



# Has the Democratic Party's Alliance with US Muslims Ruptured Over the LGBTQ Agenda?

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The 9/11 attacks that sparked the rise of Islamophobia in America attracted many American Muslims to the Democratic Party, which expressed solidarity with their battle against anti-Muslim bias. However, the support of the Democrats for LGBTQ and other progressive trends over the last decade has challenged that alliance, with many Muslims refusing to align with concepts that explicitly contradict basic Islamic values. Are the latest clashes over the LGBTQ agenda a sign of cracks in the alliance, or possibly even a rupture?

Islam is the third-largest religion in America after Christianity and Judaism. American Islam started to coalesce and become more visible in the fifties and sixties and again in the last decade, with an increase in immigration and the establishment of Muslim organizations like the MSA (Muslim Student Organization) and ICNA (Islamic Circle of North America). These organizations have the goal of spreading Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims.

Despite minor incidents of Islamophobia that have occurred from time to time, by and large, Muslims have lived quite peacefully in the US for decades. Many supported the Republican Party, which promoted the kinds of conservative values that are cherished by Muslim families. However, the September 11 attacks caused a rise in Islamophobia in the US, especially among Republicans.

This was a watershed moment for Islam in America. Many Muslims joined the Democratic Party, which expressed tolerance and empathy and joined them in their battle against Islamophobia.

The alliance between the Muslim community and the Democrats seemed a worthy alternative to the previous coalition with a purportedly “Islamophobic” right wing. The new “red-green alliance” came to be threatened, however, by increased Democratic support over the past decade for the LGBTQ community and other progressive trends that challenge and indeed contradict fundamental religious Muslim views.

Despite this problem, moderate Muslim voices managed to coexist with the LGBTQ community within the party and were able to maintain a respectful and cautious status quo. The support of Muslim members of Congress like Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) solidified the alliance and helped to create a bond between Democratic members of the LGBTQ community and the Muslim community. However, while some mainstream Muslim leaders were relatively tolerant of the LGBTQ agenda, more conservative Islamic religious figures strongly opposed any cooperation with that community on the grounds that it is impossible to cooperate with people on social-political matters while ignoring their “dangerous moral” acts.

The battle against Islamophobia, which brought the Democratic Party and the Muslim community together, has weakened as a unifying factor. The powerful and continuing influence of LGBTQ on Democratic policy in recent years has caused more and more mainstream American Muslim clerics, some of whom had previously supported cooperation with LGBTQ on political issues, to agree that the “moral agenda” of LGBTQ may threaten the future of Islam in America.

These clerics have begun to openly criticize progressive Democrats’ overwhelming support for the LGBTQ agenda. One of them is Imam Zaid Shakir, a prominent figure at Zaytuna College in California and a well-known preacher. In an interview in 2022, Shakir cited the progressive postmodern embrace of the LGBTQ agenda as the biggest threat to Islam in America, arguing that if Muslims adopt these trends, Islam in the US could be destroyed. Shakir did not name the Democratic Party but directed his criticism at the American left in general.

Similar views were expressed by Omar Suleiman, a young American cleric and founder of the Yaqeen Institute in Texas. Suleiman has been accused in the past of holding a soft stance towards the LGBTQ community, as he participated in protests against US migration policy that were affiliated with LGBTQ and embraced the LGBTQ community after the Orlando nightclub shooting in 2016. However, in a recent statement that went viral, Suleiman denied supporting the LGBTQ agenda and said he opposes any ideology that is contrary to the Qu'ran or the Sunna. He concurred with more conservative stances by disapproving of the "immoral" acts of the LGBTQ community and declared that Muslims must not participate in any activity undermining their religion.

In his statement, Suleiman alluded to Muslim politicians and activists including Congresswomen Omar and Tlaib as well as influential Muslim activist Linda Sarsour, who is known for her support for LGBTQ rights. Suleiman rejected any alliance with the LGBTQ community despite its support for Muslim rights and willingness to battle Islamophobia. In his view, Islamic principles cannot be compromised for the sake of political give and take.

While neither Shakir nor Suleiman referred explicitly to the Democratic Party, a more direct statement was made by Sheikh Dr. Yasir Qadhi of the Islamic Seminary of America in Texas. Qadhi is one of the most influential mainstream Muslim clerics in the US. About a decade ago, he believed cautious cooperation with the LGBTQ community, which had gained great political power, would benefit the Muslim community, especially in its battle against Islamophobia. However, like Shakir and Suleiman, Qadhi came to believe that the increasing impact of the LGBTQ agenda on the progressive left, particularly the left's recent attempts to redefine norms of gender and sexuality among Muslim children at schools, is a red line.

In a sermon at Epic Masjid in June 2023 that also went viral, Qadhi directly criticized the Democratic Party while addressing a recent incident in Canada. A teacher at North Edmonton's Londonderry Junior High School had scolded a Muslim student for refusing to participate in Pride Month activities, and even accused the child of not being a real Canadian if he disagreed with those progressive values. The teacher drew a parallel between the participation of non-Muslim students in Ramadan activities and the participation of Muslim students

in Pride activities, both of which she said should be required to show mutual respect.

Qadhi said this incident resembled other progressive aggressions against American Muslims that had taken place in Maryland and Detroit and symbolized the hypocrisy of the Democratic left, which claims to be tolerant and empathetic towards the Muslim community but only so long as it aligns with progressive values. Qadhi believes the embrace of Muslims by the Democratic Party after 9/11 was an attempt to portray itself as tolerant and pluralistic when in reality it is a “fraud”, because the Democrats do not respect conservative and religious values that contradict their progressive universal agenda.

Qadhi pointed out that the teacher’s instruction to the Muslim student to “go back where you came from” is deeply ironic, as North America is a continent of immigrants. In Qadhi’s view, this instruction reflects the “white supremacy” that still exists in North America -- even among the American left, which has always touted its multiculturalism even as it distinguished between white Irish immigrants and brown-skinned immigrants from the East.

These mainstream American imams represent large segments of the Muslim community who are trying to remain faithful to the tenets of Islamic tradition. Many Muslims in America feel caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, segments of the Republican Party still harbor anti-Islam sentiments resulting from the 9/11 attacks. On the other, the Democratic Party promotes progressive values that contradict basic Islamic beliefs.

The rise of the progressive LGBTQ agenda has prompted cooperation among various groups within the American Muslim community, which is not monolithic. For example, North American Muslim parents of different ethnicities have come together to protest “gender ideology” studies and LGBTQ “indoctrination” of Muslim children. A joint declaration, “Navigating Differences: Clarifying Sexual and Gender Ethics in Islam”, was signed and endorsed by hundreds of North American Muslim clerics from various backgrounds – Sunni, Shia, Sufi, Salafi, etc. – notwithstanding their theological differences. These clerics chose to join hands in order to clarify the non-negotiable Islamic position on sexuality and gender ethics, and in the process demonstrate that while Muslims are law-abiding citizens, they will not compromise basic Islamic values.

There is potential here for inter-religious collaboration between Muslims and Orthodox Jews to bolster their shared conservative and religious values. This can contribute to the healthy coexistence of these two important communities in America and highlight the joint struggle of Muslims and Jews. It might even temper the blatant anti-Israel attitude of some American Muslims.

It appears that the rise of LGBTQ's influence on politics in the last decade, especially in recent years, has caused fissures in the alliance between the Democratic Party and the American Muslim community. If the Republican Party continues to display elements of Islamophobia, as it did during the past (and possibly future) Donald Trump presidential era, the Democratic Party might continue to be considered by American Muslims to be the lesser of two evils. But while American Muslims still care about Islamophobia, Islam's basic principles are now facing an unprecedented challenge in Democratic progressivism. Many in the Muslim community will have to recalculate their strategic social-political moves to carve out a path that will allow them to live safely as a minority while preserving Islamic values in America for future generations.

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