

Elections, Representations, and Journalistic Schemas: Local News Coverage of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in the US Mid-term Elections

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Abstract: Communication research has systematically pointed to the disparities in news coverage of political candidates from women and minority groups. These differences may hurt the chances of these candidates at being elected. Recently more migrants are entering the political arenas in their adopted Western countries. Migrants have become the center of debates over the rights and wrongs of multiculturalism. In particular, Muslim women, in liberal democracies have been turned into an allegory for undesirable cultural difference. The November 2018 US Congressional race saw an unprecedented number of women especially minority women run for office. Ilhan Omar (representing Minnesota) and Rashida Tlaib (representing Michigan) are the first Muslim women elected to Congress. Both Omar and Tlaib won by large margins. This study examines if local news coverage of Omar and Tlaib's candidacy was congruent to prevalent schemas in representations of Muslim women and minorities in American media.

Keywords: media representations, stereotypes, candidates, gender, Muslim women

Elections, représentations et schémas journalistiques: couverture médiatique locale d'Ilhan Omar et de Rashida Tlaib aux États-Unis aux élections de mi-mandat

Résumé : La recherche en communication a systématiquement mis en évidence les disparités dans la couverture de l'actualité des candidatures politiques féminines et des groupes minoritaires. Ces différences peuvent nuire aux chances de ces candidats d'être élus. Ces récentes années, de nombreux migrants font leur entrée dans l'arène politique dans les pays occidentaux d'adoption. Les migrants sont devenus le centre des débats sur les avantages et les inconvénients du multiculturalisme. Dans les démocraties libérales, les femmes musulmanes en particulier ont été transformées dans allégorie de la différence culturelle indésirable. La course au Congrès américain de novembre 2018 a vu un nombre sans précédent de femmes, en particulier des femmes issues des minorités, se présenter aux élections. Ilhan Omar (représentant le Minnesota) et Rashida Tlaib (représentant le Michigan) sont les premières femmes musulmanes élues au Congrès. Omar et Tlaib

ont toutes deux gagné avec de gros écarts. Cette étude examine si la couverture par la presse locale de la candidature d'Omar et de Tlaib était conforme aux schémas courants par rapport aux représentations sur les femmes et les minorités musulmanes dans les médias américains.

Mots-clés : représentations des médias, stéréotypes, candidats, genre, femmes musulmanes

Introduction

At a time when more immigrants enter the political arenas in their adopted Western countries, debates rage over the rights and wrongs of multiculturalism. Muslim women in liberal democracies have been turned into an “allegory for undesirable cultural difference” (Bilge, 2010, p. 10). Western media portrays Muslim women either as passive victims oppressed by a patriarchal religion or as a “threat to Western democracy and individual freedoms” (Kilic, Saharso & Sauer, 2008 p. 404). Furthermore, communication research points to disparities in coverage of women and minority political candidates (Campbell, 1995; Devitt, 2002; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Kahn, 1992; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Major & Coleman, 2008; Niven & Zilber, 1998; Norris, 1997; Zilber & Niven, 2000).

In view of the current political climate in the United States, one would assume that fewer minority candidates would be elected to office in the November 2018 mid-term Congressional election. Mid-term elections in the US are determined by popular direct votes in the individual states yet their resonance is felt at a national level. This round proved to be historic in many respects. First, voter turnout, at 50.3 %, was the largest since the 1914 mid-term election. Second, a record number of women (127) were elected to Congress (Politico, 2018). Third, the pool of candidates saw a significant increase in the number and diversity of minority candidates.

Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib are among those firsts. They are the first Muslim women elected to Congress. Omar won 78% of the vote in Minnesota, a state where 84% of voters are white and Muslims account for 1% of the population (Politico, 2018). Tlaib won 84% of the vote in Michigan where 79% of the state is white and Muslims are only 1 %.

Omar and Tlaib had big wins supported by a voter base that for the most part shared no attributes with them. The following research examines if coverage of Omar and Tlaib was congruent to prevalent schemas in coverage of Muslim women and minorities in US media. The study is significant because it will compare journalistic themes covering these two candidates with existing stereotypes and schemas used to portray women and Muslims.

1. A minority within a minority: Muslims, minorities and media representations

The mass media create and distribute frames or schemas that help audiences construct meaning about the world around them (Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson, 1992; Gitlin, 2003; Hall, 1977). Schema theory is usually used to explain how gender and racial/minority stereotyping occurs. The theory posits that people create cognitive structures to organize knowledge about a given concept or stimulus from previous experience (Fiske & Taylor, 1984). Audiences bombarded by a deluge of information turn to the media to make sense of the world around them (Graber, 1988). Media “frames issues and public deliberation in a particular way” (Reese, 2001, p. 25). Over an extended period of time these frames or schemas emerge as dominant interpretative packages that construct “realities” about politics, people, social issues, etc. (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). These frames or schemas are good when they help audiences process the deluge of information they are exposed to.

However, when they are negative and overgeneralized they can have undesirable effects. Many studies have shown mass media’s interpretative packaging often leads to misrepresentation or stereotypical portrayals of minorities in the media (Hall, 1990, 1992a, 1992b; Saha, 2012; van Dijk, 1991).

The media is the primary provider of information regarding minority groups (Saeed, 1999; van Dijk, 1991). This is problematic and particularly troublesome for minorities because media representations either ignore them, rendering them invisible, or portray them negatively giving rise to stereotypical frames (Poole, 2002; Oliver, 1994; Staples, 2011). For example, Hartmann and Husband’s 1974 study examining news coverage of “people of color” in 1960s Britain framed them as outsiders who do not integrate well into British society. Hall (1992a) found news coverage of Blacks in Britain to portray them as less British and culturally inferior. Studies examining race relations in the US had similar findings to those in Britain, where minorities were stereotypically portrayed and represented as inferior Americans (Fitzgerald, 1992; Totti, 1987) Wilson and Gutierrez (1985) found media representations of minorities in the United States aligned them with crime and drugs. African-Americans were portrayed as drug pushers and criminals who incite violence (Chaney & Robertson, 2013; Dixon, Schell, Giles & Drogos; 2008; Staples, 2011).

While non-Muslim minorities in Western media representations are othered they are not deemed to be diametrically opposed to Western societies (Poole, 2002; Said, 1978, 1981). Media representations of Islam fail to humanize Muslims often depicting them as a monolithic violent, irrational, and patriarchal group of people (Awass, 1996; Korteweg, 2008; Richardson, 2004).

Negative representations and hostility targeting Muslims in contemporary times can be traced with the term Islamophobia being coined in the 1980s (Brown, 2000; Zolberg & Woon, 1999). The following two decades saw an increased interest in Islam as the numbers of Muslim immigrants in the West grew significantly and a

chain of events (mostly negative) were attributed to the religion and its followers (Foner & Alba, 2008).

Media representations were mostly negative, cementing stereotypes among audiences and within public discourse. Richardson's analysis of British newspapers (2004) indicates that there are four reoccurring themes in the coverage: (1) Muslim extremism and violence; (2) Military threat posed by Muslim countries (3) Negative impact on Western democracy as more Muslim immigrants participate in the political process (4) The notion that Muslim gender inequality can spillover into Western countries as the numbers of adherents to the religion grow in number. Unlike other minorities in the West, Muslims and their way of life are seen as incompatible to Western democracy (Foner & Alba, 2008). Research findings across different Western countries has found stereotypes and media representations of Muslims to be consistent. Consequently, these prevalent news frames aided in the rise of an anti-Muslim prejudice in the West, an us against them dialectic (Bulliet, 2003; Dunn, 2001; Read & Bartkowski, 2003).

While it is easy to solely blame media representations in othering Muslims and giving rise to the tide of anti-Muslim prejudice in the West, it is important to note that journalists and media do not exist in a vacuum. They are part and parcel of society and its existing constructs (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005; Barker & Galasinski, 2001). Journalists themselves have their views and understanding of reality shaped by social forces and a wider cultural environment to which they belong. Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005) argue that journalists are similar to their audiences in that their perception and understanding of events is "influenced by factors including their background, education, and wider social and cultural environment" (p. 6).

This does not negate the fact that media is the primary conduit that organizes and articulates representations of issues, groups of people, etc. and it turn plays a significant role in the cultural production of knowledge (Dunn, 2002; Poole, 2002). Media coverage helps people develop cognitive structures to understand events, process the deluge of information, and make sense of the external world (Grimes & Drechsel, 1996; Reese, 2001). Arguably, journalists then bear a responsibility to transmit a reality that is based on objectivity rather than a reproduction and/ or reinforcement of existing stereotypes and representations.

2. Women and gendered news coverage

Media representations of women in general are problematic. Scholars have found the concepts of frame theory useful when analyzing gender portrayals in the news. Studies first examined the amounts of coverage and whether it was positive or negative (Luebke, 1989; Blackwood, 1983; Gerbner, 1978; Tuchman, 1978). While the media does cover women, media frames focus on stereotypical depictions of

females and feminine characteristics (Carroll & Schrieber, 1997; Robinson & Saint-Jean, 1995; Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991).

Attention has shifted to more nuanced approaches and scholarship now examines representations and frame construction when examining coverage of women in the media (Gidengil & Everitt, 1999). Concepts such as “gendered mediation”, “gendering,” and/or “gendered discourse”, focus “the gendered nature of representational politics as well as the gendered nature of media coverage” (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996, p. 103). Gendered mediation as Gidengil and Everitt (2003) contend is far from being gender-neutral, “conventional news frames treat the male as normative” (p. 210). Gendered mediated framing affords more significance to male issues or individuals in media coverage than they do females and feminine issues. The masculine narrative relegates women and their stories related to a lesser status (Rakow & Kranich, 1991; Srebeny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996).

Women (and issues related to them) tend to receive less coverage than their male counterparts. Gingras’s (1995) study of Canadian female politicians found that they received significantly less coverage in relation to their numbers. Similar findings in Kahn’s 1994 study in the United States indicate that female gubernatorial and Senate candidates received less coverage than male candidates. Norris’s 1997 study further supports these earlier findings and indicates that female politicians in the global arena receive fewer international media coverage than men that precede or succeed them.

Even when women are in the news, the media tends to focus on stereotypical depictions of feminine attributes (Carroll & Schrieber, 1997; Craft & Wanta 2004; Devitt, 2002; Heider, 2000). The media tends to focus on feminine attributes and issues that are of interest to women when covering female political candidates. Kahn (1996) found the media focuses on female candidates’ honesty and compassion whereas as experience and leadership were traits attributed to their male counterparts. Stereotypical depictions cement these particular ideas which in turn frame issues and public discourse in set ways (Reese, Gandy & Grant, 2001).

“Muslim women, on account of being both Muslim and women, face even more of a challenge” (Eid & Khan, 2011, p. 186). Muslim women have historically been confined to representations through the lens of a set of Orientalist frames adopted by Western media. They are either relegated to oppressed females with no voice within their patriarchal family structures and societies; militant jihadis; or mysterious scantily dressed belly-dancers (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Mabro 1991). News tends to frame and position Muslim women as dependent actors within larger social and religious constructs rather than independent ones (Wilkins, 1997). Rarely does news coverage of Muslim women focus on their individual or professional worth. These oversimplifications in media representations reinforce stereotypes and strengthen an Orientalist perspective which in turn fails to capture the diversity and heterogeneity

of Muslim women and their life experiences (Poole, 2002; Said, 2008; Wilkins, 1997).

The shifting demographics and growing numbers of minorities in their respective state districts did help Omar and Tlaib secure their seats. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that Omar's and Tlaib's big wins in the November 2018 Congressional race indicate that Muslim women candidates are being accepted by a majority of constituents who don't necessarily share attributes with them. The only reasonable reason constituents would vote for Omar or Tlaib is that they saw them as viable candidates whose stand on political issues is congruent to their own.

Ms. Omar is a naturalized American citizen of Somali origin. She arrived in the United States at age 10 after which her family settled in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Before winning the 5th Congressional District seat, Ilhan Omar served as Minneapolis City Council member Andrew Johnson's Senior Policy aide for 2 years (2013-2015). She then moved on to become the Director of Policy Initiatives of the Women Organizing Women Network.

The state of Minnesota is one where Caucasians account for 84% of the population. Minorities account for 15% of the population. Muslims in Minnesota are only 1% of the population. The 5th Congressional District's population is predominantly Caucasian at 67.4% and minorities account approximately for 33%. Despite the fact that Caucasians are the majority in this district, it is the most racially diverse district in the state of Minnesota. Three other characteristics distinguish the 5th Congressional District: first it has more millennials than baby boomers; second it has a highly educated population surpassed only by Minnesota's 3rd Congressional District; and third it has the highest rates of poverty and unemployment in the state (Politico, 2018).

Rashida Tlaib is a first generation American of Palestinian descent born in Detroit, Michigan. Tlaib began her political career in 2004 after interning with Michigan State Representative Steve Tobocman and later succeeding him. Ms. Tlaib won the Congressional seat for Michigan's 13th District in November 2018. The District is predominantly Black at around 56%. Caucasians account for 39 % of residents. The remaining 5% is composed of other minority groups (Politico, 2018).

Michigan, very much like Minnesota, has a predominantly Caucasian population (79%). Muslims account for 1% of the state's population. However, Islam has a relatively longer history and presence in Michigan than most states. The religion was first introduced to the state with Middle Eastern immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. The city of Dearborn, part of Michigan's 12 Congressional District, is home to the largest Muslim population in the United States.

As previously mentioned, Omar and Tlaib did not run in districts where a majority of people share many of their attributes (e.g. religion, ethnic background/race, etc.) Their wins, (by large margins) indicate an acceptance by the electorate and favorable public opinion of them. However, the narrative Omar and

Tlaib espoused about their candidacy is not necessarily the same. While both Omar and Tlaib are Muslims, Ms. Omar chose to cement this identity as part of her narrative. Omar has said, “That she had confronted ‘my otherness’ as both a black person and a Muslim. She became a citizen in 2000, when she was 17. “After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, she decided to wear the hijab, as an open declaration of her identity” (Stolberg, 2018, p. A15). Rashida Tlaib on the other hand, while always acknowledging her faith and her Palestinian background, is a first-generation American born raised in Detroit, the city she ran to represent. Tlaib’s narrative was based on fighting for civil rights and against social injustices prevalent in her district. Sally Howell, director of the Center for Arab American Studies at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, said in a quote to the Associated Press when asked about Tlaib’s candidacy, “This is a huge victory for the Arab and Muslim American communities – it’s also a huge victory for the city of Detroit, Rashida Tlaib brings forward the legacy of John Conyers in terms of the groundbreaking role he played in Congress and his commitment to civil rights”, (Durkin, 2018).

There has been a surge in the number of Muslim candidates running for office in the US especially Muslim woman (Kishi, 2017). Yet, the same report indicates an increased level of crimes and assaults against Muslims exceeding those that took place after September 11, 2001. This study will examine if stereotypical representations of Omar and Tlaib as women (particularly Muslim women) persisted in local news coverage or if journalists were able to surpass these portrayals and focus on the issues the candidates stood for. This research also seeks to compare coverage of both candidates who do share one faith yet have different backgrounds as well as narratives for their candidacy.

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: Will there be significant focus in the coverage on Ilhan Omar’s gender than there will be for Rashida Tlaib?

RQ2: Will there be significant focus in the coverage on Ilhan Omar’s race/ethnicity than there will be for Rashida Tlaib?

RQ3: Will there be significant focus in the coverage on Ilhan Omar’s religion than there will be on Rashida Tlaib’s?

RQ4: Will there be significant negative reference to religion in coverage of Ilhan Omar than there will be for Rashida Tlaib?

RQ5: How much of the coverage will be on feminine versus masculine issues for Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib.

3. Method

The following research examined if coverage of Omar and Tlaib was congruent to prevalent schemas in coverage of Muslim women and female candidates. The

sample was $n=215$ newspaper articles/editorials collected through Lexis Nexis covering the time period from October 1 to November 5, 2018 (34 days before the November 6th election). Articles were randomly selected from the 4 top local newspapers in Minnesota (2) and Michigan (2) covering the candidates' districts (see Table 1). The unit of analysis was the paragraph. News stories comprised 88.3% of the sample (189) whereas editorials represented 11.7 % (26) of the sample. There were 112 news stories on Ilhan Omar and 103 on Rashida Tlaib. Coverage from the local press was selected for this analysis because proximity is a news value that is key in shaping voter perceptions, ideas, and attitudes of candidates.

Two independent coders were utilized. A double coding process was utilized for the first 50 articles to ensure that discrepancies were discussed, and coding rules were further refined. Each article was assigned to only one category based on its primary purpose. Following that another 20 articles were randomly selected and coded yielding a 93.0 % inter-coder agreement and Cohen's kappa score of .91, indicating a high level of inter-coder reliability.

Coding categories were divided into 2 general areas: (1) Individual attributes as gender, race, and religion (2) Candidates' stand on issues such as the economy, defense, civil rights, education, environment, and healthcare). Following on the steps of previous research, issues were categorized either as feminine or masculine issues. Feminine issues included education, healthcare, and the environment; masculine issues were defense, civil rights, crime, and the economy (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Major & Coleman, 2008). Coders were instructed to include explicit mentions of attributes and issues and not to depend on their interpretations of implicit attributes or issues (Major & Coleman, 2008). Gender was operationally defined as reference to the respective candidate as a woman, female, mother, daughter, granddaughter, wife, or spouse. Race or ethnicity was operationalized as reference to the candidates' as white, black, Caucasian, African, non-white, Arab, Somali, and Palestinian. Religion was operationalized as any reference to Islam, Muslim, hijab, hijabi, veil. If there was reference to a candidate's gender, race/ethnicity, and religion in the same paragraph it was coded separately into each one of the categories. For example, Ilhan Omar was referred to numerous times as a "Somali-American Muslim whose family immigrated to the US."

The issues categories were operationally defined as (a) economy—any topic relating to employment, poverty index levels, business and industry, taxes, budgets, etc.; (b) education—teaching, school funding and budgets, etc. creating a well-educated; (c) healthcare—medication prices healthcare insurance, and hospitals, doctors; the environment; (d) – climate change, pollution, etc.; (e) civil rights- social justice, minorities, policing, etc.; (f) crime- safety, statistics about crime, gun control, and so on; (g) defense—homeland security, defense spending, etc.

The tone (valence) of the coverage of issues was operationally defined as follows: Positive statements were any statements that the reporter himself/herself made, statements made by someone else about the candidate or by the candidates

themselves. For example, when a supporter for Ms. Omar says “This is an historic moment. Two amazing immigrant women are running for Congress”, this is coded as positive. Neutral statements strictly report on facts without any particular feelings. For example, “Former state Rep. Rashida Tlaib won the race to be the full-term replacement for U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Detroit.” Negative statements are unfavorable portrayals of the candidate and her ability to handle an issue. For example, “This month, the district’s Republican Party launched a web and billboard campaign dubbed “Stop Ilhan.” It called the candidate “dangerous for Minnesota”.”

Table 1. Minnesota and Michigan Newspaper Circulations

Newspaper	Daily Circulation	Location
The Star Tribune	288,315	Minneapolis, Minnesota
St. Paul Pioneer Press	208,280	St. Paul, Minnesota
Detroit Free Press	234,579	Detroit, Michigan
The Detroit News	141,668	Detroit, Michigan

3. Findings

The findings indicate more significant coverage of religion for Omar than there was for Tlaib. There was no significant focus on race and gender for either Omar or Tlaib. However, Omar’s religion was significantly mentioned in the coverage. This was not the case for Tlaib. Gender was more prominent in coverage of Ilhan Omar than in the coverage of Rashida Tlaib (see Table 2).

RQ1: Will there be significant focus in the coverage on the Ilhan Omar’s gender than there will be for Rashida Tlaib?

This research question was supported in the findings ($t= 6.06^*$, $df=214$, $p<.001$). There were more mentions of gender in Ilhan Omar coverage ($M=.25$, $SD=.59$) than there was for Rashida Tlaib ($M=.15$, $SD.25$).

RQ2: Will there be significant focus in the coverage on Ilhan Omar's race/ethnicity than there will be for Rashida Tlaib?

Research question number two was not supported by the findings ($t=1.0$, $df=21$, $p<.001$). Reference to both Omar and Tlaib's race/ethnicity were not significant ($M=.007$, $SD .000$) and ($M=.001$, $SD =.14$) respectively.

RQ3: Will there be significant focus in the coverage on Ilhan Omar's religion/faith than there will be on Rashida Tlaib's?

The research question was supported ($t= 3.8^*$, $df=214$, $p<.001$) There were significantly more mentions of Ilhan Omar's Muslim faith ($M=.29$, $SD .89$) than there was for Rashida Tlaib ($M=.07$, $SD.44$). There was support for the existing body of literature regarding Muslim women. Ilhan Omar received more reference to her faith than Rashida Tlaib in the coverage.

RQ4: Will there be significant negative reference to religion in coverage of Ilhan Omar than there will be for Rashida Tlaib?

This research question was not supported ($t= 2.6$, $df= 214$, $p<.001$; Omar $M=.15$, $SD= .21$; Tlaib $M=.05$, $SD=.16$).

RQ5: How much of the coverage will be on feminine versus masculine issues for Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib?

There was coverage on both feminine and masculine issues for Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib. (see Table 3). Rashida Tlaib got more coverage for the economy, a masculine issue, than Omar did. Civil rights were another masculine issue that Tlaib received more coverage on than Omar. Overall, Rashida Tlaib received more coverage on issues (both feminine and masculine) than Omar did.

Table 2. Differences in Attribute Mentions Between Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib

Attribute Mentions	Ilhan Omar M(SD)	Rashida Tlaib M(SD)	T
Gender	.25 (.59)	.15 (.25)	6.06*
Race	.007 (.000)	.001 (.14)	-1.0
Religion	.29 (.89)	.07 (.44)	-3.8*
Negative Religion	.15 (.21)	.05 (.16)	2.6

* $p<.001$

Table 3. Mentions of Feminine Versus Masculine Issues

Issue	Mentions (<i>Ilhan Omar</i>)	Mentions (<i>Rashida Tlaib</i>)
Education (<i>Feminine Issue</i>)	10	21
Healthcare (<i>Feminine Issue</i>)	6	18
Environment (<i>Feminine Issue</i>)	0	3
Civil Rights (<i>Masculine Issue</i>)	26	43
Crime (<i>Masculine Issue</i>)	3	12
Defense (<i>Masculine Issue</i>)	17	23
Economy (<i>Masculine Issue</i>)	15	56

4. Discussion

Ilhan Omar received significantly more mentions on her religion and gender than Rashida Tlaib. This might be attributed to several factors. First and foremost, Omar wears the hijab –a visible symbol of her faith and for many non-Muslims cementing existing ideas about Muslim women. Tlaib on the other hand does not wear the hijab. Second, Ilhan Omar herself might be the strongest proponent of this narrative. She has said on several occasions that the fact that she is a refugee Muslim woman wearing the hijab and running for office, attests to American tenets of diversity and inclusion; a melting pot that accepts all. Third, as previously mentioned, the state of Michigan, Rashida Tlaib’s home, has a long history and exposure to Muslims dating back to the beginning of the 20th century with the settlement of Muslim immigrants. Minnesota on the other hand has demographically been a lily white and homogenous state. The state’s prominent exposure to Muslims started in the 1990’s with the

resettlement of Somalis there. Rashida Tlaib's district is predominantly one where minorities are the majority (African/American/ Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian) accounting for 64.4 % of the population.

Minorities tend to have favorable opinions of other minorities as they have similar experiences (Mogahed & Mahmood, 2019). It comes as no surprise that the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* both endorsed Tlaib rather than black candidates such as Brenda Jones. The *Detroit Free Press* cited Tlaib's experience in social justice issues as well as her pledge to address the economic concerns of Detroiters as the main reasons for endorsing her rather than the other candidates. In Minnesota *The Pioneer Press* decided not to endorse any candidates while *The Star Tribune* decided on the Democratic candidate, Margaret Anderson Kelliher, a white female candidate hailing from rural Minnesota. *The Star Tribune* ranked Ilhan Omar as their third choice citing her "lean record of accomplishments" and the fact that the editorial board is bothered by an overstatement on her campaign website about her accomplishments. *The Star Tribune* cites a "lean record of accomplishment" for Omar, 14 years Kelliher's junior, while neglecting to point out that Kelliher had dropped out of the political map for 8 years following her defeat in her 2010 bid for state governor (Brodey, 2018).

The findings indicate that for Muslim women, at least those who are visibly so (such as Omar), media coverage always intersects with their gender and their faith. Moreover, their faith seems to dictate how they are covered as women. As Macdonald asserts "The image of the veil continues to exercise discursive power over perceptions of Islam and Muslim women" (p. 19, 2006). The hijab/veil is the defining factor for Muslim women. The literature already indicates that women candidates receive less coverage than their male counterparts and even when they do receive coverage it examines them through the lens of feminine attributes. For candidates such as Omar, this is even more problematic because their faith supersedes issues and where they stand on them, consequently the electorate perceives and gets to know them through their faith rather than their politics. In turn this leads to the continuation of what has been termed "hegemonic modes of representation" (Macdonald, 2006, p.19). On the other hand, Tlaib's religion and gender were not focal points in the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* coverage. Both newspapers focused primarily on Tlaib's stand on issues of social justice and economic revival for the district.

The literature predicts that Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular receive negative coverage (Poole, 2002; Said, 1991; Sreberny, 2002; Wilkins, 1997) however, this did not happen for either Omar or Tlaib. While there is still a fascination with Ilhan Omar's hijab/veil and significant mention of her faith, there is no negative reference to either Omar or Tlaib's Islamic faith. In fact, coverage many times alluded to the ideas of diversity and inclusion when referring to both Omar and Tlaib's candidacy. To paraphrase a quote from *The Star Tribune* in Minnesota, "District 5 is where a person of color, a Muslim can run for a Congressional seat.

This is a district where you build what this party looks like 60, 30, 20, 15 years from now [this party is in reference to the Democratic party].”

Local press coverage of Omar and Tlaib at times did reference their race and/or ethnicity but it was not a focal point. For example, Omar’s Somali background is mentioned to attest to the “growing numbers of Somali Americans in Minnesota”. Rashida Tlaib’s Palestinian background is not focal in either the *Detroit Free Press* or *The Detroit News* coverage. When it is mentioned it is more an assertion of pride. One news story in the *Detroit Free Press* (that first ran in August 2018 and once again in October 2018) refers to Tlaib as “a source of pride for the West Bank”.

Both candidates did receive coverage for feminine and masculine issues, but the findings clearly indicate that overall Tlaib received more coverage on issues than Omar. Civil rights and the economy, both masculine issues, were significantly more when journalists covered Tlaib. This can be attributed to the platform she ran on and the unique concerns of her district. Both candidates received little to no coverage on the environment, an issue considered to be a feminine issue.

There is no doubt that journalists are to be commended for their coverage of Omar and Tlaib because it was able to avoid blatant negative stereotypical representations and bias against Muslims and Muslim women. Perhaps it is the growing diversity in the US population, especially in the candidates’ respective districts, that has influenced and shaped coverage. Another reason might be the fact the journalists themselves are exposed to Muslims, or they themselves identify as a minority. Research findings indicate that when non-Muslims are exposed to or personally know Muslims, levels of Islamophobia decrease (Mogahed & Mahmood, 2019). It can also be that journalists are paying more attention to longstanding criticisms of their coverage of female and minority political candidates. Whatever factor or factors influenced the coverage, local press has avoided negative stereotypes in portrayals of Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib.

Conclusion

There is no denying that the local press plays a critical role in shaping voters’ attitudes toward candidates. The findings of this research indicate that while there are shifts in representations of Muslim women in the press, narratives are still dependent on existing stereotypes. Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib ran and won their seats with large margins in states where they are a minority within a minority. There is no doubt that they were accepted by a majority unlike themselves.

The fascination with Omar’s hijab is still within the sphere of stereotypical representations of Muslim women. However, her stand on issues both feminine and masculine is also included in the local press coverage. In spite of her hijab, coverage of Omar surpassed the three personas designated to Muslim women, that of oppressed females within a patriarchal societal structure; the militant jihadist; or the belly dancer relegated to sex-object status (Bullock & Jafri, 2000; Mabro 1991).

Omar is covered as a serious candidate, albeit less experienced according to *The Star Tribune*, with ideas on policy and issues affecting the electorate. This is definitely to be hailed as a step forward in media representations of Muslim women.

Rashida Tlaib's coverage focused on her established record in fighting for social issues and delivery of tangibles to her constituents. As the *Detroit Free Press* stated in its endorsement, Tlaib has "a solid record of progressive politics. She pairs progressive politics with policy know-how; a commitment to social justice with a reputation for solid delivery of constituent services; she's not afraid to unleash fiery rhetoric, but she can also deploy an easy charm that allows her to forge unlikely working relationships with her ideological opposites."

Both Omar and Tlaib's reference their faith as integral to their identity as well as their candidacy, but Omar in particular included this in her narrative. The fact that they are Muslim women running for office in the United States made them unique, garnered them attention, and shattered existing stereotypes of oppression. The candidates themselves (especially Ilhan Omar) maybe the catalyst that spurred reference to them as "Muslim female candidate". The local press may have picked up on these assertions and included them in their coverage.

While the coverage of both these candidates was not found to be negative, in the case of Omar stereotypical representations that link her gender to her faith are prevalent. She is more often than not referred to as one of the first female Muslim candidates to run for a Congressional seat. It is understandable that there should be a reference to this attribute in the first days of her candidacy as an introduction to constituents. However, a month before the election (the period of this analysis), her stand on issues and policy should be the focus of coverage. As Coleman and Major (2008) argue, journalists must understand that stereotypical representations are still harmful even if they are not negative.

The following study examined how two Muslim female candidates were represented by local media in their districts. Coverage did examine their positions on issues (surprisingly both feminine and masculine issues were covered). While journalists did avoid negative stereotypical frames in their coverage, in Ilhan Omar's case, there was a significant intersection and reference to her religion and her gender. Unlike coverage of Tlaib in Michigan, reporters in Minnesota were unable to avoid and/or contradict prevalent representations of Muslim women. Tlaib definitely benefitted from the long history of Muslims in Michigan as well as the fact that she ran in a district that is predominantly composed of minorities. Moreover, Tlaib is a "daughter" of the district, born and raised in it with an extended history of public service and involvement in civil rights issues. Perhaps with the changing demographics in Minnesota (as well as other states) and the possibility of more Muslims/Muslim women running for office, journalistic representations and schemas will better reflect candidates. It is pertinent that journalists avert stereotypical representations of women candidates in general, especially Muslim

women candidates, as their coverage is one of the key factors that influence voters' attitudes.

As Muslim women assert their presence in the American political debate, there are changes in their representations as this study indicates. Representations are still stereotypical and fascinated with the veiled Muslim woman, but they are not blatantly negative, nor do they reinforce framing of Muslim women as oppressed creatures. Future studies on Muslim women candidates can help shed light on changes in patterns of coverage. Hopefully these changes reflect the diverse life experiences of Muslim women referring to them first and foremost as American women who happen to be Muslim.

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