RUTGERS LAW CENTER FOR SECURITY, RACE AND RIGHTS

PUNISHED FOR PARTICIPATING

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN U.S. ELECTORAL POLITICS



2026

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I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"It is time we assume our place at the table. … We must become participatory citizens in the American experiment."

United States House Representative Keith Ellison[1]

The first Muslim elected to Congress in 2006, Representative Keith Ellison, urged fellow Muslim Americans to "step out of the shadows."[2] His advice echoed the message given to multiple prior waves of new immigrants arriving on America's shores seeking to integrate into their new homeland—participate in American democracy and politics.[3]

Over the next 15 years, this advice would guide Muslim Americans as they sought elected offices at the county, state, and national levels. By the summer of 2026, more than 255 Muslim Americans were elected officials, including four in the U.S. House of Representatives and three more predicted to win in the November Congressional elections.[4] But rather than being embraced as engaged fellow citizens, Muslim American political candidates are encountering overt hostility and attempts to exclude them from public service. Put simply, Muslims are punished for participating in one of the most American acts—running for office in democratic elections.

Not only do Muslim Americans' experiences contradict the fundamental American ideal of equal participation in self-governance, but they also reinforce the structural racism that has undermined this ideal since the nation's founding. This report, *Punished for Participating: Islamophobia in U.S. Electoral Politics*, finds that despite historic gains in political representation, Muslim American candidates face a mainstreamed racialized backlash. Through analysis of over thirty-one case studies of Muslim American candidates and elected officials between 2001 and 2026, we observe that four distinct manifestations of Islamophobia pervade electoral politics: 1) conspiracy theories of an Islamic invasion and imposition of Sharia law, 2) gendered Islamophobia, 3) political violence, and 4) presumptions of antisemitism. To protect multiracial democracy, the report offers three recommendations intended to initiate the long-term project of combating Islamophobia and preserving equal access to self-governance for all Americans.

For decades, Muslims in America have been 'otherized' as presumptive foreigners who allegedly pose a threat to American democracy, liberalism, and equality. That is, "they" are outsiders who want to destroy "our" democracy, and in turn do not deserve equality here in "our country." That divisive narrative dominated the airwaves in the years immediately following the September 11th attacks. Most Americans at the time, however, did not think

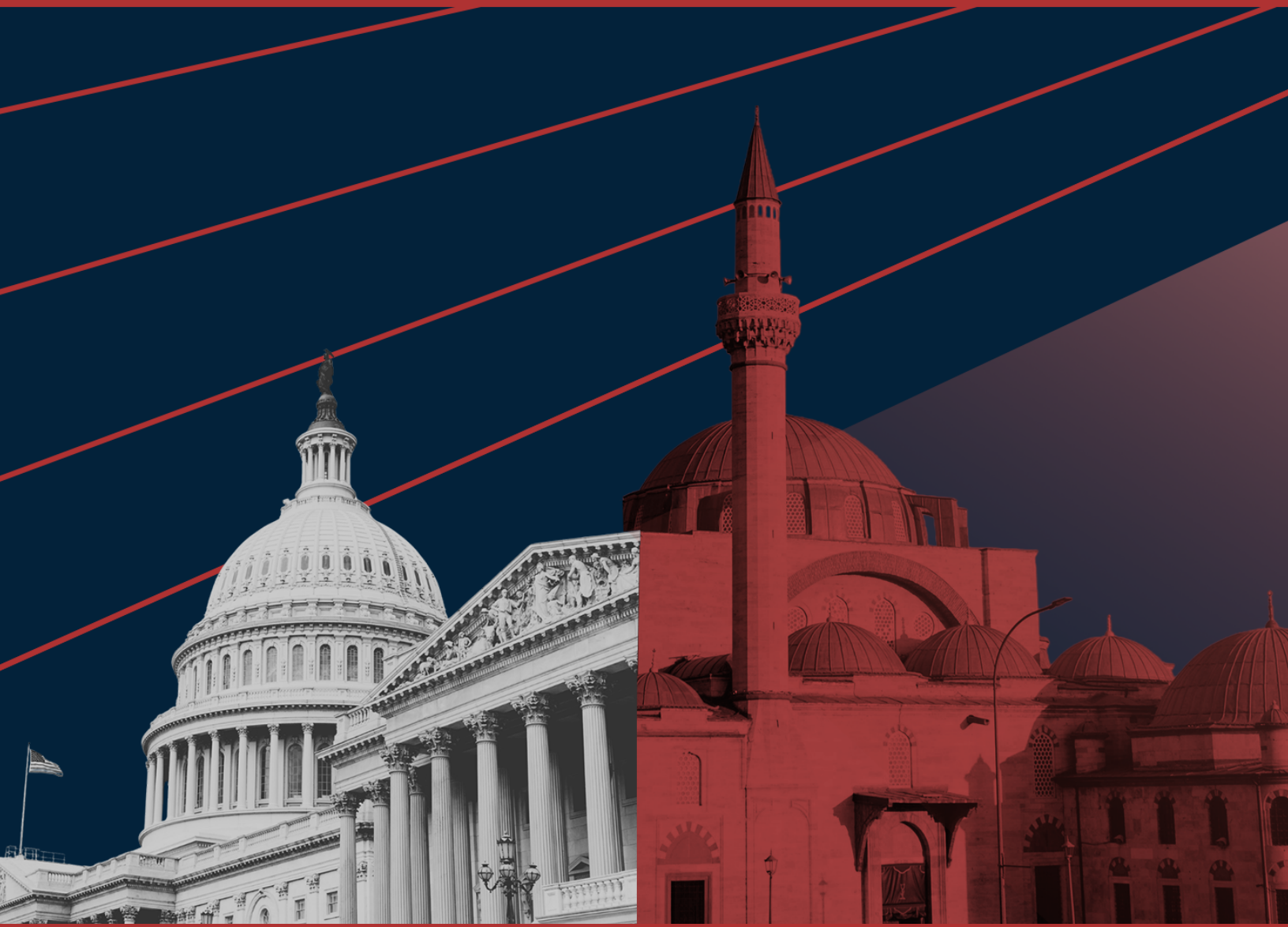
of their Muslim neighbors' faith as antithetical to American life. The Pew Research Center, for example, found that in March 2002, only 25% of the public believed that Islam was more likely than other religions to encourage violence.[5] In 2003, just a year later, this figure jumped to 45%, demonstrating the impact of anti-Muslim narratives flooding mainstream media at the time.[6]

By 2017, when Muslim Americans were beginning to run for elected office in noticeable numbers, another Pew Research poll found that 50% of Americans believed that Islam was not part of "mainstream American society."[7] Almost as many Americans (44%) believed that there was a "natural conflict" between the tenets of Islam and democracy.[8] The same anti-Muslim narrative continues to dominate airwaves today in political advertisements, social media, and public statements by elected officials and opposition campaigns attacking Muslim candidates.[9]

Prevalence of these Islamophobic views is not attributable to public backlash after the September 11th terrorist attacks.[10] Islamophobia is driven by a relentless fixation on casting Muslims as radicals and extremists, and this fixation is grounded in erroneous racial stereotypes and is factually false.[11] An increasing number of Muslims are literally "playing within the system" by running for office in democratic elections—more than two hundred and fifty-five Muslim Americans across the country in 2026. Yet, this quintessential American act attracts the racial stereotyping premised on Muslims' permanent outsider status, regardless of their individual actions, citizenship status, or civic participation.

The racialized backlash against Muslim political participation reflects a broader contradiction in American democracy. Muslim Americans are encouraged to assimilate, vote, and participate in civic life while simultaneously being vilified when they do so in ways that offer their unique perspectives, experiences, and analysis on public policy as public servants. The experiences of Muslim American candidates and elected officials documented in this report, thus, offer a contemporary example of how racism threatens American democracy by creating different classes of citizens: a privileged class entitled to participate in self-governance and a subordinated class denied the same opportunity due to the extraordinary costs imposed on their safety, reputations, and mental well-being.

FOUR ANTI-MUSLIM NARRATIVES IN ELECTORAL POLITICS



Punished for Participating analyzes over thirty-one cases of Muslim Americans running for local, state, and federal office between 2001 and 2026, drawing from media analysis, social media posts, official statements, and campaign data. Through these case studies, the report examines the causes and harmful consequences of anti-Muslim racial tropes deployed against Muslim American candidates and elected officials at all levels of government for over two decades. The cases reveal four recurring anti-Muslim narratives in public discourse that reinforce Islamophobia in U.S. electoral politics across the country.

First, conspiracy theories of an Islamic invasion and imposition of Sharia law portray Muslim public officials as disloyal Americans or agents of a secret foreign Islamic network's agenda, mirroring traditional antisemitic tropes of dual loyalty and a Jewish world conspiracy.[12] Second, American misogyny and gendered Islamophobia depict Muslim women as simultaneously oppressed and dangerous, while Muslim men are racially stereotyped as patriarchal, misogynistic, and terrorist.[13] Third, political violence against Muslim candidates and public officials comes through in the form of threats, harassment, intimidation, and physical assaults. Fourth, the specious presumption of antisemitism of Muslim candidates and elected officials who advocate for Palestinian human rights or criticize Israeli government policies denies them equal opportunity to engage on a matter of public importance while reinforcing racial stereotypes of Muslims as hateful.[14] The report's corresponding sections provide concrete evidence of how Islamophobic narratives operate to punish Muslim candidates and elected officials for participating in American democracy, and in turn exclude Muslim Americans from equal participation in the democratic practice of collective self-governance.

Section One, *Islamic Invasion and Dual Loyalty Conspiracy*, examines the most common Islamophobic trope: suspicion of a plan to control the United States from within, based on an alleged loyalty to a global Islamic network. Proponents of a "creeping Sharia" conspiracy theory allege an Islamic infiltration of American institutions when Muslim citizens or public figures visibly practice their faith.[15] As a result, Muslim public officials who wear the hijab, openly practice their religion, or use the Quran in their swearing-in ceremonies are smeared as cultural threats to American identity. The case studies in this section demonstrate that Muslim identity is so reviled that even when Muslim Americans partake in the most American of acts—running for or winning elected office—they are accused of threatening the republic.

Section Two, *American Misogyny and Gendered Islamophobia*, examines how Muslim men and women are viewed through racialized and gendered negative stereotypes. Despite Muslim women's collective high levels of educational achievement in the United States, they are still perceived as oppressed, passive, and lacking agency.[16] Yet, when Muslim women are elected to public office, they are accused of supporting terrorism. Their hijabs attract harassment and suspicion rather than respect for their religious expression or bodily autonomy to choose how they dress. Meanwhile, Muslim men are stereotyped as patriarchal, misogynistic, and terrorist. These Orientalist importations from the European colonial era continue to taint how some Americans perceive Muslim elected officials and

political candidates as threats rather than as fellow civically engaged citizens.

Section Three, *Political Violence Against Muslims*, sounds the alarm on the normalization of threats of harm and physical attacks that Muslim public officials have endured. This includes verbal or physical assaults in person, racist messages left through email or voicemail, and credible death threats that take a deep psychological toll on the Muslim target and illustrate the racial price paid by Muslims in public service. Moreover, little regard is given to the substantial costs of security services to protect them should the threats of violence be acted upon.[17] Recently, anti-Muslim threats have escalated to unprecedented calls for the denaturalization of Muslim American citizens, including Representative Ilhan Omar and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani.[18]

The final section of the report, *Presumptively Antisemitic Racial Trope*, exposes the convergence of Islamophobic and pro-Israeli entities in furtherance of a shared goal: keeping Muslims out of elected office and public policymaking. Muslims are labeled as antisemitic as a matter of course with no regard for the absence of credible evidence. The presumption of antisemitism is intended to portray Muslim candidates and elected officials as uniquely dangerous to Jews despite their inclusive political platforms.[19] Muslim officials who advocate for Palestinian human rights, support a ceasefire in Gaza, or criticize the Israeli government's human rights violations are frequently subjected to coordinated defamation campaigns that equate criticism of Israeli state policy with hatred toward Jews. The latest examples of this peddling of racial tropes can be found in smear campaigns against U.S. Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, as well as 2026 Congressional Democratic nominees Adam Hamawy in New Jersey and Abdul El-Sayed in Michigan. These accusations often persist even where these same Muslim candidates and officials explicitly condemn antisemitism and promote religious pluralism.[20] Ultimately, false allegations of hatred toward Jews directed at Muslim Americans seeking elected office reinforce Islamophobic racial tropes that fuel hate against Muslim communities.[21]

ISLAMOPHOBIA IN ELECTORAL POLITICS UNDERMINES AMERICAN DEMOCRACY



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In some ways, Muslim immigrants and their children are no different than preceding Jewish and Catholic immigrants to the United States, whose children and grandchildren sought elected office.[22] They too were subjected to explicitly antisemitic and anti-Catholic smear campaigns. They too were accused of loyalty to secret foreign networks. Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, for example, succumbed to anti-Catholic pressures to publicly declare that he was first and foremost loyal to the United States of America, not the Pope.[23] His historic electoral success constituted a watershed moment for Catholic Americans' entrance into mainstream political life.[24] However, the case studies in *Punished for Participating* reveal the opposite trend for Muslim Americans: the more they partake in electoral politics, the more explicit and intense the Islamophobic attacks become. Rather than being accepted as equal citizens, Muslim candidates and elected officials are routinely punished for their visibility and civic engagement through Islamophobic campaigns, harassment, threats, and attempts at their political exclusion.

The persistence of these racialized attacks illustrates that Islamophobia is not merely a reaction to isolated political disagreements or international events, but systemic discrimination that treats Muslims as permanent outsiders regardless of their citizenship, professional qualifications, or demonstrated commitment to democratic participation. For instance, the Pew Research Center showed that 45% of the American public believed in 2003 that Islam was more likely than other religions to encourage violence.[25] Though this number has fluctuated throughout the years, the partisan gap in the response to this question has grown over the past two decades. In 2002, Republicans' and Democrats' opinions were separated by just eleven points.[26] By December 2016, this gap had grown to forty-four points: 70% of Republicans said that Islam was more likely to encourage violence than other faiths, compared to 26% of Democrats.[27] By 2024, when Donald Trump was elected to his second presidential term, a whopping 70% of Republicans supported banning travel from certain Muslim-majority countries.[28] Such views animate the disproportionately Republican-led Islamophobic attacks against Muslim candidates and elected officials, although numerous pro-Israeli Zionist Democrats also propagate the presumptively antisemitic racial trope.[29]

While Islamophobia has been integral to the agenda of the political right, the Pew Research Center's surveys show a broader apprehension about Islam in America. In 2017, at the height of Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric, a poll found that 50% of Americans believed that Islam was not part of "mainstream American society."[30] Almost as many Americans believed (44%) that there was a "natural conflict" between the tenets of Islam and democracy.[31] In a 2024 YouGov poll measuring six forms of political extremism, 85% of Democrats were most likely to fear "white-supremacist extremism," while 78% of Republicans were most likely to fear "left-wing extremism." That 77% of Republicans were most likely to fear "Muslim extremism" evinces an association between these two groups perceived as 'extremists' in the minds of Republican voters.[32] Although Democrats were more likely to say that they feared "white-supremacist," "right-wing," and "Christian" extremism, 55% of Democrats also said they feared "Muslim extremism."[33] While fear of "white-supremacist extremism" has remained constant since 2022 at 62%, fear of "Muslim extremism" grew by seven

RATHER THAN BEING ACCEPTED AS EQUAL CITIZENS, **MUSLIM CANDIDATES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS ARE ROUTINELY PUNISHED FOR THEIR VISIBILITY** AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ISLAMOPHOBIC CAMPAIGNS, HARASSMENT, THREATS, AND ATTEMPTS AT THEIR POLITICAL EXCLUSION.

percentage points, likely reflecting the resurgence of inflammatory anti-Muslim political rhetoric during Trump's 2024 presidential campaign.

Normalization of anti-Muslim rhetoric predictably has led to higher support for anti-Muslim discriminatory policies. A plurality of Americans (43%) in 2024 supported banning travel from certain Muslim-majority countries.[34] Notably, such support was deeply polarized, with 73% of Republicans favoring the policy compared to 20% of Democrats. These polling trends reveal that anti-Muslim attitudes are not confined to fringe political movements or constitute a new phenomenon. Rather, as the case studies in *Punished for Participating* demonstrate, suspicion toward Muslim Americans is increasingly normalized in mainstream political discourse.

That Muslims are punished for participating in electoral politics brings into sharp relief the threat to American democracy posed by Islamophobia. Public perceptions of Muslims as culturally incompatible with democracy or uniquely prone to violence create the conditions under which attacks against Muslim candidates and elected officials deny the second largest religious minority equal access to the democratic process. The fact that Muslim American politicians are forced to operate within a hostile environment where large segments of the public view their religious identity with suspicion or fear before even considering the candidate's policy positions or qualifications chills other Muslims from running for elected office.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When Muslims are penalized for participating in the electoral process, the harm reaches far beyond one religious minority—it undermines the foundational democratic principle that allows all Americans to participate equally and safely in public service. A more serious and systematic approach to combating Islamophobia is thus long overdue. Accordingly, *Punished for Participating* offers three recommendations as a starting point for undoing decades of socialization that has legitimized discrimination against Muslims in all facets of life, including electoral politics.

1 ESTABLISH TASK FORCES AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM

2 TRAIN LOCAL AND STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT ABOUT ISLAMOPHOBIA, ANTI-MUSLIM HATE CRIMES, AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROSECUTION AND PREVENTION

3 DEVELOP CURRICULUM AND TRAININGS TO UNDERSTAND MUSLIMS AND COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA FOR K-12 SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

WHEN MUSLIMS ARE PENALIZED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, THE HARM REACHES FAR BEYOND ONE RELIGIOUS MINORITY—IT UNDERMINES THE FOUNDATIONAL DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE THAT ALLOWS ALL AMERICANS TO PARTICIPATE EQUALLY AND SAFELY IN PUBLIC SERVICE.

1 ESTABLISH TASK FORCES AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM

The federal government and each state should establish a *Task Force to Combat Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism*; the task forces should be comprised of state and local government officials, educators, scholars, journalists, and diverse Muslim American civil society leaders. The task forces can learn from and build upon similar ones created to combat antisemitism across the United States.[35] Existing anti-discrimination task forces combine data collection, civil-rights enforcement, education, public safety, institutional reform, community engagement, and periodic government accountability. Accordingly, the state task forces should study Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism, propose measures to reduce anti-Muslim incidents, assist public schools and universities, and compile educational materials. To ensure public accountability, a *Task Force to Combat Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism* should also hold at least four public meetings annually, invite public testimony, and produce annual reports that make recommendations to the respective governor and state legislature.

The mandate of each task force should clearly state that it distinguishes between protected expression and unlawful discrimination, harassment, threats, and violence. As such, nothing in the task force's work should be construed to authorize restriction of constitutionally protected speech, academic freedom, religious exercise, peaceful protest, criticism of any religion or religious doctrine, or criticism of any domestic or foreign government, political movement, or ideology.

2 TRAIN LOCAL AND STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT ABOUT ISLAMOPHOBIA, ANTI-MUSLIM HATE CRIMES, AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROSECUTION AND PREVENTION

Each state government should train local law enforcement on how to identify, document, prevent, and prosecute anti-Muslim hate crimes and harassment, which empirical studies show rise with the increase in Islamophobic rhetoric in U.S. electoral politics.[36] Such trainings should include developing and implementing safety protocols for Muslim American political candidates and elected officials who are frequently targets of hate crime threats and acts. Again, task forces to combat antisemitism offer a useful template. Moreover, preventing and prosecuting anti-Muslim hate crimes requires improving centralized hate-

crime reporting and adequate staffing of specialized anti-Muslim hate-crime units at the local and state levels. Local and state governments should offer specialized anti-Muslim hate-crime training for police, prosecutors, magistrates, and victim advocates.

Law enforcement should also work with Muslim American community centers to address the threats they face and the consequent security needs. Local officials should provide security training for Muslim elected officials' staff as well as cybersecurity training for mosques and Islamic schools.

3 DEVELOP CURRICULUM AND TRAININGS TO UNDERSTAND MUSLIMS AND COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA FOR K-12 SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Too often, Muslims in the United States are absent or inadequately covered in school curricula. Muslim-American history thus should be incorporated into state social-studies standards that allow for instruction concerning Islam as a major world religion, the history of Muslim Americans, Muslim immigration, Black Muslim movements, and contemporary Muslim-American civic life. Teaching modules should explain Islamophobia and anti-Muslim stereotyping against Muslim women, Arabs, Palestinians, South Asians, and African American Muslims.[37]

Likewise, existing anti-discrimination training and educational programming in public schools, universities, government agencies, and workplaces should incorporate the history and experiences of Muslims in the United States and should also address topics in the prevention of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. Teachers should receive professional development to educate them about Islamophobia and the distinction between Islam, politically motivated violence, and the political diversity of American Muslim communities.

At the university level, administrators should create standardized anti-Muslim bias reporting systems and report anonymized aggregate data annually to state and federal agencies. Campus climate surveys of Muslim students, faculty, and staff that measure harassment, religious accommodation, classroom climate, discrimination, and perceptions of institutional belonging can inform educational programming intended to combat Islamophobia on campus.

Universities should develop anti-doxxing protocols, which are particularly relevant for Muslim students publicly engaged on Palestinian human rights who are consequently targeted by pro-Israeli special interest groups.[38] Administrators should be trained on the various ways in which Muslim students, staff, and faculty experience violations of Title VI, Title VII, state civil rights laws, and First Amendment protections.

Finally, state governments should establish and increase grants for university research concerning Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism whose analysis can meaningfully inform the work of the state level *Task Forces to Combat Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism*.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION FREQUENTLY TRIGGERS A RACIALIZED BACKLASH INTENDED TO EXCLUDE MUSLIMS FROM PUBLIC OFFICE RATHER THAN INSULATE THEM FROM ANTI-MUSLIM BIAS.

II INTRODUCTION

The increase in newly elected Muslim Americans to public office—such as Mayor Zohran Mamdani, U.S. Representatives Lateefah Simon and Aisha Wahab, and Virginia Senator Ghazala Hashmi—signifies a notable shift in American civic life. The historic democratic primary victory of Abdul El-Sayed in the Michigan U.S. Senate 2026 race is further evidence of American Muslims' significant strides in increasing electoral participation.[39] Such progress should be celebrated, not condemned.

In the decades since the September 11th attacks, Muslim Americans have transformed from a community with relatively low rates of political participation into one that is increasingly engaged as voters, organizers, candidates, and elected officials at the local, state, and federal levels.[40] The 2022 midterm elections marked a historic milestone, with a record-breaking 145 Muslim candidates running for office across the United States.[41] Muslim women accounted for approximately sixty percent of the victories in those races.[42] In 2025, Zohran Mamdani's election as mayor of New York City marked another historic breakthrough, making him the city's first Muslim mayor and underscoring the growing political influence of Muslim Americans within multiracial electoral coalitions. By August 2026, over 255 Muslim Americans held elected office across 26 states.[43]

Expansion of Muslim political participation unfolded against the backdrop of persistent and evolving Islamophobia in American society. Muslims in the United States are racialized as presumptively foreign, disloyal, violent, or incompatible with democratic values. The "War on Terror" institutionalized these negative stereotypes through surveillance programs, selective prosecutions, immigration restrictions, and political rhetoric that cast Islam as a civilizational threat. Although public officials actively encourage civic participation and democratic engagement as markers of successful integration (of 'being truly American'), 'outsider' groups, and Muslims in particular, are harshly punished for doing exactly that. Like other immigrant communities, Muslim Americans are encouraged to culturally assimilate, vote, and participate in civic life while simultaneously being treated as permanent outsiders when they do so visibly and successfully. Thus, political participation frequently triggers a racialized backlash intended to exclude Muslims from public office rather than insulate them from anti-Muslim bias.

The backlash reinforces anti-Muslim racial tropes that Muslim candidates and elected officials are part of a conspiracy of "Islamic infiltration." They are accused of holding dual loyalty to international terrorist organizations. Muslim American candidates and officials are subjected to misogynistic and gendered attacks, death threats, and physical intimidation, and are presumed to be antisemitic if critical of Israel's policies. These attacks emerge

NO OTHER RELIGIOUS MINORITY TODAY FACES SUCH SYSTEMIC RACIALIZED OPPOSITION WHEN THEY RUN FOR OR SERVE IN ELECTED OFFICE.

not only from fringe actors online but also from elected officials, political commentators, media personalities, and organized advocacy networks that amplify anti-Muslim narratives in mainstream political discourse.[44] Even though Muslims comprise only one percent of the population in the United States,[45] they remain targets of disproportionate political fearmongering and scapegoating. No other religious minority today faces such systemic racialized opposition when they run for or serve in elected office.

Through analysis of media coverage and social media public posts, this report documents over thirty-one cases of Islamophobic attacks and backlash against Muslim American political candidates and elected officials. For example, in 2025, Ghazala Hashmi's election to the Virginia State Senate prompted online comments accusing her of participating in a plot to "destroy America from within."[46] In 2021, U.S. Representative André Carson, the second Muslim American elected to Congress, was targeted by an armed individual who parked a truck filled with firearms near the Capitol.[47] In January 2026, Representative Ilhan Omar was physically attacked during a town hall event in Minneapolis, following years of sustained anti-Muslim rhetoric directed at her.[48]

In the summer of 2026, when Abdul El-Sayed won the Democratic primaries for a U.S. Senate seat in Michigan, Senator Tommy Tuberville called him a "terrorist."[49] Representative Nancy Mace declared "every single Muslim holding public office in America" as "a threat to both national security and our republic."[50] And President Trump stated there were "jihadists being elected all over the place."[51]

These are just a few incidents that illustrate how Islamophobic hostility toward Muslim public officials is explicit and divisive. Paradoxically, the increasing success of Muslim candidates has not reversed the racialized narratives that define Islam as fundamentally incompatible with American democracy. Muslim public officials are routinely expected to prove their loyalty to the Constitution, explain their religious beliefs, condemn terrorism, or defend their right to hold office in ways that would be widely condemned if directed toward other faith communities. Muslims' political participation attracts scrutiny rarely imposed upon other religious minorities.

At a societal level, the backlash against Muslim political participation reflects how racism fuels a longstanding broader contradiction in American democracy. Political empowerment of racial minorities is often followed by a racist backlash. The experiences of African Americans in the reversal of the Reconstruction Era after unprecedented numbers of African Americans were elected to office, the rise of the White nationalist "Tea Party" movement that transformed into the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) movement as backlash to the election of the first African American president, and dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs as a rebuke to the Black Lives Matter Movement are contemporary examples of a historic trend.[52]

The rise in Muslim political participation did not occur overnight. It emerged from generations of political organizing and community formation among African American


Post
Coach Tommy Tuberville
@SenTuberville
Michigan Democrats just voted to send a TERRORIST to the Senate.
Abdulrahman Mohamed El-Sayed is a RADICAL ISLAMIST who will do everything he can to destroy America.
RNC Research @RNCResearch · Apr 7
NEW
Michigan Democrat U.S. Senate Candidate Abdul El Sayed DEFENDS Hasan Piker for saying "America deserved 9/11" and "it doesn't matter" if rapes happened on October 7th....
LIVE
DEMOCRAT MICHIGAN SENATE CANDIDATE TO RALLY WITH ANTI-ISRAEL STREAMER
HAPPENING TODAY
00:11
1:28 PM · Aug 5, 2026 · 280K Views
840
1.4K
3.7K
76


Post
Rep. Nancy Mace
@RepNancyMace
Every single Muslim holding public office in America is a trojan horse, and a threat to both national security and our republic.
We refuse to be silent.
4:30 PM · Aug 7, 2026 · 10.8M Views
12K
17K
107K
1.8K

MUSLIM PUBLIC OFFICIALS ARE ROUTINELY EXPECTED TO PROVE THEIR LOYALTY TO THE CONSTITUTION, EXPLAIN THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, CONDEMN TERRORISM, OR DEFEND THEIR RIGHT TO HOLD OFFICE IN WAYS THAT WOULD BE WIDELY CONDEMNED IF DIRECTED TOWARD OTHER FAITH COMMUNITIES.

Muslims, immigrant Muslim communities, civil rights advocates, and post-9/11 grassroots organizations.[53] In response to government overreach and private discrimination after 9/11, Muslim Americans increasingly turned toward electoral politics as a strategy for asserting belonging within American society. Learning from the experiences of African American civil rights organizations, Muslim American organizations such as the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Emgage, and MPower invested heavily in voter registration, civic engagement, and candidate development programs that contributed to historic gains in Muslim political representation during the Obama and Trump eras alike.[54] Active engagement in cross-racial and intercommunity mobilization is the latest chapter in the history of American Muslims in politics.

HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSLIMS IN POLITICS



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III HISTORY OF AMERICAN MUSLIMS IN POLITICS

Muslim political participation in the United States reflects a long struggle for belonging, citizenship, and equal participation in American democracy. From enslaved African Muslims in the Antebellum era and African American Muslim activists in the twentieth century to the growth of immigrant Muslim communities after 1965, Muslims in America have continually navigated racial exclusion while building political and civic institutions.[55] Although African Muslims arrived on its shores before the country's founding, they were rendered invisible within mainstream narratives of American identity or portrayed as permanently foreign and incompatible with democratic values.[56] These racialized perceptions intensified dramatically after the September 11 attacks, when the "War on Terror" transformed Muslims into a suspect community associated with violence, extremism, and disloyalty.

Rising Islamophobia catalyzed Muslim political mobilization. Heightened surveillance, discrimination, and exclusion prompted Muslim communities to turn to electoral politics as a means of defending their civil rights and asserting full membership in American society. Muslim Americans expanded voter registration efforts, built advocacy organizations, and sought elected office in unprecedented numbers. The historic election of Barack Obama in 2008, combined with the normalization of anti-Muslim rhetoric during the first Trump presidency, further accelerated Muslim civic engagement, producing what commentators described as a "Muslim Blue Wave." Yet Muslims' growing political visibility also triggered intensified backlash, with Muslim candidates and elected officials facing accusations of disloyalty, extremism, and malevolent infiltration. The case studies in this report demonstrate that Muslim political participation in America is often met with efforts to exclude their voices from the nation's political community.

RISING ISLAMOPHOBIA CATALYZED MUSLIM POLITICAL MOBILIZATION. HEIGHTENED SURVEILLANCE, DISCRIMINATION, AND EXCLUSION PROMPTED MUSLIM COMMUNITIES TO TURN TO ELECTORAL POLITICS AS A MEANS OF DEFENDING THEIR CIVIL RIGHTS AND ASSERTING FULL MEMBERSHIP IN AMERICAN SOCIETY.

A ANTEBELLUM ISLAM, THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSLIMS

Islam's first encounters on the shores of the United States occurred through the transatlantic slave trade starting in 1619.[57] Scholars estimate that fifteen to thirty percent of enslaved Africans in the Antebellum South were Muslim—up to 1.2 million people.[58] Despite harsh conditions, many enslaved African Muslims continued to practice their faith in secret.[59] Some formed small, hidden communities known as the Maroons in remote areas throughout the Americas, which provided safe havens for religious practice.[60] Most enslaved Africans, however, were forcibly converted to Christianity by their White enslavers.[61]

Slavery was, in part, justified by its perpetrators as a means of civilizing Africans through conversion to Christianity and imposition of Anglo-Protestant cultural norms.[62] The prevailing Protestant view held that Africans lacked souls, which, despite opposition from some groups such as the Quakers, legitimized centuries of slavery without conflicting with Christian morality.[63] In response to centuries of anti-Black racism, a new political movement emerged in the early twentieth century that appropriated Islam as a symbol of Black Liberation against White supremacy and the legacies of slavery.[64] The Nation of Islam (NOI), a religious and political organization that was ideologically distinct from Sunni Islam, played a significant role in (re)establishing Islam in the United States among African American communities. Under the auspices of the Nation of Islam, African Americans established civic and economic services in economically depressed areas.

The NOI's emphasis on Black pride, self-determination, economic independence, and resistance against white supremacy resonated with African Americans in inner cities in the North.[65] In the 1950s, Malcolm X emerged as the NOI's most effective organizer, whose gift of oratory attracted tens of thousands of new members in the northern cities.[66] Similar to the experiences of other Black nationalist groups, the NOI was surveilled and infiltrated by the FBI. It was vilified in the American media as dangerous and extremist. The more the NOI grew in influence among African American communities, the more intense the government's attempts became to delegitimize its leaders.[67]

In 1964, Malcolm X publicly broke with the NOI and converted to Sunni Islam after making a pilgrimage to Mecca.[68] While a small portion of NOI members followed Malcolm X to Sunni Islam, the majority of African American Muslims stayed in the NOI. In 1975, Elijah Muhammad's son Warith Deen Mohammed took on the leadership of NOI, formally announced his conversion to Sunni Islam, and brought with him the majority of African American Muslims into Sunni Islam, constituting the largest single mass conversion to Islam.[69] Imam Warith Deen's work with immigrant Muslim communities contributed to the development of multiracial Muslim American communities. At the time of his death

in 2008, over two million African Americans were Muslim, comprising twenty percent of Muslims in the United States.[70] The political experiences of African American communities in the decades following the civil rights movement laid the foundation for the political mobilization of Muslim Americans of immigrant backgrounds that accelerated after the attacks of September 11.

Experiences of enslaved African Muslims and the Nation of Islam demonstrate that Muslim political consciousness in the United States predates the waves of immigration from Muslim majority countries after 1965. African Americans practiced Islam both as a religious framework and a vehicle for resisting racial oppression, exclusion, and White supremacy. The experiences of African American Muslims also reveal a recurring pattern: Muslim identity is perceived as incompatible with American democracy, even when Muslims actively participate in civic and democratic political life.

B AMERICAN MUSLIMS' POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT BEFORE AND AFTER 9/11

A strong tradition of political engagement in African American communities led to gradual increases in the representation of African Americans in elected office.[71] Muslim immigrants remained noticeably absent, primarily because immigration from Muslim-majority countries was severely restricted by national origin quotas favoring northern European immigrants.[72] On October 3, 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, which eliminated the national origins quota system and led to an influx of immigrants from the Global South and East. Professor Edward Curtis concludes that "[f]rom 1966 to 1977, approximately 2,780,000 people immigrated to the United States from areas of the world with significant Muslim populations."[73] The immigration of Muslims presented a unique narrative compared to other groups.[74] The association of Islam with stigmatized groups and European Orientalist perceptions led to a socially constructed Muslim identity imposed upon all Muslims that homogenized immigrants and non-immigrants of various racial backgrounds into a monolithic identity perceived as foreign, dangerous, illiberal, and disloyal.[75]

New Muslim immigrant communities generally did not engage in electoral politics, consistent with a 2001 research study that found that first-generation Americans of all national origins vote less often than later generations.[76] Muslims who did vote were evenly split between Democratic and Republican candidates, except in the 2000 presidential elections when Muslims voted as a bloc for George W. Bush.[77] In fact, Bush intentionally courted Muslims at the urging of one of his strategists who argued that Muslims were a "natural GOP constituency" because they were a "socially conservative, family-oriented, business-friendly group."[78] An estimated 42% of Muslims voted for Bush compared to 31% for Al Gore.[79] However, Muslim support for the Republican Party decreased after 2001 due to the Bush administration's anti-Muslim policies and practices.

The United States' response to the September 11 attacks led to increased scrutiny, discrimination, and suspicion towards Muslim communities, particularly those of Middle Eastern, South Asian, or North African descent. Nine days after the attack, President George W. Bush gave a speech in Congress announcing the beginning of "our war on terror."[80] Bush acknowledged Al Qaeda as a "fringe form of Islamic extremism" and stated that "the enemy of our America is not our many Muslim friends. … Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them."[81] Yet his remarks cast America's fight not just for freedom, but as a religious crusade and a civilizational fight for "progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom."[82] This narrative invoked the clash of civilizations theory developed by Orientalist scholars Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington, which portrayed Western and Islamic civilizations as inherently incompatible.[83]

Bush's rhetoric set the stage for an "us vs. them" mindset that justified open-ended military campaigns in Muslim-majority countries and ushered in an era of discrimination against Muslim communities at home. Despite public statements that "Islam is peace,"[84] the Bush administration institutionalized Islamophobia into American society through racialized surveillance, immigration, and national security practices.[85]

The racially targeted surveillance and selective prosecutions drove Muslim American voters into the Democratic Party.[86] One poll found that three-quarters of Muslims were planning to vote for Democrat John Kerry in 2004, with just seven percent supporting Bush.[87] Established Muslim American organizations also shifted their focus from internal community affairs to publicly engaged advocacy and education. Muslim advocacy organizations invested heavily in voter registration, coalition-building, and civic education efforts that would empower the Muslim community over time. [88]

The transformation of Muslim Americans from a politically fragmented community into an increasingly organized voting bloc reflected both fear and opportunity.[89] Government surveillance, selective prosecutions, and anti-Muslim rhetoric after September 11 convinced many Muslims that political disengagement carried significant costs to their liberty, safety, and livelihoods. Younger Muslim Americans increasingly viewed civic participation as essential to protecting civil liberties and challenging stereotypes that portrayed Muslims as foreign or anti-democratic. The focus on political participation as voters proved to be a crucial precursor to Muslim Americans' entrance into electoral politics as candidates.

In 2006, Keith Ellison made history as the first Muslim American elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.[90] Ellison represented Minnesota's 5th congressional district from 2007 to 2019,[91] after which he was elected to serve as Minnesota's Attorney General.[92] André D. Carson soon followed as the second Muslim elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 2008, representing Indiana's 7th congressional district.[93] Ilhan Omar, a Somali American, then won Ellison's seat in 2019, joining Rashida Tlaib, a Palestinian American, that same year in making history as the first Muslim American women elected to Congress. The election of Ellison and Carson, both African Americans, alongside Omar and Tlaib, both from immigrant Muslim communities, marked a milestone in the entrance of Muslim Americans into national politics. Their electoral success, however, triggered frequent Islamophobic attacks as well as challenges to their patriotism and legitimacy as elected officials. It was a foreshadowing of what lay ahead for subsequent Muslim candidates and elected officials: the greater the visibility in public office, the more intense the racialized backlash.

MUSLIM AMERICANS EXPANDED VOTER REGISTRATION EFFORTS, BUILT ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS, AND SOUGHT ELECTED OFFICE IN UNPRECEDENTED NUMBERS.

C OBAMA AND THE MUSLIM BLUE WAVE

The historic election of the first African American president of the United States in 2008 inspired a generation of Americans. Obama's platform of inclusion inspired Muslims, among other minorities, to lean into political engagement and mobilization in what came to be known as the "Muslim Blue Wave." The "Muslim Blue Wave" reflected more than increased voter turnout or symbolic political victories. It represented an effort by Muslim Americans to assert belonging within a political system that had frequently marginalized them after 9/11. Obama's outreach to Muslim communities during his campaign, coupled with the symbolic impact of his presidency, inspired hope and a sense of inclusion among American Muslims.[94]

Witnessing the election of the nation's first African American president boosted voter registration of Muslims.[95] In 2009, Gallup conducted the first nationally representative survey of Muslim Americans and found that only 64% of eligible Muslim voters were registered—the lowest among religious groups surveyed and well below the general population at 81% of all registered voters.[96] The Obama administration's engagement of Muslims contributed to greater Muslim involvement in electoral politics, as did concerted efforts by Muslim American civil society groups. Between 2012 and 2015, approximately 300,000 Muslim Americans were registered to vote. [97] By 2020, according to the civic engagement organization EMGAGE, over 1.5 million Muslim Americans were registered to vote, of whom 71% voted in elections.[98]

The tide of engagement turned not only because of Obama's popularity, but also due to the rise of explicitly Islamophobic discourse in American politics. Obama himself was subjected to an Islamophobic "birther" conspiracy alleging that he was a secret Muslim born outside the United States. Although Donald Trump became the face of this movement, Obama was dogged by these racist smears from the start of his national political career. After Obama delivered his star-making keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, a fringe right-wing political candidate issued a press release declaring that "Obama is a Muslim who has concealed his religion."[99] Detractors intentionally recited his full name, Barack Hussein Obama, to fuel the 'secret Muslim' conspiracy theory.

During Obama's first term, Islamophobia shifted from the political right to the mainstream. In 2011 and 2012, Republican Congressman Peter King spearheaded a series of anti-Muslim Congressional hearings grounded in an alleged threat of Muslim "radicalization."[100] The hearings portrayed Muslims as presumptive terrorists whose presence in the country purportedly posed a national security threat. Opposition to these racialized witch hunts galvanized Muslim Americans to increase their participation in American electoral politics.

More Muslims began to run for local office as a means of challenging misperceptions that American Muslims are out of place in the United States as well as to combat the consequent anti-Muslim discrimination.[101]

By the time Donald Trump was first elected president in 2016, Islamophobia had become an official policy of the Republican Party, most notably through the actions that came to be known as the "Muslim Ban." The Executive Order excluded or restricted entry into the United States by nationals from several Muslim-majority countries, including Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and Sudan. Millions of individuals seeking visas, refugee resettlement, or family reunification were barred from legally entering the United States. All of the nations in the ban, except for Cuba and North Korea, were Muslim majority.[102] Opposition to the Muslim Ban spurred American Muslims to not only show up in large numbers at the polls, but also to run for elected office themselves.[103] By 2018, Muslim Americans ran for office in their highest numbers thus far, with at least 128 candidates on the ballot from local to national offices.[104] Voter registration among American Muslim voters also significantly increased, surging from 60% in 2016 to 81% in 2022.[105]

By 2022, Muslim Americans were not only running but winning in historic numbers, with 82 victories in local, state, and federal elections, as well as numerous judicial seats in red and blue states alike.[106] Notably, sixty percent of elected Muslim American officials in 2022 were women.[107] Maine, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas elected their first Muslim state lawmakers while Georgia had the second-highest number of Muslim state legislators with four Muslim lawmakers, behind Minnesota, which had five.[108] American Muslims seemed poised to firmly establish their place in American politics, mirroring the political trajectory of Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants a century earlier.[109]

The rise of Muslim American participation in politics, however, triggered a swift racialized backlash from political opponents, media commentators, and online extremists. The anti-democratic message was clear: Muslims are unwelcome outsiders despite their participation within the American political system. Beyond the usual political mudslinging typical of American politics, Muslim public officials are singled out as posing a civilizational threat based on their presence in government alone. Perversely, the same political engagement that demonstrated Muslims' investment in American democracy became the basis for accusations that Muslims were "infiltrating" American institutions. This contradiction would become a defining feature of Islamophobia directed toward Muslim American candidates and elected officials.

NOTABLY, SIXTY PERCENT OF ELECTED MUSLIM AMERICAN OFFICIALS IN 2022 WERE WOMEN

D SYSTEMIC RACISM AGAINST MUSLIM PUBLIC OFFICIALS

In the immediate months after the September 11 attacks, Americans did not immediately associate their Muslim neighbors with terrorism and violence. The Pew Research Center showed that in March 2002, only 25% of the public believed that Islam was more likely than other religions to encourage violence.[110] A year later, this figure jumped to 45%.[111] Though the numbers fluctuated throughout the years, they never dropped back to their 2002 level.[112]

More telling is the partisan gap in the response to this question over the years. In 2002, Republicans and Democrats were separated by just 11 points.[113] By December 2016, it had grown to 44 points: 70% of Republicans said Islam was more likely to encourage violence than other faiths compared to 26% of Democrats.[114] By 2024, when Donald Trump was elected to his second presidential term, a whopping 70% of Republicans supported banning travel from certain Muslim-majority countries.[115] Such views animate the disproportionately Republican-led Islamophobic attacks against Muslim candidates and elected officials, with the caveat that pro-Israeli Zionist Democrats often propagate the presumptively antisemitic racial trope.[116]

While Islamophobia has become a pet project of the political right, Pew's surveys also showed a broader "reservation" about the role of Islam in society. In 2017, at the height of Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric, a poll found that 50% of Americans believed that Islam was not part of "mainstream American society."[117] Almost as many Americans (44%) believed there was a "natural conflict" between the tenets of Islam and democracy.[118] These polling trends reveal that anti-Muslim attitudes are not confined to fringe political movements. Rather, suspicion toward Muslims became increasingly normalized within mainstream political discourse after 2001. Public perceptions of Muslims as culturally incompatible with democracy or uniquely prone to violence create the conditions under which attacks against Muslim candidates and elected officials can flourish. Muslim politicians are therefore forced to operate within a political environment where large segments of the public already view their religious identity with suspicion or fear before even considering the candidate's policy positions or qualifications.

The prevalence of these views is manufactured, in part, by a relentless right-wing fixation intent on casting Muslims as radicals and extremists. A 2011 report from the Center for American Progress documented how a small network of funders had provided $42.6 million to Islamophobia think tanks between 2001 and 2009.[119] Many of the organizations that were funded—The Center for Security Policy, the Middle East Forum, the Investigative Project on Terrorism—disseminated Islamophobic racial tropes that have been repeatedly recycled

by right-wing media and politicians.[120] Over time, the institutionalization of Islamophobia through think tanks, political advocacy organizations, media platforms, and donor networks moved anti-Muslim conspiracy theories from fringe rhetoric into mainstream political discourse. Narratives portraying Muslims as infiltrators, extremists, or enemies of Western civilization became widely circulated through cable news, social media, legislative campaigns, and political fundraising networks.[121] These racial tropes now shape the experiences of Muslim candidates and elected officials, who are frequently portrayed not simply as political opponents, but as existential threats to American democracy itself.

The case studies in this report demonstrate four recurring manifestations of systemic anti-Muslim racism directed at Muslim American candidates and elected officials: 1) accusations of Islamic infiltration and dual loyalty; 2) gendered Islamophobia directed differently at Muslim men and women; 3) political violence and threats against Muslim public officials; and 4) the presumption that Muslims' defense of Palestinian human rights is inherently antisemitic. All four manifestations share a common premise: Muslims are treated as outsiders whose participation in American political life is unwelcome, suspicious, or dangerous.

The following case studies expose the discriminatory motives of politicians claiming that their critiques only apply to "Muslim extremists" or "Muslim radicals." To the contrary, their attacks against Muslim Americans literally 'playing within the system' reveals an anti-democratic objective: excluding fellow Americans from serving as peers in Congress, state legislatures, town councils, and school boards.

"ISLAMIC INFILTRATION" AND THE DUAL LOYALTY CONSPIRACY



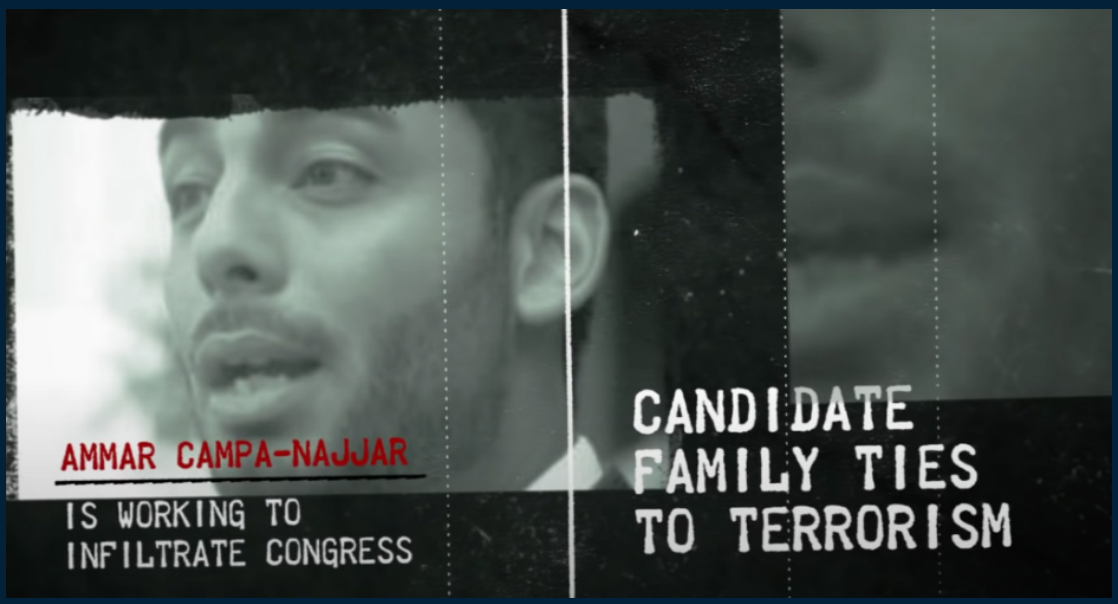
IV “ISLAMIC INFILTRATION” AND THE DUAL LOYALTY CONSPIRACY

Muslims in public office are frequently accused of being part of a global Islamic conspiracy to infiltrate the United States. Proponents of a “creeping Sharia” conspiracy theory allege an Islamic infiltration of American institutions when Muslim citizens or public figures visibly practice their faith.[122] As a result, Muslim public officials who wear the hijab, openly practice their religion, or use the Quran during swearing-in ceremonies are smeared as cultural threats to American identity rather than religious minorities exercising their constitutional religious freedom rights. Specifically, Muslim public officials are accused of being dangerous foreign agents infiltrating government institutions. A 2011 report by People for the American Way identified eight strategies employed by anti-Muslim activists on the right to “cast doubt on the validity of Islam as a religion and the integrity of American Muslims in order to justify prejudice and illegal discrimination.”[123] Three of these tactics included framing American Muslims as dangerous to America, inventing the danger of “creeping Sharia,” and denying the validity of Islam as a religion.[124]



Influence of this political playbook can be found in Texas state representative Molly White’s refusal to meet Muslim visitors at her state capitol office in 2015 unless they “renounce[d] Islamic terrorist groups and publicly announce[d] allegiance to America and its laws.”

White said of Islam: “It’s not just a religion. It’s a whole ideology; it’s a whole way of life. And their belief system is so contrary to our American ideology of freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of worship.”[125] She was repeating a component of the War on Terror discourse that frames Islam in opposition to the West and treats Muslim communities with deep suspicion. Ten years later, the anti-Muslim rhetoric within the Texas Republican Party reached fever pitch. Aaron Reitz, a candidate for the attorney general of Texas, released a political ad in 2026 that declared: “Politicians have imported millions of Muslims into our country. The result? More terrorism, more crime and they even want their own illegal cities in Texas to impose Sharia law. Not on my watch.”[126]Similarly, Republican Representative Duncan Hunter released a political ad in 2018 suggesting that his Democratic opponent **Ammar Campa-Najjar** was a “security risk … working to infiltrate Congress.”[127] Despite the Islamophobic and xenophobic attacks directed at him during the campaign, Campa-Najjar remained highly competitive in the race for a Congressional seat in California. Hunter ultimately won reelection by fewer than four percentage points, receiving approximately 51.7% of the vote compared to Campa-Najjar’s 48.3%.[128] The close result demonstrated both the electoral viability of Muslim American candidates and the continued political utility of portraying Muslim or Middle Eastern-associated candidates as national security threats.




AMMAR CAMPA-NAJJAR
IS WORKING TO
INFILTRATE CONGRESS
MIDTERMS 2018
OAN
EXPERTS WARN REP. HUNTER'S OPPONENT
IS NATIONAL SECURITY RISK


CONCLUSION:
SECURITY
RISK
PAID FOR AND AUTHORIZED BY DUNCAN D. HUNTER FOR CONGRESS

When **Sadaf Jaffer** was elected as mayor of Montgomery Township in 2017, she became the first South Asian Muslim woman mayor in New Jersey. Her electoral victory attracted hundreds of hateful tweets claiming that she would implement Sharia law and warned of a Muslim "invasion" and "jihadist takeover."[129] In 2021, Jaffer successfully ran for the New Jersey State Assembly. Her opponents created a website accusing her of being a radical extremist.[130] As a state legislator, she faced persistent Islamophobic attacks. On her social media accounts, for example, users wrote comments such as "you shouldn't be in this position. You're not an American. You're an infiltrator."[131] The heavy psychological toll caused by the Islamophobic harassment throughout her term caused Jaffer not to seek a second term in the New Jersey legislature.





In 2025, days after **Ghazala Hashmi** was elected as lieutenant governor of Virginia, racist comments flooded social media. All major Richmond-area news outlets—CBS 6 (WTVR), ABC8 (WRIC), NBC12 (WBBT) and the Richmond Times-Dispatch—posted stories on Facebook about Hashmi's victory.[132] Hundreds of Facebook users accused the first Muslim American woman elected to state office of links to terrorism. Others lamented that it was a "sad day" for Virginia[133] and asked "why did we let this happen," according to an analysis of about 3,000 comments posted to five news articles on Facebook.[134] More than 40 comments said that Virginians "forgot" about the 9/11 attacks, while many others referred to Hashmi using anti-Muslim slurs.[135] At least two people called Hashmi a "towel head," and other comments included, "I think a whole lot of people need a dose of 9/11 history."[136] Another comment questioned whether Hashmi, as a Muslim, could take the oath of office, "No such thing as a muslim-AMERICAN. Either you are a muslim, or you are an AMERICAN."[137] Several people suggested that Hashmi was part of a plot to "destroy America from within."[138] A woman posted on WTVR's Facebook page, ". . . this is how they get foot into our country ... You who voted her in you just doomed us way to go," and another poster said, "My lovely state of Virginia has become so liberal it makes me want to puke. Did anybody forget who tried to destroy us on 9/11? Pretty sure it was the Muslims ... just saying. Trump 2020!"[139] Worth noting is that the racist comments were rivaled, if not outnumbered, by comments supporting Hashmi and denouncing the anti-Muslim posts about her. While the support against the racist commentary is heartening, the racialized backlash to Hashmi's electoral victory reflects the endemic nature of Islamophobia when Muslims participate within the political system.

Another Muslim American candidate in Virginia state elections, **Sam Rasoul**, faced questions about his loyalty to the United States during his candidacy for lieutenant governor. During a debate in May of 2023, a moderator asked whether he could reassure voters that he would "represent all of them, regardless of faith or beliefs."[140] The moderator also stated, "*The Washington Post* reported your fundraising effort is 'category-leading,' because of some out-of-state donors connected to Muslim advocacy groups – there's nothing wrong with that – but that was the case."[141] The moderator continued, "Talk a little bit about your fundraising efforts and can you assure Virginians, if you're elected, you'll represent all of them regardless of faith and beliefs?"[142] After the debate, Rasoul tweeted a picture of the Virginia statute of religious freedom, writing, "We serve all people. Of all faiths. We welcome you & love you as you are." [143]

A CONDEMNATIONS OF OATH OF OFFICE ON THE QURAN AS UN-AMERICAN

Muslim Americans elected to political office have chosen to use the Quran for their swearing in ceremonies, attracting accusations of disloyalty premised on the Bible being the only permissible religious book for the oath of office. Reflecting the Framers' emphasis on the separation of church and state, no law requires elected officials to take the oath of office with a Bible or any other religious text. In fact, Article VI of the United States Constitution states, "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."[144] At least three Presidents[145] as well as several members of Congress[146] were sworn in without a Bible. Senators Kyrsten Sinema,[147] Suzi LeVine,[148] Franklin Pierce,[149] and President John Quincy Adams[150] took their oaths on either a "law book" or the Constitution. President Lyndon Johnson took his oath on a Catholic missal, another religious text, that belonged to the slain John F. Kennedy.[151]

Yet Muslim politicians choosing to use the Quran are consistently singled out for attack. As the first Muslim elected to Congress, Keith Ellison's decision to use a Quran owned by Thomas Jefferson attracted criticism, despite his stated intent to illustrate that "religious differences are nothing to be afraid of."[152] A few years later, Republican U.S. House of Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene visited the Capitol and publicly pressured Democratic Representatives Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib to re-swear their oaths of office on a Bible instead of a Quran.[153] Greene claimed that both Muslim Congresswomen were illegitimate because they took their oaths of office on the Quran instead of the Bible.[154] Someone off-camera then told Greene she was "infringing" on the two Representatives' religious freedom by asking them to take their oaths on the Bible.[155] Greene incorrectly retorted "It wasn't a law yet … at the time they swore in. I think at the time they swore in it wasn't passed, because it wouldn't pass in a Republican-controlled … So they're not really official, I don't think."[156] Greene claimed there was no law allowing the use of a Quran over the Bible.[157] This bigoted attitude has been echoed by other Republican figures such as Roy Moore, former chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court and one-time candidate for the U.S. Senate, who argued that elected officials should swear on the Bible and that Muslims should be barred from office.[158]

Other Muslim American public officials have been similarly attacked. In 2023, **Carolyn Walker-Diallo** became the second Muslim woman elected to serve as a judge in New York State.[159] She took her oath of office using the Quran after being elected as a civil court judge in Brooklyn's 7th Municipal District.[160] A clip of her taking her oath using the Quran, recorded at Brooklyn Borough Hall, was posted on social media where it garnered more than 600,000 views and more than 2,500 comments.[161] The *New York Daily News* reported that the comments raised serious concerns for Walker-Diallo's safety.[162] Vitriolic comments



Tweet attacking Ilhan Omar for swearing in ceremony with Quran
Deplorable Kel (@DeplorableKel2), X (Aug. 14, 2018, at 13:37 ET),
https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/ilhan-omar-sworn-quran/.



Carolyn Walker-Diallo swearing in ceremony,
https://www.dailymail.com/news/article-3363130/Fears-safety-Muslim-judge-sworn-using-Koran-racists-threaten-online.html

included "sickening" and "disgusting."[163] One person wrote: "Another piece of s*** Muslim trying to take over the country."[164] Law enforcement sources told the *New York Post* that the judge received two threatening phone calls while at Kings County Criminal Court.[165] "You are not an American because you got sworn in on a Koran," a male caller allegedly told the judge.[166] "You're a terrorist; we are going to get you," a second caller reportedly said in another phone call.[167] "Pray for the world as it is in shambles," wrote one Facebook user in response to the clip. [168] "This is a sad day for America!" and "Makes me sick," another man wrote on the social network. A Republican commenter wrote, "There should be absolutely no Muslim judges. I certainly don't think they'd be objective. We would see the beginnings of Sharia law here for sure. I can't tolerate what is going on here."[169]

A right-wing media outlet accused Walker-Diallo of being "intimately connected to the terror-friendly group known as CAIR."[170] Comments under the article included, "... Judges in America have ALWAYS been sworn in with a BIBLE. I am just astounded at the satanic spiritual push behind this Islamic influence that is being pushed on American citizens."[171] Another said, "... This judge needs to go. NO! NOT IN MY COUNTRY! Keep Reloading, American Patriots!"[172] Several tweets showed hateful rhetoric: "Muslim Woman Takes Oath As Judge, Swears On Quran .. NONSENCE! MUSLIMS DO NOT BELIEVE ON OUR CONSTITUTION, & QURAN IN AMERICA? NO!!! BIBLE!"[173] "The problem with this is that America IS a Christian nation!!! Founded on Christian principles,"[174] and "[T]his is not serious! US judge sworn in on a Quran? The country is losing its identity."[175] Walker-Diallo, who converted to Islam, commented on the furor in 2024, saying, "I was actually shocked by the backlash. ... It was eye-opening. We have a lot of work to do in terms of understanding each other and recognizing that we are so diverse in this country and that 'American' doesn't look one particular way."[176]

Even without a Quran in hand, Muslim politicians still face Islamophobic attacks. **Movita Johnson-Harrell**, Pennsylvania's first Muslim woman in the state general assembly, was singled out by another state representative.[177] During Johnson-Harrell's swearing-in ceremony, State Assemblywoman Stephanie Borowicz delivered a two-minute prayer that was labeled "Islamophobic, weaponized, xenophobic and degrading" by some African American legislators.[178] Borowicz publicly prayed for President Donald Trump and mentioned Jesus 13 times.[179] By doing so, Borowicz "intentionally excluded those who were not Evangelical Christians," according to State Senator Sharif Street, the only Muslim American in the Pennsylvania Senate.[180] Street added that Borowicz's prayer implied, "[I] f you were not of her faith, then you were on the path of wickedness."[181] Before Borowicz finished, at least one House member shouted objections,[182] and shortly after, Republican Speaker Mike Turzai prompted her to end the prayer.[183]

After Borowicz finished, she exited the chambers and did not attend the swearing-in.[184] In an interview with the American Pastors Network, she said, "I stand by it. I don't apologize, but I stand by it. I was just a weak vessel. I was being obedient to the Lord, and excited and nervous at the same time to pray to my Jesus." Borowicz's actions were roundly condemned by Johnson-Harrell's colleagues. City Councilman Curtis Jones proposed

that the City Council approve a non-binding resolution condemning Borowicz's prayer as Islamophobic, stating, "We just can't sit by and let people just deliberately let people feel uncomfortable and unwelcome."[185] Subsequently, State Representative Kevin Boyle introduced a resolution calling for future House prayers to be respectful of all religions.[186]

When **Ghazala Hashmi** became the first Muslim woman elected to statewide office as lieutenant governor of Virginia in 2025, she joined Abigal Spanberger as the first woman elected governor of Virginia.[187] Yet at the state inauguration ceremony, influential far-right wing activist Laura Loomer, a close ally of Trump at the time, posted on X that Hashmi's use of a Quran while being sworn-in showed "elected Democrats' contempt for American culture."[188] The anti-Muslim post garnered at least 200,000 views and over 259 comments, many of which were Islamophobic.

The backlash against Muslim officials taking their oath of office on the Quran reflects more than hostility toward individual politicians. It demonstrates a perception that visible expressions of Muslim identity in public office threaten a White Christian nationalist vision of America. Manufactured fear of Muslim participation in governance often merges with conspiracy theories that Muslim Americans are secretly attempting to "infiltrate" public institutions and impose "Sharia law" throughout the United States.



Movita Johnson-Harrell's swearing in ceremony. https://time.com/5559522/pa-muslim-law-maker-prayer-islamophobia/, (via Penn. House of Representatives)



B ISLAMIC INFILTRATION AND THE "CREEPING SHARIA" CONSPIRACY

Muslim candidates and elected officials are frequently subjected to a conspiracy theory of a secret plot to implement "Sharia law" throughout the country. Islam is portrayed as incompatible with the Judeo-Christian values that Christian nationalists assert constitute American identity. The conspiracy theory of "Creeping Sharia" originated on the far-right.[189] The Center for Security Policy, classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, put out a report in 2010 arguing that the Muslim Brotherhood had successfully infiltrated the "educational, legal, and political systems, as well as top levels of government, intelligence, the media, and U.S. military."[190] The purported goal of Muslim American organizations is thus to "subvert" these institutions.[191] The fixation with "creeping Sharia" reflects a profound ignorance of Islamic law as well as an intolerance toward religious freedom for Muslims.[192]

Several interconnected themes emerge from the creeping Sharia conspiracy theory. First, Muslim candidates and elected officials are treated not as ordinary political actors with diverse policy positions, but as representatives of a monolithic and threatening Islamic identity. Whether targeting local city council members, mayors, judges, or members of Congress, Islamophobic rhetoric routinely frames Muslim participation in public life as evidence of organized "infiltration" rather than patriotic democratic engagement. Muslim civic participation itself becomes recast as suspicious. Ordinary acts associated with electoral politics—running for office, mobilizing voters, taking an oath of office, or publicly discussing one's faith—are ironically proof of a malicious scheme to destroy American democracy from within.

The case studies below also reveal how the "Creeping Sharia" conspiracy theory relies on racialized assumptions about Muslims as permanent outsiders incapable of assimilating into American society. Muslim public officials are frequently accused of harboring secret allegiances, advancing foreign interests, or seeking to replace constitutional governance with Islamic law, despite the complete absence of evidence supporting such outlandish claims. These attacks often intensify when Muslim officials visibly express their religious identity through the hijab, use of the Quran in swearing-in ceremonies, or public references to their Islamic faith. In this framework, Muslim identity itself becomes interpreted as incompatible with democracy, secular governance, or "American values." As a result, Muslim public officials face a uniquely hostile political environment in which they are expected to continuously prove their patriotism, loyalty, and commitment to democratic norms in ways not demanded of other religious groups.

The "Creeping Sharia" conspiracy made its way into mainstream politics, resulting in

forty-three states introducing legislation by 2020 to ban Islamic law.[193] The enormous resources, time, and political capital expended by state politicians nationwide peddling a false conspiracy theory reveals the extent of anti-Muslim bias pervading America's political class.[194] This conspiracy theory's corrosive influence remains present in political discourse as an easy label to tar Muslim candidates and elected officials.

In 2019, twenty-three-year-old **Safiya Khalid** became the first Somali American elected to the city council in Lewiston, Maine.[195] One week before the Lewiston election, Khalid faced a barrage of Islamophobic comments online, including messages telling her that "Muslims had no place in American government and she should go back to where she came from."[196] As she told *The Washington Post*, every aspect of her identity was weaponized. Khalid was "attacked for being Black, Muslim, a woman and a refugee."[197] Opponents circulated a photo of Khalid from when she was a high school freshman where she flipped off the camera. Khalid responded saying, "I was 15. I didn't know any better."[198] The photo was subsequently spread over social media. "This is a pic of a young lady who is running for a position in a governmental role for the town of Lewiston, Maine," said one tweet that was shared nearly 4,000 times leading up to the election.[199] As the *Mainer* reported, on a local right-wing Facebook group, commenters posted, "we are slowly losing our city."[200] Soon, Khalid was accused of seeking to institute Sharia law and her campaign's Facebook page was spammed with racist comments as well as outright threats.[201] In their coverage of the campaign, *The Sun Journal* wrote that many of the comments were "too graphic and inappropriate to be published."[202]

After Khalid's victory, a Facebook group called "LA's Journal" posted content targeting Khalid with racial slurs.[203] The group's private setting "emboldened the trolls to use racist slurs, promote lies about Islam and incite violence against Muslims."[204] Andy O'Brien, one of the reporters from the newspaper *Mainer*, discovered the threats and shared them after Khalid posted "kind of a veiled threat that was sent to her by what appeared to be a member of an anti-Muslim militia basically accusing her of wanting to impose Sharia law and that there was no place for Sharia law in Maine."[205] LA's Journal, O'Brien said, had "a lot of people using anti-Muslim slurs, accusing them of being involved in obscene acts." He further added that, "One member fantasized about killing as many Muslims as possible."[206]

In 2022, **Amer Ghalib,** Mayor of Hamtramck, Michigan, stated, "Noble Islam promotes doing good and abandoning evil," triggering criticism for discussing his faith.[207] On an online platform, Christine Douglass-Williams, author of the book *The Challenge of Modernizing Islam*,[208] attacked Ghalib on the Islamophobic blog Jihad Watch, "No, Mr. Ghalib. Islam is the only mainstream religion that does *not* promote *'respecting others and treating them well,'* at least when it comes to women and non-Muslims. Islam sanctions violence against disbelievers, hatred against Jews (and thus the state of Israel), and the inferiority of women."[209] Additionally, a right-wing media article targeted Ghalib, "Look at the all-Muslim City Council and newly elected Muslim mayors, and you'll believe you aren't even in America anymore. But this is just the latest example of how Muslims never actually assimilate into any non-Muslim country, they come to dominate and spread



Safiya Khalid.
https://www.wjhl.com/news/politics/somali-who-was-target-of-threats-wins-us-municipal-election/ (Andree Kehn/Sun Journal via AP)

Islam."[210] The same article garnered numerous hateful comments such as "I hate muslime parasites," "They are arrogant self serving haters," and "Muslimes defile everything they touch."[211] The article further asserted "[S]uddenly Hamtramck became "Shariaville, USA" and "Muslimville, USA," enacting booze bans and Sharia law."[212]

Shahana Hanif, a member of the New York City Council representing the 39th district, encountered several hateful comments that were posted in response to her tweets. For example, under a tweet in 2021 where Hanif thanked Senator Chuck Schumer for nominating Nusrat Choudhary as a federal judge, responses included "Terrible!!!! NO SHARIA LAW!!! Remember 9\11!!!"[213] and "Yep, just what we need! One more terrorist in federal government!"[214] In another tweet featuring Hanif with four girls on an election day, a commenter wrote "So obsessed with a Muslim winning. In no other religion is this is a big deal. It's creepy and foreboding."[215] A comment under another tweet that included Hanif said, "Muslims have been marginalized for a reason—and it isn't racism. Treatment of women, gays, Sharia law, free speech, anti-Israel rhetoric, inaction against the radicals they keep telling everyone else don't represent them, … take your pick."[216]

When **Fauzia Rizvi** ran for the California State Assembly in 2022 in Corona City, California, Councilman and Pastor Randy Fox proclaimed that Rizvi "will not say no to Sharia law."[217] Rizvi responded, "I find it disgraceful that my opponents are using my religious background as political props instead of engaging on the issues."[218] Fox later explained that he made the comments on "Sharia law" because church members feared that if Fauzia Rizvi was

elected, Corona's Mosque would begin broadcasting a call to prayer, despite Rizvi never having made such a proposal. [219]

In 2020, **Sumbul Siddiqui** was the first Muslim American woman elected as mayor of Cambridge, Massachusetts.[220] In a news interview, Siddiqui admitted that she was targeted by Islamophobic messages and insults soon after her election.[221] For instance, only a few days after Siddiqui's appointment, anti-Muslim activist Amy Mek of the Rise Align Ignite Reclaim Foundation (RAIR) tweeted, "Iranian News Brags Massachusetts elected their 1st Muslim Mayor! Sumbul Siddiqui was supported by Muslim-Brotherhood-tied Jetpac, an Islamic org., mobilizing to get Muslims in office. The Muslim Brotherhood's stated goal is to take down the US through non-violent civilization jihad."[222] Mek, who boasts over half a million followers,[223] founded the RAIR Foundation. The acronym once stood for Resistance Against Islamic Radicals, but today the foundation's website reads "Rise Align Ignite Reclaim."[224] Nonetheless, the organization casts itself as a player in a movement protecting America's "Judeo-Christian values" from "Islamic supremacists, radical leftists and their allies."[225]

Mek's post was retweeted at least 1,600 times.[226] Numerous responses targeting Siddiqui and her Muslim identity appeared under the tweet "The Islamic invasion continues. Don't vote for these people. Immigrate and intimidate until they get what they want U.S. domination,"[227] and "The US is being white anted from the inside. I hope they wake up and realise b4 it is too late. Once in office the demands for their Sharia law , which is diametrically opposed to all that the US stands for, wil grow louder."[228] Siddiqui stated, "I think the last few days have showed me that there is a lot of Islamophobia. I was, even the first few days, just still shocked at some of the vitriol that was thrown at me through social media because of my election."[229]

Siddiqui shared that her last name had been wrongfully linked to terrorist organizations on multiple occasions.[230] According to *The Bay State Banner*, Siddiqui recounted experiences of Islamophobia, particularly attacks conflating Islam with terrorism.[231] "I get the whole 'Siddiqui, that's associated with a known terrorist — are you related to one?'" the Cambridge Mayor explained.[232] "These types of things … you have to call it out because it's all rooted in ignorance, bigotry, hate," she added.[233]

Farrah N. Khan, Irvine's first Muslim woman mayor, described how the city was unprepared for diversity in leadership when she first considered running for office in 2014.[234] Her journey to become mayor in 2016 was laced with numerous instances of Islamophobia. In every election, Khan faced Islamophobic threats. For instance, in the 2020 mayoral race, she said, "I remember our mayor at the time really pointing me out using my pictures at the rally, saying 'Oh, she is out there trying to incite violence,' that I was against the police and I wanted to eliminate safety in the city."[235] "[She was] targeting me as one person, but that is how our communities get targeted, day after day," Khan added.[236] "I saw it all," she stated, "from trying to link me to terrorist organizations to making charges that I got money from terrorist organizations."[237] During the 2020 election, her opponent lodged a federal

complaint against her alleging that Khan accepted an offer from the Republic of Azerbaijan to pay for her trip to Baku, Azerbaijan, to attend the 5th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue.[238] An investigation by the State of California's Fair Political Practices Commission concluded with the issuance of a "No Action Closure Letter," with the allegations disproven, as Khan had timely reported the gifts and they met the required standards.[239]

The manufactured fear of Muslim Americans purportedly infiltrating American society and subverting liberal norms has roots in deep-seated Orientalism and the more recent Islamophobic racial project spearheaded by the political right. [240] The central goal is to portray Muslims as dangerous outsiders as a means of excluding them from self-governance. Gendered Islamophobia is integral to that racial project.

AMERICAN MISOGYNY AND GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA



V AMERICAN MISOGYNY AND GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA

Between 2016 and 2019, constituting the first wave of Muslim electoral participation, thirty-six percent of Muslim candidates running for office were female.[241] Consistent with sexist stereotypes adversely impacting women writ large, Muslim women are often portrayed as unfit for certain political roles or responsibilities.[242] Additionally, gendered Islamophobia deploys socio-cultural stereotypes of perceived oppression and submission. That is, Muslim women are presumed to be less educated, lack independence, and are oppressed by their male family members. American media outlets perpetuate these negative stereotypes by depicting Muslim female politicians as passive or lacking agency.[243] Yet these stereotypes could not be farther from the truth. Pew Research, in describing the findings of their 2009 report on Muslim Americans, stated that "Muslim American women are one of the most highly educated female religious groups in the United States, second only to Jewish American women. In addition, as a group, Muslim Americans have the highest degree of economic gender parity at the high and low ends of the income spectrum."[244]

The following case studies demonstrate that impediments to Muslim American women's participation in public office arise from the gendered Islamophobia spearheaded by Republican politicians, right-wing media, and influential anti-Muslim special interest groups. Consequently, smear campaigns frequently focus on Muslim women's clothes, especially their choice to wear the hijab or other religious attire. Threats of violence and rape, misogynistic slurs, and sexually explicit language saturate political campaigns against Muslim women candidates and elected officials. Conversely, male candidates are accused of harboring misogynist beliefs merely because they are Muslim.[245]

A THE HIJAB TRIGGERS GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIA

There is perhaps no more visible trigger of Islamophobia than the hijab. A *Foreign Policy Magazine* survey of 78 American Muslims who ran for office in 2018 found that more than 40% of women respondents reported "receiving verbal threats, almost as many said they received text threats, and about 20 percent reported being physically threatened."[246] Those who wore a hijab, like U.S. Representative **Ilhan Omar**, are disproportionately targeted.[247] In the weeks leading up to the 2018 midterm elections, for example, Omar was tagged in more than 80,000 anti-Muslim tweets that "found a twisted fascination with her hijab." One telling tweet read: "No one that wears a #Hijab should be running for office in America. The #Quran #Islam and our #Constitution are Not compatible in any way."[248]





According to political researchers at Penn State University (PSU), gendered Islamophobia significantly intensified on social media during the 2018 midterm elections, and Representative Omar was one of the primary targets.[249] Researchers found that Omar was "viciously attacked by anti-Muslim activists and media outlets" and "has been accused of marrying her brother to commit immigration fraud."[250] President Trump repeated these defamatory accusations in 2026 while also mocking her "little turban."[251] Despite these attacks, Omar has continued to vocally oppose white supremacy and gendered Islamophobia while defending her legal right to wear the hijab.[252] "To be (hijabi) or not (hijabi) is the business of no state or man," Omar posted on social media.[253]

At the state level, **Ruwa Romman** was the first Muslim woman elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 2022. Romman's campaign navigated a political environment wherein advertisements portrayed Muslims as "invaders" and warned of "Sharia" influence in public life.[254] Romman condemned such messaging as "hateful" and reflective of broader anti-Muslim hostility in electoral politics, highlighting the risks faced by Muslim candidates, particularly women.

At the local level, **Nida Allam**, a progressive Durham city councilmember and the first Muslim woman elected to office in North Carolina in 2020, embraced the hijab as a campaign logo.[255] Allam's foray into politics and public service was galvanized by the murders of her friends Deah Shaddy Barakat, Yusor Mohammad Abu-Salha, and Razan Mohammad Abu-Salha[256] in 2015, which federal prosecutors declined to pursue as a hate crime.[257] During her campaign, Allam was inundated with anti-Muslim comments on social media questioning her citizenship status, demanding her to return to her native country,

THE OVERLAPPING MISOGYNY AND RACISM EFFECTIVELY PUNISH MUSLIM WOMEN FOR BEING ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN AMERICAN DEMOCRACY—THE SAME SEXIST PRACTICE THAT WESTERN LIBERALS DECRY MARGINALIZES WOMEN IN MUSLIM MAJORITY COUNTRIES.

and referring to her as a "rag head" because she wore a hijab.[258] Allam responded to the gendered Islamophobia, "As a woman, you're targeted for everything, but that shouldn't be the case. Being the first Muslim woman is also important to me to make sure it's easier for the next generation and for the next woman. … I'm young. I'm a person of color. I'm an immigrant, I'm Muslim. All of those things open me up to attacks that honestly no other candidate in this race is going to be attacked at that level."[259] In 2022, Allam challenged U.S. Representative Valerie Foushee for her seat but lost. Allam announced a second run for the U.S. House of Representatives in December 2025 against Representative Foushee, which she lost by less than one percentage point.[260]

When **Sarah Khatib** was elected to local office in Walpole, Massachusetts, in 2017, her opponent George Hodges smeared her on Facebook, posting, "If there's a rag on your head You want Americans dead." [261] Khatib responded, "I was disturbed by it, as a potential constituent I was bothered. … These things have real consequences for Muslims in this country … It wasn't really directed at me or my family, but I was not happy."[262]

These case studies offer a glimpse into the experiences of Muslim women either seeking or already in public office—gendered attacks on their religious identity and threats to their safety. The overlapping misogyny and racism effectively punish Muslim women for being active participants in American democracy—the same sexist practice that Western liberals decry marginalizes women in Muslim majority countries.

B GENDERED ISLAMOPHOBIC SMEAR CAMPAIGNS

Whether or not they wear the hijab, Muslim women are still defined by gendered anti-Muslim stereotypes. When **Sadaf Jaffer** won her election as New Jersey's first South Asian Muslim mayor in 2019,[263] Islamophobic comments invoked tropes of a civilizational war between the West and Islam. A news article featuring Jaffer noted, "The bigoted comments directed at Jaffer lay bare the incredible contradiction of public expectations for Muslim women in America. Muslim women are stereotyped as oppressed, silent, and failing to assimilate. But when these women take leadership positions in the community and government, proving their critics wrong, they are still maligned for being involved while Muslim."[264]

Jaffer served two terms as mayor of Montgomery Township and was subsequently elected to the New Jersey state legislature in 2021. However, she declined to seek reelection in 2023 and stepped out of public life, speaking candidly about the misogyny embedded in several Islamophobic attacks against her.[265] Jaffer noted the hypocrisy of critics alleging legal inequality between men and women in Islamic law to mock her gender while simultaneously questioning her credibility as an elected official because she is a Muslim woman.[266] Some even ridiculed Jaffer by suggesting she ought to be reporting to a male master.[267] Jaffer pointed out the gendered nature of these Islamophobic attacks, describing them as particularly pernicious in her case.[268] She said, "I think we experience certain levels of harassment, and especially as minorities, as women of color, as Muslims in politics."[269] She added, "When you face that targeted harassment based on your race or your religion, ethnicity, gender, it really gets to you."[270]

In addition to attacks from opponents, Jaffer faced harassment from people on social media, with comments such as, "you shouldn't be in this position, you're not American, you're an infiltrator, you're going to do all these horrible things."[271] Hundreds of tweets targeted Jaffer, accusing the new mayor of Montgomery Township of secret plans to implement Sharia law and warning of a Muslim "invasion" and "jihadist takeover."[272] She was called a "savage," a "terrorist," a "jihadi."[273] One tweet stated, "Muslims need to be removed from the planet by any means necessary."[274] Another said, "You're not even supposed to be in the country."[275] Jaffer described spending days reviewing and reporting hostile messages to Twitter.[276] She also noted that within her community, she encountered negative comments alluding to her faith and saw fliers calling her ideas "extreme" and "dangerous."[277] She explained, "It was exhausting. How much of this can you take in?"[278] Her decision to step out of public arose from the psychological tax imposed by gendered Islamophobia by fellow Americans.

Male Muslim officials also experience gendered Islamophobia, stereotyping them as sexist and terrorists. In April 2017, then-Michigan state representative **Abdullah Hammoud**,

who now serves as mayor of Dearborn, Michigan, was asked to support a bill criminalizing Female Genital Mutilation ("FGM") after a doctor was found mutilating underage girls in an illegal underground clinic.[279] State Representative Michele Hoitenga circulated an email to state lawmakers seeking co-sponsors on a bill that would ban the application of "foreign law" in Michigan.[280] In her email, Hoitenga said, "If you have not heard by now, a doctor in Detroit is being charged with operating an underground clinic that actively engaged in genital mutilation on young girls, essentially practicing a fundamentalist version of Sharia Law."[281] Hammoud publicly opposed the bill, stating, "As a Muslim, I can tell you that I'm not aware of a fundamentalist version or another version that encourages female genital mutilation. That's just not a thing."[282] Hammoud's statements are consistent with the findings of the Female Genital Mutilation National Clinical Group, a UK-based charity, that FGM is a cultural practice not confined to any one religion.[283] Shelby Quast, the Americas director for Equality First, a women's rights organization, noted that more than 500,000 women and girls are either at risk of FGM or have experienced it in the United States.[284] "Previously, we thought it was certain communities," Quast said.[285] "What we're seeing is it's very widespread."[286] Quast further emphasized that FGM is not unique to any religion, recounting a summit attendee's experience: "I'm white, I'm Christian, I'm from the Midwest, and this happened to me."[287]

Hammoud argued that Hoitenga's bill would not protect girls from FGM because it is already a crime in Michigan. He asserted that these laws "do nothing more than just perpetuate an unjustified and dangerous Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric, and it reinforces really harmful stereotypes."[288] He also warned that the bill could have unintended consequences on other religious communities, including banning the observance of Catholic doctrines such as annulments and Jewish halachic laws, such as circumcision for male babies or dietary restrictions.[289] The continuing false perception of FGM as a Muslim practice is rooted in Orientalist tropes of Islam as a barbaric and savage religion. These stereotypes ignore American Muslims' opposition to FGM, mainstream Islamic rejection of FGM, and its practice in Christian and other religious communities.[290] The consequent attacks against Hammoud recycled racist perceptions that Islam is an inherently misogynistic religion and that Muslim men are prone to violence and misogyny.[291]

Orientalist and anti-Muslim stereotypes not only minimize the contributions of Muslim women and men in public service, but they also legitimize doxxing, physical threats, intimidation, and political violence against Muslim American candidates and elected officials.[292]

POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MUSLIM AMERICAN CANDIDATES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS



VI POLITICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MUSLIM AMERICAN CANDIDATES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS

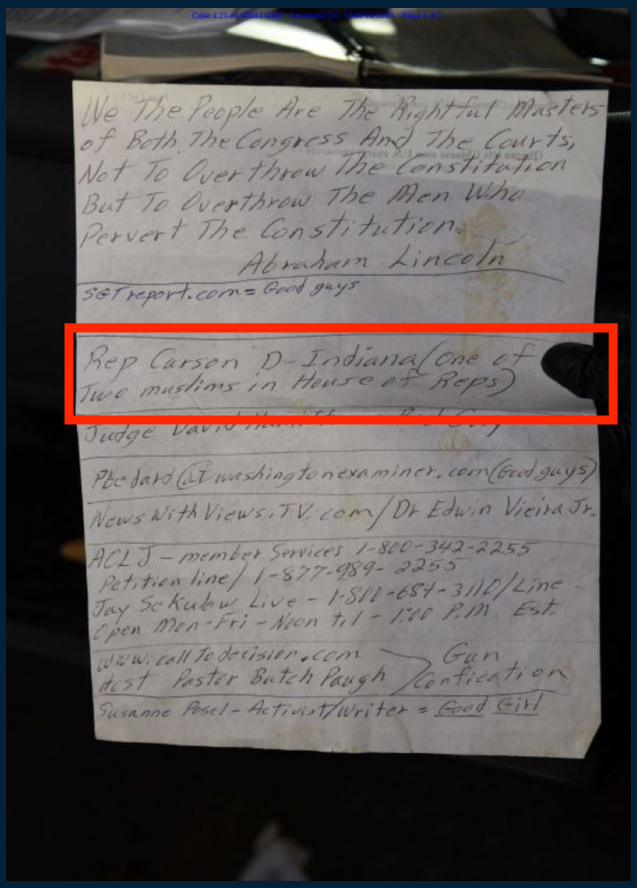
The vitriol on social media can escalate into credible threats of violence. Islamophobic discourse against Muslim candidates has increased the risk of political violence, including death threats or threats of physical harm, verbal abuse, and physical attacks. The FBI reported a 67% surge in hate crimes against Muslims in 2015, driven in part by Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric and scapegoating Muslims after terrorist attacks perpetrated by Islamic individuals in Paris and San Bernardino, California.[293]

The following case studies reveal how threats of political violence seek to delegitimize Muslim participation in the American political community through intimidation, dehumanization, and demands for exclusion or removal from public life. Recurring threats of deportation, physical violence, rape, and death directed at Muslim candidates and elected officials demonstrate the extent to which they are punished for participating in American democracy, a pervasive level of punishment not imposed on other religious minorities actively engaged in electoral politics.[294] Recently, anti-Muslim threats have escalated to unprecedented calls for the denaturalization of Muslim American citizens, including Representative Ilhan Omar and New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani.[295]

A THREATS OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

American Muslims' efforts to work within the political system are met with the very violence that Muslims are falsely accused of perpetuating. Threats of political violence take a great psychological toll on the Muslim target while imposing substantial costs of security services to protect them.[296] Representative **André Carson**, the second Muslim elected to Congress, has received death threats on several occasions, some of which were against his wife and daughter.[297] Carson's spokeswoman, Jessica Gail, said he has received dozens of threats since taking office in 2008, with the frequency increasing when he is in the media spotlight.[298] As a result, Representative Carson's staff had to receive FBI training, and local law enforcement provided security at major events.[299] On December 8, 2015, Representative Carson reported, "I just received a death threat yesterday in my own office, and it's largely in part to this toxic environment."[300] He had received the death threat on December 7, 2015, the same day Trump called for a "total and complete" ban on Muslims entering the United States.[301] In response, Carson said, "What concerns me is you have the demagoguery taking place from people who are seeking to become president of the United States. You have other politicians who are joining the bandwagon and who are fanning the flames of bigotry."[302]

On January 6, 2021, one year after the Capitol insurrection, an Alabama man parked a truck filled with explosives and firearms near the U.S. Capitol and a handwritten message in the vehicle—including one that singled out Carson as "one of two Muslims in House of Reps."[303] Carson lamented, "Sadly, as a Black man and a Muslim fighting for equality, I have often been the target of death threats by domestic terrorist."[304] He also noted that it was "especially disappointing" that law enforcement did not notify him that he was "targeted and at risk from the indicted terrorist and his co-conspirators," instead learning of the message through press reports.[305]



A handwritten note recovered by law enforcement from the truck of an armed Alabama man arrested near the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2022, specifically identifying Representative André Carson as "one of two muslims in House of Reps."

In 2022, Carson condemned Islamophobic comments made by Colorado Republican Representative Lauren Boebert alluding that Ilhan Omar may be a suicide bomber.[306] Soon after, Carson received a slur-soaked voicemail.[307] "This caller said Muslims would be gotten rid of," Carson's spokesperson said.[308]

Abraham Aiyash, a Michigan state representative, reported being doxxed and threatened after a Wayne County Board of Canvassers meeting to certify his electoral victory.[309] In November 2020, Aiyash was in a Zoom meeting with the Board after the two Republican members on the board refused to certify the election returns from Detroit.[310] During the meeting, Aiyash raised the legacy of Black voter suppression and directed his comments to the Board chairperson, a Republican. Aiyash told her, "You, Ms. Monica Palmer of Grosse Pointe Woods, which has a history of racism, are deciding to enable and continue to perpetuate the racist history of this country," Aiyash said at the meeting. "And I want you to think about what that means for your kids, who probably go to Grosse Pointe North, and when they see all their Black classmates and they know that their mother, or their grandmother, their aunt, decided to say … 'I'm going to be comfortable sleeping at night

knowing that I silenced the votes of so many people'." A shortened clip, later flagged as manipulated media, quickly circulated on Twitter, implying that Aiyash had directly threatened Palmer's children.[311] Trump retweeted the clip, which was viewed over 1.6 million times.[312] Aiyash said he was not aware whether Palmer even had children and was attempting to "appeal to [Palmer's] moral compass."[313]

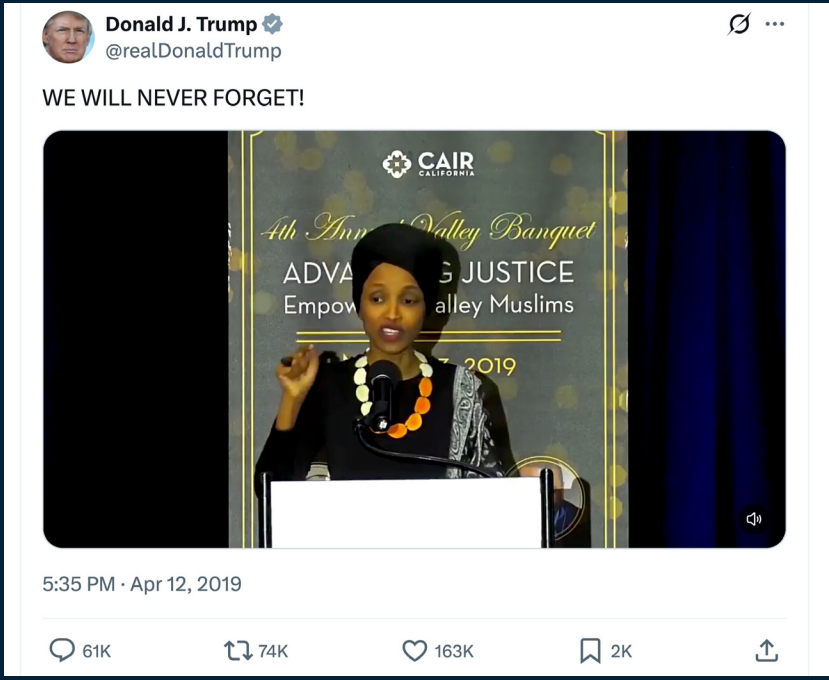
After the clip spread, Aiyash's past employers, credit report, and social security number were disclosed to the public.[314] Even the type of car he drives was shared.[315] Aiyash received more than 1,000 calls and messages saying, "You're gonna pay," "Muslim pig," "Terrorist," "Go back to your country," and "We're watching you."[316] Threats were also directed at Aiyash's family members. A "DemDox" flyer featured a photo of him and one of his sisters, encouraging people to "hang him," and listed his address.[317] [318] Another threatening message said, "Winter is coming. Roads are icy. You better get your brakes checked. Brakes develop problems in icy conditions especially when you harass people that you should not."[319]

Representative **Ilhan Omar** has been a focal point for Islamophobic threats and harassment since she first ran for elected office in 2018. One study measuring online abuse against Congressional candidates in the 2020 election found that Ilhan Omar received the highest proportion of abusive messages, at thirty nine percent.[320] In December 2021, she revealed in a press conference that she has endured numerous death threats and intimidation: "I myself have reported hundreds of threats on my life, often triggered by Republican attacks on my faith ... Here is just one voicemail my office received yesterday."[321] Omar then played a racist death threat-filled voicemail, which was left for her after fellow legislator Lauren Boebert refused to publicly apologize for a video in which she referred to Omar as a member of the "jihad squad" and compared her to a suicide bomber.[322] The voicemail quoted: "We see you Muslim n-word bitch, we know what you're up to. You're all about taking over our country ... Come get it. But you f-ing Muslim piece of s***. You jihadist. We know what you are. You're a f-ing traitor. You will not live much longer."[323] Omar claims that she frequently receives threatening calls due to criticism from conservative commentators and legislators.[324]

Yet the abuse Representative Omar endures is not based on political disagreement or opposition to her policy positions. Instead, the wording and nature of the threats reveal a hatred of Muslims and Islam. On October 20, 2023, voicemails shared with NBC News included death threats calling Omar a "terrorist Muslim."[325] Another voicemail claimed that a group was spying on Omar and her children and had obtained "all your addresses and handed them out to rapists."[326] Another voicemail was from a male caller saying, "I'm from a militant group. I can't wait 'till our group sees you one day and I can rip your f------ rag off your head... I hope the Israelis kill every f------ one of you."[327] One caller said, "I wish that someone would kill you and put you in hell."[328] Another caller said she should "drop dead for supporting f------ terrorists."[329] "You work for this country," the caller continued.[330] "Pull your f------ head out of your f------ turban-wearing ass, and f------ see the light of day, you dumbass f------ terrorist-supporting f------ piece of s---."[331] Another caller threatened,

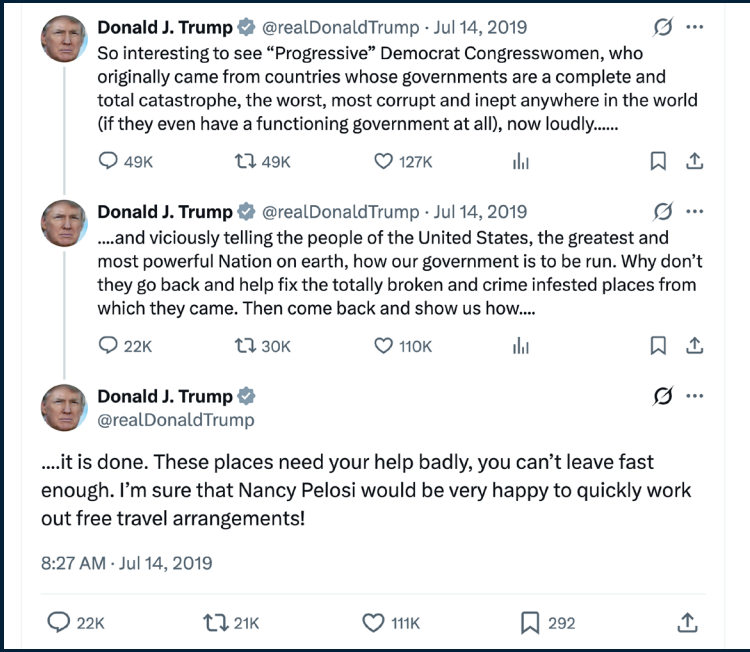
ONE STUDY MEASURING ONLINE ABUSE AGAINST CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES IN THE 2020 ELECTION FOUND THAT ILHAN OMAR RECEIVED THE HIGHEST PROPORTION OF ABUSIVE MESSAGES, AT THIRTY NINE PERCENT.

"Allegations are they're going to kill you and we get to watch on the internet," the caller said.[332] "I pray that they f------ have justice on all you traitors."[333] In May 2023, a separate man accused of starting fires at two Minneapolis mosques allegedly vandalized Omar's congressional office and sent harassing emails.[334]



Trump's fixation with Ilhan Omar directly imperiled her life. During his first administration, President Trump tweeted a video juxtaposing images of the World Trade Center during the September 11 attacks with a quote from Omar.[335] In a previous public speech, Omar had described how CAIR was founded after the attacks, saying, "because they recognized that some people did something and that all of us were starting to lose access to our civil liberties." Trump's video took the statements out of context by focusing exclusively on the words "some people did something," implying that Omar was downplaying the significance of the 9/11 attacks.[336] Trump's comment in the tweet was "WE WILL NEVER FORGET."[337] Omar reported subsequently "... experienc[ing] an increase in direct threats on my life — many directly referencing or replying to the president's video ...."[338]

In 2019, Omar, along with Democratic Reps. Rashida Tlaib, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Ayanna Pressley, often called the "Squad," held a press conference at which they denounced as "openly racist" widely viewed social media posts by Trump telling progressive Democrats to "go back" to the "crime infested places" that they "originally came from."[339] In response, Florida resident David Hannon sent an email in which he called Representative



Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · Jul 14, 2019

So interesting to see "Progressive" Democrat Congresswomen, who originally came from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe, the worst, most corrupt and inept anywhere in the world (if they even have a functioning government at all), now loudly.....

49K 49K 127K

Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · Jul 14, 2019

....and viciously telling the people of the United States, the greatest and most powerful Nation on earth, how our government is to be run. Why don't they go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came. Then come back and show us how....

22K 30K 110K

Donald J. Trump
@realDonaldTrump

....it is done. These places need your help badly, you can't leave fast enough. I'm sure that Nancy Pelosi would be very happy to quickly work out free travel arrangements!

8:27 AM · Jul 14, 2019

22K 21K 111K 292

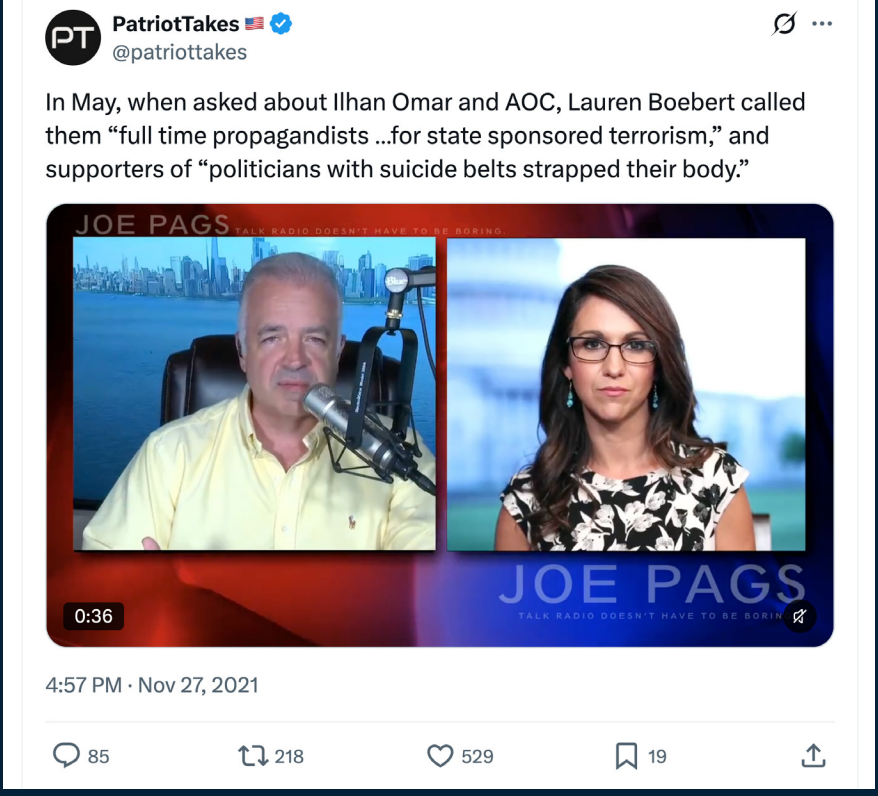
Omar a "radical Muslim," threatening that "within a week you and the other three radical rats will be six feet under."[340] Though Hannon threatened that he would shoot all four members of the Squad in the head, he singled out Omar specifically, asking her whether she was "ready to die for Islam."[341] In 2022, Hannon pleaded guilty to threatening a federal officer and expressed remorse for his threatening email, which his attorney described as "a spontaneous reaction ... fueled by his excessive drinking mixed with medication."[342] Notwithstanding this statement, Hannon was apparently reiterating curse words that Trump *himself* had made.[343]

The subject line of Hannon's email to Representative Omar read "Your [sic] Dead You Radical Muslim." Hannon's email stated:

"We Are Ready To Carryout Mass Assassinations Against Alquida [sic] Radicals That Have Somehow Got Into Our American Political Parties! Your [sic] Already On The HIT LIST BY OUR AMERICAN PATRIOT ARMY AND THE MOUSAD [sic]! YOU BETTER GET MORE SECURITY, OR WITHIN A WEEK YOU AND THE OTHER THREE RADICAL RATS WILL BE SIX FEET UNDER! THIS IS NOT A THREAT BUT FACT! ARE YOU READY TO DIE FOR ISLAM? ARE YOU READY TO DIE FOR ALLAH? ARE YOU READY TO GET OUT OF OUR COUNTRY! YOU WONT [sic] HEAR THE BULLET GOING THROUGH YOUR OR THEIR HEADS! ALL FOUR OF YOU CONGRESS WOMEN [sic] WILL DIE AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WILL CHEER! PATRIOTS AGAINST ISLAM! GOD BLESS AMERICA!"

In January 2026, amid the heightened tensions in Minneapolis after ICE agents killed two white American citizens, a man sprayed Representative Omar with an unknown foul-smelling liquid.[344] The man was sitting in the front row and rushed at her after Omar called for ICE to be abolished and for Homeland Secretary Kristi Noem to resign.[345] A few hours earlier, Trump had attacked Omar again at a political rally in Iowa as he ranted again about letting in "legal" people. Trump mocked her as coming from "a country that's a disaster" [346] and said that people coming into the United States "have to show that they can love our country; they have to be proud – not like Ilhan Omar."[347] Following the attack, Trump said he had not seen the video and that he hoped he did not "have to bother."[348] Trump then suggested that, "She probably had herself sprayed, knowing her."[349] The attack on Omar was denounced by both Republicans and Democrats, a rare show of bipartisanship.[350]

Though other Democratic politicians have echoed Representative Omar's call to abolish ICE, attacks targeting her are explicitly Islamophobic and frequently involve threats of physical harm.[351] As Omar herself noted afterwards, "What the facts have shown since I've gotten into elected office is that every time the president of the United States has chosen to use hateful rhetoric to talk about me and the community that I represent, my death threats skyrocket."[352] While Omar is certainly not the only target of Trump's verbal attacks, the level of political violence she endures remains disproportionately high as rightwing media continues to pump out Islamophobic rhetoric and conspiracy theories about her.[353] Representative **Rashida Tlaib**, the first and only Palestinian American elected to Congress, has also been subjected to considerably numerous threats of violence. In a 2021 speech





on the House floor, she said, "I didn't even get sworn in yet, and someone wanted me dead for just existing."[354]She further explained that the threats continued to become "uglier" and "more violent" over time.[355] Among the most disturbing was a message celebrating the Christchurch massacre in New Zealand, in which 51 Muslim worshippers were killed.[356] One caller left a message saying, "Attention, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and ragheads Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar. I was totally excited and pleased when I heard about 49 Muslims were killed and many more were wounded in New Zealand. This is a great start. Let's hope and pray that it continues here in the good old USA. The only good Muslim is a dead one."[357] Another caller threatened Representative Tlaib by mentioning her son directly by name.[358]

Minnesota State Senator **Omar Fateh** has faced a persistent stream of threats and abuse since announcing his candidacy for mayor of Minneapolis in December 2024.[359] Following U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar's announcement endorsing him, Fateh's campaign received a message that read, "two bullets to the head, done." It was punctuated by a checkmark emoji.[360] "That is not only a direct threat, but, like, direct plans," Fateh said. "Like 'I'm going to literally come over there and come to you myself."[361] Just weeks earlier, his campaign headquarters in the predominantly East African neighborhood of Cedar-Riverside, Minneapolis was defaced with graffiti that read "Somali Muslim — this warning is no joke.".[362]

Aisha Wahab is California's first Muslim and Afghan American state senator, elected in 2022.[363] She represents California's 10th senatorial district consisting of cities in the greater San Francisco Bay Area. In 2023, she introduced groundbreaking legislation, SB 403, that would have banned caste-based discrimination by adding it as a protected category under state anti-discrimination law. The bill sought to combat caste discrimination reproduced from India among the South Asian diaspora in the United States. Wahab's office was immediately flooded with dozens of hateful calls, hundreds of emails, and individuals

showing up to her district office to yell at her staff.[364] Slurs called her a jihadist or a Talibani, or played on her last name by tying her to Wahhabism, an orthodox political movement originating in the Arabian Peninsula.[365] The bill passed the California legislature but was vetoed by California Governor Gavin Newsom.[366] Four years earlier, Wahab also faced threats, hate mail, and Islamophobic comments when running for Hayward City Council in 2018. Among them was an email with the subject line asking if she wanted to live under Sharia law and a question from a resident asking if she sent money to the Islamic State.[367]

The anti-Muslim politics ratcheted up when Aisha Wahab successfully ran in the 2026 special elections for a Congressional seat, previously held by Eric Swalwell, who resigned amid sexual assault allegations.[368] Super PACS associated with the American Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) spent over five million dollars in an effort to defeat Wahab.[369] The political attack advertisements portrayed the first Muslim and Afghan American elected to the California Senate as "radical," outside mainstream political values, dangerous to children, soft on criminals, and an obstacle to public safety.[370] A local political strategist independently characterized one major attack ad as effective at "othering" Wahab. Wahab, who holds a doctorate in social work, described the campaign's labels and imagery as racialized "dog whistles," alleging that campaign imagery darkened her skin. She noted how opponents portrayed her as "not American enough" because she was Afghan American, Muslim American, and a woman of color.[371]

Identity-based smear campaigns and intimidation of Muslim public officials undermine core principles of democracy and equal access to electoral representation. Muslim Americans cannot safely participate in public life if subject to a persistent dehumanizing discourse that in turn fuels threats of violence and demands to strip Muslim elected officials of their U.S. citizenship.

B THREATS TO STRIP CITIZENSHIP OF MUSLIM ELECTED OFFICIALS

On the first day of his second administration, President Trump signed an executive order declaring his intent to launch a mass deportation campaign.[372] His administration initially targeted immigrants living in the United States without legal authorization. The anti-immigrant campaign soon expanded to denaturalize American citizens with a stated goal of supplying 100-200 cases per month.[373] By 2026, threats of deportation became a routine feature of Islamophobic attacks.

Threats of deportation are leveled against Muslim non-citizens critical of U.S. support for the Israeli genocidal campaign in Gaza, turning "dissent into a deportable offense."[374] However, in January 2026, Trump began threatening revocation of citizenship for Somali immigrants in Minnesota if convicted of benefits fraud, which served as a pretext for an unprecedented ICE operation in the state.[375] Threats of denaturalization for the purpose of deportation have also been wielded against Muslim American public officials. This intimidation tactic marks an escalation of Trump's verbal insults, telling people of non-European ancestry to "go back" to their countries.

Ilhan Omar and **Zohran Mamdani** are two of the most prominent politicians targeted by Islamophobic campaigns demanding they be denaturalized of their U.S. citizenship.[376] Representative Omar has faced political attacks misrepresenting her legal status since the beginning of her political career. A right-wing blog began circulating misinformation in 2016 that Omar married her brother, accusing her of committing immigration fraud and incest. The claim was picked up by the conservative anti-immigration organization Center for Immigration Studies.[377] President Trump amplified this narrative of immigration fraud during both his first and second terms. At a North Carolina rally, Trump lambasted Omar as "ungrateful" and "unpatriotic," prompting the crowd to chant, "send her back!"—a remark he has repeatedly made on social media.[378] In his second administration, Trump's rhetoric against Omar and the Somali American community grew more vicious. Trump called Representative Omar "garbage" at a cabinet meeting and railed against her in an expletive-filled rant at a rally in Pennsylvania, where Trump mocked Omar's hijab as a "little turban" and called for greater immigration from northern Europe.[379] Omar's son was also pulled over by ICE officers, who demanded that he prove his citizenship. Omar's son produced his passport, which Omar says he always carries with him because of the constant threats against her family.[380]

Following his Democratic primary victory in the New York mayoral race in June 2025, **Zohran Mamdani** faced similar anti-Muslim threats. Tennessee Congressman Andy Ogles sent letters to U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi in June and October calling for Mamdani

to be denaturalized and deported. Rep. Randy Fine (R-Fla.) echoed Ogles' call, posting on X that the federal government "review every naturalization of the past 30 years, starting with Mamdani, Omar, and [Mehdi] Hasan."[381] In October 2025, Fine introduced a piece of legislation titled the Disqualifying Dual Loyalty Act in Congress, intended to bar naturalized citizens from serving in Congress.[382] Representative Chip Roy introduced the MAMDANI Act ("Measures Against Marxism's Dangerous Adherents and Noxious Islamists" Act) in April 2026 that sought to prohibit non-citizens and certain naturalized citizens from receiving federal housing assistance and other public benefits if they were alleged to have supported "anti-American" or "extremist" political causes.

Although framed as a national security measure, critics argued that the bill was transparently aimed at Muslim and immigrant political figures, particularly Mamdani, whose advocacy for Palestinian rights and criticism of U.S. foreign policy drew sustained attacks from right-wing politicians and media outlets. Civil rights organizations warned that the legislation relied on longstanding Islamophobic tropes portraying Muslim Americans as presumptively disloyal or sympathetic to extremism.[383] By tying Muslim political participation to questions of citizenship and national belonging, the bill reinforced the broader narrative that Muslim elected officials are presumptively disloyal and undeserving of participating in public life. [384]

Politicians outside the national spotlight have also experienced threats to their citizenship. In August 2025, Texas State Representative **Salman Bhojani** received anti-Muslim threats after Tarrant County Republican Party chair Bo French called for him to be "denaturalized and deported."[385] Bhojani announced on August 3 that he would be unable to attend the special legislative session called by Texas Governor Greg Abbott, coincidentally on the same day that Texas Democrats fled the state to try to block state Republicans from pushing through a controversial redistricting measure. French singled out Bhojani through a series of racist posts on X, accusing him of using his trip as cover to join his fellow Democrats.[386] French called Bhojani a "radical Muslim" who should not be allowed to hold office.[387] He also railed against other "foreign-born" Muslim politicians, including Mamdani, Omar, and Minneapolis mayoral candidate Omar Fateh.[388] While revocation of citizenship is rare, its



invocation reminds Muslim public officials of the precarity of their citizenship status.

While Trump dropped casual remarks about deporting political enemies such as Rosie O'Donnell or Elon Musk, threats made to Muslim Americans often carry a more sinister message. They build on years of Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric premised on treating Muslims as presumptively anti-American. Threats, acts of violence, and intimidation are distressingly routine for Muslim public officials. Meanwhile, condemnation by their peers does little to stem the tide so long as Islamophobia incurs no political cost. The specter of violence illustrates the punishment Muslim Americans incur for their participation in public service.

PRESUMPTIVELY ANTISEMITIC FOR DEFENDING PALESTINIAN RIGHTS



VII PRESUMPTIVELY ANTISEMITIC FOR DEFENDING PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

One of the most frequent defamatory accusations directed at Muslim public officials is that of antisemitism. Pro-Israeli Zionist political ideology relies on racist tropes that Muslims seek to harm Jews anywhere. With no representation in Congress for decades, the label of antisemitism was effectively deployed to silence Muslim Americans who tried to call attention to Israeli human-rights abuses. As Muslim Americans have increased their participation in political life, they have faced accusations of antisemitism merely for recognizing the humanity of Palestinians or criticizing Israeli human rights violations.[389]

Muslim public officials face greater personal and professional scrutiny for speaking out in support of the human rights of Palestinians at the same time that the United States funds the country, Israel, accused of violating those human rights. When being Muslim implies inherent antisemitism in American political discourse, the political speech of millions of Americans is chilled on a matter of public importance.[390] While this axiom was true even before October 7, 2023, the charged atmosphere in its wake brought into sharp relief the salience of the racial trope that Muslims are presumptively antisemitic.[391]

Criticism of the United States government's financial and political support for Israel and its military occupation of Palestine has long been a political taboo for elected officials.[392] But as Muslim Americans become more politically engaged, they are demanding elected officials to explain their voting records in support of Israel's military and refusal to hold Israel accountable for documented human rights violations. By merely dissenting against U.S. foreign policy that unconditionally supports Israel, Muslim Americans are defamed as antisemites. Peddlers of this racial trope intend to exclude Muslims from the political discourse on Palestine and Israel while also fueling anti-Muslim bias in American society. Even Muslims who are not politically active on Palestine-related matters are accused of antisemitism. Put simply, Muslims are presumptively antisemitic merely on account of their identity.

One of the most egregious cases involved the historic nomination of the first Muslim American to the U.S. Court of Appeals by then-President Joe Biden in November 2023. **Adeel Mangi** would have been the first Muslim judge on the federal Court of Appeals. However, at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing in December 2023, Mangi was subjected to a McCarthyistic interrogation by Republican members about whether he supported the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel and the September 11th attacks on the United States.[393] Senator Josh Hawley asked Mr. Mangi a question irrelevant to the role of a judge: whether Israel had the right to exist. Hawley then implied Mangi was antisemitic when he asked whether American Jews should be "safe in their homes and on their campuses?"[394] The

racially hostile hearing came on the heels of Republican-led inquisition into universities on the pretext of antisemitism, including a public grilling of the presidents of Harvard, M.I.T., and the University of Pennsylvania.[395]

The smear campaign against Mangi continued into 2024. Special interest groups of unknown funding sources targeted voters in Montana and Pennsylvania with close Senate races with digital ads accusing Mangi of antisemitism. One *Washington Times* op-ed called Mangi "Hamas' favorite judicial nominee."[396] In February 2024, the right-wing Judicial Crisis Network announced that it spent $50,000 on an ad called "Stop Antisemitic Adeel," which used footage from 9/11.[397] Senator Richard J. Durbin of Illinois, chairman of the Judiciary Committee, commented that, "This has been the most brutal attack I have ever seen on anyone — and that is saying something."[398] Numerous civil-rights groups who supported Mangi's nomination came to his defense. This coalition included prominent Jewish organizations, and even the Anti-Defamation League, which called it "inappropriate and prejudicial treatment."[399]

Mangi responded in a letter to President Biden when it appeared the anti-Muslim conservative Senators had successfully stalled his nomination.[400] Mangi named the racialized bias that sabotaged his historic nomination: "The underlying premise [of the questions] appeared to be that because I am Muslim, surely I support terrorism and celebrate 9-11"—the type of "guilt-by-association attacks [that] Muslims in America recognize well."[401] Mangi also criticized the broken process behind judicial appointments as "a channel for the raising of money based on performative McCarthyism before video cameras, and for the dissemination of dark-money-funded attacks that especially target minorities."[402] While he could not save his own nomination, Mangi hoped his letter would set the record straight for the next Muslim nominee in his position.

False accusations of antisemitism intensified even before the events of October 7, 2023, laying the groundwork for a broader campaign to portray Muslim political participation itself as inherently suspect or dangerous.

A THE PRESUMPTIVELY ANTISEMITIC RACIAL TROPE

When Muslim candidates and elected officials address the human rights of Palestinians, the attacks on their reputations, safety, and professional lives are aggressive and sustained. For decades, Muslim politicians who dared to criticize Israel or speak up for Palestinian rights faced false accusations of antisemitism. Many face death threats, professional investigations, and other personal and professional consequences. The attacks are consistently framed as antisemitism despite the Muslim speakers' expressed concerns for the lives, health, and liberty of Palestinians, not a desire to harm Jews.

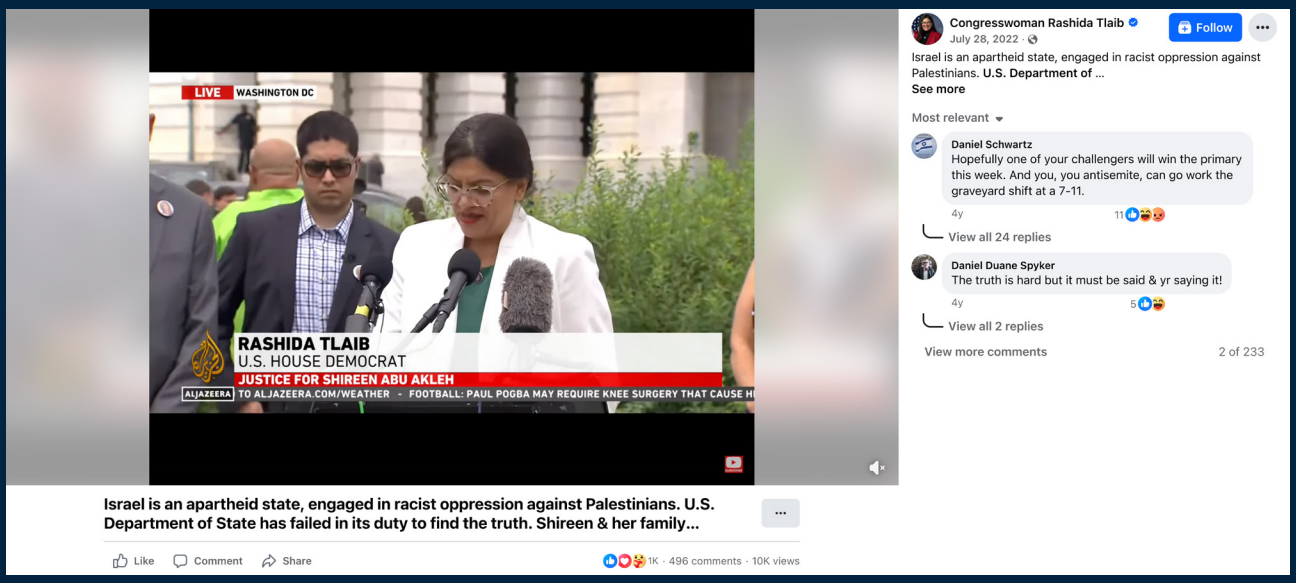
The following case studies demonstrate a troubling pattern in contemporary political media culture in which Muslim public officials are transformed into spectacles of suspicion and controversy rather than treated as ordinary democratic actors. The Islamophobic narratives portray Muslim participation in public life as abnormal and threatening. Such visual rhetoric contributes to a hostile political environment where Muslim elected officials are subjected to heightened scrutiny, harassment, and dehumanization in ways rarely imposed on non-Muslim public figures.

The two most prominent Muslim elected officials, Representatives **Ilhan Omar** and **Rashida Tlaib**, face frequent accusations of antisemitism in retaliation for their defense of Palestinian human rights. As the first Palestinian American elected to Congress, Tlaib has consistently challenged American support for Israel's occupation of Palestinian land.[403] Since 2019, Tlaib has condemned Israeli human rights abuses of Palestinians, pointed out Israel's sabotage of a two-state solution, and advocated for Palestinian statehood.[404] Even where America's domestic interests are more directly implicated, as with the assassination of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by the Israeli military, Tlaib still encounters inflammatory accusations of antisemitism.[405]

One study examining social media during the 2018 primaries found that, "of the 12,492 tweets tagging Rashida Tlaib, 29% contained Islamophobic/xenophobic language and another 22% attacked her outspoken sympathy for the Palestinian cause, often with Islamophobic and/or hate-filled language."[406]

Similarly, **Ilhan Omar** is targeted by voluminous online and offline defamatory campaigns accusing her of antisemitism due to her support for Palestinian human rights and opposition to Israel's occupation of Palestine.[407] According to a 2020 study analyzing social media over a two-month period during the 2018 midterm elections, 10% of the 90,193 tweets referencing Omar contained Israel-related hate speech.[408] Several tweets called

ONE STUDY EXAMINING SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE 2018 PRIMARIES FOUND THAT, "OF THE 12,492 TWEETS TAGGING RASHIDA TLAIB, 29% CONTAINED ISLAMOPHOBIC/XENOPHOBIC LANGUAGE AND ANOTHER 22% ATTACKED HER OUTSPOKEN SYMPATHY FOR THE PALESTINIAN CAUSE, OFTEN WITH ISLAMOPHOBIC AND/OR HATE-FILLED LANGUAGE."


LIVE WASHINGTON DC
RASHIDA TLAIB
U.S. HOUSE DEMOCRAT
JUSTICE FOR SHIREEN ABU AKLEH
AL JAZEERA TO ALJAZEERA.COM/WEATHER - FOOTBALL: PAUL POGBA MAY REQUIRE KNEE SURGERY THAT CAUSE H
Israel is an apartheid state, engaged in racist oppression against Palestinians. U.S. Department of State has failed in its duty to find the truth. Shireen & her family...
Like
Comment
Share
1K · 496 comments · 10K views
Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib
July 28, 2022 ·
Follow
Israel is an apartheid state, engaged in racist oppression against Palestinians. U.S. Department of ...
See more
Most relevant
Daniel Schwartz
Hopefully one of your challengers will win the primary this week. And you, you antisemite, can go work the graveyard shift at a 7-11.
4y
11
View all 24 replies
Daniel Duane Spyker
The truth is hard but it must be said & yr saying it!
4y
5
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2 of 233


André Carson @RepAndreCarson · Apr 15, 2022
With Easter, Passover, and Ramadan occurring at the same time this year, the opportunity to celebrate peacefully and de-escalate tensions should be a top priority. Israeli authorities' force of entry into the al-Aqsa Mosque is exceedingly harmful – particularly during Ramadan.
119
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1.1K
Ms.Channing
@channingms1
Take a seat sweetie. Terrorists from the PA do this every year and disrupt Ramadan and then blame it on Israel. Your anti-Zionism, antisemetic bias is showing.
5:53 PM · Apr 15, 2022
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her a "Jew-hater" and "antisemitic."[409] Omar was the subject of two House resolutions condemning antisemitism over comments she made.[410] Then-Congresswoman Liz Cheney accused Omar of stoking violence, saying that, "Representative Omar embodies a vile, hate-filled, anti-Semitic, anti-Israel bigotry."[411] Although Liz Cheney later recognized that criticism of Israeli government policy and support for Palestinian rights should not be equated with antisemitism, her false accusations reinforced an Islamophobic trope that Muslims are presumptively antisemitic.[412] Cheney continued to advocate for a close U.S.-Israel relationship and Israel's right to self-defense, but distanced herself from efforts to broadly label all criticism of Israeli policy as antisemitic.[413] While Tlaib and Omar may be the most visible targets of Islamophobic rhetoric in response to Palestinian advocacy, the weaponization of antisemitism has become a routine feature of political discourse that adversely impacts Muslim public officials across the country.[414]

Congressman **André D. Carson**, who has served as the U.S. representative for Indiana's 7th congressional district since 2008, was also accused of antisemitism for criticizing Israeli actions.[415] For example, Carson's inclusive tweet in April 2022, "With Easter, Passover, and Ramadan occurring at the same time this year, the opportunity to celebrate peacefully and de-escalate tensions should be a top priority. Israeli authorities' force of entry into the al-Aqsa Mosque is exceedingly harmful – particularly during Ramadan,"[416] attracted hateful comments such "It appears that @RepAndreCarson is a supporter of terrorists by spreading anti-Jewish propaganda. How pathetic are you, Carson, to spread this damn lie? F*cking loser", "Take a seat sweetie. Terrorists from the PA do this every year and disrupt Ramadan and then blame it on Israel. Your anti-Zionism, antisemitic bias is showing."[417]

Iman Jodeh, a Palestinian American, became Colorado's first Muslim state lawmaker when she was elected to the General Assembly in 2020.[418] Since then, Jodeh has faced several online attacks due to her defense of Palestinian human rights. A right-wing media outlet in October 2020 published a hit piece on Jodeh, stating that "Jodeh's involvement with an Islamist mosque and her history of pro-Palestinian activism reveals an alternative agenda that stands starkly at odds with her constituents' values."[419] After accusing Jodeh of having "willful ignorance" on issues such as FGM and women's rights, the article stated that, "Jodeh's constituency should also be concerned with her obsessive focus on the Palestinian resistance, which seems to overshadow her commitments towards climate change, health care, and criminal justice reform."[420]

On April 13, 2021, a special interest group *United with Israel* published a defamatory article with a video titled "Watch: Meet America's Most Anti-Israel Lawmaker."[421] The article read "Colorado Congresswoman Iman Jodeh is so full of vicious hatred that she makes even Rashida Tlaib look like a pro-Israel advocate."[422] The video included clips from a Zoom meeting in which Jodeh discussed her experiences visiting Palestine.[423] The video creator added commentary in which he referred to Jodeh as a "brain-dead anti-Zionis[t][424]" and stated "America beware, Iman Jodeh is a wolf in sheep's clothing."[425]Another article published in 2021, titled "US 2020 Elections See New State Representatives With Problematic Ties," included Jodeh in the list of candidates and stated "Iman Jodeh, the

first Muslim and Arab woman elected to the Colorado State Legislature who in November 2020 participated in a virtual high-level conference of the American Muslims for Palestine (AMP), a Palestinian advocacy group with strong ties to both the US Muslim Brotherhood and to the Hamas support infrastructure in the US."[426]

During his campaign for the Virginia House of Delegates in 2019, **Ibraheem S. Samirah** faced allegations of antisemitism in what he characterized as a "slander campaign."[427] A far-right conspiracy site dug up Facebook posts by Samirah made in 2014 when he was in college. One shared a letter by musician Brian Eno that compared funding Israel to supporting the Ku Klux Klan[428] – though much of the media coverage mistakenly attributed this comment to Samirah himself. Another post said that former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon should "burn a million times for every innocent soul [he] killed."[429] The controversy was amplified by a pro-Israeli Zionist organization, The Investigative Project on Terrorism, whose executive director, Steve Emerson, gave a radio interview to a conservative radio show claiming that there was an "infection of antisemitism … within the Democratic party locally and nationally."[430]

The concerted defamatory campaign against Ibrahim Samirah prompted him to issue an apologetic statement in which he spelled out a "life of activism [built] upon the principles of equality, justice, freedom, and love between the Jewish and Muslim community."[431] As the son of Palestinian immigrants, Samirah described how he had joined a formerly Jewish-only fraternity in college and co-founded a chapter of Jewish Voices for Peace.[432] He also noted that he was a student of Yossi Olmert, the brother of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, and that he sought out the class "to engage in many thoughtful, tough conversations surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict."[433]

Samirah's outspoken nature was not limited to Palestine. In 2016, he was filmed protesting at the Democratic National Convention and allegedly poured a bottle of water on Fox News' Geraldo Rivera, which he neither confirmed nor denied.[434] Only a few months after winning his seat in the state House of Delegates, Samirah made headlines when he disrupted a speech by President Trump during his first administration. Standing alongside a series of signs, Samirah shouted, "You can't send us back, Virginia is our home!"[435] Two weeks earlier, Trump had made comments that the four freshmen members of the Squad "go back" to their home countries.[436] Yet it was only his activism on Palestine for which he was made to apologize.

Nida Allam has served on the Durham County Board of Commissioners since 2020, making her the first Muslim woman elected to a public office in North Carolina.[437] Like other lawmakers publicly defending Palestinian human rights, Allam was a victim of concerted smear campaigns, this time by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Democratic Majority for Israel (DMFI), and various media outlets.[438] A 2019 article discussed how the Jewish community felt targeted in 2018 because the Durham City Council passed the "Israel Resolution," making Durham the first city in the United

States to boycott police trainings with Israel.[439] The resolution prohibited Durham police from engaging in international military-style training programs with foreign governments, specifically targeting exchanges involving Israel, based on concerns that such trainings promote militarized policing tactics and contribute to human rights abuses against Palestinians. The measure emphasized that Durham should not participate in programs involving countries accused of systemic violations of human rights and civil liberties. Although the resolution did not explicitly endorse the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, critics characterized it as anti-Israel and antisemitic because of its practical effect on police exchange programs involving Israeli security forces.[440] The article then quoted from Voice4Israel of North Carolina, "Allam signed a petition given to the Council demanding that Durham ban police trainings with Israel. Voice4Israel is concerned that Allam is campaigning for local office (Durham Board of County Commissioners) by attacking Israel. As one Durham official told Voice4Israel, 'local government should focus on paving the roads, not Israel.'"[441]

Nida Allam was subject to another set of antisemitic accusations and hate speech in an article published in 2021.[442] The article, titled "North Carolina: Anti-Israel 'Progressive' Muslim Congressional Candidate Hopes to Become New 'Squad' Member" read, "Nida may be a fool, but she's "no fool," given that this past May, amid escalating violence between Israel and Hamas, Allam participated in a pro-Palestinian rally where protestors chanted slogans such as "Israel is an apartheid state" and "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," the latter of which is correctly understood to be a call to eliminate Israel." The article added, "In a live video she posted to her Facebook page on May 22, Allam appears to have been chanting that line along with her fellow protestors."[443] Despite pro-Israeli Zionist organizations' insistence that the phrase can only be interpreted as a desire to ethnically cleanse Jews, the phrase is widely used by human rights advocates of diverse backgrounds, including Jewish Americans, as a slogan in support of a single democratic state with equal rights for all persons residing between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, including Jews, Muslims, and Christians.[444]

The attacks against Allam illustrate how advocacy for Palestinian human rights is frequently reframed in American political discourse as evidence of extremism, disloyalty, or antisemitism when expressed by Muslim public officials. Rather than engaging with Allam's actual policy positions or criticisms of Israeli government actions, the article portrayed her Muslim identity and participation in pro-Palestinian activism as inherently suspect and dangerous. This pattern reflects a broader tendency to treat Muslim political speech concerning Palestine as presumptively illegitimate, particularly when Muslim elected officials challenge dominant narratives surrounding Israel and U.S. foreign policy.

When Allam announced her candidacy for the U.S. House of Representatives in 2022, she was immediately defamed by pro-Israeli Zionist media outlets. On November 10, 2021, *Jewish Insider* released an article where it portrayed Allam as anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, and antisemitic.[445] The article read "Allam has positioned herself as a vocal opponent of the Jewish state, whose past statements on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have drawn scrutiny

that is likely to increase now that she is seeking federal office."[446] "Allam's involvement in anti-Israel activism extends beyond the recent flare-up," the article continued. "In 2018, for instance, she signed a petition demanding that Durham's mayor and city council "immediately halt any partnerships" between the Durham police department and Israel, alleging that "the IDF and the Israel Police have a long history of violence and harm against Palestinian people and Jews of color."[447]

The framing of Allam's advocacy illustrates how criticism of Israeli government policy is erroneously conflated with antisemitism when expressed by Muslim political figures. The article characterized support for Palestinian human rights, opposition to police exchange programs with Israel, and participation in pro-Palestinian demonstrations as evidence of hostility toward Jews or the existence of Israel itself, rather than engaging with the underlying political and human rights arguments being advanced. By portraying ordinary forms of political advocacy as inherently extremist or antisemitic, the media smear campaigns contribute to a hostile political climate in which Muslim candidates are denied equal opportunity to speak about Palestine, Israel, or U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East.

The antisemitism accusations against Allam persisted for months. An article from November 15, 2021, named "New Congressional Candidate Is Proudly Anti-Israel," stated that Allam had a history of making "abhorrent statements."[448] The article reads, in relevant part: "In 2018, Allam tweeted, 'This is the United States of Israel,' which is consistent with centuries-old antisemitic propaganda that Jews seek to dominate the world."[449] The article then quoted some statements of Bob Gutman, a Jewish leader in Durham: "In her bid for local office, Nida Allam [ran on] an anti-Israel position. She has served as a County Commissioner for less than a year, and in that time, Allam has caused painful division in the city. Now she wants to leave Durham and take a seat with The Squad."[450] "In her short political career, Nida Allam has alienated both Black and Jewish constituents. North Carolinians need a representative who will foster peace and cooperation. Instead, Allam offers hate and division," the article concluded.[451] The article's framing demonstrates how accusations of antisemitism are often expanded beyond explicit anti-Jewish animus to encompass broader critiques of U.S.-Israel relations and American foreign policy. Allam's statement criticizing perceived U.S. political support for Israel was interpreted not as political rhetoric about foreign influence or international relations, but as evidence of alleged antisemitic hostility rooted in classic conspiracy tropes.

By equating criticism of Israeli policy or pro-Israel lobbying influence with hatred toward Jews,such commentary narrows the space for legitimate political debate and disproportionately casts Muslim public officials advocating for Palestinian rights as inherently divisive or extremist. Another article from November 16, 2021, titled "Anti-Semitic Leftist Who Also Hates Police Enters North Carolina Congressional Race," discussed Allam's candidacy and reads, in relevant part: "She also espouses socialist rhetoric, typical of today's Israel haters like Vermont Sen."[452] The article goes on to say: "In her minuscule time as county commissioner, Allam has reportedly caused division and alienated both black and Jewish constituents, making it fitting she wants to move to

BY PORTRAYING ORDINARY FORMS OF POLITICAL ADVOCACY AS INHERENTLY EXTREMIST OR ANTISEMITIC, THE MEDIA SMEAR CAMPAIGNS CONTRIBUTE TO A HOSTILE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN WHICH MUSLIM CANDIDATES ARE DENIED EQUAL OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK ABOUT PALESTINE, ISRAEL, OR U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

Washington and cause havoc with the Hamas Squad."[453]

By January 2022, the concerted political attacks intensified to the extent that Allam published an op-ed apologizing for previous statements.[454] She wrote, "In the past, I regrettably and unintentionally invoked antisemitic tropes in a tweet attempting to call attention to the United States' withdrawal of humanitarian aid from the Palestinian people. In another instance, I attended and livestreamed a protest at which destructive and antisemitic language, which I do not condone, was used by some of the protesters present."[455] "For my tweet and lack of sensitivity to what was captured and then posted in my personal livestream of that protest, I deeply apologize," Allam added.[456] Furthermore, she noted, "I stand by the urgent need to end Israel's illegal, violent occupation of the Palestinian people. But the movement to end the occupation, secure a lasting and peaceful resolution with Israel, and defend the human rights of everyone living in the region is a movement for justice and peace, in which antisemitism must have no home."[457] Allam lost the election.

At the local level, **Farrah N. Khan** experienced similar smear campaigns equating her Islamic faith with antisemitism during her career in public office. During 2016, when she first ran for city council in Irvine, California, an opponent made a lawn sign accusing her of being "anti-Israel."[458] Khan lost that race but was elected to the city council in 2018. She was then elected as mayor of Irvine in 2020 and served the maximum two terms until 2024.[459] In 2021, a white supremacist banner was put up on a freeway overpass in Irvine, targeting her Islamic faith.[460] The banner featured Islamophobic, antisemitic, and other forms of bigoted messaging.[461] It referred to Jews as a "virus" with "white replacement,"



and mentioned that "Mayor Khan's mosque agrees," making a false connection between antisemitism and Khan's Islamic faith.[462]

The attack against Khan also foreshadowed another recurring feature of Islamophobia directed at Muslim public officials: the false conflation of Muslim identity and pro-Palestinian political advocacy with antisemitism. Muslim candidates and elected officials are increasingly accused of harboring hostility toward Jews or supporting extremism simply because they are Muslim, advocate for Palestinian rights, or criticize Israeli government policies.

Fahim Abedrabbo, a Clifton, New Jersey, Board of Education commissioner, faced a wave of antisemitism accusations after he and fellow board member **Feras Awwad** made statements during a board meeting in May 2021 opposing Israeli violations of Palestinian human rights.[463] At the meeting, Abedrabbo spoke of global injustices all over the world, particularly in the Middle East, and said that children should be able to attend school without worrying whether their homes will be destroyed "or their neighborhoods ethnically cleansed."[464] He added that he had been humiliated by being detained and strip-searched and having guns pointed at him while visiting relatives in Palestine.[465] Awwad stated, "It's unfortunate a country over there is being funded with $40 billion of U.S. tax dollars to oppress the Palestinian people."[466] "Gaza is the most densely populated place in the world and the biggest open-air prison with Israel controlling the water—the Mediterranean—pointing missiles at them, the military building apartheid-style walls, trapping them, controlling every movement," he said.[467] Awwad further added, "We should all be living in peace. Hatred will never win. Colonialism will never win. Apartheid will disappear as it did in South Africa. I want to close my statement with 'Free Palestine. Free my people.'"[468] In his remarks, Awwad stated that he loves Judaism and that he never intended his words to be viewed as hateful to Jews. Abedrabbo stated that "antisemitism should not be taken lightly, and I consider every religion to be equal."[469]

Following the board meeting, Abedrabbo and Awwad were accused of antisemitism, despite making it clear that they were criticizing practices by the Israeli government. Michael Cohen, eastern regional director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, wrote in a statement to *The Jewish Link*: "The fact that such an antisemitic diatribe can be heard by an elected body in open session and not be condemned by any of the body's members is in fact outrageous and unacceptable. Members of the Jewish community have the right to expect that the members of the Clifton Board of Education would respond directly and immediately to the cascade of antisemitic and anti-Israel tropes from one of their own."[470]

In September 2021, a complaint was filed against Abedrabbo and Awwad for violating the School Ethics Act by making antisemitic statements.[471] In February 2022, the School Ethics Commission dismissed the complaint in its entirety, stating that it failed to prove their speech was in violation of any school ethics codes.[472] The complainant appealed the decision, which was dismissed on October 6, 2023.[473] Hamas' attack the following day would usher in a paradigm shift in the global discourse and awareness around Palestine.

B ACCUSATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM AFTER OCTOBER 7

For Muslim American public officials in positions of leadership, standing up for human rights and Palestinian self-determination while criticizing an Israeli state campaign of destruction in Gaza, now widely regarded as genocidal, has prompted personal and professional threats by pro-Israeli Zionist organizations and politicians. The paradigmatic case is that of **Zohran Mamdani**, the state legislator who improbably won the New York City mayoral election in 2025, making him the first Muslim mayor to serve in this powerful position.[474] Mamdani's public support for Palestine became a focal point of attack for his opponents, notably former Governor Andrew Cuomo and Republican candidate Curtis Sliwa.[475] As a state assemblyman representing Queens, Mamdani was already known for his support of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. In 2023, Mamdani introduced legislation that would block charities in New York state from providing money to Israeli settler organizations.[476] Immediately after the bill was announced, pro-Israel advocates misrepresented the bill as an attack against Jewish organizations. Dozens of members of the New York state assembly signed a letter lambasting Mamdani's bill as "a ploy to demonize Jewish charities with connections to Israel" and an "attack" on groups that feed the poor and provide medical treatment.[477]

As Mamdani's mayoral campaign gained steam, he was continuously asked to condemn slogans such as "Globalize the Intifada" and "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."[478] While pro-Israeli and Zionist organizations interpret these phrases as calls for Israel's destruction, Mamdani interpreted them as expressions of a "desperate desire for equality and equal rights" for Palestinians.[479] Representative Dan Goldman, a Jewish Democrat from New York, stated that Mamdani's refusal to condemn these slogans makes him "unfit to lead a city with 1.3 million Jews."[480] Some Jewish organizations echoed these sentiments, accusing Mamdani of antisemitism.[481] His stance was also denounced by former Governor Andrew Cuomo, whose campaign predictably labeled Mamdani's comments as antisemitic.[482] Despite the backlash, Mamdani received support from progressive Jewish groups like Jewish Voice for Peace and Jews for Racial & Economic Justice, as well as support from Jewish American former city comptroller Brad Lander.[483]

Mamdani also faced outright racist campaign tactics from Cuomo throughout the mayoral election. Before the primary election in June 2025, the Mamdani campaign accused a pro-Cuomo super PAC of producing an Islamophobic flier that lengthened and darkened Mamdani's beard after a digital copy circulated online.[484] A spokesperson for the super PAC stated that a vendor had proposed the mailer but was rejected.[485] Another attack ad released on social media by the Cuomo campaign in October 2025 was immediately condemned as blatantly racist and Islamophobic. The AI generated ad depicted Mamdani

walking through the streets eating rice with his bare hands before showing different criminals declaring their support for Mamdani, including a Black man wearing a kufiyah who was shoplifting.[486] The Cuomo campaign attempted to defend its actions by saying that the video was a "draft proposal" that was "inadvertently posted by a junior staffer."[487]



On the debate stage, both Sliwa and Cuomo continued to lodge inflammatory accusations of antisemitism at Mamdani, with Cuomo stating that Mamdani was helping to "stoke the flames of hatred against Jewish people," while Sliwa declared that Mamdani supported "global jihad."[488] Mamdani rejected the accusations as fearmongering rooted in Islamophobia and attempts to delegitimize criticism of Israeli government policy. During the debate, he emphasized that advocating for Palestinian human rights and opposing civilian deaths in Gaza did not constitute antisemitism, while also explicitly condemning antisemitic violence and hatred against Jewish people. Mamdani argued that his opponents were weaponizing accusations of antisemitism to distract from substantive policy disagreements and to portray Muslim political participation as inherently suspect or extremist.[489]

Less than 12 hours later, Cuomo was criticized for his statements on a conservative radio program when he told the host to "imagine Mamdani in that [mayoral] seat" if there were another September 11th-style attack, to which the host responded that Mamdani would be "cheering," and Cuomo laughing and replying, "That's another problem."[490] Though Cuomo's remarks were roundly condemned by election officials, including New York Governor Kathy Hochul and New York Congressman Jerry Nadler, Cuomo's increasing use of anti-Muslim racial tropes in the final weeks of the campaign demonstrates that Islamophobia is a mainstreamed political strategy.[491] Despite Mamdani campaign's disciplined focus on an economic reform platform, the hostility toward his Muslim identity became so pervasive that Mamdani held a press conference in front of the Islamic Cultural Center of the Bronx,

describing the threats to his safety as well as warning how such anti-Muslim racism threatens hundreds of thousands of Muslim New Yorkers.[492] While Mamdani's remarks were universally lauded, with a video of the speech racking up more than 25 million views, the ugly tenor of the election reinforces the experiences of many Muslim politicians whose political agendas are flattened by a relentless fixation on their purportedly dangerous and presumptively antisemitic Muslim identity.[493]



Another high-profile candidate, Virginia state senator **Ghazala Hashmi**, faced accusations of antisemitism following her decision to organize a Senate Education and Health Committee hearing in response to campus protests supporting Palestine.[494] The student-led protests were sparked by the Israeli military's incessant bombing of Gaza from 2023 to 2025 that killed over 72,000 Palestinians and injured over 250,000.[495] Campus police at some colleges violently responded to student demonstrations opposing Israel's genocidal campaign.[496] Hashmi's hearing aimed to provide a platform for public and university representatives to discuss the protests and law enforcement's response.[497] However, critics, including the Jewish Insider, accused her of bias, claiming the meeting was one-sided and that she failed to consult Jewish groups beforehand. The *Jewish Insider* story also criticized Hashmi for attending a 2021 ceasefire event related to the Israel-Hamas conflict, suggesting that her presence at the event implied antisemitism.[498] Hashmi clarified that her comments at the event were general, expressing hope for a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and emphasized that she does not typically engage in foreign policy matters.[499]

Despite her efforts to address the concerns of all communities, including Jewish students who felt threatened during the campus demonstrations, Hashmi's actions were mischaracterized as antisemitic. A number of Jewish leaders across Virginia defended Hashmi against these false accusations. Rabbi Dovid Asher praised her for being a strong voice against white supremacy, Nazi ideology, and religious bigotry, and for her willingness to learn about how anti-Zionism can sometimes intersect with antisemitism.[500] He also highlighted her attendance at a memorial ceremony for victims of the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel as evidence of her support for the Jewish community.[501] Similarly, Irvin Varkonyi, chair of the Fairfax Democratic Committee's Jewish Caucus, stated that the insinuations of antisemitism in Hashmi's record were not supported by his interactions with her.[502] He emphasized her efforts to conduct hearings that acknowledged the rights of all students while addressing concerns of Jewish students.[503] The defense of Hashmi by some Jewish American groups evinces a recognition that accusations of antisemitism against Muslims are often in bad faith by actors seeking to exclude Muslims from elected office.[504]

On January 3, 2024, **Naveen Khan** became the first female Muslim to serve on the Voorhees Township school board in New Jersey.[505] During her first meeting, she was sworn in to the board along with other new members.[506] The board then opened the floor to the public for questions and comments.[507] A well-known resident in the community stated that he felt unity on the board would be lacking if Khan stayed on and addressed her directly.[508] He said, "You would have never been elected because of your feelings against Jewish people."[509] This criticism stemmed from an October 2023 Facebook post that went public shortly before the board meeting in which Khan's husband allegedly described Israel as a "terrorist nation." Khan denied "liking" the post and tried to quell the controversy prior to her upcoming tenure on the school board with little success.[510] The windows of her home were smashed, and her family was threatened over text messages. In interviews, Khan stated that she had worked with the Jewish Federation of Southern New Jersey and her Jewish friends in community-based projects.[511] At the board meeting, Khan lamented that she and her family were being unfairly maligned. She was disappointed at the lack of support from her fellow board members as residents falsely accused her of being antisemitic. Out of fear for her and her family's safety, Khan decided to resign from the board, less than 90 minutes after being sworn in.[512]

Resignation and opting out of running for public office altogether is the outcome desired by the multitude of politicians, organizations, and influencers partaking in the four manifestations of Islamophobia described in this report.

VIII CONCLUSION

Over the past ten years, Muslim Americans have become increasingly visible participants in American political life. From local school boards and city councils to state legislatures, Congress, and mayoral offices, Muslims are entering public service in unprecedented numbers. This development did not occur in spite of the post-9/11 era, but rather in direct response to it. Faced with surveillance, racial profiling, exclusionary policies, and widespread racialized suspicion, many Muslim Americans embraced political participation as a means of asserting their belonging within the American democratic project. Running for office, voting, organizing communities, and advocating for policy reform became mechanisms through which Muslim Americans sought equal citizenship and representation. Yet, as the case studies in this report demonstrate, Muslim participation in democratic institutions has not diminished Islamophobia. Instead, it has frequently intensified backlash against Muslims who visibly claim a place within American public life.

The experiences documented in *Punished for Participating* reveal that Muslim public officials and candidates are subjected to a distinct racialized burden not imposed upon similarly situated religious groups. Muslim candidates and elected officials are repeatedly framed as outsiders whose loyalties, values, and identities are fundamentally incompatible with American society. The "Islamic infiltration" and dual loyalty conspiracies portray Muslims as dangerous foreign actors secretly attempting to undermine the United States from within. Even ordinary democratic participation—running for office, taking an oath, mobilizing voters, or advocating for policy change—is perversely transformed into evidence of supposed infiltration or subversion. Muslim elected officials are often forced to prove their patriotism, loyalty, and commitment to democracy in ways that are not demanded of non-Muslim public officials.

The report further demonstrates that these attacks are deeply gendered. Muslim women in public office experience overlapping forms of racism and misogyny that target both their faith and gender. The hijab, in particular, is a visible religious marker onto which preconceived notions about Islam, foreignness, and women's oppression are projected. Muslim women candidates and elected officials are routinely subjected to gendered harassment, threats of rape and violence, and stereotypes portraying them as submissive, backward, or incapable of independent political thought. Muslim men, conversely, are often stereotyped as inherently patriarchal, violent, or extremist. Both forms of gendered Islamophobia rely upon longstanding Orientalist narratives that continue to shape public perceptions of Muslims in the United States.

Political violence and threats against Muslim public officials represent another deeply

THE CASE STUDIES ALSO UNDERSCORE HOW ACCUSATIONS OF ANTISEMITISM ARE INCREASINGLY BEING WEAPONIZED AGAINST MUSLIM PUBLIC OFFICIALS, PARTICULARLY THOSE ADVOCATING FOR PALESTINIAN HUMAN RIGHTS, CHALLENGING U.S. FOREIGN POLICY IN THE MIDDLE EAST, OR CRITICIZING ISRAELI GOVERNMENT POLICIES.

troubling trend. Muslim elected officials endure death threats, physical assaults, armed intimidation, online harassment campaigns, and threats of deportation or denaturalization. Such threats seek not merely to intimidate individual officeholders, but to delegitimize Muslim participation in democratic governance altogether. The rise of rhetoric questioning the citizenship or belonging of Muslim elected officials reflects a broader effort to cast Muslims as permanently foreign, regardless of citizenship status, public service, or democratic participation. The normalization of such rhetoric by political candidates, media personalities, and elected officials increases the risk of real-world violence while signaling that Muslims do not belong in the American political community.[513]

The case studies also underscore how accusations of antisemitism are increasingly being weaponized against Muslim public officials, particularly those advocating for Palestinian human rights, challenging U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East, or criticizing Israeli government policies. Muslim political speech concerning Palestine is frequently treated as presumptively antisemitic in ways that chill participation in public debate on matters of profound public concern. Rather than engaging with the substance of Muslim officials' policy positions, critics often portray Muslim political advocacy itself as evidence of antisemitism or support for terrorism. These accusations rely upon racialized tropes that Muslims are uniquely prone to extremism and incapable of legitimate participation in discussions surrounding Israel and Palestine.

The case studies in this report are not isolated incidents involving a few controversial public figures. They reveal broader structural patterns in contemporary American political discourse. Islamophobia directed at Muslim public officials is sustained through interconnected networks of politicians, media outlets, advocacy organizations, online actors, and social media ecosystems that normalize anti-Muslim rhetoric while disingenuously framing it as legitimate political criticism. Muslim candidates are often denied the presumption of belonging routinely afforded to Americans of other faiths.

To be sure, the continued rise of Muslim political participation demonstrates extraordinary resilience. Muslim Americans continue to run for office, organize voters, build coalitions, and participate in public life despite the hostility documented in this report. Their participation challenges the exclusionary logic underlying Islamophobia itself: the notion that Muslims do not belong in the American nation. However, political representation alone cannot dismantle deeply embedded racial narratives that cause myriad harms to Muslims.

Punished for Participating highlights not only the treatment of Muslim public officials, but also the erosion of American democracy. A political system in which an entire religious minority faces threats, racialized suspicion, and organized intimidation for participating in public life cannot claim to embody pluralism or equal citizenship. When Muslim participation in democratic institutions is treated as dangerous or illegitimate, the rights and freedoms of all Americans are weakened. The ability of individuals from marginalized communities to seek public office, advocate for dissident viewpoints, and participate equally in democratic governance is fundamental to a functioning democracy. Protecting

A POLITICAL SYSTEM IN WHICH AN ENTIRE RELIGIOUS MINORITY FACES THREATS, RACIALIZED SUSPICION, AND ORGANIZED INTIMIDATION FOR PARTICIPATING IN PUBLIC LIFE CANNOT CLAIM TO EMBODY PLURALISM OR EQUAL CITIZENSHIP. WHEN MUSLIM PARTICIPATION IN DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS IS TREATED AS DANGEROUS OR ILLEGITIMATE, THE RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS OF ALL AMERICANS ARE WEAKENED.

Muslim public officials from Islamophobia, political violence, and racialized exclusion is therefore not merely a matter of minority rights; it is a necessary condition for preserving democratic participation itself. The case studies discussed in this report, drawn from the past twenty-five years, evince the overt hostility Muslim Americans experience when participating in public life as candidates or elected officials.

American elites encourage diversity and inclusion; yet, when Muslim individuals participate in American civil society, they are often met with ridicule, exclusion, and discouragement. Islamophobic rhetoric is not only echoed by commenters and private actors but is often validated by politicians. As organized campaigns promote and benefit from Islamophobia in America, the need for advocacy groups like CAIR, MPAC, Emgage, and MPower Change is at its highest. In the competition for the hearts and minds of Americans, established national authorities such as legacy media, teaching institutions, and governing bodies are needed to shine a light on this ongoing issue and take affirmative action to promote inclusion and protect against harmful rhetoric. At a local level, community leaders and mindful individuals are paramount in guarding against Islamophobia. Islamophobic narratives perpetuated by the media cannot be squared with the positive impressions gained through direct and personal interactions created in inclusive spaces. It is hoped that the hateful dialogue against American Muslims will follow a similar arc as that of other religions, but stronger leadership and proactive work is needed towards that end.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

When Muslims are penalized for participating in the electoral process, the harm reaches far beyond one religious minority—it undermines the foundational democratic principle that allows all Americans to participate equally and safely in public service. A more serious and systematic approach to combating Islamophobia is thus long overdue. Accordingly, *Punished for Participating* offers three recommendations as a starting point for undoing decades of socialization that has legitimized discrimination against Muslims in all facets of life, including electoral politics.

1 ESTABLISH TASK FORCES AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM

2 TRAIN LOCAL AND STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT ABOUT ISLAMOPHOBIA, ANTI-MUSLIM HATE CRIMES, AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROSECUTION AND PREVENTION

3 DEVELOP CURRICULUM AND TRAININGS TO UNDERSTAND MUSLIMS AND COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA FOR K-12 SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

1 ESTABLISH TASK FORCES AT THE STATE AND FEDERAL LEVEL TO COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA AND ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM

The federal government and each state should establish a *Task Force to Combat Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism* that includes state and local government officials, educators, scholars, journalists, and diverse Muslim American civil society leaders. The task forces can learn from and build upon similar ones created to combat antisemitism across the United States.[514] Existing anti-discrimination task forces combine data collection, civil-rights enforcement, education, public safety, institutional reform, community engagement, and periodic government accountability. Accordingly, the state task forces should study Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism, propose measures to combat it, reduce anti-Muslim incidents, assist public schools and universities, and compile educational materials. To ensure public accountability, a *Task Force to Combat Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism* should also hold at least four public meetings annually, invite public testimony, and produce annual reports that make recommendations to the respective governor and state legislature.

The mandate of each task force should clearly state that it distinguishes between protected expression and unlawful discrimination, harassment, threats, and violence. As such, nothing in the task force's work should be construed to authorize restriction of constitutionally protected speech, academic freedom, religious exercise, peaceful protest, criticism of any religion or religious doctrine, or criticism of any domestic or foreign government, political movement, or ideology.

2 TRAIN LOCAL AND STATE LAW ENFORCEMENT ABOUT ISLAMOPHOBIA, ANTI-MUSLIM HATE CRIMES, AND EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR PROSECUTION AND PREVENTION

Each state government should train local law enforcement on how to identify, document, prevent, and prosecute anti-Muslim hate crimes and harassment, which empirical studies show rise with the increase in Islamophobic rhetoric in U.S. electoral politics.[515] Such trainings should include developing and implementing safety protocols for Muslim American political candidates and elected officials who are frequently targets of hate crime threats and acts. Again, task forces to combat antisemitism offer a useful template. Preventing and prosecuting anti-Muslim hate crimes requires improving centralized hate-crime reporting, participation in FBI reporting, and adequate staffing of specialized anti-

Muslim hate-crime units.

Law enforcement should also conduct listening sessions at Muslim American community centers to understand the threats they face and the consequent security needs. Local officials should provide security training for Muslim elected officials' staff as well as cybersecurity training for mosques and Islamic schools. Local and state governments should offer specialized anti-Muslim hate-crime training for police, prosecutors, magistrates, and victim advocates.

3 DEVELOP CURRICULUM AND TRAININGS TO UNDERSTAND MUSLIMS AND COMBAT ISLAMOPHOBIA FOR K-12 SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITIES, AND GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Too often, Muslims in the United States are absent or inadequately covered in school curricula. Muslim-American history thus should be incorporated into state social-studies standards that allow for instruction concerning Islam as a major world religion, the history of Muslim Americans, Muslim immigration, Black Muslim movements, and contemporary Muslim-American civic life. Teaching modules should explain Islamophobia and anti-Muslim stereotyping against Muslim women, Arabs, Palestinians, South Asians, and African American Muslims.[516] Likewise, existing anti-discrimination training and educational programming in public schools, universities, government agencies, and workplaces should incorporate the history and experiences of Muslims in the United States, as well as the prevention of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. Teachers should receive professional development to educate them about Islamophobia and the distinction between Islam, politically motivated violence, and the political diversity of American Muslim communities.

At the university level, administrators should create standardized anti-Muslim bias reporting systems and report anonymized aggregate data annually to state and federal agencies. Campus climate surveys of Muslim students, faculty, and staff that measure harassment, religious accommodation, classroom climate, discrimination, and perceptions of institutional belonging can inform educational programming intended to combat Islamophobia on campus. Additionally, universities should develop anti-doxxing protocols, which are particularly relevant for Muslim students publicly engaged on Palestinian human rights who are consequently targeted by pro-Israeli special interest groups.[517] Administrators should be trained on the various ways in which Muslim students, staff, and faculty experience violations of Title VI, Title VII, state civil rights laws, and First Amendment protections.

Finally, state governments should establish and increase grants for university research concerning Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism whose analysis can meaningfully inform the work of the state level *Task Forces to Combat Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Racism*.

ENDNOTES

* The full report, *Punished for Participating: Islamophobia in U.S. Electoral Politics*, can be downloaded at csrr.rutgers.edu/newsroom/reports.

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The Center for Security, Race and Rights (CSRR) engages in research, education, and advocacy on law and policy that adversely impact the civil and human rights of America's diverse Muslim, Arab, and South Asian communities. It does so through an interfaith, cross-racial, and interdisciplinary approach. CSRR's work is organized around three themes: 1) the contemporary and historical intersection of race and religion in the United States, 2) securitization of Muslim identity through United States and global national security laws and policies, 3) transnational rights and security arising from relations between the United States and Muslim majority countries.



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