

**Sample**

**Questions**

**for**

**Candidates**

**and**

**Government**

**Officials**



Council on American-Islamic Relations

## Vision and mission

CAIR's vision is to be a leading advocate for justice and mutual understanding.

CAIR's mission is to enhance understanding of Islam, protect civil rights, promote justice, and empower American Muslims.

## Introduction

The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the nation's largest Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization, has compiled a unique resource, our **CAIR Sample Questions for Candidates and Government Officials**, to help Muslim community members and allies better question and understand the views and positions of candidates running for office and government officials already in service.

Questions included in this community resource cover issues related to freedom of religion, the economy, education, immigration, community safety, right to vote, and right to boycott. These questions can be asked during community town halls, public forums, public or private meetings, or submitted for written response. These questions are drawn from the advocacy and legal work of CAIR and its network of chapters that serve the needs of American Muslims nationwide.

As a nonpartisan organization CAIR encourages American Muslims to engage government officials and policy makers at the local, state and federal level. CAIR also encourages Muslims to participate in national and state elections, conduct voter registrations, training programs, issue briefings, candidate forums, volunteer in campaigns, and get-out-the-vote drives.

Nonprofits cannot engage in political activities that support one candidate or party over another, but we are committed to making our community's voice heard.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

1. **Fostering Mutual Respect:** Do you support a welcoming environment that fosters mutual respect for all religious beliefs, traditions, and heritages in the United States?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

2. **Religious Land Use:** Do you support actions taken by the Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice to protect the right of Muslim communities to establish or expand places of worship on the same terms as other religious communities?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

3. **Freedom to Practice One's Faith:** Do you agree that the U.S. Constitution and state laws are not threatened by citizens privately following their own religious codes, such as Jewish Halacha, Islamic Sharia, or Catholic Canon Law, as long as such religious codes comply with U.S. law?

(Check one)      Agree       Disagree

**Background:** In the past several years more than a dozen states have adopted copy-cat “anti-Sharia” or “anti-foreign law” legislation whose sponsors invoke Sharia as the reason behind the legislation. Moreover, the Republican National Committee website’s current “Listening to America” survey currently asks if survey takers are “concerned by the potential spread of “Sharia Law?”

#### 4. Addressing White Supremacy, Islamophobia and Xenophobic Hate:

- Do you plan to address the rise in white supremacy and white nationalism in the United States?

(Check one)      Plans to Address       No Plan to Address

- Do you plan to address the rise in Islamophobia and hateful rhetoric towards Muslims in the United States?

(Check one)      Plans to Address       No Plan to Address

- Will you affirm that America must stand against xenophobic sentiments directed to members of Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Arab, Middle Eastern, and South Asian communities?

(Check one)      Affirm       Does not Affirm

## 5. Addressing Religious Accommodations for Inmates:

- Do you support the right of Muslim and Jewish inmates to make religious accommodation requests for halal and kosher meals?

**(Check one)**      **Support**       **Oppose**

- Do you support the right of Muslim inmates to make religious accommodation requests for religious headwear, like hijabs, kufis, and other head coverings?

**(Check one)**      **Support**       **Oppose**

- Do you support the right of Muslim inmates to make religious accommodation requests for copies of the Quran and other religious texts, prayer mats, prayer beads, and other religious items?

**(Check one)**      **Support**       **Oppose**

- Do you support the right of Muslim inmates to make religious accommodation requests for modified meal schedules while fasting during Ramadan?

**(Check one)**      **Support**       **Oppose**

- Do you support the right of Muslim inmates to make religious accommodation requests for daily congregational prayers and Friday religious services?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Many Muslim inmates face unreasonable and excessive harassment from prison staff and officials for requesting basic religious accommodations such as for halal food, Qurans and other religious texts, prayer mats, kufis and hijabs (religious headwear), and modified meal schedules while fasting during Ramadan.

6. **Opposing CVE:** If elected, would you use your office to support or oppose Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives and programs on any level of the government?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** In 2011, the U.S. Department of Justice announced a new anti-terrorism initiative, Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), with the seeming objective to deter U.S. residents from joining “violent extremist” groups by bringing community and religious leaders together with law enforcement, health professionals, teachers and social service employees. However, Muslim and allied communities nationwide have rejected the CVE initiative for its primary focus on and singling out of Muslim communities above all other communities for surveillance and criminalization. The Trump administration has further made it clear that it plans to use CVE to solely target American Muslim communities.

## Economy

7. **Right to Commerce:** Do you support businesses denying entrance or service to customers based on their perceived race, religion or nationality?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Several businesses declared themselves “Muslim Free Zones,” or denied serve to Muslim patrons in the decade.

8. **Living Wage:** A growing number of cities and states are exploring the possibility of increasing minimum wages to better support low-income workers and families. Do you support increases to the minimum wage, federally set in 2009 to \$7.25, to correspond to the cost of living?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** According to Interfaith Worker Justice: In 2012, a working mother of two earning \$7.25 per hour lived below the poverty line.

9. **Paid Sick Leave:** States, cities and counties across the U.S. have adopted paid sick time laws. Do you support reforming federal law to require employers to provide paid sick days for all workers?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**10. Paid Parental Leave:** Millions of American workers who are new parents go without paid parental leave (maternity or paternity leave) or the option to take additional parental unpaid leave, impacting working families nationwide. Do you support reforming federal laws to require employers to provide at least six weeks of paid family leave and at least 12 weeks of unpaid leave as already afforded to federal employees?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

## Education

**11. School-to-Prison Pipeline:** In addressing the school-to-prison pipeline, do you support policies that promote restorative justice and conflict de-escalation and resolution practices as opposed to disciplinary approaches (suspension, expulsion or arrest) in addressing student misconduct?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**12. Federal Anti-Bullying Reform:** Recent reports have indicated that Muslim children have faced increased bullying and harassment in schools. Do you support amending Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to include religion\* as a protected characteristic in schools?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** As of now Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 does not directly cover religion. In some cases, the US Department of Education can take action against religious-based harassment when it falls under the umbrella of shared ancestry of ethnic characteristics.

**13. Local Measures to End Bullying of Muslims:** Do you support school districts taking measures to identify, record, and prevent anti-Muslim bullying?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Muslim children are targets for bullying because their name identifies them as Muslim or because they practice their religion openly by praying while at school, wearing a hijab (headscarf) or growing a beard. Sometimes this leads to them being called a “terrorist” by their peers or taunts that they are going to “bomb” the school. Often the child victim of bullying will react or retaliate against their tormentors. School administrators have in the past punished this behavior rather than the initial bullying.

**14. School Recognition of Muslim Holidays:** Do you support public school systems with significant Muslim populations in your congressional district and/or state closing for the Muslim holidays of Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha\*, when many students or faculty would otherwise be absent?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Eid al-Fitr, which comes at the end of the month-long fast of Ramadan, is the first of the two major Muslim holidays. The second holiday, Eid al-Adha, comes at the end of the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca. Many public-school districts, including New York City, New York; Cambridge, Massachusetts; Dearborn, Michigan; Burlington, Vermont; Paterson and South Brunswick, New Jersey; and Montgomery County, Maryland, and others, already grant school days off for Eid. Many more schools note Eid on school calendars and excuse student absences.

**15. Muslim Student Nutritional Needs:** In communities with large Muslim populations, do you support halal (Islamically permissible) food options on school cafeteria menus?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** By meeting Islamic dietary laws, Muslim students are not virtually excluded from the school lunch system.

## Immigration

**16. Pathway to Citizenship:** Do you support the adoption of comprehensive federal immigration reform which provides a pathway to citizenship for the nation's 11 million undocumented immigrants?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**17. Resettling Refugees:** Do you support locally resettling Syrian, Iraqi, Somali, or Afghani refugees?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**18. Muslim Travel Ban:** Do you support President Donald Trump's discriminatory Muslim travel ban?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**19. Family Separation:** Do you support the separation of immigrant and refugee families at the U.S. border?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**20. Right to Seek Asylum:** Do you support ensuring that refugees are not prevented from seeking asylum at the border or inside the United States?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**21. Ending ICE MOUs:** Do you support state or local law enforcement entering into 287(g) agreements with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to carry out federal immigration law enforcement functions?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Many state or local law enforcement departments have entered into a partnership with ICE, under a joint Memorandum of Agreement, commonly referred to as 287(g) agreements, to receive delegated authority for federal immigration enforcement within their jurisdictions. These agreements have led to state and local law enforcement officials enforcing the Trump administration’s controversial “zero tolerance” immigration policies among immigrant families and communities.

**22. Family Separation:** Do you support awarding city contracts to vendors that supply Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Customs and Border Patrol (CBP), or the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) with data broker, extreme vetting, or detention facility support?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Each of these agencies are responsible for detaining thousands of immigrants across the country. ICE carries out secretive raids on immigrant communities, sending hundreds of people at a time to detention facilities, leaving their children by themselves. CBP detention facilities have been widely condemned as inhumane. ORR, a department of the Health and Human Services Agency, was responsible for housing children separated from their families at the Southern border.

**23. Trust Act:** Would you use your office to support adoption of the Trust Act in local or state government?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Adopted by cities and states nationwide, the Trust Act prohibits city or state employees — including law enforcement officers — from asking a law-abiding person’s immigration status. It would also prohibit the collection of residents’ information for unconstitutional federal registries.

## Community Safety

**24. End Law Enforcement Profiling:** Do you support the adoption of federal and state laws prohibiting law enforcement officers profiling individuals based on their perceived race, ethnicity, gender, national origin, or religion?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**25. Police Training:** Do you support anti-discrimination and use of force de-escalation training for federal and state law enforcement officers?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**26. Body-Worn Cameras:** Under a framework that protects the privacy rights of both citizens and law enforcement, do you support outfitting federal law and state enforcement officers and agents who are required to face an imminent threat of some kind with body-worn cameras?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** One such a framework that strikes a balanced approach between privacy rights and the use of police body-worn cameras is the American Civil Liberties Union white paper “Police Body-Mounted Cameras: With Right Policies in Place, a Win For All,” Version 2.0, March, 2015.

**27. Facial Recognition Technology:** Do you support banning the government use of facial recognition technology, as they have been the subject of mass surveillance and police misconduct?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Facial recognition technology is not only dangerously inaccurate, but also a serious infringement on one’s right to privacy, and it can have a chilling effect on one’s free speech activities.

**28. Police Surveillance:** Do you support transparency, accountability, and a use policy for the acquisition of surveillance technology?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Police departments around the country have begun implementing new pieces of surveillance technology, like drones, in their policing practices without adequate transparency about the rules governing how this new technology will be used. Many state legislatures are stepping in to ensure that the rights of American citizens are not violated.

**29. Working with the FBI:** Do you support local police officers who are assigned to federal task forces, such as the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF), following local and state laws rather than the looser and highly problematic FBI guidelines?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** The FBI standards for opening a terrorism investigation are so low that they have been widely ridiculed. Investigations have found that federal task forces frequently overstep their mandates and lead to broad, unconstitutional surveillance.

## Right to Vote

**30. Voting Rights Act Reform:** Do you support devising a new formula to establish criteria for determining whether states with histories of voter discrimination can fall under Justice Department preclearance oversight?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court in a 5-4 ruling struck down a key provision of the historic 1965 Voting Rights Act used to determine which states with histories of voter discrimination were required to obtain federal preclearance before changing state voting laws. The Court did however uphold the constitutionality of requiring states with histories of voter discrimination to obtain federal preclearance.

**31. Voter ID Laws:** Do you support Congress devising a law that bans all modern forms of voter discrimination, such as state voter ID laws?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**32. Restoring the Right to Vote:** Do you support restoring the fundamental right to vote for citizens who have served their prison sentences as a necessary step towards eliminating policies that have historically disenfranchised large segments of communities and disproportionately affected U.S minorities?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

## Right to Boycott

**33. Right to Boycott:** Do you support the First Amendment right of Americans and U.S. businesses to engage in a boycott of countries that engage in human rights abuses?

(Check one)      Support       Oppose

**Background:** Boycotts supporting civil and human rights such as the Montgomery Bus boycott against segregation or the boycott of companies enabling South African Apartheid have been revered throughout American history as an integral part of our political process and means by which to participate in democracy. However, many states have adopted statutes to curb activity involving Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaign activity in support of Palestinian human rights.

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