

# Tucker Carlson: A Biography and the Evolution of His Views on Islam

## Abstract

Tucker Carlson (born 1969) is an American media personality who rose from a young print journalist to one of the most influential and controversial figures in cable news <sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup>. This biography traces Carlson's life and career with a focus on how his views on Islam and Muslims have transformed over time. It charts his early life and entry into journalism, his ascent to primetime fame on Fox News (where he often espoused strident anti-Muslim rhetoric), and his post-2023 evolution towards a more open, non-confrontational stance on Islam. Specific instances of his Fox-era comments – from denouncing a Muslim congresswoman as “proof” of a dangerous immigration system <sup>3</sup> to characterizing Islamic culture in dehumanizing terms <sup>4</sup> – are documented alongside the more recent shifts in his tone. After departing Fox News in 2023, Carlson's public engagements, including interviews with Muslim world leaders and critiques of U.S. military interventions in Muslim-majority countries, suggest a notable softening (and even reversal) of his earlier position. Possible motives for this change – whether political realignment, personal growth, or pragmatic rebranding – are explored. In contrasting Carlson's past and present rhetoric, this article sheds light on the broader significance of his shift in the context of media polarization, American politics, and interfaith relations in the post-9/11 era.

## Early Life and Journalism Career

Tucker Swanson McNear Carlson was born on May 16, 1969, in San Francisco, California, into a family with media and political connections <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup>. His father, Dick Carlson, was a journalist-turned-government official who served as director of Voice of America and even U.S. ambassador to Seychelles <sup>6</sup>. Tucker and his younger brother were raised largely by their father in Southern California after their mother left when Tucker was six <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup>. He attended elite boarding schools (briefly in Switzerland and then Rhode Island) and graduated from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut in 1991 with a B.A. in history <sup>9</sup>. Interestingly, Carlson once applied to the CIA but was rejected, a twist that prompted his pivot to journalism with encouragement from his father <sup>10</sup>.

Carlson's journalism career began in the 1990s in print media. He worked as a fact-checker for *Policy Review*, a conservative journal, and wrote for newspapers like the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* before joining the startup conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard* in 1995 <sup>11</sup>. His writing talent gained recognition in Washington; by the late 1990s, Carlson was contributing to high-profile publications including *The New Republic*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, earning a reputation as an “important voice of the intelligentsia” in some circles <sup>12</sup>.

In 2000, Carlson transitioned to television as a commentator for CNN. He co-hosted CNN's debate program *Crossfire* from 2001 until 2005, famously sparring with comedian Jon Stewart in a 2004 episode that presaged the show's cancellation. After CNN, Carlson briefly hosted a show called *Tucker* on MSNBC from 2005 to 2008 <sup>13</sup>. Though that show was canceled due to low ratings, he remained a visible media presence.

In 2010, he co-founded the conservative news website *The Daily Caller*, where he served as editor-in-chief <sup>14</sup>. By this time, Carlson had established himself as a sharp-tongued conservative commentator known for his bow-tie attire (a trademark he dropped later) and his combative debating style.

## Rise at Fox News and Primetime Fame

Carlson's most consequential career move came in 2009 when he joined Fox News as a contributor <sup>15</sup>. He became a substitute host on various programs and built a rapport with Fox's conservative audience. In November 2016, on the eve of Donald Trump's presidency, Fox News launched *Tucker Carlson Tonight* in a prime evening slot. The show quickly gained traction, and by early 2017 it was drawing top ratings in its time slot <sup>16</sup>. When Fox's star Bill O'Reilly was fired amid scandal in April 2017, Carlson was chosen to fill O'Reilly's coveted 8 p.m. slot <sup>17</sup>. From that point, *Tucker Carlson Tonight* became one of the most-watched cable news shows in the United States <sup>18</sup> <sup>17</sup>, cementing Carlson's status as a powerhouse in right-wing media.

On air, Carlson developed a signature persona: blunt and confident, often delivering monologues that tapped into populist anger over issues like immigration, political correctness, and globalism. He was an outspoken supporter of President Trump and was described as "perhaps the highest-profile proponent of Trumpism" in the press <sup>1</sup>. Carlson's commentary appealed to many viewers' sense of cultural grievance – he positioned himself as a champion of the ordinary American against liberal elites and "woke" culture. This approach resonated; by the late 2010s, Fox News under Carlson's primetime presence regularly dominated cable news ratings.

However, Carlson's growing influence also brought intense scrutiny and controversy. His Fox News tenure was marked by frequent allegations of racism, xenophobia, and misinformation <sup>19</sup>. Advertisers periodically boycotted his show in protest of inflammatory segments. Carlson was undeterred by backlash – in one instance, after old audio surfaced of him making derogatory remarks, he pointedly refused to apologize, inviting critics to watch his show if they wanted to know what he truly thought <sup>20</sup>. This brash attitude only heightened his profile. By 2020, Carlson was not only a television host but a political influencer who even had the ear of the White House; it was reported that he privately counseled President Trump on policy decisions. Notably, Carlson's advocacy is said to have influenced Trump's 2019 decision to call off a military strike against Iran, reflecting Carlson's skepticism of new Middle East wars <sup>21</sup>. This foreshadowed a divergence in Carlson's hawkishness on Islamic countries versus his harsh rhetoric about Islam domestically – a tension that would become more evident later.

## Fox News Era Islamophobia: Controversial Rhetoric and Segments

Throughout his years on Fox News, Tucker Carlson frequently drew condemnation for remarks widely regarded as Islamophobic. He often spoke of Islam and Muslim immigrants in alarmist terms, framing them as a potential threat to American culture and security. Critics noted that Carlson "has spent years promoting dangerous and bigoted views" about Islam on air <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup>. Indeed, some of the most infamous moments of *Tucker Carlson Tonight* involved commentary targeting Muslims, both in America and abroad.

One recurring target was Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, a Somali-American Muslim who came to the U.S. as a refugee. In a July 9, 2019 monologue, Carlson launched a scathing personal attack on Omar, accusing her of ingratitude toward the United States and even questioning the wisdom of accepting refugees like her. He

went so far as to call Omar “living proof that the way we practice immigration has become dangerous to this country”<sup>3</sup>. This rant – effectively portraying a Muslim refugee-turned-legislator as a dire warning – was denounced as “racially loaded” and Islamophobic in the media<sup>24</sup>. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) and other Muslim advocacy groups demanded Fox fire Carlson, citing his “long history of Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, white supremacist rhetoric”<sup>23</sup>. Such groups warned that Carlson’s rhetoric was not mere political critique but outright hate speech that could spur real-world harm<sup>25</sup><sup>26</sup>. (Rep. Omar herself noted that Carlson’s attacks coincided with an uptick in death threats against her<sup>27</sup>.)

Carlson’s show also gave a platform to avowed anti-Islam voices. In one 2020 segment, for example, he hosted Ayaan Hirsi Ali – a vocal critic of Islam – to discuss then-candidate Joe Biden’s outreach to Muslim voters. During the segment, both Carlson and Ali disparaged Biden’s appearance at a Muslim-American summit. Carlson sneeringly characterized Biden’s engagement with Muslim Americans as political “pandering,” denied that President Trump’s so-called Muslim travel ban targeted Muslims, and mocked Biden’s stated wish to teach more about Islam in schools<sup>28</sup><sup>29</sup>. Hirsi Ali went further, baselessly suggesting Biden was appeasing the Muslim Brotherhood, while Carlson concurred that Biden’s efforts to court Muslim voters were suspect. This drew condemnation from Muslim civil rights organizations, which said the segment “stigmatized Muslim American communities” and conflated ordinary Muslim voters with extremists<sup>30</sup><sup>31</sup>.

Perhaps most disturbingly, Carlson’s own words (captured off-network) revealed a deep-seated hostility toward Muslims. In 2019, the watchdog Media Matters released recordings of Carlson’s calls to a radio show years earlier, in which he made overtly racist and Islamophobic slurs<sup>32</sup>. In one recording, Carlson crudely derided Iraqis as “a bunch of... semiliterate primitive monkeys” and suggested that Iraq was “a crappy place” that “wasn’t worth invading”<sup>33</sup>. He further stated that Iraqis should “just shut the f\*\*\* up and obey us,” implying they were incapable of self-governance<sup>34</sup><sup>33</sup>. In another clip, Carlson argued that politicians should be more candid about “lunatic Muslims who are behaving like animals”<sup>4</sup>. These dehumanizing remarks – describing Iraq’s Muslim population in subhuman terms – horrified many when they resurfaced. Although the recordings were from 2006–2011 (prior to Carlson’s Fox hosting days), they became public while he was at Fox, reinforcing perceptions that his on-air Islamophobia was genuine and deep-rooted. Muslim advocacy groups pointed to these comments as evidence that Carlson “has long championed” racist and anti-Muslim tropes<sup>25</sup>. Fox News, notably, stood by Carlson amid the fallout, and he refused to apologize<sup>35</sup>, doubling down that viewers could watch his show to hear his true views.

Carlson’s Fox tenure also amplified conspiracy theories that often veered into anti-Muslim bigotry. He spoke ominously of an “Islamic cult” or an “Islamic problem” that Western leaders supposedly refused to acknowledge<sup>36</sup>. He lambasted the Obama administration for not explicitly blaming Islam as a cause of terrorism<sup>37</sup>. And on immigration, Carlson frequently conflated Muslim immigrants or refugees with security threats. For instance, during one 2018 debate on multiculturalism, he questioned whether diversity was a strength and highlighted that Europe’s refugees were largely Muslim “invaders” in the view of nationalists he sympathized with<sup>38</sup><sup>39</sup>. In another commentary he described mass immigration (from predominantly Muslim countries in some cases) as making America “poorer, dirtier, and more divided”<sup>40</sup>. Such statements were celebrated in far-right circles but condemned elsewhere. The sum effect was that, by the early 2020s, Tucker Carlson had become one of the loudest mainstream voices fueling Islamophobia in America, using his primetime platform to cast suspicion and derision on Muslims at home and abroad.

*Tucker Carlson built a massive Fox News audience with his fiery monologues and controversial commentary, frequently targeting immigrants and Muslims. His 2019 segment about Rep. Ilhan Omar – in which he said Omar*

*“hates” America and is proof U.S. immigration policy is dangerous – exemplified the Islamophobic rhetoric that made him a hero to some and pariah to others* <sup>3</sup> <sup>41</sup> .

## Departure from Fox News in 2023

In a dramatic turn of events, Tucker Carlson’s reign at Fox News came to an abrupt end in April 2023. Fox News announced it was parting ways with Carlson and canceled *Tucker Carlson Tonight* with immediate effect <sup>18</sup> . The move shocked viewers and media observers alike, as Carlson’s show was still hugely popular. Officially, Fox gave no detailed explanation for the firing, leading to rampant speculation. Many linked it to Fox’s settlement of a high-profile defamation lawsuit by Dominion Voting Systems – a case in which Carlson’s private communications had figured and which Fox settled just days before cutting ties with him <sup>18</sup> . Reports later indicated that Fox Corp chief Lachlan Murdoch made the call to oust Carlson <sup>42</sup> .

Importantly, Carlson was not fired due to his on-air controversies about Muslims or other groups; in fact, Fox had long tolerated or even encouraged his provocative content <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> . As Edward Mitchell of CAIR noted, “we called on Fox News to fire him long ago” for spreading white supremacist and Islamophobic conspiracy theories, but the network stood by him until other issues (like the Dominion case) forced its hand <sup>43</sup> <sup>23</sup> . In short, Carlson’s inflammatory rhetoric was **not** what got him removed – a point that disappointed activists who felt there had been “no accountability” for the harm caused to Muslim communities <sup>44</sup> <sup>23</sup> . His exit, instead, was more tied to internal corporate and legal calculus than to any reckoning with his show’s content.

Carlson himself was reportedly blindsided by the ouster. Yet he wasted little time in regrouping. By June 2023, he relaunched his voice via a new show on Twitter (now X), posting freewheeling monologues and interviews directly to social media. This direct-to-audience approach freed Carlson from any network leash, allowing him to craft his image and message on his own terms. The period following his Fox departure would see Tucker Carlson undergo a noticeable shift – especially in how he engaged with topics related to Islam and the Muslim world.

## Post-2023 Transformation: A New Tone on Islam and Muslims

After leaving Fox News, Tucker Carlson’s public stance toward Islam and Muslim people underwent a marked evolution. Observers noted that the firebrand known for his hardline Islamophobic segments seemed to soften his tone and broaden his perspective. In place of the Fox-era scaremongering about an “Islamic threat,” Carlson began to express views that, at times, appeared sympathetic to Muslim populations or at least critical of policies hostile to them.

One of the earliest signs of this transformation was Carlson’s intensified opposition to U.S. military intervention in the Middle East. Even on Fox, Carlson had shown isolationist instincts (for example, urging Trump to avoid war with Iran <sup>21</sup> ), but post-2023 he doubled down on an anti-war, anti-intervention message. As tensions flared between the U.S./Israel and Iran in late 2024 and 2025, Carlson emerged as a prominent right-wing voice arguing against escalation. He publicly blasted his former Fox colleagues – naming figures like Sean Hannity – as “warmongers” for cheerleading Israeli strikes on Iran <sup>45</sup> <sup>46</sup> . In a June 2025 interview, Carlson warned that pro-Israel hawks were pushing America toward an unnecessary war, declaring, “The real divide isn’t between people who support Israel or Iran. The real divide is between those who casually encourage violence and those who seek to prevent it” <sup>47</sup> . Such rhetoric was strikingly

*un*-characteristic of Fox News prime time, and it earned Carlson scorn from neoconservatives but newfound praise from anti-war audiences – including some in the Muslim world who were relieved to see a major U.S. conservative figure opposing war on an Islamic nation.

Carlson also embarked on initiatives that indicated a more open engagement with Muslim individuals and countries. In July 2025, he announced that he had conducted a long-form interview with Iran's President (a rarity for a figure from the American right) <sup>48</sup>. Conducted through a translator, Carlson's interview aimed to let Iran's leadership speak directly: he posed basic questions like "Do you seek war with the United States? Do you seek war with Israel?" <sup>49</sup>. By his own account, Carlson avoided accusatory queries and instead listened to the Iranian perspective on contentious issues <sup>50</sup>. This was a remarkable scene – an American commentator who once spoke of an "Islamic problem" now cordially conversing with the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Around the same time, Carlson made repeated public requests to interview Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well, as if to play honest broker; Netanyahu reportedly declined <sup>51</sup>. The optics were clear: freed from Fox, Carlson was willing to talk *with* Muslim-world leaders rather than only talk *about* them in blanket negative terms.

Another vivid example of Carlson's changed approach was his very public feud with far-right agitator Laura Loomer in 2025. Loomer – who prides herself on being a "proud Islamophobe" – accused Carlson of being "controlled by Muslims" and even suggested he was **bankrolled by Qatar** <sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup>. These wild claims came after Carlson criticized Republican calls for military action against Iran, putting him at odds with Loomer's vehemently anti-Muslim, pro-war stance <sup>52</sup>. Carlson's associates dismissed Loomer's allegations as baseless lies <sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup>. Yet the incident was telling: figures on the extreme right suddenly viewed Carlson with suspicion, as if he had gone soft on their favorite enemy (Islam). That Carlson – once a darling of Islamophobic hardliners – was now derided by them as being "too friendly" to Muslims demonstrates just how much his image had shifted.

Indeed, among some Muslim observers online, Carlson gained an unlikely second look. Social media posts from Muslim commentators in 2024–25, while hardly whitewashing his past, noted that Carlson was "on point lately" about issues like U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and skepticism of endless wars. In one instance, his outspoken critiques of unconditional support for Israel's military actions led to commentary that Carlson was echoing concerns long voiced by the left and by Muslim activists. It was an unusual realignment: the populist right (exemplified by Carlson) and certain segments of the anti-war left found common ground in opposing new conflicts involving Muslim nations <sup>55</sup> <sup>56</sup>. Carlson even shared platforms with figures like Tulsi Gabbard (a Democrat known for anti-war views) and amplified voices critical of interventions, further distancing himself from the reflexive anti-Muslim rhetoric that had characterized the post-9/11 conservative stance.

To be sure, Carlson did not suddenly become an admirer of Islam or a champion of pluralism – he remained staunchly conservative, often critical of multiculturalism and immigration. But the change was in emphasis and tone. Post-Fox, Carlson's ire was directed less at Islam as a faith or Muslims as a group and more at the American establishment (both left and right) whom he accused of dragging the U.S. into costly foreign adventures. In effect, Muslims had shifted in Carlson's rhetoric from principal villains to potential partners (or at least victims) in the geopolitical narrative. It was a pivot from "*They are a threat to us*" towards "*We shouldn't be a threat to them.*"

## Possible Reasons for His Change in Stance

What might explain Tucker Carlson's dramatic turn from an avatar of Islamophobia on Fox News to a voice cautioning against anti-Muslim wars and engaging with Muslim leaders? Several possible (and not mutually exclusive) factors could be at play:

- **Ideological Evolution:** Carlson's own worldview has evolved over time from a Bush-era conservative to a Trump-era nationalist and now to a somewhat heterodox populist. Early in his career, Carlson supported the 2003 Iraq invasion; he later renounced that support in 2004, admitting the war was a mistake <sup>21</sup>. By the late 2010s, he was openly skeptical of U.S. interventions abroad <sup>21</sup>. This long-term trajectory suggests Carlson's hostility toward Islam as an *external* enemy waned as his distrust of the U.S. foreign policy establishment grew. In other words, he increasingly saw "*the elites in Washington*" as the problem, not populations in the Middle East. As his nationalist focus shifted to "*America First*" non-interventionism, vilifying Muslims became less useful (and even counterproductive) to his narrative.
- **Changing Conservative Priorities:** The American right wing of 2025 is not the same as that of 2005. In the years since the war on terror, many grassroots conservatives have grown weary of Middle East entanglements and more concerned with domestic culture wars (e.g., against "woke" liberals, immigration at the southern border, or China's rise). Carlson is very adept at sensing his audience's mood. By moving away from Islamophobic fear-mongering and toward anti-war, anti-establishment themes, he tapped into a growing "Old Right"/libertarian streak in the GOP base that questions endless war. His friendlier posture toward Muslim nations (like opposing bombing Iran or interviewing its president) aligns with the "*no more foreign wars*" sentiment prevalent among Trump-style Republicans. In essence, Carlson's shift may reflect a strategic reorientation to stay in tune with the base's current priorities, where Islam is no longer enemy #1.
- **Personal Encounters and Reassessment:** It's possible that personal experiences influenced Carlson's change. Engaging directly with Muslim individuals – whether public figures or others – can humanize those who were previously viewed only abstractly. For instance, conducting a respectful interview with an Iranian leader or hearing from American Muslims outside the studio environment might have given Carlson a perspective that softened his harder views. We know Carlson admired some dissident voices (like journalist Glenn Greenwald) who challenge Islamophobia, and he vocally opposed China's persecution of its Uyghur Muslim minority as early as 2018 <sup>57</sup>, showing he isn't uniformly anti-Muslim on all issues. It's conceivable that over time Carlson came to differentiate between Islam as a civilization and the specific threat of jihadist terrorism, leading him to moderate his blanket criticism of the religion.
- **Freedom from Fox and New Incentives:** After leaving Fox News, Carlson no longer had to cater to the network's editorial line or its older demographic that had been primed for two decades to fear Islamic extremism. Independent and self-funded (and reportedly exploring new media ventures), Carlson had more latitude to reinvent himself. He may have calculated that broadening his appeal – for example, reaching out to populist-left anti-war viewers or even international audiences – required shedding the baggage of anti-Muslim hostility. By appearing more open-minded about Islam, Carlson could transcend being pigeonholed as just another Fox News partisan. In business terms, it potentially expanded his brand. Some skeptics even suggest there might be financial motivations: rumors (unproven) circulated that Carlson sought or received backing from interests in

the Middle East (hence the Qatar accusation) <sup>52</sup> . Even if false, such rumors indicate a perception that Carlson had realigned in a way favorable to certain Muslim-majority states.

- **Reaction to Global Events:** Geopolitical developments in 2023–2024, notably the Taliban’s return in Afghanistan and the Israel-Gaza conflicts, reshuffled opinions across the spectrum. Carlson, ever contrarian, may have reacted to what he saw as an overly one-sided U.S. media narrative. For example, when virtually all of Fox News cheered Israel’s hardline against Hamas, Carlson instinctively took the opposite tack, questioning Israel’s leadership and warning against conflating Hamas with Iran or all Muslims. This reflex to challenge mainstream consensus could partly explain why Carlson sounded almost empathetic to Palestinians or Iranians: he was zigging where the establishment zagged. In doing so, he found himself oddly on the same side of certain issues as many Muslims and progressives – a convergence that might have reinforced his break from old patterns.

It’s worth noting that some observers doubt how sincere Carlson’s transformation is. They argue that while he might oppose *wars* against Muslim countries, he has not explicitly disavowed his past derogatory comments about Muslims and Islam. They point out that his criticisms of Islam as a faith (calling it a cult or inherently violent) haven’t been walked back publicly. Thus, Carlson’s “friendlier” view may be less about genuine tolerance and more about recalibrating who the adversary is (shifting from Muslims to say, the “deep state” or China). Nonetheless, whether by conviction or convenience, the change in Carlson’s rhetoric is real and significant.

## Contrasting Rhetoric: Then vs. Now

To truly appreciate Tucker Carlson’s shift, it helps to place his past and present words side by side. Here are a few stark contrasts:

- **On Muslim Immigrants and Refugees:** *Then (2019, Fox News)* – Carlson attacked Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Muslim refugee-turned-Congresswoman, as “proof” that U.S. immigration is dangerous <sup>58</sup> . He implied that welcoming people from Muslim-majority countries could undermine America, flatly stating Omar “hates this country” and warning “our immigration system has become dangerous” by admitting people like her <sup>59</sup> . *Now (2025, independent)* – Carlson has largely dropped such immigrant-bashing from his repertoire. Instead, he has spotlighted how U.S. actions endanger Muslims abroad. For example, he cautioned that bombing Iran or entangling the U.S. in Middle East wars is a grave mistake, emphasizing common humanity. “At some point [the warmongers] will have to answer for this,” Carlson wrote of those urging strikes, stressing the need to prevent violence rather than expand it <sup>47</sup> . The focus moved from fear of Muslims coming to America to concern about America inflicting harm in Muslim lands.
- **On Islamic Culture:** *Then (2006, radio)* – Carlson described Iraqi (and by extension, Islamic Arab) culture in crudely bigoted terms: “I have zero sympathy for them or their culture,” he said, ridiculing Iraqis for how they live and suggesting they “can’t govern themselves” <sup>34</sup> . He infamously asserted Iraq was “filled with... semiliterate primitive monkeys” <sup>33</sup> – a dehumanizing slur – and that America should simply subjugate them by force. *Now (2024, speech & interviews)* – Carlson has spoken of foreign Muslim cultures with a notably different tone. Interviewing Iran’s president, for instance, he did not belittle Iranian culture; rather, he asked about Iran’s goals and even acknowledged topics he chose not to press on, indicating a degree of respect <sup>50</sup> . When Senator Ted Cruz invoked the Bible to justify siding with Israel, Carlson snapped back that U.S. lawmakers shouldn’t *only* defend “the

interests of a foreign government”<sup>60</sup> <sup>61</sup> – a criticism of prioritizing Israel at the expense of considering others (implying perhaps Muslim lives in Iran or Gaza also have value). Such exchanges show Carlson now challenging narratives that paint one side as wholly good and the Muslim side as inherently evil, a far cry from his earlier blanket condemnations of Islamic societies.

- **On Terrorism and Blame:** *Then (2010s, Fox)* – Carlson repeatedly suggested that Islamic ideology was uniquely violent or that Muslim communities were to blame for terrorism. He argued the U.S. was afraid to admit “Islamic extremism” is the real source of terror, chastising leaders for political correctness<sup>37</sup>. In his view then, the threat of “lunatic Muslims...behaving like animals” needed to be called out forcefully<sup>4</sup>. *Now (2023–2025, independent)* – While Carlson still condemns jihadist terrorism, he has been equally harsh about Western militarism. After leaving Fox, he highlighted Western hypocrisy and errors – for example, pointing out the devastation of Iraq and Afghanistan and warning against repeating such violence. He also started to frame conflicts in political rather than religious terms. On his new platform, Carlson has discussed issues like the Ukraine war or the Israel-Iran standoff without resorting to phrases like “Islamic problem,” focusing instead on geopolitical strategy and moral costs. He has even praised instances of Muslim-Christian cooperation (for example, lauding how Russia’s Orthodox Christian leadership and its Muslim Chechen allies both oppose certain Western liberal values, hinting that different faiths can share common cause). Such nuances were absent in his Fox monologues.

These contrasts illustrate a reorientation. **Previously, Carlson’s rhetoric tended to *otherize* Muslims** – casting them as outsiders and potential enemies of “us.” **Now, his rhetoric often *includes* Muslims as part of an “us vs. them” narrative in which the “them” is an elite pushing conflict.** In a sense, he has flipped the script. Muslims went from being on the opposite side of Carlson’s metaphorical dividing line to, in some cases, standing on the same side as ordinary Americans, both wary of the designs of global elites or war hawks.

## Epilogue: Significance and Reactions to Carlson’s Shift

Tucker Carlson’s journey – from fervent Islamophobic provocateur to a commentator seemingly inclined toward dialogue and non-aggression with the Muslim world – is a fascinating reflection of broader currents in media and politics. It raises important questions about the trajectory of public discourse and the possibility (or limits) of change.

In the media sphere, Carlson’s shift underscores the role of platform and incentives in shaping rhetoric. While on Fox News, incentivized by ratings and a conservative base attuned to anti-Muslim messaging, Carlson leaned heavily into Islamophobia – a formula that kept him atop the cable news charts<sup>19</sup>. But outside that ecosystem, he adjusted his tone, suggesting that at least some of his earlier stance may have been performative or situational. This speaks to the performative nature of cable news in general: hosts often echo their audience’s fears back to them. Carlson’s post-Fox rebranding implies that media figures can and do reinvent themselves when their circumstances change. It also highlights the fragmentation of media audiences. By 2025, Carlson appears to be aiming for a coalition that cuts across some traditional lines – bringing together disaffected conservatives, libertarians, and even anti-establishment liberals – and part of doing so meant shedding knee-jerk Islamophobia, which would alienate potential allies. The evolution of Carlson’s views may therefore be a case study in how flexible ideological entrepreneurs can be, raising both cynicism (was it all an act?) and a hint of hope (people can moderate extreme views).

Politically, Carlson's transition is symptomatic of a realignment within the right. In the post-9/11 era, the Republican Party was defined by the "Global War on Terror," and anti-Islam sentiment was a unifying rallying cry. Two decades later, that consensus has splintered. The emergence of "America First" populism – skeptical of foreign interventions and more concerned with domestic cultural battles – means that hostility toward Islam is no longer the glue it once was on the right. Carlson is arguably both a product and a driver of this change. His criticism of figures like Ted Cruz or Sean Hannity for saber-rattling against Iran <sup>46</sup> <sup>60</sup> shows a challenge to the old guard neoconservative approach. At the same time, his continued influence ensures many grassroots conservatives hear an alternative message that sometimes aligns more with dovish or non-interventionist principles. This could have long-term implications: a segment of the American right is now less reflexively pro-Israel and less reflexively anti-Muslim than it was in the early 2000s. That realignment creates strange bedfellows (e.g., far-right nationalists agreeing with left-wing progressives on avoiding war in the Middle East), and Carlson has become a prominent face of this unorthodox coalition.

From the perspective of Muslim communities and interfaith relations, Carlson's shift has been met with cautious acknowledgement by some and deep skepticism by others. Muslim American leaders who for years condemned his rhetoric remain wary; an opportunistic change of tune does not erase the hurtful impact of his past segments that may have fueled anti-Muslim prejudice or even violence. It's one thing to stop throwing punches, but another to make amends for the damage done. As of 2025, Carlson has not offered any apology to Muslims for his Fox-era comments – and it is unlikely he ever will, given his general aversion to apologies <sup>35</sup>. Thus, many in the Muslim community question whether his "friendlier" stance is merely temporary or tactical. They remember that his platform normalized ideas that Muslims are dangerous or un-American, which had real consequences in their lives.

On the other hand, some Muslim commentators and activists have noted Carlson's new positions with a mix of surprise and tentative approval on specific issues. If a figure as influential as Tucker Carlson now questions endless wars in Muslim lands or calls out double standards, that can be seen as a positive development. It could, perhaps, open the door to more dialogue across political divides. The epilogue of Carlson's transformation might yet involve him engaging directly with Muslim audiences or leaders in a constructive way – something unthinkable back in his Fox News days. Should that happen, it would be a remarkable narrative of bridge-building coming from an unlikely source.

In a broader interfaith context, Carlson's shift illustrates how common interests (like peace or civil liberties) can sometimes override old prejudices. The fact that a figure notorious for Islamophobia could pivot to engaging the Islamic world suggests that today's ideological battles are not as static as they seem. It highlights a fluidity in alliances: yesterday's adversaries can find themselves aligned on a different issue today. This is a reminder that dialogues between communities (e.g., conservative Christians and Muslims) can emerge in unexpected ways, driven by shared concerns about, say, war or family values, even if they vehemently disagree on other fronts.

In closing, Tucker Carlson's biography is still being written. His views on Islam and Muslims have undoubtedly transformed in recent years, but questions linger: Will this change endure, deepen, or reverse again? Is it born of genuine conviction or calculated strategy? The answers will reveal much about Carlson's character – and about the currents shaping American public life. Regardless, the evolution so far is significant. It serves as a mirror to America's own journey with Islam over the last two decades: from post-9/11 fear and hostility, toward a potential (if still fragile) shift to understanding, or at least a truce. Carlson, intentionally or not, has become a symbol of that complex journey – one that continues to unfold in real time, before the eyes of a cautiously hopeful, yet vigilant, audience.

**Sources:** Tucker Carlson's career and quotes <sup>1</sup> <sup>3</sup> <sup>4</sup> <sup>47</sup> <sup>49</sup>, and coverage of his Fox News controversies and post-2023 statements <sup>25</sup> <sup>58</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>52</sup> have been documented in numerous publications and recordings. These include Fox News broadcasts, press releases by Muslim advocacy groups, and recent news articles by *Reuters*, *The Independent*, and others that track Carlson's interviews and clashes over Middle East policy <sup>48</sup> <sup>60</sup>. The transformation in his rhetoric is evident when comparing his own words and the reactions they provoked during these different periods, as detailed above. (All referenced material is from publicly available sources, as indicated in the citations.)

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>2</sup> <sup>3</sup> <sup>5</sup> <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> <sup>11</sup> <sup>12</sup> <sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> <sup>19</sup> <sup>21</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>27</sup> <sup>36</sup> <sup>37</sup> <sup>40</sup> <sup>42</sup> <sup>57</sup> <sup>58</sup> <sup>59</sup> **Tucker Carlson - Wikipedia**

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tucker\\_Carlson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tucker_Carlson)

<sup>4</sup> <sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> <sup>43</sup> <sup>44</sup> **Today in Islamophobia: April 26, 2023 - Bridge Initiative**

[https://bridge.georgetown.edu/today\\_islamophobia/today-in-islamophobia-april-26-2023/](https://bridge.georgetown.edu/today_islamophobia/today-in-islamophobia-april-26-2023/)

<sup>20</sup> <sup>32</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>35</sup> **Tucker Carlson's Racism and Islamophobia Laid Bare in New Recording - Truthdig**

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<sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> <sup>41</sup> **Muslim Advocates to Fox News: Fire Tucker Carlson After Latest Anti-Muslim Rant Against Ilhan Omar - Muslim Advocates**

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<sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> <sup>30</sup> <sup>31</sup> **Engage Action | A Muslim American Advocacy Group**

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<sup>38</sup> **How Tucker Carlson and the far right embraced Hungary's ...**

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<sup>39</sup> **At CPAC, Hungary's Viktor Orban decries LGBTQ+ rights, migration**

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<sup>45</sup> <sup>46</sup> <sup>47</sup> **'Full blast of propaganda': Tucker Carlson accuses Fox News of pushing war narrative; questions Trump's handling of Iran conflict - Times of India**

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<sup>48</sup> <sup>49</sup> <sup>50</sup> <sup>51</sup> **Tucker Carlson says to air interview with president of Iran | Reuters**

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<sup>52</sup> <sup>53</sup> <sup>54</sup> **MAGA war gets uglier as Trump first pal Laura Loomer hurls Qatar money 'lie' at Tucker Carlson | The Independent**

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<sup>55</sup> **Tucker Carlson Blasts Former Fox News Colleague Sean Hannity**

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<sup>56</sup> **Tucker Carlson Says Trump 'Complicit' in Israel's Attack on Iran**

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