

Strategies to Increase Effective Political Engagement

THE CHALLENGE

American Muslims are underrepresented across the different levels of government. As such their voices and concerns are not adequately reflected or addressed in policy.

THE SOLUTION

Although American Muslims have made significant gains in voter registration over the past five years, only 78% of eligible American Muslims are registered to vote, the lowest of all surveyed faith groups. Given that American Muslims make up just 1% of the population, other forms of political engagement are vital for increasing representation.

In 2020 we polled Americans about their political engagement beyond voting. We found that 22% of American Muslims attended a town hall meeting, making them among the mostly likely groups to do so. At 16%, American Muslims, along with Jewish Americans, are the most likely to volunteer for a political campaign. Finally, 21% of American Muslims made a financial contribution to a political campaign, on par with the general public.

ATTEND A TOWN HALL MEETING

22%

VOLUNTEER FOR A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

16%

FINANCIALLY CONTRIBUTE TO A POLITICAL CAMPAIGN

21%

1 active voluntary involvement with civic bodies as part of a public service

2 designation as an official volunteer or staff for political candidates' campaigns

3 official appointment in a government body

4 organizing fundraisers and donations for political candidates in a systematic way.

ISPU's case study, **Strategies to Increase Effective Political Engagement**, follows a group of American Muslims in northern Virginia ("the NoVa group") who took measures to create and nurture an ecosystem to improve their community's political engagement, including roles like...

THE GOAL

The NoVa group's goal was to create systemic change; develop, foster, and animate high-quality American Muslim leadership; and create a multifaceted ecosystem to ascend American Muslims into the highest levels of American politics. Their tangible goal was to have an American Muslim in a statewide office by 2017.



ACTIONS: The NoVa group operated based on three guiding principles:



Scalability. Envisioning an environment where the barriers to entry and cost of each successive American Muslim individual to enter into and advance within the political system would be progressively lower.



Collaboration over competition. Operating with an abundance approach, the belief that there is room for all Muslim individuals and organizations to cooperate for collective benefit.



Talent pipeline. Creating a system to encourage American Muslims to serve at lower levels of government with the potential to advance higher.

6 RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO INCREASE EFFECTIVE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT



Set tangible goals. The strategic plan should include tangible goals by which to measure progress. For example: a desired number of political representatives, American Muslims working at a certain level of government, or achievement of a given milestone by a certain time.



Undertake community outreach education. Community buy-in is fundamental to the long-term success of an initiative to increase political representation.



Develop strategy and supportive systems. In order to achieve stated goals, a clear strategic plan is fundamental to the development of pathways to success.



Conduct analysis and reflection. The NoVa group's very inception was the result of a group of concerned community members' self-reflection after a spirited election cycle. Reflection at each step of engagement and after each election cycle must occur.



Use levers of local engagement strategically: investment, volunteers, votes.

Investment: The key lever used by the NoVa group was financial contributions made on behalf of the entire local American Muslim community to strategically back viable candidates.

Volunteers: The NoVa group recommended quality volunteer candidates for campaigns

Votes: Once committed to a race, they also mobilized American Muslim voters and advanced further community-candidate relationships.



Create avenues for sustainability of vision. In order to create an effective ecosystem and a self-sustaining cycle of civic and political engagement, American Muslims must have sustained involvement in civic engagement through activities across organizations, communities, and candidates, irrespective of election cycles.

THE RESULTS

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

2010 (group's inception) = 10 Muslim held civic board positions



2020 = nearly 100 Muslims held civic board positions at city, county, and state levels.

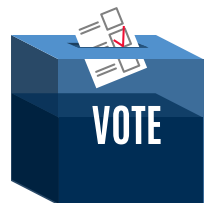


APPOINTMENTS

The appointment of an American Muslim to the Virginia Governor's Cabinet as Secretary of Education in 2018 is directly related to the efforts of the NoVa group. The group recommended him as a volunteer for several local campaigns. He ran for the seats in the Virginia legislature twice, losing both times. His presence in the civic space left an impression.

ELECTIONS

In 2019, Virginia elected eight American Muslim officials, the most of any other U.S. state.



TALENT PIPELINE

Several political campaign volunteers and staffers appointed through the NoVa group's efforts have risen to national recognition.

Methodology

To collect data for this report, we conducted five in-depth participant interviews. Participants were contacted using snowball sampling.

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