

The Rockefeller Family, Islamic Institutions, and Financial Support for Zohran Mamdani, USAID

Introduction

The Rockefeller family's relationship with Islam can refer to several different things, including funding Islamic studies, supporting Muslim communities, engaging with Muslim-majority countries, and financing organizations involved in international relations. These are distinct forms of involvement, and it is important to identify which Rockefeller institution or family member is involved.

The principal institutions to distinguish are the Rockefeller Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and individual Rockefeller family members' philanthropic activities. These entities are separate, and their grants or policies should not automatically be attributed to the entire family.

The Rockefeller family is historically associated with American Protestant Christianity, particularly the Baptist tradition of John D. Rockefeller Sr. Support for Islamic institutions does not establish that the family was Jewish, Muslim, or Israeli.

1. Rockefeller Foundation and Islamic Studies

In 1951, the Rockefeller Foundation provided approximately \$214,800 to help establish the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. The institute's purpose was the scholarly study of Islam, involving Muslim and non-Muslim researchers.

Source: Rockefeller Foundation, 1955 Annual Report

<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Annual-Report-1955-1.pdf>

2. Funding Islamic Research in Pakistan

In 1961, the Rockefeller Foundation reported a grant of \$62,000 to help establish the Central Institute of Islamic Research in Karachi, Pakistan. The Foundation also supported research involving Islamic art, history, literature, and the modern Arab Middle East.

Source: Rockefeller Foundation, 1961 Annual Report

<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/Annual-Report-1961-1.pdf>

3. Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Muslim-Western Relations

From 2003 to 2010, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund reported that its Peace and Security program awarded more than \$10.7 million in grants intended to promote mutual respect and understanding between Muslim and Western societies. The program also supported dialogue involving the United States and Iran.

Source: Rockefeller Brothers Fund, International Philanthropy

<https://www.rbf.org/about/about-us/international-philanthropy>

These records document philanthropic support for Islamic scholarship, international dialogue, and initiatives involving Muslim societies.

4. Campaign-Finance Allegations Involving Zohran Mamdani

In October 2025, the Coolidge Reagan Foundation submitted criminal referrals alleging that Zohran Mamdani's New York City mayoral campaign had received unlawful contributions from foreign donors.

On July 10, 2026, the *Washington Examiner* reported that Mamdani's campaign had returned approximately \$9,000 in potentially unlawful foreign donations.

Sources:

NYC Campaign Finance Board

<https://www.nyccfb.info/>

Federal Election Commission, Foreign Nationals

<https://www.fec.gov/updates/foreign-nationals/>

The existence of campaign-finance allegations does not establish Rockefeller involvement. Evidence connecting a particular donor or institution to a campaign would be needed to substantiate that connection.

5. Rockefeller Foundation Support for Mamdani's Administration

On July 13, 2026, the Rockefeller Foundation announced support for a public-interest technology team working with New York City's Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City. The initiative aims to improve municipal services through in-house technology teams.

Source: Rockefeller Foundation announcement

<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/news/mayor-mamdani-public-interest-technology-pit-crew-build-digital-solutions-public-problems/>

This represents documented institutional support for a city-government initiative associated with Mamdani's administration. It is distinct from a donation to his election campaign.

The July 13, 2026, announcement provides more detail. Rockefeller Foundation President Rajiv Shah said the Foundation was committing more than \$2 million to the initiative as an initial investment. The city also said four teams would use \$5.24 million in city funding, while a fifth would receive Rockefeller support through the Mayor's Fund.

Additional sources:

Rockefeller Foundation Financial Statements

<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/governance-reports/>

NYC Announcement of the PIT Crew Initiative

<https://www.nyc.gov/site/dca/news/049-26/mayor-mamdani-launches-public-interest-technology-pit-crew-rapidly-build-digital-solutions>

Private foundations can fund government programs without the money being a taxpayer grant. To determine whether any public money indirectly supported this particular Rockefeller grant, the Mayor's Fund financial filings and the grant's terms would need to be examined.

The distinctions are as follows:

- **Rockefeller-funded team:** Announced as receiving private philanthropic support.
- **Other city technology teams:** Supported by city funding, which includes public money.
- **Taxpayer funding of the Rockefeller Foundation itself:** Not established by the records reviewed for this initiative.

Source: Rockefeller Foundation Funding and Grants

<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/our-grants/>

6. Rajiv Shah: Background, Religion, and Public Service

Rajiv J. Shah is an American physician and global development leader who has served as president of the Rockefeller Foundation since 2017. Before that, he served as administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) from 2009 to 2015 under President Barack Obama.

Sources:

Rockefeller Foundation

<https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/>

Faith & Leadership

<https://faithandleadership.com/>

Rajiv Shah has publicly discussed his Hindu upbringing and how it influenced his approach to humanitarian work.

His background includes the following:

- **Religion and upbringing:** He grew up in a Hindu household.
- **Family background:** He is the son of Indian immigrants and was raised in the Detroit area of Michigan.
- **Current position:** President of the Rockefeller Foundation.
- **Previous government role:** Administrator of USAID from 2009 to 2015.

His religious background does not, by itself, establish his motivations for any particular grant or political initiative. To assess the Rockefeller Foundation's support for Mamdani's administration, the relevant evidence is the Foundation's funding records, the terms of the grant, and the stated purpose of the initiative.

7. Fraud, Waste, and Abuse at USAID

Source: USAID Office of Inspector General

<https://oig.usaid.gov/>

What Was the Controversy About?

7.1. Alleged Wasteful Spending and Questionable Grants

In early 2025, President Donald Trump and Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) targeted USAID for major cuts and restructuring. The administration criticized grants for diversity programs, arts projects, and other overseas initiatives.

FactCheck.org found that several examples publicly cited as USAID spending were actually funded by the State Department, illustrating the importance of checking individual grants.

Source: FactCheck.org

<https://www.factcheck.org/>

7.2. Humanitarian Consequences of Funding Cuts

Supporters of foreign aid argued that abrupt cancellations disrupted medical assistance, food programs, disaster relief, and other services. In February 2025, USAID's inspector general warned that staffing reductions and the aid freeze had severely weakened oversight of \$8.2 billion in unspent humanitarian assistance.

Source: Associated Press

<https://apnews.com/>

7.3. Questions About Accountability and Oversight

The controversy cuts both ways. Critics of USAID raised concerns about waste, fraud, and whether grants served American interests. Critics of the agency's dismantling raised concerns that eliminating staff and independent monitoring could make fraud harder to detect.

A September 30, 2026, Government Accountability Office report found that the State Department lacked complete foreign-assistance award data and documented guidance for funding decisions after taking over USAID's remaining programs.

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office

<https://www.gao.gov/>

7.4. Allegations Involving Politically Sensitive Recipients

Another concern is whether American assistance has reached organizations whose personnel or activities are connected to terrorist groups. USAID's Office of Inspector General has conducted investigations involving allegations that aid personnel associated with Hamas could move between U.S.-funded organizations.

Source: USAID Office of Inspector General

<https://oig.usaid.gov/>

8. What Happened to USAID?

The agency's operations were dismantled under the Trump administration, and its remaining foreign-assistance programs were transferred to the State Department.

According to the GAO's September 2026 report, approximately 6,780 of 7,510 USAID awards were terminated between January 2025 and March 2026. The remaining active awards were managed by the State Department.

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office

<https://www.gao.gov/>

9. How Does Rajiv Shah Fit into the USAID Controversy?

Rajiv Shah led USAID from 2009 to 2015, years before the agency's dismantling in 2025. His tenure involved major global health, food security, and development initiatives. He later became president of the Rockefeller Foundation, which is a separate philanthropic organization.

Conclusion

Historical records document Rockefeller-affiliated philanthropic support for Islamic studies, research in Muslim-majority countries, and initiatives promoting Muslim-Western dialogue.

More recent records also document Rockefeller Foundation support for a municipal technology initiative associated with Zohran Mamdani's administration.

The available information distinguishes private philanthropic funding from city funding and federal foreign assistance. It does not, by itself, establish that the Rockefeller family was Jewish or Israeli, that it supported Islamist political movements, or that it illegally financed Mamdani's campaign. Those are separate claims that require separate evidence.