

THE RISE OF THE ALT-RIGHT: UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIOCULTURAL EFFECTS OF MAINSTREAMING ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT

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Introduction

There are scores of abuses of fundamental freedoms and human rights worthy of investigation within Muslim-majority countries, including in the Middle East, and far beyond. Nevertheless, there are also important and pertinent issues vis-à-vis the communities where Muslims exist as demographic minorities. This is no less relevant in a country such as the United States—which is important in and of itself and to Muslim communities worldwide—owing to its political and economic power, which impacts those communities on a regular basis. Understanding the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim rhetoric, which aims to marginalize Muslim American communities, is thus a relevant and deeply significant issue for Muslim communities everywhere.

The gradual and extensive shifting of anti-Muslim rhetoric from the margins of American life to its political mainstream is the product of a symbiotic relationship between a tight network of anti-Muslim interest groups and a corresponding faction of willing politicians in need of grassroots exposure. Coupled with a mutually beneficial relationship with the conservative wing of the national media, anti-Muslim messaging is amplified.

The most prominent vehicle for this political and rhetorical movement's penetration into much of the Republican Party and, by extension, much of US politics, has been Barack Obama's eight-year presidency—punctuated by the 2008 and 2012 presidential elections, as well as (and in particular) the 2010 mid-term congressional elections. These three election cycles demonstrate a rise and fall trajectory that seems to characterize the intensity of racist, anti-Muslim politics as a mechanism by which political candidates benefit

by participating in fomenting anti-Muslim sentiment in the run-up to an election, which then subsides after the election takes place. The 2008, 2010, and 2012 elections are useful in that they help highlight the lifespan of a trend that has done less to change the national political tenor than it has to set a permanent electoral tendency where more Americans vote for politicians who espouse anti-Muslim sentiment.

Three Elections and Their Correspondence to Anti-Muslim Politics

The following elections demonstrate the mechanism by which political candidates have benefitted from fear mongering at the expense of Muslims by participating in fomenting anti-Muslim sentiment in the run-up to an election. And while from within the political establishment anti-Muslim politics often subsides after the election takes place, the resultant rise in Islamophobia has lasting social effects.

2008 Presidential Election

Barack Obama's candidacy provided an opening for a specific network of right-wing groups to ally themselves with the increasingly radical wing of the Republican Party by fueling anti-Muslim rhetoric. The anti-Muslim rhetoric was an attempt to counter Obama's internationalist appeal—combined with the Illinois senator's worldly background and non-white skin—which symbolized a new chapter in the United States' societal evolution that certain segments of the conservative movement feared. Thus, rumors of the future president's religion and beliefs, through the cumulative effect of several organized processes, began to make their way from the margins into its mainstream.

The strategy was multipronged. The documentary film *Obsession: Radical Islam's War against the West* was distributed to more than twenty-eight million voters

in swing states.²³⁹ Rumors of Barack Obama's "Muslim faith"²⁴⁰ have been around since he made his keynote speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, but the matter became an actual election cycle issue for many, prompting Obama's campaign to launch the now-defunct FighttheSmears.com. The site clarified everything from smears regarding his religion to the so-called birther conspiracies, alleging he was not born in the United States, and as a result ineligible to run for the US presidency. This matter is, of course, indicative of a deeper anti-Muslim sentiment, since the idea of a Muslim president seemed threatening to US national identity.²⁴¹ In January 2007, *Insight Magazine* (now defunct), an outlet owned by the same company as the conservative newspaper the *Washington Times*, published a story saying Hillary Clinton campaign associates unearthed evidence that from the ages of six to ten, Obama had attended a Wahabbi-oriented madrasa that taught the most intolerant form of Islam. The rumor was never substantiated, but made it onto Fox News, *The Glenn Beck Program*, and the *New York Post* before CNN sent a journalist to Indonesia to investigate the matter.²⁴² Furthermore, Erick Stakelbeck, a personality on a right-wing evangelical network who worked as a senior writer and analyst on Steven Emerson's notoriously anti-Muslim Investigative Project on Terrorism, wrote in the lead up to the election about how Muslims are Arabizing and Islamizing the United States.²⁴³

2010 Midterm Congressional Elections

The 2010 midterm elections marked the point where the network of anti-Muslim interest groups seems to have reached their full influence in US politics from an electoral standpoint, though external circumstances

favored their rise. Two parallel events helped buy the relationship between members and groups in the Islamophobia network and their willing Republican politicians: the "ground zero mosque" hysteria and the national campaign to ban sharia law at the state level.

In December 2009, the *New York Times* published a front-page story on the approval of the Cordoba Project, or the Park51 community center.²⁴⁴ Pamela Geller published a post on her blog, *Atlas Shrugs*, on the same day, claiming the project amounted to a "victory mosque" for radical Islamists to celebrate their win on 9/11. She referred to the project as the "ground zero mosque," a term that would catch on at a national level even though it is neither located at ground zero nor really a mosque. During this time before the 2010 midterms, both Richard Spencer, president of the National Policy Institute, a white supremacist think tank, and David Horowitz, editor of *FrontPage Magazine*, an online right-wing political website, contributed to multiple articles a day on *Jihad Watch* and *FrontPage Magazine*, respectively, that focused on exposing matters like Obama's "radical Islamist agenda."²⁴⁵ Right after the midterm elections, the David Horowitz Freedom Center published a pamphlet called *Obama and Islam* detailing Obama's supposed plans to "appease Islamic supremacism" and countries like Iran.²⁴⁶

In November 2010, Oklahoma became the first state in the United States to pass a state-level constitutional amendment (State Question 755) banning the practice of sharia law in the state. Though the courts eventually struck down the law, this was the beginning of a nationwide movement that helped politicians present an anti-Muslim rhetoric to their base.²⁴⁷

239 The Clarion Fund (now the Clarion Project), which received around \$17 million from the Donor Capitals Fund in 2008, used much of that money to make and distribute the documentary film *Obsession: Radical Islam's War against the West* to more than 28 million voters in swing states. See Justin Elliott, "Mystery of Who Funded Right-Wing 'Radical Islam' Campaign Deepens," *Salon*, November 16, 2010, https://www.salon.com/2010/11/16/clarion_fund_obsession_dvds.

240 Jim Rutenberg, "The Man behind the Whispers about Obama," *New York Times*, October 12, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/13/world/americas/13iht-13martin.16893087.html>.

241 *FrontPage Magazine* published an article in January 2008 by Daniel Pipes that "confirmed" Obama had practiced Islam at one point in his life. See Daniel Pipes, "Confirmed: Barack Obama Practiced Islam," *FrontPage Magazine*, January 7, 2008, <http://www.danielpipes.org/5354/confirmed-barack-obama-practiced-islam>.

242 "CNN Debunks False Report about Obama" CNN.com, January 23, 2007, <http://edition.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/01/22/obama.madrasa/>.

243 Erick Stakelbeck, "Ohio No Stranger to Radical Islam," CBN News, October 22, 2007, <https://www.investigativeproject.org/529/ohio-no-stranger-to-radical-islam>.

244 Ralph Blumenthal and Sharaf Mowjood, "Muslim Prayers and Renewal Near Ground Zero," *New York Times*, December 8, 2009.

245 Faiz Shakir, "Islamophobia Network's David Horowitz Responds to ThinkProgress by Calling Us 'Fascistic,'" Think Progress, August 26, 2011, <https://thinkprogress.org/islamophobia-networks-david-horowitz-responds-to-thinkprogress-by-calling-us-fascistic-e52edd7d2967/#.mkx30noI9>.

246 David Horowitz and Robert Spencer, "Obama and Islam: The Freedom Center's New Pamphlet Sheds Light on the Dangers of Obama's Islamophilic Outreach," *FrontPage Magazine*, December 23, 2010. <https://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/79909/obama-and-islam-david-horowitz>.

247 Jacob Gershman, "Oklahoma Ban on Sharia Law Unconstitutional, US Judge Rules," *Wall Street Journal*, August 16, 2013, <https://blogs.wsj.com/law/2013/08/16/oklahoma-ban-on-sharia-law-unconstitutional-us-judge-rules/>.



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Former Republican Majority Leader Newt Gingrich made sharia law his project. After years of promoting the issue, in September 2015, “he told the audience at a Value Voters Summit in Washington, D.C., ‘We should have a federal law that says Sharia law cannot be recognized by any court in the United States.’ Such a law will let judges know, Gingrich went on, that ‘no judge will remain in office that tried to use Sharia law.’ These words prompted a standing ovation from the crowd.”²⁴⁸ As of 2011, twenty-three states had considered bills banning sharia. The movement aimed to insert anti-Muslim rhetoric into the American political fabric, primarily by using the platform of right-wing state-level politicians. Regardless of the chances of actually passing the law, this rhetoric has already been given a chance to penetrate the mainstream of American politics.

2012 Presidential Election

As 2010 marked a climactic year for the influence and political success of the Islamophobic network’s working relationship with willing Republican members of Congress, events in 2012 demonstrated the limits of this political movement. It should be stressed, however, that the ultimate goal and effect of this relationship has not always necessarily been electoral. Rather, the cumulative result of fear has laid a kind of rhetorical, grassroots groundwork to facilitate the movement of anti-Muslim bigotry from the margins of American life to the main arena of its politics.

Though 2012 shows the limits of the material or electoral usefulness of this bigotry—primarily through the rebuke of conspiratorial accusations by mainstream

248 Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, “Fear Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America,” *American Progress*, August 26, 2011, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/religion/reports/2011/08/26/10165/fear-inc/>, 97-98.

conservative Republicans like John McCain—the rise and election of Donald Trump is the latest example of how this rhetoric is now ready to be used or exploited at any time by aspiring politicians or their more experienced colleagues. As the anti-Muslim network aspired to use their rhetoric at higher levels of the political horse race, the sheer absurdity of their claims began to catch up with their electoral ambitions.

In short, the movement of anti-Muslim rhetoric into American politics has been made possible by a political climate altered by the tragedy of 9/11. Suspicion of Muslims has become commonplace across the political board, but particularly within the GOP, which, according to an August 2012 poll by the Arab American Institute, has an overwhelmingly negative view of Islam and Muslims.²⁴⁹ But this rhetoric of “creeping jihad” or “stealth jihad” has led to the demonization of a certain group of people, intended to create wedge issues that can then be used to exact a political and electoral result.

The 2016 Election and Trump’s Vehicle: Right-Wing Racism, Islamophobia, and Conspiracies

In March 2011—in a series of TV appearances over a period of six weeks—Trump shared his suspicions that Obama was not born in the United States. This riled up much of the Republican base—which was galvanized by all the dog-whistling undertones of the issue—and was Trump’s first attempt to test the waters of being a reality TV star cum politician. The experiment even propelled him in early polls of the Republican field of candidates for the 2012 election.²⁵⁰ According to a Gallup poll, the percentage of Americans who believed Obama was “definitely” born outside of the United States rose from 38 percent to 47 percent during that period.²⁵¹ This was the case *after* Obama—president of the United States—eventually chose to address the fringe conspiracy by releasing his long-form birth certificate to the public. Trump pushed the issue so hard that he even reached out to fringe figures on the right who published tracts about Obama’s non-American birth; one of them even shot up to the top of Amazon sales charts.²⁵²

Such was the atmosphere created by Donald Trump at a time when the United States was experiencing a resurgence in anti-Muslim paranoia. He *started* his intrusion into US electoral politics that way, entering US politics by using the vehicle of right-wing (later, “alt-right”) conspiracies imbued with Islamophobia. Since the birther mantra had run its course in April 2011 (after Obama released his birth certificate), Trump dropped the issue. By then, he had taken up a significant spot in the US political arena and imagination.

Trump began to cultivate Republican figures and influential right-wing social circles leading up to the 2012 election. He eventually decided not to seek the Republican nomination, but had changed the political culture and discourse in both Washington, DC, and around the country by raising a far-right, anti-Muslim conspiracy that had been debunked. It provided Trump with the basic ideological and political foundation for his 2015-16 campaign and eventual presidential win. Trump gradually but overtly pushed a fringe right-wing conspiracy into the mainstream as more formal Republican circles were willing to humor him and take his donations. He even convinced the Mitt Romney campaign to accept his endorsement (in the form of a highly public press conference) in 2012, further legitimizing his place as a political figure in the United States.²⁵³

Donald Trump clinched the US presidency on November 8, 2016. Trump’s unexpected win signified a major shift in the Republican base from “mainstream, Rockefeller conservatism” to a set of unabashedly far-right values that can be summed up as alt-right. His rise was orchestrated and made possible by a coalition of actors that fed and exploited the anger of the white working class, its litany of perceived sociopolitical grievances and deprivations (and it was not just the working class), as well as the increasing cohesion and solidification of such sentiments into a corresponding political and, more importantly, electoral constituency. All this would go on to have highly significant consequences for outside perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

The influence of formerly marginalized figures such as the alt-right figure Steve Bannon on the Trump

249 The Arab American Institute, “The American Divide: How We View Arabs and Muslims,” August 22, 2012, <https://www.scribd.com/doc/103694579/The-American-Divide-Zogby-Poll>.

250 Asley Parker and Steve Eder, “Inside the Six Weeks Donald Trump Was a Nonstop ‘Birther,’” *New York Times*, July 2, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/03/us/politics/donald-trump-birther-obama.html>.

251 Lymari Morales, “Obama’s Birth Certificate Convinces Some, but Not All, Skeptics,” Gallup, May 13, 2011, <http://news.gallup.com/poll/147530/obama-birth-certificate-convinces-not-skeptics.aspx>.

252 Parker and Eder, “Inside the Six Weeks Donald Trump Was a Nonstop ‘Birther.’”

253 Maggie Haberman and Alexander Burns, “Donald Trump’s Presidential Run Began in an Effort to Gain Stature,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/13/us/politics/donald-trump-campaign.html>.

campaign, as well as the American and global alt-right, is one of the major reasons for the further mainstreaming of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric from both Trump and the political culture he emboldened. Steve Bannon, former executive chairman of the alt-right *Breitbart News*, was named the chief executive of Trump's 2016 presidential bid in August of that year. After the election he served as White House chief strategist in the administration during the first seven months of Trump's term. This orientation—one that tests the boundaries of political discourse, where incendiary commentary and coverage of sociopolitical issues have helped evolve a fruitful incubator for alt-right activities²⁵⁴—became mainstream.

The sociocultural effects on the wider country of this gradual process of mainstreaming anti-Muslim sentiment culminated briefly for about a month after the 2016 election, when 1,094 hate crimes were recorded by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in thirty-four days.²⁵⁵ (For context, the Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] recorded 6,121 hate crimes for the entire year of 2016, a five-year high).²⁵⁶ Three hundred and fifteen of these were anti-immigrant attacks and 112 were explicitly anti-Muslim.²⁵⁷ Thirty-seven percent of the total number were committed by individuals who directly referenced Trump or his campaign.²⁵⁸

The background to these numbers is equally troubling, with hate crimes in the United States rising 10 percent from 2014 to 2016.²⁵⁹ Anti-Muslim incidents also rose from 154 in 2014²⁶⁰ to 307 in 2016.²⁶¹ Moreover, the number of hate groups, primarily made up of white

nationalist or far-right groups, rose from 782 in 2014 to 917 in 2016, almost a historic high.²⁶² The SPLC reports that “The most dramatic growth was the near-tripling of anti-Muslim hate groups—from thirty-four in 2015 to 101 last year [2016].”²⁶³

In other words, since the Trump campaign started in mid-2015, a dramatic rise in hate crimes and hate groups accompanied the duration of the election cycle and leading up to his election. Near the end of 2015, a YouGov/HuffPost poll showed that 58 percent had an “unfavorable opinion” of Islam and only 17 percent had a favorable one.²⁶⁴ These trends follow the increased Islamophobic rhetoric in the United States and are strong signs that the movement of alt-right rhetoric into the sociocultural and political mainstream had a tremendously negative effect on perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

The Muslim Ban

Trump's initial executive order, signed on January 27, 2017, one week after taking office, signaled the final stage of the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim sentiment—political policy and a constitutional test, banning citizens of Iraq, Syria, Iran, Sudan, Libya, Somalia, and Yemen from entering the United States for at least ninety days (including green card holders). Refugees were banned for 120 days and Syrian refugees were banned indefinitely.²⁶⁵ “We don't want them here,” said President Trump, referring to Muslim extremists.²⁶⁶ Both the executive order and the speech accompanying it helped galvanize a highly problematic and increasingly

254 Hatewatch Staff, “Breitbart Exposé Confirms: Far-Right News Site a platform for the White Nationalist ‘Alt-Right,’” Southern Poverty Law Center, October 6, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/06/breitbart-expos%C3%A9-confirms-far-right-news-site-platform-white-nationalist-alt-right>.

255 Hatewatch Staff, “Update: 1,094 Bias-Related Incidents in the Month Following the Election,” Southern Poverty Law Center, December 16, 2016, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2016/12/16/update-1094-bias-related-incidents-month-following-election>.

256 Federal Bureau of Investigation, “2016 Hate Crime Statistics Released,” November 13, 2017, <https://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2016-hate-crime-statistics>.

257 Hatewatch Staff, “Update: 1,094 Bias-Related Incidents in the Month Following the Election.”

258 Ibid.

259 Reuters, “U.S. Hate Crimes Rise for Second Straight Year: FBI,” November 13, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-hatecrime-fbi/u-s-hate-crimes-rise-for-second-straight-year-fbi-idUSKBN1DD2BA>.

260 Azadeh Ansari, “FBI: Hate Crimes Spike, Most Sharply against Muslims,” CNN, November 15, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/11/14/us/fbi-hate-crime-report-muslims/index.html>.

261 Reuters, “U.S. Hate Crimes Rise for Second Straight Year: FBI.”

262 Southern Poverty Law Center, “Hate Map,” 2018 (scroll down to see graph, 1999-2017), <https://www.splcenter.org/hate-map>.

263 Southern Poverty Law Center, “Hate Groups Increase for Second Consecutive Year as Trump Electrifies Radical Right,” February 15, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2017/02/15/hate-groups-increase-second-consecutive-year-trump-electrifies-radical-right>.

264 Peter Moor, “Most Americans Dislike Islam,” YouGov US, December 9, 2015, <https://today.yougov.com/news/2015/12/09/most-americans-dislike-islam/>.

265 BBC, “Trump's Executive Order: Who Does Travel Ban Affect?” February 10, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-38781302>.

266 Sarah Pulliam Bailey, “Trump Signs Order Limiting Refugee Entry, Says He Will Prioritize Christian Refugees,” *Washington Post*, January 27, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2017/01/27/we-dont-want-them-there-trump-signs-order-limiting-refugee-entry/?utm_term=.62f875aacfc4.

hard-right political base. Crucially, the executive order stated that if “the religion of the individual is a minority religion in the individual’s country of nationality,” then he/she would be admitted.²⁶⁷ That essentially limits the targets of these countries to Muslims only.

Though the “Muslim ban” was stopped by a federal court order before reemerging after a number of changes and iterations, the initial move from the White House to push such a thinly veiled and uncompromising anti-immigrant policy dovetailed perfectly with the Trump campaign’s proclamations to get tough on terrorism, excessive immigration, and crime.

In keeping with his essentialist world view, Trump reiterated throughout his campaign that radical Islam was on a par with some of the greatest evils of the twentieth century, like Nazism. Trump introduced the idea of registering all Muslims in a massive database,²⁶⁸ as well as the possibility of closing down certain mosques.²⁶⁹ His rhetoric accusing Muslims of trying to impose sharia law throughout the West seems lifted from the list of talking points of the “Islamophobia industry,” and had already been a long-established mantra by Bannon.²⁷⁰ *New York Times* journalists explain this Trump-Bannon vision of Islam versus the West in a February 2017 article, not long after Trump signed the first iteration of the Muslim ban:

This worldview borrows from the ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis of the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington, and combines straightforward warnings about extremist violence with broad-brush critiques of Islam. It sometimes conflates terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and the Islamic State with largely

nonviolent groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots and, at times, with the 1.7 billion Muslims around the world. In its more extreme forms, this view promotes conspiracies about government infiltration and the danger that Shariah, the legal code of Islam, may take over in the United States.²⁷¹

It is perhaps not strictly a coincidence then that twenty-three pieces of legislation were introduced at the state level in 2017 to ban the practice of sharia in eighteen states.²⁷² Forty-three such bills were introduced from 2010 to 2017.²⁷³ Such anti-sharia campaigns, which produce caricatures of Islamic law and Islam itself, can be found to originate from efforts within the Islamophobia industry in post-9/11 United States.²⁷⁴ These efforts are meant to spread fear of Islam and Muslims by portraying their values as completely alien to that of the Judeo-Christian West. Again, the West versus Islam binary so central to Bannon’s worldview can be located in such campaigns and efforts.

Likewise, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted not long after the executive order was initially announced, 48 percent of surveyed Americans agreed with the ban while 41 percent were opposed.²⁷⁵ Around the same time, a poll conducted by the conservative Rasmussen Reports showed 57 percent in support of the ban and 33 percent opposed.²⁷⁶ Yet, in February 2017, a Pew survey showed that on a scale of 0 to 100 (with 100 being the warmest and most approving), Islam scored a 48 for a large sample size of Americans. Though still behind most major religions, a score of 48 was higher than the 2014 score of 40. As is almost always the case with these issues in the United States, the scoring broke down quite visibly along partisan

267 White House, “Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States,” January 27, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states/>.

268 Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, “‘I think Islam Hates Us’: A Timeline of Trump’s Comments about Islam and Muslims,” *Washington Post*, May 20, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/05/20/i-think-islam-hates-us-a-timeline-of-trumps-comments-about-islam-and-muslims/?utm_term=.081f8ace1955.

269 Susan Milligan, “Trump to Muslim World: Fighting Terror Is about Good against Evil,” *US News and World Report*, May 21, 2017, <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2017-05-21/trump-to-muslim-world-fighting-terror-is-about-good-against-evil>.

270 Scott Stump, “Donald Trump: Brussels Is ‘Catastrophic,’ Waterboarding Paris Suspect ‘Would Be Fine,’” *Today*, March 22, 2016, <https://www.today.com/news/donald-trump-responds-brussels-attacks-it-s-very-dangerous-city-t81716>.

271 Scott Shane, Matthew Rosenberg, and Eric Lipton, “Trump Pushes Dark View of Islam to Center of U.S. Policy-Making,” *New York Times*, February 1, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/01/us/politics/donald-trump-islam.html>.

272 Ed Pilkington, “Anti-Sharia Laws Proliferate as Trump Strikes Hostile Tone toward Muslims,” *Guardian*, December 30, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/dec/30/anti-sharia-laws-trump-muslims>.

273 Ibid.

274 ACT for America, “State Legislation,” 2018, <http://www.actforamerica.org/statelegislation>.

275 Chris Kahn, “Exclusive: A Third of Americans Think Trump’s Travel Ban Will Make Them Safer,” Reuters, January 31, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-immigration-poll-exclusive/exclusive-a-third-of-americans-think-trumps-travel-ban-will-make-them-safer-idUSKBN15F2MG>.

276 Rasmussen Reports, “Most Support Temporary Ban on Newcomers from Terrorist Havens,” January 30, 2017, http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/current_events/immigration/january_2017/most_support_temporary_ban_on_newcomers_from_terrorist_havens.

lines: in the 2017 survey, Republicans gave a score of 39 while Democrats gave 56.²⁷⁷ It is also possible that the obvious increase in alt-right activism and Islamophobia resulted in an oppositional reaction. According to the Atlantic's Emma Green, who also refers to Pew data published in August 2017,

Almost half of respondents said someone had reached out to express support for their religion within the past year, compared to 37 percent in 2011 and 32 percent in 2007. Admittedly, these performances of alliance and optimism can be fraught; Muslims might prefer seamless acceptance to handshakes and earnestness from well-meaning neighbors.²⁷⁸

Additionally, the Pew data cited above show that, compared with 2007 and 2011 numbers (when Pew last surveyed American Muslims), experiences of concrete anti-Muslim discrimination toward Muslims do not seem to have fluctuated much under Trump. But this finding seems to be contradicted by hate crime numbers released by the FBI in the past two years or so, which show a dramatic increase. That hate crime statistics for Muslims are almost always underreported²⁷⁹ should also be taken into account, as well as the fact that Muslims—predominantly people of color—also experience racial attacks/discrimination that are statistically categorized separately from religious discrimination. The fact that a large number of protesters came together in multiple cities across the United States to protest the Muslim ban was a much more encouraging sign, and perhaps the strongest, most media-saturated example of Americans trying to counter the rise of Trump.²⁸⁰

Conclusion and Recommendations

Religious liberty has always been at the heart of the American vision of democratic freedom, emerging from within the civic framework provided by the US Constitution. However, rising anti-Muslim sentiment questions the place of specific religious groups in American life. The Muslim American community faces extreme and difficult challenges from institutional,

social, and economic discrimination. Their fundamental freedoms and human rights are thus in question, as they face complex challenges from the US mainstream that are hard to combat for the simple reason that these challenges come from stereotypes perpetuated through the highest echelons of the political establishment. From religiously motivated discrimination and attacks on existing and proposed Islamic centers to misguided congressional hearings, Muslims in the United States are being unfairly targeted simply for exercising their basic constitutional right to religious liberty.

The attempt to conflate all of Islam with extremist violence by disseminating misinformation and distortions about Islam and American Muslims leads to a rise in discrimination against American Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim, attacks on American Muslim institutions, and protests against the building of mosques in local communities.

The rise in now mainstream anti-Muslim sentiment not only tests the long-established patterns of intercommunity relations, but hinders intracommunity growth and negotiation that is essential to Islamic rejuvenation as called for in this volume.

To this end, the use of othering and marginalization as a tool to achieve power has not been critiqued in the West as it has in the rest of the world, nor have its long-term implications for community growth and development been analyzed. Thus, there are several ways this can be achieved:

- The interactive nexus of interest groups-media outlets-political figures must be addressed in the United States. Power and influence networks should not be able to use the media to scapegoat a community for political gain.
- Standards for the treatment of minorities and marginalized communities need to be identified and formalized globally, tied to the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Such standards should be designed within communities through guidance from their leaders to lead to the

277 Pew Research Center, "Americans Express Increasingly Warm Feelings toward Religious Groups," February 15, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2017/02/15/americans-express-increasingly-warm-feelings-toward-religious-groups/>.

278 Emma Green, "How Much Discrimination Do Muslims Face in America?" *The Atlantic*, July 26, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/07/american-muslims-trump/534879/>.

279 Abigail Hauslohner, "Hate Crimes Reports Are Soaring—But We Still Don't Know How Many People Are Victimized," *Washington Post*, November 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2017/11/17/hate-crimes-are-soaring-but-we-still-dont-know-how-many-people-are-victimized/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6a7917362e41.

280 Emanuella Grinberg and Madison Park, "2nd Day of Protests over Trump's Immigration Policies," CNN, January 30, 2017, <https://www.cnn.com/2017/01/29/politics/us-immigration-protests/index.html>

creation of universal standards for implementation in all nations.

- Reporting and data collection are then needed to evaluate the treatment of minority communities, not just in the developing world but particularly in the West.
- Arab and Muslim governments engaging and dealing with the United States must also be fully aware of this phenomenon, for two major reasons. The first is that Muslim-majority state governments often invite and engage with elements of the Islamophobia industry for projects within their own borders, without necessarily knowing that these elements are involved in such a network. In so doing, they inadvertently support this industry and then those in this industry continue to marginalize Muslim communities in the United States.
- Arab and Muslim-majority state governments often engage with those same elements to further their relationships with powerful actors within the United States itself—which, again, leads to the support of the wider networks, and thus contributes to the marginalization of Muslim American communities. Arab and Muslim governments ought to be supporting ways to increase political participation in their own societies and in the United States, so as to safeguard them from further rights abuses—rather than support elements that would be opposed to this.
- Each minority community must continue to engage not only in creating counter narratives, but in telling their own stories. For example, the contributive legacy of Islam in the United States is vast. Conversely, media should work towards normalizing the portrayal of minorities, rather than demonizing them.
- Finally, several statements from Muslim religious leaders have been developed with a renewed commitment to protecting minority rights in Muslim-majority countries; the same is not expected for groups such as Christian Evangelicals in the United States. A universal commitment to norms and values cannot be expected if the relationship is not bidirectional. Collectively moving towards a future based on pluralism is not possible without credible commitments.