The Muslim Ban, MENA Migration, and the Shattered Dream of America

(Revised and Expanded)

November 2025

IMAGE FROM PROTEST AT DETROIT AIRPORT AFTER ENACTMENT OF MUSLIM BAN, JANUARY 2017
(photo credit: Gregory Varnum)

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I: INTRODUCTION

GOAL & SCOPE OF REPORT

Shortly after taking the oath of office on January 20, 2025, President Donald J. Trump signed seven Executive Orders (EOs) pertaining to United States immigration policy, including one to suspend entry of refugees into the U.S. through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). But this was not the first time the Trump administration attacked the refugee program.

The goal of this report is to begin to assess the short- and long-term impacts of two of the most infamous immigration-focused Executive Orders: 13769 and 13780; also known as the "Muslim Ban."[1] EO 13769, issued on January 27, 2017, and entitled Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States, blocked entry of people from Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen for at least 90 days, regardless of whether they held valid non-diplomatic visas. These two EOs have yet to be studied in terms of their impact on admissions of refugees and Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs) from the impacted countries. This report analyzes data produced by the Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS) in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the State Department's Bureau of Populations, Refugees and Migration (PRM) to assess the impact of the Muslim Ban on immigration from countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

MUSLIM BAN ANALYSIS AND LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

On June 16, 2015, Donald J. Trump burst onto the scene as a presidential candidate by announcing a virulently nativist stance on immigration policy. Ascending down a golden escalator at Trump Tower, Trump proclaimed that "the U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else's problems." The first country to draw the ire of then-candidate Trump was Mexico. Of Mexican immigrants, Trump did not mince words: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best … They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." Trump's protectionist immigration stance was embodied in the promise to build a wall on the southern border; a testament to his movement's zero-tolerance policy on illegal immigration.

Still, the ballyhooed wall was never completed. Instead, Trump disrupted migration to the U.S. for hundreds of thousands of people from the MENA region, including tens of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers. To properly assess the full impact of the Muslim Ban requires both a quantitative (using federal data sources) and qualitative (gathering stories from individuals and organizations) approach. This report uses federally available data on immigration and refugee resettlement, as well as interviews with staff at community-based organizations, to demonstrate just how detrimental the Muslim Ban was to Arab American and MENA American communities.

[1] "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States." Federal Register 82, no. 20 (February 1, 2017): 8977–8982. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/02/01/2017-02281/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states.

LEAD UP TO THE MUSLIM BAN

Trump's executive order announcing what is widely called "the Muslim Ban" in January 2017 was not produced in a vacuum. In many ways it was decades in the making—the culmination of ever-increasing Islamophobia that even pre-dated the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.[2] Even before announcing his first presidential bid in 2015, iconic New York businessman Donald Trump had made multiple, high-profile statements against Islam and Muslims, including referring to the "Muslim problem" in the United States multiple times during a 2011 interview with Fox News personality Bill O'Reilly, as well as weighing in on the infamous Ground Zero mosque controversy in lower Manhattan, by saying no mosque should be built within 5 blocks of the former site of the World Trade Center. [3]

Trump has repeatedly claimed, since at least 2011, to have seen Muslims in New Jersey cheering the destruction on 9/11. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, which were falsely blamed on Syrian refugees in the days following, Donald Trump escalated his anti-Muslim rhetoric by announcing one of the key elements of his presidential campaign: that if he wins the election, he will impose a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims" coming to the United States. [4]

The period in which he made this campaign promise was one of highly-charged anti-Arab and anti-Muslim refugee rhetoric, specifically directed at the soon-to-be-arriving Syrian refugees. Although at the time of the attacks in Paris there were only a few hundred Syrian refugees in the United States, the State Department had recently announced that by 2017 the United States would settle an additional 5,000-6,000 refugees from Syria. Just two days after the deadly Paris attacks, Michigan's Governor Rick Snyder announced what he called a "pause" in Syrian refugee resettlement to his state. [5] Gov. Snyder's announcement was significant for three reasons. First, it created a ripple effect across the country, and within a few weeks more than 20 other governors also stated that they were halting Syrian refugee resettlement to their states. Second, Michigan had been a key state for the resettlement of Arabic-speaking refugees from Iraq for many years and would be one of the top states for the incoming Syrian refugees. Finally, it was this national spotlight on the perceived dangers of Syrian refugees that emboldened candidate Donald Trump to champion his cause of shutting down all Muslims, refugees or otherwise, from coming to the U.S. [6]

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[2] For a full accounting of pre- and post-9/11 Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism, read Nadine Naber's introduction to her edited volume Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11 (2008).

[3] Justin Elliot, "Russell Simmons: Donald Trump is 'Insane,'" Salon, May 10, 2011, https://www.salon.com/2011/05/10/donald_trump_russell_simmons/, and Laura Mecker, "Obama Administration to Revamp Immigration Policy," Wall Street Journal, September 7, 2010, https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704644404575482093330879912.

[4] Domenico Montanaro, "Trump Calls for 'Total and Complete Shutdown' of Muslims Entering U.S.," NPR, December 7, 2015, https://www.npr.org/2015/12/07/458836388/trump-calls-for-total-and-complete-shutdown-of-muslims-entering-u-s.

[5] Laura Sullivan, "Governor Who Started Stampede On Refugees Says He Only Wants Answers," NPR, November 20, 2015, https://www.npr.org/2015/11/20/456713306/governor-who-started-stampede-on-refugees-says-he-only-wants-answers.

[6] Because Michigan's refugee population has been heavily Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) for the two decades prior to 2015, the drop in national admissions of refugees from Arab and MENA countries, due to the eventual federal Muslim Ban, dropped Michigan's state rank for refugee admissions from a high of 3rd in 2013 and 4th in 2016 to a low of 13th in 2018 and 10th in 2019.

II: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

ANALYSIS OF DATA ON REFUGEE ADMISSIONS

In Figure 1, we graphed the number of refugees admitted into the U.S. from MENA and Muslim-majority countries annually, from 2012 to 2024. For the purposes of refugee admissions, we are defining MENA countries as Syria, Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Egypt. Although there are other MENA countries, these are the countries that appear in the refugee admissions data.

Federal data on refugee admissions to the United States can be found in reports from the Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS) and the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP). Our graph plots the trend line in refugee admissions for countries that were named in the two Executive Orders that comprised the Muslim Ban as well as other MENA countries. Data are displayed for countries with total admissions above the median of 14. Countries that were named in the Muslim Ban are represented by a solid line, whereas unnamed countries are dotted. The years in which the Trump administration set the refugee admissions ceiling and administered the refugee admissions process are shaded (2018 through 2021).

Figure 1. reflects the felt reality that overall refugee admissions from the MENA region drastically declined during the first Trump administration, with much of the decline coming from countries that were named in the Muslim Ban. More specifically, Figure 1 demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of refugees from MENA countries have come from Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Somalia and Iran, all of which were listed in the Muslim Ban. During the first term of the Trump administration, refugee admissions from the MENA region plummeted across the board. Interestingly, there were declines in MENA refugee admissions from 2016 to 2017, which covers the final year of the second term of the administration of President Barack Obama.

ASSESSING OUR PROMISE TO MENA REFUGEES

The United States has a rich history of welcoming refugees. In 1980, a near unanimous, bipartisan congressional coalition passed the Refugee Act, which established USRAP, defined the legal status of a refugee, and created the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The Refugee Act of 1980 also conferred upon the President of the United States the authority to establish the “refugee cap” at the beginning of each fiscal year, which begins on October 1. For instance, FY 2022 began on October 1, 2021 and ended on September 30, 2022. The refugee cap is broken down into regional groupings, each of which is allotted a portion of the total ceiling. Most MENA refugees fall under the “Near Eastern/South Asian” group, with a smaller share falling under the “African” subgroup.

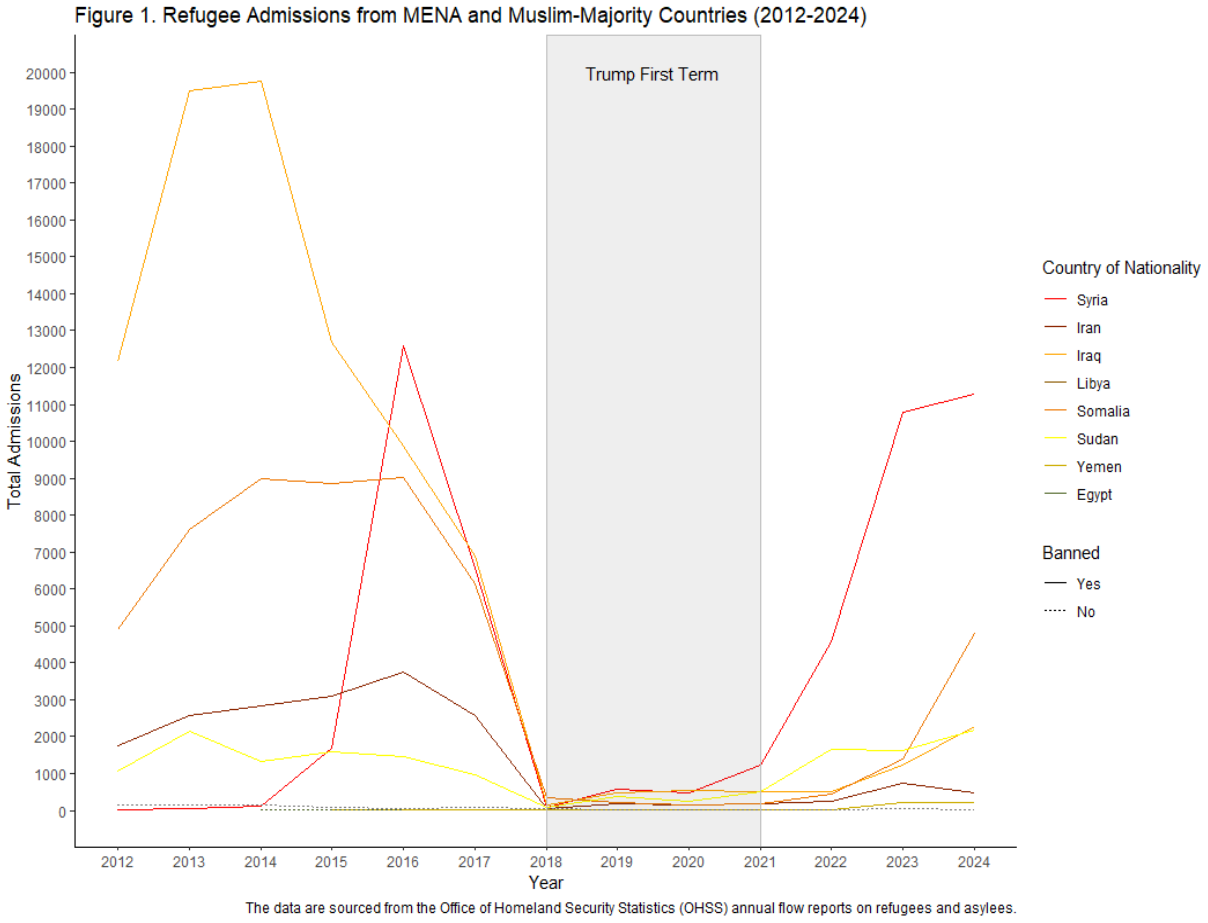
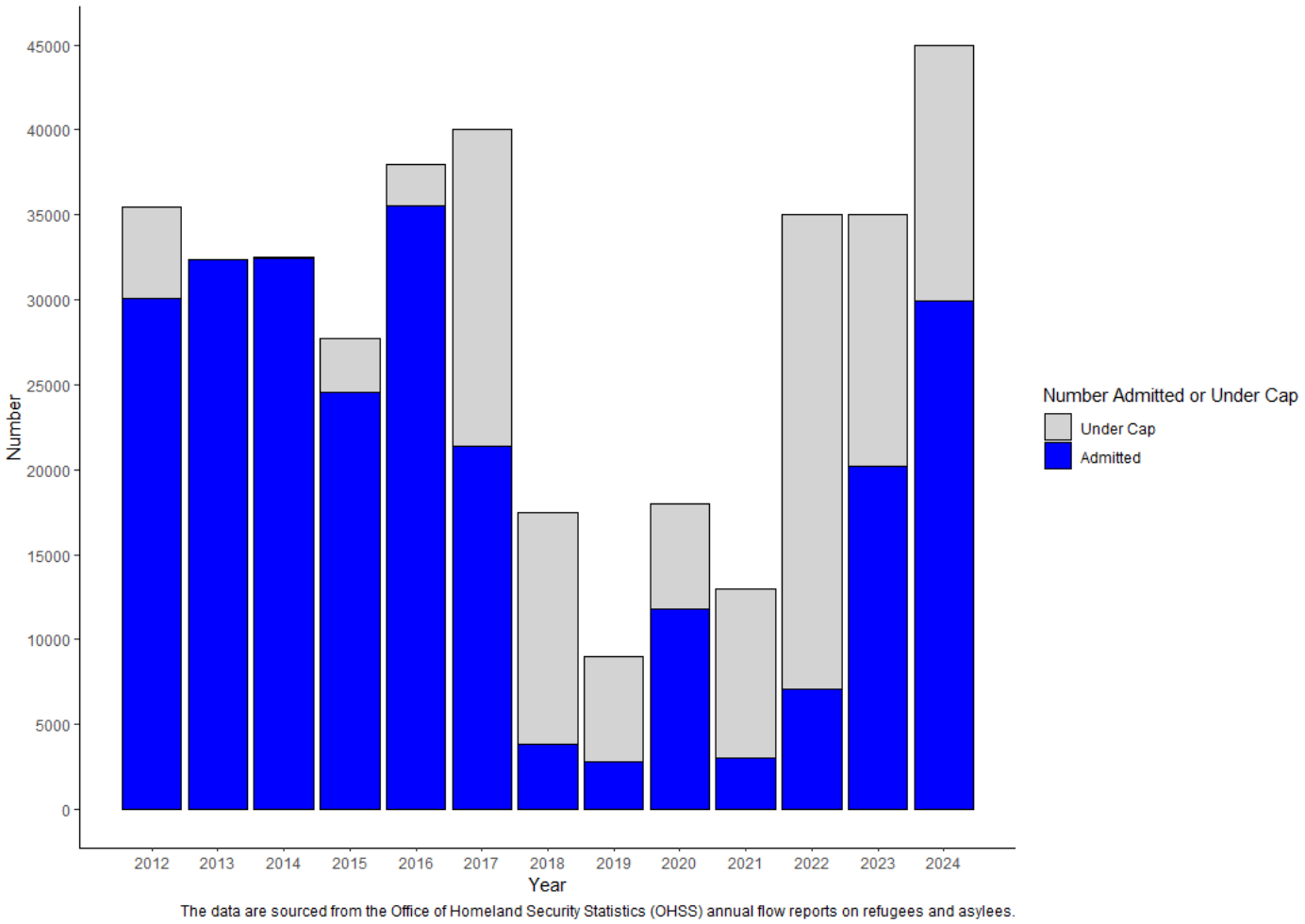


Figure 2 represents the trend in refugee cap set for the Near Eastern/South Asian group from 2012 through 2024. It also represents the gap between the refugee cap and the total refugees admitted from the Near Eastern/South Asian region in each year. Importantly, there is no guarantee that the total number of refugees admitted from a given region matches the ceiling set by the administration in a given year. There are a variety of factors that may limit the number of total refugees admitted each year, including changes in historic push (e.g. civil unrest, government persecution) and pull (e.g. economic opportunity, refugee admissions policy) factors. During the period observed, the Arab Spring, and its attendant upheavals, was a significant push factor. It created new populations of refugees and displaced people. On the other hand, Trump's Muslim Ban represented a significant change in the posture of the U.S. as a nation that welcomed new arrivals, which had been a "pull" factor for many of those seeking settlement in the U.S. as refugees. President Trump had also established a refugee cap far lower than that which had been set during the Obama years, which effectively imposed an upper limit on the number of refugees that could be settled in the U.S., regardless of how the "push" and "pull" played out. Once he had assumed office, in 2021, President Biden re-established the refugee cap to the level which had been set during the Obama years. However, Figure 2 demonstrates that the total number of refugees admitted from the Near Eastern/South Asian group during the Biden years failed to reach the level established during the Obama years. Interestingly, there was a similar decline in overall refugee admissions during the last year of the Obama administration, as had been observed in Figure 1 for specific MENA and Muslim-majority countries.

Figure 2. Gap Between Near Eastern/South Asian Refugee Ceiling and Admissions (2012-2024)



The data are sourced from the Office of Homeland Security Statistics (OHSS) annual flow reports on refugees and asylees.

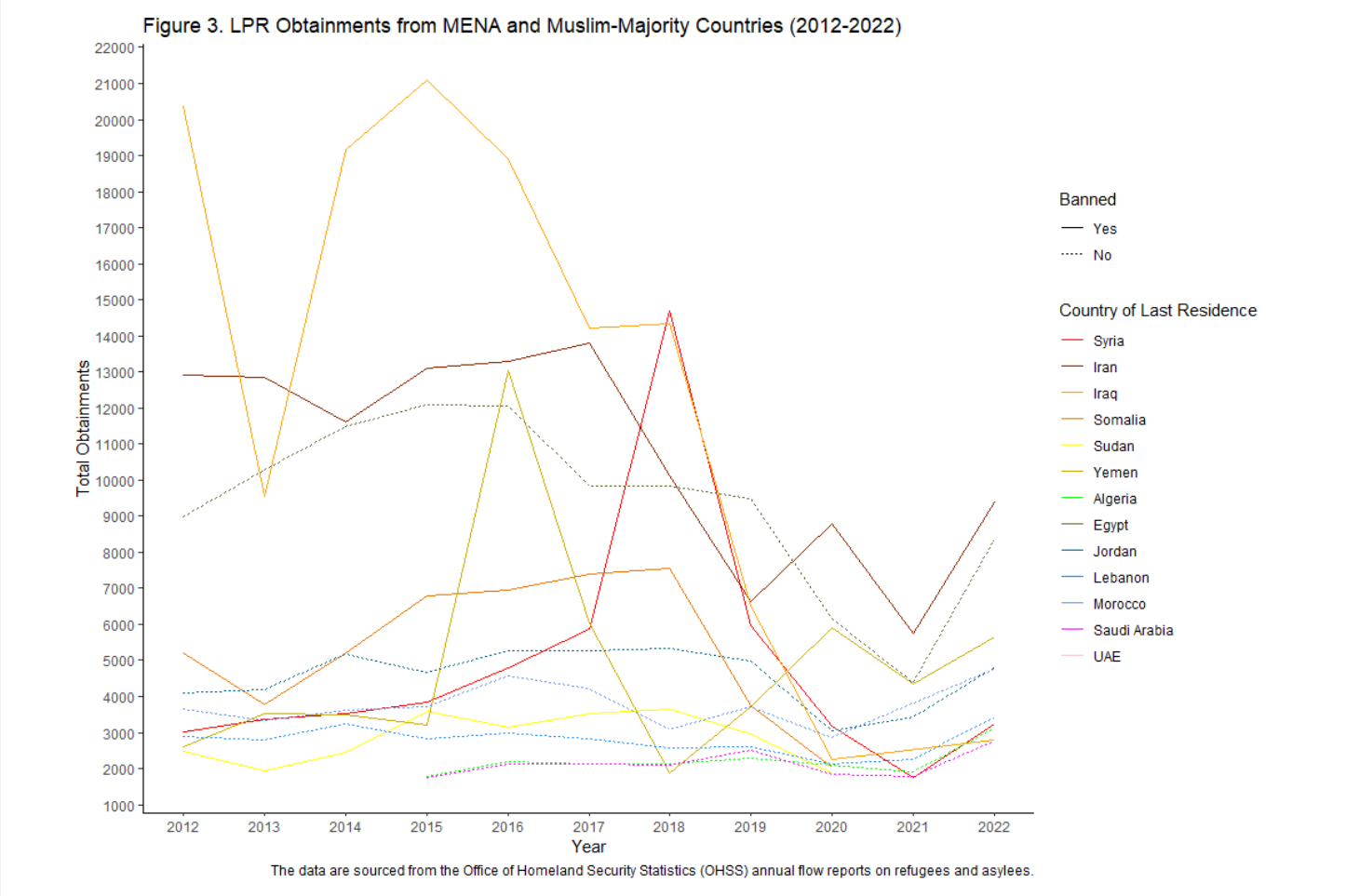
ANALYSIS OF DATA ON LPR OBTAINMENTS

Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs), also known as "green card" holders, are non-citizens who are lawfully authorized to live permanently within the United States. If they meet certain eligibility requirements, LPRs may apply to become U.S. citizens. Through the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), LPRs are granted several pathways -- classes of admission -- through which they may gain LPR status. The largest category of new LPRs (40 percent) are immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, though family members beyond immediate relatives may also be eligible for immigration. People may also attain LPR status through any one of five different categories of "employment-based preference," including "priority workers," "professionals with advanced degrees or exceptional ability," "skilled workers, professionals, and needed unskilled workers," "certain special immigrants" (e.g. broadcast employees, religious workers), and "investors who create new U.S. jobs." [7]

[7] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigrant Classes of Admission, Office of Homeland Security Statistics, accessed January 8, 2025, https://ohss.dhs.gov/topics/immigration/lawful-permanent-residents/immigrant-classes-admission.

Figure 3 plots the trend of LPR obtainments from MENA and some Muslim-majority countries during the years 2012 through 2022. [8] Data are displayed for countries with total admissions above the median number of 1,735 LPR obtainments for all MENA and Muslim-majority countries in the universe. Importantly, the data is not simply an aggregation of immigrant arrivals for each year but also includes status changes for people who came to the U.S. in prior years, whether as refugees, asylees, or under some other status designation. Conceivably, an individual could be designated as an LPR multiple years after they had initially entered the country. As a result, the data does not show a stark decline in LPR obtainments until 2 years after the Muslim Ban.

For example, 2018, the year following the Muslim Ban, still shows more than 7,000 Somalis obtaining LPR that year—but this number includes thousands of people who came in prior years as refugees and achieved LPR status during 2018. Another note is that Palestinian immigrants and LPRs are not listed in data as "Palestine", because DHS, like other federal agencies, does not consider Palestine as a sovereign country. Since many Palestine immigrants to the United States arrive via Jordan, Palestinian immigrants or LPRs are likely included within Jordan's numbers. Data on LPR obtainments from the remaining Palestinian immigrants are likely to be aggregated under the "Unknown" category.



[8] For the purposes of the LPR data analysis, MENA countries are: Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros Islands, Djibouti, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. But only countries with statistically significant numbers are included in the figures. For example, in 2012 there were only 74 LPRs from Oman and 315 from Libya.

LPR OBTAINMENT TRENDS FOR THE OVERALL MENA POPULATION

Figure 4 visualizes the overall trend of LPR obtainments for all MENA immigrants in the United States for each of 2012 through 2022. It demonstrates that overall LPR obtainments were also significantly negatively impacted during the Trump years. The number of total LPR obtainments from MENA immigrants declined from 81,757 in 2018 to 37,005 in 2021. In 2022, the first year in which immigration policy was shaped by the Biden administration, the total number of LPR obtainments from MENA migrants rebounded to 56,356.

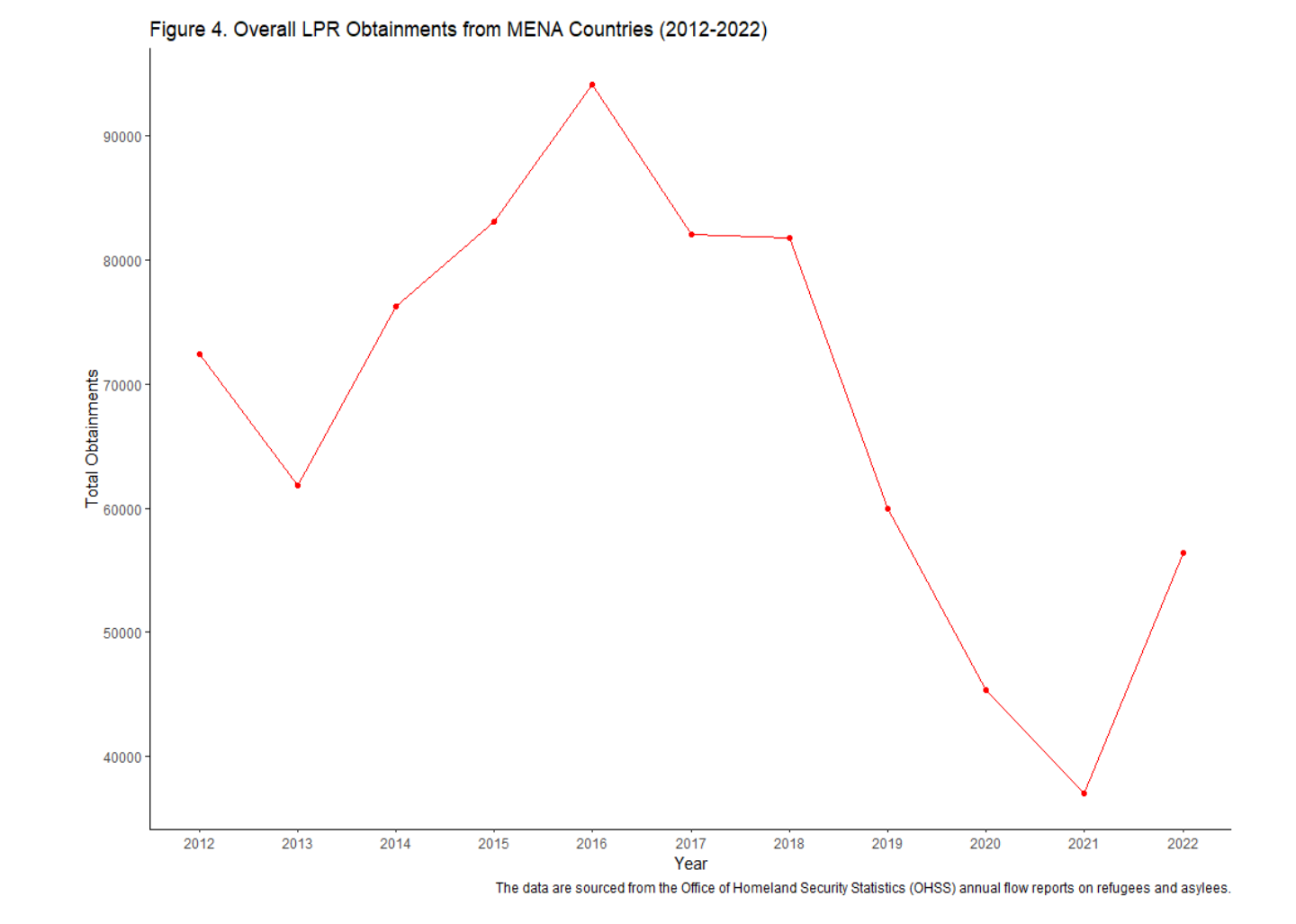


Figure 4 shows the impact of the Muslim Ban on the total number of LPR obtainments for people from MENA countries. The figure shows that overall LPR obtainments from the MENA immigrants declined precipitously during the Trump years, only rebounding after President Biden assumed office. However, the figure also demonstrates that overall LPR obtainments from MENA immigrants began to decline during the last years of the Obama administration.

TAKEAWAYS FROM DATA

It is clear from the data that the different iterations of Trump's Muslim Ban had a major negative impact on the migration patterns of Arab, MENA, and some Muslim majority nations. For certain communities, like the Syrian and Iraqi community, the effect was particularly extreme. In the years leading up to the enactment of the Muslim Ban, Iraqi and Syrian refugees, in particular, were being re-settled in the U.S. in large numbers, which was understandable given the scale of the crises occurring in the region. We also see that Trump's actions against refugees and refugee resettlement had deleterious effects beyond the Muslim Ban countries, as the total allotment ceiling for refugees was reduced by almost two thirds from the Obama-era high of 110,000. Through the LPR data represents a multi-year lag between arrival and obtainment, the Muslim Ban affected migration from the MENA region in general and not just the countries named in the Muslim Ban EOs.

THE CASCADING EFFECTS OF THE MUSLIM BAN AND COVID-19 ON MENA POPULATION GROWTH IN THE U.S.

As the Muslim Ban, in its different iterations, continued to impact migration from MENA and other Muslim-majority countries, the COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted the movement of refugees and immigrants to the United States. Prior to Trump first taking office in 2017, Obama-era refugee caps had hit 110,000; the highest point in decades. The Muslim Ban erased any chance of reaching that mark between 2018 and 2021. Even in the fiscal year shared between the Obama and Trump administrations, which ran from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017, there were only 53,716 refugees settled of the 110,000 admissions that were allotted.

The pandemic likely played a role in the Biden administration's delayed increase of the refugee cap. But even when Biden came into office with his plan to end the Muslim Ban, the refugee resettlement program did not immediately return to Obama era-resettlement numbers. Although Biden raised the allotment ceiling to the highest in decades (125,000), during his first full year in office (FY 2022), only 25,465 refugees were admitted. Disruptions to the refugee program which stemmed from the Muslim Ban were enhanced by those attending to the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the Muslim Ban was enacted in the year following the highest single total of Arab and MENA people coming to the United States, and on the heels of many years of steady growth, these two structuring events (Muslim Ban and COVID-19) heavily impacted the growth trajectory of the nationwide Arab and MENA population. It is difficult to discern how much larger the national Arab and MENA population would be now if the growth trends pre-2017 were maintained.

More research is needed to assess how the COVID-19 pandemic, which came on the heels of the Muslim Ban, further complicated the migration of MENA individuals even well into the Biden administration. For example, nationally, the average number of new Lawful Permanent Residents to the United States in the 5 years prior to the pandemic was 1,098,015. In 2020 and 2021, the average was 723,682, resulting in a near 35% drop in the number of immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers to the U.S.

III: QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Somali Family Services provides culturally and linguistically appropriate services in the San Diego area (photo courtesy of SFS).

Looking strictly at the available data on refugee admissions and Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) is a first step toward constructing a narrative of the ongoing impact of the Muslim Ban. But data analysis is not enough. One of the most striking impacts of the Muslim Ban was how quickly it disrupted the migration flows to communities and service organizations that had been preparing to settle and service migrants who ultimately never came. The following analysis explores this impact through stories from the migrants themselves and the service organizations that work to settle them once they have arrived.

BACKGROUND ON INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, RESEARCH SUBJECTS, AND METHOD OF ANALYSIS

To produce the qualitative portrait of the impact of the Muslim Ban, we designed a semi-structured interview protocol. We utilized this protocol to conduct one-hour interviews with representatives of Arab and MENA American community-based organizations (CBOs). One, Somali Family Service (SFS) of San Diego, CA, is a community-based social service organization that provides culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and services to refugee and immigrant communities in San Diego. Another, ACCESS of Dearborn, MI, is the nation's largest and most comprehensive Arab American community-based nonprofit service organization. The representatives of SFS had expertise in and oversight of program evaluation and general operations. ACCESS' representatives oversaw the organization's social service programs.

Our interview protocol covered four areas: 1) general background, including the services each organization provides, as well as the demographic characteristics and needs profile of their service populations; 2) the personal or individual experience of the Muslim Ban's impact on the interviewees themselves, including whether and to what extent they or their respective networks were impacted; 3) the Muslim Ban's impact on the communities their organizations serve, including whether and to what extent the Muslim Ban itself or the broader climate of anti-Muslim and anti-Arab hate and discrimination compelled any changes in health behaviors or service needs; and 4) whether, and to what extent, the organization identified any specific actions or interventions as particularly effective in meeting the needs of their communities. Interviews were recorded and responses were compiled into a dataset, coded, and analyzed into a more general summary of key themes and general takeaways. The following sections detail findings from the qualitative data analysis and summary.

IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

The Muslim Ban, as well as the rhetoric leading up to the ban, had a profound and multifaceted impact on Arab and MENA communities, triggering a wave of fear, trauma, and existential questioning. Individuals reported direct experiences of hate crimes, gendered Islamophobia, and profiling at ports of entry. Families were separated, travel was disrupted, and many community members began questioning whether the U.S. was a safe or viable place to remain. SFS documented widespread mental health concerns, including depression and isolation, particularly among women who felt unsafe leaving their homes. The ban disrupted mourning and caregiving rituals, as people were unable to visit sick or dying relatives abroad due to travel restrictions and immigration freezes.

Migrants from the MENA region experienced a sharp uptick in Islamophobia and anti-Arab racism in San Diego, which functions, due to its proximity to the United States' southern border, as a hub of refugee resettlement. Women that wore hijab bore the brunt of such targeted violence, due to their hyper-visibility as "others" — in this case, as Muslims. For instance, shortly after the election of Donald Trump in 2016, two individuals targeted a Muslim student wearing hijab on the campus of San Diego State University. [9] They made comments about her faith and Trump's recent election eventually stealing the keys to a car that was later reported missing. In 2019, a man, without provocation, physically and verbally assaulted three veiled women in San Diego's downtown neighborhood of Little Italy, a neighborhood in downtown San Diego. [10]

The increase in hate crimes had adverse, secondary effects on the behaviors of the local migrant population. One of our interviewees, a Somali American Muslim who works within SFS, framed it thusly:

[The increase in hate crimes] created a fear in me, for my family, specifically the women in my family – my own mother, my sister – to the point where … families were [advising one another] not to leave the house unless in groups.

Unsurprisingly, the travel experiences of MENA populations were significantly impacted by the Muslim Ban. Impacts were broadly felt, even among MENA individuals who resided in the U.S. or who had attained citizenship. They experienced discriminatory treatment at ports of entry, or at other points in the process of completing air travel. Agents of the

[9] CBS News. "San Diego Student Wearing Hijab Attacked; Police Investigating as Hate Crime." CBS News Sacramento, October 3, 2023. https://www.cbsnews.com/sacramento/news/san-diego-student-wearing-hijab-attacked-police-investigating-as-hate-crime/.

[10] Hamedy, Saba. "Man Who Beat, Slapped And Pulled Women's Hijab Charged With A Hate Crime." HuffPost, October 7, 2019. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/man-who-beat-slapped-and-pulled-womens-hijab-charged-with-a-hate-crime_n_5d9e19c4e4b06ddfc512adf6.

Families receive supplies and services during the annual ACCESS Back to School Fair (photo courtesy of ACCESS).

Transportation Security Administration (TSA) subjected them to secondary screenings on spurious grounds, questioned about the placed they had visited, and interrogated them about the purpose of their travel. The same interviewee remarked that their experience of secondary screenings would have been more negative if they were not an American citizen with English proficiency. This would have been the case for a large segment of the service population of SFS. More dedicated research and study must be conducted to uncover the disparate impacts of these practices on such populations.

For community-based organizations, the impact was equally significant. They faced increased demand for services, especially around immigration, hate crime support, and economic hardship. SFS noted a surge in clients seeking help with family reunification, hate crime recovery, and basic needs. At the same time, organizations grappled with threats to their own capacity—loss of funding, shifting donor priorities, and concerns about physical safety. ACCESS described the rise of manipulative actors exploiting vulnerable clients, while SFS faced media harassment linked to a hate crime involving the CEO's family. These pressures tested the resilience and adaptability of CBOs across the country.

Despite these challenges, community-based organizations emerged as critical lifelines. They offered protection, advocacy, and a sense of belonging amid a climate of exclusion and fear. SFS and ACCESS both documented how community members turned to places of worship and trusted organizations for support, even as they feared being targeted. These organizations responded by creating new systems of safety, developing internal policies, and expanding their services to meet the moment. The Muslim Ban, while deeply harmful, also revealed the indispensable role of Arab/MENA CBOs in sustaining community resilience and advancing justice.

RESPONSE FROM COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS

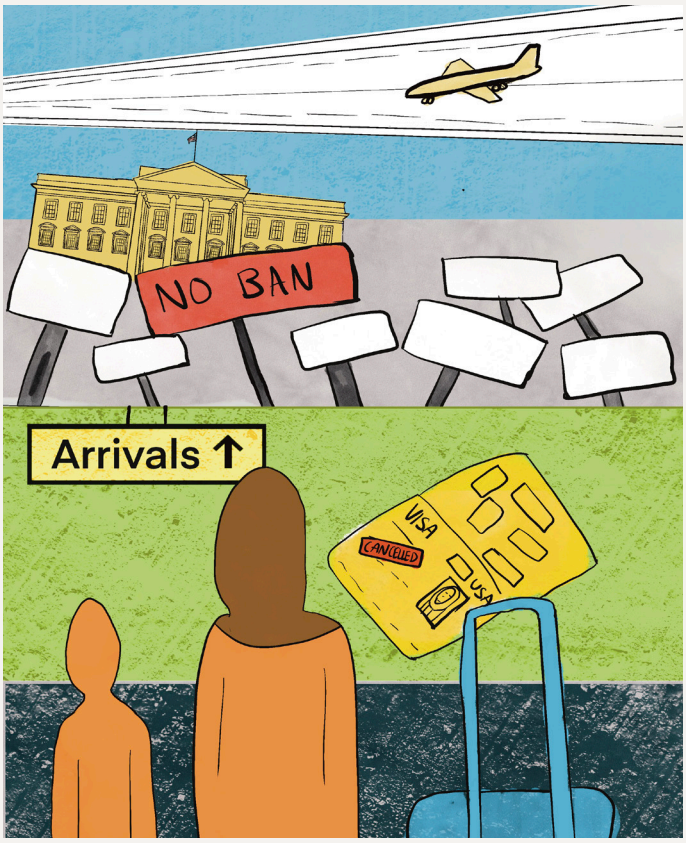
Community-based organizations like SFS and ACCESS responded swiftly and strategically to the first iteration of the Muslim Ban by adapting their service delivery models to meet urgent needs while protecting community members from heightened visibility and risk. SFS, for example, shifted to appointment-based resource distribution to avoid gathering large groups, ensuring that vulnerable individuals could access essentials like food and diapers discreetly. ACCESS similarly responded by purchasing vehicles and covering transportation costs for clients who had found work but lacked mobility, recognizing that traditional funding streams often excluded such critical supports.

These organizations also became hubs of emotional and psychological support, responding to the widespread fear, anxiety, and depression that permeated their communities. Staff members documented increased isolation among Muslim women, many of whom chose to stay home due to safety concerns. Community organizations stepped in to offer reassurance, develop internal policies for ICE visits, and create protective environments where people could still access services. In doing so, they not only addressed immediate needs but also helped restore a sense of safety and belonging amid a climate of exclusion.

Beyond direct services, Arab/MENA CBOs took on the role of public educators and advocates. Staff members actively pushed back against harmful rhetoric, engaged in discourse-shifting within their networks, and worked to reframe immigration narratives. SFS, for instance, restructured its funding applications to align with shifting philanthropic priorities, securing foundation support when government funding waned. ACCESS mobilized community donors and philanthropic allies to create unrestricted funds, enabling flexible responses to emergent needs. These efforts reflect a broader strategy of resilience, solidarity, and advocacy in the face of systemic hostility.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM MUSLIM BAN 1.0

Fallout from the Muslim Ban had a tumultuous effect on the broader MENA diaspora in America. However, in a sense, the community emerged from this period more battle-tested and resilient than they were before, having adapted to providing service and mutual aid within a more precarious context. Among the most critical lessons learned among community service providers was the importance of maintaining flexibility and responsiveness in service delivery. Organizations realized that traditional funding mechanisms often failed to meet the real-world needs of their communities, especially during moments of



crisis. ACCESS responded by using unrestricted funds to cover essentials like vehicle registration, insurance, and even school driving fees — items that federal or foundation grants typically excluded. SFS similarly adapted its outreach strategies to protect clients' visibility and safety, demonstrating that discretion and trust-building were vital in hostile climates.

Another key lesson was the value of diversified funding and strong relationships with foundations and community donors. SFS credited its survival during the ban years to foundation support across departments, while ACCESS highlighted the role of philanthropic community members who sponsored families and contributed to unrestricted funds. These experiences underscored the need for organizations to cultivate flexible, values-aligned funding sources that could sustain operations during politically volatile periods. They also revealed the importance of community solidarity and mutual aid as a buffer against institutional detachment.

Organizations also learned that internal policy development and staff education were essential for long-term resilience. SFS implemented protocols for ICE visits and trained staff to navigate new legal and security landscapes.

ACCESS documented the rise of manipulative third-party actors exploiting increased demand for public services like Medicaid, Medicare, and Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI). These actors, neither certified nor well-informed, propped up phony businesses, promised to help complete and submit applications, and pocketed the service fees. The vulnerable clients who sought assistance would leave mired in red tape; their applications taking week and, in many cases, months, to fix.

This prompted ACCESS to seek stronger vetting and provide community education. The lessons extended beyond logistics—they reshaped how organizations thought about their role in protecting, empowering, and advocating for their communities. The Muslim Ban

CONCLUSION

The first iteration of the Muslim Ban exposed the fragility of civil protections for Arab, MENA, and Muslim communities in the United States. It catalyzed a wave of fear, trauma, and displacement, not only in physical terms—through family separation, travel restrictions, and hate crimes—but also in emotional and psychological dimensions. Community-based organizations like Somali Family Services and ACCESS discovered that flexibility in service delivery, unrestricted funding, and community-rooted strategies were not luxuries but necessities. They became essential anchors during this period, responding with agility, care, and strategic foresight. They built protective infrastructures, developed internal policies to shield staff and clients, and cultivated relationships with philanthropic allies to fill gaps left by shifting government priorities. These adaptations were not merely reactive—they were transformative, reshaping how Arab/MENA CBOs conceptualize their missions, their funding models, and their role in civic life. The ban became a crucible for institutional evolution, revealing both vulnerabilities and strengths within the ecosystem of immigrant-serving organizations. Their interventions—ranging from discreet resource distribution to mental health support and policy advocacy—demonstrated the indispensable role of local institutions in sustaining community resilience amid federal hostility.

In June of 2025, the Trump administration reinstated an expanded travel ban, targeting several Muslim-majority countries.[11] While framed under national security and administrative discretion, the latest iteration of the ban continues to disproportionately impact Arab, African, and South Asian communities—echoing the same patterns of exclusion, surveillance, and fear. The contemporary immigration landscape remains volatile, marked by increased scrutiny at ports of entry, renewed barriers to family reunification, increased deportations, and persistent gaps in federal support. In this context, the insights from Muslim Ban 1.0 are not historical footnotes—they are strategic imperatives. Arab and MENA community-based organizations must continue to lead with vision, adaptability, and solidarity, not only to mitigate harm but to shape a more just and inclusive future for all.

[11] Steve Rose. "Trump Travel Ban Countries Face Increased Immigration Enforcement." NPR, June 9, 2025. https://www.nprorg/2025/06/09/nx-s1-5427998/trump-travel-ban-countries-immigration-enforcement. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/03/09/2017-04837/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states

As this report was being published, the Trump administration announced plans to reduce the total refugee admissions ceiling to 7,500, which would be a record low,[12] and a large portion of which will be reserved to resettle South Africans.[13] Both actions place them at odds with immigrant rights advocates, who have castigated the administration for its lowly commitments to the growing global refugee population while reserving a more welcome approach for populations of European origin. [14]

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NNAAC is a coalition of Arab American community-based service organizations, founded in 2004 as a national institution of ACCESS. NNAAC has grown to include 36 independent Arab American community-based organizations in 13 different states.

[12] Garance Burke. "Trump Administration Considers Letting White South Africans Migrate to U.S." Associated Press, October 6, 2025. https://apnews.com/article/trump-refugees-immigration-afrikaners-south-africa-04d8b794277c8380b041dda1e9725c83.

[13] Zolan Kanno-Youngs. "Trump Administration Cuts Refugee Admissions, With Focus on South Africa." New York Times, October 3, 2025. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/03/us/politics/trump-refugee-admissions-south-africa.htm

[14] Lucien Bruggeman. "Trump Administration Faces Criticism for Prioritizing White South African Immigrants." ABC News, October 4, 2025. https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/trump-administration-faces-criticism-prioritizing-white-south-african/story?id=121755687.