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Meet the Teenagers Spurred into Action by Donald Trump's Muslim Ban

BY ANTONIA NOORI FARZAN

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Mohamed Abdulkadir, Taylor Penn, Mikala Teramoto, Megan Longton, and Emma Shenk organized a rally in support of the Muslim community.

Antonia Farzan

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Shortly after learning that Donald Trump had signed an executive order banning people from seven majority-Muslim countries from entering the United States, Mikala Teramoto, a senior at the Arizona School for the Arts, decided to plan a

rally in solidarity with the local Muslim community.

“I’m half Japanese, and my grandfather was in one of the internment camps,” she explains. “To me, a lot of the rhetoric was very similar to what was coming out after Pearl Harbor, that led to my grandfather being interned.”

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Within days, thousands of people had signed up to attend.

Many had no idea that the event was organized by a group of high schoolers who – to their great frustration – hadn’t been able to vote in the 2016 election.

“We were probably the only 17-year-olds having debate-watching parties,” Megan Longton, a fellow A.S.A senior, says. “I remember driving home on election night and just feeling numb.”

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Emma Villa Moraila

Taylor Penn, also a senior at A.S.A., found following the election "incredibly stressful. I am a woman, and I am gay. I'm bisexual. Watching him talk the way he does about females made me scared."

Joining their group was Mohamed Abdulkadir, a 19-year-old who attends Mesa Community College. Originally from Somalia, he became a citizen three weeks ago and was not able to vote in November.

"My mom was already a citizen, so I tried to help her register, because she has limited English," he says. "When she went to vote, they said she wasn't registered, but I had the registration card. I didn't want to argue, so we left."

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He went to bed early on election night and was woken up to the sound of his mother crying because Donald Trump had won.

The helplessness that all of them felt motivated them to organize the rally so that their voices could be heard.

"It wasn't a protest, it wasn't a march, it wasn't anti-Trump," Teramoto emphasizes. "It was anti-legislation."

She chose to collaborate with the Islamic Community Center of Phoenix, which hosted the

rally, because her church, Trinity Mennonite in Glendale, had formed a relationship with the mosque back in 2015 when it started **receiving threatening letters** and became the site of **armed anti-Muslim protests**.

Word spread through social media, and Abdulkadir told people at his mosque at Friday prayer.

The teenagers estimate that over a thousand people ended up attending.

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“We were not expecting as many people as we got,” Penn says. “We were expecting 50 people from school.”

A few anti-Muslim protesters even turned up outside the mosque. (“But like, five of them,” Teramoto says.)

Though they’re all looking forward to being able to vote, the students who organized the rally have mixed feelings about whether or not they’d want to

go into politics.



Emma Villa Moraila

“I didn’t mean to turn into an activist!” Teramoto says. “Humans just need to be kind to humans.”

Emma Sherk, a 14-year-old who lives in Phoenix and is homeschooled, says, “Politics kind of scares me. I don’t think I’d ever go into a career involving politics.”

Penn agrees. “I don’t think it’s something I would pursue as a job – I think I’d go crazy. Maybe I’d run for city council.”

But Megan Longton, who will attend the University of Mississippi in the fall and plans on double-majoring in public policy and musical theater, wants to turn both those passions into a career.

“That’s my plan right now, to move to New York and start out as a struggling artist,” she says. “When I’m not struggling, I plan to be working in politics.”

So does Mohamed Abudulkadir. “I’m hoping go to Georgetown or George Washington University after finishing my associate’s degree, then go back to my country and work in foreign ministry and diplomacy,” he says.

In the meantime, they’re already thinking about planning their next event – maybe a rally in solidarity with refugees.

“We want to use this platform of people who are shocked that high school students did this,” Teramoto says.