

Journalists Speak—
Part I of a Two Part Series
from a National Poll of Journalists

The Offending Danish Cartoons—

**Most Canadian Journalists Found the Cartoons on the Web
and Want Media to Carry Them;
A Mix of Respect and Fear Explains Non-Publication;
Non-Publication Plays into the Hands of Muslim Extremists**



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Preface

Like clean air, press freedom is vital to the good life and is so often taken for granted.

Most of the surveys and focus groups that COMPAS undertakes are for a paying client. But this one is not. This survey among journalists, conducted February 16-18, will be the first in a series of un-sponsored studies of press freedom, undertaken at our initiative and cost. The purpose is to provide journalists with a platform for conveying their own professionally based concerns about challenges to journalistic freedom.

In this survey, we invited journalists to provide suggestions for future themes. They graciously obliged. Respondents gave us many ideas and themes. We welcome further suggestions as well as any and all feedback about any aspect of this inquiry.

We are grateful to the journalists who participated in the survey.

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1.0. Introduction

Almost seven in ten journalists believe the media should have carried the offending Danish cartoons once the worldwide protests broke out (table 1). The same proportion has seen the offending cartoons, primarily by searching them out on the Internet.

Journalists are polarized in their explanations of the medias' non-publication decisions. Those who approve tend to attribute the decisions to respect. As one respondent put it, "Some [cartoons] were simply in bad taste and weren't funny. They were needlessly offensive." Those journalists who believe that the media ought to have published at least some of the cartoons once the worldwide backlash became evident tend to attribute the non-publication decisions to worry. One respondent captured this perspective in the following words: "There's fear, and a misguided understanding of multiculturalism."

Journalists are very diverse in their nuanced assessments of this issue, as evidenced in their own words or verbatims, extensively reproduced in this report.

These are some of the key findings from a Press Freedom survey carried out by COMPAS on its own account as a public service February 16-18, 2006. This report, Part I of a two-part report, focuses on the views of journalists about the cartoon controversy. Part II, to be released later this week, reports journalists' opinions about their degree of freedom to report what they feel needs to be reported, the various threats to press freedom, and the extent to which journalists' fear of a dismissal is a factor in their reporting.



2.0. Most Have Seen the Cartoons, Most Would Publish— Opinion Strong on Both Sides

2.1. 7 in 10 Saw Cartoons on the Web, 7 in 10 Would Publish

The overwhelming majority of journalists believe that at least some of the Canadian media should have carried the cartoons once the worldwide protests erupted, as shown in table 2A. Opinion falls into three broad groups:

- 35% believing that most (18%) or all (17%) of the major media should have carried, respectively, most or all of the cartoons;
- 25% believing that at least some of the media should have carried the cartoons; and
- 31% believing that the major media were right not to publish the cartoons.

Just as seven in ten journalists favoured publication, seven in ten also saw the cartoons for themselves. Of those who saw the cartoons, most (65%) searched for them on the Internet, as shown in table 2B. A few (10%) received the cartoons by email from friends or colleagues. A few (8%) reported seeing the cartoons on (U.S.) television.

*Table 2A: (Q1) After the world wide protests about the Danish cartoons, which of these four opinions is closest to your own.
[RANDOMIZE] (Addition Errors due to rounding)*

	%
All the major media should have published or televised all of the cartoons OR	17
Most of the major media should have published or televised most of the cartoons OR	18
Some media should have published the cartoons (some have) OR	35



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	%
None of the media should have published any of the cartoons	31
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know or no opinion excluded from calculation	7



Table 2B: (Q2) Have you seen any of the cartoons?

	%
Yes	69
No	31

*Table 2C: (Q3) [IF YES]: Where did you see the cartoons?
Please check all that apply (Percent)*

You found them on the Internet	65
A hard copy of a magazine or newspaper	16
A friend or colleague emailed you the cartoons or a link	10
On television	8
Elsewhere	1

2.2. No Relationship between Seeing the Cartoons and Opinion about Publishing Them

A sizeable minority of journalists volunteered to COMPAS that they believed that the major media did not carry the cartoons because the cartoons were of poor quality, as reported below in section 5.0. Nonetheless, those who saw the cartoons for themselves were not more likely to advocate non-publication than those who did not, as shown in table 2D.

There appears to be no statistically significant relationship between whether journalists saw the cartoons and their opinions about publishing them. If there is indeed any relationship between seeing the cartoons and believing that the major media were right not to publish, it is that those who did not see the cartoons are more apt to believe that the major media were right.



*Table 2D: Relationship Between Seeing the Cartoons and Opinion
about Whether They Should Have Been Published*

	Saw cartoons	Did not see cartoons
All the major media should have published or televised all of the cartoons OR	17	15
Most of the major media should have published or televised most of the cartoons OR	20	15
Some media should have published the cartoons (some have) OR	34	37
None of the media should have published any of the cartoons	29	33

3.0. Majority Concern that Non-Publication Strengthens the Hands of (Wahhabist) Extremists in the Muslim World

Respondents were asked to score on a 5 point scale the degree to which they believed or did not believe that non-publication would strengthen the hands of Saudi-based Wahhabists at the expense non-Wahhabist Muslims (see table 3 for question wording). Among the three-quarters of journalists with an opinion, the overwhelming majority believed at least to some extent that nonpublication strengthened the position of extremists within the Muslim world, as shown in table 3. Approximately one-fifth of those with an opinion did not believe that non-publication would have such an effect, scoring their position as a “1” on the 5 point agree-disagree scale.



Table 3: (Q6) After the worldwide demonstrations, some critics said that not carrying the cartoons increased the power of the (Saudi) Wahhabist extremists at the expense of Shia Muslims who include portraits in their every day lives and pluralist Muslims who want the Islamic world to accept diversity of opinion. Where 5 means agree strongly with this criticism and 1, disagree strongly, what is your own view?

Mean	5	4	3	2	1	DNK excl. from calc.
	17	23	22	18	19	26

4.0. Polarization between Those Who Attribute Non-Publication to Respect as Opposed to Fear

Journalists tend to be polarized in their willingness to attribute the non-publication decisions to either fear or respect. In separate questions, respondents were asked to score on 5 point scales the degree to which the medias' non-publication decisions had been made out of respect and fear. Most of those who support complete non-publication believe that respect was the key motivator, 78% scoring respect as a 4 or 5 on the 5 point respect scale. Meanwhile, most of those who believe that most or all of the major media should have carried most or all of the cartoons believe that fear was the medias' key motivator, 78% scoring fear as 4 or 5 on the 5 point fear scale.

Given these differences in how proponents and opponents of publication explain the non-publication decisions, one might expect a polarization in attitudes about whether fear or respect was paramount. Indeed, that is what correlation analysis shows. The correlation between the fear and respect scale scores is -0.6 (a mathematically negative score), confirming that those who highlight respect as the motivator downplay fear and vice-versa. For example, among respondents who rate very highly respect as the medias' motivator (scoring 5 on the 5 point respect scale), 49% score 1 on the 5 point fear scale.



Thus, almost half of those who believe intensely that respect is the motivator believe intensely that fear is not a factor at all, as shown in table 4A.

Table 4B shows that the polarized views about why the cartoons were not published extends to opinions about whether they should have been. Journalists who believe that most or all of the media should have carried most or all of the cartoons tend to explain the non-publication decision in terms of fear. Meanwhile those who believe that no media should carry any of the cartoons tend to attribute the media decision to a desire to show respect.

Table 4C shows that the polarization among journalists extends to opinion about whether non-publication helps or does not help extremist factions in the Islamic world. Those who favour publication tend to believe that non-publication helps the Saudi-based Wahhabist extremists at the expense of other Muslims, for example, the Shia who do not oppose portraiture or pluralists who wish the Muslim world to become more accepting of diversity. Those who oppose publication tend to reject this assessment.

On balance, journalists as a whole lean to a more charitable than uncharitable interpretation of the medias' motives even while they favour publication and are concerned that non-publication favours extremism. There is a slightly greater tendency for journalists to attribute the non-publication decision to respect rather than fear, as shown in table 4C. This statistical finding is lent credence by open-ended responses, which tend to highlight considerations other than fear.

Table 4A: Respect vs. Fear as Explanations for the Medias' Non-Publication Decisions (Row Percentages)

Fear\respect scores	Respect=1	2	3	4	5
Fear=1	6	4	15	26	49
2	0	3	8	57	32
3	2	7	38	29	24
4	13	47	30	10	0
5	36	26	29	7	2



Table 4B: The Degree to Which Journalists Explain the Non-Publication Decision in Terms of Fear and Respect by Their Own Opinion about Whether The Cartoons Should Have Been Carried (Mean Scores on 5 Point Fear and Respect Scales Where 5=Highest Possible Score, 1=Lowest Possible Score)

	Fear, Mean Scores	Respect, Mean Scores
All or most of the major media should have published or televised all or most of the cartoons OR	4.0	2.3
Some media should have published the cartoons (some have) OR	2.7	3.6
None of the media should have published any of the cartoons	1.9	4.2

Table 4C: Concern that Non-Publication Strengths the Hand of Wahhabists by Personal Opinion about Publication

	Mean Scores on 5 Point Scale Gauging Degree to Which Non-Publication Is Perceived as Helping Extremists
All or most of the major media should have published or televised all or most of the cartoons OR	3.9
Some media should have published the cartoons (some have) OR	2.9
None of the media should have published any of the cartoons	2.1



Table 3A: (Q4) On a 5 point agree-disagree scale where 1 means disagree strongly and 5, agree strongly, how much do you agree with each of the following opinions about those media that did not carry the cartoons.[RANDOMIZE]

	Mean	5	4	3	2	1	DNK excl. from calc.
They did so out of respect	3.3	23	26	24	15	11	4
They did so out of fear	2.9	21	15	23	18	23	5

5.0 Verbatims Explaining the Non-Publication Decisions

5.1. Overview of Themes—From Poor Quality Cartoons to Respect , Fear, Google, and Bias

Respondents offered many detailed explanations for the non-publication decisions. To enable readers of this report to get a fulsome sense of journalist opinion, we reproduce in detail the verbatim comments of respondents about why the major media chose not to publish under nine categories ranging from a modest commitment to a free press to the poor quality of the cartoons, a desire to show respect, and so forth. Our selection of comments for reproduction places an emphasis on unique rather than redundant or repetitive comment.

5.2. Moderate/Modest Commitment to Free Press—Verbatims

I think the greatest, and most disturbing, reason is that many reporters and editors in North America have lost touch with those liberal values, emanating from the Enlightenment, in which journalism is grounded. Journalism is not a value-free profession; it's a product of Western liberalism and we should not be afraid to defend it on that basis. We should be willing for defend the freedom of the press against all of its enemies.

Because few others did. Followed the pack.



One reason may have been some media organizations were waiting for others to publish them first. The Western Standard and Jewish Free Press are not major, mainstream media, and their decision to publish the cartoons was not enough to push the major media to do it.

They were confused about what freedom of the press really means; they had little or no knowledge of its historical background and significance; they took the easy route rather than attempt to articulate a response that in their mind wouldn't be politically correct.

Faulty understanding of press and religious freedom

5.3. Poor Cartoon Quality—Verbatims

The cartoons by themselves made no meaningful point

They weren't that good

Some of the cartoons didn't meet a test of fairness

Satirizing the prophet, hence Islam in general, as an agent of terrorism was indiscriminate

The cartoons weren't funny

Most of them are not very good

A matter of taste. The cartoons I saw were amateurish drawings and showed little humour or insight.

They're not very good and they accomplish nothing, other than insulting an entire religion.

Other than fear and respect? Some made sound editorial judgement that the cartoons were flippant. Just because media have the right to publish, doesn't mean it always has to be exercised. In other words, discretion.

Because they are trash and not newsworthy on their own

5.4. Multicultural, Leftwing, or Other Bias—Verbatims

Excessive political correctness

The left-leaning media, in general, is pro-Arab.

Politically correct response. Most senior managers feel intimidated when challenging non Judeo Christian views.



I also believe there is not equal treatment among the religions by the media. Some religions seem to be "fair game", while others are not. Right now, Islam is not fair game. Muslims are trying to portray their religion as loving and peaceful, and that the worldwide violence is the act of a few radicals. The media does not want to challenge this.

Years of subservience to the "feelings" of the downtrodden and the neurotic

Hypocrisy Fear and a preference to avoid a public relations "situation" with local Muslim communities.

Their left-wing, politically correct bias. It's OK to publish cartoons that mock Christians, but suddenly not OK to publish Muslim cartoons.

5.5. Respect for Religious Belief—Verbatims

They were in poor taste. Perhaps journalistic standards accounted for some restraint

Some were simply in bad taste and weren't funny. They were needlessly offensive

The Muslims have every right to be upset at the implied underlying hostility of this decision to continue publishing the cartoons. We may not agree with the violence that we see on the part of some Muslims, but we have here in Canada a community of people who are a minority in our society and we have an obligation to treat that community with the same respect.

5.6. Concern Not to Inflame or Fear of Backlash—Verbatims

Perhaps they didn't want to alienate readership.

It would be a provocation

They feared the consequences of their actions (rather than reprisals)

Why inflame a situation

Afraid to offend specific groups.

Didn't want to inflame tensions

Peut-être en raison d'une certaine confusion entre liberté de l'information et respect des différences



Possibly just not wanting to wade into a volatile situation. Really fear, I guess.

Not to inflame

Pour ne pas envenimer le débat. Nous l'avons expliqué en éditorial

Perhaps they didn't want to feed into the violence that was taking hold in the Middle East

Taste, understanding of the responsibilities of freedom of press, understanding of consequences of freedom of press poorly exercised. Not wanting to draw attention to self a la Ezra; able to think of savvy ways to sell units.

Well, there's fear, and a misguided understanding of multiculturalism.

They were quite nasty, and nasty doesn't make any point, except perhaps to reflect the blind anger that followed the senseless killing of the the Dutch documentary filmmaker a year ago. But there was no direct connection to that in the cartoons I saw. On the other hand, the reaction in the Muslim world is totally out of proportion, and suspect many of the zealots have not seen the cartoons either. They've probably been whipped into a frenzy of anger by activists.

I think there was a feeling that this controversy had just gone too far and was not worth the collision of cultures

Advertising revenue loss may have played a part in some cases.

Uncertainty about the ramifications.

Backlash

A concern that we couldn't provide adequate security in our building

Avoid controversy

Pour la "stabilité politique" du pays

Due to the lack of understanding by media consumers and advertisers that news media must report in full with all available information possible to give a complete and accurate accounting of events to preserve press freedom and the misconception various media are newsmakers rather than news reporters causing media owners to fear reprisals from readership and advertisers.



5.7. Journalists' Insufficient Background Information or Knowledge on the Subject—Verbatims

Maybe journalists did not know or understand enough about the subject
Ignorance ...not knowing the full story e.g. that other cartoons not published by Jutlands Post were circulated in the Middle East in order to foment opposition. Judgment ...looking at the cartoons and deciding they are too hot to handle because (patronizingly) Muslims will be too insulted ...when in fact moderate Muslims like moderate Christians can handle satire.

Neither fear nor respect...just not knowing how to handle this new dilemma - it was easier to avoid showing the cartoon, than to properly and respectfully contextualize them.

5.8. Limited Audience Interest—Verbatims

Lack of local interest

The Danish newspaper had a context the other newspapers did not have.

Par manque d'intérêt réel

There was no issue in Canada

Utterly no relevance to the day-to-day reality of society. Here in Canada, we have far more pressing issues (Emerson's blatant self-promoting defection to the Conservatives; the resulting conclusion that the Harper regime has stumbled out of the gate; the fact that we're spending millions of dollars to prosecute Robert Pickton after failing to spend the money to solve the "missing women" cases piling up in Lower Mainland police offices.

5.9. Google—Verbatims

Out of a belief that most people would know how to find them on their own, combined with the earlier mentioned fear!

Perhaps because people, if they truly wanted to see them, could do a quick Google search on the Internet. The media can still engage in thoughtful discussion about the controversy without directly publishing the photos. A mere description of the photos would suffice.



5.10. Other—Verbatims

I do believe many publishers feel it is wrong to gratuitously insult a portion of their readership. However, I take less seriously those who have not been so cautious about insulting religions less likely to break their windows.

The cartoons went beyond a freedom of the press issue, and instead became a tipping point for Muslim culture, tired of Western domination and U.S. intimidation over Iran, Iraq and the terrorist agenda. They were responding to an over-the-top backlash from a small number of fanatics who were able to blow this thing into an international incident, which it is not.

6.0. Methodology

A random sample of 221 journalists were interviewed February 16-18, 2006. Samples of this size taken from the general population are deemed accurate to within approximately 7 percentage points 19 times out 20. In the case of smaller populations such as journalists, the margin of error would be smaller.

7.0. Contact

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