



Fear, Inc. 2.0

The Islamophobia Network's Efforts to Manufacture Hate in America

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Introduction

At its core, the United States is a nation built on a few fundamental values. The values of freedom of religion and basic civil liberties are enshrined in the Bill of Rights and have been upheld time and time again by the U.S. Congress and courts. A basic respect for the rights of minority groups throughout the country—whether these minorities are ethnic, religious, political, geographic, or social—are inherent in the founding principles of the United States. All Americans—progressives and conservatives alike—share these core values that have formed the backbone of an inclusive, multidimensional society for nearly 250 years.

But the journey toward a more perfect union has not always been smooth. During World War II, for instance, Japanese Americans were unjustly interned because they were seen as “others.” In 1960, many opposed the election of President John F. Kennedy because they erroneously believed that his Catholic faith meant that his first loyalty would be to the Pope rather than the Constitution—and that if the two ever came in conflict, he would take orders from the Pope.

More recently, American Muslims in the United States have been targeted, profiled, or seen as suspect because of their faith.

In 2011, the Center for American Progress published “Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America”¹ in order to identify and expose the organizations, scholars, pundits, and activists comprising a tightly linked network that spread misinformation and hateful propaganda about American Muslims and Islam. The report found that seven charitable foundations spent \$42.6 million between 2001 and 2009 to support the spread of anti-Muslim rhetoric.² The efforts of a small cadre of funders and misinformation experts were amplified by an echo chamber of the religious right, conservative media, grassroots organizations, and politicians who sought to introduce a fringe perspective on American Muslims into the public discourse.

In the three years since “Fear, Inc.” shined a light on the Islamophobia network and exposed the network’s key members, a number of them have been marginalized by the mainstream media and politicians. For example, the American Conservative Union publically reprimanded misinformation expert Frank Gaffney and made it clear that he is no longer welcome at their annual Conservative Political Action Conference.³ Conservative politicians from Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) to former presidential candidate Mitt Romney have pushed back against the “sinister accusations” of the Islamophobia network.⁴ And the anti-Muslim caucus in Congress took a huge hit by losing some of its loudest members, such as Reps. Allen West (R-FL) and Michele Bachmann (R-MN).

Unfortunately, in both the United States and abroad, some have seized on CAP’s 2011 report as evidence to support their own negative perceptions about the United States, claiming that the United States is indeed hostile to Muslims and Islam. To be clear, the Islamophobia network that CAP identified in 2011 is not indicative of mainstream American views. In fact, the views of anti-Muslim actors stand in stark contrast to the values of most Americans. The findings of the 2011 report, as well as this report, should not be misconstrued as a sign of widespread public antipathy toward the Muslim community in the United States, although concerns remain about the rise of anti-Muslim attitudes in the United States during the past few years. Instead, these two reports reveal how a well-funded, well-organized fringe movement can push discriminatory policies against a segment of American society by intentionally spreading lies while taking advantage of moments of public anxiety and fear. We are seeing this dynamic play out yet again in the aftermath of the attack on French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, as former elected officials and certain media commentators have used the terror attack as an opportunity to call for increased profiling of the American Muslim community.

Although the first report succeeded in identifying and marginalizing many members of the Islamophobia network, a number of these misinformation experts are still able to disproportionately influence public policy in America. From hate-group leader David Yerushalmi’s impact on anti-Sharia legislation across the country to Islamophobe William Gawthrop’s influence on the FBI’s training manuals, it is clear that the well-funded and well-connected individuals within the Islamophobia network still have the ability to promote bad public policies that ultimately affect all Americans.⁵

Islamophobia in the United States takes many shapes and forms. It takes the form of a general climate of fear and anger toward American Muslims, as seen in the “civilization jihad” narrative,⁶ the religious right’s rhetoric, and the biased media coverage of the Boston Marathon bombing. It comes out in cynical political efforts to capitalize on this climate of fear, as seen in state-level anti-Sharia bills introduced across the country and in far-right politicians’ grandstanding. And perhaps most dangerously, it manifests itself in institutional policies that view American Muslims as a threat, as seen in the FBI training manuals that profile Islam as a religion of violence.⁷

But while the Islamophobia network has launched a variety of attacks on the American Muslim community during the past several years, the general public has also been more vigilant, and both progressives and conservatives have effectively rejected many of these anti-Muslim efforts. The public pushback—from New York City to Lansing, Michigan, and from Boston to Birmingham, Alabama—has been crucial in keeping the Islamophobia network where it belongs—on the fringes of American society. And while anti-Muslim groups continue their efforts incessantly, there has been a rise in religious and interfaith groups pushing back against Islamophobia.

Although the American public largely dismisses such prejudiced views, the Islamophobia network’s efforts to target American Muslim communities remain significant and continue to erode America’s core values of religious pluralism, civil rights, and social inclusion. The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS, offers the Islamophobia network a new opportunity to leverage unrelated geopolitical events in order to create a caricature of Islam, foment public anxiety, and push discriminatory policies against American Muslims. The Islamophobia network’s new effort to equate mainstream American Muslims with the perverted brand of Islam promoted by ISIS is a reminder of the ongoing vigilance needed to push back against the anti-Muslim fringe.

This report examines several key elements of the Islamophobia network, including:

- The civilization jihad narrative and theories of Muslim Brotherhood infiltration of the U.S. government
- The Islamophobia network’s influence among the religious right and faith groups combating anti-Muslim sentiment

- The impact of the Islamophobia network on law-enforcement training
- The response to the Boston Marathon bombing and the narrative of Islamic extremism
- Politically motivated Islamophobia and pushback by mainstream conservatives

The first “Fear, Inc.” report sought to expose elements of the Islamophobia network by giving the mainstream public the information it needed to refute the claims and distortions made by the network’s misinformation experts. This report identifies the Islamophobia network’s ongoing efforts to promote policies that violate and contradict core American values and interests. The defense of these core values remains ongoing. As this report demonstrates, it only takes one individual with disproportionate influence to negatively affect the treatment of an entire group of American citizens.

The Center for American Progress is a nonpartisan research and educational institute dedicated to promoting a strong, just and free America that ensures opportunity for all. We believe that Americans are bound together by a common commitment to these values and we aspire to ensure that our national policies reflect these values. We work to find progressive and pragmatic solutions to significant domestic and international problems and develop policy proposals that foster a government that is “of the people, by the people, and for the people.”

