



CASE STUDY

The ISAIAH Trash Referendum

Should a faith-based organization take on an issue not of its choosing? Can relational organizing help its leadership support a new mayor while also engaging their base and holding their coalition together?

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SNF Agora Case Studies

The SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University offers a series of case studies that show how civic and political actors navigated real-life challenges related to democracy. Political leaders, students, and trainees can use our case studies to deepen their skills, to develop insights about how to approach strategic choices and dilemmas, and to get to know each other better and work more effectively.

How to Use the Case

Unlike many case studies, ours do not focus on individual leaders or other decision-makers. Instead, the SNF Agora case studies are about choices that groups make collectively. Therefore, these cases work well as prompts for group discussions. The basic question in each case is: “What would we do?”

After reading a case, some groups role-play the people who were actually involved in the situation, treating the discussion as a simulation. In other groups, the participants speak as themselves, discussing the strategies that they would advocate for the group described in the case. The person who assigns or organizes your discussion may want you to use the case in one of those ways.

When studying and discussing the choices made by real-life activists (often under intense pressure), it is appropriate to exhibit some humility. You do not know as much about their communities and circumstances as they did, and you do not face the same risks. If you had the opportunity to meet these activists, it might not be your place to give them advice. We are not asking you to second-guess their actual decisions as if you were wiser than they were.

However, you can exhibit appropriate respect for these activists while also thinking hard about the possible choices that they *could have made*, weighing the pros and cons of each option, and seriously considering whether they made the best choices or should have acted differently. That is a powerful way of learning from their experience. Often the people described in our cases had reflected on previous examples, just as you can do by thinking about their situation.

This case study is appropriate for:

- College students
- Activists
- Civil society leaders

Keywords: community organizing, faith-based organizing, policing, relational organizing

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Introduction

THIS IS A CASE about an organization in Minnesota called ISAI AH. Its work can be described as *community organizing* of a particular kind.

ISAI AH strives to change policies and institutions. It is a network of affiliated organizations that is independent from political parties and governments. Because it began as a network of churches—and most of its affiliates are still religious congregations—ISAI AH can be considered a faith-based organization, although it also includes barbershops, childcare centers, and many other groups.

ISAI AH works to expand the power and influence of people who have often been overlooked, especially poor people and people of color. To do this, it mainly uses a “relational” approach to organizing. Relational organizers form lasting relationships with people in their community, listening to them, learning from them, and helping them to develop as leaders in their own right. Relational organizing is different from what some call “issue-based mobilization,” which means persuading people to vote for—or otherwise support—an organization’s chosen objectives by communicating messages to them.

This case examines what happened when Saint Paul elected its first Black mayor, Melvin Carter, in 2017. Mayor Carter’s priorities included affordable housing and police reform. ISAI AH shared Carter’s goals and values and anticipated strong resistance from groups like landlords and the police union. However, Carter soon faced a divisive issue—not of his own choosing—that revolved around garbage. The trash issue was not particularly important to the people in ISAI AH’s networks, but it threatened to damage the mayor and reduce his ability to accomplish police reform.

ISAI AH faced at least three choices: 1) stay out of the fight over garbage; 2) use mobilizing techniques to help the mayor win the garbage issue; or 3) use relational organizing to enter into a power relationship with the mayor in the garbage fight—even though most of the people in ISAI AH’s networks didn’t care much about the issue.

ISAI AH is a network of affiliated organizations that is independent from political parties and governments.

Relational techniques (collective action)	Mobilizing techniques (one-to-many)
<p>Organizers recruit and identify leaders, motivate and activate community networks for collective action, and equip volunteers to make strategic decisions about how to engage other members of the community (for example, by doing outreach in churches or other community institutions, knocking on doors, and meeting voters in public places—such outreach is called “canvassing”).</p> <p>While talking with community members one-on-one, organizers learn about people’s problems, values, and goals. These one-on-one conversations are a key way in which organizers identify potential leaders.</p> <p>Organizers invite community members to take leadership in recruiting others to events such as house meetings, where participants build relationships with one another and discuss goals and strategies. Volunteers are trained and coached; they are often asked to contact their neighbors, friends, family, or other peers—who they in turn ask to contact others.</p>	<p>An organization or group of people chooses an objective, such as protesting a policy or passing or blocking a referendum.</p> <p>The organization develops a message and tests it with a sample of voters or residents to see if it is persuasive.</p> <p>The organization disseminates its message to residents using paid advertisements, mailings, automated phone calls (“robo-calls”), and other forms of one-way (or one-to-many) communication.</p>
<p>Many organizers and organizing groups use a mix of these techniques at different times.</p>	

Learning Objectives for this Case Study

By the end of this case study, you should be able to:

1. Understand several approaches to organizing, including the relational and faith-based approach of ISAIAH.
2. Begin to learn about some of the practical tools of community organizers.
3. Analyze and discuss the strategic choices that confronted ISAIAH and apply your insights to other situations.

Case Narrative

ISAIAH

ISAIAH is a statewide organization founded in 1999 to promote racial and economic equity and the political empowerment of poor, working-class, and racial minority groups in Minnesota. Today

By sheer number of affiliates, ISAIAH is one of the largest faith-based community organizing coalitions in the United States.

ISAIAH employs 27 staff, 12 of whom are full-time organizers (mostly people of color), has an eight-member governing board, and operates on an annual budget of approximately three million dollars.¹ By sheer number of affiliates, ISAIAH is one of the largest faith-based community organizing coalitions in the United States.² As of 2019, ISAIAH's formal affiliates included 126 faith institutions (104 churches and 22 mosques and Islamic centers), a network of leaders and clergy from a broader pool of 280 faith institutions, 55 institutions that provide sanctuary for undoc-

umented immigrants, 14 barbershops and beauty salons, priests from 21 Catholic churches, and more than 50 childcare centers. The organization's internal database includes records for more than 30,000 volunteer members and supporters across Minnesota.

ISAIAH led a successful campaign to defeat a 2012 ballot initiative that would have restricted voting rights in the state. The group also played a leading role in helping pass a Homeowners Bill of Rights in 2013 and raising the statewide minimum wage in 2014. Today, ISAIAH works against mass incarceration and for affordable childcare for working families and immigrants' rights, among other issues.

During its first decade, ISAIAH organized primarily in white and Christian churches in and around the Twin Cities. Over time, ISAIAH grew to include more multiracial (especially Latino) Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist, and evangelical churches, and their Black Congregational Cooperative expanded. More than two dozen mosques, including the Dar-al-Farooq mosque in nearby Bloomington, Minnesota, are members of the network as well.

Mayor Melvin Carter and the Trash Fight

Melvin Carter was elected the first Black mayor of Saint Paul in 2017 by a wider-than-expected margin. He won despite racist attack ads sponsored by the police union, and his victory signaled a shift in the balance of power in the city. In his inaugural speech as mayor, Carter promised more affordable housing and a review of the police force to increase accountability and then cut the number of police, foreshadowing a national movement to reduce police budgets. ISAIAH supported his agenda.

The day before Carter's election, the Saint Paul City Council had voted to change the city's garbage system. Traditionally, Saint Paul residents had individually purchased their own waste management services. About 15 companies served the city. Often neighbors chose different companies, which

meant that trucks would crowd the streets or rumble through a single neighborhood on multiple days in a given week. The city council voted to replace private trash collection with a public system: one hauler would have a contract with the city to serve everyone on each block.

This change was unpopular with some residents, who organized a campaign against it. They won a court victory that required a citywide referendum on whether to retain the new public garbage policy. Voters could vote yes or no on whether to keep the new system. If the no vote won, the mayor would be weakened politically because he had supported the move toward collective waste management. A victory for the no side would also leave the city with no system in place for trash collection. The mayor would have to resolve the resulting garbage crisis instead of working on his own priorities, such as police reform. And a no vote would create a budget crisis that the mayor would have to address.

Opponents of the mayor's agenda sought to win the no vote. As the campaign proceeded, some of the "vote no" partisans in Saint Paul issued racist death threats against Mayor Carter. Police investigated a series of letters and phone calls that Mayor Carter received throughout October, including hate mail attached to news clippings about the trash referendum, "annotated with racial epithets in black marker," the police reported. "This is what we get for voting a [racial epithet] boy," said one. Another read, "This is B.S. you [expletive] [racial slur]." At one point, Mayor Carter received an anonymous voicemail suggesting that if taxes increase because of the trash vote, Carter would have to "pay for it" and should put "bulletproof windows" in his house.³

If the no vote won, the mayor would be weakened politically because he had supported the change.

ISAIAH's Choice

When ISAIAH staff learned that the trash referendum would be added to the fall ballot, they had one day to decide how they would respond. It was not obvious that they should take on the garbage issue. Reflecting on this moment in the campaign months later, ISAIAH's Saint Paul staff organizer, Vivian Ihekoronye, said, "To be totally transparent, I was not that excited about trash at first."⁴ She believed that much more important issues confronted the city.

When ISAIAH's lead organizer, Laura Johnson, first presented the idea of a trash campaign to 50 of ISAIAH's leaders,⁵ she described their ultimate goal as governing the city along with the mayor and the city council—a bold claim about power.

"Woohoo!" cheered the ISAIAH volunteers in attendance.

She added, "... and the way we're going to do that has to do with ... trash!"

Everyone laughed, not sure if Laura was being serious. She was. This is the "terrain on which we fight for our politics," she explained. Then she asked the volunteers, "Tell me about what you have been hearing about garbage hauling in Saint Paul."

One elderly white woman said that it was “a distraction from the big issues we care about.” Others in the room were genuinely upset with the new public trash system and objected to the city council’s decision to make the transition without consulting the public. Another woman remarked, “I think it’s going to be hard to convince people [on trash] because the city missed picking up my trash for three weeks in a row. If you follow NextDoor you can see the conversation there. People feel like the city is giving us the short end of the stick.”

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Laura asked participants what they wanted to see happen in Saint Paul next year. “Housing,” “funding for public schools,” “good transit,” “gun violence prevention,” “action on climate change,” volunteers offered.

“Those are political fights. They require money,” she said. “If we lose this fight about collective trash collection, Mayor Carter is done and we will not be able to co-govern with him on our agenda, which includes all of those things,” she said bluntly.

An elderly couple remained unconvinced and continued to admonish the city council for how poorly they handled the trash transition. “We’re leaving. See you at church,” they huffed as they walked out of the training. Reflecting on this moment five days later, Laura said that “of the roughly 50 people in the room, at least a quarter would not have voted with us [on the trash referendum] at that moment.”

Given these challenges, ISALAH faced a hard choice. Here are some of the organization’s options and reasons for and against each one. You may be able to think of more options and other reasons for or against them.

Options	Advantages	Drawbacks
1. Stay out of the trash fight.	ISAI AH did not view garbage policy as a priority. There was no reason to expect that ISAI AH’s members would be excited about trash. If ISAI AH took a side, that side might lose.	ISAI AH’s leaders believed that the new trash system was a collective solution to a public problem that deserved support. A defeat in the referendum would hurt the mayor. Since the mayor of Saint Paul has considerable power, a defeat for him would be a setback to the agenda for racial and economic justice that ISAI AH supported.
2. Mobilize people to support the new trash policy by developing persuasive messages about the issue and communicating those messages to likely voters.	Turning out the vote for the new garbage policy might be a way to win that issue, support the mayor, and demonstrate clout in the city.	Mobilizing could fail—the other side might win the referendum. By trying to persuade people to support a position that ISAI AH had chosen, the organizers would neglect their usual commitment to listening to people about their own priorities and values. Most traditional mobilizing campaigns target likely voters, ignoring other residents.
3. Use relational organizing tactics to support the mayor on the trash referendum.	If this approach worked, it would solve the garbage crisis, help the mayor, demonstrate clout, enhance ISAI AH’s relationships with people across the city, <i>and</i> build people’s capacity to shape the city in the future.	It might be very hard to use relational techniques to influence a referendum, with limited time, when most people in the organization’s networks were not very concerned about the issue.

Challenges in the Somali Community

In keeping with its core strategy and values, ISAIAH chose the third option as its primary strategy: relational organizing on the trash issue. They chose the second option—mobilizing voters to vote yes on the referendum—as one of the tactics they used to advance that strategy. To illustrate the difficulties that this choice presented, we will look more closely at one segment of the campaign: organizing in the Somali American community in Saint Paul.

Immigrants from Somalia represent a significant portion of the Muslim community in Minnesota. As recent immigrants who are both Black and Muslim, Somalis face pronounced prejudice and exclusion.

In fact, ISAIAH's affiliate, the Dar-al-Farooq mosque, was firebombed on August 5, 2017. The FBI later found that an Illinois-based domestic terrorist group known as the White Rabbits had planned and executed the bombing. At his trial two years later, one of the perpetrators confessed that he wanted to “scare [Muslims] out of the country” by telling them, “You’re not welcome here.”

Since ISAIAH's objective was to combat such injustices, the organization was eager to work with the Dar-al-Farooq mosque and the Somali Muslim community. For the mosque's director of programs and services, Abdulahi Farah, ISAIAH's relational organizing represented a potentially powerful alternative to what he called the “mobilizing” and “advocacy-based” approach that his community had tried before. “We’re like, you know, if we wanted to change, I mean have like, permanent change or really influence our politics in our state ...[we need] a power organization.”⁷ This analysis drew him and his fellow leaders in Minnesota's Muslim community into the ISAIAH network.

However, ISAIAH's priority at this moment was not Islamophobia; it was trash. That meant that Abdulahi, as part of the ISAIAH network, was asked to organize the Somali community to support a yes vote on the trash referendum.

He struggled with his task. Although he didn't know it at the time, an informal political network of actors—whom ISAIAH staff came to refer to as “the operators”—were organizing in Saint Paul's Muslim community in support of a no vote in the trash referendum.

Abdulahi described what happened when he and the canvassers he recruited showed up to talk to voters about the ballot initiative:

Because most of the campaigns would show up during an election and just try to get votes because they have a candidate, usually a white candidate, who hires them, “I approve this message.” So [the residents] would ask, “who are you and where is your white candidate?”

Dar-al-Farooq's religious leader, Imam Mohamed Omar, later recalled:

Here we were talking about trash and nobody wanted to talk about trash. They'd say, „You told us to go organize ourselves against Islamophobia, or around affordable

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housing, why do we care about trash? We live in high-rise apartments, we don't even have a trash contract!"⁸

Still, as October approached, Abdulahi made efforts to "do things by the book." By which he meant: "We brought people together, talked about what was at stake, had your average ISAI AH meeting with some imams, built a core team, and propositioned these people to make commitments to knock doors.... We were excited! People committed!" Then, all of the sudden,

... some of our big people [super leaders] started to drop out. They would not answer our call, they were just "busy." A couple were like, "Well, if you hire me I can do this," and another was like, "usually campaigns have money. I like the issue but it's hard to do it for free." It's kinda like having a team and having your best player pull out. And not knowing why.⁹

Abdulahi tried to set up a one-on-one with his "best player" who dropped out, but the leader flaked on him twice. "I asked Ahmed [Anshur, executive director of Al-Ihsan Islamic Center, the largest mosque in Saint Paul] and he's like, 'No, he's a great leader,'" Abdulahi said. "But then two to three other leaders pulled out too, or were 'just busy.' We went into, like, a valley of despair."

The Somali Muslim community in Saint Paul is made up of many concentric circles of close-knit familial and religious ties. That complexity made organizing difficult, and required a different approach than the one Vivian was implementing with the religious communities that ISAI AH had organized for nearly two decades. Mohamed noted that the relational organizing tactics that were working well with ISAI AH's mostly white Christian base—such as asking people to consult their church directories to make lists of thirty personal contacts to enter into the database for organizing—"just doesn't work in the mosque." He explained: "I got tired of making the [trash referendum] announcements [at] every single Friday [prayer]." Mohamed had been making those announcements to try to get people to make their lists, but it was not working.

Commenting on Abdulahi and Mohamed's analysis, ISAI AH's executive director, Doran Shrantz, observed:

This is the moment that a lot of organizations would say, "This just doesn't work in X community," or "X community can't be organized, this is not an issue that they care about, it doesn't matter for their daily lives."

What Would *You* Do?

If you were a leader in ISAI AH, would you want to retain a relational approach to organizing and keep working on the garbage referendum? If so, how might you adjust your strategy to address the challenges we have discussed so far?

Or would you drop either the garbage issue or the relational approach? Do you see some other way forward?

How It Turned Out

ISAIAH's leaders were discouraged.¹⁰ But they regained motivation by reminding themselves that the real issue wasn't trash, but changing who had power in the city.

Organizing in the Somali community, Mohamed and Ahmed modified their approach. They went on a reconnaissance mission. "We said, let's go to the places and the coffee shops ... where the community meets and sit and see, 'What's the movement? What's going on? Talk to people. Information-gather,'" said Mohamed.

What they learned was that Mayor Carter was considered a "Bogeyman" to much of the community because they were told he was responsible for blocking the construction of a new mosque in the city.

Abdulahi and Mohamed also learned that Kassim Busuri, Saint Paul's first Somali American city councilmember, who had been appointed to fill a vacant seat in early 2019 and was up for election, had "connected the Somaliness of his candidacy to voting no on the trash referendum," Abdulahi said. "The Somali community felt like, 'Why would I be against this young guy—we finally have one guy who looks like us [on city council], why trade that for something we don't even know?'"

And finally, they learned after talking to another Somali police liaison that the mayor was being labeled as "anti-law enforcement," pointing to Carter's decision to cut the police force by five cops. "So then we understood that the opposition's fear-mongering messaging was working—to make them scared of us, even though they like our message,"

Abdulahi reflected.

Mohamed and Ahmed proposed getting a meeting with the mayor and inviting Muslim community leaders. This would be an opportunity to resolve some tensions between Mayor Carter and the Somali community, to allow the community to ask hard questions, and to position ISAIAH as an important player that was holding the mayor accountable.

Despite some misgivings, Doran agreed. She came to see that residents of the apartment complexes where many of Saint Paul's Somali residents lived had to see that they could have their own, direct power relationship with the mayor. "It's not an access thing," she said, "it's an experience of—you, yourself, are the leaders. You can have your own set of power relationships with the mayor. Until we demonstrated that, we couldn't unlock what needed to be unlocked," she said.

A lingering concern, however, was what would happen if any of the operators came to the meeting with the mayor. "They could have sabotaged it, yelling, venting, basically saying the mayor was dividing the community," Abdulahi said.

They regained motivation by reminding themselves that the real issue wasn't trash, but changing who had power in the city.

While Doran worked to get an appointment with the mayor, the community organizers from Dar-al-Farooq brought Somali leaders together for a pre-meeting, which they informally called the “Family Feud” because it would be an opportunity for them to air their own differences before encountering the mayor together the next morning.

After Mohamed opened this pre-meeting, one of the operators interjected, “Why are you talking about unity but then you’re against Kassim?” Abdulahi responded, “We are not against the Somali candidate. Can I ask you a question? Can I vote for you and then vote for yes [on the trash referendum]?” To which City Councilor Busuri answered in the affirmative.

At one point in the room one of the operators jumped up and said, “Let’s call the elephant in the room! Who are you guys? What is your agenda?” The discussion turned into a fight about the mayor. When it was his turn to speak, Abdulahi adopted a pleasant demeanor, trying to persuade people

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that the referendum was about paving the way for working on the issues that the Muslim community in Saint Paul cares about, not a feud with the mayor.

“And then it went wild!” Abdulahi said. “They started making personal attacks! These are grown people’s beef being translated into a community issue, they just want the mayor to go away,” he said. “That’s when everything got exposed.” At that point, Abdulahi remembered, “Kassim and the operators most closely aligned with him just got up and walked out. We were very

disciplined not to react. It was one of the undecided people there who said, ‘Don’t walk out.’ Because in Somali culture, if you walk out from a meeting while you have a guest from somewhere, it is a deal-breaker, you have no respect at all.”

After Kassim and his allies walked out of the meeting, Abdulahi, Ahmed, and Mohamed took stock of who was still there. “There was this elder operator, the most experienced, who was leaning toward them,” who was still there, Mohamed remembered. “It’s like they brought him to war and left him on the battlefield! They became the bad guys and the meeting shifted to, ‘Abdulahi will lead us!’” One person in the room said he had already early voted but would go back and change his vote from no to yes on the trash referendum. Another Somali leader present, who was running for school board, shared that the operators who had just walked out had told him that if he supported the public trash collection system, “his political life would be over.”¹¹

Securing the meeting between the Muslim community leaders and Mayor Carter for the very next morning was not easy. “The mayor didn’t want to do it,” Doran remembered. “He was completely confused about who to relate to in the Somali community. He thought it might be a trap, so I had to pull like eight strings,” she said. In advance of the meeting, ISAI AH Muslim coalition leaders recruited community leaders from the three main Somali apartment complexes in Saint Paul, as well as day-care owners, a school principal, business owners, imams, and Somali TV. “We didn’t tell them they

were going to meet with the mayor until that night because we were waiting to see what happened with the operator meeting,” Doran said.

The meeting with Mayor Carter was “awesome,” Mohamed said. “It gave our base back their energy.”

The re-energized Muslim base had just four days to turn out their voters. Abdulahi knew he needed to reach his goal of 10 volunteers, but by Sunday he had 25 who were from Saint Paul and had signed up for get-out-the vote shifts on Tuesday. “The tables have turned!” he remembered thinking. Knocking on doors was so successful that the canvassers ran out of literature because they weren’t expecting as many volunteers as showed up. On election eve, Abdulahi sent volunteers around to seven childcare centers asking for use of their vans to help bring voters from the apartment complexes to the polling stations the next day.

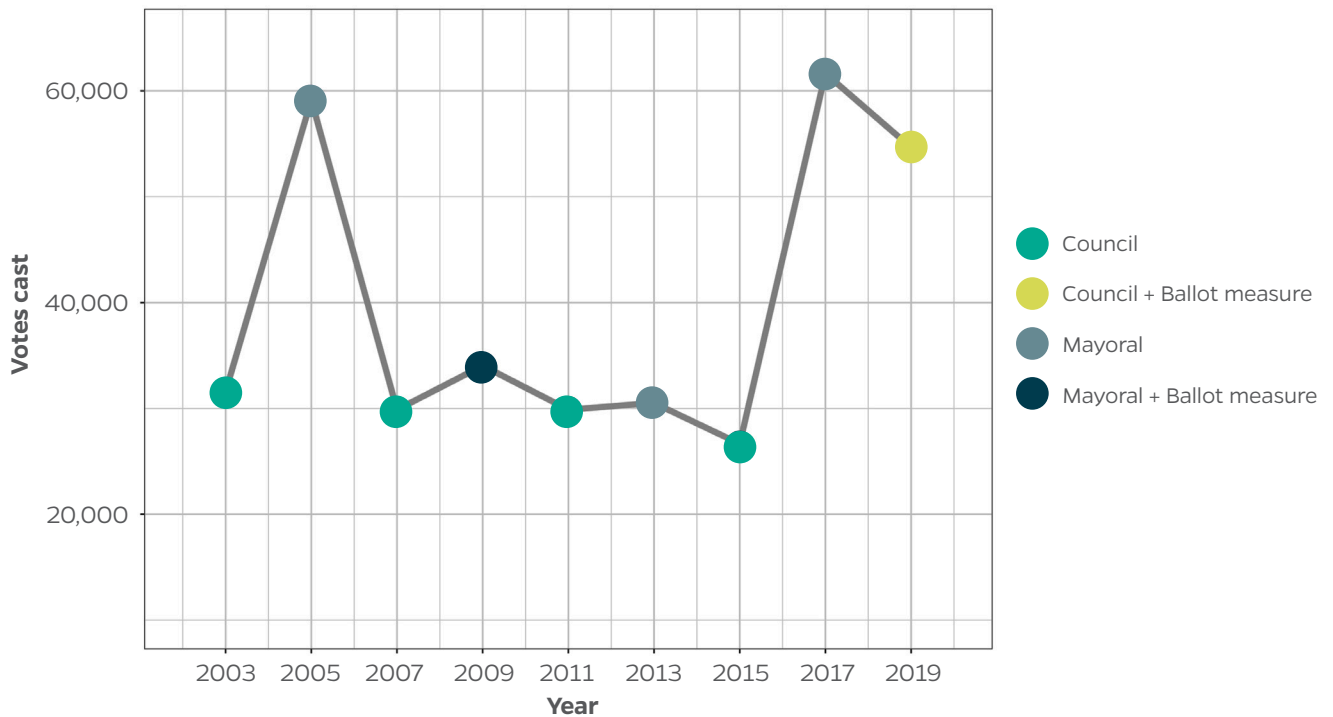
A get-out-the vote effort took place on Election Day that involved shuttling people to the polls. At an Election Night party, the community recognized the work of college students, young people, older people, mothers, and other volunteer leaders that ISAI AH organizers had recruited to the campaign. The party brought together Muslim and non-Muslim ISAI AH leaders who had joined the campaign.

Mayor Carter, who had canvassed several Somali apartment complexes with ISAI AH’S Muslim Coalition leaders on election day, also came.

On November 5, 2019, nearly two thirds (63 percent) of Saint Paul voters decided to keep the public trash collection system, with the yes vote prevailing in six of Saint Paul’s seven wards. As shown in Figure 1, turnout in the city reached its highest level in recent memory for a non-mayoral municipal election.

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Total Votes Cast in Saint Paul Municipal, 2003–2019



Election type shown in the legend. Source: data downloaded from the Minnesota Secretary of State.

Most striking were the increases in turnout at three Saint Paul apartment complexes with significant Somali populations where ISAI AH leaders organized. At one of these complexes, turnout more than doubled, with three quarters of the residents voting yes on the ballot measure.

Reflections: Relational Organizing (and Mobilizing) to Build Political Power

In addition to the win at the ballot box, ISAI AH’s Christian and Muslim base programs relationally activated thousands of Saint Paul voters—significant in an election in which just over 50,000 voters turned out. Throughout the course of the campaign, ISAI AH volunteers contacted some 2,400 of their friends and family to talk to them about the trash referendum. Deep relationships with volunteer leaders, politicization around the trash issue as a power fight, and leadership development preceded this GOTV mobilization.

In addition to activating these communities of voters in this way, ISAI AH’s Christian base program that Vivian led also knocked on 3,000 doors and had 703 conversations for a contact rate of 23 percent in the final days of the campaign.

Reflecting on the whole campaign, Doran said that the meeting with Mayor Carter on the eve of the election “was the most strategic power move that needed to happen in order for the Muslim coalition to have an experience of agency. We had to clarify the channels of communication, who was representing whom, and who could be trusted,” she said. Once ISAI AH leaders had facilitated that “experience of agency” between the Somali community leaders and the city’s leadership, information about the trash referendum spread through the community “like a brushfire,” Doran said.

Whereas at the beginning of GOTV, the mayor was uneasy about his relationship with the Saint Paul Muslim community, after the meeting he had a deeper and more accountable relationship with many of the community’s core leaders, including Abdulahi and Mohamed. Reflecting this shift, on election day, Mayor Carter spent his day door-knocking with ISAI AH volunteers in the Somali high-rises and celebrated the referendum victory at the ISAI AH election night party held at the Masjid At-Taqwa Islamic Center. Late that night, he tweeted, “New city... who dis?” showing his eagerness to move beyond trash. He found himself in a new co-governing relationship with key leaders in the ISAI AH base. “After the election,” Vivian said,

It didn’t take a long time to get on the mayor’s calendar. I was able to schedule a 45-minute conversation with him that became an hour. We’ve never had that—in the past it was just petitions and protests, leading to a transactional relationship. Now we’re in a strategizing partnership with city leadership, which is a huge shift; we’ve never had this much power before in Saint Paul.

One of the points Mayor Carter made in his interactions with ISAI AH was about how “disciplined” the organization’s staff and volunteer leadership are. “He mentioned that multiple times,” Vivian said. “And because the organizers who led this campaign—Abdulahi and myself—are both people of color and the mayor is a person of color—this is now an exciting opportunity to contest who gets to belong, and who gets to sit at the table.”

Notes

- ¹ ISIAAH Guidestar tax filing, 2017. Most annual revenue comes from grants and program income, but an increasing amount comes from individual membership dues and 52 dues-paying churches and mosques.
- ² Delehanty, Jack and Michelle Oyakawa (2018), “Building a Collective Moral Imaginary: Personalist Culture and Social Performance in Faith-Based Community Organizing.” *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, Vol 6(2): 266-295, pp. 272.
- ³ Quotes in this paragraph are from Liz Sander and Randy Furst, October 24, 2019. “Saint Paul Mayor Gets Racist Threats Over Trash Collection Vote,” *Star Tribune*.
- ⁴ Field notes from March 23, 2020.
- ⁵ All quotes in this section are based on field notes from the training on August 24, 2019.
- ⁶ January 25, 2019, “Minnesota Mosque Attack: ‘White Rabbits’ Militiamen Plead Guilty.” BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-46999849>.
- ⁷ Interview with Abdulahi Farah on May 1, 2018, conducted by Michelle Oyakawa as part of research for Han et al. (2020).
- ⁸ Interview on November 26, 2019.
- ⁹ Interview on November 26, 2019.
- ¹⁰ Quoting ISIAAH’s Saint Paul staff organizer, Vivian Ihekoronye, from an all-day staff debrief held on November 26, 2019.
- ¹¹ All quotes in this section come from a joint interview with Abdulahi, Doran, and Mohamed on November 27, 2019.