

## Episode 13 - Dr. Erik Nisbet: International Conflict and Social Identity: The Influence of Mass Media on "Us vs. Them" Thinking

[00:00:08] Welcome to LIVING PROOF A podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu). Celebrating 75 years of excellence in social work education. We're glad you could join us today. The series Living Proof examines social work research and practice that makes a difference in people's lives. I'm your host Adjoa Robinson. Barack Obama gave his first formal television interview as president to a correspondent from Al Arabiya the Dubai based satellite network aimed at Arab audiences. During the interview the president mentioned that members of his family are Muslim and that he has lived in Muslim countries saying quote Now my job is to communicate the fact that the United States has a stake in the well-being of the Muslim world that the language we use has to be a language of respect unquote. President Obama was in fact beginning to change the us vs. them discourse that has shaped international relations over the past eight years. It is as if the president were listening to the advice of today's guest Dr Eric Nisbet. Dr. Nisbet is an assistant professor of communication at the Ohio State University. His research interest is comparative political communication and the media psychology of international conflict. Dr. Nisbet studies how the interplay between media frames and social identity scheme impacts audience perceptions of international conflict and terrorism across national context. His current work examines how foreign media shapes public opinion toward the United States and how foreign media may embed anti-Americanism within national or cultural identity.

[00:02:09] In an interview recorded before the presidential election of 2008 Dr Nisbet discusses the parallel processes that have shaped perceptions of social and group identity and attitudes towards the imagined other in the United States and the Muslim world and how those perceptions and attitudes drive our behavior and policy. Dr. Catherine Dulmus Associate Dean for Research and Director of the Buffalo Center for Social Research is our interviewer joining us today is Dr. Eric Nisbet from Ohio State University whose area of expertise and researches international conflict. Thank you for joining us today Eric. Could you kind of share with us a little bit about exactly what is the international conflict here. Well thank you for having me. I'm pleased to be here today. My research focuses on what I like to call the media psychology of international conflict. I primarily look at the role that the mass media play in conjunction with social or group identity in defining what international conflict is about how it is perceived among the general public and how what are those sort of policy implications of these perceptions. How does the media shape our understanding of the conflict. What is going on. What parties are in conflict. What we should do about the conflict and I primarily focus on as my case study sort of the U.S. war on terror as is commonly defined today which involves our engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan and basically between sort of al Qaeda the United States and basically how not only does the American public perceive this conflict but also how do Muslim publics perceive this conflict overseas. I really look at it in parallel to each other use the role the media plays not only in the United States also in the Muslim world. Very fascinating.

[00:04:07] How did you happen to get interested in this area. Well my and my my background in my field is communication and back in 2001 2002 shortly after the September 11th attacks a question that was often being asked by many policy makers. Was why do they hate us in reference to a Muslim or Arab publics ideas whereas you know very strong anti-Americanism coming from and the common response specially from the Bush administration was that it was not American foreign policy per se that was wrong or incorrect or American actions that were promoting anti-American sentiment but rather the misperception of American foreign policy or misperception about United States actions about the American people inciting culture. And they pointed to the

foreign media. You know Arab channels such for example as Al-Jazeera as one of the sources of the misperceptions and laid the blame at the door of these foreign media channels is someone who is in the field of communication interest in the mass media that served my interest in the sense of well really is it what role is the mass media overseas playing in promoting anti-American sentiment. These are the other types of social influences. How is the media or reliance upon foreign media or even specific types of channels like Al-Jazeera in the Muslim world. How is that shaping perceptions of the United States its people its culture and its policies. Taking a look at that and doing some initial research on that I started to think about what's going on in the United States in the international conflict is not one sided conflict is not one sided. Good point two it's two sided. So that thinking about that. Well what are the same processes going on here.

[00:06:05] How do we perceive Muslims and Arabs overseas and why and how does the media the U.S. media for example shape our perceptions or cues that we're getting from political religious leaders United States. So I started really looking at this more and more as a parallel process of perception and opinion formation looking at media and religious and political discourse in United States about Islam and about the conflict itself and then also looking at foreign media Arab media religious and political discourse in the Middle East and about about the United States and seeing how they compared to each other and what the impact is worse worsen the political consequences of these processes. And this this research we've been doing since 9/11 since about 2002 2002. Can you share a little bit of what the research writer. Sure well taking a look at starting maybe in the Muslim world for example I have found over doing primary relying upon large national or cross national surveys that we've done or work together to collect that indeed there is a relationship of people Arab audiences or Muslim audiences that rely for example on certain types of channels like Al Al-Jazeera in the Arab world and the Middle East are more negative or have more negative perceptions the United States Arab audiences rely on different channels. For example maybe western channels like CNN or some other types of channels whether the question of whether these channels are overtly biased is is a whole different question. You can find a relationship you can. There's several reasons why reliance upon Arab media might lead to more negative perceptions the United States.

[00:07:50] It primarily is that you know Arab media much like American media present issues and topics from an Arab or Muslim perspective. Right. Those are who their audiences are and that's how they sort of characterize or frame different types of media. It's primarily what you've also found is that in the Arab world not only has the some media channels to promote negative or such nice dates but it's in conjunction with what I would call identity formation. We have to step back from it. What you've had going on in the Middle East which is a big change over the last 10 years is the increase in media globalization where I used to have most channels would you characterize like you'd have Egyptian channels or Saudi Arabian channels but where are you what you've had with the growth of satellite technology. You have these pan Arab channels for example are regional channels that have this stuff that you know like channels like Al-Jazeera or a Saudi channel called Ellerby or other types of channels there's about 300 now satellite channel 301 in the Middle East. And so they've served changed the media environment and the political discourse and in the sense that instead of focusing on issues in terms of purely like pieces from Egyptian perspective or from a Syrian perspective or a Saudi perspective or a Lebanese perspective they're looking at it from a Muslim perspective or an Arab perspective. The sense that looking at the United States foreign policy looking at our actions in Iraq for example in Afghanistan looking at how we interact with the Muslim world does not seem from a national perspective anymore or more from a greater hand Arab or Muslim perspective.

[00:09:32] When you take it that this change is significant is because people use the media often as a way to define themselves and sort of like a symbolic resource to help understand who and what they are. And when you've had the most popular media in the Middle East no longer talking about issues in terms of like national identity in terms of what it means to be an Egyptian what it needs to

be as a Saudi as Lebanese. We're talking about these issues and what it means to be as an Arab or Muslim it changes their perspective their frame of reference so part of when they talk about how media might promote increased negativity towards the United States in the Middle East. It's either southwesterly issue of overt bias or even being overtly critical of the United States is the fact that these relationships group identities have increased so that as the media talk about these issues and a grander narrative and a grander cultural identity narrative that people start internalizing and seeing the states as possible a threat to Muslim identity or view the United States as possibly threatening all Muslims or all Arabs because they are the the frame of reference as change shows how United States you know package about national estuary's and foreign policy and that you know you're an Egyptian but we're really you know we're invading Iraq and there were no issue with Iraq and they're not seeing it as separate countries are separate issues. They're seeing it all as one issue that they feel a closeness an identification with Muslims and Arabs. Region wide they see the conflict in this greater sort of context than simply say are isolated events or isolated policies. When you gather information related to individuals in those countries.

[00:11:30] Did you survey them or what did the research I've done in the last couple years is primarily based upon a range of surveys mostly face to face surveys and collected by different organizations agencies. I've collaborated with and then I've done my own survey work in conjunction with some of the Arab television stations in that region surveying some of their audiences specifically that we had to summarize how they view Americans based on your research. What would you say. I would say in summary the and this is not all Muslims as Muslims in the Middle East are actually Muslims in Africa. Different we can talk about that but in the Middle East a growing number of Muslims the United States is that they not only have an unfavorable attitudes towards the United States but they have an unfavorable attitude towards American culture and society and they differentiate themselves from they use the United States as sort of this imagined other which they define themselves against. And what you've had this and the problem is that growing Muslim identification part of it's sort of this chicken or the egg. You always you know obviously there's always been individuals in the Middle East who say I'm Muslim first I'm Egyptian second Saudi second that are their primary social political identity is their religion but because of the nature of this conflict it's only strengthened these processes and the change in the media environment where people now can have they're all watching a similar television stations and they're all sort of sharing the symbolic space where they're forging these are group identities mediated identities.

[00:13:07] It's only strengthened these processes are more and more people the number of people who identify as Muslim or Muslim as their primary political identity as since like 2003 has more than doubled. So now actually based upon a you know a recent survey of six different Arab countries about 45 or 50 percent of the population say that Muslim is their primary social political and any where back in you know three or four years ago like 20 percent. Basically the idea of national Dandi has recede has become less important. And so this growth of what these surveys are showing this growth of political political Islam or Muslim identity has actually increased anti-American sentiment because anti-Americanism becomes sort of like that any marker away sort of a base of how much the force of this identity serve because identity tells us that who we are but it tells us who we are not. So to have a a political identity or social identity. It tells us OK I share certain attributes of religion for example or religious beliefs. That's who I share with people who are like me. But how do I differentiate people who are not like me. All right. And one way for many Muslims in Middle East unfortunately United States are American society culture has become that serve of imagined other they define themselves against. And this is driving a lot of anti-American sentiment. Sounds like it's an us and them work for increasingly so unfortunately where the problem with that is that it's harder to resolve because you can it when it's simply I have an unfavorable attitude about the United States based upon differences and political interests or differences on economic interests or differences and military interests. You can negotiate and solve those interests

and mediate those differences.

[00:14:59] But one it's a difference based upon simply I am you know based upon a group identity where the difference is not based upon a rational calculation or rational perception of interest but rather like I instantly not you. I'm against you because that begins with how I define myself. That's much more difficult to resolve in the long term. It takes a longer term to resolve those type of guy. It's not. It's not the idea that you can ever be resolved but it takes a much longer process to deal with. And you know I find that to focus simply and lay the blame and say all this conflict and what's been going on a few years last few years is specifically because of dynamics going on in the Middle East a process that is going on. Have I noticed that you know when you started speaking when we when I first saw that issue you talked about a parallel process. Yes your research and I assume the other part of that and it's related to the United States is I mean yes. Maybe surprisingly or not surprisingly many of the same processes of identity formation and opinion information about the United States that may be going on for example in the Middle East are also going on the United States about Islam attitudes towards Islam among Americans. What research is actually doing surveys we were doing several different national surveys in the United States looking about looking at attitudes towards Islam looking at different information sources and what people rely upon and different influences on those opinions as shown that reliance on television television news is highly predictive of anti Islamic attitudes the United States for example.

[00:16:38] The more we rely on television news more exposure to have this conflict going on in the United States the more likely to have strongly negative attitudes towards Islam as well as I'll be supportive of restricting for example Muslim American Civil Liberties. We'll also see that you've had a strong relationship with evangelical or political identity. The more that the more salient your identity is the more importance you placed on your religious identity the more likely you are Christian religious and then and specifically the more likely you are to have strong negative attitudes or opinions about Islam as well. Those are the primary drivers. And so the idea here is that you know this conflict between the United States and the Middle East or Islam however you define it however you want to call it the U.S. war on terror or however you want to call it it's the issues that strongly. It's symbolic in mediated in the sense that there's very little direct social interaction between Americans and Muslims whether it's in the Middle East or the United States. Muslim Americans are two percent of the population in the United States. And so all our information about we have about each other is either what we see or read in the media are what we hear from political or religious leaders and so how they harm our opinions is based upon this information.

[00:18:06] And so are information many facts are our opinions reflect what is in the media or where our political religious leaders are saying if you want to look at the United States you know most of the settlers in some academic studies and content analyses of media content showing how you know after prior to September 11 when Islam or Muslims were presented in the media is usually in entertainment content to usually was in a stereotypical context like sort of a tool kit of stereotypes. You see you know Islamic terrorists out to destroy United States against everything America stands for a way of life or you know if it was in the news it was very episodic. It was occasional references is usually confined to Israeli Palestinian conflict in terms of violence. So it was it was very little. But what there was was it was usually a highly negative. So September 11th happened most people had very little knowledge about Islam very little factual knowledge had only been exposed to possibly entertainment stereotypical representations. And so because the Muslim population is very small vast majority Americans I've never met a Muslim a Muslim friends I've not seen and heard of a Muslim. So September 11th happened where you know Islam suddenly becomes the new threat. Well how what resources do we have as individuals to make sense of this. Right. Were rather ill prepared. So we have to rely upon the media and what political or religious cues we get. Well most of the cues in the first year were somewhat positive.

[00:19:42] You know there was a strong social desirability to differentiate between al Qaeda as a political you know a political terrorist group and you know Muslims as a whole and Muslim Americans well unfortunately that was short lived most of the research has shown that within a year shortly after a year the media discourse and the political discourse turned highly negative towards Islam in both its media representations how it was covered in the mass media as well as the political religious discourse highly conservative and evangelical discourse from the day one you had you know evangelical leaders talking about the threat to Islam how you know it's you know putting in terms of Christianity versus Islam. Even President Bush used the word crusade and said I was just thinking about that you have. This is for this of Islamofascism frame come about implacable religious discourse. Even President Bush used that term quote Islamofascism terrorist but basically that sort of paints the idea that Islam is sort of historically tied to fascism for example of worldwide threat. So you've unfortunately seen this in the attitudes towards Islam in the polling if you look over time now you have the number of Americans about 45 50 percent of Americans believe Islam is more violent than Christianity for example other religions inherently. So you have about used to be had about 50 percent increase the number of Americans I believe that Islamic values are fundamentally different from their own. Since that time we've had the number of people who have unfavorable opinion of Islam has doubled since then since 2001. So this change in media and political discourse where the two things that are stressed the most is the threat of Islam and not talking about physical threat we're talking about what some of the candidates like Rudy Giuliani or used to call it calls it an existential threat in his campaign. And McCain calls a transidental threat. The idea is that you know it's a threat versus us as a person it's a threat of terrorist attack. It's threatening our values our culture our religious beliefs.

[00:22:04] So the idea of painting Islam as a threat or Islamic terrorism as more of this threat to our culture our values to our way of life to our way of life. Exactly which puts it in a much deeper meaningful terms much more conflictual identity terms. It's a threat to our identity as Americans are Christians. So there's the type of threat and then the idea of this other that you know Islam is different from ourselves. We are you know prominent religious and political leaders talk about the fact that you know Islam has different values. It's that they don't include it with a Judeo Christian heritage even though there is strong historical ties between Christianity and Judaism and Islam. They're painting it as sort of this other like in basically trying to demonize and differentiate Islam from everything America or everything Christian. So these two sort of these are the two themes that run through much of the political religious and media discourse of the last six or seven years. And there's consequences for those of these rising negative attitudes. And because most people still have very little knowledge. If you ask if you ask Americans two basic questions about Islam what is the name of the equivalent of the Islamic Bible the Koran. Right. And if you ask them about what was that. What is the Islamic name for a God Allah. Only 50 percent of Americans can answer those two questions. Correctly so that and that's the most basic you know most basic knowledge about Islam and this is you know seven years after September 11th attacks where Islamic fundamentalism or Islamic terrorism was seen as the primary.

[00:23:48] So what people don't people have very little knowledge of and lack when they lack knowledge will do they rely upon the form their opinion or make up their minds about an issue or a topic or something about Islam. They've had this discourse that they find in the media or from religious or political leaders they rely upon that. And so these two. So when they're stressing both threat and difference it just exasperates the whole conflict itself and changes with the conflict is about. So you used to have you know right after September 11th maybe 20 25 percent of Americans if you asked and the question is this a conflict between a small radical group of like political terrorists or is this a conflict between Islam as a whole you know between either America and Islam as a whole or Christianity is as a whole. Back in 2001 after the attacks maybe 25 percent of people said that. Now you have close to 60 Saudis 60 70 percent of people saying that. So it changes what you do about the economy changes dealing with the idea that there is this threat to the small radical

terrorists out there. A small percentage of the population the Muslim population versus it's a larger conflict with Islam itself. It changes the nature of our perceptions of the conflict change led changes what we do about the conflict what policies we support the conflict. The coverage itself about how it impacts policy. You expand on that a little bit and taking a look at for example the Iraq war as an example. If you look at political support in the Iraq war since about 2004 2005 it's been highly polarized along party affiliation.

[00:25:23] So a majority a large majority Democrats oppose now oppose the Iraq war or oppose the idea of the Iraq war and are support withdrawal from Iraq almost immediately as soon as possible majority Republicans still believe that the Iraq war was a good idea to support Bush policy towards it believe it was justified. And you know are against at least a rapid withdrawal. Well what about political independents. So you know put Democrats and Republicans among the populace rely upon what they are hearing from their respective political leaders rely upon you know political cues from those leaders or independents. You know they're not as ideological. So what cues they rely upon what if they're not relying upon somebody being Democrat or Republican or listening to Democrat Republican leaders. What do they rely upon to make up their mind. Because they're going to and. Well what it could be knowledge but most people have very low knowledge of all the pros and cons the nature of the conflict. My research has shown that is one thing that they do rely upon is their attitudes towards Muslims or Islam or the nature of the Islamic threat and serve a mental shortcut or holistic. So not having defined ideological orientation towards the policy issue use what you would call an effective holistic their their attitudes towards the group that the policy targets. OK. It's coming from political psychology.

[00:26:52] So the sense that if you look at the if you split out and look at independence and you split the Pens between those who have you know a negative attitude or negative perceptions of of Islam for example independence who believe Islam is inherently promotes violence more so than other religions versus heads who do not believe that you see a striking difference where independents who have to serve negative schema towards Islam are much more likely to support Republican policies or conservative policies towards Iraq or more active or a foreign policy or more towards Iraq. On the Bush lines then Democrats. So the idea is one of the consequences of increasing defining this conflict as more large scale conflict between large groups versus a small radical group of terrorists and having this conflict in terms of the sort of clash of civilizations between Islamic states and having sort of these strong negative attitude towards Islam is that increases political support for conservative foreign policy or Bush policy and intervention and often you know more violent interventions in the Muslim world than possibly alternatives. That's foreign policy. There's domestic policies too. Part of my interest is looking at political tolerance and social tolerance towards Muslim states and how how does the media and identity and these attitudes impact for example civil liberties and Muslim Americans and social justice. Unfortunately you know if you look at the polling for example Gallup did a poll in 2006. Forty percent of Americans support Muslim American citizens. Now this not immigrants Muslim American citizens carrying some form I.D. card that I find them as most American. Forty percent 40. About 39 percent 40 percent also support specifically ethnic or religious profiling at airports of Muslims and about 40 percent also admit having some kind of prejudiced feelings towards are. This is a Gallup poll. My own poll I did in 2004 found that 65 percent of Americans supported one form restricting Muslim Americans civil liberties in one form or another rather it's infiltrating and putting surveillance on Islamic mosques.

[00:29:21] Profiling I.D. cards. So there's been you know these these rising negative attitudes toward them directly. You know idea of painting Islam as a threat. Painting them as sort of this foreign other even if they're you know Muslim American citizens are being born here lived all their lives creates more support for restricting civil liberties and treating them as a different class citizen. If you are about 45 percent of Americans believe that they cannot vote for a Muslim political

candidate for example no idea ideas that this even goes into the political discourse in talking about political intolerance and civil liberties sort of keeping Muslims out of the political process. You're not actually that equally thinking that basically Muslim political candidates are a threat of some kind. And that's what you saw in the back in 2006 after Keith Ellison was elected to the Congress. He is a African-American Muslim from Minnesota. Born in United States converted to Islam in college and shortly after 2006 you had this Virginia congressman named Virgil Goode who sent a letter to his constituents saying that the election of Keith Ellison to the Congress to the Congress. This is why you need to support his policy on illegal immigration. Here we have a American native born African-American and has lived here for generations. So because he's Muslim taking taking linking that to the idea of this you know form other immigration that totally you know he's trying to link this example of this candidate who wanted to use the Qur'an for example in his picture of the swearing in for Congress is you don't use a Bible or anything like that it's a purely secular ceremony.

[00:31:15] But for the sort of the pictures for the ceremony that use for yourself you often are your hands on a bible or something that he when he's a Qur'an. Right. Well this is again this is Virgil Goode mentioned in his letter that you are going to have more Muslims when they use the idea of the Qur'an you know in American politics this idea of this threat of Islam singling out this American congressman in return as a counterpoint what Ellison did was to sort of demonstrate that Islam or Muslims are not foreign states and that this foreign threat that serve infantry that states use Jefferson's Qur'an as for his pig pictures of his swearing in ceremony here's one of our founding fathers. He owned a copy of the Koran. He read the Qur'an. He thought the Koran was a you know legitimate tax the essence of this foreign other tax. So this is this is sort of the you know the examples of you have you know rising and time anti Islamic in the United States that translates into intolerance towards Muslim participation in politics are restricting their civil liberties. I mean the ideas that they are restricting our civil liberties restricting these other people's civil liberties as this threat you know Muslim Americans who are not really American. And that's why you've had these are some of the political consequences I'm fascinated by your research. And as you know I have to admit as you share with us it causes me to be a little concerned over what some possible solutions would be. You have a parallel process. It's almost a recipe for disaster.

[00:32:56] You look at how the media is influencing individuals from Muslims from other countries and their countries as to how to view Americans and then hear how it's being impacted on are few Muslims. What do you see as some potential solutions for a foreign policy perspective. We'll start there and then talk about the domestic or foreign policy perspective. Well the United States has invested hundreds of millions dollars now and use public diplomacy programs. It's one of the biggest programs is creating that are all sort of American sponsored alternative media in the Middle East unfortunately it has no audience no credibility. That's the problem. Well you know it's it's us you know Arabic you know like the Voice of America models but Voice of America and Eastern Europe for example. I mean the days of the Cold War was very successful because many audiences in those countries felt they did not have a credible media alternative. They didn't think their state sponsored media was credible. They didn't they didn't believe in it. They didn't find it trustworthy and they did not rely on for news and the Voice of America was this alternative from the United States that they relied upon and they found credible and they believed in and had a really strong impact. What we have in the Middle East these days that Arab audience and Muslim audience for the most part they trust and believe in their domestic and regional media. I mean Al Jazeera our other channels are to be highly credible for the most part. You know they're not to say overtly biased but they do present issues from a Muslim or Arab point of view. And they're much more.

[00:34:32] You know they're relatively objective within the confines and so they are American sponsored media has no market there. So what can we do. Well how so one thing is to do instead of trying to create our own alternative media and serve more from the American propaganda

viewpoint. And it is heavy propaganda. You know Al Hurra which is the American channel that we broadcast in Arabic is often still called the Cooking Channel otherwise called the cooking channels because a prominent terrorist freedom fighter depending on who you look at in the Middle East but a prominent official from Hamas was killed in the Israeli public Israeli Palestinian conflict. And there is a huge funeral for this official and all the regional channels showed it live right. All the major news channels in the region. The American channel had a cooking show at the same time the idea was that we only present some news that we find in conjunction with our own you know policies our own versus trying to build sort of a credible channel that yes it might be it might offend some sensibilities in the West or might offend or might be critical of U.S. policy even as a U.S. sponsored channel but is trying to be objective or try to build credibility in the region. So we've decided not to go that route with our own channels. So what alternatives do is really if you want to focus on promoting U.S. credibility and sort dampen anti-Americanism and not just change policy is to engage foreign media directly and have started to do that. Basically instead of trying to create all internal media engage them much like you engage American media here.

[00:36:19] Put American officials on provide counter cues to negative views of what American foreign policy and be more engaged in the dialogue in the Middle East. The other thing we could do is re-examine our policies as well and how we engage with the Muslim world. We have a very state centric policy. We believe in national interests and we serve. We deal with the individual states. But the idea is if we have this rising sort of pan Muslim or pan Arab political and social identity we are trying to engage politically with the states. Wow. You know politically people are more identifying transnationally not base that's state centric. So we need engage with the sort of social forces that are emerging in the Middle East. No proactive way and somehow communicate through either our public diplomacy efforts or through our actual policies that were not threatening Islam as a whole. Is not about a Catholic to recognize states in Islam as a whole we're not trying to threaten Islamic beliefs. And you know that Islamic way of life. I mean that's part of what we many Americans see is a threat the American way of life we have to communicate we're not free. And that's very difficult. And hopefully part of you know if there is a change in the administration there will be a change in the situation wherever New ministration comes in.

[00:37:43] That will be one of their challenges to do that is to create policies beyond just public diplomacy efforts or communication policies or media and media efforts actual policies that communicate to the Muslim world is that we're not trying to threaten our way of life that there is a means of coexistence here and that we are engaged in trying to specifically target a small radical number of terrorists and that Islam or Muslims are a whole. Get outside this or paradigm this is clash of civilizations which has grown in the last quarter in the United States. A We have to realize that because of media transparency media globalization or negative news about Islam is being broadcast the Muslim world that's both domestic and foreign policy issue. We talk about we think because most of our channels here in the states are just U.S. channels to our own little sort of media bubble United States that if we say are religious and political discourse which is often has highly negative views about Islam in it that it's only we're all talking to each other. What this diffuses I mean they know this gets translated into foreign press when you know you have a primary religious leaders say something very negative about Islamic United States. This gets translated into the press so we have to realize that domestically also you know education programs decreasing for them aired about Islam outreach programs teach ins for example those were how those can have an impact on individuals but only some individual those people have strongly held predispositions. Now political conservatives are evangelical Christians for example have very strongly held predispositions. Those programs will not reach or change opinions about Islam or promote more social tolerance of political tolerance because they'll screen out they'll use those predispositions as a perceptual screen. What you mean by that perceptual screening idea is that we will we will they will resist information which is not consistent with their predispositions. So factual information so the viewer will be the audience of your who you're trying to communicate with.

[00:39:44] So if I try to create you know most research shows the more familiar the more you educate about Islam. For most people the more tolerant they will about you know choices are more. However for a substantial segment of the population evangelical Christians represent about 33 percent of the population. About 35 percent of political concerns about about a third of the third of the U.S. population no matter how much you try to educate them about Islam. They're not going to be more tolerant towards Islam or least promote believe in more inclusive hypotheses or you know or be less willing to restrict Muslim Americans civil liberties. So education doesn't work but it does work because they're more likely to screen out any information which is inconsistent with their strongly held beliefs. Well other alternative is to serve focus more on trying to demonstrate or frame Islam or create either experiential learning or communication messages that show how Islam is not inconsistent with their beliefs. You don't have to define yourself in opposition to Islam. So talk about more about shared values shared beliefs. I mean if you look at objectively a lot of survey research looking at the beliefs the cultural beliefs or other types of you know way of life type beliefs of devout Muslims. They're very similar to devout Christians and evangelical Christians so there are more calm. There are more commonalities than they would think the differences. And so part of that is creating either you know experiences or persuasive messages that stressful shared values and political contacts.

[00:41:28] You know for example you know whether you depending on what side of abortion you you're into taking abortions objective political issue abortion rights devout Muslims share some many of the same attitudes towards an issue like abortion. As a devout evangelical Christians. So there are not only sort of cultural but also political ideas that you want and engage these faith communities and what culture political symbolism might have to Tuteur trying to at least moderate the sense of difference the threat from each other. You know you know when you have evangelical pastors talking about the threat of Islam United States was created as a means to fight Islam and that Islam is this you know like Satan's religion and these negative views. Well how do you do that. You don't. It's not a rational knowledge based argument to refute that. You have to refute it more based upon shared cultural icons or ideas or beliefs to serve addressed this type of social doctrines that I'd like to thank you so much for sharing your research with us today. You've been listening to Dr. Erik Nisbet Assistant Professor of Communication at the Ohio State University. Discuss perceptions of international conflict and terrorism across national contexts. Join us again next time for more conversation on social work practice and research. Hi I'm Nancy Smith professor and dean at the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. Our school is celebrating 75 years of research teaching and service to the community with more information about who we are our history our programs and what we do. We invite you to visit our website at [www.socialwork.buffalo.edu](http://www.socialwork.buffalo.edu). Here at UB we are living proof that social work makes the difference because lives.