GETTING MUSLIM REPRESENTATION RIGHT
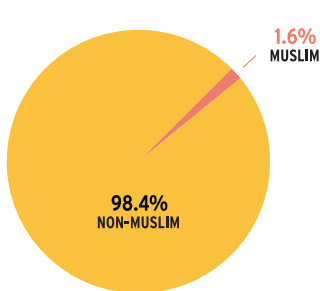
Why Muslim Representation Matters

- Anti-Muslim hatred has reached **"epidemic proportions"** according to Dr. Ahmed Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, in a 2021 report shared with the UN Human Rights Council.

- Studies show on-screen depictions of Muslims have **direct consequences on policy and legislation.**

- Helping improve Muslim representation in film and television is a **unique inclusion opportunity across both class and race,** given Muslims are **the most racially and geographically diverse faith group in the world,** making up 24% of the world's population (1.9 billion people). Muslims are also **the most likely faith group to live in poverty** in the US, and more than half of Muslims in the UK live in poverty.

- While most diversity initiatives don't focus on religion, the racialization and marginalization of Muslims as a distinct group means we must **directly tackle anti-Muslim hate, stereotypes, and erasure.**
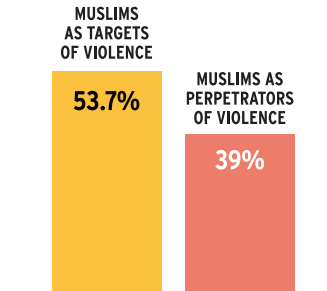
Missing and Maligned: The Reality of Muslims in Popular Global Movies

The USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative, Pillars Fund, The Ford Foundation, and actor Riz Ahmed and his production company Left Handed Films partnered to release a study conducted by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative on the portrayal of Muslims in 200 top-grossing movies released between 2017 and 2019 in the US, UK, New Zealand, and Australia.
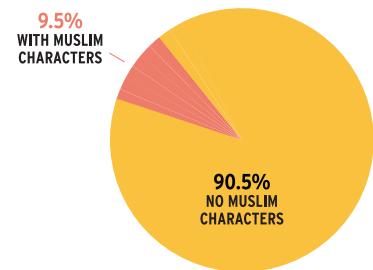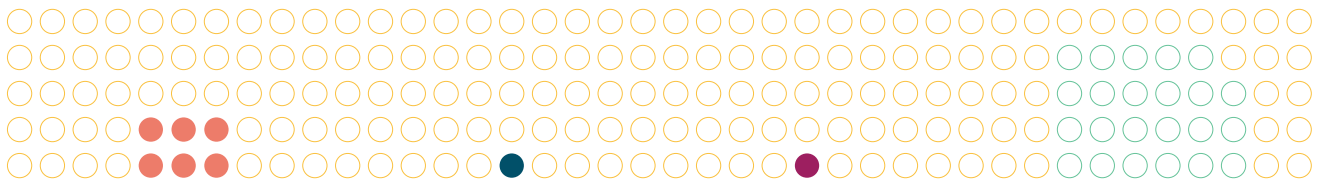
In these top 200 films:

1.6% MUSLIM

98.4% NON-MUSLIM

144 out of 8,965 speaking roles were Muslim characters.

MUSLIMS AS TARGETS OF VIOLENCE
53.7%

MUSLIMS AS PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE
39%

Primary and secondary Muslim characters are often limited to being depicted as **perpetrators or victims of violence.**

9.5% WITH MUSLIM CHARACTERS

90.5% NO MUSLIM CHARACTERS

More than 90% of films studied had no Muslim characters whatsoever.

6 films featured a Muslim in a solo, duo, or ensemble lead role.

1 Muslim man was LGBTQ.

1 Muslim man was depicted with a disability.

0 out of 23 animated films had a Muslim character.

23.6% of all Muslim characters were **women.** Primary and secondary characters were often in roles defined by their male counterparts, for example, romantic interests.

51.1% of Muslim characters were in films **set in the past,** excluding Muslims from modern life.

87.8% of primary and secondary Muslim characters **spoke no English** or spoke with an accent that rendered them "foreign."

66.7% of Muslim characters are depicted as Middle Eastern, despite findings that 61% of the world's Muslims are from Asia (Pew 2017) and 28% of US Muslims are Black (ISPU 2019).

Blueprint for Muslim Inclusion

All industry leaders, regardless of specialty, have the opportunity to **uplift Muslim narratives** by formally recognizing Muslims as a marginalized, erased, and under-resourced group in diversity, equity, and inclusion programs.

The Blueprint for Muslim Inclusion is comprised of community-developed solutions for film and television industry professionals **to learn and implement practices designed to support Muslim stories and storytellers.**

THE BLUEPRINT

1. **Studios, Networks, and Production Companies**

   a. Conduct inclusion script reviews that capitalize on the expertise of self-identified Muslims.

   b. Examine and reform casting practices.

   c. Source Muslim vendors and suppliers. Full list to support sourcing can be found in Appendix C of the Blueprint for Muslim Inclusion.

   d. Build and support pipeline programs that bring Muslim executives, creators, and above-the-line and below-the-line crew into the process of bringing narratives to the screen.

2. **Film and Drama Schools**

   a. Invite Muslim talent to serve on your board.

   b. Engage your endowments and donors to underwrite fellowships and thesis films for Muslims.

   c. Support emerging Muslim filmmakers with the resources to attend the top 10 film festivals globally.

3. **Agencies**

   a. Audit your talent pool and track the number and percentage of intersectional Muslim writers, above-the-line talent, and on-screen talent your agency represents.

   b. Intentionally seek out polycultural and diverse Muslim talent.

   c. Conduct script reviews that capitalize on the expertise of self-identified Muslims before shopping scripts to ensure the Muslim representation in your scripts is inclusive, accurate, and nuanced.

   d. Represent Muslim consultants who can collaborate with writers, studios, production companies, and other industry professionals.

4. **Festivals**

   a. Earmark slots in pipeline and lab programming for Muslim creatives each year.

   b. Invite Muslim talent to serve on your board.

   c. Intentionally invite Muslim critics and journalists to cover your festival.

MUSLIM VISIBILITY CHALLENGE

The Muslim Visibility Challenge calls on the film industry to transform on-screen representation of Muslims with two urgent actions:

SUNSET TERROR TROPES IN YOUR CONTENT OVER THE NEXT 18 MONTHS.

It's time to say goodbye to story lines of violent Muslim terrorists.

SECURE A FIRST-LOOK DEAL OR SIGN WITH AT LEAST ONE MUSLIM CREATOR IN THE NEXT 18 MONTHS.

When Muslims are empowered in the creative process, we can create more well-rounded and accurate stories.

pillars   FORD FOUNDATION   USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative   LEFT HANDED