



Under Suspicion, Under Attack

Xenophobic Political Rhetoric and Hate Violence against
South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and
Arab Communities in the United States



2014 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Four years have passed since South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) published its report, *From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobia and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse* in October 2010, yet South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities continue to live in a climate of growing hostility. Emerging revelations demonstrate the extent to which our communities are cast as suspicious by multiple levels of government and law enforcement without cause or accountability. South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities are increasingly subject to xenophobic rhetoric from political figures and government officials, which are then highlighted by the media and filtered through society. Our communities continue to face hate violence at an unacceptable frequency, forcing us to heal over and over again while living in a climate of increasing fear.

In this report, SAALT collected data from January 2011 through April 2014 on two elements that characterize the hostile climate faced by our communities: xenophobic rhetoric by political figures and hate violence. Our current findings show that xenophobic political rhetoric has become more frequent, more insidious, and more likely to be featured on a national platform, relative to our 2010 report. Simultaneously, hate violence against our communities has expanded in volume as well as intensity. While our previous report did not track incidents of hate violence, our research and reports from communities appear to indicate a surge in such incidents over the past 13 years. We collected almost 160 examples of xenophobic rhetoric and hate violence targeting our communities during this time period. Yet as hostility increases toward our communities, the population of South Asians and other communities of color in the United States is also growing: America is projected to no longer be majority white in less than 30 years.¹ The impact of these attacks on our communities is manifold and threatens the safety and freedom of all in the U.S.

Amid the growing hostility facing our communities throughout the nation, South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities and allies have stood together to protect religious freedoms and to support American ideals of equality and justice. This report examines incidents of xenophobic rhetoric by political figures and hate violence nationwide as well as best practices in messaging, policy advocacy, and community engagement to address these attacks and shift our society toward the freedom and safety to which we are all entitled.

This report also includes recommendations for the President and Congress, as these government leaders and entities can use their executive and legislative positions to set the tone for appropriate political discourse and create policies and programs that address hate violence targeting our communities. Recommendations for community members, leaders, and allies are also included so we can all respond to the impact of a hostile climate on our communities and begin to move the narrative toward a better tomorrow.

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Key Findings

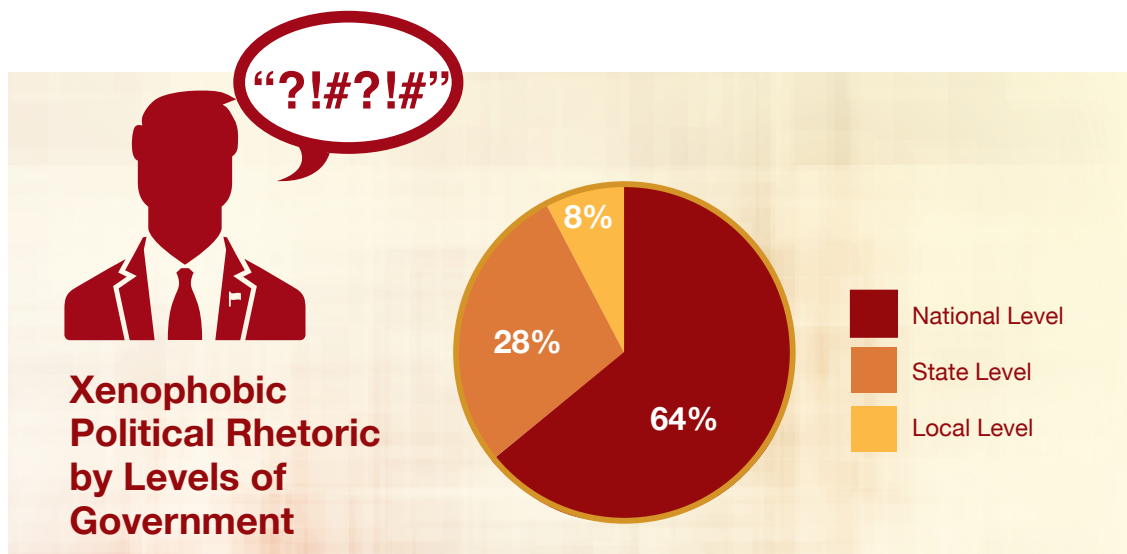
SAALT researched and documented xenophobic rhetoric by political figures and hate violence directed at our communities from January 2011 through April 2014. During this period, SAALT documented 78 instances of xenophobic political speech and 76 examples of hate violence. Our analysis of these 157 incidents establishes the following key findings:

- **The Overall Climate:** The climate faced by South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities has become increasingly hostile in the four years since SAALT published *From Macacas to Turban Toppers: The Rise in Xenophobic and Racist Rhetoric in American Political Discourse*. This climate is characterized by profiling and surveillance by law enforcement agencies, the growth of an Islamophobia “industry” that demonizes Muslims via the Internet and media, xenophobic political speech, and hate violence, among other elements.
- **Xenophobic Rhetoric in Political Discourse:** The 78 examples of xenophobic rhetoric by political figures documented over a three-year period in this report underline such rhetoric has become more prevalent since SAALT’s previous report on the issue was published in October 2010. Our 2010 analysis tracked 76 examples over a four-year period. Although both reports documented nearly

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the same number of incidents, the incidents in this report occurred over a three-year period versus the four-year period covered in the 2010 analysis. SAALT tracked an average of nearly 40% more examples of xenophobic political rhetoric since our previous report. It is clear the political speech targeting our communities is more numerous, more insidious, and is more likely to be heard on a national platform. An overwhelming majority of the xenophobic political comments—over 90%—were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment.

- **Hate Violence:** The 76 hate violence incidents we documented demonstrate the high level of hostility our communities face. While our previous report did not track incidents of hate violence, our research indicates a surge in hate violence over the



past 13 years. The Department of Justice (DOJ) reports that incidents of hate violence against our communities surged after 9/11 and have remained high with little variation.² Over 80% of the instances of hate violence documented for this report were motivated by anti-Muslim sentiment. Attacks on other faith communities often also involved severe violence.

- **Impact on Our Communities:** This hostile climate has a lasting impact on individuals living in our communities. Many in our communities are being deprived of their First Amendment rights to freedom of religion, speech, and association.
- **Threat to the Very Fabric of Our Country:** Xenophobic rhetoric, hate violence, and other factors that contribute to a hostile climate experienced by members of our communities run contrary to the values of our nation and serve as a chilling reminder that the American principles of freedom and equality remain a dream for many within the U.S. This growing hostility is especially alarming given the shifting racial and demographic fabric of the U.S. and the fact that the South Asian population represents the fastest-growing major ethnic group in the U.S.³
- **Better Practices in Messaging, Policy Advocacy, and Community Mobilization:** Despite the overwhelming incidents of xenophobic rhetoric and hate violence, there are also numerous examples of “better practices” from government and community leaders, organizations, and media who played an essential role to shift the narrative in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon Bombing to allow for an effective investigation and reduce backlash. In the wake of the Oak Creek tragedy, policy advocacy organizations came together and successfully requested a Senate hearing on hate crimes and a system to track hate crimes against Hindus, Sikhs, and Arabs. Advocacy organizations worked across lines of race, ethnicity, and religion in New York City to raise national awareness on local surveillance, spur legislative and political change, and develop an effective social media campaign to impact discriminatory policing.

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Recommendations

Recommendations for the President:

- Ensure that all political speech emanating from the Administration upholds American values of fairness and equality; swiftly and strongly condemn xenophobic and hateful rhetoric by other political figures.
- Create a National Task Force to Prevent Hate Violence focused on addressing incidents directed at South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities. This task force would leverage a holistic approach and develop relationships between communities and government to address hate violence by creating comprehensive and coordinated preventive measures and response protocols at the federal, state, and local levels.
- Rigorously enforce hate crimes legislation and ensure that law enforcement receive cultural and religious competency trainings to understand the challenges our communities face when reporting hate violence.

- Revise the Department of Justice 2003 Guidance on the Use of Race by Federal Law Enforcement. Critical changes would include prohibiting profiling based on categories of national origin and religion; removing the national security and border integrity loopholes; ensuring the application of the Guidance to state and local law enforcement agencies; prohibiting surveillance activities and data collection; and create enforceability and compliance mechanisms.
- End suspicionless and discriminatory surveillance of our communities by law enforcement agencies; investigate state and local law enforcement for discriminatory practices and the use of biased and discriminatory trainings; and proactively issue statements condemning these practices.
- Conduct congressional hearings to investigate the discriminatory and suspicionless surveillance of our communities by all levels of law enforcement.

Recommendations to Community Members, Leaders, and Allies:

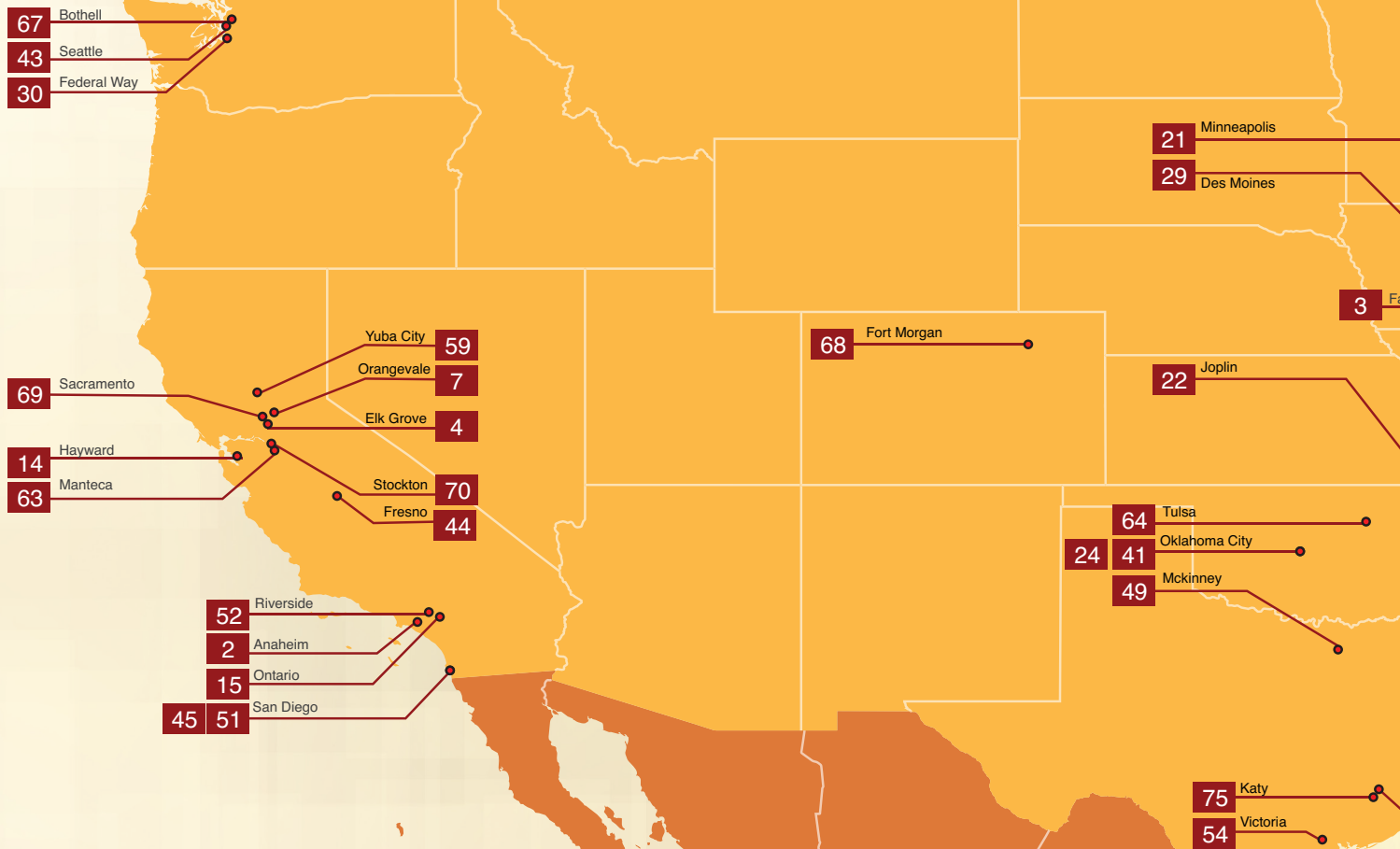
Recommendations for Congress:

- Insist that all political speech emanating from members of Congress upholds American values of fairness and equality; swiftly and strongly condemn xenophobic and hateful rhetoric by other political figures.
- Pass the End Racial Profiling Act (ERPA) to end law enforcement profiling on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, and national origin.
- Educate communities about their rights; encourage reporting of hate violence; and foster healing in our communities in the aftermath of incidents of hate violence.
- Voice opposition to political figures engaging in xenophobic rhetoric and support those who promote equality and freedom for all.
- Promote messaging that supports and welcomes our communities; work collaboratively to advance our communities' policy agenda; build collaborative relationships across sectors to address the hostile climate facing our communities.
- Continue building meaningful relationships with local and national media to enhance critical reporting of xenophobic rhetoric and hate incidents. Amplify media outlets that expose xenophobic political rhetoric and shed light on the climate facing our communities.

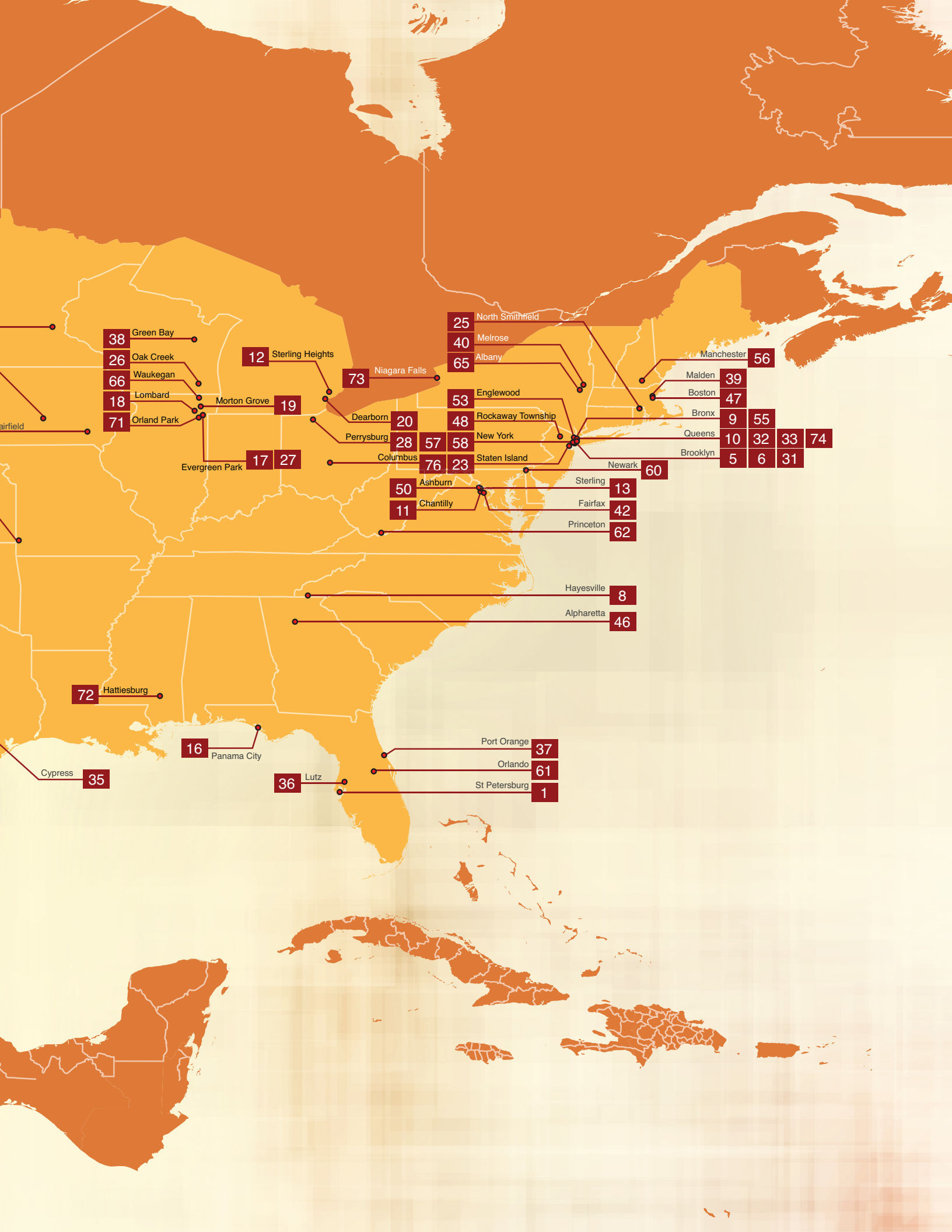
Endnotes

- 1 D'Vera Cohn, *Falloff in Births Slows Shift to a Majority-Minority Youth Population*, Pew Research Center (Jun. 26, 2014), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/26/falloff-in-births-slows-shift-to-a-majority-minority-youth-population>.
- 2 U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Confronting Discrimination in the Post - 9/11 Era: Challenges and Opportunities Ten Years Later* (Apr. 2012), *available at* http://www.justice.gov/crt/publications/post911/post911summit_report_2012-04.pdf.
- 3 *A Demographic Snapshot of South Asians in the U.S.*, S. Asian Am. Leading Together (Jul. 2012), <http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Demographic-Snapshot-Asian-American-Foundation-2012.pdf>.

Hate Violence Incidents Targeting South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Arab, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab Communities Nationwide: January 2011 – April 2014



This map outlines the 83 hate violence incidents documented by SAALT targeting South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab communities from January 2011 to April 2014. These incidents include attacks upon individuals, community spaces, and religious institutions. Incidents are numbered chronologically. A detailed list of incidents, dates and locations can be found in Appendix A of *Under Suspicion, Under Attack* at <http://bit.ly/SAALTUnderSuspicionUnderAttackAppendices>.



About South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT)

South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) is a national nonpartisan non-profit organization that elevates the voices and perspectives of South Asian individuals and organizations to build a more just and inclusive society in the United States. SAALT's strategies include conducting public policy analysis and advocacy; building partnerships with South Asian organizations and allies; mobilizing communities to take action; and developing leadership for social change. SAALT is the coordinating entity for the National Coalition of South Asian Organizations (NCSO).

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The authors would like to acknowledge the individuals, communities, and institutions that continue the fight each and every day to expose xenophobia and protect our communities from hate violence. Thank you for your work toward achieving a climate free of hostility and discrimination in our country.

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6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 506 | Takoma Park, MD 20912

Phone: 301-270-1855 | Fax: 301-270-1882 | Email: info@saalt.org

www.saalt.org