

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## 'Islamophobia' a hot topic for Muslims

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By [Jane Hawes](#)

For The Columbus Dispatch

As difficult as the days after the Sept. 11 terrorist attack were for American Muslims, there were many positives.

"A lot of people reached out," said Asma Mobin-Uddin, president of the Ohio chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations. "We built a lot of bridges out of that experience."

Unfortunately, Mobin-Uddin said, some of that support has eroded in the past few years.

"We're seeing more misinformation," Mobin-Uddin said. "Some of it's ignorance, but with some of it, people have an agenda."

Islam expert and author John L. Esposito agreed, noting that many of the constructive responses post-9/11 have given way to "Islamophobia," a prejudice and fear of the religion.

"There's a genre of literature which has come out," Esposito said. "You can look on Amazon and see that many of the top books listed are Islamophobic. Much of their subject matter is often blatantly wrong."

Esposito is the founding director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He will speak Thursday at the Athletic Club of Columbus about his 30-plus years researching Islam.

His appearance is sponsored by the Columbus Council on World Affairs, the Council on American-Islamic Relations and the Columbus Metropolitan Club.

Central Ohio's Muslim community is estimated at about 80,000 people, Mobin-Uddin said. More than half are relatively recent immigrants from Somalia. Yet some local Muslim families are fifth-generation Ohioans. Mobin-Uddin's parents came from Pakistan more than 30 years ago and settled in Marion when she was in the third grade.

"We were the only Muslim family, but I didn't feel the hostility that sometimes occurs now," Mobin-Uddin said.

Some of that hostility, she said, is the result of people attributing the attitudes and actions of Muslim extremists to the religion as a whole because they don't know enough about Islam.

"If the Ku Klux Klan quotes the Bible to justify their actions, most people know Christianity well enough to know that doesn't represent Christianity," Mobin-Uddin said. That's why education is so important, she said.

Esposito's most recent book, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*, is the culmination of a Gallup World Poll project that has collected and analyzed the opinions of Muslims around the world on a variety of topics.

"Only 30 years ago, Muslims were pretty invisible in the West, but that's changed tremendously," Esposito said. "How Americans put all of that together now has become a major issue."

For more information or to register for Esposito's lecture, visit [www.columbusworldaffairs.org](http://www.columbusworldaffairs.org). The presentation will start at noon Thursday at the Athletic Club of Columbus, 136 E. Broad St.

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