

# Defending Refugee Rights

## Understanding the Threat to Refugee Rights

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Global displacement is at an all-time high, according to a [June 18 UN refugee agency report](#). Violence and persecution has forced as many as 59.5 million people from their homes to seek refuge elsewhere. Half of these refugees are children. In recent years, displacement has been driven by conflict in at least 15 countries, with the war in Syria serving as the single largest cause.

**Instead of responding to this “[unprecedented mass displacement](#)” with compassion and calls to assist people fleeing for their lives, anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim activists are intensifying their divisive and hateful rhetoric.**

Increasingly, the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim movements have been working together to target refugee resettlement in the U.S. For instance, the Center for Security Policy (CSP), an anti-Muslim think tank, released a publication in the summer of 2015 that fuses the arguments of these two bigoted movements. The e-book, *Red-Green Axis: Refugees, Immigration and the Agenda to Erase America*, claims that refugee resettlement in the United States is part of some grand scheme between “left-wing philanthropists” and Muslims, an oft-repeated conspiracy theory.

During a segment promoting the *Red-Green Axis* on his daily radio program, CSP’s founder and president, Frank Gaffney, hosted Center for Immigration Studies’ Executive Director, Mark Krikorian, a leader of the anti-immigrant movement. Krikorian agreed with Gaffney that “refugee activist types and immigration activists” want to promote “Islamic immigration” and resettle Muslim refugees in America because they are “the most different and non-American” and serve the purpose of “erasing America.” This radio segment is just one of many examples demonstrating this troubling and ongoing collaboration.

It may be tempting to dismiss Gaffney, Krikorian and those who work with them as fringe extremists who should be ignored. But doing so would be to overlook the undue influence their movements have on civil and human rights, particularly for immigrants, refugees and Muslims. Their strategy is effective. It plays off the fear and uncertainty many Americans have about changing demographics in the country and in their communities. This movement has been successful — especially within the Republican base — as they exploit this anxiety to [conflate border security](#) with the fear of terrorism.

Advocates working to resettle and support refugees must be able to defend against these rhetorical attacks and political abuse that can, all too often, have real policy impacts and foster a climate of hate. We must identify harmful rhetoric and expose the drivers of organized bigotry in order to dilute the influence they have on public policy and discourse, while we simultaneously lift up the stories of those seeking safety and refuge in the United States.

## Who is Behind Anti-Refugee Rhetoric and Policy?

**Federation for American Immigration Reform:** FAIR lobbies and drafts anti-immigrant legislation while coordinating a network of anti-immigrant groups at the state level. FAIR, founded in 1979 by eugenicist and white nationalist John Tanton, maintains influence among lawmakers, despite its designation as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center. The increased scrutiny hasn't stopped FAIR's work, but has driven it further behind the scenes. [FAIR claims](#) that U.S. refugee policy is primarily the result of domestic political considerations, entrenched government bureaucracies, and the interests of non-governmental organizations, rather than meeting refugees' need for safety from persecution.

**Center for Immigration Studies:** Tanton founded CIS as an immigration restrictionist think tank, to compile facts and arguments to serve the anti-immigrant movement. For instance, CIS successfully launched the doctrine of "self-deportation" into the public debate. In addition to executive director Mark Krikorian, CIS fellow Don Barnett has been a powerful voice stoking anti-refugee sentiment and bringing together anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant arguments about refugee policies. Another CIS fellow, Dan Cadman, is a former INS/ICE official who has ramped up his calls for increased scrutiny on refugee resettlement agencies. CIS regularly publishes reports with "facts" so misleading that the group has been dubbed the "[False-Fact Think Tank](#)." Unfortunately, that doesn't stop CIS from collaborating with lawmakers and being regularly invited to testify at Congressional hearings.

**Center for Security Policy:** Led by Frank Gaffney, CSP is a national security "think tank" responsible for manufacturing fear of Muslims. Before he founded CSP in 1988, Gaffney was a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense in the Reagan administration. Gaffney's group led a team of 19 authors — mostly former defense officials and retired military leaders — to advance the conspiracy theory that the Muslim Brotherhood has infiltrated the U.S. government at all levels and is secretly working to control it from within. CSP has used its platform "Secure Freedom" to host a daily radio show, publish blog articles and produce e-books including *Red-Green Axis: Refugees, Immigration and the Agenda to Erase America* and Ann Corcoran's *Refugee Resettlement and the Hijra to America*.

**ACT! for America:** ACT! claims to "provide American citizens with a means to be a collective voice for the democratic values of Western Civilization, and against the threat of radical Islam." This grassroots group boasts more than 280,000 members and 800 chapters, primarily in the United States. With statements like "every practicing Muslim is a radical Muslim," ACT! founder Brigitte Gabriel rouses her base on the right-wing media circuit. In the summer of 2015, ACT! launched a new "Refugee Resettlement Working Group" and signaled in their announcement they would be taking cues from anti-refugee activist Ann Corcoran.

Corcoran and anti-refugee activism also featured prominently at the group's national conference in September 2015.

**Refugee Resettlement Watch:** RWW is a blog run by activist Ann Corcoran, who is also the author of the e-book *Refugee Resettlement and the Hijra to America*, which was published by Center for Security Policy. Corcoran claims that most refugees are chosen by the United Nations to come to the U.S. from "countries that hate us." She says the UN, the State Department and Christian and Jewish resettlement agencies are aiding in "Muslim colonization" and claims this is part of a larger scheme for Muslims to "dominate" America and "all lands in the world." Corcoran's website is used as a resources for groups including the Center for Immigration Studies, Center for Security Policy and the anti-Muslim grassroots organization ACT! for America. Corcoran was a featured speaker at the September 2015 ACT! national convention in Washington, D.C.

## **The Opposition's Key Messages—And How to Respond**

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**Government Overreach:** Opponents of refugee rights argue that the U.S. government accepts too many refugees into the country, and then resettles them in communities without the consent of local residents.

**Example:** "Some American towns have been overwhelmed by the arrival of refugees. At no point are these communities consulted. The closed loop of the UN, the State Department, and NGOs leaves citizens with no voice in events that affect their communities." — [Don Barnett](#), CIS Fellow

**Bridge message:** When opponents talk about the communities that welcome refugees as being 'overwhelmed' they are making a dangerous assumption, that Americans will buy into the notion that a changing America is a bad America.

**Closing message:** Across the country, communities are actually welcoming refugees with open arms and everyone benefits when neighbors take care of each other.

**Economic:** Opponents of refugee rights argue that refugees receive excessive and undeserved public assistance, taking money from American taxpayers and harming long-term U.S. fiscal security.

**Example:** "The U.S. welfare system is a global magnet, which has been instrumentalized by the international refugee industry." — [Don Barnett](#), CIS Fellow

**Bridge message 1:** Although anti-refugee extremists would like you to believe that refugees are encouraged to flee their home countries by the allure of food stamps or other public assistance, the truth

is much more distressing. Refugees are forced to flee their homes due to severe violence and other life-threatening situations.

**Closing message 1:** Refugees seek protection because they have survived — or are vulnerable to — unspeakable horrors, and they have few other options. Americans have decided, along with many other countries of the world, to provide safety to a certain number of people fleeing violence. We must do so with openness and commitment if we seek to be an example for other nations.

**Bridge message 2:** Anti-refugee extremists like to pretend they care about American workers and taxpayers, but these are the same advocates and politicians who consistently stand against measures that would ease the financial and job-related struggles of millions of Americans.

**Closing message 2:** Research shows that refugees, and immigrants in general, contribute much more to the American economy than they receive. The U.S. must embrace its commitments to human rights and support refugees, rather than catering to disingenuous advocates and their bigotry.

**National Security:** Anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant leaders have used fear mongering to drive much of the current conversation about U.S. refugee policy by accusing refugees of being terrorists working with extremist groups like ISIS.

**Example 1:** Rosemary Jenks, the Director of Government Relations at NumbersUSA, [said on the radio](#) that extremist groups like ISIS have “infiltrated” refugee camps and plan to use refugee programs to gain entry to the U.S. “We know that they are placing terrorists into the refugee camps and we don’t have the means to vet them,” she argued.

**Example 2:** “Over time this migration will be more devastating to your children and grandchildren — and to our country — than any terrorist attack could ever be.” — [Ann Corcoran](#)

**Bridge message 1:** Refugee opponents rely on cynical tactics to push their extreme agenda. By using unsupported accusations and painting an entire diverse group of individuals with a single brush, anti-refugee extremists are trying to appeal to the public’s worst instincts.

**Bridge message 2:** Recent studies have shown that the main terrorist threat in the United States is not from Muslim extremists, but from [right-wing extremists](#). The current anti-refugee fear mongering is not only reckless, irresponsible and *wrong*, it is also dangerous.

**Closing message:** We owe it to ourselves to offer refugees protection from violence and the opportunity to raise their families in safety. Many of our grandparents came to the United States to escape persecution

and were offered the opportunity to become Americans. We must keep this legacy alive for today's refugees and create the kind of welcoming nation in which we want to live.

**Demographic Threat / European "Forecast":** Anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim leaders have joined together to issue the same pernicious warning: refugees are "overrunning" European society, and the U.S. will follow if it continues to accept refugees.

**Example 1:** "It is an existential threat. Frankly, we could survive terrorist attacks; in my mind, it might even make us stronger, but we're not going to survive this migration... We only need to look to Europe to see how far advanced Europe is in a very bad way." — [Ann Corcoran](#)

**Example 2:** "There are already areas in the U.S. where it is becoming a little bit sporty (sic), you know Dearborn, Michigan is one example. We've had populations dropped in this country as refugees in areas they are not assimilating. They are becoming, I'm afraid, ghettoized. And that is an incubator for precisely this type of problem: Shariah exclusive areas." — [Frank Gaffney](#)

**Bridge message:** This argument isn't new: Anti-immigrant and anti-refugee extremist movements often employ fear of people who are different to rally their grassroots base, whether that fear is based on race or religion. With a long history of white nationalist leadership, these movements rely on racist ideas to make the case for restricting immigration to preserve a white majority.

**Closing message 1:** Everyone deserves freedom from persecution. We also believe everyone should have the chance to make it if they work hard—regardless of the color of their skin, the place they came from, or the way they worship. Just as Italians and Irish came together as Americans and strengthened our country in the past, refugees from around the world who desire safety for their families will join with us in making this country stronger in the future.

**Closing message 2:** The U.S. must live up to our highest values and ideals by welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution into our communities. Now is not the time to retreat from those values. The United States is not in this alone; many other countries around the world have stepped up their commitment to protect people fleeing violence and other forms of persecution.