



**Opinion**

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## The Southern Poverty Law Center has lost all credibility

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After years of smearing good people with false charges of bigotry, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has finally been held to account. A former Islamic radical who was expelled from the SPLC for including him in its bogus “Field Guide to Anti-Muslim Extremism” was recently forced to pay him a \$3.375 million settlement and issued a public

The SPLC is a once-storied organization that did important work in the 1970s. But it has become a caricature of itself. It has abandoned its original mission and now does not fall in line with its left-wing ideology and “extremist” or

Nawaz is a case in point. Since abandoning Islamic radicalism, he has worked with Muslim ministers and created the Quilliam Foundation, to fight extremism. He is not anti-Muslim. He is a Muslim and has argued that “Islam is a religion of peace.”

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So how did he end up in the SPLC's pseudo-guide to anti-Muslim groups? Well, he has become a leading critic of the radical Islamist ideology. The SPLC has been forced to pay a multimillion-dollar penalty because it was "wrong" and that Nawaz has "made valuable and important contributions, including by promoting pluralism and condemning both anti-Muslim and anti-Christian hate."

Let's hope this settlement is the first of many, because this is a pattern. In 2010, it placed the Family Research Council (FRC) — a group that opposes abortion and same-sex marriage — on its "hate map" because of the FRC headquarters with the intention to "kill as many as possible" and "sandwiches in victims' faces." He told the FBI that he had to

Unfortunately, many in the media still take the SPLC seriously. A recent [headline](#): "Jeff Sessions addresses 'anti-LGBT hate group' by the Southern Poverty Law Center in 2016." The Alliance Defending Freedom is a respected organization of conservative lawyers dedicated to defending religious liberty, and it just argued a [case](#) before the [Supreme Court](#), *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*. It won, 7 to 2. It is not a "hate group." If anything, it is fighting anti-Christian hate.

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In 2014, the SPLC placed Ben Carson — later a Republican presidential candidate and now the current secretary of housing and urban development — on its “extremist watch list,” alongside neo-Nazis and white supremacists. After an uproar, the group removed him and apologized.

The SPLC also lists Charles Murray, a colleague of mine at the American Enterprise Institute and one of the most respected conservative intellectuals in the United States, on its website as a “White Nationalist.” Last year, an angry mob of students, many citing the SPLC’s designation, physically attacked Murray during a speech at Middlebury College. He escaped unharmed, but the liberal professor who invited him ended up in the hospital.

Little wonder that Nawaz was not just angry but also afraid about being designated an extremist by the SPLC. He told the Atlantic in 2016, “They put a target on my head. The kind of work that I do, if you tell the wrong kind of Muslims that I’m an extremist, then that means I’m a target.”

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Unfortunately, the settlement that the SPLC reached with Nawaz is not likely to deter it from smearing others — \$3.4 million is a drop in the bucket for the center, which raised \$132 million between November 2016 and October 2017 and has a \$477 million endowment, including a reported \$92 million in offshore accounts. Sliming conservatives is big business.

The only way to stop the SPLC is if people stop giving it money and the media stop quoting it or taking it seriously. The SPLC once did important work fighting the Ku Klux Klan. But when it declares Maajid Nawaz, the Family Research Council, Ben Carson and Charles Murray as moral equivalents of the Klan, it loses all integrity and credibility.

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