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MONITOR ANALYZE DOCUMENT

After the Ballot: How U.S. Media Covered the Muslim American Electoral Wins of 2026

A framing study. Media Justice Network, November 2026.

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MEDIA JUSTICE NETWORK

1. About this study

Media Justice Network (MJN) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that monitors, documents and reports on media equity issues in the United States. This study examines a declared sample of American media coverage published between November 4 and November 18, 2026, concerning the American Muslim candidates who won elected office in 2026, described by tracking organizations as a record number. It is a monitoring and documentation document, not an advocacy brief and not a legal finding.

Method.

- **Declared sample.** The study examines ten published items, plus the press release they respond to. Every item is listed in the source list at the end. The sample is not a census of coverage; it is the set of items in MJN's ongoing monitoring that met two tests: published after the November 3 elections, and treating the Muslim identity of winning candidates as a central theme.
- **Verbatim quotation.** Every quotation in this study was copied from the original publication on November 19, 2026. Where an item is a reprint of another outlet's work, we say so and name the original when known.
- **Attribution of facts.** Election results are attributed to the organizations that produced them unless stated otherwise; section 2 reports the status of MJN's own race-by-race verification, still in progress. MJN did not independently audit any allegation quoted in the coverage. Claims made in the articles examined remain their authors' claims, not MJN findings.
- **A stated question.** The study asks one question: in the coverage examined, where does ordinary scrutiny of newly elected officials end, and where does coverage begin to treat Muslim identity itself as the story? We answer with documented examples, and we include coverage we judge to fall within legitimate scrutiny.

2. The event

On Tuesday, November 3, 2026, American voters elected what tracking organizations describe as a record number of Muslim candidates. On November 17, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and CAIR Action released final tracking results: 115 confirmed Muslim victories on November 3 across 21 states, including 45 state and legislative wins, with one more candidate leading in a race still being counted; at least 126 Muslim Americans elected across the full year 2026, a figure the organizations projected would rise to 128; and 169 tracked candidates in the 2026 cycle, of whom 115 won and 52 lost. The organizations described 2026 as their most successful tracked year, up from 82 victories recorded in 2022.

The release records several historic firsts: Abdul El-Sayed of Michigan as the first Muslim elected to the U.S. Senate; Adam Hamawy as New Jersey's first Muslim member of Congress; Darializa Avila Chevalier as New York's first Muslim member of Congress; and Aber Kawas as the first Palestinian

American Muslim woman elected to the New York State Legislature.

These figures are the organizations' own counts, and the published subtotals do not fully reconcile arithmetically (115 won, 52 lost and 1 leading account for 168 of the 169 tracked candidates). The subsection below reports the status of MJN's race-by-race verification, still in progress. In their statement, CAIR and CAIR Action said the victories "came during a campaign season marked by open anti-Muslim rhetoric aimed at candidates and their communities."

It is the coverage that followed these results, not the results themselves, that this study examines.

An independent count

CAIR and CAIR Action's published totals serve as the comparison baseline for this review. MJN has been verifying the results race by race, working from a per-race results guide that records a named result source for every race it tracks; two separate checks are run for each candidacy: the race outcome against its recorded result source, and the candidate's religious identity against any independent statement of it, with each candidacy then classed by its evidence category. As of November 19, 2026, the register tracks 135 candidacies, with paired source checks completed for 69 of them; one further listed name is excluded because Ann Arbor mayor-elect Yousef Rabhi has said he is not Muslim. Several races still await updates, and every figure in this section is provisional, not a final tally.

Independent count (provisional; results await updates): race-by-race review working from Mahjar Post's 2026 midterms results guide (mahjarpost.com/midterms/), checking each race against its recorded result source (AP, NBC News, Decision Desk HQ, state election boards, county results tables and official county canvass reports) and each candidate's religious identity against any independent statement of it, classed by evidence category; the reconciliation reference is the numbered winners list in CAIR and CAIR Action's November 17 release. As of November 19, 2026, the detailed numerical breakdowns are under revision pending reconciliation against source evidence, with the races listed below still awaiting updates; all figures are provisional and not a final tally.

As of November 19, 2026, our source review supports at least 68 Muslim American winners in held elections within the election register we examined: 61 in elections held on November 3 and 7 in earlier 2026 elections. One further winner is tracked separately: Maimona Afzal Berta was returned unopposed without appearing on the ballot after her November 3 contest was canceled, so she is not counted among the 68. For each of these people, we read both election-outcome evidence independent of CAIR's list and explicit evidence of Muslim identity from outside CAIR. Sources are linked by candidate in the evidence ledger.

This is a documented minimum within our reviewed register, not a complete national count or a certified-results-only count. Outcome evidence includes official results, some still marked unofficial; independent news calls or declarations; explicit secondary results-service declarations; and community or institutional reporting. In specified unopposed contests, official counted votes also

support inclusion. Identity evidence includes the candidate's own words and explicit attributable news, community or institutional reporting. The 69 supported winners are not all self-identified in our sources, nor are all their results certified.

After excluding one person who has said he is not Muslim, the working register contains 135 candidacy rows: 123 scheduled for November 3, of which 122 were held and 1 was canceled with the candidate returned unopposed without a ballot, and 12 for earlier 2026 elections. Beyond the 68 paired source-supported winner rows in held elections and the 1 separately tracked unopposed return, it contains 45 other recorded winner rows still awaiting paired substantive identity/outcome acceptance, 2 winner rows without independent outcome evidence beyond CAIR, 11 leading rows, 3 unknown outcome rows and 5 recorded losses. These remaining entries are not all independently verified. An unfinished check is not evidence that a candidate lost or is not Muslim. The register also does not contain every 2026 election event; a special and general election won by the same person must not be silently counted as one victory or two different people.

Figures under revision. The numerical breakdowns previously given here - the counts of verified wins and losses and the identity-evidence totals with their cross-tabulation against outcomes - are temporarily withdrawn while race-by-race source bindings are reconciled against the original evidence. The tracked case list, the two-check methodology, and the evidence categories described above are unaffected, and all figures remain provisional, not a final tally.

Awaiting updates. The following races remain open in the verification: Nafisa Fai (Washington County Board of Commissioners Chair, Oregon; certification expected November 30), Nilu Jenks (Seattle City Council, District 5; certification expected November 24), Aziz Akbari (Fremont City Council, District 4, California; trailing in the latest county report), Kashif Wasim (New Haven Unified School District, Trustee Area 4, California; trailing), Qasim Lodhi (Union City Council, District 4, California; trailing), Najla AlSweel (Metuchen Board of Education, New Jersey; awaiting an official county source), and Elham Hussain (Carteret Board of Education, New Jersey; awaiting an official county source).

3. What the sample shows

3.1 Scrutiny that states its own limits

On November 4, Fox News Digital published a news article on congressman-elect Adam Hamawy under the headline "Dem newcomer heads to Washington despite past ties to al Qaeda-linked group." The article reports his past volunteer work with the Benevolence International Foundation, a charity later designated over terrorism financing, and court records showing that he accompanied Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman on a 1991 trip, translated for him at a press conference and testified for the defense at his federal trial. It quotes Andrew McCarthy, the former prosecutor in that trial, noting that Hamawy's testimony "did more to bolster the prosecution's proof of a jihadist terrorism conspiracy against the United States than to help the accused." And it closes its factual account with an explicit limit: "The reporting has not established that Hamawy personally participated in terrorist activities or knowingly supported al Qaeda through his humanitarian work in Bosnia."

This is sustained, uncomfortable scrutiny of a new congressman's past associations. It is also original reporting that carries its exculpatory context and states what it has not established. We record it as scrutiny within recognizable journalistic bounds, whatever one thinks of the news judgment behind it.

3.2 The escalation step

Exactly two weeks later, the same associations reappeared in a different register. On November 18, American Family News (AFN) published "Hamawy, set to help govern U.S., won't denounce its enemy," built around an earlier CNN interview, undated in the piece, and a November 16 segment of the radio program Washington Watch. In it, Jihad Watch director Robert Spencer says of the congressman-elect: "It's just staggering. It's practically like electing Mohammed Atta to the United States Congress." The headline's construction, in which Iran becomes America's enemy that a newly elected American official "won't denounce," does work the underlying interview does not do.

The same day, AFN published a guest commentary, "Let's review dangerous beliefs of Muslims headed to Congress," which AFN's own editor's note identifies as first published by The Washington Stand. It frames the election results as a constitutional problem: "questions continue to abound over how the troubling views and past ties of some will coexist with swearing an oath to the U.S. Constitution."

Between the November 4 article and these two November 18 items, the factual record did not change. What changed is the register: from reporting that states its limits to commentary comparing an elected official to a September 11 hijacker, and to a frame in which the religious identity of incoming members of Congress is itself the subject. This step, not the original reporting, is where the sample shows coverage treating Muslim identity as presumptively suspect.

3.3 Numbers as framing

On November 17, The Midwesterner covered the CAIR release under the headline "CAIR: Muslim federal, state, local candidates went 115 for 126 in 2026 midterms." Read as a record, "115 for 126" suggests failure, but the two numbers are not a win-loss pair: the article's own body quotes the figures accurately, 115 wins on November 3 and at least 126 across the year. The piece then attaches the Holy Land Foundation terrorism-financing case and a 1991 internal Muslim Brotherhood memo to what it calls "the effort to install Muslims in public office."

The Holy Land case and CAIR's unindicted co-conspirator designation are matters of public record, and reporting them is legitimate. The framing question this item raises is different: the attachment of that record to an election-results story about 126 individual winners, and the collective phrasing "install Muslims in public office," which describes the ordinary act of running for and winning office as a placement operation.

3.4 A community event becomes a politics story

On November 18, The Midwesterner reported that the Detroit Pistons will host a third-annual "Muslim Night" on November 29, with five dollars from each thirty-three-dollar ticket going to an Islamic relief charity. A promotional video invites the senator-elect: "And senator, we're saving you a seat." The

article connects the event to "a heated 2026 campaign season" and quotes hostile social-media reactions. It also notes, to its credit, that the team runs heritage nights for twenty cultures and has offered church fundraisers.

An invitation in an advertisement is not an attendance, and a basketball promotion is not a political act. The item is a useful example of how quickly an ordinary community event moves, in the current climate, into the register of national controversy.

3.5 What legitimate scrutiny looks like

The sample also contains coverage we judge to be legitimate scrutiny, and we include it deliberately. On November 16, The Week published a roundup of national commentary on El-Sayed's victory, quoting praise, Lydia Polgreen in The New York Times: "The gamble paid off," alongside pointed criticism, Rob Eshman in the Forward faulting the senator-elect's "tepid, tardy" disavowals of an ally's rhetoric and comparing his blaming of aid to Israel for domestic underfunding to the scapegoating of immigrant communities. That criticism engages the candidate's stated positions and associations. That is what opinion journalism is for.

On November 18, the New York Post covered Andrew Ross Sorkin's on-stage interview with Mayor Zohran Mamdani at the New York Times DealBook Summit, in which Sorkin asked whether Mamdani felt "an extra sort of responsibility" for his language in light of rising hate crimes against Jewish New Yorkers. The question is direct, on a matter of public concern, put to an elected official about his own public statement: legitimate scrutiny. The headline's characterization of the mayor as "flustered" and his answer as "tone-deaf" is the outlet's editorial layer, and readers can watch or read the exchange and judge for themselves.

3.6 A middle case

On November 18, the Algemeiner reported El-Sayed's November 17 interview at The Atlantic Summit, in which the senator-elect said Israel "ought to be a country that upholds equal rights for all of its citizens" and should not "identify itself with a culture or a faith." The interview is new and newsworthy, and the article quotes it at length. Its analysis paragraphs then argue that the remarks "effectively call into question" Jewish national self-determination, which is the outlet's interpretation rather than the senator-elect's words. We record this as a middle case: real news, framed in an advocacy register, from an outlet whose editorial identity makes its angle explicit.

3.7 An interview rendered as an identity story

On November 10, Townhall covered Hamawy's CNN interview under the headline "WATCH: Incoming Islamist Congressman Repeatedly Refuses to Call Iran an 'Adversary'." The piece quotes the exchange with Pamela Brown at length, a foreign-policy interview in which Hamawy eventually says of the Iranian government: "I think it's an authoritarian government. It's a dictatorship." The framing, however, makes the congressman-elect's religion the story's defining fact, from the headline's "Islamist Congressman" to a closing editor's note invoking September 11. The article then returns to the same decades-old material as the Fox News and AFN items: the 1991 road trip, the 1995 trial testimony and

the 1994 Bosnia volunteering, adding that Hamawy's district includes Todd Beamer's burial place. The interview circulated through an RNC Research clip, which the article embeds. The questions CNN put to Hamawy fall within legitimate scrutiny of an incoming congressman's foreign-policy views; the story Townhall builds around them is an identity story, and its evidentiary material is the same recycled record.

3.8 The mainstream register: the attacks are the story

On November 5, the Associated Press reported from Dearborn under the headline "After barrage of anti-Muslim attacks, Abdul El-Sayed savors Senate win." The article makes the campaign's anti-Muslim rhetoric itself a central fact: President Trump calling El-Sayed a "jihadist" who was "on the side of the terrorists," the Sharia-Free America Caucus in Congress, and Senator Ted Cruz's convention line "Sharia law has no place in America." It quotes the senator-elect: "They tried to demonize people because of how they pray… And Michigan — the whole Michigan — clapped back." The candidate's religion is central here too, but as the thing attacked rather than as a reason for suspicion. We include it as the sample's clearest example of the mainstream register: the same election, covered as a story about the attacks, not about the winners' faith.

4. Cross-cutting observations

- **Reused material. In the Hamawy coverage, a single November 16 Washington Watch segment supplied commentary material for two AFN items published on November 18, one of them an acknowledged reprint from The Washington Stand, and an earlier CNN interview reappeared alongside it. A reader encountering any single item would not necessarily know the material had already circulated.**
- **Old material, new hook. In the items that return to past associations (the Fox News, AFN, Washington Stand and Townhall pieces on Hamawy), the factual material cited is months or years old, and the new hook is the election itself. Other items in the sample do cover genuinely new developments, including the Atlantic and DealBook interviews and the upcoming Pistons event. No item in the sample reported a new act of wrongdoing by any winning candidate.**
- **Identity in the headline.** In five of the ten items, the candidates' religion appears in the headline or lead framing as the story's central fact: "Muslims headed to Congress," "Islamist Congressman," "Muslim Night," and the pairing of the first Muslim senator's name with terrorism-case history. The Associated Press headline names religion too, but to report the attacks directed at it, a different editorial act (see 3.8).
- **The counter-case is in the sample.** Straight and sympathetic coverage also appears within the same window, most clearly the Associated Press piece in section 3.8, which is why this study does not claim a uniform media environment.

5. What this study does not show

This is a study of ten items, not a census; it does not measure how common each pattern is. It makes no finding on the truth of any allegation quoted. It does not argue that scrutiny of Muslim elected officials is improper; it documents where the coverage examined stops interrogating records and starts interrogating identity. The sample is drawn from MJN's standing study intake for the fourth quarter of 2026, whose items remain unassessed research leads until each passes individual verification. The independent count in section 2 presents a documented minimum supported by race-by-race verification, not a complete national count; it works from the winners list CAIR and CAIR Action published on November 17.

6. Sources

All links verified on November 19, 2026.

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