



Elections Guide 2006

CAIR  **CAN**

Canadian Council on American-Islamic Relations

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In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful



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Dear Imam, activist, community leader, sister or brother:

Assalaamu'alaykum. May God's peace be with you.

CAIR-CAN has published its Election Resource Guide. The guide is available at www.caircan.ca. There is also a special downloadable pdf version available at www.caircan.ca/downloads/election2006.pdf.

The Election 2006 Resource Guide has been developed to educate Canadian Muslims about the Canadian election system and to encourage them to vote.

The first part of the guide, reproduced below, is meant to educate Canadian Muslims both about the need to vote in the upcoming elections and the essentials of our voting system.

*** ELECTIONS 2006**

*** WHY SHOULD I VOTE?**

*** GET EDUCATED WITH THE "ELECTION WATCH"**

*** THE ABCS OF VOTING IN CANADA**

-An Explanation of the Canadian Election System

-Requirements for Voting

-Registering to Vote

-Adding Your Name to the Voter's List

*** ACTION ALERT: ORGANIZE A FRIDAY PRAYER ANNOUNCEMENT**

*** ACTION ALERT: MEET LOCAL CANDIDATES IN YOUR RIDING**

*** ACTION ALERT: ORGANIZE A DEBATE FOR LOCAL CANDIDATES**

Wassallamu'alaykum,

CAIR-CAN

Why should I vote ...

Elections 2006

A general federal election has been called for January 23, 2006. Canada's 600,000 Muslims must realize that without political participation our lives and our communities will not change for the better. Many of us realized this in the post-9/11 environment. We have since become more involved in community affairs. We are now beginning to take our civic duties more seriously.

The Elections 2006 Guide is designed to provide you with information to successfully participate in the Canadian federal elections of 2006. But before you continue on, please take a few minutes to read the tips below to guarantee that you get the most out of this resource guide.

Read through this guide. In it, you will find information essential to understanding the basics of the election process.

Photocopy the page "Mosque Announcement" and distribute it to mosques in your city.

Call CAIR-CAN if you have any questions, or if you do not understand any part of the resource guide.

Clip news articles and record TV items related to Canadian Muslims during the election process. Send originals of newspaper clips and clear video copies to the Communications department at CAIR-CAN.

Inside this kit:

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Why should I vote ...

It is your sacred duty to participate and make your society better. As a Canadian Muslim, you have made your home in Canada and you benefit from the many rights and privileges of Canadian citizenship. It is time to give back to your community and your country. Your vote demonstrates that you are committed to making Canada a better place for all Canadians.

Voting plays a tremendous role in the making of government policy at all levels – both locally and internationally. Voting is your chance to choose a representative who best expresses your values and opinions as a Canadian Muslim.

Complacency, apathy and a mindset of victimization are your greatest enemy. If you bury your head in the sand, you will harm no one but yourself. If you are not vigilant about your rights and freedoms, you will lose them. If you don't speak up, no one will speak up on your behalf.

The issues that affect you, your family and your community are too numerous to mention. They include health care, the environment, education, employment, poverty, child care, immigration, national security, civil liberties, discrimination, racial profiling and taxation.

For an informed, intelligent decision at the ballot box, you must educate yourself about the political process. To exercise your democratic rights, some of you may choose to join political parties, others may volunteer on a political campaign. But the least you can do is vote and be counted.

Get educated...

CAIR-CAN'S "ELECTION WATCH"

CAIR-CAN is committed to providing Canadian Muslims with up-to-date information regarding the platforms and opinions of our main political parties. As a service to you, we will be issuing a regular "ELECTION WATCH," which will summarize important articles from media outlets across the country that deal with election issues. The "ELECTION WATCH" will keep you updated, educated and informed about the issues that confront you as a Canadian Muslim.

Sign up for the "ELECTION WATCH" by becoming a member of our national e-mail list. If you are not already a member, sign up at: http://www.caircan.ca/sty_conn.php.



The ABC's of voting in Canada ...

An explanation of the Canadian Election System

Canada is divided into 308 electoral districts or ridings. Voters in each riding elect one Member of Parliament (MP) to send to the House of Commons.

There are nine registered federal political parties. Each party can nominate one candidate for each riding.

The party that wins the most ridings in a general federal election is asked by the Governor General to form the government. The leader of that party becomes the Prime Minister of Canada. If the party wins in more than 154 ridings, it will have a majority government.

If the winning party wins 154 seats or fewer, it will form a minority government. The political party that wins the second highest number of seats in the House of Commons becomes the Official Opposition.

Requirements for voting

To vote in a Canadian federal election you must be a Canadian citizen, be 18 or older on election day and be on the voters list.

If you are not able to vote on election day, you can vote in the advance polls held in all ridings. Locations and times of advance polls appear on the Voter Information Cards that Elections Canada mails to all registered voters.

Eligible voters who do not wish to vote at their polling station, or cannot get to a regular polling station on election day or during the advance polls, can vote by mail, or in person at the office of the returning officer, using a Special Ballot.

To use a Special Ballot, you must have a Canadian address for electoral purposes and your vote will be counted for that riding. Contact Elections Canada at 1-800-INFO-VOTE (1-800-463-6868) to get an application form as soon as possible. Elections Canada will send you a voting kit, which must be completed and received back by Elections Canada by 6 p.m. EST on election day. You can also get an application form from your riding returning office or the nearest embassy or consulate.



The ABC's of voting in Canada... (con't)

Registering to vote

Elections Canada keeps a permanent National Register of Electors, from which a preliminary list of voters are drawn up.

Returning officers update the preliminary voters lists during a revision period that starts three days after the election is called and ends six days before election day. The end of the 2006 Election revision period is January 17, 2006.

For the 2006 election, Elections Canada will begin mailing Voter Information Cards to those individuals whose names are on the preliminary voters lists on January 6, 2006.

The card will tell you that you are registered, and where and when to vote.

If you do not receive a Voter Information Card, or if the information on your Voter Information Card is incorrect, contact the returning office for your riding by January 17 at the latest. If you do not know the address of your returning office, contact Elections Canada at 1-800-INFO-VOTE (1-800-463-6868).

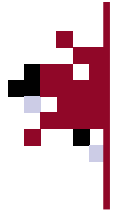
Adding your name to the voters list

There are several ways to add your name to the voters list for the 2006 election.

* Contact your returning office by 6:00 p.m. on January 17, 2006. You will have to show a "valid official document" with your name, address and signature, such as a drivers licence, or two valid official documents, one with your name and address such as an electricity bill, and one with your name and signature, such as a library card.

* You can also register at the polling station on election day. It is best if you register earlier, though. You must show valid identification and also make a sworn statement of your identity and residence, and have another elector registered in the same polling division make a sworn statement to vouch for you.

To find the address of your returning office, the date and location of advance polls in your riding and the polling station on election day, call Elections Canada at 1-800-INFO-VOTE (1-800-463-6868). People who are deaf or hard of hearing can call TTY 1-800-361-8935.



Action Alerts...

Make an announcement at Friday prayers

Arrange with your local mosque to read the following announcement after Friday prayers:

“As Canadian Muslims, we have made our home in Canada and benefit from the many rights and privileges of Canadian citizenship. We must participate fully in the political process of Canada. It is our sacred duty as Canadian Muslims to vote and make our voices heard.

“Voting plays a tremendous role in the making of government policy at all levels – both locally and internationally. The issues that affect you, your family and your community are too numerous to mention. They include health care, the environment, education, employment, poverty, child care, immigration, national security, civil liberties, discrimination, racial profiling and taxation.

As a Canadian Muslim, you must choose a candidate who will be an effective spokesperson in promoting what is collectively beneficial and challenging what is harmful.

Meet local candidates in your riding

Organizing a meeting between political candidates and members of your community can help clarify each candidates' position on issues of importance to Canadian Muslims and permit you the opportunity to lobby their support for those issues.

To organize a meeting with a candidate, determine who will attend the meeting and what issues you are planning to raise. Try to avoid delegations of more than 5 community members or leaders. You can then send an invitation stating a purpose for the meeting, a proposed date, the names of each community member who will attend, the issues that will be raised and your contact information. Include your address so they can verify that you are a constituent.

After you send the invitation, follow up in two days to ensure that it has been received. Be patient and flexible in seeking a meeting. It may take several calls before a time is scheduled. When a meeting is scheduled, call the day before to reconfirm.

Action Alerts... [con't]

Meet local candidates in your riding [con't]

Before attending the meeting, make sure you know the candidates' positions and policies. You can find this information by checking their website or reading news articles. On issues where you may not agree, remember to always maintain basic courtesy and respect for different opinions and ideas.

During the meeting, lobby the candidates for a commitment to taking action on issues of importance to Canadian Muslims rather than merely informing them of the community's opinions. Keep in mind how those actions can benefit both our community and the candidate when putting forward your arguments.

After the meeting, inform the community about what was said. Consider posting transcripts of the discussion on your website, or writing an article for a local Muslim newspaper.

Remember to send a thank you note to the candidate.

Organize a debate for local candidates

Holding a debate for the political candidates running for office in your riding is a good way to learn about each candidates' position on issues of importance to Canadian Muslims. Here are some steps you can follow to organize a debate:

1. Determine when and where the debate will take place. Contact each candidate early in an election campaign to find out when they are available.
2. Determine the format of the debate. Decide how long opening and closing remarks will be, and choose a time period for questions from the moderator and audience. For example, each candidate could be given 5 minutes for opening remarks. That can be followed with a 30 minute question period in which each candidate gets 1 or 2 minutes to answer each question. Part of that question period can include questions from the audience. The debate can then end with 5 minutes of closing remarks per candidate.
3. Decide who will be the moderator and design guidelines for the debate. The moderator will introduce the candidates as well as explain and enforce the rules of the debate and how questions will be asked and answered. The moderator will also give guidelines for audience participation and remind the audience that the debate is a forum for learning about the position of each candidate. Disagreement can be expressed when casting your vote on election day.

Action Alerts ... [con't]

4. Determine what questions will be posed by the moderator. Choose issues that affect Canadian Muslims and the broader Canadian society. The issues you choose can range from local community concerns to foreign policy. Visit CAIR-CAN's website, www.caircan.ca, for information about issues of importance to Canadian Muslims.
5. Send formal invitations to each candidate. Include the date, time and location of the debate, the purpose of the debate and the rules and format of the debate.
6. Advertise the debate. Send press releases to local media, (contact CAIR-CAN for more information on how to write a press release), run announcements in community newspapers and on radio and television shows, and post announcements or distribute flyers in the community. Include the date, time and location of the debate as well as the names and political party of each candidate.
7. Determine the layout of the debate room. Make sure name cards indicating each candidate and their political affiliation are clearly visible to the audience. Have microphones set up by the candidates, along with one or two amongst the audience for questions. Provide water for the moderator and each candidate.