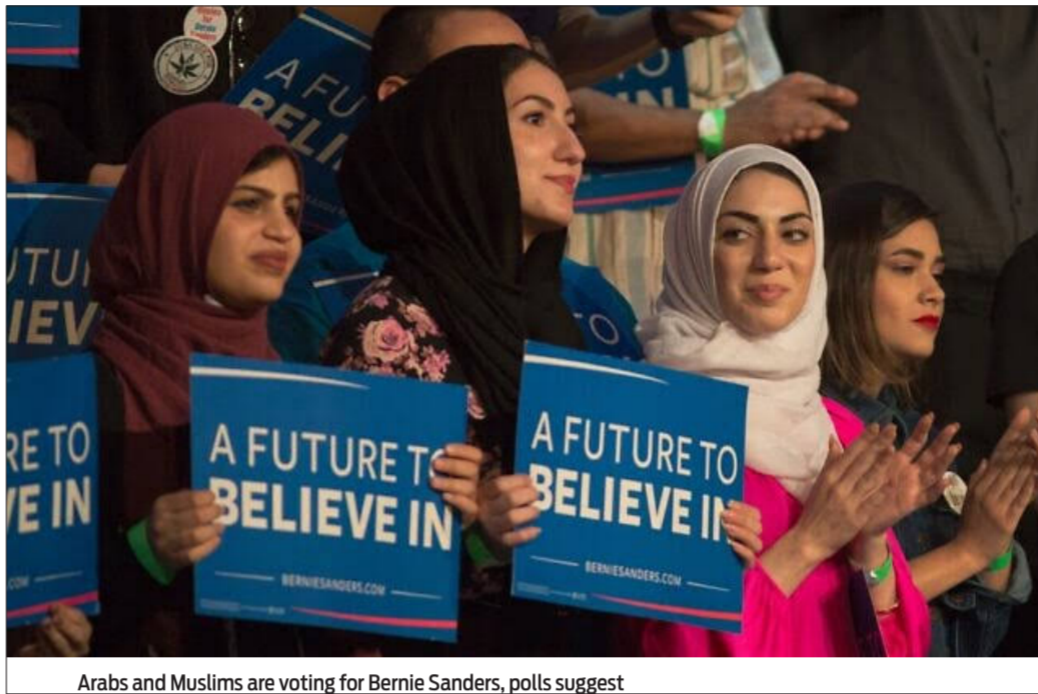


Why Muslims Want This Jew To Become US President

AMER ZAHIR

Let me try to explain something. Arab Americans support Bernie Sanders, not in spite of his Jewishness, but because of it. Sanders has often spoken of how his family's history of suffering in the Holocaust has informed his empathy for that of others, including - most notably for Arab and Palestinian Americans - the unjust plight of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.



Arabs and Muslims are voting for Bernie Sanders, polls suggest

I'm a Palestinian Arab American. My father is a Palestinian Christian. My mother is a Palestinian Muslim. (They're hippies, obviously.) Both of my parents were driven from their birthplaces of Yafa and Akka by Israel. After my birth in Jordan, I grew up in the suburbs of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. I then attended college, graduate school, and law school in Michigan. I then became a comedian. My mom still tells people I'm a lawyer.

I now live in Dearborn, Michigan, home to the largest concentration of Arabs and Muslims anywhere in the United States. It's the only place in America where you can eat a delicious shawarma, drink thick coffee, smoke a tasty shisha, and then chant "Free, Free Palestine" with hundreds of your friends, all in the same afternoon. It's the Arab Disneyland.

I'm also a national surrogate for presidential candidate Bernie Sanders. No, that doesn't mean I'm having his baby. It means that I campaign on the candidate's behalf whenever asked to do so. Yes, I am a Palestinian volunteering countless hours of my time for the old, Jewish guy running for president. And I'm proud as hell about it.

Arab Americans (of all faiths) and Muslim Americans (of all nationalities) are overwhelmingly supporting Bernie Sanders. In fact, we have stood behind the Vermont senator since 2016.

Four years ago, Arab Americans in Michigan put Bernie Sanders over the top. Reviews of polling stations in Dearborn showed that Arab Americans there voted at a ratio of 3-1 for Sanders over Hillary Clinton in the 2016 Democratic primary.

Roughly 400,000 Arabs live throughout Michigan. Sanders won the state by 17,000 votes.

I was a political activist on the ground then, and I am now too. Back then, and still today, reporters routinely call me with a strikingly similar line of questioning:

"Can you explain how Arab Americans are supporting the Jewish candidate for president?"

"Has it been a struggle to convince your community to support Sanders, who is Jewish?"

"Bernie Sanders is Jewish. You know that, right?"

First, yes, we know. We totally know. Second, questions like this are utterly racist. Queries like that assume that we Arabs, and Palestinians especially, are somehow genetically predisposed to anti-Semitism. The premise is simply ridiculous.

There are many things we Arabs are predisposed to. Garlic. Bargaining. Fighting over the bill. Plastic on the furniture. Disagreeing loudly. Agreeing loudly. Just being loud. Moving our hands while we talk. Yes, even on the phone. But not anti-Semitism. Not that.

Let me try to explain something. Arab Americans support Bernie Sanders, not in spite of his Jewishness, but because of it. Sanders has often spoken of how his family's history of suffering in the Holocaust has informed his empathy for that of others, including - most notably for Arab and Palestinian Americans - the unjust plight of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation.

He routinely outlines how American foreign policy must reflect not only an emphasis on the welfare of Israelis, but also, just as equally, on the welfare of Palestinians as well. The deplorable

humanitarian situation in Gaza is frequently a focus of his remarks. And he doesn't revert to the old line of "It's all Hamas' fault." The responsibility for the Gaza blockade, which has caused immeasurable suffering for the two million residents of that land, lies at the feet of the Israeli government.

He reiterated these sentiments Tuesday night at a townhall meeting in Nevada, saying, "I feel strongly about it, as someone who is Jewish, and knowing how much our people have suffered over the years, take a look at what's going on in Gaza right now," detailing the astronomical unemployment and inhumane immobility of Gazans.

In that same event, he also declared, "To be for the Israeli people and to be for peace in the Middle East does not mean that we have to support right-wing racist governments that currently exist in Israel." He stated his vision of bringing Palestinians and Israelis together "under a banner of justice."

This type of rhetoric is simply unheard of in American presidential politics. And Bernie is able to wade into this area, in large part, because he is Jewish. That has not, however, stopped pro-Israel groups from going after him. A year-old Super PAC named "Democratic Majority for Israel" is running ads against Sanders. That political action group has, according to reporting by The Intercept, close funding, messaging and institutional ties with AIPAC. Sanders, of course, has not backed down.

In 2016, Palestinian and Arab American activists made a bet on Bernie. We urged his campaign to speak about justice for the Palestinians. We promised our support in return. He did it, and we delivered. And we are delivering again.

Moreover, the central themes of his campaign speak directly to our cultural values. His slogans of "We are all in this together," "Fight for someone you don't know," and "Speak up for the weakest among us" are mantras we've been hearing from our Arab moms and dads for years. His famous hashtag of #NotMeUs is a natural fit for us. Yes, he says these things because he is Jewish, and we hear them natively because we are Arabs.

As I often say in my performances, Arabs and Jews aren't that different. In Arabic, we call Jews awlaad 'amna, our cousins. And we mean it. We are almost the same. Big noses. Crazy moms. Hairy arms (that goes for men and women). The only difference is they are chosen by God. And we are chosen by the FBI.

In this American election cycle, watch for us hairy, crazy Arabs to vote for the old Jewish guy. It's just natural.

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Hindutva supporters hate the Mughals. So why is Adityanath taking Trump to Shahjahan's Taj Mahal?

Hindutva has its own pantheon of medieval kings. Why not take the US President to visit monuments they built?

SHOAIB DANIYAL

On Monday, Donald Trump arrives in India. As part of the United States President's itinerary, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Adityanath will take him to see the Taj Mahal.

This shouldn't be too surprising. There is no other single Indian monument more famous than the Taj Mahal. In a poll conducted in 2007, the Taj Mahal in Agra was voted as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. So treasured is it as a monument of humanity, a picture of it was included among the 115 images on the Voyager spacecraft when it was launched in 1977. In case the vehicle was discovered by intelligent extraterrestrial life, the scientists who launched Voyager wanted them to know that earthlings had built the Taj Mahal.

Trump has himself attempted to profit from the fame of the monument, building a casino called the Trump Taj Mahal in the United States. (He made money from it but the establishment did not.)

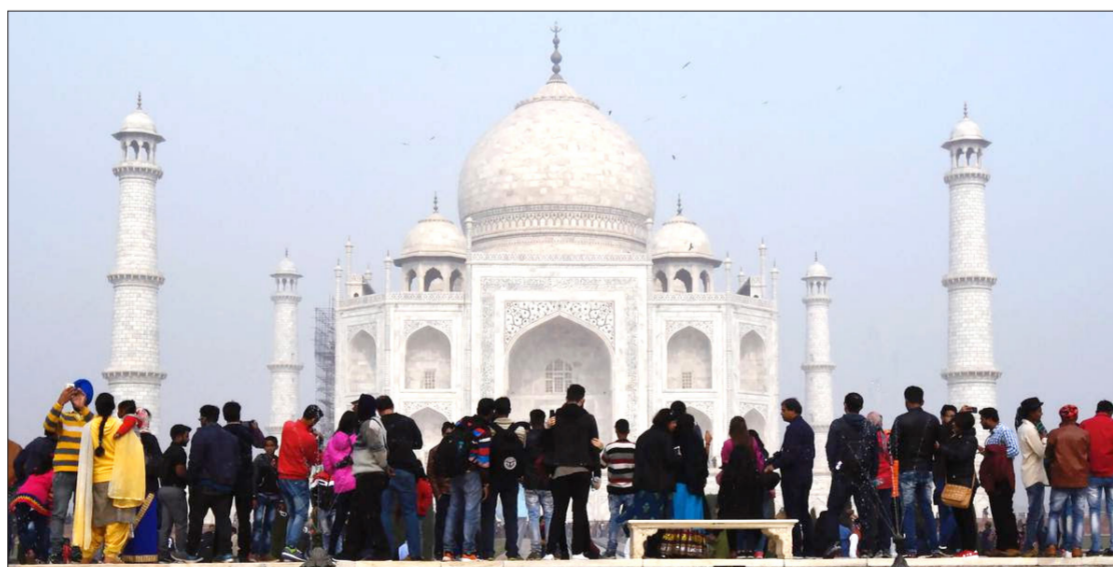
Yet, there's one group of people who really isn't as sold on the Taj as Trump and the rest of the world: Hindu nationalists.

Anti-Taj Mahal

Given that it was built as a mausoleum by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, Hindutva supporters have launched a series of attacks on the monument. In 2017, the Taj Mahal was left out of Uttar Pradesh's official tourism booklet by the Adityanath government. In fact, Adityanath has previously criticised the mausoleum for not being Indian enough since it was built by the Mughals.

Some other Hindu nationalists take a more creative approach to the problem of India's most famous monument being Mughal: they deny it is Mughal at all, claiming instead that it is actually a Hindu temple. This bizarre claim is widespread in Hindutva circles has even been repeated by a minister in the Modi government.

But this leads to a paradox: why is Adityanath taking Trump on a tour of the Taj Mahal if the Mughals and anything built by them is so disliked? Hindutva has its own pantheon of medieval kings. Why



not take Trump to visit sites associated with them?

Uniting India

The most obvious answer is the Mughals were so dominant in medieval India that the West recognises the dynasty more than any other in India. In fact, dating from the seventeenth century, the word "mogul" itself in English refers to a "powerful person".

This power also means that Mughal monuments have a grandeur that is unmatched in India in terms of scale and opulence. The expansive and centralised nature of the Mughal Empire meant it could draw in to its capitals a quantum of wealth from the provinces that was unheard of in medieval India. The grandeur of the Red Fort in Delhi, the Taj Mahal in Agra or the Badshahi Masjid in Lahore are, more than anything, a result of the power of the Mughal state. This means, politics aside, Mughal monuments are easily the most impressive buildings in town. If India needs to put its best foot forward in front of a guest, a Mughal monument is its best bet.

Mughal memory

On the one hand, Hindu nationalists dislike the Mughals. Yet, on the other hand, the Mughal empire is the only state to have united South Asia politically in the popular Indian imagination. While, two millennia ago, the Mauryas did also rule a vast portion of South Asia, Indians - never great at keeping historical records - had completely forgotten about the dynasty. It took the arrival of the British and a phalanx of modern historians to tell modern Indians that they had a great emperor called Ashoka.

The stature of the Mughals as a pan-Indian empire meant that the British, who became the paramount political power in India by the 18th century, consciously styled themselves after the Mughals in order to signal to their subjects that Calcutta - their first capital - was picking up where the Mughal Empire's capital of Delhi had left off.

The British started using Persian (right till 1947, the British king styled himself Kaiser-e-Hind or Emperor of India) and used a modified Mughal style in its architecture to establish sovereignty over India. By the 1930s, the British even shifted their capital back to Mughal Delhi.

In 1857, as parts of the Bengal Army rebelled against the British, they automatically headed to Delhi and, by some accounts, virtually forced the Mughal emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar to become their leader. Zafar had no power at the time, but his title as Mughal emperor was a valuable stamp for the largely rulerless revolt.

Later, as modern Indian nationalism took root, Subhas Chandra Bose challenged British rule by exhorting his Indian National Army with the slogan "Dilli Chalo!", march to Delhi, with the Red Fort as the symbol for India. Since the Red Fort was the Mughal nerve centre, it was easily used a metonym for the whole country. As legal scholar Kanika Sharma puts it: "The iconicity of the Red Fort was such that there was a belief that to raise your flag over the Red Fort was to raise your flag over all of India."

Independent India

As India became independent, like the British Raj before it, it also drew a line from the Mughals. Every year on Independence Day, the prime minister - including Modi - addresses Indians from the Red Fort, hoping to reuse some of Shahjahan's power for modern purposes.

So powerful is this association that even Hindu nationalists cannot break it. Ideologically inclined proponents of Hindutva would prefer to see, say, the Raigad Fort of Shivaji as the symbol of the Indian Union. But Shivaji did not rule all of modern Maharashtra, not to mention India. Similarly, no other state in the Maratha Confederacy ever reached the pan-South Asian scale of the Mughal empire. In fact, even when the Marathas were more powerful than the Mughals, they could not think of deposing the emperor at Delhi as the Indian sovereign. Only a foreign power, the British, could consider taking that extreme step.

Many Indians would have favourable views of the kings that Hindutva supporters hail. But they sit in very different boxes compared to the claim to pan-South Asian sovereignty that the Mughals make in popular memory.

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