**Background on GDELT**

The Global Database of Events, Language and Tone (GDELT) is a rich source of information about the news since 1979 and will form the basis of this project. It extracts and collates news data every fifteen minutes, meaning that it is up-to-date and has high resolution data (GDELT, 2017). One of the important aspects of this project is that it will be contributing to the current body of work that employs the GDELT. The majority of the studies conducted using GDELT have been concerned with a single event, such as a natural disaster or political unrest, and the reporting patterns surrounding it (for example, Yonamine, 2013; Kwak and An, 2014), while this project aims to use this database to gain insight into a longer-term trend. This means it can function as a new type of quality test of GDELT itself, as it demands temporal consistency, which was not integral to other work conducted using the data.

At present, the meta studies on GDELT, suggest that it is limited by the fact that it is not exhaustive. It focuses on major news outlets and often has poor coverage for older events (Hammond and Weidmann, 2014). This is something that will need to be noted as the research progresses, not only in terms of the validity of the results but also as an evaluation of GDELT itself.

**Background on Islamophobia**

Islamophobia in the West

The most popular current discourses on Islamophobia, are concerned with prejudice against Muslims in a strictly Western setting (Allen, 2016). The Runnymede Trust defines Islamophobia as “a useful shorthand way of referring to dread or hatred of Islam – and therefore, to fear or dislike all or most Muslims” (1997:1).

Although the concept is not new, its recent resurgence can be attributed to the September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City (Doyle and Ahmad, 2013). Following this, there was a notable change in the discourse surrounding Islam in the West; particularly, it encouraged an increased focus on securitisation (Allen, 2010).

Vakil (2010) notes that the origins of the term ‘Islamophobia’ come from critics of the French Empire at the end of the First World War. It was used to question France’s rejection of the Muslims who had died for the country during the War.

Doyle and Ahmad (2013) also highlight that Islamophobia is linked to Europe’s secular, liberal identity.

On the individual level, Allen (2010) notes that there has been rise in hate crimes committed against Muslim people, especially women wearing Hijabs. And, more insidiously, they are also subject to negative stereotyping and profiling (EUMC, 2007). However, this dissertation will focus on the macro-level discourses of the state and the media.

The concept of Islamophobia is often framed in antithesis to the Western world (Doyle and Ahmad, 2013). There are two ways in which this is done. Either, Islam is seen as an international problem, invoking phrases such as “threat to national security” (Bell, 2006:66). In these cases, Islam is geographically placed in the Middle East, and there is a sense of physical distance from the West (Ahmad, 2013; Taras, 2013). The other way in which it is often framed is as an immigration issue: the fear is that, as Muslims enter the country, they change the cultural landscape and compromise its secularity. For example, Brubaker (2012) discusses how ‘Muslim’ is increasingly becoming conflated with certain nationalities in the context of border control, and how the definition ‘Muslim’ has begun to take precedence over other attributes, such as race and nationality.

The Western media

The primary inspiration for this dissertation is the 2018 paper by Kearns *et al*., which discusses the disparity in coverage of terrorist attacks in the US depending on the perpetrator’s religious affiliations. It finds that, in the past decade, terrorist attacks committed by Muslims were overreported by 357% as compared to those committed by members of other or no religious affiliation.

There have also been many qualitative studies, focusing more on nuances in tone in articles written about Muslim people. For example, Sayeed (2007) finds similarities in the British media between the tone used to discuss British Muslims as with non-British peoples, suggesting that they are still framed as ‘the other’ in media discourse. Similarly, Aly (2007) argues that one of the main issues is the lack of diversity in the way Muslims are portrayed, stating that the Australian media is prone to treating them as a “monolith” (p.28). On the other hand, many studies also focus on the way the Western media conflates the Muslim ideology with the ‘War on Terror’ (Morgan, 2016; Kassimeris and Jackson, 2011).

Islamophobia in India

On the other hand, Islamophobia has a long history outside the West that is unrelated to the September 11th attacks but have resulted in contemporary societies in which Muslims face systemic oppression. China (Luqiu and Yang, 2018), India (Abadi *et al.*, 2004), and Myannmar (Kyaw, 2015) all exhibit tense relations between the majority group and Muslims. India, in particular, is interesting as the conflicts between Hindus and Muslims (the country’s two major religion groups) have been a defining aspect of India’s political landscape longer than the state has existed (van der Meer, 1994). There is evidence of tense relations between Hindus and Muslims in the Indus region dating back to 1526 (van der Meer, 1994), long before the India was unified while under the British rule. However, Talbot (1995) notes that the power relations between these groups were different then as many parts of the Indian Subcontinent were under Muslim political rule.

This changed with as India became a British colony, during which time, Hinduism gained dominance due to the sheer population difference between the two groups (Talbot, 1996). This culminated in the partition of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh as the government was unable to control the violence between the two religious groups (Varshney, 2003). Post-partition, Hinduism became even more dominant in India, both in terms of cultural norms and political discourse (van der Meer, 1994). However, many Muslims remained in India post-partition, making up as much as 14.2% of the population (India Census, 2011). Despite this, they have often faced social and political discrimination (Sen, 2005), this has been exacerbated in recent years as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gainedpower in 2014 (The Times of India, 2014). The BJP brand themselves as a secular government but have received criticism for embracing the *Hindutva* ideology, which favours the Hinduism over other religions and brands that as ‘essentially Indian’ (Guha, 2007). Historically, they have enacted laws that make further restrict the religious expression of Muslims (Sen, 2005) and their recent election has corresponded with an increase in hate crimes against Muslims (Amnesty, 2017).

Indian media

The scholarship surrounding the representation of Muslims in Indian media also tends to focus on qualitative approaches. Ludden (1996) finds that Muslims are often portrayed as wealthy, and volatile leaders in fiction, potentially contributing the narrative that India’s future is more secure in the hands of a Hindu leader. However, Ludden (1996) notes that the BJP tries to distance itself from such conversations and avoids commenting on the issue. Similarly, Narayana and Kapur (2011) highlight that India has a free press, meaning that we must be wary of conflating the popular sociocultural discourse with politics.

There is limited literature that takes a quantitative approach to studying bias in Indian news media. Narayana and Kapur (2011) use text analysis to assess the popular narratives surrounding Muslim Indians in the Indian press. Meanwhile, other studies employ techniques such as discourse analysis as their tools of analysis. Therefore, this research will be one of the first of its kind, focusing on a more statistical approach to studying bias in press coverage.

**Preliminary results**

*Table 1: Summary statistics of the mentions of an event in the first 15 minutes after the event takes place.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Min.** | **1st Qu.** | **Median** | **Mean** | **3rd Qu.** | **Max.** |
| **Muslim** | 1.000 | 2.000 | 6.000 | 6.191 | 10.000 | 56.000 |
| **Non-Muslim** | 1.000 | 2.000 | 6.000 | 6.178 | 10.000 | 160.000 |

Table 1 indicates that there we do not see substantial differences between the coverage of person-on-person violence in Indian media. However, the results above have several caveats. First, these results only concern news articles published within the fifteen minutes of the news breaking. They also do not account for the severity of the crime, not does it separate different types of person-on-person violence. Moreover, it is generalising across the period of study as well as the country, which would include a diverse range of attitudes towards Muslims.

The next steps would be to find counts of all news article published for each event, including op-ed pieces, which are not included in the current sample. I would then consider analysing temporal and geographic subsets of the data to look for variations across India over time. I will also separate the sources of the news reports by domestic and foreign, to investigate the differences in the bias at the local and international levels.