginia Incumbent senator George Allen was defeated by his Democratic opponent, Jim Webb, giving Democrats control of the Senate with 51-members.

There are approximately 60,000 Muslim voters in Virginia, with 85% of them living in Northern Virginia. According to the Muslim American Society Center for Electoral Empowerment Director (MASCEE) Mukit Hossain, it is estimated that 47,700 Muslims voted for Jim Webb, which positively contributed to his narrow victory over Senator George Allen. The MASCEE also helped support a larger Muslim voter turnout in Virginia by recruiting 230 volunteers for some 200 election sites.

An informal poll of Muslim voters, conducted by the New Jersey Chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR-NJ), indicated that the vast majority in that state voted for Democrats in the mid-term elections. There are at least 18,000 registered Muslim voters in the state of New Jersey.

CAIR-NJ contacted 100 Muslim voters from various districts to ask how they had voted. Of 100 Muslim voters contacted, 77 said they had voted for the Democratic Party candidates. This result was in line with a recent CAIR poll of Muslim voters nationwide indicating that American Muslims lean toward the Democratic Party.

An informal poll of Muslim voters, conducted by the CAIR Columbus office indicated that the overwhelming majority of Muslim voters in that state voted for Democrats in the mid-term elections.

Seventy-five Muslim voters from Ohio responded to a post-election survey. More than 90 percent of the respondents said they had voted for Democratic Party candidates.

A pre-election CAIR survey revealed that 42 percent Muslim voters consider themselves members of the Democratic Party while only 17 per cent are Republican. Another 28 percent do not belong to any party.

The survey also pointed out that 49 percent of the registered voters in the survey said that they voted regularly. Previous surveys also indicate that the American Muslim community has the highest turnout of voters in elections.

Similarly, another poll by the Arab American Institute (AAI) pointed out that strong majorities of Arab-American voters in four key states — Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Florida — intend to vote for the Democratic candidates for senate. It may be pointed out that about 40 percent of the 3.5 million-strong American Arab community is Muslim and the rest is Christian. Like Muslim Americans, Arab Christians have also been complaining of discrimination in the post-9/11 era.

Arab American Institute said 2006 historic elections will have a significant impact on the Arab American community. Eighty-two percent of the candidates supported by the state and local Arab American community leaders in fifteen states were victorious. Of the 39 Arab American candidates vying in the election, 24 won their races.

The Muslim groups had launched a vote registration campaign and also get-out-to-vote campaign. They particularly targeted 12 states with a high concentration of Muslim population: California, 20 percent; Illinois, 8.9 percent; New York, 8.6 percent; Texas, 7 percent; New Jersey, 6.8 percent; Michigan, 6.7 percent; Florida, 6.4 percent; Virginia, 6.3 percent; Maryland, 3.1 percent; Ohio, 3 percent; Pennsylvania, 2.9 percent; and Minnesota, 2.8 percent.

The Muslim American Society, which had set up voter registration booths in mosques across the country, has added 30,000 new voters to the rolls just weeks before the election.

In Illinois, another state with a heavy concentration of Muslims, the Council of Islamic

Organizations of Greater Chicago had been working to register more of the area's approximately 400,000 Muslims to vote.

The Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC) held four Election Forums in Virginia, Kansas and California, providing an opportunity for more than a dozen candidates to meet with the American Muslim community to share their perspectives on pressing current issues.

In several states the American Muslim Alliance (AMA) issued an election advisory suggesting its preference for the candidates who supported the Muslims on the issue of civil rights which remains the top Muslim concern in elections since 2000.

Interestingly, an important impact of Muslim political activism was that the candidates who were vocal supporters of profiling the Muslims and Arabs lost elections in Illinois, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin.

Republican candidate for Illinois' 17th Congressional District Andrea Zinga said: "Profiling doesn't bother me if we are profiling the people who. . .have caused the outrages against our nation and caused the deaths of American citizens. . .We're talking about Mideastern men."

In Pennsylvania, Sen. Rick Santorum lost his seat in the Senate after targeting so-called "Islamic fascism" during his campaign. Santorum even linked the Islamic concept of Jihad to Nazism when he said: "Mein Kampf means struggle; jihad means struggle."

In Wisconsin, 3rd Congressional District GOP candidate Paul Nelson suggested looking for anyone who is "wearing a turban and his name is Muhammad" when he was questioned about his call for profiling of Muslims.

And in Florida, both gubernatorial candidates repudiated anti-Muslim remarks made by supporters during the campaign.

While it is unclear if Muslim American voters have the numbers to tip any tight elections, many political observers believe that they have achieved unprecedented levels of political organization and electoral enthusiasm.

At least two million Muslims are registered voters. A 2001 poll by Zogby International found that 79 percent of the country's Muslims are registered to vote.

CAIR/MAS report on 2006 election efforts

On Nov. 14, 2006, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) offered a report to the Muslim community on its efforts to promote political participation in the recent mid-term elections.

CAIR Chapters in 11 states participated in non-partisan election efforts. States with "get out the vote" and other activities included: Arizona, California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

Other highlights of CAIR's non-partisan election activities included:

* National: The creation of a database of some 400,000 American Muslim voters developed by matching state records of registered voters with an extensive list of Muslim first and last names.

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- * Arizona: 11,000 automated get out the vote calls were made.
- * Florida: 10,000 voter guides were distributed at state mosques.
- * Illinois: More than 1000 Muslims were registered to vote in the Third Congressional District. Two hundred Muslim volunteers also got out the vote on election day in the Chicago area by knocking on doors and making phone calls.
- * Ohio: 1,200 get out the vote calls were made in the Columbus area.
- * Texas: More than 3,500 Muslims in the Dallas area were contacted and urged to vote. More than 800 Muslims were contacted in the San Antonio area.
- * California: 500 posters were distributed to mosques and businesses around the state urging Muslims to register to vote. CAIR-CA also distributed a congressional scorecard and held a voter education forum with candidates and representatives for and against propositions on the ballot.

Results of informal exit polls in Ohio and New Jersey indicate that more than 75 percent of Muslim voters in those states cast their ballots for Democrats in the mid-term election.

Democrats' wins hinged on Muslims – Washington Times

The Washington Times reported on November 14, 2006 that Muslim voters, an electoral ally of President Bush as recently as 2000, played a key role in turning over control of the Senate to Democrats.

"Although the-get-out-the-vote campaign was nonpartisan, there is no doubt that our strategy to support a large Muslim voter turnout in areas with potentially close election races was a correct one," said Mahdi Bray, director of the Muslim American Society (MAS) Freedom Foundation. "We looked at the states with close races and matched them up with states that had a large concentration of Muslims."

MAS also targeted races in Florida, Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

In the U.S. Senate race in Virginia, more than 50,000 self-identified Muslim voters went to the polls, MAS said. A commanding majority of them, 92 percent, or 47,092, voted for the Democratic challenger, James H. Webb Jr. Mr. Webb won his race against Sen. George Allen, the Republican incumbent, by 9,326 votes.

"If Muslims had decided to put their weight behind Allen, Republicans would have had at least a tie in the Senate," said Mukit Hossain of MAS, which conducted the survey.

Muslim turnout of registered voters was exceptionally high in Virginia, at 86 percent, MAS reported. About 13 percent, or 7,822, of them were first-time voters.

Muslims also celebrated the victory of Keith Ellison, the first Muslim elected to Congress. The Democrat won his race with 56 percent of the vote in Minnesota's traditionally liberal 5th District.

Mr. Ellison, who describes himself as a moderate Muslim, won the backing of the National Jewish Democratic Council, even though his opponent, Republican Alan Fine, was Jewish.

Muslim voters have not always turned against Republican candidates. A survey by the Center for American Islamic Relations found that 78 percent of Muslims supported Mr. Bush during his first presidential election in 2000.

CAIR found that Muslims were drawn to Mr. Bush's conservative stances on social issues and their hope that he would overturn provisions of a 1996 law, backed by the Clinton administration, that allowed for "secret evidence" in the deportation of immigrants with suspected terrorist ties.

Some estimates show that 60,000 Muslims voted for Mr. Bush in Florida. Those numbers nearly flipped in 2004, with most surveys showing Mr. Bush receiving about 7 percent of Muslim support against his opponent, Sen. John Kerry, Massachusetts Democrat.

Mr. Hossain is president of the Virginia Muslim Political Action Committee, a group that endorsed Mr. Webb's candidacy. However, Mr. Hossain says neither the Virginia PAC nor MAS has a partisan affiliation. He said the PAC endorsed Mr. Webb and other Democratic candidates because of their positions on civil liberties, immigration and health care.

Mr. Hossain did not hide his personal preference for Mr. Webb and his enthusiasm for Democratic victories a week ago, appearing at a press conference yesterday wearing a Webb campaign button on his jacket.