

American Muslims may go against B

AN overwhelming majority of Muslims — from 70 to 80 per cent according to some surveys — seem eager to vote against President George W. Bush. Some, however, also want to vote for his challenger John F. Kerry because they believe Democrats are always better for immigrants than the Republicans.

Some among Pakistani Muslims, however, want to vote for Mr Bush because they say a Republican administration has always been good to Pakistan while Democrats favour India. But more than one-third of American Muslims believe that a Bush victory will be bad for them and their faith. They say that the US war on terrorism is really a war on Islam, according to a survey report released this week by researchers at Georgetown University.

American Muslims have shifted massively from 2000, when a plurality supported President Bush over Vice-President Al Gore, to today, when 76 per cent support Massachusetts Senator John Kerry and just seven per cent support Mr Bush, a survey released last week noted.

Surveys and reports published this week show that the support for Senator Kerry stems from a general dislike for Mr Bush's domestic and foreign policies. Many Muslims blame Mr Bush for making policy decisions that have made life difficult for them in America. Most of them are upset with the Patriot Act that they say has made it difficult for Muslims to come to America as students or immigrants.

Policies of the Bush administration, they say, also have forced thousands of Muslims to relocate, forcing some to seek asylum in Canada while oth-

ers had to return to their home countries. Many complain that Mr Bush's 'war against terror' is actually a war against Islam and that the Bush administration has no regard for their faith or their community.

Some Muslim advocacy groups reflected these feelings when they publicly appealed to their supporters earlier this week to vote for Kerry. But others also urged caution, saying that an en masse support for him would further eradicate an already weak Muslim presence in the Republican Party and may make life even more difficult for them if Mr Bush is re-elected.

Ignoring such cautions, the Muslim American Political Action Committee and the American Muslim Task Force, umbrella groups representing several Muslim organizations, have officially endorsed Senator Kerry for president.

However, two mainstream Muslim organizations — the Islamic Society of North America and the Islamic Circle of North America — have refused to do so. They say that they want Muslims to make individual decisions rather than voting en bloc. At their recent meetings, they allowed both Democratic and Republican parties to set up campaign offices. But the Bush campaign office at ISNA's annual gathering looked deserted while the majority lined up before the Democratic Party's booth to express their support for Kerry.

Another advocacy group, the Muslim American Society, has set up a database, listing more than 700,000 Muslim voters, including more than 100,000 in each of the three battleground states of

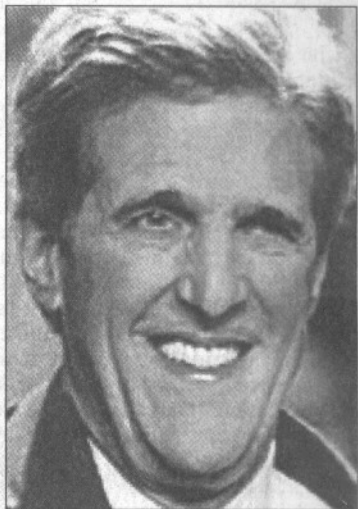
Florida, Michigan and Ohio.

And the major Muslim group, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, says that there are seven million Muslims in the United States, which gives them a major political clout in a close election as this year's is predicted to be.

But others have disputed this number. Surveyors for Howard Fienberg and Iain Murray of the Statistical Assessment Service reported that there are about two million US Muslims. Another recent study commissioned by the American Jewish

Committee puts the number between 1.9 million and 2.8 million.

Muslim organizations reject this figure as distorted and claim that the surveyors want to reduce their numbers to make them look weak and vulnerable. Arab American pollster John



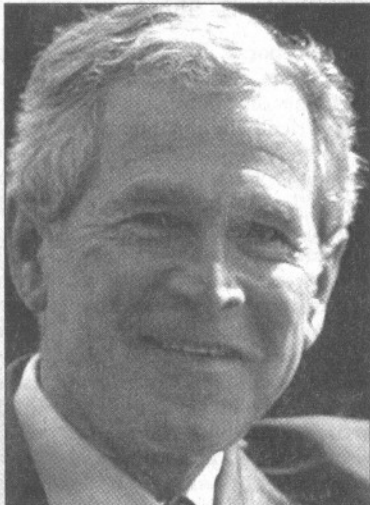
JOHN KERRY & GEORGE W. BUSH: V

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Zogby estimates that US Muslims are about 30 per cent African American, 20 per cent Pakistanis, 15 per cent Arab American and 13 per cent Indian. About 20 per cent come from Iran, Turkey, and other parts of Africa and Asia.

The latest survey, conducted jointly by a Georgetown University project for assessing political awareness of the American Muslims and Washington's Zogby International, reviews political changes in the American-Muslim community since 9/11, and the impact of the US-led war in Afghanistan and Iraq.



“The results of this survey are truly astonishing — for American Muslims, there has been a sea-change in political alignment and outlook since 9/11,” said Zahid Bukhari, director of Georgetown University’s project,

Muslims in American Public Square, known as MAPS. “The political realignment in the Muslim community is unprecedented in ... American history.”

The political realignment in the American-Muslim community seems to come from several factors, including a higher emphasis on domestic policy and opposition to both the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. A higher percentage of Muslims than other subgroups believe that America is not moving in the right direction.

The poll found 53 per cent of American-Muslim voters say they believe Muslims should vote as a bloc for a presidential candidate. Four in five respondents (81 per cent) also indicated they supported the agenda of the American Muslim Taskforce on Civil Rights and Elections, a US-wide coalition of the 10 largest Muslim organizations, during the presidential election. Over two in three (some 69 per cent) said an AMT endorsement would be important in making their decision for whom to cast their ballot.

“The results of our poll are some of the most striking this election season,” said John Zogby, president and chief executive officer of Zogby International. “The shift by American Muslims away from the president — and the Republicans — is dramatic, and the truest example of a backlash we’ve seen. This is virtually unprecedented.”

The surveyors say the American Muslims are at a political and social crossroads in 2004. In a few short years, they have undergone massive political shifts, and have become a relevant part of the political landscape in North America. — Anwar Iqbal