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# *Islamophobia in the Digital World*

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ALEXIS GRAY

*Produced in Steffen Guenzel's Spring 2016 ENC 1102*

*The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Islamophobia is demonstrated in a technology-based society and aims to distinguish how three social media platforms promote or discredit Islamophobia. The data for this research paper was collected from Facebook statuses, tweets from Twitter, and YouTube comments. The starting point for this paper is a video clip of Donald Trump requesting a temporary ban on Muslim immigration into the United States, which was released on December 8, 2015. This paper examines how public reaction to Trump's statement differs depending on what platform is being utilized to express an opinion. The reactions of YouTube users varied greatly from strongly opposed to strongly agree and moderates. Twitter produced more political results, and most users strongly opposed the Muslim ban proposal. Facebook users reacted in a political manner as well as disheartened by the American people.*

In response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11, resentment has cultivated Islamophobia tremendously towards the Muslim community within the United States, proceeding from the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centers in New York City. Due to the brutality, duration, and tragedy associated with both the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, American hatred towards the Muslim community has steadily increased over the past two decades. Therefore, it is imperative to acknowledge as a society the extent of feelings of animosity that surrounds the topic of Islamophobia. This paper first provides a basic understanding of what Islamophobia is and then discusses how it has so far affected the US society. Finally, this paper provides how Islamophobia is being expressed within different social networking sites. In doing so, the research will illustrate the contrasting views of the Muslim and American nationalities and the effects of its actions on three distinct social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

While conducting my research, I have found that it is hard to distinguish between a credible opinion-based writing and one which is discredited because the claim was made on a fallacy. The concentration of my research is Donald Trump's temporary "[call] for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States" (Diamond, 2015), which was made on December 8, 2015. The declaration made by the GOP frontrunner to suspend the migration of Muslims westward until further provisions were made has provoked an increase of media coverage on the issue of Islamophobia. The research presented illustrates how each social networking platform is used to promote or discredit Islamophobia in a technology-operated society. Therefore, the main purpose of the paper is to juxtapose the reactions of the Muslim community with the citizens of the United States on Islamic-related topics through three social media sites.

## **Background Information**

With the rise of the terrorist group, ISIS, and the plethora of terrorist attacks that have been committed since 9/11, the American people are more susceptible to passing judgment on those of the Muslim faith. Clinical psychologist, Dr. Ali Mattu, collaborated with Mashable, a leading global

media company that adapts the way information is presented for the digital generation, to express the psychology behind bias and Islamophobia in America. The information is presented in the form of a video and contains the thoughts and reasoning for the increasing production of Islamophobia in American culture. The video contains crucial knowledge and a basic understanding of how people's personal biases are created from a psychological viewpoint. I located the video below on the platform of YouTube by searching for Dr. Mattu's broadcast channel, *The Psych Show*.



Dr. Mattu stated in the Mashable News video, “Dangerous logic: The psychology behind bias and Islamophobia Ep.2,” that every individual has personal biases that range in severity from favorite foods to states and nationality. Dr. Mattu further explains in the video that personal biases are normal and mostly inoffensive, but when left unchecked, they intensify and become harmful to an individual’s surroundings. Additionally, bias is understood through the term in-group out-group bias, which involves an individual liking the group they belong to and disliking others. In conjunction with group polarization, which involves limiting the diversification of ideas by associating with similar individuals, in-group out-group bias supplements the growth of negative biases such as Islamophobia. An example of this would be “un-following” an individual on Twitter because the user disapproved of the content in their tweet. In doing so, the individual who “un-followed” the other person is limiting the diversification of ideas in their news feed and creating a network of people who only believe in the same ideals they do (The psychology behind bias, 2016).

In a world ruled by technology, Donald Trump has transcended from the television screen and is now prevalent on all forms of social media. Donald Trump, a business billionaire, is the leading GOP candidate for the 2016 Presidential Election. The Trump campaign is constantly in the news spotlight for statements made in interviews, political rallies, and debates. In a campaign press conference on December 8, 2015, Donald Trump called for the temporary banning of Muslims entering into the United States (Diamond, 2015). The statement was made in light of the San Bernardino, California massacre that occurred just six days earlier. The shooters, husband and wife, were radicalized Muslims who shot and killed fourteen people and wounded twenty-three at the Inland Regional Center (Healy & Kandel, 2016). Recent terrorist attacks, such as San Bernardino, have caused people in US culture to create generalizations about the Muslim community and faith.

The most prevalent generalization is due in part to the rise and strengthening of the terrorist group, ISIS. Ignorance and bias is causing irrational associations between the Muslim community and terrorist events. These types of terrorist attacks on American soil are negatively affecting the way in which Muslims are viewed in the United States and is aiding in the formation of Islamophobia.

## Methodology

My research is based off of a video clip of Donald Trump explaining his intention to place a temporary ban of Muslims entering the United States. The video was chosen to illustrate the extent of Islamophobia within US culture and the discourse community in which the subject pertains to. I selected the hashtag, #MuslimBan, because Muslim and ban were two key words in the video clip of Trump. Additionally, #MuslimBan works across all three social media platforms and is able to produce ample amounts of tweets, statuses, and comments. I chose the specific platforms YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook because it offers individuals a forum to exchange comments, is free to use with internet access, and allows for the exchange of rational appeals.

Furthermore, I did not include other popular social media networking sites such as Snapchat, Pinterest, or Instagram because these platforms focus mainly on the exchange of visuals, in the form of pictures. The exchanging of ideas through an open forum is not the intention of these particular social media platforms and as a result they did not meet the criteria of my research.

In order to keep consistency within my research, I analyzed two ordinary users and two politicians, Jeb Bush and Lindsey Graham, for the platforms Facebook and Twitter. Although Jeb Bush and Lindsey Graham have YouTube channels, I did not utilize the politicians for the YouTube platform because they do not voice their opinions by commenting underneath a video clip. Instead, politicians use social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook to simultaneously express their views with vast amounts of followers. I was unable to follow the same non-politician users throughout each platform because users on YouTube can create unique usernames, which makes it impossible to identify the individual on Facebook. Additionally, even if a YouTube user used their real name, the commonality of names makes it extremely difficult to know which individual is which when using the Facebook search engine (see Table 1).

FACEBOOK	TWITTER	YOUTUBE
HeckleMaster	Trish Regan Intel	BENOBRO
Imam Azeez	Nahed Eltantawy	David Gonzalez
Jeb Bush	Jeb Bush	Nick Bauer
Lindsey Graham	Lindsey Graham	Potter Head

**Table 1:** This figure illustrates the users I examined throughout my research, arranged by social media platforms.

## Social Media Platform: YouTube

The following research examines the reactions to Donald Trump's press conference statement made on December 8, 2015. The responses are taken directly from each platform:

YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.



## Donald Trump: Ban all Muslims from entering USA



HLC Media

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The short clip, published by HLC Media, contains live footage of Donald Trump's statement regarding the temporary ban on Muslim immigrants into the United States. The video comes from the social media site YouTube and the reactions of viewers are recorded as comments underneath the clip. YouTube is a free video-hosting website that allows members to store and share video content. Registered users can upload and share videos either privately or publicly with anyone able to access the site. The responses did not have a consistent flow or rhythm to them; rather, the comments were erratic and contained a variety of beliefs and viewpoints. Although the GOP frontrunner is dominating the Republican Party for presidency, these comments indicate the polls are inconsistent with how American voters truly feel. In response to most, if not all, political events, the comments indicate a strong opposition and a strong favoring for the claims being made. Some commenters attempt to equate the personality and logic of Donald Trump's proposition to that of the Nazi Germany dictator, Adolf Hitler, and his plan to exterminate the Jews from Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.



**Potter Head** 2 months ago

behold Hitler and the Jews 2.0

Reply • 1

[View all 11 replies](#)



**David Gonzalez** 4 months ago

How can anyone listen to this racist pig. Hitler Trump this country was founded for freedom not racism

Reply • 11

[View all 20 replies](#)

Other commenters support Trump's claim so indefinitely that they come off as radical extremists who denounce the freedom of religion and wish to inflict pain and misery on the Muslim community.



**BENOBRO** 2 weeks ago

We need to permanently ban Islam and ownership of the Quran in the US. Islam sickens me.

Reply •



**Nick Bauer** 3 months ago

I'm with you, Donald! Please ban this horrible death cult called Islam from our civilization forevermore! Please also obliterate Mecca and Medina while you are at it and cover the ruins in pig's blood. I am so sick of the miseries of "pisslam" and it's dead pedophile, thief, psychotic murderer, rapist, slaver, genocidal monster of a false prophet. May pig piss

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Reply • 1

[View all 13 replies](#)

However, besides the left- and right winged views, the responses also indicate an area of matter in which the rhetors try to employ the appeals of pathos (emotion) and logos (logic). These types of users utilize this type of commenting because it reveals to the discourse community that a more rational appeal has to be made when judging the content of Trump's statement. Username Real.Gario, an American Muslim, uses a personal anecdote to condemn not only Trump for his blasphemous proposition, but also the American people who support the ruling. On the other hand, William Elliot declares that he follows Trump's plan not because he is a racist, but because it makes the most logical sense. Elliot attempts to support his reasoning by hinting at the damage the Islamic state has been at the root of within the past two decades. The diversification of user responses on YouTube to Trump's statement illuminates the variation of support seen within voting poll results.



**Real.Gario** 4 months ago

I am Muslim.. I am a us citizen.. Do you think I like having a dead father that was a hostage by Isis for three hours then was killed....do you think I like having my house burned down by Isis bombing when I was in Iraq at age six..do you.. You people should be ashamed of yourselves it is not I who should be ashamed to be Muslim I will stand proud and walk

[Read more](#)

Reply • 96

[View all 233 replies](#) ▾



**william elliott** 2 weeks ago

This is just plain Common Sense. Muslims have proved over and over they cannot co-exist among civilized people. We need to deport ALL of them. It has nothing to do with being racist it has everything to do with common sense. Wake Up american sheep before the slaughter.

Reply •

## Social Media Platform: Twitter

In contrast to the responses received on YouTube, there was a consistent pattern amongst Twitter users: opposition to the proposed statement. Twitter is a free social networking website that allows registered members to post in forms of tweets; each tweet cannot exceed 140 characters. Twitter is used most popularly “for commercial and political purposes to keep customers, voters, and fans up-to-date” on events (PC Encyclopedia, n.d.). Seeing that political leaders and advisors use Twitter most prevalently, the tweets from the Republican Party were uniform in dismissing Donald Trump as a representative figure of the political party.





**Jeb Bush** ✓  
@JebBush

Follow

Donald Trump is unhinged. His "policy" proposals are not serious.

5:18 PM - 7 Dec 2015

3,615 4,449



**Lindsey Graham** ✓  
@LindseyGrahamSC

Follow

Every candidate for president needs to do the right thing & condemn @Realdonaldtrump's statement.

5:13 PM - 7 Dec 2015

1,760 1,768

Upon closer inspection of the two former GOP presidential candidate's tweets, their actions do not mirror the statements they made. Although Lindsey Graham, Republican Senator of South Carolina, condemns @Realdonaldtrump on Twitter, he stated that "he would ultimately support the businessman if he becomes the nominee" for the GOP (Bobic, 2015). Additionally, Jeb Bush engages in denouncing Donald Trump's policy proposal and insults the candidate's legitimacy as a nominee. With further investigation, the research reveals Bush appointed Jordan Sekulow as a senior advisor to his Right to Rise Political Action Committee in March of 2015 (Islamaphobia, 2016). Sekulow is the executive director of the American Center for Law and Justice, which is an organization responsible for publishing false claims in an anti-Muslim leaflet titled *Shari'a Law: Radical Islam's Threat to the U.S. Constitution*. Although the majority of Twitter users did not support Trump in this aspect of his campaign, there were still a few that backed him up, one for example is Roger Stone.



**Trish Regan Intel** @TrishIntel · 11 Dec 2015

.@RogerJStoneJr tells @trish\_regan that #Trump #MuslimBan is “extraordinary and brilliant”



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65



Trish Regan Intel shared a short clip from an interview between Trish Regan and Roger Stone on the issue of the temporary banning of Muslims into the United States. Roger Stone, an American political consultant, acknowledges that the ban is only temporary and claims that Trump’s remarks are “extraordinary and brilliant.” He further explains that the candidate is not obstructing any constitutional amendment and relates the topic to Jimmy Carter’s ban on Iranians during the Iranian hostage crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

The most surprising Tweet underneath the #MuslimBan was by Nahed Eltantawy, who shared a political cartoon constructed by editorial cartoonist David Horsey. The illustration itself is not surprising considering the overwhelming popularity associated with relating Trump and Adolf Hitler. However, the surprising effect came from the main source of publication, The LA Times.





The illustration was published in The LA Times a week after the San Bernardino massacre. The city of Los Angeles is roughly an hour away from where the shootings took place. It was astonishing to see how the terrorist attack did not waver the writers of The LA Times views on Muslims in America. Instead, the cartoon portrays Donald Trump as an authoritative dictator who opposes the diversification of other nationalities in the United States. Similar to the way the Nazi Regime mandated that every Jew wear a star on their chest to indicate their nationality, the cartoon modernizes the routine to represent Muslims in America, which are recognizable by the crescent and star on their chest. Twitter users, especially American politicians, used the platform to strongly object to Trump's proposal. Some users went as far as directly calling him out on his misconduct as the GOP frontrunner by tagging @Realdonaldtrump in their tweets.

## Social Media Platform: Facebook

The responses to Donald Trump's proposal to ban Muslims differ slightly in content but greatly in the means of expression on the social media platform Facebook, which is a free social networking website that allows registered users to interact with the online community. Users do this by creating profiles, uploading photos and videos, sending messages and interacting with friends, family and colleagues. Many of the statuses on Facebook are in the form of link sharing. The Facebook user writes a simple phrase explaining their view on the matter or summarizes what the link is about and shares it to their news feed.

Both Lindsey Graham and Jeb Bush utilize the technique of link sharing on their political pages on Facebook.



**Lindsey Graham**

December 12, 2015 · 🌐

Donald Trump's plan to ban Muslims from entering the United States is both counterproductive and dangerous.



### Graham: Trump represents 'worst in America'

Republican presidential candidate U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham called GOP candidate Donald Trump's plan to ban all Muslims from entering the country as the worst possible idea an American political leader could come up with.

WMUR.COM | BY JENNIFER CROMPTON

👍 Like

💬 Comment

➦ Share

Lindsey Graham embedded into his status a link to an article published by a local Manchester and New Hampshire news station, WMUR 9. The article illustrates the South Carolina representative's oppositional response to the GOP frontrunner's plan to ban all Muslims from entering the country. Lindsey Graham explained to the Portsmouth, New Hampshire Rotary Club that it was "the worst possible idea an American political leader could come up with" and believes his statement is putting the United States at risk. He goes into further detail about his disapproval by explaining that "[Trump] can't win this war without Muslims helping [him]" and he claims that Trump is not a true Republican (Crompton, 2015).



Jeb Bush follows the same mode of sharing by embedding a video clip from the Republican debate on January 14, 2016. Jeb Bush claims that the Muslim ban “makes it impossible to build the coalition necessary to take out ISIS” and Donald Trump should reconsider his stance on the provision. However, unlike Lindsey Graham, who denounces Trump’s involvement in the Republican presidential election, Bush “recognizes there are terrorist impeded in refugee populations” and explains the best way to tackle the issue of terrorism is to revise the screening process. In response to South Carolina’s eleven-point increase in favoritism for Donald Trump after the release of his statement, Bush explains that due to the weakening of the national security, it is acceptable that the American people agree with Trump because they are scared. However, he reprimands Trump for his actions because he is held to a higher standard and his actions should exemplify leadership, not discrimination (Bush, 2015).

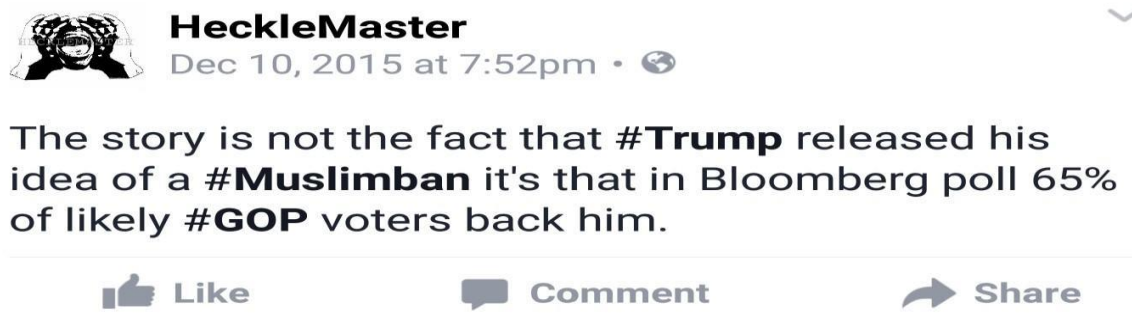
Posts by individuals not associated with a position of power in the country followed the format of link sharing and commenting on the issue. Users who posted statuses underneath the

#MuslimBan voiced their opinions in a more professional and respectable manner than those who commented on YouTube. Although the means of expression differ on Facebook when compared to Twitter and YouTube, a remark consistent on all three social media platforms is linking Donald Trump and Nazism.

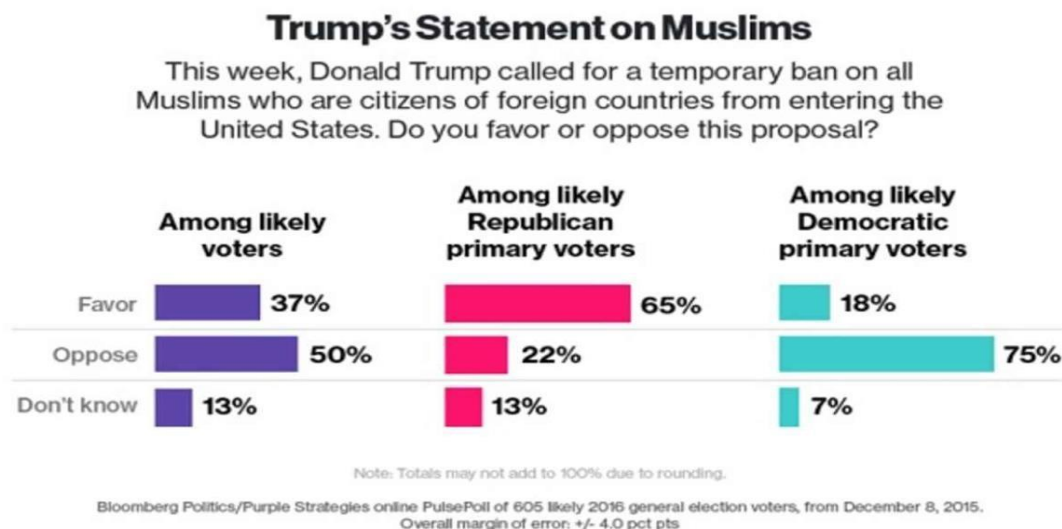




In the Muslim culture, Imam describes a person who leads prayers in a mosque; therefore, the Facebook user, Imam Azeez, is a Muslim leader who is considered a successor of Muhammad. Imam Azeez is the founder of Tarbiya Institute in Roseville, California, which is an educational facility that helps Muslims “achieve harmony between their divine obligations and worldly responsibilities” (Azeez, n.d.). Noting the recognition of Imam Azeez’s status in the Muslim community, his post is rather surprising because it does not demonstrate anger, but, rather, illuminates sadness and disappointment in the American people. Additionally, his post is a perfect example of how personal biases impede one’s ability to distinguish peaceful Muslims from radicals.



Facebook user, HeckleMaster, reshapes the centralization of the conversation from Trump’s notion of banning the migration of Muslims to America to the overwhelmingly high support from Republican Party voters. HeckleMaster’s post is in response to a Bloomberg survey conducted on December 8, 2015, which asked internet users if they favor or oppose Donald Trump’s proposal. The high percentage of support by Republican voters is due in part to the party’s belief that President Obama has weakened the U.S.’s national security within the past two presidential terms. As a result, Americans are more fearful for their lives and are resorting to drastic measures to compensate for their distress.



**Figure 1:** This figure illustrates whether voters favor, oppose, or don't know about Trump's Muslim ban proposal. Results are broken down into three categories: among likely voters, Republican voters, and Democratic voters.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, public reaction to Trump's statement differs depending on what platform is being utilized to promote an opinion. The reactions of YouTube users varied greatly from strongly opposed, to strongly agree, and moderate. Twitter produced more political results, and select users strongly opposed the Muslim ban proposal. Facebook users reacted either in a political manner in which they discredited the statements made by Trump or as an observer disheartened by the actions of the American people. Islamophobia is highly present within American culture and is in part due to many factors such as the rise of Islamic radicals, decreased sense of security within the last two decades, and personal biases about one's nationality.

Due to my inability to follow the reactions of the same internet users on each platform, I want to advise my audience to keep their username on social media consistent on each platform. In doing so, researchers, like myself, can observe data more accurately. For example, if each user I followed throughout my research was consistent, I would have been able to easily identify each internet user and observe how each platform differed the way they portrayed their opinion. In a technology-based society, social media users must be aware of the extent to which Islamophobia is present on the internet. For example, it is very likely to encounter a post or tweet about the issue from a political figure, but the user is less likely to see the same politicians commenting on YouTube videos. Users should become more aware of the discriminatory content on the internet and recognize how each social media platform is being used to promote or discredit the information.

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