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Islamophobia and Media Portrayals of Muslim Women: A Computational Text Analysis of US News Coverage

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This article examines portrayals of Muslim women in US news media. I test two hypotheses derived from theories of gendered orientalism. First, US news coverage of women abroad is driven by confirmation bias. Journalists are more likely to report on women living in Muslim and Middle Eastern countries if their rights are violated but report on women in other societies when their rights are respected. Second, stories about Muslim women emphasize the theme of women's rights violations and gender inequality, even for countries with relatively good records of women's rights. Stories about non-Muslim women, on the other hand, emphasize other topics. I test these hypotheses on data from thirty-five years of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reporting using a structural topic model along with statistical analysis. The results suggest that US news media propagate the perception that Muslims are distinctly sexist. This, in turn, may shape public attitudes toward Muslims, as well as influence policies that involve Muslims at home and abroad.

> "56 percent of Americans believe the Syrian refugees' values are at odds with our values. That may not be wrong. If you are in this religion [Islam], you probably do have values that are at odds.… Uh, killing women for being raped, I would say is a bad idea. Yeah, I do. Hang me for it."
>
> –Bill Maher, *Real Time,* November 20, 2015

> "These kinds of conversations that we're having aren't really being had in any kind of legitimate way. We're not talking about women in the Muslim world. We're using two or three examples to justify a generalization—that's actually the definition of bigotry."
>
> –Reza Aslan, *CNN Tonight,* September 29, 2014

Public hostility toward Muslims appears to be on the rise in the United States. The most common explanation for this growing antipathy centers on the perceived link between Muslims and terrorism. Many blame the media for reinforcing this association in the American public consciousness. Indeed, various media outlets frequently connect Muslims with political violence and terrorism (Alsultany 2012; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Powell 2011; Shaheen 2003). Such portrayals, scholars argue, influence public opinion concerning both Muslim-Americans and policies affecting Muslims at home and abroad (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, and Vermeulen 2009; Kalkan, Layman and Uslaner 2009; Nisbet, Ostman, and Shanahan 2008; Saleem and Anderson 2013; Saleem, Prot, Anderson and Lemieux 2015; Saleem, Yang, and Ramasubramanian 2016).

However, recent findings suggest that the perception of Muslims as a cultural threat may generate more anti-Muslim hostility than their association with terrorism. Public opinion data reveal growing anxiety about Islam's compatibility with "Western" values such as tolerance, equality, and civility (Panagopoulos 2006, 613). Further, people who see Muslims as culturally distinctive are more likely to hold negative attitudes toward them (Ciftci 2012, 303). And yet few studies systematically examine the origins of this perception in media portrayals.

Drawing on the theory of gendered orientalism, I identify an important aspect of media coverage that perpetuates the stereotype of Muslims as a cultural threat: representations of women and gender inequality. According to the theory, US media outlets cast Muslim societies as distinctly misogynistic. In doing so, they reinforce general stereotypes of Muslims as uncivilized, barbaric, and a threat to Western values. This argument serves as the bedrock for a vast literature spanning many disciplines, but remains unverified against a large dataset. Harnessing recent advances in computational text analysis, I test this argument on thirty-five years of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* reporting about women abroad. Specifically, I employ a structural topic model, an unsupervised machine learning technique that enables researchers to categorize texts on a large scale. Along with statistical analysis, this method facilitates a systematic comparison of both the quantity and substance of media coverage.

My analysis produces two main findings. First, it reveals that Muslim women (defined as women from Muslim-majority or Middle Eastern societies) are more likely to appear in the US press if they live in societies with poor records of women's rights.[1] Non-Muslim women, on the other hand, are more likely to appear in the media in contexts where their rights are respected. This suggests a kind of confirmation bias, whereby Muslim women are associated with countries that violate women's rights, whereas

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[1] Throughout this article, I use the phrase "Muslim women" as a shorthand to refer to women living in Muslim-majority or Middle Eastern countries. I do not presume to know these women's religious identity. Due the predominate associations in the American consciousness, however, I assume these women are "read" as Muslim by American readers. Nevertheless, as a robustness check, I use three different metrics throughout the analysis corresponding to Muslim demographics or the geographic region of interest.

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non-Muslim women are associated with countries that respect their rights.

Second, US news media tend to frame reporting about women in Muslim societies around the specific issue of women's rights and gender discrimination at the expense of other topics. This framing is biased on two accounts. First, it reflects an intergroup bias by presenting Muslim societies as more discriminatory than non-Muslim societies. Second, it reflects an inter-reality bias insofar as this differential remains even after controlling for the real-world conditions of women's status in the reported country. In other words, stories about women in Muslim countries more frequently feature content about systemic gender inequality, even for countries with relatively good records of women's rights.

Together, the findings shed light on an important aspect of Muslim stereotypes in the US media. They also contribute to longstanding debates in the realm of political communication concerning subtle or indirect media stereotypes and their influence on public opinion of groups and policies. Just as stories about crime shape public opinion of African Americans (Dixon and Linz 2000; Entman 1992; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Peffley, Shields, and Williams 1996) and social welfare policies (Gilens 1996a, 1996b; Kellstedt 2000; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002), stories about gender inequality may shape public opinion of Muslims and the War on Terror. Although I do not tackle media effects directly, this study identifies a key mechanism whereby media portrayals construct stereotypes of Muslims as a cultural threat.

Media Stereotypes of Muslims and Public Opinion

Generally speaking, Americans view Muslims much less favorably than other religious and racial minorities (Pew Research Center 2014). The most common explanation for this disfavor centers on the perceived link between Muslims and terrorism, spurred in large part by the attacks on 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror. Scholars devote special attention to the role of mass media in propagating and solidifying this association in the American public consciousness. Various outlets—including newspapers, television, movies, and video games—frequently portray Muslims as violent, aggressive, and drawn to terrorism (Alsultany 2012; Dixon and Williams 2015; Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007; Powell 2011; Shaheen 2003). Even when these portrayals concern people in far-off places, they potentially shape attitudes toward Muslim minorities in the West because media consumers generally do not differentiate between Muslims at home and Muslims abroad (Sides and Gross 2013, 588).

Importantly, a number of correlational and experimental studies demonstrate the impact of negative media portrayals of Muslims on public opinion (Das et al. 2009; Kalkan et al. 2009; Nisbet et al. 2008; Saleem and Anderson 2013; Saleem et al. 2015; Saleem et al. 2016). These media effects go beyond generic attitudes; they shape support for specific policies. For instance, exposure to media stereotypes of Muslims as violent increases Americans' support for public policies that harm Muslims, such as military action abroad and civil restrictions at home (Saleem et al. 2015; Sides and Gross 2013). In fact, the media exerts a stronger influence on negative attitudes of Muslims than other informational sources, which is unsurprising considering that most Americans lack direct contact with Muslims in their daily lives (Kalkan et al. 2009, 859; Saleem et al. 2016).

However, while the majority of research focuses on the association of Muslims with political terrorism, recent findings suggest that public opinion is more influenced by the perception of Muslims as a cultural—and not necessarily political—threat. Public opinion data reveal growing anxiety about Islam's compatibility with Western values of tolerance, equality, and civility (Panagopoulos 2006, 613). This is important because studies have shown that American feelings about Muslims are more closely related to cultural outgroups than racial/religious minorities (Kalkan et al. 2009). Furthermore, people who believe that Muslims remain culturally distinct from mainstream society are more likely to have negative attitudes about them and associate Islam with violence, terrorism, and extremism (Ciftci 2012, 303). However, despite evidence that media coverage of Muslims has increasingly turned toward stories focusing on religious and cultural differences between Islam and the West (Moore, Mason, and Lewis 2008, 3), few studies have systematically examined the origins of this perception—Muslims as a cultural "other"—in media portrayals.

Islamophobia and Gendered Orientalism

In the last three decades, a large theoretical literature has developed critiquing Western portrayals of Muslim and Middle Eastern culture, religion, and society. Much of this scholarship is indebted to Edward Said's groundbreaking *Orientalism,* which critiqued historical Western representations of the "Orient" that were structured by Manichean binaries separating the civilized "West" from the barbaric "East" (Said 1979). For Said, the significance of orientalism went beyond mere representation. At its core, orientalism was (and is) a form of knowledge production that affirmed Western cultural and political superiority, thus legitimizing colonial rule over Muslim lands in the name of modernity, civilization, and progress.

One of the most insidious aspects of orientalism concerns representations of women and gender relations, or "gendered orientalism." Historically speaking, women's oppression served as a central trope in colonial discourse. Practices such as footbinding (Teng 1996), female genital mutilation (Wade 2009), and sati (Mani 1987) exemplified what colonial discourse presented as the inherently barbaric and degenerate culture of colonized peoples. As part of their civilizing mission, European colonizers sought to "free" these oppressed women from their traditional ways of life (Chatterjee 1989; McClintock 2013).[2] In sum, gendered orientalism occupied a central place in colonial and imperial projects that structured Western-Muslim relations in the modern era.

Since 9/11, the study of orientalism has undergone a significant revival, driven by scholars who see "neo-orientalism" at work in the War on Terror and related political developments. The literature on gendered orientalism has been particularly rich, arguing that contemporary portrayals of Muslim women work to stigmatize Islam as inherently barbaric, violent, and undemocratic.[3] While the literature spans multiple disciplines, theoretical approaches, and empirical territory, scholars converge on three modal claims.

First, American media discourse is purportedly obsessed with Muslim women's oppression, for which the veil represents the ultimate symbol and case in point

[2] Considering the centrality of women in colonial discourse, anti-colonial and self-determination movements also placed gender at the core of their ideology, using women's bodies as the bearers for tradition, cultural authenticity, and national identity (Chatterjee 1993; Moallem 2005; Najmabadi 1991; Yuval-Davis 1993).

[3] For helpful reviews, see Abu-Lughod (2001) and Charrad (2011).

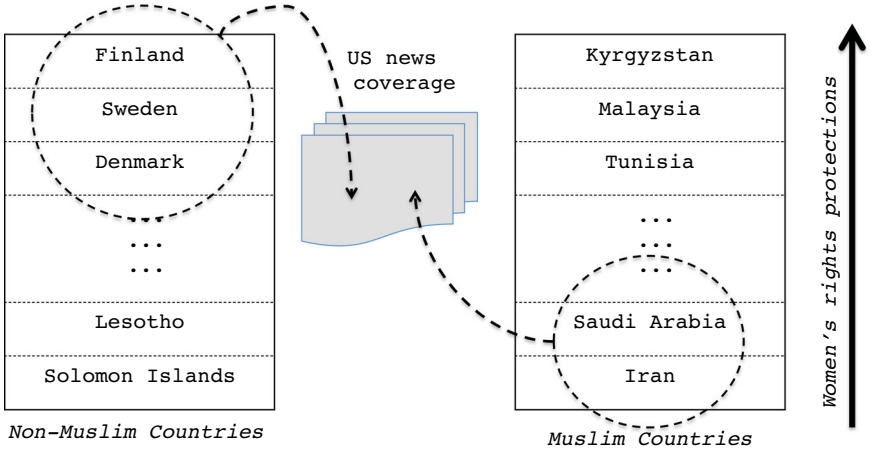

Figure 1. Hypothesis 1 (confirmation bias)
Note: Arrows represent higher quantities of articles about women in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Rankings and estimates are for illustrative purposes only.

(Macdonald 2006, 8). Popular media outlets portray Middle Eastern and Muslim societies as distinctly misogynistic, especially compared to Western countries. They further ascribe this misogyny to Islam and/or Arab culture, cast as inherently sexist and discriminatory against women (Ahmad 2009; Bahramitash 2005; Mahmood 2008). Not only is this narrative simplistic and sensationalist, it conflicts with the reality of women's lives insofar as it inaccurately depicts the degree and origins of Muslim women's suffering (Abu-Lughod 2013). Furthermore, these portrayals deny Muslim women's agency by reducing their lives to totalizing oppression (Mahmood 2011), while demonizing Muslim, Arab, and Middle Eastern men as inherently barbaric and cruel (Bhattacharyya 2008; Puar 2007).

Second, American media discourse tends to compare the lives of Muslim women to those of Western women, who are portrayed by contrast as liberated and free of sexist constraints (Yegenoglu 1998). This dichotomy justifies a rescue mission by which Western feminists must "save" Muslim women from their oppressive religion, culture, or traditions (Abu-Lughod 2002). The "savior" narrative has been heavily denounced as paternalistic and imperialist (Abu-Lughod 2002; Cooke 2002; Mohanty 2003).

Third, the need to "save" Muslim women, bolstered by American media portrayals, justifies undesirable political projects at home and abroad (Kapur 2002, 219–23; Mahmood 2008; Maira 2009; Razack 2008). The increased coverage of Afghan women post-9/11 represents an oft-cited case in point (Cloud 2004; Fowler 2013; Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002; Klaus and Kassel 2005; Shepherd 2006; Stabile and Kumar 2005). One implication is that US media coverage of Muslim women pertains to public policies that concern Muslims generally, both at home and abroad.

In short, gendered orientalism concludes that American media coverage casts Muslims as distinctly misogynistic, which reinforces stereotypes of Muslims generally as uncivilized, barbaric, and a cultural threat to Western values. But while rising to the level of common sense in some disciplines, the argument meets with suspicion in others, perhaps due to the literature's general prioritization of theoretical innovation over empirical findings. Notwithstanding a number of rich qualitative studies, we have yet to see an analysis that effectively tests these claims against a large dataset.

Hypotheses

If the gendered orientalism argument were true, how would we know? This section derives two falsifiable hypotheses from the theory. The first concerns the discursive binary separating oppressed Muslim women from liberated Western women. Few scholars of gendered orientalism would deny the existence of sexism or gender inequality in Middle Eastern or Muslim societies. But they would argue that US observers tend to notice gender inequality in the Muslim world more often because it corresponds to their pre-established biases. In contrast, the West (and the non-Muslim world in general) represents a haven for gender equality. In this way, US media outlets reinforce the stereotype linking Islam with women's oppression by disproportionately reporting gender inequality from the Muslim world.

This implies a testable hypothesis concerning the geographic focus in US news reporting of women abroad. Muslim women are more likely to make the news if they live in societies that violate their rights. In other words, countries like Iran and Saudi Arabia are featured in greater quantities, while those nations with relatively good records—such as Malaysia and Tunisia—are shown less often. On the other hand, the pattern reverses for stories about non-Muslim countries. Here, media outlets ignore non-Muslim countries that do poorly on women's rights—such as Lesotho and Solomon Islands—while spotlighting more egalitarian nations.

More formally, the effect of women's rights on the likelihood of coverage is conditional on whether the country is Muslim or Middle Eastern (see Figure 1). I call this the "confirmation bias" hypothesis because it involves the tendency for media to report information confirming the idea that Muslim women live in societies that violate their rights, while giving less attention to alternative possibilities. This is not to say that all stories about Muslim women pertain to gender inequality. But if the majority of news portrayals of Muslim women concern Taliban-era Afghanistan (or other societies with poor respect of women's rights), a reader might build

the association of Muslim women with a lack of rights regardless of the topic.

H1a: *Muslim women are more likely to make the news if they live in societies that violate their rights.*

H1b: *Non-Muslim women are more likely to make the news if they live in societies that respect their rights.*

The first hypothesis concerns the quantity of coverage. A second possible mechanism involves the quality or framing of such coverage. According to the theory, stories about Muslim women reduce their entire lives to oppression and inequality (Abu-Lughod 2013; Ryan 2011). Even women who live in relatively egalitarian societies are portrayed as oppressed if they are Muslim. Non-Muslim women, on the other hand, are depicted in greater dimensions and with more complexity.

This, too, generates a testable hypothesis. Coverage of women may assume a variety of content, from rights and equality to sports, fashion, politics, etc. If we believe the gender orientalist argument, however, we would expect coverage of Muslim women to feature a more concentrated discussion of one issue in particular—women's rights and gender inequality—compared to coverage of non-Muslim women. We would also expect this disparity in content to be driven by bias, not the reality of women's rights and gender discrimination on the ground.

H2: *All else equal, coverage of Muslim women focuses more on "women's rights and gender discrimination" than coverage of non-Muslim women.*

Note that, unlike the first hypothesis involving an interaction effect (the relationship between women's rights and likelihood of coverage is conditional on whether the observation is a Muslim country), Hypothesis 2 contains a more straightforward comparison of topical content. Here, we expect coverage of Muslim countries to focus predominately on "women's rights and gender equality," regardless of these countries' records with regards to women's rights. I label this the "reduction" hypothesis since it claims that women in Muslim countries are reduced to their (lack of) rights.

Data

The primary data used in this study consists of all articles about women in non-US countries that were published in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* between 1980 and 2014. Clearly, inferences drawn from this data cannot be straightforwardly applied to American media writ large. With that reservation, I maintain three reasons to value this sample. First, the thirty-five-year range includes enough temporal variation to validly test the hypotheses raised above. Second, these two outlets represent "papers of record," that is, the most prominent, accurate, and influential of US news outlets. Other media outlets, including print and television news, rely on the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* for their reporting (Schraeder and Endless 1998). Lastly, and importantly, these sources constitute a "hard test" of the hypotheses by virtue of their sober, and relatively liberal, reputation. We would expect to find anti-Muslim stereotypes in more sensationalist media outlets, as well as those with a more conservative outlook.[4]

Using the LexisNexis database, I downloaded all articles containing the subject term "women" from these outlets during the specified time period. Subject terms are derived from LexisNexis's SmartIndexing technology, which applies controlled vocabulary terms for different taxonomies such as subject, geographic region, language, etc. In addition to subject, documents contain country terms along with a relevance score (how important or salient each country is to a document). Scores of 85 percent or higher indicate a major term. I assign each article to a single country using its most salient country term if that term has a relevance score of 85 percent or higher.[5] Because this study explores US media representation of women abroad, I discarded all articles primarily about the United States.[6] The final sample includes 4,531 documents: 3,726 from the *New York Times* and 805 from the *Washington Post*.

I then aggregated these data to a country-year format, with each document assigned an observation based on the year in which it was published and the country it concerned. The country-year dataset includes all current and historic UN states, plus Palestine but excluding the United States, for a total of 199 countries and 6,292 observations. I also assigned a regional classification based on Hafner-Burton and Ron's (2013) six regional groupings: Powerful West (*West*) with twenty-eight countries; Asia (*Asia*) with thirty-three countries, including Pakistan; Latin America (*LA*) with thirty-three countries; the Middle East and North Africa (*MENA*) with twenty-two countries, including Afghanistan; Sub-Saharan Africa (*Africa*), with forty-six countries; and the Eastern Europe/Central Asia (*EECA*) with thirty-one countries.[7]

Modeling Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis concerns the geographic distribution of US media attention toward women abroad. When discussing the world's women, which societies do media feature and which do they ignore? Here, the dependent variable is likelihood of coverage, operationalized in one of two ways. *Reported* (*Binary*) indicates whether a country-year observation featured at least one article in the sample (true in 1,451 cases). *Reported* (*Count*) measures the total number of articles published for that observation.

The main explanatory variable in Hypothesis 1 is the state of women's rights protections for a given country-year. Estimating the real-world conditions of women's rights presents a number of conceptual difficulties (Peksen 2011). While recognizing the limitations of such a measure, I rely on the popular Cingranelli-Richards Rights Index (CIRI), which

[4] Public opinion data demonstrate that views towards of Muslims are divided among party lines, with Republicans having a more negative opinion (Telhami 2015). Although both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* have been criticized for their reporting of Muslims (most notably in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), other outlets—especially Fox News—are considered more hostile (Nacos and Torres-Reyna 2007, 107).

[5] Some articles contained more than one major country term; in these cases, I took the term with the highest relevance score. These cases accounted for only 9 percent of the corpus. Articles with missing major country terms were discarded.

[6] The exclusion of the United States warrants further explanation. There are both empirical and theoretical justifications for removing this set of articles. Empirically, the vast majority of articles in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* are about the United States. In fact, approximately 88% of the original sample pertains to domestic issues. Including these articles would risk biasing the statistical results in favor of the United States and its particular characteristics. Second, there exists a theoretical trade-off, insofar as media consumers read domestic coverage very differently than foreign news coverage. Testing gendered orientalism in a domestic context would require filtering stories about Muslim women from non-Muslim women living in the United States. While it involves a significantly different empirical setup than the one used in this study, future research could explore this angle.

[7] See the online appendix for details on these groupings.

culls data from the US State Department's annual human rights country reports.[8] CIRI offers three variables capturing women's rights as they are affected in law and practice: *Women's Economic Rights*, *Women's Political Rights*, and *Women's Social Rights*.[9] Each variable contains an ordinal measure ranging from 0 (women's rights were not guaranteed by law during a given year) to 3 (women's rights were guaranteed in both law and practice.) The composite variable *Women's Rights Index* estimates the overall situation of women's rights by taking the mean of these three indicators for each observation.

Hypothesis 1 claims that the effect of women's rights protections on the likelihood of coverage is conditional on whether the unit of observation is a Muslim or Middle East country. The model therefore requires an interaction term.[10] The moderating variable indicates whether the observation is a Muslim or Middle Eastern country and is operationalized in one of three ways: *Percentage Muslim* captures the percent population that is Muslim according to the Pew Research Center (2010). The dichotomous *Muslim Majority* indicates whether *Percentage Muslim* is 50 percent or above. The dichotomous *MENA* indicates whether a country is included in the Middle East and North Africa regional classification described above. I estimate models with all three variables to ensure my results hold against alternative measures.

I also include a number of controls that may affect the likelihood of coverage. One straightforward alternative explanation suggests that reporting about women is proportional to general news coverage. For instance, the *New York Times* may publish a lot of articles about women in Afghanistan because they report a great deal about Afghanistan in general. To account for this possibility, the variable *Country Reports* records the number of articles that appear in the *New York Times* in a particular country-year, including those unrelated to the subject "women." We would expect that women-focused coverage correlates with overall coverage for a given country-year.

On the other hand, reporting about women may exhibit special features that distinguish it from general reporting. Journalists may treat stories about women as "soft" news, requiring more personal interviews and field research than "hard" news items. Thus reporters may find it difficult to report on women in authoritarian countries, which tend to restrict freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press. To account for this possibility, I include a *Democracy* variable from the Polity IV dataset's Polity2 index (Marshall and Jaggers 2015).[11] *Democracy* ranges from –10 (most autocratic) to +10 (most democratic).

Journalists may also find it difficult to report on countries mired in domestic turmoil and violence. I include a variable *Instability* culled from the Banks Cross-National Time Series Data Archive composite index of political instability, including indicators of riots, antigovernment protests, guerrilla attacks, general strikes, purges, government crises, and assassinations. Higher values denote greater levels of political unrest and violence. Finally, I include controls for *GDP per capita* (logged) using World Bank Development Indicators and *Population* (logged) from the United Nations. Journalists find it easier to report about women in rich, populous countries, where it is easier to conduct field research and/or conduct interviews.

I use statistical models that account for the cross-national time-series structure of the data. Because the panel data are highly correlated, I use generalized estimating equations (Zorn 2001). When modeling the dependent variable as *Reporting* (*Binary*), I use a probit regression. When modeling the dependent variable as *Reported* (*Count*), I use a negative binomial regression since this variable consists of overdispersed counts.[12] To deal with heteroskedasticity, all estimates use Huber-White corrected robust standard errors clustered on country. I lag time-variant independent and control variables by one year to mitigate simultaneity issues and lessen any incorrect direction of inference. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the results.

The findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 1. I find positive and significant coefficients on *Muslim Majority*, *MENA*, and *Muslim Percentage,* indicating that US news media allot greater attention to Muslim societies when covering women abroad. More importantly, the interaction terms (*Women's Rights* × *Muslim Majority/MENA/Muslim Percentage*), register statistically significant and negative. So the effect of women's rights protections on the likelihood of coverage depends on whether the observation constitutes a Muslim (MENA) country. Muslim societies that violate women's rights garner special attention, while the reverse holds for non-Muslim societies.

To help interpret these results, Figure 2 visualizes the marginal effect of *Women's Rights Index* on *Reported* (*Count*) for countries with and without a Muslim-majority population.[13] For stories about Muslim countries, the effect is negative, meaning that rights-violating countries feature disproportionately in American news coverage (Hypothesis 1A). The right side of Figure 2 demonstrates this finding, showing an estimated coefficient of –0.87. In other words, if a Muslim country improves its women's rights protections by one point (on a scale from 0 to 3), it loses approximately 0.87 articles on average per year. In contrast, the effect registers positive for non-Muslim countries. Here, US media emphasize more egalitarian societies (Hypothesis 1B). On average per year, non-Muslim countries gain about 0.2 articles as they improve one point in women's rights protections.

The results indicate a pattern of bias when it comes to what stories the American media outlets consider newsworthy. Not only are women in Muslim and MENA countries represented more often—they also garner special attention if they suffer discrimination. This is not to say that all stories about Muslim women concern women's rights or gender discrimination. But, all else equal, Muslim women from oppressive countries display more prominantly than those in relatively egalitarian societies. One implication is that US news media find Muslim women newsworthy to the extent that they experience discrimination. As an

[8] Of course, the US State Department reports may themselves be biased. But this bias makes my findings even more revealing because we would expect that US news media follow a commensurate understanding of "women's rights" with that used by the US State Department. In other words, the following results show that US news media are disproportionately focused on women from Muslim societies, even when accounting for a US-centric understanding of women's rights.

[9] The *Women's Political Rights* and *Women's Economic Rights* variables are only available to 2011. *The Women's Social Rights* variable is only available to 2004. For details on these measures, see the online appendix.

[10] Clearly, respect for women's rights is itself affected by whether the observation is for a Muslim or MENA country. However, tests using variance inflation factors indicate that collinearity was not a problem in the models; furthermore, the results are robust across a number of specifications.

[11] This data is only available to 2013.

[12] Note that a tobit is inappropriate as coverage cannot assume negative values (Sigelman and Zeng 1999).

[13] Results are substantively identical for *MENA* and *Muslim* (*Percentage*) indicators, as well as the probit model on the *Reported* (*Binary*) DV. Graphs were made using code by Strezhnev (2013).

Table 1. Probit analysis of US news coverage of women abroad

	Reported (Binary)		
	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Country reports	0.002***	0.002***	0.002***
	(0.0003)	(0.0003)	(0.0003)
Women's rights index	0.110	0.117	0.138*
	(0.065)	(0.063)	(0.068)
Muslim majority	0.553***		
	(0.166)		
MENA		0.705***	
		(0.186)	
Muslim percentage			0.657***
			(0.184)
Democracy	0.008	0.013**	0.009
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Instability	–0.00001	–0.00001	–0.00001
	(0.00002)	(0.00002)	(0.00002)
Population	0.438***	0.436***	0.431***
	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
GDP per capita	0.144***	0.129***	0.141***
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.025)
Women's rights × Muslim majority	–0.466***		
	(0.128)		
Women's rights × MENA		–0.475**	
		(0.152)	
Women's rights × Muslim percentage			–0.496***
			(0.138)
Constant	–9.262***	–9.162***	–9.197***
	(0.444)	(0.447)	(0.443)
N	3934	3950	3934
Log likelihood	–1671.856	–1677.103	–1671.785
AIC	3361.712	3372.205	3361.570

Note: Robust standard errors clustered on country appear in parentheses.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

illustration, there were 102 articles about women in Iran, but only 20 about Malaysia—a country that does significantly better on gender equality.

On the other hand, we witness a different dynamic occurring for stories about non-Muslim societies, where stronger rights protections correlate with higher likelihood of coverage. The articles in this subsample tend to feature issues such as work-life balance, electoral politics, the feminist debate over pornography, individual accomplishments in business or the arts—issues that tend to correlate with a better overall situation for women's rights. Again, this is not to imply that stories of systemic gender discrimination are absent, just that relatively egalitarian societies are disproportionately showcased. For example, there were 250 articles in the sample about France, while the Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Lesotho—some of the worst violators of women's rights on earth—received almost no attention.

Together, the results indicate a kind of confirmation bias, reinforcing the stereotype linking Islam to gender oppression. The findings hold across a number of specifications. First, to ensure the results are not model dependent or due to extrapolation, I ran simpler models focusing on key variables of interest. Second, I estimated alternative models replacing the *Women's Rights Index* composite variable with individual scores representing *Women's Political Rights, Women's Social Rights,* and *Women's Economic Rights,* respectively. Lastly, I included a lagged dependent variable as a regressor to address the possibility of serial correlation.[14] The results, reported in the online appendix, are substantively equivalent across all models.

Measuring Substantive Focus

While the above findings concern the quantity of coverage about women abroad, the second hypothesis pertains to the quality or framing of coverage. How does the substance of these articles vary depending on the society being covered? Reporting about women can address a variety of specific issues, from elections to sports to fashion. But according to gendered orientalism, stories of Muslim women myopically stress one issue in particular: women's rights and gender inequality.

To test this hypothesis, we need a measurement of substantive themes that appear in these articles, raising a number of practical challenges for a corpus this large. Fortunately, recent advances in computational text analysis offer new tools to categorize texts on a large scale (Grimmer and Stewart 2013, 2). Among the most promising techniques for social scientists is the probabilistic topic model, an algorithm used to code the content of a corpus of texts into substantively meaningful categories, or "topics," using the statistical correlations between words in a corpus.[15] Topic

[14] Note that lagged dependent variables risk artificially suppressing the explanatory power of other independent variables (Achen 2000).

[15] Mohr and Bogdanov (2013) provide an accessible introduction to topic modeling for social scientists.

Table 2. Negative binomial analysis of US news coverage of women abroad

	Reported (Count)		
	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Country reports	0.002***	0.002***	0.002***
	(0.0001)	(0.0001)	(0.0001)
Women's rights index	0.206*	0.248*	0.249*
	(0.102)	(0.097)	(0.111)
Muslim majority	1.339***		
	(0.373)		
MENA		1.713***	
		(0.389)	
Muslim percentage			1.469***
			(0.412)
Democracy	0.003	0.013	0.004
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Instability	–0.00002	–0.00003	–0.00002
	(0.00002)	(0.00002)	(0.00002)
Population	0.640***	0.639***	0.631***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)
GDP per capita	0.226***	0.189***	0.226***
	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Women's rights × Muslim majority	–1.088***		
	(0.246)		
Women's rights × MENA		–1.157***	
		(0.269)	
Women's rights × Muslim percentage			–1.120***
			(0.266)
Constant	–13.627***	–13.477***	–13.567***
	(0.589)	(0.573)	(0.599)
N	3934	3950	3934
Log likelihood	–3591.307	–3590.501	–3592.008
Theta	0.837***	0.852***	0.836***
	(0.056)	(0.058)	(0.056)
AIC	7200.614	7199.003	7202.015

Note: Robust standard errors clustered on country appear in parentheses.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

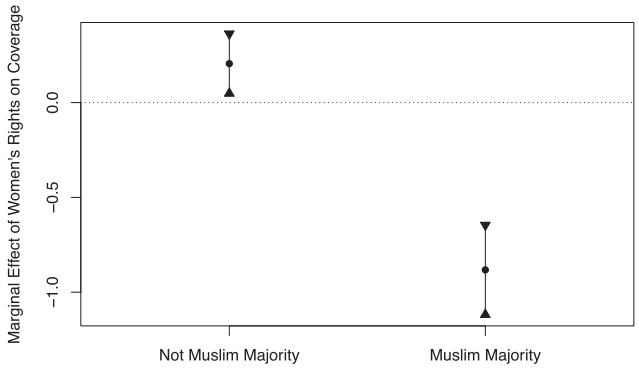

Figure 2. Marginal effects of *Women's Rights Index* on *Reported (Count)*

modeling is a mixed-membership model, meaning that it considers each document to be a mixture of many topics. For instance, a hypothetical document devotes 54 percent of its content to "Business and Work," 14 percent of its content to "Women's Rights and Gender Equality," 7 percent of its content to "Marriage and Family," etc.

For the purposes of this study, topic modeling holds a number of advantages over other methods given the outcome of interest. The main benefit of this method is its ability to infer and analyze substantively meaningful categories (topics) with minimal assumptions and expense (Quinn, Monroe, Colaresi, Crespin, and Radev 2010). Unlike human-coder approaches, an automated topic model estimates topics from the observed data without assuming the substance, division, or keywords of topics beforehand. Thus it ameliorates the potential for confirmation bias. It is also fully replicable because it is fully automated, which is an important validity concern for content analysis (Neuendorf 2011).

An alternative workflow would involve categorizing each document based on whether it pertains to women's rights as a whole, and then calculating the proportion of articles in the "rights" category for each country-year. But this blunt metric flattens important dimensions of variation. Most articles about women have at least one mention of rights or equality but differ in the degree to which they emphasize this theme. The gendered orientalist argument claims that every story about Muslim women, whether about politics or sports or literature, is framed around women's rights. A mixed-membership topic model estimates the outcome of interest more directly because it represents texts as a distribution over many topics, not just one category. This allows one to compare documents in terms of their proportion—not just presence—of a topic. However, as a robustness check, I also applied document-level labels indicating whether an article (as a whole) addresses women's rights

Table 3. Summary of topic labels

	Labels	*Probability*	*FREX*
1	Business	said, work, compani, year, percent, job, busi, worker, million, market	compani, bank, industri, factori, employ, market, employe, busi, corpor, manag
2	Sports	team, women, game, play, world, said, olymp, sport, player, first	game, olymp, sport, player, soccer, athlet, coach, team, medal, championship
3	Public health	cancer, health, women, doctor, said, hospit, aid, breast, clinic, year	cancer, infect, patient, clinic, virus, hospit, doctor, surgeri, breast, health
4	Fashion	black, dress, one, cloth, wear, design, street, fashion, citi, white	restaur, jacket, shirt, color, skirt, blue, worn, cloth, fashion, pant
5	Arts	film, book, show, art, work, stori, life, one, play, write	film, artist, novel, art, museum, theater, movi, charact, fiction, reader
6	United Nations	women, said, will, right, confer, organ, group, world, issu, govern	confer, deleg, forum, organ, meet, intern, secretari, peac, committe, statement
7	Sexual assault	said, polic, rape, case, report, sexual, violenc, victim, court, crime	rape, crime, victim, sentenc, crimin, polic, gang, prosecutor, convict, violenc
8	Combat	said, war, militari, kill, attack, soldier, women, forc, two, combat	soldier, troop, bomb, armi, militari, combat, command, civilian, gun, camp
9	Women's rights and gender equality	women, men, femal, law, right, chang, male, equal, mani, issu	equal, male, gender, femal, discrimin, men, women, law, status, chang
10	Politics	polit, minist, govern, elect, parti, presid, said, vote, leader, prime	elect, vote, minist, prime, parti, candid, voter, cabinet, politician, polit
11	Profiles	year, mrs, work, school, first, mother, said, student, husband, children	mrs, student, colleg, graduat, career, school, degre, teacher, univers, becam
12	Human interest	said, like, say, one, peopl, just, want, get, can, think	know, think, feel, thing, someth, realli, see, lot, tell, just
13	Marriage and family	famili, girl, women, husband, said, children, villag, live, marri, marriag	villag, marriag, famili, rural, bride, marri, girl, shelter, husband, wive
14	Religion	said, islam, religi, right, church, ban, law, countri, women, practic	islam, religi, religion, secular, veil, circumcis, fundamentalist, church, genit, koran
15	Reproductive and personal health	abort, studi, women, said, research, use, percent, report, birth, rate	abort, pill, contracept, fertil, implant, hormon, research, studi, method, data

Note: Words are stemmed (see below).

and gender equality using a simple word search strategy, described below. This provides an alternative measure of the main outcome variable used in the proceeding analysis.

Data Preparation and Model Estimation

To estimate the topic model, the corpus was preprocessed following the standard recipe for automated text analysis (Grimmer and Stewart 2013, 6). First, I removed capitalization, numbers, and punctuation. I then removed stop words: words that are extremely common but unrelated to the research topic, such as "and," "or," "the," etc. Since I was more interested in general frames than specific events, I removed named entities from the text of the articles, including names of specific people, locations, and organizations.[16] The popular Porter Snowball II program reduced words to their stem or root (Porter 2001). Finally, I removed sparse terms by discarding all words used in less than ten documents out of the entire corpus. The final document-term matrix contained 4,531 documents, 7,653 unique words, and 1,007,249 total words.

To identify and explore thematic topics in the corpus, I use the Structural Topic Model (STM), developed by social scientists to facilitate the analysis of metadata and topics in text corpora (Lucas, Nielsen, Roberts, Stewart, Storer, and Tingly 2015, 2).[17] STM extends the popular topic modeling tool Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) by incorporating document-level information into the analysis as covariates. This enables the researcher to measure systematic changes in topical prevalence across different groups of documents, similar to a regression framework (Roberts, Stewart, Tingley, Lucas, Leder-Luis, Gadarian, Albertson, and Rand 2014, 1068).

My model estimated fifteen topics by regressing topic prevalence on region and year covariates. Table 3 gives a summary of those topics, including hand-applied labels of each topic's semantic meaning, as well as top (stemmed) words calculated by frequency and simplified frequency-exclusivity scoring (FREX).[18] One can see a clearly discernible topic corresponding to "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" in this corpus, as inferred by the word stems "right," "equal," "discrimin," "status," etc. Figure 3 gives a corpus-level summary of topic distributions. The most common topics include "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" and "Human Interest," with the average document devoting about 9 percent of its content to each of these

[16] I identified these using Stanford's Named Entity Recognizer (Finkel, Grenager, and Manning 2005) as well as my own dictionary of nationalities.

[17] I use the R package *stm* to estimate the model (Roberts et al. 2014). Details on model selection are contained in the online appendix.

[18] In brief, frequency scoring finds words common to a topic. Frequency-exclusivity scoring finds the words that are common to one topic and rare in others. Both are heuristics that assist interpretation, as detailed in the online appendix.

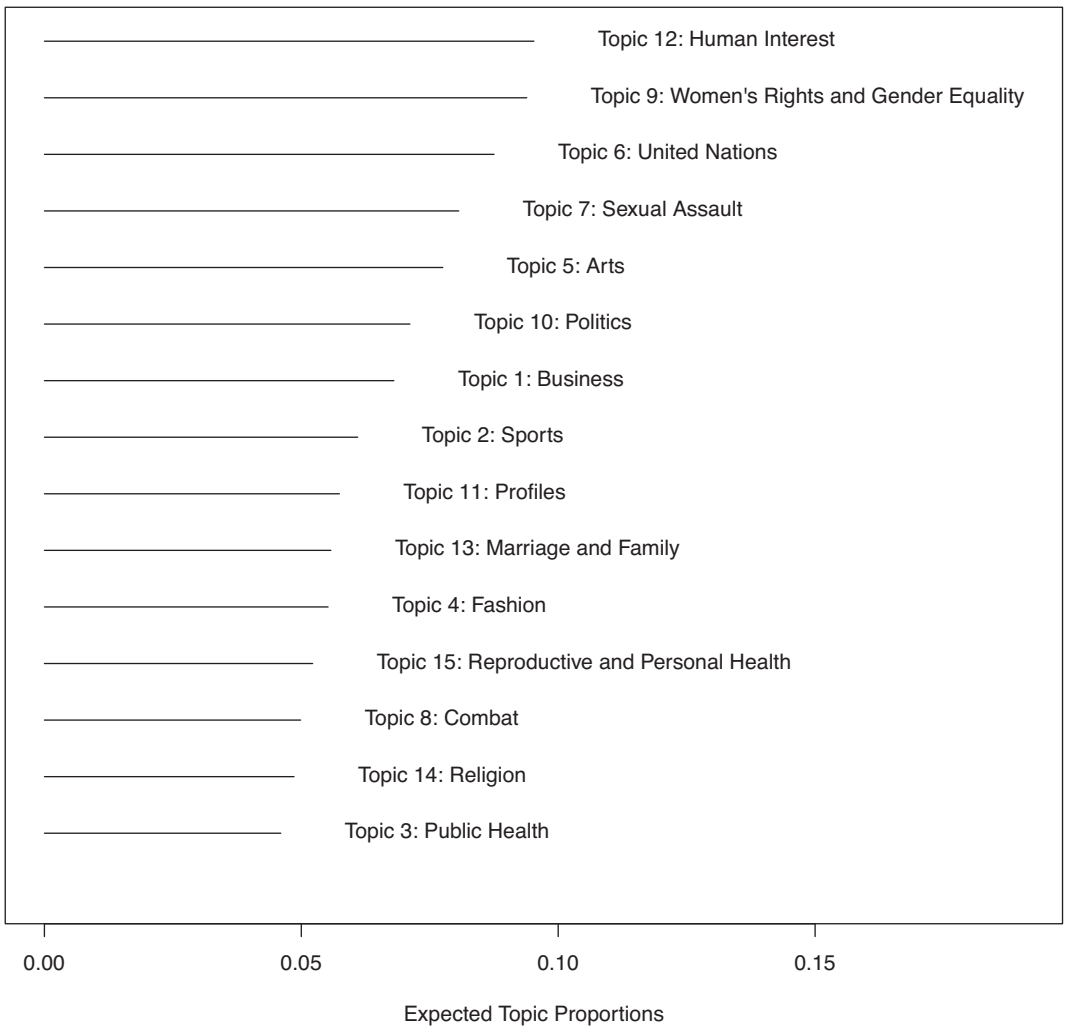

Figure 3. Summary of topic prevalence

topics. "Public Health" represents the least common topic, accounting for about 4 percent of the corpus.

Comparing Coverage across Region

Coverage of these topics is unevenly distributed across region; that is, certain topics are more prevalent in stories about certain places. To get a better sense of this, we can plot the relationship between topical prevalence and metadata in a regression-like framework. Specifically, the model estimates the expected proportion of an unseen document devoted to a topic as a function of the region the article is about and the year it was published. Holding time constant, a number of topics vary significantly in their expected proportions depending on the region covered. Figure 4 visualizes these findings for a number of topics.

As the graphs show, if we came across an unseen article reporting about a MENA country, we would expect approximately 11 percent of its content devoted to "Women's Rights and Gender Equality," with a confidence interval of a little over 1 percent. But if that article concerned a Western country—even if it was published in the same year—we would expect less than 8 percent of its content to be devoted to "Women's Rights and Gender Equality." In other words, reporting about women in MENA countries dedicates 73 percent more coverage to "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" compared to women in the West, and more than four times the attention to "Religion."

The reader may find these results unsurprising, given the varying situation of women's rights around the world. The MENA region exhibits serious gender inequality, and so it is not surprising that media coverage would reflect that reality. And, as we've seen above, the press tends to focus on Muslim and MENA countries with the worst records of gender discrimination. Hypothesis 2 of the gendered orientalist argument, however, claims the existence of bias, even when accounting for realities on the ground.

Modeling Hypothesis 2

The dependent variable in Hypothesis 2 reflects the percentage of coverage devoted to women's rights for a particular country-year (*Rights Focus*). I expect this percentage to be higher for Muslim and MENA countries, even after controlling for *Women's Rights Index*. I operationalized the outcome variable by taking the average proportion of articles assigned to the topic "Women's Rights and Gender Equality," weighted by number of words in each article. In other words, I sum the number of words addressing "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" and divide it by the total number of words for all articles in that country-year. This gives an estimate of the degree to which these outlets

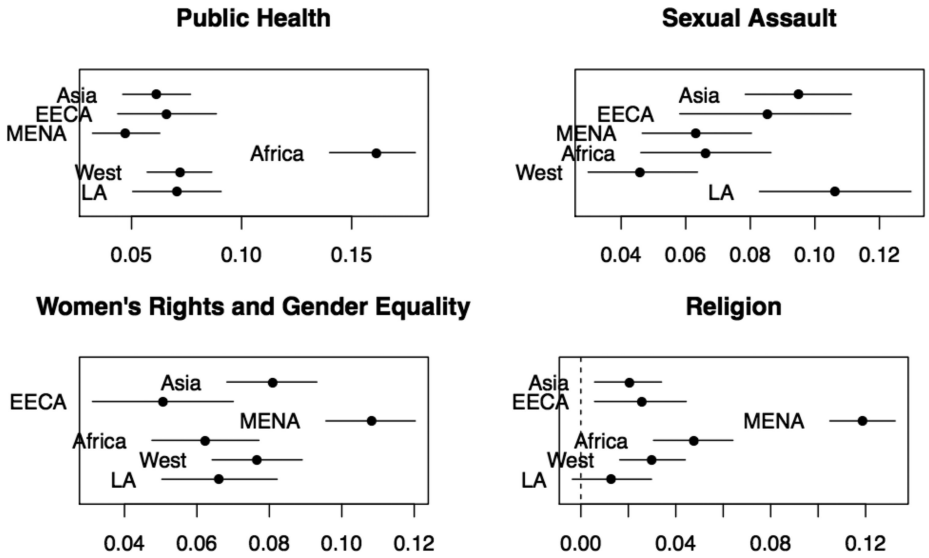

Figure 4. Expected document proportions for four topics

focus on this topic relative to other subjects for each observation, ranging from 0 to 1.

The model regresses the dependent variable *Rights Focus* onto two main explanatory variables. *Women's Rights Index* measures respect for women's political, social, and economic rights using the same CIRI indicators described above. Theoretically, *Women's Rights Index* should correlate negatively with *Rights Focus*. Coverage of "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" tends to be negative in tone, addressing the *violation* of women's rights and the *absence* of gender equality. Thus we would expect to see more language pertaining to "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" in articles written about rights-violating societies.

The second explanatory variable reflects whether the observation represents a Muslim or Middle Eastern country. Again I use the variables described in the previous analysis: the fractional *Percentage Muslim* ranging from 0 to 1, the dichotomous *Muslim Majority*, and the dichotomous *MENA* variables. We would expect to see higher *Rights Focus* for Muslim and MENA countries, as predicted Hypothesis 2.

I also include two controls that may affect the amount of rights language in reporting. First, coverage of women's rights may be driven by the general state of human rights protections in certain countries. For instance, the poorer a country's rights protections, the more coverage it may receive on its rights situation in general, including women's rights. For this reason, I include a measure of general human rights protections, the *Physical Integrity Rights* index, also from the CIRI dataset.[19] I also include a *Democracy* variable, described above.

Because country-years must contain at least one article to be included in the sample ($n = 1451$), I use a two-step Heckman model to account for potential selection effects. The selection equation is identical to the model presented in Table 1, where the dependent variable is the *Reported* (*Binary*), indicating whether a country-year contained any articles in the dataset. Conditional on inclusion, an ordinary least squares model was estimated regressing *Rights Focus* on the four explanatory variables. As with the previous models, I lag time-variant explanatory variables by one year and use Huber-White corrected robust standard errors clustered on country. Table 4 reports the results.

As expected, *Women's Rights Index* is statistically significant and negative in all models, indicating that US news media highlight the issue of "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" when covering those societies with poor respect for women's rights. However, even after controlling for *Women's Rights Index*, I find that the coefficients on the *Muslim Majority*, *MENA*, and *Muslim Percentage* variables register statistically significant and positive. In other words, US news media talk more about "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" if the reported country lies in the MENA region or has a larger Muslim population, regardless of the status of women's rights on the ground.

This finding supports Hypothesis 2, stating that US news media represent Muslim women narrowly, focusing largely on their subordination, whereas they portray women from other societies with greater complexity. The issue of gender discrimination features more pervasively in stories about Muslim societies than non-Muslim societies. Furthermore, this disparity remains even after controlling for the reality of women's rights in the reported country. To illustrate, Figure 5 presents a sample of headlines about women's sports in the Muslim world; notice the observable framing around the issue of "Women's Rights and Gender Equality."

While the magnitude of the *Rights Focus* coefficients may appear small (ranging from 3.4 to 3.6 percent), note that they indicate changes in topical focus relative to all content. In other words, if the average article about a non-Muslim country devoted 10 percent of its content to the topic of "Women's Rights and Gender Equality," we would expect this topic's prevalence to increase to 13.5 percent for a Muslim observation. Further, the mean of *Rights Focus* across all observations is only about 8.7 percent; a 3.4 to 3.6 percent shift around a base of 8.7 is substantial. In sum, the American news media tend to frame stories about Muslim women around the topic of "Women's Rights and Gender Equality" significantly more so than non-Muslim women.

As in the previous analysis, results are robust to a range of alternative specifications. First, I added a one-year lagged dependent variable as a regressor in the model to account for the possibility of serial correlation (for example, the possibility that journalists maintain their thematic focus

[19] See the online appendix for details on this measure.

Table 4. Two-step analysis of rights focus in US news coverage of women abroad

	Rights focus		
	Model 1	*Model 2*	*Model 3*
Intercept	0.094***	0.093***	0.089***
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Women's rights index	–0.014**	–0.015**	–0.013**
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Muslim majority	0.036***		
	(0.007)		
MENA		0.051***	
		(0.008)	
Muslim percentage			0.042***
			(0.008)
Democracy	–0.0004	0.0002	–0.0004
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Physical integrity rights	0.005***	0.004***	0.005***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
IMR1	–0.016***	–0.012**	–0.016***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
N	1039	1040	1039
R-squared	0.580	0.585	0.581
Adj. R-squared	0.578	0.582	0.579
Residual std. error	0.076 (df = 1033)	0.075 (df = 1034)	0.076 (df = 1033)
F statistic	238.113*** (df = 6; 1033)	242.629*** (df = 6; 1034)	238.835*** (df = 6; 1033)

Note: Robust standard errors clustered on country appear in parentheses.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 5. Sample of headlines about Muslim women's sports
Note: Sample is non-random and for illustrative purposes.

for a particular country from year to year). Second, I replaced the composite *Women's Rights Index* variable with the three individual indicators representing *Women's Political Rights*, *Women's Social Rights*, and *Women's Economic Rights*. Third, I estimated models using an alternative measure of the dependent variable *Rights Focus*. Instead of relying on topic modeling, this alternative measure uses a simple word search strategy to apply boolean labels to documents: If a document contained the word "right" (including the plural "rights," "equal," "sexist," or "sexism"), it was labeled as pertaining to women's rights. Then for each country-year observation, I summed all documents containing the women's rights label and divided this count by the total number of articles for that observation. This offers a similar fractional variable to the *Women's Rights Focus* variable used in the main analyses. Finally, I estimated one-step models using fractional logit. All models reported substantially identical results.[20]

Coverage of Sexual Assault

The topic concerning "Sexual Assault" deserves further mention. Scholars of gendered orientalism claim that the US media is obsessed not only with gender equality but also violence against women in the Muslim world. The topic of "Sexual Assault," however, displayed relatively low prevalence in articles about women in the MENA region compared to those in Latin America, Asia, Eastern

[20] Reports of all alternative models are included in the online appendix.

Europe/Central Asia, and Africa. This suggests evidence against an intergroup bias whereby "Sexual Assault" is associated exclusively with Muslim women. Unfortunately, a test for inter-reality bias, like the one above for "Women's Rights and Gender Equality," is impossible due to lack of reliable data on sexual assault, rape, or violence against women at the country-year level.

We can, however, glean some qualitative insights through an examination of the documents themselves. While inspecting articles with a high prevalence of the topic "Sexual Assault" for each region, it becomes clear that this topic encompasses a broad range of specific issues, ranging from rape to war crimes and police/criminal justice more generally. For instance, representative articles about sexual assault in the EECA region center primarily on two modal issues: wartime rapes during the Balkan conflicts, especially Bosnia; and the trial and imprisonment of the Russian feminist punk rock band Pussy Riot. Relevant coverage in Latin America focuses on smuggling and trafficking, the drug war, and murders of hundreds of women in and around the northern Mexican city of Ciudad Juarez. Coverage on sexual assault in Africa focuses heavily on female genital mutilation and war crimes in Rwanda and the Congo.

Interestingly, more than 40 percent of all coverage about "Sexual Assault" stems from Asia.[21] A substantial portion of this coverage concerns the Delhi gang rape case that occurred in December 2012. In fact, 30 percent of all articles about Asia in the whole sample were published between 2012 and 2014, and the majority of these concerned India. By all accounts, the interest that this particular story attracted was unprecedented. As for the MENA region, representative articles feature content that is highly associated with culture and religion, including stories on stoning in the Sudan, "moral crimes" in Afghanistan, a Sudanese woman facing fines for wearing trousers, and virginity tests of Egyptian protesters. This observation should not come as a surprise, given the disproportionate focus paid to religion in general in the MENA region (see Figure 4.)

In sum, unlike coverage of "Women's Rights and Gender Equality," coverage of "Sexual Assault" tends to distribute more evenly among Muslim and non-Muslim societies. On the other hand, coverage of "Sexual Assault" focuses overwhelmingly on non-Western countries, while displaying the lowest prevalence in stories about Western women. In addition, coverage of "Sexual Assault" emanating from the MENA region emphasizes stories with a significant cultural and religious component. While the results are inconclusive, it is plausible that readers may come away with the impression that sexual assault is a strictly non-Western problem, along with the implication that the influx of Muslim (or non-Western) immigrants may introduce cultural or religious practices that endanger the safety of women in the West.

9/11 and Change over Time

Finally, how does 9/11 figure into these results? The literature of gendered orientalism remains inconclusive regarding the role of 9/11 and recent historical events. On the one hand, scholars insist on the long history of orientalism and have addressed the gendered aspects of this discourse decades before 9/11. On the other hand, many scholars describe 9/11 as a pinnacle moment, ushering in a new age of anti-Muslim sentiment, especially in the United States. The literature on gendered orientalism has exploded in the last decade.

With these data, some trends appear roughly stable across time, specifically before and after 9/11. For instance, while the MENA region was the most covered region in the sample from 2002 to 2005, that increase disappears once we normalize for the amount of *New York Times* coverage devoted to MENA countries in general. Likewise, the effects described in the *Reduction Hypothesis* (H2) appear stable in pre- and post-9/11 samples.[22]

On the other hand, initial analysis suggests that the confirmation bias hypothesis (H1) may have lessened in the post-911 era. In some models, the coefficients of interest lose significance when run on a post-9/11 subsample. Given the number of modeling assumptions involved, researchers ought not interpret this finding as definitive evidence of US media becoming more even-handed in their reporting of women abroad. It may, however, give plausibility to that claim, undermining the conventional wisdom that gendered orientalism has worsened after the events of 9/11. Still, future research is necessary for determining how 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror have influenced popular understandings of the cultural distinctions dividing Muslims and the West.

Conclusions

No society is immune from gender discrimination. But this article demonstrates that representations of women—and their rights—are unevenly portrayed in US news reporting. First, I put forth a confirmation bias hypothesis, whereby Muslim women are considered newsworthy to the extent that they live in societies that violate their rights. Not only did I find bias in terms of quantity of coverage, but in the substance and framing as well. In the reduction hypothesis, US news represents Muslim women narrowly—emphasizing "Women's Rights and Gender Equality"—in contrast to non-Muslim women, who are portrayed with more nuance.

While this kind of content analysis cannot definitively demonstrate the effects of media coverage on public attitudes, it does provide plausibility to the claim that readers are exposed to a particularly pernicious stereotype of Muslims: they are distinctly sexist. This has three major implications. First, given that the American public tends not to differentiate between Muslims at home and abroad, the disproportionate emphasis on women's inequality in Muslim lands may shape negative attitudes toward Muslim-Americans by painting them as a cultural "other." The association of Muslims as a cultural threat may also influence policy debates, such as the recent crisis concerning Syrian refugees. We know that stories about crime shape public opinion of African Americans (Dixon and Linz 2000; Entman 1992; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Hurwitz and Peffley 1997; Peffley, Shields, and Williams 1996) and social welfare policies (Gilens 1996a, 1996b; Kellstedt 2000; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). In a similar vein, stories about gender inequality may shape public opinion on issues such as the War on Terror and the potential settlement of Muslim asylum seekers.

Second, the American media exhibit a limited attention span when it comes to global women's rights. While women from Muslim and Middle Eastern countries stand front and center on the agenda, news outlets generally ignore oppression in other societies. Insofar as media attention drives awareness and resources, women from

[21] See the online appendix for more details on this statistic.

[22] See the online appendix for tables.

non-Muslim countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe lose out in this scenario—even if they suffer more egregiously. Likewise, the dichotomy between the "oppressed Muslim woman" and the "liberated Western woman"—a central trope in gendered orientalism—minimizes the extent to which women in the West (including in the United States) continue to struggle with discrimination and inequality.

Lastly, an obsession with Muslim women's rights may, ironically, prove counterproductive for the goal of gender equality within Muslim communities. Considering the already volatile environment surrounding Islam in the American public sphere, a disproportionate focus on Muslim women's oppression will likely meet with suspicion and incredulity among Muslim men and women alike. This is especially the case when the media's diagnoses of sexism in Muslim societies point overwhelmingly to Islam. Tired of feeling singled out, Muslims both at home and abroad may learn to equate feminist criticism with imperialism and Islamophobia, thus undermining even local initiatives for gender equality (Terman 2016).

Yet, a number of questions remain. First, due to the limited sample used here, we do not know to what degree these biases vary across platform. Some scholars of gendered orientalism point to conservative and right-wing factions as the worst offenders, whereas others insist on the ubiquity of Islamophobia stereotypes among even progressive crowds (Kumar 2012). Using similar techniques to the ones presented here, future research can examine these trends by comparing liberal and conservative media. Likewise, scholars should compare portrayals in news outlets with those in entertainment, social media platforms, and media outside the United States.

Second, the precise mechanisms driving these trends—that is, confirmation bias and reduction—remain unclear. What makes journalists write about women, or about Muslim societies, the way they do? Recent research has emphasized the role of civil society organizations in shaping media coverage about Muslims. Christopher Bail (2012), for instance, shows that anti-Muslim organizations originally occupied discursive niches but were amplified by mass media on account of their emotional energy, eventually drifting from the fringe of the discursive field into the mainstream. Scholars interested in the positivist aspects of gendered orientalism should make similar inquiries into the ecological and organizational dynamics of media attention of women abroad, as well as explore temporal dynamics in greater depth.

Finally, while a number of experimental studies demonstrate the influence of the "Muslims as terrorists" stereotype on attitudes, future research should examine the "Muslims as cultural threat" stereotype using congruent designs. Scholars can potentially examine the relationship between these two stereotypes, delineating which wields greater influence on public opinion. Extending beyond gender relations, other stereotypes regarding "Muslim culture," such as respect for religious minorities, could display similar patterns. Such extensions would further the goal of a more theoretically refined and statistically robust portrait of Muslim portrayals in the media and their effects on public opinion.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information may be found at http://rochelleterman.com/research/ and at the *International Studies Quarterly* data archive.

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