



Fear And Loathing In The Campaign's Wake

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Like many people these days, Maria would only give her first name. Sitting in a restaurant in East Boston, she recalled how a white man walked up to her cousin on Nov. 9, the day after the election, and told her to go back to her country. The incident still haunts her cousin, Maria said.

"My cousin was really taken back by it," she said. "She didn't say anything, but she felt offended because she is a business owner in East Boston. She's been here for more than 20 years, and she's a U.S. citizen.

Maria is from El Salvador. But many Muslims, Jews, African Americans and Latinos alike say they have been targeted for hate and harassment since the election in ways that have rarely been so direct. Here in Massachusetts, hate crimes have spiked since Nov. 8, according to the state attorney general's office. Critics blame President-elect Donald Trump, who often used rhetoric on the campaign trail that many found divisive. Meanwhile, supporters say the fears over Trump are blown out of proportion.

John Robbins, Massachusetts's executive director of the Council on Islamic American Relations, said he's heard a lot of stories like Maria's recently.

"We've seen a spike in anti-Muslim incidents where Muslims have been fired from the workplace or given reduced hours because of their faith," Robbins explained. "And we've seen, unfortunately, a tremendous uptick in bullying among Muslim students as young as first grade. We're seeing anyone who presents as Muslim or seems to present as Muslim is being stigmatized — and that includes people from the Sikh community, who are not Muslim but wear turbans and can often 'get mistaken' for members of the Muslim community."

Harmon Singh experienced one of those "mistakes" first-hand. Singh, a Sikh student at Harvard Law School, was shopping at a store near campus recently when he said a man came in and began harassing him.

"He called me an f----- Muslim," Singh, originally from Buffalo, N.Y., recalled. "He then followed me around the store asking me where I was from, and eventually I was able to leave the store after not engaging with him and was able to, fortunately, continue on safely."

At an Anti-Defamation League rally against hate where Singh was one of several speakers, many of the 400 attendees echoed his fear.

"I'm scared," Miranda Banks explained. "I'm scared for my community. I'm scared for everything that I know and love America to be."

Carol Oldham said she feared for the planet itself. "Well, I work in climate change advocacy and I'm terrified about what Donald Trump and his cabinet are going to do to the environment."

"There's a lot of nasty stuff that's going on. If we fight against it now, hopefully that's as bad as it gets," Kevin Block-Schwenk said.

Christina Wilson, another rally participant, said the rally also gave her some hope for the future. "I feel heartened by what I see here today, and that people will not be silent," she said. "I will not be silent."

Attorney General Maura Healey told attendees that her office had received nearly four-hundred calls to a hot line set up to respond to bias incidents.

Across the street, Kris and Chris, a white couple visiting from Florida, listened carefully. Both said they voted for Trump. The demonstration is "over the top," they say, and the reports of hate crimes are exaggerated.

"I just think that it has gotten all blown out of proportion," Kris said. "I mean, he won the election. So move on."

Her husband Chris agreed. "Currently, as it stands, he won the election, electoral votes," he explained. "Let's go ahead and try to work together and have a smooth transition and try to heal."

To the crowd gathered in front of the State House, State Treasurer Deb Goldberg told those who say to "wait and see" that widespread reports of harassment and violence makes that impossible. Speaking from the podium, Goldberg pointed out that these incidents are occurring close to home.

"Not in the Midwest," she said. "In Cambridge, Mass. In Wellesley, Mass. In Northampton, Mass. And we cannot afford to wait and see."

The FBI reports that [hate crimes against Muslims](#) rose by 67 percent nationally in 2015. Here in Massachusetts, the number of crimes reportedly motivated by racial bias

rose by 20 percent between 2014 and 2015, according to [an analysis of state and federal data by WGBH News](#). The same analysis found that crimes tied to religious bias rose by 40 percent.

Toward the end of the rally, Michael Curry of the Boston NAACP called for attendees to resist Donald Trump's promise to register Muslims, deport undocumented immigrants, and nominate a conservative justice to the Supreme Court.

"No one can sit silently now," he said. "We have to make it known: Not one step back. Not one step back."