

By January, This City's Leadership Will Be All-Muslim

A Detroit-area city made history this past week by electing an entire slate of Muslims to fill its mayoral and city council slots, creating an all-Muslim council. Hamtramck, Michigan, voters elected Yemeni immigrant and practicing Muslim Amer Ghalib, 41, as mayor, upsetting Karen Majewski, 66, a 16-year incumbent in the formerly majority Polish city, per Michigan Advance.

Three Muslim City Council candidates, Khalil A. Refai, Amanda Jaczkowski and Adam Albarmaki, also won election and will join three current City Council members who are also Muslim, per the *Detroit Free Press*, which also says, "Advocates with Muslim groups and experts say they do not know of any other city council in the history of the U.S. that has been entirely Muslim."

Wayne State University Law professor and Islam expert Khaled Beydoun noted the significance of the vote on Twitter:

The first Muslim majority city in the US – Hamtramck, Michigan – will have an ALL Muslim American City Council. Historic moment.

– Khaled Beydoun (@KhaledBeydoun) November 5, 2021

The U.S. Census does not inquire about religion, so it's unclear whether Beydoun's claim of a "Muslim-majority city" has merit. However, estimates based on census ancestry data suggest that about half are Muslim, the *Detroit Free Press* reports.

"About 25% of the city is of Arab descent, most of them Yemeni, and an additional 27% is of Asian ancestry, most of

them Bangladeshi, according to 2019 census data. Almost all Yemenis are Muslim, while Bangladeshi Americans in Hamtramck are a mix of Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian.”

Hamtramck has always had a Polish-American Catholic mayor since it became incorporated as a city 100 years ago. But today, the city is only 6.8% Polish, according to 2019 census data.

Sally Howell, director of the Center for Arab American Studies and associate professor of history at University of Michigan-Dearborn, told the *Detroit Free Press* the all-Muslim council in Hamtramck is “another barrier broken.”

“It reflects the population” changes in Hamtramck, she said. “And it also reflects the diversity of the Muslim community because you’ve got a white convert to Islam, you’ve got Muslims from the Bangladeshi community and you’ve got Yemeni Muslims.”

Rummi Khan, chief operating officer for the Muslim Public Affairs Council, said: “We are pleased to see our community vibrantly engaged in the foundation of American democracy: our elections. This representation is a wonderful step toward realizing the promise of a government for the people, of the people, by the people for all Americans.”

Ghalib, who has faced some opposition for his position against flying the Pride flag over City Hall this summer, told the *Detroit Free Press* last month: “People think because of my background and my religious beliefs that I will be anti-LGBT or something, but we are in America. The same constitution that allowed me to practice my religion here, to pray the way I want, it gives others the same freedom to practice their beliefs and express their values the way they want.” {eo}

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