**Meet the White Supremacist Leading the GOP's Anti-Sharia Crusade**

**States across the country are considering far-right bills to ban Islamic law. For that, we have hate-group leader David Yerushalmi to thank.**

—By [Tim Murphy](http://motherjones.com/authors/tim-murphy)

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Theodore Liasi/Zuma

Last week, legislators in Tennessee introduced a radical bill that would make "material support" for Islamic law punishable by 15 years in prison. The proposal marks a dramatic new step in the conservative campaign against Muslim-Americans. If passed, critics say even seemingly benign activities like re-painting the exterior of a mosque or bringing food to a potluck could be classified as a felony.  
  
The Tennessee bill, [SB 1028](http://www.scribd.com/doc/49501971/Tenn-Anti-Sharia-Senate-Bill-1028), didn't come out of nowhere. Though it's the first of its kind, the bill is part of a wave of related measures that would ban state courts from enforcing Sharia law. (A court might refer to Sharia law in [child custody](http://www.salon.com/news/islam/?story=/politics/war_room/2011/02/26/sharia_the_real_story) or prisoner rights cases.) Since early 2010, such legislation has been considered in [at least 15 states](http://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/02/has-your-state-banned-sharia-map). And while fears of an impending caliphate are myriad on the far-right, the surge of legislation across the country is largely due to the work of one man: David Yerushalmi, an Arizona-based white supremacist who has previously called for a "[war against Islam](http://www.cair.com/ArticleDetails.aspx?ArticleID=26408&&name=n&&currPage=1&&Active=1)" and tried to [criminalize](http://www.saneworks.us/indexnew.php) adherence to the Muslim faith.

Yerushalmi, a lawyer, is the founder of the [Society of Americans for National Existence](http://www.saneworks.us/indexnew.php) (SANE), which has been called a "[hate group](https://pa.cair.com/actionalert/wash-times-promotes-hate-group/)" by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR). His [draft legislation](http://publicpolicyalliance.org/?page_id=38) served as [the foundation](http://www.tennessean.com/article/20110223/NEWS0201/102230378/Tennessee-bill-would-jail-Shariah-followers) for the Tennessee bill, and at least half a dozen other anti-Islam measures—including two bills that were signed into law last year in Louisiana and Tennessee.

With the exception of SB 1028, much of Yerushalmi's legislation sounds pretty innocuous: State courts are prohibited from considering any foreign law that doesn't fully honor the rights enshrined in the US and state constitutions. Because a Taliban-style interpretation of Islamic law is unheard of in the United States, the law's impact is non-existent at best. But critics of some of the proposed bills have argued they could have far-reaching and unintended consequences, like undoing [anti-kidnapping statutes](http://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/02/sd-rep-who-authored-abortion-bill-nixes-sharia-ban), and hindering the ability of local companies to enter into contracts overseas.

But Tennessee's SB 1028 goes much further, defining traditional Islamic law as counter to constitutional principles, and authorizing the state's attorney general to freeze the assets of organizations that have been determined to be promoting or supporting Sharia. On Monday, CAIR and the ACLU called for lawmakers to defeat the bill.

"Essentially the bill is trying to separate the 'good Muslims' from the 'bad Muslims,'" said CAIR staff attorney Gadeir Abbas in an interview with *Mother Jones*. "Out of all the bills that have been introduced, this is by far the most extreme."

Reports about the rise of the anti-Sharia movement have typically focused on Oklahoma's [voter-approved](http://motherjones.com/mojo/2010/12/sharia-fever-catch-it) constitutional amendment, which explicitly prohibited state courts from considering Islamic law (a federal judge issued a permanent injunction against the amendment in December). But the movement began much earlier, with a sample bill Yerushalmi drafted at the behest of the [American Public Policy Alliance](http://publicpolicyalliance.org/), a right-wing organization established with the goal of protecting American citizens from "the infiltration and incursion of foreign laws and foreign legal doctrines, especially Islamic Shariah Law."

In a [40-minute PowerPoint](http://publicpolicyalliance.org/?page_id=71) that's available on the organization's site, Yerushalmi explained the ins and outs of the sample legislation. His bills differ from the failed Oklahoma amendment in one key way: They don't mention Sharia. Instead, they focus more broadly on "foreign laws and foreign legal doctrines." As Yerushalmi explained in an interview with the nativist [*New English Review*](http://www.newenglishreview.org/custpage.cfm/frm/77157/sec_id/77157) in December, the language is "facially neutral," thereby achieving the same result while "avoiding the sticky problems of our First Amendment jurisprudence."

Since crafting the sample legislation, Yerushalmi's services have been been in high demand as an expert witness. In mid-February, he flew to South Dakota to testify in support of a bill modeled on his "American Law for American Courts" plan. (He also offered to provide pro-bono legal support for the state if the law produced any legal challenges.)

Ultimately, the bill died in committee, after the state's attorney general testified that the bill could lead to lawsuits. "I am a little chagrined by the fact that none of the opponents of the bill have actually read it with any care," Yerushalmi told the committee. "Something else is at work here."

But it's not just Muslims who draw Yerushalmi's scorn. In a 2006 essay for SANE entitled [*On Race: A Tentative Discussion*](http://www.mcadamreport.org/The%20McAdam%20Report%28585%29-05-12-06.pdf) (pdf), Yerushalmi argued that whites are genetically superior to blacks. "Some races perform better in sports, some better in mathematical problem solving, some better in language, some better in Western societies and some better in tribal ones," he wrote.

Yerushalmi has suggested that Caucasians are inherently more receptive to republican forms of government than blacks—an argument that's consistent with SANE's mission statement, which emphasizes that "America was the handiwork of faithful Christians, mostly men, and almost entirely white." And in an article published at the website Intellectual Conservative, Yerushalmi, who is Jewish, suggests that liberal Jews "destroy their host nations like a fatal parasite." Unsurprisingly, then, Yerushalmi offered the lone Jewish [defense of Mel Gibson](http://www.intellectualconservative.com/2006/08/08/mel-gibson-and-why-jewish-liberals-give-jews-a-bad-name/), after the actor’s anti-Semitic tirade in 2006. Gibson, he wrote, was simply noting the "undeniable Jewish liberal influence on western affairs in the direction of a World State."

Despite his racist views, Yerushalmi has been warmly received by mainstream conservatives; his work has appeared in the [*National Review*](http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/191091/threat-shariah-compliant-finance/david-yerushalmi) and Andrew Breitbart's [Big Peace](http://bigpeace.com/author/dyerushalmi/). He's been lauded in the pages of the [*Washington Times*](http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2008/oct/28/sell-off-or-sell-out/print/). And in 2008, he published a paper on the perils of Sharia-compliant finance that compelled Sen. Minority Whip John Kyl (R-Ariz.) to write a letter to Securities and Exchange Commission chairman Chris Cox.

More recently, Yerushalmi [co-authored a report](http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/p18523.xml) on the threats posed by Islamic law—among other things, he worries Sharia-compliant finance could spark another financial collapse—that [earned plaudits](http://wonkroom.thinkprogress.org/2010/09/15/creeping-sharia-team-b-report-presented-to-congress/) from leading Republicans like Michigan Rep. Pete Hoekstra. The report was released by Frank Gaffney's [Center for Security Policy](http://www.centerforsecuritypolicy.org/index.xml), for which Yerushalmi is general counsel.

In 2007, he pushed legislation to make "adherence to Shari'a" a felony, punishable by up to 20 years in prison. That same proposal called for the deportation of all Muslim non-citizens, and a ban on Muslim immigration. The United States, he urged, must declare "a WAR AGAINST ISLAM and all Muslim faithful."

Neither Yerushalmi nor the American Public Policy Alliance responded to a request for comment for this article.

If his racially infused writings and rhetoric are any indication, it's Yerushalmi, not his Muslim bogeymen, who seems most determined to remake the American political system. Per [its mission statement](http://www.talk2action.org/story/2007/12/27/20819/823), SANE is "dedicated to the rejection of democracy and party rule," and Yerushalmi has likewise criticized the universal suffrage movement. As he once put it, "there's a reason the founding fathers did not give women or black slaves the right to vote."