

The Islamophobia Movement in America

Reference Guide

What is Islamophobia?

Islamophobia is a hatred or prejudice that focuses on a Muslim threat, real or imagined, especially when that threat carries a perceived social and/or political relevance. It also involves cultivating a fear of Muslims or people perceived to be Muslim. Islamophobia can also be considered a form of nativism: “an inflamed and nationalistic type of ethnocentrism”¹ and opposition to immigrants or those thought to be “foreign” to the dominant culture.

Who makes up the organized Islamophobia movement in the United States?

A tight core of activists and self-styled experts drives this movement. These individuals are more than just casually linked: They often share mutual funders and board members, work under the same umbrella organizations, author joint reports and appear together on panels and at public events. Many of the prominent actors coordinate directly with leaders of the organized anti-immigrant movement, including the groups Center for Immigration Studies and NumbersUSA. Together, they exploit existing anxieties about security and changing demographics to demonize and to marginalize Muslim Americans, to advance discriminatory policies and to block integrative measures at all levels of government.

What is the agenda of the organized Islamophobia movement?

Legislative

This movement deliberately uses the legislative process to manufacture fear of Muslims. David Yerushalmi, the author of model state legislation that restricts judges from consulting religious or foreign law (i.e. anti-Shariah bills), has admitted that his bills are intended to pique suspicions with regards to Muslims and Islam, not necessarily to be passed into law as written.

Opposition to Mosques & Islamic Centers

Most opposition to new or expanded mosque construction is the result of coordinated efforts between local advocates and national strategists, not spontaneous grassroots organizing. Cities and towns cannot directly reject the proposals on religious grounds; therefore, anti-Muslim activists often cite municipal technicalities such as zoning laws or traffic flow concerns in order to justify their objections.

National Security: Immigration, Surveillance, Detention, Deportation

Anti-Muslim rhetoric is often framed to argue for anti-immigrant laws, harsh immigration enforcement measures, increased border security, surveillance, mass detention and deportation by claiming that terrorists from Muslim-majority countries can and will penetrate U.S. borders.

Law Enforcement Training

The lack of universal standards for supplemental law enforcement training means that law enforcement agencies may hire instructors who teach their own personal biases instead of legitimate counterterrorism practices. One example of this is former FBI agent John Guandolo, who works closely with national anti-Muslim activists and groups to conduct seminars for law enforcement as well as non-law enforcement activists.

Media Bias

Anti-Muslim bias is most prevalent in right-wing media outlets, but mainstream and even liberal media sources often advance stereotypes and prejudices. When stories about Muslims are told through the lens of ethnic stereotypes and “the war on terror,” surveillance on Muslims, racial profiling and other practices and policies that marginalize communities can be successfully promoted within public discourse.

Online Echo Chamber

Anti-Muslim bigotry abounds on the Internet, with Islamophobia movement members churning out dozens of online articles daily. These websites’ comments sections and social media accounts are echo chambers of prejudice and hatred that often become platforms for promoting discriminatory policy and, in some cases, threats of violence.

Hate Crimes and Violence

Hate crimes in the United States are a reality for Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim. Tragedies like the killing of six people at a Sikh gurdwara in Wisconsin and the arson attack at a Missouri mosque have received widespread attention. Many less visible encounters with harassment, threats and violence, however, often go unnoticed, unreported or even ignored.

Which organizations comprise the organized Islamophobia movement?

The American Freedom Law Center claims to practice “public policy lawfare” against Muslim groups and in defense of anti-Muslim rhetoric. The group’s co-founder, David Yerushalmi, has emerged as the legal mastermind of this movement. He is the architect of anti-Shariah model legislation that has been passed in at least nine states and has been introduced in more than 30 states since 2010.

ACT! for America is an anti-Muslim grassroots organization that claims more than 279,000 members and over 800 U.S. chapters and a handful of international chapters. The group, led by Brigitte Gabriel organizes efforts to lobby legislators, to push anti-Shariah laws, and to influence local law enforcement and national security agencies.

¹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. 355.

American Freedom Defense Initiative and Stop Islamization of America are partner organizations led by Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer that are funded, in part, by the David Horowitz Freedom Center. Together, they sponsor incendiary ad campaigns on public transit systems, promote anti-Muslim public rallies (i.e. “Ground Zero Mosque” rally and mosque opposition in Murfreesboro, Tennessee), and use their respective blogs as platforms to demonize Muslims and to advance conspiracy theories.

The Clarion Project is best known for producing the controversial anti-Muslim films “Obsession,” “The Third Jihad,” “Iranium” and most recently “The Honor Diaries.” Its advisory board includes a cast of movement leaders – Daniel Pipes and Frank Gaffney among them. The organization’s “analysts” are regularly featured in conservative media outlets including Fox News to provide biased messages and talking points.

The Middle East Forum, founded in 1990 by movement figurehead Daniel Pipes, is a think tank responsible for distributing more than \$1 million in grants to fund Islamophobic organizations and biased research. Pipes also sits on the advisory boards of several groups within this movement including the Clarion Project and International Free Press Society.

International Free Press Society was founded in 2009 by Danish activist Lars Hedegaard and serves as an international umbrella organization of “Free Press Societies.” The group petitions for and organizes around spectral freedom of speech concerns. Its board of advisors is comprised of many of the movement’s most prominent activists including Robert Spencer, Geert Wilders, Frank Gaffney, Brigitte Gabriel, and Daniel Pipes.

Headed by Frank Gaffney, the **Center for Security Policy** is a think tank responsible for manufacturing fear about Muslims and Islam, all couched in the supposed interest of “national security.” Gaffney’s group is a main proponent of the conspiracy theory that the Muslim Brotherhood has infiltrated the U.S. government at all levels and is secretly controlling it from within. The group has co-authored reports with movement mainstays like David Yerushalmi and John Guandolo, and Gaffney holds close ties to powerful anti-immigrant groups like the Center for Immigration Studies and NumbersUSA.

Eponymously named after its founder, the **David Horowitz Freedom Center** is a foundation that sponsors and funds numerous far-right populist and anti-Muslim platforms including FrontPage Magazine, Robert Spencer’s Jihad Watch blog, and Ben Shapiro’s Truth Revolt project. The Freedom Center is also responsible for funding campaigns to counter the so-called liberal and Islamic bias in the media and on college campuses nationwide.

Steven Emerson’s **Investigative Project on Terrorism** provides often misleading research on the perceived threat of Muslims. Despite Emerson’s reputation for bias, his work has been utilized by movement groups and has even been well-received by some government officials and political organizations. The group produced the 2012 film “The Grand Deception,” and in 2014 placed a full-page ad in the New York Times (and on its website) purporting that Muslim advocacy organizations were subverting the US government and targeting First Amendment rights.

Dangerous Discourse:

“If a Muslim who has — who is — a practicing Muslim who believes the word of the Koran to be the word of Allah, who abides by Islam, who goes to mosque and prays every Friday, who prays five times a day — this practicing Muslim, who believes in the teachings of the Koran, cannot be a loyal citizen to the United States of America.”

– Brigitte Gabriel, ACT! for America

“Fears of a Muslim influx have more substance than the worry about jihad. West European societies are unprepared for the massive immigration of brown-skinned peoples cooking strange foods and not exactly maintaining Germanic standards of hygiene.”

– Daniel Pipes, Middle East Forum

“Muslims are the first group to come as immigrants to the West determined to replace Western government and social structures with Islamic ones.”

– Pamela Geller, blogger and co-founder of American Freedom Defense Initiative

1 John Higham, Strangers in the Land: Patterns of Press, 2002), p. 355.

“The ultimate goal of both violent jihad and stealth jihad is the same: the advance and imposition of Islamic sharia law throughout the world. Only the means to the end is different.”

– ACT! for America

“And in these troubled times, we must not disregard those who strive every day to undermine our Nation’s heritage of faith and freedom, those who seek to destroy America from within. Led by President Obama and flanked by stealth jihadists and secular progressives, our Nation’s enemies will stop at nothing to ensure that our ‘shining city’ is turned to rubble and her beacon of freedom extinguished.”

– American Freedom Law Center

“That’s Civilization jihad. That’s finding ways to use our institutions — to use our government as well — to destroy us from within.”

– Frank Gaffney, Center for Security Policy