

Key concepts

- Many Muslims complain of bias and misrepresentation of Islam in the media. The Runnymede Trust commissioned a report to look at this and defined 'Islamophobia'. They recommended means of tackling the issue. However, there is debate about how helpful the term is.
- Some analyses of media sources (television, radio, newspapers and social media online) suggests a degree of bias in Britain today, but also some ways in which legitimate criticisms are raised as well as positive documentaries.
- Following various terrorist related incidents, some Muslims complain that the media focus on these more than positive aspects of Islam.
- The Runnymede trust report highlighted research which showed some Muslims were being treated differently and less favourably because of aspects of their faith such as prayer and dress.
- However, some in the media said it was important not to restrict freedom to criticise aspects of Islam. It was unfair prejudice against Muslim individuals which should be challenged.
- The issue of how Muslims become radicalised has led to fears about Islam in general. The Runnymede trust report suggests that aspects of Islam such as wearing a veil or praying, should not cause any difficulty and these should become a normal part of living in a mixed society.

- Research, such as Pervez Sadia's research from the USA, suggests most media articles are negative. However, there are some positive documentaries such as about the art and culture of Islam, and positive news stories such as about Muslim charities.
- Some Muslims have achieved influential positions such as Sadiq Khan as Mayor of London, MPs and counsellors. This success may show that Muslims are better represented than is sometimes thought.
- Online media is an area of research. Muslims themselves may misrepresent Islam with unauthorised opinions (fatwas) and it is a challenge to ensure that the young are not led astray or into extremism.
- Some Muslim scholars, such as Ziauddin Sardar, have written both of western bias but also of the need for Muslims to become more integrated and tolerant of modern influences.

Key quotes

- “‘Islamophobia’, a wretched concept that confuses criticism of Islam as a religion and stigmatisation of those who believe in it.’ (Together facing a new totalitarianism)
- ‘Whether it takes the shape of daily forms of racism and discrimination or more violent forms, Islamophobia is a violation of human rights and a threat to social cohesion.’ (Ingrid Ramberg)
- ‘In the mass media of the world, the ‘Muslim’ is stereotyped as aggressive, lawless, terrorist, uncivilised, fanatic, fundamentalist, archaic and anachronistic. He is the object of hatred and contempt.’ (Ziauddin Sardar)
- ‘I am often dumbfounded by what some of our prominent newspaper columnists have to say about Islam and Muslims. But not too surprised. Stereotyping is an old and, dare I say it, almost respectable institution in Britain. Muslims have been pigeonholed as violent, inferior fanatics for centuries; it provided a good excuse for colonising their lands.’ (Ziauddin Sardar)

Key words

Islamophobia

bias

misrepresentation

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key questions, arguments, and debates

1. The extent to which the media influences Western perceptions of Islam. How do people form opinions about Islam? It could be argued that meeting Muslims in their community is one of the main ways, or that the media only reflects the image that Muslims portray of themselves. On the other hand, media has a huge influence nowadays with the rise in technology, including online social media. Bias in the media can create negative impressions.
2. Whether Islam is accurately represented in Britain today. Politicians, the MCB as an umbrella group, mosques, community organisations and individual Muslims all have a role to play as well as the media which put forward the views which they hold. It could be argued that where some negative views are presented, they are only representing the truth and criticism is legitimate. On the other hand, some Muslims argue that their campaigns against terrorism have achieved little media coverage therefore some people are unaware of them. Also, if there is no single version of Islam and what it is, it is difficult to accurately represent it.