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## A RETURN OF FAITH IN MUSLIMS

### The Decline of Islamophobia in the United States

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#### Abstract

Recently, there has been a decline in *anti-Islam* or Islamophobia among the global community, including the Muslim community in the United States. Concrete evidence of this development can be seen in the permissibility of Muslims performing religious rituals in public spaces and the increasing number of Muslim representatives in the legislative and executive branches of government. This research explores the factors that led to the reduction of Islamophobic sentiments in New York, United States, during the period 2017-2023. Hostility towards Islam, which reached its peak after 11 September, is now showing a significant downward trend, especially in the period 2017-2023. This study uses a qualitative research method through a literature review, gathering information from academic publications, electronic journals, and other reliable sources such as digital news media. The results of the study identify a variety of factors causing this decline, including socio-cultural aspects, changes in population composition, and political dynamics that favour better acceptance of Islam in America. Especially since Joe Biden took the helm of the country, the reduction of Islamophobic attitudes has become more evident, especially in the political sphere.

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## Introduction

The phenomenon of Islamophobia in the United States began in the 1970s, which is academically categorized as *anti-Muslimism*.<sup>1</sup> Geopolitical tensions characterized this period due to the Arab-Israeli conflict in 1973, where war erupted between a coalition of Arab states and Israel with the support of the United States. The complexity of the conflict resulted in Arab countries, through the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), imposing an oil embargo on the United States. The consequences of this situation were not only economic but also fueled discrimination against the Muslim community in America.<sup>2</sup> American society at that time tended to construct negative perceptions of the Muslim community, assuming they lacked empathy in the context of the embargo. This then led to various forms of discrimination, both in the form of physical and verbal violence, which significantly affected the social life of the Muslim community in the United States.

A series of historical events contributed significantly to the escalation of Islamophobia in the United States. The Iranian Revolution of 1979, which included attacks on US embassies, undermined public confidence in the American Muslim community. The Gulf War in 1990 exacerbated the situation with an increase in ethnic-based crimes against Arabs and Muslims. This was exacerbated by the propaganda of right-wing politicians and the media's systematic role in distorting the image of Islam through the construction of a narrative that portrays Muslims as a potentially dangerous group. According to Beit, the worst impact of this narrative is the emergence of a paradox of violence, where efforts to discredit Muslims have actually given birth to forms of domestic terrorism carried out by white supremacist groups and anti-Muslim extremists in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Liu notes that stereotypes that equate Muslims with terrorism have systematically marginalized and discriminated against Muslim communities.<sup>4</sup>

The prevailing stereotype in the West portrays Muslims as fanatical, inclined to violence, and potential supporters of terrorism. The manifestations of Islamophobia go beyond verbal or physical violence to a broader spectrum of discrimination, including: destruction of religious property, prejudice in social settings, systemic discrimination in education, barriers to employment opportunities, and restrictions on religious freedom.

Muslim communities in the United States face complex challenges in integrating into local society, with Muslim women experiencing the most significant social pressures.

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<sup>1</sup> Sabri Ciftci, "Islamophobia and Threat Perceptions: Explaining Anti-Muslim Sentiment in the West," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 32, no. 3 (2012): 293-309.

<sup>2</sup> Cut Khaila Tiara Putri et al., "Analisis Stigma Buruk Terhadap Agama Islam Akibat Peristiwa 9/11," *Nusantara: Jurnal Pendidikan, Seni, Sains dan Sosial Humanioral* 1, no. 2 (2022): 1-25.

<sup>3</sup> David D. Beit, "Anti-Islam Discourse in the United States in the Decade after 9/11: The Role of Social Conservatives and Cultural Politics," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51, no. 2 (2016): 210-23.

<sup>4</sup> Yuanyuan Liu, "American Islamophobia: Understanding the Roots and Rise of Fear," *University of California Press* 47, no. 4-5 (2018): 1-3.

Women who wear the hijab often experience harassment that forces them to choose between isolating themselves at home or leaving their jobs as a defensive response. Furthermore, American Muslims, including immigrants from the Middle East, experience prolonged psychological distress that includes a range of traumatic experiences such as: ongoing prejudice, constant feelings of threat, verbal humiliation, systematic intimidation, and Unfounded accusations of terrorism. Moordingsih emphasises that the psychological conditions experienced by the Muslim community in the United States are not merely individual experiences, but reflect institutionalised structures of discrimination in society.<sup>5</sup>

The First Amendment to the United States Constitution, which was formulated in 1791 and became part of the Bill of Rights, was actually designed to protect freedom of religion and expression from government interference. This fundamental law includes two key clauses related to religious freedom: The Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. The Establishment Clause expressly prohibits the government from establishing or endorsing an official religion through legislative mechanisms. Meanwhile, the Free Exercise Clause guarantees that the government cannot intervene in individual religious practices. Comprehensively, the First Amendment prohibits any form of regulation that: Establishes a national religion; Restricts freedom of religion; Restricts freedom of speech; Restricts freedom of the press; Interferes with the right of peaceful assembly; or Obstruct citizens from petitioning the government for redress of grievances. The detailed interpretation of these rights is entirely within the power of the Supreme Court to determine and enforce.

Based on Alsultany's findings, the period following the 9/11 attacks marked a dark era of escalating discrimination against Arab and Muslim communities in the United States. Shocking statistics show a 1600% increase in workplace discrimination between 2000 and 2001.<sup>6</sup> Responding to these conditions, the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) took a number of strategic initiatives in combating Islamophobia, which include; Providing comprehensive support to victims of discrimination; Organising education and awareness-raising programmes; Advocating on issues related to Islamophobia; Lobbying and political pressure; and Raising the issue of discrimination in the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> Alsultany and CAIR stressed the importance of systematic intervention in the face of media representations that tend to demonise Muslim and Arab communities in the aftermath of the September 11 tragedy.

A number of academic studies have explored the phenomenon of Islamophobia. Research by Helen,<sup>8</sup> Gorman and Culcasi,<sup>9</sup> confirms that discrimination against Muslims

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<sup>5</sup> Moordingsih, "Islamophobia dan Strategi Mengatasinya," *Buletin Psikologi* 12, no. 2 (2015): 73-84.

<sup>6</sup> Evelyn Alsultany, "Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a 'Posttrace' Era," *American Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2013): 161-169.

<sup>7</sup> CAIR, "CAIR at a Glance," August 3, 2024, cair. [https://www.cair.com/about\\_cair/cair-at-a-glance/](https://www.cair.com/about_cair/cair-at-a-glance/)

<sup>8</sup> Galvin Helen, "Discrimination against Islam in America: A Comprehensive Analysis," *International Journal of Science and Society* 5, no. 3 (2023): 300-309.

has been going on long before 9/11 in the United States. Helen specifically identified various forms of discrimination, including restrictions on the rights of Muslim employees, unfair treatment, physical violence, and traumatic psychological impacts experienced by Muslim workers, with an emphasis on Muslim women.

Meanwhile, Dubosh et al.<sup>10</sup> and Wright's<sup>11</sup> research reveals another dimension of Islamophobia, namely how negative stereotypes and misleading media coverage have contributed to discriminatory attitudes, especially among law enforcement officials towards Muslim citizens or immigrants.

According to Considine's research,<sup>12</sup> Islamophobia is significantly influenced by racial factors and visual perception. Discrimination against Muslims is not always motivated by ideological criticism, but rather by physical differences and social constructs that exist in American society. Stereotypes that portray individuals with turbans, beards and Arab facial features as terrorists have perpetuated the practice of Islamophobia.

Islamophobic practices are not only limited to the social sphere, but also extend to systemic structures. This is reflected in discriminatory treatment such as strict vetting of individuals of Middle Eastern descent, barriers to employment opportunities, and restrictions on civil rights. Considine's findings are in line with Dauda<sup>13</sup> and Pratt's<sup>14</sup> research which shows that Islamophobia is a real threat to global harmony. Factors that contribute to the development of Islamophobia include several dimensions, including anti-Islamic sentiments, xenophobic attitudes, the emergence of right-wing extremist political movements, and the impact of acts of terrorism committed by Muslim extremist groups.

Based on the literature review, previous studies have focused on analysing the concept of Islamophobia and its impact on the Muslim community in the United States. However, these studies have not examined in depth the factors that contribute to the decline of Islamophobia. Referring to these limitations, this study aims to explore the phenomenon of declining Islamophobia in New York by asking two main research

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<sup>9</sup> C. S. Gorman & Karen C. "Invasion and Colonization: Islamophobia and Anti-Refugee Sentiment in West Virginia," *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 39, no. 1 (2021): 1-16.

<sup>10</sup> Emily Dubosh et al., "Islamophobia and Law Enforcement in a Post 9/11 World," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 3, no. 1 (2015): 138-157.

<sup>11</sup> Stephanie, Wright, Reproducing Fear: Islamophobia in the United States. In Douglas Pratt & Rachel Woodlock (Eds), *Boundaries of Religious Freedom: Regulating Religion in Diverse Societies* (45-65). Switzerland: Springer, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> Craig Considine, "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and Flying While Brown," *Religions* 8, no. 9 (2017): 1-19.

<sup>13</sup> Kazeem Oluwaseun Dauda, "Islamophobia and Religious Intolerance: Threats to Global Peace and Harmonious Co-Existence," *Qudus International Journal of Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2021): 257-292.

<sup>14</sup> Douglas Pratt, "Islamophobia as Reactive Co-Radicalization," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 26, no. 2 (2015): 205-218.

questions: (a) what factors have led to the decline of Islamophobia in New York? and (b) what are the conditions behind the phenomenon?

This research focuses on investigating the decline of Islamophobia in New York by exploring three main dimensions: socio-cultural, demographic, and political aspects throughout the period 2017 to 2023. The research methodology uses a qualitative approach, where the researcher collects descriptive qualitative data to analyse the dynamics of the political system in a complex context, as referred to in the research method proposed by Soegiyono.<sup>15</sup>

This research is based on secondary data obtained through various sources, including previous research journals, official websites of organisations, and news portals. By applying the library research method, the researcher collected and processed the data. The data was then analysed using the descriptive analysis method, which aims to describe political phenomena, both natural and man-made, with a focus on assessing the characteristics, quality, and interrelationships between activities.

### **Increasing Muslim Population in the United States**

The increase in the Muslim population in the United States is characterised by massive migration from Middle Eastern countries. Muslim migration to the United States began in the late 19th century, with the first wave of immigrants arriving on the East Coast from Syria and Lebanon in the early 1870s. Later waves included Muslims from Europe and colonisers from the Indian subcontinent who landed on the West Coast in the early 1900s.<sup>16</sup> Over time, these migrations significantly influenced the growth of the Muslim population in the United States. In 2007, the Pew Research Centre recorded approximately 2.35 million Muslim adults and children, which at the time represented 0.8% of the total population. The subsequent demographic growth of the Muslim community was fuelled by two main factors: the continuity of Muslim immigration to the United States and their tendency to have more children than other religious groups in the country.

According to surveys and demographic research by the Pew Research Center, in 2017, there were approximately 3.45 million Muslims of various age groups in the United States, which is equivalent to 1.1 per cent of the total population. Although relatively small in number compared to followers of other religions, such as Christianity or Judaism, the Muslim community is evenly spread across the states. The distribution of the Muslim population is not concentrated in one particular region, but rather spread across each state. Some areas, such as Washington, D.C. and New Jersey, are known to

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<sup>15</sup> Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Harvard University, "Early American Mosques," August 3, 2024, <https://pluralism.org/early-american-mosques>.

have significant concentrations of Muslim residents. The development of the number of American Muslims from 2007 to 2017 shows a consistent growth trend.<sup>17</sup>

Based on the latest data for 2023, the distribution of the Muslim population in the United States shows interesting geographical variations. New York ranks as the state with the largest Muslim population, with a population of 724,500. Next in line is California with 504,100 Muslims, and Illinois with 473,800 Muslims. Demographic projections estimate that by 2050, the Muslim population in the United States will grow rapidly to reach 8.09 million out of a total national population of 394.35 million. This growth is even predicted to surpass the number of Jews, currently the second-largest religious minority in the country.<sup>18</sup>

The demographic composition of Muslims in the United States displays significant ethnic diversity, with no dominant majority race. Based on the latest data, the Muslim population consists of various racial groups with the following percentages: 25% black, 24% white, 18% Asian, 18% Arab, 7% mixed race, and 5% Hispanic. This demographic diversity signals an interesting development in the religious map of the United States. Projections estimate that by 2050, Islam could potentially become the second largest religion in the country, reflecting the growth and integration of an increasingly complex Muslim community.

### Freedom of Worship

Through a socio-cultural approach, the decline of Islamophobia in the United States can be understood through the strategic role of da'wah carried out by the Muslim community. Communication efforts built by the Muslim community, especially Indonesian Muslims in America, have succeeded in changing people's perceptions. They succeeded in establishing constructive relationships with religious leaders and presenting a moderate face of Islam. As a result, the American public began to understand that Muslims do not fit the negative stereotypes that have been developed. They realised that Muslims are not violent or associated with terrorism, but a normal, peace-loving community. This process has brought about a significant change in people's views, to the point where Islam can now be considered an integral part of American society itself.<sup>19</sup>

The history of Islam in New York has deep and complex roots, far beyond the stereotypes often associated with the religion. Since the 17th century, the Muslim community has been an integral part of the social and demographic fabric of the metropolis, which is now characterised by the presence of around 300 mosques scattered

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<sup>17</sup> Pew Research Center, "U.S., Muslim Population Has Been Growing Steadily," August 3, 2024, [pewresearchcenter. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/09/01/muslims-are-a-growing-presence-in-u-s-but-still-face-negative-views-from-the-public/ft\\_2021-09-01\\_muslimsinamerica\\_02/](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/09/01/muslims-are-a-growing-presence-in-u-s-but-still-face-negative-views-from-the-public/ft_2021-09-01_muslimsinamerica_02/)

<sup>18</sup> Wisevoter, "Muslim Population by State," August 3, 2024, <https://wisevoter.com/state-rankings/muslim-population-by-state/>

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Rafi'i et al., "Tarik Menarik Islamophobia di Amerika," *Jurnal Pengajaran dan Kajian Islam* 1, no. 1 (2021): 1-11.

across New York City. The tragic events of 9/11 in 2001 became a critical moment that fundamentally changed the dynamics of society's relationship with the Muslim community. While it initially created tension and prejudice, it also opened a space for dialogue and a deeper awareness of religious and cultural diversity in the United States.

Mass media and social media play a strategic role in transforming public perception.<sup>20</sup> Through more balanced reporting, documentation of Muslim daily life, and open spaces for dialogue, New Yorkers are slowly coming to understand that Islam is not a homogeneous monolithic entity, but rather a religion with a diversity of thought, practice, and interpretation.

The growing number of Muslims in New York is not just a demographic statistic, but also reflects a dynamic process of social integration. The Muslim community, coming from various ethnic backgrounds such as Arab, African, South Asian, and Indonesian, has contributed significantly to education, economy, arts, and community service. Religious institutions such as mosques are no longer seen as exclusive spaces, but have become open centres of social activity. Many mosques now host interfaith dialogue programmes, charitable activities, and community initiatives that involve various groups of people outside the Muslim community.

These developments illustrate a complex social transformation in New York, where diversity is not merely tolerated but truly valued and considered a strength. Islam has thus become an integral part of the city's multicultural narrative, not as an alien entity, but as a fundamental component of New York's dynamic and evolving social identity.

The history of the United States, which was built by immigrants with diverse cultural backgrounds, customs, and habits, has created a culture that tends to be open and tolerant of differences. This has been one of the fundamental factors in the acceptance of the Muslim community in the country. The majority of Americans, although not in absolute terms, show an inclusive attitude towards Islam, similar to their treatment of other religions such as Christianity and Judaism.

Concrete indications of the development of Islam in the United States can be seen from several official recognitions, such as the granting of leave to Muslim employees to celebrate Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha by a number of companies. In 2022, the acceptance of Islam became even more evident when it was allowed to break the fast together and offer Tarawih prayers in Times Square, which symbolically represents the centre of New York's metropolitan life.<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon shows that tolerance and openness in American society are not just a discourse, but have been actualised in concrete social practices, showing significant progress in interfaith dialogue and recognition of cultural diversity.

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<sup>20</sup> Konsulat Jenderal Republik Indonesia, "Konjen RI New York: Islam Sudah Menjadi Bagian dari Masyarakat Amerika," August 5, 2024. <https://kemlu.go.id/newyork/id/news/10237/konjen-ri-new-yorkislam-sudah-menjadi-bagian-dari-masyarakat-amerika>

<sup>21</sup> CNBC Indonesia, "Sejarah! Umat Muslim Tarawih Perdana di Times Square AS," August 5, 2024, <https://www.cnbc-indonesia.com/news/20220404101511-4-328448/sejarah-umat-muslim-tarawih-perdana-di-times-square-as>.

## Acceptance of Halal-Certified Products

One indication of the socio-cultural development of the Muslim community in the United States is the increasing consumer interest in halal food products. According to recent data, the food industry in the country has shown significant growth in the halal product segment, although the volume is still lower than the organic product market.

The increasing Muslim population in the United States directly affects the demand dynamics for halal products in the American market. The appeal of halal food is not limited only to the Muslim community, but also extends to consumers who are highly concerned about animal welfare. This is because the halal certification process has strict protocols that align with ethical sourcing practices and emphasise compassionate animal care. Interestingly, however, awareness of the importance of halal products is not only limited to the Muslim community but also extends to non-Muslim Americans. They increasingly understand and appreciate food processing standards that comply with Islamic law. The role of independent organisations such as The Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) is becoming increasingly important in facilitating and overseeing the non-profit halal certification process in the United States.

Based on a survey from a halal certification body, there is significant growth in interest in halal products in the United States. Data shows that 72% of Americans regularly consume halal-certified food, while 52% are familiar with halal products. Nonetheless, people experience difficulties in obtaining halal products, indicating the limited availability of such products in the market. The IFANCA survey revealed an interesting perspective of American consumers on halal products. The majority of respondents who are familiar with halal products believe that halal-certified food is of better quality, which is considered more humane, fresh, and healthy than non-halal products. More knowledgeable consumers also tend to be more selective, focusing on nutritional content and transparency of ingredients when shopping at supermarkets or local markets.<sup>22</sup>

Traditional halal food was originally deeply rooted in the cultural context of countries with significant Muslim populations, such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. The dynamics of ethnic mixing in the United States have been instrumental in shaping the ongoing demand for halal food products.<sup>23</sup> However, interest in halal products in America is not limited to the Muslim community. Non-Muslim consumers also show enthusiasm for purchasing halal food products with various motivations, including considerations of quality, taste, or specific dietary preferences. This has significantly contributed to the widespread popularity of halal products in the

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<sup>22</sup> Konsulat Jenderal Republik Indonesia, “Konjen RI New York: Islam Sudah Menjadi Bagian dari Masyarakat Amerika,” August 6, 2024, <https://kemlu.go.id/newyork/id/news/10237/konjen-ri-new-yorkislam-sudah-menjadi-bagian-dari-masyarakat-amerika>

<sup>23</sup> IFANCA, “IFANCA Survey Uncovers the Need for Consumer Education & Access to Halal-Certified Products,” August 6, 2024, <https://ifanca.org/ifanca-survey-uncovers-the-need-for-consumereducation-access-to-halal-certified-products/>



country. A contributing factor to American consumers' confidence is their perception that halal food products, particularly meat, poultry, and seafood, are processed through strict procedures that ensure higher standards of sanitation and food safety.

Comprehensive production and certification processes have cemented the reputation of halal products as representing superior food safety and quality standards. Non-Muslim consumers in the United States view halal food as pure, ethical, hygienic, and natural. Young US millennials, in particular, have adopted halal cuisine as a nutritious alternative to fast food and conventional packaged products. Market projections expect halal food sales to see a significant increase of 9.33 per cent by 2030.<sup>24</sup> This trust in halal products has indirectly contributed to the decline in Islamophobia in America. Through experiences with halal products, non-Muslim consumers are beginning to understand that Muslims have a humane attitude, not only towards fellow humans but also towards animals.

### **Participation in the Public Sphere and Government**

In the recent period, the American Muslim community has shown a significant increase in participation in the public and political spheres. This is reflected in the growing number of Muslim leaders who have been elected to strategic positions, ranging from city governments to state parliaments, indicating stronger integration and representation in power structures and decision-making.<sup>25</sup>

The participation of the Muslim community in the United States has grown significantly in various sectors of life, especially in the fields of economy, education, and security. More and more Muslim Americans are taking up important positions in various professional domains, including in the police, military, and intelligence institutions.<sup>26</sup>

The phenomenon of increased discrimination and violence from white radical groups has helped to open the American public's awareness of the complexity of the threat of extremism. People are beginning to understand that terrorism and radicalism are not exclusively associated with one particular religion, but can arise from a variety of backgrounds, including white supremacy.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Abdelhadi Halawa, "Acculturation of Halal Food to the American Food Culture through Immigration and Globalization: A Literature Review," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 5, no. 2 (2018): 53-63.

<sup>25</sup> Republika, "Posisi Publik Muslim Amerika Serikat dan Populasi yang Tumbuh di Tengah Ancaman Rasial," August 11, 2024, <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/roy3jn320/posisi-publikmuslim-amerika-serikat-dan-populasi-yang-tumbuh-di-tengahancaman-rasial>.

<sup>26</sup> Konsulat Jenderal Republik Indonesia, "Konjen RI New York: Islam Sudah Menjadi Bagian dari Masyarakat Amerika."

<sup>27</sup> Kompas, "Muslim New York Alami Peningkatan Kejahatan Rasial," August 11, 2024, <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/rfboud313/muslim-new-york-alami-peningkatan-kejahatan-rasial>.

The development and involvement of Muslims in the United States political scene shows a dynamic that is getting stronger every year.<sup>28</sup> The growth of the Muslim population in the country is not just a statistical figure, but also reflects a significant increase in socio-political participation, interfaith dialogue, and efforts to fight discrimination (Islamophobia). The Muslim community has successfully transformed itself into an influential social force in the national and international politics of the United States. This can be seen from some concrete evidence, such as the election of Amar Ghalib as mayor of Hamtramck, who not only allows Islamic religious practices such as sacrificial slaughter on Eid al-Adha, but also supports the visual expression of Muslim culture through murals in public spaces.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, Muslim political representation is increasingly evident with figures such as Ilhan Omar, a congresswoman who often raises anti-Islamophobic issues in congressional hearings, signaling the increasing representation and voice of Muslims at the government level.<sup>30</sup>

The 2022 election made history by increasing the number of Muslims elected to political office in the United States. A joint report from the Jetpac Resource Centre and the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) revealed that 82 Muslim candidates won seats at various levels of government, from local to federal, in 25 states. This success was not only limited to traditional Democratic areas, but also extended to 'red' states such as Texas, Georgia, and Virginia. The composition of the winners included 20 incumbents and 17 new candidates, including some significant figures such as Maryland's first black governor and the first generation Z member of Congress. In the national congressional context, politicians such as Ilhan Omar (D-MN) and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) successfully defended their positions, strengthening Muslim representation in the US House of Representatives. Their victories are not only limited to the federal level, but also include strategic positions in city councils and local educational institutions.

The political history of the United States records significant advances in Muslim representation at the state legislative level. Maine, Illinois, Texas and Ohio have elected their first Muslim legislators, while Georgia stands out with the second largest number of Muslim legislators, including the first Muslim women elected to the state's senate and house of representatives. The victories of these Muslim politicians are all the more meaningful given the ongoing challenges of prejudice and discrimination they face. One inspiring example is Nabeela Syed, a 23-year-old Indian-American woman, who defeated a Republican incumbent in Illinois' 51st District, becoming one of the first Muslims elected to a state legislature.

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<sup>28</sup> Republika, "Muslim Amerika Serikat Tahun Ini Mendulang Sukses di Politik," August 11, 2024, <https://khazanah.republika.co.id/berita/qkrw4g320/muslim-amerika-serikat-tahun-ini-mendulang-sukses-di-politik>.

<sup>29</sup> VOA Indonesia, "Mengenal Dua Wali Kota Muslim di AS yang Berjuang untuk Membuktikan Diri," August 14, 2024, <https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/mengenal-dua-wali-kota-muslim-di-as-yang-berjuang-untuk-membuktikan-diri/7052904>

<sup>30</sup> ALJAZEERA, "Progressive US Lawmaker Omar Faces Censure over Mistranslated Speech," August 11, 2024), <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/1/progressive-us-lawmaker-omar-faces-censure-overmistranslated-speech>

The social context in which they win is increasingly complex, as data from The Muslim Community Network for the first half of 2022 shows. It revealed that more than 26% of black Muslims and 32% of Asian Muslims in New York City had experienced or witnessed hate crimes. Nevertheless, the success of Muslim candidates in states such as Illinois, Texas, Georgia, and Minnesota brings new hope and inspiration to the American political landscape.<sup>31</sup>

According to a report by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and the Jetpac Resource Center (JRC), an organisation focused on increasing Muslim representation in American politics, there have been significant gains in Muslim political participation in the United States. The report revealed that more than 80 Muslim candidates were successfully elected to various positions in more than 20 states, ranging from municipal to federal levels. This is the highest achievement since CAIR and JRC began monitoring. In particular, the JRC noted an interesting dynamic in legislative elections, where 17 new Muslim candidates won their campaigns, 20 incumbent Muslim legislators ran again, and two previously appointed lawmakers ran for full terms and became the first Muslims elected to their state legislatures.<sup>32</sup>

In the context of American politics, the majority of the Muslim community showed significant support for Joe Biden. Biden's presidential period is characterised by a significant decline in Islamophobia cases, which sharply contrasts with Donald Trump's era of leadership. The study conducted by Khan et al. revealed an increase in positive views towards Muslims, especially in regions such as New York, after the end of the Trump administration.<sup>33</sup>

The fundamental difference between the two leaders lies in their approach to diversity. Biden is known for a more inclusive leadership style that respects the plurality of American society. In contrast, Trump had implemented a controversial policy known as the Muslim Ban, which was considered discriminatory.

Political factors also influence the Muslim community's choices. It appears that American Muslims are more inclined to vote for Democratic candidates, who are considered to value diversity more than Republicans. This is reflected in the significant difference in the level of Islamophobia, which declined sharply during Biden's term, in contrast to the increase in similar cases during Trump's administration.

In the early days of his presidency, President Biden took a significant step by appointing a number of Muslim Americans to strategic positions in the government. Among others, Lina Khan was appointed Chair of the Federal Trade Commission, Sameera Fazili became Deputy Director of the National Economic Council, Reema

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<sup>31</sup> CBS News, "Record Number of Muslim Americans Elected in 2022 Midterms," August 19, 2024, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/midterm muslim-americans-in-office/>

<sup>32</sup> Washingtonpost, "Muslim Americans Make Historic Gains in Midterm Elections," August 19, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2022/11/14/muslim-americans-make-historic-gains-midterm-elections/>

<sup>33</sup> Mohsin Hassan Khan et al., "Trump and Muslims: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobic Rhetoric in Donald Trump's Selected Tweets," *SAGE Open* 11, no. 1 (2021): 1-16

Dodin was appointed Deputy Director of Legislative Affairs of the White House Office, and Rashad Hussain held the position of International Ambassador for Religious Freedom. This move is considered to encourage the interest of the Muslim community to be more involved in the United States political scene and has the potential to reduce the level of Islamophobia by increasing the trust of non-Muslim communities in the Muslim community through representation in government structures.

### **Conclusion**

The reduction in Islamophobic attitudes during the 2017-2023 period can be examined through three main aspects: socio-cultural, demographic, and political. From a socio-cultural perspective, this reduction stems from the increasing tolerance of American society in accepting diversity. Thanks to this shift in attitude, the minority Muslim community took advantage of the momentum to introduce the teachings of Islam through aspects of its traditions and culture. To date, acceptance of the Muslim community has become more evident, such as the permitting of Tarawih prayers in New York's Times Square area in 2022. In addition, there has been a significant increase in non-Muslim Americans' interest in halal food consumption. They believe that halal products are of a more ethical and cleaner standard, although commercially, they are not yet able to compete with the sales of other halal and organic food products. The demographic aspect is also an important factor, which is reflected in the growth rate of the Muslim population, which continues to rise every year. In 2017 specifically, the Muslim population reached 3.45 million people. Specifically in New York City, the total Muslim population reached 724,500 people. The development of the Muslim community is also fuelled by the wave of immigration that continues to come to the United States, especially to New York City.

The decline in Islamophobia is also fuelled by politics. The American Muslim community began to actively participate in the US political scene. Their presence is evident through Keith Ellison as the first American Muslim to win a congressional seat in 2006. This achievement motivated other American Muslims, so that every year, there is Muslim representation entering the American political sphere, both at the state and federal levels. The three factors mentioned provide a strong indication that the level of Islamophobia in New York has decreased over the past six years. A notable decline has been seen since Joe Biden's presidency began. Biden directly revoked the Muslim Ban policy previously enacted by Donald Trump, his predecessor. This move succeeded in creating a more peaceful and safer atmosphere.

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