

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/community-policing-post-9-11-rebuilding-trust-with-amemsa-communities>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

The events of September 11th, 2001 were a game changer for law enforcement, as homeland security became a shared mission for local and federal agencies. Since then, an extensive array of laws and policies have been enacted at the national and state levels to support that mission, including but not limited to the PATRIOT Act, Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, multiple immigration restrictions, and policies governing information sharing, intelligence gathering, and public access to information. While these government actions have helped protect our country from violence, many observers have recounted that they have sometimes done so at the expense of civil liberties and public safety [of certain communities](#). In particular, Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim, and South Asian (AMEMSA) communities have been disproportionately affected. With their trustworthiness openly questioned by some, they have been subjected to suspicion, bigotry, false incrimination, and hate crimes. In December 2012, for example, a woman [pushed a Hindu man to his death](#) on a New York City subway track, and then told police, "I hate Hindus and Muslims ever since 2001." While hate-motivated murders may come to law enforcement attention, community advocates and police believe that many lower-level hate crimes ranging from verbal and physical assaults to arson have [gone unreported](#) and/or could have been prevented with greater police-community collaboration.

AMEMSA communities, like other ethnic and religious communities, can be valuable partners in ensuring public safety and homeland security. Yet this is not happening to the extent that it should. Nationwide, many local law enforcement agencies are unsure how to connect with these diverse, growing communities, or how to overcome challenges to developing community policing partnerships with them. In and around the New York tri-state area, surveillance by the NYPD of AMEMSA student groups and demographic mapping of AMEMSA-specific community spaces and clubs such as cafes/tea houses, sports leagues, and mosques were revealed in 2013, leading to increased mistrust of the police by AMEMSA community members. Although the NYPD disbanded its Demographics Unit last April in part because it did not lead to any terrorist leads as well as an expressed desire by Mayor Bill de Blasio to ease tensions between [the police and the communities they serve](#), that mistrust has not disappeared.

For agencies striving to include AMEMSA community members some of whom who have lived in the U.S. for decades in their community policing efforts, there are a number of practical ways that trust can be strengthened, and if necessary, restored. We at Vera learned about these strategies, ranging from effectively collaborating with different faith leaders to re-orienting terrorism liaison officers to have an all crimes focus, through our national [United Communities](#) project. The project sought to investigate the challenges and opportunities that exist in relations between local law enforcement and AMEMSA communities by focusing on three different jurisdictions (Anaheim, California; Cleveland, Ohio; and Piscataway, New Jersey).

Before jumping into any strategies, however, agencies need to answer three important questions to ensure that they are optimally situated to serve and protect AMEMSA individuals:

By answering these questions honestly and continuously, law enforcement agencies can build the capacity, provide the training, and send a clear message that building trusting and mutually beneficial relationships with AMEMSA communities is a top priority for the safety of all.

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