

Media representation of muslims in the context of terrorism: Audience's view on print news coverage of terrorism attacks in Kenya

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Abstract: Many studies on media representation of Muslims in the context of terrorism have been conducted extensively with in-depth analyses, highlighting different regions of the world. However, few studies to establish the perception of non-Muslims on Muslims in regards to terrorism have been conducted in Kenya on the audience's view on print media news reporting of terror attacks that happened after 2011 when Kenya raided Al-Shabaab in Somalia. Therefore, the research filled this gap by assessing, from the audience's perspective, the portrayal of the Muslim community by the mainstream newspapers in their reporting of the six attacks. The study further interrogated the impact of the portrayal. The newspapers studied were, Nation, Standard, and Star. The study used a descriptive research design. Qualitative and Quantitative approaches were utilised for the Mixed method of data collection. For qualitative data, 30 key informants were purposely selected from security experts, media scholars, journalists, and terrorism experts. For quantitative data, 1, 199 questionnaires were administered to households in Nairobi, Garissa, and Mombasa counties. Quantitatively, the data were presented in forms of tables and texts, and analysed using descriptive analysis while the qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. The study contributes to Africa's Agenda 2063 of an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa. It also promotes Sustainable Development Goal 16 of peace, justice, and strong institutions, and enhances both political and social pillars of Kenya's Vision 2030.

Keywords: Extremism, Informing, Islamophobia, Media, Representation, Terrorism

1. Introduction

Western media, Said (1979) argued, have for long portrayed the Muslim community as a pariah; as either terrorists or one that aids the act. Such press representations started many centuries ago and can be traced back to the European colonial writings of the Muslim world. Consequently, this anti-Muslim racism, fueled by media content across the globe, has affected Muslims, regardless of age and gender. Scholars have argued that in some countries such as the United States of America (US), negative portrayal of Muslims is so deeply entrenched that policies have been developed to ensure it is tactfully implemented. In his observation, Nguyen (2019) argued that national security policies and discourses in the US and other countries have been infused with anti-Muslim racism; which he further narrates, has spread Islamophobia directly or indirectly.

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However, in the US, for example, as Nguyen cited, President George Bush changed tact in his Congress speech after the September 11, 2001 terror attack against New York City and Washington DC. This attack, which is said to be the deadliest in American history, caused deaths and destruction. It was allegedly meted by Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda terror group. After the terrible assault, the view of who could be a terrorist then changed in Bush's speech arguing that it was broader than accusations against Muslims only (Nguyen, 2019). The President declared that 'the enemy of America is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them' (Nguyen, 2019: 11).

In spite of that, Donald Trump brought back the taunting of the Muslim community over terrorism even before he became the US President. In fact, during his campaign in 2016 for president, he publicly argued that Muslims were a problem, that; 'I think Islam hates us. There is something there. There is tremendous hatred there...we are having problems with the Muslims, and we are having problems with Muslims coming into the country (Nguyen, 2019: 11). By so doing, Nguyen further argued, Trump intensified Muslim fears when he declared 'radical Islamic terrorism' as a civilization threat. Over and above that, certain studies have revealed that in Europe, many Muslims feel they are under intense scrutiny. Research conducted by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2006) disclosed that Muslims in different aspects of life-economic, social and cultural, feel that Islamophobia is in the rise; with the majority of attacks suffered are more of verbal than physical violence.

The report divulges that, 'visibly Muslim, such as when wearing a headscarf...and discrimination in access to housing, education and employment...that Islamophobia is also expressed in small details of every day encounters, in passing comments, in jokes, in the way Muslims are observed and looked at by others' (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2006: 9). In his observation, Khalil (2021) stated that four in ten Europeans hold unfavourable views of Muslims, and blames the media over the situation. For example, he cited that out of 600, 000 Dutch news items in 2016 and 2017, 'the adjectives most used to describe Muslims were 'radical', 'extremist', and 'terrorist'; while Dutch people were described as 'known', 'average' and 'beautiful' (Khali, 2021: 2).

Even so, more of such scenarios have been witnessed in Europe as Ali (2023) remarked. Ali observed that some mosques in Europe have been banned from operating; that the ban on wearing of *hijab* has 'become normal in Europe' (Ali, 2023: 3). In fact, the issue of Islamophobia has become a global concern as some giant countries such as France, Denmark, Austria, have officially legalised it (Ali, 2023). France, for example, which is the home to one of Europe's largest Muslim populations, with about 5.7 million Muslims, is said to have allowed policies that promote Islamophobia. For instance, the French government put bans on *burkinis* and Muslim head-scarves, arguing, that these offend the values of secular life in France (Al Jazeera, 2022).

In Denmark, in 2023, a Danish-Swedish politician, Rasmus Paludan, burnt copies of the Quran outside mosques. However, Ahmed (2023) argued, the Danish government never took any action against Paludan. In fact, it is stated that Paludan instead remarked that, 'this Mosque has no place in Denmark.' These remarks Ahmed argues, were streamed live on his Facebook page as he was being protected by some police officers. The Muslims in Africa have also faced hatred from other communities and religious groups such as Christians. In the Central African Republic (CAR), the minority Muslim population is being targeted—forcing the community to leave the country, according to a report by Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

There is an increase of anti-balaka militias in CAR whose intention is said to eliminate Muslim residents from CAR, and 'if this violence is not looked into, then a number of Muslims will not be in this African country' (Human Rights Watch, 2014: 2). The report further points out that 50,000 Muslims, mostly nationals of the CAR have fled to Chad, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo; and that the attacks against the Muslim community in CAR include brutal assaults on women and children, and Muslims who try to flee.

Kenya, a country in the east part of Africa, faces a similar screenplay as argued in Al Jazeera (2014). Al Jazeera's Kajee Ayesha reported how Muslims in Kenya feel under siege. She argued that Imams and Muslim clerics face the wrath of State security in Kenya; that terrorist sympathizers kill those Imams who they feel are against terrorism. Her major argument is that radicalization of Muslims in Kenya could be a result of discrimination by the government in terms of development; remarking that economic, political, and social marginalization of Kenyan Muslims and Muslim areas has indeed provoked 'widespread resentment and frustration within the community' (Ayesh, 2014, p.2). Some of the frustrations, Qureshi (2014) averred,

include claims put down by the Muslims that domestic and foreign policies alienate them as Muslims and specifically target them.

The film, *Not Yet Kenyan*, by Mohammed Addow and produced by Al Jazeera (2014), it shows that 50 percent of the Kenyan population who live in nomads blame the government for terrorist attacks in Islamic areas; that the government has failed to protect the North Eastern region. Such hatred has led to a number of terrorism attacks in some parts of Kenya such as Coast, North Eastern, Isiolo, Nairobi, Mandera. Al-Shabaab has carried out many attacks in these regions as they target non-Muslims because of faith (US Department of State, 2021). Even though many factors have been mentioned to be behind terrorism and inter-faith hatred, media has also been blamed for fueling Islamophobia in many parts of the world. It has been accused of spreading propaganda and reinforcing negative stereotypes and at times promoting violence. Print media, even though is argued not to be as 'comprehensive at conveying shocks and sensations like electronic media' (Thiong'o, 2016: 1), is detailed in terms of content; and has been accused of representing Muslim community negatively.

In the West, media has portrayed Muslims unfairly as terrorists and as terrorism perpetrators. Print media, according to Thiong'o (2016), has been in the forefront championing this negative representation. For example, newspapers such as the *Washington Post*, *Newsweek* magazine and *New York Times*, have represented Muslims as 'monolithic force which is a threat to non-Muslims' (Thiong'o, 2016: 2). This narrative is ripe on the African continent where newspapers have been blamed for linking Muslims to terrorism and violent extremism. Oyoola et al. (2014) argued that in Nigeria, print media has in many ways misrepresented Boko Haram activities by using certain labels such as 'jihadist militants', 'Islamic group', 'Islamic insurgents', among other terms that have led to islamophobia, a condition that has strained relations between non-Muslims and Muslims; and what has also led to conflicts in some African countries such as Egypt and Kenya (Kamau, 2013).

Horvit (2004) observed that Kenyan media relies majorly on international news agencies such as Reuters, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Associated Press (AP) and the Agence France-Presse (AFP) in regards to terrorism reporting. They have developed the mentality that Muslims are terrorists like in the western media. This therefore, spreads the negative ideology of the West against Islam and Muslims in Kenya. For instance, in 2010, *Daily Nation* newspaper published a cartoon that illustrated the myth of 72 virgins who were awarded to terrorists. This elicited reactions from Muslims arguing that the the myth's source was a 'weak Hadith which has not been authenticated' (Thiong'o, 2016: 5).

Therefore, this area is still ripe for more studies especially in Kenya after the 2011 attack of *Al Shabaab* by Kenyan military. Consequently, this study has interrogated Muslims and non-Muslims on their view about Muslims and Islam in the context of terrorism as reported by print media in Kenya.

2. Literature review

2.1. Media Representation of Muslim Community in the Context of Terrorism

After the September 11, 2001 bombing of the United States, states and security experts globally coined the term 'new terrorism' whose main aim was to send a message of increased risks from terrorism activities (Mythen et al., 2000). However, as Spalek (2010) argued, in this notion of 'new terrorism', there is the construction of the narrative of Muslim minorities as terrorism 'suspects', who require 'State surveillance and control' (Spalek, 2010: 795). By doing so, the Muslims, as Poynting et al. (2008) put it, have become main targets of anti-terrorist legislations and policing in the western world, especially in Britain, Germany, France, United States, and Australia. Within the notion of 'new terrorism', young Muslim men have been viewed as 'problem group' by the media, political leaders, and security agencies (Spaleki, 2010).

The Media, especially the western one, on the other hand, have been accused of fueling the anti-Muslim agenda. Print media is treated as one of the key platforms that are used to spread the stereotypes against the Muslim community in regards to terrorism. The tension between Muslim and non-Muslim communities has been witnessed globally-in the West, Asian continent and in Africa. The multicultural tolerance of the Britain to some point portrayed Britain negatively in the face of the world as reported by the American print media in regards to Muslims representation on acts of terrorism. However, this kind of representation of Muslims as enemies is a global concern. Pew Research Centre (2013) revealed that in a data from public opinion surveys conducted throughout the world, non-Muslims still associate Islam and Muslims with violence, and are in support of difficult restrictions for Muslims. This concurs with Williams et al. (2015) argument that the media all-over the world link Muslims with violence and acts of terrorism.

The media outlets such as newspapers, televisions, and movies, are majorly used to propagate such messages (Tores-Reyna et al., 2007 in Saleem, 2015). These scholars revealed that many studies portray media as playing a big role in creating negative notions about the Muslim community. American media portrays Muslims, Arabs and the people from Middle East as violent and terrorists (Al Sultany, 2012). It has been observed that the Western media exposure of Muslims as terrorists has influenced the perceptions of the public about the Muslim community (Das et al., 2009).

For example, the influence of 'media on America's attitudes toward Muslims is stronger than that of other informal sources' (Kalkan et al., 2009 in Saleem, 2015, p.3). Important to note, according to Saleem (2015), media stereotypes of minority groups such as that against Muslims, influence attitudes mostly negatively and in turn influence 'support for race-related policies' (p.5). The author further argued that exposure to media where Muslims are depicted as terrorists could fuel the perception that Muslims are threatening and aggressive.

In the United States, media stereotyping Muslims as terrorists has impacted the Americans' perceptions who view Muslims as aggressive and has eventually supported policies that are harmful to Muslims. Newspapers across the globe have portrayed Muslims and the Islamic community as violent and terrorists; spreading the ideology associating Muslims with terrorism. Analysis conducted by British scholars about the United States (US) media treatment of British Muslims reveals how the *New York Times* newspaper shifted from a sympathetic tone after the September 11, 2001 terror attacks towards British Muslims to an open hostility against Muslims (Miazhevich et al., 2012).

Miazhevich et al. (2012) averred that after the September 11, 2001 attack, the United States media blamed Britain for not fully joining the world in the fight against Muslims who were seen as potential terrorists. Coincidentally, some British Muslim students, after school, joined terrorism and attacked the United States. For example, the Christmas Day Bomber of December 2009 who got his education in Britain targeted a flight bound for the United States for an attack. All of these are linked to the United Kingdom and Muslim terror attacks in the United States (Miazhevich et al., 2012).

The case seems to have set off a new round of discourse interlinking British integration and Muslim extremism. The *Times* newspaper called London an 'Islamic hothouse' and treated the incident as a stark reaffirmation that Britain, the United States' closest ally, poses a major threat to American security (Miazhevich et al., 2012: 93). In a content analysis study conducted on stories in nearly 1000 newspapers across Great Britain, between 2000 and 2008, it was revealed that around two-thirds of contents focused on Muslims as threat in relation to terrorism and Muslim extremism (Ogan et al., 2014). Representation of Muslims negatively in different United States newspapers existed as early as the 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, stories mentioned Muslims as people who liked wars or other conflicts (Sheikh et al., 1995).

In countries that have strong religious identities, newsrooms are said to have decided to conform to the norms of respective religions. In Nigeria, for example, Marthoz argued that many private and State-owned newspapers are religious and are seen as the 'extensions of their churches and mosques' (Sheikh et al., 1995: 41). It has been argued that extremely radical journalists even make phone calls openly for violence against those they feel are infidels. This kind of environment indeed affects journalists' ability to report safely.

2.2. Mediatisation of terrorism and perception of Muslims

After conquering Kabul in 1996, Rashid (2013) revealed that Taliban leaders banned all news media apart from *Radio Afghanistan* which was run by the Taliban themselves. Use of television, newspapers, magazines, and photography was forbidden; meaning for many years before the September 11, 2001 attack on the United States, Afghanistan survived without domestic media. This is an indication that terrorists only recognised news media that they feel will relay messages that favour their interests.

In some countries where journalists report otherwise, terrorists would frustrate their efforts. Rashid (2013) gave an account of his personal experience with terrorists as a news reporter. He claims that the Taliban made it difficult for foreign journalists to carry out normal news reporting in Afghanistan: "By 2000, some Taliban commanders developed largely because of the presence of Arab militants and the influence of every paranoid Al-Qaeda" (Rashid, 2013: 22). Media generally is used by terrorists for different reasons but majorly to win and show mighty-publicity and their military success.

To achieve this more effectively, extremists have resorted to using all available media platforms-traditional and new media. Al-Qaeda militants, for example, had at one point, set up video film studio in

Pakistan from where they released gory scenes of suicide bombings and attacks they had committed in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2013).

The Al-Qaeda, it is argued, later trained Taliban about the use of media for effective execution of terror attacks against their perceived enemies; 'surprisingly, it was Al-Qaeda and Pakistan extremists who taught the Taliban how to use the media more effectively in the post-9/11 era...the Taliban provided video clips of their battles to journalists, sold propaganda DVDs...and offered instant comment via mobile phone from official spokesmen' (Rashid, 2013: 22-23).

Even though media can be used by the states and other agencies to handle matters terrorism, terror groups still use the press for attention and recognition. Many scholars have the opinion that terrorism extremists use the free press of liberal countries to publicise issues that benefit them (Nacos et al., 1989). In so doing, the scholars observed that media has become the best terrorists' friend-that it doesn't count when there are terrorists' acts without publicity. It is through the media that terrorists spread fear and anxiety as media covers their actions. Again, through the media, terrorists ensure their views, demands, and philosophies are publicised, and by holding press conferences, they seek respectability and legitimacy (Nacos et al., 1989). All media platforms have always been singled out as major tools which extremists and terrorists are radicalized. These platforms; the print, broadcast and the Internet, are used by terrorists and extremists for many different purposes from fueling propaganda and information to fund-raising and planning.

Internet is today taking centre stage as one of the media platforms used by the terrorist. It is argued that many terrorists and extremists have moved away from public spaces such as the mosques to private homes, computers, tablets and mobile phones (Edward & Gribbon, 2015). This means the internet has made the process of radicalisation secretive, posing huge security threat. In a study conducted by Edward and Gribbon (2015), they gave vivid voices from terrorists themselves. From the voices, many young people in England say they joined terrorism as a result of what they consumed on the Internet. One claims that he was 'accessing bomb-making websites and downloading videos of beheading and purchased bomb-making material, including quantities of hydrogen peroxide and other ingredients (Edward & Gribbon, 2015: 3).'

Role of media in promoting terrorism has been of global concern. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC] (2012) conducted a study which concluded that there are messages that terrorists pass through the media platforms, messages of propaganda, incitement, radicalisation, financing, training and recruitment. Utilisation of online newspapers by terrorists is also on the rise. Terrorists develop their own online newspapers or use online newspaper contents and twist messages for their own benefit. UNODC (2012) gives an example of an online magazine, *Inspire*. The *Inspire* was published by the Al-Qaeda, and contained ideological materials that indeed promoted global terrorism.

Newspaper messages, especially print texts, frame events from a particular angle for a purpose or just to cover events as news items. Such angles, as Kabir et al. (2015) observed, sometimes are viewed to be manifested in the selection, emphasis and omission of certain information to mirror an ideology of the news source. During this process of 'ideologising', Kabir et al. (2015: 1) averred that the newspapers become more visible in their representation of the 'other' as inferior and is subjected to dehumanizing and exclusion; "the ideological support that is given to the mainstream group and its views can be seen in the way a particular non-mainstream group is represented, sidelined or kept silent about a particular issue to favour the former group" (Kabir et al., 2015: 1). The media succeed in this as they frame events and news according to their interests with journalists tending to sensationalize matters by utilising certain metaphors and imagery meant to demean the group that is considered 'the other.'

3. Methodology

The study utilised descriptive research design where Sequential Explanatory method was used to collect data. To effectively achieve this, the researcher started with quantitative data collection before going to qualitative. This is because the quantitative part of the study informs qualitative part of the research; therefore, qualitative was used later to confirm the findings of quantitative part of survey study. This is why, as FoodRisc Resource Centre (2016) observed, mixed research approach is better than either qualitative alone or quantitative alone as it provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of these two. For qualitative data, 30 key informants were purposely selected from security experts, media scholars, journalists, and terrorism experts. For quantitative data, 1, 199 questionnaires were administered to households in Nairobi, Garissa and Mombasa counties. The three counties were selected for this study since they are the three

worst hit by acts of terrorism in Kenya (Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government, 2017).

Using the Yamane’s formula, the researcher arrived at sample size of 1, 199 households calculated from a total of 2, 026, 701 households in Nairobi (1, 506, 888), Mombasa (378, 422) and Garissa (141, 394). For quantitative, the data was collected from members of the public-the audience-who have been reading the three newspapers under study-*Nation*, *Standard* and *Star*. This study looked at how these newspapers represented Muslims when reporting terrorism attacks between 2013 to 2020. *Standard* and *Nation* were selected for this study since they are the most read newspapers in Kenya, according to the Media Council of Kenya 2023 Media Performance Report.

Even though *Taifa Leo* has more readership than the *Star*, according to Media Council of Kenya (2023), the study selected *Star* instead-because from the observation-*Nation* and *Taifa Leo* are from one media house (Nation Media Group) and most of the contents are the same, only language differs. *Taifa Leo* uses Kiswahili language while *Nation* uses English language.

Study based its data collection on the contents of six major terror attacks in Kenya, namely: Westgate Mall shooting, Nairobi-bound bus, Mpeketoni attack, Garissa University raid, Nairobi’s Dusitd2 Complex and the Camp Simba attacks, which are the major attacks in Kenya after Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) attacked *Al Shabbab* in Somalia (US Department of State, 2020; Ministry of Interior and Coordination of National Government, 2017). It looked at the responses of the audience who were consuming hard news stories, feature stories, cartoons, editorial and pictures about terror attacks in Kenya during the period under study. These were selected since they contain news categorizing in newspapers (Hassan and Azmi, 2021); and are best for the study because they are more objective and reliable compared to other contents such as adverts, opinion pieces, among others (Oyero, 2006).

The study used systematic sampling for quantitative data where the researcher chose the ‘nth’ individual to be included in the sample. The researcher, therefore engaged research assistants in a systematic sampling method to choose households at regular intervals in the three county headquarters of the counties under this study. For qualitative data, the study used Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) to interview the 30 key informants. This involved making phone calls to interview respondents as guided by the questions displayed on the computer screens.

4. Research Objectives

1. To assess the audience’s view on the print media representation of the Muslim community in the context of terrorism in Kenya.
2. To investigate the effect of print media representation of the Muslim community in the context of terrorism attacks in Kenya.

5. Result and discussion

The study’s main objective was to assess the news coverage of the Muslim community in the context of terrorism during the reporting of terror attacks in Kenya. The study further established the impact of the negative portrayal of the Muslim community on Kenyans and the effect of this. Out of 1, 199 questionnaires distributed in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Garissa, the counties with the highest cases of terrorism in Kenya, 987, which is 82%, were returned. First, the study sought to establish the representation of Muslims in the news coverage of terror attacks in Kenya. **Figure 1.0** below gives results from the questionnaires distributed in Mombasa, Nairobi and Garissa, and from the key informants interviewed.

Figure 1.0: Audience’s response in regards to news reporting on terror attacks in Kenya

Respondents (<i>Questionnaires in Mombasa, Garissa and Nairobi</i>)	News portrayed Muslims negatively (<i>either terrorists or aiding terrorism</i>)	News framed Muslims positively (<i>not as terrorists nor aiding it</i>)	Neutral (<i>Do not know</i>)
987	640 (65%)	40 (4%)	307 (31%)
Respondents (<i>Key Informants</i>)	News portrayed Muslims negatively (<i>either terrorists or aiding terrorism</i>)	News framed Muslims positively (<i>not as terrorists nor aiding it</i>)	Neutral (<i>Do not know</i>)

30 (100%)	21 (70%)	09 (30%)	0 (0%)
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Field Data (2024).

In the above quantitative results, more people (65%) believe that *Nation*, *Standard* and *Star* newspapers portrayed Muslims as either terrorists or aiding terrorism. 4% disagreed while 31% remained non-committal. These results agree with that of qualitative data where 30 key informants were interviewed. Of the 30, 21, which is 70%, agreed that indeed the newspapers stories portrayed Muslims negatively as either terrorists or those aiding terrorism while 3 (30%) did not agree.

During an interview with the key informants, a *participant D*, who is a Muslim in Mombasa, argued that from the news stories about the six terror attacks in Kenya, Muslims have been framed as terrorists or aiding terrorism. He observed that even some pictures in the newspapers portrayed Muslims as terrorism sympathisers; *'yes; they reported it as if we Muslims are the perpetrators of terrorism. Pictures of terrorists were people dressed in Muslim attires. Use of words such as 'Islamic' 'jihad' portrayed Islam and Muslims as terrorism sympathisers. This is bad indeed.'*

When asked about contents that make him feel that Muslims are terrorism sympathisers, another key informant, *participant L*, based in Nairobi, remarked that most of those stories exposed how terrorists were killing those who could not recite Islamic prayers; *'what would you conclude, if what is in the media is how fellow Christians were killed by a gang of people who insisted on reciting Islamic prayer? Obviously they are Muslims. Therefore, as a Christian, I know very well that terrorism in Kenya is championed fully by Muslims, period. I cannot trust them. Read news and see the names of the suspects; they are Muslim names, not Christian, not Hindu..what do you conclude?'*

A media scholar, *participant J*, who lectures Media and Journalism in one of the universities in Kenya, revealed that the language used by the Kenyan newspapers has indicated that terrorism is really an Islamic ideology that Muslims support religiously. The lecturer identified the use of words such as 'islamist', 'jihadist', among others; *'the moment a newspaper has associated the acts of terrorism with jihad war, and islamism, what does that mean? Is it not telling the audience that indeed acts of terrorism is Islamic? In fact, many Kenyans believe terrorism is Islamic.'*

This is similar to other studies that have been conducted in other parts of the world. For example, in a content analysis study conducted on stories in nearly 1000 newspapers across Great Britain, between 2000 and 2008, it was revealed that around two-thirds of contents focused on Muslims as threat in relation to terrorism and Muslim extremism (Ogan et al., 2014). Representation of Muslims negatively in different United States newspapers existed as early as 1980s and early 1990s. During this period, stories mentioned Muslims as people who liked wars or other conflicts (Sheikh et al., 1995).

The media outlets such as newspapers, televisions, and movies, are majorly used to propagate such messages (Tores-Reyna et al., 2007 in Saleem, 2015). The scholars reveal that many studies portray media as playing a big role in creating negative notions about the Muslim community. American media portrays Muslims, Arabs and the people from Middle East as violent and terrorists (Al Sultany, 2012). It has been observed that the Western media exposure of Muslims as terrorists has influenced the perceptions of the public about the Muslim community (Das et al., 2009).

For example, the influence of 'media on America's attitudes toward Muslims is stronger than that of other informal sources' (Kalkan et al., 2009 in Saleem, 2015, p.3). Therefore, these findings answer objective one of the study which was to assess the audience's view on the print media news coverage of Muslim community in the context of terrorism in Kenya. From the study it was found that indeed the audience have a view that *Standard*, *Star* and *Nation* newspapers in Kenya have portrayed Muslims as terrorism sympathisers in their coverage of the six major terror attacks under the study.

During the data collection, it was found that the framing of Muslims as either terrorists or aiding terrorism led to more Kenyans developing fear of Muslims; that the portrayal of Muslims negatively in the context of terrorism can cause more cases of Islamophobia in Kenya. This is presented in **Figure 1.1** below:

figure 1: islamophobia as a result of negative perception of muslims

respondents (questionnaires in Mombasa, garissa and nairobi)	there is islamophobia (fear of muslims/islam as a result of the negative news coverage)	there is no islamophobia(no one fears muslims/ islam as a result of the negative news coverage)
987 (100%)	801 (81%)	186 (19%)
respondents (key informants)	there is islamophobia (fear of muslims/islam as a result of the negative news coverage)	there is no islamophobia(no one fears muslims/ islam as a result of the negative news coverage)
30 (100%)	19 (63%)	11 (37%)

field data, 2024

From the questionnaires' data, 801 (81%) respondents agreed that the news coverage of the six terror attacks that portrayed Muslims negatively in the context of terrorism has, in a way, created fear of Islam and Muslims in Kenya; Islamophobia. Paltry 186 (19%) disagreed. This was also evident on the side of the key informants where 19 (63%) agreed it can cause fear of Muslims/Islam while 11 (37%) disagreed.

For this, the study interviewed a number of people, including security officers in the military and in the police force. When interviewed, *participant C*, a Kenyan police officer based in Tana River County, argued that there is deep fear even in the forces; *'I cannot be with a Muslim police officer at the same point while on duty here in Tana River. I will stand far away from him. These are people we fear and we cannot trust them. We know they can secretly link up with enemies-the terrorists. It is not a lie. But we pretend to be putting on brave faces while deep inside our heart we know things are not normal.'*

The officer further remarked that what he reads in the newspapers during terror attacks in Kenya have confirmed to him that Muslims are not people to be trusted; *'what do we read in the newspapers? Muslims killing non-Muslims and even themselves! Even when we make arrests on terror suspects, the names we finally find in the media are Islamic.'*

The information the officer gave is similar to what a military officer said during the interview. However, the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) officer gave a different tact on how he dealt with the situation. According to the soldier, *Participant T*, he remains vigilant all the time when working with a Muslim soldier; *'I will always be where he is. I do not give him chance. I will be with him throughout so that I see every move he makes. Muslims soldiers cannot be trusted. Even when we went to Somalia to fight Al Shabaab, I could not trust colleagues who are Muslims.'*

'The fear of Muslims has infiltrated almost all the sectors. This was revealed by another key informant, Participant D, who is a Primary School teacher based in Garissa County. He remarked that he cannot hide his fear while in school. According to his argument, the fear he has on Muslims as terrorists is so huge and hurting. He said that, 'in fact, I work there but I cannot let them know my plans. My home is in Migori county, many miles away, but when I am leaving for holidays, I don't tell them exact day and time I am leaving. In the December 2023 holidays, I left the school on a Monday when they were to close on Friday same week, and I didn't tell them. What we read in the newspapers is enough to alert us to be careful of Muslims.'

Important to note is that even though Muslims are feared by non-Muslims, the situation has made Muslims to also fear the non-Muslims. In fact, according to Mohammed (2024), the 2023/2024 Israel-Palestine war has made the majority of Muslims, especially Muslim-Americans feel more discriminated with half (53%) arguing that 'news about Israel-Gaza war makes them feel afraid.'

This situation was also encountered during this study. Interviewing a Muslim, *participant T*, who lives in Mombasa county, the fear and mistrust of non-Muslims was evident. She argued that she fears interacting frequently with non-Muslims since they don't trust Muslims; *'how can you not fear someone who believes that terrorism is part of Muslims' lives? When we are with non-Muslims, some even tell us point blank that we are killers; meaning you cannot tell what they can do in revenge, so we fear too. The media reports have portrayed us negatively and honestly, something should be done to save the situation.'*

The fear, or rather Islamophobia, is an act that has been a thorn in the flesh for many countries globally. For example, during this process of 'ideologising', Kabir et al. (2015) averred that the newspapers become more visible in their representation of the 'other' as inferior and is subjected to dehumanizing and exclusion; "the ideological support that is given to the mainstream group and its views can be seen in the way a particular non-mainstream group is represented, sidelined or kept silent about a particular issue to favour the former group" (Kabir et al., 2015: 1).

The media succeed in this as they frame events and news according to their interests with journalists tending to sensationalize matters by utilising certain metaphors and imagery meant to demean the group that is considered ‘the other.’ This brings fear, not only to non-Muslims but to the whole human population around the world. Therefore, the insensitive reporting on terror attacks in Kenya has led to Islamophobia. Meaning, that the perception that Muslims are terrorists has an impact on the people; fearing Muslims as terrorists, and in return, Muslims also fear non-Muslims because they feel members of other religions can get revenge. This has answered objective two of this study which was to investigate the effect of print media representation of the Muslim community in the context of terrorism attacks in Kenya. This fear is evidently dangerous for peaceful co-existence in society.

This part was further investigated to find out the impact of this fear in regard to terrorism and violent extremism in Kenya and the results are shown in **Figure 3** below:

Respondents (<i>Questionnaires in Mombasa, Garissa and Nairobi</i>)	The fear can lead to violent extremism and terrorism (<i>Fear of Muslims/Islam as a result of the negative news coverage can lead to acts of terrorism/violent extremism</i>)	The fear cannot lead to violent extremism and terrorism (<i>Fear of Muslims/ Islam as a result of the negative news coverage cannot lead to cases of violent extremism and terrorism</i>)
987 (100%)	820 (83%)	67 (17%)
Respondents (<i>Key Informants</i>)	The fear can lead to violent extremism and terrorism (<i>Fear of Muslims/Islam as a result of the negative news coverage can lead to acts of terrorism/violent extremism</i>)	The fear cannot lead to violent extremism and terrorism (<i>Fear of Muslims/ Islam as a result of the negative news coverage cannot lead to cases of violent extremism and terrorism</i>)
30 (100%)	24 (80%)	6 (20%)

Field Data, 2024

Out of 978 (100%) respondents, as the figure above shows, 820 (83%) agreed that fear can lead to more cases of violent extremism and terrorism. However, 67 (17%) respondents disagreed. This result is similar to the findings from the key informants who were interviewed. 24 (80%) of key informants agreed that it can lead to acts of terrorism while 6 (20%) disagreed. This was actually found to be true during the interviews with the key informants. *A participant M, A Muslim based in Migori County. He argued that ‘this fear creates a lot of tension and enmity between Muslims and non-Muslims; so it is easier for a fight to start against each other. Some Muslims feel they are being victimised for wrongs they do not commit and therefore feel to revenge.’*

This was also echoed by a Christian pastor, *Participant J* who argued that fear can lead to terrorism and violent extremism, *‘the fear creates enmity and tension among religions that eventually fight each other.’ Even non-Muslims may end up fighting Muslims because they have been labeled enemies, the terrorists.’* Therefore, this fear, as Gurski (2016) observed, has led to Muslims feeling isolated from the rest of the world since the rest of the world see them as terrorists who should be dealt with as enemies. Gurski argued that the feeling of exclusion is one of the factors that has contributed to violent ideologies among the Muslims; that it is why groups such as IS, Al Qaeda, Al Shabaab always inform Western Muslims that they don’t belong in the West and that the West hates them (Gurski, 2016).

The study has therefore concluded that print media representation of Muslims in the context of terrorism has led to Islamophobia, which from the results is likely to cause more acts of terrorism and violent extremism.

6. Contributions of the study

The study contributes to the Africa’s Agenda 2063 of integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa. It also promotes Sustainable Development Goal 16 of peace, justice and strong institutions, and enhances both political and social pillars of Kenya’s Vision 2030.

7. Implications of the Study

The study implies that conflict-sensitive journalism should embrace matters religion and faith in order to close the inter-faith conflict gap that is highly likely to fuel terrorism in Kenya and globally.

8. Recommendations

The study recommended that journalists should be trained in conflict-sensitive journalism and adhere to its tenets. Since inter-religious conflicts are on the rise, it is important to include matters of religion and faith in journalism training in order for news reporters and their editors to understand the facts regarding faith doctrines.

It is also important for religious leaders to use different media platforms to make people understand well their respective faith doctrines to avoid confusion and misunderstandings. Finally, the Kenyan government should open up through media platforms to initiate inter-faith dialogues across the country in a way to promote peace, and reconciliation in efforts to curb violent extremism and terrorism.

9. Conclusion

The study looked at the portrayal of the Muslim community in the news coverage of the major terror attacks that happened in Kenya after the 2011 Al Shabaab war with the Kenya Defence Forces (KDF). The study found that news portrayed Muslims negatively; as those who either aid terrorism or are terrorists. This, according to the findings, further revealed that this coverage was likely to lead to fear. From the study, the fear is not only of Muslims but also of Muslims fearing non-Muslims. This situation, the study concluded is likely to create more tension among religions, more between Muslims and non-Muslims; leading to more cases of violence-violent extremism and terrorism.

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