

Title: The Impact of Security Based Racial Profiling of Muslims.

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WP Number: 08-14

Research Question: The overarching question to our participants was: “Has the current government national security apparatus caused overt suspicion upon the activities of yourself or those you know?”

To gain a sense of how participants understand racial profiling, researchers used eight guiding questions, modifying them when needed, to allow participants a wide range of entry points through which their narrative could take shape.

Importance: This research is the first of its kind to investigate the impact of security based racial profiling of Muslims in Canada. Our primary research goals were to discover how participants view the concept of racial profiling, whether they have experienced it or not, and to what extent, if any, their lives have changed as a result of the broad range of security measures now practiced by Canadian law enforcement and intelligence officials. In recording their narratives, many of which recount deeply troubling experiences of being singled out by an authority of the state, we seek to emphasize the value of personal experience as a means of generating a wider dialogue among all members of Canadian society, including policymakers, security officials, legal professionals, and advocacy groups.

Research Findings:

Participants overwhelmingly expressed the concern that state officials target Muslims with greater scrutiny and suspicion than others on the basis of religious identity, without regard to age, ethnicity, gender or place of birth. We learned that the “national security” rationale currently justifies the screening and surveillance practices that have raised the alarm that racial profiling is happening in Canada. The claim that national security is at risk, largely uncontested by mainstream Canadian political officials and media commentators since the calamity of 9/11/01, gives endurance to the notion that religious identity can, despite the protections afforded by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, provide a basis for treating an individual with greater suspicion. This suspicion has had a wide range of effects on the personal lives of participants, in the economic, social, media and educational arenas in which our study participants live, work and interact with fellow Canadians, in ways that compound the socio-economic, bread-and-butter challenges many of them face daily. Participants express an understanding that few spaces are neutral anymore; that the expanded powers of police and security agents mean that no cultural or religious Muslim gathering place is likely to escape surveillance.

Implications:

We find that the impact of racial profiling in Canada on participants’ feelings overall, of belonging to a civil society, of enjoying fully all rights and freedoms guaranteed by citizenship are sufficiently negative to render more or less irrelevant the contention that there is a valid distinction to be made between the perception and the practice of racial profiling. In other words, racial profiling is a vital community concern which calls for state responses that reach beyond denial of its existence. In this regard, racial profiling mirrors security concerns as a socially constructed reality. Our overall recommendation is that there needs to be greater transparency about what state agencies are doing and why. There also needs to be greater understanding of how and why this practice is experienced as harmful.