Covering American Muslims Objectively and Creatively

A GUIDE FOR MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND UNDERSTANDING

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The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding is a non-partisan research and education organization specializing in the American Muslim community. Our objective, solution-seeking, original research educates the general public and enables community change agents, the media, and policymakers to make evidence-based decisions.

We are committed to helping journalists and media professionals do their best work. Stay in touch with us on Facebook and Twitter, or access all of our reports, case studies, briefings, as well as a list of our expert scholars at: www.ispu.org.

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INTRODUCTION

The majority of Americans say they do not know a Muslim.[1] For many of these Americans, what they know about Muslims comes from media representations.

However, according to media content analysis, more than 80 percent of television media coverage of Islam and Muslims in the United States is negative.[2]

Such narrow media representations open the door to distorted public perceptions of American Muslims, especially in the absence of any first-hand knowledge of this diverse community.

The role of the media in informing the public has never been more important, especially when it comes to marginalized communities. At the same time, journalists are constantly asked to cover more and more, with less resources.

38%

Percentage of Americans Who Know Someone Who Is Muslim

WE CREATED THIS GUIDE TO HELP.

WHY ISPU?

The Problem:
A lack of data on American Muslims and dearth of Muslim voices in media and policy circles

The Solution:
A research organization focused on the trends, opportunities, and challenges of American Muslims

ISPU provides:

1 **SOURCES**   **2** **NUMBERS**   **3** **IDEAS**

1. **Sources:** Direct access to over 40 experts on issues related to Muslims in the United States

2. **Numbers:** The latest survey data on demographics, religiosity, civic engagement, and attitudes on political and social issues

3. **New Ideas:** Background on issues seldom discussed and new perspectives on breaking news and current events

Since 2002, ISPU has provided data-driven education to:

- Media organizations
- The Department of Justice
- The White House
- Schools and universities
- Community leaders and groups
- General public
- Interfaith leaders
- And many more…

Access all of our reports, case studies, briefings, as well as a list of our expert scholars at:
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SUCCESSFUL MEDIA APPROACHES

Expand the voices that inform your reporting.

- Muslims come from all walks of life, as well as diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. They play a variety of roles in their communities.
- Include Muslim voices in stories about what concerns all Americans. This includes the voices of:
  - African American Muslims, who make up 25–33 percent of all American Muslims
  - Women
  - Both native-born and immigrant American Muslims[3]

Move beyond the security lens.

- Cover stories about American Muslims not framed around national security or criminal violence.
- Shed light on the diverse roles American Muslims play in their communities and provide a more accurate, nuanced portrait of who American Muslims really are.

Treat Americans that are Muslims as just that—American.

- There has never been an America without Islam and Muslims;[4] they were early explorers, enslaved Africans, and immigrants from around the world.
- Casting Islam and Muslims as foreign, un-American, and "other" is inaccurate. Rather, rightly cast Muslims as a part of the diverse fabric of American society.

Avoid implicating religion as the sole explanation for negative behavior.

- Americans that are Muslim are complex human beings, and their motivation is complex. Don't assume religion is the driver in their behavior.[5]

Be factual and avoid loaded or Orientalist language.

- The use of culturally specific language to describe human behaviors that are not unique to Muslims makes such behaviors seem pathological to these communities.
- For example, domestic violence affects Muslim communities no more than other faith (and non-faith) communities. Reference to such incidents should be to domestic violence, not "honor crimes."[6]

MEDIA CHECKLIST

✓ Does my media outlet feature the voices of Americans that are Muslim in contexts outside of violence and public safety?

✓ Is my media outlet including Muslim voices in stories about subjects that concern all Americans?

✓ Does my coverage of American Muslims feature reliable, mainstream Muslim experts and sources?

✓ Am I being representative and including Black Muslim voices in my reporting on "Muslim stories"?

✓ Am I considering what factors other than religion and ethnicity might explain the behavior in question? Could trauma or economic factors be a more powerful variable than ethnicity or religion?

✓ Have I included the voices of American women who are Muslim in my reporting that represent the vast majority of women's experiences (Islam-positive, educated, and more challenged by racism and Islamophobia than Muslim misogyny, according to ISPU's American Muslim Poll 2018)?

✓ Am I using culturally neutral language? Arabic words or culturally specific language is often used to describe behaviors that are not unique to Muslims or Arabs, making the behavior seem pathological to these communities. Before using such language, it is helpful to ask yourself: Am I assigning foreign ("Muslim-sounding") words to a universal human behavior? What would I call this type of behavior if it didn't involve a Muslim person?

✓ Is my story driven by the priorities and points of view of the majority? If not, am I qualifying it as a minority point of view?
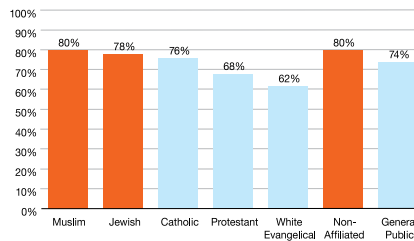
Despite empirical evidence to the contrary, many misconceptions and damaging stereotypes about American Muslims often are repeated in mainstream media and go unchallenged. The following are **data-driven responses** to common misconceptions.

1. FACT: Muslims are one of the most likely groups in the United States to reject violence.

- ISPU's American Muslim Poll 2018 found that Muslims were the least likely to accept both military and individual violence against civilians.

Muslims, Jews, and Non-Affiliated Most Likely to Reject Individual Attacks on Civilians

Muslim 80%, Jewish 78%, Catholic 76%, Protestant 68%, White Evangelical 62%, Non-Affiliated 80%, General Public 74%

Some people think that for an individual or a small group of people to target and kill civilians is sometimes justified, while others think that this kind of violence is never justified. Which is your opinion? (% Never justified shown) Base: Total respondents

Muslims Most Likely to Reject Military Attacks on Civilians

Muslim 71%, Jewish 51%, Catholic 35%, Protestant 34%, White Evangelical 23%, Non-Affiliated 55%, General Public 42%
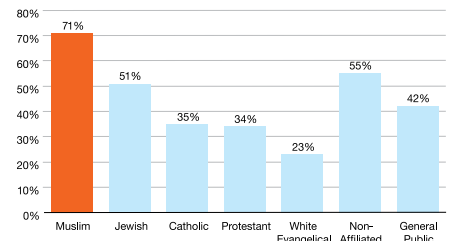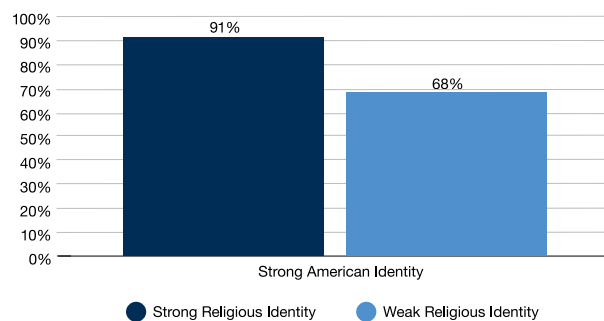
Some people think that for the military to target and kill civilians is sometimes justified, while others think that this kind of violence is never justified. Which is your opinion? (% Never justified shown) Base: Total respondents

2. FACT: A strong Muslim identity is directly correlated with a strong American identity.

- Such data challenges the myth that Americanness and Muslimness are mutually exclusive.

Muslims with Strong Religious Identities Are More Likely to Have Strong American Identities

Strong American Identity: Strong Religious Identity 91%, Weak Religious Identity 68%

● Strong Religious Identity   ● Weak Religious Identity

How important is being an American to the way you think of yourself: is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all? (% Net important vs. net not important shown); How important is your religion to the way you think of yourself, is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all? (% Net important vs. net not important shown) Base: Total Muslim respondents, 2016

3. FACT: American Muslim leaders and organizations have consistently and repeatedly condemned violence and denounced violent ideologies.

- But should they be expected to? Or are such expectations based in bigotry and Islamophobia?
- ISPU recently examined attitudes surrounding this debate. In ISPU's 2017 American Muslim Poll, 50 percent of American Muslims and 44 percent of the general public responded that American Muslim leaders should condemn ideologically motivated violence publicly.[7]

One point of view: ISPU Director of Research Dalia Mogahed says, "When [acts of ideologically motivated violence perpetrated by non-Muslims] occur, we don't suspect other people who share their faith and ethnicity of condoning them. We assume that these things outrage them just as much as they do anyone else. And we have to afford this same assumption of innocence to Muslims."

Muslims, Public Split on Muslim Need to Condemn Terrorism
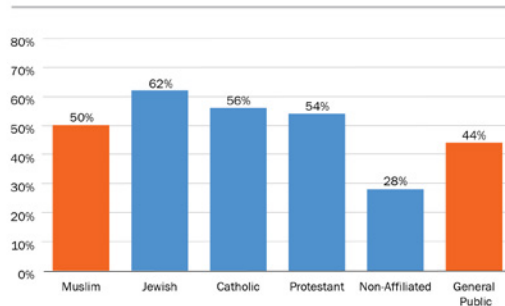
Which comes closest to your point of view, even if neither is exactly right? (% That think American Muslim leaders and organizations should condemn terrorism publicly) Base: Total respondents, 2017

4. FACT: Most Americans agree that Muslims are no more responsible for violence carried out by a Muslim than anyone else.

- Most Americans also agree that negative political rhetoric toward Muslims is harmful to the United States.

Most Americans Believe Muslims No More Responsible for Violence Carried Out by a Muslim

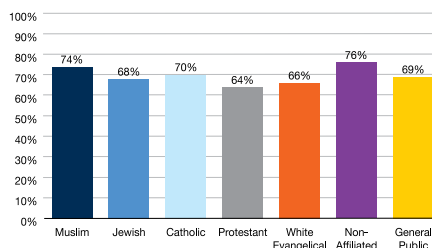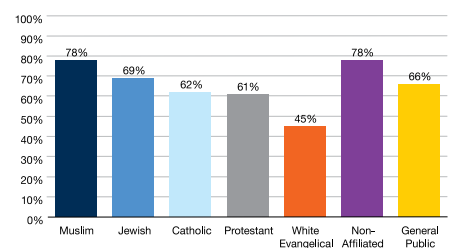**FIGURE 15:** *Most Muslims living in the United States are no more responsible for violence carried out by a Muslim than anyone else.* (% Net agree shown) Base: Total respondents

Most Americans Believe Negative Political Rhetoric Toward Muslims Is Harmful to U.S.

The negative things politicians say regarding Muslims is harmful to our country. (% Net agree shown) Base: Total respondents

5. FACT: Violence by perpetrators perceived to be Muslim receives far more media attention than other types of ideologically motivated violence.

- A recent study by ISPU found that perceived Muslims accused of a violent plot received more than seven times the media attention as their non-Muslim counterparts, despite similarities in their alleged crimes.

- Similarly, Muslim-perceived perpetrators accused of violent acts were referenced in the media more than four times the rate of their non-Muslim counterparts.[8]

6. FACT: Muslims who bring up religious-based claims in court are not attempting to change the laws of the United States.

- Individual Muslims determine the role of religious rules in their lives depending on their personal beliefs.

- If a legal dispute arises involving one of those rules, individuals will likely find themselves in litigation, raising claims before an American judge.[9]

- Anti-shariah legislation restricts the rights of American Muslims to apply religious rules to their lives.[10] This type of legislation is also strongly linked to a legislative agenda aimed at excluding various minority communities from the political landscape.[11]

**7. FACT: The concept of *taqiyyah* refers to a religious permission to conceal one's faith if revealing it endangers one's life, not an open license to lie.**

- As explained by American Muslim scholars, nothing in Islam gives Muslims general permission to lie.

- The origin of the notion of taqiyyah refers to the permissibility for Muslims to conceal their faith if identifying as Muslim puts their lives in danger.[12]

8. FACT: By an overwhelming margin, Muslim women choose how they dress.

- ISPU recently asked American Muslim women why they wear an identifying religious symbol like hijab.
- 99 percent of respondents indicated personal reasons for wearing hijab, such as piety or the desire to be identified as a Muslim.

Piety, Identity Top Reasons for Hijab
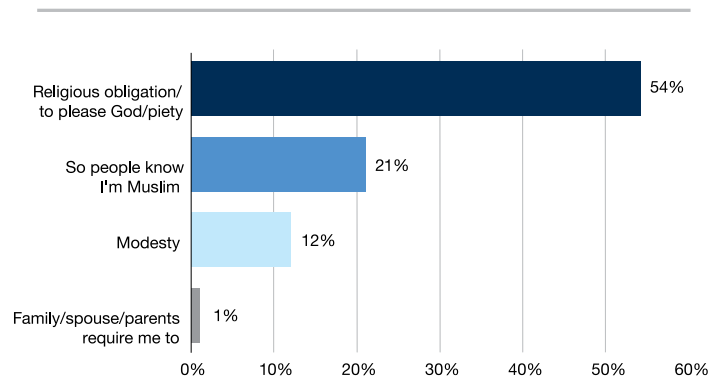
Can you please tell me why you wear this symbol? Base: Female Muslim respondents who wear a visible faith symbol that makes their faith identity known to others

9. FACT: The overwhelming majority of American women who are Muslim say Islam is a source of pride and happiness in their lives.[13]

- American women who are Muslim are one of the most educated female religious groups in the United States.[14] They also overwhelmingly view their faith as a source of happiness and a part of their identity for which they feel a great deal of pride.
- As described in a recent ISPU policy brief, the rights afforded to women by Islam in the seventh century include the right to a consensual marriage, to remain their own legal entities after marriage, to initiate a divorce, to child support, to own property, to pursue education, and to be involved in social and political affairs. Many Muslim women rise to the tops of their professions as doctors, lawyers, and scholars.[15]
- A recent study suggests U.S. news media's disproportionate focus on gender discrimination in Muslim societies contributes to stereotypes that Muslims are distinctly sexist and misogynistic.[16]

Muslims make up about 1 percent of the population in the United States and are the fastest growing and most diverse religious community in the nation.[17]

Facts at a Glance
DEMOGRAPHICS

Why It Matters

ISPU data on the diversity and demographics of the Muslim community has implications for journalists seeking to accurately represent American Muslims. Journalists might ask themselves:

• Who is speaking for the community?

• Are sources representative of the community's diversity?

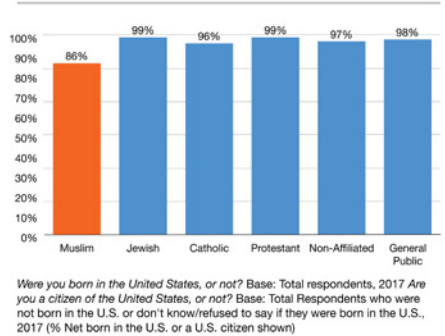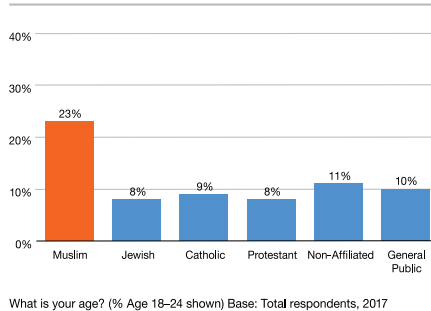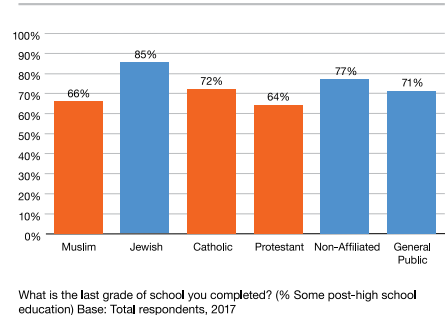### Muslims Most Ethnically Diverse Faith Community

Black or African American 25%
White 24%
Asian/Chinese/Japanese 18%
Arab 18%
Mixed 7%
Hispanic 5%
Other 2%
Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native 1%

Are you of Hispanic origin or background? Do you consider yourself White, Black or African American, Asian, Arab, Native American, Pacific Islander, mixed race or some other race? Base: Total Muslim respondents, 2017

Most Muslims Are Americans by Birth or Naturalization

Muslim	Jewish	Catholic	Protestant	Non-Affiliated	General Public
86%	99%	96%	99%	97%	98%

Were you born in the United States, or not? Base: Total respondents, 2017 Are you a citizen of the United States, or not? Base: Total Respondents who were not born in the U.S. or don't know/refused to say if they were born in the U.S., 2017 (% Net born in the U.S. or a U.S. citizen shown)

Muslims America's Youngest Faith Community

Muslim	Jewish	Catholic	Protestant	Non-Affiliated	General Public
23%	8%	9%	8%	11%	10%

What is your age? (% Age 18–24 shown) Base: Total respondents, 2017

Muslims, Christians Similar in Level of Education

Muslim	Jewish	Catholic	Protestant	Non-Affiliated	General Public
66%	85%	72%	64%	77%	71%

What is the last grade of school you completed? (% Some post-high school education) Base: Total respondents, 2017

Muslims Most Likely to Report Low Income

Muslim	Jewish	Catholic	Protestant	Non-Affiliated	General Public
35%	17%	15%	14%	18%	14%

What is your total annual household income from all sources, and before taxes? (% net less than $30K shown) Base: Total respondents, 2017
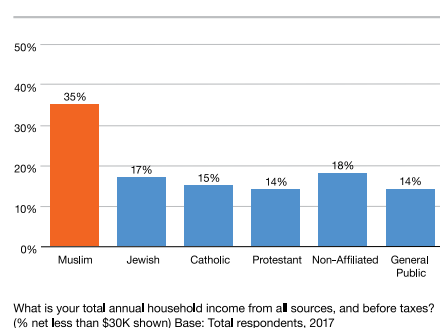
Americans of All Backgrounds Consider American Identity Important
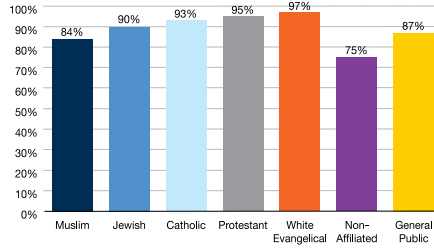
Bar chart:
- Muslim: 84%
- Jewish: 90%
- Catholic: 93%
- Protestant: 95%
- White Evangelical: 97%
- Non-Affiliated: 75%
- General Public: 87%

How important is being an American to the way you think of yourself, is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all? (% Net important shown) Base: Total respondents who are American citizens

Unlike Age Peers, Young Muslims as Likely as Older Muslims to Say Religion Important to Identity
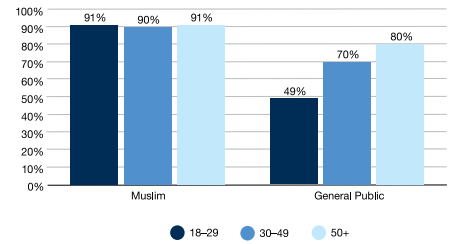
Bar chart (18–29, 30–49, 50+):
- Muslim: 91%, 90%, 91%
- General Public: 49%, 70%, 80%

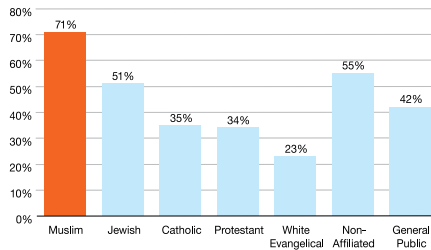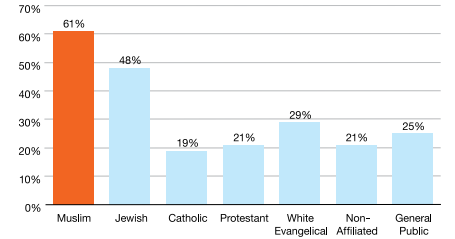How important is your religion to the way you think of yourself, is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all? (% Net important shown) Base: Total respondents

Muslims Most Likely to Reject Military Attacks on Civilians

Bar chart:
- Muslim: 71%
- Jewish: 51%
- Catholic: 35%
- Protestant: 34%
- White Evangelical: 23%
- Non-Affiliated: 55%
- General Public: 42%

Some people think that for the military to target and kill civilians is sometimes justified, while others think that this kind of violence is never justified. Which is your opinion? (% Never justified shown) Base: Total respondents

Muslims Experience the Most Religious Discrimination

Bar chart:
- Muslim: 61%
- Jewish: 48%
- Catholic: 19%
- Protestant: 21%
- White Evangelical: 29%
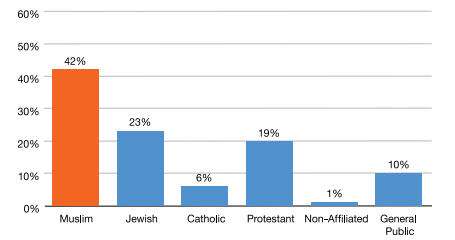- Non-Affiliated: 21%
- General Public: 25%

How often, if at all, have you personally experienced discrimination in the past year because of your religion? (% Net ever experienced shown) Base: Total respondents

Muslim Satisfaction with Direction of Country Declined Over Time

Bar chart:
- 2016: 63%
- 2017: 41%
- 2018: 27%
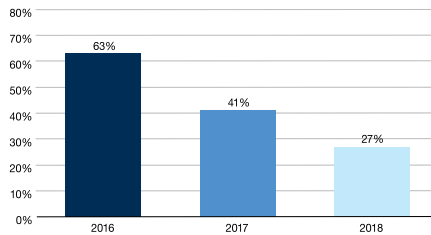
Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in this country today? (% Satisfied shown) Base: Total Muslim respondents

Muslim Families Most Likely to Face Bullying

Bar chart:
- Muslim: 42%
- Jewish: 23%
- Catholic: 6%
- Protestant: 19%
- Non-Affiliated: 1%
- General Public: 10%

How often, if at all, have your children experienced bullying (insults or physical assaults) in the past year because of their religion at school?(% Net ever experienced shown) Base: Total respondents who have children who attend a K-12 public school, 2017

A Michigan without Muslims would lose:

- More than 1600 new inventions
- Medical care for 1.6 million patients
- Social services for 24,000 families
- The education of 30,000 K-12 students
- The creation of 100,000 jobs
- $5.5 billion from its economy
- The representation of 2.3 million constituents
- $117 million in charitable giving
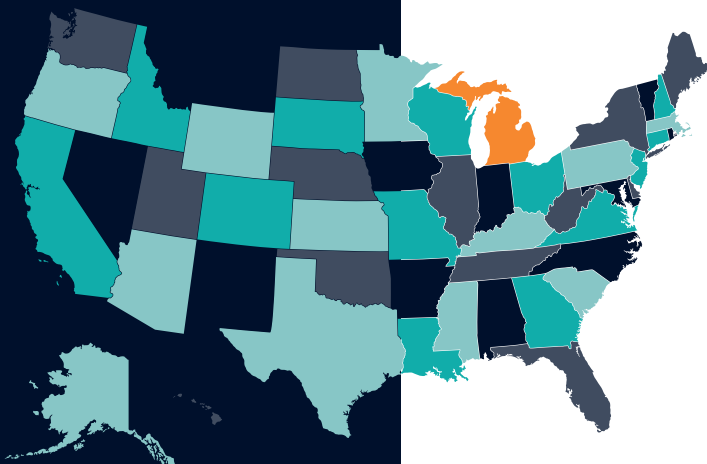
CONTRIBUTIONS
ISPU's Muslims for American Progress study quantifies the impact of Muslims on U.S. communities.

In just the state of Michigan, for example, where Muslims make up only 2.75 percent of the population, Muslims contribute to every sector of society.

PRIMER ON SUNNI AND SHIA MUSLIMS

As explained by the Islamic Networks Group:[18]

- The majority of both Sunnis and Shias share the core beliefs of Islam and adhere to the Five Pillars.

- The main differences between them today are their sources of knowledge and religious leadership.

- In addition to the Quran and hadiths, the Shias and the many sects that comprise them rely on the rulings of their Imams and resulting variations in beliefs and practices.

- Historically, the difference originated from the question of succession after the death of the Prophet Muhammad and is related to differing views about appropriate leadership for the Muslim community.

Sunnis[19]

- The largest division of Islam

- Close to 90 percent of the world's Muslim population

- Understood as an umbrella identity with no centralized clerical institution

- Include adherents to the four extant schools of fiqh (religious law or understanding) including the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafii, and Hanbali schools

- Believe in the legitimacy of the order of succession of the first four Muslim caliphs

Shias[20]

- The second largest division of Islam

- Believe Ali (cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad) was the rightful leader of the early caliphate

- The majority today are Twelve-Imam Shias (notably in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, India, and Pakistan); however, smaller sects include the Ismailis (in India, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen) and the Zaydis (in Yemen)

ACCURATE LANGUAGE

PROBLEMATIC

These words have been politicized and misrepresented, and are often used as slurs.

Terror(ist/ism): According to a recent study,[21] the word "terrorist" was used in media headlines far more often in reference to perpetrators perceived as Muslim than those who are not for similar ideologically motivated crimes.

Islamist (ism): According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, this term refers specifically to "a popular reform movement advocating the reordering of government and society in accordance with laws prescribed by Islam." The majority of these movements are nonviolent and shouldn't be lumped together with those claiming Islam sanctions their violence.

Jihad: Literally, the word "jihad" means "struggle" and most often refers to the inner struggle against one's own evil impulses, such as greed, anger, and malice. According to Muslim theologians, armed jihad is a heavily regulated military engagement where non-combatants, livestock, and even trees cannot be harmed.[24]

Islamic State: The group that refers to itself as "The Islamic State," known also as ISIS/ISIL, has been denounced by nearly every major cleric of Islam as un-Islamic.

PREFERRED

These are neutral, clear, informative alternatives to commonly misused words.

When reporting on ideologically motivated violence, use fact-based language to describe groups, persons, and events at hand. For example, describe perpetrators as "militia," "gunmen/women," "bombers," etc.[22]

There is no causal relationship between religious adherence and violence.[23] We've never lumped the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ku Klux Klan together as "Christianist terrorists," even though both claim to act in the name of Biblical teachings. Instead, we simply use the group name. Do the same for all groups.

Individuals who commit ideologically motivated violence and claim their actions are sanctioned by Islam should not be referred to as engaging in "jihad," nor should they be called "jihadis" or "jihadists." Use fact-based language to describe groups and events. Use the same standards in all coverage of ideologically motivated violence in your newsroom.

We recommend Daesh, which is the acronym of ISIL in Arabic, just as we say Hamas, which is the acronym for a longer Arabic name for the group. Current AP style guidance doesn't use "The Base" for Al-Qaeda. Similarly, we shouldn't translate other words. In all instances possible, use accurate, unloaded terms. The alternatives are ISIS/ISIL.

KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The diversity of Muslim communities results in a diverse array of terminology. Some commonly used terms include:

Alhamdulillah: Thank God	**Khutbah:** Sermon given during the Friday noon prayer
Aqeedah: Religious creed	**Masjid:** A Muslim place of worship
Eid: A Muslim holiday	**Mosque:** A Muslim place of worship
Eid Al-Fitr: Holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting	**PBUH:** Peace Be Upon Him; a prayer said by Muslims after the Prophet's name out of reverence
Fard: An Islamic term that denotes a religious duty commanded by God	**Quran:** Central religious text of Islam, which Muslims believe to be a revelation from God
Fiqh: Islamic jurisprudence	**Ramadan:** Month of fasting, when the Quran was first revealed
Hajj: Pilgrimage to Mecca	**Salaam:** Greeting of peace
Hadith: Traditions containing sayings of the Prophet Muhammad that constitute the major source of guidance for Muslims apart from the Quran	**Salah:** A prayer; usually referring to the five daily prayers required of all Muslims as one of the pillars of Islam
Iftar: A meal eaten by Muslims breaking their fast after sunset during the month of Ramadan	**Shahaddah:** The testimony of faith (There is no deity but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God)
Imam: A Muslim prayer leader; can also mean congregation leaders that fulfill organizational and pastoral needs of a mosque	**Sheikh:** A religious leader
Inshallah: God willing	**Sunnah:** The "path" or "example" of the Prophet Muhammad
Juma'ah: Friday noon prayer	**Tafseer:** The Arabic word for Quranic exegesis or interpretation

COVERING MUSLIMS: BEYOND THE SECURITY LENS

American Muslims are often viewed through a security lens, cast as either good or bad from a purely security-oriented perspective.

- Stories about "bad Muslims," who are violent or likely to act violently, and the rare "good Muslim" who is "rooting out extremism in his own community" dominate the American imagination about American Muslims.

- Americans of the Islamic faith are much more than this binary. They are doctors, cab drivers, school teachers, engineers, and physicists.[25]
- Moving beyond the security lens to include such voices provides a more accurate portrayal of American Muslims.
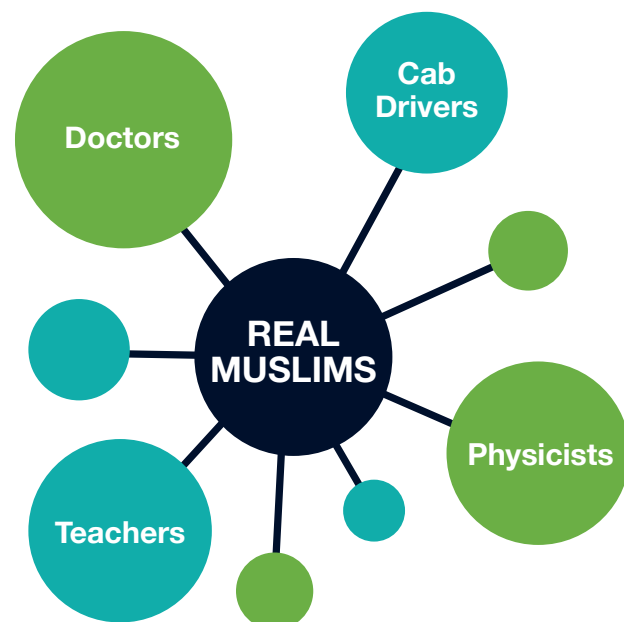
TIPS FOR IMPROVING DEPTH OF COVERAGE

Relationships of trust between media professionals and individuals in American Muslim communities produce better, richer reporting. The following tips, adapted from the Religion Communicators Council,[26] help improve depth of coverage.

DOs

- Do work actively to form connections with local, national, and international Muslims to establish a relationship.
- Do attend a local, national, or community event.
- Do focus on interesting stories done by Americans who just happen to be Muslims.
- Do write on American Muslim stories that are not framed around ideologically motivated violence.
- Do find value in American Muslim experiences and contributions other than helping national security or countering violent crime.
- Do write more stories about the lives of American Muslim women not involving the hijab, burqa, domestic violence, or FGM.

DON'Ts

- Don't assume all hijab-wearing women (or bearded men) are religious Muslims.
- Don't assume all uncovered women (or clean-shaven men) are not religious Muslims.
- Don't wait for an event dealing with Muslims to develop sources. Develop a source list and make it available to colleagues.
- Don't use the word "unveil" in your title.
- Don't assume any person claiming to represent Muslim communities really does.
- Don't use fringe Muslims as representatives for diverse Muslim communities.
- Don't say the "Muslim world." There is no "Muslim world."
- Don't assume all Muslims can speak accurately about Islam.

Equal Treatment?

ISPU recently examined the factors that shape media coverage of individuals who plan or carry out crimes in the name of violent ideologies. Our 2018 report found that:

- **Media coverage** of perpetrators of ideologically motivated violence perceived to be Muslim differed from those not perceived to be Muslim in **striking ways**. Those perceived to be Muslim received:
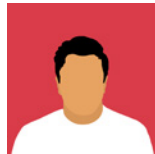
  - **Twice** the absolute quantity of print media coverage for violent crimes carried out
  - **Seven and a half times** the coverage for "foiled" plots
  - Greater references to their religion
  - Greater mention of specific phrases such as "terrorist" or "terrorism"
  - Increased coverage of the ultimate prison sentences
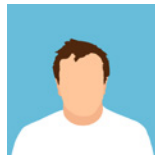
In the legal system, perpetrators of ideologically motivated violence perceived to be Muslim differed from those not perceived to be Muslim:

- Perceived Muslims receive four times the average prison sentence.
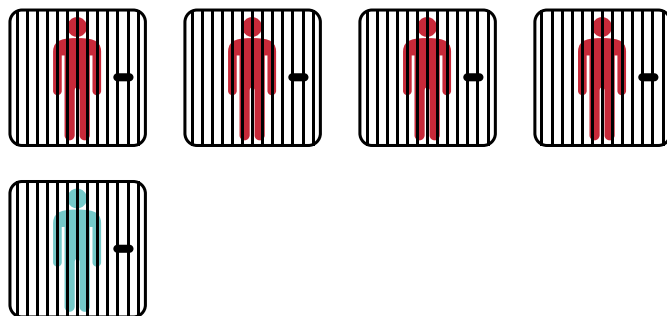
- Undercover law enforcement provided the means of the crime (such as a firearm or inert bomb) in a majority (two-thirds) of convictions involving a perceived Muslim perpetrator, but in a small fraction (2 out of 12) of those involving a non-Muslim.

AVOIDING DOUBLE STANDARDS

Covering crime and violence in all its forms is a challenge many journalists face. The following recommendations, based on the Asian American Journalists Association reading of ISPU's *Equal Treatment*? report, help inform journalists' reporting on ideologically motivated violence.[27]

1. Context Is Important

- Many experts agree that white supremacists and right-wing extremists pose a more serious threat to Americans than individuals who falsely claim Islam sanctions their crimes.
- Rather than paint them as "lone wolves," coverage of these extremists should include the context of this growing national threat.

2. Details Matter

- Law enforcement rarely discuss the documented role of informants and agent provocateurs in motivating and operationalizing terror plots that would have never manifested without the law enforcement asset.
- Journalists need to ask law enforcement about their active involvement in these plots, or lack of, and mention it in all coverage.

3. Define Ideologically Motivated Violence Consistently in All Stories

- Every newsroom needs to have a discussion on whether and when to use the terms "terror/terrorism/terrorist."[28]
- The word "terrorism" is highly politicized, and many governmental agencies have their own various definitions.[29]
- We recommend moving away from the word "terrorism" and using instead "ideologically motivated violence," which is a neutral term. The standards should be the same regardless of the suspect's background or views.
- Use actual, concrete terms to describe what has happened, not buzzwords that will inflame.

4. Don't Assume Race, Religion, or Ethnicity Are Relevant

- Newsrooms should discuss when a suspect/offender's race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin are relevant.
- Using descriptors of race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin when they're not relevant or without explaining their relevance can perpetuate harmful stereotypes.
- Such stereotypes prevent discussions on how mental illness and other systemic problems can lead to violent attacks or plots.

5. Question Authority

- Journalists covering ideologically motivated violence must question prosecutors and investigators over why they are or are not calling something terrorism, why they've chosen to charge a suspect with particular crimes, and what evidence they have for their charges.

6. A Press Release Is a Press Release

- ISPU's report found the Justice Department sent out six times more press releases for offenders perceived as Muslim than offenders who were not, and ideology was highlighted more often in the former than in the latter. Journalists need to read between the lines, ask questions about language used and facts omitted, and verify details.[30]

7. Examine Why You're Covering or Not Covering a Particular Story

- Journalists should examine what they're covering, what they're not covering, and ask newsroom decision-makers why. Some basic rules should apply: Does the reporting give background and context? Does it offer diverse voices? Does it follow up on events or situations to gain greater insights as well as measures of change or impact?

Shariah ≠ Islamic Law

According to Dr. Asifa Quraishi-Landes, translating shariah as "Islamic law" is problematic because in the United States we think of law as derived and enforced by the state. However, religious law, like Jewish halakha or Islamic shariah, are often complete systems of doctrine that do not require state power to govern individual behavior.

Shariah in Five Words

ISPU asked Dr. Asifa Quraishi-Landes, a trained Islamic legal expert and professor of law at the University of Wisconsin, for a five-word definition of shariah. Her answer:

Shariah: "Islam's recipe for a good life."

According to Quraishi-Landes:

- Shariah literally means "way" or "street."
- In an Islamic context, the word shariah refers to the set of principles mandated by God through the Quran and Prophetic example.[31]
- There is no one way to interpret and apply these principles. A rigorous legal process allows shariah to be interpreted in varying (and often contradictory/debated) ways in different times and contexts.
- Specific rulings that dictate Muslims' lives are the result of this interpretation of shariah by Islamic jurists.
- This process, called *ijtihad*, produces rules called *fiqh*.

Fiqh: "Fiqh are Muslim rules of right action."

According to Quraishi-Landes:

- Fiqh rules cover a range of arenas, from religious rituals like prayer and fasting, to business transactions.
- Fiqh is pluralistic and is understood to be the unavoidably fallible, human articulation of shariah.
- Unfortunately, in some predominantly Muslim countries, one fiqh interpretation is codified into law and called "shariah." This undermines the pluralism that is meant to exist among various schools of fiqh.

Shariah in an American Context

According to Islamic legal expert Dr. Asifa Quraishi-Landes:

• American Muslims' request that the law recognize their choice to apply religious rules to their lives is not a demand that such rules be legislated for everyone.

• Muslims who bring up religious-based claims in American courtrooms are not attempting to change the prevailing secular law or force anyone else to follow shariah.

• Legal disputes involving the application of religious rules to the life of an American Muslim should be subject to the same constitutional scrutiny as any other contract.

• Judicial respect for shariah-based practices exemplifies how Americans value religious freedom and religious pluralism without discriminating between religions.

Shariah: Why the Term Matters to American Journalists

• So-called anti-shariah legislation restricts American Muslims' constitutional rights and religious freedoms by limiting the practice of their faith in personal legal matters.[32]

• An aggressive anti-Muslim campaign has posited that shariah is "creeping" into American law and is a threat to American democracy.[33] However, such claims from anti-Muslim activists and pseudo-experts sorely miss the mark.[34]

• Moreover, though anti-Muslim legislation may be motivated by Islamophobia, there is evidence that these laws are strongly linked to other forms of bigotry and a legislative agenda aimed at excluding various minority communities from the political landscape.[35]

• Data from over 3100 bills across all 50 U.S. states showed that anti-Muslim legislation and anti-Muslim bigotry frequently overlapped with prejudices directed toward other communities.[36]

ISPU's Islamophobia 2050 Restrictive Measures Map shows:

• Lawmakers that target Muslims also often support laws that disproportionately harm other marginalized communities.

• Such laws adversely affect communities of color, and others according to their national origin/ethnicity, civic association, gender, or sexual identity.

See:
www.ispu.org/visualization
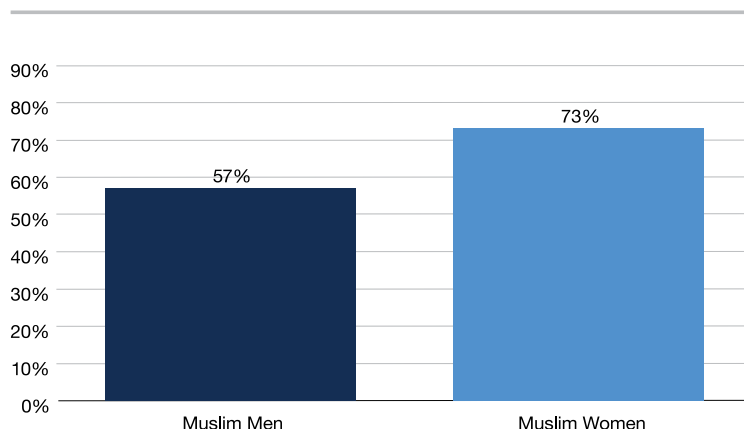
Muslim Women in the Media

- American media has increasingly expanded its coverage of Muslim women, both in the United States and abroad.

- Yet, representations of Muslim women often falsely stereotype them as meek, powerless, oppressed, or, after 9/11, as sympathetic to crime and violence or only relevant in the context of their headscarf.[37]

- Such stereotypes not only contribute to negative perceptions of Muslim women in the U.S. but also fly in the face of actual data showing that American Muslim women overwhelmingly see their faith as an asset in their lives.

- So, too, reporting often falls short of explaining the diversity of Muslim women, both those born in America and others from dozens of countries.

American Muslim Women by the Numbers

ISPU's data helps paint a more accurate, nuanced portrait of American Muslim women.

- In the United States, Muslim women are more diverse than women of other faiths and are from the only faith group with no majority race.

- American Muslim women are more likely to report higher socio-economic and educational status than their male counterparts.[38]

American Muslim women surpass American Muslim men in education.

- **73%** of Muslim women have a post-high school education

- **57%** of Muslim men have a post-high school education

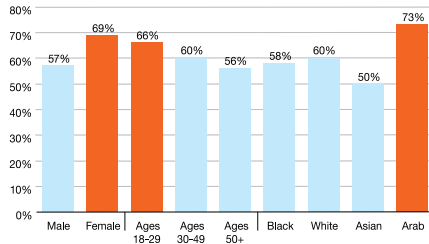## Muslim Women Surpass Men in Education

What is the last grade of school you completed? (% Some post-high school education) Base: Total Muslim respondents, 2017

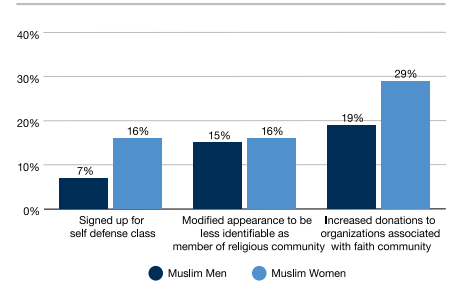## American Muslim Women: Resilience Despite Challenges

American Muslim women are also more likely than their male counterparts to say they experience discrimination and fear for their personal safety.

Muslim Women, Arabs, Young People Most Likely to Experience Religious Discrimination

Bar chart values: Male 57%, Female 69%, Ages 18-29 66%, Ages 30-49 60%, Ages 50+ 56%, Black 58%, White 60%, Asian 50%, Arab 73%

How often, if at all, have you personally experienced discrimination in the past year because of your religion? (% Net experienced discrimination shown) Base: Total Muslim respondents

Muslim Women More Likely than Men to Take Action Post Election

Signed up for self defense class: Muslim Men 7%, Muslim Women 16%
Modified appearance to be less identifiable as member of religious community: Muslim Men 15%, Muslim Women 16%
Increased donations to organizations associated with faith community: Muslim Men 19%, Muslim Women 29%
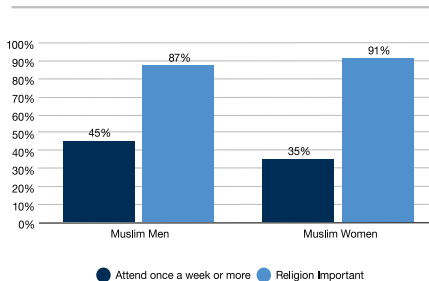
● Muslim Men ● Muslim Women

As a result of the outcome of the 2016 presidential elections have you done any of the following? (% Yes shown) Base: Total Muslim respondents, 2017

Despite this, women are no more likely than men to alter their appearance to be less identifiably Muslim and have responded to the challenges they face with resilience and resistance.

Additionally, American Muslim women value their religion as much as, if not more, than Muslim men, and are as active as men in their faith communities.
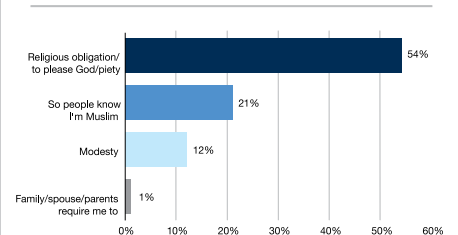
Lastly, by an overwhelming margin, Muslim women choose how they should dress.[39]

Women, Men Similar in Mosque Attendance

Muslim Men: Attend once a week or more 45%, Religion Important 87%
Muslim Women: Attend once a week or more 35%, Religion Important 91%

● Attend once a week or more ● Religion Important

Aside from weddings and funerals how often do you attend religious services? (% Once a week or more shown) How important is religion to your daily life? (% Important shown) Base: Total Muslim respondents, 2017

Piety, Identity Top Reasons for Hijab

Religious obligation/to please God/piety 54%
So people know I'm Muslim 21%
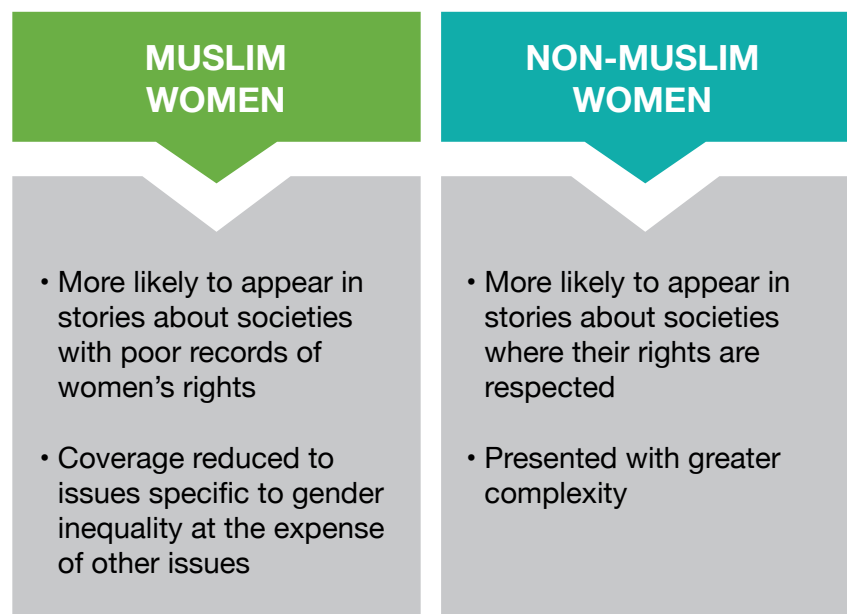Modesty 12%
Family/spouse/parents require me to 1%

Can you please tell me why you wear this symbol? Base: Female Muslim respondents who wear a visible faith symbol that makes their faith identity known to others

Muslim Women in the Media: A Closer Look

What characterizes representations of Muslim women in the media? How does this compare to representations of non-Muslim women? A recent, large-scale study of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* coverage of Muslim and non-Muslim women in foreign countries between 1980 and 2014 suggests the following:

MUSLIM WOMEN	NON-MUSLIM WOMEN
• More likely to appear in stories about societies with poor records of women's rights • Coverage reduced to issues specific to gender inequality at the expense of other issues	• More likely to appear in stories about societies where their rights are respected • Presented with greater complexity

- U.S. news media's tendency to frame coverage of women in Muslim societies around gender discrimination holds even after controlling for the actual conditions of women in those societies.

- Thus, countries with relatively good records of women's rights are still more likely to be covered in relation to issues of gender inequality.

- The study concludes that slanted media coverage may be to blame for negative public opinion about Muslim women in the United States.[40]

"U.S. media consumers are fed a particularly pernicious stereotype of Muslims: that they are distinctly sexist and misogynistic. This paints Muslims as a cultural threat to Western values. Since most Americans do not have direct contact with Muslims in their daily lives, media seriously influences public attitudes about Islam."

— Dr. Rochelle Terman, provost postdoctoral fellow at the University of Chicago

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

ISPU knows that media matters, and we are committed to helping journalists and media professionals do their best work.

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ISPU conducts objective, solution-seeking research that empowers American Muslims to develop their community and fully contribute to democracy and pluralism in the United States. Our research aims to educate the general public and enable community change agents, the media, and policymakers to make evidence-based decisions. In addition to building in-house capacity, ISPU has assembled leading experts across multiple disciplines, building a solid reputation as a trusted source for information for and about American Muslims.