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Islam For Reporters

DATA, COMICS, ISLAM-RELATED TERMS FOR REPORTERS.
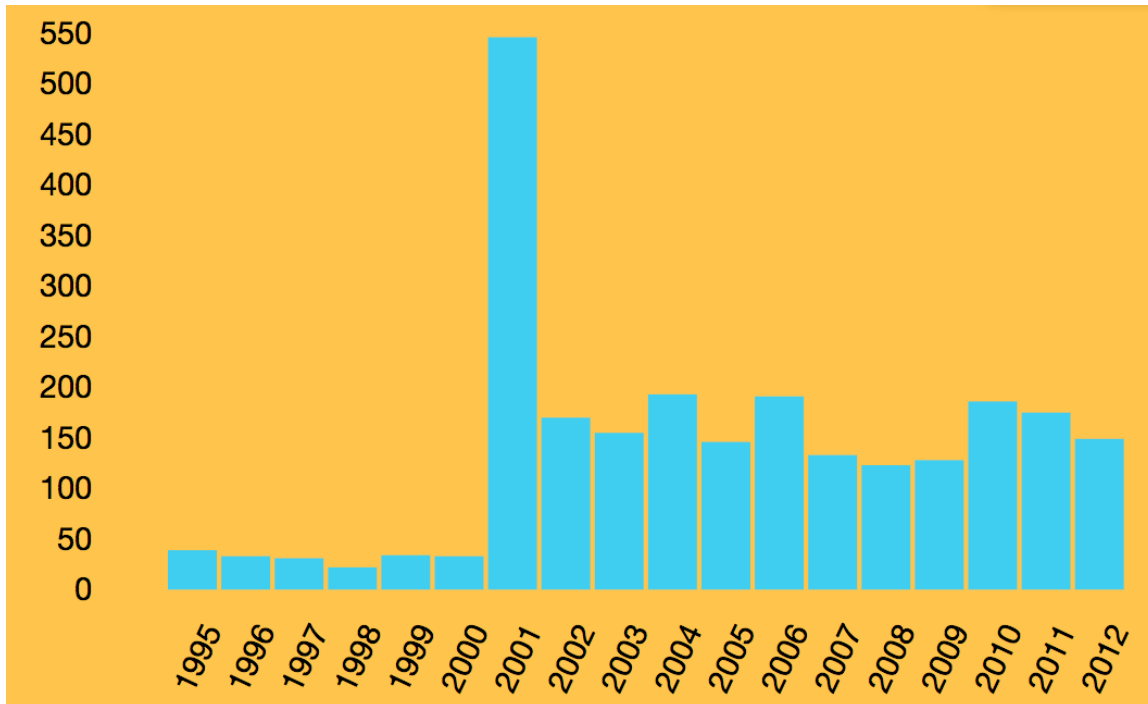
The FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting Program has been tracking anti-Muslim hate crimes since 1995.

Anti-Muslim hate crime numbers have yet to go down to pre-9/11 levels.

Hate crimes against Muslims jumped considerably in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks of 2001. There were 33 incidents the year before the attacks, and by the end of 2001, the number soared to 546. But levels of offenses in the U.S. — though they have decreased significantly since 2001 — have not gone down to pre-9/11 numbers. Some of the highest levels of reported hate crimes against Muslims after 2001 took place during election years, particularly in 2004, 2006 and 2010.

The FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR) collects and publishes hate crime data submitted voluntarily by more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies. Hate crime data collecting and reporting is done by a group of about 45 people, according to FBI statistician Dr. Jim Noonan. Hate crime data from 1995 to 2012 is available online.

Nausheen Husain
UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism
May 2014

One of the biggest hindrances to a complete set of recorded data is the fact that this program is voluntary. Law enforcement agencies don't have to submit their hate crime data to the FBI, though Noonan said the program is working to increase participation in the program. Subject matter experts and a training staff travel the country to conduct training sessions and encourage non-participating agencies to consider participating. Their most recent training was in the southern district of Florida.

"It becomes kind of a political issue. Nobody wants to admit they have hate crimes in their area," he said, "but we need to get reporting up."

Only 44 percent of hate crimes are reported to the police, according to a 2005 Bureau of Justice Statistics report, and actual hate crime numbers are much higher than reported by the FBI UCRP. In Muslim communities in particular, a general distrust of law enforcement and the FBI, stemming from the defense of police surveillance of these communities, can also serve as a hindrance to accurate data collection of hate crimes.

"Our data probably looks kind of underrated or silly," said Noonan. "For example, Alabama has no hate crimes -- I mean, really? Something like that, we would hope people would call attention to."

All hate crimes reported upon in American media from 2003 to the present, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

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The Southern Poverty Law Center, a well-known civil rights organization based in Alabama, has been tracking hate crimes covered by the media from 2003 to present time. The map above shows where coverage of anti-Muslim hate crimes was published, as well as a description of each crime. Though the map includes coverage from 2003 to 2013, it has a total of less than 200 data points, which is much less than all the FBI-reported hate crimes for just 2001. This gives a sense of the proportion of anti-Muslim hate crimes coverage in American media versus levels of reported anti-Muslim hate crimes.

The Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) has a fairly extensive record, through its press releases, of relatively recent Islamophobic occurrences in the country, such as the anti-Muslim textbook censorship in Florida or the "insufficiently vetted" National September 11 Memorial Museum film in New York. CAIR has been publishing reports on the status of civil rights for Muslims every year since 1995.

Despite the increase in agencies, like the SPLC and CAIR, tracking hate crimes and Islamophobic incidents, it is very difficult to keep a full record anti-Muslim crimes and trends in the U.S. in order to get a complete picture of the overall bias.

Screenshots

Story told by Hind Makki.

Text written by Nausheen Husain.

Understanding: "Jihad"

In Islamic traditions, jihad, an Arabic word meaning "struggle," means struggling against one's lesser instincts to try and be a good person. In some instances, it can refer to an armed struggle against oppression.
Defining the term jihad as "holy war," especially without explanation, is inaccurate.
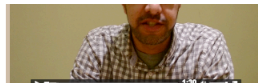
1:07
Ali Asani is a professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard University.

Read

3:15
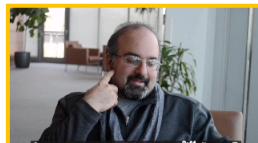Jocelyne Cesari is a professor of Islamic Studies at Harvard University.

Read

1:30
Haroon Moghul is a scholar and writer in New York.

Read

2:30
Hussein Rashid is a scholar and writer in New York.

Read

2:41
Omid Safi is a professor of Islamic Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Read

Hind Makki is a blogger in Chicago.

Read the explanation.

Jihad is a very strong word, and it's a very strong term for Muslims. What it really means in Arabic, is struggle. I mean, that's literally the root word of the term jihad. Spiritually what jihad means is an internal struggle. Because what Islam really tells Muslims is that we need to basically fight with our egos to submit to the will of God. Not that God doesn't want good things to us, but things happen in the world and that as Muslims, as spiritual beings, we should be able to submit, our egos should be able to submit to that. And the scholars realize that this is a very difficult thing to do and so that's why the term "struggle," jihad, is referred to that. The actual term is "jihad al-nafs," which means struggle of the self. And so you can imagine how closely that is linked to the idea of making your ego submissive to the way the world works. The other term that jihad often means is as an armed struggle, or a struggle to actually change things physically. This is where the mis-definition of jihad often comes, that says that jihad is actually a holy war. From my understanding, where that mis-definition comes from is actually -- the source is actually one of the prophetic sayings, which is that if you see injustice around the world, you should change it with your hands and that is one of the best ways of changing something. And that can mean, obviously, a physical, armed, military change, perhaps similar to the Catholic understanding of a just war. And then the second way to change things is with your mouth or with your hands, as in, if you're writing something, you want to write an op-ed against an injustice around the world, you want to speak out against it. And then the third way to change injustice is through prayer in your heart. And that, the prophet tells us, is one of the weakest ways, but some people are not able to change injustice around the world and the most we can do is just to pray that it goes away. And so, this is actually a pretty well-known, strong prophetic tradition, that if you see injustice around the world, you should change it, with your hands, with your words or with just your heart. And I think oftentimes there is this miscommunication that this is what jihad always means, a holy war. But you have to also understand that wars in Islam -- there's rules of engagement and that it's very important to know why you are having an armed or military change.

Go Back
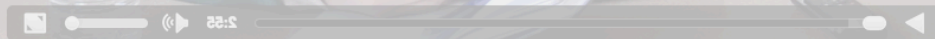
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Ali Asani is Professor of Indo-Muslim and Islamic Religion and Cultures and Director of the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Islamic Studies Program at Harvard University. A scholar of Islam in South Asia, Prof Asani's research focuses on Shia and Sufi devotional traditions in the region. In addition, he is interested in popular or folk forms of Muslim devotional life, Muslim communities in the West and the role of the arts in promoting religious literacy.

Jocelyn Cesari:

Jocelyn Cesari is a lecturer on Islamic Studies at Harvard University. She is also the director of the Islam in the West Program at Harvard, as well as the founder of Islamopedia Online, which tracks Muslim communities' presence in Europe. Cesari is also a senior research fellow at Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris, France.

Eli Clifton:

Eli Clifton is a reporting fellow with The Investigative Fund at The Nation Institute who focuses on money in politics and US foreign policy. Clifton is a co-author of the Center for American Progress's report "Fear Inc.: The Roots Of the Islamophobia Network In America," which tracked millions of dollars of funding for Islamophobic organizations in the U.S.

Matthew Duss:

Matthew Duss is a Policy Analyst at American Progress, where his work focuses on U.S. national security policy in the Middle East, with a concentration on Iran and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Duss' work also focuses on the issue of Islamophobia in the United States. He is a co-author of the Center's 2011 report, "Fear, Inc: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America," which tracked millions of dollars of funding for Islamophobic organizations in the U.S.

Carl Ernst:

Carl W. Ernst is the Kenan Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and a specialist in Islamic studies, with a focus on West and South Asia. His published research, based on the study of Arabic, Persian, and Urdu, has been mainly devoted to the study of three areas: general and critical issues of Islamic studies, pre-modern and contemporary Sufism, and Indo-Muslim culture.

Wardah Khalid:

Wardah Khalid is the author of the "Young American Muslim" blog on the Houston Chronicle and is a blogger for the Huffington Post. She is heavily involved in civic outreach, youth and interfaith work and has offered workshops on Islam, social media and Islamophobia to local and national audiences. She is currently pursuing her Master's in International Affairs at Columbia University.

Hind Makki:

The daughter of African immigrants to the American Midwest, Hind has long been interested in understanding the impact of migration, race, religion on shaping the development of Western Muslim consciousness. She blogs at Hindtrospectives on Patheos, and is the founder of Side Entrance, a tumblr which showcases the women's sections of mosques around the world; according to the blog's description, they showcase "the beautiful, the adequate and the pathetic."

Haroon Moghul:

Haroon Moghul is an Associate Editor at Religion Dispatches and Senior Editor at The Islamic Monthly. He is a Ph.D. candidate at Columbia University, focusing on 'Allama Muhammad Iqbal's concept of reconstruction; his research more broadly includes Islam in India and Islamic networks across the greater Indian Ocean and West Asian regions. Moghul is also the author of two novels – My First Police State and The Order of Light.

Hussein Rashid:

Hussein Rashid is currently a faculty member at Hofstra University and Associate Editor at Religion Dispatches. He is the convener of islamicate and a contributor to Talk Islam and AltMuslimah. He received an MA and PhD from Harvard's Near Eastern Languages and Cultures. His dissertation focused on the role of music as a means of integration amongst South Asian immigrants to the US and the UK. His larger research interest is the representation and self-representation of Muslims in America. He is currently expanding his research to include graphic novels and the Muslim-American blogistan.

Omid Safi:

Omid Safi is an Iranian-American Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, where he specializes in Islamic mysticism (Sufism), contemporary Islamic thought and medieval Islamic history. He has served on the

board of the Pluralism project at Harvard University and is the co-chair for the Islamic Mysticism Group at the American Academy of Religion. He is also the author of Progressive Muslims, which contains a diverse collection of essays by and about Muslims committed to social justice and pluralism.

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