

Who Watches the Media?

Race-related reporting in Australian mainstream media

Summary report

December 2017



In 2016, All Together Now commenced work to gain a better understanding of race-related reporting in the Australian media. Our background research indicated that the ways in which race is portrayed in the media must be taken seriously. The media is often the only interaction audiences have with people from other cultures, nationalities or ethnicities. With this in mind, the media plays a crucial role in forming and shaping public perceptions of race. These perceptions then affect how the public interacts with people from different racial backgrounds.

Previous research demonstrates that the language the media uses to describe racial backgrounds, and the portrayals the media uses to depict racial backgrounds, impacts on attitudes towards race. Indeed, the media has an agenda-setting role that informs how the general public treats migrants. And, when ethnic minorities occupy a central role in mainstream media, they are often portrayed as threatening to the Anglo mainstream.

Racial discrimination in the media can be reported to regulatory bodies, but complainants often have difficulty in achieving favourable outcomes from this complex and time-sensitive process.

To investigate the extent to which race-related reporting is an issue in Australia, All Together Now worked with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) to create a framework for collecting data about race-related reports. The research team used the framework to monitor and collect data published by Australia's four most read online newspapers (The Australian, Daily Telegraph, Sydney Morning Herald, Herald Sun), and the four most watched TV current affairs programs (A Current Affair, The Project, 60 Minutes, 7:30).

All Together Now's team sampled 124 opinion-based reports over a six-month period, as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Number of samples by media outlet and classification of race-related reporting

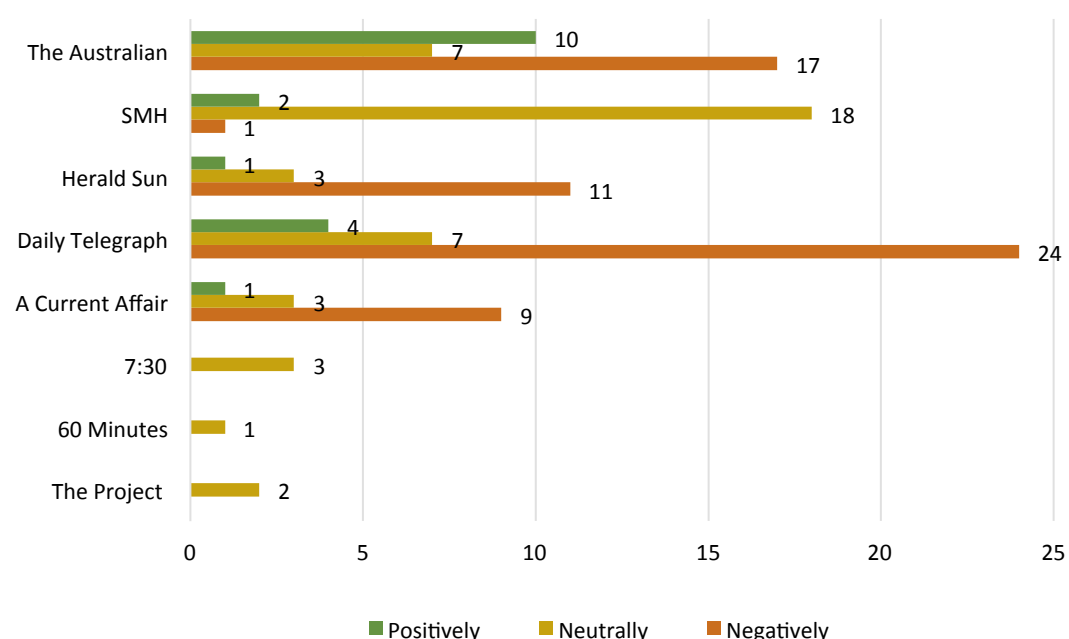
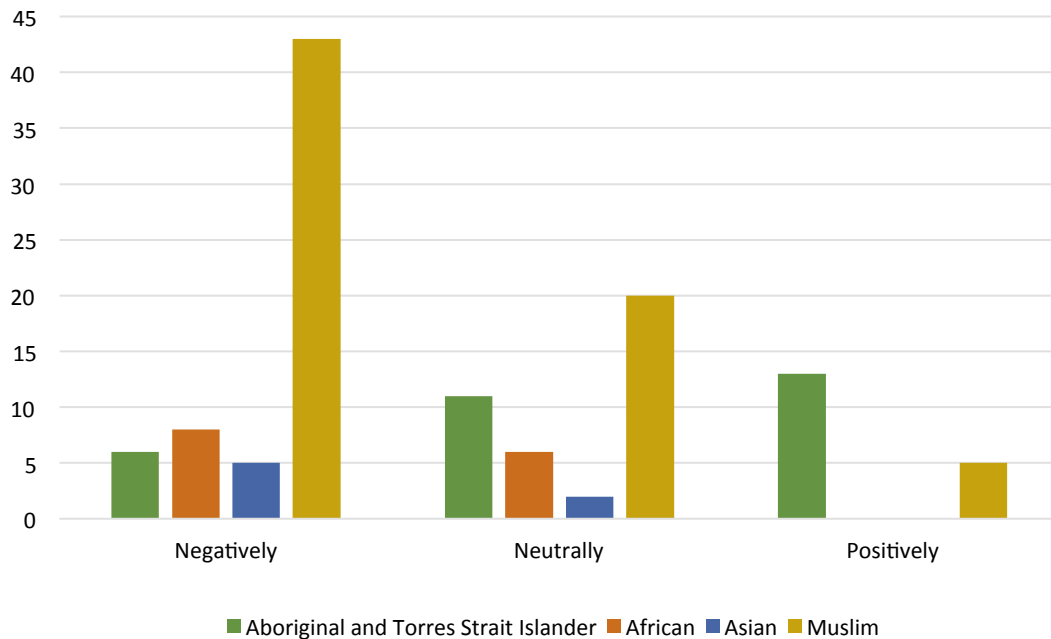


Figure 1 shows that negative portrayals of race were most often published on News Corp Australia online newspapers such as *Daily Telegraph* (24 articles), *The Australian* (17) and *Herald Sun* (11).

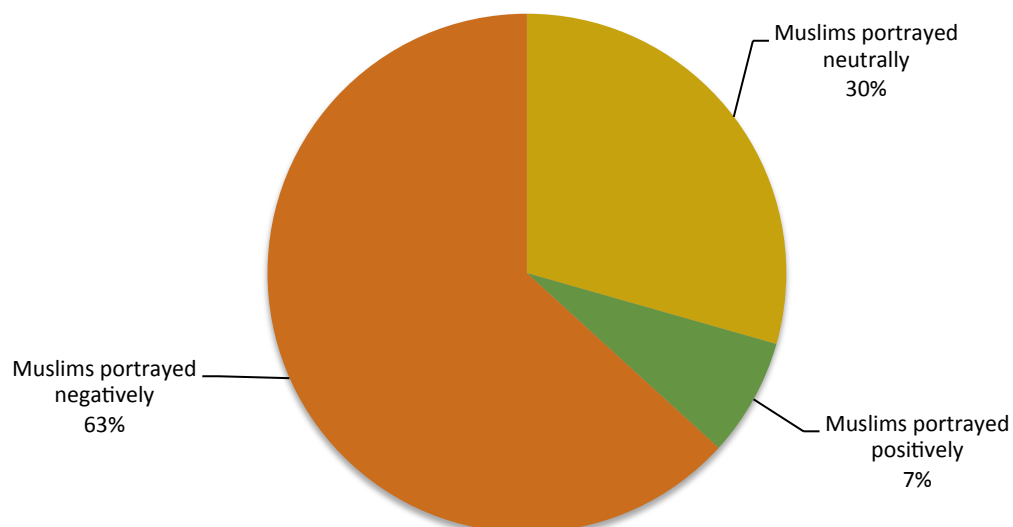
The data analysis showed that the highest number of articles about a single group of people were about Muslim people, with other groups represented in smaller percentages.

Figure 2: Portrayal of race (negative / neutral / positive)



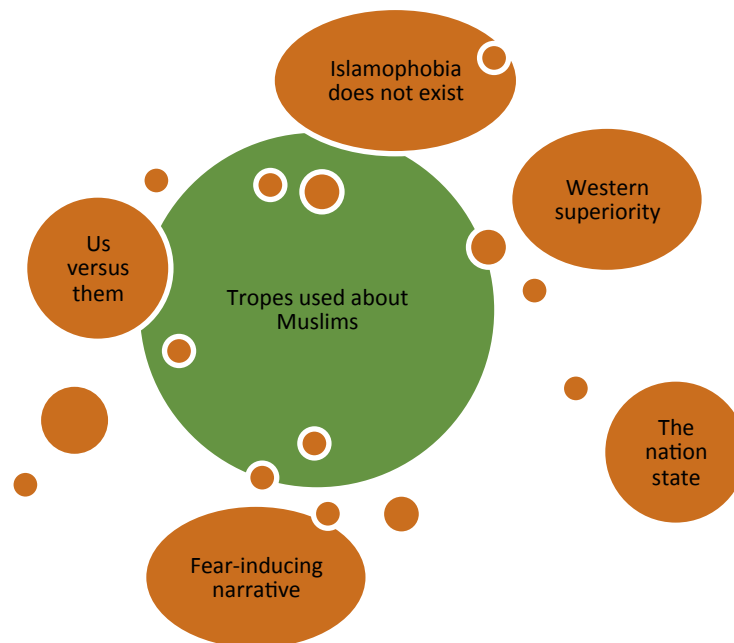
The 68 articles about Muslim people were analysed in greater detail. Twenty were neutral, five were positive and 43 were negative (the negative stories being around one third of all 124 articles sampled), as seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Portrayal of Muslims



The negative reports showed that, over the six-month sample period, Muslims were often conflated with terrorism, thereby fuelling a stereotype that ‘Muslims are terrorists’. Figure 4 illustrates the most commonly-used tropes about Muslims during this study.

Figure 4: Tropes used about Muslims



The small number of race-related articles and TV segments about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during the sample period were mostly neutral or positive. This prompted All Together Now to question the ways in which decisions are made by social commentators — and news agencies more broadly — about which groups of people to cover and commentate on. This can be fraught when they choose to cover and commentate on groups to which they themselves do not belong.

All Together Now also reviewed various Australian media regulations with a specific focus on the codes of conduct that enable audiences to make complaints about racism in the media. Of note is that, under some codes, audiences have only 30 days to make a complaint, which is inadequate when much of today’s news is published online, and sometimes remains online indefinitely. It is unclear whether some racist opinion-based reports might constitute a breach, as the regulators take into consideration the tone and context used to discuss race.

In total, 62 out of 124 race-based reports collected during the six-month sample period express racist views through their title, content, a picture, and/or tone of voice. Therefore, All Together Now considers that these 62 articles and TV segments likely contravene one or more of the codes of conduct. To tackle the problematic findings of our report, we have put together a list of recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen media regulations in relation to race-based reporting

- The regulations covering media conduct (and journalistic standards) must be strengthened so that definitions of racism include both overt and covert forms.
- In today's online age, audiences should be permitted to make complaints about media content at any time. The one-month deadline for making complaints should be removed to make it easier for audiences to make complaints about racist media content.
- Response times by the regulators must be improved so that reports deemed racist are quickly rectified.

2. News agencies must support journalists to discuss race sensitively

- News agencies must ensure journalists receive training about racism so that fewer journalists file negative race-based reports.
- News agencies must hire more journalists from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds and ensure they receive mentoring if requested to encourage greater cultural diversity among media workers and content.
- News agencies must ensure that their editorial policies are racially aware.

3. Continue media monitoring and analysis

- Media monitoring needs to be an ongoing practice to track changes in race-related reporting over time.

The full report containing all the results and recommendations from this study is available from All Together Now's website: <http://alltogethernow.org.au/media-monitoring/>.

To protect the environment, All Together Now has chosen not to provide printed copies of this report.

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