

2,891 Murdoch Media Stories Trashing Islam in a Single Year, Study Reveals

And before you Fairfax readers say ‘I told you so’, they didn’t fare all that much better. Michael Brull reviews a stunning study released by the One Path Network.

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Loyal readers of New Matilda should remember One Path Network, a Muslim video production studio and media company in Sydney. They produced the [first devastating report](#) exposing Channel Seven’s favourite purported Muslim leader and sheikh, Mohammed Tawhidi.

Their calm and factual retort to Tawhidi’s lurid claims about Muslim conspiracies in Australia left his credibility in shreds.

The OPN team has come up with a new report on Islamophobia in Australian media. Disappointingly, I don’t think it has received any media coverage. Thus, *New Matilda* is proud to bring you a brief summary of its findings, and a few accompanying comments.

A quick summary of the report, complete with flashy graphs and images, and an accompanying short video, can be [seen at this link](#). There’s also a longer PDF version, which can be downloaded at the site, and runs to 44 pages, though about 20 pages are devoted to front pages about Muslims. More on that shortly.

Image on the right: Mohammed Tawhidi, a self-proclaimed Imam from South Australia.



The report investigates how five newspapers covered Islam in 2017. Their primary metrics were a numerical count of certain types of stories, number of front pages, a few case studies, and a brief look at a handful of columnists reporting on Islam.

The newspapers were all Murdoch’s: the *Australian*, *Herald Sun*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Courier Mail*, and *Adelaide Advertiser*.

Articles were regarded as “negative articles written about Islam”, if they “referred to Islam or Muslims alongside words like violence, extremism, terrorism or radical”. It should be noted – this is a pretty expansive definition. A story that accurately reported a noteworthy incident of Muslim violence, without being inflammatory or misrepresenting material facts, and which had the respectful cooperation of Muslims, would still be caught up under this definition.

Indeed, the definition could go further. A report that noted Muslim women in a non-

government organisation helping victims of domestic violence might also be caught up under this definition. It should also be noted – there is an implicit slippage, in the sense that a negative story about Muslims isn't necessarily a story about Islam. Thus, I would argue that the definition may be overbroad.

With that proviso, it's not much of a secret that the Murdoch press constantly attacks Islam and Muslims. So, given this definition, how frequent were stories featuring Muslims or Islam in a negative sense?

There were 2,891 of them. That's almost 3,000 negative stories relating to Islam in one year. Which is an incredible amount. That's almost eight stories a day, every day, for the whole year, somehow relating Muslims to terrorism or violence or whatever.

It's a shame that the study didn't investigate other media more fully. It would be interesting to know how they compare. The website guide to the report features an interesting comparison of Fairfax and Murdoch articles about Islam (in the sense explained above). Interestingly, though Fairfax has considerably less coverage of Muslims than the Murdoch press, it's still pretty substantial, at over 100 every month. That is, over three negative stories *every day* at the less Islam-obsessed Fairfax. And even this gives an unfair disproportionate advantage to Fairfax – it is not clear which Fairfax publications were taken into consideration in this count.



The next metric is front pages. Here, the numbers are pretty stark. 152 front pages relating to Islam or Muslims in a negative way. The graph gives an idea of how regular that is, though it seems likely on some days multiple papers had Islam related stories on the front page.



The front pages blur out the non-Islam related stuff, and make the content of interest in focus. This is an idea of what those front pages looked like:



Again, a weakness in this study is the overly broad definition. One interesting case is a *Daily Telegraph* story headlined “A KICK IN THE ASSAD”, about the Trump administration bombing Syria. To my mind, that story doesn't relate to *Islam* in any serious sense. Yet funnily enough, the bottom of the page says: “NSW TERROR: ISIS LINK TO SERVO STABBING MURDER”. The *Tele* was determined to claim its space in this report.

The report turns to case studies, what it calls “ridiculous highlights” from the year. The first example is the coverage of terrorism. They observe that “a casual observer would not be faulted for thinking that Australia was actively engaged in daily combat on its streets. In fact, it would hardly be surprising if that was the perception in the offices of the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Australian*.”

The section on Yassmin Abdel-Magied reaches a staggering count of over 200 articles about her. This obsession is utterly deranged. I fear that this year too, we'll continue to see Murdoch hacks trolling her social media to find new anodyne liberal tweets to feign outrage over.

Possibly the most revealing part of the study relates to opinion writers at the Murdoch press. We all know their positions. Yet it is striking to see their obsession with Islam quantified. All of them write about Islam a lot. Miranda Devine, one of the least devoted Islam bashers, made 16 per cent of her 185 op eds about Islam. Janet Albrechtsen weighed in at 27 per cent, a bit less than Greg Sheridan at 29 per cent. Andrew Bolt and Rita Panahi came in at 38 per cent and 37 per cent – particularly impressive for Bolt, who produced 473 opinion pieces in the year (I suspect this counts blog items). Jennifer Oriel wrote 48 op eds, and over half were about Islam.



What is striking about this to me is that this is like a kind of one-sided cultural war. When the *Australian* decided to promote Keith Windschuttle, progressive academics rallied to defend historical truth. When they trash climate change science, other media covers the actual record of what's happening to the world. When the Murdoch press run anti-feminist claptrap, there are plenty of feminists at Fairfax and the *Guardian* to strike back.

But there is no serious mainstream contestation of this constant drumbeat of anti-Muslim and anti-Islam stories and op eds. These are hundreds of op eds demonising Islam, without any real response. There are apparently no Muslims working at (say) ABC or Fairfax to give a different take on these issues, or complain about what the Murdoch press is doing.

The report concludes with some brief analysis and statistics, which are kind of incredible when paired. One is the finding from an Australian National University study that 71 per cent of Australians were concerned about the rise of Islamic extremism. A reasonable finding, one might think, given the nature of media coverage of Muslims (I really wish One Path would do a follow-up study on other media outlets).

Yet Griffith University researchers found the second statistic: 70 per cent of Australians think they know “little to nothing” about Islam and Muslims. Which raises an obvious question about what public opinion might be like if the media in Australia did its job differently.

My major reservation about the study is the broad definition of negative stories about Islam. If we simply regard these as stories about Islam or Muslims connected to violence, terrorism, and extremism, then the findings remain shocking. This is a constant, endless deluge of stories about Islam and Muslims. The vast majority receive no counter-argument or response, whether in the Murdoch press or elsewhere.

There are no ensconced media platforms for Muslims to write about Islamophobia in Australia with the kind of relentlessness of a Bolt or Oriel. The study shows a vast media empire endlessly picking on a small Australian minority before a huge audience, without offering the victims any way of defending their names and religion before that audience.

And the study that documented this is being ignored.

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