

MARCO RUBIO

IMPACT: Marco Rubio is a US Senator from the state of Florida. He previously ran for President in 2016. He has a documented history of minimizing the issue of Islamophobia, promoting anti-Muslim tropes, and supporting discriminatory policies targeting Muslims. In 2024, President-elect Donald Trump nominated him to serve as Secretary of State.

- Marco Rubio was born on May 28, 1971, and is an **American lawyer and politician who has served as a Senator from Florida since 2011**. He was born to immigrant parents from Cuba who came to the US in 1956. He received a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Florida in 1993 and a Juris Doctor from the University of Miami School of Law in 1996.
- Rubio's political career began in 1998 when he became City Commissioner for West Miami. From 2000-2008, he was a member of the Florida House of Representatives, and in 2010, Rubio was elected as a Senator from Florida. In November 2024, **President-elect Donald Trump nominated Rubio to be his Secretary of State, describing him as "a strong advocate for our nation, a true friend to our allies and a fearless warrior who will never back down to our adversaries."**
- In 2016, Rubio ran for President of the United States. During his campaign, he made comments **minimizing the reality of Islamophobia in the country**. On February 3, 2016, Rubio criticized then-President Barack Obama's visit to a mosque where he [Obama] gave a speech condemning "inexcusable political rhetoric against Muslim Americans that has no place in our country." **In response to President Obama's visit to the mosque, Rubio stated, "Look at today - he gave a speech at a mosque... Oh, you know, basically implying that America is discriminating against Muslims. Of course there's going to be discrimination in America of every kind. But the bigger issue is radical Islam.** And by the way, radical Islam poses a threat to Muslims themselves." He followed up this statement by accusing Obama of inciting division by proclaiming, "But again, it's this constant pitting people against each other -- that I can't stand. It's hurting our country badly... We can disagree on things, right? I'm a Dolphins fan, you're a Patriot fan."
- When asked about his comments during a Republican debate shortly after on February 6, 2016, **Rubio replied, "My problem with what he did is he continues to put out this fiction that there's widespread systematic discrimination against Muslim Americans."** In February 2016, a Pew Research Report stated that "About six-in-ten Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP think at least 'some' U.S. Muslims harbor anti-American views, including one-third who think at least half of Muslims are anti-American." Another Pew Report in November 2016 concluded that **"The number of physical assaults against Muslims in the United States reached 9/11-era levels last year... the FBI reported 257 incidents of anti-Muslim hate crimes in 2015, a 67% increase from the previous year."** The report goes on to further state that, "Most Americans say there is 'a lot' of discrimination against Muslims in the United States today - roughly six-in-ten U.S. adults (59%) said this in a January 2016 Pew Research Center survey. About three-quarters of Americans (76%) also said discrimination against Muslims in the U.S. was increasing."
- On **July 25, 2019, Rubio tweeted an edited video of Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN)**, which appeared to show Omar saying that "Americans should be more fearful of white men." Rubio tweeted the video with the comment, "I am sure the media will now hound every Democrat to denounce this statement as racist. Right?" However, a **July 2019 Washington Post piece noted that the video was "deceptively edited, removing a key part of Omar's comment."** Omar preceded her statement with the phrase, "If fear was the driving force of policies to keep America safe, Americans safe inside of this country," making her overall statement (in response to a question about the claim that the rise in Islamophobia is allegedly due to "legitimate" fear) read as: "I would say our country should be more fearful of white men across our country because they are actually causing most of the deaths within this country, and so if fear was the driving force of policies to keep America safe, Americans safe inside of this

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country, we should be profiling, monitoring and creating policies to fight the radicalization of white men.”

- Rubio has supported several discriminatory policies. **On November 15, 2015, Rubio voiced opposition to accepting refugees from Syria by stating, “We can’t background-check them. You can’t pick up the phone and call Syria, and that’s one of the reasons why I’ve said we won’t be able to take more refugees. It’s not that we don’t want to, it’s that we can’t.”** Just a day before, on November 14, 2015, he reiterated Clash of Civilizations talking points when he argued that the fight against ISIS “is a civilizational conflict. This is not a geopolitical grievance that these people have with us.”
- Additionally, **Rubio voiced support for maintaining the bulk metadata collection program (which has its roots in the PATRIOT ACT) for national security** by stating, “Allowing any of these programs to expire is a mistake, but that’s what is happening as a consequence of the reckless spreading of misinformation and political posturing.” Mass surveillance and other PATRIOT ACT policies have been used to curtail civil liberties, both domestically and abroad, with a large number of Muslims and Muslim organizations being negatively affected. More information on this topic and specific examples of its connection to Islamophobia can be found in Bridge factsheets on the War on Terror and The Patriot Act.
- Rubio has also **supported sending more people to the Guantanamo Bay Military Prison**, stating in 2016 that, “if we capture any of these ISIS killers alive, they are going to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and we’re going to find out everything they know, because when I’m president, unlike Barack Obama, we will keep this country safe.” In 2010, he asserted that “The ones that survive, we will capture them. **We will capture them, we will get useful information from them and then we will bring them to justice in front of a military tribunal in Guantanamo. As I said in front of a military tribunal in Guantanamo, not a civilian court room in Manhattan.**” Military tribunals have been heavily criticized by human rights organizations due to legal and ethical issues. An ACLU report states that “The proceedings [in military tribunals] allow the admission of secret evidence, hearsay, and evidence obtained through coercion in certain circumstances. Defendants’ access to counsel has been consistently obstructed, and even their testimony about torture and coercion can be censored, keeping the worst of the government’s post-9/11 abuses shielded from the public.” More information on legal challenges against the Guantanamo Bay Detention Camp can be found in our factsheet.
- During a presidential debate on March 10, 2016, Rubio pushed back against Trump’s “Islam hates us” remark. **Rubio stated, “I’m not interested in being politically correct. I’m interested in being correct. And in order to be correct on this issue, here’s the bottom line: Islam has a major problem on its hands. It has a significant percentage of its adherents, particularly in the Sunni faith but also in the Shia, who have been radicalized and are willing to fly planes into a building and kill innocent people. There is no doubt about that. It is also true that if you look around the world at the challenges we face, we are going to have to work together with Muslims who are not radicals.** We’re going to have to work with the Jordanian Kingdom. We’re going to have to work with the Saudis. We’re going to have to work with the Gulf Kingdoms. We’re going to have to work with the Egyptians, to defeat, for example, ISIS.”
- On **March 7, 2022, Rubio criticized the transfer of a Guantanamo Bay prisoner to Saudi Arabia.** Rubio stated that “because of the Biden Administration’s misguided policies, he [al-Qahtani] has the opportunity to once again return to the battlefield. The decision to transfer al-Qahtani is not simply a lapse in judgment, it is a massive error which poses a serious risk to our national security and the security of our allies.” On January 30, 2024, he co-authored a letter to the Director of National Intelligence where he argued that the Intelligence Community should not use funds from the National Intelligence Program to transport detainees from Guantanamo Bay. The letter stated, “While there are differing views among us regarding the administration’s stated policy of closing the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, we share the belief that NIP funds should not be used to charter any private or commercial aircraft to transport detainees.”

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- The Center for American Progress's Fear, Inc. report on the American Islamophobia Network [lists](#) several individuals and organizations that have contributed to the spread of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim rhetoric and policies. A number of individuals and groups on this list have supported Rubio. **[Walid Phares congratulated Rubio's nomination for Secretary of State in a tweet on November 11, 2024, stating, "Another great choice: Marco Rubio, son of immigrants, for secretary of state. He understands where the threat is and how to identify it and he sides with freedom fighters. Supports the Abraham accords."](#)** In February 2016, [Bobby Jindal](#) and [Pete King](#) endorsed Marco Rubio's presidential campaign. On November 9 2024, Ralph Reed and Rubio were [photographed](#) together attending Trump's final rally in Macon. Reed is the founder of the conservative Christian political organization known as the Freedom and Faith Coalition, which has [platformed](#) speakers such as Frank Gaffney who have urged the organization to pursue actions like "take up the fight against Shariah." Rubio has [stated](#), "Let me start by congratulating Ralph Reed on the work he's done at getting the Faith & Freedom Coalition of the ground and for all the work that's been done to promote the public policy goals of strengthening families, preserving traditional values, protecting the dignity of life and marriage, lowering the tax burden on small businesses and families, and requiring government to tighten its belt and live within its means."
- **Rubio is a staunch and uncritical supporter of Israel. He has supported Israel's war in Gaza, which [Amnesty International](#) and UN rights expert, [Francesca Albanese](#), have concluded is a genocide against Palestinians.** On October 9, 2023, Rubio [Tweeted](#), "Israel has no choice but to seek the complete eradication of Hamas in Gaza. There simply is no diplomatic solution or 'measured response' available. This tragically necessary effort will come at a horrifying price. But the price of failing to permanently eliminate this group of sadistic savages is even more horrifying." On November 8, 2024, the BBC [reported](#) that "nearly 70% of Gaza war dead verified by the UN are women and children."
- In May 2024, the Canadian government announced a [new initiative](#) to increase "the number of applications that will be accepted into processing under the temporary special measures for Palestinian extended family in Gaza." On July 24, 2024, Rubio sent a letter to US Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to express his concerns regarding Canada's new policy. In the letter, **Rubio, along with five other Senators, [stated](#) that Canada's policies "unlock opportunities for individuals with ties to terrorist groups to enter Canada, receive new forms of identification, and then try to enter the U.S. along the porous north border."**
- In November 2024, Rubio was [asked](#) by a CODEPINK representative about supporting a ceasefire, to which **Rubio responded, "No, I will not. On the contrary, I want them to destroy every element of Hamas they can get their hands on. These people are vicious animals who did horrifying crimes."** Regarding the civilian casualties, Rubio added, "I think Hamas is 100% to blame."
- In **August 2024, Rubio sent a [letter](#) to Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in which he criticized the Biden Administration for imposing sanctions against Israeli settlers who were associated with violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.** Rubio claimed that "Israel has consistently sought peace with the Palestinians. It is unfortunate that the Palestinians, whether it be the Palestinian Authority or FTOs [Foreign Terrorist Organizations] such as Hamas, have rejected such overtures. Israelis rightfully living in their historic homeland are not the impediment to peace; the Palestinians are."
- According to **Open Secrets, [over one million dollars](#) have been contributed by pro-Israel groups to Rubio's political campaigns, with the [largest](#) one being the pro-Israel America PAC** in the previous five years. During his senate re-election campaign in 2022, he became the [third-largest](#) recipient of contributions from pro-Israel groups, raising \$367,000.
- **Rubio has been an outspoken critic of the Chinese government.** This resulted in him being [sanctioned](#) by China in July 2020. **He will be the first sitting Secretary of State, once confirmed by the Senate, to have been sanctioned by the Chinese government.** A September 19, 2024 [press release](#) shows Rubio co-introducing a Bill to "require the U.S. Secretary of Treasury to instruct U.S.

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executive directors at international financial institutions to oppose projects that use forced labor, particularly in the XUAR.” A few months prior, a June 6, 2024 [press release](#) highlights **Rubio having a role in reauthorizing the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act, stating that “At a time when the Uyghur diaspora and Chinese dissidents remain the targets of transnational repression at the hands of Communist China, we must have the tools needed to confront this threat.** This reauthorization is essential and I urge my colleagues to support this initiative.”

- In November 2015, Rubio **criticized Hilary Clinton for not characterizing the War on Terror as “a war on Radical Islam.”** When Clinton asserted that the United States was not at war with Islam, Rubio stated, **“That would be like saying we weren’t at war with Nazis because we were afraid to offend some Germans who may have been members of the Nazi Party but weren’t violent themselves.”**

Bridge Initiative Factsheet