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Anti-Muslim incidents at US mosques surged last year

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By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF JUNE 20, 2016

Anti-Muslim incidents at mosques in the United States surged last year, according to a new report that blames the trend on backlash from terrorist attacks and the rhetoric of presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

There were nearly 80 incidents — including vandalism, property damage, harassment, and intimidation — recorded at mosques nationwide in 2015, according to the [report](#) by the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Center for Race and Gender at University of California Berkeley.

That was about four times higher than in 2014, when 20 such incidents were recorded, the report said. It was the highest total since 2009, when the two organizations began tracking the incidents.

There were 17 incidents recorded in both November and December 2015, which were the highest single-month totals ever recorded.

A Trump campaign spokeswoman didn't immediately return a message seeking comment on Monday afternoon.

Cases cited by the new report included a [fire at a California mosque](#) that authorities believed was

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intentionally set, and an incident in which a [bloody severed pig's head](#) was found outside the door to a Philadelphia mosque.

The report noted that the spike in incidents at the end of last year came in the wake of the terror attacks in Paris on Nov. 13, and the attack in San Bernardino on Dec. 3.

And, “by November 2015, Islam was a central issue in the 2016 presidential campaign,” the report said. “In December 2015, this focus was magnified when GOP frontrunner candidate Donald Trump put forward a policy proposal that would ban all Muslims from entering the United States.”

“When you have a terror attack in the news, there will be maybe a small spike in incidents,” Corey Saylor, director of CAIR’s Department to Monitor and Combat Islamophobia, said in a telephone interview Monday.

He cited how, for example, there was no significant spike in the wake of the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris.

“But anti-Islamic sentiment tends to spike in relation to presidential cycles, and when you have something like [the] San Bernardino [attack] and combine it with a high-visibility campaign like Donald Trump’s, it takes that sort of mix to really set off the spike in anti-Muslim incidents we saw,” said Saylor.

The report said the last significant spike in anti-Muslim incidents at mosques was in 2010, “when the controversy over the Park51 Islamic Cultural Center [near Ground Zero in New York City] became an election issue.”

The report listed a total of 78 incidents, but one incident listed in Massachusetts actually involved a man who had posted Facebook messages threatening the Islamic Society of Boston Cultural Center in Roxbury in October 2014. Federal charges weren’t brought against him until 2015.

In 2010, 53 anti-Muslim incidents were recorded at American mosques.

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“That both the 2010 spike in incidents and the late 2015 spike both occurred when Islam was an election campaign issue lends additional weight to the argument” that anti-Muslim sentiment trends in the United States are affected more by domestic U.S. politics than international terrorism, the report said.

The report said the actual annual totals of anti-Muslim incidents at mosques were likely higher because many incidents are not reported in media coverage, to law enforcement, or to CAIR.

The report also raised concerns over Islamophobic groups, calls for “Muslim-free” businesses, anti-Muslim demonstrations, and the passage of anti-Muslim legislation.

“The hope is that this report and others like it will provide the needed grounding for communities across the country to use for effective engagement with policy makers, educators, civil society leaders, and media outlets,” said a statement from Hatem Bazian, director of the Islamophobia Research and Documentation Project at the Center for Race and Gender at UC Berkeley.

“Education and applied research is the best avenue to uplift and bring about a social justice transformation in society and this report is a step in that direction,” added Bazian.


The FBI tracks reports made to law enforcement of anti-Islamic, and other types of, hate crimes. The agency has not released figures for 2015 yet.

Data from prior years tracked by the FBI shows that the number of incidents nationwide ranged between about two and three dozen annually prior to 2000. But in 2001, the year of the 9/11 attacks carried out by an Islamic terrorist group, the figures soared. A record 481 anti-Islamic hate crimes were reported that year. And in the years since, the figures have fluctuated between about 100 and 150 reports annually.

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