



# **ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC COOPERATION**

**Political Affairs Department**

**Islamophobia Observatory**

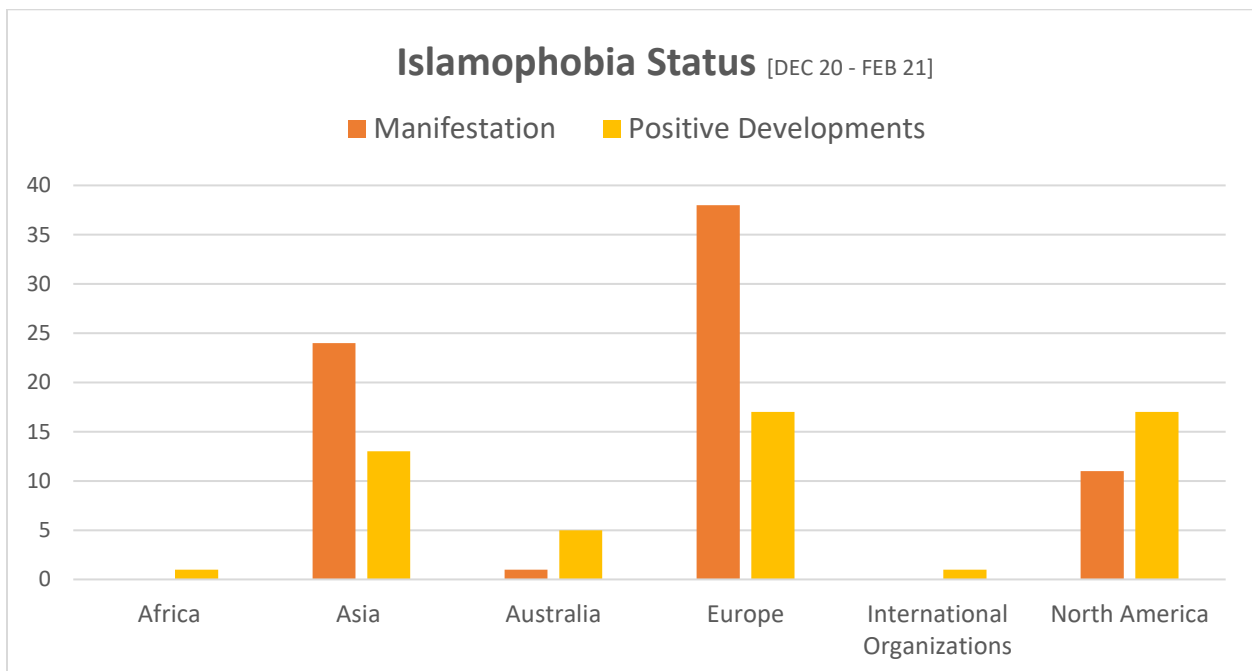
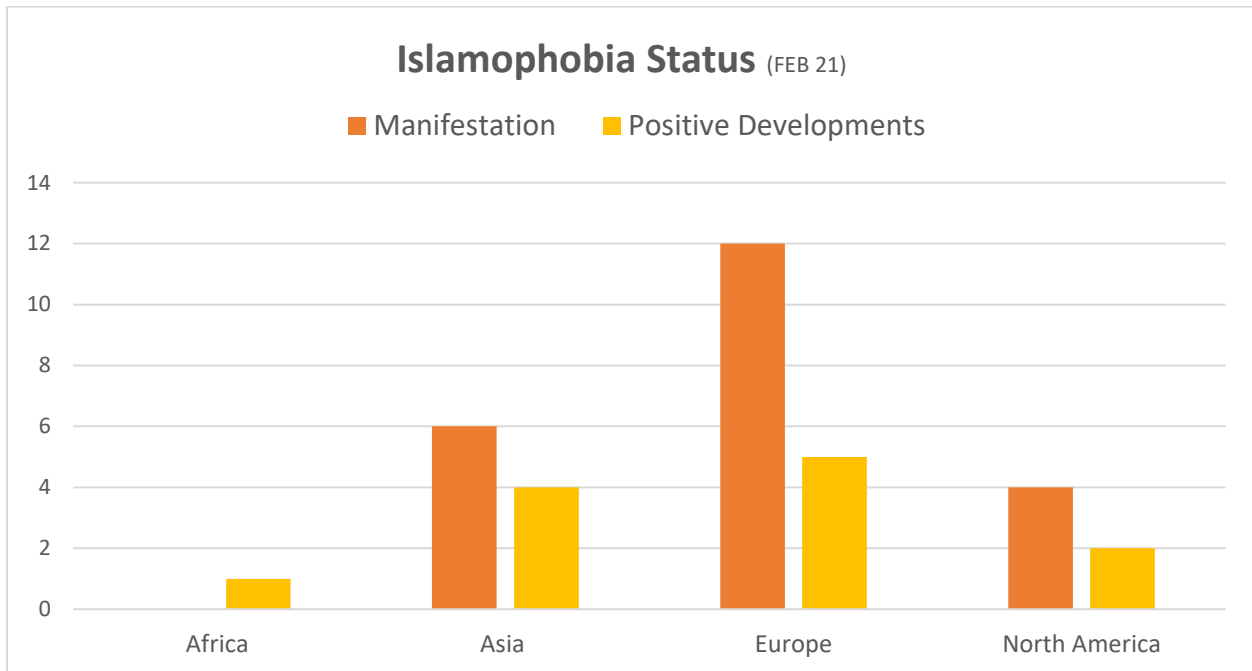
**Islamophobia Monitoring**

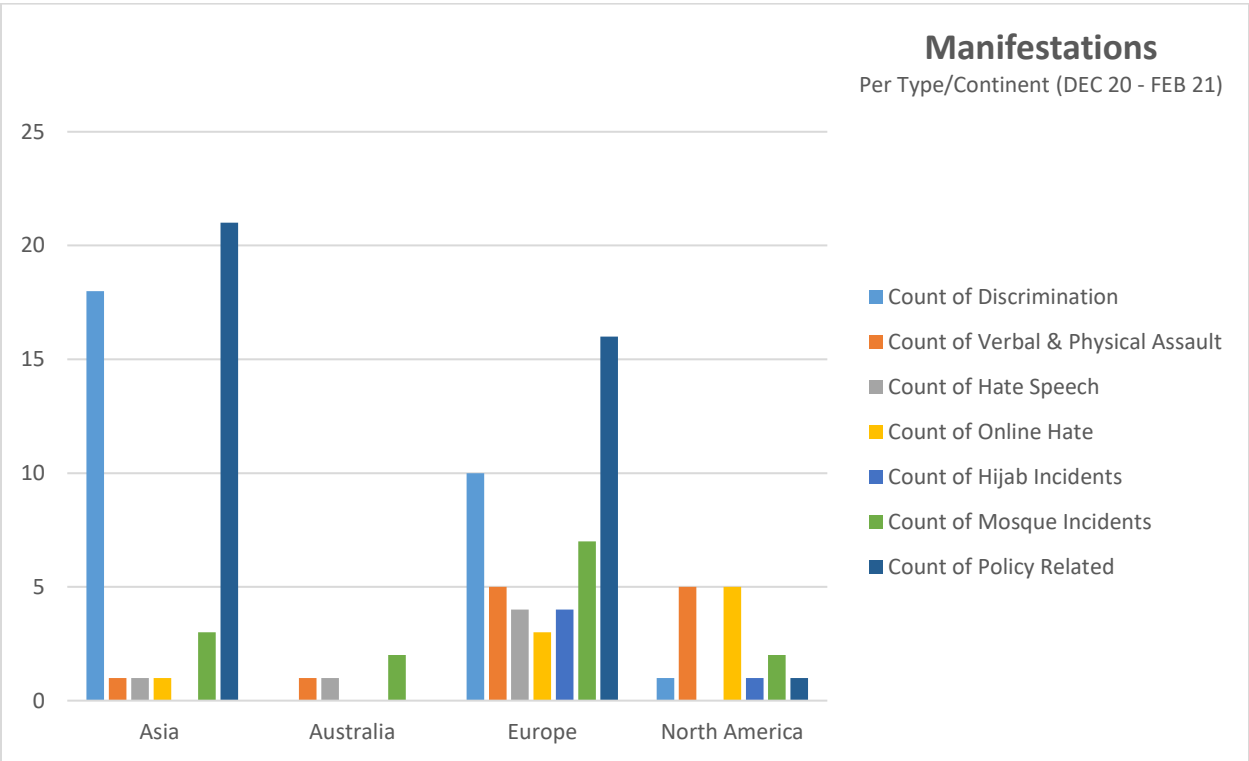
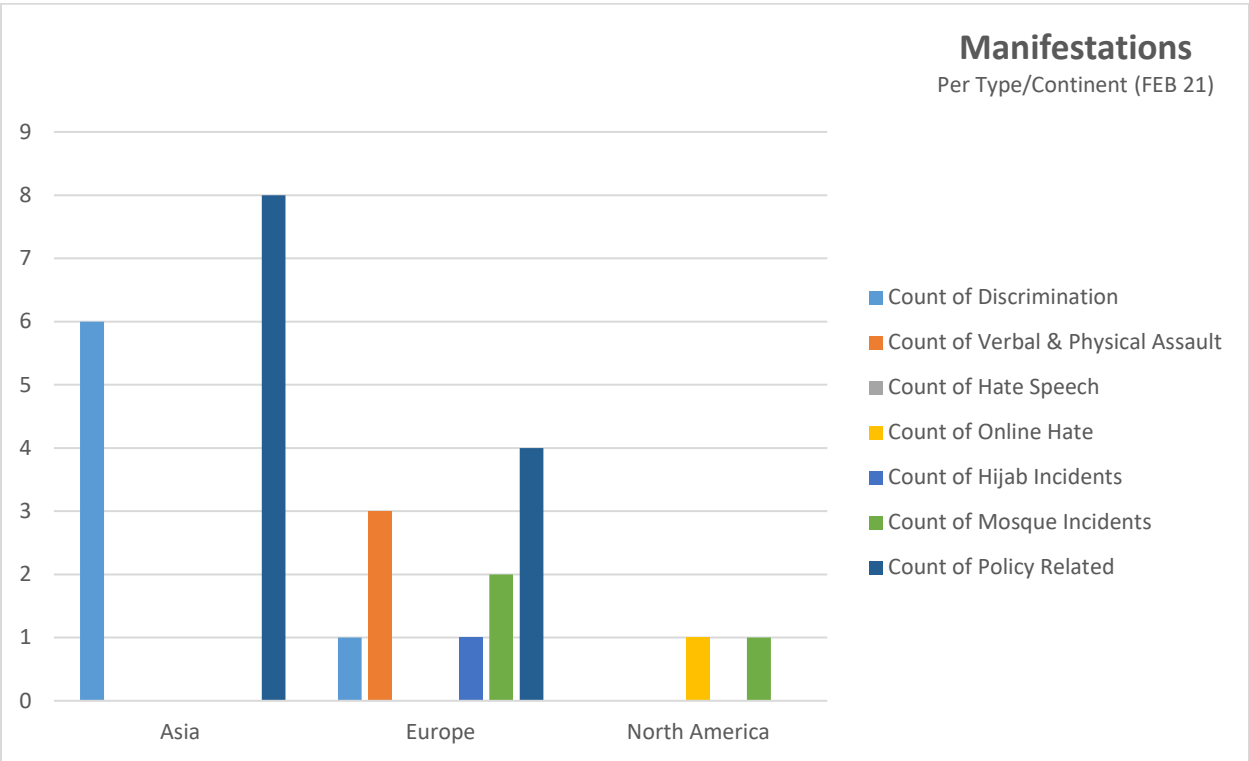
Month: February 2021



## OIC Islamophobia Observatory

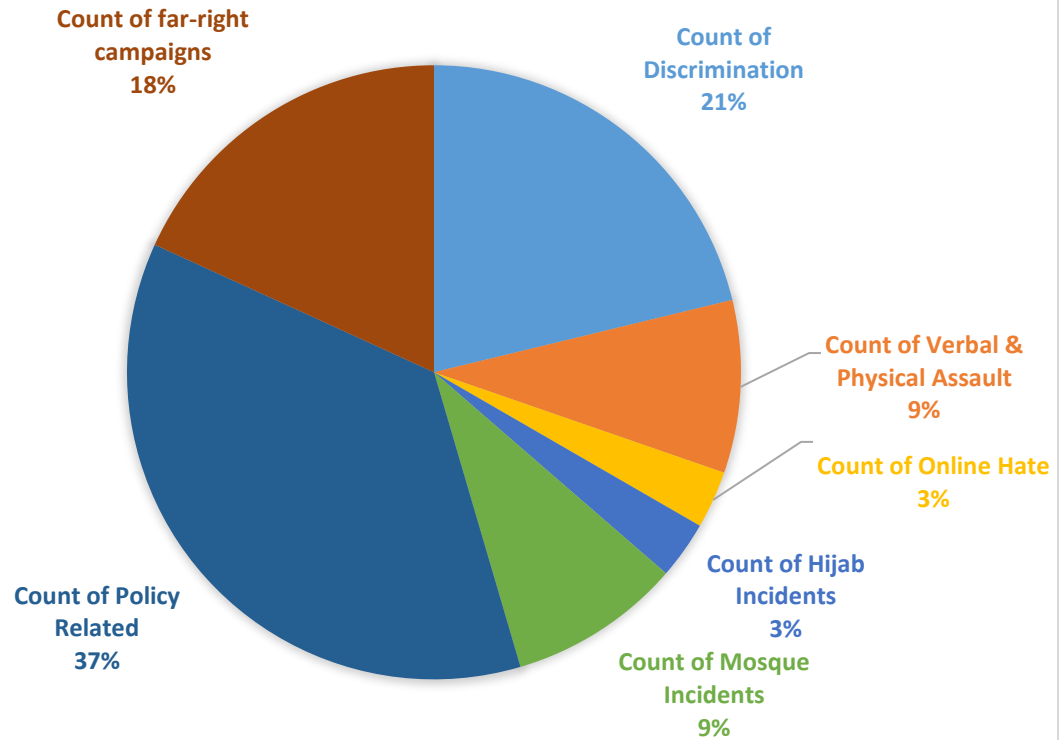
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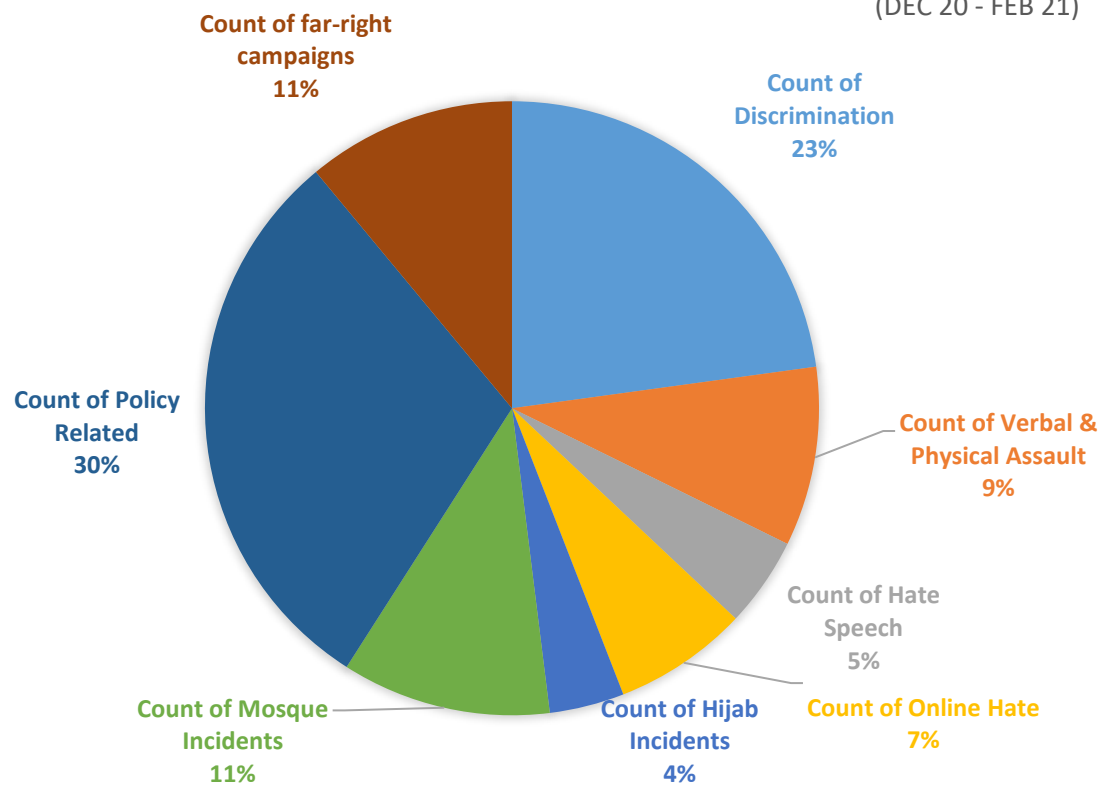
## MANIFESTATION

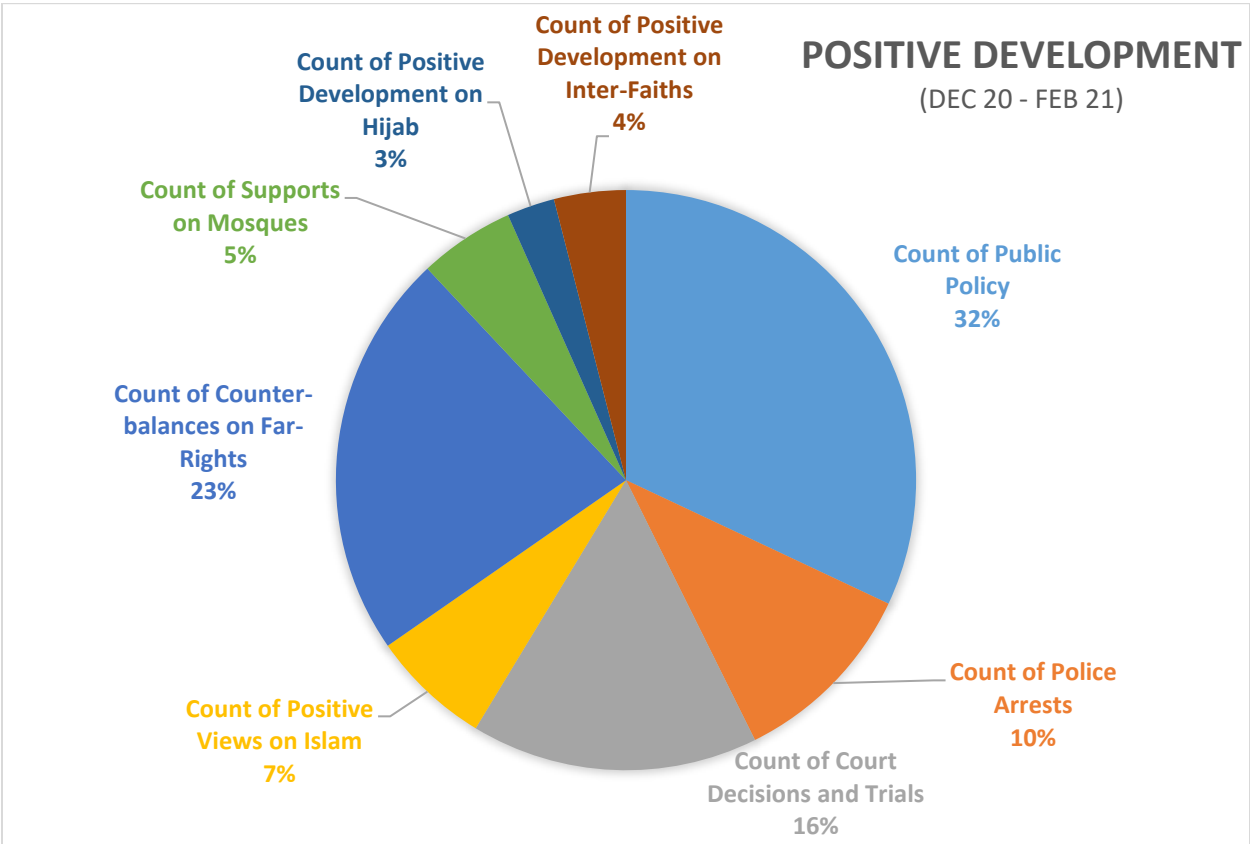
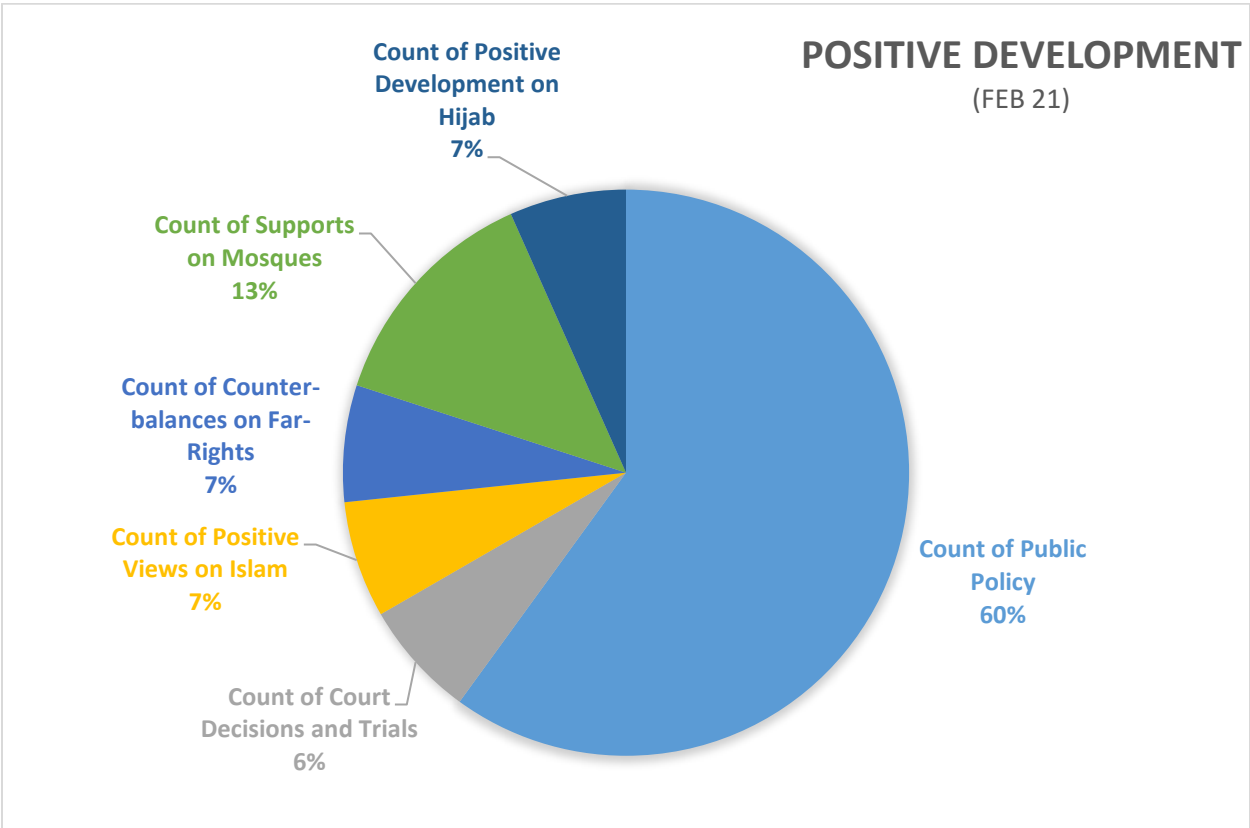
(FEB 21)



## MANIFESTATION

(DEC 20 - FEB 21)





# MANIFESTATIONS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA

## NORTH AMERICA

**IsP140095-US: Hate groups migrate online, making tracking more difficult** — On February 1, The Southern Poverty Law Center released its annual report titled “Year in Hate and Extremism”, in which they said that the number of active hate groups in the U.S. had declined as far-right extremists migrated further to online networks. SPLC had identified 838 active hate groups operating across the U.S. in 2020, a decrease from the 940 documented in 2019 and the record-high of 1,020 in 2018. “It is important to understand that the number of hate groups is merely one metric for measuring the level of hate and racism in America, and that the decline in groups should not be interpreted as a reduction in bigoted beliefs and actions motivated by hate,” said the report. Many hate groups had moved to social media platforms and use of encrypted apps, while others had been banned altogether from mainstream social media networks. The report added, white nationalist organizations, declined on 2020 from 155 to 128, while they had seen huge growth the previous two years after being energized by Donald Trump's campaign and presidency. The number of anti-Muslim hate groups remained largely stable, while their in-person organizing was hampered by the coronavirus pandemic. Margaret Huang, SPLC President and CEO, told the Associated Press, that the levels of hate and bigotry in America had not diminished, he said “What’s important is that we start to reckon with all the reasons why those groups have persisted for so long and been able to get so much influence in the last White House, that they actually feel emboldened.”. In their recommendation, SPLC had called for establishing offices within the Department of Homeland Security, the Justice Department and the FBI to monitor, investigate and prosecute cases of domestic terrorism. It also urged improving federal hate crime data collection, training, and prevention; and for enacting federal legislation that shifts funding away from punishment models and toward preventing violent extremism.

See: Yahoo News’ entry, in: <https://ca.news.yahoo.com/report-hate-groups-decline-migrate-080053607.html>, Also: See: the SPLC’s annual report, in: <https://www.splcenter.org/news/2021/02/01/year-hate-2020> ,retrieved on 02.02.2021

**IsP140097-US: Oklahoma’s leading pro-gun group endorses ‘Anti-Islam’ former lawmaker for chairman of state’s Republican Party**—

The Oklahoma Second Amendment Association, a nonprofit that bills itself as “the state’s leading advocate for Second Amendment rights,” had endorsed for state Republican Party chairman, John Bennett, former state lawmaker who drew the ire of Muslim groups when he called Islam “a cancer.” John Bennett, a United States Marine who served in the House of Representatives from 2011-2019, called Islam “a cancer that needs to be cut out” of America in 2014. Later that year he told a Tea Party group of supporters at a meeting that there’s “no difference between moderate Islam and extreme Islam.” The state convention was scheduled for April 10, in Oklahoma City at the Cox Convention Center. Adam Soltani, the executive director of CAIR-Oklahoma, said hearing Bennett’s name again was a bit like going



back in time. Don Spencer, the president of OK2A said: “As soon as we heard that (Bennett was running) for party chair, we were pretty convinced that’s our guy.” Spencer, said he was aware of Bennett’s past comments and statements about Muslims, but said he didn’t believe Bennett was “anti-Muslim” as much as he was “anti-Islam.” “That’s a major difference,” Spencer said.

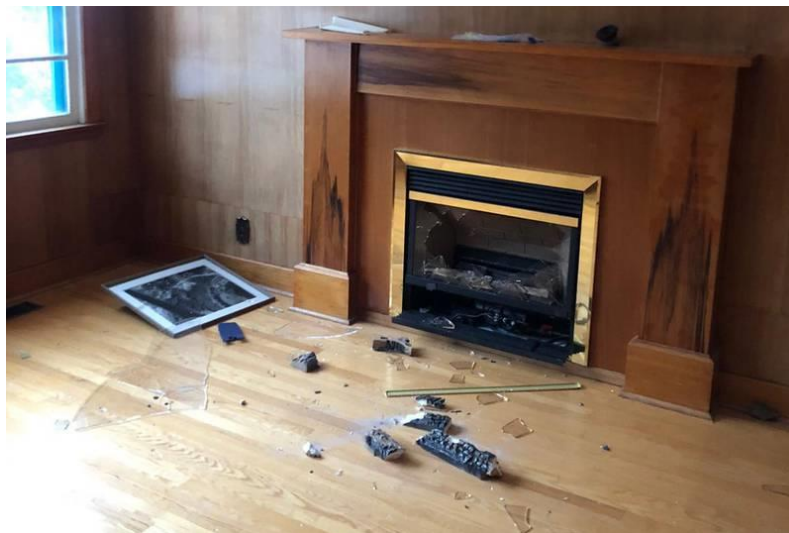
See: Read Frontier News’ entry, in: <https://www.readfrontier.org/stories/oklahomas-leading-pro-gun-group-endorses-anti-islam-former-lawmaker-for-chairman-of-states-republican-party/>, retrieved on 24.02.2021

**IsP140098-US: Marjorie Taylor Greene Endorses 'Proud Islamophobe' Laura Loomer in 2022 Midterm**— On February 24, Laura Loomer, a self-described "proud Islamophobe," had filed to run for 2022 Congress Midterm election. Loomer was looking to unseat Democratic Representative Lois Frankel, to whom she lost in 2020 by 20 points. She already gained support from Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, a freshman Republican who was removed from her committee assignments on February 4, over her controversial comments before she was elected to Congress, which included wild conspiracy theories and extreme anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic comments. Loomer had described Islam as a "cancer on humanity" and had been banned from various social media platforms, as well as ride-share apps, for her comments about Muslims. In a tweet on February 25, Greene called Loomer a "friend" who was "exactly the type of America First Patriot that I need standing beside me on the House floor."

See: Newsweek entry, in: <https://www.newsweek.com/marjorie-taylor-greene-endorses-proud-islamophobe-laura-loomer-2022-midterm-1572063>, retrieved on 28.02.2021

**IsP140099-Canada: Minors cause ‘painful’ damage to new mosque in Newfoundland**— A

mosque been constructed in Conception Bay South was attacked and many items damaged in an act of vandalism. An estimated \$15,000 worth of damage was done to the former house being renovated into a mosque. Omer Sajeed Mallhi, the mosque administrator, said the damage was “painful and stressful .. The perpetrators were minors and broke in and did a lot of damage ...A huge window was broken, a fireplace destroyed,



lighting fixtures, a sump pump, a dehumidifier and so much more.” He said, the provincial police service for the province of Newfoundland and Labrador identified the minors. Sajeed added they had “forgiven the perpetrators of this act of vandalism and hope to use the incident to help build bridges of understanding and tolerance,” The Muslim Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (MANAL), had issued a news release condemning damage and destruction “caused to any establishment, especially places of worship.”

See: The Chronicle Herald Newspaper entry, in: <https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/news/canada/minors-cause-painful-damage-to-new-mosque-in-newfoundland-548130/>, retrieved on 04.02.2021

**IsP140101-Spain: Discrimination worsens in Spain, far-right and fake news largely to blame**— On January 25, Spain’s Equality Ministry, stated in their 2020 report that racial and ethnic discrimination in Spain had worsened in the past few years, fuelled by far-right politicians and fake news. The report said religion-related discrimination had increased considerably, with North African and Indo-Pakistani communities hardest-hit as a result of the increased stigmatisation, Islamophobia and been likened to terrorists. “The media noise about squatters mean people associate North African, Latino and Sub-Saharan people with over-crowding and squatting,” said study coordinator Anabel Suso. “Racially-motivated hate speech against determined groups is surging, gaining traction through social media,” the report said. Without naming any particular party, the study said that far-right parties incited hate crimes and spread racial stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes which have gained momentum in the political debate. The ultranationalist, anti-immigrant Vox party became the third-largest force in parliament in late 2019.

See: Reuters News’ entry, in: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-rights-discrimination-idUSKBN29U228>, retrieved on 01.02.2021

**IsP140103-Spain: Community condemns attack on mosque in Spain**— On February 21, a mosque was attacked in the small Spanish town of San Javier, Murcia. According to local Spanish media, at around 4 a.m. an explosion was felt by residents living near the place of worship. “I heard a loud noise and felt the floor move,” Francisca Chuecos told local daily La Verdad. The fire and explosion caused damage to the building's windows and facade. Police discovered that one or more perpetrators, had spray-painted "**death to Islam**" on the mosque's windows. The spray paint can was then lit on fire causing an explosion, likely with the intention of burning down the mosque. In a released statement, the San Javier city hall had strongly condemned the violent attack and insisted that the community took pride in the "harmonious way that San Javier has become an intercultural town in recent years.”

See: Daily Sabah News’ entry, in: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/community-condemns-attack-on-mosque-in-spain>, retrieved on 25.02.2021

**IsP140104-Belgium: EU Court backs ban on animal slaughter without stunning**— On December 17, 2020, The European Court of Justice had rejected objections of Muslim and Jewish religious groups and backed a Belgian ban on kosher and halal slaughter of animals without being stunned. The European Court said all member states had to reconcile both animal welfare and freedom of religion and EU law did not prevent countries from requiring the stunning of animals as long as they respected fundamental rights. While the Court accepted that imposing such a requirement limited the rights of Muslims and Jews, it did not ban ritual slaughter and the Belgian law's "interference with the freedom to manifest religion" had met an "objective of general interest recognised by the European Union, namely the promotion of animal welfare". EU law, along with UK law, already required animals to be stunned before been killed, unless the meat is intended for Muslims or Jews, and then only in approved abattoirs. Muslim groups had repeatedly challenged the Flemish legislation before it was passed and came into force in January 2019. The French-speaking Wallonia area of southern Belgium also adopted the law months later.

See: BBC News’ entry, in: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-55344971>, retrieved on 02.02.2021



**IsP140105-France: French mayor criticizes decision to shut down mosque** — Patrick Floquet, the mayor of the Montmagny town in northern France, had lashed out against the government’s “Islamist separatism” campaign after a mosque in his jurisdiction was accused and shut down to combat radicalism. The mosque was among Muslims' nine places of worship closed by the Interior Ministry Mr. Gerald Darmanin. Among the reasons the mosques were closed were non-compliance of safety standards, disseminating radicalized speeches or practicing separatism, according to the daily Le Figaro. The mayor however said that he verified that the mosque had followed up with works related to safety norms, which a security commission in a routine inspection in December 2020 had ordered it to do within a month, in order for the place to receive 476 people as authorized by the commission. “It’s a mosque that has never been talked about. A security commission has nothing to do with a connotation of radical Islamism. Five years ago a place of worship had been closed at the request of the prefecture, because of the remarks made there. But this site has no connection with the current mosque,” Floquet said.

See: Anadolu Agency News’ entry, in: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/french-mayor-criticizes-decision-to-shut-down-mosque/2115440>, retrieved on 03.02.2021

**IsP140106-France: Islamophobic attacks in France increase by 53% in 2020**— On January 29, the National Observatory of Islamophobia, said that the number of Islamophobic incidents in France, rose sharply on 2020 amid controversy over the French government’s stance toward the religious minority. Abdallah Zekri, the head of the observatory said in a statement, there were 235 attacks on Muslims in France on 2020, up from 154 the previous year, a 53% jump. According to Zekri, most of the attacks took place in the Ile-de-France (greater Paris), Rhones-Alpes and Paca regions of the country. Attacks on mosques had also jumped 35% in the same year, Zekri added. Moreover, 70 threatening letters were sent to the headquarters of the French Council of Muslim Worship (CFCM) or its administrators on 2020.

See: Daily Sabah Newspaper entry, in: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/islamophobic-attacks-in-france-increase-by-53-in-2020>, retrieved on 04.02.2021

**IsP140108-France: French MPs approve controversial ‘anti-separatism’ bill**— On February 16, french lawmakers in the lower house National Assembly had approved a bill that the government said would strengthen the country’s secular principles. The so-called “anti-separatism” bill, brought forward by President Emmanuel Macron, paved the way for it to be passed into law within months. The lower house National Assembly, voted 347 to 151 in favour of the bill with 65 abstained votes. The new legislation was passed up to France’s upper house, in which they could amend the bill but had been expected to approve it. Among the more than 70 separate articles, the law had expanded the ability of the state to close places of worship and religious schools, as well as to ban preachers it considered “extremist”. In addition, the law would require religious groups to declare large foreign donations.

See: Aljazeera News’ entry, in: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/16/french-mps-approve-controversial-anti-separatism-bill>, retrieved on 18.02.2021

## IsP140109-France: France’s controversial ‘separatism’ bill: Seven things to know

### What is “Reinforcing Republican Principles” Bill?

During a high-profile speech on secularism and Islam on October 2020, French President Emmanuel Macron said that “Islam is a religion which is experiencing a crisis today, all over the world”, and there was a need to “free Islam in France from foreign influences”.

- On December 2020, the French government unveiled draft legislation in order to combat what it termed “Islamist separatism” and an ideology it described as “the enemy of the Republic”. Critics said the so-called “separatism law” was discriminatory to Muslim community.
- On February 2021, French MPs staged two weeks of heated debates in the National Assembly, discussing some 1,700 proposed amendments to the bill’s 51 articles. Tensions over the legislation were highlighted by the unusually large number of amendments, which came from parties across France’s political spectrum. While France’s left lambasted an attack on civil liberties, the right criticised the government for failing to overtly tackle “Islamist extremism”, which was not mentioned in the text.
- On February 16, 2021, the bill was approved by the lower house, after 313 amendments were accepted. MP’s voted 347 to 151 in favour of the bill with 65 abstained votes. The new legislation was passed up to France’s upper house, in which they could amend the bill but had been expected to approve it.

### Key Measures In The Legislation:

<p><b>Hate Speech &amp; ‘Separatism’</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new offence for online hate speech had made it possible to quickly detain a person who spreads personal information about public sector employees on social media with the intent to harm them, and the offender would be punished by up to three years’ imprisonment and a fine of 45,000 euros (\$55,000).</li> <li>• The bill made it easier to block or delist of websites which promote hate speech and would accelerate legal proceedings.</li> <li>• Under a so-called “separatism” offence, anyone who found threatening, violating or intimidating an elected official or public sector employee would face up to five years imprisonment and a fine of 75,000 euros (\$91,000). If the offence was committed by a foreigner, they could be banned from French territory.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Controlling Organisations</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Any association in France that receives public funding were required to sign a “republican contract of engagement” which, if breached, could result in the removal of the fund.</li> <li>• If the subsidy had already been granted, it must be reimbursed, and within a maximum period of six months.</li> <li>• The grounds for dissolving an association were no longer limited to court orders – they would be extended to include administrative decisions.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Homeschooling &amp; Sport</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aimed at ending so-called clandestine schools with their own agenda, all homeschooling would need to be authorised by the state rather than be self-declared, starting from the 2024/2025 school year. This would affect an estimated 62,000 home-schooled children in France, though</li> </ul>

	<p>exemptions include health and disability reasons, as well as geographic distance from school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The approval of sports associations and structures, meanwhile, considered a breeding ground for “separatism”, would be entrusted to state representatives and no longer to national federations.</li> </ul>
<b>Virginity Certificates, Polygamy, Forced Marriage</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctors would be fined 15,000 euros (\$18,000) and faced a prison sentence of up to one year for if they provide virginity certificates and rules would be put in place against polygamy. Any immigrants practising it, for instance, would not be issued a residence permit.</li> <li>• Suspected forced marriages could also be referred to a prosecutor and laws would be introduced to guarantee gender equality in inheritance.</li> </ul>
<b>Foreign Funding Of Religious Organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stricter financial controls would be put in place on foreign money sent to religious organisations in France, and so-called “anti-putsch” rules for religious associations are designed to allow the government to prevent takeovers by “extremists”.</li> <li>• Those that receive foreign financing would need to declare any income of more than 10,000 euros (\$12,000) from abroad and the law required them to publish government accessible annual accounts.</li> </ul>
<b>Policing Places Of Worship</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater punishments for offences committed in connection with religious communities. It included, increased penalties and allowed authorities to close any places of worship for up to two months in order to stop hate preachers.</li> <li>• Individuals convicted of terrorism would also be banned from leading a religious association for 10 years.</li> </ul>
<b>Extending The Ban On Religious Symbols</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The bill extended what was known in France as the “neutrality principle”, which prohibits civil servants from wearing religious symbols like the Muslim hijab and voicing political views, beyond public sector employees to all private contractors of public services such as those employed by the transport companies.</li> </ul>

See: Aljazeera News’ entry, in: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/2/15/frances-controversial-separatism-bill-explained>, retrieved on 22.02.2021

**IsP140111-UK: Muslim woman subjected to sustained assault, hijab pulled by a woman when out driving** — On February 16, A Muslim women, who wished to remain anonymous, told Tell Mama UK, that she was assaulted by a white woman who had shouted racist abuse at them, as another vehicle had attempted to run them off the road. She described how she had been on a driving lesson with her father in north-west London, noting that the targeting from the first vehicle started for several minutes (including flashing lights and the tossing of objects towards their car) in a 20-mph zone. She stayed, however, in the same lane until another vehicle, containing the perpetrator and her male partner, had overtaken them and forced them to stop after almost running them off the road. After observing the female perpetrator exiting the passenger-side door and shouting obscenities and abuse, the Muslim woman did not anticipate the violence that would follow as the white woman had forced open the driver’s door, punching her repeatedly, spitting at her, and grabbing her hijab. To further protect their identity, Tell Mama UK had not disclosed the precise location of the attack.

See: Tell Mama UK News’ entry, in: <https://tellmamauk.org/muslim-woman-subjected-to-sustained-assault-hijab-pulled-by-a-woman-when-out-driving/>, retrieved on 24.02.2021

**IsP140112-Sweden: Stockholm Grand Mosque threatened with suspicious object**

— On January 30, A suspicious object was placed on the doors of the Stockholm Grand Mosque. The mosque administration notified the police, and explosives expert examination of the object discovered that it was not dangerous and that it was only intended to intimidate. Mahmoud al-Khalfi, director of the Islamic Center and Stockholm Grand Mosque, told “Alcombs, “not a week goes by without us finding threatening messages and offensive phrases about the mosque. Today, at about six in the morning, I saw on the staff door a device connected to three wires attached to the door.” Al-Khalfi pointed out that the surveillance camera outside the mosque detected the person who placed the foreign object at three in the morning. He said that his features were not clear, but he appears in his forties.



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See: Alkompis News’ entry, in: <https://alkompis.se/news/%D8%AA%D9%87%D8%AF%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%AC%D8%B3%D9%85-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A8%D9%88%D9%87-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%AC%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D8%AA%D9%88%D9%83%D9%87%D9%88%D9%84%D9%85>, Also: See: the mosque administration’s statement on Instagram, in: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CKoNxEeFWF2/>, retrieved on 03.02.2021

**IsP140113 Germany: Fears heavily armed German neo-Nazis could spark far-right terror war as 1,200 fanatics licensed to own guns**

— GERMANY’S intelligence service had identified more than 1,200 far-right extremists licensed to own guns. The finding had fuelled fears that the country could see repeats of terror attacks carried out by neo-Nazis and other fanatics in coming years. According to released data by Germany’s domestic security agency, the BfV, identified a total of 1,203 known or suspected far-right extremists who were licensed to own firearms as of December 2019. It also found that, of those, 528 were so-called Reichsbürgers, members of a movement which rejects the legitimacy of the modern German state and holds that the German Reich had continued to exist in its pre-World Word 2 borders. The most recent estimate of how many of the extremists licensed to have a gun actually own one is 700, DW had reported. German intelligence also reported 17 cases of shooting practice sessions or programmes attended by members of the far-right between early 2019 and late 2020. Of those, three-quarters were held in other parts of Europe. The BfV had estimated that in Germany, there were around



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13,000 members of the far-right who were prone to violence. The data was released in response to questions submitted to parliament by Die Linke, or "The Left Party", focused on gun violence and far-right extremism. Speaking on February 2, Martina Renner, a member of the party, said the latest findings "[prove] the growing threat posed by neo-Nazis and racists."

See: The Sun Newspaper entry, in: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/13934986/armed-german-neo-nazis-terror-licensed-guns/>, retrieved on 04.02.2021

**IsP140114-Germany: Germany saw a record level of far-right crimes in 2020**—The number of crimes committed by right-wing extremists in Germany had jumped to its highest level for at least four years in 2020, according to provisional police figures released on February 4. Police recorded 23,080 crimes of a far-right nature in 2020 - around 700 more than 2019 - the figures published by the German MP, Petra Pau show. The number was already the highest since 2016, and could yet rise to the highest level since records began in 2001. Pau, told Berlin newspaper Der Tagesspiegel "The acceptance of violence as a replacement for politics is rising." She added that the coronavirus crisis had acted as a "booster" for far-right crime in the same way that the refugee crisis had in 2015 and 2016. The provisional figures for 2020 include 1,054 violent crimes, which led to at least 307 injuries. The final total, which had been expected to be released later, were already on course to exceed the all-time high of 23,555 recorded at the height of the refugee crisis in 2016.

See: NBC News entry, in: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/canada-labels-far-right-proud-boys-terrorist-entity-n1256615>, retrieved on 07.02.2021

**IsP140115-Germany: Over 900 anti-Muslim attacks recorded in Germany in 2020**—Islamophobic attacks had been on the rise, with Germany reporting over 900 attacks against Muslims and Islamic organizations across the country, a German daily wrote on February 8. According to Neuer Osnabrücker Zeitung, at least 901 Islamophobic attacks were recorded in Germany in 2020, a 2% rise compared to the previous year in which the interior ministry recorded 884 crimes that would be considered Islamophobic. Despite the coronavirus's lockdown had limited public life, the number of criminal offenses, including defacing spaces with Nazi symbols, writing threats and ripping women's headscarves off, had risen again. German Left Party (Die Linke) interior expert Ulla Jelpke described the attacks to the newspaper as "the tip of the iceberg." The article pointed to a large proportion of the attackers being far-rightists. It noted that 48 people were physically wounded in attacks in 2020, increasing the figure from the year before. Two people lost their lives in Islamophobic attacks in the country.

See: Daily Sabah Newspaper entry, in: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/over-900-anti-muslim-attacks-recorded-in-germany-in-2020>, retrieved on 23.02.2021



**IsP140117-Singapore: 16-year-old Singaporean detained under ISA for planning terrorist attacks on two mosques**— On January 27, Singapore's Internal Security Department (ISD) had announced the detention of a 16-year-old Singaporean student under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for planning to attack two mosques and kill worshippers in Singapore on March 15, 2021 on the second anniversary of the Christchurch terror attacks. The teenager, who was identified as a Protestant Christian of Indian ethnicity, was the first detainee to be inspired by far-right extremist ideology and the youngest person detained under the ISA for terrorism-related activities, said the ISD. The secondary school student had made detailed plans and preparations to conduct terrorist attacks using a machete against Muslims at two mosques, Assyafaah Mosque in Sembawang and Yusof Ishak Mosque in Woodlands, the ISD said. "He was self-radicalised, motivated by a strong antipathy towards Islam and a fascination with violence. He watched the live-streamed video of the terrorist attack on the two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand and read the manifesto of the attacker, Brenton Tarrant," said the ISD. The investigation results indicated that the youth had acted alone.

See: Straits Times News' entry, in: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/16-year-old-detained-under-isa-for-planning-terrorist-attacks-at-two-mosques-in-singapore>, retrieved on 01.02.2021

## IsP140121-Sri Lanka: Muslim families complained to UN over Sri Lankan Covid cremations



— A group of eight Muslim families had complained to the UN Human Rights Committee (HRC) about Sri Lanka’s policy of enforced cremation of all those confirmed or suspected to have died with Covid. The families said the policy had breached their religious rights and caused “untold misery”. The case was brought on behalf of the families by the Muslim Council of Great Britain and with the support of the British law firm Bindmans. The claim stated that the Sri Lankan government had enforced hundreds of cremations despite the objection of the international and Sri Lankan medical experts, where they denied the existence of any evidence that Covid-19 might be communicable from dead bodies. UN special rapporteurs had written twice to the Sri Lankan government and urged it to respect the wishes of those who seek burial, and to recognize that the disregard of Muslims’ feelings might lead them not to present bodies for cremation.

See: The Guardian Newspaper entry, in: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/09/muslim-families-complain-to-un-over-sri-lankan-covid-cremations>, retrieved on 14.02.2021

**IsP140123-Sri Lanka: Burial of Muslim victims of Covid: “PM was expressing his personal opinion” – Gammanpila**— On February 16, The Co-Cabinet spokesman Minister Udaya Gammanpila said Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had expressed his private opinion when he told Parliament, on February 10, that burial of the remains of Covid 19 victims would be allowed. Gammanpila, the Energy Minister, was responding to questions from reporters at Cabinet press conference where he was asked whether the government was split on the matter. Gammanpila said that the Director-General of Health Services Dr Asela Gunewardana would take the final decision “based on the recommendation of the Technical Committee he has appointed.” Senior Professor Jennifer Perera, Head of the Expert Committee, had recommended to the Health Ministry that burials could be permitted subject to certain conditions. Prof Perera, told Media on February 14, that her committee of experts appointed on December 24 had reported to the Health Department that both cremation and burial could be permitted.

See: Economy Next News’ entry, in: <https://economynext.com/burial-of-muslim-victims-of-covid-pm-was-expressing-his-personal-opinion-gammanpila-78909>, retrieved on 15.02.2021

**IsP140124-Myanmar: Facebook’s oversight board reverses Muslim-related hate speech takedown in Myanmar** — On January 28, Facebook’s independent oversight board (FOB) said that it overturned the decision to take down a post that was shared by a Facebook user in Myanmar initially considered as “pejorative or offensive” towards Muslims, concluding that it did not advocate hatred or incite imminent harm. The post, published in October 2020, includes two widely-disseminated pictures of a Syrian toddler who drowned and washed up in the Mediterranean Sea in September 2015, together with a text stating that “there is something wrong with Muslims (or Muslim men) psychologically or with their mindset.” The author argued that the deadly attacks in France had lowered the sympathies towards the Syrian toddler in the picture, which might suggest that the child could have grown up to be an extremist. The board, argued that while the post appeared to make an insult against Muslims, it suggested to read it as “a commentary” on the differing reactions of Muslims regarding the events in France. The board said: “Facebook’s sensitivity to anti-Muslim hate speech was understandable... particularly given the history of violence and discrimination against Muslims in Myanmar and the increased risk ahead of the country’s general election in November 2020.”

See: KrASIA News entry, in: <https://kr-asia.com/facebooks-oversight-board-reverses-muslim-related-hate-speech-takedown-in-myanmar>, retrieved on 16.02.2021

**IsP140125-Palestine: Israel bans Muslim call to prayer to allow settlers to celebrate Purim**— On February 26, Israel authorities had banned the raising of the Muslim call to prayer at the Ibrahimi Mosque in occupied Hebron under the pretext that settlers were celebrating the Jewish holiday of Purim. The Director and head of the Ibrahimi Mosque, Sheikh Hefzi Abu Sneina, said the ban came into effect at dusk on February 25 and will remain in place until the evening of February 27. The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had condemned the ban and said these measures were an infringement on the freedom of worship guaranteed by international law.

See: Middle East Monitor News’ entry, in: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210226-israel-bans-muslim-call-to-prayer-to-allow-settlers-to-celebrate-purim/>, retrieved on 28.02.2021



# POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

## NORTH AMERICA

**IsP140096-US: YouTube bans Steve Bannon's War Room podcast channel**— On January 8, the video sharing platform, YouTube announced that it banned the channel of Steve Bannon's War Room podcast, after it repeatedly violated the platform's rules. The ban came hours after the former White House chief strategist had Rudy Giuliani, President Donald Trump's personal lawyer, on the program following the violent insurgency at the US Capitol on January 6. "In accordance with our strikes system, we have terminated Steve Bannon's channel 'War room' and one associated channel for repeatedly violating our Community Guidelines," a YouTube spokesman said in a statement. In addition to the War Room channel, YouTube said it took down another one associated with Bannon.

See: CNET News' entry, in: <https://www.cnet.com/news/youtube-bans-steve-bannons-war-room-podcast-channel/>, retrieved on 15.02.2021

**IsP140100 Canada: Canada labels far-right Proud Boys a terrorist entity**— On February 3, the Canadian government had formally labeled the Proud Boys, the far-right extremist group, as a terrorist entity. As a recognized "terrorist entity," property and other belongings connected to the group might be seized by the government, and financial institutions "are subject to reporting requirements with respect to an entity's property," under terms of Canada's Anti-Terrorism Act. "The Proud Boys consists of semi-autonomous chapters located in the United States (U.S.), Canada, and internationally ... The group and its members have openly encouraged, planned, and conducted violent activities against those they perceive to be opposed to their ideology and political beliefs." according to a statement by Public Safety Canada. The Proud Boys were a self-described "Western chauvinist" organization, that were willing to use violence to move their nationalistic, Islamophobic, transphobic and misogynistic ideals forward, according to the Anti-Defamation League.

See: NBC News entry, in: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/canada-labels-far-right-proud-boys-terrorist-entity-n1256615>, retrieved on 07.02.2021

## EUROPE

**IsP140102-Spain: Spanish prosecutors probe hate speech against Muslims, Jews**— On February 16, The Barcelona province prosecutor's office in Spain had launched two separate investigations which involved the Vox party, and extremist neo-Nazi sympathizers for possible hate crimes against Muslims and Jews, respectively. Prosecutors said they were looking into the recent campaign in a regional Catalan election by Vox, a far right party that mixes Spanish nationalism, populism and an uncompromising stance against illegal migration, after they had received complaints from several Islamic communities. The groups, which represented more than 300 mosques in the northeastern region, argued that Vox's social media campaign under the tag #StopIslamization, which included a video mixing news about Muslims and an extremist attack in 2017, was slanderous toward Muslims in Catalonia. Barcelona prosecutor Pilar López told The Associated Press that the initial probe, which would be protected by judicial secrecy, could last up to six months before they were able to decide whether the campaign had incited hatred against Muslims.

See: The Associated Press News' entry, in: <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-media-social-media-barcelona-crime-9babe2c97e7be859f139789be3a0ea22>, retrieved on 22.02.2021

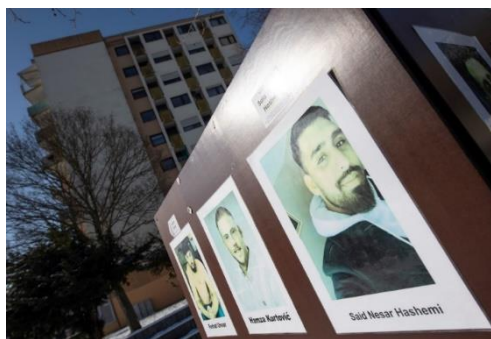
**IsP140107-France: Bid to ban face veil at universities draws criticism in France**— The French parliament debate on the draft "separatism bill" had sparked criticism in France, dividing parliamentarians on the question of the face veil and whether to include amendments to ban university students from wearing a veil on school premises. On January 19, several lawmakers had considered the move counterproductive and said it would alienate the Muslim community. Sacha Houlie, a member of President Emmanuel Macron's centrist liberal La Republique En Marche party, warned that prohibiting students and parents from public services and school trips, and preventing their participation in cultural and sporting activities would "be totally counterproductive in relation to the very objective of this text which fought against the separatists" and "would refer these people to their identity" so they "would favor the community withdrawal." Boris Vallaud, a member of the Socialist Party, also reacted: "Students are users of the public service; this secularism does not apply to them." "To ban the veil at a university would be to say that all women who wear the veil pose a problem, which would mean we consider that it is Islam which poses a problem," said Pierre Yves Bournazel, an Act Together party member representing Paris. A 2004 law had prohibited the open display of religious symbols in all French schools, but it was not applied to universities.

See: Daily Sabah News' entry, in: <https://www.dailysabah.com/world/europe/bid-to-ban-face-veil-at-universities-draws-criticism-in-france>, retrieved on 14.02.2021

**IsP140110-UK: Review of counter-extremism scheme boycotted over chair's 'Islamophobic' comments**— On February 16, leading Human rights organisations announced that they would boycott the UK government's review of the anti-extremist Prevent program to protest the appointment of William Shawcross as its chair. A joint statement accused Mr Shawcross of expressing "patently Islamophobic views" in the past. Human rights organisations had pointed to an appearance at the 2012 World Affairs Council, in Texas, where during a conversation about terror plots, Mr Shawcross said: "Europe and Islam is one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future." The 17 groups, included Liberty, Amnesty International and the Runnymede Trust, said in the statement, that the appointment of Shawcross shows the review was there to "simply rubber-stamp" the controversial and divisive strategy, and they would not contribute to the exercise. "It is apparent that the government intends to use this review to whitewash the strategy and give it a clean bill of health, without interrogating, in good faith, its impacts on human rights and fundamental freedoms," the statement added. The groups, said they would launch their own "parallel review" which would look at alleged discrimination and human rights violations under the Prevent strategy.

See: The Independent Newspaper entry, in: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/prevent-review-william-shawcross-boycott-b1803079.html>, retrieved on 18.02.2021

**IsP140116-Germany: Berlin launches task force against anti-Muslim racism on anniversary of Hanau attacks**— On February 19, Berlin became the first German state to found an expert commission against racism targeted towards Muslims. The move came on the one-year anniversary of the racist-motivated terror attacks in Hanau in Hesse. On February 19th 2020, a man shot dead nine people of Muslim backgrounds in two Shisha bars before killing his mother and himself. The commission was scheduled to hold its first meeting in Berlin on February 26th. Eren Ünsal, head of the state anti-



discrimination office, would be the moderator. "We've been able to put together a great panel with a lot of scientific expertise," said Ünsal. The project was set up for one year, she said. The first task would develop a good definition of anti-Muslim racism, and then the commission would work out strategies to prevent it. "The concrete result should be tangible recommendations for administration and civil society," Ünsal said.

See: The local News' entry, in: <https://www.thelocal.de/20210219/berlin-starts-first-commission-against-anti-muslim-racism-on-anniversary-of-hanau-attacks>, retrieved on 23.02.2021

## AFRICA

**IsP140126 South Africa: South Africa's military ends hijab ban for Muslims**— On January 28, South Africa's military had changed its dress policy to allow Muslim women to wear hijabs with their uniforms. Maj Fatima Isaacs, had led a three-year legal battle for her religious right to wear a headscarf beneath her military beret. The change in policy came after the military dropped charges the week before against Maj Isaacs for wearing one. She had faced dismissal for "wilful defiance and disobeying a lawful command" for refusing to remove it. Maj Isaacs, who had been working as a clinical forensic pathologist at a military hospital, told the Cape Times "there should be no discrimination with regards to religious beliefs. I believe religion is the foundation of a moral state/country. This is an important victory." After military charges were dropped, the Legal Resource Centre (LRC), a rights group which took up Isaacs's case in 2019 filed an application at the Equality Court, where they argued that the dress code of the South African Defence Force (SANDF) was unconstitutional. This had resulted in the defence force "amending its religious dress policy to allow Muslim women to wear their hijab with their military uniform", the LRC tweeted.

See: BBC News' entry, in: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55841768>, retrieved on 03.02.2021

## ASIA

**IsP140118 India: Delhi court directs police to probe mosque attack**— On February 1, A Delhi court had ordered police to register a First Information Report (FIR) and carry out a probe into the attack on a mosque in Shiv Vihar, Northeast Delhi, by armed rioters. On February 25, 2020, rioters broke into the mosque after a power cut and set two LPG cylinders on fire, causing an explosion. Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Mayuri Singh, stated that a cognizable offence was made out. "In my considered opinion, FIR is to be registered if a cognizable offence is made out. As per the allegations contained in the complaint regarding the incident of fire, etc in the Madina mosque, cognizable offence is clearly made out and a proper investigation is required as it cannot be said that all the evidences are within the reach of the complainant, even though he has named some of the persons allegedly involved in the offence," the order said.

See: Indian Express News' entry, in: <https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/delhi-court-directs-police-to-probe-mosque-attack-7170530/>, retrieved on 02.02.2021

**IsP140119-India: Gujarat shelve anti-'love jihad' bill for now**—The State Government of the Indian state of Gujarat had decided not to enact the 'anti-love jihad' law for the time being. The decision was made after legal experts, including the advocate general, opined that the new law might not be legally sustainable. Sources in the government said that following the adverse

opinion, the government will not introduce the bill in the budget session of the assembly. After BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh enacted the laws to curb 'love jihad,' the Gujarat government had expressed its resolve to introduce the law, despite the fact that the Gujarat government already had an anti-conversion law which prohibits conversion from one religion to another by the use of force or allurements or by fraudulent means. The Deputy Chief Minister of Gujarat Nitin Patel had said: "We are studying the effectiveness, long-term effects, and legal standing of the laws made by UP and MP. The Gujarat government will take a decision at an appropriate time regarding such a law."

See: The Times of India News' entry, in: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/gujarat-shelves-anti-love-jihad-bill-for-now/articleshow/80716209.cms>, retrieved on 17.02.2021

**IsP140120 India: UP Police probe Hindu leader as video showed him call for 'economic, social boycott of Muslims'**

Police in Meerut, a city in the western part of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, had launched an investigation into a Hindu leader who called for an economic and social boycott of Muslims, at a gathering in the Chaudhary Charan Singh University on January 10. In a video circulated online, Swami Anand Swaroop, a Hindu leader and the president of Varanasi-based outfit Shankaracharya Parishad, said: "One who reads the Quran becomes a beast, they are no longer human. For those who wish to remain connected to India, they must give up the Quran and *namaz*. If we start boycotting Muslims socially and economically, they will embrace Hinduism." He added, "We want an army of one crore Hindu youth. We don't need swayamsevak, we need a swayam-sena now. Pick up swords, guns or whatever you have, war has been declared and it will go on till we have a Hindu rashtra." The video was shared by a Twitter user named Md Asif Khan On January 11. On January 12, The Meerut Police said the matter was being investigated by its cyber cell and necessary action would be taken. This was not the first time that Swaroop had made Islamophobic remarks. His Twitter timeline showed similar tweets and also retweets calling Muslims and other non-Hindu practitioners 'demons'.



See: The Print News' entry, in: <https://theprint.in/india/up-cops-probe-hindu-leader-as-video-shows-him-call-for-economic-social-boycott-of-muslims/584834/>, retrieved on 25.02.2021

**IsP140122-Sri Lanka: Sri Lanka to allow burial of COVID-19 victims following ban**

On February 10, Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa had announced in parliament that the country would allow Muslims to bury those who died from COVID-19. Mr. Rajapaksa, gave the assurance in response to a question from a lawmaker in Parliament. Sri Lanka had required the cremation of all people who die from COVID-19, where they claimed that the virus in human remains could contaminate underground water. Since 2020, Muslims and non-Muslims had been protesting the rule, in which they called it unscientific and insensitive of Muslim religious beliefs. Muslim lawmaker Rishard Bathiudeen said "I am happy that they showed some compassion even at this stage, but it has to be implemented soon because people are dying every day."

See: ABC News entry, in: <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/sri-lanka-burial-covid-19-victims-ban-75797559>, retrieved on 15.02.2021

**IsP140127-India: Hindu Munnani functionary arrested for remarks on Prophet Muhammad**— On February 6, The Singanallur police had arrested M. Jaishankar, a Hindu Munnani functionary, on the charges of making remarks insulting Prophet Muhammad during a public meeting. According to the police, Jaishankar, district general secretary of Hindu Munnani, made the remarks on February 1, during a meeting held near Singanallur Bus Terminus, in Coimbatore, a city in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Based on a complaint lodged by Uppilipalayam Village Administrative Officer Banumathi, the Singanallur police had registered a case against him under sections 143 (Punishment for unlawful assembly), 341 (Punishment for wrongful restraint), 270 (Malignant act likely to spread infection of disease dangerous to life) and 153 A (Promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc., and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony) of the Indian Penal Code against Jaishankar.

See: The Hindu News' entry, in: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Coimbatore/hindu-munnani-functionary-arrested-for-remarks-on-prophet-muhammad/article33771175.ece>, retrieved on 08.02.2021

## EUROPE

**IsP140128 Switzerland: Swiss religious leaders: Ban on burqas would violate religious freedom**— Switzerland's Catholic Church had joined other religious groups who opposed a proposed ban on Muslim head coverings, they argued that it would "disproportionately" restrict religious freedom. The statement was published on the bishops' conference website amid preparations for a March 7 referendum on a law to ban "covering the face in public," introduced by members of the center-right Swiss People's Party. The bishops said freedom "to choose and shape ways of life, lifestyles and orientations" was a core value of Switzerland's liberal democracy, they added that religious leaders would reject "all ideologically and sociopolitically motivated attempts" to interfere with constitutionally protected religious expressions. "This initiative claims to have public security as a goal. In reality, it is directed toward an exceedingly small minority of the population and does not resolve any problems." the statement said. The religious leaders said the Swiss government's counterproposal, requiring faces to be revealed for official identification, appeared "reasonable and proportionate."

See: Catholic Philly News' entry, in: <https://catholicphilly.com/2021/01/news/world-news/swiss-religious-leaders-ban-on-burqas-would-violate-religious-freedom/>, retrieved on 01.02.2021