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Honors Media and Society

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How Post 9/11 Imagery Affected Hate Crimes and Discrimination in America

I. Introduction

“Most of the time at the airport I used to get stopped for “random selection.” That started to happen when I grew my beard out, and my dad told me I should shave it before I go to the airport because they’ll stop me. I said no and they ended up stopping me. This especially happens when I travel between the UK and Boston.” This quote was provided by Ahad Khatau; a 21 year-old film student from Emerson College. Khatau grew up as a Pakistani in Dubai, moved to London at 18, and attended college in the United States. Through my conquest for information, I realized how difficult it would be for me to fully understand the massive amounts of discrimination without speaking to my Muslim peers first. Growing up, my best friend, Kazi Begum wore a hijab. I didn’t quite understand the reason she received stares until we were older. Through speaking to Kazi, I concluded just how detrimental the role the media plays in framing negative narratives concerning Muslim and Middle Eastern Americans. After 9/11, hate crimes spiked nearly 2400% to the previous year to around 500 per year; the year 2000 saw around 20 hate crimes against Muslim Americans (FBI).

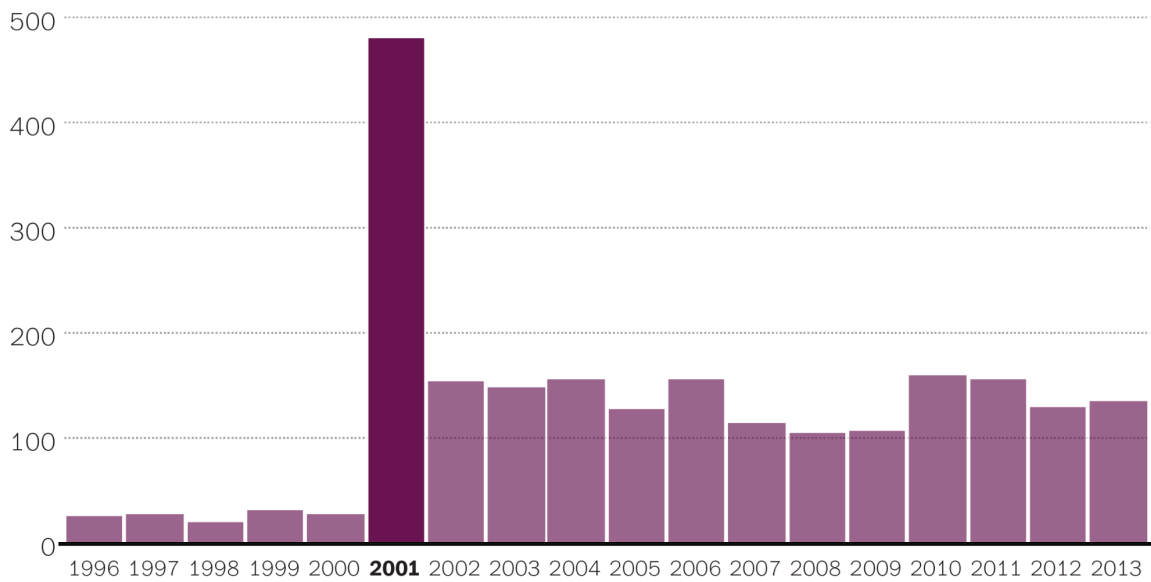


Figure 1: Hate Crimes Incidents Against Muslims, By Year

Source: Washington Post (FBI Crime Stats)

Going into this project, I knew that the media played a negative role in discrimination against Muslim Americans, but I wanted to get to the bottom of just how critical the media became. Fox News has been particularly bad recently with Islamophobia. In 2019, Judge Jeanine Pirro stated, “Omar wears a hijab, which according to the Quran 33:59, tells women to cover so they won’t get molested. Is her adherence to this Islamic doctrine indicative of her adherence to Sharia law, which in itself is antithetical to the United States Constitution?” Fortunately, the network pulled Pirro’s show after she made these claims, and the network lost sponsorships. Pirro personally paid the price for her words, but other news anchors kept their shows. Tucker Carlson made similar comments and remains the most watched news broadcast almost every night. For this analysis, I will be taking a closer look at Muslim and Middle Eastern discrimination across CNN, BBC, and Fox News with the intention of

finding a link between the number of hate crimes and the increasing negative framing in the News.

II. Research Method

To test my hypothesis, I decided to look at three different news sources: CNN, BBC, and Fox News. I looked at 6 months of news coverage between January and June of 2002. I focused on pulling out specific buzzwords within the article titles: Muslim, Middle East, war, war on terror, terrorist/terror, Arab, military/army, and Bush. The reasoning behind counting Bush in the total is because George W. Bush is known for his drastic war policies that led the United States into the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. There were some concerns I had before beginning the content analysis. Because these archives are close to 20 years old, I had limited access to CNN and BBC articles. I only had access to the political archives from CNN and BBC's top stories from the day. Fox News gives access to all video, articles, and news stories from January-June 2002.

III. Results

Word	Times Used
Middle East	0
War	4
Terrorism/ terrorists	1
Muslim	0
Arab	0
Bush	1
Military/army	1
Attack	0

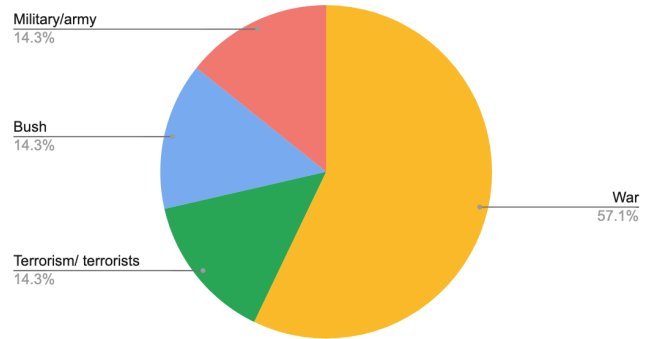


Figure 2: Buzzwords used on the BCC from January-June 2002

Word	Times Used
Middle East	1054
Terrorism	9950
Muslim	345
Arab	22,000
Bush	40,500

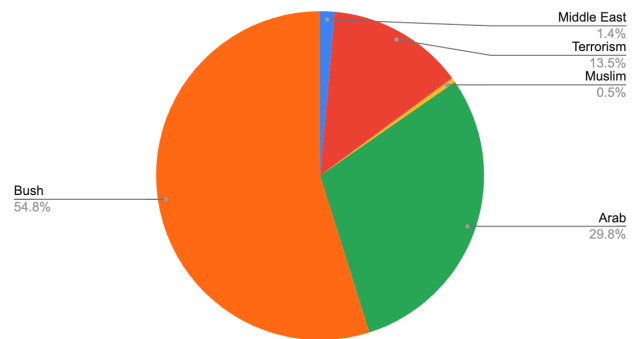


Figure 3: Buzzwords used on Fox News from January-June 2002

Word	Times Used
Middle East	2
War	33
Terrorism/ terrorists	23
Muslim	0
Arab	2
Bush	176
Military/army	6

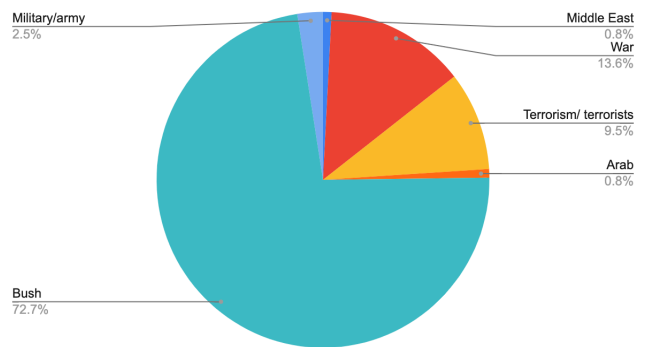


Figure 4:

Buzzwords used on CNN from January-June 2002

IV. Analysis

After reviewing the articles, these are the conclusions I came to:

- Buzzwords such as: the war on terror, Bush, and terrorist were used the most frequently
- “The War on Terror” was used in over 50,000 Fox News articles, videos, and news broadcasts in a 6-month span.
- As time went on, these terms were used more frequently.
- The BBC used buzzwords less frequently than CNN and Fox News (this makes sense considering their role on the world stage).

It was clear that Fox News used these buzzwords the most frequently amongst the other news sources. However, it is important to note that I had access to all of the Fox News Achieves, unlike the other sources. It is important to note that Fox News is the most viewed news station within the United States, which comes as a concern when discussing the increase in hate crimes. While the data collected during the content analysis was shocking, it didn't quite prove the hypothesis, and I cannot definitively say the media's use of “buzzwords” was responsible for the jump in hate crimes towards Muslim Americans. A combination of the increase in war-time news coverage, an increase in nationalism, and the overall negative representations of Muslim/Middle Eastern Americans within the media.

V. Literature Review

The negative framing of the Middle East by the western media was entirely intentional. Phillip Knightly describes in *The Role of Media in Justifying and Promoting War* that, “It has become increasingly difficult for a government to wage a sustained war without the support of its people. One reason for this is that the main victims of the war are now

civilians” (Knightly 377). As expected, Knightly goes into detail outlining how news networks, especially British and American networks showed bombings, dead soldiers, etc (Knightly 377). *Framing the War on Terror* details the rhetorical nature of the term “The War on Terror.” This term was coined specifically to create, “rationale for the invasion of Iraq” (Reese and Lewis 776). The role of the media during the Iraq War dramatically changed. American citizens tuned into nightly news and were greeted by gory depictions of war torn countries, and fallen soldiers. This combined with the heightened nationalism within the country made for a dangerous combination. Was this done intentionally? Not exactly. Yet, the outcome was devastating for Muslim and Middle Eastern Americans.

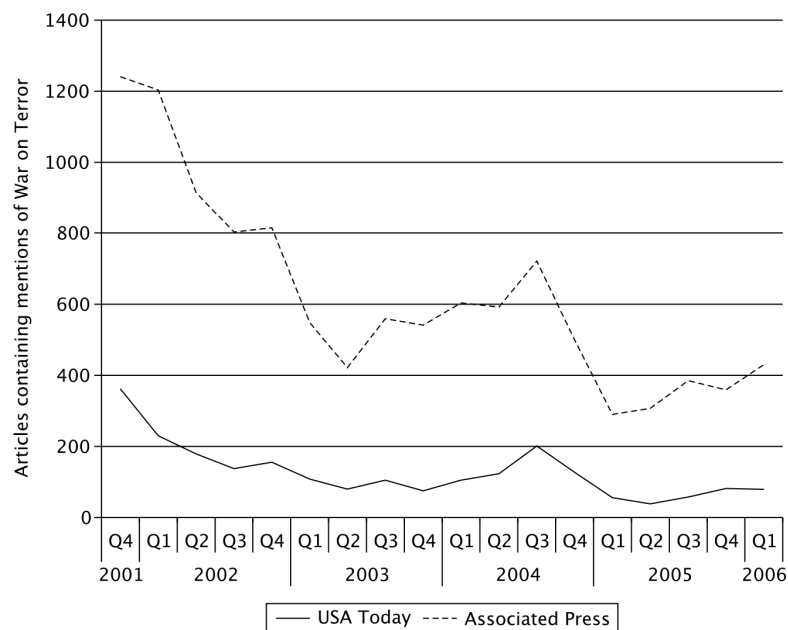


Figure 5: Tracking the War on Terror in USA Today and the Associated Press

Source: Framing the War on Terror by Stephen Reese and Seth Lewis

Reese and Lewis conducted a similar content analysis where they looked at the amount of times “The War on Terror” was used by year. The term is used the most frequently in 2001, and there was a spike in 2004. Bush was running for reelection in 2004 and the war was a prominent issue amongst voters. Ahad Khantau

There is an obvious bias in the news when it comes to the representation of Middle Eastern and Muslim Americans, but I wanted to explore the other factors that increased hate crimes within the United States. Nazita Lajevardi of Michigan State University conducted survey experiments in *The Media Matters: Muslim American Portrayals and the Effects on Mass Attitudes* that concluded that, “media portrayals of Muslims and Muslim Americans increase hostility toward Muslim Americans and increase support for stringent policies targeting them, while positive portrayals have relatively weaker effects” (Lajevardi 1060).

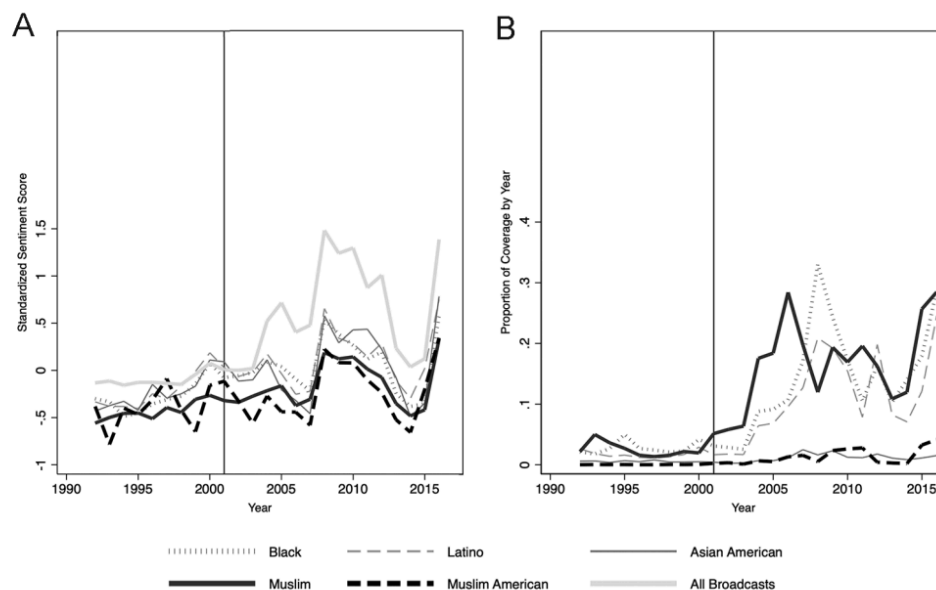


Figure 6: Yearly mean media coverage sentiment (A) and proportion of yearly coverage (B) of groups on CNN, 1992–2016

Source: The Media Matters: Muslim American Portrayals and the Effects on Mass Attitudes

Lajevardi's findings concluded that Muslims, the foreign group, received more yearly coverage. This makes sense considering the countless wars that were taking place overseas in the Middle East. Yet, there is a concerning aspect of this data. Americans began to perceive and connect foreign Muslims to Muslim Americans. There was no distinction in the news media. This is not to say that all Muslims, foreign or not, are responsible for the acts of 9/11, but Muslim Americans are being compared to Middle Eastern people fighting in a foreign war. This leads to a negative view of all Muslims and Middle Eastern people as well.

Every minority population details their own experiences with seeing common tropes within movies and tv shows. Kazi Begum, an 18-year old Muslim student from the University of Connecticut details her experience, "A common stereotype or narrative in the media is that women of Islam are oppressed and involved in terrorism. This is an example of the vilification of the Middle East." Begum's words reign true when looking at Spanish-Muslim character, Nadia, in *Elite* (a Netflix original series). Though this is not an American TV show, Parrot Analytics found that, "the audience demand for *Elite* is 5.7 times the demand of the average TV series in the United States" (Parrot Analytics). The representation within this show is persuading and affecting America's views on Muslims. In the finale of the second season, Nadia removes her hijab to impress her boyfriend during a clubbing scene. Everyone in the club can be seen "wooing" at her; implying she was less beautiful with the hijab on. Begum describes her experience with this trope, "There's a lot of absolutism in the media" she begins, "I removed my hijab this year, not because I thought I looked prettier without it, not because I felt 'oppressed,' it my decision, and my decision only. That is a personal decision for each woman." Another popular trope within western media is using yellow filters when depicting Middle Eastern countries and war torn

countries. This may not seem like monumental, but by doing this, Dr. Victor Fan states, “when a cinematographer or director decides to use a yellow filter in scenes that take place in Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, they indeed intend to create a space that would make their intended viewers (i.e. viewers like themselves) associate it with poverty, ‘pre-modernity’, lawlessness” (Ullman). By associating these Middle Eastern countries with poverty and lawlessness, whether intentional or not, unconscious biases are being developed within viewers. Ahad Khatau, a film student from Emerson College, describes just how necessary representation is, “There needs to be more perspectives shown of Muslims. The way they are being shown now is very one sided, and having only white directors working on these productions isn’t helping the issue.”



Figure 7: Example of “Yellow” Filter from *Extraction*

Source: The Media Diversity Institute

VI. Conclusion

Muslim Americans make up 1% of the United States population, but 14.6% of hate crimes committed every year on average. A mixture of extreme post 9/11 nationalism, negative TV and film portrayal, and an increase in war-time news media is to blame for this increase. News outlets, especially Fox News used “buzzwords” (Muslim, War on Terror, terrorist, etc) more frequently than the BBC and CNN from January-June 2002, which continued an upward trend of violence within the United States. As time progressed these terms were used more frequently, but began to subside as the war in the Middle East became less popular amongst Americans. “Oppressed” women shown throughout the media continue to villainize Islam, even though the religion has 1.9 billion followers throughout the world. So, where do we go from here? As a white person and non Muslim, I was having a difficult time trying to come to a conclusion, so I decided to ask Kazi and Ahad for their opinions. Kazi explains that,

Having positive representation in the media is a good step, but it's not enough. It's a good, casual way to get the message across; it's a way to ease people in. People need to be educated and aware as to why people have certain beliefs. It can be done through our education and media. The media needs to be accurate. Much of American media is propaganda”

Ahad felt a similar way and described that the media has created this trope, now they have to be the ones to destroy it. However, he does state, “In the early 2000s in general, Muslims were portrayed as terrorists or the “bad guys.” It seems to be getting better since directors are noticing the harmful effects of those stereotypes.” Ahad seems to see a better future where Muslims and Middle Eastern people are shown in a more positive light and develop

storylines that don't only revolve around their religion, oppression, war, and poverty, or as I've outlined in this research, the result is deadly.

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