

**A SHORT REVIEW**

**OF**

**STATE OF MEDIA REPORTING**

**ON**

**ISLAM & MUSLIMS**

*A report published (July 2019)*  
*by*  
*the Centre of Media Monitoring,*  
*a Project of the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)*

**Review by Islam Surveyed**  
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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Research by the MCB shows there is an enormous amount of bad news about Islam and Muslims in the British media. It examined more than 10,000 articles and TV clips and said....

- **59%** of news reports associate Muslims with negative behaviours,
- **a third** of all articles misrepresented or generalised about Muslims, and
- **26%** of articles have an antagonistic bias.

The MCB presented the results in Parliament on Tuesday, 9 July.

## 2.0 THE METHOD

To determine if an article or item is biased and to what degree, it is assessed against five key metrics.

*Association with negative aspects or behaviour*

*Misrepresentation*

*Generalisations*

*Lack of due prominence to a Muslim voice or identity*

*Issues with imagery or headlines.*

One might wonder about this choice of metrics. The reporting of negative aspects or behaviour can be the whole point of the article or item.

It only becomes questionable or wrong if the information given is false or twisted. The significance of generalisations, lack of a Muslim input, and imagery and headlines, may depend very much on a person's opinions. Why should the opinions of the MCB researchers be the correct or best ones?

The shaky and subjective nature of these metrics and how they are assessed is (unintentionally) demonstrated by the illustrative examples the report itself gives. For example:

### NEGATIVE BEHAVIOUR

The MCB says: *"Articles associating Muslims or Islam with negative aspects or behaviour can be found across most publications. One example is Trevor Phillips' article in The Mail on Sunday. In arguing for more power for prison governors against gang members, Phillips singles out the nationality and religion of "Pakistani Muslims", while using broader terms for "Black" and "White" people."*

Whoever gave this example seems to be unaware that Pakistani prison gangs use Islam as the basis of the gang. You are not a good Muslim if you don't join and bad things happen to bad Muslims! And, the Times recently reported *"Muslim gangs 'beat prisoners' who will not convert to Islam"*.

### MISREPRESENTATION

The MCB says: *"Qanta Ahmed's piece in The Spectator, following Boris Johnson's article in The Telegraph (August 2018) where he mocked Muslim women wearing the burqa, is an example of misrepresenting Muslim behaviour and belief. Ahmed claims there is no basis for the niqab in Islam. This ignores and negates the belief of some Muslims whose decision to wear the burqa or niqab is rooted in a particular interpretation of the religion."*

The author is a Muslim expressing her opinion. Why does she have to mention what other Muslims do or might think? Does the MCB do this when it states its view on some issue? In the MCB's continual and virulent criticism of the Government's Prevent programme you would have to look very hard to find any mention of the positive opinions some people hold of Prevent and why they hold them. And 99 percent of her readers will be fully aware a subject is or can be controversial.

*"Joanna Lumley, in describing the former Soviet satellite state of Kyrgyzstan, suggests that the communist system (which was repressive towards Islam) had a positive impact on how the religion is practiced giving it a "less strict Islamic feel". The assumption is that, had the state been allowed to practice Islam, it would have inherently been "strict". "This is a mainly Muslim country, but its communist legacy gives it a much less strict Islamic feel." "*

There aren't many countries where Islam is the ruling creed that might be said to be free of "strict" Islamic practices. In 40 percent apostasy is a crime and in 13 countries it carries the death penalty. Brunei has just brought back stoning as a means of execution.

Big countries, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, and now Turkey, are daily in the news for examples of strict practices (see examples below). Joanna Lumley's assumption is perfectly reasonable.

### **GENERALISATIONS**

*"The claim by Dominic Green in The Spectator that there are Muslims wanting to target him for his "Jewish blood" is just one example of generalisations made about Muslims being antisemitic, a trope that is increasingly being used by right leaning publications."*

*"There are Muslims wanting to target ...."* is not a generalisation. The person has not said *"Muslims want to target ...."* which would be a generalisation. Given the torrent of venom about Jews that comes out of the Middle East, [1] statements from British Muslims, and what Islamic holy texts say about Jews, the comment published in the Spectator is an accurate statement of fact.

And, the claim is not made by Dominic Green but by David Pryce-Jones, the person Green is interviewing.

### **IMAGERY & HEADLINES**

*"A Channel 5 news report on the release of Anjem Choudhury from prison chose to include footage from a previous protest which contained images of an antagonistic placard which associates Muslims as an existential threat to society. This does not reflect the reality that the vast majority of Muslims reject the views of Choudhary and his followers."*

It reflects the reality that there are Muslims like Anjem Choudhury and his followers that wish to impose an extreme version of Islam on everyone else. Perhaps if there were Muslims who believed in a modern and tolerant form of Islam and who made some effort to counter Choudhury and his ilk they would be in the news too.

## **3.0 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE "FINDINGS"**

Given the questionable methods and the attitudes of the MCB staff applying them the number of biased or faulty reports about Islam and Muslims might be somewhat less than the figures claimed by the MCB.

But even by their own reckoning the greater part of the news on Islam and Muslims is sound. That's what happened, that's what Muslims believe, say, and do!

Here are some headlines from the last six months. [These headlines have been gathered by the reviewer. The MCB report in its 74 pages does not provide any list and mentions only a handful of examples of headings it deems faulty.]

**From the Guardian** (Balanced and accurate reports, one assumes):

*Tehran closes 547 restaurants for breaking 'Islamic principles'*

*Asia Bibi's lawyer to defend couple on death row over blasphemy*

*Pakistan: where the daily slaughter of women barely makes the news*

*Persecution of Christians 'coming close to genocide' in Middle East – report*

*Brunei defends death by stoning for gay sex in letter to EU*

*'I lost consciousness': woman whipped by the Taliban over burqa without veil*

*Human rights lawyer Nasrin Sotoudeh jailed 'for 38 years' in Iran*

*UK-based TV station fined for anti-Ahmadi Muslim hate speech*

*Iranian couple arrested after public marriage proposal goes viral*

*My sister is in a Saudi jail. Her crime? Campaigning for women's rights*

**From The Daily Mail** (Wordy and possibly excitable headlines but largely accurate):

*'Practise what you preach!' Sajid Javid lashes out at Imam who berated Tory leader hopefuls over Islamophobia after vile anti-Jewish tweets surface*

*Bereaved British schoolgirl will be stripped of £500,000 inheritance after Sharia court in Dubai is told that she is a Christian*

*Doctor who faces inquiry for asking a Muslim to lift her veil says he will quit after 23 years as a GP due to the 'major injustice' of the investigation*

*Secret Government report warns over 48 British Islamic schools are teaching intolerance and misogyny to future imams*

*Bangladesh actress is forced to apologise after suggesting she might be an atheist in the conservative Muslim country*

*Government adviser on Islamophobia gave his backing to a Pakistani cleric who called for a Christian mother to be hanged for blasphemy*

*'I was called a sl\*t for taking off my hijab': Student, 26, who renounced Islam reveals she still receives death threats for ditching the religion – and says hundreds more women are living in fear*

*BBC Asian Network is forced to apologise amid backlash after asking listeners whether 18-year-old girl was right to flee Saudi Arabia when family threatened to kill her for leaving Islam*

**From the BBC and Others:**

*The website helping ex-Muslims flee the Gulf [BBC]*

*Muslim gangs 'beat prisoners' who will not convert to Islam [The Times]*

*Islamic charities push death for 'apostates' and female subjugation [NSS]*

*Birmingham LGBT lessons: Head teacher threatened [BBC]*

*Stoke-on-Trent charity 'encouraged support for IS' [BBC]*

*British Muslims like me have had enough of 'Abdullah from Bristols' speaking for us [The Telegraph] [An imam from Bristol claims men are predators and it is a woman's fault if she is attacked][2]*

*Birmingham-based President of UK's Pakistani Youth Council once said he would 'salute' Hitler [Birmingham Mail]*

*Burkina Faso Christians killed in attack on church [BBC]*

*Greedy Pigs cafe stands firm after hate letter brands its name 'disgusting, shameful and offensive' [Telegraph & Argus] [Local Muslim community unhappy with reference to pigs]*

*Runaway Saudi sisters: 'We were treated like slaves' [BBC]*

*Men laugh as woman caned in public for having sex outside marriage in Indonesia [The Independent]*

*Muslim charities push links to sites defending marital rape [The Times]*

*'Taught the stones shouldn't be too big' [BBC]*

*One-man Sharia courts 'discriminate against women' [The Times]*

*London mosque warned over 'kill Ahmadis' leaflets [BBC]*

*Iranian human rights lawyer who defended hijab protesters sentenced to seven years in prison [The Independent]*

*Islamic school rated 'inadequate' over offensive library books [Tes Global]*

*Muslim school will not allow girls to eat lunch until after boys have finished, Ofsted chief says [The Telegraph]*

*Iran arrested 7,000 in crackdown on dissent during 2018 - Amnesty [BBC]*

*Saudi women to get divorce confirmation by text message [BBC]*

#### **4.0 WHAT DOES THE MCB WANT?**

The main concern of the MCB is the media should be much more careful in its coverage of Islam and Muslims, avoiding ....

Association with negative aspects or behaviour,  
Misrepresentation,  
Generalisations,  
Lack of due prominence to a Muslim voice or identity,  
Issues with imagery or headlines

The report concludes: *"Of particular concern is what can only be reasonably interpreted as a deliberate attempt by some online news platforms, in particular, to associate Muslims and/or Islam with anything negative.*

*This as shown includes a rather inventive manufacturing of headlines. More disturbingly is the building of certain narratives around Muslim populaces including the rather disturbing insinuation that Muslims are inherently antisemitic.*

*.... the framing of complex issues as religious conflicts or disputes, distorts reality as well as provides tropes seized upon by those seeking to cause real harm to Muslims.*

*A greater emphasis on fact checking as well as more responsible editorial decision making, are some ways in which this can be corrected."*

**There is nothing at all about the Muslim behaviour that generates the media coverage in the first place!**

**There is no concern whatsoever with the greater part of media coverage that is sound journalism, even according to their own figures, which shows Islam and Muslims in a very bad light.**

**The fact is, a large number of Muslims practice their religion in ways most modern people find objectionable and in ways that cause trouble, and that is why there is so much news about Islam and Muslims.**

**If the MCB wants to be taken seriously it needs to recognise this.**

A significant proportion of British Muslims hold views and do things that justifiably attract the attention of the media. It is not an insignificant few percent; it can be a fifth, a third, or even more, depending on the issue. For example a recent survey [3] found:

*"Just over half of British Muslims said they wanted to "fully integrate" (53%), and 37% said they wanted to integrate "on most things" with separation in some areas, such as schooling and laws." 6% sought a "separate Islamic life as far as possible".*

"Schooling" and "laws", what could be more important! Nearly four out of ten wishing to live by their own rules concerning schools and the law is alarming, and a huge problem if most of them, and the 6% who want total separation, live together in the same areas.

**It would also be newsworthy and do a lot to make things better for everyone if the MCB took some time and trouble to do such things as, for example:**

- Petition (or hold a demonstration outside!) the Brunei embassy. Death by stoning for gay sex is barbaric, and casts a very bad light on Muslims everywhere. [The MCB might put aside the excuse that not all Muslims practice the same way, noting what one part of the *ummah* does reflects on other parts.]
- Publically tell the Bristol imam that his view - a woman is at fault if she is attacked by a man - might have been the way things were in dark age Arabia, but now in the modern civilised world, men should behave themselves and master their feelings.
- Issue a report explaining how anti-Jewish Islamic holy texts should be interpreted in modern times. And, write a public letter to the President of UK's Pakistani Youth Council condemning his belief that Hitler was right regarding Jews.

- Survey Muslim charities (and mosques and schools) and provide guidance to them on literature that should not be used because it pushes death for apostates, female subjugation, that marital rape is OK, and death for Ahmadis.

If the MCB put as much effort into such newsworthy activities as these, as they do into monitoring the media, they might actually do some good.

## 5.0 TO SUM UP

**The MCB report may be well-meaning from a narrow Muslim perspective but it is of poor quality, divorced from reality, and useless regarding what needs to be done.**

### Notes

[1] *"The Quran focuses on the Jews. First of all they are our sworn enemy ...."* See: <https://mickhartley.typepad.com/blog/2019/06/permanent-enemies.html>

[2] Abdullah Patel. *"Generally, men are the predators, but women need to realise this and be smarter. 'It takes 2 to tango, and if you put yourself in that position, don't expect every man to pass up the opportunity to take advantage of you. Don't be alone with a man!'"* <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/06/21/british-muslims-like-have-had-enough-abdullah-bridgwater-speaking/>

[3] The figures quoted are from an ICM survey carried out for Policy Exchange in December 2016. Other survey organisations have produced the same result. There is a very large British Muslim minority who are at odds with British society.

- A third (33%) of UK Muslim adults do not feel "part of British culture", Opinium Research, May 2016;
- One in three (33%) refuse to condemn acts of violence against people who mock Mohammed, ICM for Channel 4, April 2016;
- NEARLY one in four (25%) British Muslims would support Sharia law replacing UK law in some areas of the country;
- One in five (20%) British Muslims believe British liberal society can never be compatible with Islam, ComRes for the BBC.

The Casey Review of community cohesion in Britain shows we are already on a very dangerous road! *".... some communities are becoming more segregated. Too many people in this country have been living parallel lives, refusing to integrate, as politicians ducked the controversial issues of social integration for fear of being called racist."*

### Islam Surveyed

<https://islamsurveyed.com/>

### Circulation

Home Affairs Select Committee, The APPG British Muslims, The APPG Social Integration, the MCB, leading journalists, etc.