MUSLIM CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT FOR FAITH LEADERS

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INTRODUCTION

Civic engagement means "working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."*

This toolkit is intended to facilitate engagement between American Muslims and both primary American political parties, and to do so at a shared value: consultation between legislators and political subjects.

It comes equipped with resources for faith leaders, community leaders, and members alike, as well as information for those hoping to engage this November as either civic leaders or participants.

SPIRITUAL MANDATE

As Muslims, we aim to fulfill civic duties out of a shared religious mandate to engage in our political process and ensure a collective social good. *Shura* understood in this sense emphasizes the responsibility of civil society to engage in the political process, and of the state to ensure a representative process. In *Surah ash-Shura* (42:38), *shura* is considered on a par with prayer (*salah*) and charity-giving (*zakat*).

Islam only further grounds our responsibility to participate in the political process. As Muslims, our mandate is to build the world in accordance with Islamic values, and to do so in a way compatible with the current time, place, and circumstance. *Sharia* functions as a guide for how to exercise our judgment and engage with contemporary realities.

As American Muslims, our contemporary material realities generate a significant responsibility to engage politically, for the sake our *umma* but for all as well. The Trump administration has expanded its unconstitutional Muslim Ban; the question of Congressional war powers remains in flux; a slate of anti-BDS bills passed in the Senate; voter suppression remains a persistent problem; reactionary immigration policy remains a familiar axe for this administration to grind; and the COVID-19 outbreak has exposed the limitations of our nation’s housing, nutrition, and healthcare systems. White supremacist terrorism persists, as does this administration’s demonstrative ambivalence toward it.

Clearly, the stakes are high. We owe it to our communities to defend their political and civic rights anywhere we can, and this includes at the ballot box.

**Voting on Election Day, November 3rd, serves as a great chance to do just that.**
WHY CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IS IMPORTANT

American Muslims are similar to any other religious community in the United States, having the same concerns with election topics like the environment, education, and jobs. And just like other minority communities in the United States, Muslims have the power to be vital and active citizens in our nation’s decision-making process. We are a community that can and will affect elections. Elections and advocacy are crucial mechanisms in holding our representatives accountable. They ensure your voice is heard, thereby creating an America that is for you and me.

According to the Institute of Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), American Muslims can be a key factor in this year’s election, especially in swing states such as Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Virginia. American Muslims can bring in 1 to 2 percent of the votes that are needed to swing the election in either direction. Unfortunately, in the 2016 election, polls found that only 60% of Muslim Americans were registered to vote in comparison to 94% of Protestants, making American Muslims the least likely group to vote or even plan to vote in comparison to other religious groups.
November 3, Election Day 2020, is just around the corner. With it, a referendum on the Trump administration and the future of our collective, American politics. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing health and economic crisis it caused, has significantly compromised matters. Through their responses to the COVID-19 crisis, the Republican and Democratic parties are effectively auditioning for the role of governing party. Situated at the crossroads of this event are American Muslims this nation’s most diverse religious community as well as one of its most socioeconomically diverse.

However, rather than engage with us as the politically diverse demographic society has largely engaged us as a monolith. In so doing, they ignore those Muslims whose experiences do not fit the monolith.

Since people at the lower rungs of the socioeconomic spectrum are more likely to be negatively impacted by the health and economic consequences of COVID-19, these figures are politically significant for Muslims in America. They demonstrate that our communities will tend to have less access to healthcare coverage and are living paycheck-to-paycheck, making them uniquely vulnerable to budget cuts and healthcare inaccessibility.
MY MUSLIM VOTE KHUTBA DAY

2020 has been about COVID-19 and the movement for Black lives and the economic and social catastrophes to our communities. As Muslims, there is still so much we can do as we move forward. This is a critical year for not only for Muslims, but for all communities looking to elect officials that reflect their interests, their hopes, and their pressing needs. This year, all **435 seats in the House of Representatives** are up for election, as are **35 Senate seats**. 2020 will be an historic opportunity for Muslims to vote in record numbers - and to vote in officials who will support an equitable and just system.

This year, **#MyMuslimVote** will continue to recruit, engage and activate thousands of grassroots leaders in key regions of the United States. We all must get involved in voter registration drives, neighborhood canvassing, and phone banking efforts to ensure we’re represented in 2020. Organizations like MPower Change, CAIR, Poligon Education Fund, Emgage, America Indivisible, MPAC, and so many more are doing the work and making it easy for us all to plug in.

**IMPORTANT POINTS**

1. As people of this country and this state, who pay taxes and contribute in other ways to the country and community we live in, it is imperative that we make use of a right that others have given their lives for, both here and around the world.

2. The upcoming election is critical for American Muslims. At the beginning of the Trump administration, the first policy implemented was the **#MuslimBan**. It was during his campaign and election into office that we saw surges in anti-Muslim rhetoric and violence, more than we’ve seen in recent years. Mobilizing voters around hate is easy, but Muslims must mobilize votes to demonstrate strength and solidarity during times when so many communities are under attack.

3. This election will determine the future of our children as American Muslims; a vote for candidates who speak out against Islamophobia is a vote that challenges this racist rhetoric per the Prophetic responsibility of *amr bil ma’rouf wal naahee ‘an al munkar* (the obligation to enjoin the good and forbid the evil.)

4. There are many other important ethical issues at stake in this election, including income inequality, state violence against our Black sisters and brothers, and the very future of our planet - which Islamic teachings clearly emphasize as a religious and moral issue with the numerous Qur’anic verses and ahadith emphasizing the importance of acting as good stewards and *khulafa* (vicegerents) on this Earth.
RELIGIOUS REFERENCES
Provided by Munes Tomeh, Attorney and Professor of Islamic Law, Zaytuna College

Allah subhanahu wa ta`ala says in the Noble Qur’an, in surat Aal-`Imran: “Let there be among you a community calling to the good, enjoining right, and forbidding wrong. It is they who shall prosper” (3:104). And in a famous Hadith, the Prophet salla Llahu `alaihi wa sallam is reported to have stated something similar to this:

من رأى منكم منكرا فليغيره بيده
فإن لم يستطع فبلسه
فإن لم يستطع فبلسه
وذلك أضعف الإيمان

“Whosoever of you sees wrong, then let him change it with his hand, and if he is not able to, then let him change it with his tongue, and if he is no able to, then let him change it with his heart [that is, let him recognize it as wrong inside his heart], and that ["changing" it in the heart] is the weakest of faith.”

We see from this verse in the Qur’an and selection from the sayings of the Prophet, salla Llahu `alaihi wa sallam, that “calling to the good, enjoining right, and forbidding wrong” are things that Allah has commanded us to do. It is not sufficient for us as a community to simply pray, fast, perform Hajj, and to concern ourselves with ourselves and our worship, while ignoring that which is around us. We have to be engaged, discussing issues of common concern, "calling to the good." We must enjoin that which is right, and we should not sit idly by when we see wrong, but rather should be people, as individuals and as a community, that forbids wrong through the various means at our disposal.

One of the most important Hadiths that is a basis for law in general--whether Islamic law and even secular notions of law is:

لا ضرر ولا ضرار

"Let there be no harm, nor any reciprocation of harm."

Based upon this Hadith, Muslim scholars have posited a general legal principle:

الضرر يزال ضرر

“Harm must be removed.”

Based on the ideas above, we can understand that it is a responsibility of our community, both as individuals and collectively, to be engaged in the larger society around us, in which we work towards justice and equity in our community.
American Muslims are the least likely to communicate with local and federal elected officials. Here are some stats from a recent ISPU study:

- In the 2016 election, only 60% of American Muslims were registered to vote - compared to the 85% to 95% of eligible voters in other faith groups.
- In the 2018 mid-term election, only 58% of American Muslims voted.
- In 2019, 73% of American Muslims were registered to vote, making them the faith group least likely to be registered to vote.
- Only 20% of Muslim men and 21% of Muslim women reported to have communicated with a local official.
- Only one out of six (17%) of Muslims directly contacted their congressional representatives in 2018. Of those, white Muslims were the most likely to conduct outreach (25%), while Arab Muslims were the least likely (10%).

### MUSLIM CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH BY RACIAL & ETHNIC IDENTITY

According to ISPU’s American Muslim Poll 2019, Muslims of different racial/ethnic groups reached out to local officials at similar rates.
INTERESTED IN DOING MORE?

In the era of COVID-19, more and more states are turning to vote by mail options, by increasing funding and extending voting deadlines. For the latest updates and comprehensive list of state-based primary voting instructions and deadlines check out the US Vote Foundation or your state or regional board of election office website.

Voting by mail is also known as absentee voting. Although every state provides the option to vote by mail, there are different rules and criteria to be able to request an absentee ballot.

A request to vote by mail is generally accepted for these 4 main exceptions:

- An illness, injury, or disability
- Business travel or vacation
- Students at out of state college or universities
- A pandemic like COVID-19

Don’t forget to contact your friends and loved ones with a friendly reminder to request their ballots as well! There is strong evidence that personal engagement is far more effective than a broader, distant call for action. Digital communities can be created through mediums like Whatsapp groups or Facebook pages to harness collective power.

ESTABLISHING A MOSQUE AS A POLLING LOCATION

Polling locations are extremely important for elections, other than the fact that it’s a center for voters to cast their ballots, the quantity and distance of polling places have become the target of voter suppression in previous years. Many locations have been cut from official operation and disproportionately affect minority voters.

What can you do? Double check your polling location, organize a local petition to reopen polling locations and send it to your local County Clerk, and carpool together according to CDC guidelines to your local polling location.
However, establishing a polling location is simple enough. Although requirements may differ from state to state the general criteria for a polling facility include the following:

1. Ample space for voting booths, ID check-in, a designated space for voters to stand, parking etc.

2. Compliant with the American with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)

3. Commitment to host a polling location at least 30 days before an election

If your Mosque can meet these requirements, you can contact your local board of elections to officially register your Mosque as a polling place.

Here are some additional guidelines for a polling location:

- A polling place must be located in a publicly owned or controlled facility such as a school building, fire station or police station.

- If it is not a publicly owned or controlled facility, the building must be owned or controlled by an organization that is “exempt from federal income tax pursuant to section 501(c) other than 501(c)(4), (5), or (6) of the internal revenue code of 1986....”

- A polling location cannot be in the same facility of another business, individual, firm, organization, etc. that has established, directs, controls or financially supports the administration of a Political or Independent Committee registered under the Campaign Finance Act.

SUCCESS STORY

In 2019, the County Clerk in Houston, Texas was able to designate the community center in the Islamic Institute & Houston Blue Mosque as an official polling location. This opened up new opportunities for Muslims to get involved and build relationships with local community officials.
MUSLIM CIVIC CHECK LIST

WHAT CAN YOU DO

☐ CHECK YOUR VOTER INFORMATION
  • Check your registration status [here](#)
  • Confirm your polling location [here](#)
  • Pledge to vote and join the [1 Million Muslim Campaign](#)

☐ GET INVOLVED
  • Engage with your local mosque: ask your Imam to do a Khutbah Day
  • Advocate for your mosque to be a polling place for your community

☐ BRING IN YOUR FOLKS
  • Carpool with the people you are sheltering with on Election Day and vote together

☐ FOLLOW US ONLINE FOR MORE INFORMATION
  • [America Indivisible](#)
  • Emgage
  • MPower Change
  • Muslim Public Affairs Council
  • Poligon Education Fund