Religious Facilities Sector Snapshot

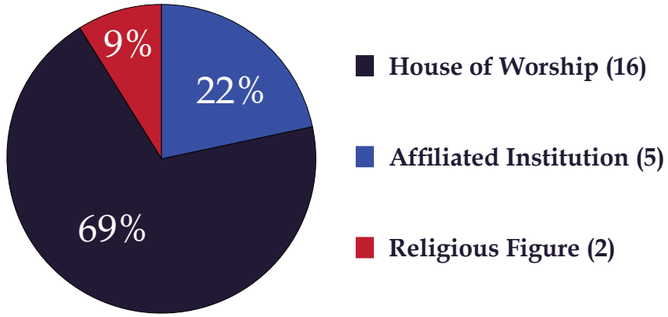
Sector Information

Religious facilities include houses of worship, childcare centers, schools, and community centers that are affiliated with faith-based groups.

According to the Association of Statisticians of American Religions, the United States has approximately 345,000 religious congregations with about 150 million members.

Religious facilities share common vulnerabilities because they are open-access and often have limited security. Faith-based organizations are constantly balancing the desire to be open to the public with maintaining a secure environment.

Attacks on Religious Targets in the US, 2006-15



Intelligence Gaps

- Which terrorist groups are planning to attack religious facilities in the United States?
- What level of training do religious facilities in New Jersey have, and are they trained to report suspicious activity?
- What types of cyber incidents have religious facilities in New Jersey experienced?

Threat

Terrorism: Moderate

Religious facilities in New Jersey face a moderate terror threat from white supremacists and homegrown violent extremists conducting small-arms attacks. In 2015, federal authorities arrested a New Jersey resident, inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, for plotting to assassinate Pope Francis during the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia. Recent white supremacist attacks on religious facilities in the US include Dylann Roof killing nine at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina in 2015; Ku Klux Klan leader Frazier Glenn Miller killing three at a Jewish community center and retirement home in Kansas in 2014; and Wade Michael Page killing six at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin in 2012.

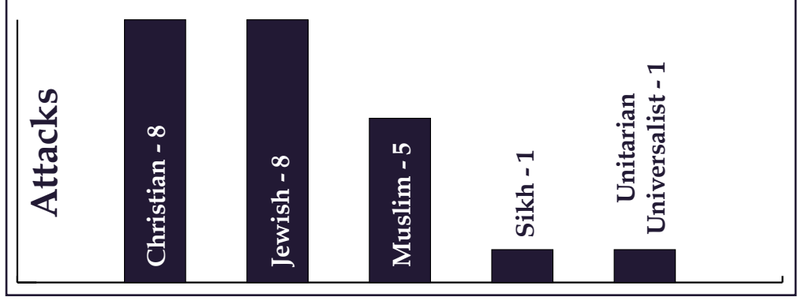
Cyber: Low

Cyber attacks targeting religious facilities have had minimal consequences. Vulnerabilities exist as a result of outdated computer systems, software, and networks. For example, a religious school in Burlington County had its website defaced twice in 2015. Other cyber threats include malicious software, social engineering, web application attacks, distributed denial-of-service attacks, network intrusion, exploitation of unpatched system vulnerabilities, and sensitive data theft.

Crime

Threats to New Jersey's religious facilities have been criminal in nature, including acts of vandalism and "swatting," or the act of falsely reporting an emergency to prompt a law enforcement response.

Religious Affiliation of Targets in the US, 2006-15



Preparedness

The NJOHSP Religious Facilities Threat Assessment Webinar and the Religious Facilities Resource Sheet presents information on potential threats posed to religious communities throughout New Jersey, as well as measures organizations can take to mitigate the risk from potential threats.

NJOHSP and the Interfaith Advisory Council developed the Faith-Based Security Strategy for New Jersey's religious facilities. The strategy includes security guidelines for houses of worship, outlines the development of security coordinators, and promotes awareness and resources provided by local, state, and federal agencies.

The 2016 Nonprofit Security Grant Program provides funding to New Jersey-based nonprofit organizations, including religious facilities, at high risk of terrorist attacks. Eligible 501(c)(3) organizations must use these funds to purchase or install security equipment on their property. Equipment is limited to items contained within FEMA's Authorized Equipment List.

All resources can be accessed through NJOHSP's website at www.njohsp.gov/interfaith.

Faith-Based Security Seminar in Piscataway in 2015

Contact Information

For more information, please contact NJOHSP's Preparedness Bureau at preparedness@njohsp.gov.

Information cutoff: August 26, 2016