About the Religious Freedom Project

The Religious Freedom Project (RFP) at Georgetown University’s Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs is the nation’s only university-based program devoted exclusively to the analysis of religious freedom, a basic human right restricted in many parts of the world.

Under the leadership of Director Thomas Farr and Associate Director Timothy Shah, the RFP engages a team of international scholars to examine and debate the meaning and value of religious liberty; its importance for democracy; and its role in social and economic development, international diplomacy, and the struggle against violent religious extremism.

The RFP began in 2011 with the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation. In 2014 that support continued, while the project also began a three-year partnership with Baylor University and its Institute for Studies of Religion under Director Byron Johnson.

For more information about the RFP’s research, teaching, publications, conferences, and workshops, visit our website at http://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/rfp.

About the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, created within the Office of the President in 2006, is dedicated to the interdisciplinary study of religion, ethics, and public life. Through research, teaching, and service, the center explores global challenges of democracy and human rights; economic and social development; international diplomacy; and interreligious understanding. Two premises guide the center’s work: that a deep examination of faith and values is critical to address these challenges, and that the open engagement of religious and cultural traditions with one another can promote peace.

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On December 15, 2014, the Religious Freedom Project—in partnership with Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion—assembled scholars, experts, and activists for a dynamic, robust examination of Muslim minorities around the world and their struggles with religious freedom.

Questions addressed at the conference included the following: How has the persecution of Muslim minorities affected their well-being in Europe and North America, the overall health of Muslim-majority nations, and the growth of violent Islamist extremism? Are Muslim minorities developing theologies that can bolster religious freedom, stable democracy, and economic growth, as well as undermine violent Islamist extremism?

Our keynote conversation featured three of the most influential public intellectuals in the United States—Robert George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence at Princeton University; John Esposito, founding director of Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University; and Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, co-founder of Zaytuna College. The rich backgrounds of our speakers enabled us to delve into the varying experiences of Muslim minorities inside and outside the West, and to explore how those minorities could contribute to promoting religious freedom, stable democracy, and economic growth.

We also hosted three panels. The first, “Muslim Minorities in Europe,” focused on the challenges faced by Muslim minorities in Europe and how these difficulties shape their participation in the larger global Muslim community. The second, “Muslim Minorities in North America,” conducted a lively discussion that revealed some of the deep differences that exist within the American Muslim community regarding questions of Islam and religious freedom.

The closing panel featured two of the world’s most eminent scholars of Islam, Timur Kuran of Duke University and Abdullah Saeed of the University of Melbourne. In a fascinating and revealing conversation, Kuran and Saeed explored how growing global restrictions on religious freedom have affected both the economic and the political well-being of Muslim individuals and communities.

The conference’s investigation of these issues was both winsome and enlightening. It not only drew attention to the foundational significance of religious freedom as a fundamental human right, but also provided practical suggestions for religious communities and political leaders who can see the value of advancing religious freedom as a path to peace, stability, and economic growth.

Read on. We think this volume will add to your understanding of the meaning and value of religious freedom both here and abroad.
Program

Welcome
Thomas Farr, Director, Religious Freedom Project

Muslim Minorities in Europe
Moderator: Jennifer Bryson, Executive Director, Zephyr Institute
Panelists: Jocelyne Cesari, Senior Fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs
Kübra Gümüşay, Media Consultant, Said Business School, University of Oxford
Maajid Nawaz, Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Candidate, United Kingdom

Keynote Conversation: Muslim Communities Around the World
Moderator: Robert P. George, McCormick Professor of Jurisprudence and Director of the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions, Princeton University
Panelists: John Esposito, Founding Director, Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University
Hamza Yusuf, Co-founder, Zaytuna College; Advisor to the Center for Islamic Studies, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California

Muslim Minorities in North America
Moderator: Timothy Samuel Shah, Associate Director, Religious Freedom Project
Panelists: Zareena Grewal, Associate Professor of American Studies and Religious Studies, Yale University
Zuhdi Jasser, Founder and President, American Islamic Forum for Democracy
Farid Senzai, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Santa Clara University

Closing Conversation: The Economic and Political Effects of Restrictions on Religion
Moderator: Daniel Philpott, Associate Scholar, Religious Freedom Project; Director, Center for Civil and Human Rights, University of Notre Dame
Panelists: Timur Kuran, Professor of Economics and Political Science and Gorter Family Professor of Islamic Studies, Duke University; Associate Scholar, Religious Freedom Project
Abdullah Saeed, Director, National Center of Excellence for Islamic Studies; Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Melbourne
THOMAS FARR: On behalf of the Religious Freedom Project, I would like to welcome to all of you. This is a great turnout, and we’re delighted you’re all here. Today’s event will focus on the experience of Muslim minorities around the world. It’s another in a series of public conferences sponsored by the Berkley Center’s Religious Freedom Project, which today has been joined in a strategic partnership with Baylor University’s Institute for Studies of Religion directed by Professor Byron Johnson. We’re very proud of this, as far as I know, unprecedented partnership between the oldest Catholic university in the land—Georgetown University—and one of the oldest Baptist universities in the United States and the largest Baptist university in the world—Baylor.

Now, the premise of the Religious Freedom Project is that religious freedom is very important for individuals, whether they’re religious or not, and for all societies everywhere. Notwithstanding its importance, however, we believe religious freedom is in global crisis. And yet, it is too often neglected by scholars, by the media, and by policymakers. Our goal at the RFP is to address that deficiency by building knowledge, by raising the profile of religious liberty and its value for everyone, both here and abroad. We do that through conferences such as this one, through a vigorous online presence including a dynamic webpage, and through our new blog, which is called Cornerstone. It is, so far as we know, the only blog in the world dedicated exclusively to religious freedom. Please visit Cornerstone for some of the most vigorous, illuminating, and entertaining debates on religious liberty that you will find anywhere. This week, I believe, we’re going to be highlighting some of the issues that we’re discussing today, from various perspectives as always.

The RFP also funds a team of scholars, both here and abroad, to conduct research and to write books and articles on the relationship between religious freedom and other goods, such as economic growth and the consolidation of democracy. We do congressional and parliamentary testimonies, workshops with and for government officials here and abroad, media appearances, and, of course, books and articles. We’re also beginning this year a competitive dissertation fellowship program for Ph.D. students who are interested in writing their dissertations on the subject of religious liberty. In addition we are developing religious liberty curricula for high school students.
So if you want to know more about the RFP and our upcoming events, visit our webpage, check out *Cornerstone*, pick up the pamphlets that are at your tables, and sign up for our quarterly newsletter. Let me just mention briefly a couple of these publications. Two of them are part of our series of sourcebooks on religious freedom for the world’s major religious traditions. You have in front of you printed copies of our web-based sourcebooks on Islam and religious freedom, and on Christianity and religious freedom.

Finally, let me mention the more colorful publication that you can pass around the table from last spring’s event on the Hobby Lobby Supreme Court case. Many of you were there. It’s entitled “Everybody’s Business: The Legal, Economic, and Political Implications of Religious Freedom.” This is precisely what we study at the RFP.

Now, let’s get to the subject of our exciting conference today. Much is in the news about Muslim majority states, especially in the Middle East and South Asia. But today we want to examine the experience of Muslim minorities, especially in Europe and North America, but also elsewhere, including in Muslim majority states. What can we say about the experience of Muslim minorities? Do they suffer discrimination and even persecution in the West? Do they suffer discrimination and persecution in the Middle East? If so, what is the nature of that persecution? What are its causes and what are its effects?

For example, does the experience of Muslim minorities have any explanatory power with respect to the strength and spread of violent Islamist extremism either in the West or in the Middle East? In the important task of interpreting the Islamic tradition, what are Muslim minorities in the West and elsewhere contributing to that enterprise? Are the liberal voices of Western Muslims being heard in Muslim majority nations, or are those voices rejected precisely because they’re Western or because they’re liberal?

To examine these and allied questions, we’ve assembled a sterling cast of scholars and experts. We’ll begin shortly with an outstanding panel to discuss Islam in Europe, followed by lunch and an exciting lunchtime keynote conversation featuring three of the most influential public intellectuals in the United States. That will be followed by a fascinating panel on Islam in America and, at the end of the day, a wrap-up conversation that you won’t want to miss.

So once again, thank you for being here today. I’ll ask our first panel on Europe to come to the podium as I speak. I’m going to
introduce our moderator and then let her introduce the panelists. Jennifer Bryson is a friend and colleague, a friend of the Religious Freedom Project for many years, and a force in her own right in the study of Islam and especially its relationship to religious freedom. She’s perfect for the role we’ve cast her in today. As you can see from the bios, Jennifer is the director of the Zephyr Institute, a new institute in California, and is a distinguished visiting professor at the US Army War College. Okay, Jennifer, take it away.

JENNIFER BRYSON: Thank you so much, Tom. And I’d like to thank the Religious Freedom Project for bringing us together here today. And I also thank our audience for your time and our discussion together.

When I was asked to moderate this panel, I was really delighted to hear who our panelists would be. We have Professor Jocelyne Cesari, who is a senior fellow at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs. She’s a visiting professor at Georgetown in the Department of Government, she directs the Islam in the West Program—right on topic for our discussion today—at Harvard University, and also directs the Berkley Center’s Islam in World Politics Program.

Next we have—and here I must say that my American ear does not always do so well with Turkish vowels, so I hope you’ll appreciate my attempted pronunciation—Kübra Gümüsay. She’s a journalist and blogger from Germany, and she writes in major German publications such as Die Zeit, Zeit Campus, Der Freitag, and the ever interesting taz newspaper. Also, she’s currently working full time as a consultant for social media innovation and communication at Oxford University in the Saïd Business School.

And then on your far right is Maajid Nawaz, who has jumped in feet first to European democracy as a Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate in the United Kingdom. He’s the co-founder of Quilliam, a Muslim anti-extremism think tank. He’s also a former member of the Islamist extremist group Hizb-ut-Tahrir. And his story about his transition from Hizb-ut-Tahrir to being a candidate in a democratic process is in his autobiography, Radical: My Journey Out of Islamist Extremism. Thank you very much for being with us today.

On our panel, we could spend weeks on the topic of Islam in Europe. I’d really like to take advantage of this unusual opportunity, in my experience, to focus on Islam in Europe, and then to discuss the particular intersection of the experience of Muslims in Europe with religious freedom. And I’d ask our panelists today to consider this from three different aspects.

The first is from the lens of Muslim minorities in Europe, and their experience with religious freedom and challenges to religious freedom. Next, I’d ask them to consider the experience of non-Muslim majorities in Europe in relation to the Muslim minority communities. Here we see both the positives, such as statements in the last few days by Chancellor Merkel of Germany solidly renouncing anti-Muslim prejudice, but also the challenges that this relationship faces and whether non-Muslim majorities in Europe are thinking about religious freedom or not. And the third angle I’d ask them to consider is how this experience of Muslim minorities in Europe shapes relations of the Muslim minorities in Europe to their participation in a larger global discussion among Muslims about religious freedom.

I’d like to start with a general question, and I’d welcome responses from any or all of you. According to the Pew Research Center, levels of religious restrictions in Western Europe have risen significantly since 2007. In what ways have religious restrictions, whether by government or by social pressures, risen against Muslims? I’d also like you to consider what explains these rises in restrictions and discrimination. And then hopefully as we move on today our conversation will also move toward seeking solutions.

JOCELYNE CESARI: I can respond to this question. Six years ago, I wrote a paper called “The Securitization of Islam” for a research project we were running in Europe. We had seven teams...
across Europe looking at the way that the securitization related to 9/11 was impacting not only Muslims but all religious groups. It was clear that there was some kind of limitation of religious practices related to the post-9/11 conditions.

And a few years after that—you have a related handout at your tables—two of my colleagues, Jonathan Fox at Maryland University and Yasemin Akbaba at Gettysburg College, tried to take on this idea of the securitization of Islam, by using a database that is looking at a relationship between state and religion across the world. And they quantified their data, because that’s what is the most legitimate. Apparently, if you don’t have numbers, it’s much more difficult to be heard.

But they came out with strong quantitative evidence that indeed in the last 10 years there has been an increase in religious discrimination—it is not ethnic or social discrimination—against Muslim minorities across Western Europe. And interestingly, they show that Christian minorities have also been affected by this change. But Muslims are at the top of the list.

So if I may explain, what does securitization mean? It comes from a theoretical background in Europe called the Copenhagen School of International Relations. These colleagues have been looking very seriously at the amplification of the discourse that tends to limit freedom and civil liberties. This is based on the ideas that the ontological security of the group is at stake; if we are threatened, then we can justify suspension of basic civil liberties. And these colleagues, with whom we have been working for a long time, usually look at the discourse. For them, securitization is a speech act.

And if you listen to the discourse in Europe, you can hear, indeed, that there has been an increase in concern and worry about the presence of Islam—not Muslims, but Islam as a religion in the public space. If I had a PowerPoint, I would show you what symbolizes securitization for me: a poster that was released at the time of the campaign against the minaret in Switzerland. It shows a Swiss flag with minarets coming out of it, which are depicted as missiles. And to make the point even stronger, among all of that you have a woman clad in a burka. So what does this mean? It means that Islam is a threat.

In my work, I was not only interested in the speech act. This is, I would argue, simply the most visible part of the iceberg. Instead, what I did for the research that is published in a book called Why the West Fears Islam, is I looked at the policymaking done by people who are not automatically public figures or politicians, but the civil servants who had to implement the laws or procedures that are not automatically related to Islam or Muslims. What I found was very interesting, but also worrisome: a continuous breach in the silence of regular procedures that should respect civil liberties and do not anymore because of the threat of Islam.

Regarding immigration laws and the admission of new immigrants, we surveyed the Netherlands, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. And we saw that there has been a continuous increase in screening immigrants before they come to European countries on a cultural and religious basis. Interestingly, all these cultural and religious criteria have to do with Islam. I’ll give you an example.

If I am willing to come to the Netherlands and I am an immigrant from the Philippines—so I’m not a Muslim—I have to respond to a few questions that are called the “understanding of Dutch culture.” I also have to watch a few slides where I see two gay persons kissing at the dinner table, or I see people walking naked on the beach. And if I am shocked by that, maybe I’m not a good candidate for Dutch society.” I also have to watch a few slides where I see two gay persons kissing at the dinner table, or I see people walking naked on the beach. And if I am shocked by that, maybe I’m not a good candidate for Dutch society. This is very much related to the assumption that if I come from a Muslim country, I may not be comfortable with gay people around me, or I may not be comfortable by the kind of sexual freedom that the Dutch very much praise.

“She two cultural groups, the extremist Muslims on the one hand and the far-right on the other, reinforce each other’s message. And they fundamentally agree on one point: that Islam is a totalitarian political ideology that is in the West to dominate and to take over, the so-called “Eurabia” theory that Muslims will outbreed, and they will eventually come to take over the West from within.”

Maajid Nawaz
But again, the criteria here are about these preconceived ideas that Muslims have this inbuilt kind of bias, but it's applied to everybody. So I had a lot of discussions with the Dutch civil servants and asked them questions, such as: Have you taken into account other biases coming from other countries that have nothing to do with these particular questions? And have you also considered that very religious people within your country who are not Muslim may be just as uncomfortable with this kind of situation as a Muslim? They have no answer to these questions. This securitization of immigration does affect everybody, not only Muslims. There was a very interesting declaration of one of these Dutch ministers about these “cultural tests”: “If they can't stomach it, then they don't have to come in. We don't want them.”

So again, the idea here is that Islam is a danger to core European values. This is the difference with the United States in terms of securitization. It is a difference not only in regard to the security of people, materials, and goods, but in regard to our core values as a secular, liberal democracy. In Europe, the situation of women and the intolerance vis-à-vis sexual minorities are now built-in, not only in the public discourse but also in the day-to-day policymaking or administration of policies on the ground.

This also relates to the restriction of imams on the very conservative discourse they can have. There is a very famous case that raised lots of legal issues, when French security services expelled an imam in a mosque in Lyon because he had justified the beating of wives on religious grounds. The French security service, which scrutinizes all mosques, said, “Wow, this is a terrorist.” So they expelled him back to Algeria on the basis that he was threatening the security of the country. The Conseil Constitutionel, the equivalent of the Supreme Court in France, came out and said there is not even the beginning of a plot here. The Imam came back, returned, and there's a long series of back and forth.

Indeed the discourse of the imam is far from being liberal. But does it mean it’s a terrorist discourse? What’s happening in Europe is a leap between terrorist and conservative, and you indeed have lots of Muslim conservative voices. Does it make them terrorists who threaten the security of the country? Not automatically. That is part of the problem, and I'm going to end up on that.

What we are witnessing in Europe is what I call the Salafization of Islamic thinking, which is indeed a very conservative and illiberal way of dealing with Islam. Does it mean that it’s a terrorist way of acting? Probably not. What I usually say is that all the Salafists are not jihadists. But it happens that most of the jihadists we know are Salafi. That’s where the confusion comes, and that’s where the securitization of Islam is happening.

And the consequence is that all over Europe, scrutiny of other religious practices that are not from Muslims are also at stake now. There is a greater and greater anxiety in Europe about the visibility of all religious practices in the public space. So that’s why it was interesting in this handout to see that also Christians are now pretty much affected by the securitization. I’m going to stop here.

KÜBRA GÜMÜŞAY: I'll build up on some of the points you raised. You described an interesting dynamic, how in the Netherlands immigrants were asked certain questions, and that's actually an interesting thing. I think two weeks ago, new research was published by Naïka Foroutan. She was analyzing how Germany defined who belongs to Germany, and they had very interesting research. They found out that the collective “we” does not include Muslims.

And an interesting factor here is just what you described: that certain problems within German society itself, such as sexism, homophobia, and racism, are externalized to immigrants. So they have imported those problems. They have imported those values such as sexism, homophobia, and racism within their communities as well. That's actually an interesting factor, and that also represents how Muslims are being depicted within the country, what a Muslim narrative is.

Your initial question was also to talk about the restrictions that Muslims are experiencing. Building upon Jocelyne's examples, a very interesting example in Germany was actually three years ago. We've had many religious restrictions against Muslims, but one was particularly interesting, and that case was the debate on circumcision. And it was very funny actually because when this whole debate started, many Muslims were concerned about it, so they didn’t want to allow circumcision on boys up until a certain age, until they could decide themselves.

So when this debate arose, many Muslims then leaned back and said, let our Jewish friends do this and handle this. The debate then totally shifted because it was actually aimed against Muslims, but the ones who were also affected by it was the Jewish community. And within a few weeks, the whole debate shifted because then it was not about the external sexist, racist Muslims
leads me nicely to the point that in terms of identity, what we have in the United Kingdom is this term “British,” which played out recently in the referendum efforts for Scotland. And it’s a bit like the term “American,” in that you can be British Scot, you can be British Welsh, you can be British Muslim, and you can be British English.

And the term “British” is a catchall phrase because of the peculiar history of the United Kingdom, including “British Irish” from Northern Ireland, in that it allows for this more national macro identity to form and caters to sub-identities within it. Until recently, this hasn’t been even legally the case in Germany, although they changed that within our lifetimes. But as you mentioned, Kübra, it’s still a huge cultural issue.

So there is the legal freedom in the United Kingdom to practice one’s faith, but it’s under threat. It is not under threat legally; it’s under threat culturally. And I say this with a level of insight and experience because of some of the people involved in challenging that much cherished freedom.

What do I mean by culturally under threat? It’s under threat in terms of attitudes in civil society, largely by two groups. One is those on the far-right. Many street protest movements have emerged of late, such as the English Defence League (EDL), and before them the National Front and the British National Party (BNP), but after the EDL, groups such as Britain First. These groups, from the EDL onwards, were historically focused on race and ethnicity. As you mentioned, when I joined Hizb-ut-Tahrir at the age of 16, my challenge on the streets of Essex was against neo-Nazi skinheads who had a problem with the color of my skin and didn’t really know that I was a Muslim. And how that’s evolved today with groups such as the EDL and beyond is that they make public displays of not being concerned about ethnicity. In fact, they make public displays of having multicultural membership. But the issue they have in particular is with Muslims and Islam.

So those cultural groups have emerged across Europe. However, as I said, in Britain it’s not a legal issue. It’s a cultural issue only. And they’ve emerged, and they have focused on Islam and Muslims. And their particular focus has certain flashpoints. Those

Kübra Gümüşay

“...So every time other minorities are collateral damage of Islamophobic pushes, the debate shifts. And then it’s actually revealed that those pushes against Muslims are not based on certain honest and sincere intellectual concerns with certain practices, but are more about a symbolic act against Muslims.”
flashpoints could be the question that recently arose of halal meat. The Jewish community and our Jewish cousins stepped in and said, hold on, that’s going to start involving kosher meat as well.

So there was a huge furor in the tabloid press around whether halal slaughter is humane, which was interesting because eventually voices came to the fore and began comparing the factory line slaughter processes in abattoirs. It started shedding light on the whole industry, which meant a very quick backtrack, eventually. Because as we all know, the industry generally isn’t particularly good with the way it treats animals. And this is coming from an avid meat eater.

So the other flashpoint that emerged—the most recent flashpoint—has been the one of stripping citizenships. Now again, the issue is that legally, thank God, it’s not currently the case. The Conservative Party, my political party’s coalition partners in government, and Theresa May, the home secretary, floated the idea of stripping passports. And we, the Liberal Democrats, came forward and said, “Hold on, you can’t do that because it’s illegal.” But the focus would have been on people that have dual nationality and are suspected of terrorism, which inevitably ends up with the Muslim population.

And the problem there of course is you then create a sub-category of citizen. Those who are deemed permanently British or somehow native to the land, and those who are guests who could be stripped of their citizenship if they misbehave. And that two-tier system is something very dangerous, which we would personally resist openly to make sure that that doesn’t happen. So there are flashpoints that emerged in fundamentally removing freedoms. But those flashpoints, once the debate is sparked, raise very loud voices in opposition to them.

But the other cultural group—I already mentioned the far-right—that is culturally threatening our much cherished religious freedom are the Islamists. And they are threatening it in a very different way, because extremist organizations reinforce the far-right narrative. It was no surprise to us that Anders Breivik, the mass murderer, was quoting in admiration Al-Qaeda texts and talking about how successful they were in igniting a cultural war.

So these two groups have a symbiotic relationship with each other. These two cultural groups, the extremist Muslims on the one hand and the far-right on the other, reinforce each other’s message. And they fundamentally agree on one point: that Islam is a totalitarian political ideology that is in the West to dominate and to take over—the so-called “Eurabia” theory that Muslims will outbreed, and they will eventually come to take over the West from within.

Now, Islamists or Muslim extremists subscribe to the same fundamental understanding of Islam that it’s eventually there to take over. And so it therefore reinforces that narrative of the far-right. And what they do, which gets actually far less attention, is culturally curtail the religious freedom from within Muslim communities.

People attempt to argue from a theological perspective that one can be British and have loyalty to the country, and that one can be a Muslim, or that one can be perfectly at home with the multiplicity of identities in the West, as many scholars here today have also done in their respective countries. But when somebody would attempt to do that in, say, the United Kingdom, the Islamist discourse would emerge and would attempt to silence those voices in the name of religion. So it’s an interesting dynamic in that, whereas the far-right would be dealing with the mainstream society’s dynamic in attempting to convince mainstream society to curtail Muslim’s religious freedom, Islamists are primarily focused on policing religious discourse within Muslim communities.

And I refer to this as the minorities within the minorities. And we have to also be very concerned about those minorities within
minority communities. They are reformist, dissenting, challenging Muslim voices who are attempting to maintain a respect for their heritage in whichever way. I’m not a theologian, and I don’t prescribe good theology versus bad theology. I leave that to the theologians to do, and I’m closer to some of them than I am to others. But whatever that voice is, it needs to thrive, that pluralism needs to be encouraged. And in the attempts to reconcile my heritage, our Muslim heritage, with the positions we find ourselves in, using theology must continue.

So part of that challenge is also somehow working a way through the walls that Islamists put up within Muslim communities, whether they’d be, as I said, feminist Muslim voices, minority Muslim voices, minority sects and dominations, or reformist Muslim voices. Muslims are attempting to reconcile liberal freedom, political philosophies with theology, and the right to enter and leave the faith as one chooses. Because as one scholar recently said to me, there can be no belief without the right to disbelief.

And all of these can and must be reconciled with Islamic theology. They have been, and it is being done by some scholars even present here today. But that is often resisted by Islamists within the British context.

KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY: If I may add, you rightly mentioned two dynamics that actually support one narrative and one policy, which are the Islamists and then the radical racists within British society. But I think it’s also applicable to other countries in Western Europe as well.

But I would add another group, a third group that also fits into this narrative. In Germany, we have several examples of this: people of Muslim heritage and background who support the racist, radical, extremist narrative of the far-right. We have a very prominent example, Necla Kelek, who actually supported the notion on German TV that Muslim men are overly sexualized and overly sexist as well. And then she said on national TV that Muslim men, if they could not find a woman, would regularly—this was apparently a norm—have sex with animals. And she’s still being invited and seen as a credible source.

And just four years ago, we had a book published by the German banker Thilo Sarrazin that basically explains that Muslims are genetically less intelligent than others. And Kelek was there for his book presentation serving as a native informant, supporting his thesis and his statements, because she herself is from a Muslim background, hence her sitting with Sarrazin makes him more credible.

So I would definitely add another group to the two groups you have said: Muslims or people of Muslim background who use their background to give credibility to racists and Islamophobes. They actually also support the narrative of the sexist, homophobic, racist, backward, unintelligent, and totally not European or Western and uncivilized Muslim. So yeah, I would agree, we also have this group.

MAAJID NAWAZ: Can I add something?

JENNIFER BRYSON: I’ve got another question, but I’m interested in your contribution.

MAAJID NAWAZ: So what reinforces this cultural divide that’s emerging is, unfortunately, what recent surveys in Britain have revealed: that Muslims in the United Kingdom are the most likely to be discriminated against when they look for employment opportunities. And these are not just surveys that were done just to survey generally the British public. They’re done by major polling companies. There’s nothing dodgy about the stats.

And it’s very unfortunate if you combine that particular statistic—that underemployment among Muslim communities is already a challenge, and they’re more likely to be discriminated against if they have Muslim names—with another very worrying statistic. And that is that 3 percent of the population in the United Kingdom is Muslim, but around 18 percent to 20 percent of the prison population is Muslim. Now, they’re not in prison because they’re Muslim. But this is the reality as we find it. And when you have that sort of discrimination coupled with overly high conviction rates, for whatever reason, it’s a playground for extremists to recruit from by reinforcing this kind of clash-of-civilizations narrative.

JOCELYNE CESARI: I would like to add something. What the two of you are describing is not a clash of civilizations—that underemployment among Muslim communities is already a challenge, and they’re more likely to be discriminated against if they have Muslim names—with another very worrying statistic. And that is that 3 percent of the population in the United Kingdom is Muslim, but around 18 percent to 20 percent of the prison population is Muslim. Now, they’re not in prison because they’re Muslim. But this is the reality as we find it. And when you have that sort of discrimination coupled with overly high conviction rates, for whatever reason, it’s a playground for extremists to recruit from by reinforcing this kind of clash-of-civilizations narrative.

I would also like to be more nuanced on what you call “Islamist.” For example, in my experience, Muslim Brothers do not fit into this model, while Salafists or neo-Salafists are indeed moving away or convincing young people that they should not be part of Western society. This has not been the message of the Muslim Brothers as I know them across Europe.

But what you are describing as the Islam built by the Islamophobic discourse is not the reality. It’s a projection of a certain num-
ber of stereotypes and pre-assumptions. But the problem is it is also reinforced by the existence of the Salafist thinking that puts the West as the enemy. So what you are seeing is not so much a clash of civilizations, but what someone said a long time ago: a clash of essentialism with the other in the mirror. And this is the most dangerous situation, because it does not leave any room to take into account the reality of people.

An important point to mention here is that it has not happened yet in the United States. It’s a very important point that you’ve raised, that in this essentialization of Islam, lots of Muslims or former Muslims—and most of the time it’s women more than men, because the discourse is also very much focused on women’s rights, and it’s not a coincidence that this young woman you’re mentioning is very much involved in this debate—they came in and reinforce the idea that indeed Islam is in its essence bad against women and against religious minorities.

I’m thinking of a figure that used to live in the Netherlands and that now is actually my neighbor in Cambridge: Ayaan Hirsi Ali. She was a member of the parliament. Now she is a former Muslim. She doesn’t want to be called a Muslim but she built her legitimacy on alerting the West on the dangers of Islam. It is a very efficient argument in the Western world—how if Muslims are saying that Islam is bad, there must indeed be an issue here.

And what worries me in Europe is that you have this anti-Islamic discourse versus this anti-Western discourse that is very much present in the media and in the blogosphere on both sides. This completely erases the much more diverse and nuanced way that Muslims and non-Muslims are trying sometimes to live together. And this is a major, major problem that nobody is addressing, because for the West, the Salafists look like the real thing. They are a practicing Muslim, if you look like you could be from a majority-Muslim country or if you are visibly a Muslim, you are being treated as a Muslim. And that then actually implies that Islam has actually been racialized. And whether or not you are a practicing Muslim, if you look like you could be from a majority-Muslim country or if you are visibly a Muslim, you are being treated as a Muslim. And that then actually implies that Islam is being racialized and the way that people who look like they could be Muslims are treated is racist. We do not yet—I think more so in Britain than in mainland Europe—have the understanding of anti-Muslim racism and how that plays into these processes and dynamics.

These people are solving problems. If you’re interested in solving some of those issues and not being part of the problem, then you talk to those audiences who believe in those things and try to change those people. In that case, for instance, it would mean talking to certain communities who have sexist practices, rather than talking again to white, Western, non-Muslim audiences and getting applauded by them and being portrayed as the good Muslim that is this sort of wonderful example. The rest, once again, are portrayed as bad Muslims.

So there is a difficulty for many Muslims in Europe who do work on a grassroots level but do not want to talk in the mainstream media, those who wash the dirty laundry of their community just for the sake of washing it and getting applauded for being one of those people who works against it. But actually, when talking to mainstream communities in the mainstream media, they do want to address topics that are problematic to those people such as racism, specifically anti-Muslim racism.

In the beginning, one of the questions you asked was, why is it that these restrictions do happen in regard to Muslim communities? And what I find as a major reason is that somehow it is seen as an intellectual act to criticize Islam. And it is legitimate to criticize Muslims because we do not have the understanding that Islam has actually been racialized. And whether or not you are a practicing Muslim, if you look like you could be from a majority-Muslim country or if you are visibly a Muslim, you are being treated as a Muslim. And that then actually implies that Islam is being racialized and the way that people who look like they could be Muslims are treated is racist. We do not yet—I think more so in Britain than in mainland Europe—have the understanding of anti-Muslim racism and how that plays into these processes and dynamics.

The real task—where the real heroes are—is actually talking to the communities and dealing with the problems on a grassroots level. I’m not saying that every intellectual should work on a grassroots level, but it should be aimed to the grassroots because that, to me, is sincere work. And these are sincere and honest intentions.

JENNIFER BRYSON: Well, on those notes, I’d like to look more at the impact of these challenges with anti-Muslim attitudes, and then in particular the impact that religion-based restrictions have on civic and economic engagement. Maajid, you commented on the high rates of unemployment, and that there is a distinctly high rate among the Muslim population in some areas. And I think that we need to realize that religious freedom is not an abstract separate element, but that it is very much part
of human society and these dynamics in civil society interrelate with each other.

And also as an outsider, as an American looking toward Europe from a distance, I see a strange irony that precisely the groups on the far-right who are voicing and also engaging in action that has the most to do with anti-Muslim sentiment are also calling for integration. And yet, it seems that anti-Muslim sentiment may be having a negative impact on this lived reality, on these in-between groups in this diverse population in economic and civil society.

And for me, now that I’ve moved to the West Coast, and I don’t get to be out here in Washington as much, it’s a joy to come here today and see some Muslims I know who are involved in robust civic engagement in America. I see people here from independent think tanks, such as the Minaret of Freedom and the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. We’ve got somebody here from Zaytuna College. They just partnered this past weekend with my secular think tank that I lead out in California.

This is really an important part of our society. How are things going in Europe?

MAAJID NAWAZ: I’m really happy you touched on both civil and economic engagement. There’s a huge challenge with economic engagement—or lack thereof—and underemployment.

And a lot of what we’re seeing around in the world, including the atrocious events in Sydney at the moment as we speak [this conference took place on the same day as the 2014 hostage crisis at a cafe in Sydney, Australia], makes it very difficult for Muslims who are seeking employment with overtly Muslim names.

When I published my book, I chose deliberately to keep my name as it was, not to use a pen name. I chose to call it Radical not in an attempt to describe my Islamist past, but to reclaim the word “radical” as a positive term, describing thinking in a different way. But unfortunately, when it comes to the employment sector, people are seeing Muslim names or they’re seeing a particular look and assuming a lot about the person that they’re looking at.

So I want to tell a story. I was recently in a minicab, and the driver was clearly an Arab Muslim with a big beard and he’s speaking to me in Arabic. And one word, if they saw this driver who was Algerian in origin—if anyone knows anything about Algeria, it’s even easier to stereotype; the religious Muslim comes from Algeria because of the jihadist civil war that ensued in that country—one would have assumed this man was some form of extremist. He was certainly a Salafist, which is why I take issue with even us having a problem with all Salafists. I don’t think we should use or frame a discussion that all Salafists are inherently problematic either.

I think the issue is those who politicize the faith, and that’s what I meant by Islamism. It’s simply the politicization of the religion in an attempt to take over, whether from within or from without, that I take issue with. Because what the driver proceeded to say to me was that his son—and this is unfortunately very common in Europe—his son wanted to go and join ISIS. This is a random minicab driver. He just picked me up randomly. He had no idea who I was. I don’t use my real name when I order these minicabs for many reasons. But he told me his son wants to join ISIS. I asked him what he said next. And he said well, he basically engaged in a religious discussion with him, which succeeded, thank God, and his son was convinced by his father’s efforts. And he referred him to many Saudi-based Salafists, well-known scholars, and he was referring these scholars to me. I wrote some of their names down, and also traditional scholars of hadith who had passed away since, such as Shaykh Al-Albani, who’s well-known as a sort of Salafist hadith scholar.

So it’s unfortunate that for people who look Muslim or have Muslim names, one does assume certain things about them. And this conversation I had with this driver kind of reminded me
to check my own understanding of even Salafist Muslims, since ordinarily I would take issue with some of their theology. But in here, he’s clearly done some good in stopping his son going to fight.

Now, there’s a phrase, an Arabic word that was used, that the Muslims and the scholars present would know very well. It was ibn-Abbas who said, “Kalimat al-haq yureeda biha al-batil,” meaning, “the word of truth that is aimed for an unjust ends,” or “the word of truth that is being used to achieve an unjust end result.” And this phrase was used by Abbas during the negotiations with the Khawarij, or those who are the seditious sect that was attempting to excommunicate the Muslim community just after the passing of the Prophet Muhammad, and were attempting to kill the companions of the Prophet exactly as ISIS is doing today by arguing that they’re not ruling by Islam. And in those negotiations, they were citing passages from the Qur’an, such as inn al-hukm illa lillah, or “the rule is from none but God,” and it’s in response to that passage that the Sahabi ibn-Abbas said that actually this is the word of truth, but you’re using it for unjust ends.

Now, the reason I recall this particular story is because today you mentioned integration. Today, there are far-right organizations in Europe, doing the same thing with the word integration. Integration is needed. It’s necessary. It’s an important conversation we need to have. But they are using this very just desire to have this conversation about the challenge of integration, particularly within Muslim communities in the West. There are many challenges that remain open, and we have to have those conversations. But they are piggybacking. They are jumping onto that legitimate conversation to arrive at a stage where, for example, they would want to ban minarets. They would want to ban the face veil.

And so I think the solution to that isn’t to deny the conversation, just like in the original story of the companion. Ibn-Abbas wasn’t saying don’t discuss the Qur’an, but to actually focus on the motive for the conversation and to also openly—for people that don’t have the ulterior motive—embrace that conversation.

And so I think that’s also very important. Let’s ditch that paradigm, and let’s have the ambassadors who are speaking, and who really care about preserving human rights, and who also don’t shy away from some of the more difficult debates around immigration and around integration, but just have an open and frank conversation.

Sometimes, that will bring us—as it’s done with me in many instances—to have conversations with those who’ve even rejected the faith such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali. But we need to be able to talk to these people in a way that doesn’t stigmatize rejecting the faith as well within the Muslim discourse.

“These two cultural groups, the extremist Muslims on the one hand and the far-right on the other, reinforce each other’s message. And they fundamentally agree on one point: that Islam is a totalitarian political ideology that is in the West to dominate and to take over, the so-called “Eurabia” theory that Muslims will outbreed, and they will eventually come to take over the West from within.”

Maajid Nawaz
JENNIFER BRYSON: As eager as I am to tap in to how much you guys have to contribute, we have just a little more time. Go ahead, Kübra. But please keep it on the shorter side because I'd like to have time to switch to a different topic.

KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY: Okay. I would actually disagree with some of the things you've said [referring to Maajid]. Specifically, I'm not saying that those who talk to mainstream media or those who talk about these problems to mainstream media are necessarily bad Muslims or bad in general. What I'm saying is about how you talk and what you say to which audiences.

Gaining fame by pointing out problems in the Muslim community when speaking to a Western, white audience and being applauded for that is not a heroic act and doesn't make me a good person. What makes me a good person would then actually be to address those problems or to speak to the right audiences. And when I talk to other audiences about these problems, I give context. I explain. I make this a productive and long-lasting and solution-oriented debate.

So it's rather about how I've talked to mainstream audiences. I myself talk about sexism in mainstream media. I write about it in Germany. But it's very important to me how I write about it. Do I do it by demonizing Muslim organizations and my Muslim community and building a career on sort of demonizing them and bashing them? Or do I build a career on working on solving these problems? When I talk to a Western audience, I explain this problem and give solutions that will be also useful for non-Muslims. So I think it's rather about that.

Coming to your question about the economic effects of this: I think, ironically, it has a positive effect as well. Many Muslims in Germany have become entrepreneurs. Because of the lack of possibilities they've had within traditional companies, many have created their own companies and have been successful with that. But nonetheless, there is a huge problem we have here, as you've already mentioned, if you have a Muslim-sounding name or a non-German sounding name in general. So it's not specifically applicable to Muslims only. You have to send twice the amount of applications as someone who has a German-sounding name, which then leads to a lot of frustration.

You touched upon radicalism. I think we're going to talk about this as well in the next few minutes. One of the problems we have here is that if you don't have any prospects within the country, it leads to a lot of frustration. Many of the people we see who go into more extremist interpretations of Islam are those who 15 to 20 years ago used to be in those gangs, and who used to be small criminals. Those are the very same groups usually—not all of them, but there's a tendency. Most of those who go into that direction are not religiously well educated. Actually, research shows that most of the people who have that kind of development are those who have not been religiously well educated.

So to ward off radicalism and extremism, we need not less Islam, but more Islam. We need more profound Islamic education. That's the problem we have, because so far there has not yet been this understanding of how important Islamic teaching is to ward off extremism.

Luckily, in the United Kingdom it's very different. We have many teachers who are visibly Muslim, but we also have Islamic schools. We have many possibilities to have access to Islamic education. It is very much limited in mainland Europe and in Germany, for instance.

It has recently changed. We now have certain states within Germany where there is Islamic teaching in schools as well. But in general there is a huge restriction on that. And so I think this paradigm needs to shift as well. We don't need less Islam to ward off extremism. We need more Islam to ward off extremism.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Can I say something on the economic side? There is a debate now among economists across Europe to look at Muslims as an underclass. It does create a lot of debate, and it is not completely consensual yet. The idea of an underclass is about people who have the same economic status, education, or background as the majority, and despite these shared features are not benefiting from the same social mobility. And so it has been controlled among different groups taking into account ethnicity, religion, and so on. It looks like Muslims are at the bottom and the discrimination that was mentioned here in the UK or Germany is actually common all over Europe.

So, this is something that has to be addressed in political terms. It also has religious consequences because it does reinforce the idea that Islam is the factor for lack of integration. And this came in the focus group for the survey I mentioned. Lots of Muslims, more in Europe than in the United States, actually think that they are more and more discriminated against because they're Muslim, from the school and the classroom to the shop and the news. I mean, there is this multi-layered vision that Islam is an issue, from micro interaction to international politics, that came very strongly in the interviews of European Muslims, and not as much in the case of American Muslims. We really have to ad-
dress that in political terms in Europe. Unfortunately, it is not really happening now.

JENNIFER BRYSON: I’d like to ask you just one question and then we’ll move to questions from the audience. We’re going to switch gears. We’ve talked about very serious and real challenges and problems. There’s another way of approaching this. I wonder what examples you might know of, ways in which positive experiences of religious freedom in Europe by Muslims have had an impact on discussions with Muslims from Europe into other parts of the Muslim community, and more broadly in the world. I can think of one example. Have there been ways that the imam on Friday at communal prayer is able to give the sermon without the government scripting it? Have there been ways that this positive experience has been something that some Muslims have wanted to share?

MAAJID NAWAZ: Thank you. This is a really important point. I think it’s been under-exploited by us Western born and raised Muslims in our engagement. I have family still in Pakistan. I’ve travelled a lot across the entire region, in the Middle East as well as South Asia. It’s been under-exploited as a resource, as an opportunity for Muslims in the West. It hasn’t been well sold. In fact, through the 1990s, it was the opposite. That freedom of religion that you just referred to was used by people like me to undermine that premise in our engagement with Muslim communities in Muslim-majority societies, unfortunately.

My very first trip to the United States of America was in 2007 when I came here to testify at the US Senate. I left Hizb-ut-Tahrir in 2006, so it was very recent after my departure from my former organization. I came here inspired originally by the book that Sayyid Qutb wrote, *Amrika allati Ra’aytu*, or *The America I Have Seen*. It was a diatribe against American society. It was a rant. Sayyid Qutb blames licentiousness and Western promiscuity for a lot of what he ended up becoming in that book.

So, inspired by that, I wanted to upload a video blog, “The America that I Saw.” It’s still on YouTube. It was my first time here, very recently having been an Islamist, and it was an important conversation. I uploaded this conversation that the very licentiousness and the very freedom to dress how one wants in these societies is the very same freedom that allows Muslims to build mosques, that allows Muslim women to dress how they like.

It’s important to recognize that. I made that point in the video, that what Sayyid Qutb failed to realize was it’s what allows us to be Muslim here. That point—the positive side of freedom being the religious freedom to practice one’s faith—that point, I believe, has been undersold by people like me in our engagement with Muslim majority societies.

There have been lots of efforts by religious scholars—again, some of them are present here today—in attempting to make the religious case using Islamic theology. What is missing are grassroots activists popularizing that religious theology, which does exist. It’s not that Muslim theologians aren’t speaking out. They have been for many years. What’s missing are grassroots social movements popularizing that theology and making it common discourse within Muslim-majority societies at the grassroots. If anyone wants to see what I mean by this in a bit more detail, I gave a TEDGlobal talk on this very subject of how to popularize such discourse within Muslim-majority societies and where the mistakes have been made and what we can learn from those mistakes.

KÜBRA GÜMÜŞAY: What I find difficult about this question is that many Muslim minority groups in Western Europe usually don’t have any influence on Muslim-majority countries, because they have immigrated. They feel part of Western society. By having Muslims in the West experience religious freedom, it will have no immediate impact on Muslim-majority countries. Actually, what happened was that lack of religious freedom in some Muslim-majority countries was used as rhetoric in the
West to defend restrictions against Muslims. For instance, people would argue that since country X doesn’t permit the building of churches, then the building of mosques should not be allowed in their Western country.

Nevertheless, I think there is a huge potential that the possible coexistence of different religions can be a positive role model for other Muslim countries as well. But then again, there are other role models in the past, like the Ottoman Empire, where religious plurality was a part of the very essence of the empire. So I think there are many examples of that.

But let me address the topic you touched upon, the government’s influence on the Friday speeches or sermons. I think, because we live in a globalized world, there are debates now that are very well connected such as the Islamic feminist debates, where many Muslim feminists from Europe are very much in contact with Muslim feminists in Muslim-majority countries. From that aspect, for example, I think it has had a positive impact and led to an empowering of women based on Islam. These women say that Islam gives us these rights and let’s make use of it. So I think there has been an empowerment in that sense.

JENNIFER BRYSON: Jocelyne.

JOCELYNE CESARI: I have a few remarks on that. First, all the surveys, not only the one I had the chance to conduct, but lots of polling and quantitative surveys show that Muslims in Western Europe praise democracy and religious freedom, and that they identify with the country in which they live. This is again at odds with the dominant narrative, but nobody’s taking into account this opinion.

In the focus group we conducted, it was really clear that these views were felt strongly everywhere. The most surprising focus group we had was in the Netherlands, because we were expecting Muslims to voice lots of frustration and anger vis-à-vis fellow Dutch citizens. And they didn’t. They were very, in some way, understanding and tolerant, which was quite a shock actually, compared to the French Muslim. It came across as, “Okay, that’s what it is, but it’s better to be here than to be anywhere else in the Muslim world.” So this was an interesting dynamic.

Now, if we look at Europe as an opportunity for free thinking, we see new Muslim thinkers emerging who can do two things. They can think independently of the state, because we were expecting Muslims to voice lots of frustration and anger vis-à-vis fellow Dutch citizens. And they didn’t. They were very, in some way, understanding and tolerant, which was quite a shock actually, compared to the French Muslim. It came across as, “Okay, that’s what it is, but it’s better to be here than to be anywhere else in the Muslim world.” So this was an interesting dynamic.

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Now, if we look at Europe as an opportunity for free thinking, we see new Muslim thinkers emerging who can do two things. They can think independently of the state, because never forget that in Muslim countries religion is an asset for state policy. It’s part of the state policy. So these thinkers in the West do not have a need to comply to the khutbahs [sermons] sent by fax or email to the mosques. But it’s also for them a challenge to depoliticize Islamic thinking, because beside the state involvement in Islam, there is also a growing or dominant vision that links Islam to political challenge.

So we see emerging a lot of theologians and women who are at the forefront of these attempts to depoliticize Islam, especially in Germany. There is a whole group of female theologians trying to reread the Qur’an with interpretations that are not Sayyid Qutb based. Sayyid Qutb’s interpretation of the Qur’an has been very influential among Muslim youth in the last 50 years, but that’s a political reading of the Qur’an.

Then the question is this: Is it the only way to read the Qur’an today? Is it the only framework in which you can express who you are as a Muslim? One way to get away from that political form of Islam is to try new forms of hermeneutics. The problem is that this kind of initiative emerging from the West for now doesn’t have a lot of impact in Muslim majority countries. Additionally, a lot of Muslims in Europe are very upset by the ways the situation in Muslim-majority countries is affecting them.

So it’s not just one way. It’s also the other way. In this sense, they feel like the international environment and the situation of Islam—let’s say in Iraq or Libya or Tunisia—is the paradigm for which the situation of Muslims in Europe is read. They feel like hostages, not only of European governments, but also of Muslim political activists in Muslim countries that use them as a vehicle or tool for political discourse. It makes the space of freethinking very vulnerable, I would say, but it’s there. I think it’s there.

JENNIFER BRYSON: Let’s open it up for audience questions now.

DEJOD RIYAB: I’m Dejod Riyab from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. It is a minority Muslim community all over Europe and the USA. We’re thankful that we have religious freedom in Europe and the USA. We’re thankful that we have religious freedom in Europe and the USA. At this time, we are progressing all over the world. We are the one Muslim organization that supports Muslims for Peace, Muslims for Loyalty, and Muslims for Life.

JENNIFER BRYSON: And do you have a question for our panel?

DEJOD RIYAB: The question is that these people from Eu-
rope, I know they are focusing on the other Muslims. But I don't know if they're focusing on the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, which is all about peace in Europe.

**JENNIFER BRYSON:** I did appreciate that several of you have brought up the diversity and complexities within Europe. Do you have any more comments on this internal diversity?

**MAAJID NAWAZ:** Actually, it just reinforces the point that there are minority voices within Muslim communities who are either other sects or other denominations. They do face challenges. The Ahmadiyya community does face challenges in expressing their own religious freedom because there is a cultural stigma associated with them by mainstream Sunni Muslims and Shi’a Muslims, because of what is deemed to be some of their beliefs. That’s a challenge which more Muslims need to be speaking openly about.

Because, say, in Pakistan, if one is applying for a visa from Britain to travel to Pakistan, or if one is applying for a dual nationality, they have to sign a declaration on the visa form, the official Pakistani government form, which not only declares that they are not of the Ahmadiyya, but then testifies that the Ahmadiyya are in fact non-Muslim. You can’t get the dual citizenship or anything unless you swear to that. It’s a level of discrimination, which leads to lynch mobs in Pakistan. It’s an acute challenge.

**JENNIFER BRYSON:** Go ahead, Kübra.

**KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY:** It’s just a brief comment. I’m aware of the discrimination that the Ahmadiyya community faces within Britain. It’s very much different though in Muslim minority groups that are not predominantly from Pakistan. In Germany and in France, for example, I have many Ahmadiyya friends who state themselves that the problems they face within Germany or France with the Muslim communities are nothing like what they face in Great Britain. They are actually very well integrated. So you will find many Ahmadiyya Muslims who are regularly on TV who speak out on behalf of the Muslim community, and they are not seen as, “Oh, you can only speak for the Ahmadiyya.” They are not stereotyped. That’s because we don’t have a predominantly Pakistani community in Germany, for example.

**JENNIFER BRYSON:** We have a question over here.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER (unidentified):** I’m not as articulate as our panelists, and I realize we’re pressed for time, so I’ve written down my question, if that’s all right. I believe the question is for Jocelyne. I was looking down at the time when it was said, but she made a comment about how she considered Salafists Islamists, for example, but not the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun. The question is coming from someone who speaks Arabic as a second language and has read The Lives of Hassan al-Banna & Sayyid Qutb. I’ve read the book by Sayyid Qutb that was mentioned, Amrika allati Rāaytu, as well as others like Madālim fi al-Tariq (Milestones) also by Sayyid Qutb in Arabic.

Traditionally, Salafists—excluding Salafist jihadists, who are obviously very political—have been very apolitical. They still have the goal of the synchronization of religion and state law, but they ignore the legitimacy from Germany, but also across Europe. Interestingly, the Alevi have been very much associated with the EU in the debate of Turkey getting into the EU and improving the status of religious minorities in Turkey.

**JOCELYNE CESARI:** Yeah, absolutely. That’s why they recognize the Alevi slaughtering. But they say, “We’re not going to recognize other slaughtering, because if Alevi are following this rule, we don’t need another rule for other Sunni Muslims.” This is also an interesting way how the recognition of the minority within the minority actually discriminates against the whole Muslim community.

**KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY:** I just want to add to this. It’s funny—many things happen to be funny in Germany, I’ve realized during this conversation—that Sunni Islam is not yet recognized as a religion by the German state, but Alevi Islam is.
are not nearly as active as all the other political movements that one initially thinks of. You can name 10 off the top of your head. They’re not out in the streets, trying to reach their goal within the next decade quite like the Muslim Brotherhood and others.

I’ll get right to the point. In light of the Muslim Brothers and this whole idea of synchronization of religion and state law with the halal and haram, the sharia becomes synonymous with legal and illegal. I’m just wondering that if the Muslim Brotherhood is not Islamist, then who is? Other members of the panel can respond to that as well.

JENNIFER BRYSON: This is a huge question. So maybe you can offer us at least some pieces of the European section of this.

JOCELYNE CESARI: Yes, otherwise, it can indeed take long. The point is not to say that Muslim Brothers are not Islamists, because in discussion with our colleagues here we are talking about the position of Muslim Brothers vis-à-vis citizenship in Europe, and vis-à-vis national identity in Europe.

What I can say is that in the last 50 years, the most active agents in the co-existence between national identity and Islam or secularism and Islam have been the Muslim Brothers. They are at the forefront of all the initiatives to build a representative body of Islam recognized by European states.

In this sense, they are different from, I would say, the Salafists who have been very much withdrawn, advocating a separation between young Muslims and the society in which they live—saying that citizenship is haram, saying that voting doesn’t make any sense, that the best way to live is to live like the Prophet Muhammad at Medina. This is not what the Muslim Brothers are advocating.

So it’s not about Islam. It’s about postures within the secular democracy vis-à-vis your interaction with a non-Muslim. It’s a very, very different position. But again, most of the Salafists are not advocating violence, but they are intolerant. What I have seen in the discussion we had with our Muslim focus group is that they’re also intolerant vis-à-vis other Muslims: meaning, if you don’t follow the way I live, you are not such a good Muslim. This intolerance also has to be addressed.

There is a deficit here in the leadership between what is said at the level of European nations or international organizations, and the reality of Muslims. From what I have heard, Muslims are complaining all the time about this monopoly by people who do not automatically represent where they live—either Salafi or neo-Salafi—but, for that matter, also the representatives from the countries of origin in Europe—Pakistan, Turkey, Algeria, or Morocco. These are real issues for Muslims.

MAAJID NAWAZ: I hesitate because I don’t want this to turn into a debate about the Muslim Brotherhood. But I do fundamentally disagree with what has just been said—not entirely, though. I agree with some of what you’ve said. But I fundamentally disagree with the idea that one should separate and say that Salafists pose problems and the Muslim Brotherhood has been good for integration. I think the answer is a lot more nuanced than that.

I lived with the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in prison for five years and with their entire organization. I know Dr. Mohammed Badie personally, who’s currently the murshid of Ikhwan [Brothers] in Egypt, and I broke many a bread with him over Ramadan in Mazra Tora prison. I think there’s a lot more nuance that we need to apply here. We can see some positives in the Salafists in their apoliticized or depoliticized approach. There are some positives in the original Saudi Salafists from the Khaleej (or the Gulf), in that they have traditionally been at the forefront of challenging the innovation or the Bid’ah of Islamism. They’ve been at the forefront of that.

Where the negatives are is that they are very socially conservative. They are very against women’s empowerment, in many instances, and against dissenting voices within communities such as the Ahmadiyya. So the Salafists have both the good and bad. The same is true for the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim Brothers are Islamists. They do aspire to influence policy with a particular ideological dogma. Now, that’s in Europe as well as in Egypt.
There's no difference in what they're doing. They're participating in government because they participate in government in Egypt as well. That doesn't mean they are not attempting to influence policy with a particular ideological agenda.

The positives are that socially, they are relatively more progressive than the Salafists. So we have to learn to be a bit more nuanced about these various groups, to encourage the positives in all of them and discourage the negatives, rather than just saying that the Muslim Brotherhood is bad, the Salafists are bad, and so on.

JOCELYNE CESARI: I just want to say—

MAAJID NAWAZ: Hold on. I'm not saying you've done that. But I'm saying there is a tendency, particularly in Europe, to engage with Ikhwan [Brothers] as enablers of secularism. We have got to be very careful. They are enablers of some aspects of social cohesion. For example, mosques that have been frequented by the Muslim Brotherhood tend to have space for women and men, whereas other mosques from certain conservative communities don't. So that's a good thing.

However, in other instances, when they engage with government, they seem to be, in many cases, the most prominent voices in shutting down dissenting political voices because of some of the views they hold about the nature of Islam in politics. So we should, I think, recognize that there's good and bad in all, and know the direction of travel that we want to head in. There are many things that one should be wary of when it comes to the official manifesto of the Muslim Brotherhood.

JOCELYNE CESARI: One thing we have to be very clear about is not to confuse the situation of Muslim Brothers in Muslim-majority countries and in Europe. All the factual evidence of this distinction is there. Muslim Brothers in Europe do not want to be associated in the way they deal with Islam and nation states in Europe with the political situation of Europe. They do not want Islamic states in Europe.

What they want is a presence of Islam in the public space—which is problematic in other aspects—but it has nothing to do with imposing sharia or Islamic law at the level of the state in Europe. There has been a lot of discussion on that. I think you are a little behind in the evolution of Muslim Brothers in Europe on this topic, while the Salafists are saying that the state elections are haram. I see a real problem here. These people are competing on the ground. The most intolerant are not the Muslim Brothers.

JENNIFER BRYSON: Part of the joy of having a panel is we get different perspectives. As we wind up and lunch is coming near, we’ve got time for one more question. I’m sorry for those we haven’t been able to fit in, but hopefully in the breaks, you’ll have time to continue the conversation with each other.

ALEJANDRO BEUTEL: Thanks to Georgetown University, Dr. Bryson, and the panelists for a spirited discussion. I’m Alejandro Beutel with the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. I just wanted to ask a quick question. There was something that stuck out to me that Kübra had mentioned before, which was that discrimination against Muslims isn’t seen as racist and discriminatory until it affects others.

There are two takeaways that I got from that in terms of the work that I’ve done as a researcher here in the United States with American Muslim communities—myself being Muslim as well. On the one hand, it could be seen that Muslims are a potential political albatross that people sometimes, to use the old phrase, don’t want to touch with a ten-foot pole. But on the other hand, if I was to look at it from an outsider’s perspective, it could also be that they are the proverbial canaries in a coalmine. What may happen to Muslims could be a harbinger for what could happen to other people down the line.

Here in the United States, my organization just came out with a study about a month ago. One of the main takeaways was, empirically speaking, that the same people who go after Muslims, for instance, sponsoring certain types of legislation at the state level, are people who then in turn support legislation that disproportionately impacts others. I guess you could call them vulnerable communities, such as African-Americans or Latinos or the like—again, myself being a part of one of those other communities.

My question then is two-fold. One, in terms of the research, have there been any studies that look at the broader “connecting of the dots,” if you will? Does such a thing even exist? And then number two, what is the state of the practice of potential coalition building? Not just in terms of what may be called anti-racist coalition building, but building across what may be seemingly strange bedfellows with other social conservatives and political conservatives, which can isolate and marginalize individuals who are on the fringes in broader society.

JENNIFER BRYSON: Thanks for a very great question. I would ask our panelists to try to keep it on the brief side since
our session’s time is nearing the end. Kübra, why don’t you start since we just heard from Maajid and Jocelyne?

KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY: Is this my very last remark?

JENNIFER BRYSON: I think it might be.

KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY: Okay. Then I will frame it a little differently. Thank you very much for the question. I’m going to answer the second part of that. I think intersectionality is a key word here. I think what I stopped criticizing in the past with the Muslim communities and their concerns was that they were very much concerned about their own things that affected their own communities. But I think the way forward is to look at the bigger picture and see how things that might not affect them at the moment might affect them in the future. Things that affect them right now might affect other communities in the future.

So having that understanding of a broader connection of all these problems would actually enhance the activism. What I actually do in Germany is I personally work together with Jews, the black community, POC, and other marginalized communities to create—

JENNIFER BRYSON: What is POC?

KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY: People of color.

JENNIFER BRYSON: I want to make sure the acronym is clear.

KÜBRA GÜMÜSAY: I thought that was common here in the United States as a word. The power here is that when my black friends speak out against anti-Muslim racism, it has a very different effect than when Muslims do it. When we as Muslims speak out against racism against blacks in Germany, it has a very different effect.

I want to name one particular example. In 2008, we had the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini, who was an Egyptian scientist who came to Germany to study. There was a racist who was harassing her, and then this went to court in Dresden in Germany. In court, he stabbed her to death. She was pregnant at the time, and her three-year-old son was witnessing all of this. Her husband, who jumped in to help her, was then shot by the police who came into the courtroom assuming that the one brown guy in the room must be the perpetrator. That was outrageous.

For five days, no national newspaper, magazine, or news outlet reported on this incident. It was Muslim bloggers who did that, but that did not shape the mainstream debate. But when the Council of Jews talked about this, then the whole debate shifted. And then they saw the problem. It was the first anti-Muslim racism murder that happened in Germany. Until today we sort of struggle naming it that way. But it was when Jews helped Muslims that this problem became evident. I think intersectionality, working together, is the strategy for the future as well if we want to live in a multicultural society with religious freedom.

JENNIFER BRYSON: I’m going to have to apologize to our other two panelists. We are out of time. But thank you all very much for your rich contributions.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Please join me again in thanking Jennifer Bryson and these extraordinary panelists. Bravo!

[Applause]
TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Good afternoon. We are delighted and honored that our conversation continues, and that we'll be in the hands of three extraordinarily able and powerful speakers and experts on the issues of religious freedom and Muslim minority communities around the world.

As Tom Farr began the conference earlier today, he noted that the theme, the inspiration for this conference is—we have to confess—the grave issue that faces many people around the world, namely, the extent to which religious freedom is under threat around the world. As congenial as our conversations are, the backdrop to them is the sad, grim reality of this crisis for many people. Our focus today is particularly on the crisis that Muslim minority communities face with respect to their religious freedom, especially in the United States and Western Europe, but also across the world.

Many of us are mindful—but not sufficiently mindful, I would suggest—of the extent to which Muslim communities across the world face very grave threats, not only to their religious freedom, but even to their survival. Countries such as India, Burma, and, in the last few months, the Central African Republic, have all seen horrific attacks on Muslim minorities from governments, as well as from social groups. Just last week, I noted that a Hindu nationalist group in India in the great city of Agra, where the Taj Majal is located, attempted to forcibly “reconvert” 200 Muslims to Hinduism. These kinds of efforts to coercively convert Muslims to Hinduism are happening all the time now in India, the world’s largest democracy.

To discuss these grave issues, we are delighted that we have this extraordinary panel. I’m not so much going to introduce the three panelists as introduce Professor Robert George, who has agreed to moderate this stellar panel. Professor Robert George, we are delighted to welcome you back to an event hosted by the Religious Freedom Project. We hosted Professor George a couple of years ago, and we’re happy that he has agreed to return.

We’re delighted because for many reasons Professor George is really the ideal person to lead this panel conversation. He is an extraordinary scholar and teacher of the very issues we’ll be discussing today—issues of constitutional rights, issues of natural rights, issues of the relationship between freedom and morality. He’s a legendary teacher at Princeton and a winner of numerous teaching awards. He’s also a stalwart, articulate advocate for religious freedom. He recently served as chairperson of the US Commission for International Religious Freedom—a role he took extremely seriously—and he has advocated vigorously on behalf of persecuted religious communities across the world, including Muslim communities.

Another important element of his biography for today’s proceedings is that he is a bluegrass banjo player. Unfortunately,
Professor George has not brought his bluegrass banjo. [Laughter] But we hope that he’ll do that on another occasion. It would, I think, add a certain kind of congenial spirit to the proceedings. We’ll have to ask you to do that next time, Professor George. And I should note that he was part of a group called Robby George and Friends at Swarthmore. I’m hoping the conversations today will go so well that we could call the three of you Robby George and Friends, but we’ll have to see. [Laughter]

Perhaps most importantly for today’s proceedings is that Professor George has been a consistent builder of interreligious bridges. In the last few years, he has worked tirelessly with Muslim groups, leaders, and public intellectuals to promote shared values around the sanctity of life, around marriage and the family, and—important for today’s purposes—around religious freedom. I know that an important inspiration for Professor George has been these words, words that he has often quoted, that he’s reminded us of, words from the Second Vatican Council, from the great document Nostra Aetate.

The Church document says,

“The Catholic Church has also a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to man. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims link their own. Although not acknowledging Jesus as God, they revere him as a prophet; his virgin Mother they also honor and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the Day of Judgment and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-giving, and fasting.”

Nostra Aetate, the document, goes on: “Over the centuries, many quarrels and dissensions have arisen between Christians and Muslims.” This is a remarkable understatement in the document. The document continues: “The sacred council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding, for the benefit of all men. Let them together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values.”

I only add that Professor George has not only quoted those words, but has acted on them. He has consistently advocated for closer cooperation between Muslims and Christians and other religious groups to advance freedom of conscience for all.

He has also, I should add, denounced those people who have attacked Muslims and have attacked their loyalty, have attacked their commitment to values of freedom. He’s gone out of his way to criticize politicians who have tried to stir up Islamophobic sentiment. In many, many ways, Professor George is an ideal person to lead us in our discussion of Muslim minorities and religious freedom. So please join me in welcoming Professor Robert George and this distinguished panel: Professor John Esposito and Shaykh Hamza Yusuf. [Applause]

ROBERT GEORGE: Thank you, Tim. Thank you. May God the almighty and merciful be praised for bringing all of us together—Jews, Muslims, and Christians—laborers in the same vineyard, working for the important values that must be advanced, not only here in our own country, but across the globe, beginning with the fundamental freedom of people to worship God as conscience dictates in freedom and security.

It’s a very great honor for me to be here, especially with my distinguished co-panelists. I want to congratulate the Berkley Center and especially Tom Banchoff, Thomas Farr, and Timothy Shah for their wisdom in gathering us together across the historic lines of religious difference to share our best thoughts about the way forward for us, about the ways that we can cooperate in pursuit of those common values to which the great document, Nostra Aetate, which was quoted by Tim, refers. I promise that on the next occasion that we’re together I will bring my banjo, if Hamza will bring his Dobro, or at least his brother’s Dobro, to join me. [Laughter]

My very first obligation is a pleasant one, and that’s to introduce my fellow panelists. Professor John Esposito is a professor of Religion and International Affairs and a professor of Islamic Studies here at Georgetown, where he’s the founding director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding. He’s a very distinguished scholar in the field. He’s been president of the Middle East Studies Association of North
America and the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies. He’s currently a member of the High Level Group of UN Alliance of Civilizations, a body of 20 international leaders that guides the alliance’s work. He has written many books, including most recently, *Islamophobia: The Challenges of Pluralism in the 21st Century*. Among his honors is the American Academy of Religion’s Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion, which he received in 2005.

It’s a very special joy always to be with—and today, to introduce—my beloved friend, my brother, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf. Shaykh Hamza is an American-born Muslim scholar and educator and one of the founders and currently the president of Zaytuna College. That’s our nation’s very first accredited Muslim institution of higher learning.

**HAMZA YUSUF:** I’m meeting with the accrediting commission on the sixteenth of February, so pray for me. [Laughter]

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Okay. Yes, absolutely. I know why the prayers are needed as well. It was preceded by the 1996 founding of the Zaytuna Institute, committed to presenting a classical picture of Islam in the West and reviving traditional study methods in the sciences of Islam. He became a Muslim back in the mid-1970s and spent 10 years in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and in North and West Africa receiving teaching licenses in Islamic subjects. He then returned to the United States where he earned degrees in Religious Studies and healthcare.

He is the first American lecturer to teach in the Qarawiyyin, Morocco’s most prestigious and oldest university. He also advises Stanford University’s program in Islamic Studies and the Center for Islamic Studies at Berkeley’s famous graduate Theological Union. He was one of the 138 Muslim signatories of *A Common Word Between Us and You*, which was the very respectful response, the acceptance of the invitation for engagement with Pope Benedict XVI after his famous and very controversial Regensburg address.

That engagement, that outreach, that willingness to talk, is exactly what Hamza is known for and the example that he sets for all of us—not simply for his fellow Muslims, but for Christians and Jews and really all believers and people of good will. Hamza and I have had opportunities to collaborate on projects where we are pursuing values that are shared by the Islamic and Christian traditions. We have worked together, for example in the cause of fighting against pornography, the horrible plague of pornography, which is causing so much devastation in our country, devastation that should be as obvious as the nose in front of your face. And yet, it’s passed over in silence.

Of course, we’ve worked together on the very issues that we’re here talking about today—fighting against unjust discrimina-
tion, against persecution, and for the free exercise of religion, not only for people of his faith or my faith, but for people of all faiths. Why do we do that? Why do we fight for those important freedoms? It’s not despite being a Muslim or despite being a Christian, but because he is a Muslim and because I am a Christian. We are motivated by our faith to reach out in respect, to defend even people who have a different point of view.

And so with those introductions, I will now open us up with some questions. I’ll go on for a bit and encourage some discussion here on the dais. And then we’ll reserve a few minutes toward the end for some Q&A with the audience.

Both John and Hamza—and I’ll ask John to comment first and then Hamza, but the question really is for both of you—as you look now at the situation for Muslims in the West—let’s begin in the West and then we’re going to talk about the situation for Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere—but in the United States and in Europe, what is your sense of the state of Muslim communities? How are these communities faring? What problems do they face from the outside? What problems are coming from inside the communities? How well are these communities addressing their problems? John, what’s your sense?

JOHN ESPOSITO: I think that I would separate out the United States and Europe in terms of my comments. With regard to the United States, major polling data done by Gallup and others show that at this juncture—not 10, 20, or 30 years ago, but at this juncture—Muslims are educationally and economically and increasingly politically integrated into American society. And indeed, in some polls, many do say that either they or members of their family or friends or somebody from their mosque have experienced problems with regard to their civil liberties, but they remain generally quite optimistic.

However, the civil liberties issues are there, and the growth of Islamophobia is there. Our center is launching a five-year study called “Pluralism, Diversity, and Islamophobia,” because we see that rather than it going away, it’s still very much part of the fabric of our society. One need only think of recent presidential and congressional elections or look at media and certainly social media. The situation in Europe is generally a bit different in the sense that European Muslims—many of them came quite a few years ago—came from rural areas, came as laborers and workers primarily, and had a lot of the educational and social disadvantages that immigrant Muslims in America did not have.

Here in the United States one also has to distinguish between the African-American experience and the immigrant Muslim experience. The Muslim immigrant experience here is marked by people who years ago fled for political reasons or for a better life, but also in recent years those who came for education and didn’t go back. And so you have a different profile, educationally and professionally—more of a chance to fast-track to success and integration, certainly in recent years.

The European situation is still a problem. The background for that community to begin to fast-track varies depending on which country they’re in. But certainly, if you take a look at the United Kingdom, if you take a look at the Netherlands, at Germany, and France, there are problems. Again, that varies from country to country.

ROBERT GEORGE: Hamza.

HAMZA YUSUF: There are a lot of ways we could categorize the Muslim community. Just to look at America in the first place, I’m going to give three basic categories. First, you have indigenous African-American Muslims. That community is very diverse. You can’t lump that community together either because you have, for instance, Warith Deen Muhammad’s community, which has really been highly integrated for a long time. I think Warith Deen Muhammad was definitely ahead of his time in dealing with a lot of the issues that we’re grappling with now as a community. You then have the Salafist African-Americans. And thirdly, you have a prison community that’s quite extensive—an African-American Muslim prison community.

ROBERT GEORGE: Hamza, can I interrupt on that point?
HAMZA YUSUF: Yeah.

ROBERT GEORGE: Is that community mainly people who have been converted to the faith in prison?

HAMZA YUSUF: Well, a lot of them converted in prison and then Warith Deen Muhammad’s community now has second- and third-generation members because they’ve got a lot of people that have been born into Muslim families. Their families converted in the ‘50s or ‘60s.

And then you have highly educated Cold War immigrants that came in the post-1965 era under Johnson’s Immigration Act. That enabled people to come from India, South Asia, and the Arab countries. These are really highly educated people. Many of them have Ph.D.s or are engineers and physicians who are highly integrated into the community.

And then you have the 7-Eleven owners, the taxi drivers, the people that are the brunt of jokes on *The Simpsons*. I don’t know if people remember the two Bengali characters that David Letterman used to bring on, where people could laugh at their accents and things like that. That’s a very broad-strokes look at what’s out there. Then you have interesting groups like the Vietnamese-Muslim community. You have these funny pockets of unusual immigrant communities that come. Overall, in the United States the Muslim community is actually doing exceptionally well financially and professionally.

In terms of the religious community, and I think John probably knows these numbers a lot better than I, I think it’s probably around 15 percent that have some kind of affiliation with the mosque; whereas, you’re dealing with 85 percent of the Muslim community that is actually not a religious community, and yet gets lumped in with the Muslim communities that are religiously committed. They end up getting on the no-fly list because their names happen to be the same as somebody else’s name.

I literally bumped into Yusuf Islam, who is formerly Cat Stevens, going through airport security yesterday. He was being patted down. I was really surprised. Apparently, they go through it all the time. It was really upsetting for me to see that. There are a lot of Muslims that go through these problems.

From that aspect, now look at the problems that we’re facing from the outside. In many ways, there are two major problems. One is what happens in the Muslim world, because all of that comes back to us here. What’s happening in Sydney right now affects Muslims here [this conference took place on the same day as the 2014 hostage crisis at a café in Sydney, Australia]. At Fox News and increasingly the more liberal news stations, including CNN, the rhetoric is changing. We’re noting a change in the rhetoric of late.

I think what’s happening in the Muslim world is a major problem: the breakdown of these failed states in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen; the rise of ISIS, which has in some ways renewed all of the trauma of 9/11; and these beheadings that we’re seeing, despite the fact that people forget that thousands of beheadings south of our border have been going on with the drug lords. We’re not invading Mexico over all the beheadings that have gone down in Juarez or over the 43 students that were recently killed. There are, to me, a lot of similarities between these two forces working: ISIS and this force in Mexico.

From that point of view, this is one of the major problems that we’re facing. The other one is the Islamophobic rhetoric that’s been going on in this country for a long time. I first took note of it in 1993 when I bought this book at Safeway. It troubled me that it was at Safeway, but it was a book by Robert Morey called *Islamic Invasion*. It just struck me as to what it was doing in Safeway of all places. It’s just so weird to see a book like that, and I bought it. Fortunately these books used to be so poorly written, but increasingly they’re getting better writers to write these books. [Laughter] The book really troubled me because if you read Hal Lindsey’s book from back in the 1970s, *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, Morey has rewritten these books by doing a search and replace and putting the word “Muslims” in the place of “communists.” [Laughter] Literally you can read his latest version, he just replaced “Islam” for “Russia” and “the

“Among observant Jews, among devout Christians living in our society and enjoying its freedoms and its pluralism and its many advantages, there’s a grave concern, especially with the millennial generation, that the ideology of secularism is now so much suffusing our culture that it’s very difficult for us to transmit our faith to the next generation.”

Robert George
Arnold Toynbee said 50 or 60 years ago—he was writing about Russia—and he said before we had Russia as the enemy, Islam played the role of the bugbear for the West. And it may be in the future that that role will return again.

ROBERT GEORGE: What about Europe, what’s your assessment of Europe?

HAMZA YUSUF: I think European Muslims are not the children of the Cold War, but of colonialism. A lot of Muslims were actually brought in to Europe to rebuild Europe after the devastation of World War II, and so they were more often laborers. They weren’t part of the kind of brain drain that occurred in the United States where we took a lot of the best and the brightest from the Muslim world. They were the laborers from villages in Pakistan and places like that, and for a long time they survived in their kind of ghettoized cultures.

I remember because I lived in England in the late ’70s and went up to Bradford and visited Sufi Abdullah’s community. They used to have a big Mawlid parade, and they would march down the main street in Birmingham with all these thousands of Muslims singing prayers on the Prophet. The English weren’t bothered by that at all, but I think things have changed radically now. I think there’s increasing racism and disenfranchisement. A lot of these people came with all these traditional values from their own countries, and they had a lot of just basic human civility. Now they’ve got children that have grown up in very difficult circumstances not dissimilar to what we face in a lot of the inner cities in America, and it breeds a different type of character who reacts differently when he’s aggressed upon.

ROBERT GEORGE: John, what about the news reports that we hear about recruitment by radical violent organizations like ISIS in Europe and the United States? In the United States, it seems to be fairly localized, largely Somali if I have a correct reading on it. Is that just a kind of relatively small-level constant or is that something that has increased? And if so, what seems to cause the increase? What makes it attractive for Western Muslims to join up?

JOHN ESPOSITO: I think there are a lot of factors. For example, if you take a look at the European situation, for a number of years I was on the European Commission’s panel on de-radicalization. A lot of studies were done. What you saw there was that the drivers, generally speaking, were not primarily religious. A lot of it had to do—for many of them—with a sense of alienation from society with regard to media, with regard to
what was going on in the Muslim world, with regard to the experience they were having. You might have been born in Britain but were always being treated as if you were a foreigner. I think that those kinds of issues can play a role.

Mehdi Hassan did a piece recently in which he referred to two fellows who were going to Syria. They didn’t get there. They were arrested. But what was noted was that they had ordered on Amazon *Islam for Dummies* and *The Koran for Dummies* meaning that they—

**ROBERT GEORGE:** They didn’t know much about it. *[Laughter]*

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** That’s right.

**HAMZA YUSUF:** And admittedly they were dummies, which is quite good. *[Laughter]*

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** Yeah, I know. I set it to my books too, and it didn’t make a difference. *[Laughter]* The reality of it is that those drivers are there. Religion can then be clearly used as a legitimator, as a motivator. And we do see numbers in some European countries that are a serious matter of concern, particularly in places like France and also in Britain. In the United States, our issue, often with what would be called “domestic” or “home-grown” terrorists, has been people who go over to fight overseas. For example, you had Somalis going to fight in Somalia. In this area you had some Washington-born young people going to fight in Pakistan but not committing any actions within the country. And our numbers still remain very, very small if one thinks about, relatively speaking, the size of the community.

There’s one final point I really want to underscore because nobody ever points to it, and that’s the point you made about how many Muslims are associated with the mosque officially, and also the notion that you have a lot who’d say that they would consider themselves cultural Muslims and so they don’t really get involved in the religious side. Yet, in our society we’ve transcended that when we talk about Christians or Jews in any situation. So first of all, we don’t look to identify religion when we’re talking about criminals, or when something happens we don’t say, “Well, this was a Christian,” or “The number of Christians who are in prison is X.”

I find in a lot of situations in the last 20 years, people ask me the same question, and that is, “How many Muslims are there in America?” But when you answer it, with many of them you know that the number of Muslims constitutes the “magnitude of the problem” because they don’t have a sense of the diversity of the Muslim community.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** And by diversity, you mean not simply national or ethnic diversity.

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** That’s right.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** You mean diversity when it comes to religious activity.

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** Religious practice.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Well, I have to say I’m rather stunned that the percentage is as low as 15 percent.

**HAMZA YUSUF:** I mean that’s about accurate, isn’t it, 15?

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Yeah?

**HAMZA YUSUF:** Maybe with the “Eid Muslims”—what you would call “Christmas/Easter Christians” or “Hanukkah Jews”—it’s probably 25 percent. It may be a little higher.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Well, that raises another question for me then.

**HAMZA YUSUF:** Religion is in a bad shape.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Yeah. Well, I mean among observant Jews, among devout Christians living in our society and enjoying its freedoms and its pluralism and its many advantages, there’s a grave concern, especially with the millennial generation, that the ideology of secularism is now so much suffusing our culture that it’s very difficult for us to transmit our faith to the next generation. Is that something Muslims wrestle with?

**HAMZA YUSUF:** Actually the problem is much deeper, because I think what’s happened is secular ideas have so infiltrated religious practices that people are very unaware. For instance, metaphysics has almost completely been removed from the Islamic tradition. And metaphysics was at the heart of the Islamic tradition, especially linguistic studies and the metaphysical nature of language.

Marxism had a massive impact on Islam, and so many of the
Marxists of the 1930s and ‘40s that were in these anti-colonial movements reconverted to Islam in the ‘50s and ‘60s. I mean Ali Shariati is a great example of this—someone who studied at the Sorbonne in France and became completely absorbed in French Marxism and then went back to Iran and redacted Islam, completely turning it into basically a religious Marxist ideology.

So, it’s not just that secularism as an ideology that is anti-religious, as in laicism, like French secularism, but a secularism that, as Stephen Carter puts it, puts “religion into the garage.” The more American form of secularism is that religion is a hobby that you can have in your garage, but it had better be well in tune if you bring it out into the public space. The problem for me is that even among devoutly religious people, they’re unaware of how profoundly secularism has impacted religious doctrine.

JOHN ESPOSITO: I was at a luncheon with somebody who’s an adviser to one of the cardinals of the United States, and we’re talking about Muslims and secularism, et cetera. And at one point, the adviser, who was a monsignor, if I remember correctly, started pounding the table to make a point, and said, “They’re going to have to realize we Catholics have become secular, completely secular.” And I just sort of looked at him and I thought, “Hmm, that’s interesting.” But I think there’s another dimension to a problem that Muslim communities deal with, and it has to do with the younger generation.

Now, part of the problem for so many younger generations born here who have a good education, et cetera, is, when you go to your local mosque, who’s your imam? Is your imam from overseas? Does your imam really understand the society? Do you have to listen to the khutbahs?

I remember one fellow who was born and raised here telling me about his kids. This fellow and his father had established their own Islamic center. He’d left that Islamic center because it was sort of taken over by a “foreign imam.” And his sons who were in their 20s said, “I’m not going to the mosque anymore.” On the other side, one does have to point out that there are incredible examples in the younger generation, of younger Muslims who are getting more involved in their community as professionals—lawyers, doctors, et cetera—but also in terms of Islamic studies. A few years ago when we hired at my center, all three of our finalists were Muslim. That you wouldn’t have seen years ago.

HAMZA YUSUF: That’s a major change, I think.

JOHN ESPOSITO: And if you look, for example, today, a graduate of Georgetown and of our center went from getting a J.D. from Yale and a Ph.D. from Princeton to being the head of the Islamic Law Program at Harvard Law School in six years.

HAMZA YUSUF: Intisar Rabb, yeah.

JOHN ESPOSITO: You’ve got Intisar. She’s not an exception in terms of what’s happening.

HAMZA YUSUF: No, that’s a major change that’s happening.

JOHN ESPOSITO: But I think the—and I mean this in the best sense of the term—“foreign cultural dimension” all depends on who the imam is. If you’re an imam from overseas, that’s not the problem. It’s whether or not you understand the United States.

ROBERT GEORGE: Hamza, what is your prescription for the proper role of Islam in the life of the Islamic citizen, let’s say in the United States in a liberal democratic regime? How should Islam help to shape his life as a citizen? I’m asking you to wrestle with the kind of issue that in Christianity Richard Neuhaus famously wrestled with; in Judaism, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has wrestled with it quite brilliantly in England. To what extent should it affect your citizenship that you happen to be a Muslim?

HAMZA YUSUF: Well, first of all I would say that one of the major problems that we have in this issue is a lack of understanding that throughout history, Muslims have always lived as minorities in non-Muslim countries. This idea that Muslims have only lived where they dominated is completely false. One of the biggest problems that happened in Andalusia after the collapse of the Muslim polities there is that the Muslims stayed
there for a few hundred years. In Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, you’ll note mention of certain people hiding out in the mountains. Cervantes lived in the period of the Inquisition and people were afraid. The Moriscos were hiding out in Las Alpujarras and other similar places.

But one of the things they grappled with was how to be a Muslim when you’re living in non-Muslim lands. Fifteen years ago I brought Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah over here, who’s one of the preeminent scholars of jurisprudence and the philosophy of Islamic law, which is akin to constitutional law in our culture. He did a program that we entitled “Sacred Law in Secular Lands,” and it was really grappling with this idea of what our religion says about living in a secular state. One of the things that he said was that it was obligatory for Muslims to be engaged civically with the society and that their faith compelled them to that. And he said that we have a concept in *Usul* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence) of taking the lesser of two evils. So even with two candidates, both with whom you’re not really pleased, you look at which one is going to be better. He also talked about the importance of the commonweal, where we shouldn’t only regard our own community, but should be thinking of the commonweal in general and of what’s the best thing for the society. I think our faith should compel us to that.

In the Prophet Muhammad’s *salāt*, he said he was somebody who was profoundly concerned about the human condition and all human beings. I recently read Imam Al Sha’rani, who said that one of the things that he realized in his own state was the mercy of the Prophet. He said this was a mercy to all of creation. He said it even compelled him to treat inanimate objects gently. And he is one of the great spiritual masters of Islam. So he said, I never put a cup down with any force. This was how Muslims understood the Prophet. This violent transformation that’s occurred in the Muslim world is really very alien to the spirit of scholastic Islam.

So I would say for us in the United States, I think our religion should compel us to the civic duties of really being concerned about this. And I emphasize local participation, because I think at the federal level it’s very hard to change policy and to do things. However, at local levels you can do amazing things, because we have more of a direct democracy with public hearings, and people can really be involved. You can get gambling out of your communities if you have enough people to get behind these causes. So I think there’s a lot that we could do. And then I think there’s a lot more I would really like to see Muslims more engaged in. These are things that I know the Catholic community is deeply troubled with, and that we’ve [indicating Professor George] worked together on.

You know, somebody wrote something about me, and we had a conversation. He said, “Oh, religious people” (he was obsessed with pornography), which was a secular dig. That’s fine.
If Sayyid Qutb was horrified by America of the 1940s, because he saw men and women dancing closely together (that’s how he describes it in *The America I Saw*), what would he think of America now? It’s amazing what’s happened. You [Robert George] point out very well in *Conscience and Its Enemies* that these things are not personal matters, that they concern all of us. They concern the nature of the culture that we’re living in. And those of us who have children have an even more profound concern here because of the innocence that we would like to see them maintain as long as possible.

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** The interesting thing about the point that you’re making is that when you actually look at, for example, data on different religions and their response to Islam, among the most Islamophobic will often be what I call hard-line Christians who really emphasize many of the family values that are very close to what many Muslims emphasize. That’s point one.

Point two: With regard to the Prophet, what I also find interesting is that the way in which the lens through which we look at Islam is never the way we look at other religions. For example, people bring up the passages that deal with violence. Somehow they bypass the incredible number of violent passages in the Old Testament. I remember doing an interview in New York, and the fellow said, “Well, Muhammad was different. Muhammad was a warrior.” And I thought, “Well, how about our biblical prophets?” At certain points in their actions they were warriors, but we celebrate the whole person. And when you actually look at the Prophet—

**HAMZA YUSUF:** Or Jesus in the temple with the moneychangers.

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** —most of what you emphasize, it wasn’t as if he were a fulltime warrior. If you actually go back and look at how he responded, it’s a family situation.

**HAMZA YUSUF:** And what’s fascinating is in prophetic biography, the *maghazi* was a distinct branch of Prophet Muhammad’s battles. And out of the 29 battles, there was actually fighting in only 11. In the other ones no fighting occurred. So this idea of violence in that period is crazy. You’ve probably read *The Myth of the Muslim Tide*, which I think is a really important book. It was written by a Canadian journalist working in London who saw his neighborhood turn into a den of Muslims, and he was concerned about what was happening. And when his French nanny converted to Islam, he noticed that she became more somber, and so he started studying it. He looked at all these claims about Islam and found that they were completely false. One of them was the violence of the Muslims.

Here in the United States they did a poll where they asked American Muslims if they thought bombing that killed civilians was ever justifiable. Seven percent of American Muslims polled said that it was often or sometimes justifiable. One percent said that it was completely justifiable. And everybody else said never justifiable, so that’s 92 percent who said that it was never justifiable. Well, what’s interesting is that when they polled Americans in general, 26 percent said that it was often or sometimes justifiable. So it’s actually three times higher than the number of Muslims who thought it was justifiable. And 7 percent said it was completely justifiable. So we forget how violent a lot of our own citizens are in their attitudes about how to deal with problems.

My experience in the Muslim world has always been how amazingly peaceful Muslim societies are. In my time in Morocco and in my time in Egypt before all this trouble began, at one in the morning walking down a street, I never felt any fear. People pass by and say *assalamu alakum*, “peace be upon you.” That was the greeting; whereas, I cannot say the same in San Francisco where I live. In fact, if somebody was coming at night, I was calling them every few minutes asking, “Is everything okay?”

**ROBERT GEORGE:** And yet the regimes that Americans are concerned about, especially on issues such as religious freedom, form for many Americans the image of what Islam is—the Iranian theocracy.

**HAMZA YUSUF:** That term “theocracy” is a completely alien term to the Islamic tradition. No Muslims ever in the *Usuli* tra-
diation have considered a Muslim government to rule by the religious authority. They saw it as that there was a relationship obviously between religion and the state, but the judgments of the government were considered their own. In Sahih al-Bukhari, the Prophet said, “If you go to a city, never tell them that you will judge them by the ruling of God but say that you will judge them by your own understanding.” And he said because it’s easier for you to make a mistake about your own judgment than it is about God’s. That was very important to the Muslims, which is why they always put “God knows” (Allahu A’lam) at the end of their legal opinions, because that was their attempt. We forget the *ijtihad*, which is the legal reasoning process of man.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Reasoning, yeah.

**HAMZA YUSUF:** Exactly, the legal reasoning process of the Muslims. I think it’s a testimony to the genius of the Muslim jurists that they were able to deal with multiple interpretations. You argue about judicial despotism and the problem of only having one legal interpretation for something. Muslims incorporated all these differences. These are the things that need to be reestablished, but unfortunately our tradition is ossified. We have great schools that have been destroyed, and the colonial period did a lot to damage them. I don’t completely blame colonialism, however, because I tend to adhere to Malek Bennabi’s idea of the susceptibility to colonialism as the primary problem.

These great schools are no longer producing independent thinkers to deal and grapple with the problems of modern society, because the complexities of modern society are so immense and so overwhelming. We have people that are largely coming out of the least educated and the poorest strata of Muslim societies that are going into Islamic Studies; the best and the brightest are going into engineering and medicine. This is simply a fact. And so we have a lot of really “impoverished” Muslim scholars.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** Well, Zaytuna is a kind of response to that, right?

**HAMZA YUSUF:** Zaytuna is interesting because initially we started out as a seminary. But what I really felt and realized (and we talked about this a lot with the other people that co-founded it with me) was that what we needed was a liberal arts tradition. I would recommend, if you’re really interested in this, to read John Walbridge’s amazing work *The Caliphate of Reason*, which describes the centrality of the intellect and logic in the Islamic tradition. Language and logic were the two central studies of all Islamic higher institutions of learning.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** So when did the ossification begin? Is it a hundreds of years’ phenomenon or a few decades?

**HAMZA YUSUF:** It’s been going on hundreds of years, but by the nineteenth century it was in pretty bad shape. There are some areas with a pretty vibrant tradition: the Iranians oddly enough, because they kept *ijtihad* alive. I think the Iranians housed that tradition.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** John, if you agree with what Hamza’s saying—

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** I don’t agree with anything he said. [Laughter]

**HAMZA YUSUF:** I know. I was saying I consider John a friend; I don’t know what he considers me. He’s a contrarian, by the way.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** What would the connection be between that ossification and the loss at the intellectual level and the oppression, the political failures of so many majority Muslim states? Is there a connection between that ossification, that loss at the intellectual level, and what we see in Pakistan and what we see in Iran and even in Saudi Arabia?

**JOHN ESPOSITO:** I think it’s the intellectual, but it’s also overwhelmingly the political. I mean, what assured the continued ossification was basically the threat and then the reality of colonialism. When in fact that happens, people circle the wagons. Religions tend to pull back. Then you get independence in nation-states, but you don’t get what you expected. Instead you wind up with authoritarian regimes, most of them supported by western countries, that then also control or manipulate religion and the educational system. And so all of those things work against producing the kinds of citizens that you want, but also what they work toward is the culture of authoritarianism and the values of authoritarianism. Without that opening of society, which doesn’t occur, you could wind up with what you see in Egypt now. You first have the period from Nasser and Mubarak, then you have a democratic election. And whether one agrees with the Brotherhood or not, you don’t replace them through elections, but, in fact, you wind up with a coup and with the government now that’s become even more authoritarian.

**ROBERT GEORGE:** You know, there’s a tendency—and I have to admit that I am, myself, on occasion falling for it which is inexcusable—to suppose that violent extremism, when
it comes to religion, is associated with higher and pathologi-
cal degrees of religiosity, so the most intensely religious become
violent. But my friend, Jennifer Bryson, who is here and is a
wonderful Islamic scholar and now with the Zephyr Institute
at Stanford, told me of her experiences as an interrogator at
Guantanamo, learning about the fact that the radicals, the ex-
tremists she was interrogating, would almost always have laptop
computers stuffed with pornography. And on the one occasion,
Jennifer said—I think I have this right—when the people found
that a particular extremist had a laptop that was free of the stuff,
they were absolutely shocked because that was so rare.

HAMZA YUSUF: I have a theory. I haven’t written about this,
but I call it the Defilement Theory of Terrorism. I think that a
for lot of these young men what happens is that they become
deeply defiled, and they really begin to view the West as the
source of the defilement because they’ve been seduced. One of
the things about pre-modern cultures is that the society really
helped people in virtue, generally. Every pre-modern culture
understood that there were evils in the world, and they didn’t
really allow those evils to come out in the public space as a kind
of protection and making men moral.

JOHN ESPOSITO: I was going to say, can I advertise my
book too? [Laughter]

HAMZA YUSUF: Yeah, Making Men Moral. So I still owe my
best ideas to you, Robby.

JOHN ESPOSITO: But I think if you look at—

HAMZA YUSUF: Hold on. Osama bin Laden, for example,
you see the pictures of him in Cambridge with his girlfriends.
It’s interesting when these guys come here. I got a letter from
a Saudi girl living in the United States. It was about how she
came to America against her parents’ will. She finally convinced
them to let her come. She was seduced by an American, and she
said, “I hate this country. I hate everything about this country.
This man tricked me. He lied to me. He took my virginity. I

JOHN ESPOSITO: I think I spent a little bit more time look-
ing at what the methodology was and how it operated. But the
same thing will be true if you, for example, look at when people
asked about waging jihad. The people who were against waging
jihad cited religion. Those who were the strongest in waging
jihad cited politics, and I think that’s there too. I think you’re
right about, for example with regard to some of the people in-
volved in 9/11, the defilement side. But I think that, as Graham
said—this is a former senior security person, Graham Fuller—if
we really want to address the issues today, we have to deal with
the underlying political issues. Because when ISIS disappears,
there will be another group to come up. When Khomeini died,
everybody thought it was over. When bin Laden died too.

And it’s interesting, the Patriarch of Antioch from Damascus—
I just saw a quote from him today, I guess he’s in the States—
commented that if Christians want to solve the Christian prob-
lem, they have to focus on solving the Syrian political problem.
There is a religious dimension.
ROBERT GEORGE: I want to save a little time for Q&A, but I would like to get a quick set of lightning-round type of answers to a couple of questions. The first is this: Is there sentiment in the European and American Muslim communities—is there support for protecting Muslim minorities, in particular in Muslim countries where Muslim minorities are being persecuted? The Ahmadiyya in Pakistan is obviously a very good example of this. Is there momentum, is there sentiment among Muslims here to support those victims?

HAMZA YUSUF: What lightning round? I’m bad at lightning. [Laughter]

JOHN ESPOSITO: I think that ironically you mentioned that because I’m involved in a project. We’ll be bringing people together tomorrow to talk about this issue, which has to do with interfaith Muslim relations. In fact, one does see a very pluralistic approach in America that does not exist in majority countries overseas. There are problems with certain groups, and the Ahmadiyya have had the problems overseas. But here in general, while one might not hang out with an Ahmadiyya, some Muslims might not, it’s not the kind of situation that was referred to before that exists in Pakistan and also at times existed in Indonesia.

ROBERT GEORGE: Hamza.

HAMZA YUSUF: I think that Muslims right now are so embattled and so overwhelmed by so many issues, not to mention just surviving in the United States. The Silicon Valley people that I know worked 80-hour weeks. In terms of the areas of engagement, right now when we’re all strapped for funds, we’re strapped for resources. Unfortunately I don’t think that that is high up on the priority list in my experience. It’s sad to say, but I think that’s a reality.

People get really angry at me, and I literally get letters. I just got one a couple of days ago where they’re so angry at me for condemning all the Muslim violence and are saying that I never talked about the American or Israeli violence. This is what they say in these letters. My response to that is I do talk about those other problems; maybe you don’t listen to those talks or something like that. But my concern is much more about how Muslims behave as somebody committed to the faith, because I see what it does to the faith, not just for people outside of the faith who begin to view Islam as this evil force in the world, but for people inside the faith that are so gutted and in the doldrums, literally spiritual doldrums, where they just are really depressed. You cannot imagine the amount of depression in the Muslim community right now, really deep depression. People are overwhelmed with what’s happening. And I see people that have been completely incapacitated by what’s going on, and this is just one thing after another.

Now, we’ve got the hostage situation in Sydney, Australia. What’s going to be next? It’s one thing after another. So I think just getting Muslims motivated and getting them to be positive about things is crucial. This is why I’m just trying to start a liberal arts college to get them to think about things at a deeper level.

ROBERT GEORGE: It’s very frustrating to me. It seems to me we have something of a chicken-and-egg problem. I’ve discussed this actually with Maajid Nawaz and with the folks at the IIIT (International Institute of Islamic Thought). I think it would be a huge step forward for many Americans who simply don’t understand their Muslim fellow citizens and are fearful of them if they would see Muslims acting on the views they hold in so many areas where they share common values with ordinary people of differing faiths.

But then the other side of the problem is what you point to, and Maajid and I have discussed this well. Muslims are so focused on surviving and dealing with people’s fear, non-Muslim’s fear of them, that they are reluctant to step out and bear any kind of witness in the public square beyond issues of protecting themselves against persecution or discrimination. So I’d somehow like to break that vicious cycle.

JOHN ESPOSITO: But I think as with all significant social change, that social change takes place just as theological change. If you look at, for example, Vatican II, which was cited earlier, and the decades before, the small number of theologians that began to reinterpret Catholicism that went through persecution—the same thing is true with social change. I’m more optimistic. As much as the Islamophobia part is bad and I think Muslims have a real reason to feel concern, I’m far more optimistic when I look at a lot of the younger generation coming along and what they’re doing. And when I look at people like...
Ahmad and Maajid and the kind of work that they’re doing, I do see people being willing to speak out. But speaking out—we know this—with all social movements in their early stages, it’s not the majority of the community that speaks out.

ROBERT GEORGE: Sure.

JOHN ESPOSITO: Because it’s got to be people that know that there can be a cost.

ROBERT GEORGE: All right. Sure. Okay, the floor is open. Yeah, you, sir. Tell us who you are and where you’re from.

MOHAMMAD AL-SHARIF: I’m Egyptian born, and I live in DC.

HAMZA YUSUF: He’s a scholar too.

MOHAMMAD AL-SHARIF: I’m a learner, a student of Shaykh Hamza and Professor Esposito and many beautiful faces around the room.

ROBERT GEORGE: I’m a student of Shayk Hamza too.

MOHAMMAD AL-SHARIF: That’s an honor for all of us. I think what we touched on is what Muslims can do in this very depressing time. I think Muslims feel that they don’t have the room to speak. They are afraid of even speaking out because as soon as they are speaking out, they are being targeted, harassed, X, Y, and Z. So for us the question is, how can we provide a venue for people to speak out? Because if you don’t speak, if people can’t speak, at some point they’re going to get violent. I think Muslims in America, or especially in the West, are so conflicted between what’s happening in the Muslim world and what’s happening in their own local communities, and we cannot distinguish between the two.

ROBERT GEORGE: I should let the panelists speak, but I can’t resist saying I think it’s very important for Muslim public intellectuals and scholars and ordinary citizens to speak about issues pertaining to Islam. Obviously that’s true, including the problems that American Muslims suffer here. And yet I think it is so critical for the general public to hear important Muslim figures, listen to important Muslim voices speaking about issues other than Islam, speaking about the same sort of issues that everybody else in America is worried about. And I think it’s very important that they see cooperation between Muslims and others—especially Christians and Jews.

HAMZA YUSUF: We don’t just speak about Islam. We speak about violence and Islam. That’s what the panel is speaking about. I spend more time in the tenth century than I do in the twenty-first. I spend my time with—

ROBERT GEORGE: My colleagues accuse me of that. [Laughter]

HAMZA YUSUF: I spend my time with medieval minds that floor me with their intelligence. We have what C.S. Lewis called “chronological snobbery.” We’re so convinced that this is the end-all of knowledge. A lot of the solutions to these problems that we’re grappling with were dealt with centuries ago. They really were.

JOHN ESPOSITO: Let me give you data on this. A study done by Media Tenor, which is based in Geneva, looked at 985,000 pieces of media from Europe and America over a ten-year period from about 2003-2013. They found in 2003 when they looked at coverage of Muslims in the Muslim world—this is in general, not necessarily religion—2 percent was on extremism, 0.1 percent was on, as it were, mainstream Muslims. Jump ten years later: 2 percent jumps to 28 percent on extremism, and the mainstream remains exactly the same, 0.1 percent, okay?

Now you combine that with the explosion in social media with regard to anti-Muslim activities. Two major studies done in the last four years show that close to $160 million has gone to these websites and these individuals. You are talking about one heck of a problem, and it’s below the radar. Most Americans aren’t aware of that. I don’t blame people—although I get annoyed—who are sitting at home, who have busy lives, who aren’t Muslims, and the only time they actually feel they are engaging Islamism is when they throw the TV on.

HAMZA YUSUF: I just saw a story about people’s reactions and what the media does. When I lived in Spain, I was in Granada. There was a man who stabbed a man because he insulted his mother. There were witnesses that saw everything, and the judge actually let him off.

JOHN ESPOSITO: Are you sure of that?

HAMZA YUSUF: Yeah, he let him off. See, Italian. He is an Italian.

JOHN ESPOSITO: I’m Mediterranean. [Laughter]
HAMZA YUSUF: Now what’s interesting to me is that there are certain ways to push buttons in certain cultures, and if you do push those buttons, see what happens. People don’t realize that religious identity is a very profound identity. It’s more profound for a deeply religious person than racial identity. We cannot call people the n-word or any of these other words that used to be used as ethnic slurs. They were common terms not that long ago in this culture, but they have been banished from public vocabulary. Why? Because people recognized that there’s just something wrong about it, right? You can be critical of religion without being foul in speaking about another person’s deepest beliefs. Until we recognize that religious identity and racial identity have great similarities and we begin to respect religious identity in the public space, we’re going to continue to see problems because people are deeply offended. I had a descendant of the Prophet say to me, “They’re talking about my great-grandfather”; he was saying it not just as a believer, but as a direct descendant.

JOHN ESPOSITO: We have major political commentators that can say, “Convert them or kill them.”

HAMZA YUSUF: Yeah.

JOHN ESPOSITO: You see, you couldn’t say that about Italian Americans. You can’t say that about Jews, Catholics.

HAMZA YUSUF: Noam Chomsky, pardon the quotation doctor, said that the only acceptable racism now was against Muslims. You just replace the words in the public space.

ROBERT GEORGE: Matt Franck.

MATTHEW FRANCK: Hi. I’m Matt Franck from the Witherspoon Institute in Princeton. I’d like to ask both panelists about a problem that I see occurring in conservative circles and among a lot of Americans who are severely under-informed, undereducated about their fellow Americans who happen to be Muslim, and that’s the so-called “sharia problem.” Americans revere the rule of law and their constitution, and so every once in a while when what I regard as absurd and outlandish fears and paranoia are fanned up about sharia law, one sees proposals made in legislatures and town councils and so on to ban the recognition by judges of foreign law, and the subtext always is sharia. And of course I’ve looked into this and seen that in the rare instances in which American judges have recognized Islamic legal principles, it is always in the realm of what lawyers call private law of family relations and so on. And these things would—

ROBERT GEORGE: Or Catholic canon law, or Jewish law.

MATTHEW FRANCK: —or Jewish law would be the analogy. I think there’s an educational project here, and I wonder
if you might comment on how to educate fellow non-Muslim Americans about getting right with this.

HAMZA YUSUF: It’s a great question. The major problem that we have is just that the term sharia has become so emotive, because it has been framed by a set of people on both sides. There’s a certain Muslim framing of it that has happened by extremists, and then there’s a framing that’s happened by extremists from the other side, anti-Muslims. When Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah was here, we were at the Adam Center, and Imam Maajid was with us. Somebody asked him about some community down South that was “implementing hadd punishment,” which are these penal codes in their personal community. Shaykh Abdallah Bin Bayyah was asked about that—what’s the sharia ruling? And he said the sharia ruling is that to implement the hadd punishment in the United States is against the sharia and that the sharia ruling is that there is no implementation.

This is where the problem lies. The penal code of Islam is a tiny chapter in any major text of Islamic law. It’s not even taught in many Muslim countries anymore. The scholars don’t even teach it, because it’s not applicable. But these are called Al-Ahkam al-Sultaniyya, which are the rules that relate to polity or government. It is prohibited to implement them by people that are not in government authority. The bulk of the sharia actually is marriage and commercial law, and the commercial laws would have solved a lot of our problems on Wall Street, if we actually implemented some of the sharia premises about not tricking people.

JOHN ESPOSITO: But think about the news coverage that we have on the issue and then think about how many shows you have seen where you’ve seen a real discussion about what sharia is really about. I’m finishing a book for Oxford called What Everyone Needs to Know about Sharia. [Laughter] I know you look disappointed, so you can look at my book What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam and learn something about sharia. But, I mean, the fact is we don’t see, whether it’s on PBS or any place else, where there’s actually a fair treatment of sharia—you’ll see the negative stereotyping. And it’s not that there aren’t issues when you start talking about whose interpretation of sharia and how that is put into place. You need to face those issues, but we have no context within which to understand that term.

HAMZA YUSUF: The other thing about it is that the sharia in traditional classical Islamic law is our principles. They are actually not statute. So statute law, which is fiqh, is human. And this is something most Muslims don’t understand: that actually the sharia does not give specific laws except in rare situations like inheritance. Inheritance is one of the few areas, because there are so many human problems that happen with inheritance. Often times it breaks up families. The inheritance laws in the Qur’an are completely laid out, so there’s no fighting within families. But all the other laws that have been codified in the religion have been formulated after much scrupulous review and debate. In fact, more often than not, there are varying opinions about many of the rulings, and the majority of these opinions can be considered valid. It’s a very rich tradition.

And finally, to the fear of having a sharia: Our law in this country is the Constitution of the United States. It’s such an absurdity to say we need to make laws against sharia or creeping sharia. We already have laws in the Islamic law that do not permit going against American law, which is that you can’t implement anything unconstitutional even though, as Dr. George argues, many unconstitutional laws have come into existence.

ROBERT GEORGE: That’s true. I’m told we have time just for one more question. You, sir.

QUDUS MALIK: Hi. My name is Qudus Malik. I’m an attorney in Washington, DC. First of all, I just want to thank all three of you. It’s such an honor for me to be at a function where all three of you are speaking. I was so anxious to come here that I actually showed up here last week as well, on Monday. [Laughter] And I think the job that you guys are doing to try and remove misconceptions about Islam, all three of you, I
consider that to be a holy war, a jihad, and may God help you and continue to be of help to you.

The question I have is for Shaykh Hamza. You have publicly spoken on takfir, the practice prevalent amongst Muslim communities to try and declare other communities to be non-Muslim. And you’ve also gone publicly on record to say that you believe that Ahmadis are non-Muslim. My question is not really about the theological discussion around that fear. But once a community is declared non-Muslim like the Ahmadiyya in Pakistan, do you think that Islam still allows the kind of criminal persecution of Ahmadis? For example, insisting that Ahmadis are non-Muslim, insisting that they can’t use any Islamic terminology saying that it’s a trademark, forcing other Muslims to sign a passport form that says that they are non-Muslim?

The second question very quickly for Professor Esposito is that if there is ever a battle between religious freedom and Ijma, the consensus in Islam, who do you think wins? Thank you.

HAMZA YUSUF: First of all, to answer the question, there is no such thing as collective takfir in Islam. You cannot say all these groups are non-Muslims. Takfir is done on individuals, and there’s a trial. There’s a whole process. They are asked questions. So the idea of saying people are kafir is totally against the Islamic tradition, first and foremost.

ROBERT GEORGE: Hamza, for those of us who are on the outside, would that be like excommunication?

HAMZA YUSUF: Excommunication, yes. I’m against religious persecution. I think there’s a reason why for the first 13 years Muslims were persecuted, so they could know and understand what it’s like to be persecuted. Because when you’re persecuted, you become empathetic to other people that are persecuted. So that for me is very important. My ancestors came here fleeing religious persecution, to the United States as Catholics. I also come from largely an Irish background. If you want to weep tears of blood, read Irish history about the Irish persecution.
Everybody has their narratives, except white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. But everybody has a persecution story.

ROBERT GEORGE: That’s very Irish of you.

JOHN ESPOSITO: They have one but it’s false. [Laughter]

HAMZA YUSUF: Everybody has a persecution narrative. Jeremy Rifkin wrote an entire book on the importance of empathy as being foundational to human civilization and said that we have to become more empathic as human beings. But this also leads to the point that we have to learn grammar so that we can communicate with each other. The Internet is the greatest proof that nobody knows grammar anymore because all you have to do is read comments. Obviously if you can’t write a grammatically correct sentence to comment on grammatically correct sentences, we have a serious problem.

ROBERT GEORGE: Hamza, so often empathy is depicted as if it were the embracing of relativism. Of course, there are some people who do think that if you really want to be empathetic, you have to be a relativist. But I gather even from the question that obviously you reject that.

HAMZA YUSUF: Absolutely.

ROBERT GEORGE: And you still think it’s very important that you have to make a judgment about whether somebody is or is not—

HAMZA YUSUF: Absolutely, and we have criteria to do that. As religious people, we have very strong criteria. But desiring a sinner to leave his sin is empathy.

ROBERT GEORGE: Yes.

HAMZA YUSUF: It is. And even though people don’t like that statement anymore, it’s really been removed as an acceptable statement to love the sinner and hate the sin.

ROBERT GEORGE: It happens to be true.

HAMZA YUSUF: It is true. For religious people, whether you believe in sin or not, those of us who do believe in it know how dangerous it is for the soul because we believe in ensoulment—that we’re more than material things. We’re spiritual beings, and the spiritual nature of the human being is profoundly affected by our behavior. I really like Cormac McCarthy. Cormac McCarthy talks about the complicity of our behavior and how it affects people, others. People use illegal drugs in this country; they are empowering the beheadings by drug lords in Mexico.

ROBERT GEORGE: Absolutely right.

HAMZA YUSUF: You know, they don’t think about it. The people that are consuming pornography are empowering the traffickers of pornography that are involved in pedophilic pornography. So in that way we are all sinners, and that sin is having a profound effect on us as human beings.

ROBERT GEORGE: John, you have the second half of the question.

JOHN ESPOSITO: My cousin, Guido, will take care of me. [Laughter] I think just two quick points. First, one has to acknowledge at the start: We fought the problem with institutional religion, including Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam, that often somehow human beings get to make judgments that only God should make.

With regard to the question of freedom, I think one should look at the past period in which one can talk about the extent to which Islamic law in theory—not always in practice—had far more a pluralistic approach when it came to freedom of religion. The challenge to Muslims today, and it is being faced, is dealing with the need to reinterpret in a new context. The problem is for ultraconservatives. They don’t do that. But for those of us with faith, of different faiths, we know those differences exist in all faiths: the differences between ultraconservatives’ approach to tradition and the way in which more, if you will, progressive voices do.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you. Needless to say we could continue, and I wish we could continue this conversation. But we’ll continue in another way. This has been a wonderful panel. Thank you very much John Esposito, Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, Robert George. And we will be continuing the conversation the rest of the day. Thank you all very much.
TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: I’m delighted to be able to moderate this panel on Muslim minorities and religious freedom in North America. We have yet another outstanding panel of experts who bring enormous expertise and experience to the question of the challenges and the opportunities that Muslim minorities face in North America, particularly the United States. Though I’m delighted to be able to steer this conversation, as you have noticed so far, we have lots of outstanding speakers who don’t need much steering. Here again it’s the same situation. We have really outstanding panelists who bring diverse sets of experiences to this issue.

First, I want to just emphasize that we want to discuss this afternoon, as we’ve been discussing all day, the challenges that Muslim minority communities face in terms of the practice of their faith. Here we’ll be zeroing in on the experiences of Muslim minority communities in the United States and North America more broadly. But we also want to talk about the opportunities that living in the United States provides Muslim communities in America. So we want to focus on both the challenges as well as the opportunities.

To lead us in this conversation, I’m delighted that we have scholars, experts, and activists, people who again have enormous experience and credibility on these issues. First, to my immediate left, we have Zareena Grewal, who is an associate professor in the Departments of American Studies and Religious Studies and in the program of Ethnicity, Race, and Migration at Yale University. She’s also the former director of the Center for the Study of American Muslims at the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU). She previously was a visiting lecturer in Vassar College’s Department of Anthropology. She’s the author of numerous articles and chapters on the intersections of race and religion in American Muslim communities. Her latest book is *Islam is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*.

ZAREENA GREWAL: This is the book. [Shows book to audience]

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: All right, great. She is also a documentary filmmaker and a regular contributor to the *Huffington Post*.

To Professor Grewal’s right is Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, who is the founder and president of the American Islamic Forum for Democracy, an organization dedicated to preserving American founding principles by directly countering extremist ideologies. Dr. Jasser currently serves as a commissioner on the US Commission on International Religious Freedom. He has written numerous op-eds and articles on the challenges that Muslim communities face in America. He’s also the author of a book called *A Battle for*
In the last panel, we heard the mention of anti-sharia law campaigns, which have become widespread in America. Just to give one example, 70 percent of Oklahomans voted in November 2010 to amend the state constitution to forbid courts from considering sharia law in their decisions. And most recently the US Supreme Court is now taking its first hijab case to decide whether Abercrombie & Fitch can deny employment to an otherwise qualified young woman who wanted to wear a head scarf on the job. Samantha Elauf, who had applied to work at Abercrombie & Fitch and had worn her black hijab to the job interview, was considered very well qualified as a result of the interview but was denied the job. This case is now before the US Supreme Court. Here today are representatives of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, who are involved in arguing that case and in providing briefs on that case.

I want to ask all of the members of the panel: Are these incidents in which the religious freedom of Muslim Americans is challenged increasing, or are they decreasing? Are we seeing a kind of discouraging trajectory, or are we seeing perhaps an encouraging trajectory in terms of the religious freedom of Muslim Americans? Can I start with you, Farid?

FARID SENZAI: Thank you. Well, it’s really an honor to be here. Many of the presenters in the previous panels shed some light on the Muslim community in the United States. We heard from Shaykh Hamza as well as John Esposito talking about the diversity of this community. And so when one looks at this community, the first thing one has to note is how diverse this community is in terms of their background or where these Muslims came from—whether they’re indigenous Muslims born here or whether they’re immigrant Muslims—and then the diversity that exists along ethnic and racial lines within the community. And then one must also consider, as we heard from the previous panel, the diversity of views that exists here within this community in terms of how they interpret their faith. That then also speaks to, of course, the way they practice their faith and the extent to which they actually practice their faith in this country.

Based on the polls that we had taken—and this includes polls that I’ve been involved in with the Pew Research Center as well...
as our polls through ISPU and the studies that I’ve done in the Bay Area—when one asks this question about discrimination, it depends on which Muslims you’re speaking of and which Muslims feel that they are discriminated against. Some Muslims have assimilated and see no connection with their faith; in the way that they look, dress, or practice they do not identify with Islam, whether they see themselves as secular Muslims, cultural Muslims, or Muslims purely in name. In these cases, when you ask about discrimination, they are less likely to see it happening. Yet when Muslims identify with their faith and their appearance associates them with Islam—whether it’s a hijab for women or a beard for men, for instance—then you begin to see that the level of discrimination goes up.

This applies to employment as well in terms of job seekers. A study by Carnegie Mellon University looked at the question of employment and found that individuals that had applied for jobs, just by changing their name to an American-sounding name, increased the chances that they would actually get the interview. The difference was actually quite stark. Muslims that self-identified as Muslims or with Muslim-sounding names were called back at a lower rate for job interviews than individuals that had names that were not Muslim-sounding.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: This is about religion, not just ethnicity.

FARID SENZAI: Exactly. So you begin to see it in terms of how they identify themselves. Those that had Muslim-sounding names had significantly fewer interview requests than those that did not. So you begin to see that sometimes the name alone can be reason enough to discriminate against a Muslim. But in terms of the overall trends, we are seeing a significant rise in discrimination cases across the country.

I’ll give you just one example. Muslims make up a very small minority of the population here in this country—somewhere between 0.5 percent if you believe the Pew Research Center study, though others suggest close to 2 percent of the national population is Muslim. But yet, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), of all the discrimination cases filed by religious communities and those that identified religiously, one out of four was Muslim. You’re looking at a quarter of all discrimination cases that are filed by Muslims, and yet Muslims only make up somewhere between 0.5 percent and 2 percent of the population. So clearly the frequency of discrimination cases against Muslims is much higher than the population would suggest.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Great. Thank you. The Pew Research Center has data which suggests that in general there’s a rise in restrictions on religion in the United States since 2007. And some of that data would be tracking, I assume, some of the growing restrictions on Muslim communities in America.
Zareena, can I ask you to address the same question? What do you think the trends are? But then also add your sense of why we are seeing the kinds of trends that we’re seeing. Understandably, after 9/11 there was certainly a kind of spike in hate crimes against Muslims. But that was well over 10 years ago. Are we seeing a second spike in these kinds of trends, and if so, why?

**ZAREENA GREWAL:** Yes, it’s counterintuitive. One would think that as we move away from September 11 that things should be getting better, but they are not. In fact, with the election of Obama, you actually have a rise in anti-Muslim fervor. I mean the kind of grassroots mobilization, for example, over the so-called “Ground Zero Mosque” that happened in 2010. Before, there wasn’t any such apparatus in that kind of Islamophobic community able to garner that kind of activism and resources. Since Obama’s election, there has been a convergence of anti-black racism and anti-Obama feeling with anti-Muslim attitudes.

You gave us the cases of Oklahoma and Tennessee, but there actually aren’t a lot of Muslims living in Oklahoma and Tennessee. The lesson here is that it doesn’t take a whole lot of Muslims to create a massive fervor and to get everyone so riled up around these issues. If we go back to the history of sharia bans, the earliest one in the 1990s was actually in a rural part of Canada where there was not a Muslim for a hundred miles in any direction.

So in other words, the Muslim becomes a kind of phantom; the specter of Islam as a threat doesn’t actually require real Muslim bodies to generate the fear. We need to think about that. There was a poll done that shows 62 percent of Americans have never met a Muslim; in other words, they have had zero social interactions with a Muslim. This is very different from Europe where Muslims are a very sizeable demographic. They are not in the United States, as Farid pointed out.

However, although 62 percent of Americans have not met a Muslim, 100 percent of Americans have opinions about Islam and what its problems are. That’s what we need to be thinking about: How we can know so little about this community and this religion and yet have such strong opinions about what’s wrong with it, how it needs to be fixed, and what the threat is?

What I’d like to do today is to try to frame these anxieties around Islam in terms of a larger racial picture. For example, if we look at Los Angeles, the surveillance apparatus that’s been introduced by the LAPD was intended to target the Muslim community. It’s called the Muslim Mapping Project, and they’re basically spying on Muslim communities. They’re allowed under this program to create secret files which then go into a national database.

An oversight committee looked at this database of secret files, and 82 percent of the files were on racial minorities. Most of them were black and not Muslim. What does this mean? Everyone should be concerned about Muslims losing their rights. But the Muslim community is so small, and the target of the surveillance machine is much larger than the Muslim community itself. In other words, Muslims become the alibi for a number of policies that I think should be troubling to many people, particularly racial minorities.

**TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH:** The same could be said about anti-sharia laws, which have the potential to deprive not just Muslims but others of their basic religious freedoms—as has been pointed out by the latest ISPU report, I believe, which was referred to earlier.

**ZAREENA GREWAL:** I’d like to give one example to sort of highlight and underline the enormous ignorance about sharia. Senator Allen had proposed a sharia ban, and he was interviewed by a journalist, a smart journalist, who asked him a very simple question: What is sharia? You’re proposing a ban on sharia. What is sharia? He fumbled with his papers and said, “Uh, uh, I’ll have to have someone get back to you.” He couldn’t actually tell the reporter what sharia was. And then he later released a statement explaining what sharia was, and it was literally a cut and paste of the first paragraph from Wikipedia on what sharia is. Now, unfortunately, he didn’t include the second paragraph on Wikipedia—I mean, you can see the amount of research that has gone into this—which actually explains that Islamic law has multiple interpretations and is complex. In other words, even the Wikipedia entry would have given him a little education on what Islamic law is.

But that’s what we’re dealing with today in the American Muslim
community. We’re dealing with a discourse that is operating in a vacuum of knowledge. For example, my next book is going to be on the Qur’an and the American imagination. Pew hasn’t released the study yet, but they just did a poll. Fifty percent of Americans cannot name the scripture of Islam. Well, Muslims do not suffer from lack of representation. Islam is around you all the time. You turn the TV on and you hear about Muslims and Islam all the time. So it’s not that there aren’t too few representations of Islam. There are actually too many, but they’re all the same note, and it is this very troubling racial note.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Zuhdi Jasser, what’s your sense of the basic trend lines in terms of religious freedom and then conversely religious discrimination for Muslim minorities in America?

ZUHDI JASSER: Thanks, Tim. And I want to thank the Berkley Center, Tom Farr, and all of you for including all of our voices, including some more diverse controversial voices. I have to say that when you frame the question about sharia, mosques, the right to build mosques, et cetera—which are core American values—I think it is important to look at the surrounding narrative and the lens through which we look at these issues. And if we spend time talking about the symptoms of what’s happening in America, we should balance that with an equal amount of discussion identifying what is the problem. Where is this fear in America coming from?

You know, we can sit among people of peace and academia and say there are no problems and deal with Islamic apologetics over and over. But the reality is that every Muslim majority country that exists—whether through populist movements as we saw with the Brotherhood or oligarchical movements—enacts Islamic law in ways that are oppressive, demeaning to women, demeaning to minorities, et cetera. Can we say that somehow our Muslim communities in America bring those ideas over and become Jeffersonian democrats overnight and enact the ideas of Thomas Paine and others that rejected theocracy?

It might be easy to say that Islamic history was not theocratic in its entire history. The bottom line, the way I view it, is that these are all symptoms, and it is going to get worse. In Georgia just last week there was a hearing to prevent the building of a mosque. Right after 9/11 in Scottsdale, Arizona, where I live, a group of us defended our ability to build a mosque in Scottsdale. But those are symptoms of a community, an American community—over 60 percent of whom never met a Muslim, as Zareena said.

And Muslim minorities, while we can protect their rights, have to remember that in World War II there was a movement to prevent the building of Japanese shrines and places of worship because of the conflict we were in. And today the Nazi Party, the Communist Party, and a lot of parties still exist freely. I think Egypt has proven that pushing these political Islamist movements underground doesn’t work, whatever you want to call them. I think there’s been some demonization of the “Right” today in that this is not a Right-Left movement. You can call it what you want. I’ve seen it in these countries that have been mentioned—whether it’s Burma, which I visited earlier this year, Nigeria, Ethiopia, or Tajikistan.

And I think that’s where we need to appeal to Americans in that, yes, there is a threat, but to push it underground actually makes it thrive. That’s why the Brotherhood thrived for 60 years in Egypt, and one year of running the government in Egypt made it fall apart. But in the American context, I think by making this all about “woe is us, the Muslim minority, we’re victims of this so-called Islamophobia,” we’re racializing Muslims.

There are a lot of comments I heard today that racialize a faith. Islam is an ideology. Anything that you can approach or leave at will is not a race; it’s an ideology. That’s not to say that there isn’t bigotry against Muslims. But by describing any criticism of Islam as a phobia, what do you make of the millions that went to the streets in Egypt against the Brotherhood? What were they fighting?
Just last week, the king of Bahrain made a statement against political Islam, saying that it is the plague of our society. The Egyptian government just had a commission that outlawed political Islam. Are we to believe that Abdel Fattah el-Sisi and the royal family of Bahrain are great liberal theologians? They’re not. They’re oligarchical Islamists who believe that the greatest threat to them are populist Islamists. So you have multiple internecine battles going on within the house of Islam that in America, looking at it through the lens of a minority, we’re missing.

As a doctor who treats disease, I don’t primarily treat symptoms. I would tell you as a Muslim that I’ll let the non-Muslim community deal with maintaining America’s principles of religious freedom, and I think we are able to do that more so in America because it is a first freedom. In Europe radical Islam is a bigger problem because of the identity of the community. Nationalism there is based on race and based on lands and history, while in America it’s truly based on religious freedom.

But where are the Thomas Paines of Islam? I think it is relevant. Ideology is relevant if we are going to protect our country. While we shouldn’t prevent the building of mosques, these laws called anti-sharia—again, as a Muslim, I would protest them being called anti-sharia because sharia to a Muslim is the pathway to the watering hole, it means God’s law, it’s like saying Islam—but things done in the name of sharia globally, for the most part, are not liberal.

Talk to women’s rights groups, talk to feminists that are working against not only honor killing but honor violence, et cetera. Our organization has signed on to some of these movements, like the one in Michigan, the one in Arizona, the one in Florida. These don’t cite sharia. They say that any law in America that violates our American laws should not be protected but should be countered. This is the issue. Ask the British what’s happening with sharia courts in London and elsewhere. In America, there are women that come to ask for divorce and are told, “Oh, go back to your husbands.” The sharia courts become incubators for the violation of women’s rights.

“I was born with a heart; I don’t get invited to speak at cardiology conferences. However, there are many people who become overnight experts about Islam because they were born Muslim and because they’re ready to say certain things. So when you ask the question, ‘Where is the fear of Islam coming from?’ there is a multi-million dollar industry that manufactures fear of Islam. That is a fact.”

Zareena Grewal

And it’s not about sharia. It’s about draconian law where we, as Muslims, have to address our scripture that says a woman gets half the vote of a man. She gets a quarter of the inheritance. Certain passages that I feel are misinterpreted and most Muslims feel are misinterpreted need to be readdressed. But the way to give women protection is to say that foreign law cannot be incubated in sharia courts in America or so-called sharia courts or tribunals. But right now, the arbitration system in America is so hands-off, which I as a libertarian am conflicted about. But we’re not at the same point in history as the Jewish (beth din) court system or the Christian (canonic) court system. Right now I think we Muslims are more in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and I think this is where the narrative has to be addressed.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: But in regard to my question, do you have a growing concern about the treatment of Muslims in America? Are there problems? Perhaps you have a different understanding of why the problems are there, but are there growing problems?

ZUHDI JASSER: Yes, there are. And I think just like a patient with cancer is treated with chemotherapy, part of the treatment is going to create symptoms that hurt our community and are painful to deal with. What pulls Muslims to these radical movements is Islamo-patriotism—a belief in the caliphate, a belief in jihad, et cetera. Read this “Letter to Baghdadi” (www.lettertobaghdadi.com) that many imams, some of whom may be here, signed. It is apologetic. For example, it says the caliphate is right, but it needs to be done by a consensus.

But what about condemning all caliphates? What about condemning all jihad? What about talking about women’s equality? These are the things that we aren’t doing (and aren’t done in that letter), and I think the symptoms are going to get worse. They’re going to continue to climb because the populist, activist, common media that addresses these issues in seven-second sound bites is going to stir the pot without treating the condition.

I think it’s going to take a lot more Muslims to feel that we really have a problem. Most Muslims I talk to say, “Zuhdi, I like
what you’re doing. But gosh, I left that stuff in the Middle East because we’re a minority here. The Brotherhood will never take over the government here. It’s just not an issue for us.” Well, eventually I think part of this pathology—for example, the anti-mosque building movement is a pathology, Muslim bigotry is a pathology—is going to motivate Muslims to finally ask what is our American national identity. Is it based on liberty? Or are we rather Islamo-patriots who believe that we’re here to follow the laws and the conflict is just really about violence and non-violence?

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Farid Senzai, we’ve heard different points of view now. Zuhdi Jasser says, well, maybe the bigger problem isn’t discrimination against Muslims but extremism, or at least the danger of some Muslims absorbing extremist ideas. What’s your assessment?

FARID SENZAI: The problem unfortunately in the comments just made is that there’s an attempt to somehow equate what’s happening in Muslim-majority countries with Muslims here—an attempt to somehow link politics there with politics here, where Muslims are living as a minority community. Clearly, in many cases, as I mentioned, Muslims are very diverse. Many of them have emigrated from Muslim-majority countries. Many of them have brought many of those cultural as well as religious views.

But you see significant differences among Muslims. The fact that we even had this first session, the morning session on the differences that exist within Europe, showed there is tremendous difference between German Muslims and French Muslims, and significant difference between European Muslims and American Muslims: their history, their interpretation, their practice. To equate and begin to lump together Muslims in Egypt or the rest of Muslim-majority countries with Muslims in America in an attempt to link all of these groups together is unfortunate because the point of our effort, especially today, is to begin to see the diversity and the differences that exist.

If one looks at Muslims in the United States, one sees that, yes, clearly there are Muslims that have very radical and, in some cases, extremist views that in a small number of cases even support violence. We see this in the polls that were taken; the Pew poll showed that 6 percent of Muslims had very extreme views when it came to violence, for instance. But yet the vast majority of Muslims did not. You see the condemnation of violence by Muslims in this country. So to suggest that they’re somehow apologizing for it is absolutely not the case. But one then has to look at the fact that, yes, there is a minority of Muslims in this country that has been either radicalized or has extremist views and to find out why that is.

The first thing one can do is dissect the data further and look at the views of Muslims in various age groups. In the Pew study that we were involved with, we found that it was Muslims between the ages of 18 and 29—so Muslim youth—that had the more radical views. Muslims that were older than 29 had far less radical views. Then when we talked about the extremist views—which sort of goes against the point that was just made—it wasn’t the immigrant Muslims that had the most radical views. Believe it or not, in terms of racial lines, the ones who were more likely to have radical or extreme views were African-American converts to Islam.

So you begin to see a significant difference. Immigrant Muslims were far more tolerant in many ways. Because they’ve come to the United States, they’ve had the opportunity to express themselves politically and see themselves engaging in a political process. That process has, in fact, de-radicalized or in many ways allowed them to participate in a way that has moderated Muslims.

The 2007 Pew study that came out had the title, “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream.” That was the title of the entire study. Yes, the vast majority of Muslims is moderate and mainstream, but we did see some radical elements within the community. We can’t deny it. We must look more deeply at the roots of that extremism.

Now the unfortunate thing when the 2007 study came out is that in every interview that I did, the first question asked was about those who support extremism or radicalism—even suicide bombing, for instance, which is one of the questions that kept coming up. It really was an attempt to take this minority segment of the community and somehow conflate it with the entire majority of the community. Those of us who are actively involved in studying this community show the diversity. We show that, yes, there is radicalism and extremism within a minority of the community, but the vast majority of the community has, in fact, overwhelmingly seen some of this as a problem and now is attempting to try to do something about it. Subsequent polls that had been done have shown that to be the case.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: There are a couple of interesting arguments. One, the fact that there are not heavy legal restrictions on the freedom of American Muslims is a kind of antidote to the possibility of radicalization in America. We don’t have bans
on head scarves. We don’t have bans on minarets relative to some policies in Western Europe. So I want to ask: To what extent is that greater freedom a kind of antidote to radicalization and extremism?

And then also to your point, Farid, that we are seeing movements within the Muslim community against extremism and radicalism: That seems to be directly counter to what Zuhdi Jasser was suggesting when he asked, “Where are the Thomas Paines? Where are the liberal Muslims?” You are suggesting that we are already seeing them, and perhaps we are seeing them actually on display here today. We’ve seen Shaykh Hamza Yusuf, founder of a liberal arts college in the United States, making extremely articulate arguments against Islamic radicalism. Aren’t we perhaps seeing as a result of a blending of Islam with the American context a kind of fresh liberal Islamic discourse?

FARID SENZAI: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, if you look at the scholarly literature on this topic, in terms of what it refers to as the “inclusion-moderation thesis,” Muslims’ inclusion in the political process has led to moderation. When they are included and allowed to participate through democratic means, through political institutions, and within societies that are pluralistic, that then leads to moderation. So therefore, you begin to see direct links between inclusion leading to moderation. So I think that the evidence suggests that that’s the case.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Are we seeing a kind of fresh liberal Islamic discourse in the United States in part because of the relatively religiously free environment?

FARID SENZAI: Yeah. I think that what you’re seeing is this new generation of Muslims, and it’s really exciting to see. As John Esposito pointed out in the previous panel, you see this new generation of Muslims that identify with Islam. Now the question was to what extent do they identify with Islam? We’re seeing with the study that a large percentage of Muslims do in fact self-identify as being Muslim. In fact, in some cases Islam is their primary identity.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Despite the fact they may not be mosque attenders? Even if mosque attendance is at 15 percent or so?

FARID SENZAI: I would have to argue that it’s much higher.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: It’s higher than that?

FARID SENZAI: In fact, in our Bay Area study, we found that it was significantly higher—between one-third and one-half in the study there. But overwhelmingly, if you look at national studies of Muslims, about a third is what most scholars suggest, that it’s about a third that are mosque-attending. Now, of course among the mosque-attending you see diversity, whether they’re going once a week or they’re just going to what they refer to as the Eid prayer or they’re going every single day. And so you have a tremendous diversity of what constitutes a mosque goer.

But the point is that in terms of their identity, Muslims overwhelmingly see themselves as Muslim. But they don’t see this in conflict with being American; they see themselves as Muslim and American just as if you ask Christians. The Pew study in fact did equate these and looked at the Christian community. Many Christians also identified very much with their Christian identity, but also with their American identity. So there were actually parallels along those lines.

But then we have the question of what is happening with this community. Do we have new voices that support the liberal ideas to which Zuhdi is referring? We are seeing that. But these voices are also insisting on maintaining an Islamic identity. And that is the key point. They are not assimilating to the point where they are washing away their religious identity. Now, a small percentage is, where they’re changing their names and they don’t at all identify with Islam. But the majority of Muslims are what we refer to as integrated Muslims or integrationist Muslims, where they are integrating without losing their religious identity. You see many of these individuals, including a younger generation of Muslims establishing new institutions, being voices that support and fully advocate for the principles that this country was founded on, but yet proudly insisting on their Muslim identity as well.
TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Right, not privatizing their faith, not abandoning it. Professor Grewal, I want to ask you to comment on the discussion, but I'd like to ask another question to add to the discussion. You've done fascinating work on the links between Muslims in this country and Muslim networks abroad. I'd like to ask you again to comment on what's been discussed, but also to ask you a question that was asked in the Europe panel; namely, is there a way in which these new voices that we're seeing in the United States are having an influence in other parts of the world? We know Shaykh Hamza has had a real influence in Islamic discourse not just in this country but elsewhere. Are there other examples of that happening? Muslim Thomas Paines, if you will? Or maybe that's not the best analogy given that Thomas Paine was a pretty—

ZUHDI JASSER: I think it's the best analogy. [Laughter]

THOMAS SAMUEL SHAH: Okay. All right. He was famously deist and not exactly a fan of orthodox Christian theology, but we understand the point. But are there other examples?

ZAREENA GREWAL: I didn't get the memo that you have to prove that you're Thomas Paine to have rights as a citizen in this country. I didn't know that was the new criteria under which Muslims are being asked to perform their citizenship. I mean, I wrote a book about American Muslims who exactly fit the profile that make many Americans nervous: young people, politically disaffected, very religious. And I interviewed hundreds of them who had gone abroad to study Islam traditionally. That was 10 years of research.

But I find myself encountering people on panels such as these who—I have to confess, I didn't know Dr. Jasser until today. I've never met you before, but I do feel like I know you because I watch Fox News every day. [Laughter] And so I have to say I'm glad you're here. I'm having heart palpitations as you talk about sharia, so maybe you can help me afterwards. I don't know.

ZUHDI JASSER: That's the medium that over half of the American population watches, by the way.

ZAREENA GREWAL: I'm counted among them, I guess. My concern is that when we talk about Islam having a cancer, first of all that in itself is a problem. I think that kind of analogy and that kind of language—

ZUHDI JASSER: I didn't say Islam has a cancer. Islamist Muslims have a cancer.

ZAREENA GREWAL: I consider Islamists to be Muslims. I would count them among the billion Muslims.

ZUHDI JASSER: Yeah, absolutely.

ZAREENA GREWAL: So if they in fact have a problem, maybe it would be helpful if we actually understood a couple of things about them. In other words, I was born with a heart; I don't get invited to speak at cardiology conferences. However, there are many people who become overnight experts about Islam because they were born Muslim and because they're ready to say certain things. So when you ask the question, "Where is the fear of Islam coming from?" there is a multi-million dollar industry that manufactures fear of Islam. That is a fact. "Fear, Inc." is a wonderful report that was published a couple of years ago which shows how this happens. The sharia bans all come from one website with a boilerplate that can be used in any state by any public official, and that's how this happened. I mean, it's not a great mystery of where this came from.

As for the question of the racialization of Islam, Muslims aren't the ones who are saying Islam is a race. The state has racialized Muslims. That is what is happening. In fact, when I say that Islam is racialized, what I mean is that we have a category of Muslim-looking people now. Many of the targets of hate crimes that are intended for Muslims are not themselves actually Muslims. Sikhs, Native Americans, and Latinos have died because they were presumed to be Muslim. So that's what I mean when I say Islam is racialized.

Now, in a post-civil rights America we don't have policies that are anti-Islam or that are racist at the face, but they are racial in their effects. In other words, the War on Terror policies—immigration policies, policies focusing on charities (six Muslim charities were shut down post 9/11)—these are laws and policies that are selectively targeting particular Muslim populations. That's racial in its effect, even if it's not called racial.

For example, after 9/11, Muslim charitable work, the amount of money that left the US from Muslim pockets, was reduced by 42 percent. When we look at the incredible humanitarian crisis in Syria and elsewhere, all that money is not able to get to those locations because Muslim giving is so constrained. At the exact same moment, under George W. Bush, faith-based organizations that were Evangelical and Christian were receiving more funds from the government than they ever had before.

So the selective application of these laws is in fact racial, if we
can get past the face of it. It is not called racial. It’s not like the Asian Exclusion Act which said Asians couldn’t come here. But the deportations are all mostly Asians, from Pakistan actually. So we have to look a little deeper to study the issue and see what’s going on here. What you see now is that Muslim charities have to rebrand themselves as not “charities,” because charity is seen as religious and therefore suspect, but as “humanitarian.” So humanitarian work is seen as secular and somehow devoid of this dangerous religious quality, and that’s very troubling. In other words, zakat practices—the Muslim requirement that is the part of sharia that calls for charitable donations once a year—are constrained by the state, and it deeply impacts some communities.

Now it also has unexpected effects. For example, because Muslims are not able to give so easily outside of the United States, the square footage of mosques has, I think, doubled in some states such as Michigan since 9/11 because Muslims are essentially investing domestically in projects like Zaytuna College, their local mosques, Islamic schools, and the like. This is not the intended effect of these policies, but that’s one of the good things that’s come out of it for the Muslim community.

As for the question of radical Muslims, this book is basically about radical Muslims. It’s unfortunate that the term radical has itself become a slur. When I say radical Muslims, we immediately assume that we’re talking about someone who’s about to behead you if you don’t look exactly the way they do. That’s very troubling.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Maajid Nawaz made this point earlier.

ZAREENA GREWAL: Yes, and I want to underscore that point. I think that's exactly right, and I really appreciate that he titled his book Radical, and we need to recuperate that term. It’s precisely because of this aversion to being labeled “radical” that you see American Muslim leadership making terrible mistakes.

This weekend—I find this embarrassing—the Muslim Public Affairs Council honored the LA Police Chief Michael Downing. He got the Community Partnership Award from the Muslim Public Affairs Council in Los Angeles over the weekend. This is the same weekend that the whole country is seeing thousands and thousands of people pouring into the street protesting police violence. Isn’t it offensive to the families and victims and all those people who are protesting for justice for this Muslim organization to be congratulating LA’s police department, which has one of the most aggressive and disturbing surveillance programs in the country? This has been a model for other states. But, you see, because of this desire not to be seen as radical, to be seen as good Muslim patriots, they’re making all kinds of mistakes.

You were asking, are there liberal voices? I think there’s a liberal vacuum, actually, in the Muslim community. I would like to see American Muslim leaders align their activist energies with the people that are in the streets who are so inspiring: all the White House staffers that stood on the stairs with “I Can’t Breathe” and “Black Lives Matter” signs. This is the moment. This is the movement of the moment, and it affects us Muslims too. That’s where we need to see a kind of convergence of energy rather than at these dinners giving awards to people who are at best “frenemies.”

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Zuhdi, would you like to respond to anything that’s been said?

ZUHDI JASSER: I find it amazing that in the United States of America an educated opinion about Islam gets dismissed because some of us don’t have degrees in theology. That is entirely against what our Founding Fathers and what America was based on—that Muslims who understand, who believe in their scripture, having a kitab as part of my marriage, believing in sharia and my personal practice of faith and my dietary restrictions—that if I take on sharia and government, then I become uneducated about Islam. I become anti-Muslim. I become part of this Islamophobia industry that she so nonchalantly mentioned.

In fact, you’ll find this industry has a lot of overlap with some of the groups that fund organizations like Georgetown and others. So at the end of the day, that industry is reacting to an ideological problem. That, by the way, is a drop in the bucket compared to the billions of dollars spent by Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) countries—billions from Saudi Arabia, all the Emirates and other radical monarchies that are spreading an ideology of Islam, in the name of our faith, that is from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. And unless we address these things, if we continue to get warmth in our blanket of American freedom, we are going to miss the boat as far as where we are in history.

Now, I’m not disagreeing with some of these symptoms that exist. I talked about how we are fighting on some of those front lines, but the issue I see is, what is the worldview of Muslims and our leadership? And I would tell you that most of the Muslim organizations and the imams leading our communities have a pretty singular worldview about the role of Islam in government. Now, you can separate them into Salafist (and other subdivi-
sions), and there are debates about the Brotherhood versus Salafism, et cetera. But the issue is their worldview. And this isn’t “American hyper-patriotism,” as we often get dismissed. You dismiss 60 percent of the American population as bigoted conservatives and hyper-patriots—you can call them whatever you want. It’s about liberty. It’s about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and those of us who are trying to fight for those ideals within the house of Islam and portray where we are as Muslims in this time of history.

Because left to their own devices, what are Islamists and what is Islamism? Yes, Islamists are Muslims. Absolutely. But I want to have that dialogue, not about violence. And what is an extremist? I don’t even know what that is. It’s maybe about somebody who wants to do whatever they want militantly. But the difference between the Brotherhood and Al-Qaeda is really the means. They dismiss violence. They dismiss all these other things. But what is their worldview when they become a majority? And if they become a majority, it’s relevant because in America we can do this work to counter Islamism. Islamism is the belief in the Islamic state in which Muslims are a majority, and that ultimately they will put into place not systems based on reason and the separation of church (mosque) and state, but systems in which their ulama, or scholars, decide by consensus what the law should be and the population does not do so through a reasoned process, rather, just as the West abandoned canon law.

The Islamists want to put into place a theocratic type of mindset. And I think it’s really important for us to understand where we are at this time in history. We can’t dismiss this debate, because when you dismiss it, you actually perpetuate the separation of the debate from the realities that we need to confront.

**TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH:** Let’s broaden the debate and get people from the audience. I know we have a microphone going around. So perhaps we can begin with Maajid Nawaz here in the front.

**MAAJID NAWAZ:** Thank you. I know I’ve spoken, but I was referred to by the panelists and I’d like to comment on some of what I’ve just heard. I am in this peculiar position in that I’ve been on both sides of this very important dialogue, and it shouldn’t be dismissed. I am somebody who spent a long time arguing for the Islamist worldview that Zuhdi Jasser just referred to. And as a Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidate in London, I care deeply for the liberal issues that were referred to before Zuhdi’s comment.

Often it’s frustrating to me as somebody who approaches this debate from a liberal perspective to see the dichotomy whereby one is either perceived of as a hyper-patriot, as Zuhdi referred to, if they’re critical of Islamism, or as a liberal, and it is expected or anticipated that a liberal is somehow inherently sympathetic to Islamism if they don’t criticize it enough.

What I would like the speakers to comment on is actually that there is no reason why these two perspectives should be at odds. There is no reason why the debate should be polarized in that way. It’s simultaneously true that there’s a rise in the symptoms of anti-Muslim hate across Europe—in particular, I’m aware of the European context. It’s simultaneously true that Muslims must participate more in things such as “I Can’t Breathe” campaigns and everything we’re seeing in the social justice movements across America at the moment. And it’s simultaneously true that there’s diversity within Muslim communities, while it’s also true that there is a very, very unhealthy strand of discourse referred to as Islamism that is attempting to crush that diversity within our own communities.

And so I just want the speakers to comment on why there’s a tendency, and what I sometimes see as laziness—intellectual laziness perhaps—to fall into these comfortable zones.

**TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH:** So either-or, dichotomous—

**MAAJID NAWAZ:** Yes, when actually all of these things can be done and need to be done by liberal voices more so. If we want to stop anti-Muslim hate, it’s even more important for liberal voices...
who also happen to be Muslim, who also happen to care about other social justice causes as part of their desire for social justice, to care about the stigmatization that happens by Muslims to other Muslims within their own communities—what I referred to earlier as the minorities within minorities context.

We are traditionally very bad at catering to dissenting Muslim voices, whether they’re Ahmadies or Muslims who choose to leave their faith. We are very, very intolerant generally as communities, especially in Europe, of those dynamics. And just as we expect non-Muslims to speak out against anti-Muslim hate, we must also speak out against Islamist extremism and hate within our communities for minority Muslim voices as well or people who choose to leave the faith.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Farid, would you like to respond?

FARID SENZAI: Well, I think there’s a lot to respond to. I think that Jocelyne had done a good job in the first session discussing the diversity within Islamism. So once again, let’s not fall into the trap of identifying a single “Islamism.” In fact, everyone’s promoting their book, so—

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Please, share it with us! [Laughter]

FARID SENZAI: My book has 11 chapters. Each chapter is on a different manifestation of Islamism, and each one has a very different history and has quite distinct and different opinions about many of these issues—whether it’s liberalism, whether it’s democracy, or whether it’s violence. And so you see that within Islamism there is a tremendous amount of diversity. So to suggest that Islamism once again is in the United States and it’s here and it’s dominated as if there’s only one perspective, it’s absolutely not the case. Clearly, Muslims say that Islam should play a more important role, first of all personally, but also in some cases that it should play a more important role in the public sphere.

It’s no different than, you know, if you asked Jerry Falwell and 60 million Evangelical Christians whether they think that Christianity should play a role in the public sphere. Absolutely. Sure. What...
do you think the abortion debate is about? What do you think the same-sex marriage debate is about? This is all about allowing religion to play a role in the public sphere, and so Muslims have every right to have that. In fact, what makes America so great is that it allows for this religious diversity to play a role in the public sphere. And then to fear that is very unpatriotic, because the history of this country is based on the diversity of religious views.

The problem that I have with those that try to advocate and inflame the hatred against Muslims, Islamophobia, is how they somehow suggest that Muslims are un-American, to the point that because our president’s middle name is Hussein, there’s still 20 percent of Americans who think that he is a Muslim, and they still continue to advocate that. That’s what I object to.

And part of my effort and Zareena’s effort and others is to try to show this diversity. Yes, there’s extremism and radicalism within the community. But yet, because of this diversity, Muslims have just as much of a right to express their faith whether it’s in the personal arena or within the public sphere, just as the 60 million Evangelical Christians do, not to mention the Hasidic Jews or Orthodox Jews in this country that do the same. And so to somehow suggest that Muslims are different than other Americans because of this is unfortunate. I would hope that a conference like this begins to shed light and express views that are contrary to that.

ZUHDI JASSER: I just briefly want to reject the notion that a Muslim who is against the Islamic state and against having a citizen’s identity determined by their faith is somehow not for family values, could not be pro-life, could not be pro-family values and all the other aspects that we look at in conservative Christian movements, conservative Jewish movements, and movements of all people of faith. The discussion of religion in the public place for America in 2014 is very different from where we are versus the Islamist movement within the Muslim consciousness today. As to the Islamist movement right now—and the Muslim-majority conversation within mosques, within Muslim-majority countries—I believe there are a lot of differences with Christendom in the West. What’s needed, I believe, is a revolution such as Chesterton said that tradition was the democracy of the dead. So I want to defend the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholars that Dr. Jasser thinks these people represent. They don’t. If the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholars were actually here today, it would be a very different situation. You wouldn’t be seeing the type of violence that you’re having here. And that’s simply a fact for somebody who spends more time with them than with people.

My only problem with a lot of what Dr. Jasser said is I think instead of using a scalpel, he’s using a sledgehammer. And I think he needs a little more nuance in his approach. That’s all. Thanks.

And the bottom line is that this is the front line ideologically. We may want to focus on violent extremism at the end, but the beginning of the Imam Al-Awlakis (of this world), the beginning of the conversation, is to demonize Western liberalism and secularism as anti-religious and to then say that the ulama and the scholars need to control society to keep it clean. This rejects the populist understanding that even a Jew, even an atheist, could become president of your country, versus the Islamic worldview which is that rights come from Islam and not from God, and that you need to have a Muslim lens through which to view them. That’s the debate and where we are today.

But I resent the fact that somehow if you’re against the Islamists or if you don’t go to a mosque—which we already said 85 percent of American Muslims don’t do for the most part—that somehow you’re not religious, when in fact in Islam there was no congregational concept. My parents in Syria used to go to a different mosque every Friday because there’s a mosque at every corner. So the fact that you don’t go to a mosque doesn’t make you unreligious; sometimes maybe you are just repulsed by the leaders in the pulpit and by what you’re going to hear in the sermons in many of the mosques in America.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Yes, Shaykh Hamza.

HAMZA YUSUF: This has been very interesting.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: It’s going to be hard for you to keep it brief, I suspect. [Laughter]

HAMZA YUSUF: I will, I’ll keep it very brief. I think Dr. Jasser brought up some very valid points about what’s happening with the vast amount of money that has been spent on promoting a certain type of Islam that I find very odious. But, you know, Chesterton said that tradition was the democracy of the dead. So I want to defend the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholars that Dr. Jasser thinks these people represent. They don’t. If the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholars were actually here today, it would be a very different situation. You wouldn’t be seeing the type of violence that you’re having here. And that’s simply a fact for somebody who spends more time with them than with people.

My only problem with a lot of what Dr. Jasser said is I think instead of using a scalpel, he’s using a sledgehammer. And I think he needs a little more nuance in his approach. That’s all. Thanks.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Do you want to respond?

ZUHDI JASSER: I don’t disagree with him. We could do a whole panel on apostasy and the fact that Ibn Taymiyyah and many other scholars said in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries said that we should—
HAMZA YUSUF: He was arrested. And he spent the vast majority of his life in prison.

ZUHDI JASSER: We can have that debate, but the bottom line is that—

HAMZA YUSUF: The scholars of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries put him in prison.

ZUHDI JASSER: Okay. So the bottom line is most of the legalism—there used to be 4,000 schools of thought of Islam. Now there are four. So it has narrowed itself down. The interpretation of the Shafi’i school of thought that says if people leave Islam, kill them, is still distributed in the Reliance of the Traveler and major Muslim organizations as being our sharia. So if this is such a whitewash, where are all of the Muslim leaders condemning Shafi’i interpretations or the other schools of thought that came out among the twelfth- and thirteenth-century interpretations?

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: I want to actually get a couple of questions in one after another, and then have a response. This gentleman’s been waiting.

HASSAN: Assalamu alaikum (peace be upon you). My name is Hassan. I was born in Tehran. I am a builder-developer, retired, and I have an organization called Global Bridges for Humanity, through which I hope to do what you’re all doing in a much, much bigger way. Qur’an gives the answer to all the questions. Qur’an does not say if you don’t believe in Qur’an, you should be pushed away. Allah says we send Muhammad as a blessing to all the things, or Rahmat al-‘alameen. Therefore, there is no Islamist, there is no extremist, there is no fundamentalist in Islam. Islam is only one Islam and that is Islam, the pure message of Muhammad.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you. I’m closing, but just one suggestion to Mr. Jasser. In the context of American ideals, you have caused problems in that you may be associated with Fox News and so on. You have to deal with the Second Amendment, whether I need to have a gun as a Muslim and so on. So instead of that, what if you expand your horizon to an Islam that is more in harmony with universal rights and freedoms, which is above American founding ideals, I think, and more improvised, so to speak? Thank you.

ZAREENA GREW AL: Yes, if I could just say a couple of things. First of all—I’ll just say this—I just had a baby, actually. I’m on maternity leave, but I came here because I think this issue is very important.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (unidentified): I would like to actually thank Mr. Jasser for his comments. I think he is pointing out a very serious problem among us Muslims, that we spend too much time not confronting our problems, and we have been looking for apologies. We say, if Muslims are violent, backward, poor, or have whatever problems, this is because of colonialism, because of this and that, and so on. I’m from Turkey originally; I am very familiar with this discussion. I think it’s a very important part of the problem.

The reality is that there’s so much anxiety in the United States. In fact, one of the questions in the earlier panel was about minorities in the Muslim world. If you look at the news coverage of the Muslim world, the treatment of Christians which is often very bad, the treatment of homosexuals which is also very often very bad, these are the kinds of things that are covered again and again in the Muslim world. That’s often glossed over, and this is what people don’t understand about what happened in Egypt, is that the government also persecutes the religious majority in most Muslim countries, such as Egypt. The Sunni majority is
also targeted. That’s what people often don’t understand. It has come to the point now where the Muslim Brotherhood equals something deeply alarming, which it shouldn’t, as Farid pointed out.

Since September 11 I’ve been seeing Muslim institution after Muslim institution in the United States collapsing under basically guilt by association, even organizations that have no religious element to them. So for example, KindHearts, which is a totally secular Lebanese charity out of Toledo that was giving money to orphans, had their assets frozen because somebody somewhere might have met with somebody who met with Hamas. The ACLU took the case and actually won the case, and so that’s a success story. But there’s this idea that every Muslim organization, whether it’s the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) or the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) or all of these mainline Muslim organizations in the United States, if they have any connection at all to the Muslim Brotherhood, they’re actually a terrorist organization.

This is, actually, what we see under the Obama administration. Under Bush, it was “good Muslim citizens” and “bad Muslims,” like the jihadists who hate America. Under Obama, this Islamophobia discourse treats the entire American Muslim population as a giant sleeper cell that’s about to be awakened, and we need to have any connection at all to the Muslim Brotherhood, they’re actually a terrorist organization.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: We have a couple more minutes, so I just want to get at least a couple more questions, if possible. Imam Magid was waiting, I think, patiently for some time.

IMAM MAGID: Since the morning, I’ve been listening to this discourse. I would like to say that you may have frustrated Muslims and angry Muslims within the Muslim community. You may have an angry Catholic with the Catholic community, and angry Jews with the Jewish community. But in order for us to address the anger—why are you angry with all the Jewish organizations or all the Catholic organizations—I think you need to have an open debate, and I appreciate this debate taking place here.

But I would like to say that you have to be very careful in addressing the issue of the need for creating a very tolerant and understanding religious community. You cannot exclude the people who disagree with you on all sides. Because sometimes someone comes on TV who wants to exclude everybody who does not agree with him, and he calls them the terrorist organizations. And we have Muslims who exclude someone like Dr. Jasser and say he should not have a voice. I would like to say that it cannot be exclusive because the debate today in the Muslim community, in interfaith dialogue, has to include everybody.

But I would like to say as a last point that in my experience as an imam, you have to accept a person wearing a niqab. I cannot tell them that wearing a niqab is not the right thing to do, or covering their face with a burka, or a person who doesn’t wear a scarf. Our mosque is open for all. But for anyone to say that Muslim Americans should be different from Jewish Americans and Catholics and others, who have elements within them that are conservative, liberal and so on—for someone to say, we need Muslims to be liberal, to be conservative—why don’t you accept the Salafists and the Sufis and everyone else in this country, like any other community accepting diversity? And that way, no one manipulates Islam; it’s just accepted like any other community. Why does there have to be somebody saying true Islam must look like this? Accept the diversity.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you. Yes, go ahead.
AUDIENCE MEMBER (unidentified): My question is to Dr. Jasser. It’s very interesting to hear how the US Constitution and the government plays out in this issue. You’re in medicine, right? Think about a person who is sick and doctors just treat him in biomedical ways all the time. This is the situation in the United States now. We know that this is the society with the worst health and the most expenses. And nobody has an answer to this healthcare problem because the libertarians and the liberals are fighting on whether healthcare should be inclusive or not. And it’s a very complicated thing.

So in this context of public health and medicine in America, don’t you think America is like the Muslim people, and public health should be addressing the socioeconomic factors that are actually affecting the health of the Americans? Medicine is just trying to cut off the cause of disease, because health is the absence of disease. But we have to look at the socioeconomic factors that keep perpetuating the reasons why people have diseases. And some of these things include the urban environment, and the safety and the security of the place, and education.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you, thanks very much. We do need to move to close the panel. So I’m going to ask each of the panelists to make closing comments, perhaps in dialogue with some of the questions and comments we’ve just heard the last few minutes, but feel free to make general closing comments as well. And we’ll start with Farid and continue over to Zuhdi and then Zareena.

FARID SENZAI: Well, I don’t have much more to add. I think I’ve essentially made my major points. I think that one of the things to know or to keep in mind as we deal with these very important and complex issues is that we’re seeing a tremendous amount of positive change that’s taking place. I think in many ways, the role that someone like Dr. Jasser plays within the community is a very healthy and important role. You’re seeing that the community is looking much more internally in terms of some of the issues that it faced and some of the problems that it faces. You’re seeing this as a community that is evolving in many ways from the concerns that they had in the 1960s, for instance, or the concerns that they had in the 1980s or 1990s, to the concerns they have in a post-9/11 world. And I think that this is a healthy process.

For instance, there is change in the places and the organizations that they fund. Initially they were funding mosques, and they were very interested in establishing their places of worship. Then they were building and establishing civil rights organizations,
like CAIR for instance and MPAC. Then you see this transition where the next generation of Muslims is building organizations and institutions, as well as colleges like Zaytuna College. You’re seeing this evolution that’s taking place. Part of this evolution is to begin to look internally at some of the problems in the community. I think that the community is beginning to do that. In some ways, it’s understanding that it has to do that, to address the radical extreme elements within the community and not just completely ignore it. But as I’ve continually said, one has to keep this in perspective. It’s not that the entire community supports this, and you begin to see the diversity that’s there.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you. Zuhdi then Zareena. Quickly, if I may.

ZUHDI JASSER: I just have to say that I approach this from a position of love for my faith, for my country, and for my beliefs and their centrality. I think de Tocqueville got it right, that democracy works in America because we have a faithful religious population that doesn’t need a military regime in order to work.

Having said that, in response to Imam Magid and some of the other comments, the reason the question for Muslims regarding religious liberty the way our Founding Fathers defined it is so relevant is because our constituency is not just 1.0 percent of the American population. The constituency for whom we write and produce about liberty versus Islamism is the 25 percent of the world’s population that’s Muslim, that’s going through an Arab Awakening, that’s switching back and forth right now between Islamism versus Arab fascism. In the middle a liberty movement is lost. Tunisia is divided into 50 different parties that could have united under liberty, and Ennahda won because the Islamists were united, except for maybe the Salafists.

That unification of the West under liberty, I believe, is the future when we take away the fear in America that’s creating these pathological manifestations of preventing the building of mosques, et cetera. We’re not addressing the issue of whether Islam is becoming more compatible with Western modernity or Islamism. And I think this has to be approached not only as an American issue, but as an issue of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, versus the Cairo Declaration that rejected a lot of the Universal Declaration.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Last word, Zareena.

ZAREENA GREWAL: Okay, just very quickly. Fifty years ago, Islam was seen as a learned tradition by most Americans and also associated with some kind of concept of social justice. That is no longer the case, unfortunately. Most Americans don’t link those things. That is a shame. And I think that the American Muslim community needs to think long and hard about that fact. However, within the community, the issues of radicalization and jihad are all issues worth tackling. There are theological issues like apostasy laws. Should Islam be reformed? That’s a live debate. I wrote 400 pages about it. You can read it. Muslims have thought of this question before today. That idea is there, okay?

However, the larger problem for the American Muslim community is actually not theological debates or legal debates about apostasy and the hijab, and so on. The real problem is that they’re in a very politically precarious position in the United States. Maybe they are not as bad off as some people, like Muslims in Europe and other places, but they are vulnerable. And I think what we need to challenge is the very basic concept that more surveillance, more policing, more criminalization of the Muslim community at-large makes us safer. It doesn’t. The evidence shows us that it doesn’t. That’s what we need to turn our attention to. What are we willing to sacrifice to feel safe?

And for me, our commitment needs to be not only to Salafist American Muslims or atheist Americans. I think we need to commit to all of us being able retain our rights as citizens, regardless of what our religious identity is or even whether we have one or not. That’s the premise of our political foundation.

TIMOTHY SAMUEL SHAH: Thank you very much. Well, please join me in thanking this outstanding, vigorous panel. [Applause]
CLOSING CONVERSATION:
THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL EFFECTS OF RESTRICTIONS ON RELIGION

THOMAS FARR: If I might introduce our final panel, I said at the beginning of the day that you had a real treat to look forward to. You’re going to see shortly what I mean. I’m going to turn you over to our friend and colleague, Professor Dan Philpott of Notre Dame University, who’s been part of the Religious Freedom Project since the beginning. Dan has recently taken the position of director of the Center for Human and Civil Rights at Notre Dame University.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Okay, thank you very much. Greetings everyone, and welcome to our final panel for the day. I can think of no better people to sustain our interest at four o’clock in the afternoon when eyelids grow droopy and people start shifting restlessly in their seats than these two scholars, Timur Kuran and Abdullah Saeed. Both are scholars whom I’ve long admired for being courageous pioneers in their field, and whose work I have had a chance to appreciate well before meeting them both.

Professor Timur Kuran is a professor of Economics and Political Science and the Gorter Family Professor of Islamic Studies at Duke University, as well as an associate scholar with the Berkley Center’s Religious Freedom Project here. He has written numerous books. The intersection of Islam and economics and Islam and economic and political developments in the Middle East is the central axis of his interests. An example is The Long Divergence, How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East, published in 2011. His works are breathtaking in their historical scope and quite provocative as well. So I’m very pleased to have him on the stage.

Abdullah Saeed is the Sultan of Oman Professor of Arab and Islamic Studies at the University of Melbourne in Australia. He originally hails from the Maldives Islands. I have long admired him as a pioneer in religious freedom in Islam. He is one of the very best scholars to articulate a case for religious freedom grounded in Islamic thought, history, and texts, which is very much at the center of our event today. His book Freedom of Religion, Apostasy and Islam, published in 2004, is one of the most compelling cases for religious freedom on Islamic grounds that has been written.

So let me begin by turning to Professor Kuran and asking him a question that I’ll ask both of them to engage. One of the trends that we have seen that the Pew Research Center—an authority on questions of religious freedom—has shown us is a rise in levels of religious restrictions all around the world. They’ve risen dramatically since 2007. In a sense, the world is moving in the opposite of the
direction of religious freedom and challenging that “sobriety of the present” that Hamza Yusuf spoke about, namely the idea that the world is always going in the right direction.

I’d like to ask Professor Kuran to explore how these religious restrictions and rises in discrimination have affected both the economic and the political well-being of Muslim individuals and communities. So let’s start with the economic picture. How do religious restrictions impinge on economics?

**TIMUR KURAN:** To restrict a religious community’s religious freedoms is to stigmatize it. It is to send the message to the community that it is unwelcome and that its practices and its beliefs are illegitimate. In the European context, which we’ve spent a lot of time talking about, it is to legitimize social discrimination in employment and in housing. Of course, this imposes costs on the victims of discrimination.

There has been a lot of coverage in the literature about these costs. But I think these costs are surmountable. They are short-term costs. If we look at the history of religious communities that have suffered discrimination and stigmatization, they have often overcome the disadvantages. They have incentives to try harder. They have incentives to cultivate special skills and look for special economic niches. They have special incentives to look for opportunities abroad.

I’ll give you a couple of examples. Jews in medieval Europe suffered discrimination. They were excluded from various sectors. They ended up specializing in a sector where they were allowed to operate, namely, finance. They derived benefits from the financial skills that they developed in the Middle Ages. But these skills became particularly valuable in the Industrial Age, when exploiting modern technologies required large-scale finance.

A second example comes from the Middle East, Islam’s heartland. In pre-modern times, Jews and Christians suffered discrimination in various areas in the Middle East. This gave them special incentives to be alert to developments abroad. So when technological and organizational advances took place in Western Europe, the religious minorities of the Middle East were the first to notice them and to transplant the new institutions and practices to the Middle East.

So I think that in the long run the economic costs of the denial or suppression of religious freedoms are not the most important ones. And we are already seeing some signs in Europe or among European Muslims of the process that I illustrated in the context of Middle Eastern minorities and Europe’s Jews. If you look at the second- and third-generation Turkish Muslims, you’ll see that they are beginning to excel in certain economic sectors that demand novelty, such as high cuisine, the travel industry, and commerce, both within Turkey and abroad. And I think that we will probably see more of this with other Muslim communities as well.

I’ll finally say on the topic of the economic effects that globalization, that is, the present period and the technologies that have been fueling globalization, make this period particularly conducive to overcoming the barriers erected by particular societies through the various forms of discrimination, including religious discrimination. It is possible, using modern technologies, to develop contacts abroad, not only to identify economic opportunities for enrichment abroad, but also to act on them.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** So, it almost sounds like you’re saying being a religious minority is an asset for economic growth.

**TIMUR KURAN:** In the short run there are certain costs, and we certainly see that denying opportunities to religious minorities and Muslims in particular in Europe is creating costs. There are Turks in Germany or Arabs in France who were denied contacts that are available to others; they suffer in the job market. Yet their handicaps are not insurmountable. Overcoming their handicaps will require a great deal of effort; they won’t happen automatically. Overcoming the handicaps wasn’t a process that took place immediately in medieval Europe or the Middle East. And I’m not suggesting that
there won’t be any lasting negative effects. But I’m suggesting that the economic consequences are not the ones that we really have to worry about. I think the political consequences are more important.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** Let’s move to that in a moment. But I think my own university, the University of Notre Dame, which kind of embodies the history of American Catholics, who were once discriminated against as a minority but fought to be very successful in American life, as, in a sense, trying to fight back against that. That’s the Fighting Irish icon. And now, they are full of doctors and lawyers who are giving lots of money to the university. Would that be kind of a parallel?

**TIMUR KURAN:** That is an example. I think there are many other examples from the United States. For another very recent example of Muslim successes, I might point to pious Turks, who for two or three generations were stigmatized by the largely secular elites and were kept out of circles of influence. When opportunities emerged, their entrepreneurial skills became very valuable, as did their skills in dealing with outsiders and dealing with adversity. If you look at the export boom of Turkey, it has been driven largely by pious entrepreneurs who until the 1990s, and in some respects until the rise to power of the AKP (Justice and Development Party), were denied various economic opportunities. So operating under adversity can have certain long-term advantages.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** While we’re still exulting in the pious entrepreneurs, let’s turn to the political realm. What are the effects of religious restrictions on the health of polities in a political sense?

**TIMUR KURAN:** Restricting religious freedoms and allowing for religious discrimination generate feelings of resentment and alienation. This is felt, I think, across many communities in Europe as well as in other parts of the world. Muslim communities have suffered discrimination. The feelings of alienation and resentment are particularly acute—one of the speakers made this point earlier—among the young and particularly among young males. A large majority of them don’t turn to violence, but some of them do. We are seeing the current examples, such as alienated youths from Europe and other parts of the world and Muslim youths going to fight in jihadi movements in Syria and Iraq.

Of course communities, whether religious communities or national communities, can police their young. Historically, they did do this. If you look at the religious minorities in the Middle East, the Jews and the Christians, they had reasons to resent the rules and regulations under which they lived, but they policed their young. As long as the state was strong, they largely prevented their young from turning to violence because they were afraid of retaliation. And they protected their young from movements or from influences that would make them turn to violence.

These days, because of modern technologies and globalization, it’s much harder to police your own community. It is harder for Muslim communities in Europe or elsewhere to police their communities. So I think that in regard to the danger of turning to militant Islam or joining jihadi organizations, this is a danger not only for Europe as a whole, the rest of the world, Muslims in the Middle East, and the places where they go to fight, but also for the very communities that they come from. It increases tensions. It reinforces the fears that are driving religious discrimination. It ultimately delays the reconciliation that is needed.

**(DANIEL PHILPOTT):** Okay. Well, this is something that you’ve talked a lot about in your work as well, Abdullah. You’ve written so much on religious freedom and ways that religious freedom is restricted. Do you see a connection between restrictions on religious freedom and the rise of extremism and extremist violence?

**ABDULLAH SAEED:** Thank you. Before I answer the question, let me just make a couple of points. The very first is that we have talked about Muslims quite a bit in this symposium. There have been many references to diversity among Muslims. I just want to highlight that diversity. Because when we talk about extremism and the impact of restrictions on religious freedom, we also need to be aware that those restrictions actually affect different Muslims differently.

The second point I would like to emphasize, before I answer the question, is that I come from Australia. Probably most of you have heard about an Australian Muslim who has taken a number of hostages in a café in Sydney. These kinds of events are going to have a direct negative impact on Muslim communities in Australia, Europe, and North America, and I’m sure there will be calls for all kinds of restrictions on Muslims in these countries.

Coming back to the question, let me say this. The impact of those
restrictions may vary, depending on the particular trend of thought a Muslim belongs to. There are Muslims whom we might call legalist traditionalists, theological puritans, political Islamists, progressive *ijtihadists*, secular Muslims, and the like. And different Muslims may experience or respond to these restrictions differently.

The other point is, when we talked about restrictions on religious freedom, we also need to look at Muslim-majority contexts, as well as Muslim-minority contexts. I started off by making reference to Australia, which has a Muslim minority. There are also restrictions on religious freedom in many Muslim-majority contexts, say, for instance, the country where I came from (the Maldives), which is a small country with a population of 350,000. Until relatively recently, this country did not develop any significant extremist tendencies as far as Islam is concerned. But the restrictions on the religious freedom of Muslims by the state, in part, led to the emergence of a variety of extremist expressions of Islam in the country over the last 30 years or so. The restrictions included, among other things, limitations on what one can teach or express about religion when such teachings and expressions go against the state-supported orthodoxy, or even on some cases how one manifests one’s religion. I’m referring here to Islam only, ignoring restrictions on people of other faiths. This is a case of a Muslim state controlling what Muslims may say or teach or how they manifest their religion. The state felt that those who did not follow the state-supported orthodoxy were not sufficiently Muslim, or they are perhaps “too Muslim” in some cases. These kinds of restrictions over a long period of time led to the emergence of strong extremist tendencies in the country.

When you look at other Muslim-majority countries—we have 57 of them—what is very noticeable is that there are plenty of laws and restrictions on the religious freedom of Muslims in these countries. Where you have a high degree of restrictions on the religious freedom of Muslims, you will also find high levels of extremist tendencies. You will see that a lot of extremist tendencies that are emerging in these Muslim-majority countries are connected in part to the kinds of restrictions they are placed under by the state.

I’m not saying extremism is the result of restrictions on religious freedom entirely, because we know that there are lots of factors giving rise to extremist tendencies, whether in Muslim societies or elsewhere. What I’m saying is that restrictions on religious freedom—with religion being a very important part of one’s identity, as was highlighted in the previous sessions as one of the most important aspects of one’s identity—do play a part in people moving away from what we might call mainstream to the extreme.

Whenever we talk about extreme or extremist tendencies, we’re always looking at a mainstream. There has to be a norm that is represented by the mainstream. When you move away from the main-
stream, whether it is to the left or to the right,—that is extreme. Extremism doesn’t necessarily mean adopting violence. Violent extremism is just one form of extremism.

To summarize all of this, whether we are talking about Muslim-majority contexts or Muslim-minority contexts, when you have restrictions on people’s religious freedom, then you are bound to have an impact, and that impact could be a rise of extremist tendencies.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: There has been a lot of talk today about diversity in Islam and, in the previous panels, about the diversity of meanings in sharia and so forth. But since you have talked about Muslim-majority countries, is there a sense in which there’s a problem with religious freedom in Muslim-majority countries that maybe you thought was unique to Islam or connected with some of Islam’s history?

Let me tell you why I ask this question. I did a little study myself where I took the Pew Forum scores on religious freedom. And we coded all countries in the world, and then we coded the Muslim countries. And the Muslim countries were in fact lower or less religiously free, quite significantly on average, than the world average. So is there something about Muslim-majority countries today that—without denying the diversity, without denying the sense in which Christianity has its own history and evolution and so forth—requires particular focus in terms of addressing religious restrictions?

ABDULLAH SAEED: What you notice is in any survey, on restrictions on religious freedom, as you rightly pointed out, long lists of Muslim-majority countries will be very prominent. Again, the reasons are complex. There are theological reasons. There are Islamic legal reasons. There are also political factors. There is also the recent history, and more importantly, there is also the status of these Muslim-majority countries as far as the global geopolitical situation is concerned.

But let me narrow this down to just one particular area. That is the Islamic legal tradition, which the vast majority of Muslim-majority countries actually have some connection to. Some Muslim-majority countries do give a lot of emphasis on what is called sharia, whatever sharia means—as we saw in earlier discussions today. Some Muslim-majority countries have a symbolic connection to sharia. For our purpose, let’s equate sharia with, broadly speaking, the Islamic legal norms, principles, laws, and so forth.

Part of the classical Islamic legal tradition is certain restrictions on religious freedom, for instance, in terms of apostasy laws or blasphemy laws, which keep coming up in any discussion on Muslims and religious freedom. Although restrictions are a lot broader than blasphemy or apostasy laws, let’s focus on those two areas.

In the Islamic legal tradition, blasphemy laws are associated with severe punishments, including the death penalty, for example. And apostasy is also associated with the death penalty. Whether Muslim-majority countries implement those penalties or not is perhaps irrelevant, at least in the average Muslim’s mind. Muslims very often actually emphasize that these restrictions do exist, and that’s part of what they consider to be sharia. And more importantly, for many Muslims, these laws cannot be changed. They are part and parcel of Islam—Islamic tradition and sharia—and therefore, they have to be maintained.

Of course, there are reasons why a lot of Muslims keep emphasizing those laws today, whether it is fear of conversion of Muslims to other religious traditions or fear of loss of identity, and the like. Let’s not get into that. But the fact that these laws do exist, at least on paper, at least in classical Islamic legal tradition and to some extent in contemporary Muslim-majority states as law, means that when it comes to issues such as proselytization, conversion, and also even criticizing Islam or Islamic tradition or what some people might consider to be Islamic ideas, practices, and symbols, there could be all kinds of restrictions in Muslim societies depending on the society you come from.

You may look at the example of Saudi Arabia or United Arab Emirates or Malaysia or Pakistan. Whichever country you look at, there are significant restrictions on religious freedom of one sort or another, be they apostasy laws or blasphemy laws. Restrictions don’t necessarily mean just legal restrictions. Restrictions don’t have to be enshrined in law. Restrictions can be social restrictions, as many of the surveys show.
Of course, the level and intensity of restrictions vary enormously from country to country. In some countries, it’s much more severe. In other countries, it is less so. But it is a fact of life in most Muslim-majority countries.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: One other thing in the same survey is I found that 35 out of 47 Muslim-majority countries are in the high to very high repressive range. Out of those 35, 21 countries, or 60 percent of them, are what I would call Islamist countries. So whatever the diversity, you still have 60 percent of these 35 states for whom sharia means what people seemed to be worried about. And it seems to derive from Islamic doctrine and ideas, a fairly repressive religious policy.

The other 14, though, were quite interesting in that they’re what I would call secular repressive, meaning that the denial and the discrimination comes more from almost a European-imported kind of heavy management of religion that is prevalent in the West. And here’s where I maybe would turn to Timur. Now, you’re from Turkey. How much of this problem of religious repression would you attribute to secular repressive policies in Islam rather than Islamism?

TIMUR KURAN: There are many examples in the Islamic world of secular regimes that have restricted religious freedoms, and Turkey is a very good example. The Kemalist regime set up by Ataturk, and then continued by several of his successors, tried very deliberately to push Islam out of the public sphere, and it very openly denied opportunities to people who insisted on practicing their religion openly. It got to the point in Turkey in the 1940s where people who fasted during Ramadan and refused to go to a lunch were denied promotion opportunities or were not selected in the first place.

So there is a long history of secular repression as well. Turkey, of course, is not the only country. You mentioned 14. I can think of Bourguiba’s regime in Tunisia. Of course, the secular regimes in Syria, in Iraq for many years, Egypt’s Nasser and some of his successors, would fall into that category also.

Certainly, the religious repression or the repression of religious freedoms and the religious discrimination that the secular regimes practiced led to movements aimed at restoring religious freedoms. And some of the movements today that we would characterize—or many of us would characterize—as extremist or militant have their roots in regimes, in movements that were set up in reaction to religious discrimination and to expand their own religious freedoms.

Now, in some cases, some of these movements, when they succeeded, not only restored the freedoms of their own followers but then started suppressing the freedoms of others. Again, Turkey offers a very good example. The AKP regime that has been in power since 2002 initially expanded the freedoms of pious Muslims. Right now, it is in the process of forcing the president’s vision of Islam, or type of Islam, onto the rest of society through the education system, through the hiring policies of the government, and so on.

Now, this raises the question of whether something is wrong. What problem underlies this? Why is it proving impossible for these countries to find the right balance for everyone’s religious freedoms, including the freedoms of those who do not believe or who want to practice another religion or who interpret Islam differently? Why is the right balance not being achieved? What I’d like to suggest here is that freedoms, religious freedoms, but also types of freedoms including artistic freedoms and intellectual freedoms and freedoms of the press and so on, flourish in societies that have political checks and balances.

The entire Islamic world, and especially its heartland, the Middle East, entered the modern era with very weak civil societies, very weak political checks and balances. That is one of the major differences between the Middle East and some other parts of the world, which have also suffered various kinds of repression. Eastern Europe is a good example. Its countries suffered a period of very intense, extreme repression of religion. After communism, within just a generation, they have broader religious freedoms. So this is, I think, the main difference.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: Abdullah?

ABDULLAH SAEED: If I could just comment on that. If you look at Islamic history and how Muslim states managed the issue of religious freedom, restrictions, and so forth, you will find that when the state was strong, the society was prosperous, and things were going well, there was confidence. And a high degree of religious freedom existed then both for Muslims and non-Muslims even though there were apostasy laws, blasphemy laws, and restrictions on non-Muslims in general, in legal texts. When the society was comfortable with itself and there was stability, there was a high degree of confidence and also more freedom.

So when we look at the modern period right now, most of the 57 Muslim-majority countries are struggling with all kinds of political problems, economic difficulties, and social issues, and one could not say that the degree of confidence that we are talking about exists in most of these societies. Many Muslims are obsessed with issues like colonialism, the recent past, and certain things that may have happened in the distant past to Muslims. Conspiracy theories flourish.
Fears of major powers are on the minds of many Muslims. Most Muslim-majority countries are still struggling with authoritarianism, major economic problems, and the like. In a context like this, religious freedom seems to be one of the victims.

TIMUR KURAN: Can I just jump in here? I completely agree with this. The periods when religious freedoms were strongest in the Islamic world are, in fact, when certain regions peaked economically and in terms of technological innovation and military power, where confidence was at its highest. I have in mind Baghdad and the rest of Iraq in the eighth and ninth centuries, Muslim Spain, and then the Ottoman Empire when it was at its peak in the sixteenth century. These are times when religious freedom was, in fact, strongest.

Why is confidence extremely low right now? I think that in the nineteenth century, the Middle East and the rest of the Islamic world entered an existential crisis that it hasn’t come out of. The self-image of Muslims until that point had been primarily that they were practicing the last monotheistic religion, the most perfect religion. They had a glorious past. Suddenly in the nineteenth century, they were overrun by the armies of Europe that they had dominated for a long time, and they were subjugated economically. They were colonized. And the region still has not come up with an effective response to this shock. And it’s a source of very low confidence.

DANIEL PHILPOTT: I think from all this discussion, we see the challenge of trying to carve out a sphere or a constituency for religious freedom. I mean, so many Islamic societies today, as in history, as we’ve heard in the first panel this morning on Western Europe, seem to oscillate between a kind of Salafism and secularism, just to simplify it somewhat, where religious freedom gets crunched in the middle.

Abdullah Saeed has been kind of a hero, a pioneer and an intellectual who is trying to expand and put strong arguments out there for religious freedom that are based on Islamic texts and the traditions. But when I think of the scholars promoting religious freedom, I think of you, I think of An-Naim, Soroush, Sachedina, El Fadl, and so forth; almost all of them are living here in the United States or in Australia.

What about the Muslim-majority countries? Is there a kind of constituency, intellectual or otherwise, for religious freedom? In the first panel somebody made a great suggestion that there needs to be somebody to take religious freedom to the grassroots and make that a popular ideology. Is there anybody, either in the universities or elsewhere, who is promoting and advocating for religious freedom in the Muslim-majority world?

ABDULLAH SAEED: Well, the Muslim-majority world is huge, so it would be very hard to look at the entire Muslim world. There are voices in the Muslim-majority countries that are arguing for religious freedom: religious freedom for Muslims and religious freedom for non-Muslims. There are Muslims who are arguing for the rethinking of traditional Islamic legal restrictions we may have on non-Muslims and Muslims in the area of religious freedom. There are Muslims who are arguing that in today’s world, we are living in a very different social, political, and legal context, and this context requires a slightly different way of looking at the tradition, as well as of interpreting important texts, ideas, norms, and values. These voices exist across the Muslim world.

But one of the difficulties for Muslim-majority countries is, as we talked about early on, that there are all kinds of restrictions on the intellectual freedom of Muslims, as well as non-Muslims. And those restrictions mean that it’s very hard to engage in these discourses as we may engage in here, at Georgetown, in the United States, or at my university in Australia. These Western societies where many of us function, live, write, debate, and engage in these discourses are intellectually free societies.

I have the freedom to write about the issue of religious freedom, which is a very controversial issue for many Muslims in Australia. Would I be able to write the same kind of papers or books in countries like Saudi Arabia? Probably not. Would I be able to give a lecture on religious freedom and apostasy and Islam in such countries? Probably not.

The minute I start talking about religious freedom, for a lot of Muslims, it becomes a code word for conversion from Islam to other religious traditions, in particular, Christianity. At the end of the day, for these Muslims, this is really about global competition between Christians and Muslims, or between Christianity and Islam. Because of the history of colonial experience and the like, any talk of religious freedom is immediately associated with apostasy and conversion from Islam.

So to give a very brief answer, yes, we do have Muslim voices in Muslim-majority countries, but you don’t hear very many of them because of the difficulty of talking about issues, publishing works, and so forth. Many of us who left our Muslim-majority countries and came to countries like the United States or Australia are lucky to actually have this ability to look at our tradition critically in an intellectually free environment.

Development of intellectual thought cannot happen if we just slavishly follow the tradition. We should have the ability to look at the
tradition critically. The tradition has a lot to offer. As Shaykh Hamza Yusuf actually highlighted very, very well, we have a lot of resources within our tradition. We have a lot of scholarship that we can rely on. A lot of Muslims aren't aware of this very rich scholarship, even on the issue of religious freedom. We need to utilize that. We need to bring that to our modern context, and see how we can actually utilize that.

Again, this is not about slavishly following everything and anything from the past. This is about making a fresh contribution to the discourse right now through interpretation, reinterpretation, and putting forward some new principles for interpretation of the text, and relating the text to the social, political, intellectual, economic, and cultural context. This is the struggle. This is the debate.

But where can you have this debate? You can have this debate only in intellectually free societies. And most Muslim-majority countries, whatever country you look at, are not intellectually free. We don't have the necessary freedom. Even a lot of Islamic universities that we have in Muslim-majority countries, when you look at the way research is done, the way teaching is conducted, and so forth, many of them may not actually be preparing you to think critically about your tradition, about engaging with the tradition and so forth.

So we do have a lot of shortcomings in most Muslim-majority countries. But in Muslim-minority countries such as the United States and other Western countries, we do have quite a lot of Muslims—Muslim scholars, intellectuals, thinkers—who are writing and publishing in various languages. And these are having an impact on Muslim-majority countries.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** Where do they live though? Are there ones who live in these countries?

**ABDULLAH SAEED:** We know that this is having an impact because of the translation of a lot of these works into local Islamic languages. In Indonesia, for instance, a lot of these works that we're talking about are actually translated into Indonesian. They discuss, and they debate such works. Indonesia is a relatively free society, unlike many other Muslim-majority countries.

At the end of the day, the issue is, do we have the right context for us to engage in these discourses? These are critical issues. Some of them are very sensitive. But we, as Muslim scholars and thinkers, have the ability to engage with our tradition critically and to contextualize it in our reality right now. It is happening right now, and that does have an impact on elsewhere.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** I would think that the most promising arguments for religious freedom would be ones, like yours, that are deeply rooted in the Islamic texts and tradition. I think even in the tradition of the Catholic Church, there was a long resistance to religious freedom because it was being articulated by the French Revolution, the same people who were attacking the Church. And so the Church had trouble disassociating the idea of religious freedom from this kind of broad secular package. It took intellectuals who were able to place religious freedom on a foundation of the history and of the tradition to be pioneers, and the Catholic Church's acceptance of it rests not on the secular basis, but comes from the Church's very roots.

Let me turn to Professor Kuran and ask, what are the biggest obstacles to accepting religious freedom in Islam? What stands in the way?

**TIMUR KURAN:** So if I could just add one thing to the very interesting comments that Abdullah made on the question of finding justifications for religious freedom, you and Abdullah mentioned a number of names. There are people in this room who are doing this. Within the Muslim world, I would add one name, Mustafa Akyol, who's written a book *Islam without Extremes.*

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** He's a journalist.

**TIMUR KURAN:** But there are many, many, many others whose voices are not being heard. I have a Yemeni student right now. She's a senior writing a thesis with me. And at the end of her junior year, she had taken a couple of classes from me, and she came to me and said, “I’d like to write my senior thesis with you,” and I said, “About what?” And she said, “Islam needs to be reinterpreted with regard to a variety of freedoms, including intellectual freedoms and so on, and I would like to explore this.”

So to cut a long story short, she wrote a proposal that we accepted. She was going to go to Lebanon and Egypt. And her hypothesis was that the conservatism, the main obstacle, is coming from the ulama. So in fact, she was going to interview a series of imams in Lebanon, who were scientifically selected. These were sampled in Lebanon and Egypt and so on. If only you could bring in enlightened leaders, then everyone else would follow.

She came back after a summer of fieldwork and said, “I have totally changed my mind because my data have falsified my hypothesis. Many of the clerics that I’ve spoken to agreed that freedoms have to be expanded. They are too terrified though to actually say this in their sermons. They are afraid.” And in fact, they know that...
members of their congregations agree with them. But there are others who will accuse them of blasphemy and apostasy, who will give them trouble, who will cause them to lose their positions, who will get them in trouble with the state. That is why they don’t speak their minds.

So the potential is there, but the societies are locked in, unfortunately, to a self-destructive equilibrium. Some people are preventing others—those who agree with each other that reforms are needed, that new thinking is needed, and that some of the required intellectual elements are present in the Islamic tradition—from expressing their positions. They’re unable to speak. They’re unable to even speak honestly with each other.

Now, with respect to the other obstacles, I think there’s one that I want to mention that is external to the societies that are suffering from a lack of open discourse and lack of innovation. I have in mind the enormous funds that are going to support schools all around the world, including the Middle East. These are schools that promote a very conservative vision of Islam and that train people who are opposed to the type of project that we’re talking about. That is a major obstacle to advances. These schools are producing people who are conservative and don’t want a reinterpretation, don’t want religious freedoms to be expanded, and other intellectual freedoms to be broadened. They are ready to accuse their rivals of apostasy and blasphemy and so on. And this is extremely destructive.

And of course, what we’re seeing now has precedents in Islamic history. Some very famous thinkers who are very widely admired all across the Muslim world and beyond were accused of apostasy and blasphemy in the Middle Ages through very similar processes.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** You wrote a widely cited article in *World Politics* about the popular non-violent protest movements that brought down the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. And in the dynamic by which you may have widespread opposition to the regime, everybody is thinking it, but until somebody goes out in the street and takes that first step and gets the ball rolling, nobody else knows that everybody else thinks the same way, right? So what is the dynamic by which you get that cascade going?

Well, if your Yemeni student is right, it almost seems like you might need some courageous people to say that the emperor has no clothes and then other people join the bandwagon.

**TIMUR KURAN:** It already happened.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** Yes.

**TIMUR KURAN:** Now, of course, ultimately, it didn’t achieve its purpose because the individuals who went out were not organized. It was by the force of numbers that they toppled the regime. But because they were not organized, because civil society in Egypt is so weak, organizations to then carry the project forward and to strengthen democracy just were not there. So we come back to the issue I raised earlier, the weakness of civil society.

I think that what happened in Cairo and in several other countries may happen again. As long as the discontent is there, as long as you have governance failures, we’re going to see replays. And if oil prices continue to fall, we may even see movements of this sort in the monarchies. There is a great deal of discontent in those societies. There is enormous inequality that people rarely talk about in those societies, including inequalities of wealth and inequalities of power. There’s religious discrimination, too.

In Saudi Arabia, for example, discrimination against the Shi’a, but also other groups, generates a lot of discontent. The one thing we know on the basis of the history of revolutions is that when this happens, it’s going to catch us by surprise. It will move very, very rapidly, and just as the events in Tunisia and Egypt caught us by surprise, the same will happen again.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** I suppose the bravery of the dissidents is that you never know how much support you have until somebody goes out there in the street and tries it, so to speak.

Now we are also under the authoritarian control of those who have told us that we only have five minutes left in this panel. But we do have five minutes of freedom in which to consider some questions. So yes, start here.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER** (unidentified): I had a question about the ways in which the War on Terror is implicated in these projects of expanding religious freedom. For example, in Turkey right now, there’s a lot of repression of even the Gülen under Erdogan. In Saudi Arabia, in their lists of terrorist organizations, they’ve included atheists, for example, and refuse to call ISIS apostates.

So there’s a kind of awkward relationship between those who want to liberalize Muslim societies and those who also want someone to dictate who isn’t Muslim. I mean they want to curtail these apostasy laws and blasphemy laws, but at the same time they want to instru-
mentalize them in the War on Terror. Could you respond to those cases or other cases like that?

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** Either of you is welcome to take the first stab.

**ABDULLAH SAEED:** Well, it's a difficult question. Let me try. Apostasy laws and blasphemy laws are used by various Muslim-majority states as part of their arsenal of controlling the people. Not just people but also thought, and what they consider to be dangerous thought. So I guess it's not surprising that in the context of the War on Terror, a number of Muslim-majority countries have moved to use apostasy laws and blasphemy laws to curtail dissent. In Islamic tradition we have a very strong tradition of dissent that is well established. But as we discussed early on, that tradition was maintained partly because of the confidence of the people at the time.

Now we probably don't have that. The War on Terror is a good opportunity for a lot of authoritarian regimes to further curtail the freedoms. The reasons are primarily political, and of course, justified on a religious basis. Here you have very good collaboration between the political establishment and the religious establishment. For both, there's a kind of mutual benefit in controlling the dissent for the benefit of maintaining the authoritarian tools of power.

**TIMUR KURAN:** I'll just add something. Even in societies that have strong freedoms, when people perceive a clear and present danger, they're willing to deny others all sorts of freedom. So at the height of the Cold War, three-quarters of Americans were willing to deny communist authors the opportunity to publish. Now, that clear and present danger has passed. So right now, when the same question is asked, only 2 percent of Americans will deny a communist the opportunity to publish.

The War on Terror has created feelings of major danger in a number of societies, and a number of leaders are suppressing freedoms with the support of many of their followers. It's not terribly surprising given what we read in the media every day.

**DANIEL PHILPOTT:** Unfortunately, I'm now feeling the iron hand of General Sisi. So we may have to bring this wonderful, dynamic panel to a close. So let's join me in thanking our two speakers.

**THOMAS FARR:** Well, I guess I'm General Sisi. Actually, I'm Tom Farr, director of the Religious Freedom Project. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you all for coming. We hope you will sign up, as I said earlier in the day, for our newsletter and keep in touch—we'd like to hear from you. We have events like this with some frequency. To me, today's event was an example of what the great the American Jesuit John Courtney Murray called “creeds intelligibly in conflict.” Or, as I like to say, religious freedom. This has been an example of religious freedom in practice. So if you would, one final round of applause for our panelists today. [Applause]