

*U.S. Backing of Israel's War on
Lebanon Deters Support for
Harris in Swing States*

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Community organizer Ruqia Abei urges Muslims in Minnesota to get out and vote despite widespread despair over U.S. support for wars in the Middle East.

By Mike Ludwig, Truthout

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz has charmed the political class across the United States with his folksy affect. Back in home in Minnesota, Walz's constituents in liberal strongholds are wondering whether they can support his bid to serve as Kamala Harris's vice president while Israel uses U.S. weapons to escalate a brutal war in the Middle East.

Leaders of the large Muslim community in Minneapolis gathered on Wednesday to warn Democrats that voters are despondent and at risk of staying home on Election Day after months of watching Israeli forces kill and displace civilians in Gaza, the West Bank and now Lebanon.

The press conference came a day after Walz's debate with Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance, the Republican vice presidential nominee. In the debate, which kicked off with a question asking whether each nominee would support a preemptive Israeli strike on Iran, Walz said "the expansion of Israel and its proxies is an absolute, fundamental necessity for the United States to have the steady leadership there."

Jaylani Hussein, a board member of the Justice and Equality Coalition in Minneapolis, told reporters that Walz still has not met with Palestinian families in Minnesota who lost relatives in Gaza, including one family that saw 42 members across three generations massacred in a single Israeli airstrike in November 2023.

"I think we have unfortunately been traumatized by the murder of all these children, and I think a lot more people will be voting against Kamala Harris, and there will be a lot more people not voting, and that is one of our concerns," Hussein added.

Imam Hassan Jama, a Muslim community leader in south Minneapolis, first registered as a Democrat 19 years ago and campaigned for President Joe Biden in 2020. Now he said he refuses to vote for Vice President Harris, Biden's successor. He worries many Muslim and progressive voters in his state won't cast ballots at all this year — even with Walz, their own governor, on the ticket.

"If Donald Trump wins, it was the failure of the Democratic Party. They didn't listen to their base because they thought our votes didn't matter," Jama said.

Anger over the Biden administration's unflinching support for Israel, especially as its far right government expands its war on Gaza to Lebanon, poses a problem for Harris and the Democrats in states with large numbers of Muslim and antiwar voters. That includes the key swing state of Michigan, where more than 101,000 Democratic voters cast "uncommitted" ballots in the primaries. Michigan has one of the nation's largest Arab populations and the highest concentration of Lebanese residents.

Back in April, more than 40,000 Democratic primary voters in Minnesota cast uncommitted ballots instead of votes for President Joe Biden to demand the U.S. stop the flow of weapons to Israel and secure a ceasefire in the war on Gaza. With 19 percent of the total vote in the state's primary, Minnesota sent more Uncommitted delegates to the Democratic National Convention than any other state.

Biden's position on arms transfers did not change, and now Israel's war is escalating in explosive fashion. Quietly backed by U.S. diplomats, Israel has carried out escalating series of brazen attacks, first causing personal communication devices across the country to explode, and then dropping dozens of bunker-buster bombs on a southern suburb of Beirut. The attacks maimed and killed top members of Hezbollah, the militant armed group within Lebanon that has historic ties to the Palestinian resistance, including the group's former leader Hassan Nasrallah.

Hezbollah responded with a barrage of rockets against Israeli military targets. Iran, Hezbollah's ally, sent missiles to Israel as well, noting that its attack was in response to the killing of Nasrallah, as well as Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh, who was assassinated in Tehran in July.

Israeli forces have now invaded southern Lebanon, Altogether, Israeli attacks on the country over the last three weeks have caused hundreds of civilian casualties and displaced more than 1 million people. Meanwhile, Israeli airstrikes on civilian infrastructure continue to claim dozens of lives in Gaza. Independent experts say Israel has likely used U.S. weapons in war crimes, and progressives in Congress recently moved to block a \$20 billion weapons sale to Israel.

Now, fears are growing over regional war — exactly the scenario the White House has publicly claimed for months it was trying to avoid by brokering a ceasefire deal in Gaza that never materialized.

The Harris-Walz campaign could not be reached for comment and has been broadly criticized for dodging journalists. Emgage Action, a Muslim political action committee that has endorsed the Harris campaign, is hosting Walz for a virtual “summit” on Thursday that promises “a way forward” for Democrats and the nation’s 2 million registered Muslim voters.

Jama said Walz and other Democrats should be denouncing the genocide in Gaza and taking action to end the war, and he pointed to numerous nationwide polls showing that a clear majority of Democrat-leaning voters agree with him.

Hussein and Jama are part of the #AbandonHarris campaign, which is urging people to show up and vote in November — but not for Republican Donald Trump or his opponents, Harris and Walz. Instead, the campaign called on Minnesotans to vote for a third-party presidential candidate or leave the ballot blank.

The Uncommitted movement that rallied voters to protest Biden’s primary campaign recently said it cannot endorse Harris while the administration continues unconditional weapons transfers to Israel.

Hussein said Walz failed to deliver “a single line” in his debate against Republican Sen. J.D. Vance on Tuesday that demonstrates the Harris campaign has listened to Muslim Democrats and understands that a genocide is underway in Gaza.

Between both sides and the moderators at CBS, Walz was the only person on the debate stage to even mention Gaza, but only in passing. In the debate’s opening question, Walz called both the release of remaining Israeli hostages held by Hamas and an end to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza “essential.”

Hussein said that for many Muslims and their allies in Minneapolis, Walz is doing too little, too late. Voters go to the polls a month from now. The war is only intensifying, and Biden has sent more U.S. troops to the Middle East in recent weeks.

“Many of them are now numb — numb because they have stopped understanding that their loved ones may survive, and now they believe that this war will mean the end of many of their family members in Gaza,” Hussein said of Palestinian voters in Minneapolis. “This is unacceptable.”

The Harris-Walz campaign’s challenge to win over Muslim voters extends to Arab voters as well, regardless of religion. A recent poll found that support for Harris among Arab Americans is still 18 points below Biden’s level of support in 2020, and Arab voters are split evenly along party lines.

Unless the White House changes course, Hussein is urging his community to vote for third-party presidential candidates or simply leave the top of the ballot blank. However, both Hussein and Jama also urged their community not to let despair over the presidential race prevent them from voting. Jama said Muslims are called to stop injustice by any means besides violence, and that includes voting in elections.

“You don’t deserve my vote,” Jama said of Democrats. “My vote has value.”



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