

# Islamaphobia in 2012

By Sally Huang Rice University '15 &  
Virginia White Rice University '13

Dr. M. A. Muqtedar Khan, an associate professor in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of Delaware, examined the prominent and often contentious role of Islam in politics and governance the world over, from the Burqa ban in France to the banning of Minarets in Switzerland.

According to Dr. Khan, however, Islamaphobia is not only found in other countries. Such fears affect the behaviors of American voters and politicians alike. For example, in 2000 Presidential candidate Al Gore refused to meet with Muslim groups in order to appeal to Jewish constituents, while in the recent 2012 Republican debates Herman Cain asserted that he would not allow Muslims in his cabinet. With these examples, Dr. Khan contended that Muslims do not have appropriate representation in the contemporary American political arena. As a result, American Muslims wavered between the Republican and Democratic parties between the 2000 and 2008 elections and their future political alliances remain precarious. Indeed, many American Muslims report incomplete satisfaction with both parties because "national leaders do not know the language to defend [them]."



Muqtedar Khan speaks about  
Islamaphobia in 2012

Dr. Khan explained further that the Muslim community, like any religious community, can only be properly understood as a diverse group with varied beliefs and interests, rather than as a large-singular group with homogenous goals. In particular, he differentiated between "mosque centered" and "outside the mosque" Muslims, or Muslims who are traditionally religious and those who associate loosely with the faith and the religious community. (continued next page)

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## Islamophobia (continued)

In Dr. Khan's view, these various religious stances translate to divergent political concerns. "Mosque centered" Muslims are politically liberal, but socially conservative. This group is often highly concerned with Middle Eastern foreign policy and issues around social justice. On the other hand, "outside the mosque" Muslims tend to have wider interests, are less socially conservative and act as political "free agents." Through this discussion, Dr. Khan reminded the audience that proper and effective understanding of religion in politics requires great care and willingness to remain true to the detailed intricacies of public opinion and behavior.

Throughout his talk, Dr. Khan was engaging and passionate, often eliciting verbal and physical responses of agreement from the audience. Dottie Burge, a community member and retired interior designer in

attendance at the session, echoed Khan, arguing "it is important to note that [there has been] no candidate that Muslims have really coalesced around" in recent years. She spoke more broadly, though, of Dr. Khan's discussion of Islamophobia, highlighting that his assertions regarding the "irrationality of people's fears" were his "strongest points." And, evidenced by their enthusiastic response to his strong statements on this theme, the entire audience agreed with Burge on the importance of discussing Islamophobia.

Joe Hawthorn, a retired member of the Texas Freedom Network, mentioned that he was "always concerned about

bigotry and the irrational thinking of all candidates, all of whom have done talking," effectively expressing the views of many in attendance. For others, the Religion in the 2012 Elections event was a gateway which opened their eyes to the current state of Islamophobia in the United States. Vashoe Shelby, a biology major and pre-medical student at the University of Houston, mentioned her reasons for attending. "I came for general interest, and was intrigued," after hearing about the event from a good friend.



**Khan engages in a lively discussion with attendees after his talk.**

Several Rice University undergraduate students attended as well. Myles Bugbee, a senior at Rice University and President of the Baker Institute Student Forum voiced his opinion on the relevance of the issue of Islamophobia to the potential outcomes of the 2012 elections. Indeed, as Dr. Khan pointed out, it is particularly relevant to the 2012 elections due to

pervasive perceptions among some constituents that President Obama is of the Islamic faith.

For all involved, Dr. Khan's presentation was a critical reminder that religion and religious diversity continue to be central issues in the United States that subsequently affect the political arena. As a result, The Religion and Public Life Program seeks to heed Dr. Khan's insights in order to foster an atmosphere where people of all faiths-including Muslims- are effectively and appropriately represented in public life.