

# PETER KING

**IMPACT:** Republican Representative Peter King of New York led the 2011 congressional hearings on the “radicalization” of American Muslims. The hearings added further stigmatization to the American Muslim community and were described by legal rights organizations as neo-McCarthyism. Rep. King has a history of making false accusations linking Muslims to violence and has been connected to a number of anti-Muslim organizations, including the Center for Security Policy and Act for America.

- [Peter King](#) is a Republican Congressman for New York’s Second District and is currently **servicing in his fourteenth term in the U.S. House of Representatives**. King previously **served as Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee in 2005–2006 and again in 2011–2012**. King’s biographical page on his website [describes](#) him as a “leader in homeland security” and “a strong supporter of the war against international terrorism, both at home and abroad.”
- During his second tenure as Chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, **King held a series of hearings focusing on so-called “radicalization” within the American Muslim community**. From March 2011 until [June 2012](#), King led [five congressional hearings](#) entitled “Extent of Radicalization in the American Muslim Community and that Community’s Response.”
- A 2011 article in *Foreign Policy* [stated](#) that King based the hearings on “the premise that the Muslim American community is dangerously prone to radicalization and has been systematically uncooperative with law enforcement.” **King claimed that Muslim communities were not cooperating with law enforcement but did not include any representatives from law enforcement agencies on his witness list**. Additionally, a 2011 [study](#) by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on terrorism committed by American Muslims found that the “single largest source of tips about terrorist plots came from the Muslim American community.”
- The 2011 article in *Foreign Policy* also [noted](#) that a month before the hearings were set to begin, House Committee on Homeland Security ranking member **Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.) wrote a letter to King requesting that the hearings include “a broad-based examination of domestic extremist groups regardless of their ideological underpinnings.” King rejected Thompson’s request.**
- A 2011 article in *CBS News* [noted](#) that **opponents described King’s hearings as a “witch hunt similar to Senator Joseph McCarthy’s efforts to expose communists in the United States in the 1950s.”** Additionally, a March 2011 blog post by the **American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)** [stated the hearings were “reminiscent of McCarthyism.” King responded to claims that he is a “modern-day McCarthy” by stating he considers the characterization a “badge of honor.” In March 2011, \*\*King responded to the growing criticism against the hearings, stating he will not “back down ... to political correctness.”\*\*](#)
- In his opening statement for the March 2011 hearing, **King stated, “There is no equivalency of threat between al Qaeda and neo-Nazis, environmental extremists or other isolated madmen. Only al Qaeda and its Islamist affiliates in this country are part of an international threat to our nation.** Indeed by the Justice Department’s own record, not one terror-related case in the last two years involved neo-Nazis, environmental extremists, militias or anti-war groups.” The **Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)** [refuted his claim](#) by drawing attention to the [attempted bombing](#) on Martin Luther King Day in Spokane, Washington by Kevin William Harpham, a member of the neo-Nazi [National Alliance](#).
- King went on to [remark](#) in his opening statement for the March 2011 hearing, “I have repeatedly said the overwhelming majority of Muslim-Americans are outstanding Americans and make enormous contributions to

# PETER KING

our country. But there are realities we cannot ignore. For instance, a Pew Poll said that 15% of Muslim-American men between the age of 18 and 29 could support suicide bombings. This is the segment of the community al Qaeda is attempting to recruit.” A 2007 *Reuters* [article](#) on this Pew survey included an analysis from Farid Senazi of the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU) who stated, “It’s not something they see themselves engaging in. It’s more of them seeing what’s happening abroad and ... feeling that in these situations, suicide bombings are justified for others.” A separate 2011 Pew Research Center poll [found](#) that there is “no evidence of rising support for Islamic extremism among Muslim Americans.” A 2017 Pew [survey](#) of Muslim Americans found that 76 percent of U.S. Muslims say that violence against civilians can never be justified compared with 59 percent of the general public.

- A March 2011 piece in the *Nation* [reported](#) that **King’s “star witness” for the hearings was Dr. Zuhdi Jasser, who has a long record of supporting anti-Muslim policies.** During the hearings, Jasser [claimed](#) that “the United States has a significant problem with Muslim radicalization” and [argued](#) for an “ideological offense” into Muslim communities. **King also invited Asra Nomani, a self-described “Muslim reformer” who has called for the religious and racial profiling of Muslims.** The Democrats [invited Representative Keith Ellison](#), one of only two Muslim members of Congress at the time, as well as [Sheriff Lee Baca of Los Angeles County](#).
- A 2012 Discourse and Society [article](#) by Dr. Hakimeh Saghaye-Biria noted that the hearings muted “the voices of major Muslim-American organizations, as no representatives of mainstream Islamic organizations [were] called upon to testify as expert witnesses and some [were] expressly discredited.”
- In February 2004, the ACLU [issued](#) a response following King's comments **on The Sean Hannity Radio Show, where King claimed that “80-85 percent of mosques in this country are controlled by Islamic fundamentalists. Those who are in control. The average Muslim, no, they are loyal, but they don’t work, they don’t come forward, they don’t tell the police...”** The ACLU [described](#) King’s remarks as “disparaging and offensive.” In a **2007 interview with Politico, King claimed there are “too many mosques in this country, too many people sympathetic to radical Islam.”** He continued, “We should be looking at them more carefully and finding out how we can infiltrate them.”
- During the 2010 [controversy](#) surrounding the proposed [building](#) of an Islamic cultural center in New York City, inaccurately [dubbed](#) the “ground zero mosque” by anti-Muslim writers and speakers, King was one of the first to speak out against the proposal. In an [interview](#) with *Fox News* on May 14th, he commented that “it is very offensive and wrong” to build a mosque “within walking distance of where so many Americans were killed by radical Muslims.” In the same interview, King said of Attorney General Eric Holder, “He just does not get it and he’s afraid to stand up and say our enemy today is radical Islam.”
- **King has been supported by or connected to some of the leading anti-Muslim individuals and groups in the United States.** In 2010, King was the [recipient of ACT for America’s “National Security Patriot Award”](#) for his “enduring commitment to protecting our national security and democratic value.” In his [acceptance speech](#), King said: “We are engaged in a brutal war, with a brutal enemy: Islamic terrorism... and so many people in our country choose to be politically correct.” The SPLC considers ACT for America to be the largest grassroots anti-Muslim group in the United States. **A March 2011 article in the *New York Times* noted that in February of that year, King was the first guest on a new cable television show co-hosted by ACT’s founder, Brigitte Gabriel.**
- In **January 2011, King went on the Secure Freedom Radio hosted by Frank Gaffney, a long-time anti-Muslim conspiracy theorist** and founder of the Center for Security Policy (CSP). On the show he [claimed](#), “When a war begins, we’re all Americans. But in this case, this is not the situation. And whether it’s pressure,

# PETER KING

whether it's cultural tradition, whatever, the fact is the Muslim community does not cooperate anywhere near to the extent that it should." In 2012, King was awarded the "Keeper of the Flame" award by the CSP. King thanked Frank Gaffney for "enabling us to learn the true nature of our enemy," and stated that "it's a battle of civilizations between us and Islamic terrorists."

- On March 29, 2011, two weeks after King held his first hearing on radicalization in the Muslim community, Senator Dick Durbin of Illinois held the first-ever Congressional hearing on the civil rights of American Muslims in response to rising anti-Muslim bigotry. On the day of this hearing, King went on *Fox News* and stated, "It just doesn't make sense to have this hearing because it's perpetuating the myth that there's some organized effort against Muslims." He went on to claim that "there is no systematic or intense violation of any rights of Muslims in the country."
- In a February 2015 interview on *CNN*, King criticized then-President Barack Obama's Countering Violent Extremism summit for failing to explicitly identify the threat, which he believed was "Islamic extremism." In response to the host's question about "what difference would it make if the word Islam, Islamic, or Islamist were included as part of this conversation," King responded, stating, "These are Islamist extremists...You're talking about people who are motivated by an Islamist ideology and therefore we have to zero in on that...The terrorist threat today comes from a very small but very violent segment of Muslims...If you don't identify your enemy, it's hard to mobilize support against it."
- **King has repeatedly called for increased surveillance of Muslim Americans.** In a December 2015 interview on *CNN*, he stated, "You go where the threat is coming from, in this case it's coming from the Muslim community." He went on to claim without evidence that "in many cases, the mosques have not told the police when there's been radical activities in those mosques." Two years later in a separate interview on *Fox News*, King claimed "the threat from Islamist terrorism is coming from Muslim communities. We need surveillance in those communities." He stated that the surveillance would involve having "sources in the community... and involves not being politically correct."
- Shortly after the deadly July 2016 attack in Nice, France, King went on *Fox News* and called for mass surveillance of Muslim Americans, stating, "The fact is there are people out there who want to kill us. There are people in the Muslim community. It's a small minority, but they are there. If we hold back, it's looked upon as a sign of weakness."
- In **December 2016, King met with President-elect Donald Trump and proposed that the federal government adopt a nationwide program modeled after the New York Police Department's Muslim surveillance and mapping program.** Despite an abundance of evidence demonstrating otherwise, King claimed the NYPD surveillance measures "were very effective for stopping terrorism." King has repeatedly voiced his support for the discriminatory program and in 2014, he castigated the *New York Times*, *AP*, and ACLU for criticizing the NYPD surveillance program.
- While King condemned the deadly June 2017 Finsbury Park mosque attack in London, England, he went on to allude that the mosque was "radical."
- In the 1980s and 1990s, **King publicly supported the Irish Liberation Army, a militant group in Northern Ireland with a "history of killing civilians, speaking at protests staged by Noraid, which the U.S. government claimed funneled guns and money to the IRA."** In 1985 King said: "If civilians are killed in an attack on a military installation, it is certainly regrettable, but I will not morally blame the I.R.A. for it." The Washington Post, The New York Times, and The Atlantic have pointed out the irony of his near singular focus on

# PETER KING

the so-called ‘radicalization’ of Muslims with his previous support of militancy in Ireland.

- In **September 2011, King was invited to testify before the British House of Commons Select Committee on Home Affairs. The hearing aimed to explore King’s findings from his hearings on radicalization in the Muslim American community, and then look into “these issues with experts on radicalization in the UK.”** During his testimony, King claimed that “many of the imams in the prisons are extremely radical.” When asked if he stood by his previous statements supporting the IRA, King responded, “I stand by it in the context of when it was said.” In his testimony, **King described the Guantánamo Bay prison as a “model facility,” downplaying the torture that has occurred at the naval base by referring to waterboarding as ‘enhanced interrogation.’**

Bridge Initiative Factsheet