

Studying The American Identity Through The Experiences Of Ethnic Groups From 9/11 Until Today

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CONCEPTS OF ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY

The American identity is:

- The criterion by which residents of America consider themselves American
- A term that has certain agreed upon traits,
- A term that includes race, ethnicity, gender, class and age, among other traits, in its assessment

In present day America, race and ethnicity converges in complex and multi-layered ways. National and individual identities often clash. A person's heritage and origin can come into conflict with one another.

After 9/11, Muslim Americans found themselves torn between the country they increasingly called home and the religion they lived by. As Islamophobia and national policy created divisions in American society, the Muslim Americans of this generation were so assimilated into the fabric of the nation that they did not look at these issues as foreigners, but as natives.

9/11 AND ITS AFTERMATH

On September 11th, 2001, a handful of terrorists acting on behalf of the terrorist organization Al-Qaeda flew four planes into four difference places along the northeastern seaboard. Two planes went into the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center, one plane went into the Pentagon, and one plane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania.

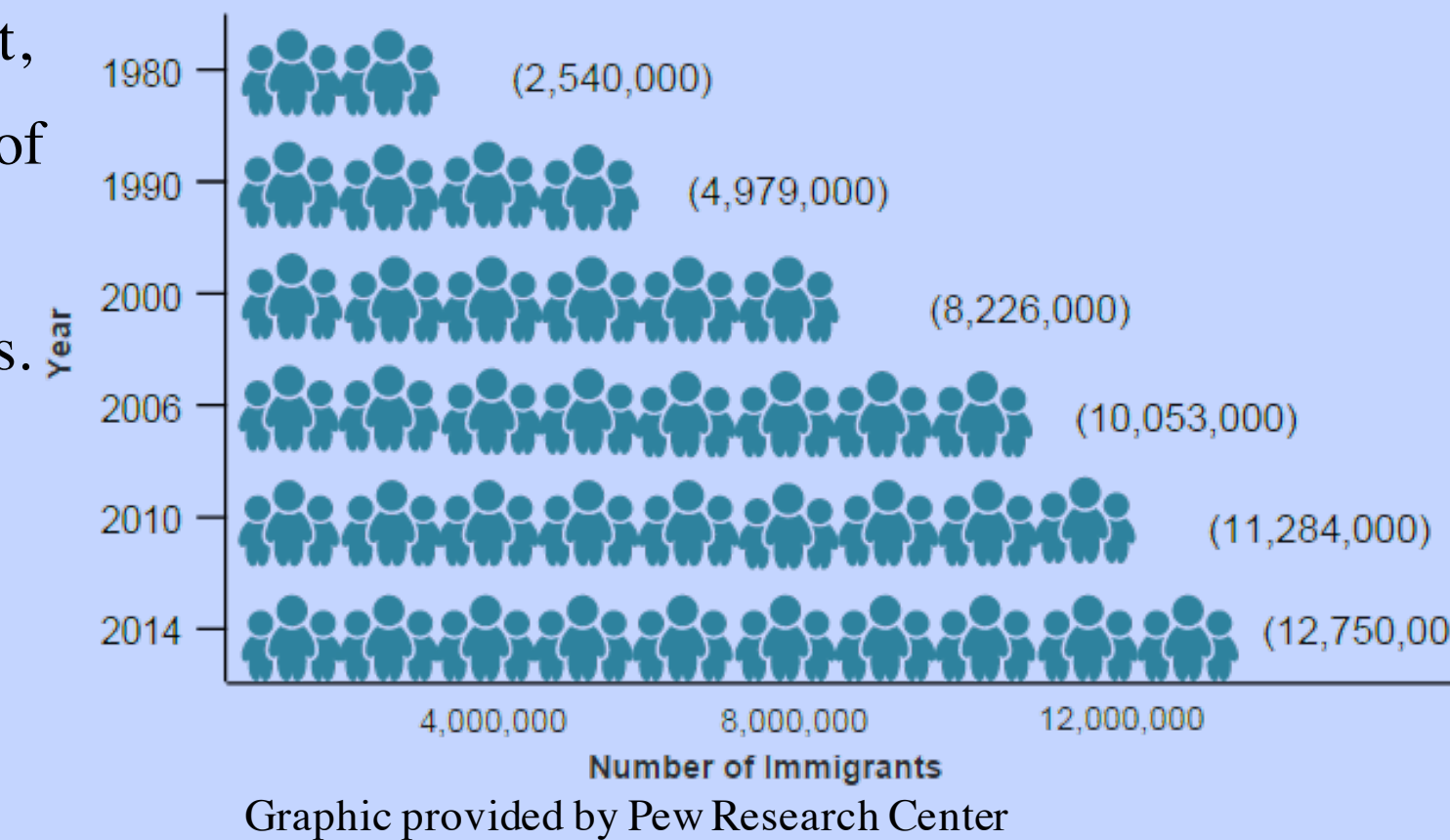
In reaction to this event, Muslim Americans experienced an onslaught of racial discrimination. People who were Muslim and/or mistaken for Muslims faced threats and even physical violence from people who took them as terrorists. Further events evoked a sense of loss of personal freedoms in the Muslim American community. The passage of the Patriot Act led to increased surveillance and suspicions around Muslim Americans. Islamophobia broke out as people across the country to a mythical "widespread Muslim threat". Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq started up on with Muslim dissatisfaction abroad and at home.

These events did not fracture the Muslim American community — instead, 9/11 brought the community closer together. Muslims were more concerned with issues and this led to more outspoken members of the community.

RESULTS

1. More Muslims are now "American" in origin

There has been a large increase in the number of Muslim-Americans who not only live in the United States, but call the United States home. The below diagram from the Pew Research Center shows a rapid increase in Muslim immigration, showing their increased presence in the US. More telling of Muslim American influence is that, according to a 2007 Pew report, 65 percent of Muslim Americans are native born and 61 percent of foreign born Muslims are citizens. These statistics show that more and more Muslims are growing up identifying with the American experience, and are more concerned about their status.



2. 9/11 led to more Muslims identifying with Islam.

Trends like the effects of Patriot Act and the advent of Islamophobia led to more Muslims identifying closely with Islam. Rather than turning away from their faith, Muslims further embraced it and took to being more involved in their communities.

3. #1 and #2 resulted in a more politically active Muslim American population

Because more Muslims have grown up in America and, because they are younger, have grown up seeing the issues affecting their community in America, there has been an uptick in political participation in the Muslim American community.

This increase in participation can be seen through:

1. Increases in mosque participation. From 2000-2005, mosque participation increased by 75% (Princeton University).
1. There is a direct correlation between mosque participation and civic engagement (ISPU).
2. A belief in the power of the political system. 95% of Muslims, in a survey done by ISPU, said that Muslims Americans should be involved in the political process.
3. The majority of Muslims are registered to vote (ISPU).
4. *Muslim Americans have a deep concern with the issues that have faced their community after 9/11.*

As Muslim Americans are more politically active, they are also advocating on behalf of issues that do not affect Muslims directly, like the Black Lives Matter movement. Advocates here include people like Dalia Mogahed.

"As our community gets established more, a larger percent of our community is American born. A lot of the American born Muslims — they are already engaged in the community through school and work, so they are interested in their religious organizations being engaged in the same way."
— Bhawana Kamil, activist with the Muslim American Society (Bay Area chapter) and former president of MAS

"You can't fight the system without banding together with those who are also marginalized. So if you were to do this solely for the sake of the Muslim American community and you ignore people without healthcare or ignore the destitute, or if you ignore the issue of homelessness, if you ignore people that are faced with injustice, then at the end of the day you're not going to have a bedrock to stand on."
— Marwa Aly, activist with the Muslim American Society (Bay Area chapter) and former Muslim chaplain

THE FUTURE

Three trends in the present day (and/or reactions to said trends) reflect the political participation of Muslim Americans:

1. Social justice movements
2. Nativism in the United States
3. Terrorist attacks and Islamophobia

The advent of social justice movements across the nation in recent years has also reached the Muslim American community. Figures like Dalia Mogahed and Linda Sarsour represent an increased interest in issues like equality and racial justice.

The 2016 presidential elections have shown an increase in nativist tendencies against Muslim Americans, especially from presidential candidate Donald Trump. These feelings have elicited a united reaction from the Muslim American community that stands against these sentiments.

The trend of Islamophobia continues as people stereotype against Muslim Americans after a terrorist attack, which continue to the present day as ISIL and al-Qaeda continue to hold power in the Middle East. Muslims continue to stand against hate.

SUMMARY / CONCLUSIONS

Muslim Americans faced various types of opposition after 9/11, but out of that opposition came unite. Their increased political participation represents their changing perception of the American identity. Muslim-Americans are more American in origin and nationality and more Muslim in their beliefs and values. This is not to say that the two are at odds, but rather that the events of the past 15 years have created a divide in affiliation between the abstract "America" and the less abstract Muslim community. Therefore, while relations between the two groups have experienced a widening gap, Muslim Americans are more united towards outside forces than they were before 9/11.

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Please see my paper for a more in-depth look at the issues I am exploring.

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IMMEDIATE TIMELINE OF EVENTS

September 11, 2001	October 7, 2001	October 26, 2001	March 20, 2003
Two planes are hijacked and flown into the two towers of the World Trade Center by terrorists affiliated with al-Qaeda, causing 3000 casualties and billions of dollars in damage.	The US begins military activity in Iraq.	The USA Patriot is signed into law by president George W. Bush.	The US begins military activity in Afghanistan