

Religious groups rally around issues after election; new Jewish-Muslim partnership forms

by [Yonat Shimron](#), [Lauren Markoe](#), and [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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On the day after the election, Mervat Aqqad's seven-year-old son woke up and asked who got elected president.

When Aqqad broke the news to Ibrahim his first question was, "Do we have to move now?"

"I told him, 'You were born here. You're an American citizen like anyone else,'" said Aqqad, a middle school teacher in Raleigh, North Carolina.

They weren't the only ones concerned about increased acts of bigotry in the wake of the election of Donald Trump, who during his campaign proposed banning Muslims from entering the United States and who has appointed a man accused of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia as his chief strategist.

The American Jewish Committee and the Islamic Society of North America launched a new national group with an unprecedented size and influence: the Muslim-Jewish Advisory Council.

"We have to show the administration that as American Muslims and Jews—people of the faiths of Abraham—we are uniting to help the administration navigate in the proper constitutional manner, to uphold freedom of religion and constitutional rights for all American citizens," said Eftakhar Alam, senior coordinator at ISNA's Office of Interfaith and Community Alliances.

Months ago Jewish and Muslim leaders hatched the idea to come together around goals such as those set at the council's first meeting: to combat bigotry against Muslims and Jews in the United States, to highlight each group's contributions to American society, and to protect the rights of all religious minorities.

Members of the new council include clergy, businesspeople, and government officials. Among them are former U.S. senator Joseph Lieberman, M. Farooq Kathwari, president and CEO of Ethan Allen Interiors, and Julie Schonfeld, vice president of the Rabbinical Assembly.

“The council’s formation shows that American Muslim and Jewish leadership are now working together, focused on domestic developments,” said Robert Silverman, AJC director of Muslim-Jewish relations. “This is a first and is good news for the entire country.”

Most people who identify with faiths other than Christianity favored Hillary Clinton in the election. In contrast, exit polls showed that Christians who described themselves as evangelical and born-again gave Trump 81 percent of their votes, up 3 percentage points from their support for Mitt Romney, the 2012 GOP presidential nominee. Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton garnered 16 percent of their votes.

The voting statistics on mainline Protestants make drawing meaningful conclusions difficult. Available exit poll data, compiled by a firm hired by a consortium of major national news organizations, does not break down the group by race—an important factor in analyzing the vote.

White Catholics favored Trump, casting 60 percent of their ballots for him, compared to 37 percent for Clinton. Cardinal Raymond Burke praised Trump’s stance on reproductive rights, telling an Italian newspaper that the president-elect would “put in place every action possible to fight abortion.” Burke dismissed concerns about Trump’s stand on immigration.

Among Latino Catholics, 67 percent went for Clinton and 26 percent for Trump.

After the election some African- American faith leaders spoke of the need to combat voter suppression of African Americans, senior citizens, and others. Barbara Williams-Skinner, cochair of the National African American Clergy Network, noted that the presidential election took place for the first time since the Supreme Court invalidated portions of the Voting Rights Act that provided voter protections.

“It makes a difference when your polling place moves to the suburbs,” she said, and “when there’s no Sunday transportation where pastors can take their people to the polls after a service.” —Religion News Service

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