



Faithful Activism: A Sunnah Framework

OMAR SULEIMAN

YAQEEN™
INSTITUTE FOR ISLAMIC RESEARCH

Author Biography

Imam Omar Suleiman is the Founder and President of the Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, and an Adjunct Professor of Islamic Studies in the Graduate Liberal Studies Program at SMU (Southern Methodist University). He is also the Resident Scholar at Valley Ranch Islamic Center and Co-Chair Emeritus of Faith Forward Dallas at Thanks-Giving Square.

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Introduction

The following document represents instructional notes formulated by Sh. Omar Suleiman, Founder and President of Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research, for a course taught on *Faithful Activism: A Sunnah Framework* to the Alimiyya students at [Qalam Seminary](#) in Dallas. It aims at a systematic treatment and provides a guiding framework for Muslims to engage in healthy civic participation in various social spaces. It is part platform and part procedural approach—the what *and* the how—to achieve this aim. Beginning with a thorough and methodical affirmation of our calling, structure, and language, these notes provide concrete direction on how to navigate limiting terminology and avoid the pitfalls of divisive social tribalism. Leading further, Suleiman argues that we must expand both our religious *and* political frameworks. He does so by offering tangible guidance on mapping ourselves within broader coalition structures based upon shared moral foundations. The notes then elaborate on the specific opportunities for spiritual and legal renewal within the parameters of Islam, positioning our methodology in order to ask one of the most relevant questions in 2020 and beyond: *how do we work together?*

Using the two key principles of preservation of faith and participation with faith as a springboard, the notes sketch out a blueprint for fruitful and firmly rooted coalition-building in our multi-faith and politically pluralist society. Replete with examples of actual figures, organizations, and movements, Suleiman provides both positive and negative examples to serve as a toolkit for American Muslims to reflect upon and learn from the best practices *and* blindspots of others. These notes are being shared publicly with the hope they will benefit those who are in positions of negotiating public spaces in order to protect our private religious institutions and build out a better, more productive and more faithful discourse for tomorrow. And Allah knows best.

Our own calling

Championing the best of our faith is an obligation to it. We are called to uplift society by conveying the message of God verbally through *dawah* (preaching) and letting our actions speak louder than our words through *khidma* (service). At the heart of both of these things is sincere concern for the people. When the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stood up to make his initial call, he referenced his credibility with the people as being one who always wished well for them: I have cared for you in this life, so clearly I care for you in the afterlife. No one can claim to care solely for the welfare of others in the hereafter while neglecting them in this life. The mission of the Prophet ﷺ began even before he knew it at the age of 40. God was preparing him, molding him, and elevating him through his character. He spent his life in service to others, and that service was only further made manifest in Islam. When the Prophet ﷺ said that the best of people in the days of ignorance are the best of people in Islam if they solidify their understanding, he himself was the greatest example of that. His service to the people, commitment to justice, and love for humanity were already unparalleled in society before Allah appointed him as a Prophet.

He had already earned the title of *Al Ameen* (the trustworthy one). But after Islam, he rose to a rank that no one before or after him ever would, and became *rahmatan lil a'alameen* (a mercy to the worlds). He was not merely a mercy to Arabs, or even to Muslims, or even to humanity, but a mercy to the worlds. As his followers, we have to kindle that desire in ourselves to be like him and seek to continue his impact on the world around us so that people come to know him through us, as they came to know Allah through him. The closer we become to the Prophet ﷺ in our worship, service, and affairs as a whole, the more deserving we become of being called people of Sunnah. In the process of enjoining good and forbidding evil, we must start with a recognition of what good and evil are according to our tradition, and then be faithful to those concepts while seeking out the best mechanisms to live up to this noble calling.

Our own framework

Religion is on the decline in America today and many who have left it cite divisive rhetoric and corruption in religious institutions. Most of the religious presence in our political discourse seems to be superficial with the religious left and the religious right often simply representing nothing more than the political left and the political right with collars. On the right, Christian nationalism has become the language of White supremacy. And on the left, selective ambiguous religious language is given to fundamentally secular concepts. Hence, a positive intervention of religion generally, and Islam specifically is so crucial. In many cases, religion does not fail because it is refuted, but because it is no longer relevant or worse, viewed as a tool of oppression. The greatest threat to religion is stagnation, not refutation. When we suggest Islam has nothing to say about the problems and pain people are encountering other than to point out what's wrong with proposed solutions, we're doing a disservice to a faith that encompasses everything that we do in a profound manner.

An-Nu'man ibn Bashir reported: The Prophet ﷺ said, “The parable of those who respect the limits of Allah and those who violate them is that of people who board a ship after casting lots, some of them residing in its upper deck and others in its lower deck. When those in the lower deck want water, they pass by the upper deck and say: If we tear a hole in the bottom of the ship, we will not harm those above us. If those in the upper deck let them do what they want, then they will all be destroyed together. If the people do not stop them, they will all fall and be failures, but if they stop them they will all be saved.” (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 2361)

What this hadith calls us to, amongst other things, is to provide legitimate solutions to legitimate problems, or else people will resort to illegitimate ways that will harm themselves, the *ummah*, and society as a whole. From an ideological perspective, that doesn't mean there is no place for refuting false ideologies and engaging in rigorous intellectual discourse, just that it has to go hand in hand with service. We also must push back on the idea that all good ideas originated in Western thought, where so much of what is of benefit to the people actually originated in Islam.

Naturally, if we don't promote our own frameworks, we risk reinforcing frameworks that are foreign to what can principally be extracted from our faith.

Our own language

Articulating those frameworks should also be intentionally in the spirit of reviving what the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ brought to us, as opposed to trying to fit them into terminology that can't encompass the profoundness of the Sunnah. We should constantly both think and act in accordance with what Muhammad ﷺ would do. There should be some reservation however with expressing definitely what the Prophet would do with things that are not so clearcut. It isn't wise or intellectually honest to state that if the Prophet were here, he would validate my precise platform. We should, however, strive to make our actions as consistent with his example as possible, while engaging thoroughly the things that we know with certainty the Prophet would engage.

We can take from some prominent Christian and Jewish thinkers and activists in this regard:



Be A King ✓
@BerniceKing

Jesus didn't call it "social justice."

He simply called it Love.

If we would only Love our neighbors beyond comfort, borders, race, religion and other differences that we've allowed to be barriers, "social justice" would be a given.

Love makes justice happen.



Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove
@wilsonhartgrove

I didn't learn about food for the hungry, living wages, healthcare for whoever needs it & forgiveness of debt from socialism.

I learned these things from the prophet Isaiah & Jesus in the gospels.

[Daniel Edelman writes](#) about Social Justice and Orthodoxy in the Jewish community saying, “In this time of heightened political polarization, American denominational Judaism is more frequently dividing by political party affiliations and agendas. As a consequence, one common mistaken impression is that Orthodox Judaism does not value or promote social justice...Whatever the merits of any particular political agenda or party politics, the ethical responsibilities to stay true to the credo that *hesed* is the password of the Jew requires us to publicly protest against the oppression of the helpless, the defrauding of the poor, the plight of the orphan.”

We should seek to craft language, especially on sensitive issues, that is authentic, consistent, wise, and beautiful. The wisdom and beauty of the message should not betray the substance of the message or be ambiguous.

Authentic: It is extracted from the proper paradigms and is true to the Qur’an and Sunnah in word and substance.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَقُولُوا قَوْلًا سَدِيدًا - 33:70

Oh you who believe, be conscious of Allah and speak words of clear truth.

Consistent: While we ought to use wisdom in how we speak with different people in different spaces, we can’t say one thing in a Muslim space and another in a non-Muslim space. We can’t say one thing in theological spaces, and another in organizing spaces. We need language and position statements that leaders, institutions, and laypeople can all use.

وَإِذَا لَقُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا إِلَىٰ شَيَاطِينِهِمْ قَالُوا إِنَّا مَعَكُمْ إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ مُسْتَهْزِئُونَ - 2:14

And when they meet those who believe, they say, “We believe”; but when they are alone with their evil ones, they say, “Indeed, we are with you; we were only mockers.”

Wise and beautiful:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحُكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ ۚ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ ۚ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ - 16:125

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in a way that is best. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has strayed from His way, and He is most knowing of who is [rightly] guided.

When Allah sent Musa and Haroon (*alayhimus-salaam*) to Firawn, He commanded them:

فَقُولَا لَهُ قَوْلًا لِّنَا اَلَعَلَّهِ يَتَذَكَّرُ اَوْ يَخْشَىٰ

“And speak to him with gentle speech that perhaps he may be reminded or fear His Lord.”

The word *layyin* literally means to soften. Let the strength of your message come through its substance and not a harsh tone. If you employ harshness in language as a regular practice, you merely activate the ego of the intended recipient of your message and also leave them to assume that you preach from a place of meanness and harsh-heartedness.

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ ۚ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ ۚ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

“So by the mercy of Allah, [O Muhammad], you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart, they would have disbanded from around you...”

The logical conclusion of harsh or insulting speech is the exchange of insults and further polarization. That makes it hard for the message to be heard and at times invites rudeness in return that does not respect what you consider sacred.

وَلَا تَسُبُّوا الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَيَسُبُّوا اللَّهَ عَدْوًا بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ كَذَلِكَ زَيْنًا لِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ عَمَلُهُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ مَرْجِعُهُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

“And do not insult those they invoke other than Allah lest they insult Allah in enmity without knowledge. Thus We have made pleasing to every community their deeds. Then to their Lord is their return, and He will inform them about what they used to do.”

Contrast this result to what Allah mentions to those who maintain composure, dignity, and noble character even in the face of insult:

ادْفَعْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ فَإِذَا الَّذِي بَيْنَكَ وَبَيْنَهُ عَدَاوَةٌ كَأَنَّهُ وَلِيٌّ حَمِيمٌ

“And not equal are the good deed and the bad. Repel [evil] by that [deed] which is better, and thereupon the one whom between you and him is enmity [will become] as though he was a devoted friend.” [*Fussilat* 41:34]

In the absence of positions that balance the above components, leaders are often put on the spot to improvise in the face of crisis. Examples of this are the Orlando

statement in the wake of the tragic PULSE nightclub shooting and the Joint statement of Muslim Scholars & Imams on LGBT row in schools.

Terminology and tribalism

It is essential, where possible, to avoid terminology that is limiting while highlighting epistemology that is authentic. Terms like progressive, conservative, centrist, moderate, liberal, etc. are inherently politicized and don't do justice to our theological commitments as orthodox Muslims, nor our politics (at least where we agree amongst ourselves). We also take away from the effectiveness of our unique message when we resign ourselves to such labels. With that being said, there may be times that our specific positions can be identified as "conservative" or "progressive" without us having to absorb the entirety of those labels.

We not only have to transcend labels and spaces but help our societies think outside of tribal lines as well. Political tribes in America are no less tribal than Banu Makhzoum and Banu Umayyad of Arabia. And tribalism is an inherent obstacle to truth. As I highlighted in a [recent talk I gave at the IOK-Yaqeen-Qalam joint conference](#), people are inherently tribal but not ideological. We use motivated cognition to drive us to comfortable conclusions that give us a place to belong, and a team to root for. And the need to belong in order to find a sense of validation increases with social alienation which is a hallmark of the social media age. The society of the Prophet ﷺ was inherently at risk of fracturing along tribal lines, even after they accepted Islam. Consider when Aws and Khazraj almost split again in the midst of debating who would relieve the Prophet ﷺ of the pain caused to him by the slander of Ayesha (ra).

Expanding our religious framework

In his book, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion*, author and social psychologist Jonathan Haidt builds upon research from

neuroscience, genetics, social psychology, and evolutionary modeling to analyze morality, politics, and religion. The core of his work, in collaboration with his colleagues Craig Joseph and Jesse Graham, is *Moral Foundations Theory*. Haidt posits that people “bind themselves into political teams that share moral narratives,” and once they have joined a particular narrative, they “become blind to alternative moral worlds.” The chart below shows a breakdown from their perspective of the different ways that morality is understood.

	Care/ harm	Fairness/ cheating	Loyalty/ betrayal	Authority/ subversion	Sanctity/ degradation
Adaptive challenge	Protect and care for children	Reap benefits of two-way partnerships	Form cohesive coalitions	Forge beneficial relationships within hierarchies	Avoid contaminants
Original triggers	Suffering distress or neediness expressed by one's child	Cheating, cooperation, deception	Threat or challenge to group	Signs of dominance and submission	Waste products, diseased people
Current triggers	Baby seals, cute cartoon characters	Marital fidelity, broken vending machines	Sports teams, nations	Bosses, respected professionals	Taboo ideas (communism, racism)
Characteristic emotions	Compassion	Anger, gratitude, guilt	Group pride, rage at traitors	Respect, fear	Disgust
Relevant virtues	Caring, kindness	Fairness, justice, trustworthiness	Loyalty, patriotism, self-sacrifice	Obedience, deference	Temperance, chastity, piety, cleanliness

The first two columns speak to what Progressives typically understand as important foundations of morality. They largely revolve around harm reduction. Conservatives tend to view the latter three columns as weighing heavier in terms of importance as they are primarily focused on preserving social order. The following chart illustrates those differences more specifically:

Traditional Narrative	Progressive Narrative
Respect is required of authority, tradition, and institutions to preserve systems	Authority, loyalty, and sanctity interfere with greater needs/wants of the population
Sanctity in high regard	Sanctity is baseless
Morality is natural	Morality can be structured
Self-discipline; Liberty is “freedom from”	Liberty is “freedom to”
Fairness is proportional or equitable	Fairness based in equality or sameness
Care/Harm may not always be the highest possible priority	“If it isn’t hurting anyone” then it can be justified morally; care/harm is held in utmost regard

Now the Muslim moral framework includes more than just oppression and harm. But the spirit of achieving the entirety of the framework should be from a place of concern and wanting good for the people; i.e., harm reduction in a more comprehensive sense, including in the hereafter. When the Prophet ﷺ stood on Safa with his initial call, he invoked his care for the people before Islam and desire for their wellbeing and safety in this life as proofs of his desire to see them find salvation in the hereafter. This is also how the *ummah* is a just and balanced *ummah* (*wasata*), not in that it takes centrist positions that are devoid of consequence or controversy, but that it balances all of the necessary components of society to make it more wholesome.

The scholars of Islam typically [broke down *dhulm* into 2 categories](#): self-harm and harm to others. Some considered 3 categories with *shirk* being a category of its own. Those that didn’t still maintained *shirk* as the greatest *dhulm* in the first category. They were greatly interconnected in the time of the Prophet ﷺ as false

idols were used to drive malicious agendas that harmed the people. The same can be said of today albeit in more deceitful forms. This understanding was even new to the companions when made clear through the verses of Surah Luqman that indeed *shirk* is a great *dhulm*.

In the Prophetic call, the *dawah* began with monotheism. Then came verses that spoke more specifically about *dhulm* to others. The category of *dhulm* to others which is also known as *ta'adee* includes things like consuming the wealth of orphans, female infanticide, and cheating with the weights (*al-mutaffifeen*). These were addressed in the early revelations and prioritized as things that were inherently wrong and against the *fitrah*. The Arabs knew that their practices were unjust, but needed to be more God Conscious in overcoming the temptation of greed that led them to corrupt and oppressive practices. All along the way, the belief and longing for the hereafter were being solidified in their hearts so that when the other forms of *dhulm* that fell under self-harm were prohibited, they were ready to make the personal commitments and sacrifices they were being called to. These forms of *dhulm* arise out of desire whereas the other type which is *ta'adee* arises out of greed and pride. Since they arise out of desire, the desire for the hereafter had to overwhelm their worldly lusts to where they can develop the willpower needed to conform accordingly. This is why [Ayesha \(ra\) mentioned](#), “If the first thing to be revealed was: ‘Do not drink alcoholic drinks,’ people would have said, ‘We will never leave alcoholic drinks,’ and if there had been revealed, ‘Do not commit illegal sexual intercourse,’ they would have said, ‘We will never give up illegal sexual intercourse.’ But Allah revealed the Mufasssal Surahs (i.e., the shorter ones) until faith was settled in their hearts.”

A practical example of a noble attempt to achieve the entirety of the moral framework in our time was the founding of Muslim Mosque Inc. by Al-Hajj Malik Al Shabazz Malcolm X upon his leaving the Nation of Islam. Malcolm, of course, embraced orthodox Islam, but still believed that the genius of the nation of Islam was in how it dignified its members comprehensively and collectively. To Malcolm, political oppression, social degradation, and economic exploitation were all interconnected. So as he exited the Nation of Islam, he founded Muslim

Mosque Inc. just a few days after saying, “This will give us a religious base and the spiritual force necessary to rid our people of the vices that destroy the moral fiber of our community.” As Malcolm went to Hajj and became further established in orthodoxy, he prayed in Arafa that he would eliminate racism from the Nation of Islam and bring it to Sunni creed while maintaining its structure. This, of course, did not happen, and Muslim Mosque Inc. never exceeded 120 members.

Malcolm then formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity which would be a broader organization that wouldn’t require its members to be Muslim seeing that it was a barrier for people who wanted to work with him but weren’t ready to accept Islam. He did not relinquish his *dawah* in the process. In fact, he openly expressed in interviews and letters that he believed Islam was the solution to racism in America, and that he hoped every black man and woman would eventually embrace Islam. He commissioned the members of Muslim Mosque inc. to be members of OAAU also and hoped that their unique commitment to the black freedom struggle and noble character would, in turn, win members over from the OAAU to Muslim Mosque Inc.

What can be learned from this practical example is that in this spirit, Muslims should be so sincere in their uprightness and dedication to justice that people would naturally be drawn to the spiritual reservoir that they pull from which is Islam in its purest sense. We need to be able to draw out our *tawheed*-centric framework that starts with belief in Allah and ends with a connection of that to everything that we do that involves only us, or the world around us. As [Dr. Yasien Mohamed writes](#), “The Islamic conception of natural justice is not akin to the secular conception in which the idea of a transcendent God is absent and the structure of nature is self-contained and independent. God commands justice, has created man with a natural inclination to it, and justice means to comply with the divine command. This is justice to God, and justice to man’s primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), which is itself created by God.”

We also need to remember that not every objective of the *deen* is attained through politics, alliances, and coalitions. *Dawah* still has its priority and place. Calling

people to Allah and to a better way still has to happen. *Tawheed* still remains at the core of our call. All of that which is good and bad in accordance with our divine revelation still is worth challenging society through appropriate vehicles. Our commitment to justice doesn't preclude our commitment to *dawah* and vice versa.

We must both serve people for Allah, and call them to Allah while demonstrating a commitment to Islam in its fullest sense. This translates into a commitment to humanity.

Imam [al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī](#) summarized the concept of justice in its full sense beautifully by saying, “Justice [*al-‘adl*] is a term associated with equality [*musāwāh*]. It has various meanings, depending on the context. In the context of potential, it is an innate human desire for equality. In the context of action, it means dealing fairly with others. And in the context of the Divine, it describes the complete orderliness of God’s actions. In the pursuit of justice, man tries to be virtuous, but can only be perfectly virtuous if his outer actions stem from an inner noble disposition and character. Outwardly just actions do not necessarily make one a just human being. If the intention of the just action is for the sake of show, a worldly benefit, or fear of a Sultan’s punishment, it cannot be truly just.”

Expanding our political framework

Sadly, many people think of political engagement only in the capacity of voting. While voting as a bloc can be effective, it is only as good as the concrete promises, and accountability to those promises, that an elected official is held to. An agreeable candidate with whom we disagree on certain issues should be welcomed and engaged on the condition that we are not forced to agree with them or their party on those issues that run counter to our ethics. There is an option between embracing a candidate’s full platform, and not voting at all. Still however, voting has to be part of a larger strategy of political engagement to be truly meaningful and when we elect a candidate, we are not electing a savior but an elected official accountable to us.

We also need to differentiate between how we engage society, vs. how we engage government. In regards to society, we lead the way in good, challenge evil in all of its forms either through political action or beautiful preaching, and demonstrate people-power through healthy coalition-building. When it comes to government, we hold it to justice, redirect crushing power to benevolence, and focus on economic justice. As [Ibn Taymiyya mentions](#), “God will establish a just nation even if it is a disbelieving one, and will destroy an unjust nation even if it is a believing one.” Power structures are meant to be held in check, and in the case of the United States, the Muslim world is the constant victim of her imperialism.

Unique opportunities

Islam is a religion of divine ethics and comprehensive notions of justice. First by looking at the Qur'an, one finds hundreds of references to justice and the pathway to an equitable society. Then in the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ are the most explicit traditions and pathways to how to achieve that society the Qur'an speaks of. Indeed one of the appeals to Malcolm was how explicit the anti-racism tradition is in Islam, whereas it is derived from other scriptures on equity in other faith traditions. This was the basis of my series [40 Hadiths on Social Justice](#) in which we studied the in-depth *ahadith* regarding social justice along with their explanations.

We also have the works of *Maqasid Al Shariah* (the objectives of Islamic law) that ponder upon the divine intent of the divine law that we may act in its spirit. In no way can *maqasid* be used to undermine clear cut dictates, but they can be used to guide us through difficult terrain. The Shariah is meant to preserve religion, life, honor, property, and intellect. As [Ibn Al Qayyim \(ra\) said](#), “Verily, the Shariah is founded upon wisdom and welfare for the servants in this life and the afterlife. In its entirety, it is justice, mercy, benefit, and wisdom. Every matter which abandons justice for tyranny, mercy for cruelty, benefit for corruption, and wisdom for foolishness is not a part of the Shariah even if it was introduced therein by an interpretation.”

Lastly, we have a history of contribution, ethics, justice, peace amongst peoples, etc. that originated through Islam. We pay close attention to the systems of justice under the likes of Omar Ibn Al Khattab and Omar Ibn AbdulAzeez, the legacies of institutionalized welfare programs for the benefit of residents and travelers regardless of their claims to faith, and how Islam dealt with a changing world only by changing it for the better. As [Dr. Khalil Abdurrashid writes](#), “Charitable foundations and endowments would become fundamental to the conceptualization and manifestation of an Islamic society to such an extent that it would become nearly impossible to envision the Muslim world without *waqfs*.”

Reviving that history is on us. As [Sr. Margari Aziza Hill writes](#), “We need a Liberation Theology—an Islamic Liberation Theology—one that reflects our souls as a people and our role in repairing a broken world. Muslim Americans must have a vision for collective liberation. Targeted by the criminal justice system, national security system, and immigration system, Muslims in America of all stripes are often overwhelmed by the onslaught and fail to make the connections with other vulnerable communities. While Muslim Americans of all backgrounds evoke Malcolm X and Muhammad Ali as examples of leadership, the language we hear today among our leaders is in stark contrast to the Holy protest of the Black Liberation movements they are part of.”

Unique boundaries

Just as Islam provides unique richness and depth through its preserved legacy, scriptures, and scholarly works, it also has unique parameters and restrictions. As other religious groups, particularly Christian denominations, wrestle with issues of reform, it's important to highlight Islam's distinct understanding of the process and limitations of reform. The Qur'an is the literal word of God, not the words of men inspired by God. The Sunnah is the manifestation of the word of God in the actions of the Prophet. What is authentically narrated from the Messenger in terms of his words and deeds cannot be separated from the message itself. This already

separates us from how our brethren of other faiths understand their scriptures, but there is an added level of difference in the scope of interpretive measure and that is the concept of consensus. While other faith denominations hold regular convenings and councils or have figureheads with the vested power to dramatically reshape tradition, Orthodox Muslims have no such equivalent.

As [Dr. Emad Hamdeh writes](#), “the theory of consensus (*ijmāʿ*) holds that it is inconceivable for the entire Muslim community to agree upon falsehood. Whenever all living jurists agreed on a particular formulation of Islamic law, this consensus raised the formulation to an infallible representation of divine will. The possibility of error concerning formulations of law only existed when jurists disagreed. When they agreed on an issue, the fallibility of individual jurists was erased through the supervening principle of the infallibility of consensus. Consensus set boundaries on disagreement in the formulation of the law, and the authority of the Sunnah was outside of those boundaries. Because dissent is the norm in matters of Islamic law, it makes any consensus all the more credible and binding when it occurs. In other words, the unanimity of opinion (*ijmāʿ*)—in a religion that has countenanced in its history a vast array of differences—is considered one of the strongest proofs for the formulation of law or creed. Ḥadīth, therefore, form a necessary component of the religion (*al-maʿlūm min al-dīn bi ḍarūra*).”

Essentially, *ijmāʿ* serves as our Pope and there is no changing it unless it is proven to have been claimed falsely. We do have a vibrant sense of *ikhtilaf* (difference of opinion) and *ijtihad* (religious reasoning) that has helped form the richness of our tradition, but to the Sunni Muslim of any school of thought, *ijtihad* can never violate *ijmāʿ*. Furthermore, *ijtihad* is meant to arise primarily due to changing circumstances and, to a lesser extent, new evidence. Public shifts of opinion wouldn’t influence the *ijtihad* on an issue. The point of this is to say that the role of human endeavor is far more limited in Islamic orthodoxy, even when compared to other orthodox expressions of faith.

So where does this leave us in regards to the future of American Muslim participation?

Some may say, well not all Muslims in America identify with Sunni orthodoxy. And they would be correct. But the reality is that the majority of Muslims in America do. And even amongst those that don't, Shia Muslims, being the second largest group, would be just as conservative on some of the pressing issues in Western religion today. Finding an Imam that performs same-sex marriages for example in any major Islamic center in North America, Sunni or Shia, is near impossible (I personally don't know of a single one). Now our friends and partners from other faith communities can certainly dislike and debate that reality, and groups that identify as progressive Muslims in the theological sense will certainly continue to attempt to change that, but it would simply be dishonest to say that there is any equivalent of religious progressives of other faith traditions in the Muslim community in terms of size and where they stand on some of the most contentious issues facing other denominations today. That certainly could make it awkward for those that consider themselves allies of the Muslim community and are simultaneously fighting for revisions of their faith traditions or positions that are not possible within normative Islam. But isn't that what pluralism is supposed to accommodate? Is erasing the particulars of our differences what's being called to, or harmonizing them in a way that we can peacefully coexist? Superimposing those religious conflicts from other faith traditions on Muslims can be both hegemonic and contradictory. Now, are we eventually bound for a bigger schism amongst Muslims similar to those faith groups? That is very possible. But those who want to engage our community and claim to be opposed to Islamophobia can't claim to work with the Muslims and sidestep, or worse threaten the mainstream, with their policies or positions. Interfaith groups are ineffective if they exclude the mainstream of any faith. Suggesting that orthodox followers of a faith have no room at the table for the betterment of society or in achieving justice is actually a form of intolerance. And antagonizing normative Islam while claiming to be opposed to Islamophobia specifically is also unfair.

As I wrote on the anniversary of the Muslim ban in an essay titled [I am not your American Muslim](#), “In our polarized politics, the liberal who limits calls of inclusivity to ‘liberal Muslims,’ and the conservative who will not stand up for the ‘religious liberty’ of a conservative Muslim both betray their own ideals. Frankly, more and more American Muslims are not willing to alter their identity to gain the half-hearted advocacy of any group that merely sees them as a political football. Just like other groups of Americans, we reserve the right to live in peace and be treated with justice just like everyone else, even by those who don't particularly like our religion.”

As one of the most famous Americans in history, Muhammad Ali, once said: “I am America. I am the part you won't recognize. But get used to me. Black, confident, cocky; my name, not yours; my religion, not yours; my goals, my own; get used to me.”

This has implications for two things: conditional allyship and tokenization. The expectation of groups coming to the table is that they are allowed to come to the table in the fullness of themselves so long as they are willing to work together on the issues on the table. They can have deep theological and political differences, but a strong desire to build a better nation in fellowship. And when groups tokenize the Muslim community by choosing our representatives for us that fit their tribal political schemes, right or left, instead of respecting the mainstream, their claims to fighting Islamophobia should be interrogated. Unity is not uniformity, though those that champion the former often demand the latter. If people can harmoniously coexist despite strong beliefs about God, purpose, salvation, and scripture, surely they can learn to coexist on political issues that are of far lesser consequence to them in their worldviews.

How do we work together?

The life of the Prophet ﷺ and his companions provide strong precedents for how we can engage society as a minority, a majority, in peace, and in conflict. What is

most relevant to our discussion is coalition building. The constitution of Madinah, the pact of Umar in Jerusalem, the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, etc. are all important, but not specifically applicable even though they should be regularly cited to show the strong inclination of the Prophet to harmony. While the constitution of Madinah guided interactions with other faith communities, the concept of interest groups didn't exist so *qiyas* should be exercised with caution. The peace treaty of Hudaibiyyah was signed with a hostile enemy, not neighbors of different persuasions. But two important lessons can be gleaned from it as we construct our framework: 1) Islam both seeks and thrives in peace. Not only was Hudaibiya a much needed way of ushering in peace, the *dawah* benefited tremendously from the ceasing of war; and 2) Clarity has to be maintained in any negotiation. While Suhayl Ibn Amr demanded things like “*Al Rahman Al Raheem*” and “*RasulAllah*” be removed from the treaty, there was no doubt or lack of clarity amongst the Muslims about Who the Most Merciful was and who the Prophet was. As we engage society for its collective betterment, we must retain clarity of our *deen* to the greatest extent possible. The most significant blueprint we have for coalition building in a multi-faith and multicultural society is the *Hilf Al Fudool* pact which we will soon elaborate on.

Muslims ultimately seek with and of their faith two things:

Preservation of faith:

Seeking to practice without being denied the right to fulfill any of the components of the *deen*. We insist on a dignified existence as American Muslims without having to relinquish our Islam to be acceptable to anyone else. Political acceptance without religious freedom in its true sense is of no benefit to us.

Participation with faith:

Beyond *dawah*, we seek to be people of service and active participants in the construction of a better society. This should not be for the sake of good public relations, but out of a sense of scriptural imperative. If the Prophet ﷺ was described as a mercy to the worlds, how do we become a mercy to our worlds? If

we are called to be witnesses unto mankind that establish justice for all, what does that look like for us as an increasingly vulnerable minority?

We have to use whatever means are available to us to implement the maximum amount of change our circumstances allow us to. As the [Prophet \(peace be upon him\) said](#): “Whoever among you sees an evil, let him change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart- and that is the weakest of Faith.”

Building out the framework

Coalition and Alliance building:

The golden rule of organizing meaningfully is to build broad coalitions around bold platforms. This means having as many partners possible around as specific a platform as possible.

The Sunnah precedent of this model is found as alluded to above in the Prophet’s example of participating in *Hilf Al Fudool*; i.e., the pact of justice.

The Messenger ﷺ said: Certainly, I had witnessed a pact of justice in the house of Abdullah ibn Jud’an that was more beloved to me than a herd of red camels. If I were called to it now in the time of Islam, I would answer it. Before the prophet ﷺ received revelation, a man from the tribe of Zubaid came to do business in Makkah. On his journey, he encountered a man who was from the Quraysh. The Qurayshi man asked him to hand over his merchandise and told him that he would give his payment for the merchandise the next day. There was no doubt in the Zubaidi man’s heart that he would receive his payment as people from outside Makkah respected and trusted the Quraysh. The next day he went to collect the money from the Qurayshi man who denied any knowledge of such payment. The Zubaidi man was distraught at the situation and went to all of the leaders complaining of the Qurayshi man who took his belongings. They ignored and dismissed him. The next morning he went to the Ka’aba, stood at the door, and

took his shirt off as a sign of desperation. He cried out and read some verses of poetry, addressing the Makkans as a people of dignity and honor, asking how theft and oppression could occur in the city of Makkah. Embarrassed about the whole ordeal, the Quraysh called a meeting to address the situation and the youngest attendees were the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr (ra). They came to the agreement that they would stand with the oppressed regardless of what tribe they were from. There were five tribes who made this pact and they were Banu Hashim, Banu Muttalib, Banu Zuhrah, Banu Asad, and Banu Taym. There was a notable tribe that was missing from this gathering, Banu Umayyah, which would go on to reject Islam initially and fiercely oppose the Prophet ﷺ and his message.

This pact was also called *Hilf Al-Mutayyabeen*, the pledge of the perfumed. They dipped their hands in henna and imprinted onto the Kaaba an oath that they would stand together in support of those that are oppressed. This was a turning point in the history of Makkah as historically Makkans were known to take petty conflicts and turn them into full-blown wars that would span several decades.

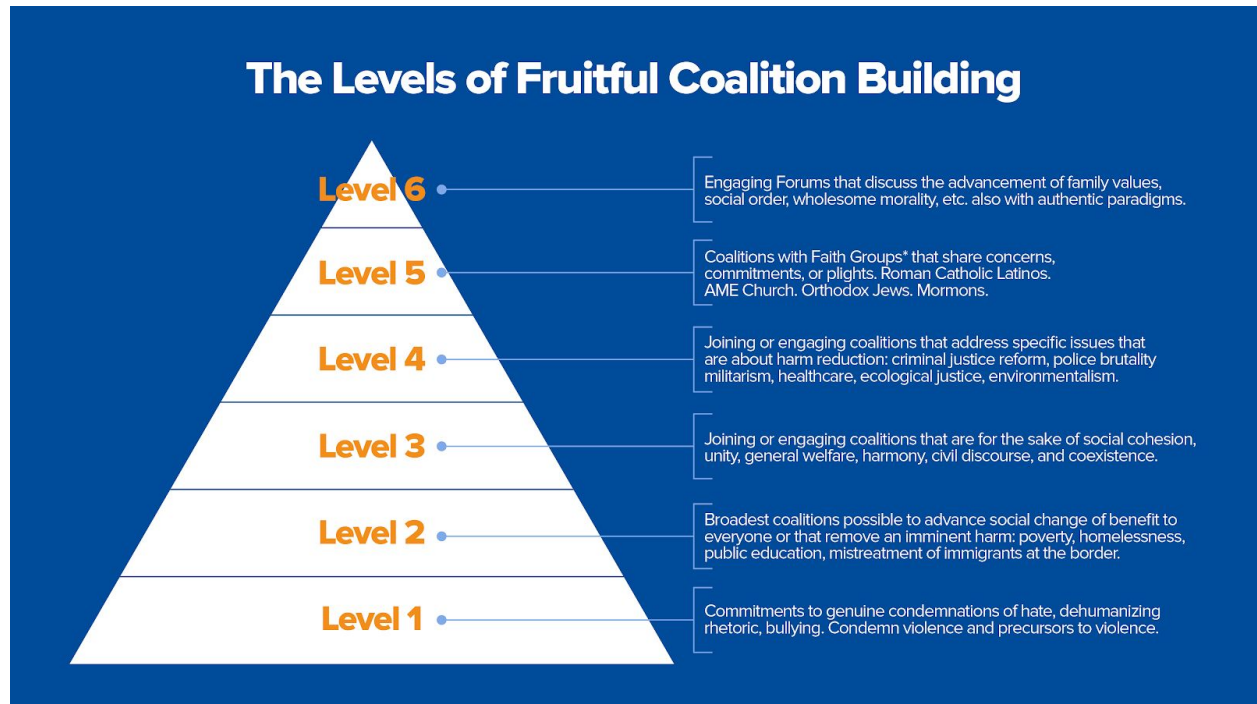
The Prophet ﷺ said after Islam: “I witnessed a treaty at the home of Abdullah bin Jud’aan. If I was asked to attend such a meeting now, I would answer.” [*Sunan Al-Bayhaqi Al-Kubra*: 12859] The Prophet ﷺ mentioning that he would continue to uphold the pact indicates that it was still in place when the Prophet said this statement despite the fact that many of the original members of the agreement never accepted Islam. The Prophet ﷺ also made it clear that he wasn’t abiding by it because he felt compelled to but because it was noble before and after Islam. He said, “I was present with my uncles at the alliance of the perfumed (*Hilf al-Mutayyabin*). I would not wish to break it, even for red camels.” [*Al-Adab al-Mufrad* 567] This took place when the Prophet was well situated in power after the Conquest of Makkah. The Muslims were confused about what should be retained from theology and seemingly good things done before Islam (i.e., certain rituals of Hajj) and so the Prophet ﷺ clarified to the community that *Hilf al-Fudul* would be upheld. This makes this statement all the more powerful because it’s easier to call upon the pact when you are one of the oppressed. However, he ﷺ was at the height of his power and maintained the integrity of this pact to make sure accountability was still in order. This pact gives Muslims a

precedent for the moral responsibility of all citizens to protect the weak, speak for them, critique the rulers and the powerful, and establish citizens' groups that advocate for the downtrodden. The Prophet ﷺ acknowledged that Muslims and non-Muslims could work together in such pacts and coalitions even if there were bigger issues that they disagreed on. The Makkans at this time maintained all sorts of idolatry, lewdness, and oppressive practices, but that didn't stop the Prophet from joining them in achieving this specific good. He wasn't normalizing their practices, he was addressing the specific harm of one of those practices that had tainted them collectively. The pact also teaches Muslims to embrace anything that is for the betterment of humanity in this life or the next. Allah (swt) says *وتعاونوا على البر والتقوى* "and cooperate with one another in *Al-Birr* (righteousness) and *Taqwa* (piety)" [5:2] Some scholars commented that *Al-Birr* means well being in this world and *Taqwa* means well being in the next. The purpose of any pact should be to achieve one or both of these goals. The pact doesn't only apply when the Muslims are a minority, but also when Muslims are in a state of power. The Prophet ﷺ was not an opportunist, but instead genuinely committed to achieving a more equitable society no matter what the benefits or implications were to him.

As for the nature of such pacts in our times, Imam Dawud Walid proposes the model of specific coalitions as opposed to general alliances as well in his book [*Towards Sacred Activism*](#). He lists the following reasons for doing so:

- Coalition is a collaboration which is usually temporary in nature and is based upon a narrow focus of issues
- Coalition partners do not have to share the same belief systems and methodologies in order to cooperate upon limited common goals
- Coalition partners can be in partnership on some issues while simultaneously be in opposition to each other on other matters

What follows is a proposed model for Muslims to work in for different purposes.



LEVEL 1:

Commitments to genuine condemnations of hate, dehumanizing rhetoric, bullying. Condemn violence and precursors to violence.

This starts with affirming the basic sanctity and dignity of every human being. Allah says, “And verily we have honored the child of Adam.” When a Jewish funeral passed by the Prophet ﷺ, he stood up and said, “Is it not a human soul?”

We then need to consider both the language we use, and the language we tolerate being used about other human beings. The Prophet ﷺ said:

At-Tirmidhi also related on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud (RAA) that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “The believer is not a slanderer, nor does he curse others, and nor is he immoral or shameless.”

{ لَيْسَ الْمُؤْمِنُ بِالطَّعَّانِ، وَلَا اللَّعَّانُ، وَلَا الْفَاحِشِ، وَلَا الْبَذِيءِ } ...

We speak with language that is courteous, even when we challenge those whom we disagree, and we don't let the bad character of anyone else drag us into such a realm. Instead, we teach with our insistence upon good character no matter what we face. This doesn't always mean turning the other cheek, but it does mean never getting into the gutter.

We reject bullying in schools, workplaces, and media spaces. We reject violence against anyone in our society, and vigilantism in all of its forms. We remain reflective on our own language and challenge others to do better as well. We check hate against us or anyone in our presence when we see it, and elevate the discourse.

I repeat, none of this means veering away from what is authentic and consistent as mentioned prior to this section. I'm also not referring to hate speech in the legal sense since that differs greatly from country to country and is sometimes used to unfairly stifle Muslims and others.

LEVEL 2:

Broadest coalitions possible to advance social change of benefit to everyone or that remove an imminent harm or advance an obvious good: poverty, homelessness, public education, etc.

Some would say broad coalitions don't work because they don't get to the heart of the issues. But these are the most important issues of our day and they cut across identities. Not only that, but you help people no matter who they are if they're in the condition you're seeking to eradicate, and don't discriminate in that process. Political tribes seek the welfare only of their particular tribes, and we have to transcend that. That doesn't mean ignoring systemic elements of these issues, but immersing yourself in them primarily as a member of the shared human family enables a perspective beyond politics or tribalism. This is, in fact, the purest form of *khidma* and where the majority of the community should be involved. It doesn't

require much political sophistication at all, just a high level of sincerity and dedication.

LEVEL 3:

Joining or engaging coalitions that are for the sake of social cohesion, unity, general welfare, harmony, civil discourse, and coexistence.

Muslims should lead the way, not just in reconciliation between Muslims and other groups, but in pulling society together as a whole. Wherever an opportunity presents itself to remind people to see each other as human beings first instead of political opponents, Muslims should play a constructive role. We need to teach people how to talk to each other again, and we have to start with ourselves.

Examples of this include Dr. Cornel West and Dr. Robert George, who hold opposing political views on practically every divisive issue in American politics today, doing a [joint series of lectures](#) on civil discourse and the importance of protecting both the right to disagree and maintain friendship despite those disagreements.

It's imperative we bring this out of the political realm and engage welcoming cities committees and diversity and inclusion groups in schools and corporations to be more balanced, and help define both healthier parameters for public debate, and better opportunities for social harmony.

LEVEL 4:

Joining or engaging coalitions that address specific issues that are about harm reduction: criminal justice reform, police brutality, militarism, healthcare, ecological justice, environmentalism.

This is where things mentioned in Level 2 are addressed at their systemic roots. This requires a deeper understanding of these issues, and a willingness to engage them alongside other organizers and groups.

Engaging these issues should be done in the following 2 ways:

1. Charitable endeavors within these areas: An example of this is the [Muslims for Migrants](#) campaign Imam Zaid Shakir and I launched through Celebrate Mercy in which we raised funds to actually reunite families by paying bail bonds. A group that does this in the broader sense is the [Believers Bail Out campaign](#).
2. Justice-oriented Prophetic paradigms: Be very clear that you are engaged in the issue both because there is precedent in the Sunnah to be engaged in that issue, and to the extent that the Sunnah teaches you to be engaged in that issue.

LEVEL 5:

Coalitions with Faith Groups that share concerns, commitments, or plights.

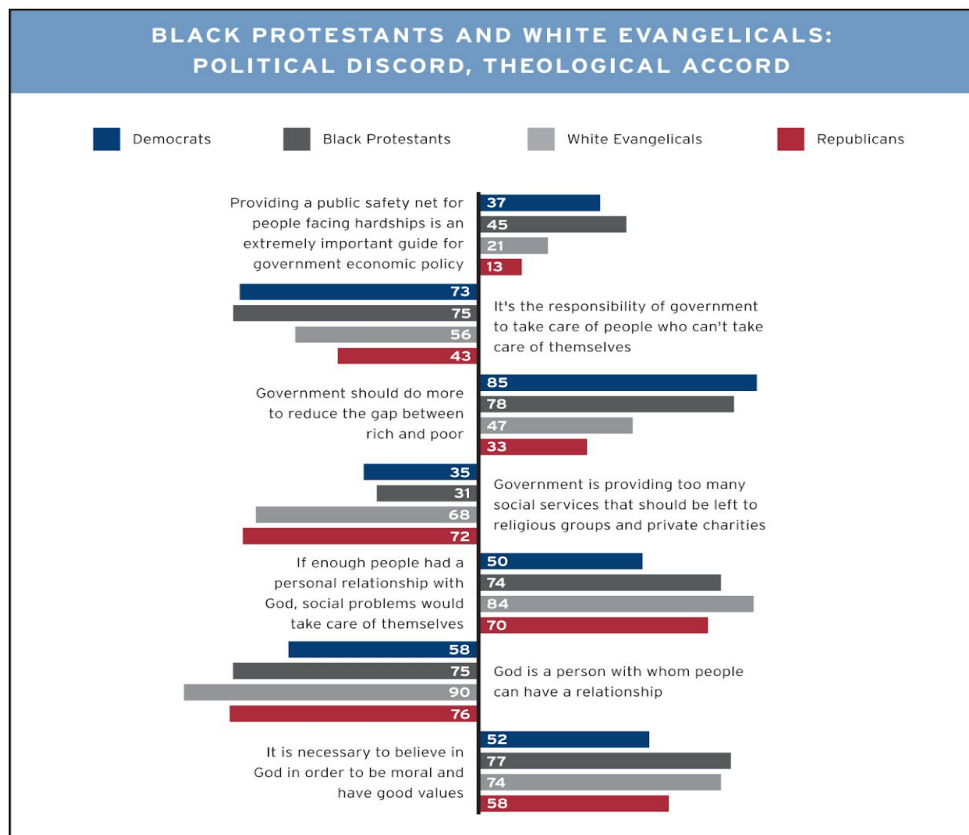
Muslims have to move away from operating within the forced confines of a political identity, and reclaim our space as a faith community.

As a faith community, we have religious concerns. And we share the dual burden of being racialized which at times puts at odds with the right and being religiously committed which at times puts at odds with the left.

We're not the only group that operates within this conundrum, but certainly the most visible. 68% of Latinos, who are at the center of the immigration debate, identify as Roman Catholic. The A.M.E Church, which is a historic church of black liberation with members like Rosa Parks and James Cone, is a socially

conservative church that was attacked in the horrific Charleston massacre in 2015. Orthodox Jews are visible targets as antisemitism is surging across the nation. We need to do a better job of broadening our multifaith engagement to include communities that share some, or all, of our plights.

As the figure below indicates, coalition-building is possible across partners as unexpected as Democrats and Republicans, Black Protestants and White Evangelicals, on issues such as the public safety net and policy frameworks that would speak to spiritual life.



As for the subjects of religious freedom and religious liberty, we need to engage with religious conservatives to ensure that we are not erased from that discussion. Typically, Muslims only think of conservatives in the sense of neo-fundamentalists and far-right Christian nationalists, but it is unfair to define conservatives in such a narrow sense. There are, even in the evangelical community, those who are faithful

believers who are genuinely worried about losing their ability to practice their religion without government interference. Expanding religious freedom advocacy to include Muslims and some of the other groups above would move it away from either being used as, or perceived as, merely a tool of political dominance.

Muslims actually do have genuine religious liberty concerns. We're not a powerful religious group trying to dominate others, but a vulnerable minority trying to maintain our faith without any legal ramifications. And there are other groups like us who feel the same way and with whom we need to work. When Beto O'Rourke as a Presidential candidate threatened to take away the tax-exempt status of religious institutions that don't perform marriages outside of their established guidelines, it was the collective pressure of minority religious groups that met with him privately that played a role in his walking back that statement. We need to use that example when dealing with any candidate that flirts with that type of legislation to say that it is unconstitutional and disqualifying with our communities.

A great initiative furthering ties between Muslims and Evangelicals is [Neighborly Faith](#) which recently [organized a panel](#) with J. D. Greear, the President of the Southern Baptist Convention, and myself at NC State.

LEVEL 6:

Engaging forums that discuss the advancement of family values, wholesome morality, etc. also with authentic paradigms.

The politics of White nationalism are as secularizing as anything on the left, and often cause religious groups to veer into overt hypocrisy. We have an opportunity to bring forth Prophetic paradigms that are far more consistent.

Beyond just ushering in our own ideas of marriage, sexuality, etc, intelligently, I think Muslims can uniquely address the harms of the over-sexualization of the public space from our TV screens to our children's school books. We can address

an age in which mobile apps exist where people shop through humans like products, and/or consume pornographic content that destroys the human psyche and dehumanizes both those in the films and those watching, not to mention its connection to human trafficking. We can call for a restoration of decency alongside others through things like the [Family Movie Act](#). We can also address issues like poverty and desperation that lead people to prostitution, without sanitizing the institution of it.

Further Considerations for Coalitions

1. Find balanced voices to work with on different sides of the spectrum. It's not wise to restrict ourselves to one side in totality. Even if we insist on differentiating ourselves in principle, our practices, if partisan, will undermine our own self expressed uniqueness.
2. Don't adopt others' blind spots. We have to stay true to our own positions as a community, even if we're in a highly ideological or partisan space. Many Americans feel the same, but often get pulled into championing [the lesser of the two evils](#).

An example of this is the discussion of abortion which is one of the most polarizing debates in American politics today. While 55% of Americans consider themselves pro-choice, most Americans are opposed to late-term abortions except in the case of saving the life of the mother but don't find themselves represented in today's political platforms. See: [Americans weigh in on backing candidates who support certain abortion restrictions](#).

3. Put pressure in the space that you are in. If they ideate in a certain direction that's positive, push it to consistency.

Example 1: When you're in a liberal setting, where people identify as progressives, challenge them on the exclusion of Palestine. If they talk about

cages at the border, why don't they talk about Gitmo and Abu Ghraib? If they talk about policing, where are they on militarism?

Example 2: When you're in a conservative setting, challenge them on how they uphold morality as sacred, yet overlook regularly the frequent moral discretions of Republican political actors including the President. Challenge them on their insistence on the sanctity of the unborn that doesn't seem to translate to born black and brown born babies.

4. Conditional allyship should be rejected. There is no rule of reciprocity that demands anyone to politically support an issue that contradicts their conscience. We do however sometimes assume this out of our own insecurity. Don't be afraid to articulate your positions in totality, and if someone doesn't want to work with you because of that, they're not worthy coalition partners anyway. But sometimes relationship building allows for suspicions to be cast aside to where you could have those conversations respectfully.

5. Differentiate between well-meaning individuals and big agendas. Agendas are driven by economic, imperialistic, and destabilizing interests and are highly self-contradicting. It's greed that drives it all. For example, when President Donald Trump spoke last to the United Nations, he boasted about his administration's efforts to push for the decriminalization of homosexuality in the dozens of countries where it remains illegal. That is not out of any love for LGBT groups, but because it serves his global agenda. Individuals are usually far less complicated. You'll often find well-meaning people who either sincerely want to support the Muslim community, or sincerely have hesitations based on misconceptions that you can rectify. Give people the benefit of the doubt and don't automatically tie them to things that are bigger than them.

Positive examples of faith-based coalitions and initiatives to study

1. Poor People's Campaign: Focuses on poverty as a moral issue. Welcomes all faith groups to organize around poverty, and connects the war economy and greed to it systematically.
2. Faith In Action (<https://faithinaction.org/>, formerly known as PICO National Network): Focuses on five issue areas: gun violence, healthcare, immigrant justice, mass incarceration, and voting rights. PICO's California Project led a \$190 million **public bond** initiative for public school infrastructure.
3. The Catholic Campaign for Human Development: The national anti-poverty program of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, working to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ "*... to bring glad tidings to the poor ... liberty to captives ... sight to the blind, and let the oppressed go free.*" (Luke 4:18)
4. Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA): Their mission states that they promote a "biblically-balanced, "completely pro-life" agenda: pro-life and pro-poor, pro-family and pro-racial justice, pro-peacemaking and pro-creation care. We believe this holistic agenda desperately needs vigorous voices that will challenge President Trump whenever he promotes policies that neglect the poor and favor the rich, disrespect women, neglect racial and religious minorities, and fail to protect the environment. Now more than ever, the nation needs evangelical Christians who vigorously work for racial, gender, and economic justice and help our fragile planet avoid dangerous global warming."
5. Faith Forward Dallas at Thanksgiving Square: Current initiatives include the community response to legal asylum seekers with Dallas Responds and conversations around housing solutions, racial equity, and gun violence.

Other programs include opportunities for civic engagement and prayer vigils on major concerns.

Potential problems and pitfalls

1. Are we normalizing *haram* because of who we work with? My hope is that we're actually neutralizing *haram* by providing an alternative. But this is certainly a valid concern. If following the *Hilf Al Fudool* model, no one bears the baggage of the other groups ideally due to the specificity of the issues, but reality can be different if we don't do a good enough job articulating our entire framework. People are interacting with these various realities outside of coalition frameworks as is, and the proper boundaries set within coalitions can hopefully offer some guidance for people in their day to day lives.
2. Can the same person or groups really engage all sides meaningfully? Probably not, so let's not undermine anyone in those different spaces who doesn't veer into *haram* or clear unethical practices. We also should try to be as longitudinal as possible so that we don't get restricted to one end of the spectrum.
3. Perception vs. Reality: you shared a platform with this person, this poster was behind you, this chant in the protest, this picture seems to suggest support for this, etc. Even if we never say anything against the Qur'an and Sunnah, a narrative can be created by the optics. Malcolm insisted, just a few days before his murder, in [an interview with Gordon Hall](#) who accused him of being many things, that he shouldn't be judged by the platform he was speaking on, but by his message to the public.
4. In a coalition, how much does one organization, personality, or cause dominate the platform to where it's only diverse on paper? This is also a very valid concern and requires careful deliberation upon each engagement.

While we may be speaking to the public, we have to constantly be aware that we may be used to impart a message that is antithetical to it. Every engagement has to be considered individually.

5. What if in the process of trying to craft our space, we become marginalized within that space? My hope is that if we become authoritative enough on important issues, we can exert enough strength to stay firm. But we have to be careful not to empower a space that is bound to suffocate us. It is natural that Muslims will always feel the pressure, especially as a vulnerable minority, to advance at all costs. We have to demonstrate that not all advancement is good, and there is such a thing as making strides with your religious principles at your center instead of cast behind you.

I do believe that Isolation is a losing strategy for Orthodox Muslims. Online, the echo chambers will get smaller and more disconnected, suspicion of the Muslim community will only grow, and our rights will be systematically taken away from us without us having any say about it. We need our own discourse that can be the basis by which we interact with anybody on any side of the spectrum, and that the community can line up behind with confidence. It would be ideal if we had our own theory of justice that can organize us. Until we build out our own frameworks, we risk reinforcing others even when we participate authentically. And to have a community agenda is not to neglect others, but to serve as an authentic expression of who you are.

I also believe that participating in an empowering way with our Islam is a means of preserving it. If young people are not confident in their faith and identity, their sense of contribution is either removed altogether or motivated through other frameworks. The logical sentiment at that point is that the pursuit of greatness comes through breaking the shackles of Islam, rather than embracing it.

Finally, we need to commit ourselves to constantly renewing our intentions, reconsidering our strategies, advising one another, and cooperating in good. I would urge scholars and thinkers to continue to attempt practical frameworks for

the Muslim community to consider that allow them to both preserve their religious identity meaningfully, and participate with it prophetically. This will require more forums, better working relationships, a willingness to engage the realities of our time productively, and putting our differences aside for the greater good.

May Allah make us sincere and firm, guided and guiding, and forgive us for our shortcomings. May He protect us and inspire us with the way of the Prophet ﷺ in this life, and join us with him in the highest level of *Jannatul Firdaws* in the next. Ameen.

Further Reading:

[40 Hadiths on Justice](#)

[Muslims and the Left: Can Social Conservatives Work in Social Justice?](#)

[The Conflicted Muslim Voter And The Flawed Candidate](#)

[My Islam: Not Dogmatic Secularism Nor Religious Fanaticism](#)

[Questions About My Political Activism](#)

[Yaqeen Institute Justice in Islam Collection](#)

[Towards Sacred Activism by Dawud Walid](#)

Examples of Service:

[Nurse Opens Domestic Violence Shelter That Gives Free Healthcare To Homeless and Uninsured](#)

[Speaking Through Service - Rami Nashishibi](#)

[A Peaceful New Life in a South L.A. Islamic Community - Islah LA](#)

[NY Drug Patrols - Imam Siraj](#)

Appendix I

Dealing With Conflict in Curriculum in Schools:

Imam Ajmal Masroor and LGBT Curriculum controversy in the UK:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WgIqohR4Jo&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0Dm-BU21mpqqL6xo0oyj7PZ2_DKQRvgqXIKtkB_3Kt8FwIY36TKL4W99k

Imam Mustafa Umar and LGBT Curriculum in California:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tYK8ADEyvlc>

Appendix II

The Challenge of Coalition Building: The Religious/Secular Divide:

Select quotes from the following Brookings paper:

[Faith in Equality: Economic Justice and the Future of Religious Progressives](#)

A July 2013 study by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and the Brookings Institution underscored the difference between the two parties. While a majority of Republicans—56 percent—could be classified as religious conservatives, only 28 percent of Democrats could be classified as religious progressives. The study found that while nearly one Democrat in five (17 percent) could be classified as non-religious, only 6 percent of Republicans were non-religious.

If the decline in religion's public standing hinders the Christian conservative movement, it also makes it difficult for progressive religious leaders to win the hearing they are seeking. It therefore hinders the creation of potentially fruitful secular/religious alliances on behalf of economic justice. This is a serious loss for justice advocates. Yet despite broad agreement on economic issues between religious and secular progressives, religious activists speak of regularly encountering suspicion and even hostility from their potential secular allies. Differences on social issues are almost always at the root of this secular mistrust, but there is also a larger suspicion of faith itself. In *The Left Hand of God*, Michael Lerner argues that the secular left "often sees religion not merely as mistaken but as fundamentally irrational, and it gives the impression that one of the most important elements in the lives of ordinary Americans is actually deserving of ridicule."

The association of religion with the religious right has exacerbated this tendency. Religious progressives reported finding themselves under increasing pressure to persuade secular allies that a hostile stance toward religion could still have high political costs and weaken potential alliances for more progressive economic policies. "One of our jobs post-election is to provide a strong counter-narrative to this 'Thank God we're done with God' sentiment," said Sally Steenland, Director of the Center for American Progress' Faith & Progressive Policy Initiative. She noted that the Democratic coalition includes many Latinos and African-Americans and that those communities have very high levels of religious commitment. "So the idea that this is going to become a more secular party and still be able to win elections is crazy."

The strengthening of conservative evangelicals on the right and secular liberals on the left has seriously weakened both religious moderates and religious progressives. Referring to the "nones," those who express no religious affiliation, Putnam and Campbell noted: "In 1973 evangelicals plus nones comprised 30 percent of the American population, but by 2008 these two extremes comprised 41

percent.” Such religious polarization has resulted in American’s religious affiliation aligning with their political inclinations.”