

American Muslims' vote for Trump; Political gamble that backfired



By **Gholamreza Mansouri**
Political science
researcher

OPINION EXCLUSIVE

In a surprising twist during the recent US presidential elections, many American Muslims and other minority groups shifted their support to Donald Trump, a figure traditionally seen as opposed to their interests due to his right-wing policies. This unexpected move helped Trump secure a not-so-narrow victory over Vice President Kamala Harris in key battleground states, especially Michigan. However, the aftermath of this decision has left many Muslims grappling with regret as the gap between campaign promises and the post-election moves of Trump becomes starkly apparent.

Why did Muslims support Trump?

Donald Trump's campaign targeted Muslim and Arab American voters with a clear and resonant message: "No new wars, family values, affordable groceries." This strategy was particularly evident in Dearborn, Michigan, home to the largest Arab-American community in the United States. Trump's anti-war rhetoric and criticism of the Biden-Harris administration's handling of

Israel's war in Gaza played a significant role in swaying voters. Polling conducted by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) in October 2024 revealed that 98% of Muslim respondents disapproved of President Biden's handling of the Gaza war. Discontent with the Democrats pushed 42% of Muslims to back third-party candidate Jill Stein, while only

41% supported Kamala Harris, a sharp decline from the 71% who had voted for Biden in 2020. Trump's campaign capitalized on this dissatisfaction, framing him as the candidate who could hold the Biden-Harris administration accountable for its perceived failures in Gaza. At campaign stops, Trump criticized Kamala Harris for her connections to figures

like Liz Cheney, labeling her a supporter of the "Muslim-hating establishment". He further reminded voters of Dick Cheney's role in initiating wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which had devastating effects on Arab and Muslim populations. Trump's rhetoric resonated with many voters seeking to hold the Democrats accountable, leading to a significant shift in support.

Aftermath

Despite the American Muslim community's support for Trump, his post-election appointments have sparked widespread disappointment and criticism. One of the most controversial moves was Trump's nomination of Mike Huckabee as ambassa-

dor to Israel. Huckabee, a staunch supporter of Israeli control over the occupied West Bank and an opponent of the two-state solution, has made inflammatory remarks over the years denying Palestinian identity. His views align with far-right Israeli poli-

cies but clash with the aspirations of Palestinians and many Arab Americans. Another contentious appointment was Elise Stefanik as US ambassador to the United Nations. Stefanik has referred to the UN as a "cesspool of antisemitism"

for its condemnation of civilian deaths in Gaza. These decisions have fueled a sense of betrayal among Muslim voters who had hoped Trump would act as a peace candidate committed to ending Middle Eastern conflicts.

Misguided punishment of Democrats

Muslim voters who supported Trump often viewed their decision as a way to punish the Democratic Party for its perceived complacency and mishandling of international crises, particularly in Gaza. However, many now realize that their vote for Trump has not resulted in meaningful change. Instead, his administration appears to uphold the same pro-Israel

policies they had hoped to challenge. In retrospect, the move to back Trump underscores a painful lesson: for American Muslims, the partisan divide offers little reprieve when it comes to US foreign policy in the Middle East. Both parties have shown unwavering support for Israel, and Trump's rhetoric during the campaign has proven inconsistent with

his measures in office. His appointments and alliances highlight his administration's alignment with hardline pro-Israel interests. The American Muslim community's shift toward Trump in the 2024 election reflects deep dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party's foreign policy, particularly regarding Israel and Gaza. However, the

post-election reality has underscored the risks of relying on campaign rhetoric without scrutinizing broader policy implications. As Trump's administration unfolds, it serves as a reminder that, for many minority communities, the US political landscape often offers limited options, particularly on issues of justice and peace in the Middle East.



Senator Marco Rubio makes a speech during a Jewish community rally against anti-Semitism and anti-Israel activism in Miami Beach, Florida, on November 15, 2015.
● JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES



Mideast looks to Saudi Arabia to rein in Donald Trump



By **Andrew England**
News editor

OPINION

Arab states are banking on Saudi Arabia to use its relationship with Donald Trump and political heft in the region to act as a check on the president-elect's Middle East policies amid fears that he will pursue a staunchly pro-Israel agenda.

After Trump named a number of ardently pro-Israeli nominees and Iran hawks for key positions, Arab officials worry his incoming administration might approve any moves by Israel to annex the occupied West Bank, occupy Gaza, or escalate tensions with Tehran.

But they hope Riyadh can temper the incoming administration's policies in the region by leveraging Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's relationship with Trump, the president-elect's appetite for financial deals, and his expected desire to strike a "grand bargain" that would lead Saudi Arabia and Israel to normalise relations.

"The key player in the region is Saudi Arabia because of their known relations with him, so it will be the linchpin of any regional actions the US might decide to do," said an Arab diplomat.

Another Arab official said Prince Mohammed would be "key" in influencing Trump's policies toward ending Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza and more broadly on Palestinian issues, using the potential for normalisation with Israel as leverage.

"Saudi Arabia could heavily influence how Trump deals with Gaza and Palestine," the official said. "A lot of the countries in the region are concerned about what comes next."

During Trump's first term, Saudi Arabia embraced his transactional style and his "maximum pressure" campaign against its regional rival Iran. Trump stood by Prince Mohammed when other Western leaders cold-shouldered the kingdom's de facto leader after Saudi agents murdered journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018.

Trump also boasted that he would broker the "ultimate deal" to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But those plans, overseen by his son-in-law Jared Kushner, fell flat, with the Palestinians and Arab states viewing the proposals as being far too tilted in favour of Israel. Trump also cut aid to the Palestinians, closed their diplomatic mission in Washington, moved the US embassy to Jerusalem — the status of which is disputed — and recognised Israel's claim to sovereignty over the occupied Golan Heights. He did, however, broker the so-called Abraham Accords, in which the UAE and three other Arab states normalised relations with Israel.

Trump told al-Arabiya, a Saudi television channel, last month that relations between the US and Saudi Arabia during his presidency were "great, with capital letters, G.R.E.A.T." "So much respect for the king, so much respect for Mohammed who's done so great, he's really a visionary," he said. After US President Joe Biden took of-

fice, Riyadh maintained ties to Trump, with its Public Investment Fund (PIF) — the sovereign wealth fund chaired by Prince Mohammed — investing \$2b in a private equity fund set up by Kushner.

The PIF's governor, Yasir al-Rumayyan, shared front-row seats with Trump at a UFC fight in New York recently. Trump's courses have also hosted events run by LIV Golf, one of the PIF's highest-profile sporting ventures.

But Prince Mohammed has recalibrated Saudi Arabia's regional policies since Biden took office. Riyadh restored diplomatic relations with Iran in 2023 in a policy of détente it has continued to pursue since Hamas's October 7 attack triggered a wave of conflict across the region.

While a Biden administration plan to normalise relations with Israel as part of a three-way deal that would include a Saudi-US defence treaty was upended by the war, the US still considers the kingdom critical to efforts to any