

Negative news coverage empowers collective action in minorities

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When minorities perceive negative news about their racial ethnic groups as inaccurate, some believe they have the power to enact change.

By taking action in a collective effort, they feel they can correct the group's disadvantageous status in society, according to a new University of Michigan study published in the current issue of *Communication Research*.

Minorities often feel dissatisfied and frustrated with negative or inaccurate [media](#) depictions about their groups in mainstream media. Negative media representations can increase prejudice and generate negative behaviors toward the depicted group members.

The study showed how minorities—and Muslim Americans more specifically—navigate and cope with mainstream media's negative portrayal, which can inspire short- and long-term action, said Muniba Saleem, an assistant professor in the U-M Department of Communication and Media.

Researchers used data from several surveys, which were done nine months before and after the 2016 U.S. presidential election. In one study, more than 240 respondents, who identified as Muslim, were asked about news media coverage about Muslims, their ability to work together in American society, and level of anger at how their group is treated.

Exposure to news in which Muslims were depicted negatively increased

collective action efforts in the long-term via increased efficacy beliefs that the group members can enact positive change.

"Minorities who perceive their racial ethnic group as inaccurately represented in [mainstream media](#) are more likely to work together in order to improve their group's position and status in the larger society," said Saleem, the study's lead author who holds affiliate positions in the Department of Psychology and the Institute of Social Research.

A second study involving more than 340 participants randomly read one of three news articles about Muslims immigrants in the United States and the implications of the growth. The negative article outlined risk of domestic terrorism. Generous charitable donations and Muslims joining science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers were part of the positive article. A mixed article combined the positive and negative content.

Those who read the negative article about their group and thought the content was accurate were less willing to engage in "non-normative" action such as violent acts as part of the protest, the study indicated.

Reading the positive article and believing the accuracy made some respondents want to mobilize to counter the negative treatment against Muslims.

"This suggests that group-based anger may play a role in motivating collective action when individuals believe that their ingroup benefits and contributes to the society at large, and yet is still at a disadvantage vis-a-vis the majority group," Saleem said.

More information: Muniba Saleem et al. When and How Negative News Coverage Empowers Collective Action in Minorities, *Communication Research* (2019). [DOI: 10.1177/0093650219877094](https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650219877094)

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