

Extreme Vetting and Trump's backdoor Muslim Ban

Despite court injunctions blocking the Muslim ban, “extreme vetting” measures are now in place to limit entry for persons from countries Trump tried to ban. Visa issuance to nationals that Trump attempted to target through the visa bans have dramatically declined. Congress must investigate and halt Trump's backdoor Muslim ban.

Visa Issuance to Nationals Targeted in Trump's Ban Has Dramatically Declined

- According to a [Politico](#) report, visas issued to Iranians dropped by 52% in April compared to the average monthly rate in 2016 - despite there being no formal ban in place.
- Other nationals included in Trump's ban saw similar declines in April, with a 68% drop for visas issued to Somali applicants, and a 20% drop in visa issuances to nationals of all Muslim-majority countries.
- This number has increased - in March, visas to countries included in Trump's ban had declined by roughly 40%, as [reported](#) by Reuters.

The Administration now mandates a “Security Advisory Opinion” for banned countries

- A [cable](#) sent by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson on March 15th implementing Trump's second Muslim ban called for enhanced screening for nationals of countries included in the ban - including through an interagency background check known as a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO) that can take months to conduct.
- Tillerson's [follow-up cable](#) on March 16 to rescind some of his earlier instructions upheld the directive to subject nationals of Muslim ban countries to SAOs. An [additional cable](#) sent on March 17th did not change this.

Extreme vetting questions are now in place through emergency procedures

- On May 23, 2017 the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) [approved](#) discretionary use of extreme vetting questions including inquiries into social media handles and extensive biographical and travel information.
- The new process was approved under expedited emergency review, meaning they will expire in 90 days, though could be made permanent.

Concern over the Administration's ‘Extreme Vetting’ is Widespread

- 50 scientific and education organizations signed a [letter](#) to Office of Management and Budget expressing concerns with the “uncertainties and confusion” surrounding the “extreme vetting” which risks the world's best students and researchers declining to pursue studies in the United States.
- The Brennan Center for Justice, together with 34 other civil and human rights organizations, [argue](#) the increased vetting measure is “extremely difficult to comply with,

possibly dissuading applicants from trying to obtain visas and penalizing applicants who are unable to provide comprehensive information.”

- Amnesty International [warned](#) that the administration’s vetting measure “could provide license for discrimination based on national origin and religion” and “a pretext for barring individuals based on their nonviolent beliefs and expression.”
- The University of California has seen a [drop in international applications for the first time in 12 years](#) with applications from countries with large Muslim populations falling 10 percent.
- An [examination](#) of 13 million users by Foursquare revealed that from October 2016 to March 2017, the average decrease in U.S. tourism market share was about 11 percent year-over-year which could result in a 1-2% drop in sales for U.S. retailers.

Congress must press the administration on its continuing efforts to bar Muslims

- Through letters, hearings and legislation, Congress should seek answers to the following questions:
 - Why have the number of visas issued to countries targeted in the Muslim ban (Iran, Libya, Somalia, Syria, Sudan, and Yemen) dropped precipitously since Secretary Tillerson’s memos implementing the President’s March 6 Executive Order?
 - How many applications has the State Department received from nationals of the six Muslim ban nations, and how many rejections have been issued?
 - What is the average processing time for a visa application from one of the six Muslim ban nations, and what was the average processing time for those applications in 2016?
 - Are all nationals of the six Muslim ban nations being subjected to a Security Advisory Opinion (SAO)?
 - What is the basis for rejecting a visa applicant based on the new vetting questions, including social media activity?