To What Extent Have Attitudes Towards Muslim-Americans Changed In The USA After 9/11?

Introduction

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has reported that following September 11, 2001, hate crimes against Muslim Americans have increased by over 1700%. The number of negative stereotypes associated with Muslim Americans skyrocketed after the September 11th attacks on multiple important targets in the United States. Members of al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and crashed one into the Pentagon, one in a rural field in Pennsylvania and the final two flew into the Twin Towers in New York City. When looking at the aftermath of September 11, society as a whole increased the negative views, they held on Muslim Americans; Muslim immigrants, disproportionate to any other immigrant group, were met with negative attitudes. Since then, increased racial and religious injustices has left Arabs, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and those who have physical appearances associated to members of these groups, fearful of potential hatred and hostility from persons of other cultures. [1: Anderson, C. (2002, November 25). FBI reports jump in violence against Muslims. Associated Press.] [2: American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, 2003; Council of American Islamic Relations, 2003; Saroglou & Galand, 2004] [3: Council of American Islamic Relations, 2003; Saroglou & Galand, 2004] [4: Abu-Ras & Suarez, 2009; Baqi-Aziz, 2001; Kira et al., 2010; Rippy & Newman, 2006]

Though no certain race is labelled clearly as Muslim, therefore the line that divides racism and religious discrimination is often blurred. Muslim Americans are often perceived as a religious minority who think, and behave similarly despite wide ethnic differences that exist within the Muslim American community.

Despite negative stereotypes of Muslims reported in the media, little psychological research has been conducted to characterize non-Muslim attitudes toward Muslim Americans. One study was published exploring negative attitudes toward Arabs, whereas none has been conducted regarding Muslims. Research focusing on Islamophobia, a dread or hatred of Islam, has been conducted in Europe where a survey in the United Kingdom indicated that discrimination against Muslims has increased in recent years. Though the U.K has had its fair share of terror attacks, not many were committed or initiated by Muslims. Even the infamous London riots, a series of riots that saw mass looting, arson and property destruction, consisted of thousands of individuals of all races and ethnicities. Sparked by the recent shooting of a black male, Mark Duggan, by Tottenham Police, many were outraged and decided to take to the streets. Though the initial crime was committed by white members of the police force, the discrimination against Caucasians stayed relatively the same. It begs the question, why did anti-Muslim sentiments increase in the same area over the same time period when terror caused by Muslims was not the primary culprit of terrorism.

As many Muslim Americans are visibly culturally distinct, it would be of value to explore whether attitudes of non-Muslims toward Muslim Americans resemble attitudes expressed by European non-Muslims toward members of these minority groups. In the aftermath of September 11, because of the higher occurrences of discriminating incidents directed toward Muslims and those perceived to be Muslims, it is paramount to identify the reason why Muslims are subject to

experiences of expressed negative attitudes toward their self or their cultural group. Such information may help Muslim Americans process and understand negative experiences through the lens of racism. The following research paper explores situational attitudes toward Muslim Americans. We examine negative attitudes that may be present toward Muslim Americans which may have detrimental effects on the Muslim American's experiences in specific contexts.

Discrimination against Muslim-Americans is not any new phenomenon just as anti-Semitism has been around for centuries. Certainly, the violence against the American people led the public to determine that as a whole, the Muslim people were innately violent giving them an added vulnerability to discrimination. The increase of attacks carried out by Muslim terrorists simply added as fuel for the fire. The added negative attitudes towards the community not only affect Muslim-Americans but have an everlasting effect on society as a whole.

The Events of 9/11

As aforementioned, four airplanes were highjacked by the Islamic terrorist group Al-Qaeda and taken on suicide missions to New York City, Washington, and Pennsylvania. 19 terrorists from a number of Middle Eastern countries were working directly for Al-Qaeda's ring leader, Osama Bin Laden. He ordered the attack due to America's ongoing intervention in the Persian Gulf war and their continued support of Israel. Most of the men entered the country through fake passports and some even lived in the United States for a few years. They decided to smuggle knives and boxcutters onto four different California-bound flights and took over the pilot's cockpit while in the air with the help of their weapons.

The first plane, an American Airlines Boeing 767, collided with the North Tower of the World Trade Center at approximately 8;45 am. Since the plane crashed directly into the 80th floor, those who worked on the highest floors of the 110-story building were left to die as they had no viable escape. On impact, all the occupants of the plane perished and many of the office workers as well. News stations began reporting this incident as one-time vis major until 18 minutes later when United Airlines flight 175—another Boeing 767— was seen appearing out of a plume of clouds. The airplane veered on course to the south tower and exploded on impact at the 60th floor, leaving massive grey clouds of debris in its wake. Screams of fear and horror were repeated in the building while firefighters dashed into the burning building to try and save as many as they could. Some were not fortunate enough to live, or to even die an instant death. Some were forced to choose between burning alive on the top floors of the building or jumping out the shattered windows. Without haste, a couple citizens decided to die on their own terms and leaped off the highest floors to their impending death.

Those who were not lucky enough to die were forced to endure the collapse of the buildings caused by the immense heat from the explosions. Many children said goodbye to their fathers and mothers that day, unbeknownst to the fact that it would be the last interaction they would have with their parents.

The second attack occurred at the US Department of Defense headquarters, the Pentagon, near Washington, D.C. The Boeing 757, American Airlines Flight 77, collided into the treasury department of the compound. It is important to note that only a few days earlier, the Pentagon reported that they had misplaced over $2.3 trillion from their budget. Coincidentally, all the documents pertaining to the spending and the loss were lost when the plane crashed into the

Pentagon.

The last plane, United Airlines Flight 93, was the only plane where passengers and crew were aware of terrorism taking place since they received phone calls from loved ones. As a result, most on board knew that they were already dead the moment the hijackers took over the plane. Knowing this, a few brave men decided that their lives were worth fighting for and intervened. Three men stormed the cockpit with fire extinguishers and tried to take over, unfortunately, they were unable to and the plane was sent hurdling towards a field in rural Pennsylvania at over 800 km/h where all of the passengers perished.

War on Terror

The actions of a few have led to unimaginable acts against the whole Muslim-American community. The discrimination of parents and grandparents ultimately trickles down for future generations. The absence a break in the chain of discrimination leads to more intense discrimination even when participants are not certain why they have said beliefs.

Following the September 11th attacks, the Bush administration declared a worldwide war on terror using covert military operations and new security legislation to stop terrorism and those who sponsor it. The president urged others to join this war on terror by exclaiming "either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.' Many governments joined this campaign, often adopting harsh new laws, lifting long-standing legal protections and stepping up domestic policing and intelligence work.

A number of critics believe that the 'war on terrorism' is an ideology of fear and repression that creates enemies and promotes violence rather than stopping acts of terror and strengthening security. The worldwide campaign has now become an excuse for governments to suppress opposition groups and disregard international law and civic freedoms. Over the past two decades, it is evident that this war on terror has been utterly unsuccessful, some would even say that it backfired completely. The new formation of the Islamic State terrorist group and the continued presence of Al-Qaeda in the Middle East are prime examples of this.

From the first hijacking to the last fall of rubble, the entire ordeal of the 9/11 attacks only lasted 102 minutes. The war on terror that the Bush administration kicked off has lasted over 6,200 days; 11 years longer than World War II. The amount of money spent on this so called "war" is astronomical, approaching $29 trillion by the end of 2020. Bush's attempt to right the injustices that have taken place has claimed over 500,000 million lives—many more than the 2,996 killed on 9/11. Bush's idea to create the war on terror was criticized as it became more of a promoter of violence rather and a force to reduce terror in America—it became an excuse for a stronger military presence in civilian neighborhoods, ultimately reducing the civil liberties of the American people themselves.

Muslim Americans Pre-9/11

Before the 9/11 attacks, Islam was viewed as a religion of peace and prosperity, often interesting the common American with its different rituals and traditions. The Council on American-Islamic Relations' Oklahoma chapter's executive director, Adam Soltani, even stated that he "didn't sense any fear in being Muslim at all" because "there was a sense of intrigue; it

was something different" Just like Soltani, many Muslim Americans felt the same way about their religion—they simply felt different, not hated.

Being a Muslim means, to live in accordance with Allah's will. Allah is the highest power of Islam and is all-knowing and omniscient—he is the creator of all things and the universe. Another important figure in this Abrahamic religion is Muhammad, a prophet who claimed to have known the words of Allah through his recurring visits with the angel Gabriel. With the knowledge from Muhammad, the holy book of Islam, the Quran, was written. Muslims have their own structure for obedience to Allah as the word "Muslim" means "one who submits to Allah" This framework consists of their declaration of faith (shahadah), their daily prayer five times per day (solat), their almsgiving (zakat), their fasting during Ramadan (sawm) and their pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj).

Islam is distinct from the other Abrahamic religions due to its belief in who the Messiah really is. Muslims believe that the Messiah is still to come while Christians and Jews believe that he has already shown himself as Jesus Christ.

Analysis

The attacks of 9/11 not only impacted the lives of Muslim-Americans of the time, but also set a precedent for future Muslim-Americans and those who have physical appearances associated with Muslims, worldwide. The difficulty in analyzing how Muslim-Americans lives have been changed after the attacks lies in the strength of peoples' voices and different types of survey data. For example, the Pew Research Centre finds that Americans are becoming more accepting and kinder towards Muslim-Americans—even only a few months after the attack. On the contrary, a scholarly journal from the National Journal of Psychology and the FBI Hate Crime Statistics both agree that the opposite is the reality. Their data shows that Americans were developing more negative attitudes towards Muslim-Americans, though their data collection and analyzation varied slightly from the Pew Research Centre. Another study published in the Journal of Muslim Mental Health in partnership with the University of Michigan states that [image:]Muslim-Americans were only seen in negative lights when boarding planes and on transportation, while they were seen in positive lights in many other regards.

Since the 1950s, Americans have generally grown fonder of the idea that religion is having less and less of an effect on daily life. Referring to figure 1, it is evident that Americans were growing less devoted to religion, especially with new age political movements in the late 1960s which expressed more progressive ideologies. The most prominent jump in the chart is from March 2001 to November 2001 which saw a 41% increase in the number of people who believed that religion was playing an increasing role in family life. More importantly, this measure is the highest it had been for decades.

Pew Research Centre

In November of 2001, the Pew Research Centre conducted a study on the public opinion of Muslims—only two months removed from the events of the terrorist attacks. They found that views towards Muslim-Americans actually grew more favorable from 45% in March of 2001 to about 59% in November. It is notable that even though Bush called for the "War on Terror", costing millions of Muslim lives, he still called for tolerance towards them in America. His words had been received well by his followers as 64% of his conservative Republican supporters felt

favorably towards Muslims.

However, not all of his mostly conservative, Christian political supporters saw eye to eye with the Islamic faith. Only about 38% of interviewees knew anything about Islam and even fewer, about 31%, said that they saw similarities between their own religion and the Islamic faith.

The stereotype provided to many on the mainstream news outlets is that many Republican supporters, mainly those of Caucasian descent living in the Southern states, are against immigration and have a slight animosity towards Muslims. According to this study, that idea is not purely fabricated or baseless. Almost half of interviewees believed that the attacks of 9/11 were mainly influenced by religion. Yet, it is important to note that those who were interviewed were able to make the distinction that the actions of few were not representative of the collective.

Based on the data in figure 2, the public opinion of Muslim-Americans in all political factions increased substantially between March of 2001 and November of the same year. The increase in acceptance to those practicing Islam in America can be attributed to Bush's speeches, but more directly it can be credited to the empathy of the common man in America. Shortly after the attack of 9/11, there was a very substantial increase in the amount of anti-Muslim hate crimes occurring in the US. To separate themselves from the radical ideologies of those committing the hate crimes, many Americans expressed more sympathy towards Muslim-Americans in this troubling time. By empathizing with Muslims who were being called out and picked on for their religious beliefs, numerous Americans were able to distance themselves from xenophobes causing damage to the reputation of Americans worldwide. Since those committing hate crimes reflected very poorly on the nation as a whole, community groups came together to try and support Muslim-Americans and protect them from those who wished to do them harm. At this point after the attacks, when New York City was recovering, a number of community support groups sprung up to aid not only the direct victims of 9/11, but the ones who were affected indirectly as well. This included young Muslim children experiencing harassment at school due to their faith, or Muslim girls being targeting in Hijab cutting attacks on public transportation. The increase in these community organizations gave those who were not well aware of the Islamic faith, a deeper insight into what it means to be a practicing Muslim in 21st century America. Those who were able to participate in these groups not only gained knowledge of the faith, but the ability to empathize with the struggles that others were dealing with. [image:]

Yet, the acceptance of Muslim-Americans pales in comparison to that of the other Abrahamic religions. More specifically, the Judeo-Christian religions were given significantly higher favorability rating when compared to those who practiced Islam. 78% of interviewees gave a favorable rating to Catholics, 77% did for Protestants while 75% did the same for those of the Jewish faith. When compared to the 59% favorable rating of Muslim-Americans it seems that the 9/11 attacks did have an effect on how people viewed Muslim-Americans in relation to other religions, but not the extent that was hypothesized.

Though the Muslim-Americans had a lower amount of favorable rating when compared to the Judeo-Christian religions, they still were seen to have a higher standing than atheists. Only 32% of those interviewed deemed a favorable rating be imposed for atheists, while 49% gave them an unfavorable rating and 19% declined to rate. This is believed to have been caused by the depicted lack of morals and ethics in the atheist community. Some who practice Islam have taken their ideologies to the extreme, but it is clear that they are radical extremists. This is

because Islam is taught as a religion of love and peace and teaches its practitioners to respect all living things and to live life justly. However, there are no distinct guiding principles for atheists, they follow their own moral compasses. This means that some have very skewed morals and ethics which reflect very poorly on the community as a whole. Therefore, it is evident that the lack of morals in atheism leads to less favorable ratings, more than the increase in religious attacks decreases favorable ratings for Muslim-Americans.

The increase in favorable ratings for Muslims can also be attributed to better educated and more open-minded youth. This could explain why only 51% of those with a high school degree or less have a favorable view of Muslim-Americans, while 73% of college graduates express the same views. With increased education of different religions and beliefs through education, the number of people with positive impressions of Islam will only continue to grow. However, even when most are willing to change their minds with the revelation of new information, some people will still be reluctant to change based on their prior experiences. This illustrates the reason why 62% of those under 30 viewed Muslim-Americans in a positive light, where older generations did not share the same viewpoint as only 48% of those over 65 expressed favorability towards Muslims.

The most important fact retrieved from this study is that in almost every interview question, a familiarity with the Islamic faith had a significant influence on the attitudes towards Muslim-Americans. 73% of people who have been informed and understand Islam express positive views of Muslim-Americans, while 51% of those who know little to nothing about the faith feel the same. Even those who are knowledgeable about Islam are more than twice as likely to see common ground between Islam and their own religion. This pattern is again reflected when Americans were interviewed on why they thought the terrorist attacks had taken place. Over 50% who felt informed about the Islamic faith believed that the attacks were motivated by political beliefs. 24% of those informed about Islam believed it was due to religious beliefs as opposed to 33% of those who knew nothing about the religion. Here one can see that the increasing familiarity with Islam leads to seeing the attacks less as one that is purely religious, but more of one that is based on politics.

FBI Hate Crimes

After the tragedy of 9/11, it is noted that there is a significant increase of hate crimes towards the people of Muslim faith. Hate crimes define as a criminal offense by the reason of one's race, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity. (Levin) This includes the recent horrid acts of burning down a mosque in Texas, and bombing residential areas who held Somali-Muslim immigrants. Trends of hate crime have been documented in the Hate Crime Statistics Act in addition to the FBI databases. Before nine eleven, records of hate [image:]crime were low and only spiked after the attack. The year of the attack in 2001 recorded 481 crimes against Muslims, post nine eleven reports gradually declined to a bracket between 105 to 160 per year.

Although the numerous of institutions documenting hate crimes, government data like the Bureau of Justice Statistics have been caught with several errors of undercounting records of hate crime. They rely on residential crime surveys instead of police reports, where indications are significantly above the stated level. The FBI data documents 257 hate crimes against the Muslims in 2015 with a 67% increase as compared to the past year.

There is a correlation between general spikes of hate crime to certain events that involve anti-Muslim involvement. This is evident in the 45 incidents of hate crime that occurred in the United States after the Paris attack in 2015 in addition to numerous attacks occurred after Trump's proposal to ban all Muslims from entering America. In contrast, after President George W. Bush's speech on promoting religious tolerance, the number of recorded hate crimes have dropped. Therefore, the influences of large figureheads have affected the rate of hate crimes.

North American Journal of Psychology

This study agrees with the aforementioned statement based on FBI statistics that the public opinion of Muslim-Americans after 9/11 has become increasingly negative. The findings state that the attacks in 2001 didn't start the movement to increase prejudice towards certain groups, but it did allow for certain dialogue to ensue. After the attacks, the word "terrorist" was continuously being associated with Arabic males. This rhetoric allowed Americans to express certain viewpoints towards Muslims-Americans—some which are new and some which have been suppressed in peoples' thoughts as the culture prevented them from expressing their feelings since they would receive certain backlash. The attacks of 9/11 opened the floodgates for Americans to express their true emotions without fear of backlash from others since many other people were also publicly expressing the same opinions. The study also reports that many Muslim-Americans reported that they have had their jobs terminated and have been harassed increasingly after 9/11. Therefore, it is evident in this certain study that discrimination has become more prevalent in our society because it was seen to have been more socially acceptable in certain circles.

Journal of Muslim Mental Health

This study admitted that before the attacks, discrimination towards "Muslim Americans was present" which led to "Islam being frequently portrayed by the media as intrinsically intolerant and violent" The study focused on studying the attitudes others would have on Muslim-Americans in certain situations, allowing them to gauge how Americans' attitudes had changed. The findings ultimately concluded that Muslim-Americans were seen in positive lights in all aspects of daily life throughout the US, safe planes and public transportation. This is believed to be because a number of Americans have only been exposed to Muslims through hearing about the attacks of 9/11. Therefore, they become frightened and have negative views towards them when they are on planes or public transportation for the fear that they may be terrorists attempting the take the lives of Americans.

Conclusion

The post-9/11 period saw a number of critical changes in the minds of Americans, most importantly how they saw and interacted with Muslim-Americans. Though President Bush called for the war in Afghanistan and started the "War on Terror", many Americans still had no negative views on Muslim-Americans. Some extremists saw Muslim-Americans as a threat to their families and their culture and deciding to take justice into their own hands by committing hate crimes against them. To combat the hate caused by certain members of society, numerous others tried to help alleviate the pain by supporting Muslim-Americans. Some Americans even took the time to learn more about Islam and how they teach one another bring love and peace. This led to a greater understanding of the Muslim people and helped with relations between

neighbors.