

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



What's Going on Here?

US Experiences of Islamophobia between Obama and Trump

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Survey Findings

Muslim Americans recognize the pervasive and threatening nature of Islamophobia in the United States.

However, while quantifying anti-Muslim hate crime is important, it is also necessary to understand the negative impact it has on victims and this can be done by classifying it according to perceived severity.

In the five categories of hate crimes classified by the report, the experience of Islamophobia among Muslims in America is most intensely felt in terms of ‘hate policy’, that is, policies adopted by the government targeting Muslim populations.

Some three-quarters of all respondents ranked ‘hate policy’ as the most powerful experience of Islamophobia, followed closely by ‘hate representation’ (69.9%) and ‘hate ideology’ (68.3%).

‘Hate representation’ refers mainly to hatred through mass media. ‘Hate ideology’ is broader and covers all instances of hatred that are Islamophobic, including the observation of actions or speech expressed in society against Muslims.

‘Hate practice’ - the citizen’s perception of belonging to a hated community that feels its consequences in everyday life – was felt less intensely (41.6%) while ‘hate as discrimination’ – the manifestation of Islamophobia as discrimination in social relations or rules was felt least acutely (33.9%).

Recommendations

The recommendations that flow from this analysis must contend with the daunting realization that Islamophobia is a manifestation of the entrenched structural racism in the United States. Whether or not the social unrest occasioned by the killing by police of George Floyd proves to be an inflection point in US politics, the climate is clearly ripe for challenging the country’s racist underbelly.

One avenue Muslims can avail themselves of is the judicial system. An increasingly common and successful strategy has involved challenging the constitutionality of anti-Muslim legislation, particularly around the establishment of places of worship. Challenges to policies in several states have yielded victories for the Muslim community, as court after court has struck down these laws as unconstitutional.

Secondly, the Muslim-American community is not alone in being the target of bigotry. Hatred is an intersectional phenomenon. The attacks against Muslims are often not

solely an issue of religious freedom; they also affect other constitutional issues (Trump's "Muslim ban" was a classic example) such as equal protection, due process and fundamental rights. This warrants developing multi-faceted legal strategies and cooperating with other Americans and suspect groups that have to confront various forms of hatred and discrimination and attacks on cherished freedoms.

That Americans representing a broad spectrum of the body-politic took on the "Muslim ban" as their own cause célèbre was a case study in the potential and power of civic engagement through coalition building, whether formally or as a matter of circumstance. This kind of cooperation and coalition building should also be extended to the fight against hate speech by politicians where the optimal way to challenge toxic speech is via mass, grassroots mobilization involving not only Muslim Americans but also other advocacy groups.

It is therefore imperative for Muslim Americans to develop stronger modes of civic engagement. This can be achieved at the grassroots level even with one's neighbors, schoolmates and work colleagues. The multiplier effect that such interactions can have in their ability to project positive sentiment about the community as a whole is immeasurable.

Muslim Americans are already very well integrated into the broader societal fabric. They serve in a variety of service-related occupations, and most Americans probably don't realize that their physician, teacher, bank teller, attorney, pharmacist, retail assistant or first responder is a Muslim.

Interpersonal contact is the most effective antidote to negative imagery and rhetoric about Muslims. People have a far greater likelihood of trusting situations in which they have agency over the matter. Interacting with a Muslim American will offer a far more authentic and reliable measure of what Islam or Muslims are like than a third party statement or media report.

The distorted narrative presented by mainstream media is a leading source of Islamophobia. Tackling it requires sufficient representation of suspect communities in all dimensions of media operations, including journalists and others who cover the news, especially of the community itself. There is a critical need for greater diversity and representation among editorial boards and media coverage, per se, and for Muslims to be provided the opportunity to speak on all issues, rather than be passive tokens or props in coverage of their own community.

Combatting toxic media narratives about Muslim Americans requires a high level of vigilance and investigation of media outlets. It requires Muslims to reclaim the agency of their own narrative, especially after something negative is published. In such instances, Muslim Americans should insist from the media outlet in question that they be given space for advancing an alternative position.

Statistics and evidence matter. Muslim Americans should contribute to the public discourse, and the creation of their own narrative by proffering indisputable data about their community. To achieve this, it is equally critical to cultivate relationships with journalists and editors of various outlets. This allows for greater visibility and for these individuals in the field to be aware of potential, viable and accurate sources for their journalism.

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