

# ISLAMOPHOBIA FACT SHEET

## What Is It?

Islamophobia is a closed-minded hatred, fear or prejudice toward Islam and Muslims that results in discrimination, marginalization and oppression. It creates a distorted understanding of Islam and Muslims and transforms diversity in name, language, culture, ethnicity, and race into a set of stereotyped characteristics. As such, Islamophobia is a system of both religious and racial animosity.

## Who is Affected?

In addition to Muslim women, men and children, those who share characteristics that have been racialized as “Muslim” – whether it be language, clothing or skin color – are also affected by Islamophobia. Thus, Sikhs, Christian Arabs, and Hindu Indians have been targets of anti-Muslim animus.

## How Is It Manifested?

Islamophobic sentiment utilizes ideas which dehumanize Muslims and their heterogeneous cultures, beliefs, customs and practices and deny the dynamic nature of Islam.

Islamophobic acts occur at both an individual and institutional level and can take many forms. They may be physical attacks against those perceived to be Muslim or the damage and desecration of mosques and Islamic centers. They include law enforcement profiling, discrimination in employment and denials of service. Islamophobic acts can also take the form of anti-Islam legislation and policy measures.

Islamophobic rhetoric expressed by individuals and political and media institutions can include verbal harassment, intimidation and hate speech.

## Where Does It Come From?

It is possible to point to five sources of contemporary Islamophobia:

- **Media representation:** The U.S. media overemphasizes negative coverage and news pertaining to Muslims and Islam leading to an exaggerated sense of threat, and consequently fear and hate. An academic study covered by *The Washington Post* found that in a four-year period, 12 percent of domestic attacks conducted by Muslims received, on average, 449 percent more media coverage than 88 percent of attacks committed by others.

- Political rhetoric: Politicians play on people’s emotions and exploit their fear to actively instigate Islamophobia when it serves their own political interests.
- Violent extremists: Although violent groups like ISIS target and murder more Muslims than any others, these groups continue to color American perceptions of Islam and all Muslims.
- American foreign policy: Islamophobia is frequently utilized by the U.S. to justify its foreign policy in Muslim-majority regions of the world. Consider President George W. Bush’s failed War on Terror, which decimated Iraq. The policy was presented to the American public as essential for freedom and safety.
- U.S. Islamophobia Network: An influential, multi-million dollar network of groups and individuals in the U.S. who falsely cast Islam and Muslims as a malevolent existential threat, and work actively to promote prejudice, discrimination, and oppression towards the faith and its practitioners.

## 5 Strategies to Counter Islamophobia

Changing people's attitudes and institutional practices is not easy. Like working against other forms of prejudice and racism, countering Islamophobia as a system of a religious and racial animosity requires committed action and resources. Here are several things you can do to join the effort:

1. Find local and national groups, such as CAIR, whose work you support and join them. Sign up for their email and social media lists and take action when they ask you to. Working together in an organized way amplifies individual efforts and advances the movement against prejudice.
2. Work on practical community projects with people of various backgrounds to build interpersonal relationships and develop solutions to shared problems.
3. Organize coalitions of community leaders representing different cultural/ethnic/religious groups and community sectors (such as schools, businesses, etc.) to examine existing policies and determine what needs to change.
4. Keep your cool. When confronted by hate, be assertive and polite. Rudeness hurts the cause and can be used against you.
5. Turn a negative into a positive. For example, if a place of worship is vandalized, bring communities together to repair and clean it up in a demonstration of solidarity.

## Further Resources

Council on American-Islamic Relations  
 (202) 488-8787  
[www.cair.com](http://www.cair.com)  
[www.islamophobia.org](http://www.islamophobia.org)