



**CAIR**  
ILLINOIS

# **Daily Herald Review: A Muslim Reader's Perspective**

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The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) is a non-profit grassroots organization dedicated to presenting an Islamic perspective on issues of importance to the American public. CAIR is the largest American Muslim civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States, serving the interests of more than seven million American Muslims with over 32 chapters and offices nationwide and in Canada.

The vision of CAIR is to be a leading advocate for social justice and mutual understanding.

CAIR's mission is to enhance a general understanding of Islam, encourage dialogue, protect civil liberties, empower American Muslims and build coalitions that promote justice and mutual understanding.

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*Addendum: Power Point Presentation (51 slides)*

## **Introduction**

In public opinion surveys commissioned by CAIR to gauge anti-Muslim sentiment nearly one-fourth of the American public was repeatedly found to believe anti-Muslim canards and stereotypes.

The latest CAIR survey of American public opinion about Islam and Muslims tested and confirmed the following findings: Approximately one-in-four Americans believes that Islam is a religion of hatred and violence. This proportion is virtually unchanged since CAIR's 2004 survey.

The need for accurate information and greater understanding about the Muslim community continues to grow more urgent.

## **The Reality of Islamophobia**

### **First Impression**

Responding to the open-ended question "When you hear the word 'Muslim,' what is the first thought that comes to your mind?" 6 percent of respondents had positive comments such as, "good religion," "good people," "faithful," "devout," and "misunderstood." In contrast, 68 percent had neutral comments such as, "mosque," "religion," and "desert." Twenty-six percent had negative comments such as, "violence," "hatred," "terrorists," "war," "guns," "towel-heads", and "rag-heads."

### **Restricting Muslims**

About one-fifth of the respondents agreed that the civil liberties of Muslims should be restricted because of security reasons. Indeed, 19 percent agreed that, "Because of security needs, the civil liberties of American Muslims should be restricted."

However, 51 percent disagreed (strongly or somewhat) with this proposition. Also, 17 percent agreed that "It's okay to lock up Muslims, just in case they are planning terrorist acts." Compared to 2004, this figure declined by 4 percent, a meager change of 1 percent above the margin of error.

### **The Knowledge Gap**

Most Americans are poorly informed about their Muslim neighbors and their role in society. Nearly two-thirds said that they did not hear, see or read about "any Muslim leaders who have condemned terrorism." And among those who answered affirmatively, the overwhelming majority learned about such Muslim positions only casually. Nearly 80 percent said the source of this knowledge was television.

These findings point to a vast difference in perception between American Muslims and their neighbors. Most American Muslims will point to the numerous condemnations of terrorism that their representative organizations have issued. However, it is clear that such condemnations are not being heard by other citizens. This may be the result of decisions by media outlets that acts of terror are more

newsworthy than statements condemning senseless violence.

### **Conditions That May Change Attitudes**

Despite negativity and indifference, most respondents said they would change their view if American Muslims took measures to condemn terrorism more strongly (69 percent), to improve the status of Muslim women (68 percent), to work harder to improve America's image in the Middle East (63 percent), to demonstrate concern for other Americans (60 percent) and to emphasize shared values with Christians and Jews (59 percent).

Replicated statistical evidence suggests that nearly one-in-five Americans maintain a strong anti-Muslim attitude. Although 27 percent are tolerant towards Muslims, only six percent have a positive first impression of Muslims.

People with negative or intolerant views toward Islam consistently agree with Islamophobic canards suggesting Islam teaches violence and Muslims inculcate hate in their children. CAIR's surveys indicate that Islamophobia defines the attitude of nearly one-fifth of Americans and has widespread influence on public discourse regarding Islam and Muslims.

The prevalence of anti-Islamic prejudice may be associated with a lack of accurate information about Islam and Muslims, coupled with widespread apprehensions about personal safety. This explains the finding that the vast majority of Americans said they would change their view if they perceive Muslims demonstrating more concern for Americans or if they perceive Muslims working towards improving America's image in the Muslim world.

### **The Role of the Media**

The media plays a significant role in shaping the public perception and understanding of Muslims. For many, the media may be the only source of knowledge regarding Muslims.

There are two main aspects of the way that news is covered: reporting and editorializing. Reporting includes the investigation, story angle, language, content scope and story content. Editorializing includes selection of headlines, pictures, captions, staff editorials, op-ed commentaries, letters to the editor, and political cartoons. The content of each is further defined by the choice of terminology.

The selection of each element carries significant impact.

## **Daily Herald Case Study**

CAIR-Chicago was commissioned by the Daily Herald to review its news sections ranging from May 20, 2007-June 3, 2007. These included five editions from Lake County, three editions from Tri-Cities & Kaneland zone, three editions from DuPage County, three editions from Northwest suburban Cook County and one Fox Valley edition intended to provide a range of coverage across the Daily Herald's many zones. Articles from the Daily Herald within this time span formed the majority of the examples for this review, in addition to a few articles from the Daily Herald outside of the date range to emphasize repeated trends.

By far, the primary presentation of Muslims in the Daily Herald was in the "World & Nation" Section, in the context of foreign affairs. In the selected two week span, the majority of stories involving Muslims included the war in Iraq, the War on terrorism, fighting in Lebanon and Palestine, and to a lesser extent, Iran and Afghanistan. Muslims were predominantly presented in contexts of terrorism and war, and the few available personal stories elicited associations of "oriental" exoticism.

Two stories printed on the same day were among the few that addressed Muslims in America in a light other than terrorism titled "Student Surveillance? Muslim college student says FBI agent bumped him with car" and "Surprises in U.S. Muslim poll: most oppose suicide bombings, but on in four youths says it's acceptable." Like presentations of Muslims in foreign affairs, the subject matter for these two domestic stories also highlighted conflict.

### **Iraq War**

Analysis of Iraq war coverage found that the majority of stories discussing the human toll focused on U.S. casualties, citing the number of U.S. loss and personalized stories of its effects locally. Few discussed the toll on Iraqis or personalized their loss. The few stories in which Iraqis were the focus were accompanied by photographs featuring U.S. troops.

While the U.S. casualty and death toll made repeated and prominent headlines, civilian casualty and death toll numbers were reported with significantly less frequency and prominence. While the month of May brought 17 times more death to Iraqi civilians than U.S. troops, U.S. troop toll was given two times as much coverage within two comparable articles. May 30, 2007 featured a prominent 316 word, page 2 story on U.S. toll in Iraq, reporting on 113 U.S. troops killed within the month of May alone. The story included a visual chart. Three days later, the Daily Herald reported on the civilian death toll of 2,000 within the same month span, 17 times that of the U.S. military, allotting a 113 word, page 8 story with no accompanying visual. The choice of reporting and editorializing reveals an unequal presentation of the human cost of the war on U.S. lives versus Iraqi lives.

It is imperative for Muslims to be shown in contexts that reflect shared humanity and experiences. Vital opportunities are either missed or misplaced. The few images available of Muslims feature Muslims in either anger or strife. Even when the story content speaks of grief and tragedy, images that may humanize Muslims and reflect empathetic emotions are not shown. Some of the few stories addressing civilian tragedy still featured the U.S. For example, a May 31, 2007 story highlighting the millions of refugees leaving Iraq has an accompanying image featuring soldiers.

### **Lebanon/Palestine**

News coverage of conflict involving Israel, Lebanon, and Palestine significantly distort the human cost of the violence, reporting the number of Israelis killed in conflict at much higher frequency than the number of Palestinians and Lebanese killed despite the larger number of Palestinian and Lebanese deaths. What coverage is available of Lebanese and Palestinians is focused upon militants without covering the civilian strife. For example, one of the few images of Palestinians available in the newspaper features a masked militant gunman (Daily Herald May 20, 2007).

### **Muslim Population**

In coverage of the Muslim population, consider titles such as “Hanging Angers Sunnis” (Daily Herald 1/07). Titles such as these reduce the entire “Muslim World” to a single, often angry, monolithic entity. Such reductionism obscures accurate understanding of Islam and Muslims. The fact that Islam is the faith and that its practitioners are Muslim are often conflated. Consider the terms: ‘Islamic fundamentalism,’ ‘Islamic militants,’ Islamic fascism,’ etc. The use of “Islamic” as a qualifier inaccurately associates the whole of the religion of Islam with radicalism. It is necessary to distinguish the faith from its practitioners as a reminder that all faiths are subject to human myopia. It is much more accurate to use Muslim as the qualifier.

### **Giving Voice to American Muslims**

American Muslims remain the subject of profound misunderstandings and deep mistrust. The struggles of the Muslim community are best articulated by its own members rather than by critics or appointed experts. It is imperative that Muslims who identify fully as Americans as well as with Islam are given their own voices in the media in order to add to a more representative discourse.

One such successful example was the Daily Herald's coverage of the Danish Cartoon Controversy. In February of 2006, the Daily Herald brought attention to the Chicagoland Muslim community's efforts to channel misunderstanding into an opportunity for dialogue and education. It is necessary to continue to cover Muslim communities throughout Illinois as they continue to engage in such outreach efforts and increase positive forums following increased political tension.

## Covering Muslims in America

Significant recent studies have been released highlight the growing role and status of Muslims in America. These studies continue to make headlines and have ongoing significance on Muslim Americans.

The Pew Research Center released a poll study and analysis entitled “Muslim Americans: Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream” on Tuesday May 22, 2007. The study finds Muslim American to be generally moderate and compatible with the general American population. The research reveals American Muslims to be a diverse population numbering over two million. This population estimate differs significantly from the standard estimate of six to seven million.

Overall the Pew survey reflected the fact that Muslim Americans are not as much of “the other” as the general American population may have been inclined to believe. It found Muslims Americans to have a broad willingness to adopt American customs and striving towards the American dream alongside their fellow citizens.

Headlines in the U.S. and abroad selectively presented the headlines. While major publications presented these main findings:

**Chicago Tribune:** “U.S. Muslims more content, assimilated than those abroad”

**National Public Radio:** “Pew Study Sees Muslim Americans Assimilating.”

**Washington Post:** “Survey: U.S. Muslims Assimilated, Opposed to Extremism”

The Daily Herald chose to headline “Surprises in U.S. Muslim Poll: Most oppose suicide bombings, but one in four youths says it’s acceptable,” choosing to highlight Muslims in a context separate from the main findings of the study.

Other more recent reports with immediate relevancy and garnering ongoing coverage include the Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs Task Force report June release of “ Strengthening America: The Civic and Political Integration of Muslim Americans, 2007” and the Council on American Islamic Relations June release of “The Status of Muslim Civil Rights 2007: Presumption of Guilt.”

The main conclusion of the independent Global Affairs Task Force is that greater Muslim American civic and political engagement is urgently needed to prevent alienation in a community that is vital to U.S. security and relations with the Muslim World.

The findings coincide with the continued increase of Muslim civil rights complaints and abuses reported by CAIR. This year’s report, entitled

“Presumption of Guilt,” finds a 25% increase in civil rights complaints nationwide. Since the first report in 1996, the number of reported incidents and experiences of anti-Muslim bias, discrimination, harassment, physical attacks, and hate crimes has risen every year. The last year alone saw a 25% increase in the number of such reports, with Illinois showing the highest per-capita complaints.

The Daily Herald did not provide coverage for the Chicago release of the report while other Chicago-land print and broadcast outlets provided coverage, including the Chicago Tribune, ABC7 News, and PBS. The same report was covered by other media outlets nationwide.

### **Summary**

The need for greater understanding about the Muslim community grows more urgent. Since the 9/11 attacks, acts of discrimination and hate crimes have annually averaged double-digit growth rates.

The media plays a significant role in the understanding of Muslims and has significant impact based upon its choice of reporting and editorializing.

Chicago has among the most vibrant, diverse, and historically based Muslim Communities in the nation. Islamic centers, Mosques, and organizations are abundant throughout Chicagoland and are good starting points for reporting on the Muslim community.

Ramadan, Eid-al-Fitr, Eid-al-Adha, and Hajj remain monumental occasions of shared joy and compassion deserving media coverage, simultaneously drawing hundreds of thousands of Muslims together in the Chicagoland area and 1.4 billion Muslims globally.

## **Muslim Community Resource**

With more than 33 active chapters in the US and in Canada the Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR) serves as a voice for American Muslims. As America's largest Islamic civil liberties group CAIR works with civil rights organizations and religious groups of all faiths.

CAIR puts forth an Islamic perspective on issues of importance to the American public. CAIR officials are regularly available for interview and also serve as the media's resource for connecting reporters with members of the Muslim community.

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## **Muslims and the American Press: Harmful Trends**

### *Sensationalist*

- American media coverage of Muslims and events in the Muslim world may often concentrate on the sensational (political upheavals, acts of violence carried out by extremist groups claiming to act in the name of Islam, perceived threats to American national interests, poor treatment of women, and outrageous human rights abuses).
  1. Media coverage may be characterized as sensationalist not just in the topics it addresses, but also in the imagery and language utilized in reporting these topics.

### *Reductionism*

- The media's use of terminology may at times be characterized as reductive, relying on certain ill-defined words both to convey certain concepts to an audience and to avoid closer scrutiny or definition of groups, individuals, and events ('Islamic fundamentalism,' 'Islamic militants,' 'Islamic fascism,' etc.).
  1. Reductionism may obscure subtle trends and breaking events.

### *Idiosyncratic*

- A good deal of the media's coverage of Muslims, particularly as one moves away from hard political or economic reporting into feature and background pieces, may be quirky and idiosyncratic. This reinforces the notion of the Muslim as "other" and the idea that Islam subscribes to a different and rather lower standard of humanity than does the West.

### *Editorial Bias*

- There is a reliance by the American media on editorial pieces to convey information about Islam and Muslims. The op-ed page is too often the only place to find in-depth analysis of the Islamic world. This analysis seldom includes the Muslim perspective.

### *Political and Cultural Sensibilities*

- The subjective political sensibilities of American media when covering the Muslim world in terms of economic relations and cultures, often set the parameters of discourse within the frame of the so-called clash of civilizations between Muslim and non-Muslim societies.

### *Historical Differences*

- Misunderstandings and biases that have influenced interactions of Islam and the West continue to influence how the American media perceive Islam and how Muslims see the West. These conflicts may date back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad and run through the Byzantine Empire, the Crusades, the Spanish Reconquista, the fall of Constantinople, the eras of colonialism and national independence, up to today. It may influence:
  1. The manner in which a journalist views the story
  2. The way a source responds to a question
  3. The language the writer uses
  4. The process an editor uses to approve and place the article
  5. And the reader's understanding of the information contained within the finished piece

## **Glossary of Common Muslim Terms and Phrases**

### **\*\*Muslim versus Islam:**

**Islam** is a monotheistic faith based on the belief in one God and Prophet Muhammad as the last messenger of God.

*Pronunciation:* [is-**lahm**] “**s**” as in [sit, passing] “**ah**” as in [arm, father, aha],

**Muslims** are the practitioners of Islam.

*Ex:* A Muslim believes in Islam.

*Pronunciation:* [**mu s-lim**] “**u**” as in [push], “**s**” as in [sit, passing], “**i**” as in [it, big]

**Allah:** The most commonly used linguistic term for ‘God’ in Arabic. Allah is the same monotheistic God of Abraham worshipped by Christians & Jews. Arabic-speakers of all faiths, including Christians and Jews, use the word "Allah" to mean "God"

**Alhamdu-lillah:** “All praise is due to God.” A Qur’anic phrase repeated by Muslims in all situations of life.

**Allahu Akbar:** “God is Great.” Used when acknowledging or recognizing an individual or an event.

**Assalamu Alaikum:** “Peace be upon you.” An Islamic greeting.

**Bismillah:** “In the name of God.” Phrase used to begin actions to ensure good and meritorious conduct.

**Eid:** An Islamic holiday which occurs twice a year. Eid al-Fitr is the holiday celebrating the end of Ramadan on the first day of the 10th lunar month of the Islamic calendar. Eid al-Adha, the most important Islamic holiday, commemorates the end of Hajj in Mecca, Saudi Arabia every year.

**Fatwa:** An opinion by an Islamic Scholar.

**Halal:** Permissible by Islamic law.

**Hajj:** see “**Pillars of Islam**”

**Haraam:** considered impermissible by Islamic law.

**Hijab:** Modest clothing that many Muslim women choose to wear in public. Generally, it is loose-fitting clothes and includes a head covering.

**Imam:** A leader of prayer.

**Insha Allah:** “God-willing.” A phrase often used when referring to anything happening in the future.

**Islam:** \*(see above)

**Jazaku Allahu Khayran:** “May God reward you.” A form of saying thank-you.

**Jihad:** literally means “to struggle”, primarily for the sake of God. Inner struggle is considered the best type of struggle in Prophetic tradition.

**Kufi:** A cap worn by some Muslim men.

**Masha Allah:** “Due to God.” Pronounced when praising.

**Masjid/Mosque:** The Arabic word for ‘mosque’ - an Islamic house of worship.

**Muslim:** \*(see above)

**Niqab:** A face veil.

**Pillars of Islam:** The 5 basic devotional-ritual duties of Islam

**Shahada:** testifying that “There is no god but God and Mohammed is the Messenger of God.”

**Salat:** “five daily prayer services;”

**Zakat:** “almsgiving;”

**Sawm:** “fasting during daylight in the month of Ramadan;

**Hajj:** The fifth pillar of Islam. It is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia and every able-bodied and financially capable Muslim must perform Hajj at least once in their lifetime.

**Prayer:** The second pillar of Islam. Islam mandates structured prayers five times a day. Muslims are also required to attend a weekly congregational prayer every Friday. During the month of Ramadan, many devout Muslims also observe extended evening prayers.

**Subhana Allah:** “God alone is worthy of praise.” Used in appreciation or time of achievement, or blessing.

**Ummah:** Arabic word meaning community or nation usually used to refer to the Muslim nation.

**Quran:** The revealed text and holy book of Islam.

**Ramadan:** The Islamic holy month of fasting and the ninth lunar month of the Islamic calendar

**Shariah:** Body of Islamic law.

## **CAIR Resources:**

“American Public Opinion About Islam and Muslims 2006.”  
<<http://www.cair.com/cairsurveyanalysis.pdf>>

“The Status of Muslim Civil Rights 2007: Presumption of Guilt.”  
<<http://www.cair.com/pdf/2007-Civil-Rights-Report.pdf>>