

# COUNTERING THE BACKLASH

Strategies for Responding to Anti-Refugee  
and Xenophobic Activity from the New South



TENNESSEE IMMIGRANT &  
REFUGEE RIGHTS COALITION  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



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# WHY TENNESSEE'S STORY MATTERS

**On November 13, 2015, a group of individuals coordinated a series of terrorist attacks across Paris, killing 130 people and injuring hundreds more. The tragedy in Paris came on the heels of terrorist attacks in Baghdad and Beirut, nearly five years into the Syrian conflict, and amidst a global refugee crisis that has displaced the most people since World War II.**

Immediately following the attack, the world joined Paris in mourning, law enforcement in France and across Western Europe cracked down in search of answers, and many in the international community called for an urgent scaling up of the fight against ISIS. An ocean away, lawmakers in the United States responded by focusing on refugee resettlement.

Within two days of the tragedy in Paris, Governor Rick Snyder asked President Obama to suspend the resettlement of Syrian refugees in Michigan. By the week's end, thirty governors had made the same request. Many elected officials across the country went a step further, calling for a moratorium on all refugee resettlement. That same week, the normally gridlocked US House of Representatives overwhelmingly voted to pass a bill essentially ending the resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees. A legislator in Tennessee called for the "rounding up" of Syrians already in the country, along with surveillance of recently resettled refugees. A mayor in Virginia justified the proposed anti-refugee policies by referencing the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II. Syrian refugee resettlement became a flashpoint at astonishing speed.

Not all nations responded this way. In fact, just days after the attacks in Paris, the French President reaffirmed his country's commitment to resettling 30,000 Syrian refugees. Canada, our neighbor to the north, committed to welcoming 25,000 Syrians in 2015. So why did the United States so quickly and uniformly focus on limiting refugee resettlement as an appropriate response to the terror in Paris?

Calls to suspend refugee resettlement are not new. The backlash against the refugee resettlement program has been brewing for years, fueled by state-based anti-immigrant legislation, like Arizona's Senate Bill 1070 and its copycats across the country,

growing Islamophobia, and a more generalized scapegoating of the foreign-born in times of economic insecurity. Long before the attacks in Paris, national anti-refugee organizations had been working to erode support for refugee resettlement. While their views and policy proposals have historically been far outside of the national mainstream, they found fertile ground in Tennessee, and are now finding favor more broadly. Since 2011, a few state legislators have been willing partners, openly casting suspicion on refugee communities in public statements and drafting legislation intended to undermine resettlement activity.

The last two decades have seen remarkable change in Tennessee and in communities across the South. Tennessee has one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the country, which is really to say that twenty years ago there were very few immigrants in the state, and today there are more than 300,000.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants still make up less than 5% of the state's total population (much less than the national average of 13%),<sup>2</sup> but the rate of growth alone presents significant challenges and opportunities in the state as residents process these changes. When a person who has never had a conversation with a Muslim sees a mosque going up next door to his church, it's understandable if he sees it as out of place. When a lifelong resident of the state hears Spanish at the grocery store for the first time in her life, she could be excused for wondering if English is somehow losing currency.

Unfortunately, many public figures responding to these changes seek to drum up discontent for political or financial gain. Add to the mix ideologues who truly believe that ethnic and religious diversity are threats to the American way of life, and outsiders who opportunistically seek out vehicles to promote their own reactionary agenda. As a result, over the

<sup>1</sup> Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/TN>.

<sup>2</sup> Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends>.



last decade, Tennessee has become a volatile testing ground for dangerous policy proposals, from declaring the very observance of Islam an act of terrorism to allowing any local government to issue a moratorium on refugee resettlement.

However, with this volatility also comes the potential to reaffirm essential values, restore civility to the discourse, and organize around a vision of inclusion. Years of heated rhetoric, desecration and destruction of places of worship, and extreme legislative assaults have taken a toll, but they have also galvanized a movement in opposition to it. Communities have rallied together, forged durable alliances, engaged directly in the civic process, built new organizational capacity, and fundamentally altered the balance of power on key issues of human rights and religious freedom.

Over the past decade, Tennessee has been on the front lines of countering anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim activity. Beginning in 2011, as many neighboring states competed to be the most unwelcoming state in the Southeast by passing increasingly harsh versions of Arizona's Senate Bill 1070, immigrant communities organized by the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) were able to hold the line and prevent a copycat bill from becoming law. In the same year, Tennessee also introduced one of the harshest anti-Shariah laws in the country and began to pilot legislation specifically targeting refugees, a group that had previously enjoyed widespread and bipartisan support. Despite having a small, albeit quickly growing, foreign-born population, and little progressive infrastructure, immigrant communities and advocates succeeded in preventing most regressive legislation from becoming law, and found ways to turn the tide.

At the time, activist groups supporting the anti-refugee backlash identified the combustible conditions in Tennessee, fueled by anxiety in response to rapid demographic shifts, as an opportunity to advance their agenda. Similarly, they are now exploiting the fear and uncertainty communities face in the wake of terrorism to advance the same agenda. But the current anti-refugee backlash must be understood in the context of a long-standing movement against refugee resettlement and as evidence of a larger tide of xenophobia animated by nativism and Islamophobia.

The Tennessee story reminds us that efforts to marginalize immigrants, refugees, and Muslims share a common source, and that the work to counter them must not operate in silos. Even after the current backlash against refugees calms down, there will still be efforts to accentuate ethnic and religious differences and to divide rather than unify communities. It is also a story of hope and resiliency, demonstrating that, even in the most hostile environment, communities can respond to legislative and rhetorical threats as an opportunity to organize, build power, and develop the capacity to shift the political climate.



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# SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE NEW SOUTH

Over the past two decades, Tennessee has emerged as one of America's unlikely new destinations for immigrants and refugees.

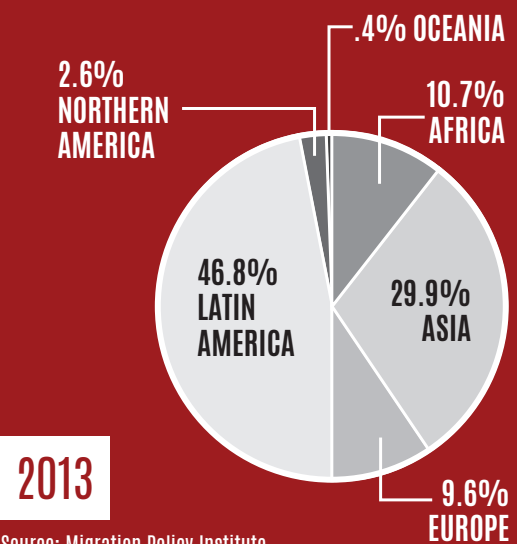
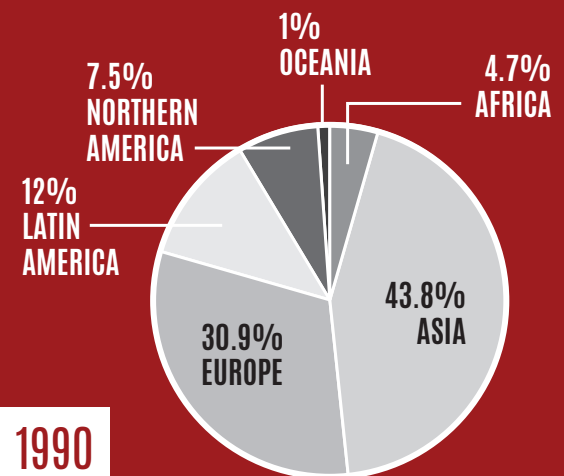
Like many states in the Southeast, the rate of growth of the foreign-born population has outpaced that of more traditional gateway cities and states, though the total number of foreign-born residents remains relatively small. Between 2000 and 2013, Tennessee had the second-fastest-growing immigrant population in the country, second only to South Carolina.<sup>3</sup> Many factors account for how Tennessee emerged as a new gateway for immigrant families: low cost of living, availability of entry-level jobs, and over time, the draw of family as certain ethnic communities established themselves and built a degree of social infrastructure.

Not only has the immigrant community grown dramatically over the past two decades, but its composition has changed as well. In 1990, the primary countries of origin were the United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany. In 2013, they were Mexico, India, and China.<sup>4</sup> In the 1990s, the federal refugee resettlement program began resettling an increasingly diverse population of refugees in new places, bringing significant numbers of Middle Eastern and African families to Nashville and surrounding areas for the first time.<sup>5</sup> Among refugees resettled in the last two decades, two groups in particular—the Kurds<sup>6</sup> and the Somalis—have figured prominently in the public debate over integration of newcomers in Tennessee.

Immigrants make up less than 5%<sup>7</sup> of the state's total population (much less than the national average of 13%),<sup>8</sup> but the rapid rate of growth itself has had significant implications, affecting the way that US-born Tennesseans process the changes, as well as the ability of public institutions to keep up with evolving demographics. While some US-born Tennesseans have celebrated the diversity and dynamism in their changing communities, the uncertainty, unease, and inability of many long-term residents to adapt to rapid demographic change has also created fertile ground for backlash.

## DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN TENNESSEE

REGION OF BIRTH OF TENNESSEE'S FOREIGN-BORN COMMUNITIES OVER TIME



Source: Migration Policy Institute

3 Migration Policy Institute, [http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#Immigrant Population Change](http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/frequently-requested-statistics-immigrants-and-immigration-united-states#Immigrant%20Population%20Change).

4 Partnership for a New American Economy, <http://www.maptheimpact.org/state/tennessee/>; Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/TN#top>.

5 Melanie Nezer, "Resettlement at Risk: Meeting Emerging Challenges to Refugee Resettlement in Local Communities," [https://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/resettlement\\_at\\_risk\\_1.pdf](https://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/resettlement_at_risk_1.pdf).

6 For more on Nashville's large and growing Kurdish population, see Matt Vasilogambros, "Lest Governors Forget, Refugees Are Already Positively Impacting American Cities," National Journal, November 19, 2015, <http://www.nationaljournal.com/next-america/population-2043/lest-governors-forget-refugees-are-already-positively-impacting-american-cities>.

7 Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/TN#top>.

8 Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/us-immigration-trends>.



# GRASSROOTS BACKLASH TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

As the immigrant population grew in the early 2000s, and particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, a sharper and louder anti-immigrant rhetoric took hold in Tennessee.

Misinformation was rampant, fueled by national hate groups, and evidenced by a spate of crimes targeting immigrants, including a pipe-bomb plot in Morristown, neo-Nazi vandalism of a Mexican-owned grocery store in Maryville,<sup>9</sup> and an attack on the Wat Lao Buddhaphathip Temple in Nashville.<sup>10</sup> The Minutemen—the nativist vigilante organization—held gatherings throughout the state, urging the mass deportation of immigrants. Talk-radio hosts were also quick to jump on the bandwagon. Controversial radio personalities spent years publicly decrying the dangers of immigration, filling countless hours of airtime, organizing rallies in downtown Nashville and surrounding counties, and at one point explicitly encouraging the shooting of immigrants as they attempted to cross the US/Mexico border.<sup>11</sup>

In this context of generalized anxiety and backlash against newcomers, Islamophobia was never far from the surface. An estimated 48% of refugees resettled in Tennessee in 2013 were from majority Muslim countries, while only 1% of US-born Tennesseans identify as Muslim. The first high-profile, anti-Muslim incident was the 2005 desecration of a Qur'an, which was torn, burned, covered with feces, and left outside a Nashville apartment complex that was home to many Somali families.<sup>12</sup> In early 2008, three men used Molotov-cocktail explosives to destroy the Islamic Center of Columbia. The Center was the first mosque to be built in the small town of Columbia, which lies about 50 miles outside of Nashville, and was the only mosque between Nashville and Huntsville, Alabama. The Center was burned to the ground, with graffiti etched across the debris—a mix of swastikas and phrases such as “white power” and “we run the world.”<sup>13</sup>

Sensationalism in local media played a role in arousing and fanning fear and distrust of Muslims. In February 2010, the local CBS station in Nashville decided to run an “exposé” on a small Muslim community in Dover, Tennessee. For a two-part



piece called “Inside Islamville,” the promotion included provocative hooks like “Are residents really terrorists? Tune in tomorrow to find out.” The actual content of the series showed “Islamville” to be a quiet, peaceful community of mostly US-born Muslims, but the damage had been done. Only three days after the story was broadcast, members of the Al-Farooq Islamic Center in Nashville, a mosque serving mostly Somali refugees, arrived to find the words “Muslims go home” and crosses spray-painted across the exterior windows and façade. A note was left at the door disparaging Islam and the Prophet Mohammed.

Beginning in the summer of 2010, a series of mosque construction proposals ran into organized local opposition. These projects were slowed or halted by public outcry (Brentwood),<sup>14</sup> organized petition (Antioch),<sup>15</sup> and outright vandalism (Murfreesboro).<sup>16</sup> While the proposals to construct mosques in Brentwood and Antioch were vigorously opposed, the project site in

9 “Turning the Tide,” Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIIRC), 2006.

10 “Teens Charged with Vandalizing Buddhist Temple,” Associated Press, July 5, 2005. <http://www.buddhistchannel.tv/index.php?id=61,1418,0,0,1,0#.UzmsVCjfz38>

11 Talk show host Phil Valentine at a Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) rally in Franklin, TN, April 27, 2006.

12 “Turning the Tide,” Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIIRC), 2006.

13 US Department of Justice, “Tennessee Man Sentenced to 183 Months in Prison for Burning Islamic Center,” March 25, 2010.

<http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/tennessee-man-sentenced-183-months-prison-burning-islamic-center>

Murfreesboro was actually attacked—opponents set fire to construction vehicles, organized demonstrations, and fired their guns in the air to intimidate women in hijab—drawing the most national attention to anti-Muslim activities in the state.

There has been a sizeable Muslim population in Murfreesboro for decades. In 2009, congregants of the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro (ICM) purchased land outside of the city to build a new community center. Although the plans were unanimously approved by the local planning commission, it sparked fierce opposition from some local residents and anti-Muslim activists. The opposition gained a national platform as residents sued to block construction of ICM, just as the controversy over the Islamic Center at Park 51 in New York City was heating up. Local figures who opposed the Murfreesboro project then became outspoken opponents of Park 51 on the national stage, appearing in national media and speaking at events across the country. On August 22, 2010, less than two weeks after an arsonist attacked the construction site in Murfreesboro, local resident Laurie Cardoza-Moore delivered a blistering speech in New York City against Muslims, recasting the entirety of US history as a war against Islam and denouncing Park 51 and the Murfreesboro Islamic centers as nothing but “compounds to promote their radical [Islamic] agenda.”<sup>17</sup> The national news cycle commonly featured both Islamic centers, elevating the Murfreesboro ICM controversy to audiences across the US and abroad.

# NATIONAL ISLAMOPHOBIA MOVEMENT FINDS OPPORTUNITY IN TENNESSEE

**As the debate over the Islamic centers featured prominently in local and national media, politicians and political candidates began to weigh in. In August 2010, Lieutenant Governor and gubernatorial candidate Ron Ramsey made news when he was caught on camera at a business luncheon saying that Islam could be considered “a cult.”<sup>18</sup>**

During the Presidential primary race in 2012, Republican presidential hopeful (and Memphis-born) Herman Cain, who was behind in the polls, attempted to stoke anti-Muslim fervor to score political points at an event in Murfreesboro, claiming “[t]he site is hallowed ground for Murfreesboro residents,” who were concerned about “the intentions to get Shariah law.” Appearing on Fox News, Herman Cain clarified his position on the First Amendment: “Our Constitution guarantees the separation of church and state. Islam combines church and state. They’re using the church part of our First Amendment to infuse their morals in that community, and the people of that community do not like it. They disagree with it.” When asked specifically if a local community can decide to ban the formation of a mosque, Cain responded, “Yes, they have a right to do that.”<sup>19</sup>

As community tensions and anxiety became more apparent to a wider audience, national anti-Muslim activists quickly saw Tennessee as a battleground state for “creeping Shariah” and as an opportunity to further their radical agendas. The big names in this field—Pamela Geller, Robert Spencer, and Frank Gaffney<sup>20</sup>—make frequent appearances in Tennessee at conferences

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14 “Brentwood Mosque not Alone in Defeat,” *The Tennessean*, May 23, 2010. <http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100523/NEWS06/109230001>

15 “Proposed Antioch Mosque Met with Opposition,” *WKRN.com* (Nashville, TN), June 29, 2010. <http://wkrcn.com/2010/06/29/proposed-antioch-mosque-met-with-opposition/>

16 Bradley Blackburn, “Plan for Mosque in Tennessee Town Draws Racism from Residents,” *abcNEWS.com*, June 18, 2010.

<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/murfreesboro-tennessee-mosque-plan-draws-criticism-residents/story?id=10956381>; Scott Broden and Doug Davis, “Mosque Expansion Proposal in Murfreesboro Spotlights Fear, Shame,” *The Tennessean*, June 21, 2010. [www.tennessean.com/article/20100621/NEWS06/6210329](http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100621/NEWS06/6210329); Bob Smietana, “Vigil in Support of Mosque near Murfreesboro Draws 150 People,” *The Tennessean*, August 31, 2010. [www.tennessean.com/article/20100831/NEWS01/8310344/Vigil-in-support-of-mosque-near-Murfreesboro-draws-150-people](http://www.tennessean.com/article/20100831/NEWS01/8310344/Vigil-in-support-of-mosque-near-Murfreesboro-draws-150-people).

17 “Hate and Violence in Tennessee Brought to You by Laurie-Cordoza Moore,” *The Liberty Lamp* (blog), August 30, 2010 (12:34 p.m.).

<http://ladylibertyslamp.wordpress.com/2010/08/30/hate-and-violence-in-tennessee-brought-to-you-by-laurie-cordoza-moore/>18 Jeremy Binckes, “Ron Ramsey, Tenn. Lt. Gov.: Islam May Not Be a Religion (Video),” *The Huffington Post*, July 27, 2010. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/27/ron-ramsey-tenn-lt-gov-is\\_n\\_659725.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/27/ron-ramsey-tenn-lt-gov-is_n_659725.html)

18 Jeremy Binckes, “Ron Ramsey, Tenn. Lt. Gov.: Islam May Not Be a Religion (Video),” *The Huffington Post*, July 27, 2010.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/27/ron-ramsey-tenn-lt-gov-is\\_n\\_659725.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/07/27/ron-ramsey-tenn-lt-gov-is_n_659725.html)

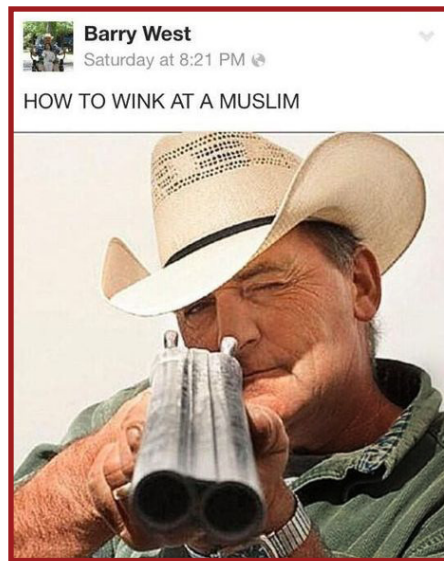
19 Manu Raju, “Cain: Americans Should be able to Ban Mosques,” *Politico.com*, July 17, 2011.

[http://www.politico.com/blogs/politicolive/0711/Cain\\_Americans\\_should\\_have\\_right\\_to\\_ban\\_mosques.html](http://www.politico.com/blogs/politicolive/0711/Cain_Americans_should_have_right_to_ban_mosques.html)



and events to rally their supporters and raise the visibility of anti-Muslim organizing. In late 2011, Geller, Gaffney, and Spencer all attended an event in Nashville billed as the “first true national conference on Shariah and the Islamization of America.” A few months earlier, Dutch Parliamentarian Geert Wilders, an internationally recognized anti-Muslim activist, had spoken to Cornerstone Church in Nashville about “creeping Shariah” around the globe. Wilders would later join Tennessee Senator Bill Ketron on the Senate floor on the day the chamber considered legislation declaring the very observance of Islam an act of terrorism.

In April 2013, Barry West, a county commissioner from Coffee County, Tennessee, posted an Islamophobic photo on his Facebook page that quickly became a national news story. In response, local Muslim leaders and the US Department of Justice (DOJ) organized an event to allay



and once again put Tennessee on the map as a hotbed of Islamophobia.

These national activists advance their anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant agendas by building on the efforts of opportunistic local politicians and locally based, ideologically conservative community organizations with sizeable membership bases, like the Eagle Forum and ACT! For America chapters.

## LEGISLATING XENOPHOBIA (2011-2015)

**Tennessee first stepped into the immigration policy arena in 2001, when the state passed one of the first immigrant-friendly driver-licensing laws in the country.<sup>21</sup>**

The attacks of 9/11 shortly afterward dramatically shifted the reception of that new state policy, and provided a handful of public figures with an issue of great emotional potency around which to foment public anxiety and garner votes. Between 2002 and 2007, several members of the Tennessee General Assembly focused much of their energy around an effort to repeal the driver-licensing law, and to enact legislation that would further criminalize and marginalize the state’s foreign-born residents.

As Tennessee’s immigrant population grew, public anxiety was first expressed as anti-Latino sentiment, couched in terms of “illegal immigration” and lawlessness. Like many states in the Southeast, the Tennessee legislature has considered some of the harshest anti-immigrant laws in the country. Through most of the 2000s, anti-immigrant legislation was largely debated in terms of the “rule of law” and focused specifically on undocumented immigrants. Proponents often insisted that they weren’t opposed to immigration more broadly but only sought to limit unlawful migration. Following states like Arizona, Tennessee legislators worked to create barriers for undocumented immigrants seeking to live, learn, and work in the state by requiring immigration status verification to be performed by state agencies, local law enforcement, and even community members.

<sup>20</sup> For more on national figures in the Islamophobia movement, see “Islamophobia Movement in America: Reference Guide,” Center for New Community, [http://newcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Islamophobia\\_America\\_Reference\\_Guide.pdf](http://newcomm.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Islamophobia_America_Reference_Guide.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> The campaign to pass this law giving undocumented immigrants access to a driver license evolved into the coalition that is now the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition.

Even though much of this work was taking place almost entirely in a post-9/11 context, national security arguments did not figure prominently in the public debate or in smaller community conversations. On the contrary, public figures were disciplined in their rhetoric, emphasizing support for any immigrant in the country legally, and justifying their measures as a righteous defense of the rule of law.

The national security frame began to appear in 2011, as a retooled, more sophisticated articulation of the blatantly anti-Muslim sentiment that had surfaced in the previous year's election cycle. The shift represented a conversion of latent cultural and religious prejudice into actual legislative proposals, and exposed the underlying intention to persecute newcomers, not just because of their immigration status, but simply because they speak a different language, observe different customs, or practice a different religion.

In 2011, in the midst of the controversy surrounding the Islamic Center of Murfreesboro, Senator Bill Ketron from Murfreesboro introduced sweeping legislation seeking to equate the observance of Shariah law with an act of terrorism, and to criminalize individuals who provide material support or resources to an organization that adheres to principles of Shariah, which might include painting a mosque or providing food at a community event. While other US states introduced anti-Shariah bills around this time, most merely forbade the citation of Shariah law in state courts. The Tennessee bill was the most extreme in that it sought to prohibit private observance of Shariah and to impose criminal penalties.<sup>22</sup>

After the mobilization of hundreds of Muslim leaders, months of meetings, press conferences, demonstrations, and testimony by leaders in the committee hearings, a broad coalition effectively stood up to oppose this blatant assault on religious freedom. However, legislators and the leadership of the General Assembly were committed to passing the legislation in some form in order to declare victory in standing up against terrorism. The bill that eventually passed was amended to the point that it mostly restated existing anti-terrorism law, but with increased sentences.<sup>27</sup> Although the worst provisions of the original bill were deleted, the debate on the bill connected immigration and increasing multiculturalism to national security concerns, and further cast suspicion upon one of Tennessee's fastest growing populations.

In 2011, as the legislature debated the anti-Shariah bill, Senator Jim Tracy proposed his "Refugee Absorptive Capacity Act," which sought to regulate and restrict the resettlement of refugees in Tennessee. The act would have required the nonprofit agency responsible for overseeing

## 2011 ANTI-SHARIAH BILL SENATE BILL 1028/HOUSE BILL 1353 INTRODUCED BY SENATOR BILL KETRON AND REPRESENTATIVE JUDD MATHENY

Read the language of the final amended bill here:  
<http://www.tn.gov/sos/acts/107/pub/pc0497.pdf>

Shariah was defined as the "set of rules, precepts, instructions, or edicts" based on sources from "the god of Allah or the prophet Mohammed," thereby encompassing the entire Qur'an and the prophetic traditions.

As introduced, the bill also sought to criminalize a Muslim's use of theological interpretation derived from "any of the authoritative schools of Islamic jurisprudence of Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'I, Hanbali, Ja'afariya, or Salafi" and to give authority to Tennessee's Attorney General to designate an organization as "shariah" if that organization knowingly abided by Shariah. It defined a "shariah organization" as "any two (2) persons conspiring to support, or acting in concert in support of Shariah."<sup>25</sup>

In making a designation that an organization is a "Shariah organization," the Attorney General would have been permitted to include information not "subject to disclosure" to the organization so designated, in the absence of defendants, and in secret.<sup>26</sup> Thus, neither the persons nor entities adversely designated by the original bill—or even the public—would ever be able to review the evidence used to criminalize their existence.

Additionally, the bill as originally introduced would have granted the Attorney General the power to freeze the bank accounts of Muslims for observing Shariah by threatening financial institutions with exorbitant fines if they were to refuse. The proposed bill would have established the right for Tennesseans to sue any individuals or organizations for violations of this bill, with entitlement to three times the damages sustained in addition to the cost of litigation.

<sup>22</sup> Bob Smierana, "Tennessee Bill Would Jail Shariah Followers," USA Today, February 23, 2011.

[http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2011-02-23-tennessee-law-shariah\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2011-02-23-tennessee-law-shariah_N.htm)

<sup>23</sup> Proposed in 2011: Senate Bill 1028 by Sen. Ketron and House Bill 1353 by House Rep. Matheny.

Bill, as originally introduced, can be found here: <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/107/Bill/SB1028.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Id.

<sup>25</sup> Id.

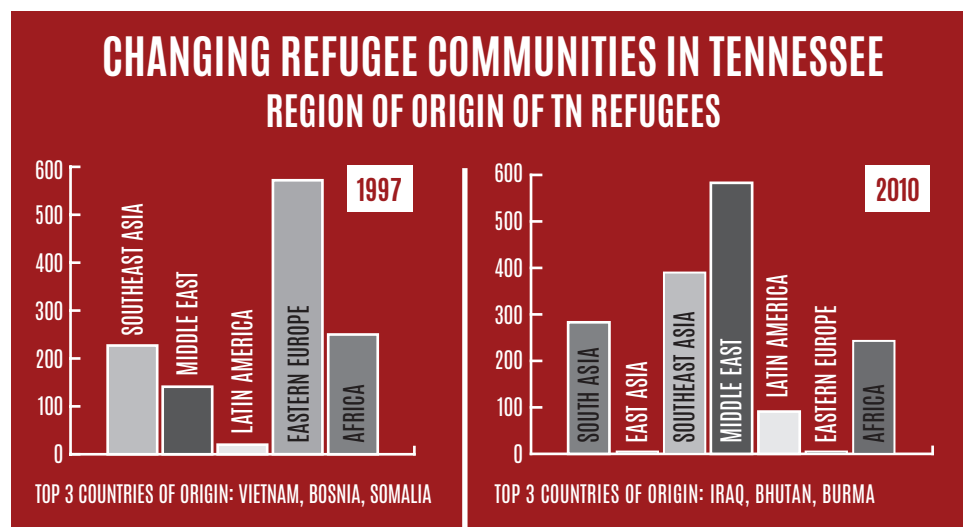
<sup>26</sup> Id.



refugee resettlement—Catholic Charities of Tennessee operates the Tennessee Office for Refugees (TOR)—to receive permission from local officials before refugees could be resettled in the area, and would have empowered local governments to request a binding one-year moratorium on any new refugee resettlement. The moratorium request would need only be substantiated by public hearings at which residents give testimony on the negative impact of refugees, and the determination that further resettlement would have any conceivable adverse effect.<sup>28</sup>

Senator Tracy advocated for the legislation as a representative of Shelbyville, which had recently witnessed an influx of Somali community members coming to work in a local chicken plant. Understandably, tensions were already high in the small town due to the weak job market, and the Somali refugees, distinguished by their language, dress, and complexion, were scapegoated in these hard economic times. As a result of successful advocacy, the bill was amended to merely require consultation between TOR and local governments during the resettlement process, something already covered under existing federal resettlement guidelines, and the provisions for a binding moratorium were removed from the bill. The legislation passed in this amended form.<sup>29</sup>

The “Absorptive Capacity Act” marked the first time that legislation was drafted specifically targeting refugees, but the rationale and the debate surrounding the legislation mirrored the arguments made against undocumented immigrants in



previous years. The bill relied on the discredited argument that any increase in the number of foreign-born residents would necessarily have a negative impact on the economic prospects of US-born Tennesseans. The bill also reflected a fundamental misunderstanding of how and why people move. Despite the sponsor’s claims that the legislation was necessary to prevent further incidents of uncontrolled resettlement to communities unfit to accommodate newcomers, it is important to note that between 1996 and 2007, only 13 refugees had been directly resettled in Bedford County, where Shelbyville is located.<sup>30</sup> In reality, Somali refugees were resettled in Nashville and moved to Shelbyville of their own accord, looking for available work and affordable housing like any Tennessee family might. The bill would have essentially legitimized municipal planning decisions based upon racial and ethnic bias, encouraged local government councils to assess the desirability of their current refugee community members, and invited public declarations about the “appropriate” demographic makeup of a municipality. The bill would also have discouraged programs that facilitate immigrant integration, as communities lost the incentive to “absorb” new residents by instead declaring themselves “saturated.”

After the 2011 legislative session, anti-Muslim legislators learned to avoid explicit mention of Islam and Shariah, lamenting instead the economic impact of new refugee communities on US-born workers and the Tennessee economy. While legislators had focused their arguments for the “Absorptive Capacity Act” on the rights of local governments and the economic impact of refugee resettlement, it became clear that the emerging movement against refugee resettlement was a thinly veiled attempt to stem Muslim migration to the state. The connection was made more clear as the same handful of legislators and civic groups had instigated both the anti-refugee and anti-Muslim legislation. For example, in 2013, Senator Bill Ketron, sponsor of the anti-Shariah bill, introduced legislation to essentially end refugee resettlement in Tennessee by defunding the Tennessee Office for Refugees.

Ketron’s bill would have required TOR to reimburse the state for the “cost” of refugee resettlement, determined by data such as the number of refugee children in public school, use of public health services, and the value of any cash assistance they might receive upon arrival. Debate on the bill focused again on how refugees were purportedly a drain on scarce state resources and a detriment to other public programs. The sponsors’ intent was also to recast refugees in a less sympathetic light by pitting them against other marginalized groups, a cynical tactic made clear by one provision of the original bill: all monies reimbursed by

27 <http://www.tn.gov/sos/acts/107/pub/pc0497.pdf>

28 Karen Herrling, “State Refugee Resettlement Bills: Tennessee Senate Bill 1325 (2013),” Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., February, 2013. [https://cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/sb\\_1325\\_absorptive\\_capacity\\_2-25-13.pdf](https://cliniclegal.org/sites/default/files/sb_1325_absorptive_capacity_2-25-13.pdf)

29 <http://www.tn.gov/sos/acts/107/pub/pc0316.pdf>

30 <http://www.cctenn.org/pdffiles/TN%20Arrival%20Data%201996-2007.pdf>



TOR were to be allocated to state programs serving children with disabilities. A vote on the bill was deferred, and it was ultimately sent to summer study in May 2013, legislative shorthand for sending a bill to a committee that never intends to meet.

In a surprise development, however, a special Government Operations summer committee was convened in August of 2013 for the purpose of analyzing the “Federal Cost-Shifting of the Refugee Resettlement Program” (i.e., the cost of refugee resettlement to the state). At the end of the first hearing, Representative Judd Matheny—co-sponsor of the 2011 anti-Shariah bill and chairman of the committee—commissioned the fiscal review committee to submit a report on the “costs” of refugees. In the end, the report concluded that refugees have contributed \$1.4 billion in state revenue between 1990 and 2012, compared to a state investment of only \$753 million over the same period.<sup>31</sup> These findings were a strong refutation of the premise that refugees have a negative fiscal impact on the state, and deflated all hopes of passing legislation in 2014 to defund refugee settlement statewide.<sup>32</sup>

After the 2013 hearing, anti-refugee, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant efforts seemed to be losing steam in the Tennessee legislature. Two bills were introduced in the 2015 legislative session to reassert state control over the refugee resettlement program, transferring the administration of the program from Catholic Charities to the Tennessee Department of Human Services with the intention of gutting the program altogether. Neither bill was debated in committee nor voted upon. As these anti-refugee policies stalled in the legislature, anti-Muslim activists in Tennessee were moving away from state-level legislation and switching their focus to local campaigns. Throughout 2015, groups like the Eagle Forum decried the mention of Islam in public schools and textbooks as a subversive attempt to indoctrinate Tennessee students, and directed most of their legislative efforts to county school boards.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, Senator Ketron continued to introduce anti-immigrant legislation. One of Ketron’s bills would have prohibited so-called “no-go zones” from existing in Tennessee. The term “no-go zone” is used to describe a neighborhood or place that are strictly for Muslim communities, where non-Muslims are unwelcome, and where Shariah law governs. Senator Ketron introduced this legislation even after the idea of “no-go zones” had been widely debunked nationally. The bill was introduced but not debated in committee.<sup>34</sup> Senator Ketron and Representative Judd Matheny introduced and passed

another bill that requires additional reporting on the number of foreign students attending Tennessee universities using specific visa programs. Although data collection itself could be considered innocuous, advocates believe it represents the first step in a longer campaign to limit the number of foreign students living in Tennessee. Ketron’s third bill of 2015, also co-sponsored by Representative Matheny, expanded civil forfeiture laws that could be used in the case of terrorism.<sup>35</sup>

Although the anti-refugee voices in the Tennessee legislature had largely been marginalized, the reorientation of the debate in the 2013 fiscal review committee to “federal cost-shifting” was a significant new frame that continued throughout 2015. As demonizing refugees was losing favor in the legislature, other policy debates about the federal government’s overreach were gaining steam. Through committee discussions and hearings on the bills, anti-refugee legislators were finding that a states’ rights argument had greater resonance, and began making the case that refugee resettlement is just another example of the federal government imposing an unfunded mandate on the people of Tennessee. The grassroots backlash against federal policies like Common Core and the Supreme Court’s *Obergefell v. Hodges* decision to require states to license same-sex marriages created additional opportunities for anti-Muslim and anti-refugee legislators to further their agenda under this new banner. In anticipation of the 2016 legislative session, several members of the General Assembly have pledged to advance a states’ rights platform in the legislative session, which will be centered on same-sex marriage, refugee resettlement, and stopping “radical Islam.”

31 [http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/tn\\_report\\_federalcostshifting\\_refugeeresettlement.pdf](http://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/tn_report_federalcostshifting_refugeeresettlement.pdf)

32 Krista Lee, “A Study on the Federal Cost Shifting to the State of Tennessee as a Result of the Federal Refugee Resettlement Program for the Period 1990 through 2012,” Fiscal Review Committee, Tennessee General Assembly, November 12, 2013. [http://www.tnimmigrant.org/storage/REPORT\\_FederalCostShifting\\_RefugeeResettlement%203.pdf](http://www.tnimmigrant.org/storage/REPORT_FederalCostShifting_RefugeeResettlement%203.pdf)

33 Melanie Balakit, “White County group claims Islamic indoctrination,” *The Tennessean*, October 21, 2015. <http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2015/10/20/white-county-group-claims-islamic-indoctrination/74267142/>

34 Dave Boucher, “Muslim advocacy group skeptical of ‘no-go zone’ bill,” February 23, 2015. <http://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2015/10/20/white-county-group-claims-islamic-indoctrination/74267142/>

35 <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/Bills/109/Amend/SA0109.pdf>



# POLITICAL OPPORTUNISM IN TIMES OF TRAGEDY

**Nativist groups have always exercised a degree of adaptability and political opportunism, shifting the frame to tap into the anxieties of the moment—law and order, economic scarcity, national security.**

A series of events in 2015 demonstrate clearly how tragedies and terror can feed these tactics and bring extremist policies into the mainstream.

In July, a woman was killed in San Francisco by an undocumented immigrant who had recently been released from a San Francisco jail. In response to the horrific action of one individual, anti-immigrant groups quickly seized the opportunity to advance their ongoing efforts to criminalize and deport undocumented immigrants. These groups framed the tragic killing as a result of “sanctuary cities” and lax enforcement of immigration laws. In response, the US House of Representatives passed H.R.3009, which would punish cities for enacting policies that limit collaboration with federal immigration enforcement agents.

Also in July 2015, a young man who happened to be foreign-born and Muslim shot and killed five military service members in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Representative Judd Matheny, a co-sponsor of much of the anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim legislation already discussed, quickly seized the opportunity to justify his legislative efforts over the years, and called for an increased focus on stopping radical Islam in the 2016 legislative session. The shooting in Chattanooga occurred in the context of an uptick in Islamophobia across the country, which included armed demonstrations outside of an Arizona mosque in May 2015. Following the Chattanooga shooting, Representative Matheny added stopping radical Islam as a core tenet of the emerging states’ rights platform, claiming the federal government couldn’t be trusted to keep Tennesseans safe. In addition to the calls to surveil mosques and profile young Muslim men,<sup>36</sup> there were attempts to draw a connection between the Chattanooga shooting and the refugee resettlement program. While legislators have tried not to associate their anti-refugee policies with Islamophobia in previous years, reframing the campaign to limit or end refugee resettlement as a matter of national security is starting to gain traction.

In the context of a global refugee crisis and increased pressure for the United States to resettle more refugees, the devastating act of terror in Paris in November 2015 enabled the anti-refugee movement in Tennessee and across the country

to inject its demands and rhetoric into the mainstream. At the time of publication of this report, more than half of the governors in the United States have called for a suspension of the resettlement of Syrian refugees, presidential candidates are calling for egregious violations of civil liberties by monitoring mosques or creating national databases for Muslims, and similar measures are being debated in Congress. In Tennessee, failed anti-refugee legislation from years past is being reintroduced, in hopes that heightened fear and insecurity have created better conditions to pass

them. Just days after the tragic shooting in Paris, Senator Ketron issued a statement announcing his intentions to re-file a bill tracking the costs of refugees. He said in his statement, “I have been very concerned

for many years that what happened in Paris, could happen here because of the lack of transparency and accountability regarding the federal government’s refugee resettlement program... I am encouraged that now that others recognize the dangers of this practice that it can be stopped.”<sup>37</sup>

**MORE THAN HALF OF THE GOVERNORS  
IN THE UNITED STATES HAVE  
CALLED FOR A SUSPENSION OF THE  
RESETTLEMENT OF SYRIAN REFUGEES.**

<sup>36</sup> Center for Security Policy, “Tennessee State Rep. Judd Matheny on Jihad in America,” July 25, 2015. <https://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/2015/07/25/sfr-is-with-tn-state-rep-judd-matheny/>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.senatorbillketron.com/2015/11/ketron-drafting-legislation-calling-for-transparency-in-federal-refugee-resettlement-program/>

# STRATEGIES TO WIN AND LESSONS LEARNED

While the situation is fluid and evolving nationally and in Tennessee, there are some important lessons to draw from Tennessee's experience up to this point.





# 1. BUILD POWER FOR THE LONG TERM

Strategies to combat xenophobic policies and build a more welcoming and inclusive Tennessee have developed in one of the most hostile climates in the country. In 2008 alone, more than 60 anti-immigrant bills were introduced in the state legislature, undocumented residents lived under the threat of deportation as the Nashville Sheriff's office entered its second year participating in the 287(g) program, and the Islamic Center of Columbia was firebombed. Against this backdrop, communities in Tennessee have learned to build power while playing defense, which is to say they have come to see specific threats as opportunities for grassroots organizing, and to recognize the deeper and broader motives behind those threats as opportunities for meaningful coalition building.

For example, the 2008 attack on the Islamic Center of Columbia galvanized an interfaith movement in Middle Tennessee, and the Center's president went on to found the Faith and Culture Center and its "Our Muslim Neighbor" project, a collaborative effort built around the principles of collective impact and focused on challenging Islamophobia in the public dialogue. The attack on Nashville's Al-Farooq mosque in 2010 was the catalyst for relationship building between Muslims and other faith leaders in the neighborhood, as well as between Somali elders, city officials, and law enforcement. When the mosque was vandalized again almost exactly three years later, it was clear that while the act of violence was the same, it had occurred in a transformed community.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the best example of turning an external threat into an organizing victory came in 2011 when the anti-Shariah bill was presented in the legislature. A statewide committee that first formed in 2010 to counter anti-Muslim rhetoric in the media was effectively repurposed to lead the 2011 legislative fight against the anti-Shariah bill. That year, over a thousand Muslims entered the doors of Legislative Plaza for the very first time, and the energy of those few weeks politicized hundreds of new leaders and inspired the founding of at least two new organizations, the American Center for Outreach and the American Muslim Advisory Council.

But communities must also build the capacity to defend their successes. Much of the xenophobic backlash communities



have experienced in Tennessee is a predictable response to demographic change and cultural uncertainty, a phenomenon seen time and again in our nation's history of immigration. But some of the specific, organized attacks have been a more direct reaction to advocacy and organizing victories, the by-product of visible success. The driver-license victory in 2001 prompted a coordinated response from a handful of lawmakers, social conservatives, and talk-radio hosts, and the coalition supporting inclusive policies was not yet strong enough to withstand it. Similarly, the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative achieved wide recognition in Nashville, and international attention through the Independent Lens distribution of *Welcome to Shelbyville*. State Senator Jim Tracy, representing Shelbyville, saw an opportunity to build on the visibility of the film, and proposed the "Absorptive Capacity Act" as a way to publicly resist the welcoming message and further resettlement in the state.

The vision and leadership of immigrants and refugees themselves drive the advocacy agenda. Campaigns to stop anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim policies have succeeded because of the effective organizing of immigrant communities and the sustained civic engagement of immigrant and refugee leaders. In addition to community organizing and institution building through campaigns, organizations have been building a culture of civic engagement in their communities, leading advocacy campaigns, registering new citizens to vote, and getting new voters to the polls in large numbers. As the immigrant and refugee community has grown in Tennessee, so too has its political power. The result is that its capacity to respond to threats has increased significantly, the number of negative proposals introduced in the state legislature has dropped to just a handful each year, and advocates have actually found the political space to introduce positive proposals instead.

<sup>38</sup> Adam Tamburin and Brian Wilson, "Nashville Mosque Vandalized Second Time," *The Tennessean*, February 12, 2013. <http://archive.tennessean.com/article/20130212/NEWS06/302120049/Nashville-mosque-vandalized-second-time>



## 2. DON'T WAIT, PREPARE FOR BACKLASH

While Tennessee provides many lessons about how to respond to backlash in a way that builds stronger communities, local governments and communities need not wait for a specific legislative attack or tragic event to begin preparations.

Many cities and counties are undergoing similar demographic change, and minor occurrences of xenophobic or Islamophobic sentiment can quickly devolve into a public campaign against immigrants, refugees, or Muslims, especially if outside organizations take notice and get involved. The best defense is to begin the proactive work of developing durable relationships between newcomers and local institutions, providing less fertile ground for those who seek to convert uncertainty and unfamiliarity into fear and hostility.

Even if your community has never faced a visible backlash, it is possible to anticipate the form it may take and contemplate a response, borrowing from the tools and resources developed by others in the field. When a backlash does occur, one does not have to look far to find others who have dealt or are dealing with a similar challenge, often times the exact same piece of legislation or a very comparable set of circumstances. For example, after the tragic shooting in Chattanooga in July 2015, when an individual who was both foreign-born and Muslim shot and killed five military servicemen, Muslim communities braced themselves for backlash and knew their entire community would be viewed with suspicion and hostility, even though they had no affiliation with the shooter. Realizing that they weren't alone in this experience, community leaders in Chattanooga connected with community leaders in Boston to learn from their experience responding to the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013.

It's critical that we invest in building our collective capacity to counter anti-refugee, anti-Muslim, and anti-immigrant activity across the country by sharing resources and tools and building a national movement to create welcoming and inclusive communities.

## 3. ENGAGE RECEIVING COMMUNITIES

One of the fundamental principles of this work is that you cannot combat fear-mongering—and the harmful policies misinformed by it—without first acknowledging the underlying fear itself. It is a reasonable instinct to respond to an influx of newcomers with fear and uncertainty, and most Tennesseans have very little context to interpret the demographic changes taking place around them. If communities don't create enough public space to contextualize and normalize these fears, they are nothing but fodder for those who seek to exploit them for political or ideological gain. After years of uphill battles at the state legislature, TIRRC recognized that a long-term strategy to counter these recurring proposals required shifting the political climate and public understanding.

In 2005, TIRRC founded the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative (WTI) as a proactive communications campaign to create spaces for constructive dialogue on immigration, restore civility to the immigration debate, and highlight the contributions that immigrants and refugees make. WTI is based on the idea that Tennessee is a fundamentally welcoming and hospitable place, and that Tennesseans from all walks of life can better understand the nature of the state's changing demographics when provided some political and historical context. WTI uses a multi-pronged approach that includes direct public education, traditional and social media, and community organizing, all with the purpose of starting conversations, dispelling common myths, and lifting up the positive aspects of immigration.

Over the last ten years, the capacity of individuals and organizations to conduct this kind of “hearts and minds” work has expanded in Tennessee. Interfaith organizations like the Faith and Culture Center, with their Our Muslim Neighbor initiative, have emerged as key players in combatting Islamophobia and increasing understanding. Similarly, organizations and campaigns have developed to address misconceptions and shift the climate and culture within public institutions. For example, the American Muslim Advisory Council works to build understanding between Muslim communities and law enforcement.

## 4. SHAPE THE NARRATIVE

In addition to directly engaging receiving communities in conversations about demographic change, developing and investing in strategic communications has been critical to holding the line against anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim policies. The media plays an important role in shaping how Tennesseans process the growth of the immigrant and refugee population—from sensationalist reporting on “Islamville,” to countless hours of talk-radio programs stoking fears and anxieties, to the stories highlighting the positive contributions of refugees or making the connection between anti-Muslim activists and anti-refugee policies.

For example, in the summer of 2013 when the hearing was called to study the “federal cost-shifting of refugees,” it became clear that the legislators involved were going to portray the committee as an act of fiscal responsibility and would frame refugee resettlement as a drain on state resources. Through the public hearing, TIRRC challenged the framework and demanded that if the committee was calculating the total cost of investing in refugee resettlement, they must also calculate the economic contributions that refugees make to the state. The coalition organized former refugees to offer their testimony during the hearing, sharing stories of their successful resettlement and how they had started businesses and created jobs in the community. This more expansive calculation of the economic impact of refugee resettlement ultimately defined the parameters for the study that found that from 1990 to 2014, refugees and their descendants had actually contributed \$1.4 billion in revenue to the state, compared to only \$753 million in “costs.” In the end, instead of framing refugees as a burden to the state, the media coverage of the hearings centered on the positive economic contributions that refugees made and the connection between the anti-refugee hearings and the state’s recent history of organized Islamophobia.

Another important lesson learned is that a bill need not become law to be harmful. Whether or not the anti-Shariah bill that passed in 2011 meaningfully changed how Tennessee Muslims experience anti-terrorism laws, the months of debates on the bill reinforced the perception that Tennessee’s growing Muslim population must be viewed with suspicion, thus creating the political space for additional Islamophobic policy proposals.

Over time, as media stories and legislative debates cast suspicion on the foreign-born and Muslim communities, policies that were once considered fringe may begin to be taken more seriously. In addition to effective legislative advocacy and organizing, a parallel communications strategy is needed to make sure negative stereotypes are countered at every turn and extremist voices are actively marginalized.







## 5. MARGINALIZE EXTREME VOICES

Over the past decade, a handful of individuals and organizations have been behind more than 100 anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim bills in Tennessee. In an effort to build support for their extreme policies, they have frequently shifted the focus and rationale for their proposals to capitalize on whatever is most politically expedient at the moment. They may target undocumented immigrants, Muslims, or refugees, or focus on law and order, economic scarcity, or national security. But they always play off of the fear and anxiety in receiving communities, and pitch variations of anti-immigrant policies as the solution to all of the state's problems.

A critical defensive strategy in Tennessee has been to create a wedge between moderate and extreme forces in the state by exposing the underlying intentions of the legislation and marginalizing its proponents. While the sponsors of legislation will attempt to mainstream their ideas and put them forward as tailored solutions to a unique problem in Tennessee, advocates make visible the connections between extremist groups and proposed legislation and link specific policies to the ongoing campaign against foreign-born communities.

National visibility and embarrassment can also act as a moderating force. Shining a light on extremist legislators and highlighting the potential damage to the state's reputation can create a countervailing force, and sometimes the necessary motivation for party leaders to apply pressure on their own peers to take a step back. While these efforts may temporarily cast the state in an unflattering light—and perhaps lead those observing from afar to conclude that extremist views are more reflective of the population than they are—these tactics have proven successful in marking the distance between extremists and the moderate middle, and in preventing harmful proposals from turning into devastating laws. The research and resources on organized nativism from groups like the Center for New Community and the Southern Poverty Law Center have been critical resources for advocates in Tennessee in drawing these connections.

The risk of extreme views and policies becoming mainstream is especially true in the wake of tragedies. After the attacks in Paris in November 2015, anti-refugee legislators in Tennessee announced their intentions to re-file the same legislation that failed to pass in 2013, 2014, and 2015. While Tennesseans try to make sense of their changing communities and resolve their fears and anxiety about terrorism, legislators have found more fertile ground to further their long-standing xenophobic agenda. It is critical for advocates to challenge emotional reactions in the face of terror that would scapegoat refugees and Muslims. While the proponents of legislation in 2016 and beyond will undoubtedly point to current events and recent tragedies as a justification for their policies, advocates must expose the nativist groups that have been pushing this agenda for many years.



# LOOKING AHEAD

For over a decade, immigrant and refugee communities in Tennessee have been up against some of the nation's harshest anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, and anti-Muslim policies. The key to success in Tennessee has been building a united movement to counter all forms of xenophobia, across lines of difference.

In many parts of the country, anti-Muslim sentiment has been treated as a question of religious freedom, not of immigration, and many in the immigrant rights movement have failed to see countering Islamophobia as core to their mission. Similarly, in many states there remains a separation in the field between immigrant rights advocates and refugee resettlement agencies. Success in Tennessee has depended on diverse communities coming together to protect one another and lay bare the nativist and xenophobic roots beneath the backlash.

Immigrant and refugee communities in Tennessee successfully counter xenophobia by intentionally building capacity and strengthening the movement through each legislative campaign. There is now greater capacity to challenge specific harmful policies as they are introduced, and to shift the narrative and transform the political climate in the long run. As a result, communities are better prepared to weather inevitable cycles of opportunism and marginalization, and to move forward a vision of resilience and inclusion.



## RESOURCES

### COMBATING THE ANTI-REFUGEE BACKLASH

**“Resettlement at Risk: Meeting Emerging Challenges to Refugee Resettlement in Local Communities.”** This 2013 report, written by Melanie Nezer from HIAS, explores the emergence of the anti-refugee backlash, including profiles in Georgia, New Hampshire, and Tennessee. [https://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/resettlement\\_at\\_risk\\_1.pdf](https://www.hias.org/sites/default/files/resettlement_at_risk_1.pdf)

**Welcoming America.** Welcoming America has produced resources and tools to equip local governments and non-profit organizations to counter anti-refugee sentiment and build more welcoming communities. [www.welcomingamerica.org](http://www.welcomingamerica.org)

**Welcome to Shelbyville:** This 2009 documentary profiles the work of the Welcoming Tennessee Initiative in Shelbyville as an example of the changing face of small-town America, and how receiving communities play an integral role in creating a welcoming environment for immigrant neighbors.

### UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZED NATIVISM

To learn more about the organizations and individuals behind nativist activity, check out the resources offered by these national groups:

**Center for American Progress:** [www.americanprogress.org](http://www.americanprogress.org)

**Center for New Community:** [www.newcomm.org](http://www.newcomm.org)

**Southern Poverty Law Center:** [www.splcenter.org](http://www.splcenter.org)

### SUPPORTING REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

Check out these organizations to connect with national resettlement agencies and advocacy efforts:

**Church World Service:** [www.cwsglobal.org](http://www.cwsglobal.org)

**HIAS:** [www.hias.org](http://www.hias.org)

**Refugee Council USA:** [www.rcusa.org](http://www.rcusa.org)



