

UNDERSTANDING AND COMBATING ISLAMOPHOBIA

Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

Last updated: March 2024

What is in this resource?

As a student, faculty member, or staff member of the University of Waterloo, you have rights and responsibilities that are guided by various policies, regulations and legislations. The Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) is legislation that protects people in Ontario from discrimination and harassment, and that includes within organizations like the University of Waterloo. Under the OHRC, “discrimination because of creed is against the law.” The religion of Islam meets the OHRC criteria for an established creed, which makes Muslims a group protected by law against creed-based discrimination. This resource provides a historical background on Islamophobia and suggests further self-learning opportunities for students, staff, faculty and the rest of the community to combat it. This Islamophobia resource has been developed by the Office of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism at the University of Waterloo.

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What is Islamophobia?

“Islamophobia is racism, stereotypes, prejudice, fear, or acts of hostility directed towards individual Muslims or followers of Islam in general. In addition to individual acts of intolerance and racial profiling, Islamophobia can lead to viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat on an institutional, systemic, and societal level” (King's Printer for Ontario, 2018).

According to surveys conducted by the Angus Reid Institute and Canada Race Relations Foundation, a significant proportion of the public hold unfavourable views of Islam and Muslims (ARI, 2017; Georgetown University, 2019):

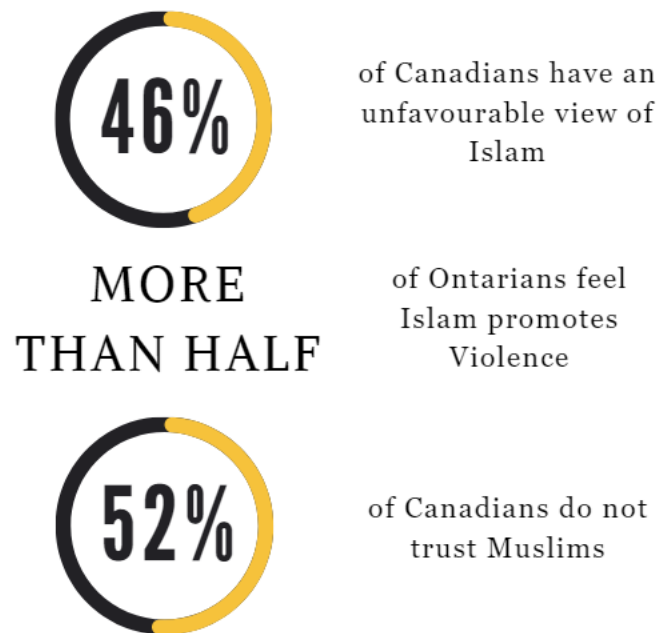


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History of Islamophobia in Canada

While the earliest use of the term Islamophobia is said to be in the 1923 *Journal of Theological Studies* (Yaqzan, 2018), there has been historical oppression of Muslim communities in Canada since World War I. The SS Komagata Maru was a chartered ship carrying Punjabi political refugees trying to escape the oppressive British rule in South Asia. In 1914, they sailed to Canada seeking asylum, only to be turned away at the Vancouver harbour. The refugees were given no choice but to return to India, where many of them were brutally murdered or detained by authorities. 27 of the 376 passengers were of Muslim descent (Johnston, 2006).

During World War I, the Canadian government implemented the War Measures Act, which led to the internment of many immigrants from the Ottoman Empire, including the population of Sunni Muslims. This led to hundreds of Ottoman-Canadians being forced into internment camps or forced to carry identity cards to notify authorities of their ethno-religious heritage (Acehan, 2015).

The internment particularly affected the Turkish Muslim labourers of Brantford, Ontario. In November 1914, they were rounded up in the middle of the night and transferred to the internment camp in Kapuskasing. Once the World War I had ended, none of the Muslims returned to Brantford. After the end of World War II, the Canadian government ordered that all the records related to the Kapuskasing prisoners be destroyed (Yaqzan, 2018). To this day, the destruction of wartime records regarding the Canadian treatment of Muslims has made it incredibly difficult to learn about the true reality of historical Islamophobia.

Studies have shown that following 9/11, Islamophobic hate crimes skyrocketed in Europe and North America; the Canadian Islamic Congress reported a 1600% increase in the annual incidence of anti-Muslim hate crime reported to them, just a year after 9/11 (Perry & Poynting, 2006). It is also important to note that Islamophobic incidents often go underreported. 47% of reported Islamophobic hate crimes were committed against Muslim women, highlighting the gendered nature of Islamophobia (Souissi, 2021). It operates to further characterize stereotypes about Muslim men as violent terrorists and patriarchs; and Muslim women as subjugated victims (Kanji, 2020).

Islamophobia only continues to grow in Canada. In 2017, one of the deadliest mass shootings and terrorist attacks in Canadian history occurred at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City. On January 29th, 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette entered the Islamic Cultural Centre, killed six Muslim men, and critically injured five other Muslim individuals. During the court trial, it was found that Bissonnette was an avid follower of radical right-wing and white supremacist figures (Montpetit, 2019). Four years later in London, Ontario, a Pakistani-Canadian family was murdered in an Islamophobic terror attack involving a speeding truck; the youngest, a nine-year old boy was the sole survivor. While these attacks were perpetuated by right-wing Islamophobes, it is not only the far-right that hold anti-Muslim sentiments. In 2017, almost 25% of Canadians favoured a ban on Muslim immigration (Hinkson & Laframboise, 2017).



What perpetuates Islamophobia?

Through multiple avenues, Islamophobic rhetoric has been most intensely perpetuated by five contemporary sources (The Council of American Islamic Relations, n.d.)

MEDIA REPRESENTATION	POLITICAL RHETORIC	VIOLENT EXTREMISTS	AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY	U.S. ISLAMOPHOBIA NETWORK
U.S. and Canadian media sensationalize negative coverage of Muslims to create moral panic. The Washington Post found that 12% of domestic attacks conducted by Muslims received, on average, 449 percent more media coverage than 88 percent of attacks committed by others.	Politicians exploit public fears to instigate Islamophobia, serving their own political interests	The West takes extremist groups, such as ISIS, and paints them as the norm— using them to justify Islamophobia against all Muslims	Islamophobia is used to justify oppressive foreign policies in Muslim-majority regions. For example, George Bush’s War on Terror decimated Iraq and led to higher rates of Islamophobic violence	A multi-million-dollar network of organizations and individuals who work to demonize Muslims as an existential threat, promoting discrimination and oppression towards Islam and its practitioners

What does the legislation say about Islamophobia?

According to section 15 of the **Canadian Character of Rights and Freedoms**, “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability”. Additionally, section 2(a) addresses the freedom of conscience and religion.

The Ontario Human Rights Code (OHRC) lists **creed** as one of the protected grounds, stating, “people who follow a creed, and people who do not, have the right to live in a society that respects pluralism and human rights and the right to follow different creeds”. In the OHRC, creed is defined as a belief system that:

- Is sincerely, freely, and deeply held.
- Is integrally linked to a person’s identity, self-definition, and fulfilment.
- Is a particular and comprehensive, overarching system of belief that governs one’s conduct and practices.
- Addresses ultimate questions of human existence, including ideas about life, purpose, death, and the existence or non-existence of a Creator and/or a higher or different order of existence.
- Has some “nexus” or connection to an organization or community that professes a shared system of belief.



Tangible actions to combat Islamophobia

AS STUDENTS

- Support Muslim peers and call out Islamophobic behaviour if it feels safe to do so.
 - Learn about Bystander Intervention Tools such as the **5 D's**
 - Check in with your Muslim friends and peers.
- Watch, listen, and read more Muslim-led media.
- Unlearn your own implicit biases so that you can stand in solidarity with Muslim communities.
- Learn how to have the difficult conversations with the people in your life.

AS STAFF AND FACULTY

- Teaching and employing cultural relativism into your curriculum and managing styles.
 - **Helping Students Deal with Trauma Related to Geopolitical Violence & Islamophobia Guide**
- Include a variety of Muslim writers and academics in course materials.
 - Look at intersectional Muslim creators as well.
- Acknowledge and accommodate religious holidays.

AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- Educate yourself on Islamic realities and what Islamophobic myths look like so that you can call them out.
- Join interfaith organizations or participate in interfaith events.
 - **Intercultural Dialogue Institute & Grand River Friendship Society**
- Join cross-cultural solidarity movements.
 - **Coalition Building Among People of Colour**
- Attend Muslim knowledge events when you can. If you are non-Muslim, make sure not to encroach on Muslim-only spaces.
- Participate in ongoing Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Anti-racism training and workshops.
 - **University of Waterloo Workshops**
- Engage in mutual aid supporting vulnerable Muslim populations whenever the opportunity arises.
- Center the voices of Muslims and give them the space to speak for themselves, but also be willing to amplify their voices.



Muslim organizations to learn from and support

- [Canadian Council Muslim Women](#)
- [Coalition of Muslim Women Kitchener Waterloo](#)
- [Muslim](#)
- [Muslim Social Services Waterloo](#)
- [Noor Cultural Centre](#)
- [Salaam Canada](#)
- [University of Waterloo Muslim Students' Association](#)

Further learnings

- [BRIDGE Georgetown University Initiative](#)
 - A factsheet listing organizations that address and combat Islamophobia.
- [Islamophobia](#)
 - A guide put together by the City of Toronto to address Islamophobia and how to support Muslim communities.
- [On the Borderzone: Toronto's Diasporic Queer Muslims](#)
 - Nayrouz Abu-Hatoum's Master's thesis on the experiences of "home" and "exile" felt within the Muslim Queer community in Toronto.
- [Factsheets - Bridge Initiative \(georgetown.edu\)](#)
 - A series of Islamophobia fact sheets put together by Wilfred Laurier University's Canadian Islamophobia Industry Research Project team in partnership with The Bridge Initiative at Georgetown University.



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