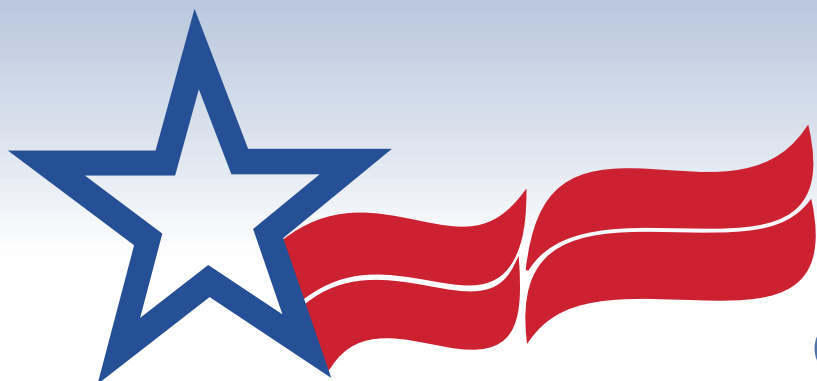


ARAB AMERICAN INSTITUTE
ELECTION REPORT

2008



OUR VOICE.
OUR FUTURE.



OUR VOICE. OUR FUTURE. YALLA VOTE '08

Just over a year ago, the Arab American Institute introduced plans for **Yalla Vote '08** – a campaign “branded” more than twenty years ago that, in 2008, would be distinguished by resources and tools never before applied. This year, the Yalla Vote initiative served the Arab American community by:

- Building the **first national coalition of Arab American organizations**—the Yalla Vote Coalition—to create, support, and organize around a common agenda.
- Providing Arab American activists with **civic engagement and media training** to enhance their voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts.
- Placing **Yalla Vote Field Organizers** on the ground in six states to mobilize and support local communities.
- Creating **virtual phone banks** to reach more than 80,000 households, mobilizing and **quantifying** the Arab American vote **for the first time**.
- Hosting **www.yallavote.org**, a dynamic, on-line resource for Arab American activists

And we did all of this while continuing to offer the other programs that our community counts on:

- Convening **Candidates' Nights for Arab Americans** to meet and talk with candidates for local, state, and federal office
- Publishing resources like the **Congressional Directory**, **Scorecard**, **Countdown**, and more
- Serving as the nation's only **Census Information Center** on Arab Americans –providing media, academia, researchers, and officials with key demographic information about our community.
- Hosting the **Kahlil Gibran Spirit of Humanities Awards Gala**, which this year featured Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, Academy-Award winner Sam Waterston, and internationally renowned journalist Rami Khouri.
- Organizing **Arab American Service Day** in Washington, DC to showcase our community's commitment to public and social service.

What AAI and the AAI Foundation accomplished in 2008 is extraordinary – a historic moment for our community and for our nation. **But now the heavy lifting starts.**

A new Congress and Administration are taking office, ready to design, review, and implement policies. And AAI already is preparing and distributing the **resources you need** to make sure that Arab Americans play a role on the national stage, in the national debate, and in our nation's future.

We are prepared, willing, and honored to continue to serve as a bridge between government agencies and the Arab American community. And we hope that *you* will continue to stay informed and engaged with our community, our issues, our government –and with AAI.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James J. Zogby".

James J. Zogby
President

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George R. Salem".

George R. Salem
Chair

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The National Leadership Conference

The Yalla Vote '08 campaign, "Our Voice. Our Future" got its start in October 2007 at the Arab American Institute and Foundation's *National Leadership Conference* in Dearborn, Michigan.

The 600-plus Arab Americans from across the country who participated during the three-day program were addressed by video or surrogate from the campaigns of **Ron Paul**, **Bill Richardson**, **Mike Gravel**, and **Dennis Kucinich**. They were also treated to special video presentations by **Barack Obama**, **Hillary Clinton**, and **John Edwards**. Additionally, NLC attendees heard from DNC Chairman **Howard Dean**; Senators **John Sununu** (R-NH) and **Debbie Stabenow** (D-MI); Congressmen **Charles Boustany** (R-LA), **John Dingell** (D-MI) and **John Conyers** (D-MI); Michigan Democratic Party Chairman **Mark Brewer**; and Michigan Republican Party Chairman **Gerry Mason**.

The guest list, however, was not the only highlight of the conference. For the first time, Arab Americans endorsed and supported an ambitious program to raise visibility and bring our voice to the political table. Draft language was widely circulated among Arab American political leaders and organizations for their input, and the resulting National Declaration was endorsed by over fifty local, regional, and national Arab American organizations. These organizations formed the backbone of our **Yalla Vote Coalition**.

Yalla Vote, supported by a large coalition of Arab Americans across the country, was set in motion during those few days in October. This report highlights the results of a year's efforts to engage, educate and empower Arab Americans in the political process.

The Yalla Vote field interns

Because AAI was committed to grassroots community participation in this critical election, we provided several cities with organizing interns. Before taking up their assignments in the summer of 2008, AAI brought the young Arab Americans to Washington, D.C. for an intensive training session. These **Yalla Vote field organizers** were given a tour of the political heart of the city, including appointments at the DNC and RNC headquarters and a trip to the Hill, a half-day session with **Campus Progress' Media Boot Camp**, and a two-day Voter Engagement Program designed for Yalla Vote by **Wellstone Action**. The program was open to Yalla Vote Coalition members as well as members of the Arab American Institute in the National Capital Region. Participants acquired tools for engaging voters in the national political process, connecting on the issues that directly impact them, and identifying candidates who will fight for their interests.

Our field organizers were ready to work with Arab Americans in their communities to 'get out the vote', and Yalla Vote was launched in California, Florida, New York, and Ohio, as well as in our Midwest office in Dearborn, Michigan. Armed with comprehensive State Guides that the AAI staff researched and assembled for 12 states, the field organizers returned home to meet their hosts and hit the ground running.

Watch videos of Presidential candidates Bill Richardson, Ron Paul, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and John Edwards addressing Arab Americans at the National Leadership Conference by visiting AAI on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/AAIUSA>

For more about the Yalla Vote field organizers and their stories on the ground, please visit:

<http://www.yallavote.org>

The dedication, enthusiasm, hard work, and creativity of our Yalla Vote organizers throughout the summer and fall deserve praise: kudos to **Matt Elias** (New York), **Mia Kamal** (Florida), **Jana Al-Mukaddam Musleh** and **Amir Eustice** (Michigan), **Nadia Zaiem** (Ohio), and **Samar Alhinnawi** (California).

Our thanks to the following individuals and organizations for their help in hosting our Yalla Vote field organizers:

- **Dr. Maha Ansara**, President of the **Arab American Community Center** in Orlando, graciously donated office space and support to Field Organizer Mia Kamal.
- **Rami Nuseir** from the **American Mideast Leadership Network** and **Lena Al-Husseini** from the **Arab American Family Support Center** both donated office space for AAI's Field Organizer Matt Elias in New York.
- **Dr. Yahya Basha** donated space for the Michigan Field office
- The California field office was hosted by **Mike Malley** of **FAM Vans, Inc.**

Voter Engagement training with Wellstone Action

In all, AAI/F sponsored three Wellstone Action **Voter Engagement Training Programs** during the spring of 2008. Arab American activists participated in workshops held in Dearborn, Michigan from the Midwest region, in Washington, D.C. for the National Capital Region, and in New Jersey, from the Mid Atlantic states. Participants took away a wealth of information during a two-day program that covered such topics as "The Building Blocks of Voter Engagement", "Components of a Voter Engagement Program", and "Grassroots Organizing Fundamentals".

AAI/F trained more than 100 Arab Americans to engage our community on the issues, bring them to the polls, and serve as the Arab American voice in other political arenas. The attendees were charged with bringing what they had learned back to their own communities, training others to use the skills they had acquired.

VISIBILITY AND OUTREACH

AAI and AAI/F at the National Conventions

This year's back-to-back Democratic and Republican National Conventions made for a busy two weeks at the Arab American Institute and the Foundation. In the Mile High City and the Twin Cities, we were there, with two incredible programs that showcased two very different sides of Arab American life.

Comedy Kabob at the DNC

The Bar Standard nightclub in Denver, Colorado was transformed into a comedy club for an unforgettable night of raise-the-roof comedy, courtesy of Dean Obeidallah, Ahmed Ahmed, and Maz Jobrani, of Comedy Central's "Axis of Evil Comedy Tour". Two sold-out shows poked fun at life as an Arab American in a post-"9/11" world. Guests, which included Democratic party officials, delegates, and Obama staffers, were treated to an Arabic feast and came away with a new perspective on Arab American life.

Dr. Zogby hosted a press briefing at the DNC for **Arab American delegates** to discuss the role of Arab Americans in the 2008 election with members of the press. In addition to the issues of economy and health care, Dr. Zogby and a distinguished panel fielded questions

about the war in Iraq, the Middle East conflict and civil liberties. Dr. Zogby also fulfilled his role as co-convenor of the National Democratic Ethic Coordinating Council and served as a super-delegate for presidential candidate Barack Obama.

Mezza in Minneapolis: the RNC

The RNC coincided with the start of Ramadan this year; the AAI and AAIF hosted an elegant evening of Arabic culture, with a dinner buffet donated by **Majdi Wadi** and Holy Land Bakery, traditional Arabic music, and a display of Arabian jewelry, antique *abaiya*, and a variety of *keffiyah*, loaned by the Arab American National Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. AAI Chairman **George Salem** served as Master of Ceremonies. Republican party guests attending the event learned a great deal about Arabic culture and the mission of the Arab American Institute and Foundation.

Throughout the week, AAI acted as a liaison between the media and Arab Americans on hand for the convention, helping to facilitate interviews and provide research materials to the media that attended.

Online 24/7

AAI/F created new online resources – not just to share tools and research, but to connect activists, to share stories of what was working on the ground, and to keep up with the Hill. The blog format of www.yallavote.org allowed the Yalla Vote Field Organizers to log on and post updates on their activities in real time, providing a first-person narrative to the elections from an Arab-American point of view. Additionally, AAI staff used the yallavote.org website to post calendar events, action alerts, and reactions to news stories in real time.

AAI has been collecting stories about your experiences in the 2008 elections. To read more, visit us at www.aaiusa.org/2008electionreport and email your stories and pictures to communications@aaiusa.org

On our main website, www.aaiusa.org, members were kept up-to-date on a variety of issues. Voter education materials, including a state-by-state roster of Arab American candidates in local, state, and national races; an interactive database on how, when, and where to vote; summaries of presidential candidate opinions on issues of importance to our constituency; and articles about our issues, candidates, and campaign activities were regularly updated. AAI also used the Internet to quickly disseminate critical information to its members, through action alerts and regular news blasts.

AAI in the media

The Yalla Vote initiatives received substantial visibility in local, national, and international media outlets. Papers from the *New York Times* (“Arab Muslims in Brooklyn Find Power in the Voting Booth”) to *The National* (“Campaign Urges Arabs to Vote”) to *The Boston Globe* (“Arab-Americans yearning Long for inclusion”) highlighted the “ambitious drive called Yalla Vote” and the efforts of our members and volunteers to activate the Arab American base. Outlets that covered AAI and Yalla Vote events and initiatives included: *Al Jazeera*, *CNN*, *Roll Call*, *Politico*, *Reuters*, *BBC*, *USAToday*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Daily News*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, to name a few.

The Yalla Vote field organizers also garnered attention in their local media markets. **Nadia Zaiem**’s efforts in Ohio caught the attention of the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. They noted that the “cry of ‘yalla’ resounds on the shady streets off Lorain Avenue, in Cleveland’s Little Arabia”. The Candidates Nights across the county attracted press attention as well. **Maram Abdelhamid**, the Arab American Institute’s national field and political coordinator, received praise in the *Florida Times-Union* for her efforts to organize the Jacksonville Florida Candidates’ Night.

In addition to the significant coverage Yalla Vote gained in the mainstream media, a concerted media campaign effort was directed at the Arab American community. AAI produced two Public Service Announcements. In addition to a Youtube viral campaign, the PSAs aired on MBN, ART and LBC satellite in the U.S., and other local networks for the month leading up to the election. Television programs that target Arab Americans also highlighted the AAI’s GOTV message. ART’s “What’s Happening” ran a segment featuring Yalla Vote.

And *Dandana TV's* "Arab American Beat" filmed a special on Arab American efforts in the presidential campaigns and prominently featured the Yalla Vote message in the show.

As well as traveling to events across the country, Dr. Zogby appeared on several TV and radio programs to encourage Arab Americans to vote, including the *BBC*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, in addition to local radio programs across the country.

Visibility work with the Yalla Vote Coalition

From walking the neighborhoods and knocking on doors to developing public service announcements and "get out the vote" tools, the Institute and the Foundation focused their energies on getting out the Arab American vote in the 2008 elections. What follows are just three highlights of the visibility work AAI undertook across the country, often in partnership with members of our Yalla Vote Coalition:

- In the early months of the Yalla Vote campaign, **ACCESS California** (Arab American Community Center for Economic and Social Services) hosted **Dr. James Zogby** at a community rally where he spoke about the importance of getting Arab Americans involved this election season.
- At a Yalla Vote community rally held in July at the Arab American National Museum, **Jim Allen**, Chair of the **American Arab Chamber of Commerce**, made a speech to motivate the Michigan vote. Dearborn City Councilwoman **Suzanne Sareini** spoke about the importance of having Arab American precinct delegates in both parties, and State Representative **Barbara Farrah** emphasized the positive impact Arab Americans have in the state legislature.
- In Virginia, more than 200 people gathered for a summer **Kabob-B-Q** hosted by the AAI and AAIF. All candidates for Virginia local, state, and federal office were invited - and many showed up. It gave Arab Americans in Virginia an early opportunity to directly interact with candidates and state party chairs.

GETTING OUT THE VOTE

Candidate nights and Community forums

Candidates nights and community forums are a vital part of the work that the Arab American Institute and Foundation does on behalf of Arab Americans across the country. In 2008, AAI/F hosted four candidate nights: two in Florida, one in Virginia, and one in New York. Dr. Zogby also taped a special episode of his public affairs program, *Viewpoint*, at a town meeting in Dearborn, Michigan, dedicated to discussing the issues of 2008 with an audience of Arab Americans from the area.

All four evenings were well attended by candidates, campaign surrogates, and Arab American voters. In response to a request made by AAI of both presidential campaigns, candidate **Barack Obama** sent a personal, video message to Arab Americans to be aired at the events.

South Florida Candidates Night was co-sponsored by the **Center for Voter Advocacy**. Arab Americans and Muslim Americans from all over the region came to the event in September to hear the candidates speak and discuss how to get involved in the 2008 elections.

To view the message Barack Obama addressed to Arab Americans during AAI's Candidate Nights, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DbMmfENikHO>

Jacksonville, Florida kicked off the Presidential debates with a Yalla Vote Candidates Night, co-hosted by the **Ramallah Club**. The community had an opportunity to engage their local candidates, as well as surrogates for the national candidates.

The Brooklyn, New York Candidates Night was a collaborative effort with local organizations. The two Presidential candidates were represented by their State Directors. Also on hand: 13th Congressional District candidates **Mike McMahon (D)**, and **Bob Straniere (R)**, Assemblywoman **Janelle Hyer-Spencer**, **Lucretia Regina-Potter**, and **Pedro Monge**.

AAI held the **20th Annual Virginia Candidates Night** on October 5th. Over 300 guests filled the banquet hall in Arlington. **Helen Samhan**, Executive Director of the AAI Foundation, acted as master of ceremonies. Serving as the surrogate for the McCain Campaign, Congressman **Tom Davis (VA-11th)** took the stage soon after Governor **Tim Kaine** spoke on behalf of the Obama Campaign. Both surrogates shared their views on the presidential election and explained their candidate's position on issues regarding healthcare and the economy. Several candidates, including candidate **Mark Ellmore (VA-8th)**, Congressman **Jim Moran (VA-8th)**, candidate **John Reeder** (Arlington County Board), candidate **Barbara Favola** (Arlington County Board), and candidate **Judy Feder (VA-10th)** addressed the issues of greatest concern to Arab Americans in Virginia and stressed the importance of participation in the campaigning and election process.

Dr. Zogby brought a **special episode of Viewpoint** to Dearborn, Michigan in August to host an issues forum with Arab Americans across the state. Policy experts were on hand to discuss the economy, social services, civil liberties, and foreign policy. **Ismael Ahmed**, Director, Michigan Department of Human Services, began the conversation by stating that "here in Michigan, the economy is the issue." The forum never turned away from the economy; this would be a recurring theme leading up to the election. In fact, two polls in September and October reinforced the point that the economy, not foreign policy as might be assumed, was the number one issue for Arab Americans in this election cycle. In addition to discussing the issues driving our community's vote, participants outlined and strategized on GOTV efforts for the primary and general elections.

To watch this and other episodes of Washington Watch, please visit: <http://www.aaiusa.org/dr-zogby/38/viewpoint>

The Yalla Vote Virtual Phone Bank and Automated Calls

By mid-October, AAI shifted into full "Get Out The Vote" (GOTV) mode. Staff volunteers, both at the Washington, D.C. office and the field offices across the country, gave their time at night and on the weekends to facilitate a massive campaign, the **Yalla Vote Virtual Phone Bank**. Working with **NALEO** (the National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials), AAI adapted NALEO's online phone bank program for use as a Yalla Vote tool to reach Arab American voters.

Yalla Vote volunteers were able to reach thousands of registered voters in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Florida. Tens of thousands of voters were directly contacted by volunteers in key congressional districts in the five-state campaign (Michigan, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Ohio).

Over 500 volunteers signed up with AAI to make calls. On-site phone banks were organized in Washington, D.C.; Dearborn and Ann Arbor, Michigan; Cleveland, Ohio; Orlando, Florida; New York City, and Anaheim, California in the final two weeks, which allowed us to double our reach.

In the final days before the election, Yalla Vote GOTV automated messages reached over 80,000 Arab American households. A special message went out on November 3rd from Arab American radio personality **Casey Kasem** and Pennsylvania Governor **Ed Rendell**.

This unprecedented effort by our volunteers took voter outreach to a new level and helped to raise awareness and activism among Arab American voters in the 2008 elections.

ISSUES AND POLICY

AAI and CIMEP at the Iowa Caucuses

In the lead up to the Iowa caucuses on January 3, 2008, AAI supported **Concerned Iowan's for Middle East Peace (CIMEP)** in organizing substantive discussions on the peace process. AAI helped CIMEP draft and circulate a petition asking candidates to take a simple pledge, which read: "If elected President, I will do everything possible to promote negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians to achieve peace and security for Israel and a secure and contiguous state for the Palestinians."

The coalitions organized a speaking tour in November of 2007, with **Daniel Levy** and **Ghaith al-Omari**, to educate Iowans on the peace process.

CIMEP and AAI members asked the candidates tough questions about their proposed Middle East policy and priorities. Not only did the initiative receive support from the public (2000 caucus goers) and gain the candidates' attention, it also garnered press recognition. Early on, the group's effort received editorial support from the *Des Moines Register*. And one *New York Times* reporter noted, "I may not always agree with you, but thank you for holding their feet to the fire."

"The Stakes Have Never Been Higher"

On February 29, 2008, Dr. Zogby addressed the **Los Angeles World Affairs Council**. His speech, "**The Stakes Have Never Been Higher**", continued to focus public attention on the state of affairs in the United States and its relationships with the Middle East. Dr. Zogby examined the deleterious effects that U.S. policy in the Middle East has had on that region: the missed opportunities, the ignorance, arrogance, and political wrangling that has dug an even deeper hole. "Vote like your life depends on it," Dr. Zogby said. "Because it does."

Dr. Zogby gave this speech at multiple forums, including the **Chicago Council for Global Affairs** and the **Cleveland City Club**, and it was broadcast on public television and radio. "The Stakes" in its entirety is available in printed book and web-based PDF formats. It was widely disseminated at Yalla Vote venues and the Democratic and Republican National Conventions this summer.

The Issues

During the summer, AAI crafted issue briefs on such topics as civil liberties, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq. **On civil liberties:** "In the aftermath of September 11th, Arab Americans, like all Americans, became even more dedicated to protecting the United States from further attack, but also believe that this important goal can be achieved without threatening the civil liberties of any American." **On Iraq:** "Arab Americans want a responsible end to the war in Iraq and strongly support the policies laid out in the 2006 Iraq Study Group Report; working with all of Iraq's constituencies to achieve political reform and national reconciliation that will bring about stable, democratic governance based on tolerance, transparency, and respect for liberal institutions." **On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:** "Arab Americans want U.S. diplomacy that will work towards the creation of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security - a Palestine that is viable, contiguous, sovereign and independent alongside an Israel that has secure and recognized borders." **On Lebanon:** "Arab Americans want the United States to support the continued efforts of the Lebanese people to achieve reform, reconciliation and national unity." Talking points on these topics served as a resource for both our constituency and the Obama and McCain campaigns.

Go to www.aaiusa.org, click on **Get Involved > Get Involved > Election Central** to review AAI's talking points and the candidates' positions on the issues.

And Dr. Zogby opened his testimony before the **DNC 2008 Platform Committee** with these words: “I am Arab American. My family came to this great country from Lebanon almost a century ago. They, like hundreds of thousands of other Arab immigrants, came because of the freedom America promised, and the opportunity it provided.” He brought with him copies of platform planks written by members of AAI that had been submitted to both campaigns. “The Platform you are writing will send a message, both to the American people and the world. More than just a political document, it will describe the policies we will pursue and the values on which we will stand. It can, we believe, reinforce the hopes of so many that change is on the way.”

To read the entire text of Dr. Zogby’s testimony, [got to the AAI website > Dr. Zogby > Speeches](#)

Platform plank parties

This summer offered a unique opportunity to participate in the political process. The call went out over the Internet from the Obama campaign: submit your platform planks! And for the first time, the Republican Party asked Americans to draft and submit platform planks, as well. AAI encouraged its membership and endorsing organizations to take advantage of this opportunity to let our political leadership know what issues are important to us, and what we expect from our next President. Members around the U.S. responded, using the language of the National Declaration as the backbone of their planks. “Platform Plank Parties” were held in Virginia, D.C., Ohio, California, Michigan, and Florida. The Los Angeles and Virginia chapters of **NAAP** co-hosted platform parties and submitted their platform planks to both the Republican and Democratic parties prior to the nominating conventions. The Arab American Democrats in Anaheim, California drafted platform planks in response to our request, as well.

Racism in Politics

This year, “Arab-baiting” began with rumors in the primaries that Senator Barack Obama was a “Secret Muslim”, fueled by an indiscriminate e-mail and Internet campaign. But what had begun as a barrier to participation and inclusion became, by the end of the election season, a catalyst for Arab American engagement in the election.

Attacks against Arab Americans and Muslim Americans gained momentum as the election season wore on: Michelle Malkin’s hysterical reaction to Rachel Ray’s “keffiyeh”; the DVD *Obsession: Radical Islam’s War Against the West* was distributed to over 28 million households in key battle ground states around the anniversary of 9/11; Rush Limbaugh claimed that Obama was an “Arab”, and implied that being of Arab descent disqualified one for public office. *The Wall Street Journal* picked up an anti-Muslim blog’s accusations of ‘guilt by association’ against Mazen Asbahi, volunteer national coordinator for Arab American and Muslim American affairs for Barack Obama’s campaign, which led to his voluntary resignation.

Doubt was cast on Senator Obama’s heritage; “Arab” and “Muslim” became pejoratives on mainstream media outlets and on the campaign trail, exacerbating racial biases. The campaign trail was not immune. After a McCain supporter said she did not trust Senator Obama because he was “an Arab”, Senator John McCain defended his rival: “No, ma’am. He’s a decent family man and citizen....”

Prominent voices began to question the racism, conscious or unconscious, in these remarks. *CNN*’s Campbell Brown editorialized, “So what if Obama was Arab or Muslim?” Ben Affleck stated, on *Real Time with Bill Maher*, that “Arab and good person are not antithetical to one another”. And Colin Powell, on *Meet the Press*, asked and answered: “Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer’s no, that’s not America.”

In the days leading up to the election, accusations were made that Rashid Khalidi, Middle East scholar and distinguished professor at Columbia University, was a PLO spokesman and, by extension, a terrorist. Reputable journalists came immediately to Khalidi’s defense; the simple fact of being Arab or Muslim was no longer a reliable campaign weapon.

ARAB AMERICANS AND THE 2008 ELECTIONS

“How Arab Americans Will Vote in 2008 And Why”

A poll commissioned by AAI revealed a historic shift of Arab Americans support towards the Democratic ticket in both their September and October polls.

According to the second of two **Arab American Institute / Zogby International nationwide polls** of 504 likely Arab American voters, 54 percent identified themselves as Democrats. The number of Arab Americans identifying as Democrats has steadily increased since 2002, while the percentage of those identifying as Republican has been declining. Until 2000, Democrats held a slight edge over Republicans among Arab Americans; today, twice as many Arab Americans identify themselves as Democrats than Republicans.

To read the poll results and analysis, visit <http://www.aaiusa.org/resources/384/the-arab-american-vote>

The AAI/ZI poll showed that 64 percent of Arab Americans favored Senator Barack Obama in a two way race. Support for Sen. Obama only dropped by two percent when third-party candidates were added. When “leaners” were added, AAI projected a final 68/27 Obama win among Arab American voters.

With almost two-thirds of Arab Americans negatively impacted by the recent economic crisis, it is no surprise that 79 percent named “Jobs and/or the Economy” as one of the most important issues in this election. 69 percent felt that Senator Obama handled the issue better than his opponent, compared to 23 percent for Senator McCain.

Arab Americans on the Move

Arab Americans made their voices heard in the elections this year: running for office at the state and national level; working for the Presidential campaigns; volunteering at the polls; and getting out the vote. Rashida Tlaib, David-Imad Ramadan, and Majid Al-Bahadli are just three of the thousands of Arab Americans who played an active role.

Rashida Tlaib is known to residents of Michigan’s 12th District by name: she’s visited their homes on her door-to-door campaign, and she’s part of a growing group of those who work in “service politics”. Tlaib, a recently elected Michigan State Representative, says she is a perfect example of why everyone should be involved in politics. “I am a product of all the work that the Arab American community has put forward so far. If it wasn’t the community mobilizing themselves and organizing their voice, I would not have ever run for office. If we give up now, then we will go back to the years where we weren’t represented at National Conventions or even viewed as an important constituency.”

David-Imad Ramadan has been a Republican activist at both a grassroots and national level since he moved to Washington, DC in 1989. Over the last twenty years, he has worked on every presidential campaign on the Republican side and has been involved in several gubernatorial and senatorial campaigns. He is currently the Precinct Captain and Outreach Chair for Loudoun County Republicans, and in 2008, he was actively involved with the Republican Party of Virginia, the Arab American Coalition for McCain, and the Lebanese American Coalition for McCain. “Every vote counts!” Ramadan emphasized earlier this summer. “And everyone should be involved; we have a civic duty to be involved in politics and we have a social and cultural duty to our ancestry to vote. Arab Americans can talk to both sides of the aisles about issues that are 100% local or that affect us nationally. If we sit at home on Election Day, we can blame nobody but ourselves.”

Majid Al-Bahadli, Obama delegate from Washington State, danced on the floor of the Democratic National Convention this past August, cheered on by members of his state’s delegation. How he came to be there, the only Iraqi delegate on the floor, is an inspiration to us all. For nearly five years, he lived in a prisoner of war camp in the Saudi desert. There were some difficult years between his arrival in the U.S. and the day he became a citizen in 2000-although politics is his passion, he lay low for fear that his actions might jeopardize his impending naturalization. In 2008, he worked to get out the vote in his adopted Seattle, Washington and is running for City Council there.

2008 ARAB AMERICAN CANDIDATES

STATE	CANDIDATE	RESULT
Arizona	State Senator Paula Aboud (D-28 th District) for Re-election	WON
California	U.S. Representative Darrell Issa (R-49 th District) for Re-election	WON
	Ferial Masry (D-37 th District) for State Assembly	LOST
Colorado	State Representative Joseph Rice (D-38 th District) for Re-election	WON
Connecticut	State Senator David Cappiello (R-5 th CD) for U.S. Representative	LOST
	State Representative William Hamzy (R-78 th District) for Re-election	WON
	State Representative Selim Noujaim (R-74 th District) for Re-election	WON
Illinois	Barrington Hills Village President Robert Abboud for U.S. Rep. (D-16 th District)	LOST
	Darin LaHood for State's Attorney (R-Peoria County)	LOST
Indiana	Governor Mitch Daniels (R) for Re-election	WON
Louisiana	U.S. Representative Charles Boustany, Jr. (R-7 th District) for Re-election	WON
Massachusetts	State Senator Steven Baddour (D-3 rd District) for Re-election	WON
Michigan	Judge David Allen (3 rd Circuit, Criminal Division) for Re-election	WON
	Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard (R) for Re-election	WON
	Judge Charlene Mekled Elder (3 rd Circuit, Family Division) for Re-election	WON
	Rashida Tlaib for State Representative (D-12 th District)	WON
	Justin Amash for State Representative (D-72 nd District)	WON
	Albert Abbasse for State Representative (D-72 nd District)	LOST
New Hampshire	U.S. Senator John E. Sununu (R) for Re-election	LOST
	State Representative Benjamin Baroody (D-13 th District) for Re-election	WON
New York	Richard Hanna for U.S. Representative (R-24)	LOST
Oregon	Nick Kahl for State Representative (D-49 th District)	WON
Pennsylvania	State Representative Camille "Bud" George (D-74 th District) for Re-election	WON
Rhode Island	State Senator Hanna Gallo (D-27 th District) for Re-election	WON
	State Senator Paul Jabbour (D-5 th District) for Re-election	WON
South Carolina	State Senator Vincent Shaheen (D-27 th District) for Re-election	WON
South Dakota	State Senator Gene Abdallah (R-10 th District) for Re-election	WON
Texas	State Representative Mark Strama (D-50 th District) for Re-election	WON
Vermont	State Representative Bill Aswad (D-Chittenden-3-1 District) for Re-election	WON
Virginia	Sam Rasoul (D-6 th District) for U.S. Representative	LOST
West Virginia	U.S. Representative Nick Rahall II (D-3 rd District) for Re-election	WON
	Delegate John Ellem (R-10 th District) for Re-election	WON

THE YALLA VOTE '08 CAMPAIGN WAS MADE POSSIBLE IN PART
BY THE GENEROSITY OF THE FOLLOWING FOUNDATIONS:

- ☆ CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK
- ☆ OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE
- ☆ THE ARCA FOUNDATION
- ☆ FOUR FREEDOMS FUND

