



SOUTH ASIAN AMERICANS LEADING TOGETHER



**FROM MACACAS TO TURBAN TOPPERS:
THE RISE IN XENOPHOBIC AND RACIST RHETORIC
IN AMERICAN POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

OCTOBER 2010

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
PART I COMMENTS AIMED GENERALLY AT SOUTH ASIAN, MUSLIM, SIKH, AND ARAB AMERICAN COMMUNITIES	4
PART II COMMENTS AIMED AT SOUTH ASIAN CANDIDATES FOR PUBLIC OFFICE	19
PART III TIPS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS RESPONDING TO XENOPHOBIC RHETORIC	22
TIMELINE OF KEY POST-SEPTEMBER 11TH DOMESTIC POLICIES AFFECTING SOUTH ASIAN, MUSLIM, SIKH, AND ARAB AMERICAN COMMUNITIES	25
ENDNOTES	28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Xenophobia and racism have no place in political and civic discourse. Yet, a pattern of such rhetoric continues to exist in America's political environment today. For decades, African Americans and Latinos have been subjected to racist rhetoric in the political sphere. More recently, as this report shows, South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Arab Americans have been the targets of such rhetoric by public officials and political candidates from both sides of the aisle. Even more alarming is the use of xenophobia and racism to stir negative responses against political candidates of South Asian descent.

When political and public figures use xenophobic and racist images and language, the impact is far-reaching. Such actions can foster similar sentiments on the part of the public by perpetuating misconceptions and stereotypes about the communities being targeted. They can also influence support for policies and practices that harm people of color and immigrants. In addition, they can contribute to feelings of marginalization and alienation by minority communities as well as hamper political and civic participation.

Appealing to latent racist attitudes through xenophobic rhetoric may appear to yield short-term political gains. Yet, such a strategy is not only myopic, but also belies this country's long and storied allegiance to pluralism, diversity, and equality.

South Asian Americans Leading Together's (SAALT) report, *From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse*, presents an inventory and analysis of xenophobic rhetoric since September 11, 2001 and calls for a return to civility in the political sphere.

About *From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse*

This report, *From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse*, categorizes and analyzes instances of xenophobic comments in political discourse in two arenas: remarks targeting community members of South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab descent; and remarks targeting candidates of South Asian descent running for public office. While such rhetoric clearly existed in our country's political discourse well before September 11, 2001, SAALT began collecting data and

research about such incidents only after that time, primarily because of their unprecedented frequency as part of the broader backlash against these communities.

Divided into three primary sections, the report touches upon the following themes: (1) documented examples of xenophobic rhetoric, aimed generally at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, or Arab American communities as a whole; (2) documented examples of such rhetoric aimed specifically at South Asian candidates running for elected office; and (3) tips for community members on how to respond to such rhetoric.

Emerging Themes

The first section of the report (remarks aimed broadly at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, or Arab American communities) generally falls into the following categories: those that paint these communities as threats to national security; those that reject the United States as a religiously pluralistic nation; those that portray community members as political liabilities because of their background; and those that cast these communities as perpetual foreigners. In the second section of the report (remarks aimed at South Asian candidates running for public office), similar themes arose through tactics such as attacks on actual or perceived religions; "foreign" sounding names or accents; and the use of darkened images of candidates.

Methodology

SAALT has been gathering, analyzing, and responding to instances of xenophobic rhetoric in the political sphere. The identification and collection of such incidents involved a variety of different methods, including internet searches of newspapers and political blogs; action alerts and announcements by ally South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab American organizations¹ as well as media watchdog entities; and correspondence to SAALT from individuals within the South Asian community. In determining whether a particular remark constituted an instance of xenophobic rhetoric, SAALT assessed whether it relied upon negative generalizations about the South Asian community. Such stereotypes included depictions of South Asian community members as dangerous and violent terrorists, as foreigners "invading" the country and taking away jobs, or simply as not fitting the image of "real" Americans.

It is important to note that the incidents included in this report are intended to provide only a snapshot of the broader types of intolerant rhetoric that exist in political discourse.

Furthermore, while there are numerous instances of media outlets and political commentators relying upon similarly harmful stereotypes of community members, the majority of this report focuses on remarks made by public officials, political candidates, and those entities and individuals formally affiliated with their campaigns. The reason for the narrower scope is because of the unique influence that such individuals hold over shaping not only policies but also the perceptions of the general public.

The Impact of Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in Political Discourse

In political life, the use of language can be instrumental in molding public perceptions and formulating policies. The detrimental effect of xenophobic remarks becomes even more egregious when made by public officials or those running for political office. These individuals have a degree of inherent authority to shape the public dialogue; given that they often have increased access to the media, their remarks are able to command greater attention among the general population. Moreover, their views are perceived not merely as individual personal opinions but can be attributed to entities beyond themselves; for example, a statement of a mayor can be seen as representative of the city government or even the broader electorate within the city.

Xenophobic statements made by public officials and candidates can also cultivate an environment within government where discriminatory policies can garner support. As an example, when public officials make comments stating that the government needs to more closely monitor the immigration of South Asians coming into the country because of the supposed threat that community members pose (as former presidential candidate Mike Huckabee has stated regarding the Pakistani community), they can be seen as endorsing policies that call for additional screening of South Asian travelers returning from trips abroad. Or when an elected official calls for law enforcement to pull over and arrest anyone with a “diaper on his head,” as former Congressman John Cooksey has stated, it sends the message that those who wear turbans are terrorists. Such statements lend false credence to negative stereotypes which can in turn lead to an environment that condones the discrimination of community members at schools and workplaces; racial and religious profiling of individuals based on their appearance; and bias-motivated violence and harassment.

Finally, as a result of these remarks, South Asian community members can feel alienated and isolated within a country that many have called home for decades. For example, when political opponents use epithets such as “raghead” or accuse candidates of having “no roots in our community”, the broader message to South Asians running for office is that they cannot be trusted because they are not “true” Americans. Or when public officials make statements equating a particular religion with terrorism and violence, that faith community’s loyalty and patriotism are automatically placed into question. Such statements vilifying community members can seriously threaten their sense of both safety and belonging in a nation they have helped to build.

Recommendations

The far-ranging impact of xenophobia and racism in civic and political life underscores the need for key stakeholders to call for their elimination and to instead promote dialogue free of the taint of racial and religious stereotypes. SAALT also believes that community members and policymakers should seize this as a moment to highlight ongoing xenophobic statements, actions, and policies occurring in the public sphere.

Based on our cataloguing of the incidents in this report and the impact that they have on community members, SAALT presents several recommendations to key stakeholders, including policymakers, public officials, and political candidates, as well as advocates and concerned community members.

Recommendations to Policymakers, Public Officials, and Political Candidates

- Refrain from making statements based on harmful stereotypes of South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab American communities or candidates (including statements portraying community members as terrorists, uncivilized, economic scapegoats, or un-American)
- Adopt a no-tolerance policy within political parties and government agencies with respect to racist and xenophobic rhetoric
- Take swift action to condemn intolerant rhetoric made by policymakers and political candidates

- Affirmatively issue statements that condemn bias-motivated violence and discrimination against South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab American communities
- Develop relationships and foster dialogues with South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab American constituents to better understand the perspectives, needs, and contributions of community members
- Oppose policies that result in discriminatory treatment and profiling of South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab American communities, including unwarranted screening of community members by immigration authorities and airline security officers, and surveillance of South Asian cultural centers and places of worship
- Support policies that end unequal treatment of South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab American communities, including anti-profiling, anti-discrimination, anti-bias-based bullying, and hate crimes legislation at the federal, state, and local levels

Recommendations to Advocates and Concerned Community Members

- Track and monitor incidents of xenophobia and racism made by public officials or political candidates
- Respond to xenophobic rhetoric by writing letters to individuals and/or entities responsible for such statements and seek clarification or apology
- Write letters to the editor or op-eds in media outlets that have previously covered the remarks in question
- Report such incidents to political parties and organizations such as SAALT

About SAALT

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) is a national, nonpartisan, non-profit organization that elevates the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals and organizations to build a more just and inclusive society in the United States. SAALT is the only national, staffed organization that advocates around issues affecting South Asian

communities through a social justice framework. SAALT's strategies include conducting public policy analysis and advocacy; building partnerships with South Asian organizations and allies; mobilizing communities to take action; and developing leadership for social change. SAALT is also the coordinating entity of the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations, a network of 42 organizations across the country that are rooted in social justice values and empower South Asian communities through social service provision, organizing, advocacy, and community education. **As a nonpartisan organization, SAALT neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate running for public office.**

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SAALT also acknowledges the efforts of our partner organizations within the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations and allies in the African-American, Arab American Asian American and Pacific Islander, Latino, Muslim, Sikh, and South Asian communities working to address xenophobia and racism, including discrimination, hate crimes, and racial and religious profiling.

PART I

COMMENTS AIMED GENERALLY AT SOUTH ASIAN, MUSLIM, SIKH, AND ARAB AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

Similar to other immigrant communities and people of color, South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Arab Americans have often been cast as foreigners within the United States. As a result, community members have borne the burden of having to prove their allegiance and “American-ness” to others. Public officials and political candidates have both perpetuated and exploited this imposed outsider status through xenophobic statements and images. While there is a common underlying message that these communities are not American, several variations upon this theme are generally used, including: (1) portrayals of communities as threats to national security; (2) statements rejecting the United States as a religiously pluralistic nation; (3) portrayals of community members as political liabilities because of their background; and (4) portrayals of community members as perpetual foreigners.

Portrayals of Communities as Threats to National Security

Since September 11, 2001, there has been a documented rise in remarks painting community members as security threats solely based upon their ethnic or religious backgrounds. Repeating an ignominious chapter of American history during which Japanese Americans during World War II were characterized as enemies of the state, so too have South Asians been viewed as undermining national security interests of the United States in the post-September 11th climate. This report identifies several prominent strands, including: (a) statements opposing proposed mosque expansion and construction projects (with a spotlight on the Park51 Muslim community center and Muslim places of worship during the summer of 2010); (b) statements portraying Islam as an inherently “violent” or “uncivilized religion”; (c) statements linking Islam with terrorism; and (d) statements supporting policies of profiling; curbing “homegrown terrorism”; and restricting immigration. While the overwhelming majority of

such comments target Muslims, their impact is not exclusively felt by those practicing Islam, as South Asians of all religious and ethnic backgrounds have been affected by Islamophobia.

Spotlight on Comments Related to Park51 Muslim Community Center and Construction/Expansion Projects of Muslim Places of Worship

During the late summer of 2010, debate across the country focused on the proposed construction of the Park51 Muslim community center in Lower Manhattan. Numerous elected officials and political candidates made statements opposing its establishment because of its perceived proximity to Ground Zero, where the September 11th attacks occurred, and the fact that it was a Muslim center. SAALT documented at least 23 remarks made by members of Congress, governors, local officials, and candidates objecting to its construction.² Comments ranged from calling it “insensitive” to characterizing it as an Islamic “training center” to hearkening fears of “territorial conquest.” Other statements undermined the First Amendment right to freedom of religion by creating apparent exceptions for the proposed center because it would be attended by Muslims. Regardless of individual opinions about where Park51 should be built, in order to have a constructive public debate, elected officials and political candidates should have engaged the issue in a manner that did not demonize Muslims.

Anti-Muslim sentiment in the country, compounded by such rhetoric, was accelerating and its impact was profound. In the wake of the controversy, several hate crimes occurred, including the vicious assault of a Bangladeshi taxicab driver in New York, Ahmed Sharif (whose attacker was a passenger who asked if Sharif was a Muslim) and an attack on a turbaned Sikh convenience store clerk in Washington State (who was punched after being called “al-Qaeda”). Mosques in California, Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, and New York were vandalized³ and Quran burnings were planned in Florida and occurred elsewhere in the country.⁴

Bolstered by the broader anti-Muslim climate fueled by Park51 opponents, public officials and political candidates across the nation began to more vociferously assail mosque construction projects elsewhere in the country (most notably in Murfreesboro, Tennessee) and to use it as a platform to depict Muslims as threats to national security. What began as a local

issue within New York City around Park51 swelled into a national referendum on Muslims and terrorism and rapidly became the cornerstone of various local political campaigns.

Below is a sampling of such comments:

- In September 2010, **Renee Ellmers**, candidate for U.S. Congress in North Carolina in 2010, released a television advertisement regarding Park51.⁵ In the ad, she equated the Muslim developers of Park51 with terrorists, and stated, *"After the Muslims conquered Jerusalem, and Cordoba, and Constantinople they built victory mosques. And, now, they want to build a mosque by Ground Zero."*⁶

“

I'm totally against [Park51]. If I had my way, it would pretty much be over my dead body . . . [t]hat religion is against everything America stands for.

Ron McNeil, Congressional candidate from Florida

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- In August 2010, **Ron McNeil**, who was then running for U.S. Congress in Florida, stated, when asked about Park51, *"I'm totally against it. If I had my way, it would pretty much be over my dead body . . . [t]hat religion is against everything America stands for. If we have to let them build it, make them build it nine stories underground, so we can walk above it as citizens and Christians."*⁷

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You could even argue whether being a Muslim is actually a religion or is it a nationality, way of life or cult.

Ron Ramsey, Tennessee Lieutenant Governor

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- In July 2010, **Tennessee Lieutenant Governor Ron Ramsey**, who was then running for governor, was asked a question by a constituent at a campaign event (during a time when a Muslim community center was potentially to be built in the state), regarding religious freedom and “the threat that’s invading our country from the Muslims.”⁸ Ramsey’s response was captured on video. He stated, *"I'm all about freedom of religion . . . But you cross the line when they start trying to bring Sharia law into the United States . . . You could even argue whether being a Muslim is actually a religion or is it a nationality, way of life or cult, whatever you want to call it. We do protect our religions, but at the same time, this is something that we are going to have to face."*⁹

Ramsey subsequently stated that he had, *"[no] problem - and I don't think anyone in this country has a problem - with peace-loving, freedom-loving Muslims that move to this country and assimilate into our society. But it's undeniable that there is a portion of Islam that's been co-opted by a radical faction that promotes violence not only against Americans but around the world. That's what I'm talking about."*¹⁰

- ◆ In June 2010, **State Senator Diane Black** of Gallatin, Tennessee issued the following statement regarding Park51: *"I will always follow the wisdom of our forefathers as laid down in the Constitution, and that means I believe that all Americans must be free to practice their faith as long it does not threaten other Americans or our national security. I'm very concerned that violent jihadism is becoming the norm, not the exception in too much of Islam today, and American communities have a right to be vigilant in ensuring that Islamic institutions in this country do not aid the jihadist viewpoint."*¹¹

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Until the American Muslim community find it in their hearts to separate themselves from their evil, radical counterparts, to condemn those who want to destroy our civilization and will fight against them, we are not obligated to open our society to any of them.

Lou Ann Zelenik, Congressional candidate from Tennessee

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- In June 2010, while a member of Tennessee’s Rutherford County Planning Commission and candidate for Congress, **Lou Ann Zelenik**, participated in marches opposing Park51¹² and issued a statement through her Congressional campaign that included, *"Let there be no mistake. Lou Ann stands with everyone who is opposed to the idea of an Islamic training center being built in our community. This 'Islamic Center' is not part of a religious movement; it is a political movement designed to fracture the moral and political foundation of middle Tennessee . . . Until the American Muslim community find it in their hearts to separate themselves from their evil, radical counterparts, to condemn those who want to destroy our civilization and will fight against them, we are not obligated to open our society to any of them."*¹³

While local and national community groups urged her to withdraw these statements, Zelenik and her campaign rationalized her inflammatory message by declaring that,

although it had no evidence that the center would stand for such things, her statements and protest against its development were necessary as a stance against Islam's supposed support of arranged marriages, female mutilation, and honor killings. Zelenik's campaign manager added that she "never intended this to even be an issue in the campaign. This has become a larger issue simply because there is so much local concern about this."¹⁴

The mosque is a martyr marker, and it must be stopped.

Ilario Pantano, Congressional candidate from North Carolina

- In June 2010, **Ilario Pantano**, who was then running for Congress in North Carolina, stated, "*The suggestion that this mysteriously funded mosque is anything other than a permanent demonstration of Islam's march on the West is naïve at best. . . . This is about marking religious, ideological and territorial conquest. The mosque is a martyr marker, and it must be stopped.*"¹⁵
- In May 2010, regarding Park51, **Manhattan Community Board Member Paul Sipos** said, "*If the Japanese decided to open a cultural center across from Pearl Harbor, that would be insensitive. If the Germans opened a Bach choral society across from Auschwitz, even after all these years, that would be an insensitive setting. I have absolutely nothing against Islam. I just think: Why there?*"¹⁶

Even among those who purported to espouse First Amendment protections, many urged that the center be built "elsewhere" sending the clear and dangerous message that the right to freedom of religion was not absolute and could be applied selectively. These comments also implied that because Muslims are perceived to be connected to terrorism, anything affiliated with Islam should not be "near" Ground Zero.

- In August 2010, **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid** of Nevada's adviser, Jim Manley, stated, "*The First Amendment protects freedom of religion . . . Senator Reid respects that but thinks that the mosque should be built someplace else.*"¹⁷
- In August 2010, **Senator John McCain** of Arizona, stated that the construction of Park51 "*would harm relations, rather than help.*"¹⁸

- In August 2010, **Governor David Paterson** of New York stated that moving the site of Park51 would be "*a magic moment in our history*" and a "*noble gesture.*"¹⁹

Statements Portraying Islam as an "Inherently Violent" or "Uncivilized" Religion

Another tactic used by certain public officials and political candidates to perpetuate the myth that South Asians jeopardize national security is to cast religions practiced by community members, most notably Islam, as being inherently violent or uncivilized. This reductivism creates a misperception that a certain religion's views are based on the destruction of the United States. Examples include claims that "[Muslims] don't even blink at killing their own wives"; "Islam's strategy [is] to annihilate the Western culture"; and "terrorists drive taxicabs in the daytime and kill at night." Statements that categorically label minority faith communities as the "enemy" determined to harm Americans effectively dehumanize adherents and can make it easier for bigotry, violence, and discrimination to occur without question.

Below is a sampling of statements portraying Islam as "inherently violent" or "uncivilized."

The Quran makes worthless toilet paper. I like desecrating their holy stuff.

- In March 2010, **Congresswoman Sue Myrick** of Charlotte, North Carolina issued a mailing on campaign letterhead urging supporters to attend a conference held by the organization Act! For America.²⁰ Act! For America's leaders have made anti-Muslim comments, such as, "*Their foot baths, I love pissing in them... The Quran makes worthless toilet paper. It just kind of scratches my ass a little bit... To me, I like desecrating their holy stuff.*" Other statements of the organization included sentiments that an American Muslim "*cannot be a loyal citizen;*" Islam is the "*real enemy;*" "*[e]very practicing Muslim is a radical Muslim;*" and "*Islam is the problem.*"²¹
- In January 2010, **Lancaster City Council Chair Sherry Marquez**, in discussing an incident where a Muslim man murdered his wife in New York, stated, "*This is what the Muslim religion is all about – the beheadings, honor killings*

*are just the beginning of what is to come in the USA ... We are told this is a small majority of Muslims in America, but it is truly what they are all about... You disrespect/dishonor them or their religion and you should die (they don't even blink at killing their own wives/daughters, because they are justified by their religion)."*²²

- In June 2008, Imam Yahya Hendi, a Muslim cleric from Georgetown University, was invited to speak at a voluntary school club meeting at Urbana High School in Frederick, Maryland. Several parents at the school expressed concern about the presence of a Muslim speaker. **Joe Chmelik**, a candidate for Frederick County's Board of Education, stated the following in response to this incident: "*[Muslims] are the masters of the death squad and they are good at it. I'm sure this is why parents are upset.*"²³

They [Muslims] will lie to you, and they will not tell you the truth because it is not a sin for a Muslim to lie to an infidel.

Sonny Landham, Congressional candidate from Kentucky

- On July 24, 2008, during the radio show *The Weekly Filibuster*, while running as the U.S. Senate candidate for the Libertarian Party in Kentucky, **Sonny Landham** stated: "*The Arabs, the camel dung-shovelers, the camel jockeys, whichever you wanna call 'em, are terrorists.*" He added: "*There has been a holy war going for thousands, and thousands, thousands of years... They [Muslims] will lie to you, and they will not tell you the truth because it is not a sin for a Muslim to lie to an infidel.*"²⁴ The Libertarian Party withdrew its endorsement of Landham soon after he made these remarks.²⁵
- On July 21, 2008, during a conference sponsored by the Florida Republican Party, a surrogate for presidential candidate Senator John McCain from Arizona, **Colonel Bud Day**, stated: "*The Muslims have said either we kneel or they're going to kill us. I don't intend to kneel and I don't advocate to anybody that we kneel and John [McCain] doesn't advocate to anybody that we kneel.*"²⁶ When asked for a response to these comments, McCain's campaign stated, "*The threat we face is from radical Islamic extremism.*"²⁷
- In July 2008, *FrontPage*, an online political magazine, interviewed **Vijay Kumar**, a candidate who ran in Tennessee's Congressional primary race in 2008 and 2010.

During the interview, Kumar discussed his choice to run on an anti-Sharia platform during which he voiced several concerning statements about the Muslim community. He portrayed civil rights organization, Council on Islamic-American Relations (CAIR), as "*just one part of Islam's strategy to annihilate the Western culture.*"²⁸ Kumar went on to label several predominantly Muslim countries, including Pakistan, as part of the "Axis of Evil" who are enemies of the United States and urged that the Western nations be vigilant about "Islamofascism."²⁹

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The United States is up against "a faceless enemy" of terrorists who "drive taxicabs in the daytime and kill at night.

Conrad Burns, U.S. Senator from Montana

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- In August 2006, former **U.S. Senator Conrad Burns** from Montana, commented, while still in office, that the United States is up against "*a faceless enemy*" of terrorists who "*drive taxicabs in the daytime and kill at night.*"³⁰ In an attempt to clarify the statement, Burns' spokesperson said, "*The point is there are terrorists that live amongst us. Not only here, but in Britain and the entire world. Whether they are taxi drivers or investment bankers, the fact remains that this is a new type of enemy.*"³¹

Burns had previously made inflammatory statements about immigrants. He referred to his handyman as a "*nice little Guatemalan man*" and made jokes about asking for his green card.³² He has also called Arabs "*ragheads*" when speaking about increased oil prices.³³

- In December 2007, **John Deady**, the former co-chairman of New Hampshire's Veterans for Rudy, which supported former New York City mayor and presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani's campaign, stated in an interview with *The Guardian* that Giuliani had "*the knowledge and judgment to attack one of the most difficult problems in current history. And that is the rise of the Muslims. And make no mistake about it, this hasn't happened for a thousand years...we need to keep the feet to the fire and keep pressing these people 'til we defeat them or chase them back to their caves, or in other words, get rid of them.*"³⁴

When later asked if he stood by his earlier statements, Deady replied, "*I most assuredly do. I've been very concerned about this Muslim thing for quite a while. The average American does not know beans about what the Muslims are about. I am talking about the Muslims in*

general. I don't subscribe to the principle that there are good Muslims and bad Muslims. They're all Muslims." He then went on to say, referring to Muslims, "We can't afford to say, 'We'll try diplomacy.' They don't respond to it. If you look into Islamic tradition, a treaty is only good for five years. We're not dealing with a rational mindset here. We're dealing with madmen."³⁵ Following these remarks, Deady resigned from Giuliani's presidential campaign.

Statements Linking Islam with Terrorism

A slightly more subtle yet equally pernicious form of xenophobic rhetoric involves those statements linking certain faiths, particularly Islam, with terrorism. While such comments may not explicitly call a religion "intrinsically violent", there is other terminology used that essentially achieves the same result. For example, public officials and elected candidates may employ words such as "Islamofascism", "Islamic terrorism" or "jihad" to convey a similar meaning. In addition, some public officials and political candidates may proclaim that not all Muslims are terrorists but will conversely state that all terrorists are Muslim. Furthermore, the use of this language establishes a dangerous dichotomy between "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims" where the former group is expected to undertake extraordinary efforts to prove their loyalty to this country.

Below is a sampling of remarks equating Islam with terrorism.

- In May 2010, **Massachusetts State Treasurer Timothy P. Cahill** derided Governor Deval Patrick for attending a forum at a mosque. Cahill accused Patrick of "*pandering to special interest groups*" and called for Patrick to urge leaders of the Muslim community to "*finally police the 'rogue elements' responsible for terrorism.*"³⁶
- In October 2009, **U.S. Representatives Sue Myrick** of North Carolina, **John Shadegg** of Arizona, **Paul Broun** of Georgia, and **Trent Franks** of Arizona highlighted a book entitled *Muslim Mafia: Inside the Secret Underworld that's Conspiring to Islamize America* in calling for an investigation into the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and possible links to Congressional interns who are Muslim as part of a plot to undermine national security.³⁷ These members of Congress stated, "*It's frightening to think that an organization [CAIR] with clear-cut ties to terrorism could have a hand in influencing policy – especially national security policy – within our government.*"³⁸

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There is a "grand Jihad" that is "eliminating and destroying the western civilization from within."
Dorrie O'Brien, Republican Party precinct judge from Texas
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- In May 2009, Republican Party precinct judge **Dorrie O'Brien** of Texas stated that most Muslims are terrorists and want to overthrow America and that there is a "*grand Jihad*" that is "*eliminating and destroying the western civilization from within.*"³⁹ She said that Muslims are engaged in a "*stealth jihad*" and are infiltrating schools, government, and the military.⁴⁰
- In September and October 2008, comments were made on the campaign trail of presidential candidate **Senator John McCain** from Arizona about his opponent, Senator Barack Obama, portraying the latter as untrustworthy because he was perceived to be Muslim, Arab, or a "*foreigner.*"

On October 10, 2008, at a political rally in support of McCain, campaign volunteer **Gayle Quinnel** made the following remarks to the candidate into the microphone:

*"I can't trust Obama. I have read about him and he's not, he's not uh — he's an Arab. He's not —"*⁴¹ She was immediately cut off by McCain, who said the following, "*No, ma'am. He's a decent family man [and] citizen that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues and that's what this campaign's all about. He's not [an Arab]."*⁴²

Following the rally, Quinnel stated in an interview that she obtained information about Obama being an "*Arab terrorist*" from her local library and a pamphlet at a local McCain campaign office provided by a fellow volunteer. The pamphlet was not a part of official campaign materials.⁴³

- On September 4, 2008, during the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota, former New York **Mayor Rudy Giuliani** and former **Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney** made several remarks that used terminology linking Islam with terrorism.

Giuliani said: "*For four days in Denver, the Democrats were afraid to use the words 'Islamic terrorism.' I imagine they believe it is politically incorrect to say it. I think they believe it will insult someone. Please, tell me, who are they insulting, if they say 'Islamic terrorism?' They are insulting*

terrorists."⁴⁴ Romney remarked, "John McCain hit the nail on the head: radical violent Islam is evil, and he will defeat it!"⁴⁵

- On July 21, 2008, **Congressman Mike Rogers** from Michigan posted an animated video on his website, summarizing his energy independence plan. One segment of the video discussed and portrayed the nature of oil importation in a highly stereotyped manner. The section in question stated: "We [Americans] import millions of barrels of oil a month from all over the world and these countries are using American money to expand their military, manipulate elections, and promote terrorism."⁴⁶ This portion of the video includes a caricature of a man wearing what is considered traditional Arab dress in the Middle East. A caption next to the cartoon image states, "Drive the oil prices up! We need more money for Jihad!"⁴⁷ Organizations in the Muslim and Arab American communities condemned the use of such harmful rhetoric and imagery.⁴⁸
- The cover of *The New Yorker* magazine for the July 21, 2008, issue entitled the "Politics of Fear" presented a cartoon of then-presidential candidate Barack Obama and his wife, Michelle. Obama was dressed in a turban and bumping fists with his wife, who was wearing military attire with a gun strapped to her back.⁴⁹ Also depicted in the cartoon was an American flag burning in a fireplace and a portrait of Osama Bin Laden on a wall.⁵⁰

The New Yorker defended the cover entitled "The Politics of Fear" stating that it was a satirized portrayal of the Obamas meant to highlight the issues that they have faced in the election.⁵¹ Muslim community members and organizations across the country expressed concern over this depiction which they believed could reinforce and contribute to the rise in anti-Muslim sentiment across the country and throughout the election cycle.⁵² When asked about the cover, Obama stated that "this is actually an insult against Muslim Americans, something that we don't spend a lot of time talking about. And sometimes I've been derelict in pointing that out."⁵³

- On March 11, 2008, **Congressman Steve King** from Iowa, a ranking member of the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration, Citizenship, Refugees, Border Security and International Law, made comments about presidential candidate Barack Obama. On an Iowa radio station, King said, "[Obama's] middle name [Hussein] does matter...because they read a meaning into that in the rest of the world...They will be dancing in the streets because of

his middle name [and] because of who his father was and because of his posture that says: pull out of the Middle East and pull out of this conflict."⁵⁴

- In 2008 **Florida Attorney General Bill McCollum** required his 500 employees to attend one of three screenings of a controversial video called "Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West" in the State Senate Building. The purported message of the film was to show that "radical Islam" would stop at nothing to destroy the United States. Following the screening, McCollum met with leaders of the Muslim community in Florida to hear their concerns. However, he still maintained that he did not regret showing the film and that if "another one comes along, we'll show it."⁵⁵
- In November 2007, when former Massachusetts presidential candidate and **Governor Mitt Romney** was asked by a columnist whether, if elected President, he would consider a qualified Muslim-American in his Cabinet to address national security issues, he responded, "... based on the numbers of American Muslims [as a percentage] in our population, I cannot see that a Cabinet position would be justified. But of course, I would imagine that Muslims could serve at lower levels of my administration."⁵⁶

Romney later attempted to clarify his remarks, stating, "I don't think that you have to have a Muslim in the Cabinet to be able to take on radical Jihad anymore than during the Second World War we needed to have a Japanese-American to understand the threat that was coming from Japan or something of that nature." He went on to say, "I don't have boxes that I check off as to their ethnicity. It's not that I have to have a certain number of each different ethnic group; instead I would choose people based upon their merits and their capabilities."⁵⁷

- In August 2007, while speaking to a group of voters in Iowa, former presidential candidate and **Congressman Tom Tancredo** said, "If it is up to me, we are going to explain that an attack on this homeland...would be followed by an attack on the holy sites in Mecca and Medina; that is the only thing I can think of that might deter somebody from doing what they would otherwise do. If I am wrong, fine, tell me, and I would be happy to do something else. But you had better find a deterrent, or you will find an attack."⁵⁸

This was reportedly the second time that Tancredo had

made similar remarks referring to dropping bombs on Mecca, a holy site for Muslims, in retaliation for terrorist attacks against the U.S.⁵⁹ State Department Deputy Spokesman Tom Casey labeled Tancredo's comments as "reprehensible" and "absolutely crazy."⁶⁰

- In a letter dated October 24, 2006, **Mary Ann Hogan**,

[Islam is a] hateful and frightening religion. Even if they have gotten citizenship, they are not true Americans in my opinion. They all want to kill us."

Mary Ann Hogan, Republican Party Chair from Florida

former Florida state committeewoman and Republican Party chair, stated in a letter to Hernando County officials that Islam is a "hateful and frightening religion." In a subsequent telephone interview, she said of Muslims: "Even if they have gotten citizenship, they are not true Americans in my opinion. They all want to kill us."⁶¹

Her husband, **Tom Hogan** who was the County Commissioner of Hernando County at the time, supported her statements on October 31, 2006 by saying: "There's a saying out there, and there's some truth to it, that not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslim. It's their thing."⁶² Mr. Hogan had also formerly founded the county's Republican Party and served as the state Republican committeeman.

Then, on November 9, 2006, **Congresswoman Ginny Brown-Waite** from Florida defended Ms. Hogan's letter, stating, "It is an accurate truism that by far and wide not every Muslim is a terrorist, but it's historically accurate that every terrorist has been a Muslim with the one exception of the bombing of the Murrah building by Timothy McVeigh."⁶³

Ms. Hogan sent a letter to the local chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), writing: "Most of my constituents have expressed to me their concern that Muslims living in our community have not disavowed these violent beliefs nor condemned the terrorist acts committed against our country. Your organization has had more than five years since the September 11 attack, and even longer since the attacks on American Embassies in Yemen, Kenya, Tanzania, or even the first attack on the World Trade Center to publicly disavow and condemn these acts."⁶⁴

During a local television interview, Brown-Waite elaborated by saying that she defended these remarks on the grounds of free speech.⁶⁵ Mr. Hogan did not apologize for his comments, which were condemned by local Muslim groups as well as government officials including the state's Governor Jeb Bush,⁶⁶ and the state's Republican Party.⁶⁷ Governor-elect Charlie Crist severed his campaign's relationship with Ms. Hogan.⁶⁸

Statements Supporting Policies of Profiling, Curbing "Homegrown Terrorism" and Restricting Immigration

At the crux of why xenophobic statements from public officials and political candidates are so dangerous is because these individuals are responsible for creating policies that affect all Americans. Since September 11th, discriminatory policies against South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Arab Americans in the United States have been implemented in the name of national security. Examples of such policies and practices include racial and religious profiling through heightened and intrusive searches, interrogation, and seizures of personal property of Sikh and Muslim passengers by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP); targeted surveillance, questioning, and use of informants involving South Asian places of worship, particularly mosques, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); and local law enforcement and immigration authorities targeting those who appear foreign. Profiling is a law enforcement tactic that targets individuals based on characteristics unrelated to suspicious or criminal behavior, such as race, religion, or ethnicity. It is an ineffective national security strategy as it diverts limited law enforcement resources away from identifying those who are true threats and diminishes trust within affected communities. Another more recent trend among national security policymakers is the emphasis on addressing "homegrown terrorism" (allegedly being fostered within segments of the Muslim community in the United States) through infiltration of mosques or prayer groups.

These policies further the misguided notion that national security can only be achieved at the expense of the civil rights and civil liberties of minority populations. They also send the message to law enforcement that those from particular countries or who practice certain faiths are a threat and

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All terrorists are Muslims or Middle Easterners
between the age of 20 and 35.

James Inhofe, U.S. Senator from Oklahoma

should be treated differently. Such policies and statements supporting them can foster feelings of alienation within communities as they are then viewed as “enemies” by the public at large.

Various public officials and political candidates have made statements in support of policies such as racial and religious profiling; curbing “homegrown terrorism” with a focus on South Asian, Muslim, and Arab communities; and targeting immigration enforcement measures on South Asian and Arab nationals. Remarks range from proclaiming “all passengers are not created equally” to “finding out how we can infiltrate [mosques]” to restricting immigration otherwise “there will likely be more Muslims elected.” These comments are particularly egregious when made by individuals who are uniquely influential over the country’s national security policies. Remarks such as these demonstrate that this type of rhetoric is not merely a matter of personal opinion; rather, it clearly enters the realm of curtailing the rights of individuals on the sole basis of ethnic or religious background.

“
All passengers are NOT created equally.

Dan Fanelli, Congressional candidate from Florida

- As part of his Congressional campaign, **Dan Fanelli** encouraged Florida voters to support him because he would ensure the use of racial profiling in airport security screening. In April 2010, Fanelli posted several videos on his website depicting Arab- and South Asian-looking actors as terrorists with an accompanying statement that “*all passengers are NOT created equally.*”⁶⁹ Although his rival candidates and various public advocacy groups condemned the advertisements, Fanelli responded to critics stating that skin color does not matter, and that, although he does support racial profiling, he believes in “racial equality.”⁷⁰
- In January 2010, during a committee hearing about the Fort Hood attacks, **Senator James Inhofe** of Oklahoma stated, “*I believe in racial and ethnic profiling. I think if you're looking at people getting on an airplane and you have X amount of resources to get into it, you need to get at the*

targets, not my wife. And I just think it's something that should be looked into ... all terrorists are Muslims or Middle Easterners between the age of 20 and 35, that's by and large true.”⁷¹

- In May 2008, the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, headed by **Senator Joe Lieberman** from Connecticut and ranking minority member **Senator Susan Collins** of Maine, issued a staff report entitled “*Violent Islamist Extremism, the Internet, and the Homegrown Terrorism Threat.*” The hearing was conducted while “The Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism Prevention Act of 2007” was being considered by Congress. This report included commentary against Islam and Sharia law and identified the Muslim community as particularly prone to radicalization and an ideology that poses a threat to the United States.⁷² The report also included information from a 2007 report issued by the New York Police Department entitled “*Radicalization in the West: A Homegrown Threat,*” which called for additional surveillance and scrutiny over Muslims in the United States.⁷³

Muslim and civil rights organizations responded by remarking on the committee’s failure to invite perspectives from the Muslim community. Concerns were also raised about the report labeling Muslims as especially susceptible to “radicalization,” which can encourage the use of profiling and stereotyping of an entire community, particularly given that Congress was considering a bill on how to combat and prevent terrorism.⁷⁴

- Following the December 2007 assassination of former Pakistani Prime Minister and Prime Ministerial candidate Benazir Bhutto, former presidential candidate and **Governor Mike Huckabee** of Arkansas made statements linking national security concerns to undocumented immigration from Pakistan into the United States. Huckabee went on to state that such immigration and incidents in Pakistan justified the need for a border fence.

At a rally before campaign supporters in Iowa, he remarked, “*In light of what happened in Pakistan yesterday it's interesting that there were more Pakistanis who illegally crossed the border than of any other nationality except for those immediately south of our border – 660 last year.*”⁷⁵ He further added that the United States should “*have an immediate, very clear monitoring of our border, and particularly to make sure, if there's any unusual activity of Pakistanis coming into the country.*”⁷⁶

Huckabee elaborated in subsequent comments, *"When I say single them out I am making the observation that we have more Pakistani illegals coming across our border than all other nationalities except those immediately south of the border. And in light of what is happening in Pakistan it ought to give us pause as to why are so many illegals coming across these borders."* He added, *"The fact is that the immigration issue is not so much about people coming to pick lettuce or make beds, it's about someone coming with a shoulder-fired missile."*⁷⁷

"I fear that... we will have many more Muslims in the United States if we do not adopt strict immigration policies..."

Virgil Goode, Congressman from Virginia

- In December 2006, through a letter to his constituents, while in office, **Congressman Virgil Goode** of Virginia criticized the Minnesotan public for electing Congressman Keith Ellison, an African-American Muslim who planned to be sworn into office using the Quran, as a threat to American values. He went on to call for the restriction of all avenues of immigration, in the letter, where he stated: *"The Muslim representative from Minnesota was elected by the voters of that district and if American citizens don't wake up and adopt the Virgil Goode position on immigration there will likely be many more Muslims elected to office and demanding use of the Koran."*⁷⁸

The letter continued to warn constituents of a supposed threat that Muslims would pose unless immigration were checked: *"I fear that in the next century we will have many more Muslims in the United States if we do not adopt the strict immigration policies that I believe are necessary to preserve the values and beliefs traditional to the United States of America and to prevent our resources from being swamped."*⁷⁹

A spokesman for Speaker Nancy Pelosi called Goode's letter "offensive."⁸⁰ Congressman Bill Pascrell from New Jersey expressed disappointment in Goode's comments and urged him to reach out to the Muslim community in Virginia.⁸¹ Goode's spokesman stated, *"[He] stands by the letter. He has no intention of apologizing."*⁸²

- In September 2006, **Andrea Zinga**, a Congressional candidate for the Seventeenth District in Illinois, made comments in support of racial profiling to the *Associated Press* on her campaign tour, *"Profiling doesn't bother me if we are profiling the people who, with one exception – and that would be Timothy McVeigh – have caused the outrages against our nation and caused the deaths of American citizens. We're talking about Middle Eastern men."*⁸³
- In August 2006, **Mark Flanagan**, candidate for the Congressional seat in the Thirteenth District of Florida, came out in support of profiling, specifically demanding closer screening of Muslims at airports as a way of preventing future attacks. He called profiling 'a tool of war,' and stated: *"Profiling is not about bigotry. It's about history, it's about evidence. It's about common sense. Terrorists are changing their tactics constantly, and they're taking advantage of our failure not to profile."*⁸⁴
- In August 2006, **Paul Nelson**, then running for a Congressional seat in the Third District in Wisconsin, when he was asked about his support of racial profiling and how to identify Muslim males, remarked, *"Well, you know, if he comes in wearing a turban and his name is Mohammed, that's a good start."*⁸⁵

"I'm OK with discrimination against young Arab males from terrorist-producing states. I'm not threatened by people from China. I'm not even threatened by people from Mexico. I just know where the threat is from. It's from a unique place, and I think it's OK to recognize that."

Mark Kirk, Congressman from Illinois

- In December 2005, **Congressman Mark Kirk** from Illinois made statements about feeling threatened by individuals who come from certain parts of the world. These comments included, *"I'm OK with discrimination against young Arab males from terrorist-producing states. I'm OK with that. I think that when we look at the threat that's out there, young men between, say, the ages of 18 and 25 from a couple of countries, I believe a certain amount of intense scrutiny should be placed on them. I'm not threatened by people from China. I'm not even threatened by people from Mexico. I just know where the threat is from. It's from a unique place, and I think it's OK to recognize that."*⁸⁶

- In an interview with *Politico* magazine in September 2007, **Congressman Peter King** from New York stated: *"Unfortunately, we have too many mosques in this country. There are too many people who are sympathetic to radical Islam. We should be looking at them more carefully. We should be finding out how we can infiltrate."* He also went on to state, *"I think there's been a lack of full cooperation from too many people in the Muslim community. And it's a real threat in this country."*⁸⁷
- In August 2006, **Congressman Peter King** from New York, while Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee in the House of Representatives, made remarks condoning racial and religious profiling, stating, *"If the threat is coming from a particular group, I can understand why it would make sense to single them out for further questioning."*⁸⁸

*"If I see someone [who] comes in that's got a diaper on his head and a fan belt wrapped around the diaper on his head, that guy needs to be pulled over."
John Cooksey, former Congressman from Louisiana*

- In 2001, **Congressman John Cooksey** from Louisiana made the following comments, while in office, shortly after September 11th, *"If I see someone [who] comes in that's got a diaper on his head and a fan belt wrapped around the diaper on his head, that guy needs to be pulled over."*⁸⁹ Cooksey's comments were met with criticism from groups around the country but he did not adequately apologize for them.
- During a May 2010 public debate among Connecticut Congressional candidates, **Bridgeport Town Republican Committee Chair Rick Torres** stated in the context of discussing immigration, *"It turns out, folks, they [Muslims] are here, they're among us. We are at war with Islam. I don't tolerate people who are not tolerant."*⁹⁰ Torres later explained further, *"I don't mean to say all Muslims are radicals but they are here and we have to know which ones they are. Talk to us. Be up front with us about where you stand."*⁹¹

Statements Rejecting the United States as a Religiously Pluralistic Nation

Enshrined within the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution is the inalienable right to freedom of religion. In fact, among the pillars of this country's foundation are both acceptance

of a plurality of faiths and separation of church and state. Yet, several public officials and political candidates have made statements that run afoul of these core tenets. The majority of these comments are rooted in the idea that the United States is a "Christian nation" while other comments blatantly disparage other religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam, which are practiced by many South Asians. Examples include public officials claiming that the invocation of a Hindu prayer in Congress "creates problems for the longevity of this country"; opposing the issuance of a postal stamp commemorating the Muslim holiday of Eid; and stating that a city is "a Christian community." Implied in these statements is the message that those who follow certain religions are not welcome in this country and are not American. Furthermore, they can lead affected community members to feel a sense of alienation as they question whether their interests will be robustly represented by their elected officials simply because of views of faith.

Below is a sampling of statements rejecting the notion of the United States as a religiously pluralistic nation:

*"We're growing a Christian community, and don't let anybody shy away from that."
Rex Parris, Mayor of Lancaster, California*

- **Mayor Rex Parris** of Lancaster, California backed a ballot measure endorsing prayers with references to Jesus Christ at city meetings⁹² and stated publicly in January 2010, *"We're growing a Christian community, and don't let anybody shy away from that ... I need [the Lancaster community] standing up and saying we're a Christian community, and we're proud of that."*⁹³ Parris subsequently apologized for his comments, stating, *"I think that communities are robust and vibrant when we do everything we can to facilitate all churches, all religions, all faiths to have a robust, vital part of that community."*⁹⁴
- In September 2009, **Mayor John Piper** of Clarksville, Tennessee circulated an email urging a protest and boycott against the United States Postal Service for issuing a stamp in commemoration of the Muslim holiday Eid.⁹⁵ The email falsely indicated that President Obama had ordered the issuance of the stamp, when, in fact, the stamp was first issued in 2001 under the Bush Administration. Piper stated he did not feel the email was inappropriate and that he intended merely to provide information to others.⁹⁶

- At a rally in Davenport, Iowa, in support of former presidential candidate and Senator John McCain of Arizona, **Arnold Conrad**, former pastor of Grave Evangelical Free Church, issued the following invocation, *"There are millions of people around this world praying to their god — whether it's Hindu, Buddha, Allah — that his [McCain's] opponent wins, for a variety of reasons. And Lord, I pray that you would guard your own reputation because they're going to think that their god is bigger than you if that happens. So I pray that you will step forward and honor your own name in all that happens between now and Election Day."*⁹⁷

McCain's campaign spokesperson, Wendy Riemann, responded to the invocation by stating, *"While we understand the important role that faith plays in informing the votes of Iowans, questions about the religious background of the candidates only serve to distract from the real questions in this race about Barack Obama's judgment, policies and readiness to lead as commander in chief."*⁹⁸

- In June 2008, the Pennsylvania **State** House of Representatives delayed voting on a resolution to recognize a Muslim organization's upcoming convention. Speaker Dennis O'Brien from Butler County presented a two-page resolution to the House that would allow the formal recognition of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community's annual convention. O'Brien stated that the convention's mission was to "increase faith and harmony and introduce various humanitarian, social and religious services."⁹⁹

Fellow Pennsylvania **State Representative Daryl Metcalfe** publicly responded to the resolution on the House floor; *"The Muslims do not recognize Jesus Christ as God and I will be voting negative."*¹⁰⁰ Metcalfe's comments prompted a delay in the resolution's vote.

... since this nation was founded primarily on Christian principles.... personally, I prefer someone who I know who has a solid grounding in my faith. I just feel that that's an important part of our qualifications to lead.

John McCain, U.S. Senator from Arizona

- In September 2007, former presidential candidate and **Senator John McCain** from Arizona remarked in an interview with *Beliefnet.com* that the prospect of a Muslim candidate for President made him uncomfortable. When asked whether a Muslim candidate would be able to lead the country, McCain stated: *"... since this nation was founded primarily on Christian principles.... personally, I prefer someone who I know who has a solid grounding in my faith. But that doesn't mean that I'm sure that someone who is Muslim would not make a good president. I don't say that we would rule out under any circumstances someone of a different faith. I just would--I just feel that that's an important part of our qualifications to lead."*¹⁰¹

McCain later attempted to clarify stating, *"I would vote for a Muslim if he or she was the candidate best able to lead the country and defend our political values."*¹⁰²

We have not only have a Hindu prayer being offered in the Senate, we have a Muslim member of the House of Representatives now, Keith Ellison from Minnesota. Those are changes and they are not what was envisioned by the Founding Fathers.

Bill Sali, former Congressman from Idaho

- While in office, **Congressman Bill Sali** from Idaho made remarks against a prayer offered by a Hindu priest in July 2007 at the beginning of Senate proceedings, stating, *"We have not only have a Hindu prayer being offered in the Senate, we have a Muslim member of the House of Representatives now, Keith Ellison from Minnesota. Those are changes and they are not what was envisioned by the Founding Fathers."* He went on to state that the United States was built on Christian principles, thus when a Hindu prayer is offered, it *"creates problems for the longevity of this country."*¹⁰³
- In November 2006, **Governor Rick Perry** of Texas publicly stated that he agreed with Reverend John Hagee's comment that *"if you live your life and don't confess your sins to God almighty through the authority of Christ...you're going straight to hell with a nonstop ticket."*¹⁰⁴

Statements Portraying Community Members as Political Liabilities Because of Their Background

South Asians, Muslims, Sikhs, and Arab Americans are part of the growing pool of new voters in the United States. In fact, within the South Asian community alone, results from a 2008 exit poll of Asian American voters in various metropolitan areas found that 87% of South Asian voters surveyed were born abroad and that 36% of South Asian voters were casting ballots for the first time.¹⁰⁵ Recognizing the value of the community's vote, political parties have been courting this increasingly influential segment of the electorate through targeted fundraising, canvassing, and voter registration.¹⁰⁶ Yet, simultaneously, there have also been instances of public officials and political candidates distancing themselves from these communities, particularly from those who are Muslim.

Below is a sampling of rhetoric and actions that portrayed community members as political liabilities because of their background:

- **Josh Mandel**, Ohio State Representative and candidate for State Treasurer in 2010, began running television ads in September 2010 accusing his opponent Kevin Boyce of corruption.¹⁰⁷ The advertisement claimed that Boyce "outsourced" work away from Ohio. The ad also referenced a lobbyist with a Muslim name connected to Boyce and stated, "*Boyce gave his wife a sensitive job in the Treasurer's office. A job Boyce admitted he only made available at their mosque.*"¹⁰⁸
- **Ami Bera**, running for Congress in California in 2010, received a \$250 personal check from the Executive Director of the Sacramento chapter of the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR). Following allegations by the California Republican Party and Republican Jewish Coalition that CAIR had ties to Hamas, Bera returned the check to his friend.¹⁰⁹
- On August 4, 2008, just ten days after accepting the position, Mazen Asbahi resigned from his role as the coordinator of Muslim American affairs for **Senator Barack Obama's** presidential campaign, stating that he was stepping down in order "*to avoid distracting from Obama's message of change.*"¹¹⁰

Asbahi's resignation followed an article by the *Wall Street Journal* regarding his previous work on the board of the Dow Jones Islamic Index Fund for a few weeks in 2000. Asbahi resigned from the board as he "became aware of public allegations against another member of the board."¹¹¹

The other board member was Jamal Said, an imam at a mosque in Illinois. The Department of Justice named Said as an unindicted co-conspirator in the 2007 racketeering trial of several alleged Hamas fundraisers, a case that ended in a mistrial. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, the connection between Asbahi and Said was publicized by an Internet newsletter.¹¹²

The Muslim and South Asian communities expressed concern regarding the circumstances surrounding Asbahi's resignation from the Obama campaign. Organizations in the community were disappointed that an individual who was considered qualified for the position and whose reputation had been held in high regard may have been excluded from the position based upon tenuous associations with others through faith-related activities.¹¹³

- Congressman Keith Ellison from Minnesota, who is Muslim, offered to provide his support to **Senator Barack Obama's** 2008 presidential campaign in Iowa. Ellison was scheduled to speak for Obama at a mosque in Cedar Rapids; however, prior to the rally, Ellison was asked by campaign aides to cancel his speech because it "might stir controversy."¹¹⁴ Recalling the conversation that occurred between himself and a campaign aide, "I will never forget the quote. He said, '*We have a very tightly wrapped message.*'"¹¹⁵ By canceling Ellison's speech, Obama was perceived by many within the Muslim community to have made an indirect statement about how his campaign was diminishing the importance of Muslim Americans and did not wish to be affiliated with this community.¹¹⁶

“

...because of the political climate and what's going on in the world and what's going on with Muslim Americans, it's not good for [Aref] to be seen on TV or associated with Obama.

Campaign volunteer at event supporting Barack Obama

”

- At a June 2008 presidential campaign rally in Detroit, Michigan, for **Senator Barack Obama**, two Muslim women wearing hijabs were not allowed to be seated in a "special section" behind the stage and podium. Hebba Aref was with her brother and his friends when they were approached by a campaign volunteer and asked if they would like to sit in the special section. Upon seeing Aref's hijab, the volunteer revoked her invitation to the group, according to a friend of Aref's, by stating: "*...because of the political climate and what's going on in the world and*

what's going on with Muslim Americans, it's not good for [Aref] to be seen on TV or associated with Obama."¹¹⁷

Similarly, when Shima Abdelfadeel entered the arena for the rally, her two non-Muslim friends were approached by campaign volunteers and asked if they would like to sit in the special section. Upon learning that they were with Abdelfadeel, the volunteer said that they could not sit in this area unless she removed her hijab. In an email interview, Abdelfadeel recalled the conversation with the volunteer, *"We're not letting anyone with anything on their heads like baseball [caps] or scarves sit behind the stage,"* she paraphrased the volunteer as saying, *"It has nothing to do with your religion!"*¹¹⁸

Obama subsequently apologized to Abdelfadeel and Aref stating that *"The actions of these volunteers were unacceptable and in no way reflect any policy of my campaign."*¹¹⁹

- On November 18, 2006, **Senator Barbara Boxer** of California wrote a letter to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), commemorating the organization's 10th anniversary and praising its establishment as a "constant support system for the American Muslim community."¹²⁰ Boxer issued a "certificate of accomplishment"¹²¹ to Basim Elkarra, Executive Director of CAIR's San Francisco office "in recognition of his efforts to protect civil liberties and to build bridges among diverse communities in California."¹²²

After the award was issued, Boxer and her staff read an article entitled "Senators for Terror" by columnist Joe Kaufman on the website for *FrontPage Magazine* which decried politicians who support the organization, writing that "CAIR is connected with Islamic extremism"¹²³ and accused Elkarra of "being a radical" for his defense of Islamic Americans in the past.¹²⁴ In his conclusion, Kaufman urged Boxer to rescind the award.¹²⁵

Subsequently, Boxer rescinded the award, stating that the decision to do so followed her staff's research into CAIR and the critical statements regarding the organization made by her colleagues **Senator Dick Durbin** of Illinois and **Senator Charles Schumer** of New York.¹²⁶ Boxer subsequently stated, *"To praise an organization because they haven't been indicted is like somebody saying, 'I'm not a crook.' I'm going to take a lot of hits for this. But I'm just doing what I think is right."*¹²⁷

Many in the Muslim community expressed disappointment with Boxer's actions and statements for being swayed by claims lacking any proof linking a civil rights organization to support for terrorism.¹²⁸

Statements Portraying Community Members as Perpetual Foreigners

The South Asian community has often been treated as the "perpetual foreigner" throughout its history in the United States. Contributing to the perception of South Asians as foreigners has been the public response to outsourcing, marked by racial and ethnic stereotyping, that is often exploited by political campaigns. Dissatisfaction and anxiety about the U.S. economy, coupled with misunderstandings about outsourcing, have led many to scapegoat South Asians, particularly Indians, as a primary reason for the country's economic woes. For example, one political advertisement by Illinois State Representative Bob Flider featured an individual in India supporting opponent Dick Cain because Cain's victory would "employ many of us in India." Another trend has been maligning financial contributions from South Asian community members to political campaigns. This sends the underlying message that these donors are exerting undue "foreign influence" on the American political system and that the candidates' primary allegiances lie abroad. This was used by Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign who called his primary opponent "Senator Hillary Clinton (D-Punjab)" because of her financial backers. In addition, several statements have underplayed the contributions of South Asian community members, including working-class immigrants, by reducing them to punch-lines in attempts at stereotypical humor, as Senator Joe Biden did in saying "You cannot go to a 7-Eleven or a Dunkin' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent."

Below is a sampling of statements portraying community members as perpetual foreigners:

- In May 2010, **Americans for Job Security** placed television advertisements in Arkansas featuring dark-skinned and accented actors dressed in traditional South Asian dress, set in Bangalore, India and with traditional South Asian music playing in the background, facetiously thanking U.S. Senate candidate and Arkansas Lieutenant Governor Bill Halter for outsourcing Arkansan jobs abroad.

While Americans for Job Security's goal was to take votes away from Halter, the advertisement utilized racial biases, reinforcing stereotypes of South Asians as 'outsiders' and fostering a public perception connecting American job losses to gleeful "foreigners". After coming under attack from numerous community groups, the organization removed the advertisement from the airwaves. Both candidates for the Senate seat denounced the advertisement, with incumbent Senator Blanche Lincoln calling it "offensive," and Halter calling it "despicable."

- A memorandum released by the presidential campaign of **Senator Barack Obama** included references to former presidential candidate and Senator Hillary Clinton of New York and the Indian-American community's financial influence on her campaign. The document labeled her as "Hillary Clinton (D-Punjab)" and discussed her "personal, financial, and political ties with India."¹³⁰ It also implied that Clinton's financial support from the Indian-American community's was concerning and could lead to lost jobs or a weaker economy due to outsourcing.

The memorandum from Obama's campaign troubled leaders in the community because it blamed Indian-Americans for the outsourcing of jobs to India. Obama's campaign apologized for the memo, calling it "unacceptable."

- In 2006, Illinois **State Representative Bob Flider** ran an election campaign ad that included a man in India, through a translator, saying the following about Flider's opponent, Dick Cain: "The big businesses that give Cain thousands of dollars employ many of us here in India. If Dick Cain is elected, that will continue." The ad also included two Asian individuals making similar comments suggesting that voting for Cain would support their jobs abroad. The ad concluded with Flider stating the following: "I'm Bob Flider. If you're tired of seeing thousands of local jobs being outsourced overseas, I hope you'll support me on November 7."¹³¹

Let's give a warm welcome to Macaca, here.
Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia.
George Allen, U.S. Senator from Virginia

- In August 2006, former **Senator George Allen's** comment aimed at a 20-year-old South Asian staffer working for his opponent led to immediate criticism and national media attention. While on the campaign trail, Allen, before a predominantly Caucasian audience, stated, "Let's give a warm welcome to Macaca, here. Welcome to America and the real world of Virginia."¹³²

Allen was roundly criticized for his remarks which implied that the South Asian staffer, despite the fact that he was born and raised in Virginia, did not belong in America because of his appearance and ethnic background. The use of the word "macaca" – confirmed as a racial slur in some parts of the world – only intensified the impact of Allen's remarks. The incident struck a chord for many South Asians who recognized the implicit assumptions in Allen's statements – that individuals are not perceived or accepted as "American" based on their national origin, ethnicity, or color. Allen issued an apology to the South Asian staffer a week after the incident. In the interim, South Asians had started petitions, donated

In Delaware, the largest growth in population is Indian-Americans moving from India. You cannot go to a 7-Eleven or a Dunkin' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent. I'm not joking . . .
Joe Biden, U.S. Senator from Delaware

funds to his opponent, and met with him to convey concerns. Allen lost his re-election bid in 2006.

- In July 2006, **Senator Joseph Biden** from Delaware made the following comment to a South Asian accompanying him, "In Delaware, the largest growth in population is Indian-Americans moving from India. You cannot go to a 7-Eleven or a Dunkin' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent. I'm not joking . . ."¹³³ Biden later clarified his statements by claiming that he was alluding to the range of Indians who have made contributions to the state of Delaware, from scientists to middle-class business owners.¹³⁴
- While in office **Senator Hillary Clinton** from New York made a remark at a fundraiser in 2004, when she introduced a quote by Mahatma Gandhi by saying, "He ran a gas station down in St. Louis."¹³⁵ Clinton later apologized for her remarks, which she claimed were an attempt at humor.¹³⁶

- In December 2007, **Catherine Johnson**, a planning commissioner in the Detroit suburb of Canton Township, Michigan asked during a public forum if Hindu women urinate in public as part of a religious ritual. Johnson claimed that neighbors around the township's Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (BAPS Temple) witnessed women urinating behind the temple during the groundbreaking ceremony in 2000. The comments occurred in a context where the temple's construction and expansion had angered many non-Hindus in the township who were concerned that the temple would not blend in well with the town's residential areas.¹³⁷

Johnson's resignation shortly followed her remarks. She subsequently defended her remarks, stating: "*It was a valid question. It was something that a few citizens contacted me at home about...I try to ask questions about what citizens in the community would want to know.*"¹³⁸ Johnson's remark was immediately criticized as being offensive within the Hindu community.¹³⁹

PART II

COMMENTS AIMED AT SOUTH ASIANS RUNNING FOR PUBLIC OFFICE

Running for office in America as a person of color or naturalized citizen is not an easy road. In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of South Asians seeking public office. In fact, in 2010, there were at least 30 candidates of South Asian descent in federal, state, and local races. While the participation of community members in the political arena has been rising and even garnered significant public attention, the number of remarks playing on race- and religion-based stereotypes against various South Asian, Muslim, and Sikh candidates has also followed a similar trajectory. Tactics have included attacking the actual or perceived religions of candidates; pointing to candidates' "ethnic" names and accents; utilizing image-altering techniques to make candidates appear "darker"; and questioning candidates' "roots." Rather than urging the voting public to assess South Asian candidates on the merits of their issue-based policy platforms, at the core of these comments is the insidious nativist refrain that a "foreign" candidate cannot be trusted.

Attacks on Candidates' Actual or Perceived Religion

Deriding a candidate's actual or perceived religious beliefs sends the message that only those who practice the faith of the majority should be eligible for office. Examples range from South Asian candidates being called "turban toppers" and "ragheads" to emphasizing that they are "not Christians." Such statements can convey the notion that those who practice certain religions have weaknesses and failings that should be considered in a political race. They also have the potential impact of casting a political candidate as an outsider who is different from his or her constituency.

“

This [G]oyle character is just another 'turban topper' we don't need in [C]ongress or any political office that deals with the U.S. Constitution, Christianity and the United States of America!!!

Blog linked to by Mike Pompeo, Congressional candidate from Kansas

”

- In September 2010, **Mike Pompeo**, a Congressional candidate in Kansas, posted onto Twitter a link to a blog post that denigrated his opponent, Kansas State Representative Raj Goyle. The post included, "*This guy could be a muslim, a hindu, a buddhist etc who knows, only God, the shadow and ...goyle knows! One thing's for sure ... goyle is not a Christian! This goyle character is just another 'turban topper' we don't need in congress or any political office that deals with the U.S. Constitution, Christianity and the United States of America!!!*"¹⁴⁰

Pompeo subsequently said, "*The statements of the blogger in no way reflect my views.*" He further stated, "*There is no place in campaigns or in public discourse for language of this nature. I have placed a personal call of apology and spoken to Rep. Goyle directly expressing our campaign's regret for the error.*"¹⁴¹ Pompeo subsequently called Goyle personally and apologized.¹⁴²

“

[a] f ---ing raghead... [w]e got a raghead in Washington; we don't need one in South Carolina... [s]he's a raghead that's ashamed of her religion trying to hide it behind being Methodist for political reasons.

Jake Knotts, State Senator and gubernatorial candidate from South Carolina

”

- In June 2010, speaking of South Carolina State Representative Nikki Haley's candidacy in the state's gubernatorial race, **State Senator Jake Knotts**, described her as, "*[a] f ---ing raghead... [w]e got a raghead in Washington; we don't need one in South Carolina... [s]he's a raghead that's ashamed of her religion trying to hide it behind being Methodist for political reasons.*" Knotts stated he believed Haley had been set up by a network of Sikhs and was programmed to run for governor of South Carolina by outside influences in foreign countries. He claimed she was hiding her religion and he wants the voters to know about it.¹⁴³ Knotts later apologized, stating his remark was meant as a joke.¹⁴⁴

- In August 2006, when Saqib Ali was running for the Maryland House of Delegates, the *Associated Press* reported that he was harassed by a man outside his home. The man sat outside Ali's home in Gaithersburg, Maryland, with a sign reading, "Islam Sucks," and a shirt with the slogan, "This mind is an Allah-free zone."¹⁴⁶
- In November 2006, Satveer Chaudhary, a newly re-elected Minnesota State Senator and practicing Hindu, received a written concession from his opponent, **Rae Hart Anderson**, asking him to convert to Christianity. The email included the following statements:

"I've enjoyed much of this race, especially the people I've met...even you! I see your deficits—not all of them, and your potential—but not all of it. Only your Creator knows the real potential He's put in you. Get to know Him and know yourself...you'll be more interesting even to you!

The race of your life is more important than this one—and it is my sincere wish that you'll get to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. He died for the sins of the world, yours and mine—and especially for those who accept His forgiveness. His kingdom will come and His will be done—on earth as it is in heaven. There's more....I love belonging to the family of God. Jesus is the way, the truth and offers His life to you and each human being. Pay attention...this is very important, Satveer. Have you noticed Jesus for yourself...at some moment in time, yet???"¹⁴⁷

According to Anderson's former campaign manager, the email was written because "Chaudhary is not Christian and he needs to find his soul."¹⁴⁸

- In September 2008, at a forum before business leaders in the community, Irvine **City Councilman Steve Choi** urged voters not to support a candidate who works with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and called it a "dangerous Islamic organization." Although not named by Choi explicitly, Todd Gallinger, an opposing candidate who converted to Islam and worked for CAIR, was the target of Choi's comments. Another candidate in the race, retired Irvine Police Lieutenant **Patrick A. Rodgers**, sent an email to reporters urging them to investigate Gallinger whom he described as, "at best, a terrorist group sympathizer." Three weeks later, an individual called Gallinger's office stating, "I want to cut off your head just like all the other Muslims deserve."¹⁴⁹

- In September 2006, Minnesota Republican Party Chairman **Ron Carey** sent a fundraising letter to voters challenging the patriotism of Keith Ellison, a Muslim-American Congressional candidate. In the letter, Carey stated that Ellison had received "financial support from a self-identified supporter of Hamas" and criticized him for accepting campaign contributions from leaders of CAIR¹⁵⁰, which he refers to as "a group that Democrats say has deep ties to terrorism."¹⁵¹ Ellison's opponent **Alan Fine**, later stated that he was "offended as a Jew that we have a candidate like this running for U.S. Congress."¹⁵²

Since his election victory in November 2006, several members of the media also questioned Ellison's loyalty to the United States because of his faith. During an interview, Glenn Beck of CNN asked Ellison, "Sir, prove to me that you are not working with our enemies." Beck added, "I'm not accusing you of being an enemy, but that's the way I feel, and I think a lot of Americans will feel that way."¹⁵³ Syndicated newspaper columnist **Dennis Prager** also criticized Ellison for intending to be sworn into office on the Quran instead of a Bible. Prager wrote "if you are incapable of taking an oath on that book [the Bible], you don't serve in Congress" and that "[Ellison] will be doing more damage to the unity of America and to the value system that has formed this country than the terrorists of 9/11."¹⁵⁴

Focus on Candidates' "Foreign" Names and Accents

Comments highlighting stereotypical indicators of foreignness imply that voters will not be able to resonate with candidates because of certain characteristics, such as their last name or accent. The implication of such rhetoric is that these candidates are outsiders incapable of speaking to and representing a constituency from another racial or ethnic group. Remarks such as these can also send the message that voters should consider a candidate's background, as opposed to other criteria, when going to the ballot box.

- In September 2010, Congressional candidate Manan Trivedi was accused by his opponent **Congressman Jim Gerlach** of Pennsylvania of playing the "race card" by "going to Indian-American groups to raise money."¹⁵⁵ In response to these comments, Trivedi stated, "These are hardworking Americans who pay their taxes and contribute to society. Congressman Gerlach's campaign is saying that somehow they aren't good enough to participate in our democracy.

Like many Americans I am so proud of my heritage and grateful for all of the support I've received and believe absolutely no one, for any reason, should ever feel shut out of the democratic process."¹⁵⁶

- In April 2010, Ohio Congressional candidate **David Krikorian** was repeatedly caught by members of his own party suggesting that his rival, Surya Yalamanchili, could not unseat the Republican incumbent because of his Indian name.¹⁵⁷ Krikorian denied making such remarks and, after he lost the primary election, asserted that Yalamanchili succeeded by "*playing the race card.*"¹⁵⁸

Raj Peter Bhakta "has no roots in our community."
**Allyson Schwartz, Congresswoman
from Pennsylvania**

- In October 2008, at a press conference held in St. Paul, Minnesota, state Republican Party Chairman **Ron Carey** supported Erik Paulsen's candidacy for a Congressional seat against his opponent, Ashwin Madia. Carey made the comment that "*[Paulsen] really fits the Third District so well, as one of them.*" When asked by a reporter if there were racial undertones to this statement, Carey replied "*Paulsen fits the district very well. People have to draw their own conclusions.*" He went on to add that "*from a demographic standpoint, Erik Paulsen fits the district very well.*"¹⁵⁹
- In June 2006, in a Congressional election against Indian-American candidate, Raj Peter Bhakta, incumbent **Congresswoman Allyson Schwartz** from Pennsylvania commented that he "*has no roots in our community.*"¹⁶⁰ Bhakta was born and raised in Northeast Philadelphia.

I'm usually not prejudiced, but I don't want an Indian in my government. As far as I know, he could be a nice guy, but these kind of people get embedded over here. . . . You remember 9/11.

**Don Sherrill, City Council candidate
from Orange City, Florida**

- In November 2005, Tom Abraham, a 60-year-old nuclear medicine technologist of South Asian descent, ran against **Don Sherrill** for City Council Seat 4 in Orange City, Florida. During the campaign, Sherrill derided Abraham's accent at a community forum, claiming that he could not understand him. The *St. Petersburg Times* reported Sherrill said that voters wouldn't support Abraham if they saw and heard him.¹⁶¹ "*I'm usually not prejudiced, but I don't want an Indian in my government,*" Sherrill told the *Orlando Sentinel*. "*As far as I know, he could be a nice guy, but these kind of people get embedded over here. . . . You remember 9/11.*"¹⁶³

Use of Darkened Images of Candidates

Several instances have emerged involving political opponents who circulated darkened images of South Asian candidates. This particular tactic raises concerns as such images can trigger implicit racial biases or negative stereotypes that are often held against those with darker skin tones and play on fears that voters may have of minority candidates.

- In September 2010, Maryland State Delegate Saqib Ali, a candidate in the Maryland primary race for state Senate, was the target of a mailer sent out by his opponent **State Senator Nancy King** in which his photograph was altered, making his skin tone and hair visibly darker.¹⁶⁴ The King campaign denied having darkened the photograph, despite the fact that the difference was apparent by comparing it to the original photo that was also included in the mailer.¹⁶⁵
- In October 2008, several photographs of Ashwin Madia, candidate for Congress in Minnesota, were darkened in a television ad run by the National Republican Congressional Committee.¹⁶⁶ Although the Committee denied that the photos were intentionally darkened, comparisons of the photographs indicated that they were altered.¹⁶⁷

PART III

TIPS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS RESPONDING TO XENOPHOBIC AND RACIST RHETORIC

There are a variety of responses that community members can take to respond to the prevalence of xenophobic and racist rhetoric in the political environment. Below are some suggestions for community members and groups.

Track, Monitor, and Report Incidents

- Community members should track and monitor incidents of xenophobia and racism made by elected officials or those running for office. Tracking such incidents can be done through searches of local print media, both in community as well as mainstream press, and by becoming actively involved in local elections.
- Report such incidents to political parties, and to organizations such as SAALT. We are interested in maintaining an archive of xenophobic statements in the political context; please send us an email with a description of the incident and a citation, if possible, to info@saalt.org.

Respond to Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric

Responding to xenophobic rhetoric in the political sphere can take on a variety of forms, depending on the nature of the comments.

- Articulate the impact of xenophobic or racist rhetoric. Here are some **talking points**:
 - Xenophobic rhetoric can marginalize and alienate community members.
 - Public figures and elected officials often set the tone for the public. When public figures make xenophobic or racist comments, members of the public can form negative perceptions about certain communities as well.

- Statements about policy stances are commonplace among elected officials and candidates for office. However, these statements can become problematic when they include inflammatory language to shore up support for policies that single out communities.

- Xenophobic rhetoric can chill civic and political participation on the part of community members who are targeted or marginalized.

- Examples of **potential responses** to xenophobic rhetoric include:

- Seeking a clarification from the official making the comment

- Demanding an apology

- Asking political parties to make public statements regarding the comments (included in this report is a letter sent by various South Asian organizations to the 2008 presidential campaigns)

- Informing ethnic and mainstream media of statements and comments locally

- Writing an op-ed or letter to the editor

- Exercising political power – for example, one of the consequences of Senator Allen’s statements calling the South Asian campaign worker of his opponent a “macaca” was an apparent decrease in public support to his campaign

Engage in Civic and Political Activities

Greater civic and political participation by community members in America can make a difference in the political environment. Examples of such participation include:

- Becoming familiar with the stances on issues affecting our community that are taken by elected officials
- Ensuring that elected officials who use xenophobia and racism to advocate for policies that endanger the rights of immigrants and people of color do not resort to such tactics
- Understanding and communicating our opinions on policy issues to elected officials
- Making sure that elected officials are accountable to our community

Resource Example

Letter to Obama and McCain Presidential Campaigns from South Asian Organizations (2008)

October 16, 2008

Senator John McCain
John McCain 2008
P.O. Box 16118
Arlington, VA 22215

Senator Barack Obama
Obama for America
P.O. Box 8102
Chicago, IL 60680

Re: Addressing Xenophobic Rhetoric and Environment in Presidential Campaigns

Dear Senators McCain and Obama:

Fourteen members of the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations (NCSO), a network of non-partisan community-based organizations across the United States, write to express our concerns over the increasingly xenophobic rhetoric that has pervaded the campaign trail during this presidential election. Our organizations send this letter to raise awareness and express concerns on how it affects our communities. We neither support nor oppose any political party or any candidate for public office.

Xenophobic discourse aimed at South Asian, Muslim and Arab American communities has been on the rise from both sides of the aisle, especially in the seven years since September 11, 2001. In fact, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) has documented over 50 comments and statements targeting South Asians, Muslims, and Sikhs in political discourse (please refer to the enclosed document entitled Community Education on Documented Incidents of Xenophobia and Intolerance in Political Discourse).

On the presidential campaign trail, statements and incidents that marginalize South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab communities have been increasing. We are concerned that such rhetoric can have wide-ranging consequences. First, xenophobic rhetoric, if unchecked, sends a message to the general public that belonging to certain communities is somehow “un-American” and untrustworthy. Second, xenophobic rhetoric can often foster similar sentiments on the part of the public, and perpetuate misconceptions and stereotypes about certain communities. These misperceptions can lead members of the general public to discriminate against neighbors, colleagues and others who are South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, or Arab. Finally, such rhetoric can hamper political and civic participation on the part of immigrants and communities of color.

As South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab Americans seek to become more involved in civic life, we hope that elected officials and policymakers will promote an environment that welcomes the inclusion of diverse perspectives and experiences.

We look forward to an opportunity to speak with you to discuss these concerns in greater detail. Please feel free to contact Deepa Iyer, Executive Director, at South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) at 301.270.1855.

Sincerely,

Adhikaar – New York, NY

Apna Ghar - Chicago, IL

Chaya – Seattle, WA

Counselors Helping (South) Asian/Indians, Inc. – Maryland

Daya – Houston, TX

Maitri – San Jose, CA

Michigan Asian Indian Family Services - Michigan

Narika – San Francisco, CA

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) – Washington, DC

South Asian American Policy and Research Institute (SAAPRI) – Chicago, IL

South Asian Health Initiative (SAHI) – New York, NY

South Asian Youth Action (SAYA!) – New York, NY

Trikone NW – Seattle, WA

Turning Point for Women and Families – New York, NY

Enclosures

Cc: Indians For McCain

South Asians for Obama

Timeline

of Key Post-September 11th Domestic Policies Affecting South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, and Arab American Communities

September 11, 2001: Attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon

September 11, 2001 – September 17, 2001: In the week following September 11th, there were 645 reports of bias incidents and crimes aimed at individuals of South Asian and Middle Eastern descent.

October 2001

October 26, 2001: President George W. Bush signs the USA PATRIOT Act into law. This legislation increases government ability to conduct searches and surveillance and enhances detention powers.

December 2001

December 2001: The Alien Absconder Initiative allows names of immigrants with deportation orders to be entered into National Crime Information Center (NCIC) database, which is searchable by law enforcement.

September 2001

September 2001 through February 2002:

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) detain without charge approximately 1,200 individuals. Many are denied access to counsel and undergo secret hearings.

September 17, 2001: Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) issues a rule allowing immigrants to be detained 48 hours without charge, which may be extended in the event of an "emergency."

September 21, 2001: Chief Immigration Judge Michael Creppy issues a memorandum allowing Immigration Courts to close deportation proceedings for "special interest" detainees.

November 2001

November 2001: Attorney General Ashcroft orders "volunteer questioning" of over 5,000 men who come from countries where al-Qaeda has a "terrorist presence." A second round of questioning begins in March 2002. Of the 2,261 men who were actually interviewed, the Department of Justice reports that none were charged with crimes related to the September 11th attacks.

April 2002

April 2002: The Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel issues its "inherent authority" opinion used as a basis for allowing state and local law enforcement to carry out federal immigration laws, a practice that results in racial profiling.

May 2002

May 2002: Attorney General Ashcroft issues revised FBI investigative guidelines relating to domestic terrorism that allow agents to attend public events without evidence of suspicious activity; and diminish oversight from FBI headquarters over the activities of field offices in terrorism-related cases.

June 2003

June 2003: The Department of Justice issues its Guidance on the Use of Race by Federal Law Enforcement Agencies aiming to ban racial profiling. It includes broad exceptions for national security and border searches; fails to prohibit profiling on the basis of religion or national origin; and does not apply to local law enforcement agencies.

Fall 2004

Fall 2004: The Department of Homeland Security instituted Operation Frontline designed to “detect, deter and disrupt terrorist operations” immediately prior to the 2004 presidential elections. Relying upon NSEERS databases, the government investigated individuals from primarily Muslim-majority countries.

June 2002

June 2002: The Department of Justice rolls out the Special Registration program as part of the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS). Expanded in the months that followed, it required that males over the age 16 who are from 25 countries (24 of which are predominantly Muslim countries, including Pakistan and Bangladesh) to report to their local immigration office for fingerprinting and interrogation. As a result of the program, over 83,000 individuals registered throughout the country, of which 13,000 people were placed in deportation proceedings. In 2003, portions of the program were suspended but certain aspects remain, including registration at ports of entry and departure and penalties for those who did not comply.

September 2003

September 2003: President George W. Bush signed the Homeland Security Presidential Directive-6 which created the Terrorist Screening Center responsible for the Terrorist Screening Database. This database includes various watchlists, including the “no-fly list” (which includes names of passengers not allowed to board airplanes) and the “selectee list” (which includes names of passengers who are required to undergo additional screening prior to boarding).

August 2007

August 2007: The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) issued guidelines stating that Sikh turbans and Muslim headscarves should be subjected to additional screening. In October of that year, such searches were no longer mandatory under TSA's "bulky clothing" policy, but rather left to the discretion of the screeners, and passengers were offered additional screening options providing increased privacy. Sikh and Muslim community members still continue to encounter significant rates of being pulled out for security screening because of their attire.

December 2008

December 2008: The U.S. Department of Justice issues the FBI's Domestic Investigative Operative Guidelines (DIOG) that relaxed restrictions on federal law enforcement to conduct threat assessments using factors based on religion and ethnicity. It also lowered the threshold to commence threat assessments without requiring an adequate factual basis or supervisory approval for national security cases.

February 2007

February 2007: The Department of Homeland Security institutes the Traveler Redress Inquiry Program (TRIP) intended to allow travelers to submit complaints with watchlists and heightened screening. Yet many individuals reported that the program failed to provide any meaningful recourse.

August 2008

July 2008: The U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency within the Department of Homeland Security is given greater authority to search and seize the belongings of passengers entering the United States, regardless of whether or not there is evidence that an individual poses a threat.

January 2010

January 2010: TSA began requiring U.S.-bound passengers who were nationals of or travelling from or through Pakistan (and 13 other primarily Muslim-majority countries) to receive a full body pat-down and searches of all carry-on items. This policy was rescinded in April 2010 and replaced with "real-time threat-based" screening system.

Endnotes

- 1 Such organizations include the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, the Council on American Islamic Relations, Muslim Public Affairs Council, the North American South Asian Bar Association, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Sikh Coalition and UNITED SIKHS.
- 2 For a more comprehensive list of comments opposing Park51 by members of Congress, governors, and political candidates, see "Statements of concern made by elected officials and political candidates regarding Park51" collected by SAALT. Available at <http://www.saalt.org/attachments/1/Park51%20Officials%20Remarks.pdf>. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.)
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- 5 "Renee Ellmers Ad: No Muslim 'Victory Mosque' at Ground Zero," CBS News Political HotSheet, Brian Motopoli, September 22, 2010. Available at http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-503544_162-20017307-503544.html. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.)
- 6 *Id.*
- 7 "Candidate: Islam is against everything America stands for," NewsHerald.com, Katherine Concepcion (August 17, 2010). Available at <http://www.newsherald.com/news/panama-86228-america-stands.html>. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.)
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- 9 "Tennessee official says Islam is a 'cult'," The Lede in The New York Times, Robert Mackey, July 27, 2010. Available at <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/07/27/tennessee-official-says-islam-may-be-a-cult/>. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.) Video of Lt. Gov. Ramsey's remarks available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Bkdofilm0g&feature=player_embedded. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.)
- 10 "Tennessee politician's remarks on Islam raise uproar," USA Today, July 28, 2010. Available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2010-07-28-islam-remarks-furor_N.htm. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.)
- 11 "Tennessee GOPer Zelenik Slams Opponents For Not Stopping Muslim Center, Campaign Warns Of Sharia Law," Talking Points Memo, Eric Kleefeld, July 19, 2010. Available at <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2010/07/tennessee-goper-zelenik-slams-opponents-for-not-stopping-muslim-center-campaign-warns-of-sharia-law.php>. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.)
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- 18 "Three Senators Oppose Ground Zero Mosque," The Weekly Standard, Daniel Halper, August 6, 2010. Available at <http://www.weeklystandard.com/blogs/senators-isakson-snowe-mccain-ground-zero-mosque-%E2%80%98insensitive%E2%80%99>. (Last accessed October 4, 2010.)
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