

KEY FINDINGS

DIALOGUE & DANGER: REPORT ON AMERICAN CATHOLIC PUBLIC OPINION AND PORTRAYALS OF ISLAM



AMERICAN CATHOLICS' VIEWS OF ISLAM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

- Nearly half of Catholics can't name any similarities between Catholicism and Islam, or say explicitly that there are no commonalities.
- When asked about their overall impression of Muslims, three in ten Catholics admit to having unfavorable views. Only 14% of Catholics say they have favorable views. 45% have "neither favorable nor unfavorable" views. 11% are unsure.
- Catholics are less likely than the general American public to know a Muslim personally.
- A majority of Catholics correctly identify prayer and fasting as important parts of Muslim life, but also incorrectly believe that Muslims worship the Prophet Muhammad.
- Catholics who know a Muslim personally, or who have participated in dialogue or community service with Muslims, often have very different views about Islam and interfaith dialogue than those who haven't interacted with Muslims.
- Those surveyed who consume content from Catholic media outlets have more unfavorable views of Muslims than those who don't.

CATHOLIC MEDIA OUTLETS' PORTRAYAL OF ISLAM ONLINE

- From October 2014 to September 2015, nearly 800 articles referencing Islam or Muslims appeared on major American Catholic websites.
- In prominent Catholic outlets, half of the time the word "Islamic" is used, it is in reference to the Islamic State terrorist group.
- The headlines of Catholic articles dealing with Islam have a negative sentiment overall, and the primary emotion conveyed is anger. Of the online Catholic outlets examined, *Catholic Answers* and *Catholic Culture* had the most negative sentiment in their titles related to Islam. Only one outlet had positive headlines about Islam: *American Catholic*.
- Often, the words, gestures, and activities of Pope Francis frame discussions of Islam in Catholic outlets. Mentioning Pope Francis often, or not at all, seems to impact the sentiment conveyed in headlines about Islam. The outlets with the most negative sentiment in their headlines about Islam were also those that mention Pope Francis the least, and the outlet with the most positive sentiment mentioned Pope Francis the most.

AMERICAN CATHOLIC BOOKS AND FOR-SALE RESOURCES OF ISLAM

- There are over 100 books, audio programs, and DVDs from American Catholic publishers that discuss Islam. Many of these attempt to introduce Catholics to Islam or compare Islam and Christianity.
- The two books on Islam sold by the most Catholic publishers are *Inside Islam*, by Daniel Ali and Robert Spencer, and *The Bible and the Qur'an* by Jacques Jomier.
- The top two words used in book titles about Islam are “world” and “dialogue,” suggesting that Islam is viewed a distant religion but one that Catholics can be connected to through conversation and relationship.
- Differences between Christianity and Islam are often highlighted in introductory and comparative materials. “Differences” is the most frequent word used in the descriptions of these books. Despite the emphasis on differences found in these materials, many of them still intend to encourage Catholic readers to dialogue and work with Muslims.
- The primary emotion in the titles of Catholic books on Islam is fear. The materials that introduce Catholics to Islam or compare Islam and Christianity have an overall negative sentiment in their titles.
- Authors of a plurality of introductory or comparative resources on Islam hoped their readers would engage in dialogue after reading their material. Others hoped readers would evangelize Muslims, grow in their faith, or judge Islam for themselves as a result of digesting the content.

CATHOLIC AUTHORS ON ISLAM & CONNECTIONS TO ISLAMOPHOBIA

- Prominent Catholic authors of introductory materials on Islam take varied approaches to the religion in their work, with some recounting their experiences of dialogue and others focusing on evangelization or how Islam is a threat.
- A number of individuals in the Islamophobia industry have impacted American Catholic discussions about Islam. In some cases, Catholic publishers, news outlets, and prominent figures have promoted their views. The work of author Robert Spencer, who leads an organization that has been named an anti-Muslim hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, has been distributed widely by Catholic outlets and institutions.
- Three Catholics who write regularly on Islam for Catholic outlets maintain connections to anti-Muslim groups and activists.

MATERIALS ON ISLAM IN D.C. CATHOLIC BOOKSTORES

- All three Catholic bookstores in Washington, D.C. sell multiple books on Islam, and say that providing an orthodox Catholic perspective is a criterion for the books they sell.
- Books by Robert Spencer are also sold at two of these bookstores, but it is unclear if those running the bookstores are familiar with his positions or activities.

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