

“Honor Killings” and the Official Peddling of Negative Stereotypes About Muslims

*Trump’s Muslim and refugee ban Executive Orders include provisions requiring the collection of information about “honor killings” committed in the United States by foreign nationals. And yet, honor killings have no connection to foreign terrorism or national security. So what could explain that reference in the text of the Orders? **The Bans’ inclusion of these directives invoking “honor killings”—a term whose main use has been to attack Muslims by portraying them as uncivilized and violent – is a classic “dog-whistle” and provides further proof that these Orders were intended to target and discriminate against Muslims.***

Selective and biased application

- The term “honor killing” refers to the killing of a woman who is perceived to have brought shame upon her family by her relatives in the name of restoring family honor.
- Examples of this form of gender-based violence occur across a variety of demographic backgrounds. Still, and despite Muslim religious leaders having repeatedly condemned such crimes, the term’s use in public discourse is almost always linked specifically to Islam.
- The term is frequently applied post hoc to crimes committed by men perceived to be Muslim—even in the absence of any evidence suggesting religion plays a role in the crime—reflecting observer bias rather than objective fact.

Dog-whistle term used by hate groups

- The term “honor killing” makes frequent appearances in the speeches and writings of prominent anti-Muslim figures and the organizations with which they are affiliated, including Robert Spencer, Pamela Geller, Phyllis Chesler, the Center for Security Policy, ACT for America, and more.
- Anti-Muslim activists use the term specifically as a means of demonizing Muslims and Islam.
- The term’s inclusion in President Trump’s Executive orders is not coincidental. Instead, it is clear evidence of the anti-Muslim animus that exists, not just in the outside context, but also in the text of the Orders themselves.

Policy driven by prejudice

- There is no evidence suggesting that “honor killings” are a distinctive problem in the U.S.—or one that is in any way related to U.S. national security or the populations of the countries identified in the Muslim Ban.
 - For example, in 2014, a study commissioned by the U.S. Department of Justice found that “cases of honor violence [in the U.S.] appear to be rare in comparison to other types of crime.”
 - Muslim leaders have repeatedly and forcefully rejected the practice, and scholars have noted that Islamic law is now more commonly used *against* the practice rather than in support of it.
- Rather than being guided by national security interests, the Muslim Ban’s reference to “honor killings” is guided by an interest in reinforcing a xenophobic and prejudicial stereotype of Islam and the Muslim community.