

Anti-Muslim Racism in U.S. Politics

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1. Introduction

This report analyzes acts of anti-Muslim racism in U.S. politics. Through gathering various social media posts by political actors as well as other forms of media such as interview clips, this report aims to highlight instances of discrimination against Muslims in the U.S. by prominent political actors.

Anti-Muslim racism is a significant problem. According to a poll by Gallup¹, more than half of Muslim societies sampled believe that Muslims in the West are not treated as equal citizens. In addition, Gallup found that Islamophobia “increased in frequency and notoriety during the past decade.” This exaggerated fear and hostility toward Muslims perpetuated by negative stereotypes ultimately results in discrimination of Muslims, according to Gallup.

Through our research, we have found that anti-Muslim racism by political actors is less blatant in comparison to countries such as Austria. Unlike in Austria where the Freedom Party of Austria collectively pushes anti-Muslim agendas and rhetoric, the situation in the U.S. is that there are few top-level actors actively pushing anti-Muslim racism.² Rather than a party as a whole engaging in anti-Muslim racism, there are a small amount of top-level actors in the U.S. who behave this way in public. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, current congresswoman, and Donald Trump, former president, seem to be the most vocal proponents of anti-Muslim racism within top-level politics. Although not directly in the realm of government officials, anti-Muslim racism is also advanced by anti-Muslim activists such as Pamela Geller and Laura Loomer, who are both vocal about collectively attacking Muslims.

Throughout this report, recurring tactics for advancing anti-Muslim racism include portraying Muslims as violent and threatening people who have no allegiance to the U.S. Although anti-Muslim racism by top-level politicians does not seem to be as severe as in Austria, it is still concerning that actors such as Trump and Greene were able to assume office and therefore have access to large platforms, ultimately propelling anti-Muslim racism forward.

2. Marjorie Taylor Greene

Greene is a politician and far-right conspiracy theorist. She is currently the U.S. representative for Georgia’s 14th congressional district, having assumed office on January 3, 2021. Greene has had a rocky tenure as congresswoman, having made multiple controversial comments. This ranges from her views on seeing face masks as oppressive to stop the spread of COVID-19, to asserting that Trump was still president after he had lost the 2020 election. On February 4, 2021, in a 230-199 vote, the House of Representatives removed Greene from all committee duties. Specifically, she was removed from her assignments on the House Education and Labor Committee, as well as

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/157082/islamophobia-understanding-anti-muslim-sentiment-west.aspx>

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https://www.sosmitmensch.at/dl/qrrpJKJkKMmJqx4KJK/Bericht2020_AntimuslimischerRassismus_SOS_Mitmensch_Maerz2021.pdf

the Budget Committee. This was as a result of multiple incendiary and violent comments she had made, including endorsing the assassination of Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi and asserting that some school shootings were staged (Sprunt, 2021).

2.1 Examples of Anti-Muslim Racism

In February 2019, Greene tried to force representatives Illhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, who took their congressional oaths on the Quran, to retake their oaths on the Bible³. In the video, Greene is seen walking around the Capitol, appearing to be searching for Omar and Tlaib. “We’re gonna explain about how you can’t swear in on the Quran...so they’re not really official, I don’t think,” Greene says. Later, she says “I really wanna go talk to these ladies and ask them what they are thinking and why they’re serving in our American government. They really should go back to the Middle East if they support Sharia.” Here, Greene is implying that because Omar and Tlaib used a Quran, their affirmation for supporting and defending the U.S. Constitution was invalid. Furthermore, by emphasizing “American government,” Greene is implying that Muslim citizens are somehow not American, although that is incorrect. Greene is targeting the religion of Omar and Tlaib and asserting that there is a fundamental conflict between practicing Islam and being elected as a U.S. politician.

In a video⁴ made before being elected, Greene says “There is an Islamic invasion into our government offices right now, okay. You saw after midterm elections, we saw so many Muslims elected.” Here, Greene uses the word “invasion” which holds negative connotation to refer to Muslims being elected in government. By using this word, Greene is implying that all Muslims are violent, warring, and aggressive people. Furthermore, Greene is saying that there is a conflict in Muslims being elected to office just because of their religion. She implies that there is a fundamental problem between practicing Islam and representing the United States.

3. Donald Trump

Donald Trump was the 45th President of the United States, serving in office from 2017 to 2021. Before his presidency and subsequent political career, Trump was involved in business ventures. This includes taking over his father’s business in 1971, and serving as executive producer of the reality show *The Apprentice* from 2004 to 2015. Trump first entered the political arena in 1999, when he ran as the presidential candidate for the Reform Party, although later dropped out in February of 2000. Between 1987 and 2012, Trump changed his political party affiliation five times, being registered as Republican since April 2012.

3.1 Examples of Anti-Muslim Racism

On March 22, 2016, Donald Trump tweeted “Incompetent Hillary, despite the horrible attack in Brussels today, wants borders to be weak and open-and let the Muslims flow in. No way!”⁵ The “attack in Brussels” refers to the Brussels suicide bombings which killed 32 civilians and injured more than 300 people. ISIL claimed responsibility for these attacks. By asserting a link between

³ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/marjorie-taylor-greene-omar-tlaib-bible-b1793806.html>

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-1nvtjZNBry>

⁵ <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/?searchbox=%22incompetent+hillary%2C+despite%22>

the ISIL terrorist attacks on Brussels and Muslims entering the U.S., Trump is equating Muslims to members of ISIL. Through this tactic, Trump is presenting all Muslims as violent and threatening. This perpetuates a negative stereotype instilled on hostility, fear, and hatred of the Muslim minority.

That same day, Trump told Fox Business “You have to deal with the mosques, whether we like it or not, I mean, you know, these attacks aren't coming out of — they're not done by Swedish people” (Hauslohner & Johnson, 2017). Trump is directly targeting mosques, a place of worship for Muslims, as the root of a problem. Here, Muslims are portrayed as a homogenous problematic collective, and discriminatory enforcement measures against their place of worship is demanded. By specifically targeting mosques and not other types of places of worship for other religions, Trump is singling out Muslims and asserts that there is a large threat associated with mosques and the Muslim religion specifically.

On December 10, 2015, Trump tweeted “The United Kingdom is trying hard to disguise their massive Muslim problem. Everybody is wise to what is happening, very sad! Be honest.”⁶ The next day, in an effort to clarify his earlier statement, Trump tweeted “In Britain, more Muslims join ISIS than join the British army.”⁷ By using negative rhetoric such as “problem” when describing Muslims, Trump is generalizing all Muslims as being an issue merely for choosing to practice their religion. Furthermore, according to The Guardian⁸, Trump’s tweet about more Muslims joining ISIS than the British army is incorrect. Trump is spreading disinformation about Muslims in order to elicit the response of fear from non-Muslims and ultimately collectively alienate Muslims. Here, this is primarily through linking Muslims to the terrorist organization ISIS.

In a March 9, 2016 CNN interview⁹ between Anderson Cooper and Donald Trump, Cooper asks “Do you think Islam is at war with the west?” Trump responds, “I think Islam hates us...there is an unbelievable hatred of us.” He goes on to say, “We have to be very vigilant, we have to be very careful. We can’t allow people coming into this country who have this hatred of the United States and of people that are not Muslim.” By using words such as “us” and “we,” Trump is painting Muslims as outsiders who have no allegiance to the United States. By saying that Islam hates the U.S., Trump is portraying Muslims as the enemy and trying to create hostility and resentment toward Muslims. Furthermore, he is asserting that the religion of Islam itself is incompatible with having allegiance to the United States.

On March 30, 2011 in an interview¹⁰ with Fox News anchor Bill O’Reilly, Trump is asked if there is a “Muslim problem” in the world. Trump says, “Absolutely. Absolutely. I mean, I don’t notice Swedish people knocking down the World Trade Center...Unfortunately, at this moment in time, there is a Muslim problem in the world, and you know it and I know it.” By referencing the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, which consisted of four coordinated attacks by Al-

⁶ <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/?searchbox=%22the+united+kingdom+is+trying+%22>

⁷ <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/?searchbox=%22in+britain%2C+more+muslims+%22>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/reality-check/2015/dec/11/donald-trump-needs-check-facts-british-muslims-isis>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-Zj0tfZY6o>

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuWoR7MUIY4&t=363s>

Qaeda, Trump is asserting that Muslims are terrorists. By drawing this comparison to the 9/11 attacks, Trump is portraying Muslims worldwide as threatening and violent.

On March 13, 2012, Trump tweeted “NYC’s top cop acted wisely and legally to monitor activities of some in the Muslim community. Vigilance keeps us safe.”¹¹ Trump is referring to the New York Police Department’s Intelligence Division engaging in religious profiling of Muslims in New York City. NYPD officers monitor Muslim communities through efforts such as photo and video surveillance, tracking individuals, and intelligence databases. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, the surveillance program has imposed suspicion and stigma on Muslims.¹² By defending the NYPD’s discriminatory surveillance practices, Trump is implying that there is some kind of danger inherently associated with Muslims. He does this through saying that individuals need to be vigilant of the Muslim community in order to stay safe.

On May 29, 2016, Trump participated in a town hall in Wisconsin. Anderson Cooper, reporter from CNN, asked “Do you trust Muslims in America?” Trumps said, “Many of them I do. Many of them I do, and some, I guess, we don’t. Some, I guess, we don’t. We have a problem, and we can try and be very politically correct and pretend we don’t have a problem, but, Anderson, we have a major, major problem. This is, in a sense, this is a war...” In this exchange, Trump blatantly says the U.S. is at war against Muslims. This type of rhetoric is dangerous because it gives Trump supporters the impression that Muslims are the enemy, and is also encouraging violence toward them. Through this tactic, Trump is generalizing Muslims as negative and threatening. The presence of Muslims itself in America is portrayed as alarming.

4. Pamela Geller

Pamela Geller is a far-right political and anti-Muslim activist. In 2010, Pamela became the acting president of the American Freedom Defense Initiative, which runs programs fighting Islamization. She openly discriminates against Muslims. For the past decade, Geller has shared a variety of baseless opinions. Her voice is largely broadcasted through her popular blog, Atlas Shrugs. This blog is unconstrained by traditional journalism etiquette, or the legalities limiting formal political roles. Her far-right stereotypes reached the mainstream through Atlas Shrugs. In October 2010, Geller sparked a national debate over Park51, a Muslim community center. She subverted its importance, and created a dark cloud around the center, labeling it as “the ground zero megamosque.” At the same time, Geller identified Park51’s creator a “thug.” Doing so pushed the false notion that Muslim terrorism is a byproduct of Islam itself further into American society. Since then, she has continued inspiring many misguided individuals¹³.

4.1. Examples of Anti-Muslim Racism

On April 13, 2010, Geller was discussing President Barack Obama’s regulation of Iran’s military activity. Her perception of the situation revolves around weak leadership, pertaining to a group she sees as an irrefutable threat. Addressing the former US president, she said “Obama is a third worlder and a coward. He will do nothing but beat up on our friends to appease his Islamic overlords.” Pamela Geller draws a line between allies and enemies. Without question, she groups all members of Islam together as “Islamic overlords.” They have been portrayed as an existential

¹¹ <https://www.twitlonger.com/show/gdjopb>

¹² <https://www.aclu.org/other/factsheet-nypd-muslim-surveillance-program>

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/nyregion/10geller.html>

threat to “our friends,” suggesting that America is in direct opposition with Islam. She is pushing for closer Muslim supervision.¹⁴

Moving forward to August 2011, Anders Breivik murdered 77 people at a youth camp in Norway. He released a manifesto right before the bloodbath, in which he mentioned Geller’s anti-Muslim writings as one of many inspirations. Pamela Geller later supported Breivik’s terrorist attack, saying Anders “was targeting the future leaders of the party responsible for flooding Norway with Muslims.” Unfortunately, Geller did not denounce the killer, but chose to applaud him. At the same time, she painted Muslims as a growing danger, in need of mitigation. No further context was provided for her belief that Muslims should not be allowed into Norway. She simply constructs Muslims as a unitary problem, justifying any means of reducing their presence.¹⁵

In November 2013, Geller decided it was time to bring Pope Francis and Islam into the same conversation. Pope Francis sought peace between Catholicism and Islam, giving his assurance that the Quran upholds righteous values. Of course, he received unfounded criticism from Geller in the blog post: “When Christianity worldwide is under siege by Islamic jihadists, the leader of the Catholic Church claims that the Quran teaches non-violence.” By criticizing this comment, Geller immediately associates the Quran to violent teachings. Then, she goes on to claim that the Muslim faith promotes “kidnapping, rape, and slaughter.” Again, without providing substantial evidence, Pamela Geller makes an outlandishly negative generalization of Islam. Geller is relentless in her anti-Muslim comments, but slow to place Christianity under the same microscope.¹⁶

The 2016 Olympics were held in Rio de Janeiro Brazil. There, Ibtihaj Muhammad was poised to become the first United States team member competing in a hijab. In February 2016, a Breitbart column shared Geller’s comments on the U.S team fencer wearing a hijab for the Rio Olympics: “Sharia, Islamic law, asserts its authority over non-Muslims.” Pamela claimed this was “Islamic supremacism,” interpreting it as an imposition of the athlete’s faith. People of different faiths display their spirituality in different ways. On Ash Wednesday, for example, Catholics prepare for Lent by receiving a charcoal cross on their foreheads. America is supposed to be a place of free worship, but clearly Geller and her supporters do not wish to extend that same inalienable right to Muslims. Instead, Pamela Geller discusses Muslims as almost a privileged group, pushing their religion onto others. Their growing presence is painted as a threat to free worship. However, Ibtihaj’s free choice did not affect anyone on the U.S. team, or anywhere else.¹⁷

During a Priority Talk Radio Appearance on October 30, 2017, Geller went as far as to say: “Muslim immigration is tied directly to Islamic terror.” Geller identifies areas with high Muslim populations as “no-go zones.” The Christian radio show host asked her if these mythical zones were a threat in the United States. She responded that they are not an issue yet, but warned “the more Muslim immigration, the more Islamic terror you have.” People of the Islamic faith are framed as a dangerous group, whose presence is highly correlated to terrorist attacks. Once again,

¹⁴ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/pamela-geller>

¹⁵ <http://www.islamophobia.org/islamophobic-individuals/77-pamela-geller.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/geller-when-did-pope-francis-become-an-imam/>

¹⁷ <https://www.newsmax.com/t/newsmax/article/712819>

Geller is attempting to make Muslims the enemy, essentially reducing them to “eternal strangers”.¹⁸

Each of the preceding comments are gross misconceptions of those who identify as Muslim. In fact, they are dangerous words attempting to incite unwarranted attacks on a collective group of people. Geller’s platform is much too large to be spewing utter ignorance, undoubtedly persuading many misinformed people. Anders Breivik is a prime example of the violence that can erupt from hate speech, after taking inspiration from Geller and other large voices.

5. Laura Loomer

Laura Loomer is another far-right political and anti-Muslim activist. She is problematically prominent. Her rise came through inflammatory comments, which spread false beliefs on different topics. Loomer frames situations in ways that amplify stereotypes, specifically creating prejudice against Muslims.

5.1. Examples of Anti-Muslim Racism

In November 2017, she tweeted: “Why is Uber hiring Islamic terrorists?” The tweet was in response to a man named Sayfullo Saipov allegedly driving down a biking lane, killing eight people.¹⁹

Later, Laura Loomer went on to say: “Someone needs to create a non-Islamic form of Uber or Lyft because I never want to support another Islamic immigrant driver.” Using her large social media presence, Loomer began framing Islamic immigrants as a problematic collective. While the insanity of Saipov’s attack was at the center of attention, she jumped on the chance to paint members of Islam as violent individuals. She minimized the Saipov situation to an Islamic terrorist attack, and grouped every Islamic immigrant driver with the assailant. Her tweets actually demand that Uber no longer “supports another Islamic immigrant driver.” Of course, she did not stop the anti-Muslim activism. More tweets followed, like: “Uber will literally hire an Islamic terrorist, but they will ban a conservative journalist for addressing legitimate safety concerns.” She once again reduces members of Islam to terrorists, and begins labeling them as “legitimate safety concerns.” At the same time, she separates herself as a “conservative journalist,” keeping those threats in check. A line is drawn, with conservatives in direct opposition of Islam. Uber and Lyft responded to Loomer’s tweets with a permanent ban.²⁰

In November 2018, Loomer attacked Ilhan Omar, a Muslim U.S representative from Minnesota’s 5th congressional district, tweeting: “Ilhan is pro Sharia... under Sharia, homosexuals are oppressed... women are abused.” Her tweet was in response to Omar’s successful bid for a Minnesota Representative seat. Instead of encouraging a peaceful transition of power, Loomer attacks Ilhan Omar’s faith. Sharia is defined as a religion where homosexuals and women are horribly mistreated. Laura Loomer tries scandalizing one of the first Muslim women being elected into Congress. This was a barrier-breaking moment, which should have been congratulated. Yet,

¹⁸ <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/pamela-geller>

¹⁹ <https://www.cnet.com/news/uber-and-lyft-ban-far-right-commentator-after-anti-muslim-tweets/>

²⁰ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/laura-loomer-banned-uber-lyft-after-anti-muslim-tweetstorm-n816911>

Loomer uses apparent homophobia and misogyny in another attempt to negatively label Muslims.²¹

6. Conclusion

Racism has endured for generations, leaving minorities on the defense both before and after America's conception. Today, information is readily available for anyone with Internet access. People easily remain updated on their friends lives, or possibly more importantly, the world of politics. Anything a prominent leader says publicly can be seen in the click of a button. If a police officer brutally attacks an innocent man, the video will likely circle social media quickly. Just as swiftly, informed members of society can react to anything that has been said or done. Especially in America, where Democracy is maintained by elections and advocacy groups, these situations place pressure on leaders. Even more, leaders are held accountable for their reactions in these periods of time. The support for Black Lives Matter upon George Floyd's murder reveals the capacity for Americans to act collectively. Similarly, American voices showed significance, as changes swept the nation. Changes were made, ranging from the removal of blackface on popular television shows, through updated policing regulations. Politicians were forced to respond, while fearing displacement. Clearly, discrimination breeds conflict, which boils over into protests and riots pushing for political action. Therefore, continued anti-Muslim racism in political campaigns will likely reach similar levels of tension. Donald Trump did not get away with mishandling the COVID-19 pandemic, much less the controversial decision to raise Muslim bans in the United States. Austrian, or more broadly European, politicians may see leniency among their constituents right now. However, they will face the consequences of suppressing and discriminating innocent human beings.

²¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/security/laura-loomer-banned-twitter-after-criticizing-ilhan-omar-n939256>