

# Mythbusting

# Islamaphobia



## “Most terrorists are Muslims”

Actually out of a reported 294 terrorist attacks across Europe in 2009, only one was classified as an Islamic terrorist attack (Europol 2010). Although some politicians and members of the press make out that suicide bombings and terrorist acts are part of Islamic teaching, the Qur’an (the Muslim’s Holy book) instructs that killing is completely unjustified.

## “The Islamic faith is an extremist faith”

“You who believe, do not kill each other [yourselves], for God is merciful to you. If any of you does those things, out of hostility and injustice, we shall make him suffer Fire...” (*Qur’an, 4:29–30, trans. MAS Haleem, 2005*)

The vast majority of Islamic followers are not extremists and follow the Qur’an’s teachings of restraint and forgiveness. The holy book actually states that you should not oppress your fellow human being.

## “Jihad means holy war”

Jihad does not mean holy war. Jihad is an Arabic word which means “to struggle” or “strive” in the way of God for good against evil. However, it is frequently misinterpreted as “holy war” by the media.



## “Muslims want their own Shari’ah Law over British rule”

The root of this myth can be attributed in part to a lack of understanding about what Shari’ah law is. Shari’ah law is the ethical and moral code based on the values in the Qur’an and sayings from the Prophet Muhammad. This ethical and legal framework is not a rigid code but a moving, evolving guide, which can be adapted to cultural and social contexts. In actuality, Islamic law Judges (through the medium of Shari’ah law) give advice on mainly dietary and family law. Muslims in keeping with the Qur’an do not want to impose this law upon British and non-Muslim people. They want to practice their Islamic principles, which do not contradict British rule. In the same way that Jewish people wish to eat Kosher food, many Muslims wish to eat halal meat. However it must be noted that the authority of Shari’ah law is sometimes contested within the Muslim community, especially in regards to equality.

### **“Muslims want special treatment”**

Contemporary Britain is multicultural, and policies and laws that are passed have to reflect this. This means that the government has to make sure that services such as education and health sustain procedures for catering to everyone’s needs as much as possible. In practice this could mean that schools allow religious garments to be worn with the standard uniform, or a hospital will provide the option of halal meat on the patient menu.

### **“Muslims are not committed to core British values, and live in closed communities that happen to be located in the UK”**

Yes it is true that increasing numbers of Muslims would

rather be identified by their faith, than their ethnicity on questionnaire forms. Research conducted by NGO’s and governmental organisations has found that faith based identity is felt to paint a more accurate picture of daily lifestyle than ethnicity, which has smaller bearing due to cultural, location and social factors. However Muslims wanting to be identified by their religion, does not mean they want to live in a closed segregated community, any more than mainstream Jews and Catholics do.

Terrorist attacks such as 9/11 in New York and the 7/7 in London, have caused critics to argue that Muslims are not committed to the core British values of

democracy, freedom, tolerance and sexual equality; especially as some of the perpetrators were born in the UK. These acts of terror, however, are strictly forbidden in Islamic teaching. Law abiding Muslims wishing and campaigning to be identified as Muslim are not a product of segregated society but surely part of an equalities struggle that many other groups have also faced.

Campaigns for equal rights created by Islamic groups shows that Muslims want to be seen and treated equally and therefore want to integrate and be considered the same as anyone else.



### **“Muslims do not want to integrate into British society”**

Some people believe that the development of multicultural policies, aimed at specific groups in society has led to division, with the settled population feeling overlooked. This in turn has caused the settled to have ill feelings towards newer Islamic communities, which spurs fundamentalist and extremist behaviour.

Most Islamic groups argue that a faith sensitive approach, being aware of differences yet working harmoniously together, creates a culturally and religiously enriched society, beneficial not just to Muslims but to followers of all faiths. Different perspectives and talents can be combined to make a society the best that it can be.

Many religions have minority branches who want to be exclusive and distance themselves from other sections of society, for example the Hassidic Jews, or the Amish. Some small branches of Islam are not different in this respect.

## “Muslim women don’t have rights”

The Qur’an directly teaches messages about equality between men and women. Men and women are portrayed as being created differently yet equally, with recognition of biological strengths and weaknesses. However specific regimes/communities have interpreted this differently.

- For example the denial of women’s rights in Saudi Arabia
- Honour killings in localised communities are sometimes ‘justified’ religiously, but this is not exclusive to Islam

Many Muslims however do adhere to and believe in the equality of men and women, as taught in the Qur’an. As with any faith it is important to distinguish between values passed on in holy documents and cultural variations in understanding that lead to widespread stereotyping.

Some women’s rights are enshrined in Islam. For example:

- Islamic law states that women have the right to independent ownership of money and property. A woman can buy, sell, borrow, lend, sign contracts and set up her own business ventures. In the 1950s British Women were not entitled to some of these rights
- Islamic law also states that women are allowed to inherit.



## “Islam endorses Forced marriage”

Islam regards marriage as a contract between two consenting adults. For the union to be valid both parties must be fully committed. Both husband and wife have individual responsibilities such as providing financially and bearing children, although women are not to be overburdened with domestic tasks, and can carry on with their own careers. The Qur’an and indeed Prophet Muhammad place importance on treating wives well and being close to them.

Many people are surprised to find that a Muslim woman has the right to leave a marriage and initiate divorce proceedings. A Muslim woman can also seek guidance from an Islamic court. Divorce, however is not looked upon well and women are encouraged to attempt to solve problems in their marriage before ending a union.

A Muslim man who wants to leave his wife has to adhere to a set of rules and conditions before divorce can take place. The woman is free to marry again without any stigma from her community. Sex in a marriage is valued in the Qur’an, and women can file for divorce if their partner is not performing.

However forced marriage is still an issue in some communities.

### **“Can Muslim women really get a good education and career?”**

Yes, the Qur’an encourages men and women to learn and gain new experiences in life. However it is true to say that tradition and customs of specific Muslim countries as well as modern family circumstances have made it harder for women to gain an education. These reasons however are not to do with the Islamic religion per se, as some people are led to believe.

The Qur’an also teaches that a woman should be allowed to work if she chooses as she should give back to society and help her community.

### **“Muslim women can’t be active politically”**

Recently the Muslim world has produced more female leaders than the West. Islam encourages women to be politically active, and Prophets’ Wives have been Judges and heavily involved in politics.

However, some Islamic regimes do heavily restrict women’s rights and their political potential.



### **“Islamic women are oppressed by their clothes”**

Both men and women are expected to dress modestly and cover themselves. Women are often perceived to be repressed because they are required to cover more of their body.

Women wearing veils is not just an Islamic practice, as many major religions have historically incorporated veils at one point or another.

There is debate among different strains of the Muslim faith about whether or not covering up with a hijab, jilbab or niqab is compulsory or not, and thought on this matter is largely based upon interpretation of the Qur’an. Literal readers believe all Muslim women should completely cover up, whereas more liberal readers believe the Qur’an was teaching general values about dressing modestly.

Muslim dress is varied and diverse, reflecting different cultures and locations, and Muslim women have different reasons for wearing their personal level of covering:

- Some believe that their dress is an outward sign to their dedication to their faith
- Some believe it is practical, especially in hot countries
- Some women feel liberated that they are being judged by their personality and intelligence rather than for their physical attractiveness.
- Some women do not cover up at all, yet remain committed to the Islamic faith.

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## **“Muslims are secretive, a lot goes on in a mosque”**

Actually, mosques do accept visitors of any religion, and are often keen to answer questions from people who genuinely want to know more about the faith. It is best to ask permission before visiting a mosque as a special event may be taking place at that time, or a smaller mosque might not be able to accommodate you but can give you information about a larger mosque.

If you do get permission to go into a mosque it is important to remember to dress modestly and cover up as much as possible. It is also expected for everyone to remove their shoes and respect the separate praying areas for men and women. If you need more information ask about the protocol before you go and visit.

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