

## Citizenship

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### How should the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims be?

Islam is a religion of peace and it envisages that harmonious relations be the norm between people. The Qur'an shows that humanity deserves great respect and has been honoured: *"We have honoured the children of Adam"* (Qur'an, 17:70). It also shows that differences of faith, ethnicity, nationality, etc. are part of the divine intent and that these differences are not to cause conflict between peoples:

*"O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other, (not that you may despise each other)..."* (Qur'an, 49: 13).

Muslims are not a chosen people or group who should remain isolated or aloof from others. The Islamic worldview envisages equality between peoples and the Muslim is present to promote the good and discourage the wrong for all people and to be of service to the whole of mankind. Muslims are therefore encouraged to forge partnerships and work with other people, regardless of their beliefs, on issues of common ground and at the same time



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ensure that they live the message of Islam so that it can be clearly seen by all.

At times people fall into the trap of comparing the best aspects of one group with the worst aspects of another, or unfairly generalising the nature of conflicts and pit one group against another as a whole. This type of 'black and white' thinking is not conducive to peace and harmony between peoples. Even when the early Muslims were facing oppression and aggression at the hands of unbelievers, it was other non-Muslims like Abu Talib or Mut'im bin Adiy, or the Christian Negus of Abyssinia, who were helping the Muslims to survive. The Qur'an clarifies and contextualises the teachings on our relationship with other people:

*“...with regards those who do not fight you or drive you from your homes, then show them kindness and deal with them justly, surely God loves the doers of justice” (Qur'an, 60: 8).*

Furthermore, due to the historical legacy of Islam and its heritage, there is a special affinity to the Abrahamic family of faiths. Any conflicts that exist between people of different faiths must be seen as an aberration from the natural state of peace, and every endeavour applied to return to that state.



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### Should we meet or have a relationship with organisations that may differ with us on issues?

Following on from the above, it is clear that co-operation with other organisations and institutions, be they Muslim or non-Muslim based, is a good thing. The Qur'an further mentions: “...and help one another in goodness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and aggression...” (Qur'an, 5: 2).

Hence, it is not just a permission but a duty to bring people's energies together and work together where possible. We can infer a general guideline for our context from the remark of a scholar concerning to the divergences between Muslims: “let us work together for what we agree on and excuse each other for what we disagree on”. One may thus find that there are alliances to built, even if temporary, on many different levels and for many different purposes. There is an interesting parallel with a pact (known as the *Hilf al-Fudul*) that was formed by Muhammad (pbuh) prior to the era of Prophecy, which he described saying, “I attended...a covenant which I would not exchange for any material gain. If now after Islam I am called upon to honour it, I would certainly do so”. This incident illustrates that the Prophet was keen to make a moral stance with other people, regardless of their beliefs, for a common cause.



### Can you vote in a non-Muslim political system?

Yes. Being a citizen and living in a non-Muslim society, or indeed any society, involves taking up an active and positive role. Most scholars have argued that Muslims must participate actively in the political process of their country, not just to protect their own interests but for the interests of the society at large. For example Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi has often declared the compatibility between Islam and democracy and stated that “Voting is a deeply-rooted Islamic system.”

Numerous other scholars have made public statements such as: “...the Muslims are recommended or even obliged to vote for the party who will be of most benefit on a national and international level, who will increase upon that which is good, or at the least, lessen the extent of the current evil prevalent in the world today”. (Shaykh Haitham al-Haddad)

### Can you become a member of a political party in a non-Muslim society or take up a position in a non-Muslim government?

Yes. A legal opinion of Shaykh Taha Jabir al-Alwani in the US gives a clear and decisive argument:



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“...it is the duty of (American) Muslims to participate constructively in the political process, if only to protect their rights, and give support to views and causes they favor. Their participation may also improve the quality of information disseminated about Islam. We call this participation a “duty” because we do not consider it merely a “right” that can be abandoned or a “permission” which can be ignored”.



With regards to joining a political group, the *Hilf al-Fudul* and other examples have already been mentioned to show that Muslims can and must join others in working for justice. There are at least three historical examples of people who ruled or participated in a non-Islamic political system: The case of the Prophet Yusuf (as) in Egypt, the Negus in Abyssinia and Umar bin Abdul Aziz who found himself ruling as a monarch - a situation that he inherited, not one that he agreed with morally. His response was to use this position to just ends and to make gradual changes from within his post, rather than abdicate it altogether.