



Republicans go all-in on 'Sharia law' attacks ahead of Texas primary

From the Senate primary to local races, Republicans are pledging to fight the supposed spread of radical Islam



Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) walks to a Senate Republican Conference luncheon at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, on Dec. 3, 2025. | Francis Chung/POLITICO

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Anti-Muslim rhetoric has emerged as a potent ingredient in the looming Texas Republican primary while candidates compete to raise fears about the spread of Sharia law in the state and portray themselves as the toughest option to stand against it.

From the state's white-hot GOP Senate primary down to local races, Republican candidates are pledging to fight the hardest against a proposed residential development of 1,000 homes centered around a Mosque north of Dallas, while issuing dire warnings about the supposed threat of Islam and questioning their opponents' commitment to the cause.

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Sen. John Cornyn (R-Texas) and his top primary opponent, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, have sparred in attack ads and on the trail over that project and Afghan refugee resettlement program, at times veering into inflammatory anti-Islamic rhetoric. Cornyn called for a federal investigation into the project; Paxton launched several probes and in December sued the development over alleged securities fraud.

Texas is a heavily diverse state, with non-Hispanic whites representing less than two fifths of its total population — a flashpoint for years on the right. The state's relatively small but fast-growing Muslim population has become a charged issue for Republicans seeking to distinguish themselves in competitive races. This year's GOP ads — which vary from condemning terror attacks to

burning the Quran – represent an escalation of rhetoric the party has long used to rally its voters.

“The Muslim community is the boogeyman for this cycle,” said Texas GOP consultant Vinny Minchillo. “One hundred percent this message works – there’s no question about it. This has been polled up one side and down the other, and with Texas Republican primary voters, it works. It is a thing they are legitimately scared of.”

Muslim advocacy organizations and Democrats decry the ads as racist and grossly inaccurate characterizations of those communities.

“The Texas GOP has declared war on Islam in Texas, claiming that Islamic leaders in the state are implementing Sharia law and using it in court,” said Joel Montfort, a north Texas-based Democratic strategist. “None of it is true, it is just fearmongering and racism to stir up the GOP base and get them to vote.”

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A POLITICO review identified ads in half a dozen races since the start of 2025 that highlighted “Sharia law,” according to data from AdImpact, which tracks political advertising. All were from or backing Republican candidates touting their fights against it, and most were common in Texas.

Last week, Cornyn launched a seven-figure [ad](#) buy titled “Evil Face” that declares “radical Islam is a bloodthirsty ideology,” referencing the Oct. 7 Hamas attack against Israel and December Bondi Beach shooting in Australia. The ad also references his bill to revoke the tax-exempt status of Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Muslim advocacy organization.

Paxton has [gone after](#) Cornyn’s past support of an Afghan refugee resettlement program. And in his capacity as attorney general, Paxton [said](#) the project is an “illegal land development scheme” and its leaders are “engaged in a radical plot to destroy hundreds of acres of beautiful Texas land and line their own pockets.”

In the four-way GOP race for Texas attorney general, candidate Aaron Reitz says in an [ad](#) out this week that “Islam is not compatible with Western civilization” and vows to “stop the invasion” of Muslims. Reitz served less than a year in the Justice Department before launching his bid for attorney general. His opponent, state Sen. Mayes Middleton, also has an [ad](#) boasting that he’s running to “stop Sharia law” in Texas.

And, most provocatively, Valentina Gomez [launched](#) her candidacy in Texas' 31st Congressional District last year with a video showing her burning a Quran and declaring that “your daughters will be raped and your sons beheaded, unless we stop Islam once and for all.” Gomez, who is challenging President Donald Trump-endorsed Rep. John Carter (R-Texas), is a known conservative activist and provocateur who won just 8 percent of the primary vote when she ran for Missouri secretary of state last year.

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Anti-muslim sentiment in the U.S. grew out of the 9/11 terror attacks, which some Republicans used to rally their base for political gain. False rumors on the right that Barack Hussein Obama was a secret Muslim persisted [from his rise to the White House](#) and for years after. The planned construction of a mosque blocks from Ground Zero became a right-wing cause celebre early in his presidency, with multiple national Republican figures rallying against it.

Trump intensified those feelings, first by elevating conspiracy theories that Obama wasn't born in the U.S., then by repeatedly disparaging Muslims, pledging in his 2016 campaign to ban Muslims from entering the country and once he became president implementing travel bans against majority-Muslim countries. On Tuesday, Trump [reposted](#) a comment calling Islam a “cult.”

But in recent years Islam hasn't been as much of a focus within GOP campaigns — until now.

The Texas ads come as Republicans nationwide have placed heightened scrutiny on CAIR, the largest Muslim advocacy group in the U.S. Sameeha Rizvi, CAIR Action Texas Policy and Advocacy Coordinator, called Cornyn's ad "defamatory and despicable" and borne out of "desperation to compete with Ken Paxton's anti-Muslim bigotry."

"CAIR is not going anywhere, American Muslims are not going anywhere, and our community will show its strength at the ballot box, God willing," Rizvi said in a statement.

Cornyn has introduced legislation seeking to revoke CAIR's tax-exempt status. U.S. Rep Chip Roy, who is also in the Texas attorney general race, introduced a similar bill last year.

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When a super PAC on behalf of Cornyn launched an [attack](#) against Paxton on Thursday, calling him "weird" and highlighting his divorce and alleged extramarital affairs, Paxton [shot back](#) on X : "This desperate hail mary can't erase the fact that he [Cornyn] helped radical Islamic Afghans invade Texas and that his family's making a fortune securing visas for foreigners."

Paxton was referencing Cornyn's past support for increasing the number of Special Immigrant Visas available to Afghans following the Taliban's 2021 takeover of the country. Cornyn, who had once been supportive of the program, [reversed course](#) along with other Republicans late last year following the

shooting of two National Guard members by an Afghan who'd been granted asylum in the U.S., on the basis that the vetting of applicants was inadequate.

Cornyn has responded to Paxton's attacks with a [digital ad](#) stating that Paxton talks tough but he's actually "soft on radical Islam," claiming that Paxton directed \$2.5 million to resettle Afghan refugees in Texas, and his former attorney who defended him during impeachment proceedings now represents the East Plano Islamic Center.

Several ads from different candidates in Texas use footage of the project from the East Plano Islamic Center, which would also feature a K-12 school and retail. Texas leaders, including Gov. Greg Abbott, have said that the presence of the planned Muslim community raises national security concerns. The East Plano Islamic Center did not respond to a request for comment.

"Texans overwhelmingly care about this – they're looking at their communities transform in radical ways," said Reitz, the attorney general candidate.

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"You look at the number of mosques that have been built in Texas in just the last 10 to 20 years, and it's explosive," he said. "It's alarming for good reason, and I think that Republican voters in particular are looking for their public office holders to address it, and so it's such a pressing issue that I chose to really lean into this."

Cornyn's ad declares that "Sharia law has no place in American courts or communities," a reference to the development. Trump's Justice Department also launched a civil rights investigation into the project last year after Cornyn requested the federal government to investigate "religious discrimination."

The project was already on the radar of Paxton, who had opened his first of several probes into its construction. In December, Paxton — whose candidacy is boosted by his reputation as an aggressive attorney general who frequently files lawsuits on behalf of MAGA causes — [sued](#) the development for alleged securities fraud.

The Justice Department quietly [closed](#) its investigation last summer without filing any charges. But Abbott still went forward and signed multiple laws last year that banned "Sharia compounds" and designating CAIR and Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist organizations. CAIR sued Texas in response, arguing the action was unconstitutional and defamatory.

Paxton, in his official capacity as attorney general, [said](#) last week that the state comptroller can exclude private schools from the school voucher program if they violate the recently signed anti-terror laws, declaring that "Texans' tax dollars should never fund Islamic terrorists or America's enemies."

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story misstated John Cornyn's level of involvement in legislation to revoke CAIR's tax-exempt status. He introduced it.

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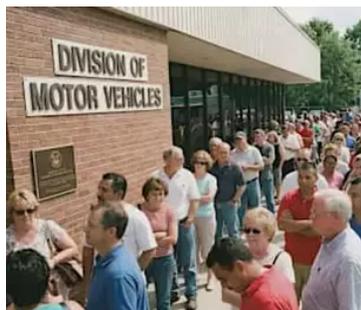
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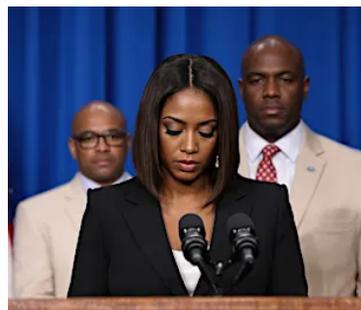
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