

American Muslims celebrate defeat of congressional critics

by [Omar Sacirbey](#)

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American Muslims are celebrating the ouster of two congressmen known for their anti-Islamic rhetoric, and heralding the outcomes as a sign that Muslim voters, at least in some districts, are a political force to be reckoned with.

"These encouraging results clearly show that mainstream Americans reject anti-Muslim bigotry by candidates for public office and will demonstrate that rejection at the polls," said Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. "This election witnessed an increased political awareness and mobilization effort among American Muslims that dealt a major blow to the Islamophobia machine."

Republican Rep. Allen West lost to Democrat Patrick Murphy by about 2,500 votes in Florida's 18th Congressional District, which includes Fort Lauderdale and West Palm Beach. West has not conceded, however, and has filed a motion to have paper ballots recounted.

There are roughly 160,000 Muslims in Florida, comprising about 0.9 percent of the population.

Over in Illinois, 21,000 votes separated Republican Rep. Joe Walsh from his successful Democratic challenger Tammy Duckworth, an Iraqi War veteran and double amputee. Illinois is home to the country's largest concentration of Muslims, about 360,000 comprising 2.8 percent of the population.

"His anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant positions were not the sole reason I voted for Duckworth, but they played a big role," said Junaid Afeef, who helped organize fundraisers and phone banks targeting Muslim voters.

Afeef even appeared in a television ad supporting Duckworth. "Joe Walsh wants us to be afraid of our neighbors. We need to be afraid of Joe Walsh," Afeef said in the spot.

In an August campaign speech, Walsh warned voters that radical Muslims were lurking amongst them.

"One thing I'm sure of is that there are people in this country - there is a radical strain of Islam in this country - it's not just over there - trying to kill Americans every week," Walsh said. "It's here. It's in Elk Grove. It's in Addison. It's in Elgin. It's here," Walsh added, naming towns in his district.

West, whose funders included casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, repeatedly derided Islam, asserting that it was "not a religion" but a "totalitarian theocratic political ideology" in which terrorism is inherent.

"By supporting Patrick Murphy you are sending a message that anti-Muslim sentiment has no place in the halls of the U.S. Congress," wrote Ahmed Bedier, a former director of CAIR's Florida chapter, in an email urging Muslims to support Murphy.

West and Walsh did not respond to requests for comment.

Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann, a former presidential candidate and Tea Party standard-bearer who co-wrote a letter suggesting that Hillary Clinton's chief of staff, Huma Abedin, had ties to extremists, won by about 4,300 votes, a margin of less than 2 percent.

In Florida's 22nd District, Democrat Lois Frankel handily defeated Republican Adam Hasner, a former Florida House majority leader who once left a Florida House meeting when an imam delivered the opening prayer.

Several other congressmen known for strident rhetoric about Islam fared better, including Reps. Trent Franks of Arizona, Louis Gohmert of Texas, Lynn Westmoreland of Georgia, Diane Black of Tennessee, and Steve King of Iowa. —RNS