

MARCH 2016

MIXED MESSAGES



By Beth Hollowell, American Friends Service Committee



American Friends
Service Committee

About AFSC

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) is a Quaker organization that promotes lasting peace with justice, as a practical expression of faith in action. Drawing on continuing spiritual insights and working with people of many backgrounds, we nurture the seeds of change and respect for human life that transform social relations and systems.

AFSC has nearly a century of experience building peace in communities worldwide. Founded in the crucible of World War I by Quakers who aimed to serve both humanity and country while being faithful to their commitment to nonviolence, AFSC has worked throughout the world in conflict zones, in areas affected by natural disasters, and in oppressed communities to address the root causes of war and violence. In 1947, AFSC was a co-recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, on behalf of all Quakers for our work “... from the nameless to the nameless....”

From our experience, we know that peacemaking requires more than merely advocating against one war or another. Real peace is more than the absence of war. Rather, we need to change the culture, situations, and systems that lead to violence.

AFSC knows that miracles can happen when we build the capacity for peace person by person, community by community. When people understand the terrible consequences of violence and witness realistic alternatives, they come together as a powerful force to address the underlying causes and lay the foundation for lasting peace.

MIXED MESSAGES

How the media covers “violent extremism” and what you can do about it

By Beth Hallowell, American Friends Service Committee

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Executive summary

Every day, Americans are bombarded with images of spectacular extremist violence and increasingly bellicose policy rhetoric towards extremist groups. This coverage warrants a closer look, as public discourse sinks to new lows regarding race, religion, and violent conflict.


What else is the media covering when they cover extremism? Ninety percent of the time they also mention Islam, and three-quarters of the time they cover violent responses to conflict. The media frame extremist groups as both rational actors and irrational ones, sometimes in the same story. And they also talk about military intervention far more than peace building or nonviolent resistance to violent extremism—solutions to conflict that research has shown are more effective than violent responses to conflict. How can the U.S. public be expected to do anything but support further military intervention in the Middle East and other Muslim-majority countries, given this framework for covering violent extremism?

In this report, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) shares the results of its original content analysis of three months of media coverage of

extremism sampled from 20 U.S. news outlets. We sampled articles from 15 national media outlets as well as 5 major “influencer” outlets that reach a high-level audience of policymakers and government staff.

This analysis of over 600 news items shows a disturbing narrative link between extremism and Islam as well as between extremism and violent responses to conflict. These patterns of news coverage frame all Muslims—and many other ethnic and religious communities—as a monolithic, homogenous group of potential extremists, rather than as complex individuals living in diverse communities that have nothing to do with the organized, politicized violence wielded by groups like ISIS and Boko Haram. By framing political groups as both crazy and highly orchestrated—sometimes in the same news stories—and by predominantly covering violent responses to conflict, media outlets frame these groups as natural military targets.

We offer specific recommendations to advocates and journalists interested in changing this narrative, by bringing important and underreported facts to light. Specifically, advocates and journalists can partner on stories that highlight the leadership, diversity, and humanity of Muslim communities as well as other historically marginalized communities painted with the same Islamophobic brush. They can also partner to tell important, often-missed stories: about the history and social context in which violent conflict emerges, or about the difference between religion itself and religious rhetoric as a tool of violent conflict, alongside guns, bombs, and social media. Advocates can point journalists toward the many effective, long-term nonviolent solutions to violent conflict around the world, so that journalists can bring the facts of peace building and nonviolence—as well as the human drama of peace building and nonviolence—to readers’ attention. We invite both groups to join us in this important work.



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Introduction

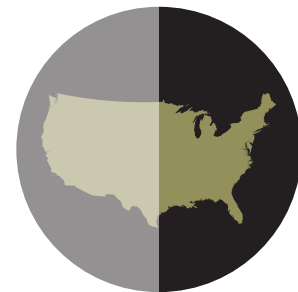
“*Islamophobia* is a problematic term that has become a popular way of referring to bigotry, hate crimes, discrimination, policies, and practices directed against a range of communities including Muslims. Despite the appearance of Islam in Islamophobia, neither Islam nor Muslims are its exclusive targets, for Arabs, South Asians, and other ethnic communities—whether Muslim or not—are also confronted with it.”

—Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, 2012¹

“It should come as no surprise that the United States and its coalition partners are discussing widening the war against the Islamic State beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria. Wider wars have become almost habitual in recent years, as military conflicts have expanded with little public awareness or debate. President George W. Bush’s “war on terror” began in Afghanistan, then moved to Iraq and elsewhere. Fourteen years after the Sept. 11 attacks, President Obama is still deploying American troops and weapons to fight Al Qaeda and other extremists in far-flung parts of the world...”

—“Stumbling into a Wider War,” New York Times, May 3, 2015

U.S. public discourse regarding race, religion, and violent conflict has reached new lows, while U.S. public support for yet another war in the Middle East is on the rise. Brutal hate crimes directed towards Muslims and other ethnic and religious communities—including a mosque torched in California, a taxi driver seriously injured in an apparent hate crime in Pittsburgh, and a pig’s head thrown at a mosque in Philadelphia—ran on the evening news and lit up social media at the end of 2015. Talking Points Memo catalogued 20 hate crimes directed at Muslims in the 11 days following the shootings in San Bernadino, California in December 2015.² The Anti-Defamation League counted three-dozen such “incidents” following the attacks on Paris in November 2015.³ Polling from the Pew Research Center shows that nearly half of Americans believe that Islam as a religion is more likely than other religions to encourage violence, a percentage that has changed little since 2014 and has spiked to 70% or greater among white evangelicals and conservative Republicans.⁴ At the same time, the Pew Research Center has also shown that 83% of people in the U.S. view ISIS⁵ as a top threat to U.S. security—up 16% from August 2014—and that approval for the U.S. military campaign in Iraq and Syria is steadily growing.⁶ Indeed, polls show that 64% of people in the U.S. approve of U.S. military



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intervention in Iraq and Syria, while 66% feel that this military campaign will likely succeed over the long term.⁷ U.S. public discourse, while rarely inclusive of Muslims or the many other groups⁸ that get framed in Islamophobic terms, has perhaps never been more stuck in an Islamophobic, pro-war rut as it is today.⁹

In this context, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) undertook an analysis of media coverage of violent extremism, which seemed to be fueling conversations on both racism and violence in the U.S. today. With nearly a century of expertise in nonviolence and civil rights, we wanted to better understand how media coverage was framing this particular conversation, which seems to be propelling us toward another war in the Middle East while harming individuals and communities here in the U.S., and where there might be possibilities for change.

Our hope is that this report is especially useful for both advocates working to break down racism in the U.S. and journalists interested in a better, more nuanced, and more inclusive public dialogue. For the advocates that we already work with and the ones we have not met yet, we hope that this report offers new, research-based¹⁰ recommendations to help shift this malicious public discourse in ways that recognize the essential dignity in everyone and that critically examine possible nonviolent solutions to both racism and extremism that enhance everyone's shared security. For journalists, we hope that this report offers points of entry into creating an "organized collaborative intelligence"¹¹ where public concerns about what a just society is or ought to be are raised and vetted—one that reflects the best kind of journalism, rather than reflecting the loudest or the most hysterical parts of the conversation.

Key arguments and recommendations

In the sections that follow, we make three key arguments and three corresponding recommendations. These arguments and recommendations serve as a starting point for collaborative work, rather than a definitive answer to the problems we identify.

1. Major media coverage of extremism overwhelmingly links Islam to extremism, framing all Muslims as a singular, monolithic group of potential extremists.

Recommendation: Tell stories that highlight the humanity of individual Muslims, including the diversity and integrity of Muslim communities. Advocates and journalists have a responsibility to bring the full complexity of individuals' and communities' stories to light.

.....

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2. The contradictory ways in which news media frame the rationality and irrationality of extremist groups makes them seem like inherent military targets.

Recommendation: Tell stories that highlight the history and complexity of politicized, organized violence, without resorting to stereotypes like “crazy” or “coldly calculating” extremists. Otherwise, it seems like the U.S. has no choice but to go to war. Advocates should bring nonviolent alternatives to politicized, organized violence to journalists’ attention.

3. News media cover violent responses to conflict far more often than nonviolent responses. This makes it seem like violence is the only response to conflict that works.

Recommendation: Increase substantive coverage of effective peace-building efforts. Readers have a right to know as much about nonviolent civil resistance, diplomacy, humanitarian interventions, and other forms of nonviolent actions and substantive peace-building efforts as they do about military strikes or intelligence gathering. Advocates should bring these stories to journalists’ attention.

Changing the media, changing hearts and minds

“It is no coincidence that inspiring outrage at the impact of US foreign policies—from sanctions in Iraq that killed approximately five hundred thousand children to the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that have killed over one hundred thousand civilians to the detention of hundreds of Muslims at Guantánamo Bay prison without being charged—is not part of the regular news cycle.”

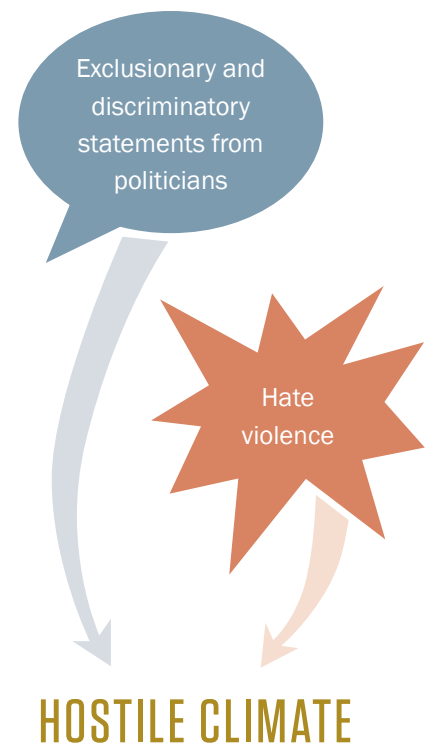
—Evelyn Alsultany in *American Quarterly*, 2013¹²

In offering the recommendations and arguments that follow, we are building on the important work of scholars, media watchers, and analysts who have been working on these issues for decades.¹³ The Center for American Progress (CAP), for example, synthesized the disparate research on the relationships between the political landscape, the media, and public opinion to produce a comprehensive view of Islamophobia in America. Its two-part report “Fear, Inc.” profiles a tightly networked group of “misinformation experts” guiding an organized effort that reaches millions of Americans. It identifies this “Islamophobia Network” as five key “misinformation experts” who generate false facts about the nature of Islam and its adherents. This network then disseminates these “facts” around the country with the help of sympathetic politicians and media outlets, as well as financial support from key foundations.¹⁴ The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)

published a similar report that also outlines the funding structure of the Islamophobia Network, including total revenue and donors.¹⁵

Unfortunately, Islamophobic fear-mongering in public discourse is not limited to particular media outlets or business interests. In her book *Selling Fear: Counterterrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion*, Brigitte Nacos found a preponderance of mainstream national media coverage of alleged threats of terrorism and a modest amount of substantive coverage of civil liberties issues raised by government anti-terrorism measures in the three years following 9/11.¹⁶ Nacos argues that despite journalists' eventual criticism of government restrictions on individual rights, news coverage in the three years following the 9/11 attacks did not fully inform the public or spur debate. Advocates have also shown a link between exclusionary political rhetoric and public sentiments like fear and hate. For example, South Asian Americans Leading Together (SAALT) documented 78 times when politicians made exclusionary or discriminatory statements and 76 incidents of hate violence committed between January 2011 and April 2014, reflecting a hostile climate at the local, state, and national levels.¹⁷ Fortunately, the report also found that key media outlets quickly amended such statements and journalists sometimes spoke out against these racist voices.¹⁸ Psychological research has similarly shown that since 9/11, public officials' vague statements about unspecified threats of extremist violence have generated fear, panic, discriminatory policies and rhetoric, hate crimes, and decreasing support for antiwar policies.¹⁹

This research raises many important questions. Could a more complex media portrayal of American Muslims from many backgrounds—as well as Muslim-majority nations and the many other U.S. communities targeted by Islamophobic rhetoric—make a two-sided debate more humanizing and nuanced? Could a journalistic commitment to covering civil rights violations endured by American Muslims, Arab- and South Asian-Americans of different faiths, immigrants from many nations, and so forth, help stem public support for war abroad and discrimination at home? Put another way: Could changing fear-filled, Islamophobic patterns in the media positively influence public opinion? Could it help shape a nonviolent, perhaps even peaceful, national response?



Psychologist Alice LoCicero identifies the recent treatment of ISIS in government communications and mass media as reminiscent of the terrorism hysteria of 2001. She points to a perplexing September 19, 2014 speech by President Obama as one example of the kind of rhetoric that fosters terrorism hysteria:

“Our intelligence community, as I said last week, has not yet detected specific plots from these terrorists against America. But its leaders have repeatedly threatened America and our allies....And if left unchecked, they could pose a growing threat to the United States...Now going forward, as I announced last week, we’re going to degrade and ultimately destroy ISIL through a comprehensive and sustained counterterrorism strategy. And whether in Iraq or in Syria, these terrorists will learn the same thing that the leaders of al Qaeda already know: We mean what we say; our reach is long; if you threaten America, you will find no safe haven. We will find you eventually.”

In the same breath, President Obama issued a vague warning of the threat of extremist violence on the United States while also reporting that no actual threats have been detected, nor did he provide any instructions for how Americans should respond to such conflicting information. LoCicero cites the next month’s public opinion polls as a testament to increasing fears of ISIS, pointing out that “polls showed that over 50% of Americans favored bombing the group, even though knowledge of the group was limited and the bombing was seen as likely to have complicated consequences.” Despite the preference for military action, only 30% of respondents saw the U.S. and its allies as having a ‘clear goal’ in taking such action.



Alice LoCicero, “Domestic Consequences of US Counter-Terrorism Efforts: Making it Harder to Prevent Homegrown Terrorism,” *The Open Psychology Journal* 8 (2014), doi: 10.2174/1874350101508010032, <http://benthamopen.com/ABSTRACT/TOPSYJ-8-32>; Barack Obama, “Statement by the President on ISIL,” (Speech, State Floor, The White House, Washington D.C., September 10, 2014)

What we did

To understand how major media cover extremism—and what advocates and journalists could do to shift those frameworks in ways that highlight everyone’s shared security—AFSC began with a few central questions:

- What else is the media talking about when they are covering extremism?
- What is the co-text—the literal adjectives, adverbs, and sentences—near mentions of extremism?
- What is the broader context of an article or television broadcast covering extremism?
- Specifically, to what extent does media coverage of extremism focus on a rational, civilized “us” versus an irrational, uncivilized “them?”
- To what extent does this coverage vary by audience—more specifically, are national news outlets framing extremism the same way for the U.S. public as specialist, insider outlets are framing extremism for a policymaker audience?

To answer these questions, AFSC conducted a study of major U.S. news outlets and their coverage of extremism. We used content analysis of 603 articles from a three-month period to see how national news media covered violent extremism, and how national coverage compared to coverage by outlets claiming to reach an “inside the Beltway” or influencer audience. In the national sample, we searched for coverage of extremism from the major broadcast news outlets (ABC News, CBS News, NBC News)²⁰, the major cable news stations by viewership (CNN, Fox News, MSNBC), the largest daily print news outlets by readership²¹ (the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, USA Today, and The Wall Street Journal²²), and both wire services (Associated Press and Reuters ONE²³). In addition, we included coverage from three additional outlets with national audiences (NPR news, PBS Newshour, and The Washington Post). One contribution of this research is that we included blogs from two major news outlets, The New York Times and The Washington Post. Although blogs are important sources of news and commentary, media researchers rarely analyze them alongside major media. Another contribution is that AFSC included “influencer” outlets in this sample. For the specialist sample, we chose outlets that claim to reach a primary audience of high-level policymakers and U.S. government staffers: CQ Weekly, Foreign Affairs, The National Journal, Politico, and Congressional Quarterly News: Roll Call.²⁴ The time frame of the sample ran from April 15, 2015 to July 15, 2015, the three-month period immediately

What else is the media talking about when they are covering extremism? What is the co-text—the literal adjectives, adverbs, and sentences—near mentions of extremism?

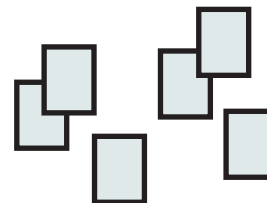
preceding the start of the study, so that the articles in the sample would reflect change over a series of news cycles.

After constructing this sample, we conducted a Lexis-Nexis search of news items from the selected outlets for “extremism,” yielding 514 news items in the national sample and 89 items in the specialist sample.²⁵ Because there has been a discursive shift since the beginning of the Obama administration to use “extremism” rather than “terrorism” to describe politicized, organized violence, we chose to use the term “extremism” as the key term for this study to capture the downstream effects of that shift.²⁶ We excluded duplicates of a given article, as well as articles that did not substantively cover extremism (e.g. a news item quoting one U.S. presidential candidate labeling another as “an extremist”). We developed a codebook with 10 broad codes, then let the content of the articles determine how we broke these codes out further—the “religion” code, for example, came to include nine sub-codes, as we came across articles mentioning Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Sikhism, and so forth. The broad codes included:

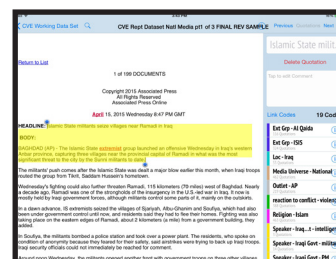
- the name of the outlet
- which sample it belonged to
- the article’s dateline
- which extremist groups were mentioned (if any)
- which religions were mentioned (if any)
- which speakers were quoted (if any)
- whether the article mentioned a violent or a nonviolent response to any of the conflicts described in that article
- what kind of U.S. government involvement was mentioned in the article (if any)
- which victims of extremist violence were covered (if any), and
- whether or not the extremists in the article were framed as rational actors, irrational actors, or in a neutral way

This last code, not surprisingly, was the most difficult to pin down. After a great deal of work-shopping, we decided to code an extremist action or group as “rational” if the actions covered in the article were described as calculated, well-planned, coordinated, or otherwise highly organized. By the same token, we coded mentions of extremist groups or actions as “irrational” when they were described as crazy, psychotic, barbaric, illogical, random, and so forth. We used the neutral code sparingly, to describe

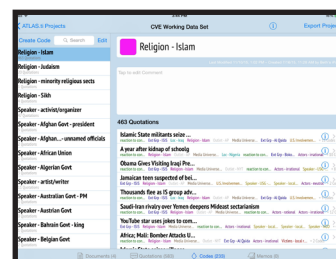
RESEARCH PROCESS



We collected a sample of 603 articles from different sources spanning several months in 2015



Each article was tagged with codes according to the story’s source and content (for example, a story mentioning Al Qaeda would be assigned an “Extremist Group: Al Qaeda” code)



Using software to filter the stories by code, we analyzed the sample to find trends in the portrayal of violent extremism

any coverage that met neither of these criteria. Typically, we applied this code to articles that listed “extremism” as one of many policy concerns (e.g. countering violent extremism as one of several White House policy initiatives in 2015).²⁷

What we found

What we found painted a disturbing picture of Muslims as an undifferentiated group linked to violence and extremism, and military solutions as the de facto ways to combat extremist violence. Perhaps the most striking result of this study is that 90% of the news items in this sample mentioned Islam,²⁸ even when neither Islam nor Islamic extremism was the main subject of the story. This number stands out even further when compared to the percentage of articles mentioning Christianity (13%) and Judaism (4%), the second- and third-most covered religions after Islam. Of all of the extremist groups that received media attention during this sampling time period, ISIS received more attention than any other group, with nearly two-thirds of articles mentioning ISIS at least once. Al-Qaida was a distant second, with a little less than a quarter of news stories mentioning al-Qaida or its Syrian affiliate, al-Nusra (23%). Boko Haram in Nigeria (11% of coverage) and al-Shabab in eastern Africa (6% of coverage) came in third and fourth, respectively. We also found passing coverage of U.S. and European groups described as right-wing extremists (about 5% of coverage) as well as scant coverage of the Taliban (about 3% of coverage).

Another striking result of this study is the wording used to frame extremists and their actions—the literal adjectives, adverbs, and sentences surrounding the mentions of an extremist group or its members. When we began this study, we expected to find a preponderance of coverage of extremists as irrational: crazy or unthinking subjects with subhuman or animalistic tendencies. We found plenty of examples of this: Over half (57%) of the articles characterized extremist groups or their members as, for example, psychotic or bloodthirsty. Perhaps the most surprising finding here was the overwhelming number of times that media coverage of extremist groups or actors framed them as rational: calculating military leaders, for example, capable of running a state-like criminal enterprise complete with a marketing strategy, media wing, and international recruitment system. Nearly two-thirds of the articles we sampled (61%) included at least one characterization of extremism in this framework, a finding that we explore in more detail below.

What we found painted a disturbing picture of Muslims as an undifferentiated group linked to violence and extremism, and military solutions as the de facto ways to combat extremist violence.

Other findings were striking, even if they were not particularly surprising. More than 75% of the stories in this sample covered violent responses to conflict, for example, while only 16% of the stories in this sample mentioned nonviolent responses to conflict. A little over a third (38%) mention U.S. military involvement in the article specifically, while coverage of law enforcement, intelligence, and diplomatic activities—like FBI investigations, CIA operations, and diplomatic negotiations between two countries, respectively—were all neck and neck with each other, ranging between 11% and 13% of the articles in this sample. Lagging behind this coverage of U.S. involvement were mentions of economic involvement, like enforcing or lifting sanctions against Iran (about 5% of total coverage) and humanitarian or development involvement (about 4% of total coverage). We discuss this stark difference between the amount of coverage of violent responses to conflict and the amount of coverage of nonviolent responses to conflict in greater detail below.

We also found considerable differences in the coverage of the victims of extremist violence. During the period of this sample, April 15, 2015 to July 15, 2015, news media covered the mass executions of Ethiopian Christians, elections in Nigeria that shifted battle lines between Boko Haram and government forces, attacks on British tourists in Tunisia, and the fall of Ramadi and Palmyra to ISIS. The nine months prior to this study included the beheadings of Stephen Sotloff and James Foley, the Charlie Hebdo massacre in Paris, and the gruesome execution-by-immolation of a caged Jordanian pilot. Within this context, we found a great deal of coverage of extremists' civilian victims—so much so that we decided to break out this category into several smaller categories of victims. We found generic civilian victims in nearly half of all articles (about 48%). Religious groups, including Shia and Sunni Muslims, were named as victims of extremist violence in about 16% of articles. Journalists or writers (about 6%) and activists on both the left and the right (about 5%) were occasionally named as victims of extremist violence, as were humanitarian or development aid workers (a little less than 3%).²⁹

In the following sections, we outline the three main stories that these data points tell. First, these data tell a story about how media outlets frame Muslims. Second, the data tell a story about how key media outlets frame extremists. Third, the data tell a story about how these media narratives point to a limited number of possible alternatives to the ways we counter politicized, organized, extremist violence.



THE DATA SHOW

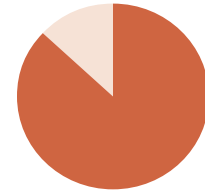
- 1 How media outlets frame Muslims
- 2 How media outlets frame extremists
- 3 How media narratives present a limited number of approaches to countering extremist violence

KEY ARGUMENT 1

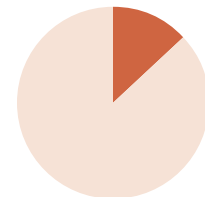
Islamophobia is at work in both national and ‘inside-the-Beltway’ media

If there is one story we can tell from this dataset, it is that Islamophobia in the media is—unfortunately—alive and well. Indeed, 90% of the total coverage we sampled includes some mention of Islam in the context of covering extremism.³⁰ This rate was higher among the national outlets than the specialist outlets (93% versus 75%), and these rates were typically higher across television news programs than in print media. CNN, Fox, ABC, and NBC mentioned Islam at least once in 100% of their coverage of extremism. AP, which had by far the largest total number of articles in this sample (219) mentioned Islam in 207 separate stories—that is, 95% of the time. The New York Times and The Washington Post blogs were tied at 94% of total coverage, with The Washington Post itself, NPR, CBS, the LA Times, and USA Today all coming in between 80% and 91%. In the specialist sample, Politico was most likely to mention Islam in the context of covering extremism (88%). The National Journal (73%) and Roll Call (56%) were the second and third most likely specialist outlets to mention Islam in this context. No matter the thrust of the article, most outlets routinely mentioned Islam in the context of covering extremism.

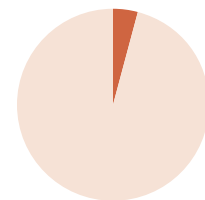
Sometimes these mentions were linked to the Muslim victims of violent extremism, or to Muslim leaders working against violent extremism.³¹ But those were far from the most common mentions. Much more common was coverage of extremists’ alleged or implied ties to Islam, particularly among ISIS affiliates. Rather than covering religious rhetoric as a tool of violence—alongside bombs, guns, and social media—outlets in this study included Islam in nearly every article on extremism as a kind of default or de facto category. This pattern paints an overall picture of Islam as intimately linked to violent extremism, rather than the use of religious rhetoric as a commonly used weapon in a particular conflict. A few articles stood out for the particularly evocative language they used to make this connection. One New York Times article, for example, quotes a local informant describing how some Sunnis have a “Dawoosh” or “little Daesh” just underneath their skin: “Now, with the sectarian polarization of the region, under the skin of every single Sunni there is a tiny Daesh” (New York Times, June 4, 2015). Other articles describe Islamic extremism as “metastasizing” through the recruitment of young people (AP, June 1, 2015), quoting sources like one Libyan commander who described “ISIS [as] a cancer” that has invaded the “weakened body” of states like Libya (CBS News, June 10, 2015). Such language makes it seem like there is a natural or predetermined link between Islam and extremism, rather than framing religious rhetoric as a tool employed by politicized, organized actors with a specific agenda. U.S.



90% of articles mentioned **Islam**, even when neither Islam nor Islamic extremism was the main subject of the story



13% of articles mentioned **Christianity**

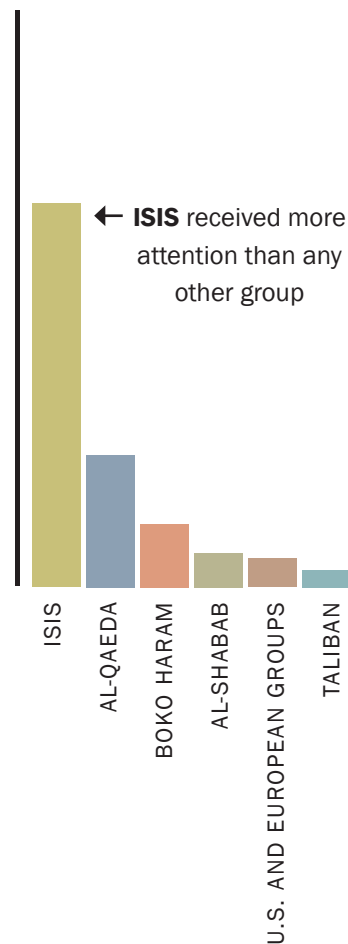


4% of articles mentioned **Judaism**

government calls to the ‘the Muslim community’ to root out extremism within its midst reproduces this link,³² as if extremism was lurking just below the surface of a social group here again portrayed as monolithic, homogenous, and somehow inherently susceptible to this particular form of violence. U.S. media coverage does not typically imply or attribute blame to all Christians, ‘the Christian community,’ or Christianity as a religion when someone who commits mass murder with political intentions turns out to be a Christian. No major media outlet would anticipate or expect an apology from ‘the Christian community’ for such horrific acts. Yet this is precisely what this coverage sets up for individual Muslims, Muslim communities, and other groups swept into the same Islamophobic bucket.

This narrative link between Islam and extremism overwhelms the coverage of Muslim activists working for peace in the U.S. and abroad, as well as the coverage of Muslim victims of extremist violence. At the same time, this pattern sets readers up for the kinds of hate-filled, fear-filled, Islamophobic public discussions that we see today. And, as Kim Powell has shown through her research on coverage of Islam in the U.S. media since 9/11, it can also help set the stage for war.³³ Framing Muslims and Islam as homogenous, inherently foreign, and in terms of a dominance- and need-based relationship paints an entire religion with one brush, and a hostile one at that. When media coverage of extremism adopts these tropes, it reinforces both the tropes themselves—which are problematic on their own—as well as the dangerous link between these tropes and extremist violence. This link is repeated until it becomes the dominant frame. Without intervention, this frame perpetuates Islamophobia in public discourse while also enabling the United States’ “stumbling” toward this seemingly endless war (New York Times, May 3, 2015).

MENTIONS OF GROUPS CALLED “EXTREMISTS”



KEY ARGUMENT 2

Framing extremism as a military target

Not quite human

“It is now time for revenge for our martyrs,’ said the sheikh, Falih al-Essawi, who was dressed in a military uniform. He checked off the destruction wrought in their lands by the Islamic State, or, as he called them, ‘the rats of ISIS’...”

—New York Times, May 20, 2015

“A public forum like Twitter, with its millions of users, means those who might otherwise have had limited exposure to terrorist ideologies now have ample access to what FBI Director James Comey has described as the ‘siren song’ of the Islamic State.”

—AP, May 7, 2015

“The individuals who make up ISIS are barbarians.”

—Rep. William Hurd, R-Texas, quoted in Roll Call, May 28, 2015

Every news cycle this year seemed to bring more coverage of extremist groups committing horrific acts of violence: ISIS fighters massacring Ethiopian Christians in Libya (e.g. AP, April 21, 2015), for example, or Boko Haram militants leaving mutilated bodies in the middle of Nigerian towns (e.g. AP, April 28, 2015). Not only was this coverage significant for the brutality it captured, but for the frames it used to do so. Indeed, this study found that media coverage overwhelmingly framed extremist actors and their violent acts as crazy, barbaric, or otherwise irrational.

The national sample outlets were more likely to include these kinds of characterizations than the specialist sample outlets: whereas approximately 61% of the news items we sampled from the national outlets characterized extremist actions in this way, only 29% of this specialist sample news items described extremist groups or their members as such. The television news broadcasts we sampled also use this kind of language to describe extremists: ABC and NBC used this frame in all of the news transcripts included in this sample, while CNN did so 86% of the time, and Fox 83% of the time. CBS did so in only about half of its coverage. NPR, the only radio station included in this sample, used this frame in 69% of its coverage as well. The print sources in the national sample, on the other hand, varied more widely: The Washington Post, for example, used this framing in about two-thirds of the coverage in its print edition, while contributors to its blog used this framing in more than three-quarters of the posts that we analyzed. The LA Times, on the other hand, used this kind of language less than half of the time, in only 46% of its coverage of extremism. In the specialist sample, Politico was at the top with 36% of its coverage using this language, while Congressional Weekly did not use this language in any of the coverage included in this sample. The sheer volume of coverage using this frame is dizzying, particularly among the national outlets: Overall, if U.S. audiences were reading a story about extremism, they were reading about extremists-as-crackpots more than half of the time.

EXTREMISTS AS
IRRATIONAL ACTORS



86%



83%



69%

The Washington Post (PRINT)

64%

The New York Times

63%

AP Associated Press

58%

CBS NEWS

56%

Los Angeles Times

46%

POLITICO

36%

Roll Call

17%

In addition to presenting extremist groups or their members as crazy, many outlets portrayed them as locked in a violent past that interrupts modern, present-day normalcy. This coverage includes mentions of extremists targeting Rome and the pope (AP), coverage of ISIS leader Abu Bakr Baghdadi's calls for murdering "the Crusaders" (LA Times), and commentary on militias occupying actual Crusader castles in Syria's historic sites (Washington Post blogs). Rather than routinely providing historical context for conflicts with extremist groups in the Middle East and elsewhere,³⁴ this use of medieval imagery and repetition of Crusader-themed storylines promotes an anti-historical perspective on current events. When this anti-history is coupled with calls from politicians to "bomb them [ISIS] back to the seventh century" (Rick Santorum, quoted by AP, May 2, 2015) and commentary by "experts" that makes it seem like they appear out of nowhere (e.g. Washington Post blogs, May 12, 2015), extremists are framed as an undifferentiated Muslim "Other" from a dark past threatening a present-day "Us" that is positioned or glossed as western, Christian, and modern (e.g. Powell 2011). This frame alone would seem to be enough to channel public sentiments toward yet another military intervention in the Middle East. But as we show in the next section, this frame works alongside another key frame to set up extremists as natural military targets.



A 'natural' military target

"[ISIS] fighters often seek to garner support by quickly repairing electricity and water lines. They call on bureaucrats to return to work... In each district, an 'emir'—often a local militant—is appointed to govern. Schools close, then reopen with IS-written curricula. Taxes are imposed on businesses. Pharmacies are given Shariah courses and banned from selling contraceptives..."

—AP article entitled "Inside the Islamic State group's rule: Creating a nation of fear," June 18, 2015

"Daesh is still a relentless terrorist-military organization..."

—Washington Post blogs, May 14, 2015

The media outlets in this sample often frame extremist groups and individuals as irrational, subhuman actors. But even more frequently—and more surprisingly—the outlets that we sampled in this research also frame extremist groups as calculating, organized, rational actors in 61% of the coverage that we analyzed. Also surprising to us was the even higher percentage of such coverage among the specialist outlets—71% of this

coverage included some mention of extremists as rational actors. Among the national outlets, about 60% of the coverage we analyzed used this framework to talk about extremists. Fox News used this frame at least once in 100% of the coverage that we sampled. Other outlets used this frame in nearly all of the coverage that we sampled, such as the National Journal (10 out of 11 articles, about 91%) and USA Today (4 out of 5 or 80% of articles). Neither NBC nor CQ Weekly used this frame at all in the coverage we analyzed, while CNN only used this frame in about 29% of coverage. Sometimes this coverage focused on the state-like actions that extremist groups like ISIS take. In other cases, this coverage focused on different groups exchanging emissaries and coordinating activities. A large amount of coverage looks at ISIS' international recruiting efforts, its media operations, and its growing role in organized transnational crime. The first article from the sample is a good example of this pattern. It uses a straightforward, 'just-the-facts-ma'am' tone that portrays ISIS and the Iraqi army as if they were two regular armies fighting a conventional war:

"The Islamic State extremist group launched an offensive Wednesday in Iraq's western Anbar province, capturing three villages near the provincial capital of Ramadi in what was the most significant threat to the city by the Sunni militants to date. The militants' push comes after the Islamic State was dealt a major blow earlier this month, when Iraqi troops routed the group from Tikrit, Saddam Hussein's hometown. Wednesday's fighting could also further threaten Ramadi, 115 kilometers (70 miles) west of Baghdad. Nearly a decade ago, Ramadi was one of the strongholds of the insurgency in the U.S.-led war in Iraq. It now is mostly held by Iraqi government forces, although militants control some parts of it, mainly on the outskirts. In a dawn advance, IS extremists seized the villages of Sjariyah, Albu-Ghanim and Soufiya, which had also been under government control until now, and residents said they had to flee their homes. Fighting was also taking place on the eastern edges of Ramadi, about 2 kilometers (a mile) from a government building, they added."

—AP, April 15, 2015

We also found considerable overlap in the irrational-actor and rational-actor frameworks. Overall, we found that in nearly a third of the articles sampled (29%), we saw instances where an extremist group was framed as both rational and irrational. This excerpt from a CNN transcript is a good example of this conflicting framing:

ASHLEIGH BANFIELD, CNN HOST: I'd love to get your opinion on some of these people [ISIS], I mean we had an ax attack on officers here in New York, we've now got this. We've got scattered encounters with people who say they're inspired online. Are these people brand

EXTREMISTS AS RATIONAL ACTORS



new wannabe killers? Or were they already crazy and just didn't take out their rage, in say, a movie theater or a shopping mall where we've had these kinds of killings before, they just were under a different banner?

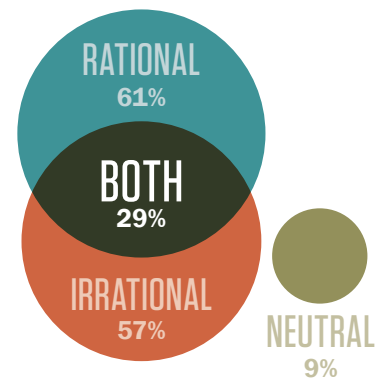
[Former Counterterrorism Operative Mubin] SHAIKH: Yeah. Well, I wouldn't call them crazies. They're, you know, psychopathology is very rare especially in terrorism. Mental illness does play a role in, you know, regular [active] shooter scenarios. But these individuals by all accounts, they were very normal, again, most people are not going to suspect, they're not going to show all those kinds of signs even when you look at murder investigations. Very often, people say, I never would have suspected or, you know, he wasn't that kind of guy. So these are your ISIS zombies really.

While Banfield sets the stage for talking about ISIS members as crazy, her guest initially challenges this frame, stating that ISIS members aren't crazy or psychopathological. Yet, in the last three sentences, the guest shifts from describing ISIS members as people who are normal to people who simply appear normal—until, that is, they are recruited and turned into “ISIS zombies.” In this framework, these actors have rational capabilities—they can plan, they can organize—but at the root, they are barbaric Others. This in turn makes it easier to justify violent intervention, even war.

Additionally, we also found that of all of the U.S. responses to conflict that we tracked, the most common kind of intervention covered was a U.S. military response to conflict. U.S. airstrikes against ISIS, military aid to Nigeria to help fight Boko Haram, and references to past U.S. military involvement against al-Qaida and the Taliban were among the many ways in which the coverage that we sampled described U.S. military responses to the conflicts in the course of writing about extremism. A New York Times editorial from May 2015, quoted at the beginning of this report, exemplifies this framing in its description of U.S. responses to extremism since 9/11:

“It should come as no surprise that the United States and its coalition partners are discussing widening the war against the Islamic State beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria. Wider wars have become almost habitual in recent years, as military conflicts have expanded with little public awareness or debate. President George W. Bush's “war on terror” began in Afghanistan, then moved to Iraq and elsewhere. Fourteen years after the Sept. 11 attacks, President Obama is still deploying American troops and weapons to fight Al Qaeda and other extremists in far-flung parts of the world...”

—“Stumbling into a Wider War,” New York Times, May 3, 2015



Nearly a third of articles framed extremists as **both rational and irrational**

Moreover, U.S. military officials were the most commonly quoted U.S. government officials in the national sample, and were second only to the White House for most-quoted U.S. government officials overall.

These simplistic frames, however, limit understanding of the complexity of these groups, while also repeating—and thus reinforcing—an Islam-violence-extremism link. For example, framing conflicts in terms of conventional war, or actors as both “very normal” until they become “ISIS zombies,” downplays not just the history of these conflicts as described above, but also the current social context: the downstream effects of more than a century of colonialism, over half a century of U.S. reliance on oil, largely from the Middle East, and over a decade of U.S.-led military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, to name just a few of the larger structural forces at play. Using this simple rational-irrational framework also glosses over the diversity and complexity of Muslim-majority communities where many of these conflicts are playing out: If war seems logical or natural, it is due in part to the fact that media narratives and pro-war advocates alike use the monolithic “Muslim Other” trope to tell this story, rather than showing how complex Muslim-majority communities are from the inside out. Put another way, it’s easier to bomb someone who seems irreconcilably different—a flat character in a story rather than a sister, brother, husband, mother, work colleague, or hometown friend. Taken together, what we see here is a pattern of framing extremist groups—already associated with Islam and framed as lurking just beneath the surface of undifferentiated Muslim communities, ready to strike from a deep dark past—are framed alternately as crackpots or calculating, often military actors. Either way, a military response to violent extremism is positioned as the necessary, inevitable reaction to this violence.

If war seems logical or natural, it is due in part to the fact that media narratives and pro-war advocates alike use the monolithic “Muslim Other” trope to tell this story, rather than showing how complex Muslim communities are from the inside out.

KEY ARGUMENT 3

‘If it bleeds, it leads’—to the detriment of public discourse

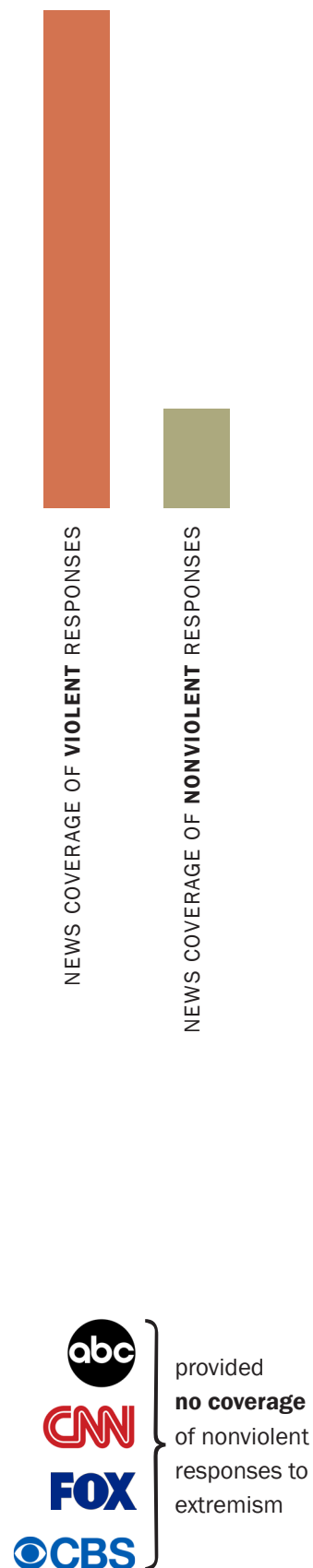
While U.S. military responses were the most common forms of U.S. intervention that we saw, nonviolent responses to conflict were rarely covered at all. Indeed, research has shown that media cover nonviolent responses to conflict in distorted, even inaccurate ways.³⁵ We found a pattern of under-coverage of nonviolent responses to conflict in this dataset, as we describe in this section. As we conducted the analysis, we tagged each article that mentioned a violent response to any conflict mentioned in the article. U.S.-led airstrikes against ISIS was a common example. We also tagged each organized nonviolent response to violence, such as coverage of the #BringBackOurGirls campaign against Boko Haram. Overall, we

found nearly five times as much coverage of violent responses to conflict as nonviolent responses. Across national news outlets, that ratio was slightly higher, with nearly six times as much coverage of violence than of nonviolence. In the influencer sample, the ratio was a little more even, with only a 2:1 ratio in coverage of violence versus nonviolence. This is likely because the sampling timeframe overlapped with the end of the Iran nuclear deal negotiations, one of the most important and most covered diplomatic achievements in the recent history of U.S.-Middle East relations, and one that was frequently covered alongside violent extremism in the specialist outlets.

Particular outlets stood out in their tendency toward coverage of violent responses to conflict. Fox News did not include any coverage of nonviolence in its extremism reporting. Neither did ABC, CBS, or CNN.³⁶ Of the AP's 219 articles on violent extremism, only 26 of them mention nonviolent responses to conflict, while 174 articles covered violent responses to extremism. This pattern of skewed coverage is seen across outlets, with The New York Times covering violent responses to conflict 46 times and nonviolence 10 times; The Washington Post covering violent responses 17 times and nonviolence twice; NPR covering violent responses 12 times and nonviolence 7 times; and Politico covering nonviolent responses 23 times and nonviolent responses 15 times.

Not only did we find disproportionate coverage of violent responses to extremism, particularly an emphasis on military responses to violent extremism, we also found that national media were more likely to mention the victims of violence than the specialist outlets. About a quarter (26%) of the national coverage included some mention of governmental or military victims of extremist violence (e.g. American extremists targeting stateside U.S. military personnel (CNN, April 17, 2015)), about 17% of the national news items included some mention of a religious group targeted by extremists (e.g. Shia Muslims targeted by ISIS), about 7% mentioned journalists or writers targeted by extremists (e.g. references to the Charlie Hebdo massacre), and 3% mentioned humanitarian workers who became victims of violent extremism (e.g. U.N. vans targeted by al-Shabab (AP, April 20, 2015)). A little more than half of the total national coverage also included some mention of what we called a “generic” civilian, that is, a non-combatant that did not fall into any of the other categories of victim (51%). Interestingly, nearly all of the coverage of victims of violence in the specialist sample came from Politico, with a few mentions included in the National Journal (6 out of 11 articles) and Roll Call (2 out of 18 articles).

Researchers have pointed out the problems with media coverage of victims of extremist violence—for example, that it allows an audience to develop sympathy for people without challenging the Islamophobic or political contexts in which that violence is perpetrated (Alsulthany 2013). We build on those insights here by arguing that the preponderance of coverage of violent responses to conflict, coupled with this coverage of victims of violence, paints



a picture especially in the national media where violent responses are not only the most likely responses to conflict, they are also necessary to protect the many victims of violence portrayed in the news.

This disparity in coverage raises an important question: What if there is simply more to be covered in terms of violent responses to conflict, as compared to nonviolent responses? Don't journalists have a responsibility to bear witness to violent conflict and its victims?³⁷ Put another way, aren't the media simply covering what is really "out there," and that at this moment there simply are more violent responses to conflict than nonviolent ones?

Of course, readers and viewers ought to know the facts about U.S. airstrikes against ISIS, for example, or the Nigerian government's clashes with Boko Haram. But the dearth of substantive news coverage of the long-term peace building efforts limits public conversation about what kinds of responses to conflict are possible. To be sure, there are important moments in public debate when nonviolent solutions to violent conflict receive substantial coverage, as in the case of the Iran nuclear deal, covered extensively within the sampling frame. But these kinds of nonviolent solutions to conflict are not typically covered within a framework of long-term approaches to peace-building or nonviolent organizing. Coverage of violence, meanwhile, typically ignores the historical and social context in which that violence emerges—that is, it ignores the root causes of violence. And, although this study is limited to coverage of extremism, AFSC has found similar patterns as we look at coverage of peace building and nonviolence in other studies, such as media analyses that the research team has conducted for our staff working in the Korean Peninsula and in Somalia. Put another way, how can the U.S. public or U.S. policymakers be expected to believe that peace building in the face of extremism can work, if coverage of organized nonviolent responses to violence receives so little media attention?

Coverage of violence typically ignores the historical and social context in which that violence emerges—that is, it ignores the root causes of violence.

Recommendations

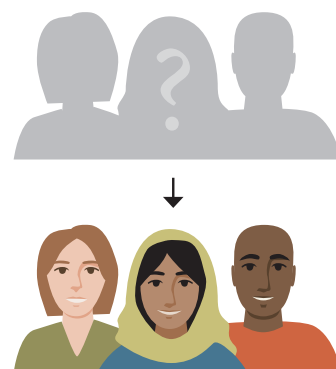
In his 2012 study, researcher Christopher Bail analyzed press releases issued by civil society organizations about Muslims and compared them to newspaper articles and television transcripts. Bail found that despite the fact that the majority of the press releases featured pro-Muslim views, anti-Muslim organizations dominated the mass media with disproportionately fearful and angry messages that created a “gravitational pull” or “fringe effect” that shifted public discourse.³⁸ Other researchers have shown that both governments’ counter-extremism programs and extremist groups benefit from heightened media attention to extremism, that “publicity is the oxygen of both terrorism and counterterrorism.”³⁹ If advocates want to change the narratives that we have found in mainstream media, advocacy groups need to do more than put messages ‘out there.’ Advocates need to work collaboratively with journalists and each other to shift public discourse in ways that humanize individuals and communities at the same time that we strengthen the case for peace with state and non-state actors alike. Additionally, journalists have the opportunity to work with “citizens [to] make possible a new and enriched kind of journalism in which citizens, technology, and professional journalists work together to create a public intelligence that is deeper and wider than any one of these could produce alone.”⁴⁰ Below, we offer three recommendations to help both groups change the terms of this public conversation.

RECOMMENDATION 1

Tell stories that highlight everyone’s humanity, especially that of historically marginalized groups—including Muslims

Taking a chapter from our friends at Race Forward, we echo a recommendation that they make to journalists covering race and racism in the U.S.: When covering any social group and especially when covering historically misrepresented groups, highlight individuals’ humanity. In this sample, we saw so much coverage of many personal narratives from people who were victims of violent extremism or other violent actors. While journalists have a responsibility to bear witness⁴¹ to events that readers would not otherwise be able to see, so that they may take action or at least understand better, there are plenty of opportunities to, as Race Forward puts it, “cultivate discourse that centers the humanity and leadership” of

1 Humanize subjects



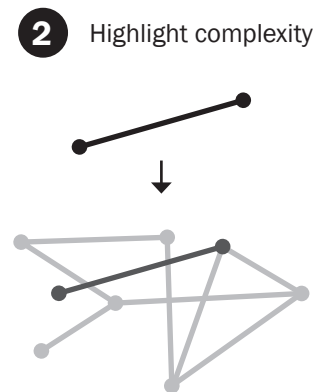
historically misrepresented groups.⁴² To shift this Islamophobic narrative of Muslims and other groups as homogenous, incommensurably different, and potentially extremist, we invite advocates to work with us to develop messaging that highlights shared values from which we can act to solve the problem of racism in general and Islamophobia in particular.⁴³ At the same time, we invite journalists to foreground the humanity and leadership of Muslims and other groups bearing the brunt of Islamophobia, like Iraqis and Syrians of many faiths.⁴⁴ Journalists can do this by covering both the leadership of Muslims across arenas as well as the everyday lives of individual Muslims, and by avoiding imagery or language that portrays all Muslims as a homogenous, monolithic group, and especially as potential extremists. Articles that show everyday people from all faiths and backgrounds doing everyday things is one place to start. The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding has an excellent list of starting places in its report *(Re)presenting American Muslims: Broadening the Conversation*.⁴⁵ Featuring real people living their everyday lives, as Walter Thompson-Hernández does in his series on Latin@ Muslims, is another example of this kind of coverage.⁴⁶

RECOMMENDATION 2

Tell stories that highlight the history and complexity of politicized, organized violence, without resorting to stereotypes like “crazy” or “coldly-calculating” extremists

We don’t keep “stumbling” into war, as The New York Times editorial quoted in the introduction suggests. Many people—in this case, policymakers, military leaders, and extremist groups—make deliberate choices that take nations and non-state actors into violent conflict. Reading current coverage of ISIS in particular, the U.S. public could be forgiven for thinking that we do not have any alternative but to go to war with this particular group. After all, with every news cycle and every social media feed, readers are bombarded with the frameworks that we have described above: Muslims as potential extremists, extremists as crazy yet also well-organized, and the U.S. as limited in its potential responses to conflict. Like The New York Times, however, we agree that the process for going to war should be open to public debate and scrutiny, and that journalists have an important role to play in bringing such decisions to the public. Advocates have a responsibility and desire to bring facts about war to the table—how violence leads to more violence

When covering any social group, and especially when covering historically misrepresented groups, highlight individuals’ humanity.



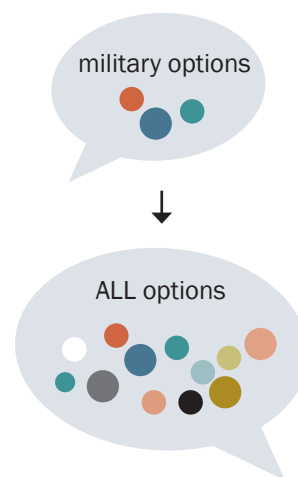
for example—and journalists have a responsibility and desire to help build a public knowledge base. In this way, both groups have an opportunity to bring new and different facts into public view: facts about the long-term consequences of war and violent conflict, for example. Which leads to our third recommendation:

RECOMMENDATION 3

Cover nonviolence and peace building that work

As this report went out for review in December 2015, the U.N. announced that it finally developed a roadmap to peace in Syria. Whether the contents of the peace plan are the kind of effective, substantive, thoughtful measures we would like to see in place for lasting peace with justice is hard to say, because the peace plan barely made the U.S. national news at all. Swallowed up between coverage of two presidential primary debates and holiday shopping news, the U.N.'s plan for peace in Syria is unlikely to receive the kind of U.S. public attention and debate it deserves, in part because there is so little thoughtful coverage of it in the national public sphere. Advocates have a responsibility to lift up the facts of these and other peace-building measures. Journalists have an opportunity to authenticate, make sense of, and then curate⁴⁷ those facts in ways that invite rigorous public scrutiny and debate. Coverage of the Iran nuclear deal is one example of this kind of coverage. AFSC's work on preventing political and organized violence in Indonesia and Somalia are additional examples. We invite advocates to bring other examples to the attention of journalists, and we invite journalists to bring the same level of scrutiny and rigor to covering these examples.

3 Cover nonviolence and peace building



Conclusion

Advocates and journalists—along with readers—have an opportunity here to make a choice. Wars on terror, extremism, or other nations do not happen by accident. Islamophobia in the media or in public discourse does not happen by accident. It may seem like both are entrenched or inevitable. But we have been able to create lasting social change—peace with justice—in the past, and we can do it again today.

AFSC has nearly 100 years of experience in nonviolence and peace building around the world. Throughout that time, we have worked against both racism and violent conflict. We are currently developing a series of case studies to show how we can build shared security through nonviolent responses to conflict in specific conflict areas. And we are not the only group with this kind of knowledge to share. Advocates have an opportunity to bring this work to the attention of journalists. Journalists, for their part, have the opportunity to bring these stories to the public. Islamophobia is a choice, and so is the choice to cover the humanity of all communities in the U.S. as around the world. By the same token, both going to war and building peace are choices, and so is the choice to cover war or cover peace building. This is a conversation we can change, together.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the following people who gave their time and expertise to this report, and without whom this project would not have been possible. At AFSC, Mark Graham provided guidance, strategic direction, and space for this project. Nina Mast provided exceptional research support from initial coding through the final drafts. At the University of Pennsylvania, Mariam Durrani, Ph.D. candidate and an expert in the anthropology of race, media, and Muslim youth, and Negar Razavi, Ph.D. candidate and an expert on the anthropology of foreign policy, provided incisive and critical feedback on an early draft of this report. Numerous other AFSC staff provided important feedback, research assistance, editorial support, design work, and promotional support, including: Alex Wiles, Alexis Moore, Aura Kanegis, Carl Roose, Emily Adams, Emily Cohane-Mann, Kerri Kennedy, Layne Mullet, Nathaniel Doubleday, Patricia DeBoer, Ronna Bolante, Sara Hughes, Theresa Kirby, Tony Heriza, Alissa Wilson, Raed Jarrar, Mike Merryman-Lotze, Peter Lems, and Mary Zerkel. Thank you.

End notes

1. Love, Erik. 2012. "What to do about Islamophobia: Why the Election Counts." Policy Brief, Institute for Social Policy and Understanding. http://www.ispu.org/pdfs/ISPU_Brief_Islamaphobia.pdf. Accessed January 26, 2016. We acknowledge the problems associated with using the term "Islamophobia" and thus use it cautiously to mean a specific kind of harmful, discursive difference-making directed towards Muslims from a variety of backgrounds (racial, ethnic, national, and so forth) as well as non-Muslims from a variety of backgrounds (religious, racial, ethnic, and so forth). Ending this harmful kind of difference-making is a key goal of this report. For an excellent scholarly review of the terms of Islamophobia and its discursive twin, Islamophilia, see Andrew Shyrock's thoughtful volume *Islamophobia/Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (2010).
2. MacNeal, Caitlin. 2015. "The Stunningly Long List of Anti-Muslim Hate Crimes since San Bernadino." Talking Points Memo, December 15. <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/news/anti-muslim-attacks-after-san-bernardino>. Accessed December 18, 2015.
3. CBS News. 2015. "Advocates fear rise in Muslim attacks after Paris, San Bernadino." December 10. <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/advocates-fear-rise-in-anti-muslim-attacks-after-paris-san-bernardino/> Accessed December 18, 2015.
4. Pew Research Center. 2015. "Views of Government's Handling of Terrorism Fall to Post-9/11 Low." December 15. <http://www.people-press.org/2015/12/15/views-of-governments-handling-of-terrorism-fall-to-post-911-low/> Accessed December 18, 2015.
5. Here and throughout this report, we use ISIS to denote the group waging open conflict in Iraq and Syria under the nom de guerre "Islamic State." We chose ISIS rather than its many other variants (ISIL, Islamic State, Islamic State group, Daesh, etc.) because of the broad recognizability of the term. We use this term throughout this report unless we are directly quoting from a source that uses another term for this group.
6. Pew Research Center. 2015. "Views of Government's Handling of Terrorism Fall to Post-9/11 Low." December 15. <http://www.people-press.org/2015/12/15/views-of-governments-handling-of-terrorism-fall-to-post-911-low/> Accessed December 18, 2015.
7. Pew Research Center. 2015. "Views of Government's Handling of Terrorism Fall to Post-9/11 Low." December 15. <http://www.people-press.org/2015/12/15/views-of-governments-handling-of-terrorism-fall-to-post-911-low/> Accessed December 18, 2015.
8. One crucial aspect of Islamophobia in the U.S. today is that many non-Muslim Americans conflate Muslims and Islam with male Middle Easterners. Many non-Muslim Americans fail to recognize that most Muslims in fact do not live in or come from the Middle East, and that Muslims can be of any racial, ethnic, or national background, and can be of any gender or sexual orientation. Individuals who identify as Muslim may or may not think of Islam as an important axis of identity. American Muslims, for example, may identify in any number of other ways, including Black, white, Brown, progressive, conservative, practicing, non-practicing, gay, straight, female, male, etc. Some American Muslims were born here, and were born Muslim; others immigrated here, some converted into the faith, and some did both. Some American Muslims may not consider themselves as part of a "Muslim community" at all, much as someone with a nominal Christian or Jewish background may not feel connected to or responsible to a "Christian community" or "Jewish community." At the same time, the Middle East is home to Muslims who are Arabs, Turks, Azeris, Persians, and Kurds, as well as Muslim Syrians, Iranians, Jordanians, Palestinians, Lebanese, and Iraqis. The region is also home to Christians, Jews, atheists, agnostics, and so forth. Most Muslims live outside the Middle East: The largest Muslim populations live in South and Southeast Asia. The U.S. is home to Muslims that have immigrated here as well as those who were born here or converted to Islam here. The fact that individuals, media outlets, and politicians across the U.S. routinely gloss over these differences—while simultaneously conflating "Muslim" with "male," "foreign," "Middle Eastern," and "not American" - is part of this Islamophobic discourse. Taken together, these confluences misrepresent individuals' lived experiences and thus devalue their identities.
9. We are indebted here and throughout this report to the thought leadership on racism in the media provided by Race Forward. See especially: Race Forward. 2014. "Moving the Race Conversation Forward." <https://www.raceforward.org/research/reports/moving-race-conversation-forward>. Accessed December 22, 2015.
10. Based on a content analysis of 603 news items (articles, transcripts, and blog posts) from a 3-month period of major and specialist media coverage of "extremism." See the "What We Did" section of this report for further details. This research, while discourse-centered, also draws on AFSC's nearly 100-year history of building peace with justice, including in conflict zones.

11. Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel. 2014. *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect*. Three Rivers Press.
12. Alsultany, Evelyn. 2013. "Arabs and Muslims in the Media after 9/11: Representational Strategies for a 'Postrace' Era," *American Quarterly*. 65(1):167. https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_quarterly/v065/65.1.alsultany.pdf (doi: 10.1353/aq.2013.0008). Accessed September 15, 2015.
13. Early work on the relationship between the Middle East and the media focused on the role of media in portraying the Middle East as exotic and backward so as to further European colonial exploitation (e.g. Said 1979); as dangerous and irrational so as to further U.S. foreign policy goals (e.g. Said 1981[1997], Chomsky 1997[2002]; see also Considine 2015); and on ignoring the harmful effects of war and sanctions there (e.g. Abunimah and Masri 2000). Since 9/11, researchers have shown that the 9/11 attacks changed the way that war and extremism are covered in U.S. media in ways that linked a stereotyped Muslim Other with extremism and violence aimed squarely at a "Christian America[n]" 'us' (Powell 2011, Reese and Lewis 2009). They have also documented the role of these narratives in continued U.S. imperialism (e.g. Alsultany 2013), in the prosecution of extremist activities (e.g. New America Foundation 2015), and in the rise of legislation aimed at discriminating against Muslims and other groups targeted by Islamophobic rhetoric (e.g. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding 2014a). These narratives, researchers have shown, permeate U.S. popular culture as well as media and policy discourses (e.g. Shaheen 2014). Importantly, however, researchers have also shown through comparative analyses of national media in different countries that it does not have to be this way. National media outlets in other countries cover conflict in a variety of ways, pointing to alternative approaches for U.S. media outlets to take (Papacharissi, Zizi and Oliveira 2008).
14. Wajahat, Ali. et al. 2011. "Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America," Center for American Progress, 14. <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2011/08/pdf/islamophobia.pdf>. Accessed September 23, 2015.
15. Council on American-Islamic Relations. 2013. "Legislating Fear: Islamophobia and its Impacts in the United States." <http://www.cair.com/images/islamophobia/Legislating-Fear.pdf>. Accessed September 14, 2015.
16. Nacos, Brigitte, et al. 2011. *Selling Fear: Counterterrorism, the Media, and Public Opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 91. Nacos' team also found that increased media attention to violations of civil liberties was negatively correlated with the public's support of the Bush Administration's tactics to identify possible extremists.
17. Hafiz, Sameera, et al. 2014. "Under Suspicion, Under Attack: Xenophobic Political Rhetoric and Hate Violence against South Asian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Middle Eastern, and Arab Communities in the United States," *South Asian Americans Leading Together*, 3. http://saalt.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/SAALT_report_full_links1.pdf. Accessed September 24, 2015.
18. Hafiz, et. al 2014, 16-17.
19. LoCicero, Alice. 2014. "Domestic Consequences of U.S. Counter-Terrorism Efforts: Making it Harder to Prevent Homegrown Terrorism," *The Open Psychology Journal*, 8. <http://benthamopen.com/ABSTRACT/TOPSYJ-8-32> (doi: 10.2174/1874350101508010032).
20. One limitation of this study is the limitations of LexisNexis indexing. For example, articles are continuously populated in the LexisNexis database but would not be included in this study if populated after the research team's download took place. As well, television and radio transcripts are indexed differently than print media and wire services, leading to possible underrepresentation of the former versus the latter.
21. Pew Research Center. 2014. "Newspapers: Circulation at the Top 5 U.S. Newspapers Reporting Monday-Friday Averages." <http://www.journalism.org/media-indicators/average-circulation-at-the-top-5-u-s-newspapers-reporting-monday-friday-averages/>. Accessed February 17, 2016. The research team omitted the New York Post from this analysis (the fifth of the top five largest dailies) for two reasons. First, the team wanted to focus on top outlets in each category that also had a national brand. Second, of the top five largest newspapers, three are based in New York. By omitting the New York Post, the research team mitigated overrepresentation of one region of the U.S. in the national sample.
22. LexisNexis only indexes the abstracts of Wall Street Journal articles, which limited analysis of their coverage.
23. The research team limited this search of Reuters to Reuters ONE based on then-current indexing available through LexisNexis.
24. Indexed in LexisNexis as "Congressional Quarterly News." The research team designed this set beginning with IRP's list of three major foreign policy outlets: Foreign Affairs, Foreign Policy, and Global Post. Of these three outlets, only one (Foreign Affairs) is indexed in LexisNexis. As a result, the research team decided to use Foreign Affairs plus the outlets that its advertising metrics posit as its competitors: CQ Weekly, National Journal, Politico, and Roll Call.
25. Although the research team limited this sample to news items mentioning "extremism" or its variants in the LEAD section of the article for the national outlets, this yielded almost no search results in the specialist sample. As a result the team expanded the search within the specialist outlets sample only, to include articles that mention extremism anywhere in the article.
26. Consequently, this report uses the term "extremism" to refer to political, organized violence instead of the term "terrorism" unless directly quoting from a source. We use quotation marks in the title of the report around the phrase "violent extremism" as a visual cue for the narrative we seek to change.

27. All 603 news items were coded using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. Intercoder reliability was checked in intervals of 25 articles evenly spaced across the data set. Early findings were work-shopped with key AFSC staff. The research team then relied on two external reviewers to critique an early draft of this report.
28. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number unless stated otherwise.
29. Apart from these victims of extremist violence, we also looked at coverage of military or government targets, including civilian and military officials targeted or killed by extremists. Approximately one quarter of the articles in this sample covered this group of victims. Initially, we tried to exclude events that seemed to fit within a formal military framework to distinguish between, say, Iraqi soldiers killed after the fall of Ramadi versus the American soldiers targeted during the attempted bombing of a stateside army base—that is, soldiers killed during a military encounter versus soldiers killed outside of a conflict zone. We also tried to make a similar distinction regarding extremists themselves, coding initially for extremist victims of extremist violence—as in an article that described ISIS executing its own people after accusations of treachery—versus ISIS fighters killed in battle with Iraqi troops. But as the research team coded the articles the lines around these categories became incredibly blurry, not in the least because this conflict involves a number of non-state actors, as well as state-based actors from so-called failed states. In the end, we decided to eliminate this code, since we could not identify a pattern of coverage that framed extremists as victims of violence.
30. This link occurred even in articles where neither Islam nor the religious rhetoric of extremist groups was the main focus of the article. See for example an article about Secretary of State John Kerry's trip to Djibouti in 2015 (AP, May 6, 2015).
31. These tropes, too, are problematic in their own ways, for example, by setting Muslim women up as a monolithic group of always-already victims, in contrast to stereotypes of Muslim men as a monolithic group of violent patriarchs, or by stereotyping some people as “good Muslims” over and against “bad Muslims.”
32. See for example: Montanaro, Domenico. 2015. “6 Times Obama Called on Muslim Communities to Do More About Extremism.” December 7. <http://www.npr.org/2015/12/07/458797632/6-times-obama-called-on-muslim-communities-to-do-more-about-extremism>. Accessed on February 17, 2016.
33. Powell, Kimberly. 2011. “Framing Islam: An Analysis of U.S. Media Coverage of Terrorism Since 9/11,” *Communications Studies* 62:1. <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10510974.2011.533599> (doi: 10.1080/10510974.2011.533599). Accessed October 3, 2015.
34. See for example: Sly, Liz. 2015. “The Hidden Hand Behind the Islamic State Militants? Saddam Hussein's.” *The Washington Post*, April 4. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/the-hidden-hand-behind-the-islamic-state-militants-saddam-husseins/2015/04/04/aa97676c-cc32-11e4-8730-4f473416e759_story.html. Accessed February 17, 2016.
35. See for example: Boaz, Cynthia. 2010. “How the media misinterpret nonviolent struggles.” International Center for Nonviolent Conflict Webinar Series. <https://vimeo.com/12476930>. Accessed on February 1, 2016; Darling-Hammond, Sean. 2016. “Lives Fit for Print: Exposing Media Bias in Coverage of Terrorism.” *The Nation*. January 13. <http://www.thenation.com/article/lives-fit-for-print-exposing-media-bias-in-coverage-of-terrorism>. Accessed February 1, 2016.
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37. Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014, 27–8.
38. Bail, Christopher. 2012. “The Fringe Effect: Civil Society Organizations and the Evolution of Media Discourse about Islam since the September 11 Attacks,” *American Sociological Review* 77:6. <http://asr.sagepub.com/content/77/6/855.short> (doi: 10.1177/0003122412465743). Accessed September 14, 2015.
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40. Kovach and Rosentiel 2014, 31–32.
41. Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014, 27–8.
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