

Messaging for Current Conversations:

Talking About the Muslim Ban

April 2018

On April 25, the Supreme Court heard *Trump v. Hawaii*, one of the legal challenges to the Trump administration's Muslim Ban, which had been blocked by the courts time and time again. Before the end of June, the Court will issue its decision in the case. It's time to remind key audiences that this ban is an obvious violation of our values. We suggest a Value, Problem, Solution, Action structure when building messages about the ban; see examples below.

Values

Communications research shows that audiences are more receptive to new arguments when they are framed by shared values. For recent Executive Orders, there are three sets of recurring values that we want to keep at the center of the conversation:

1) Our Core National Values

Remind people of the kind of country we want to be, drawing on our best ideals. For some audiences, describing times in our history when we have done the right thing is inspiring.

Values: Opportunity, freedom, justice, dignity, fairness, our founding legal documents.

- *We believe in religious freedom. We believe in equality of opportunity. We welcome our Muslim, immigrant, and refugee neighbors. #NoMuslimBanEver* – ReThink Media
- *“Americans now face a choice: Do we stand up for our highest values, treating others with dignity, fairness, and respect? Or do we succumb to bigotry and fear, allowing ourselves to be divided on the basis of faith or nation of origin?”* – Azadeh Shahshahani, Project South
- *“A nation founded with the promise of religious freedom. This nation wants to ban Muslim immigrants? #NoBanNoWall”* – Franchesca Ramsey, Youtuber

2) Our Moral Responsibility

Remind audiences of our responsibilities to our fellow humans and how we must rise above fear and xenophobia to find our “better angels” as Abraham Lincoln once said. We share responsibility for one another and for protecting and uplifting human rights.

Values: Empathy, compassion, community.

- *“Having once borne the brunt of severe discriminatory treatment, particularly in the immigration context, the Catholic Church will not sit silent while others suffer on account of their religion.”* – U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic Charities USA and Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., Amicus brief
- *Today and every day, I stand proudly with my Muslim neighbors for religious freedom. #NoMuslimBanEver* – ReThink Media
- *“All of us deserve to feel safe from hatred and to live and pray in peace. The Muslim Ban has no place in our society—not now, not ever.”* – American Friends Service Committee

3) Our “Can-do” Spirit

Audiences are hungry for solutions in times like these. We have to remember to highlight what we want moving forward – and how we can get there – in addition to pointing out what we’re against. Sympathetic audiences need to be primed to feel proud of our country’s capacity to accommodate all kinds of people, and our history of providing opportunity for those seeking it. Those in our base need to hear forward-leaning messages about working together to counter, demolish, and replace bad policies.

Values: Pragmatism, common sense, innovation, determination to do the right thing, our shared responsibility to fix flawed policies, solidarity.

- *“The technological and scientific breakthroughs that fuel the economic engine of the country — search, cloud computing, social media, artificial intelligence, faster and faster microprocessors, the Internet of Everything, reusable spacecraft — were all made possible by the ingenuity, imagination and invention of newcomers to America, including Muslims from across the world.”* – Amicus brief filed by 58 tech companies in opposition to the ban.
- *“Amici (the schools submitting the brief) have long recognized the importance of attracting international students, faculty, staff, and scholars. International scholars and faculty share important insights about the conditions, traditions, and cultural values and practices of their home nations. Their work leads to critical advancements across all disciplines, from science and technology to arts and letters, often through cross-border collaborations that enhance teaching and research. ... The benefits of international diversity in American higher education thus inure not only to colleges and universities themselves, but to the country and indeed the world.”* – Amicus brief from 30 universities in opposition to ban.

Problem

Frame problems as threats to our shared values. This is the place to pull out stories and statistics that are likely to resonate with the target audience. But choose facts carefully. We all have a lot of evidence to support our claims. However, facts do not tend to change minds if the facts are not couched in values.

- *"The Muslim ban, in all of its iterations, is nothing more than religious intolerance masquerading as an attempt to address (unfounded) security concerns."* – Amicus brief filed by the Muslim Justice League and other Muslim rights groups.
- *The Trump Administration is threatening to close our doors on Muslims, immigrants, and refugees. But as citizens of this nation, we're laying out our welcome mats. #NoMuslimBanEver* – ReThink Media

Solution

Pivot quickly to solutions. Positive solutions leave people with choices, ideas, and motivation. They are the hero of the story and rescue the values at stake. In the case of these Executive Orders, our existing laws and their enforcement, our resiliency, and our values will all point us in the right direction when it comes to solutions.

- *"I think this is a problem that will need diplomatic solutions, political solutions, military solutions, educational, social, and other solutions. So, this is a problem that is multi-faceted and therefore requires a multi-faceted solution. Muslims are an integral part of that solution."* – Dr. Khalid Qazi, Muslim Public Affairs Council of Western New York.

Action

Assign an action. What can this specific target audience do? Try to give them something concrete that they can picture themselves doing: making a phone call, sending an email. Steer clear of vague "learn more" messages, when possible. For people who have only recently become active due to the events of the past few months, it is particularly important to be explicit about action. Include specific steps and assurances that they can help make a difference by following through.

- *Join us in standing outside #SCOTUS with so many other orgs on April 25th & laying out our welcome mats for those abroad. #NoMuslimBanEver*
- *On April 25th, we're laying out our welcome mats for our Muslim neighbors in front of #SCOTUS. Bring your own and tell the world: we stand for religious freedom. #NoMuslimBanEver* – ReThink Media

VP SA Examples:

Value

America is a nation of values, founded on an idea - that all men and women are created equal. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all people have rights, no matter what they look like or where they came from. So how we treat new and potential immigrants reflects our commitment to the values that define us as Americans.

Problem

The ban on immigrants from these seven countries violates our most basic values. With this ban, the president is denying due process to people who have already gone through the work to obtain visas. He is denying people the opportunity to contribute to our country, and our opportunity to learn from these newcomers, a time-honored American tradition that has led to the innovative, rich cultural diversity and welcoming spirit that we're known for on our best days. Instead, this ban shows us at our worst: closed off and closed minded, fearful and backward-looking.

Solution

Instead of focusing on divisive, unnecessary, and illegal bans, this administration needs to focus on the real needs of our immigration system and the people involved in it: migrants, families, employers, and communities.

Action

Make your voice heard. Tell your representatives and the White House that you oppose this harmful and unnecessary ban.

Value

Our country is changing, getting more and more diverse. It might make some of us uncomfortable, but it is our reality, and a constant throughout our history.

Problem

Politicians play on this fear, trying to divide us. They push unwise and divisive ideas like sending federal troops to police our cities, building a border wall, or singling out Muslim Americans because of their religion. If we take the bait, it makes our country weaker, not stronger. Our nation is stronger when every one of us can contribute and share ideas, and when everyone's basic rights and dignity are respected.

Solution/Action

We need to embrace ideas that unify us as a diverse people and make our country stronger, and we need to speak out against discrimination and prejudice when we see it.