

For I was hungry...

I was a stranger...

matthew

I was in prison...

...least of these, you did to me.

Matthew 25 Movement Toolkit for Mobilizing to Protect and Support American Muslims

God Almighty will ask on the Day of Reckoning: "O son of Adam, I came to you as sick, thirsty, and hungry, but you did not visit me nor feed me." The son of Adam will respond, "How could You have been sick, or hungry or thirsty in need of my help when You own the whole universe." God will say, I came to you in the guise of a sick, thirsty, or hungry fellow human and if you had served them you would have served Me.

—Saying # 2569: Sahih Muslim: A collection of the Prophet's Sayings



What are some of the specific threats that American Muslims face today?

Throughout and following the 2016 elections, we heard a lot of rhetoric demeaning and threatening Muslims, and we saw a [spike in hate crimes and incidents of violence](#) against Muslims in our country. There were many times that people stood up and spoke out against this trend, particularly after the most overt and egregious incidents. We will likely continue to see overt attacks on Muslims, but we also know that many of the policies that threaten American Muslims are less overt. We need to be ready to push back against all types of anti-Muslim policies, including the ones that are a bit more difficult to understand or to see the bigotry immediately on the surface. Here are a few key things we are watching for:

The threat of a Muslim Registry

During the course of the 2016 presidential campaign, President-elect Trump made comments suggesting a “Muslim Registry.” While it was often unclear whether he was suggesting a registry for citizens and permanent residents based on their religion, or suggesting a registry of immigrants and refugees entering the country, [this proposal is extremely alarming either way](#), and harkens back to Japanese internment camps.

Background: The United States has had a form of a “Muslim Registry” before, called the National Security Entry Exit Registration System (NSEERS). Through this program, established after 9/11, the U.S. government required non-citizens from certain countries (deemed as “terror prone” - all but one were Muslim-majority countries) to register themselves with the government. These individuals had to check in regularly with the government, and a number of those who registered were subsequently

faced with deportation hearings, while others experienced government harassment in a variety of ways ([read about one family’s experience here](#)).

All of the countries on the NSEERS list [were removed by 2011](#) because the program was costly and ineffective in its stated national security aims. It remained on the books in a shell form until December of 2016, when President Obama [officially shut down the program](#), stating that the program is obsolete.

What should we expect?

Because President Obama officially shut down the NSEERS program, if the new administration wants to revive it, they will have to re-introduce (and make a case for the value of) such a program, and it is expected that they will have to allow for public comment for a period of time. Should this happen, people across the country will need to raise their voices in opposition to any such discriminatory program. Additionally, we may see more widespread surveillance measures targeting & further securitizing American Muslims.

While many of the cabinet nominees have rejected the idea of an explicit “Muslim registry,” many have entertained the idea of carefully monitoring people from certain countries. President Trump’s executive order of January 27, 2017 claims to address this need by temporarily banning all refugee resettlement and all entry to the U.S. of nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries. As this executive order makes its way through the current legal challenges to it, we need to speak into the conversation in opposition to religious discrimination and in favor of due process rights. We also need to stand up for refugees, who are already the most heavily vetted entrants to the United States, and advocate against the indefinite ban on refugees from Syria and



the dramatic cuts to the number of refugees to be admitted each year that this executive order seeks to impose [For more information on how to take action specifically on policy related to the refugee resettlement program, take a look at [this toolkit](#) from Refugee Council USA]

The bottom line is that, right now, we still don't know what to expect going forward. It is also possible that the Trump administration will try to introduce some sort of registry for Muslim citizens of the United States, which is unprecedented. In this case, we would need all hands on deck to speak up and push back against any such move. More important than publicly pledging to register yourself (which is an important symbolic act of solidarity) is to stand staunchly against the creation of any such registry in the first place. This would involve letters, petitions, op-eds, public demonstrations, visits & calls to legislators, and much more—be ready to move and move quickly if anything along these lines is introduced.

Threats to American Muslim Institutions

There have recently been pushes to designate the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist group (see [legislation introduced by Senator Ted Cruz and colleagues](#), although the broad authority to make this designation lies with the Administration, rather than with Congress). The legislation itself is highly problematic and breaks with US precedent (read more [here](#)), and many believe that this move would lead to the scapegoating of American Muslim institutions by “opening investigations” into them (you can read more about that [here](#) and [here](#)). Read up on the issue, then keep paying attention. We'll let those of you who have signed the pledge know what develops and what action steps are needed.

Ongoing Violence and Harassment

Hate crimes, vandalism, attacks on houses of worship, and bullying against American Muslims rose steadily throughout the election cycle and have continued to occur at high levels since November 9. Both the [Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University](#) and [SAALT](#) have issued reports on this trend. Muslim Advocates is [tracking & mapping hate crimes](#) targeting American Muslims (and reports these incidents to authorities- [see here for how you can report incidents](#)), and the site [Hate Hurts](#) is monitoring hate incidents as well.

Local responses to these incidents are particularly important. Consider contacting the affected community and ask what you can do. Many have come together after incidents of vandalism to [repaint the mosque](#), for example, or to raise money for the community for repairs. In cases of violence against individuals, notes of concern and raising money have also been helpful ways that the community has come alongside those targeted, as well as advocating for hate crime investigations and demanding that the incident be taken seriously by the relevant authorities. The bottom line is that, after such an incident, it is important that the affected community feels supported by the broader community, and that there is a message sent publicly that this is not acceptable. Communities can come together and send a strong message against violence and hatred. An attack on one is an attack on all and we will not stand for it. There are many creative ways to make sure those things happen.

In addition, law enforcement and media responses to hate crimes are critical in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Consider coming together with other local community organizations to urge law enforcement officials to consider all possible motives for the crimes, and to ensure the safety of the victims and their communities. Given that media



plays such an impactful role in the way communities are perceived, hold media outlets accountable if their coverage is biased.

It's also important to note that part of the rise we are seeing in anti-Muslim bigotry and discrimination

is due to an organized, well-funded network of groups and individuals interested in spreading negative (and false) information about Islam and Muslims. You can read more about that network [here](#), and about a number of the players in it [here](#) and [here](#).

OK, SO WHAT CAN I DO NOW?

Educate yourself about Islam and American Muslims

There is a lot of bad information out there about Islam and Muslims, and if you only learn about this religious community through the news, you're hearing a very tiny fragment of the story. Here are some resources to learn more:

- Harvard's Pluralism Project has [some great resources](#) for learning the basics about Islam and American Muslims, as does [ING](#)
- [This PBS video series](#) and [this Unity Production Foundation film](#) give great educational overviews
- [American Muslim poll](#), from the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding
- [The Diversity of Muslims in the United States](#) (a report from US Institute of Peace)
- Responses to FAQs about American Muslims
- Muslim Anti-Racism Collaborative has put together a Heritage Series webpage with numerous resources highlighting the diversity of the American Muslim community, [linked here](#)
- Learn from ISPU how anti-Muslim legislative measures overlap with other legislative pushes that target and marginalize minorities and vulnerable communities, and thereby presents both a theoretical and very tangible threat to all communities.
- Read about organizing happening through [Muslims for American Progress](#).

- Seek out and listen to American Muslims' experiences and stories ([here's one](#) and [here's another](#), reflecting on being Muslim in America after Trump's election).
- There are a LOT of good books out there to learn more about Islam, the Qur'an, and American Muslims. [Here's an \(always growing\) list we've compiled.](#)

Get to know your Muslim neighbors.

Call up your local mosque, reach out to a Muslim parent at your school, or contact Shoulder to Shoulder if you need help finding Muslim partners in your area to connect with. You don't need to put together a major interfaith gathering to get to know people- just have dinner or coffee to get started! Here are a few resources that might be helpful in taking the first steps:

- Ilhan Cagri, of the Muslim Public Affairs Council has created a guide for starting a relationship with Muslim neighbors, which you can find on pages 5 and 6 of this toolkit.
- This [Dinner Dialogue guide](#) is helpful if you are looking for something a bit more structured

Push for local resolutions.

Team up with others in your area to press your city council or school board to adopt an anti-Islamophobia resolution ([linked here](#), with resources for making it happen).



Be an upstander.

One of the discouraging things about a number of the recent incidents of harassment and hate violence directed at Muslims (as well as other communities) is that there have been several incidents where bystanders didn't do anything to help the person being harassed. Be ready to step in if you see something happening- [here's a great comic showing what that might look like](#).

Raise your voice publicly.

As an individual, you could write an op-ed or Letter to the Editor (LTE) to push back against hateful rhetoric or incidents. Appended to this toolkit, you'll find a guide for writing an op-ed, or an LTE, and well as messaging guidance, developed (and tested!) by ReThink Media.

As a community, your church could put up a banner indicating your solidarity with your Muslim neighbors. [Here's a link](#) to purchase one!

Pay attention, take action, & spread the word.

[Following American Muslim leaders on social media](#) is one helpful (and expedient) way to stay up-to-speed on policy issues as they come up. Matthew 25 pledge signatories will be notified when there are specific, time-sensitive actions to take in response to these policy concerns.

I want to reach out to my Muslim neighbor. How do I get started?

So maybe your neighbor is Muslim, or you've run into the parents of your child's classmate and they're Muslim. You'd like to get together with them but aren't sure how to do it.

American Muslims are an extremely diverse community. From African American Muslims, many of whose ancestors were brought to the United States as slaves; to converts; to more recently arrived

immigrants from the Middle East, North Africa, and many other places; there is no homogenous Muslim culture or American Muslim culture. Thus, while acknowledging that the following tips may not hold constant across all communities, they can be helpful for starting relationships with a number of American Muslim families.

It's important to know that some Muslim families may feel just as anxious about getting to know their non-Muslim neighbors. They may want to invite you but are sure how to go about doing it. At the same time, they may be nervous about going to a non-Muslim home where they may be served pork and will have to refuse, causing discomfort.

Let's look at what Muslims generally expect when they go to a Muslim household:

- As they enter, they'll look to see if they should remove their shoes. If they do not need to remove their shoes, the host will say something like, "Oh, don't worry, you don't need to take off your shoes."
- They know that they will not be served alcohol. No one will drink alcohol around them. The food will not contain alcohol (wine, brandy, rum); this includes desserts. [Even though the alcohol evaporates in cooking, many Muslims do not eat food that contains alcohol as an ingredient.]
- The food will not contain any pork products. No ham, salami, or prosciutto. There will be no lard in any of the desserts.
- Many Muslims eat meat that is deemed "halal". This means it has been slaughtered in a religiously prescribed way and is sold in Muslim butcher shops or is marked in the supermarket as "halal" (such as all lamb from New Zealand). Some Muslims will eat meat that is kosher, because Jewish religious laws regarding meat are very similar to Islamic guidelines. All fish is acceptable.



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As an example, if the female Muslim neighbor wears a headscarf, you can likely assume that family does not drink alcohol, never eats pork products, probably eats only “halal” meat (though it’s perfectly okay to ask, “Do you eat only halal meat?”), likely does not have a dog (you cannot pray in clothes that has dog hair on it, although this may be different for some American Muslims, who do indeed own dogs) and the women of the family will not remove their headscarf unless in the company of all women.

The thing is, people are people. Nice people attract nice people and generally figure it out, even if making the first initiation of friendship is, as always, a bit uncomfortable to do. The best way to get to know someone is to talk to them. Ask them about the things that interest you: gardening, sports, the price of gas, how to cook something, your kids, the weather, your job.

So now that you’ve clicked (you’re nice, they’re really nice), how do you move forward? Here are some ideas:

Ask if they want to meet for coffee or tea at a coffee shop

A note about the bill: Don’t be surprised if the Muslim family (particularly a more recently-arrived immigrant family) offers to pay the entire tab. In many Middle-Eastern countries, the bill is never split. When friends routinely go out, one person in the group will pick up the tab, and another time, someone else will do it. It becomes fair in the long run because you eventually end up paying. It is generally understood that if you invite someone, you will want to pay, even though there will generally be jostling for the bill. Things are a bit different in the US depending on how long the Muslim family has been here. Those people that have been here for many years are familiar with each person/couple paying for their own tab; people who are relatively new to the US will find splitting the bill a bit unusual.

Invite them for tea (or coffee) to your house

This is an easy arrangement. Serve tea or coffee plus pastries and maybe some fruit. You can add savories if you like. The point is a to create a comfortable environment so you can chat and get to know one another. Be careful if you serve pie, that the crust has not been made with lard, which is a pork product. Check the ingredients of store-bought cookies, etc. to make sure they contain no lard (or alcohol).

Arrange play dates with the kids

If you have young children who go to school with Muslim children, you can arrange a play date at your house. Like many parents, Muslim families are protective of their children. You can invite the parent to come along with the child and make it a play date/parent tea.



Invite the Muslim friend/ neighbor/family for a meal

(lunch, dinner, barbecue)

Relax. Anything you prepare will be fine. Just be careful of ingredients. No alcohol. No pork products. To be safe, you can serve fish or keep it vegetarian. If you want to serve meat of any kind, buy it from the “halal” meat market and be sure to tell your guest that it’s “halal”. Be sensitive about your dog. Fido may be a member of your family, but think of Fido as being temporarily very muddy, as in tracking in lots of dirt and mud. As noted above, many Muslims get nervous around dogs because if a dog touches their clothing, they cannot pray in that outfit until it is washed. Think of it as Fido getting mud all over your guest’s clothes.

After all that chatting and eating and bragging about your kids, you will find that your Muslim neighbor shares much the same joys and concerns as you. Your Muslim neighbor will also be grateful to you for having reached out. The hope is to develop relationships that bridge the divide created by unfamiliarity and bring out the very humanity in each and every one of us.

10 TIPS

rethink Writing & Placing Op-Eds

- 1 Always tie your op-ed to a news hook.** If you can see one coming, plan ahead. If a story is breaking, act fast (within 24 hours). There has to be a compelling reason why an editor should run it now. Make that point directly in your pitch.
- 2 Make it personal.** Tell a story. Invoke an experience. Make it readable and relevant. Audiences respond to accessible content and editors look for that.
- 3 Make it local.** With the exception of a small number of national outlets, there has to be a local tie-in. What is the relevance of the local Representative or the state's Senators? How will the decision make an impact on the community? What is the community history with the issue?
- 4 Choose the right author.** A relevant local signer is key with most regional and local newspapers. With national outlets, the prestige and credibility of the author can make all the difference. More than two signers rarely adds to a piece.
- 5 Choose the right messenger.** On any given topic, some messengers have more persuasive credibility with the target audience than others. Who does your target audience listen to? Who do they respect? And who do they ignore?
- 6 Argue a strong point—powerfully.** An op-ed argues a point of view, it does not weigh all sides of an issue. As a general rule, make one strong point and back it up with 3–4 supporting arguments.
- 7 Avoid jargon.** Use accessible language. Wherever possible use metaphors, analogies, and stories to connect to your audience and make your point more persuasive.
- 8 Always respect the word limit.** Editors don't have the time to cut your piece down to size. If it's too long, it will very likely be rejected immediately. Typically, 700 words will do, but always check the paper's op-ed page to find out their preference. Your odds will be better if your piece is even shorter.
- 9 Start strong, finish strong.** Open with a strong, tight, clear paragraph. If the reader only reads two paragraphs, they should get your essential point. The middle paragraphs exist to reinforce your point. The final paragraph should close the deal and leave the reader feeling like it's only sensible to agree with you.
- 10 Name names.** Policies don't just happen—people make decisions. In political communications, the aim is to declare who is responsible and why they should do the right thing. This does not need to be adversarial, but it cannot be vague or understated.



9 TIPS

rethink

Writing & Placing Letters to the Editor

- 1 Include the title of the original article.** Always reference the article you are responding to in the first sentence of your letter and in the body of your text. Some quick examples include:
 - *The Times* May 18 editorial, "Racial Profiling Works," omitted some key facts.
 - I strongly agree with [author's name]'s view on the need to reform public school policies on bullying.
 - Congressman Doe's efforts to establish new TSA procedures ["Title of Article," date] will be a blow to our civil liberties.
- 2 Keep it brief.** Different publications prefer different lengths, but the maximum length accepted is usually no more than 200 words. Check previous LTE's on the publication's website for guidance.
- 3 Respond quickly.** Try to write and submit your LTE the same day that the original story appeared. Most outlets have a 24-hour window in which you have a realistic expectation of being published.
- 4 Focus on one point.** Over-complicated letters don't run. Focus on one issue or point and aim for straightforward and pithy. If there are multiple points you wish to respond to in an article, write one LTE to address each and recruit colleagues to sign them.
- 5 Personalize your message.** Local editors receive dozens of letters each day; national editors receive hundreds. If you really want your letter to stand out, make sure it is not copied word-for-word from a form letter. If you have a personal story that shows how the issue affects you and/or your family, share it—briefly.
- 6 Know your audience.** Are you writing to a local newspaper? If so, try to touch on issues specific to that state's and/or community's readership. If you're writing to a newspaper or magazine with a national readership, focus on issues of national importance, unless the specific article you are referring to is about a local event.
- 7 Be polite—in what you write and in your approach.** You can be critical of the paper, author, or information, but it must be written in a civil tone. Papers will never publish insulting letters. When sending the letter, personalize the approach: take the time to find the name of the editor and make it clear you're receptive to edits or revisions.
- 8 Proofread.** Any typo or grammatical error in a letter diminishes its chances of being published. Always double-check your letter for errors and have a colleague review it before submitting.
- 9 Include your contact information.** When you send your letter to the editor, you must include your name, address, and daytime telephone number. Anonymous letters are not as credible as signed letters and most newspapers will not publish them. Your address is important because papers prefer to print letters from local readers. Include your phone number because most newspapers will not run a letter without verifying its authorship.



What We Say And How We Say It

Messaging to Defeat Islamophobia & Affirm the Value of Pluralism

Working with leading researchers, ReThink Media recently concluded an in-depth study aimed at developing effective and accessible narratives to affirm the rights of Muslims in America and repudiate anti-Muslim prejudice. One of the goals of the research was to identify the audience that defines the “base” on these issues, as well as “persuadables,” and “opponents.” At the same time, we wanted to determine which values, words, and messages move target audiences to take action versus those that suppress support or, worse yet, tacitly reaffirm the beliefs of our opponents.

The conclusions below were gathered from four investigative phases. First, ReThink Media conducted an analysis of existing discourse with particular attention devoted to how advocates and allies currently make their case. Next, ReThink Media collaborated with a polling firm, ALG Research, and a cognitive linguist, Anat Shenker-Osorio, and conducted two mini-focus groups, with Muslim American men and women respectively, to elicit their own responses to existing message approaches and, critically, to ground the development of new messages in community perspectives. Building on those findings, our research team facilitated three-day, online focus groups to test out themes, specific wording, and messengers with one group of “base” Americans and a second group of “persuadable” respondents. Finally, ReThink Media and ALG Research tested core attitudes and responses to values and narratives in an online survey with 1000 representative US adults, with oversamples of 200 African Americans and 200 Latinos.

This message guidance is meant to inform a much-needed strategic conversation with Muslim, Arab, South Asian, Interfaith, and ally organizations about how to most effectively forge a longer term and comprehensive campaign to reject prejudice directed at Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim. Our research shows that this will require a shift in the way we approach our work so that we’re crafting positive, aspirational messages while also addressing the audience’s national security fears.

While these are winning messages, there are no silver bullets to combat Islamophobia. Instead, integrating this messaging guidance into our daily work will also require a new conversation about how to navigate problematic media cycles and develop proactive campaigns that leverage this research and the skills and resources available from multiple organizations.

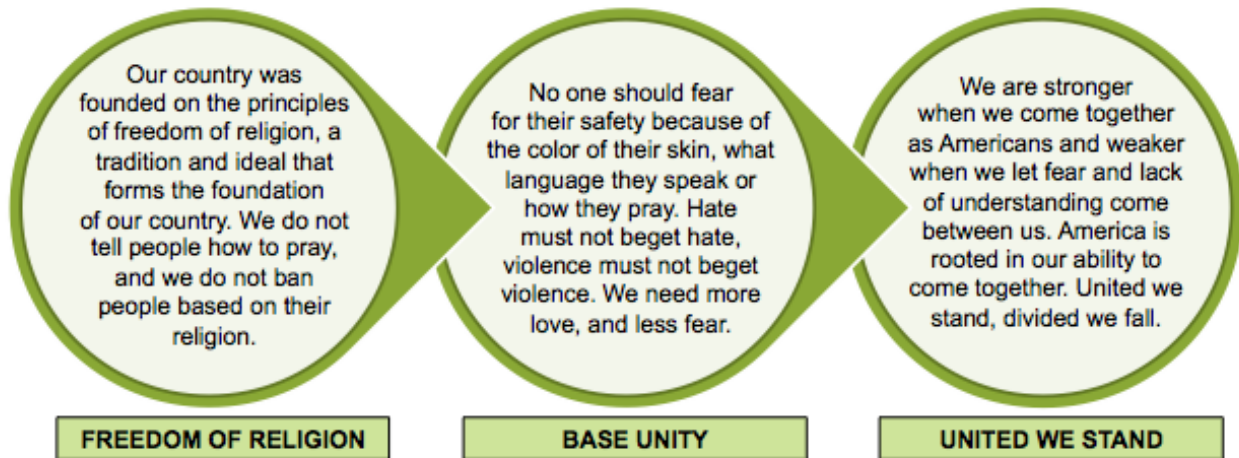
WINNING MESSAGES

The most important overall takeaway from the research is that all of the top performing messages, across all political and demographic groups, were positive and aspirational in nature. Both “base” and “persuadable” respondents preferred messages that articulated a positive vision defining American values and describing the work to be done to move the country forward. These messages were further strengthened when combined with messages that acknowledge people’s fears regarding terrorism but then describe an appropriate legal and non-discriminatory response.

These successful messages elicit strong agreement from our base, move the persuadable middle toward opposing anti-Muslim prejudice, and strike a chord with those most likely to relay our message. Critically, these messages also draw a line and frame a choice. In essence, this approach obliges audiences to choose between positive, aspirational messages rooted in American values and

negative, discriminatory, and scapegoating messages. And while many people are fully aware of America’s shortcomings with regard to living up to “the full meaning of its creed,” nevertheless these message describe a journey toward forming “a more perfect union.”

Below are the messages respondents across demographic groups rated most highly. Messages were tested for overall efficacy in the online survey described above. Italics indicate sample messages either currently in the field or ready to disseminate to new audiences.



Freedom of Religion

Our country was founded on the principle of freedom of religion, a tradition that forms the ideal of our country. We do not tell people how to pray, and we do not ban people based on their religion.

- *Our nation was founded on the principle that all people should be afforded the freedom of religion. This principle forms the foundation of our country. We should all condemn the destruction of a place of worship that denies fellow Americans their right to pray.*
- *Core themes: Emphasizing common communities (whether it’s being a fellow American, a New Yorker, a Christian, or any other commonality between the messenger and the audience)*
- *Core themes: Establishing the values that define community: “This is what we believe.”*

[Note: this message does not directly address Americans who are Muslim or perceived to be Muslim. Instead, this is focused entirely on the values of the audience and their belief system.]

More Love, Less Fear

No one should fear for their safety because of the color of their skin, the language they speak or how they pray. Hate must not beget hate, violence must not beget violence. We need more love, and less fear.

- *No one should feel threatened because of the color of their skin, their country of origin, their sexual orientation, their gender identity, or how they pray.*
- *Core themes: This message identifies the problem and where it intersects with the audience’s established values system from the first message.*
- *Core themes: Love as a common value, and fear as a value proposed by those who are willing to hurt or threaten innocent individuals.*

United We Stand

We are stronger when we come together as Americans and weaker when we let fear and lack of understanding come between us. America is rooted in our ability to come together. United we stand, divided we fall.

This message implicitly establishes a path to “winning” against the perceived threat by affirming that unity yields strength. In other words, being united is not just moral, but practical. Following are examples of suggested talking points and tweets incorporating this message.

- *America is stronger for our ability to come together. United, not divided. That includes religion. #Debates2016.*
- *At times like these, we look to our elected officials and law enforcement to model the behavior we want to see in the world. This is a time for all elected officials, including local government, to stand together united in the face of violence. This is not a time to win political points. This is not a time to use attacks to divide each other.*
- *An attack against one American is an attack against all Americans. We must stand together with Chelsea, with New Jersey, and with St. Cloud. We cannot allow these attacks to corrode the way we view each other, or even worse, stand by as some use these incidents to justify attacks against others.*
- *People of every faith denounce and reject these violent attacks. Americans of Christian, Jewish, Islamic, and other faiths stand together united against extremism and violence.*
- *We are strongest when we stand together as Americans. Our nation is strongest when unified and weakest when we allow fear and lack of understanding come between us. America is rooted in our ability to come together, especially during times like these.*

ADDRESSING SECURITY FEARS & INCREASING THE REACH OF TOP MESSAGES

As noted above, each of the best-performing messages above is strengthened when combined with language that describes a lawful, non-discriminatory approach to the problem of terrorism—increasing favorable responses by more than 10% in every example tested.

Target Terrorists Based On Evidence

We should address terrorist acts based on evidence, not single out an entire group of people based on their faith. Not only is that the right thing to do, it is more effective at keeping us safe.

- *I want to remind Americans that after an attack, we should target people based on evidence, not their faith or their country of origin or their accent,” he said. “I came to this country from India 20 years ago to create a better life for my family. I am a father of four and a proud American citizen. I am also what America looks like.*
—**Harinder Singh Bains, who identified the Chelsea bombing suspect.**
- *We must target terrorists based on evidence, not single out 3.3 million Americans based on their faith. #Debates2016*
- *Q for #Debates2016 Wouldn't evidence-based investigations prevent terror better than the mass surveillance of all citizens? @LesterHoltNBC*

Messaging Principles

Lead with values.

Our strongest messages lead with freedom, treating others as you would want to be treated (the Golden Rule), and unity. Avoid the tendency to "other" or single out Muslims, rather than speaking of action taken as wrong to do to anyone.

DO SAY

We would want to be treated fairly and met with respect for our views. Americans who are Muslim deserve to be treated as would any other American.

When politicians insult Muslims, when a mosque is vandalized, or a kid is called names, that doesn't make us safer. That harms our fellow Americans, some of whom are Muslim. That is dividing us against each other for political gain.

DON'T SAY

We would not want to be treated unfairly or be met with hatred for our views. American Muslims do not deserve to be treated this way.

When politicians insult Muslims, whether our fellow citizens or abroad, when a mosque is vandalized, or a kid is called names, that doesn't make us safer. That's not telling it like it is.

Be positive and aspirational.

Describe creating something good, not merely eliminating something harmful.

DO SAY

Everyone should be able to walk down a street and feel safe, no matter what they look like or how they choose to pray.

Doing Y makes us stronger, better able to achieve our goals, and honors who we are as a country.

Maintaining our commitment to welcome newcomers to our nation no matter their faith or country of origin upholds our values and beliefs. It celebrates and honors the very core of our First Amendment right to freedom of religion.

DON'T SAY

No one should walk down a street in America and fear for their or their families' safety because of how they look or choose to pray.

Doing X diminishes us in the eyes of the world. It makes it harder to achieve our goals. And it betrays who we are as a country.

Proposing that refugees should be barred from entering the United States on the basis of their faith is unconstitutional and un-American. It goes against the very core of our First Amendment right to freedom of religion.

Focus on shared identity before explaining differences.

While it is tempting to explain the tenets of Islam and/or point out its similarities to other major religions, this neither motivates supporters nor convinces persuadables. Deeply religious respondents may resent the comparison. For atheists, emphasizing belief in a higher power is distancing. And for all non-Muslims, focusing on Islam emphasizes a point of difference, not shared human desires and practices.

Acknowledge people's fears and redirect them toward positive behaviors.

Our research shows that fear is a very powerful driver of people's stereotypes and prejudice. This association is consistently reinforced in the media, particularly in response to attacks. We ignore this fact at our own peril. We are best served by acknowledging people's fears and then moving to what unifies us. (e.g., we share the same concerns for the safety of our families and our communities, but we are united in the proposition that we are stronger together).

Affirm what you are for, do not combat what you are against.

Avoid myth-busting and negating sentences (e.g., *this does not enhance our security; they are not a threat*) because they only provide air time to our opponents. Audiences hear the substance of the sentence far more than our insistence it is false.

DO SAY

Our communities are safest and most secure when we stick together as Americans. Asking any community to spy on its own members only fosters resentment and division.

DON'T SAY

Asking Muslims to spy on their own communities hasn't worked because Muslim communities haven't harbored violent extremists, but it has created resentment and furthered the ISIS narrative of conflict between Muslims and "the West."

Avoid passive constructions and assign agency to those involved in given situations.

DO SAY

Some angry individuals have attacked Muslim Americans on the street or leaving their house of worship simply for dressing differently or speaking another language. America is better than that. We stand for the principle of religious freedom and respect everyone's rights.

Journalists/members of the media must stick to the facts in their reporting. The best reporting avoids inflammatory headlines and reckless reporting before real facts are known because this can stoke and inflame unstable individuals who then act out against Muslim Americans.

DON'T SAY

We have seen a rise in hate crimes against Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim. Muslims have been physically attacked on the street for speaking another language, wearing a headscarf, or exiting a house of worship.

The media must avoid inflammatory headlines and irresponsible reporting before all the facts are in because reckless reporting can contribute to violence and discrimination.

Use strong language that seizes the moral high ground.

While not overt, some of our best-testing language seizes the moral high ground, implicitly placing our foes on the wrong side.

- *We do not tell people how to pray and we do not ban people based on their religion.*
- *No one should fear for their safety because of the color of their skin, what language they speak or how they pray.*
- *We are weaker as a country when we let fear and lack of understanding come between us.*
- *We should not single out an entire group of people based on their faith.*

Words That Work

BECAUSE...	SAY THIS	INSTEAD OF
Making “person/people” or “American(s)” the noun focuses on our shared identity and increases support. “American Muslims” makes the religious affiliation primary.	Muslim Americans; Americans who are Muslim; People who are Muslim	American Muslims; Muslims who are American
The comparative “more than other Americans” evokes our shared identity and frames potential action as singling out and thus unjust.	Should not be [X] more than other Americans	Should not be [X]
The comparative “like any other American” evokes our shared identity and frames potential action as applying to all people and thus fair.	Deserve [X] like any other American	Deserve [X]
Saying what you stand for and what you believe has you commanding the terms of debate. Saying what you are <i>not</i> gives airtime to your opponents.	This undermines our values; we should target terrorists based on evidence	This does not...; this is not...; we/they are not...; we/they do not...
Promoting something good builds long-term engagement and is more persuasive to the middle. While eliminating something bad may be immediately compelling to core supporters, it fails to persuade the middle.	Promote religious freedom; enhance community; create unity	Eliminate religious restrictions; end prejudice; diminish hatred...
While harms are absolutely targeted against Muslims, speaking about the inherent principles of humanity, unity, and community violated increases desire for progressive policy solutions. Conversely, focusing on what makes those targeted different diminishes respondents’ concerns.	Everyone means everyone, no exceptions; we don’t tell people how to pray; no one should fear for their safety	Islamophobia, bigotry, xenophobia
It may seem that signaling how increased scrutiny affects everyone would bolster support, but it actually backfires. Emphasizing singling out and injustice toward specific groups is more effective. Persuadables and large elements of the base are willing to undergo more surveillance—under the false belief it will improve safety. Resistance to this seems suspicious.	Single people out based on what they look like, how they pray, or where they come from; single out an entire group based on the actions of a few	All of us will be forced to undergo more security; curtail civil liberties for all of us; increase government scrutiny on all of us