

Who speaks for Muslims? The role of the media in creating and reporting of Muslim public opinion polls in the aftermath of London bombings in July 2005.

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Abstract: Despite the fact that most British people do not know many Muslims personally, some research claims that the impression of what Muslims think is closely matched with what average Britons think they think. We argue that this curious coincidence is not surprising considering that the mass media control both the process of asking Muslims what they think AND of communicating the results to the public. Public opinion polls are mostly taken at face value as the direct and unbiased voice of Muslims, but as this article argues this is not the case. We analyse all public opinion polls conducted in the 18 months following the 7/7 London terrorist attacks and all their broadsheet newspaper coverage to show that the media framing effects influence both the creation of Muslim opinion polls, and their reporting.

Key words: Muslims; media; public opinion polls; integration; support for terrorism.

Introduction

The media rarely uses any direct evidence of Muslim public opinion. Lewis et al. (2011) show that in their sample of all articles concerning British Muslims, between 2000 and 2008, only two percent used any survey/poll evidence at all, let alone those directly concerning the views of Muslims themselves. When used, however, quoting a public opinion poll is a powerful tool in the hands of the media outlets, as the media do not fall back on someone else's authority and instead make a claim that they are directly reporting the views of the population in question. The existing studies do not take into account this difference between the picture of Muslims offered as a commentary and opinion of some elite sources used by the media outlets and the reporting of results of opinion polls. These are depicted as pure 'news', i.e. uncontaminated, 'objective facts' about Muslims and their opinions. This differentiation is crucial, as the public may look upon them as unrelated to the media outlets' ideological tendencies, which in reality is not so. Far from reporting 'objective facts' of Muslim public opinion, out of the 14 polls of Muslim public opinion conducted in Britain in the 18 months following 7/7 nine were commissioned by newspapers and three by television channels. Since media outlets usually respond to their readership's prior ideological preferences by delivering news biased to fit this preference (Gentzkov and Shapiro 2007), the public opinion polling of Muslims may also be tailored to such pre-existing ideological preferences.

Consequently, our analysis concentrates on the role of the media in both creating and reporting of such polls. As a result the research question posed by this article, even though it concerns the media bias against Muslims, is different to the usual study of media framing effects. Most studies of media coverage of Muslims and Islam focus on the analysis of the value judgement aspect of the coverage, which forms a lesser part of this study, the range of elite sources the media use to inform their narrative and themes and topics covered (Poole

2006, 2002, Richardson 2006). We will look beyond what is usually studied, and which we will call *reporting effects*, to include the earlier stage of media influence, which we will call a *gatekeeper's effects* (framing effect on what Muslims are asked in the public opinion polls). The inclusion of this stage of media effects is the main contribution of this paper to the existing body of knowledge.

The period under analysis- following the London terrorist attacks in July 2005- is a particularly good test of media framing effects on both poll creation and reporting, because of the abundance of Muslim opinion polls and of many newsworthy events involving Muslims, which could provide an alternative explanation to the media framing effects. 2005 and 2006 were crucial years for Britain's relationship with her Muslim minority, comparable in their consequences only to the Rushdie Affair in 1988. Following the terrorist attacks on London's transport system on 7th July 2005 (henceforth referred to as 7/7), through the following months of failed terror plots and prominent police anti-terrorist operations, culminating with Muslim backlash against the Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammed, Britain was struggling to come to grips with Muslims, and Muslims, it seemed, struggled to come to grips with Britain. Muslims' loyalties were questioned; Muslim leaders were put under pressure; the majority population was accused of Islamophobia; the government struggled to achieve a compromise between fighting terror and maintaining social cohesion; and questions were asked about the success of Britain's integration policy (Joppke 2009). In all of this the British public desperately scrambled for an idea of what Britain's Muslims really thought and how many posed a security threat. To satisfy this understandable curiosity, more polls of Muslim public opinion were conducted between July 2005 and December 2006 than ever before –or after (see the Appendix). The singularity of this period is highlighted in comparison with the aftermath of the New York terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 (9/11): while there were 7 polls of Muslim public opinion following the New York attacks, there were 14 in the

comparable period following 7/7. We analyse all the polls conducted during the 18-month period between July 2005 and December 2006 and all the articles in the British broadsheet press reporting their results (in a period for up to a year after each poll was first released). First we analyse what was asked, and then how it was reported. Subsequently, we look at whether the political slant of the broadsheets influenced any of these two stages.

The question of whether Muslim opinion polls were in fact a major source of representations of Muslims in the broadsheet press will be the starting point of our analysis. Secondly, we will tackle the issue of media framing effects in three ways. First we will look at the selection and exclusion of themes not just from news stories, but at an earlier stage: Muslim opinion polls. We will then establish whether the media's ideological tendency influenced the exclusion/selection of themes and topics. Secondly, we will look at the evaluative coverage of Muslim opinion polls. Here we will ask two questions: were certain themes presented as more negative than others, and did different newspapers with different ideological tendency present Muslims' opinion as more or less negative? Finally, to test whether the selection of topics was biased rather than a result of a natural media interest in the stories which form a part of the media news-cycle, we will ask if the themes and topics asked about in polls and those reported responded to the news cycle.

We find that media *gatekeeper's and reporting effects* were visible in the questions asked and the way in which they were reported, with the narrative of problematic integration of Muslims prominent beyond what could be expected considering the events that took place during the period under analysis.

Muslims and the media

There is abundant evidence that the media can and do influence people's perceptions, especially on topics where previously their knowledge was scant and opinions unformed (Entman 2004; Johnson-Cartee 2004; Lippmann 1946). More specifically, there is also evidence that the public is influenced by the media in their attitudes towards Muslims (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007). Muslim minorities are additionally affected by the link between Islam and terrorism, which at a time following any terrorist attack becomes especially salient. Following the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 (henceforth referred to as 9/11), the media narrative on terrorist threat has changed with significant consequences for the public perception of Muslims (Spigel 2005; Kundnani 2004; Moore et al. 2008; Zelizer and Allan 2002; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2003). The media's influence over the interpretation of events is done through what Van Dijk (2000) calls 'news structures' or Norris (2003) calls 'news frames': patterns of selection and exclusion (of topics or stories), emphasis, and language used in creating news stories and reports of events that form a coherent picture with the attached value judgements that support the consistency of media narrative. The existence of these frames and structures is not in its own right a negative thing. The role of the media is to introduce such explanatory frames in order to give their readers not only news out of context, but also an understanding of the origins, importance, and consequences of events. To perform this role, selection and exclusion are inevitable, but they also are crucial mechanisms of manipulation of stories.

For Muslim public opinion polls selection and exclusion is present not just when polls are reported, but also when they are designed, since they are to a large extent commissioned by the media themselves. This is, in addition to the use of 'news frames', a tool with which media impose their own coherent narrative and shape the public understanding of Muslim integration, terrorist threat and other aspects of Muslim public opinion. The truism that 'you

can only get an answer to the question you ask' applies more than anywhere to public opinion polls. The way we pose a question determines which answer we receive and therefore there is an obvious opportunity for creating bias in the answer by creating a bias in the question (Clark and Schober 1992).

Whereas the studies of what is asked of Muslims, by whom and why, are virtually non-existent, there is abundant literature on media representations of Muslims. It is generally agreed upon that these are predominantly negative and very selective. In fact any ethnic minority suffers from a more negative coverage than the white majority in most countries and in those where a white ethnic group is a dominant minority this is true of the non-white majority (Van Dijk 1991). The British media is no exception (Downing and Husband 2005). This negative bias has been measured in many different ways from association of the minority group with predominantly negative topics such as crime or cultural deviance, placing such content in more visible places in the newspaper, to using active sentences to describe negative actions carried out by minority group members but passive ones when describing acts of discrimination or prejudice against them on the part of the majority (Van Dijk 2000).

In recent decades, Muslims have become of particular interest to the general public, the media, and academic community. For the coverage of Muslims in the media, there are two natural topics: terrorism and cultural differences. Terrorism is unquestionably an important topic as events such as 9/11, the Bali bombings, 7/7 and many other attacks around the world show. The proliferation of the coverage of cultural issues and differences, however, is a matter of judgement and reflect prejudices and preoccupations about integration that form a major part in the media's bias against Muslims (Jaspal and Cinnirella 2010). This is perhaps unsurprising given the framing of Muslim culture as a determining factor of Muslims' relations with the West popularised by the 'clash of civilisations' paradigm

(Huntington 1996) and that the main focus of this debate is Islam as a religious identity rather than a vehicle for nationalism, or political reform movement, both of which are recognised sources of violent political Islamism (Pargeter 2008). Said identifies this trend of focussing on cultural difference as ‘Orientalism’ in which Muslim culture is presented as backward and at odds with Western values (Said 1978; Shaheen 2001), which is often associated with ‘new’ racism, in which socially unacceptable notions of biological inferiority were replaced by socially tolerated concept of cultural inferiority and other negative stereotypes (Ansell 1997; Barker 1981, Pettigrew and Meertens 1995). In the UK it has been deemed to be the factor differentiating Islamophobia from more general forms of racial prejudice (Allen 2005; EUMC 2005; Modood 1992; Runnymede Trust 1997; Open Society Institute 2010). It therefore comes as no surprise that the negative media picture of Muslims is fuelled by the notion of cultural difference (Van Dijk 2000).

In the UK, Poole shows that cultural issues form a large part of the media’s coverage of Muslims (Poole 2002; 2006). Whereas sometimes this may be dictated by current events (such as instances of violent crime over forced marriage) or other cultural debates (such as the role of women and headscarves), it is often just part of the media narrative. The media are generally painting the picture of culturally different, and therefore more threatening, Muslims who stand in opposition to Western (and British) values (Poole 2002; 2006; Said 1997). Poole also underlines the generally negative image of religion in the British context, which exacerbates the situation for Muslims, a group mostly defined by their religious affiliation (Poole 2002). Although the right-wing conservative press is usually more at fault in misrepresenting minorities, mostly in terms of criminality, than the left-leaning media outlets (Said 1978), in the case of Muslims, even the left-leaning media engage in negative representations. Left-wing outlets’ critique is fuelled by the contrast between their secular and liberal stance with ‘irrational’ -i.e. religious- and culturally ‘backward’ behaviour of

Muslims (Poole 2002; 2006)¹. More recent research into media coverage of British Muslims confirms the tendency by the media to offer selective narratives, most prominent among them being: terror threat, religion, cultural difference, Islamist threat and failure to integrate (Lewis et al. 2011). Even though terror threat has been- until 2008- the most dominant theme of media narrative (Moore et al 2008), the presence of other narratives linked to cultural difference, concerns over ‘otherness’ and integration-related difficulties such as religious identity and national loyalties (Lewis et al. 2011), make the more broadly construed theme of integration dominant already before the 2008 benchmark.

The focus on difficulties in integration and cultural difference is especially damaging for the reputation of British Muslims because it generalises from cultural differences to difficulties of integrating with the wider society. From there, a link is being drawn between lack of integration- alienation- and the threat of terrorism. This reasoning spills over from newspaper articles to many books published by journalists, who operationalise it in more detail. This literature links three issues: alienation (cultural and social), religious extremism as an attractive alternative to Western identity, and the resultant support for violence, including ‘potential’ or ‘tacit’ support for violence (Bawer 2006; Phillips 2007; Shore 2006). The apparent link between exclusion, or self-imposed segregation from the mainstream British society, and the threat of crossing to the ‘other’ side –religious fanaticism and then support for violence– has been to a large extent built in response to the stories of the 7/7 bombers, all of whom were British-born young Muslims who appeared to have chosen fanatic Islamism over Britishness.

This narrative is reflected in the British public opinion’s perception of Muslims, which is that: “*Muslims in Britain are slow to integrate into mainstream society, feel only a qualified sense of patriotism and are prone to espouse anti-Western values that lead many to condone so-called Islamic terrorism*” (Field 2007: 466). Field suggests that British public

opinion closely follows the Muslim public opinion; however we posit that the British media follows the public prejudice and preconceptions on Muslims in the types of questions asked of British Muslims and the fuels them by what is presented to the British public thus creating a feedback loop, which departs from the Muslims real public opinion.

Even though the narrative of disillusioned Muslims seeking ‘revenge’ on Western society is widespread in the media (Ali 2007), generally it does not find much evidence in the existing empirical research. Although some academic literature does follow a similar line of reasoning (Saggar 2006; 2009), most existing academic evidence on Muslim public opinion in Britain, using academic and government surveys- as opposed to commercially commissioned public opinion polls- finds that Muslims have high levels of belonging to Britain, often higher levels of political trust and trust in British institutions and are equally or more civic-minded than the majority (Sobolewska 2009; Maxwell 2006; 2010). The limited use of survey evidence by the media is contributing to this problem (Lewis et al. 2011).

Data and research design

Because this project goes beyond observing media framing effects in the usual way –based on publications of all material relating to Muslims– and focuses on representation of Muslim public opinion, we need to separate between *gatekeeper’s* and *reporting* effects, as previously defined. The media’s role as gatekeepers in terms of Muslim public opinion polling is rarely addressed; in the case of Muslim polls following 7/7 they were particularly pronounced. We classified the bodies commissioning the polls into three categories: left-wing, right-wing and independent. Most of the commissioners were media actors: television channels, broadsheets and tabloids. The only two non-media commissioners were think-tanks. The left-wing commissioners were The Guardian and The 1990 Trust, a left-wing think tank. The right-

wing commissioning bodies were The Times, The Sun and Sky News. The independent commissioners were the BBC and Channel 4, both recipients of public funds and therefore under obligation to provide balanced coverage, and PEW Global, a non-partisan think-tank based in the US. It is striking that the left-wing stakeholders were on the whole less interested in polling Muslims than the right-wing commissioners.

Looking at media *reporting effects*, in order to contain our analysis to workable boundaries, we chose to look at the reporting of Muslim opinion polls by the broadsheet newspapers only. This choice was dictated by three considerations: the broadsheet newspapers' reputation for the quality of their news coverage; their active role in creating both the *gatekeeper's effect and reporting effect*; and the reliability and accessibility of their reporting through online and paper archives, which increases completeness of data and lowers the chances of systematic measurement error². We looked at eight broadsheets and have coded them with respect to their ideological tendency as right-wing and left-wing. The right-wing papers included: The Times, The Daily Telegraph, Sunday Times, and Sunday Telegraph. The left-wing papers included: The Guardian, The Independent, The Observer, and The Independent on Sunday. Previous literature shows this division of ideological tendency has important consequences for these papers' coverage of issues such as immigration and minorities (Poole 2006). Despite this, all these newspapers lay claim to even-handed coverage and quality unlike their lower-brow equivalents - the tabloids - excluded from this analysis.

Between the 14 polls conducted in the 18-month period following 7/7 (see Appendix) there were 408 questions asked (we were able to only find the wording for 405 of these questions). We have coded these using a two-tier coding frame: theme and topic. We developed a coding frame with 5 broad themes and within them 70 more specific topics, 12 most popular of which will be discussed in analysis³. We found our broad themes and topics

corresponded closely to the findings of studies of media coverage. First we analysed the frequency of these themes and topics being asked in the polls depending on who commissioned these polls and what their ideological tendency is, to establish the magnitude of *gatekeeper's effect* and when they were asked to establish whether the questions corresponded to the relevant events in the news-cycle.

At a second stage of our analysis, we analysed all the articles in broadsheet newspapers mentioning any of the results in these 14 polls in order to test the existence of any *reporting effect*. We looked at how the questions were subsequently reported to establish whether questions on certain themes and topics appeared in the articles more often than others, whether the frequency of reporting themes followed the current events in the news-cycle, what kind of interpretation of the results was presented, and whether this pattern varied between the newspapers according to their ideological tendency. We have followed the reporting of each poll for at least a year after its publication, and hence the total available time-frame for reporting is effectively 30 months. We allowed one mention of a question per article (if the item was mentioned multiple times in an article a joint coding for all of them was developed), with mentions that quoted the poll but could not be linked to a specific question excluded⁴.

In addition to analysing the frequencies of themes and topics being asked about in the polls, we looked at whether the questions quoted by the newspaper were accompanied by any commentary, contextual background, or were accompanied by a value judgement. For this we developed a coding frame with five categories of evaluative reporting: *neutral* when the result was reported with no further comment and not in any meaningful context; *ambiguous* when it was unclear what the evaluative content was, but there was some commentary or context provided; *ambivalent*, when some aspect of the question was presented as positive and at the same time another aspect was presented as negative; and finally when the

evaluative reporting was clearly identifiable as *positive* or *negative* it was given one of these codes respectively.

We used two indicators in order to code all mentions into one of these five evaluative categories. We looked at the *language* used to report a result and the positioning of the result in *context*. The *language* criteria included instances where the language used was value-laden (for example ‘disturbing’), when exaggeration was used (‘rising tide’), where results were not quoted directly but instead rounded up (‘more than half’, ‘a huge majority’), or down (‘a small minority’, ‘just’), and finally when juxtaposition was used (‘but’, ‘however’, ‘although’, ‘not only...but’). The *context* criteria evaluated how the polls’ findings were placed in the context of other findings from this or other polls, including comparison of Muslim opinion with majority (where results were used to show similarities the mention was coded as positive), or with other countries; whether the results were extrapolated to real population numbers to achieve a more shocking number (for example, instead of quoting 1 per cent agreement with a question, which is within limits of measurement error, The Daily Telegraph from July 23, 2005 quoted that 16 thousand Muslims agreed with it); and finally in a few instances the same topic in the poll was covered by more than one question with slightly differing results - a choice of a more negative/positive question out of more available on the same topic was used to establish the evaluative coding of the mention.

Analysis

The silent witness: were the Muslim opinion polls used?

Since the existing research shows that very few press stories on British Muslims actually use any survey/poll evidence (Lewis et al. 2011), the obvious question is why they commission

so many polls of Muslim public opinion. Perhaps the answer is that they don't and, as mentioned earlier 2005-2006 was an exceptional period in the number of polls conducted among the British Muslim population (see Appendix 1). Did this period therefore result in a higher incidence of using polls as a source in news-stories?

It seems not. In the 18 months following the 7/7 bombing, 344 mentions of Muslim opinion polls were found. Out of the total 405 questions in 14 polls, 142 questions from 11 polls were mentioned at least once. The three polls ignored by the broadsheet press were the 1990 Trust poll and the two polls conducted by The Sun- a lower quality newspaper. Altogether, these mentions spread across only 83 articles (see Table 1). Other research on more general press coverage of Muslims (Lewis et al. 2011) shows that all press stories during this period was around the 4000 figure (lower in 2005 and more in 2006). Even if we assume that the broadsheet press accounted for less than half of this coverage, or even one third, the proportion of articles that used the Muslim opinion polls seems infinitesimal- well below the two percent figure quoted for the overall use of all survey and poll data (Lewis et al. 2011).

[Table 1 about here]

Theme selection and exclusion

The theme selection and exclusion is one of the main aspects of media framing on reporting issues surrounding Muslims and Islam. As we argued earlier, this can be done not only through selection of stories that the media prints or broadcasts, but also in how they commission Muslim opinion polls. Firstly therefore we looked at the media as *gatekeepers*,

who commissioned the Muslim polls and how the ideological tendency of the outlet influenced what was asked.

Figure 1 shows what the main themes asked in Muslim public opinion polls were in the 18 months following 7/7. The two dominant themes were integration and security, with themes of foreign policy and political freedoms far behind, and very few questions on other themes (not shown in the figures). Unsurprisingly, given the nature of this period, a lot of the questions were determined by the obvious public concern with security threat related to terrorism; however, questions on the issues of integration outnumbered the security-related questions for some of the commissioners. For the independent commissioners and for the right wing commissioners, the questions relating to integration are more frequent, forming a clear majority of all questions asked by independent commissioners. The left-wing commissioners were most interested in security. This finding holds when we look at the media and non-media commissioners, with TV channels- most of whom are classified as independent- most interested in integration, and the left wing press (mostly the Guardian) mostly interested in security. This clearly shows that ideology does impact the frequency of asking about integration versus asking about an arguably more timely and newsworthy – during the period under analysis- theme of security.

The only theme that differed between media and non-media commissioners in popularity was foreign policy. Despite it being a popular explanation for Muslims disgruntlement, it was largely ignored by most polls. The foreign policy questions were mostly asked by think-tanks- 1990 Trust on the left and an independent Pew Global. It shows that these non-media commissioners were the only ones to go beyond the narrative of integration to seek explanations for Muslims' disgruntlement.

[Figure 1 about here]

Looking more in-depth at what was asked within the broader themes of integration and security we can see that what was asked of Muslims followed the popular media narrative described earlier, but also-because of this predominant narrative- that some topics were more negative than others. Surprisingly, more negative topics were present within the theme of integration than security.

Figure 2 shows that within the theme of integration the dominance of culture was consistent with other finding on Muslim press coverage, with other well-known topics like discrimination and Islamophobia, loyalty to Britain, religious identity and alienation following closely. The distribution of these topics by ideological tendency of commissioner is very telling. The left-wing commissioned polls were dominated by two polls from the Guardian that were conducted shortly after 7/7 and on its first anniversary- and did not ask any culture-related questions (which brings us to the issue of newsworthiness, which will follow in the next section). Apart from this, left wing commissioners were most likely to ask questions about Muslims' loyalty to Britain and Islamophobia. The issue of Muslim loyalty is generally quite obviously a negative narrative, but the focus on discrimination also can be perceived as negative as the Muslim communities are often attacked in the press for their airs of 'victimhood' and the demands they place on British society to placate them (Lewis et al. 2011). Independent commissioners preferred questions about culture and cultural difference, which can be interpreted as negative because of their role in forming the ongoing narrative of Muslims as 'alien others' (Saeed 2007). Among right-wing commissioners the topic of Muslim alienation was more popular than among other commissioners.

Within the theme of security, topics of support for terror prevention and support for terrorism dominated. Questions on direct approval of terrorists will yield very small proportions - often within polling error- saying they support terror; and questions on support for terror prevention will result in many Muslims offering their support in the fight against

terror. Hence these questions are more positive than the more vague questions on ‘tacit’ (i.e. conditional and potential rather than outright) support for terrorist and the ambiguous issue of awareness of terrorist and extremist activity within Muslim communities. These are usually questions yielding negative results as more people say yes to the vague questions on ‘understanding’ the motifs of terrorists and ‘sympathising’ with their cause, than to an outright question of support for terrorist actions (Sobolewska 2009). Similarly, questions about awareness- or even just suspicion- of terrorist activity will yield higher proportions of Muslims agreeing and hence create more of an atmosphere of fear. The ideological tendency had a clear impact on prevalence of topics, with the left following the narrative of ‘tacit’ support and awareness of terrorism, while the right-wing and independent commissioners preferred the more positive direct questions on support for terrorism and for terror prevention.

[Figure 3 about here]

Since half of these polls were commissioned by broadsheets, we may expect that the security and integration themes would also dominate newspaper reporting of the polls. Figure 3 shows this was the case, with integration being a dominant theme for most broadsheets- regardless of ideology- and both of them accounting for between 80 and 90 percent of all mentions of Muslim polls. The available questions on foreign policy and political freedoms were almost completely ignored in almost all cases despite questions on these topics being available in the polls. The Times was the only broadsheet to cover the issues of foreign policy.

The coverage varied by newspaper, with Daily Telegraph and left-wing broadsheets such as Independent, Observer and Independent on Sunday reporting security items almost, or equally, as often as integration items, but The Guardian heavily preferring the theme of integration, and within it the issue of culture and cultural difference. Unlike in the case of

asking questions, there is no evidence of any reliable ideological differences between the broadsheets in which questions they mentioned in the published news stories.

The good and the bad: evaluative interpretations

To confirm which themes were in fact presented as positive, and which as negative, we now look at how these polls were interpreted and framed by the broadsheet which reported them. We are interested in the overall positive or negative presentation of results, whether they varied by theme (whether the contentious issue of integration got more negative coverage) and whether right wing papers were more negative than left wing ones.

There were multiple mentions per question, with significant evaluative inconsistencies between the multiple mentions of any single item. We recorded 219 mentions as having negative evaluative interpretation, 73 as having positive, 30 were reported as neutral and 11 were coded as having ambivalent, and 11 as ambiguous, interpretations.

Figure 4 shows that the interpretations varied by themes as expected and we can clearly see that the integration questions were presented in the more negative light in comparison with the security questions, which were more evenly reported. On the whole, the right-wing broadsheets were more balanced giving more positive interpretations to issues of security and integration and less negative ones. The Times gave more positive coverage than any other newspaper to the findings of the polls, including the crucial issue of integration, which The Times was by far most positive about. Two of the right-wing broadsheets that published the most mentions of Muslim opinion polls during the period under analysis, The Times and The Telegraph, both have referred to these polls in a positive way 26 per cent of the time. In comparison, the left-wing paper that has given most attention to the polls, The

Guardian, only referred to these polls as positive 18 per cent of the time. The left-wing press was on the whole more critical than the right-wing press.

[Figure 4 about here]

Responsiveness to the news-cycle

Finally, the fundamental question in assessing framing effects is to first agree what should have been asked and why what was being asked was a result of media framing. Even though most of the existing research makes a justified claim that presenting Muslims predominantly in the light of terrorism constitutes bias on the part of the media, in the immediate aftermath of 7/7 the media's interest in terrorism and security was natural. Therefore we can hardly argue that focus on a timely and newsworthy issue at this time would constitute bias.

However, presence of less relevant topics or absence of other timely and newsworthy themes can be construed as media framing effects. Hence we will look at whether questions asked in Muslim polls, and their reporting in the press, followed the news cycle, or not.

In the 18 months under analysis, there were many salient events concerning the British Muslim community, and Muslims in general. The relevant events that we expected to contribute towards the increase in numbers of security questions asked were: the 7/7 bombing in July 2005, followed by the police mistakenly shooting an innocent Brazilian man as part of an anti-terrorist operation the same month; crack-down on Muslim clerics preaching Islamic extremism in August 2005; violent protests in London against a set of cartoons thought to be offensive to Muslims by a Danish newspaper in February 2006; passing a terror prevention legislation in March 2006; fatal police mistake in a anti-terror operation and a foiled bomb plot involving trans-Atlantic flights in June 2006; and finally the first anniversary of 7/7

bombing in July 2006 and re-ignition of violence abroad around the offensive cartoons in September 2006.

The events we expected should have caused the increased interest in integration-themed questions and their mentions were the cartoon controversy in February and September 2006; the debate over Islamic dress first in March 2006 (Shabina Begum's case) and then October 2006 (Jack Straw remarks); Tony Blair's widely contested speech on 'Duty to Integrate' from December 2006; and finally the controversy surrounding Channel 4's documentary 'Undercover Mosques', which erupted in December 2006 before the programme was aired in January 2007.

[Figure 5 about here]

The results in Figure 5 show that whilst there has been some following of the news cycle in the frequency of asking and reporting security-related questions, little evidence of this can be seen for integration-related items. The proportion of security questions asked in Muslim opinion polls was steadily falling after the 7/7 bombings in order to rise again in response to the failed bomb plot in June 2006 and culminate on the first anniversary of 7/7 bombings. A little peak of asking security questions was also recorded to coincide with the second part of cartoon protests in October 2006- but not matched by reporting more security questions in broadsheet press.

In contrast, the proportion of questions asked- and reported- on integration, does not follow the expected cycle. Instead, more integration questions appeared in polls and in press in August 2005- seemingly to coincide with Muslim cleric crack-down- and then when the terrorist plot was failed in June 2006 and arrests were made in August 2006. A possible explanation for the first event's impact is a curiosity whether Muslims supported extremist

clerics; and for the last two that the foiled bomb plot originated with British Muslim bombers throwing into question the integration of Muslim community.

Conclusions

Considering that we analysed the period directly following the London terrorist attacks, it is surprising that we found that the Muslim opinion polls following the London bombings did not focus predominantly on issues of security. Previous research on media coverage on Muslims found that violence has been the major theme covered in the British press (Richardson 2004) and that *'2008 was the first year in which the volume of stories about religious and cultural differences (32 per cent of stories by 2008) overtook terrorism related stories (27 per cent by 2008)'* (Moore et al. 2008: 3). In contrast, we have shown that in the period between July 2005 and December 2006, when generally security dominated the press coverage, Muslim public opinion before 2008 was already framed by the media predominantly in terms of integration (inclusive, but not limited to culture and religion), rather than security. Partly it may have been a response to the fact that the London bombers were all British citizens and perhaps the media framing was more aimed at explaining why British 'home-grown' terrorism may occur- and looking for this explanation among cultural and value differences of Muslims.

What is another surprise in terms of the media framing effects after 7/7 is that the right-wing press appeared to be a little more sympathetic towards British Muslims at this time of crisis than the left-wing press. Some research does point to the fact that some left-wing press is not as sympathetic to Muslims as they are towards other minorities and issues of immigration and race in general, because of Muslims' perceived cultural traditionalism (Poole 2002). Conscious of the fact that the coding of mentions of Muslim public opinion into negative or positive may be open to human error and an undue influence of personal

prejudices and judgements, we are keen to underline, that even without the coding of stories into negative or positive, the left-wing press published more mentions of the questions pertaining to integration and cultural differences between Muslims and majority population. This alone points to the fact that the framing of Muslims in terms of problematic and culturally alien minority has been more prevalent on the left. The contrasting good news on the right is that The Times newspaper has been found to be rather more balanced, not only publishing close to an equal number of positive mentions of Muslim public opinion, but also within the contentious theme of integration mentioning more stories on discrimination against Muslims than other outlets.

The main aim of this analysis was to identify the two kinds of media framing effects in order to form a more accurate view of who has influence over the picture of Muslim public opinion presented to the media consumers. As we saw most of the Muslim public opinion is heavily influenced by the media narrative both at the stage of data collection and at the stage of reporting of the results. This has serious consequences for social cohesion in Britain, as it is safe to conclude that the British are given a very selective insight into what their Muslim counterparts think about Britishness and terrorism. In his seminal paper, Field (2007) showed that the general public's impression of culturally different and prone to extremism Muslims has been reflected in Muslim opinion polls. Instead, we argue that it has been the other way round: the kinds of questions Muslim opinion polls have asked followed the pre-formed media narrative, which most likely informed the public perception. Evidence of strong selection bias was found among both questions asked of British Muslims in the polls, and in what was reported by the press. This bias did not follow fully the news cycle in the period under analysis, so it is hardly likely that the narrow selection of themes and topics was dictated by their newsworthiness. Instead, the media has followed a narrative that placed difficulties of integration and cultural differences at the heart of the explanation for the

terrorist attacks on the London transport system, an explanation that as we argued in introduction, does not find support in more scholarly data.

Appendix - Complete list of polls of British Muslims conducted between 07.2005 and 12.2006

[Table A1 around here]

1. 2005a: 15-22 July, YouGov, *Daily Telegraph*, n=526, online, weighted to 2001 census <<http://www.YouGov.com>>.
2. 2005b: 15–20 July, ICM, *The Guardian*, n=500, telephone, re-contacts and snowball, un-weighted <<http://www.icmresearch.co.uk>>.
3. 2005c: 20–21 July, Communicate Research/SKY NEWS, n=462 <<http://www.communicateresearch.com>>.
4. 2005d: 21–22 July, MORI, *The Sun*, n=282, face-to-face on-street and in-home, 10 local authority areas, weighted to 2001 census <<http://www.ipsos-mori.com>>.
5. 2005e: 8–9 August, MORI/BBC, n=204, telephone, re-contacts and random-digit dialling, 27 local authority areas, weighted to 2001 census <<http://news.bbc.co.uk>> ; <<http://www.ipsosmori.com>>.
6. 2006a: 6-8 January, Populus, *The Times*, n=500; *The Times*, 7 February 2006 <<http://www.populuslimited.com>>.
7. 2006b: 14–16 February, ICM, *Sunday Telegraph*, n=500, telephone, re-contacts and snowball, weighted to 2001 census, 19 February 2006 <<http://www.icmresearch.co.uk>>.
8. 2006c: 14 March-9 April, NOP/Channel 4 Dispatches, n=1,000, telephone, random digit dialling, areas with 5 per cent or more penetration of Muslims, weighted to 2001 census; 7 August 2006 <<http://www.gfknop.co.uk>>.

9. 2006d: 4–26 April, PEW GLOBAL/NOP, n=412, telephone, June 2006
<<http://www.pewglobal.org>>.
10. 2006e: 1–13 June, Populus, *The Times*, n=1,131, telephone and online, weighted to
2001 census, 4–5 July 2006 <<http://www.populuslimited.com>>.
11. 2006f: 16–21 June, ICM, *The Guardian*, n=501, telephone, re-contacts, weighted to
2001 census, 27 June 2006 <<http://www.icmresearch.co.uk>>.
12. 2006g: 4–6 July, YouGov, *The Sun*, n=310, includes parallel non-Muslim sample
7 July 2006 <<http://www.YouGov.com>>.
13. 2006h: 8–27 September, Trust, n=1,213, online via Muslim websites, 1990
<<http://www.blink.org.uk>>.
14. 2006i: 4–13 December, Populus, *The Times*, n=1,003, telephone and online, weighted
to 2001 census, January 2007 <<http://www.populuslimited.com>>.

Notes

1. To balance out the rather bleak picture painted so far, there is also some evidence that in some countries- namely The Netherlands and Germany- the press coverage of Muslims has become more nuanced and balanced over time (Boomgaarden and Vreese 2007; Schiffer 2009).
2. We used Lexis-Nexis for searching the archives.
3. All topics with fewer than 5 mentions were either pooled with similar items into broader topic groups or just analysed as part of the distribution of themes, but were not included as separate topics.
4. Other mentions of the results of the poll were ascribed to the specific question based on either the wording used (if it approximated the question wording) or on the proportions quoted as expressing a certain opinion (if they matched poll data as published by the pollsters).

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Table 1: All articles, questions, mentions, and polls commissioned per newspaper by its ideological tendency

Broadsheet	Number of articles using polls (%)	Numbers of mentions	Number of questions mentioned	Commissioned the poll	Ideological tendency
The Times	22	153	77	3	Right
Guardian	19	66	48	2	Left
Independent	10	18	17	-	Left
Daily Telegraph	10	42	36	1	Right
Sunday Times	10	24	15	-	Right
Sunday Telegraph	4	19	13	1	Right
Observer	4	13	8	-	Left
Independent on Sunday	4	9	8	-	Left
Total	83	344	142	7	

Source: Compiled by authors.

Table A1. Public opinion polls of, or including, British Muslims

<u>Time period</u>	<u>Length of period</u>	<u>Number of Muslim polls</u>
1989-11.09.2001	12 years and 8 months	4
12.09.2001- 12.2002	16 months	7
2003-7.07. 2005	2 years and 6 months	4
<u>7.07.2005- 12.2006</u>	<u>18 months</u>	<u>14*</u>
2007-2010	3 years	7

Source: 1989-2004 Clive Field, 2005- 2010 compiled by authors.

* A December 2006 Populus poll was released in January 2007, but was included in the 18 months under analysis as fieldwork took place in December 2006 (and it is so archived on Populus website).

Figure 1: Popularity of themes by ideological slant of poll commissioner

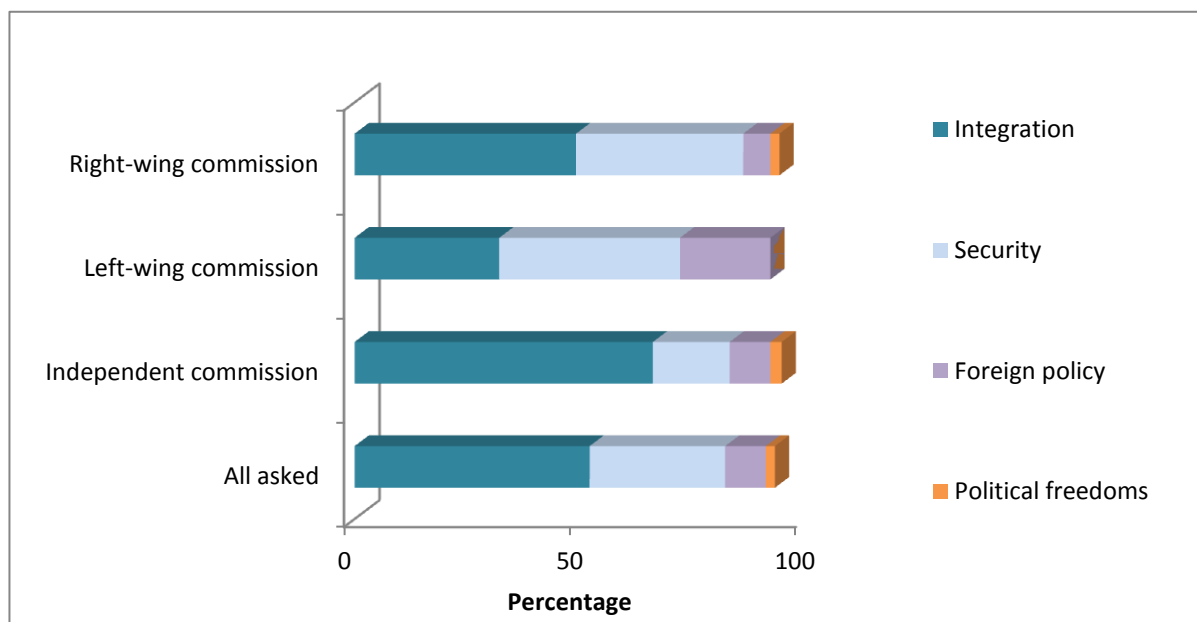


Figure 2: Popularity of integrationist and security topics by ideological slant of poll commissioner: proportion of all integration and all security

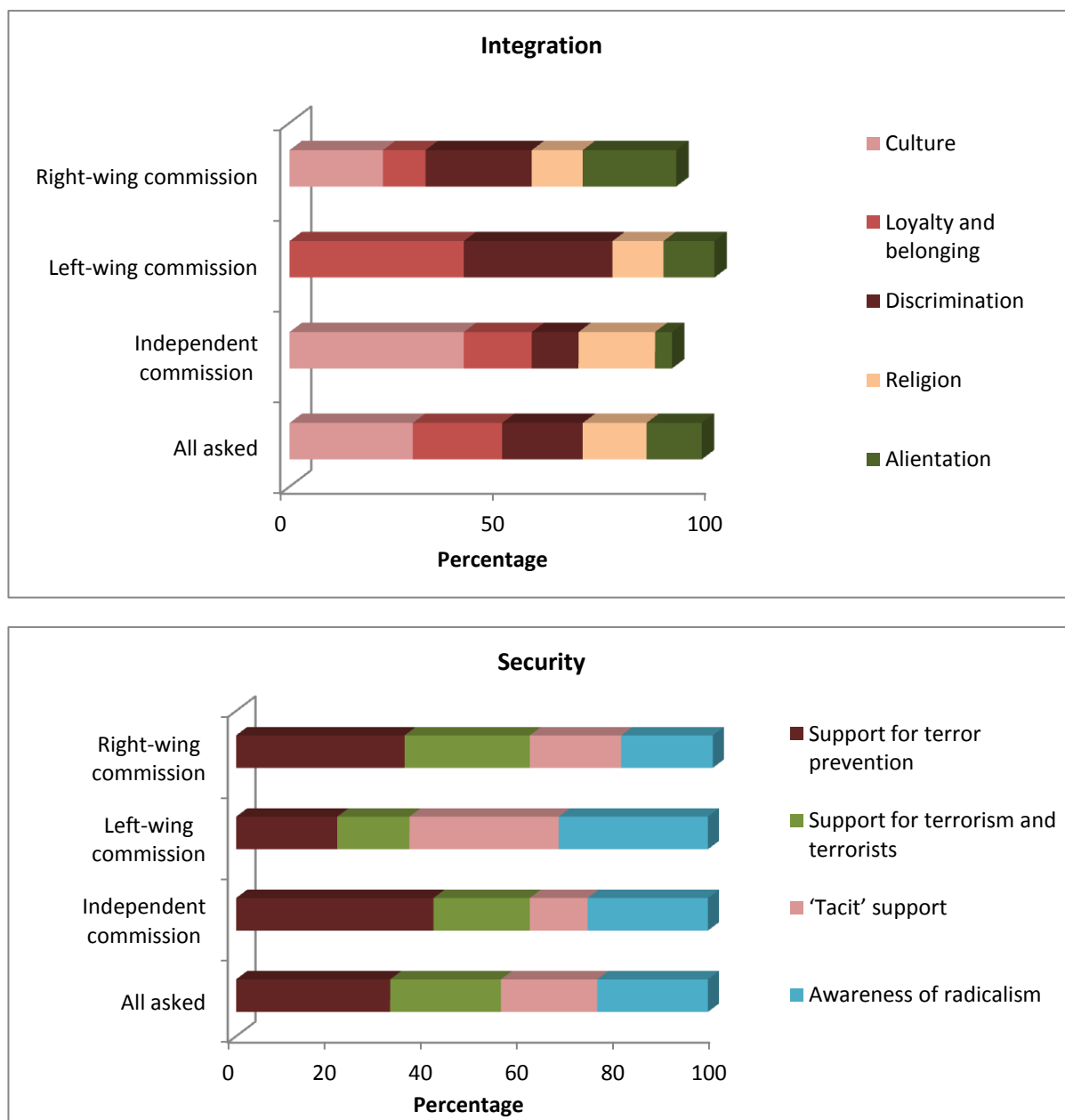


Figure 3: Integration and security questions mentioned by newspaper: proportion of all poll questions mentioned

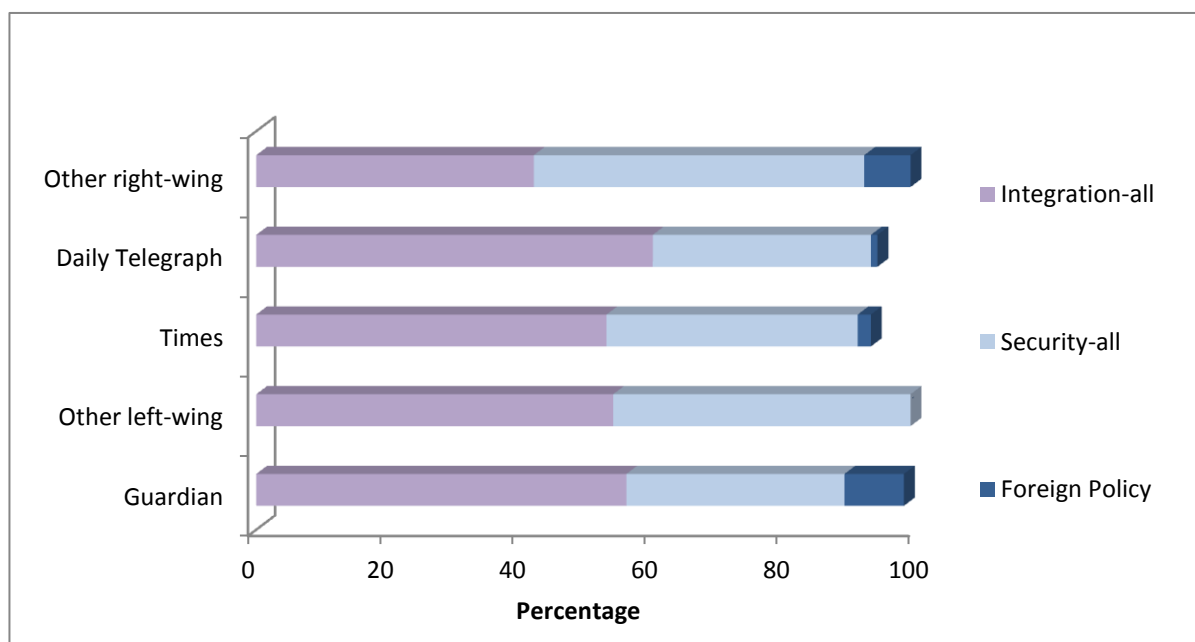


Figure 4: Positive and negative mentions of poll questions by theme and newspaper

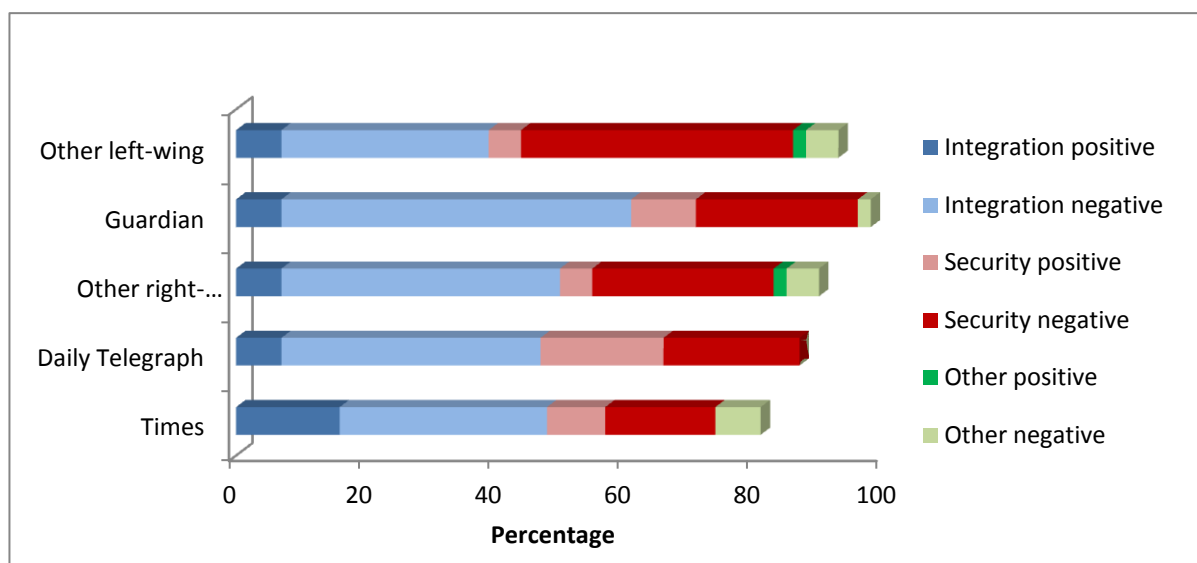


Figure 5: News-cycle and the polls: Security and Integration

