

CAIR Wants to Make This the New American Swing Vote

That there has been an effort to mobilize Christian voters for the 2016 elections goes without saying, but many were shocked to learn over the weekend that another group is attempting to become the new “swing vote” in November.

The Middle East Media Research Institute released a video Monday of Nihad Awad, the founder and executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, is seen speaking at the 14th Annual Muslim American Society/Islamic Circle of North America Convention. The event was held earlier this month in Chicago.

The entire speech is available from the MAS-ICNA YouTube channel. In the MEMRI clip, Awad speaks about the direct impact Muslims can have on the 2016 elections:

“America has influence on its people, and people around the world, and therefore what American Muslims do and do not do can determine not only the future of you here, but the future of America itself—the future relationship between America and the Muslim world. Brothers and sisters, we are leaders, and when I say leaders I mean it because you are all leaders. Your votes are your negotiating power in the year 2016. If you don’t like Islamophobia, if you don’t like what Donald Trump says, what Ben Carson said, get busy in 2016. Get busy in 2016, register to vote, and register other people to vote, if you don’t know how to do it, Google it. Turn your centers, Islamic centers, mosques into registration centers for voters, into polling stations during the election time. This is the time to tell our narrative and to show our presence. Train and get yourself trained in how to be involved in the political process. 2016 is a decisive year for us as American Muslims, but also for America. What kind of year are we going to have?

Depends on you, depends on you.”

Awad also said the number of American Muslims was growing. And as a result, he challenged those in attendance to register 1 million new Muslim voters this year.

“We have to register every single Muslim to vote in 2016. The Muslim vote can be the swing vote in major states. The swing votes, brothers and sisters you know them: Florida, Ohio. Do we have people from Florida here? Do we have people from Virginia, Colorado, Nevada, Iowa, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania? These are predicted to be the seven swing states in 2016 presidential election. The number of Muslims in these states is growing.”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were approximately 2.6 million Muslims in the U.S. in 2010. The Pew Research Center suggests about 100,000 more immigrate legally into the country each year. In 2011, it estimated the Muslim population of the U.S. will climb to 6.2 million by 2032:

Children under age 15 make up a relatively small portion of the U.S. Muslim population today. Only 13.1 percent of Muslims are in the 0-14 age group. This reflects the fact that a large proportion of Muslims in the U.S. are newer immigrants who arrived as adults. But by 2030, many of these immigrants are expected to start families.

Of the states Awad mentioned, Virginia, Florida and Pennsylvania all rank among the top 10 states for Islamic penetration in the U.S. In Virginia, which ranked second, Muslims make up about percent of the population. In Florida and Pennsylvania, which rank seventh and 10th, respectively, Muslims make up and percent of the population.

But when one considers that less than half of eligible voters are registered, and even fewer actively vote, the mobilization of 1 million Muslim voters could have a substantial impact.

In 2008, Florida, Virginia and Pennsylvania—and their 61 Electoral Votes—all went to President Obama over Sen. John McCain by a margin of less than 1,093,000 votes. In 2012, their 62 Electoral Votes all went to Obama over former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney by a margin of less than 534,000 votes.

But Awad isn't just interested in impacting elections. He wants to use the power of a motivated Muslim vote to influence government, as well.

"We would like to have an accurate assessment of our voting power, of our inclination on issues," he said. "Based on that we are going to meet with presidential and local candidates on issues of concern to American Muslims. And we're going to negotiate with them, we've done it in many elections. We are going to do it in this election, and based on that a decision will be made. Not by our national organizations because we are 501c(3), we are nonprofit, we cannot endorse or oppose candidates, or raise funds for or against candidates, like all mosques in the country. But who will make that decision is a committee, like a Political Action Committee that is registered by law to conduct that. And that decision made by that organization can be conveyed through social media, networks and through other networks to the Muslim community."