

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER

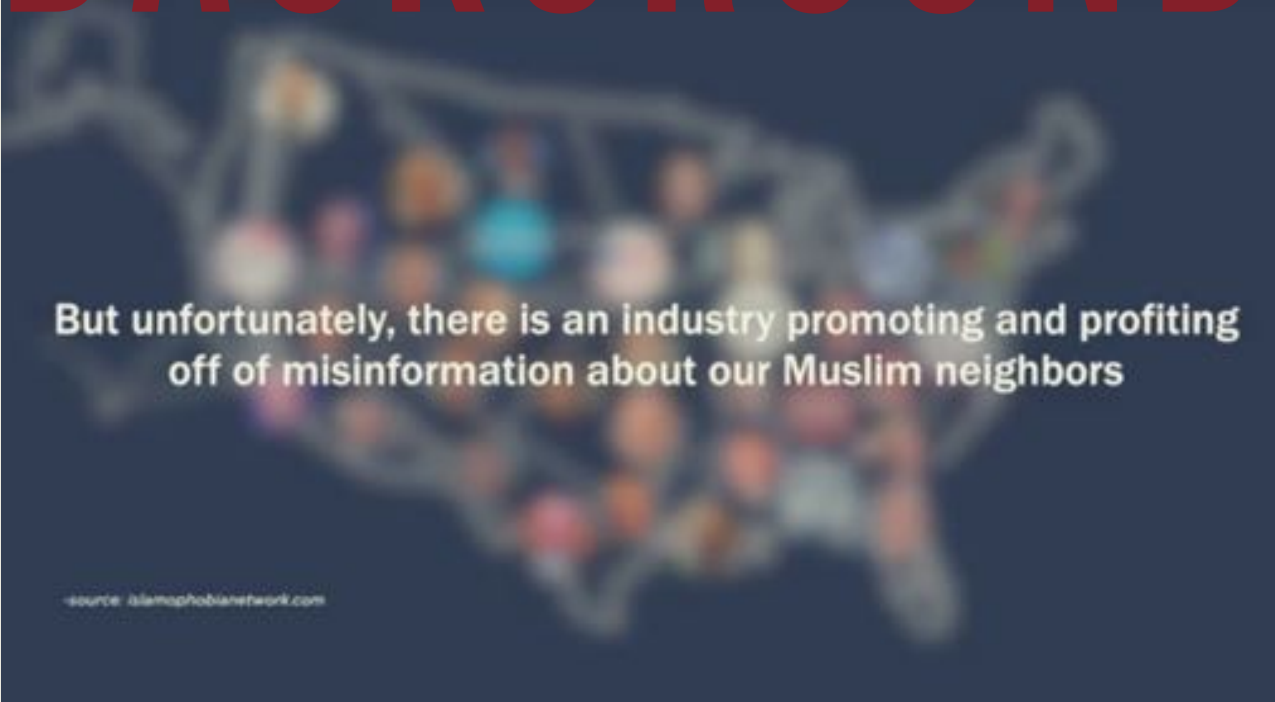
Standing with American Muslims. Advancing American Ideals.

GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING AND CONFRONTING THE ANTI-SHARIA MOVEMENT



Published September 20, 2018

BACKGROUND



But unfortunately, there is an industry promoting and profiting off of misinformation about our Muslim neighbors

source: islamophobicnetwork.com

THIS GUIDE IS MEANT TO HELP PEOPLE FROM FAITH COMMUNITIES WHO ARE INTERESTED IN PUSHING BACK AGAINST THIS PARTICULAR MANIFESTATION OF ISLAMOPHOBIA.

In the last decade, a number of individuals, organizations and political actors have taken it upon themselves to push for banning Sharia from the United States. Beyond rhetoric, a number of states have considered or passed anti-foreign law bills. This trend morphed from previous attempts to pass anti-Sharia legislation, because targeting a particular

religion is unconstitutional (determined by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2012). However, these anti-foreign law bills are clearly targeted at Muslim communities and are, as many state, “a solution in search of a problem.” The Center for American Progress (CAP) has published a good report on the history and scope of this trend—follow this link to read more.



WHAT IS SHARIA, ANYWAY?

Sharia is an Arabic word that means, literally, “path” or “way,” rather than “law.” Within an Islamic context, it refers to a broad body of teachings about how people of faith should live out their commitment to God. It’s about a way of life, not a code of laws, and Sharia as a concept is far more philosophical than it is legal. The prescriptions for this way of life are drawn from the Qur’an- the holy book of Islam- and the Hadith - the documented



PATH



WAY

DO THINGS FOR THE LOVE OF GOD

teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. Different humans have pulled out different interpretations of these teachings (this process is called “fiqh”) and there are several accepted bodies of interpretation. You can read much more about this here, here, and here, but what’s important to understand is that Sharia refers to the overarching, philosophical idea of living a life that is pleasing to God.



Who is trying to ban it, and why?

Anti-Muslim organizations have spread the false idea that American Muslims have interest in “establishing Sharia” in the United States, and have used this falsehood as the basis for mobilizing politicians and voters to try to “ban Sharia.”

For Muslims in the United States, “following Sharia” includes anything from how they conduct their five daily prayers to being kind to someone because it is part of what it means to honor God. Muslims in the United States- like other religious groups in the United States- accept and respect the Constitution and laws of this country, and identify strongly with their identity as Americans (ISPU American Muslim Poll 2016).

What’s the impact of these anti-Sharia efforts?

In short, these efforts are meant to create fear about Muslims, and therefore have an impact on our Muslim neighbors who are viewed with suspicion because of the spread of misinformation. And, it unfairly restricts the rights of Muslims by infringing on their religious freedom.





Legal pushback against anti-foreign law or anti-Sharia efforts

The American Bar Association issued an official resolution against anti-Sharia and anti-foreign law legislation (follow this link: <http://goo.gl/6VyRlx>). Additionally, many legal scholars have written on the ways in which these laws are legally unnecessary, potentially a threat to multiple religious communities, and are by-and-large bigoted fear-mongering efforts. Additionally, a number of legal scholars have written review papers and opinion pieces in response to this trend, including Eugene Volokh in the Oklahoma Law Review (<http://goo.gl/gDKM9S>) and Paul Horwitz, a University of Alabama Constitutional law professor, who wrote a white paper on the issue and several opinion pieces in the lead up to the 2014 elections: <http://goo.gl/LBSPrS>, and <http://goo.gl/btG1p9>



HOW CAN FAITH GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS PUSH BACK?

It is important for faith communities, in partnership with Muslim organizations and communities, to push back against these efforts. What this pushback looks like depends on the context, but here is a case study example from Alabama showcasing some of the tactics and messaging

Sen. Gerald Allen (R-21) proposed Alabama Amendment One in 2013. He had initially proposed the Alabama “Sharia Law Amendment” in 2011, but it was not included on the 2012 ballot, as this was deemed unconstitutional. He has thus stripped the proposal of language specifically referring to Sharia. The Alabama Senate and House both passed the bill in Spring 2013, and the amendment passed by popular vote in the fall 2014 election. However, an organized force of diverse religious leaders collaborated to run a campaign against the Amendment, demonstrating that, regardless of the outcome of the election, anti-foreign law legislation does not align with common American or religious values.

The US constitution is set up to prevent the unfair targeting of a particular religious group based on their identity as such. Thus, when legislation targets a particular religion, regardless of whether it is explicit or disguised in non-religious language, it is a threat to the values of religious freedom on which the United States was established. Because of this, anti-foreign law legislation should be seen as an affront to all religious communities.

- It infringes on religious freedom
- It poses dangers to the private operations of families
- It is an overreach of the power of the state into people’s personal lives
- It unfairly targets faith groups in the state
- Other states and courts have soundly rejected it



The Community Response



Christians against Amendment One Campaign

Christians took a leading role in opposing Amendment One, led by Randy Brinson and the Christian Coalition. The campaign, Christians Against Amendment One, showed the ways in which Amendment One could have negative impacts on issues of concern to many Alabama Christians.

Greater Birmingham Ministries Against Amendment One Campaign

Additionally, other groups, both religious and non-religious, across the state collaborated to educate their networks on the ballot initiative and its potential effects, and to Get Out the Vote across multiple religious communities. While their efforts were not, in the end, successful in preventing the Amendment from passage, the collaborative work demonstrated that religious communities in the US will not simply ignore the ways in which this bigoted legal trend is a threat to all of our values.

The main components of the collaborative multi-faith campaign involved educational efforts, getting out the vote, and speaking into the media coverage of this issue.

Media coverage

The Daily Show with Jon Stewart featured the faith group-led initiative in its coverage of the issue ([linked here](#)). Additionally, ThinkProgress covered the Christian-led efforts ([linked here](#)). The faith-based coalition-led efforts were featured in a number of Alabama publications as well; please contact us for a full clips-packet.

The Alabama work helped lay the groundwork for further collective action against these fear-mongering efforts nationwide. Religious leaders in other states have taken strong stances against anti-foreign law efforts. For example, Rabbi Robin Nafshi wrote an opinion piece in the Concord (NH) Monitor in response to efforts there, and then joined Roman Catholic representatives in testified against the New Hampshire anti-foreign law bill in the House Judiciary Committee hearing. Read Rabbi Nafshi's op-ed [here](#).





You can take action!

1

TRACK LEGISLATION

Track anti-Sharia/anti-foreign law bills in your state and familiarize yourself with which lawmakers are behind them—you can use this map from ISPU, which they update periodically

2

POLITICAL ACTION

It's best to collaborate with or connect with groups that are doing advocacy work at the state level to understand the best ways to push back, since each state is unique—we can help connect you to these partners. In some cases, it would be helpful to make calls to or arrange a visit with elected officials to express your concerns, while in other cases there will be alternative ways to engage political actors on this issue.

3

OP-EDS

Write an op-ed or letter to the editor—this guide is helpful in how to go about writing something like this.

SMALL GROUP STUDIES

Faith Communities

BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Books, fiction and non-fiction, are great ways to learn more and build community understanding

MOVIE'S ABOUT ISLAM

Host a movie night at your house or congregation.

BIBLE STUDY ON YOUR PATH

Dive into how your scriptures and traditions provide guidance on how to live a good and faithful life.

