

Australian Muslims support terrorism – or do we?

Early findings from the recent nation-wide study of 800 Australian Muslims funded by the government and conducted by Dr. Adrian Cherney & Associate Professor Kristina Murphy found that 79 per cent Muslims disagree or strongly disagree with a suggestion that terrorists have “legitimate grievances” among other finding such as 74 per cent Muslims supported anti-terror laws and same number feel that these law target Muslims. The full results of the survey will be release to public by the end of this month. However, the headlines in the major newspapers focused on one finding of 21 per cent who either agreed or strongly agree with the same statement. “Terrorists have valid grievances, say some Muslims” read the headline of the article about the survey result written by Rachel Olding in Sydney Morning Herald. The leader of self-proclaimed Anti-Islam hate group Q Society, Ms. Debbie Robinson used this to justify her theory that “21% of Muslims in Australia sympathize with Islamic terrorists and agree that terrorists have valid grievances”

Unfortunately it is this kind of selective reporting and fear mongering by mainstream media, which allows anti-Islam hate groups to garner more support through their sophisticated negative propaganda machine. The article by Rachel Olding is conveniently silent on the preliminary findings from one of the very first focus groups conducted early last year, where Dr. Cherney found that “Participants strongly condemned terrorist acts committed in the name of Islam and stated that such violence is not condoned by the Islamic religion” along with findings such as “It was stressed that Islamist terrorist groups were not true Muslims and distorted the meaning of Islamic principles.”. The same focus group also found that Muslims felt there was a “double standard in how terrorism was reported in the media and its association with Islam”. However, in her article Ms. Rachel did not consider this information relevant as it would run counter to the “scary” headline.

In any language, words and their placement out of context can be a very powerful tool to express a narrative. In this case the 21 per cent support is for “grievances” and not for “tactics” or “aspirations”. Most of the readers Ms. Rachel’s article will fail to make this distinction in interpreting these results especially when it’s loaded with fear filled headlines, followed by scaremongering by anti-Islam hate groups. The grievances, which most of the Muslim terrorist groups express are quite similar to grievances debated by wide range of people across the world, regardless of their faith or nationality. Some of these “legitimate grievances” are continuous support of Israeli occupation in Palestine, Invasion and occupation of Iraq using an unfounded claim of WMDs, Use of drones to commit extra judicial killings in foreign sovereign nations and support for dictators ruling most of the Muslim world. Change in ruling regimes and establishment of Islamic state are aspirations and using terrorism is a tactic.

Both the tactic and the aspirations are the result of lack of legitimate resolution to some of these legitimate grievances. It is scholarly research like this, which holds the solution to the “terrorism” or “radicalization” problem and to do so it is important that mainstream media is fair and balanced in reporting such information. While the policy makers do not make their decisions based on an article in

Sydney Morning Herald or Courier Mail, these newspapers play an important role in shaping public opinion and maintaining social cohesion, which has a direct impact on policy making.

The same article could have been reported with a different headline such as “74 per cent Muslims support anti-terror laws or “Terrorists don’t have valid grievances, say majority of Muslims”. According to some researchers 80 per cent people never make it past the headline while reading an online article and modern media relies on such lazy attitude to create lazy journalists, who rely on creative editors to come up with catchy headlines. Journalists and editors may or may not do this on purpose but the impact of these on social cohesion and world peace is significant. It is time that Journalists and editors take some responsibility of rising Islamophobia and anti-Islam sentiments in the west and think beyond the profit generated through distribution, TRPs or subscriptions.

<http://www.smh.com.au/national/terrorists-have-valid-grievances-say-some-muslims-20141009-113kzy.html>

<http://www.hass.uq.edu.au/article/2014/07/does-media-label-muslims-unfairly>

<http://morningmail.org/government-supported-muslim-myths/>

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