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Muslims say Ron Paul is their kind of Republican

Omar Sacirbey Religion News Service | Jan. 18, 2012

Growing up in rural parts of the American West, Nadja Adolf's libertarian streak developed early on.

"When you come from a countryside that can kill you," said Adolf, a Muslim convert in her late 50s, "there is a strong emphasis on individual rights, a strong emphasis on self-reliance and an emphasis on helping each other out."

That attitude is part of the reason Adolf is drawn to the presidential campaign of Ron Paul, the maverick Republican congressman from Texas who is fighting to stay alive in the Republican primaries.

While some political observers question whether Paul has the staying power and widespread appeal to win the nomination, his campaign has proven unique in one respect: He's drawing serious support from Muslims.

After abandoning the GOP in droves during the George W. Bush presidency, some Muslims say Paul is the kind of Republican who could draw them back and challenge their loyalty to President Barack Obama.

Adolf, who converted to Islam in May 2001, learned about Paul in 2004 during the congressman's opposition to the Patriot Act, which he argued allows the government the right to spy on citizens. Paul also opposed the National Defense Authorization Act, which was recently signed into law by Obama and allows the government to indefinitely imprison U.S. citizens suspected, but not proven guilty, of terrorist activity.

"I'm a fairly old-school rural Westerner, and I am a firm believer in individual rights, and I do not understand how a government can even pretend to have the power to detain a citizen or spy on them without warrant," Adolf said.

Paul, a 76-year-old Baptist, couldn't agree more.

The renegade Republican has piqued Muslim interest with promises to extract America from foreign wars, cut aid to Israel and protect civil liberties -- there are at least four "Muslims for Ron Paul" Facebook pages.

Paul's position on civil liberties resonates with many younger Muslims, including Zahra Siddiqui, an 18-year-old political science major at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

"These laws are obviously directed at policing Muslims," Siddiqui said. "Ron Paul knows how to differentiate between Muslims and terrorists, and he would never sacrifice any citizen's liberties over security."

Paul's promise to get the United States out of Afghanistan and other foreign conflicts also appeals to Siddiqui, whose family is from Pakistan and who worries that U.S. drone strikes there could escalate into war. Like other Muslim Paul supporters, Siddiqui said the Texas congressman is the only candidate willing to get tough with Israel.

"He has a deep understanding of how detrimental our foreign policy has been in Islamic countries," Siddiqui

said. "Ron Paul will stop the large amount of foreign aid given to Israel and will discontinue rushing to Israel's defense when it engages in oppressing the Palestinian people."

Some American Muslims say they've been let down by Obama, especially after investing such high hopes after the 2008 election.

"We've been burned again and again," said Rizwan Kadir, a financial consultant in suburban Chicago who brought his daughter to the election booth and voted for Obama four years ago. "I'm very disappointed."

Kadir is unsure whether he will give Obama a second chance, but he is confident that he could never vote for any of the Republican candidates -- except Paul. "If it came down to him and Obama, I don't know," Kadir said.

Paul's Muslim supporters say it's not all about foreign policy or civil liberties. They also make the case that Islam, founded by a prophet who was a successful merchant, also has a soft spot for free markets.

Following a natural disaster that caused the price of commodities to soar, Prophet Muhammad rejected price controls, said Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, founder of the Minaret of Freedom Institute in Bethesda, Md., whose mission includes teaching Muslims about free-market thought.

According to Islamic tradition, "Allah grants plenty or shortage," Muhammad said. "He is the sustainer and real price maker."

It's the kind of small-government, go-it-alone approach that resonates with Adolf's frontier mindset.

"I think there are some very strong libertarian values in Islam, but many Muslims don't see them," Adolf said. "If it's not causing harm to the community, then it's really nobody's business."

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