

Effective communities participate in the democratic processes, proactively educating their compatriots about their issues and views and ensuring that they are understood on an ongoing basis. Thus, they are actively and significantly engaged in activities such as the following in all three major parties:

1. Participating in the policy development process of political parties by volunteering on policy development committees at various organization levels;
2. Running for political parties' elected positions, at constituency, regional, provincial and national level;
3. Taking part in electing the best leader of the party as and when there is an opportunity to do so;
4. Getting involved in ensuring the best person is nominated for election in the local riding; and
5. Putting apprentices to work in the MP offices.

There is a very little involvement of Muslims in these processes, except for number 4 in some ridings. The result is that parties adopt bad policies and elect bad leaders; but all we do is complain. That does not help us at all, except alienating us more from them and making us sound like habitual complainers.

Then, when elections come, most of the Muslims do not vote. Those who vote have difficulty deciding who to vote for. Usually the criterion then becomes: who is the least offensive. Everyone scurries around to "stop" a certain party from forming government. Unfortunately, this approach does not work in our favour and we fail every time.

I have been studying Canadian politics and serving the community in this respect since the mid 80's. Election after election, I have seen our community deciding to "Hold your nose and vote Liberal" at both federal and provincial levels. It always happened because of some "anti-Muslim", "anti-immigrant", "racist" or "pro-Zionist" stance or attitude of the Conservative party. The result has been that the Liberals took us for a ride and did to us exactly what the Conservatives talked about, while the gulf between the mainstream Muslims and Conservatives increasingly widened every time. The current state of affairs provides clear evidence. This approach also deprived NDP of our support they deserved.

Unfortunately, Ontario Muslims are once again falling into the same trap. Although both the

Liberals and the Conservative are competing neck to neck in the list of their negatives, many Muslims are once again preaching "Hold your nose and vote Liberal".

We need to come out of this hole we have dug ourselves into and we need to avoid this trap. The first step is to understand the following:

- No party is inherently evil or inherently angelic. Every party has good policies and bad policies; and good people and bad people.
- We are not going to change the perceptions, attitudes and views of the politicians by staying out of the process and protesting, but only by getting involved using methods such as those listed above.
- Every party has something in their platform that appeals to some part of the Muslim population. They should join the parties for those common points of interest and work to improve whatever they find unacceptable.
- Whether someone is politically involved or not, everyone one must vote. Even if they did not have the chance to do their homework, they still must vote using their best judgment on the basis of whatever they know.

I have presented a strong case in the past that it is absolutely not in the interest of our community to support any party or oppose any party collectively. Instead, we should develop guidelines and criteria as a community and publish them so that members of the community can judge the candidates in their own ridings and vote according to their evaluation. That is how effective communities act.

For a more detailed discussion, refer to [The Responsibility of Voting](#) as well as [Guideline](#)  
[S](#) for proper use of the voting franchise.