

Unsettled Belonging:



A survey of Britain's Muslim communities

Martyn Frampton, David Goodhart and Khalid Mahmood MP

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Foreword

Britain's Muslims are amongst the country's most loyal, patriotic and law-abiding citizens. The truth of this is confirmed by the polling that sits at the heart of this report. None of this came as a surprise to me. In the fifteen years that I have served as an MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, I have been struck time and again by the commitment of my co-religionists to the wellbeing of our city and country. In an era in which intolerance and bigotry pose a growing challenge to our society, it cannot be stressed enough that most British Muslims want to integrate with their non-British neighbours.

It was with this in mind that I was keen to work with Policy Exchange to build the most extensive survey to-date of British Muslim opinion. I was driven by the conviction – based on my experience in my local community – that it would show Muslims to be upstanding members of society, who share many of the same ambitions and priorities as their fellow non-Muslim Britons. And so it proved. This simple idea cuts against the grain of so much special pleading that is made on the part of British Muslims – both by those on the anti-Muslim far-right and by special interest groups, which are too-often under the influence of Islamists and operate according to their own agenda.

The latter loom large in any debate about the 'needs' of British Muslims. Yet the reality – as demonstrated in the pages below – is that these groups speak for almost no-one but themselves. Organisations, such as the Muslim Council of Britain, which are most vocal about claiming to speak for Muslims in the UK enjoy the support of a tiny fraction of our communities. When government listens to them, they are listening to the sectional demands of those at the fringes of British Muslim life, and in so doing, they sometimes fail the vast majority of 'ordinary' Muslims.

The truth of this was brought home to me over the last few years partly as a result of the controversy that surrounded the use of CCTV cameras within parts of Birmingham. Certain local politicians and groups that claimed to 'speak for' Muslims made much of the fact that the cameras were being used to 'spy on' local communities. By insisting that the cameras were part of anti-Muslim security measures, they succeeded in having them turned off or withdrawn. If their claims were true, you might have expected this U-turn would have been met with relief locally; and yet, in my experience, from conversations with countless Muslim constituents, most people were sad to see the cameras go. How could this be? Because far from seeing them as the latest example of the government's anti-Muslim agenda, the cameras had in fact been welcomed as a useful tool to combat crime. And for my Muslim constituents, as much as for my non-Muslim ones, anxieties about crime far outweighed other imagined grievances and perceived slights.

As the following report makes clear, this anecdotal evidence reflects a much wider truth: British Muslims are, on a whole range of issues, no different in their views and priorities than their non-Muslim neighbours. This simple fact will come as no surprise to some people – but to many others, I think it cannot be emphasised enough.

And yet, alongside that, as this report also makes clear, there are some issues on which the views of British Muslims do give pause. Nowhere is this more evident than with regards to the troubled question of ‘extremism’. It is obviously a cause for concern that so many within our communities should doubt the very existence of this phenomenon, even as we face a severe and on-going terrorist threat.

Even more startling is the fact that so many British Muslims seem ready to entertain wild and outlandish conspiracy theories about the way the world works, believing that dark forces are at work to ‘do us down’ as Muslims. From the attacks of 9/11, down to the more recent conflict in Syria, too many people seem ready to believe that these events are being deliberately organised and manipulated – whether by the American Government, Jews, or some other force – with the express intention of damaging Muslims.

Of course, there is no denying that for many British Muslims, problems of racism, harassment and Islamophobia – are a serious cause of worry. But it is deeply troubling that this seems to have led a not-insignificant-minority to believe that the world is at the mercy of the machinations of dark, anti-Muslim forces. This readiness to believe in conspiracy theories and the mentality of victimhood to which it speaks is having a pernicious effect on British Muslims and the way they see the world. It is holding us back – as a community – and ensuring that we remain locked in a paranoid and at times fearful worldview. As other results from our polling show, there is much of which we, as British Muslims, can be confident and proud. The hope is that by drawing attention to this – as well as to those areas where there is still work to be done – this report can contribute to the further integration of British Muslims.

Khalid Mahmood MP

Birmingham, November 2016

Executive Summary

Policy Exchange has carried out, in conjunction with ICM, the most comprehensive polling to-date of British Muslim opinion. The results of this survey for the most part offer comfort, but also some cause for concern. What emerges is a picture of British Muslims as being in a state of ‘unsettled belonging’. Taken as a whole, these communities are loyal to the UK, and with essentially ‘normal’ and familiar priorities and concerns; yet equally, they remain disturbed by fears about discrimination and narratives that foreground a sense of Muslim victimhood.

Amongst the most important findings from the research are the fact that:

- British Muslims undoubtedly comprise a more religiously devout sub-set of the UK population. This is reflected in personal assessments of an individual’s own level of devotion and in the fact that an overwhelming majority identify with their mosque and see it as representing their views (71%).
- A heightened sense of religious devotion manifests in a clear social conservatism on some issues. This was reflected, for example, in high levels of support for gender segregated education (40% supported this proposal, as compared to just 11% of the general population), as well as ‘traditional’ religious clothing within schools (44% supported the idea that schools should be able to insist on the hijab or niqab).
- There are relatively large levels of support among British Muslims for the implementation of elements of Sharia law; however, the nature of that support is quite ‘soft’. Whilst a plurality of people expressed a preference for such measures ‘in the abstract’, they were far less forthcoming in supporting them ‘in reality’. (Only 4% of those surveyed said that they used Sharia banking, for instance, and 55% said that they would not prefer to use this option). It should also be noted that younger Muslims were relatively less likely than their older counterparts to endorse Sharia.
- It is clear that the more religious character and general social conservatism of British Muslim communities, does not detract from the essentially secular character of most Muslim lifestyles. In terms of their everyday concerns and priorities, British Muslims answer no differently from their non-Muslim neighbours. When asked what are the most important issues facing Britain today (people were allowed to give three responses), the most likely answer was NHS/hospitals/healthcare (36%), with unemployment second (32%) and then immigration (30%). Contrary to what is often

“They remain disturbed by fears about discrimination and narratives that foreground a sense of Muslim victimhood”

asserted on both sides of the political spectrum, the priorities and everyday concerns of the overwhelming majority of Muslims are inherently secular.

- Religious devotion and social conservatism do not correlate to political radicalism. It is striking that British Muslims are more likely, as a group, to condemn various acts of political violence (and even non-violent political protest), than the UK population as a whole. 89% of Muslim respondents condemned the use of violence in political protest and 90% condemned terrorism; in both instances, just 2% of people expressed sympathy for such actions (for the population as a whole, the equivalent figures were 5% and 4%).
- When probed specifically on the question of crime, it is striking that the issue British Muslims identified as being of greatest importance within local areas was that of ‘alcohol and drug abuse’. This, as well as other essentially non-sectarian, ‘law and order’ issues (such as ‘minor street crime’) were deemed to be of greater concern than harassment on the basis of religion, race or ethnicity. In tackling these problems, a majority of British Muslims expressed support for straight-forward law and order policies such as the provision of extra police on the beat (55%) and the provision of security cameras (30%).
- A clear majority of British Muslims (69%) favour an essentially secular education, which adheres to a shared national curriculum. Only a minority (26%) believe that the school classroom is the best place for faith education, believing instead that faith should be taught at home, or in the mosque.
- British Muslims tend to be among the more active and engaged members of British social and political life. They vote in elections, make use of local social and cultural amenities, and see the value of social and political engagement.
- In terms of the manner of that engagement, it is clear that only a minority of British Muslims (just 20%) see themselves as being represented by those organisations that claim to speak for their community. Moreover, within that cohort, there is no single group that can plausibly claim to speak for more than 20% of people who are so-minded. In each case, therefore, supporters represent a fraction of a fraction of the wider community. Putatively national representative organisations are no such thing. Groups like the Muslim Council of Britain enjoy the support of between 2 to 4% of Britain’s Muslims – and when one goes outside London, that level of support is vanishingly small.
- British Muslims overwhelmingly believe that Britain is a good place in which to practice their religion. 91% feel able to follow Islam in Britain entirely freely; just 7% said that they could only ‘partly’ practice their faith freely; and only 2% said they could not practise it at all.
- Against this, there is undoubtedly a perception – expressed often in more anecdotal fashion – that Muslims face challenges posed by anti-Muslim bigotry and racism. It is striking that this issue did not loom as large in the quantitative survey. It is also notable how concerns about these problems were often relayed with reference to stories heard from friends, family, or via the media. None of this is not to deny the reality of anti-Muslim abuse

and discrimination. But it does illustrate that often this is at least as much perceived, as experienced. Here, as much as elsewhere, narrative is everything.

- There is clearly an issue too with Muslim perceptions of the way in which they are treated in the media. When asked whether they trusted a range of media outlets, only a minority of respondents were prepared to say that they did in each case (only 34%, for instance, said they trusted the BBC – the organisation considered the most trustworthy of the ‘mainstream’ media groups examined). It is worth asking whether this tendency is, at least in part a reflection of more socially conservative attitudes, which manifests in misunderstandings about free speech and the workings of a free press.
- On the subject of extremism and radicalisation, British Muslims support a range of counter-measures, including those that require government intervention. Attempts to portray government policies – such as those associated with the Prevent agenda – as anti-Muslim initiatives rejected by the whole community, wildly misrepresent the views of British Muslims. In reality, they are comfortable with state-led intervention, which is seen as entirely compatible with efforts by Muslims themselves to do ‘more’ to tackle extremism (with almost half of British Muslims agreeing that they should do more).
- With that said, a surprisingly large proportion of British Muslims deny the existence of extremism altogether (26%). In addition, a significant proportion of British Muslims are susceptible to conspiracy theories and expressed a belief that these were often grounded in truth (roughly 40%). Of course, a belief in such theories is not limited solely to British Muslims. Crucially, however, there are certain conspiracy theories that do seem to resonate more with a Muslim audience, chiefly those that relate to narratives of Muslim victimhood.
- The prevalence of such conspiracy theories is demonstrated by views towards the terrorist attacks against America on 11 September 2001. A surprisingly large proportion of British Muslims said they did not know who was behind those attacks. Even more remarkable is the fact that some 31% said the American government was responsible for 9/11. More people claimed that the Jews were behind these attacks (7%), than said it was the work of al-Qaeda (4%) or some analogous organisation.
- Government must not fall back into the trap of looking to “gatekeeper” Muslim organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) – whether at a national, or local level – to deliver or represent the views of this diverse sub-group of the general population. British Muslims have fundamentally secular interests and priorities, and they should not be left hostage to the whims of groups that do not speak in fact for them.
- More than ever, the authorities must be clear about separating those activities that aim to promote social cohesion and those that are designed to prevent terrorism.

- The government should not be “spooked” into abandoning, or apologising for, the Prevent agenda. Our survey shows that Muslim communities are generally relaxed about government intervention to tackle extremism – and are actually supportive of traditional ‘law and order’ policies more broadly.

Introduction

What do British Muslims want? Over the last fifteen years and more, there have been several attempts to answer this question, most recently by Channel 4, in partnership with ICM.¹ As that polling demonstrated, attempts to define British Muslim opinion have been controversial. There are those who would cast doubt on the validity of the exercise altogether. However, we would argue that it is possible – and entirely right – to consider British Muslims, as an important – and on certain issues – distinct sub-set of the broader UK population. Moreover, despite what is often claimed, there remains a lack of reliable surveys of British Muslim opinion. For this reason, Policy Exchange is returning to consider the views of Britain’s Muslim communities almost a decade on from its first major intervention into this debate: *Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism* (2007).

To produce this report, Policy Exchange has partnered with ICM to produce the most comprehensive survey to date of opinion among Britain’s Muslim population. This survey builds on the methodology used by ICM in the polling they undertook in 2015 for Channel 4. When the results of that research were published earlier this year, informed observers noted that the ICM approach was ‘probably the best attempt to poll British Muslims’ that had been carried out for several years.² Critics of the dataset produced on that occasion rather bizarrely sought to assert the supremacy of ‘YouGov’ polls based on extremely low incidence of the Muslim population (and YouGov itself now refuses to poll Muslim opinion in the UK).³ In reality, on that occasion ICM demonstrated the rigour and scope of its survey methodology. Furthermore, the polling on which this present report is based was three times more extensive than the survey conducted for Channel 4 (comprising over 3000 respondents, as compared to 1000). This represents one of the most extensive polls of British Muslims ever conducted.

Of course, no survey can ever be perfect, but we are confident that this latest polling is of the highest possible quality in terms of reliability. Moreover, the project aimed to use both qualitative and quantitative survey methods, organising focus groups to build up an initial bank of data, which helped shape the extensive questionnaire that was deployed to gather quantitative data.

According to the 2011 Census, the Muslim population accounts for 4.8% of the adult population in Britain. However, individuals’ religious affiliation cannot be separately identified on any existing comprehensive sampling frame. As such, when conducting research among this audience screening is required to identify eligible respondents (in this case, whether or not they self-identify as Muslim). However, it is extremely time-consuming and very expensive to screen for such a low-incidence group using a standard nationally-representative random location approach.

1 What British Muslims Really Think, hosted by Trevor Phillips, available at, www.channel4.com/programmes/what-british-muslims-really-think

2 A. Wells, ‘ICM Poll of British Muslims’, UKPollingreport.com, 11 April 2016, available at, <http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/blog/archives/9666>

3 M. Versi, ‘What do Muslims really think? This skewed poll certainly won’t tell us’, Guardian, 12 April 2016, available at, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/12/what-do-muslims-think-skewed-poll-wont-tell-us

Therefore, we decided to take a random location, quota-based sampling approach. We selected locations from all of those where the Muslim population accounts for at least 20% of the total population. The 20% minimum threshold was chosen as it provides the best balance between extensive coverage and feasibility. A full scale random location methodology which includes areas with very few Muslims living in them would have been practically impossible given reasonable cost restraints. Slightly more than 50% of British Muslims (51.38%) live in the areas we surveyed, and we believe that the 20% threshold was the most suitable compromise.

Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) were used as the Primary Sampling Unit (PSU).⁴ ICM analysis shows that there are 2,014 LSOAs with a penetration of at least 20% Muslim residents, and that these areas cover c.1.4 million Muslims – or 51% of Britain’s Muslim population.

On the basis of this inclusion criteria, the selection of locations used the following procedure:

- All UK LSOAs with at least 20% coverage of Muslims were stratified by region and within region by local authority. Within this, LSOAs were ordered by size.
- Using a random start and fixed sampling interval, 151 LSOAs were selected, with a proportionate allocation by region. This process produced a sample of LSOAs selected using a probability proportionate to size method, where size of LSOAs is measured by the number of Muslims aged 18+.

A quota sheet was provided for each selected LSOA, based on achieving twenty interviews per PSU. Quotas reflected the actual composition of Muslims in the LSOA according to standard demographic criteria. Interviewers were required to interview a sample profile that matched that of the population profile in their sampling unit. This ensured that the sample was demographically representative at the micro-level, as well as geographically representative.

As a result of this, our survey process produced interviews with a random sample of 3,040 adults aged 18+ who self-identified themselves as belonging to the Muslim faith. Interviews were carried out face-to-face and in-home, in geographical areas where the minimum incidence of Muslim residence was confirmed to be at least 20%. Interviews took place between 19th May and 23rd July 2016, and the data has been weighted to be representative of all Muslims by age, gender, work status, region and whether born in Britain or not. Data based on 3,040 interviews is correct to within +/- 1.78% at the 95% confidence interval.

We also conducted ten multi-participant focus groups at a number of locations around the country, which sought to capture the opinions of a cross-section of the British Muslim population.⁵ For each focus group, participants were recruited on the basis that: the group should include people from at least 3 different parts of the region/city; no participant should be a full- or part-time cleric or trainee cleric, or religious studies student; participants should not be recruited from directly outside mosques; and within any single group, no two participants should know each other.

⁴ Lower Super Output Areas are geographical areas covering between 400 and 1,200 households.

⁵ Due to a failure of recording equipment, we were unable to produce transcripts for the Manchester sessions and instead had to rely on moderator and observer note-taking. The findings from those focus groups reinforced key themes from the others, but given the absence of a reliable transcript, we have refrained from quoting them directly.

With these general rules in place, we then sought to capture specific characteristics with a composition of groups, as follows:

A) London Slough

- Group 1: 20–30 year olds, mix of marital status, income status <25K
- Group 2: 45–65 year olds, all female, a mix of marital status, and with and without children, income status >£35K

B) Birmingham

- Group 1: 20–30 year olds, a mix of marital status, income status £25–40K, minimum two married
- Group 2: 30–45 year olds, a mix of marital status, and with and without children, income status <£25K

C) Manchester

- Group 1: 30–45 year olds, a mix of marital status, and with and without children. At least 4 in each group were married, income status £35K and above, all male
- Group 2: 45–65 year olds, a mix of marital status, and with and without children, income status <£25K

D) Cardiff

- Group 1: 20–30 year olds, a mix of marital status, income status <£25K
- Group 2: 30–45 year olds, a mix of marital status, and with and without children. At least 4 in the group were married, income status £25–40K

E) Central London

- Group 1: 45–65 year olds, a mix of marital status, and with and without children. At least 4 the group were married, two with children at home, two with children moved out, and income status £35K and above
- Group 2: Intergenerational group, mixed gender, income status, earning >£35K

The focus groups were mostly conducted in the early summer of 2016, with the exception of the final groups in central London, which were held back until September. This allowed for us to raise (and loop back into the qualitative process), any issues which emerged as especially significant from the quantitative polling.

What emerges from this extensive process is an extremely rich dataset, formed by the results from over 3000 in-depth interviews, comprising over 1100 pages of raw data, allied to transcripts and notes from ten multi-participant focus groups.

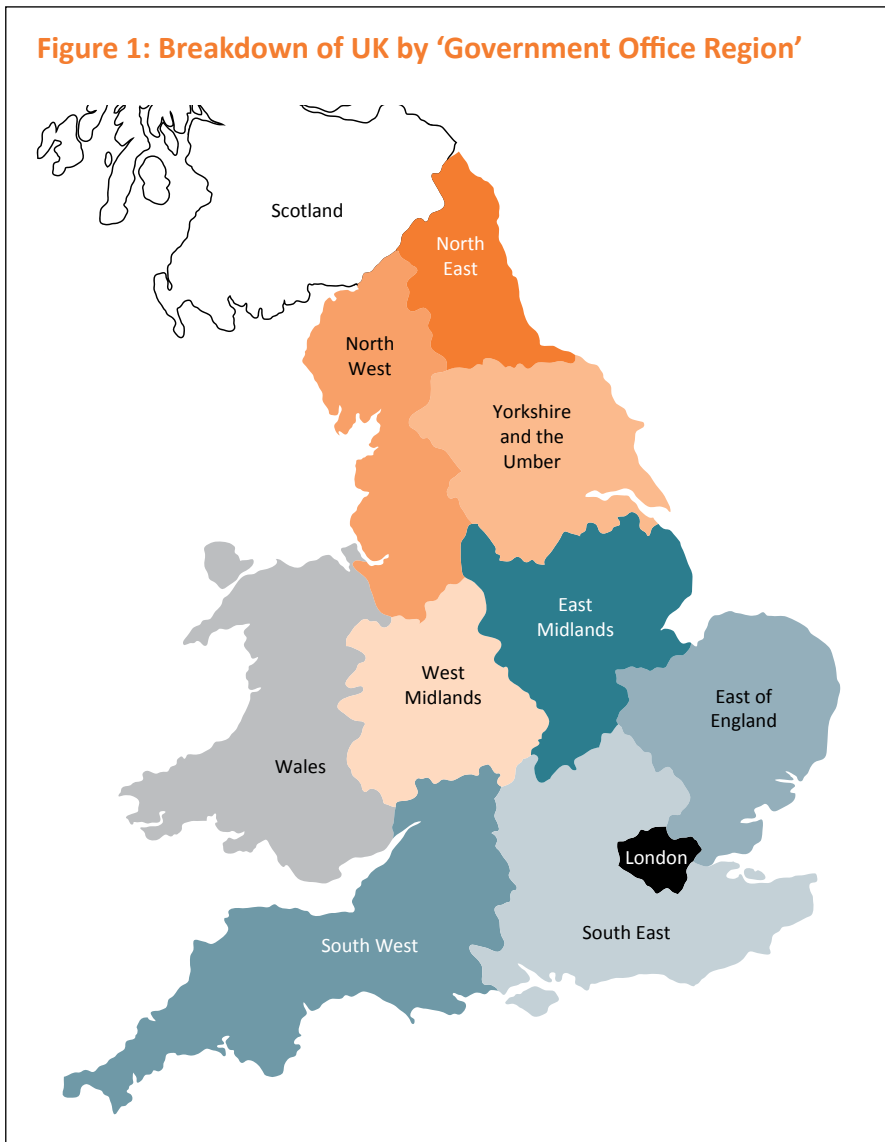
In order to allow for more substantive conclusions to be drawn, we also carried out a **'control survey' to establish comparative results that would reflect attitudes of the population as a whole.** This was based on interviews with a representative online sample of 2,047 British adults, aged 18 and over on 24–25th August 2016. A sample of respondents from ICM's online panel, NewVista, were invited to take part, with quotas set for age, gender and region. Data were weighted to the profile of all UK adults aged 18+. For reasons of applicability and cost, this control survey did not replicate every question in the original polling, but certainly covered all the most important issues arising from the survey of Muslim opinion.

What follows is an attempt to outline some of the most salient and interesting aspects of the results. We have highlighted those results that struck us as most pertinent to contemporary debates. But this report is far from exhaustive. We recognise that there will be much scope for further analysis – in particular based on the various analytical cross-breaks in the data – all of which we will be making available for public consumption. Amongst the most interesting of these breakdowns, concern regional differences – some of which we have attempted to analyse below.

As can be seen from the dataset, the results were broken down according to government region (as per the map below in figure 1):

- London
- The East (including Luton, Peterborough, Southend-on-Sea, Norwich, Ipswich and Cambridge)
- The South East (including Brighton and Hove, Canterbury, Oxford, Portsmouth, Southampton, Reading and Milton Keynes)
- The South West (including Bristol, Plymouth, Swindon, Exeter, Bath, and Bournemouth)
- The West Midlands (including Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Dudley, West Bromwich and Coventry)
- The East Midlands (including Derby, Leicester, Lincoln and Nottingham)
- Yorkshire and the Humber (including Leeds, Bradford, Sheffield, York, Dewsbury, Rotherham and Hull)
- The North West (including Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Liverpool, Blackburn and Burnley)
- The North East (including Newcastle, Sunderland and Middlesbrough)
- Wales
- Scotland

Analysis of our data by region demonstrates that, whilst it is possible to talk about a British Muslim population that shares certain important characteristics, this population does not comprise a single, monolithic community. Instead, it is a lattice of sub-communities, within which quite different attitudes prevail.



Composition

Within our survey, a **slight majority were born outside the UK (53%)**. This proportion is in line with earlier analyses and the results of census 2011. However, it is clear that this figure is falling with each passing year. **79% of the 18–24 year olds we spoke to were born in the UK, as were 60% of the 25–34 year olds** (conversely these percentages fall under half for higher age groups). The British Muslim population, it would appear, is at tipping point in terms of being predominantly UK-born population.

Breakdown by region suggests that there are more settled long-term Muslim populations (as one might expect) in the North West (where 53% of those we spoke to were born in the UK), Yorkshire and the Humber (59%), the West Midlands (58%), the East (62%), the south East (54%) and Scotland (60%).

“The greater religiosity of Muslims as a defined sub-set of the British community has long been remarked upon”

Conversely, as might also have been expected, the London population is more transient, with only 35% of those we spoke to in the capital having been born in the UK.⁶

Taken as a whole, this is still very much a ‘second generation’ community.

93% of our respondents had parents born outside the UK.⁷ (Though the Muslim populations of Scotland and the North East are relatively more likely to be raised in households where their parents were born in the UK.)⁸

As a population grouping of relatively recent immigrant origin, it is unsurprising that **British Muslims occupy a disproportionately lower place in socio-economic terms, when stratified by ‘social grade’ (an admittedly imperfect science). 16% were considered to be in the ‘AB’ bracket.** By way of comparison, the overall figure for the population of England and Wales as a whole is 23%).⁹

Asian British-Pakistanis accounted for 54% of our sample (with more from this ethnic group amongst eldest cohorts), with the second highest ethnic group being Bangladeshis (18%, and over-represented amongst the youngest cohort).¹⁰ Whereas our Pakistani respondents were more likely to be owner/occupiers (70% of them were), the Bangladeshis polled were more likely to be social housing renters: a reflection of the different socio-economic profiles of the two communities.¹¹

British-Bangladeshis were disproportionately located within London (33% of our London-based respondents gave this as their ethnic group) and Wales (where they accounted for 25% of respondents). British-Pakistanis were more prevalent in northern areas (Pakistanis comprised 69% of respondents in the North East, 62% in the North West, 73% in Yorkshire and the Humber, 73% in the West Midlands, 75% in the East, 88% in the South East and 93% in Scotland).

49% of those we spoke to in the East Midlands gave their ethnicity as Asian-Indian (though this group accounted for just 9% of the sample population as a whole).¹² Muslims who self-identified as Black-African were located primarily in London (where they made up 10% of the Muslim population), the South West (where they comprised 31%) and Wales (where they comprised 28% of the Muslim population). This varying ethnic composition (see figure 2) is worth considering when examining the regional variations in the results, as discussed below.

⁶ See p. 26 of the Dataset (all page numbers hereafter, refer to this dataset, unless explicitly stated otherwise)

⁷ See p. 30

⁸ See p. 32

⁹ 2011 Census: Approximated social grade, local authorities in England and Wales.

¹⁰ See p. 1098

¹¹ See p. 1101

¹² See p. 1105

Figure 2: Ethnic composition of Muslim population by region

Region	Largest Ethnic Group	Second Largest Ethnic Group
North East	Asian British-Pakistani (69%)	Asian British-Bangladeshi (13%)
North West	Asian British-Pakistani (62%)	Asian British-Indian (20%)
Yorkshire and the Humber	Asian British-Pakistani (73%)	Asian British-Indian (12%)
East Midlands	Asian British-Indian (49%)	Asian British-Pakistani (39%)
West Midlands	Asian British-Pakistani (73%)	Asian British-Bangladeshi (12%)
East	Asian British-Pakistani (75%)	Asian British-Bangladeshi (18%)
London	Asian British-Bangladeshi (33%)	Asian British-Pakistani (31%)
South East	Asian British-Pakistani (88%)	Asian British-Other (3%)
South West	Asian British-Pakistani (33%)	Black British-African (31%)
Scotland	Asian British-Pakistani (93%)	Asian British-Other (2%)
Wales	Black British-African (28%)	Asian British-Pakistani (27%)

Overall, **30% of our respondents lived in areas containing 50% or more of Muslim residents, as compared to 70% who did not.**¹³ However, contained within this overall figure, there were marked differences within regions.¹⁴

One of the striking features of the British Muslim population as a whole is its comparatively high-level of self-ascribed religiosity. **Respondents were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1–10, in terms of how religious they were. Only 19% put themselves in the 1–5 range, whereas 79% put themselves as between 6–10 (where 10 is ‘fully devout’). 14% put themselves in the highest possible category and amongst over 65s this figure rises to 30%.** By comparison, the equivalent figures from the control survey were as follows: just 4% considered themselves ‘fully devout’ (10); and only 26% people put themselves within categories 6–10; whereas 73% of respondents rated themselves as 1–5 in terms of religiosity.¹⁵ In other words, the pattern of answers for the control group is almost the exact inverse of that shown by our Muslim-specific survey.

What all of this tends to suggest, therefore, is that **British Muslims as a whole represent an unquestionably more religious section of the wider UK community.** Within that population, certain sub-communities are especially devout, at least in terms of their self-identity. Faith clearly plays a more central role in the lives of British Muslims – and in shaping their identity – than it does for the population as a whole.

Again, this finding is hardly surprising. The greater religiosity of Muslims as a defined sub-set of the British community has long been remarked upon. What the wider survey aimed to explore further, was the extent to which this greater devotion to faith correlated with divergent social attitudes and priorities.

¹³ See p. 13

¹⁴ See pp. 9–16

¹⁵ See question 12 on both surveys; see p. 217

1

Priorities

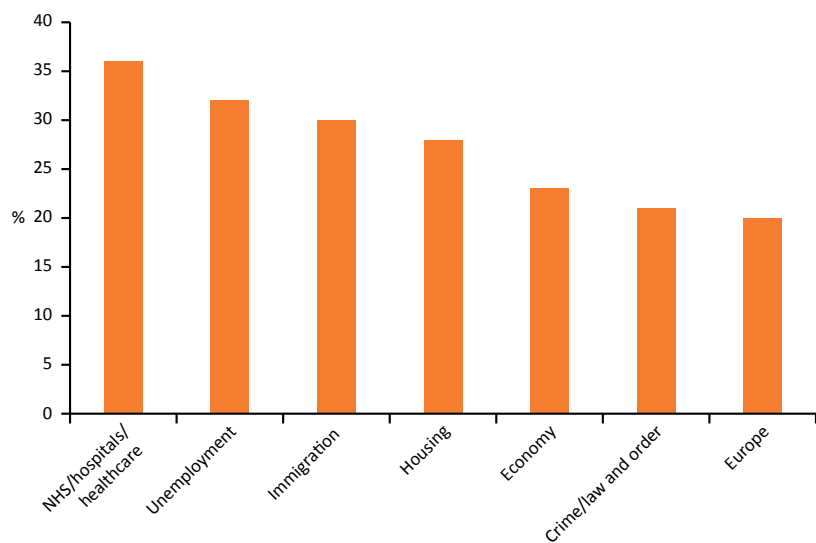
“For me, yes there should be a control on immigration. It shouldn’t be like, ‘well, anybody pack your bag and come here’, [there] should be ... control.”

Female, London Group 1

A primary hypothesis, which this polling sought to test, was the intuition that Muslim priorities and interests are essentially secular and that like their non-Muslim neighbours, their primary focus is on the stuff of ‘daily life’: job prospects, housing issues, problems of crime, and questions about schooling.

Our survey sought to put the ‘ordinary’ back in to discussions about British Muslims. Too often this has been overlooked by those – from all sides of the political agenda who wish to place Muslims in an entirely separate category, in terms of their wants and desires. On the one side, are those Islamist activists who imagine that the first issues of concern for any Muslim citizen are those of the global ‘umma’: Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir etc. On the other, are those who insist that all Muslims are extremists, who are driven by little more than a desire to see Sharia law implemented in western countries like Britain. As the results below, show, both caricatures are emphatically misplaced.

Figure 3: What are the most important issues facing Britain today?



When asked what are the most important issues facing Britain today (people were allowed to give three responses), the most likely answer was NHS/hospitals/healthcare (36%), with unemployment second (32%), followed by immigration (30%). Other popular answers included housing (28%) the economy (23%), crime/law and order (21%) and Europe (20%) (The polling was mostly carried out pre-Brexit – we might expect some shift in the direction of the latter). Issues connected with terrorism, defence and foreign affairs were only mentioned by 9% of respondents.¹⁶

As might be expected, when these top-line results are broken down by various indices, some notable differences emerge among different cohorts. For example, when analysed by age group, it is clear that there are shifts in the ordering of priorities. Among 18–24 year olds, unemployment looms as the most important issue (36%), with comparatively greater attention to the European issue (25%). For 25–34 year olds, immigration and the NHS came first with 34%. As might be anticipated, the NHS loomed especially large in the minds of the oldest cohorts.

The regional breakdown, meanwhile, shows that in the North East, issues to do with crime and law/order were much more likely to be identified as a priority than amongst the population as a whole (41% as opposed to 21%). Immigration also emerged as a matter of more pressing concern (35% as opposed to 30%) in that region. In Yorkshire and the Humber crime and law/order was also the top priority (35%), though there, the issue of immigration loomed less large (21%).

Different again was Wales, where the top priority was immigration (42%), closely followed by the NHS (41%), with proportionally fewer references to other issues. In the North West and West Midlands, there were also

“What these results show is that the communities of each area conceived of the key issues they faced in different ways”

comparatively high results for unemployment as a priority (37%). Again, as might be anticipated, given the capital’s housing crisis, respondents in London were much more likely to cite housing (44%) than respondents elsewhere.

What these results show is that the communities of each area conceived of the key issues they faced in different ways. In almost every case, the principal issues were domestic and secular; the only partial exception to this was in the North East where an unusually high percentage of respondents (26%) pointed to issues of ‘defence/foreign affairs/terrorism’, in comparison with the population as a whole (9%).¹⁷

For the most part, then, it seems safe to conclude that the issues of highest concern to Britain’s Muslim population are very much those that concern the UK population as a whole, with regional variations driven by the socio-economic context of those areas.

The truth of this is demonstrated by the fact that these same issues were raised by those people we asked as part of our control sample (representing the UK as a whole), for whom the NHS was also the top answer – indeed, even more prevalent – being mentioned by 52% of respondents. Other popular answers were immigration (45%), the economy (32%) and Europe (30%). Issues of defence, foreign affairs and terrorism were actually mentioned by a far larger proportion of the control sample (25%), as were worries about poverty and inequality (19% for the control, as compared to 11% for British Muslims). By comparison,

¹⁶ See question 10

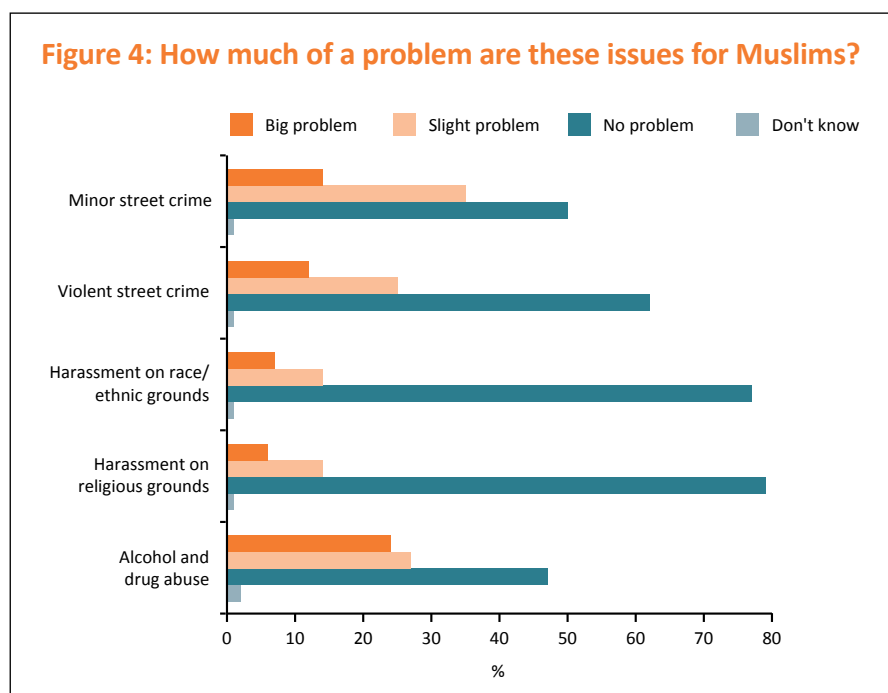
¹⁷ See pp. 197–8

concerns about housing were of substantively lesser importance (18%), as were fears about crime/law and order (12%). Yet, while these represent disagreements on the hierarchy of priorities, it is worth underling that they do not indicate any substantive divergence on the question of what kind of issues matter.

What emerges, then, is that British Muslims have very similar, domestically focused, essentially secular concerns as their non-Muslim counterparts in British society. To some, such a conclusion may seem entirely obvious, even otiose – yet it is worth underlining, given the constant attempts to sectionalise and essentialise British Muslims. These results prove the lie of those who would claim that Muslims are preoccupied with priorities and needs that are somehow peculiarly ‘Islamic’.

The ‘normalcy’ of the prevailing outlook among British Muslims was born out further by our question that asked them to think more personally about their priorities (as opposed to those of the country as a whole). The four most popular answers were: happiness and well-being (47%), the future of their children (43%), financial security (41%) and being safe from crime (32%).¹⁸

As with the previous set of questions, breakdowns by age, social grade, educational attainment, region and so forth, produce a slightly different reordering of these priorities. The focus, however, remains on secular concerns about individual and familial well-being and prosperity.¹⁹



When respondents were asked in more detail about the broad question of crime, it is striking that the issue identified as being of greatest importance within local areas was that of ‘alcohol and drug abuse’. 24% of respondents identified this as a ‘big problem’, while another 27% said it was a ‘slight problem’ and only 47% said it was not a problem at all. This was the only subject that garnered a majority

18 See question 11

19 See pp. 205–16

response in favour of the view that it was an issue of concern; and particularly high results were returned in the North East, followed by the West Midlands, the East and the South East. In the North East, only 34% of respondents said substance abuse was ‘no problem at all’. In the West Midlands, some 32% of people said this issue was a big problem (compared to 24% overall), whereas the equivalent figure in the East was 30% and 29% in the South East. At the other end of the spectrum were places like Wales (where 92% of respondents said it was no problem at all) and Scotland (70% said no problem at all).²⁰

On this issue too, it is noticeable that those born in Britain were more likely (than those born outside the UK), to say alcohol and drug abuse was a problem, as were those who felt no sense of belonging to the country. Another factor of relevance was the question of whether individuals sympathised with violence or terrorism (only 25% of those in the former category and 33% of those in the latter said substance abuse was no problem at all – compared to 47% of the Muslim population overall).²¹ Those living in areas with a higher concentration of Muslim residents were also, on balance, more likely to see it as a problem.²²

After substance abuse, ‘minor street crime’ was identified as the next most pressing type of crime. 14% of respondents said it was a ‘big problem’, 35% said it was a ‘slight problem’, whereas exactly 50% said it was ‘not a problem’ at all.

The fact that alcohol/drug abuse and minor street crime emerged as the two issues causing the greatest concern for British Muslims is what might be expected from communities located predominantly in urban environments.²³ For the same reason, it is also unsurprising that **‘violent street crime’ was identified as being a problem of only marginally less importance. 12% of respondents said this was a big problem, 25% said it was a slight problem and 62% said it was no problem at all.** Within those aggregate figures, though, there was substantial regional variation. In the East Midlands and West Midlands, for instance, respondents were far more likely to see violent street crime as an issue of some kind (19% of people in the latter region said it was a big problem). They were also far less likely to say it was no problem at all (50% and 55% did so respectively). At the other end of the spectrum, 95% of respondents in Wales and a 75% of respondents in Scotland said violent street crime was no problem at all.²⁴

At the national level, meanwhile, it is striking that lower levels of concern were registered with regards to those issues, which one might assume would be of worry for a specifically Muslim audience. **When asked about either harassment on the grounds of race and ethnicity, or harassment on the grounds of religion, very similar results were returned: 6–7% said it was a ‘big problem’; 14% said it was a ‘slight problem’ and 77% or 79%, respectively, said it was no problem at all.**²⁵

It is striking that our control group survey recorded a much greater concern for these issues among the general population. On racial/ethnicity-based harassment, 12% said it was a ‘big problem’, 25% said it was a ‘slight problem’ and only 50% said it was no problem at all. With regards to specifically religiously-grounded harassment, 9% said it was a ‘big problem’, 22% said it was a ‘slight problem’ and 55% said it was no problem at all. The population as a whole, therefore, sees such harassment as an issue of greater concern than does the British Muslim population specifically.²⁶

20 See p. 519

21 See p. 520

22 See p. 521

23 For the breakdowns of results, see pp. 492ff. These show up amongst other things, clear regional variations. Minor street crime for instance, was more of an issue in the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, the West Midlands and, to a lesser extent, the East. Those areas with over 50% Muslim residence were also significantly more likely than those with less concentrated Muslim populations to see this as a problem.

24 See p. 501

25 See question 25

26 Ibid.

The regional breakdown of Muslim-only answers on the subject of harassment shows that respondents in the North East were relatively more likely to say that abuse on racial grounds was a problem (only 55% said it was no problem at all). At the other end of the spectrum, Muslim respondents in Wales and Scotland were the most likely to say such harassment was no problem (93% and 84% respectively said as much in those areas).²⁷ Likewise on religious-based harassment, the North East led the way, as 24% said this was a big problem (compared to just 6% of the Muslim population as a whole) and a further 20% said it was a slight problem (compared to 14% overall). Just 54% of respondents said it was no problem at all (compared to 77% overall). Again, in Wales (99% said no problem at all) and Scotland (87% said no problem), people were far less likely to see harassment as a major issue.²⁸

Meanwhile, it is noticeable that elder cohorts (aged 55 and over) and less educated cohorts were significantly less likely to say that harassment on ground of race or ethnicity was a problem.²⁹ The same pattern was returned with regards to harassment on religious grounds.³⁰ Conversely, those not feeling a sense of belonging to Britain (which is not to say those who were born in Britain), were more likely to see harassment as a problem, as were those who sympathised with either violence or terrorism in the context of political protest.³¹

Nevertheless, the overall relatively low levels of concern registered in the quantitative survey were somewhat surprising, given that there was a great deal of discussion in our focus groups about fears over personal security linked to anti-Muslim bigotry and harassment. In particular, women who chose to wear Islamic clothing, were thought to be especially vulnerable to such harassment.

“The veil is kind of a big issue. In University no one can tell if I’m a Muslim or not, but for a Muslim woman, the veil, so they’re definitely going to tell you’re a Muslim. So it relates to hate crime also because it’s really easy for Muslim women to be victims of a hate crime because they’re just wearing a veil and walking across the street.”

Male, Cardiff Group 1

“My mum wears a headscarf, she was actually in Oxford Circus, she was... going down an escalator, someone decided to run down, sat behind her and pulled off her scarf from the back and ran away.”

Female, London Group 1

“My sister, who does wear a hijab, my mum who does wear a hijab, they get spat on.”

Female, London Group 2

“My mum, she wears a headscarf. My sisters wear headscarves. I get worried if they’re going out walking around town and stuff because, you know, they might get abused.”

Male, Birmingham Group 1

“You know my younger sister she wears a full veil... Ultimately I worry about my sister. I do. The reason being is she was, there was an occasion where... I think somebody called her a ninja or something. You know, just horrible malicious remarks... she’s been wearing the Niqab for I think over a year and she’s had so much abuse.”

Female, Birmingham Group 1

27 See p. 507

28 See p. 513

29 See pp. 505–6

30 See pp. 511–12

31 See pp. 508, 514

“There’s a lot of attacks on Muslim women that wear the Burka... I’ve read in the newspaper how there was a pregnant Muslim woman... wearing a burka and she got kicked in the belly for wearing that.”

Female, London Group 1

“It’s like the other day I watched a video of a woman who was just wearing a headscarf, minding her own business and this, like, six foot guy just walked up behind her... Just punches her out the blue. You’re just like, ‘Whoa!’”

Male, Birmingham Group 1

The last statement listed above appears to be a reference to the assault suffered by Tasneem Kabir, a sixteen year old who was punched unconscious by Michael Ayoade, in an unprovoked attack in Plaistow in east London in November 2012.³² It seems clear that such episodes have become an engrained part of the mental landscape of many Muslims, and appear to confirm the threat posed by racism and Islamophobia. (This, despite the fact, such episodes remain relatively rare and unusual – it is notable, for instance, that the attack on Kabir occurred four years ago.)

Unquestionably, the last decade-and-a-half have seen a rise in anti-Muslim hate crime. Campaign groups such as Tell Mama have pointed to a significant increase in attacks and insults levelled against Muslims.³³ By some estimates, the number of such crimes has nearly doubled in the last two years alone.³⁴ That being the case, it is little wonder that this topic played such an important part in focus group conversation. Equally, however, it is perhaps all the more striking, that this was not identified more clearly as a problem in the quantitative survey. How to explain this inconsistency?

Of course, there is always the possibility that it is merely a quirk of the polling sample, or the way in which respondents understood the question. Alternatively, one answer could lie in the fact that so much of the discussion about harassment and discrimination – as suggested by the comments above – actually revolves around ‘third party’ stories. When pushed, focus group participants tended to say that they themselves had not experienced racism or Islamophobia; however, almost everyone had a story to which they could point, as examples of these phenomena. Often these revolved around family members (mothers, sisters). Another common theme was that people had read about such incidents – particularly via social media. **Without in any way wishing to deny the reality of racist and Islamophobic attacks, it is striking how, to many people, these are a mediated phenomenon.**

One of the consequences of this is that for many people, harassment is an issue more in the abstract than as a tangible reality. It does not loom as large as one might expect in questions about crime, but it is always there and helps to foster an underlying sense of anxiety. Hence, several participants in focus groups talked of their sense that they received “filthy” looks or a “look of suspicion” (both quotes from London Group 2). There was, it seems clear, a rather ill defined, but pervasive sense of unease, which in turn fed a strong belief that Muslims routinely faced discrimination.

32 ‘Man who knocked 16-year-old girl unconscious in street attack jailed’, Daily Telegraph, 25 February 2013, available at, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9892995/Man-who-knocked-16-year-old-girl-unconscious-in-street-attack-jailed.html

33 See, for example, <http://tellmamauk.org/>

34 ‘Islamophobic hate crimes in London have nearly doubled in the last two years as Muslims say they are ‘very conscious of keeping your head down’, Daily Mail, 3 January 2016, available at, www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3358535/Islamophobic-hate-crimes-London-nearly-doubled-two-years-Muslims-say-conscious-keeping-head-down.html

“I remember after the Charlie Hebdo attacks and the stuff at the Bataclan Theatre, I was getting really weird looks. I’d come out of work and go on a lunch break, I’d walk through the city centre and I’d have lots of people just staring at me thinking I’ve got something hidden under my hat or something. So you get a lot of rubbish.”

Female, Birmingham Group 1

“You feel like you have to answer for everything, you know, which is not a problem because I don’t mind telling people about my religion... you just feel like ‘Oh, I have to answer for every single thing that I’m doing which relates to my religion.’ Then you kind of feel like, in a way, isolated as well.”

Female, Cardiff Group 1

“Being a British Muslim as well, yes I do get stigma, my family gets stigma and what have you.”

Female, Birmingham Group 1

“I read somewhere in a book that the Muslims are the new Blacks.”

Male, London Group 1

“I think every century or every generation, they’ll find a new scapegoat.”

Male, London Group 1

“Muslims are, like, the biggest victims out of everybody in all of this.”

Male, Birmingham Group 1

“It’s just this paranoia, you’ve been paranoid, you think people don’t like you, you think, ‘They’re thinking, you know what, they’re like them, they’re like them,’ although we’re not, we’re such nice people, but you feel so paranoid.”

Female, Slough Group 1

As the last statement reflects, at least some focus group participants were willing to reflect critically about the extent to which an over-developed sense of victimhood might fuel paranoia. Arguably, this is a product of a culture infused with an abstract sense of grievance, at least as much as it as a response to tangible, empirical realities.

In reflecting on these issues, answers to another question posed in our survey are especially striking: an overwhelming majority of respondents (91%) feel that they are entirely free to practice their religion in Britain; a further 7% said that they could ‘partly’ practice their faith freely; whereas only 2% said no, they could not.³⁵

Within that top-line figure, there was some variation with age, with elder respondents even more likely to say they were ‘entirely’ free to practice their religion (among 55–64 year olds the figure was 98%, and among both 45–54 year olds and over–65s it was 95%).³⁶ Regional breakdown showed a significant fall in the number of respondents saying they were ‘entirely’ free to practice their religion in the South East (84%), and a corresponding rise in those saying they were ‘partly’ free to do so (to 13%); those answering ‘no’ remained at 2%. At the other end of this (small) spectrum, 100% of Muslim respondents in Wales said they were ‘entirely’ free to practice their faith.³⁷

Another source of variation – as might have been expected – was the question of whether respondents felt a sense of belonging to Britain. Those who answered ‘no’ to this question were much less likely to say they felt ‘entirely’ free to practice their religion (81%), with a corresponding rise in those saying they were ‘partly’ free to do so (15%).³⁸

When the 9% of Muslims who felt there were at least some limitations on their right to practice Islam freely, were asked to identify specific elements of their faith, with which they had difficulty, 25% of this sub-group identified what might be termed ‘structural’ problems: namely, finding a place/facility to pray, including at work. To some extent, such difficulties are inevitable: a result of the relatively recent arrival of Islam in Britain. Also, the fact that Islam remains very much a minority faith within the British context ensures that many ordinary people do not consider the creation of this infrastructure (prayer rooms etc.), to be a priority. One consequence of this is that there has been a lag in the development of facilities to accommodate Islam – and in many places, it remains an issue of secondary importance at best.

The second most popular answer to this question was nebulous, ‘nothing in particular’ (18%), while 16% mentioned issues concerning dress code, such as those associated with wearing the veil, niqab and burka. The latter is unsurprising, given the controversy that has surrounded this subject (indeed, it is perhaps reassuring that this was not mentioned by more people). As described above, our focus groups revealed that the question of dress is one that many Muslims are concerned about, especially as it relates to women.³⁹

Interestingly, cross-breaks of the data suggest that the more observant respondents (those attending mosque 2–3 times, or over 4 times per week), were significantly less exercised about this issue than those who said they never attended mosque (the relevant figures being 9% and 4%, as compared to 28%).⁴⁰ This might suggest that many see the question of dress/uniform more through the lens of Muslim identity, rather than as an issue about religion per se.

Another figure worth noting here, is that, of those who felt there were limits on their faith, just 3% mentioned that people were being ‘stereotypical/judgmental’. A further 2% described getting ‘looks’ from people, and just 1% mentioned ‘poor image’ presented in the media. Again, these relatively low figures are rather startling. Given the tenor of discussion in focus groups, anyone listening to those conversations would have assumed concerns about these issues would be much higher.

35 See question 13

36 See p. 229

37 See p. 231

38 See p. 232

39 See question 14

40 See p. 246

It may be that this discrepancy can, in part, be explained by the way in which the issues are viewed. I.e. whilst there is widespread Muslim concern about racism, discrimination and portrayal in the media (see also below), these are not seen as impinging on their ability practice their faith. Equally, the incongruity between the qualitative and quantitative data on this issue may again reflect the gap between grievances as perceived in the abstract, and grievances as actually experienced.

When it comes to possible remedies to problems of crime, it is worth noting that by far the most popular solution among Muslim communities was the provision of ‘extra police on the beat’, with 55% citing this as the measure

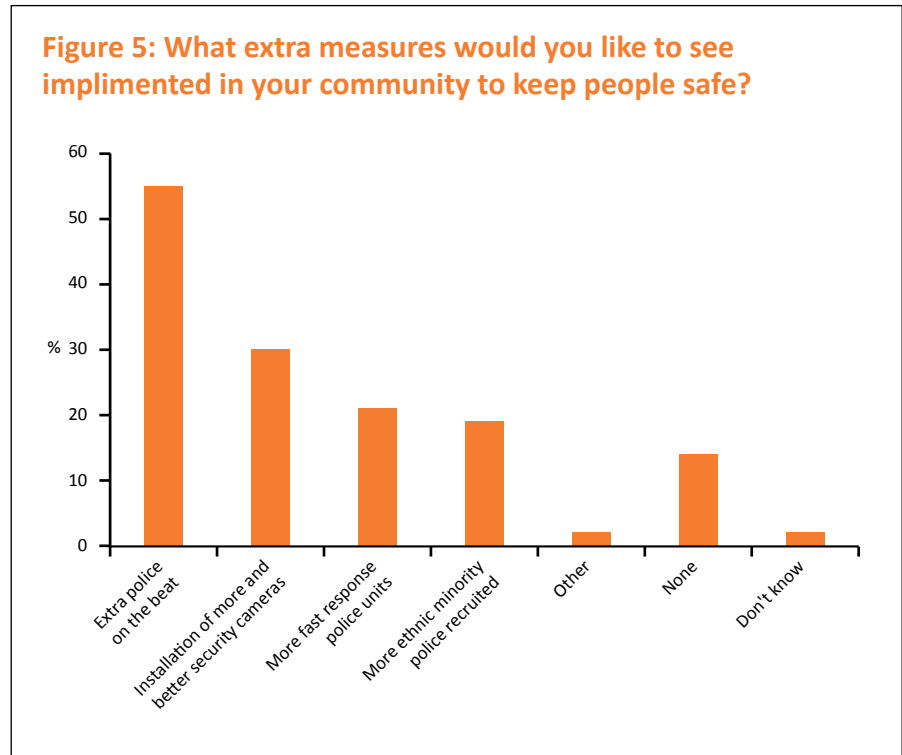
they would most like to see implemented. This was followed by the ‘installation of more/better security camera’ (30%).

These figures stand as an important corrective to those who would argue that the police are seen as an inherently pernicious force by Britain’s Muslim population. Such claims have been voiced, in particular, by those most vocally opposed to counter-terrorist policies such as the government’s Prevent agenda. Yet manifestly, they

are not true. Far from seeing the police as an oppressive force, whose purpose is to subject Muslim communities to unwanted surveillance and control, most people living within those communities would prefer to see more regular police on their streets, alongside various other measures to deal with the issues of crime and law and order, which are their real concern.

“These figures stand as an important corrective to those who would argue that the police are seen as an inherently pernicious force by Britain’s Muslim population”

Figure 5: What extra measures would you like to see implemented in your community to keep people safe?



Of course, there were variations within these top-line figures according to a number of factors, such as age, educational attainment and region. With regards to the latter, for instance, there was particularly high support for ‘extra police on the beat’ in the North East (63%), the East (63%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (61%). Security cameras, meanwhile, were particularly well-supported in London (36%) and Scotland (33%), but were far less popular in the North East (10%) and Wales and the South West (11%).⁴¹

It should also be noted that the figures from our Muslim-specific survey, also show some divergence from the control survey, where the proportion of respondents in favour of extra police on the beat was even higher at 60% (a similar 30% supported more/better security cameras). The greatest differences came on the question of ‘more fast response police units’ – a measure backed by 36% of the control survey, but only 21% of respondents in our survey of Muslim opinion. **Conversely, 19% of Muslim respondents favoured measures to recruit more ethnic minority police officers** – whereas this was cited by only 10% of the control survey.⁴² To some extent, this divergence is unsurprising: it is natural that a population predominantly formed by ethnic minorities would attach more importance to the question of ethnic diversity within the police force. And yet, as already mentioned, this was some way down on the simple preference for more police – of any kind – as the best way to combat crime in local communities.⁴³

41 See pp. 523–28

42 Again, there are notable variations here. In the North East, 44% of respondents cited this measure, whereas in the East Midlands and Wales only 5% of people did so. See page 525

43 See question 26

2

Engagement

For many years now, academics and policymakers have been aware of problems surrounding the question of political engagement. Our survey confirms that there is a broad problem within the UK as a whole in relation to empowerment. When asked on our control survey whether people felt they could influence decisions affecting their local area by engaging with local officials, only 35% agreed this was possible. Almost as many disagreed (32%), and 33% were agnostic one way or another). Only 7% agreed strongly.

By comparison, it is striking that **Britain's Muslim population feels comparatively more able to exert influence upon the system. 51% felt they could influence decisions affecting their local area by engaging with local officials and 14% felt this 'very strongly' – proportionally twice as many as the populace as a whole. 31% disagreed with this statement.**⁴⁴

It is worth noting that this headline figure masks significant fluctuations across the regions. Of those Muslims we spoke to in the North West, 64% agreed that engagement with local officials could influence decisions effecting their local areas. Scotland also returned a comparatively high result (59%). Conversely, there was much less agreement for the proposition that engagement could yield benefits in the South West (34%), Yorkshire and the Humber (32%) and Wales (31%). By the same token, in the South West and Yorkshire and the Humber, there were much higher levels of active disagreement with the proposition that could engagement could have an effect (49% and 42% disagreed with this statement, as to 31% of Muslim respondents as a whole); in Wales by contrast, respondents, whilst less likely to agree, were more likely to reflect ambivalence than open disagreement.⁴⁵

A further question asked whether respondents actually wanted to influence local decisions by engaging with local officials. Whereas 31% said they 'did not want to at all' (a figure which parallels the proportion disagreeing with the statement that engagement could yield results), **64% answered that they did want such engagement with local officials.**⁴⁶ This figure would appear to indicate that there is a percentage of British Muslims who, whilst wishing to engage, at present do not feel that such engagement can yield results. There is, in other words, a gap between expectation and reality, which one would assume could create disillusionment.

44 See question 2

45 See p. 73

46 See question 3

Analysis of how these results break down, shows that those judged to be in the higher social grades (AB and C1) are more likely than those in lower brackets (C2 and DE) to want engagement at the local level. 75% of people recorded as being AB, and 71% of those in the C1 category expressed a desire to engage with local officials, as compared to 63% of C2s and 61% of those in the DE category.⁴⁷ By the same token, those who were currently students (79%) and those with degrees (74%) were significantly more likely to want such engagement than those with no formal education (58%).⁴⁸

Even greater variations emerge when one breaks down answers to this question by region. It is worth noting that respondents from the North West, the East Midlands, London and the East were significantly more likely to express a desire for engagement with local officials (80%, 72%, 76% and 77% respectively) than other regions. Conversely, it is striking that **in Wales (69%), Yorkshire and the Humber (60%) and the South West (56%) a majority of respondents said that they did not want engagement with local officials at all**; the proportion of those actively wanting engagement was also significantly down in the South East (48%).⁴⁹

When asked about their ability to engage with and influence national level officials, the proportion of those agreeing that they could, fell to 35%, whereas relatively more people (39%) disagreed. Again, it is worth noting that the comparative figures from the control sample were: 21% agreed; 43% disagreed. Here too, therefore, British Muslims are more inclined than the wider population to feel that engagement has its benefits.⁵⁰

Moreover, a majority of Muslim respondents in the North East (53%) actually agreed with the proposition that engagement with national officials could influence decisions affecting Britain, and only 24% disagreed. There was also relatively high levels of agreement in the East (42%), London (41%), and the East Midlands (40%). Conversely, there was a significant fall-off in agreement with the proposition that engagement with national officials was worthwhile in the South East (29%), the South West (26%), Yorkshire and the Humber (18%) and Wales (7%). By the same token, the same regions show higher proportions of people actively disagreeing with the idea that engagement with national officials can yield benefit: 47% in the South East; 57% in the South West; 48% in Yorkshire and the Humber; 45% in Wales (the same figure also returned in the West Midlands).⁵¹

Another variable that produces significant divergence is that of Muslim 'penetration' of an area i.e. the extent to which the residents of a given local community are Muslim. **Those areas in which Muslims comprise 50% or more of the population are relatively less likely (30%) to agree that engagement with national officials can influence decisions than those areas where Muslims comprise under 50% of the local population (38%).** It may be that this divergence reflects a natural tendency for areas dominated by a single ethnic/religious group to become more inward looking.⁵²

A follow up question about the *desire* of respondents to engage with national officials (as opposed to their judgment of how far they *could*), reveals that 40% of the Muslim population did not want to engage with national officials – a figure very close to the 39% of those who indicated that engagement was not

47 See p. 94

48 See p. 95

49 See p. 96

50 See question 2

51 See p. 85

52 See p. 89

worthwhile. On the other side, 55% gave answers suggesting that they wanted to engage with national government officials to influence decisions affecting Britain.⁵³ As with the previous questions concerning the local level, these figures suggest that a significant proportion of people who wanted to engage with national level officials felt unable to do so.

Analysis of the data cross breaks reveals similar, though not identical, results to the previous question. Those in the highest social brackets (AB and C1) are more likely to favour engagement than those placed in the C2 and DE grades; those with higher levels of education were also relatively more likely to give answers expressing a desire for some kind of engagement.⁵⁴ Also of significance was the 'penetration of Muslims' within a given community. Those living in areas where Muslims comprised less than 50% of the local populace were more likely (58%) to give answers in favour of engagement than those living in areas where Muslims comprised at least half of the local population (48%).⁵⁵

Across the different regions, London (67%), the East (66%) and the East Midlands (63%) were the only areas where a majority of respondents gave answers that reflected a desire for engagement with national officials. By contrast, in Wales (69%), Yorkshire and the Humber (65%), the South West (60%) and the South East (59%), a clear majority of people answered that they did not want to engage with national officials 'at all'.

This pattern of answers is very similar to that registered for the previous question about engagement with local officials. **On the broad question of engagement, it seems clear that whereas there is a real appetite for engaging with the authorities – whether of a national or local stripe – in London, the East and the East Midlands, the exact opposite appears to be true for Muslim communities in Wales, Yorkshire and the Humber, the South West and the South East.**

When asked about a series of activities that might be bracketed under 'civic and political participation' in a broad sense, it is striking that British Muslims are more likely than the population as a whole to be involved.

Over the previous twelve months, 72% had voted in an election (as compared to 54% of the general population according to our control group); 33% had used local leisure and fitness activities (compared to 8%); 23% had raised money for a local charity (as compared to just 4% of the general populace); 18% had participated in a community event (as compared to 4%); 17% had visited a museum, gallery or concert (as compared to 11%), and 10% had volunteered at a local school, or other care-based institution (as compared to 4%).⁵⁶

Within the aggregate totals for British Muslims, the figures breakdown as one might expect: young people are far less likely to vote; those engaged in such 'civic' activities are more likely to be wealthy, in work, have higher levels of education and own their own houses.⁵⁷

Once more, regional patterns reveal major divergences. In the North East, for example, far fewer had recently voted (54% as compared to 72%), but respondents were more likely to have used local leisure facilities (42% compared to 33%) or

53 See question 3, p. 100

54 See pp. 100–1

55 See p. 104

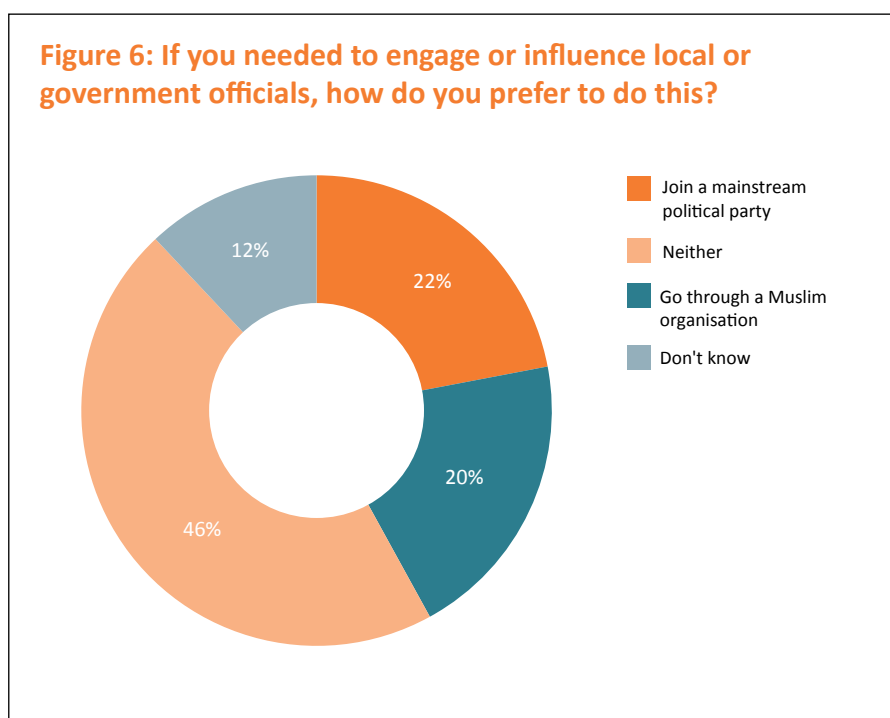
56 See question 4

57 See pp. 107–8

attended a museum, gallery or other amenity (29% as opposed to 17%). The inverse of this pattern was Yorkshire and the Humber, where respondents were much more likely to have voted recently (84%), but less likely to have visited either leisure facilities (29%) or museums/galleries (12%). Other differences of note included: significantly lower levels of community activism in the South East (11%), Yorkshire and the Humber (10%), the South West (6%) and Wales (5%), when compared to the national average (18%), whereas respondents in the North West were far more likely to say they had been involved in such activities (32%).

In the East (35%) and Wales (31%), meanwhile, respondents were more likely than elsewhere to state that they had been involved in charitable activity, whereas those in the South West were far less likely, with just 12% saying they had done this, compared to the national average of 23%. In the North West, Scotland and Wales, respondents were more likely than elsewhere to have recently attended a museum, or gallery.⁵⁸

When asked whether they preferred to engage with the authorities via joining a mainstream political party, or by going through Muslim-specific organisations, there was a marginal preference for the former over the latter (22% as opposed to 20%); but by far the most popular answer was ‘neither’ – accounting for 46% of respondents.⁵⁹



Though we did not ask the same question of our ‘control’ sample (the reference to Muslim-specific organisations rendering it incomparable), these results would appear entirely in keeping with broader social attitudes. Western European, post-industrial societies have seen a marked decline in associational culture from the post-Second World War heyday. Membership of political parties

⁵⁸ See p. 110

⁵⁹ See question 5

has collapsed. (Notwithstanding Jeremy Corbyn’s much-trumpeted claims about the size of his mandate as Labour party leader, it pales when set against historical comparisons from the 1950s and 1960s, when party leaders could look to the support of millions of members.)⁶⁰

Within these top-line figures too, it is worth noting that there were small, yet significant variations with:

- age (younger respondents were more likely to go through Muslim organisations than those in the older cohorts);
- social grade (ABs are more likely to be active via mainstream parties or Muslim organisations);
- those in work versus unemployed (the former are more likely to engage with mainstream parties);
- educational attainment (those with higher levels of education are more likely to engage);
- region.⁶¹

With regards to the latter, respondents in the North West (35%), the East (33%) and Wales (40%) were significantly more likely to join a mainstream party than the national Muslim average (22%); conversely, relatively few respondents said

they would take this step in the North East (11%), Yorkshire and the Humber (13%), the South East (10%) and South West 2%. In the North East, meanwhile, those surveyed were more likely to go through a Muslim organisation (29%), with a relatively high number of respondents also citing a preference for this approach in Scotland (28%) and the

“They do not feel a need for special representation from either political parties, or from groups that purport to represent specific ‘Muslim’ interests”

East (25%). Finally, it is worth noting that in Yorkshire and the Humber (59%), the South East (55%) and the South West (73%), a clear majority of respondents said that in a situation where they needed to engage with officials, they would neither join a mainstream political party, nor go through Muslim organisations.⁶²

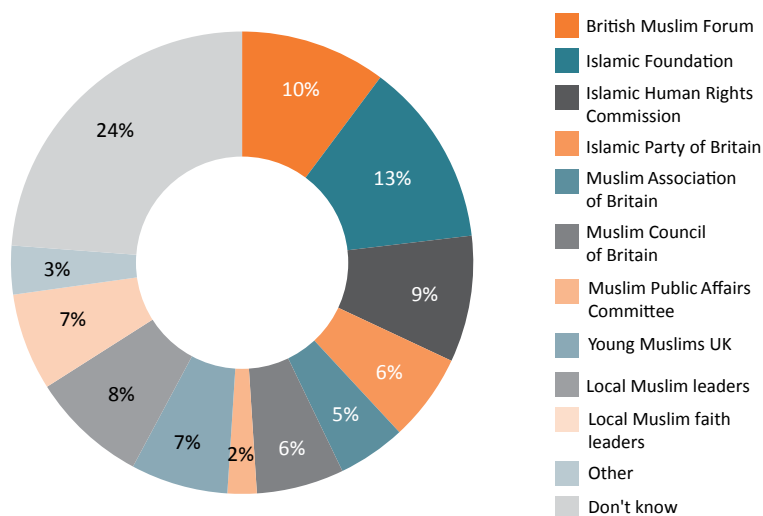
Again, then, in these areas in particular – but also across Britain as a whole – Muslims seem inclined to approach the authorities as individual members of a liberal polity. They do not feel a need for special representation from either political parties, or from groups that purport to represent specific ‘Muslim’ interests.

60 See R. Keen and L. Audickas, Membership of UK Political Parties (House of Commons Library Briefing Paper: Number SN05125, 5 August 2016), available at, file:///Users/TFD/Downloads/SN05125.pdf

61 See pp. 118–19

62 See p. 120

Figure 7: Which Muslim organisation would you choose to help engage with government officials on your behalf?



As described, just 1 in 5 Muslims look to avowedly Muslim organisations as a suitable vehicle for engagement at either the national or local level. Crucially, when we delved deeper into the beliefs of that sub-group, we discovered some very interesting results. The organisation cited by the proportionally greatest number of those who stated a preference for Muslim organisations, was the Islamic Foundation (19%), followed by the British Muslim Forum (15%), the Islamic Human Rights Commission (13%), local Muslim leaders (12%), the Islamic Party of Britain (11%), local Muslim faith leaders (10%) and Young Muslims UK (10%).⁶³ Even here, the most popular answer was ‘don’t know’.

Several conclusions can be drawn from these results. First, it should be remembered how small a proportion of the overall Muslim population, these figures represent. These are fractions of a fraction. I.e. Of the 20% of people who said they preferred to engage the local or national government via Muslim organisations, some 19% said the Islamic Foundation. **In absolute terms, this was 118 people out of 3040 (roughly 4% of our overall sample population); and this was the most popular answer.**

The second thing to note is how fragmented is the ‘Muslim organisation’ scene. No one organisation could claim the loyalty of more than 20% of those who believe in the value of Muslim organisations – the latter being only 20% of the Muslim population as a whole! **In other words, even within the small, fringe world of Muslim organisations, there is a cacophony of notes, rather than a single voice.**

Thirdly, it is worth noting how little support was given to those groups that often purport to enjoy national standing. The Muslim Council of Britain was identified by just 9% of those who preferred to engage via Muslim organisations (a proportion that amounts to just 2% of the Muslim sample population). The Muslim Association of Britain was identified by 7% of those who preferred to

⁶³ See question 6

engage via Muslim organisations (or 1% of the overall Muslim population). The Islamic Society of Britain was the choice of 9% of this cohort (or 2% of the overall Muslim population). **In absolute terms, then, these organisations, which often loom so large on the national stage, draw on tiny reservoirs of support.**

We can amplify this picture further by looking at the various statistical breakdowns. What these show, for example, is that those respondents in the 35–44 years old category, who favoured engagement with Muslim organisations, were more likely than other age groups to point to the British Muslim Forum (22%), the Islamic Foundation (24%) and the Islamic Human Rights Commission (18%). The last of these also drew stronger support from 45–54 year olds (21% of people in this age group identified the IHRC, as compared with 13% of respondents overall). By comparison, the Islamic Party of Britain enjoyed significantly more support amongst those aged 55–64, 24% of whom identified this organisation as their preferred vehicle, whereas its support was weak amongst those aged 18–34 (8–9%). As might be expected, those in the 18–24 cohort, were more likely than older counterparts to point to Young Muslims UK (17%, as compared to 10%).

Both the Muslim Association of Britain and the Muslim Council of Britain, meanwhile, enjoyed more support amongst the oldest age cohort of 65+ (16% and 14% respectively), as compared to the equivalent figures for all ages combined (7% and 9%). Older Muslims were also more likely to point to ‘local Muslim leaders’ (though only the oldest cohort cited faith leaders specifically).⁶⁴

Other statistically significant fluctuations were observable in regard to social grade, housing status, educational attainment, attitudes to Britain, and religiosity. With regards to the latter, for instance, those who considered themselves more devout were comparatively more likely to point to the Islamic Foundation and the Islamic Human Rights Commission, whereas the reverse was true for the British Muslim Forum. Perhaps the most interesting differences, however, emerged from the regional breakdowns.⁶⁵

These show, for instance, that almost all the groups in question were highly London-centric. If one takes the Islamic Foundation, for instance, 36% of those respondents in the capital, who said they would prefer to go through Muslim organisations to engage with the authorities, highlighted this group. **However, that figure falls to zero in the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, the South West and Wales.** In addition, only 7% of those in the North West and 4% of those in the South East identified the Islamic Foundation as their preferred vehicle. Similar patterns are observable across almost all other organisations, including the Muslim Council of Britain, which purports to be a nationally representative body. The highest level of support for this group was in the South West where 13% of respondents said they would prefer to engage via the MCB; figures of 12% were returned in London and the South East, and 11% in the East. Conversely, **just 1% of those respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber, who favoured engagement via Muslim organisations, pointed to the MCB, and this proportion fell to zero in the North East and Wales.**⁶⁶

In some ways this should be unsurprising given the fact that the MCB remains, according to Innes Bowen in her recent book on British Islam, “controlled by a group which manages fewer than 4 per cent of Britain’s mosques and which had links to the Jamaat-e-Islami, a political party based in Pakistan and Bangladesh”.⁶⁷

64 See pp. 124–5

65 See pp. 125–34

66 See pp. 128–9

67 I. Bowen, *Medina in Birmingham, Najaf in Brent: Inside British Islam* (C. Hurst & Co.: London, 2014), p. 2

Not only is this organisation marginal in political and religious terms among Britain's Muslim population, but also, it is geographically peripheral from the lives of most Muslims.

As Bowen has pointed out, the largest Islamic 'sect' within Britain is the Deobandis, who control some 44% of mosques in the UK, but who are not truly represented by any putatively national organisation of this kind (she estimates that only 10% of Deobandi mosques are direct affiliates of the MCB and relatively few Deobandis are involved in the group's leadership).⁶⁸ Given the affinity with which Muslims regard their local mosque (see below), as compared to other institutions, it is no surprise that they remain unmoved by many organisations that claim to speak in their name.

Again, what all of this underlines is the extent to which those groups, which often present themselves as the national representatives of Muslim opinion, can in fact claim the loyalty of very few within Britain's diverse Muslim communities – especially when one goes outside London. There is no Muslim organisation that can claim, in any meaningful way, to represent the patchwork of communities that comprise Britain's Muslim population. Those communities, whilst unquestionably more 'religious' than the British people as a whole, are not beholden to religiously-based organisations.

The caveat to the above results, is that, when asked whether they opposed Muslim organisations pronouncing opinions in the name of the community, only a minority felt strongly enough to oppose it (13%); by contrast, 54% of all respondents supported the idea that Muslim organisations should express views on economic and social issues in the name of the Muslim community (18% strongly favoured this proposition, whereas 36% expressed more lukewarm support).⁶⁹

On this issue, the eldest cohorts were least likely to oppose the activities of such Muslim organisations and most likely to support them.⁷⁰ Individuals who believe they can influence decisions affecting Britain were also more likely to affirm support for such groups, as were those who sympathised with the use of violence, or terrorism, in the context of political protest.⁷¹ As might be expected, meanwhile, both those who considered themselves more devout and those who were more observant in their practice (attending mosque more than four times a week), were significantly more likely to support these kinds of groups. For such individuals, for whom their Islamic identity obviously plays a stronger part in their lives, it perhaps make sense that they would see activism of this kind as a positive thing.⁷²

The regional breakdown of results shows that respondents in the South East were least likely to support these groups (just 32% answering to this effect), with relatively low support also in the West Midlands (45%), Scotland (45%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (40%). Conversely, people in the East (64%), London (65%) and Wales (69%) answered strongly in favour of Muslim organisations pronouncing in the name of the community.⁷³

At the aggregate level, these results, coupled with the answer to question 6, would appear to suggest: a) that a majority of respondents support the notion

68 Ibid., pp. 4–7, 24

69 See question 9

70 See p. 181

71 See p. 187

72 See pp. 189–91

73 See p. 185

of activism in the name of British Muslims – at least at an abstract level; but that b) no single organisation can reasonably claim to ‘speak’ for a monolithic Muslim community. Most respondents like the idea that someone is out there putting forward a distinctly Muslim viewpoint. But they are far from ready to be involved themselves and certainly do not invest the right of ‘representation’ in any single group.

Such conclusions again point to a key theme to emerge from our survey: that there is something of a gap between ideas adhered to in the abstract, and the way in which those same ideas are viewed when efforts are made to make them tangible in the real world.

On the subject of those who purport to represent Muslims, this divergence was reflected further in our focus groups, where multiple participants articulated strong criticism of those who inclined to present themselves as ‘community leaders’:

“I’m not impressed with the Muslim leaders that I’ve seen in the local communities at the moment. Not impressed about that at all.”

Female, Cardiff Group 2

“To be honest, I don’t think there’s really any community leaders. You know, they give them that title, but who are they leading?... They’re not really leading anybody. You know, on the news in our community, I don’t think they’re leaders.”

Male, Birmingham Group 2

“I, kind of, refuse to follow community leaders... they bring so much of their culture into it, they’re not really community leaders any more, they’re culture leaders.”

Male, Slough Group 1

“There’s no like community leadership. It’s the head of the Muslim councils and that I don’t think they do enough... They’re not supporting enough of going against certain things, like Abu Hamza only came to light because of how the media portrayed him and how it all came. There was nobody in that community of those thousands of Muslim men that were condemning him or reported him to the police or whatever.”

Male, Cardiff Group 2

“I must say, the media always picks the dodgy ones when it comes to some sort of debate, some sort of talk on the news. People see the dodgy leaders on the TV, and it really disappoints me because I would say there’s very few good community leaders out there.”

Female, Slough Group 1

Thus, to most British Muslims, the activism of ‘community leaders’ and those organisations that purport to represent a specifically ‘Muslim’ interest, appears as little more than background noise. It is something they are unlikely to oppose – and indeed many support their existence, but there is far less active ‘buy-in’. Such conclusions are reinforced when one considers active engagement, at the individual level, with ‘faith leaders’.

When asked how often they sought guidance from ‘faith leaders’ about social and economic issues, the most common answer was ‘never’ – with 44% of respondents giving this response. 24% said they might seek such advice less than once per year. Just 18% said they sought such advice from ‘faith leaders’ at least once per month. This hardly suggests a community entirely bound by the edicts of the pulpit. Nevertheless, these statistics do reflect that which was noted earlier: that for Muslims, religion plays a more prominent role than it does amongst the population as a whole. The comparable results from our ‘control’ survey were 78% (never), 7% (less often than once per year) and 11% (at least once per month).⁷⁴

Among British Muslims, it is noticeable that men were relatively more likely to seek advice from faith leaders than women – perhaps a reflection of the gender imbalances that continue to exist within British mosques. In addition, those judged to be at a lower social grade (DE) were more likely than those in other categories to say ‘never’ when asked how often they sought such guidance.⁷⁵

As ever, there were also clear differences when results were broken down by region. Muslim respondents in Wales were much more likely to answer ‘never’ (80%), while only 12% gave answers indicating that they sought advice at least once per month or more. Similarly results from the South East and Scotland showed clear majorities answering ‘never’ (61% and 60% respectively), while fewer people than average gave answers indicating advice being sought more than once per month (14% and 19%). At the other end of the spectrum, by contrast, was the South West, where only 27% answered ‘never’ and 39% of respondents gave answers indicating they sought advice at least once per month. Other regions with comparatively high levels of respondents claiming to seek guidance at least once per month were the East (25%, as compared to just 33% said ‘never’) and the East Midlands (24%, as compared to just 31% saying never).⁷⁶

Other indices that threw up interesting statistical variation included:

- Sense of belonging to Britain – where those who said they did not feel such sentiments were much less likely to say ‘never’ (32%) and more likely to give answers indicating they sought advice at least once per month (25%).
- Whether an individual believed that they could influence decisions affecting Britain – with those who felt they could, much less likely to say ‘never’ (32%) and more likely to seek advice regularly (27%).⁷⁷
- Religiosity (as might be expected) – with less religious individuals significantly less likely to seek such advice; though here, it is noticeable that even amongst those who rated themselves as between 1 and 3 on a scale out of 10 for devotion, 17% said they would seek guidance from faith leaders on secular issues at least once per month.⁷⁸

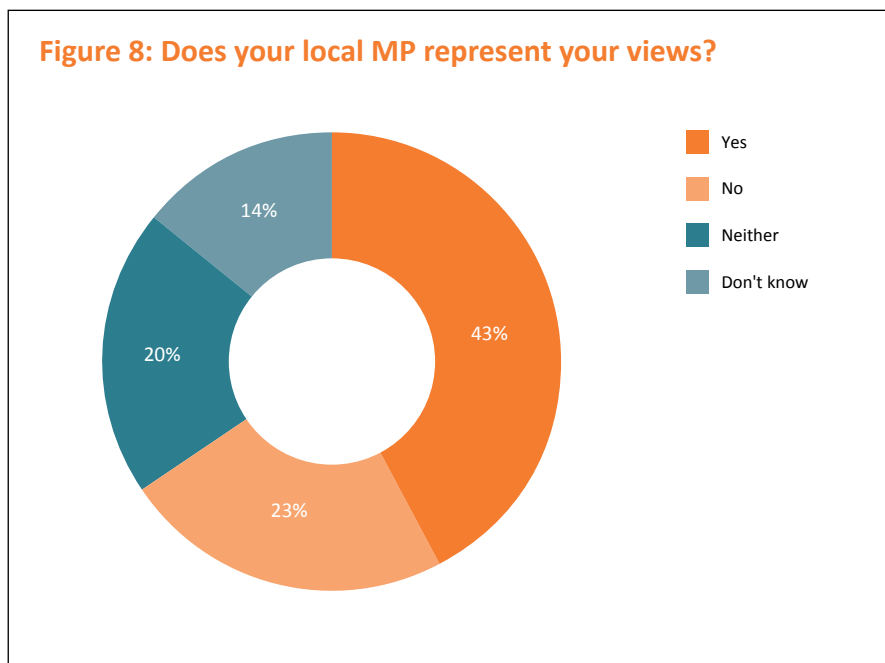
⁷⁴ See question 8

⁷⁵ See p. 170

⁷⁶ See pp. 173–4

⁷⁷ See pp. 175–6

⁷⁸ See pp. 177–8

Figure 8: Does your local MP represent your views?

When asked whether they felt their local MP represented their views, 42% said that he/she did, whereas 23% disagreed. 20% said neither and a further 14% did not know. Again, the regional breakdown shows a marked divergence here. In Wales (69%), Scotland (54%) and the East Midlands (51%), majorities agreed that their MP represented their views. These proportions were significantly higher than the populace as a whole. Conversely, relatively far fewer people agreed with this proposition in the North East (18%), Yorkshire and the Humber (23%) and the South West (24%); and whereas in the former, this lack of agreement fed into more ‘don’t know’ answers in both the latter regions, respondents were more actively to disagree actively with the statement (38% and 43% respectively).⁷⁹

Amongst other factors of note, it is perhaps unsurprising that those who felt that they could influence decisions affecting Britain, were more likely to say their MP represented their views (57% as compared to 42% overall average) – their relatively greater faith in their MP chiming with their wider faith in the system.⁸⁰

Conversely, those individuals who said they felt no sense of belonging to Britain were much less likely to agree with this statement (31%), as were those who rated themselves as less religiously devout. Just 35% those who rated themselves between 1 and 3 out of 10 for religious commitment agreed with the statement about MPs representing their views, whereas 33% of the same cohort disagreed.⁸¹

When the same question was posed with regards to local councillors, similar top-line results were returned: **43% said that the councillor represented their views; 23% disagreed; 20% said neither and 14% did not know.**⁸²

The regional breakdowns for this question follow a similar pattern to that noted in regard to views of MPs. Again, a majority of respondents in Wales (66%), Scotland (55%) and the East Midlands (59%) agreed that their local councillor represented their views, with above average levels of agreement also in the North West (51%) and the East (50%). By comparison, there was much less agreement in the North East (only 18%), with far more people saying they did not know (46% as compared to overall average of 14%). In both Yorkshire and Humber and

79 See p. 152

80 A similarly higher proportion of these people also saw their local councillor as representative of their views – see p. 164

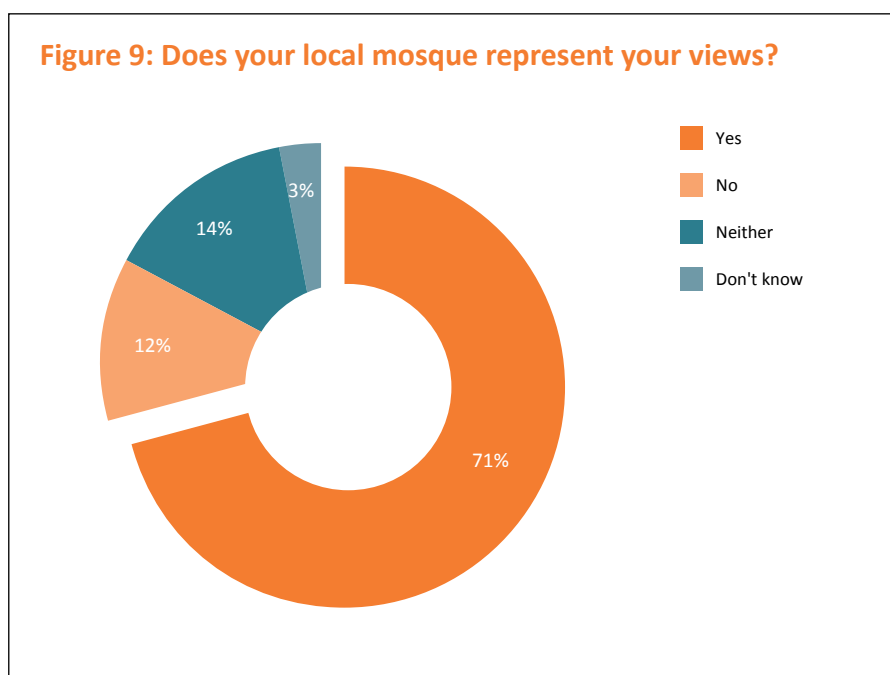
81 See pp. 154–6

82 See question 7

the South West, meanwhile, there was both markedly lower levels of agreement (23% and 29%) and significantly greater levels of disagreement with the view that local councillors represented their views (39% in each case).⁸³

What these figures would seem to indicate, then, is that there are significant levels of concern with the representative character of elected officials – at both a local and national level – in Yorkshire and Humber and the South West.

Crucially, a very different pattern of results emerged **when respondents were asked whether their local mosque represented their views. 71% agreed that it did, whereas only 12% disagreed** (14% said neither and only 3% did not know). It is also worth noting that the nature of the agreement with the statement that the mosque represented their views was also much stronger than was the case with either the local MP, or councillor. For example, 33% of people ‘strongly’ agreed that their mosque represented them; the equivalent figure for political representatives was just 9%.⁸⁴ For British Muslims, it seems clear that the mosque does have a broad social, cultural and religious resonance, acting as an overarching ‘umbrella’ for conceptions of personal identity.



Once again, answers to this question reinforce the point made earlier: that Britain’s Muslims are a considerably more religious population than the wider UK community. The mosque and religion generally, is significantly more important in their everyday lives than is the case for the non-Muslim population.

As with other questions, various breakdowns reveal statistically significant variations on a range of indices, not least that of regional location. Above average levels of support were recorded in several regions for the statement that an individual’s local mosque represented their views: the North East (88%); Wales (83%); Scotland (81%); and the East (78%). Conversely, lower than average levels

⁸³ See p. 162

⁸⁴ See question 7

of support appeared in Yorkshire and the Humber (62%) and the South West (62%), though only in the latter did this also translate into a significantly larger number of people actively willing to disagree with this proposition (22%, as compared to 12% overall).⁸⁵

Beyond this, as one might expect, those who considered themselves more religious, and those more observant in their religious practice, were more likely to say that their mosque represented their views.⁸⁶ It is also worth noting that those born in Britain were less likely to agree with the idea that the local mosque represented their views than those born outside the UK (67% as opposed to 75%).⁸⁷ It is striking that the most significant predictor of those likely to say that their local mosque represented their views was provided by the question of whether an individual sympathised with the use of violence, or the use of terrorism, as a form of political protest. 91% and 95% respectively, of those who did sympathise with these actions, said that their local mosque represented their views.⁸⁸

85 See p. 141

86 See pp. 145–7

87 See p. 143

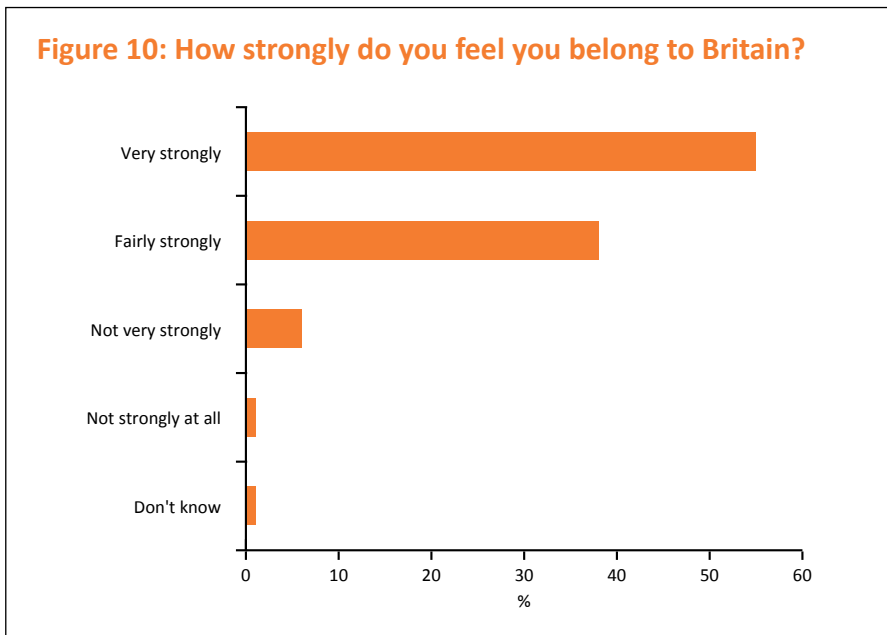
88 *Ibid.*

3

Integration

When asked to reflect on their sense of belonging to local areas, 56% of Muslims said ‘very strongly’ and a further 37% said ‘fairly strongly’. Only 7% said they did not feel strongly attached to the local community.⁸⁹ There was some marked local variation on this figure, with the communities in the East of England relatively more likely to express a ‘strong’ sense of belonging to their locality (98%), whereas this was markedly lower in the South West (84%).⁹⁰

In regard to **Britain as a whole**, very similar figures were returned: **55% of people said that they felt ‘very strongly’ attached to the country; 38% ‘fairly strongly’; and only 7% said they did not feel a strong sense of belonging to the UK.** That sense of attachment to the UK was relatively weaker in the South West, where only 77% of respondents said that they felt a ‘strong’ sense of belonging to Britain, as compared to 92% of respondents overall giving that answer.⁹¹



Nevertheless, overall it seems clear that attachment to locality overlaps with and reinforces a strong sense of belonging to the UK as a whole. Those who said they felt a sense of belonging to Britain were much more likely to feel strongly attached to their local area (95%), than those who did not feel a sense of belonging to the UK (66%).⁹²

89 See question 1

90 See p. 39

91 See p. 47

92 See p. 41

As with many communities that enjoy strong diasporic links and are of recent immigrant origin, this strong attachment to the country in which they live, can coexist comfortably with multiple other loyalties. 87% of those born abroad also felt a strong sense of belonging to the country of their birth; and amongst those whose parents were born abroad, that figure only drops to 80% (and 72% for those who were also themselves born in the UK).⁹³ Today, few people see any difficulty with such layered and complex identities. We are long past the era when Norman Tebbit-esque anxieties about cricketing affiliations raise major concerns about the ability of sections of the population to integrate.⁹⁴

This was confirmed repeatedly in our focus group sessions, when participants invariably confirmed their sense of loyalty and belonging to Britain.

“I grew up in Britain, I would class myself as British. My values are the same as any ordinary British person, I just happen to be from a particular faith.”

Male, Birmingham Group 1

“I wouldn’t affiliate myself to any nation other than Great Britain. I think it’s the best place in the world to live.”

Female, Cardiff Group 2

“I would agree with that. I’m a British Muslim, that’s my identity. I wouldn’t separate the two.”

Female, Cardiff Group 2

When asked specifically about integration, **a majority of respondents, 53%, said that they wanted to ‘fully integrate with non-Muslims in all aspects of life’, while a further 37% spoke of wanting to integrate ‘on most things’ with separation in some areas, such as schooling and laws. Conversely, much fewer people took a more minimalistic view of wanting integration ‘on some things’, whilst leading ‘a separate Islamic life as far as possible’ (6%) and only 1% of respondents declared in favour of a ‘fully separate Islamic area in Britain, subject to Sharia Law and government’.**⁹⁵

It is notable too that the percentage of those favouring full integration ‘in all aspects of life’ was highest among the youngest cohort (among 18–24 year olds the relevant figure rises to 59%). It was the eldest cohorts (aged 55 upwards) that were relatively more likely to favour integration on most things, with separation in a few areas.⁹⁶ Such results would tend to suggest that support for integration will increase as time goes by, and the British Muslim population as a whole moves further from its immigrant roots.

It is also worth noting that religiosity appears negatively correlated with support for full integration. **More religiously devout and observant respondents were relatively less likely to call for full integration, with support instead more likely to go for the idea of integration ‘on most things’, with separation in some areas such as schooling and laws.**⁹⁷

93 See question 1; see also p. 63

94 D. Howe, ‘Tebbit’s loyalty test is dead’, *New Statesman*, July 2006

95 See question 15

96 See p. 248

97 See pp. 254–6

The regional picture is a complicated one and contains significant variations. In the North East, for instance, respondents were more likely than the population as a whole to vote for full integration (62% versus 53%); yet, equally, they were more likely to call for more substantial levels of separation (14% as opposed to 6%). In the North West, those similarly voting for minimalist integration with more extensive separation accounted for 16% of respondents. The strongest support in favour of full integration was found in Wales (74%), Scotland (66%), the South East (63%), the East and West Midlands (63% and 59% respectively) and the East (59%). By comparison, it is striking that only 28% of respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber declared in favour of full integration. Here, a majority (53%) preferred integration on 'most things' with separation on certain areas, whilst 11% called for separation to lead an Islamic life 'as far as possible'. A similar pattern was observed in the South West where only 37% opted for full integration; 49% for a situation with the balance tilted in favour of separation, but with some separation; and 11% again for a more extensive separation.⁹⁸

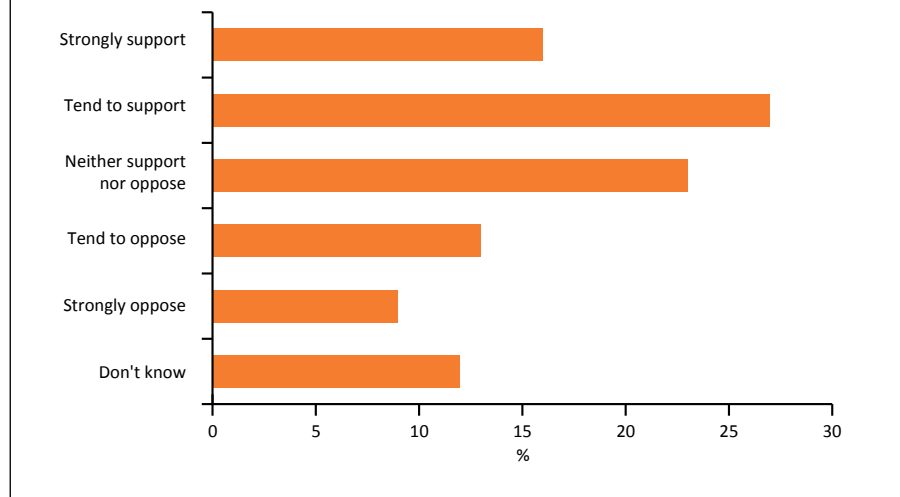
The subject of Sharia law has caused much controversy in the past. Successive polls have shown what were felt to be surprisingly large numbers of British Muslims as favouring the implementation of such legal provisions. In some ways, our survey is no different. **When asked whether they would support the introduction of Sharia Law – broadly defined, to include civil law on questions of financial disputes – some 43% said they supported this proposition, whereas 22% opposed it (23% neither supported nor opposed), while 12% said they did not know.**⁹⁹

However, it should be stressed that the wording of the question here is significant: respondents were asked about Sharia in the broadest sense – and in that context, perhaps the most significant thing is that a majority of Muslims did not express a view in support and only 16% 'strongly supported' its introduction.

98 See p. 250

99 See question 16

Figure 11: To what extent do you support the introduction of aspects of Sharia law into Britain?



Moreover, when results are broken down it is notable that younger respondents were relatively less likely to favour the provisions of Sharia law. Only 35% of those aged 18–24 expressed support for such measures (and only 11% expressed ‘strong support’ as compared to an overall proportion of 16%); conversely amongst the two oldest age cohorts (those 55 years old and

“Moreover, when results are broken down it is notable that younger respondents were relatively less likely to favour the provisions of Sharia law”

above) that figure rose to 48–49% (and 17–19% strong support).¹⁰⁰ This marks something of a divergence on the results of an earlier Policy Exchange poll (*Living Apart Together*), which had shown that younger respondents were actually more likely than their elders to favour sharia law.¹⁰¹ We can only speculate as to the

reason for this change – but it might well be a product of the diminished appeal of ‘Sharia law’ in an age in which this concept has become associated with, and tarnished by, ISIS.

This divergence in response according to age was reinforced by breakdown by educational attainment. Current students were half as likely to ‘strongly support’ the provisions of Sharia (8%); those without formal education were relatively more likely to support such measures in some form (50% of this cohort expressed support).¹⁰² Those born in the UK were also relatively less likely to support Sharia provisions than those not born in Britain (39% as compared to 46%).¹⁰³

When results are considered by region, further divergences of interest become apparent. The highest levels of support were to be found in the East Midlands where 59% of people expressed support for Sharia provisions. Respondents in London were also relatively more likely to favour it (49% did so as compared to 43% overall). Elsewhere, there were significantly lower levels of support in Scotland (38%), Yorkshire and the Humber (38%), the South West (37%), the West Midlands (36%), the North East (38%), Wales (33%) and especially the

¹⁰⁰ See p. 258

¹⁰¹ M. Mirza et al., *Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the paradox of multiculturalism* (Policy Exchange: London, 2007), p. 46.

¹⁰² See p. 260

¹⁰³ See p. 264

South East (29%). Interestingly, these lower levels of support did not always translate into significantly higher levels of opposition, though this was the case particularly in the South West (29% of respondents expressed opposition to Sharia as compared to 22% overall), Wales (31%), Scotland (32%) and especially Yorkshire and the Humber (37%).¹⁰⁴

Overall, there was perhaps far greater ambivalence about the prospect of Sharia being introduced than has been shown up in previous surveys, and this was born out in focus group discussion.

“What [the] media is talking about [with] Sharia law is, I’ll give you an example. When they say Sharia law, that means hand chopped off, leg chopped off, and stoned to death. That’s it. That is Sharia law, and that’s done, washed our hands. It’s not. When we are talking about Sharia law, we are talking about divorce, you know, in Islam, how the divorce is done, or getting married. That is Sharia law.”

Male, Birmingham Group 2

“I’ve never heard one person ask for it, ever.”

Male, Slough Group 1

“I don’t know anyone who wants sharia law.”

Female, Birmingham Group 1

This ambivalence was reflected further **when respondents were asked about the likely impact of Sharia law provisions being introduced in the UK. 13% of people predicted generally positive impacts, 14% gave broadly negative responses, whereas 30% felt it would not make any particular difference and 37% said they did not know.**¹⁰⁵

Again, at the regional level, areas that had been amongst the least favourable to the introduction of Sharia measures, also showed a marked ambivalence on the likely impact of this step. In the South West, for example, 56% of respondents said it would make no particular difference, and this figure rose to 64% in Yorkshire and the Humber.¹⁰⁶

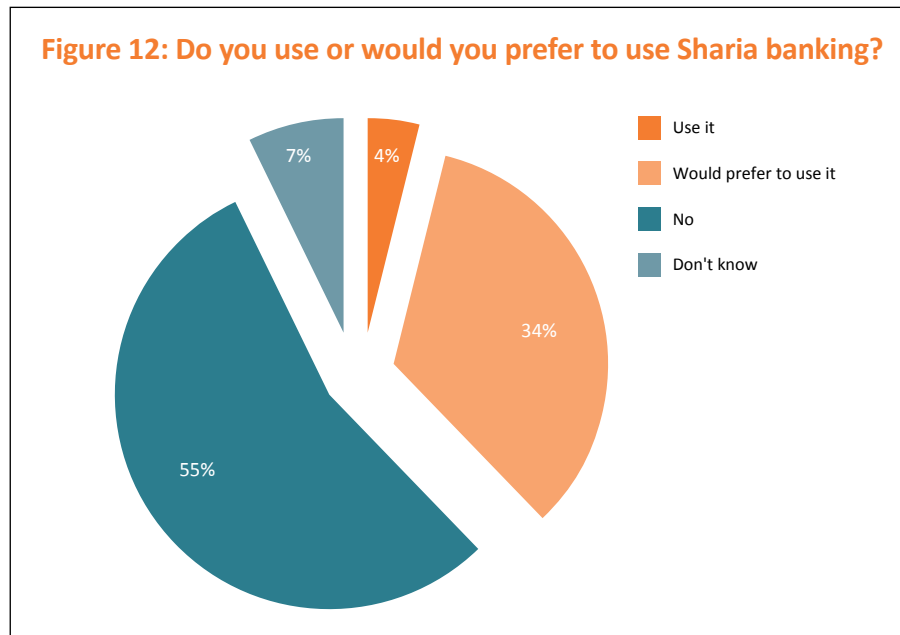
All of this reflects, we might suggest, the abstract way in which Sharia law is viewed by the overwhelming majority of Britain’s Muslim population. It is not something that impinges on their day-to-day existence.

104 See p. 262

105 See question 17

106 See p. 288

If we take one specific example, that of Sharia-compliant finance:



Just 4% of our respondents said that they used Sharia banking. A further 37% of it said that they would ‘prefer’ to use it (though what this does not reveal is whether they would ‘prefer’ to use it if it were an option, or whether they would ‘prefer’ to use it in a more abstract, idealised way). Crucially, a majority – 55% said they would not prefer to use it.¹⁰⁷ The latter is a striking statistic, given how much emphasis elements of the banking sector have placed on the provision of Sharia banking facilities. It is surely worth considering whether the huge investment of resources diverted to this sector is entirely warranted.

This result itself reflects anecdotal evidence from the focus groups, where several participants raised practical concerns about the viability and applicability of Sharia banking.

“If you look at somebody like me-, I’ll use myself as an example, a sharia-compliant mortgage, for example, the rate is-, if you forget how they word it, and you do a like for like comparison, the rate is 5%. I’ve got a mortgage and the rate is 2.9%, for example, and there’s ones that will give you 1.9 now. It’s very hard for you to commit to a 5% rate and be £300 out of pocket when you physically can’t afford it. A lot of people here want to be homeowners.”

Male, Birmingham Group 1

“A lot of Muslims who are going through buying, cannot buy properties because they think mortgages are forbidden... So they end up going into a rental market and they are screwed even more, in the rental market because they end up paying twice as much. They know, when they take an Islamic mortgage, they have to pay twice as much as they normally do.”

Male, London Group 2

107 See question 18

“Part of Sharia law says you don’t deal in interest and part of Sharia law says, ‘The punishment for this should be this.’ I don’t think we can apply that practically in the UK because we’re 3% or 4% of the population. It’s not practical.”

Female, Cardiff Group 2

“I think what people are finding is that Islamic loans, they’re quite high, if you’re taking a mortgage out. So if your normal mortgage is, say, £500, with the Islamic one it’d be £900. So I think a lot of people, they are fighting with that thinking.”

Male, Birmingham Group 2

Again, therefore, it is possible to identify a gap between an issue as seen in the abstract and the way it is viewed at a more tangible, practical level. ‘Sharia law’ as a concept considered in general terms, is one that many Muslims are not willing to reject, and significant numbers state a ‘Panglossian’ preference for it: it is something that they might like in the best of all possible worlds. However, in their day-to-day lives, this is not an issue that drives many Muslims in the UK. The practical problems that surround Sharia ensure that many show little interest in those Sharia-compliant measures that do exist. In this context, expressing support for Sharia is a way of saying something about one’s identity and religion, rather than voicing a commitment to a specific policy and legal objective.

4

Education

A key issue for many Muslims (as for any other member of the population) is education. As noted above, the ‘future of their children’, which encompasses educational issues, was the second most important priority for survey respondents at an individual level. This subject also has a crucial bearing on the question of integration. Here, it is striking too that **British Muslims favour a common national curriculum that would enhance community cohesion (69% support this with, just 6% opposed)**. If one contrasts this with results from our control survey, those agreeing with this statement represented just 58% of respondents, with 9% opposed.

When the results of our Muslim-only survey are broken down by region, there are clear divergences of opinion on this issue. At one end of the spectrum are areas like London (78%), the North West (74%), Wales and the South East (both 71%). In those areas, there were relatively high levels of support for a shared national curriculum as a vehicle of community cohesion. Conversely, a bare majority of respondents (53%) backed this proposition in the South West and in Yorkshire and the Humber this proportion fell to just 47%, whereas more than twice as many people – relatively speaking – felt that such a unified curriculum would bring cohesion benefits, in comparison to the national average (12% as compared to 6%).¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, overall it is clear that Britain’s Muslims are not inclined to educational ‘separatism’. What this reflects is the extent to which episodes like the ‘Trojan Horse’ scandal were the creation of those working to a particularly sectional and divisive agenda. The vast majority of British Muslims are the victims – not the active supporters – of those who seek to segregate their communities from wider society. As a population group, they are more likely to support those measures, such as a shared curriculum, that are seen by many as a key mechanism for social integration. Of course, what was not answered here was the question of exactly what was understood by the phrase, ‘common national curriculum’, though even with this caveat in place, the story seems to be a positive one.

Within our survey, **a slim majority of Muslims (53%) agreed with the statement that they preferred to send their children to schools with strong ‘Muslim values’**. By contrast, when our control survey asked whether respondents preferred to send their children to a school with ‘strong religious values’, just 20% agreed, and 47% disagreed. This would tend to reinforce the divergence

¹⁰⁸ See p. 372

between Muslims and the wider non-Muslim population in terms of religiosity and the importance that is attached to religion by the former. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Muslim values are seen as being entirely compatible with ‘secular’ education – which is to say, non-faith-based education. This came through very strongly in the focus groups. Time and again, when asked about education, the priority for our respondents was quality of education, rather than any demand that it be specifically-Islamic.

“For me, [the most important thing] would be the Ofsted report.”

Female, London Group 1

“I always go by Ofsted. I’ll always look for the outstanding schools or good schools, because obviously, you know, they’re doing it right.”

Female, Slough Group 1

“My child is in a good school, Church of England. We moved area, but we kept him there because he likes that school and he’s really settled in. They’ve got good morals, and it’s a very good school... we’d rather keep him there because he’s happy there, receiving a good education. So yes, good education’s very important. Islam, we can teach them at home.”

Male, Birmingham Group 2

“Well the school my children go to is a Church of England school, and this school I went to myself. I think the school is amazing. It’s got an outstanding Ofsted report. It’s a performing arts school, so it’s amazing for their confidence.”

Female, Birmingham Group 2

In this context, it is striking that **a plurality of respondents in our quantitative survey agreed that ‘children educated in schools with strong Muslim values are put at a disadvantage when they enter higher education or employment’.** **40% agreed with this statement, whereas 32% disagreed,** reinforcing the idea that to most Muslim parents, it is the quality and utility of education that matters, rather than the brand.¹⁰⁹

Nonetheless, there are some differences between British Muslims and the general population over what constitutes a ‘good education’. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our survey of Muslim opinion showed that people were more relaxed about uniforms that included recognisably Islamic forms of dress. **When asked whether schools should be able to insist on ‘a hijab or niqab’ as part of the uniform, 44% agreed with the proposition, whereas 32% disagreed.** This marks a strong divergence with results from the control survey in which only 9% agreed, whereas 65% declared themselves opposed to the idea (and 50% were ‘strongly’ opposed).

Within the breakdown, it is noticeable that current students were the cohort least likely to agree with – and most likely to disagree with – this statement. There was a significant divergence in the results between this category and those

109 See question 20

without any formal education.¹¹⁰ Another significant variable was whether or not respondents felt a sense of belonging to Britain. Those who did not were more likely to agree (52% did so) with the proposition that the hijab or niqab could be a compulsory element of uniform. On the other hand, those who felt they could influence decisions affecting Britain were also more likely than those who did not, to agree with the proposition (51%).¹¹¹ Unsurprisingly, those respondents who considered themselves more devout were also relatively more likely to support the compulsory wearing of such religious-based clothing within schools.¹¹²

Elsewhere, a breakdown of results by region showed particular high support for the hijab or niqab as part of a school uniform in the South East (57%) and South West (63%). Very different results were returned in Wales (where just 4% agreed and 90% disagreed with such uniform) and the North East (where just 24% of respondents agreed with this dress as part of school uniform – though here, people were also relatively less likely to oppose it – 23% did so, compared to 32% overall).¹¹³

Taken as a whole, though, the issue of school clothing would appear to be one where the greater social conservatism of British Muslims becomes apparent, in comparison with their non-Muslim neighbours. As a population grouping, they are much more accepting of religious-based clothing within state education – a tendency that is surely also a product of a particular conception of what it means to be Muslim.

On two other issues there were marked differences between Muslim opinion and that of the general population. **When asked about gender segregation within schools, there was almost an equal split between those who agreed ‘girls and boys should be taught separately’ (40%) and those who disagreed (41%).** Though there are, of course, advocates of gender-segregated education across wider society, it enjoys much less support among the UK population as a whole. Results from the control survey showed much less support for the proposition (just 11%), whereas 74% of respondents declared themselves opposed to separate schooling for boys and girls.

Within our survey of Muslim opinion, the breakdown of results on the question of gender-segregated schooling also makes for interesting reading. It is striking, for example that the youngest cohort was significantly less likely to support this measure than the oldest cohorts (25% support among 18–24 year olds, as compared to 57–54% for those aged 55 and over).¹¹⁴ This suggests that British Muslim opinion is moving towards the ‘mainstream’ on this issue – but clearly it is a slow process and the views of this population sub-group are not currently in line with that of most UK citizens.

In similar fashion, there is a considerable discrepancy in terms of levels of support among current students (27%) and those with secondary and degree qualifications (35% and 36%), as compared with those without formal education (55%).¹¹⁵ Also of note is the divide between those born in Britain and those not, with the former much less likely to favour gender segregated schooling than the latter (28% versus 50%). Those not feeling a sense of belonging to Britain were also relatively more likely to favour divided schools (54%) than the

¹¹⁰ See p. 394

¹¹¹ See p. 398

¹¹² See p. 400. 52% of those who rated themselves 8–10 on the devout scale supported schools being able to insist on the niqab or hijab, as compared to just 32% of those who rated themselves 1–3

¹¹³ See p. 396

¹¹⁴ See p. 334

¹¹⁵ See p. 336

overall average (40%). Those who sympathised with either violence or terrorist actions were also more likely to support segregated education (47% and 51% respectively).¹¹⁶ More religiously devout respondents were also significantly more likely to express support for segregated schooling than those who judged themselves less observant.¹¹⁷

When results are considered at the regional level, meanwhile, it emerges that there is relatively high support for gender segregation in the South West (65%) – and this contrasts sharply with say, Wales (26% support) or the North East (18%). Other regions fell somewhere in between, with relatively greater opposition to gender segregated schooling also in the West Midlands (46%) and Scotland (53%).¹¹⁸

Another area of divergence relates to whether art and music should be taught in school. Amongst the control population, 75% of respondents agreed with this proposition and just 6% disagreed. By contrast, there was a marked difference amongst our survey of Muslim opinion. **A clear majority still supported the teaching of art and music (63%), but it is striking that there was more opposition to this idea than among the UK population as a whole (15%).**¹¹⁹ Support for the teaching of art and music was greater among younger and more educated cohorts than amongst their elder counterparts with less formal education.¹²⁰ Similarly, those living in areas with less highly concentrated Muslim populations were more likely to support the teaching of art and music, than those who lived in areas where Muslims made up over 50% of the local population.¹²¹

Again here, closer examination of the results throw up interesting variations at the regional level. There was especially strong support for teaching art and music in Scotland (77%), the North East (69%) and the East (68%). By contrast, respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber (52%) and especially the South West (41%) were significantly less likely to express support for such teaching. In the latter, one in five respondents actually declared their opposition to the teaching of art and music in school. The same proportion was also recorded in the East Midlands.¹²² In neighbouring West Midlands, which includes Birmingham, it is encouraging that relatively more people favoured the teaching of art and music (67% did so) and fewer opposed this (10%) – given that this was the region exposed to the ‘Trojan Horse’ conspiracy. This saw efforts to alter the curriculum by fostering ‘conservative’ and ‘hardline’ Islamic practices, which included the curtailing or abandonment of the teaching the expressive arts. Our polling confirms that such measures were being enforced against the wishes of a clear majority of Muslim parents, whose desire for their children to receive a holistic, secular education was the principle casualty of that conspiracy.¹²³

Another factor of statistical significance concerned those who sympathised with either the use of violence, or terrorism, in the context of political protest. Both groups were more likely than the overall average (74% and 67%, as compared to 63%) to support the teaching of art and music in schools: statistics that point to the fact that religious conservatism and political radicalism are two different, not necessarily inter-linked phenomena (see below).

In line with this, the less religious respondents on the survey were much more likely to support such teaching than their more self-consciously devout counterparts (84% of those who rated themselves 1–3 devotionally as compared to 57% of those in 8–10 bracket; 74%

116 See p. 340

117 See pp. 342–4

118 See p. 338

119 See question 20

120 See pp. 346–8

121 See p. 354

122 See p. 350

123 P. Clarke, Report into allegations concerning Birmingham schools arising from the ‘Trojan Horse’ letter (London, July 2014), www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340526/HC_576_accessible_-.pdf

of those who said they never went to mosque, as compared to 53% of those who said they went at least four times per week).¹²⁴ Given that British Muslims, as a cohort, are more devout than the general population, this does suggest a clear – albeit minority – current of religious-inspired social conservatism. Overall, the answers to these two questions (about gender segregated education and the teaching of art and music), when coupled to the previous question about religious clothing in schools, seem to point to the prevalence of more socially conservative attitudes among British Muslims than amongst the wider population as a whole. That social conservatism, which has been documented in various other surveys (including the earlier ICM poll for Channel 4), was also reflected in attitudes towards earlier questions about support for ‘full’ as opposed to ‘partial’ integration and does seem to set British Muslims apart from the outlook of the population as a whole.

With that said, one should not discount the fact that most British Muslims retain an essentially ‘secular’ outlook on the subject of education and this is likely related to views about the purpose of that education. **Results from both our quantitative and qualitative surveys suggest that only a minority of British Muslims (26%) believe that faith should be taught inside the classroom. By comparison, most believe that children should learn their Islam outside the school gate: in the mosque (48%) or at home (24%).**¹²⁵ Again, such results underline the extent to which the kind of curriculum being foisted on Muslim children under the aegis of the ‘Trojan Horse’ project, runs counter to the desires of a clear majority within that community. For most British Muslims, education is an essentially secular endeavour, with faith taught outside the classroom.

At the same time, these results underline the prominent place for the mosque in the lives of most British Muslims – though additional results suggest that this is not conceived of a ‘separate space’ divorced from wider society, or the authorities (see below). The latter, meanwhile, was a recurrent theme of our focus groups, with multiple respondents stating that they, rather than formal educational institutions, bore responsibility for transmitting faith to their children.

“Education starts at home... If [children] are educated on Islamic basics, they will be fine, they can go to any school, no problem with that.”

Female, London Group 1

Within the quantitative results, statistical breakdown reveals some interesting divergences. Respondents within the youngest cohort (18–24 years old) were significantly more likely to see schools as more important (32% expressed a reference for that option, as compared to 26% overall); by contrast, the mosque grew in importance with respondents’ age, so that 57% of those over 65 cited the mosque as the best place to learn faith (and just 14% of them said school).¹²⁶

There was also a clear difference according to social grade, with those placed in the C2 and DE categories, relatively more likely than those in AB and C1 to say that the mosque was the place to receive faith education (52% as opposed to 45%).¹²⁷

¹²⁴ See pp. 354–6

¹²⁵ See question 21

¹²⁶ See p. 404. See also p. 405 – ‘current students’ were also more likely (32%) to say schools.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Elsewhere, those who said they did not feel a sense of belonging to Britain were relatively more likely than the population as a whole to say mosques were the place for faith education (59% as compared to 48%).¹²⁸

Elsewhere, there is little surprise that those who considered themselves especially devout (rating themselves 8–10 on religiosity out of 10), were relatively more likely to say ‘mosques’ were the place to receive faith education (54%). Those living in areas with a higher concentration of Muslim residents were also proportionally more likely to favour the mosque.¹²⁹

Regional variations were also apparent. In the North East, for example, respondents were much more likely to say that faith should be taught in the home (43% as compared to the 24% aggregate result). There was relatively little support in this region for schools playing this role (5% as compared to 26% overall) – though the most popular answer was still for mosques (49%). Meanwhile, in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber, clear majorities of respondents favoured mosques (70% and 61% respectively). Results from the ‘East’ region were perhaps most interesting, in that this was the one area where the mosque was not the most popular answer as the place for faith education (just 30% gave this answer, as compared to the 48% aggregate result). Instead, the highest result was for the home (36%), with relatively high support for schools (34%). This was a very different profile of results from both the aggregate results – and in particular, from regions such as Wales (18%), the North West (18%), Scotland (17%), the South West (12%), and Yorkshire and the Humber (9%), where answers in favour of schools were significantly less likely.¹³⁰

Another variable to produce interesting differentials was the question of whether respondents sympathised with either violence or terrorism in the context of political protest. In both cases, those who answered affirmatively, were significantly less likely to say that the mosque was the place for faith education (29% and 21% respectively); respondents in this category instead were more likely to say schools (49% and 48%).¹³¹

We asked whether people felt that children today were learning a form of the faith different from that with which they had been raised. Whilst the most common answer was that it was the same (38%), some 34% felt there were differences.¹³² These results reflected a strong sense of generational religious change, which came through in our focus groups:

“These results reflected a strong sense of generational religious change, which came through in our focus groups”

128 See p. 407

129 See p. 408

130 See page 406

131 See page 407

132 See question 24

“Growing up, the thing with my parents was all they ever did was, okay, they brought in culture, then they brought in religion, then they used to cherry pick from the Quran, then they used to bring it to the culture and say that’s right. I grew up, I finally found my voice, I was like, ‘Dad stop it, it doesn’t work like that.’ I don’t speak to him now. That’s what they do, they cherry pick things from our religion and from our culture, and they incorporate it more so to the culture. As I’ve got older, I’ve come to the realisation that we’re steering away from the cultural aspects of it, we don’t care.”

Female, Birmingham Group 1

“My mum and dad, they get the culture mixed with the religion and they follow both thinking it’s religion but it’s not, it’s actually culture.”

Female, Cardiff Group 1

“My mum and dad, when they taught us the religion, I don’t think they realised themselves but they actually interjected a lot of culture into it as well, and they’ve completely mixed it ... I just realised a lot of the stuff that I thought was religion was actually culture.”

Male, Slough Group 1

The sense of religious change was more pronounced, interestingly, amongst middle-aged and elder cohorts (those aged 35 and above), where the proportion of those answering ‘different’ ranged from 39% to 44%; those aged 35–54 were more likely to say ‘different’ than the same’.¹³³ Another variable that brought statistical variation was that of educational attainment. Those who had ‘no formal education’ far more likely to say that the religion being taught today contained differences, than their peers who had degrees or secondary education qualifications (44% as compared to 31–32%).¹³⁴

This is another question where analysis of the results by region throws up major divergences. In several places, a majority of respondents clearly felt that the religion being taught today was essentially the same as that which they had learned as children: the North East (52%); the East Midlands (59%); the East (54%); and the South East (56%). By contrast, in both Wales and the North West, respondents were more likely to say that the religion was ‘different’ than it was the ‘same’, with large pluralities giving the former answer (45% versus 34% in Wales; 47% versus 30% in the North West). Other regions where ‘unusual’ patterns of results emerged were:

- the South West (where just 15% of people said that the religion today was ‘the same’, as compared to 33% who said different and a large 40% who said they did not know);
- Yorkshire and the Humber (where just 13% of respondents felt the religion was ‘the same’, whereas 36% said ‘different’ and 31% did not know).¹³⁵

133 See p. 486

134 See p. 487

135 See p. 488

When asked about the role the government might play in regulating after-school madrassas of the kind that many mosques run for children, there was strong support for a variety of measures that relied on greater intervention by the authorities. **78% of respondents backed government regulation to prevent ‘anyone unsuitable from being able to tutor in madrassas’ (as opposed to just 7% who opposed this idea).** Support for this proposition grew with the age of respondents (69% of 18–24 year olds backed this idea, as compared to 81% of over 65s).¹³⁶ There were also clear regional differences. Levels of support were strongest in Wales (91%), the North East (87%), the North West (85%) and the South East (83%); conversely, there were relatively low levels of support for such regulation in the South West (66%) and the East Midlands (64%).¹³⁷

72% of respondents supported the proposal that ‘any out-of-school setting’ be required to register with the education authorities, whereas just 8% opposed. Levels of support for this proposal were particularly high in the South East (83%) and the North West (77%). In the North East the tenor of support was also especially strong as opposed to lukewarm. Conversely, there was significantly less support in Yorkshire and the Humber (65%) and the East Midlands (60%).¹³⁸ As might be anticipated, those who considered themselves less religious were also more likely to support regulation: 47% of those who rated themselves 1–3 out of ten in terms of religiosity gave ‘strong support’ to the proposition, as compared to 30% overall.¹³⁹

On the subject of corporal punishment, 71% of respondents supported its prohibition, whereas just 12% of people opposed such a ban. However, this proportion fell to a bare majority (54%) in the East Midlands (where respondents were also relatively more likely to oppose a ban on corporal punishment) and the South West (50%). At the other end of the spectrum, there was especially strong support for a ban in Wales (88%) and the South East (78%).¹⁴⁰

The proportions were slightly lower when it came to more extensive forms of intervention: **63% supported the idea that all tutors should have to be trained by a government body (with 19% opposed); and 66% endorsed a unified curriculum for madrassas (with 15% opposed).** There was, therefore, less support for more intrusive forms of regulation, but clearly Britain’s Muslims are comfortable with the authorities providing some minimum level of oversight of mosque-based education.

Breakdown of results by respondent age shows that younger cohorts were notably less likely to support steps to ensure that madrassa tutors were trained by the government (just 56% of 18–24 year olds expressed support for this idea).¹⁴¹ Unsurprisingly, those who considered themselves less religious (1–3 on our scale), were noticeably more likely to support this proposition (72%) – a reflection perhaps of their greater scepticism of religious institutions.¹⁴² Areas with a higher concentration of Muslim residents were also relatively less likely to support this measure (59% did so in areas over 50% comprised of Muslims, as compared to 65% in areas in which Muslims comprised less than half the local populace) – a sign that those in more mixed areas were perhaps more outward looking and more receptive to government activity.¹⁴³

Moreover, there were clear differences by region. Whereas relatively high levels of support for such training were to be found in the North East (78%, with opposition just 3%), the North West (72%), the East (71%) and the South

136 See p. 422

137 See p. 425

138 See p. 414

139 See p. 418

140 See p. 437

141 See p. 457

142 See p. 464. See also p. 466, where 70% of those who said they ‘never’ went to mosque supported such training, as compared to the overall figure of 63%. A similar pattern was also evident with regards to the question about a unified curriculum for madrassas (see pp. 476–8)

143 See p. 464. See also, p. 476, in which areas with a lower concentration of Muslim resident (<50%) were more likely to support moves to create a unified curriculum for all madrassa tutors.

East (70%), the equivalent figures were significantly lower in the South West (58%), the West Midlands (58%), Yorkshire and the Humber (54%) and the East Midlands (51%, with active opposition expressed by 23% of respondents). Respondents in Wales were also relatively more likely to state active opposition (with 32% of people doing so).¹⁴⁴

The one question that returned, to the minds of these authors, slightly alarming results was on the question of whether respondents favoured the banning of tutoring that ‘promotes extreme views or is deemed incompatible with fundamental British values’. One might assume that this would be uncontroversial; and a clear majority of respondents did support this idea (74%). However, it is striking that 10% opposed it.¹⁴⁵

A breakdown of results by region shows that this opposition to any ban on those promoting extremist views rose to 15% in the East Midlands (where support for prohibition fell to just 61%). There was also a relatively low level of support for such a ban in the South West (58%). This relatively low figure, though, did not translate into higher levels of outright opposition to a ban, but rather a greater proportion of people who did not express a view either way. At the other end of the spectrum was Wales, which registered extremely high levels of support for a ban on those promoting views deemed extremist or incompatible with British values (93% in favour, 0% opposed); similarly, there were high levels of support for a ban in the East and South East (82%).¹⁴⁶

144 See p. 460. A very similar pattern can be seen from the regional breakdown of answers to the question of whether madrasa tutors should have to follow a unified curriculum. Again there, the South West (63%), the West Midlands (61%) and the East Midlands (55%) were significantly less likely to support such a move than the Muslim population taken as a whole (66%), and in Wales there was more active opposition (28% as compared to 15%).

145 See question 22

146 See p. 449

5

Radicalisation

In our surveys we asked people to identify the importance (or not) of a number of factors often said to explain the phenomenon of radicalisation. Almost all of the factors we mentioned were said to be ‘important’, by a majority of respondents. Nevertheless, there were some significant differences in outlook between Britain’s Muslim population and the country as a whole. **The most significant of these related to the question of whether ‘poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunity’ helped explain radicalisation. This was the factor cited as most important in our Muslim-only survey, 57% of respondents saying it was important** (and 20% saying it was ‘very important’), as compared to only 44% of respondents in our control survey who took a similar view. By contrast, 18% said it was ‘not important’.

This divergence may again be explained by the particular position occupied by many Muslim communities within the social structure: these tend to be located in more marginal, deprived urban environments. As such, it is perhaps to be expected that questions of poverty and a lack of economic prospects might loom larger. Though here, it is worth noting that those most likely to say that poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunity were important were those respondents in the higher social grades (AB and C1), of whom 65% and 62% respectively agreed this issue was important (as compared to an aggregate figure of 57%). (Similarly, ‘current students’ were more likely than anyone else to agree this issue was important.)¹⁴⁷ This would tend to suggest that it is economic disadvantage as perceived, rather than experienced, which is key.¹⁴⁸

Beyond this, our polling showed that **55% of Muslim respondents believed ‘political beliefs, including that the government oppresses Muslims’ to be an important cause of radicalisation. On the question of whether perceived threats, humiliation and cultural domination were important, 53% of respondents felt they were, whereas just 9% actively disagreed.**¹⁴⁹ **51% said that individually ‘strongly held ideas and deeply felt convictions’ were important** (whereas just 9% said this was not important).¹⁵⁰ **And 54% said that ‘western military intervention’ was an important factor driving radicalisation** (and 22% said this was ‘very important’).

Statistical breakdown of each of these figures shows similar patterns as noted above. In most cases, younger, more educated and wealthier respondents were more likely to agree that a given factor was important.¹⁵¹

147 See p. 630

148 See p. 628

149 See p. 640

150 See question 28

151 See pp. 676–8, 688–90

Those living in more concentrated areas of Muslim residence (>50%) were also less likely to agree that any of the factors listed above were important, in comparison with those living in areas of lower concentration.¹⁵²

Conversely, those respondents who sympathised with the use of violence or terrorist action (see below) were significantly more likely than those who did not, to see a range of factors as important in explaining radicalisation:

- ‘ideas’ and convictions (67% and 76% respectively of such respondents agreed this was important, as compared with 51% of survey respondents overall);
- ‘personal bonds and relationships’ (61% and 75% agreed these were important);
- poverty and economic disadvantage (74% and 76% respectively, agreed it was important);
- ‘political beliefs including a perception of oppression (76% and 68% respectively said it was important);
- perceived threats and humiliations (69% in each case said this was important);
- and western military intervention (70% and 69% respectively, of those sympathetic to political violence agreed this factor was important).¹⁵³

Regionally, meanwhile, respondents in London and Wales were generally more likely to agree that a given issue was important, whereas those in the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, and the East Midlands were not (this pattern does not hold in every case: respondents in the North West, for instance, were relatively likely to agree that ‘strongly held ideas and convictions’ were important; those in Yorkshire and the Humber put relatively more stress on both the subject of poverty/economic disadvantage and western military intervention (76%)).¹⁵⁴

The vexed subject of western military intervention was one voiced in more than one focus group. Amongst the participants in Cardiff, for instance, was someone who felt very strongly that western policy was a cause of tension: “and how we’re treating other people in other countries, how Muslims are getting–, ... their cities are getting blown to pieces”. The same individual expressed concern about events in Palestine, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan, stating, “Ten years of bombardment over there and it’s just constant war in Islamic countries.” The British, he argued, had to “look at our own policies” [Male, Cardiff Group 2]. This view was echoed by others:

“It’s because the East is being suppressed, and who are they being suppressed by? It’s the West. They’re coming in, you know, dominating their countries, taking over and then it leads to extremist individuals that claim they’re Muslim and they’re doing it in the name of religion.”

Female, Slough Group 1

152 See pp. 612, 624, 660

153 See pp. 610, 622, 634, 646, 682, 694

154 See pp. 608–9, 620–1, 632–3, 644, 656–7, 680–1, 692–3

Nevertheless, within our focus groups more emphasis was placed on the idea that radicalisation stemmed from a lack of knowledge and misinterpretation of the Islamic religion, which left people vulnerable to the blandishments of extremists. Linked to this too, was an insistence that extremists were not really Islamic (a subject on which there has been much wider debate – the extent to which it is right to talk about groups such as ISIS as Islamic).¹⁵⁵

“The people that are new to the religion, they get easily influenced because they show them videos and images and certain texts from the Islamic books. But, obviously, they present it, out of context...”

Male, London Group 1

“I think the problem with radicalisation is that you get people that don’t know much about Islam and they get a sick knowledge.”

Male, London Group 2

“If you go to the history of the people who have been radicalised... if you go back to their life, you’ll find they are not Islamic people... They are not. They were alcoholic, drug addicts”.

Female, London Group 1

To return to the quantitative survey results, **perhaps the most important thing to note is that, in this question, respondents were given eight possible causes of radicalisation and in every case, over 50% of people said each factor was ‘important’.**¹⁵⁶ This would suggest that, as far as Britain’s Muslim communities are concerned, there is no single explanation for extremism. *Contra* the assertions of some groups that purport to represent those communities, it is not ‘all about western foreign policy’.¹⁵⁷ Neither is it enough to point to poverty and perceptions of inequality and discrimination. Of course, this is not to deny that each of these are often important as factors, but invariably, the path to radicalisation is a multi-causal one (as much recent academic scholarship has noted).

In similar vein, Britain’s Muslim communities seem open to the view that there is no single solution, and rather see the benefit in a range of possible solutions. **By an overwhelming majority, support was recorded for a variety of measures to help tackle the causes of violent extremism:**

- giving young Muslim people a greater voice in decisions affecting them;
- giving Muslim women a greater role in decisions affecting them;
- efforts by the government to tackle anti-Muslim discrimination and prejudice;
- better leadership within the Muslim community;
- and government funding for special programmes to help Muslim communities combat violent extremism.

155 See for example, M.Hasan, ‘How Islamic is Islamic State?’, *New Statesman*, March 2015; G. Wood, ‘What ISIS Really Wants’, *The Atlantic*, March 2015; S. Cottee, ‘What’s the Right Way to Think About Religion and ISIS?’, *The Atlantic*, July 2016.

156 The 8 were:

157 This was the message of the letter sent to the British government at the instigation of the Muslim Council of Britain after the disruption of the ‘airline plot’ in 2006. The letter cited British foreign policy alone as the key driver of radicalization.

In each case, between 60% and 65% of respondents thought the measure in question would help ‘a lot’, 25–29% said it would help ‘a little’, and only 2–5% said it would ‘not help at all’.¹⁵⁸

In looking at these results, it is striking that they offer endorsement for a range of propositions. **For one thing, it is clear that there is significant support for greater government activity to ‘prevent’ violent extremism.**

Such results counter the assertions of those – often very voluble groups – who claim that government-supported initiatives, such as the ‘Prevent’ programme, are deemed as entirely illegitimate within Muslim communities. As the answers to the above two questions reflect, there is a recognition that the government has a crucial part to play. Doubtless, there is some debate to be had over the precise contours of the government’s role, but too often the ‘Preventing Prevent’ lobby has been allowed to frame the existing situation as one of: an intrusive government, attempting to ‘police’ Muslim communities that prefer to be left alone. This is simply not the case. Those driving the campaign, such as CAGE, use legitimate concerns about certain aspects of existing policy, to demand the ‘complete scrapping of Prevent and its like’.¹⁵⁹ Most recently, the Muslim Council of Britain declared plans to launch a rival scheme to Prevent, which it said lacked support among Muslim communities.¹⁶⁰ Yet, as our survey suggests, there is majority Muslim support for a range of government interventions to help combat the allure of violent extremism. And this is not to mention the obvious point that, as already mentioned, the MCB itself can scarcely lay claim to significant levels of support among British Muslims.

This was born out by a further question in which **respondents were asked who should take ‘primary responsibility’ for deterring radicalisation. Whilst 38% of people said ‘Muslims themselves’, 29% said ‘the government’.**¹⁶¹

Respondents within the eldest cohort (65+) were relatively more likely to say ‘Muslims themselves’ (48% of people in this category did so); those in the AB social category were also more likely to give this answer.¹⁶² Breakdown by region reflects a diversity of opinion on this issue. Strongest support for the government taking primary responsibility was in Yorkshire and the Humber where 48% of respondents gave this answer (and only 23% said it fell to Muslims themselves). Conversely, there were relatively high levels of support in favour of ‘Muslims themselves’ taking primary responsibility in London (44%), the South East (47%) and especially, in the East (65%). (The East also saw a relatively low proportion of respondents say that primary responsibility fell to the government – just 15%, as compared to the overall figure of 29%; relatively few people also gave this answer in Scotland – 18%).¹⁶³

Another factor to influence respondent answers was whether or not they lived in areas in which Muslims comprised a greater, or lesser proportion of the local area. Interestingly, those living in areas in which Muslims comprised over 50% of a community, were relatively less likely to say that primary responsibility fell on Muslims, than those who lived in more mixed areas (32% as opposed to 41%). By the same token, they were relatively more likely to say that it was the government which bore primary responsibility (32% as opposed to 28%).¹⁶⁴

158 For breakdown of these results see, pp. 700.

159 See, for example, ‘Only the complete scrapping of PREVENT and its like will do: CAGE’, CAGE, 21 October 2016, available at, <http://cage.ngo/press-release/only-the-complete-scrapping-of-prevent-and-its-like-will-do-cage/>

160 ‘The Threat of Terrorism: How Should British Muslims Respond? – A Progress Report’, Muslim Council of Britain, 20 October 2016, available at, www.mcb.org.uk/the-threat-of-terrorism-how-should-british-muslims-respond-a-progress-report/. See also, ‘Muslim Council of Britain to set up alternative counter-terror scheme’, The Guardian, 19 October 2016

161 See question 31

162 See p. 737

163 See p. 739

164 See p. 741

At the same time, when asked specifically whether they felt Muslims should do more to tackle the causes of extremism, almost half of respondents (49%) agreed with this proposition (just 3% said they should do ‘less’, whereas 39% felt existing efforts were ‘about right’).¹⁶⁵

This belief was reflected in the views of several participants in our focus groups:

“A lot of the time, I think Muslims needs to look at ourselves... Let’s see what we are doing wrong, and we are giving other people the chance to point their fingers at us, and I think Muslims’ duty to-, to be honest, if Muslims become right Muslims, we won’t be in the media. That’s how I see it. We need to correct ourselves.”

Male, Birmingham Group 2

“If I know somebody who’s got radical views, I will challenge them, I’m not going to stay quiet because you’re doing something in the name of my religion.”

Female, Cardiff Group 2

Interestingly, within the quantitative survey, the proportion of respondents who felt more could be done rose to 57% amongst those classified in social category AB. Younger cohorts were also significantly more likely than the eldest respondents to give this answer.¹⁶⁶ Similarly, there were notable regional variations: whereas majorities in the North East (66%), North West (55%), East (55%), South East (62%) and Wales (59%) all said ‘more’ could be done, respondents in Yorkshire and the Humber were significantly less likely to give this answer (43%), with more saying that efforts were ‘about right’ (48% as opposed to 39% overall).¹⁶⁷

Overall, as these results show, there is a belief among Britain’s Muslim population that Muslim themselves bear the primary responsibility for deterring radicalisation – and many are willing to accept that they could do more in this struggle. At the same time, this acceptance among many British Muslims that they could do more to combat radicalisation does not preclude an openness to government intervention and various initiatives. For the most part, such efforts are seen as mutually reinforcing and beneficial.

In a further question, respondents were asked to reflect on a concrete example: **what they would do if they became aware, someone close to them was ‘getting involved with people who support terrorism in Syria’.** Whilst a slight majority (52%) said they would report it to the police, 26% said they would talk to the person directly to try and dissuade them, 20% said they would ‘look for help from family and friends’, and 17% said they would seek help from ‘religious community leaders’.

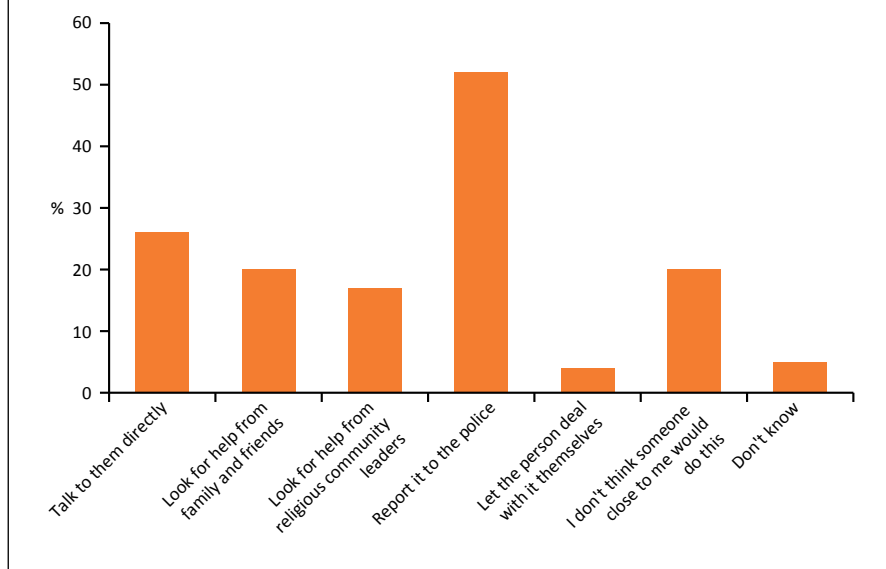
“The acceptance among many British Muslims that they could do more to combat radicalisation does not preclude an openness to government intervention and various initiatives”

¹⁶⁵ See question 30

¹⁶⁶ See p. 731

¹⁶⁷ See p. 733

Figure 13: If you thought someone close to you was getting involved with people who supported terrorism in Syria, what would you do?



These results are interesting in that they are significantly different from the results of the earlier ICM poll organised for Channel 4. On that occasion, just 34% of respondents said that they would report such a situation to the police, whereas far more said they would try speaking personally to an individual linked to terrorism in Syria (46%), or seek help from friends and family (37%). On this issue, then, there does appear to have been a shift in overall attitudes over the past year, with a greater acceptance of the role to be played by the police.¹⁶⁸

Closer examination of the results reveals that younger people and those in the higher social grades (especially AB) were relatively more likely to try and tackle the problem themselves; those recorded as being ‘current students’ were especially likely to say that they would talk to the person directly (43% gave this answer), or look to family and friends (34%), or look to religious community leaders (33%), while proportionally fewer said they would report it to the police (48%).¹⁶⁹

Analysis of responses by region showed major differences in outlook. Whereas in London (36%), Scotland (40%) and Wales (46%), those surveyed were significantly more likely to say that they would talk to the person concerned directly, the exact opposite was true in the East (17%), the North West (16%), the North East (15%), the East Midlands (15%), and the South East (11%). In London too, respondents were more likely to look to religious community leaders (28%). This was also the case in the South West (30%) – whereas in many of the other regions polled, the proportion of people giving this answer was far lower. Perhaps most interesting is the question of whether people would turn to the police. On the one hand, relatively high numbers of people said that they would in Wales (82%), the South West (75%), the East (67%) and Yorkshire and the Humber (65%). However, less than half of respondents gave this answer in London (48%) and the proportion was especially low in Scotland (42%) and the North West (31%).¹⁷⁰

168 For ICM-Channel 4 results, see Survey of Muslims: Topline Results, available at, www.icmunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Muslims-full-suite-data-plus-topline.pdf.

169 See pp. 743–5

170 See p. 747

When results to this question were analysed according to Muslim ‘penetration’ of a given area, it is notable that – slightly counter-intuitively – those respondents living in areas in which Muslims comprised less than 50% of the local population were more likely to give answers that suggested a preference for relying on themselves, or the local community, as opposed to going to the police.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, the most religiously observant respondents (those attending mosque at least four times per week), were – as might be expected – more likely to look to religious community leaders, or try dealing with the problem themselves, but they were also relatively more likely to call the police.¹⁷²

Taken together, this represents 63% of people endorsing measures coming from ‘within the community’ to try and tackle the problem.¹⁷³ Crucially, it should be noted that the answers to the question were not exclusive. Respondents could give more than one answer, and what is not revealed here is the order in which different steps might be taken. In this context, it would again seem likely that many people viewed efforts based on Muslims themselves and actions involving the authorities as entirely complementary.

The above question, meanwhile, threw up another interesting result: that **20% of respondents answered by saying ‘I don’t think someone close to me would get involved with people who support terrorism’**.¹⁷⁴

The significance of this was reinforced by a further question, which asked people to consider the prevalence and prominence of extremist views within Muslim communities. **On the one hand, a plurality of respondents (35%) stated that ‘mainstream and moderate views’ were drowned out by extremism. At the same time, though, 26% of respondents said that ‘extremist views do not exist’; a further 18% said that they existed ‘but are very rarely heard’**.¹⁷⁵ Against a background in which, over the previous several years, there have been sustained concerns about recruitment by groups like ISIS, a spate of major terrorist attacks (see figure 2), as well as the appeal of less obviously malignant, yet still recognisably ‘extremist’ ideas, these are remarkably high figures.

Further analysis of these results shows that the eldest cohorts were those most likely to say that extremist views did not exist.¹⁷⁶ By the same token, those born in Britain were much less likely than those born outside the UK to give this answer (19% as compared to 32%) – and this divergence was also reflected in the proportion of respondents in each category saying that mainstream and moderate views were being drowned out (41% of those born in the UK said this, as compared to just 29% of those who were not). Another variable of significance concerned whether or not an individual felt that they could influence decisions affecting Britain: 31% of those who felt negatively about this proposition said that extremist views did not exist, as compared to just 17% of those who felt they could influence Britain.¹⁷⁷

171 See p. 751

172 See p. 753

173 See question 32.

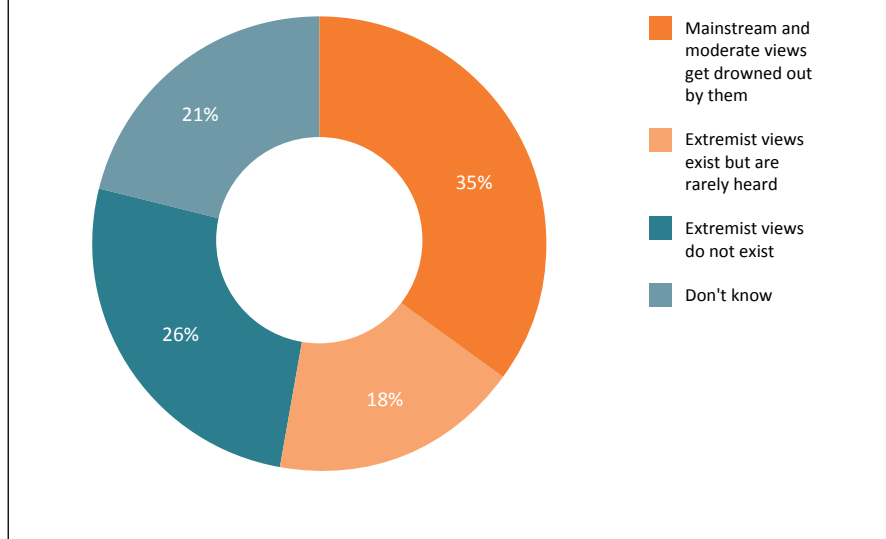
174 See p. 747

175 See question 33

176 See p. 755

177 See p. 758

Figure 14: How prominent do you think are extremist views within Muslim communities?



Regional analysis showed particular support for the statement that extremist views did not exist in Wales (41%), the North West (37%), London (36%), the East Midlands (34%) and the East (31%). Conversely, respondents were far less likely to make this claim in Scotland (17%), the South East (13%), the West Midlands (12%), Yorkshire and the Humber (5%), the South West (3%), and the North East (1%). These results were mostly in inverse correlation with the proportion of people saying that mainstream and moderate views were being drowned out. Hence, the proportion of respondents giving this answer was relatively high in the West Midlands (40%), Yorkshire and the Humber (72%), the South West (69%), and the North East (51%). (In Scotland a different pattern was observable, as far fewer people than average gave this answer (22%); instead, the more popular view there seemed to be that extremist views existed but were not often heard, with 31% giving this answer, as compared to the 18% who did so nationally.)¹⁷⁸

Nevertheless, the fact that a quarter of British Muslims felt there was no such thing as extremism is remarkable given the continuing terrorist threat to the UK and its allies. The last three years have seen a succession of major attacks, which have targeted British interests and lives both here and across the world.

As a new book by MP Liam Byrne makes clear, the scale and intensity of the threat has seemed only to escalate: in 2014/15, there were more terrorism-related arrests than in any year since the turn of the century, and senior figures in the security services routinely talk about ‘several thousand individuals’ resident within the UK who support violent extremism.¹⁷⁹

In addition, of course, there has been the phenomenon of young British Muslims leaving for Syria to join ISIS. Current estimates suggest that somewhere between 750 and 850 people have made this journey, and the authorities remain deeply concerned about the potential threat posed by those returning (currently about half have done so).¹⁸⁰

178 See p. 757. The results for the Eastern region follow a different pattern again, with respondents relatively more likely to say that extremist views exist, but are rarely heard – some 28% gave this answer as opposed to 18% of respondents nationally.

179 L. Byrne, *Black Flag Down: Counter-Extremism, Defeating ISIS and Winning the Battle of Ideas* (Biteback Publishing: London, 2016), pp. 18–20.

180 A. Kirk, ‘Iraq and Syria: How many foreign fighters are fighting for Isis?’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 March 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/29/iraq-and-syria-how-many-foreign-fighters-are-fighting-for-isis/; ‘Who are Britain’s jihadists?’, *BBC News Online*, 10 October 2016, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32026985

Figure 15: Terrorist attacks (actual/foiled) in the UK, or effecting British interests

- May 2013 – Lee Rigby murdered in Woolwich by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale
- June 2014 – Imran Mohammed Khawaja and Tahir Farooq Bhatti arrested at Dover trying to drive back into the UK from Syria; both later convicted
- August 2014 – Brusthom Ziamani is arrested and later convicted while on his way to behead a British soldier with a 12in knife in a Lee Rigby-style attack
- August 2014 – Kazi Islam arrested and later convicted for preparing a terrorist attack. He planned to make a pipe-bomb and hatched a plot to murder members of the armed forces
- October 2014 – Tarik Hassane and Suhaib Majeed arrested and later convicted of conspiracy to murder and preparation of acts of terrorism targeting the police, soldiers and the public
- November 2014 – Nadir Syed arrested and later convicted of plotting a street beheading around Remembrance Sunday 2014
- March 2015 – 21 tourists were killed, including a British national, in a terrorist attack at the Bardo Museum in the centre of Tunis
- May 2015 – Mohammed Rehman and Sana Khan arrested for plotting a terrorist bomb attack on Westfield shopping centre to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the 7/7 attacks
- June 2015 – 38 foreign tourists were killed, including 30 British nationals, in a terrorist attack at Port El Kantaoui near Sousse
- July 2015 – Junead Ahmed Khan and Shazib Ahmed arrested and later convicted for attempting to join ISIL in Syria; the former also for plotting an attack on US military personnel based in the UK
- November 2015 – Paris/Bataclan terrorist attacks kills 130 (1 Briton)
- December 2015 – Leytonstone tube station knife attack by Muhiddin Mire (though police later decided this was more a product of ‘mental health’ problems than terrorism)

The idea that fears about extremism were over-blown is one that found significant support in several of our focus groups – often linked to the view that British Muslims were unfairly misrepresented in the media. In Birmingham, for example, several participants agreed that the problem of radicalisation/extremism was “overplayed in the media” and this was echoed elsewhere.

“I think what you’ve got to remember is the fact these are all really isolated incidents, they’re not common. I haven’t come across a friend or someone that’s been radicalised. I think it’s important to remember a lot of these people themselves are very isolated.”

Male, Cardiff Group 1

“I went to a prevent workshop and basically its isolated individuals. Like they say in the media, its isolated individuals and then you have to question their source of knowledge. They’re taking knowledge and nine times out of ten, it’s coming off the internet and interpreting it how they want, or they’re getting involved with certain people already in there. I don’t know how it started, but you won’t predominantly find these people who are radicalised in Mosques.”

Female, Cardiff Group 2

The perception that the threat from extremism was to some degree overblown and exaggerated was also reflected in the fact that, **when our survey asked whether people had ever personally felt intimidated by others expressing extremist views, 90% of respondents said ‘no’.**¹⁸¹

Again, it is worth noting that there are clear regional variations to the headline figure. It is striking that whereas 90% of people overall said ‘no’ they had never felt intimidated by extremist views, this proportion fell to 77% in the North East. Here, a notable 12% of respondents said ‘yes’ they had been intimidated (as compared to just 3% of people overall) and 11% said they knew people who had been (as compared to just 1% overall). Another region with significantly different results was the South West, where 9% of respondents said they had been intimidated by extremism (whereas 81% answered ‘no’).¹⁸²

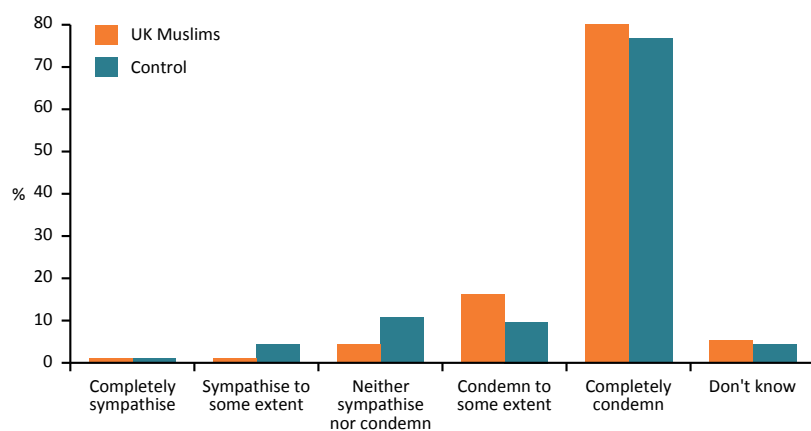
These results can be interpreted in different ways. It may be, for instance, that some have been confronted with extremist views, but did not feel ‘intimidated’. Yet, even accounting for this, when put alongside the previous set of results, it seems clear that a significant proportion of Britain’s Muslim population do not consider extremism to be a significant issue. Again, there are different ways to read this: either, they simply do not encounter ‘extremist’ views; or, when they do, they do not recognise such extremism for what it is. The vagueness of the term – and the enduring difficulties that surround efforts to produce a definition – are of critical importance here. Successive governments have sought to initiate a debate about the nature of both mainstream ‘British values’ on the one hand, and unacceptable ‘extremism’ on the other. To date, there has been little consensus on either front. Against this backdrop, it is perhaps unsurprising that many within Muslim communities are unsure about what constitutes ‘extremism’. Equally, however, it is worth at least considering whether there is an element of denial here? To what extent are many British Muslims blind to the danger posed by extremism?

181 See question 34

182 See p. 763

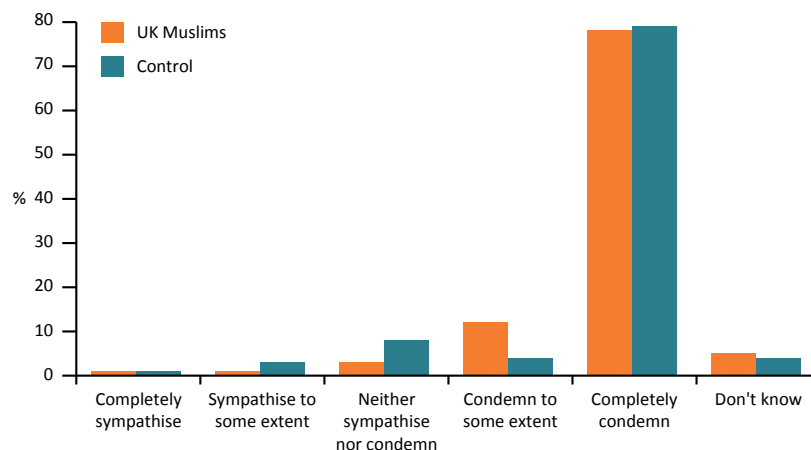
During our surveys, respondents were asked whether they sympathised with, or condemned, a number of actions related to political protest. It is striking that on any act relating to violence, there were notably higher levels of condemnation among Muslim communities than for the population as a whole. Thus, **85% of Muslim respondents condemned minor acts of crime at political protests, as compared to an equivalent figure of 71% for our control survey.** Conversely, just 4% sympathised with such actions (and only 1% said they sympathised completely), whereas 9% of people on our control survey declared themselves sympathisers.

Figure 16: To what extent do you sympathise with or condemn people who use violence in political protest?



On the use of political violence in political protest, there was condemnation from 89%, compared to sympathy from 2% of Muslim respondents; the equivalent figures from the control group were 81% and 5%.

Figure 17: To what extent do you sympathise with or condemn those who commit terrorist actions as a form of political protest?

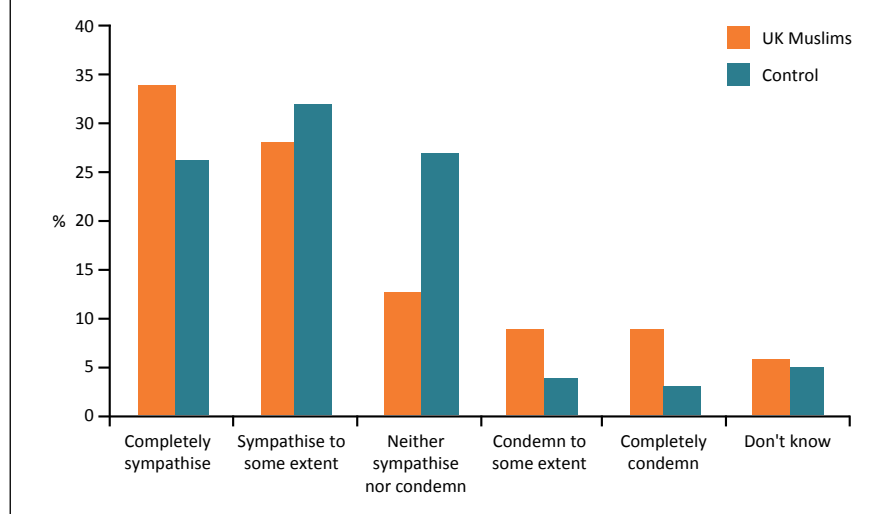


On the more pointed questions about either threatening, or committing terrorist actions, 90% of Muslims condemned these, and just 2% sympathised with such acts. By comparison, the equivalent figures from the control survey were 83% and 84% condemnation and 4% of respondents sympathised with these acts.

Indeed it is striking that 18% of Muslim respondents even condemned ‘non-violent political protest’ – as compared to just 7% of respondents on our control survey. Such responses strongly suggest that on every index, Britain’s Muslim communities are more supportive of ‘law and order’ and less tolerant of protest than the population as a whole.¹⁸³

To some extent these figures are slightly surprising – and encouraging. They diverge somewhat from previous polling – including that conducted last year by ICM for Channel 4 – which showed significantly higher levels of Muslim sympathy, and less condemnation, for acts of violence or terrorism in the context of political protest.¹⁸⁴ It is worth reflecting on whether this ‘shift’ is a product of genuine (and welcome) attitude shifts, or whether it reflects merely a greater awareness of the social unacceptability of voicing sympathy for such actions. In other words, what remains to be seen, is whether these latest figures conceal a ‘shy’ sympathy for acts of political violence, or whether they speak to an important change in the outlook of British Muslims.

Figure 18: To what extent do you sympathise with or condemn people who take part in non-violent political protest?



Within these headline figures, statistical breakdowns throw up some interesting results. For example, the youngest cohort (18–24 years old), slightly surprisingly, were those least likely to sympathise with non-violent political protest (58% did so compared to 63% overall).¹⁸⁵ This rather cuts against the grain of established ideas about youth radicalism. It should be said, though, that the youngest respondents were also the least likely to condemn acts of minor crime in political protest (79% did so as opposed to 85% overall).

The East, meanwhile, emerged as an area in which there is a relatively greater proportion of people who sympathise with various acts involving violence. 10% of respondents there sympathised with minor criminal acts in the context of political protest (compared to 4%

183 See pp. 529

184 Survey of Muslims: Topline Results, available at, www.icmunlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Muslims-full-suite-data-plus-topline.pdf

185 See p. 530

overall).¹⁸⁶ 6% said that they sympathised with acts of violence (compared to 2% overall). By the same token, there was a relative lack of condemnation of minor criminal acts in the East (70%). This was also the case in the East Midlands (72%) and the West Midlands (80%) in comparison with the overall aggregate (85%).¹⁸⁷ A similar pattern was reflected on the question of ‘violence’. The proportion of respondents ready to condemn such actions was relatively lower than the national average (89%) in each of these areas: the East (75%); the East Midlands (77%); the West Midlands (86%); and Scotland (84%).¹⁸⁸

The more pointed question about sympathy/condemnation for threats of terrorist actions produced a similar pattern of results, albeit with much lower levels of sympathy across the board. Whereas just 2% of respondents overall sympathised with terrorism, this figure rose to 4% in the South West and 8% in the East. At a more passive level, whilst 90% of people interviewed condemned terrorism, this figure fell to 87% in the West Midlands, 85% in Scotland, 80% in the East Midlands and just 74% in the East. Again, this marked a significant divergence, particularly when compared to regions where condemnation was near universal such as Wales (100%), the North East (97%), Yorkshire and the Humber (97%).¹⁸⁹

Finally, with regards to an actual engagement in acts of terrorism, it was the East that again stood out: whilst just 2% of respondents overall sympathised with such actions, this figure rose to 7% in the East. On the other side, a proportionally low number of respondents in this region expressed a readiness to condemn such actions: 75%, as compared to 90% nationally. And this relatively lower readiness to condemn was also seen in the East Midlands (79%), where the nature of the condemnation was also more lukewarm. Relatively fewer respondents in this region said they would ‘completely condemn’ acts of terrorism (58% did so, compared to 78% nationally); there was also some shortfall in Scotland where just 84% said they would condemn terrorist actions.¹⁹⁰

Nevertheless, it is the results from the East that are the most striking. Across a range of questions, this seems to be a region in which respondents expressed a relatively greater sympathy for acts that included violence and terrorism.¹⁹¹

Another issue of note is that statistically, those who considered themselves less devout on our scale (1–3) were relatively more likely to sympathise with minor criminal acts (9% did so, compared to 4% of the population as a whole) and less likely to condemn those same acts (78% did so, compared to 85% overall).¹⁹² The same was true in regard to the far more serious issue of terrorist action, where 4% of people who judged themselves least religious expressed sympathy for such acts (as compared to 2% of respondents overall).¹⁹³ In line with this, on issues such as sympathy for threats of terrorist actions and the organisation of radical groups, our results show that those who attended mosque just once per week (as opposed to four times, 2–3 times), were relatively more likely than their peers to express sympathy for such actions (though the overall proportions remain small) and they were significantly less likely to condemn them.¹⁹⁴ **What all of this suggests is that heightened religiosity is no marker of political radicalism.**

“What all of this suggests is that heightened religiosity is no marker of political radicalism”

186 See p. 546

187 See p. 547

188 See pp. 558–9

189 See pp. 570–1

190 See pp. 594–5

191 A further question about attitudes towards the organization of radical groups also revealed comparatively higher levels of sympathy in the East (see p. 592).

192 See p. 550

193 See p. 598

194 See pp. 576–7, 588–9, 600–1

6

Who are the ‘Sympathisers’?

Though they make up a very small group as a proportion of the sample population (2%), those individuals who sympathise with acts of violence and terrorism are of obvious interest. The first thing to note is that such ‘sympathisers’ constitute a relatively smaller fraction of the British Muslim population than they do amongst the UK population as a whole. Nevertheless, they are arguably of greater concern – as a cohort – for the simple reason that there are, today, more easily accessible routes by which that sympathy for acts of violence can be translated into active support and even, action itself. They are presented with what political scientists call a significantly greater ‘opportunity structure’ by which that process can occur.

Groups operating under the banner of radical Islamism pose a major threat at the current time, and have been responsible for a series of major attacks against the UK and its allies. Such groups explicitly frame their appeal to a Muslim audience and seek to radicalise and recruit individuals to their cause. Logically, those already inclined towards a sympathetic view of acts of political violence are perhaps those most open to the broader blandishments of extremist groups. It is therefore of interest to reflect on who they are – as suggested by our survey results. To be clear, this is not meant to be an exercise in profiling. There is no ‘typical’ extremist/terrorist figure to be extrapolated from the data; rather, it is merely an attempt to suggest certain characteristics, outlooks and behaviours that correlate with a tendency to sympathise with acts of political violence.

From the dataset assembled as a result of our survey, it is possible to state that those inclined to sympathise with the use of either violence, or terrorism are **more likely to be:**

- Male;¹⁹⁵
- In full-time work (or to be students);¹⁹⁶
- Owners of their own house, or have a mortgage;¹⁹⁷
- In possession of educational qualifications – at least to a secondary level.¹⁹⁸

Of course, this picture confirms the picture developed by other researchers: that political violence tends to be something to which men are drawn, more than women (which is not to say there is no appeal among the latter) – and that it appeals more to prosperous, educated members of society. There is, our research confirms, no evidence that poverty produces an inclination towards an acceptance of violence.

¹⁹⁵ See p. 1040

¹⁹⁶ See pp. 1073–4

¹⁹⁷ See p. 1086

¹⁹⁸ See p. 1124.

Other salient trends worth noting about those who sympathise with such violence include the fact that they are **more likely to**:

- Be born in the UK (71% of those who sympathised with political violence and 53% of those who sympathised with terrorism were born in the UK – as compared to 47% of the overall sample);¹⁹⁹
- Believe that engagement with officials at either the local or the national level could produce dividends;²⁰⁰
- Join political parties and see elected officials as representative of their views;²⁰¹
- Favour Muslim organisations acting as community leaders;²⁰²
- Favour full integration with non-Muslims in all aspects of life.²⁰³

Thus, sympathy for political violence is not something to which the second generation are immune; nor is it the preserve of the 'isolated', or disaffected. As can be seen from the above behaviours, those who adhere to such views are, on several indices, more engaged at a social and political level.

Against this, however, it is noticeable that when asked about measures of government intervention in regard to mosque-run madrassas (as above), those sympathetic to acts of political violence were significantly **less likely** to endorse such state-sponsored initiatives.²⁰⁴ And on a related note, they were more likely to say that the primary responsibility for dealing with the challenge of radicalisation lay with 'Muslims themselves', as opposed to the government.²⁰⁵ On certain issues, then, this cohort seemed inclined to believe that Muslims should be left alone, free of state involvement. In this context, it is also striking that those sympathetic to political violence were significantly more likely than the survey sample as a whole to seek guidance from faith leaders on social and political issues.²⁰⁶

And yet, crucially too, statistical breakdowns show that, sympathisers with political violence are less likely to:

- Consider themselves especially devout.²⁰⁷

But also, **more likely** to:

- Favour sending their children to a school with strong Muslim values;²⁰⁸
- Agree with the idea that schools should be able to insist on the niqab or hijab as part of their uniform.²⁰⁹

From this we might conclude that a heightened sense of personal religiosity does not translate to political radicalism. Neither does it stand as a barrier to people valuing aspects of Muslim identity in a more general sense.

Our results also suggest that something interesting is happening in the East of England. 18% of those who sympathised with violence in political protest were located there, as were 24% of those who sympathised with terrorist action (a significant over-representation, given that only 5% of our overall sample came from that area). By contrast, London was relatively under-represented in terms of those who sympathised with political violence (22%), and over-represented

199 See p. 27

200 See pp. 75, 97

201 See p. 164

202 See p. 187

203 See p. 257

204 See pp. 416, 427, 439, 451

205 See p. 740

206 See pp. 175–6

207 See pp. 223–4

208 See p. 328

209 See p. 398

²¹⁰ See p. 7

²¹¹ See p. 8

amongst those who sympathised with terrorism (45%, as compared to 37% overall composition).²¹⁰ Yorkshire, meanwhile, was under-represented on both counts (7% and 5% as opposed to 11% overall).²¹¹ As on other issues, these regional variations are interesting markers of divergent perspectives.

7

Conspiracy Theories

We asked respondents to reflect on the role played by conspiracy theories, such as 9/11. A plurality of respondents in our Muslim-only survey (40%) agreed that these were utilised by ‘extremists’ to try and dupe Muslims into supporting their views; this figure was down on the 49% of respondents who gave the same answer on our control survey – but does seem to reflect serious concerns about the role of conspiracy theory.²¹² That concern seemed especially significant among ‘current students’, 50% of whom agreed with the statement that extremists used conspiracy theories to try and dupe Muslims into supporting their views.²¹³ Similarly, respondents in London were relatively more likely to agree with this statement; by comparison, the equivalent figure was far lower in many other regions, including the East Midlands (35%), Yorkshire and the Humber (34%), the South East (31%), the West Midlands (29%), the South West (28%), Scotland (27%) and Wales (26%). In most of these areas, respondents were much more likely to disagree.²¹⁴

A significant number of people (46%) agreed that ‘Young Muslims’ were the ‘most prone to conspiracy theories’ (this view was held even more strongly amongst respondents on the control survey, which suggests 55% of the general population would agree with this statement). This concern was voiced in particular among current students, especially in comparison with those with no formal education. Regionally, this view was most common in Wales (63%), the North East (57%), London (56%) and the East (54%), where clear majorities of respondents agreed with the statement that Young Muslims were most at risk; by contrast, respondents in other regions and particularly the South West (33%) and the South East (32%) were far less likely to agree with this idea (and in the latter, significantly more likely to actively disagree).²¹⁵

Such results would appear to suggest that people recognise the potentially damaging effects of conspiracy theories. And yet, it is striking that with the next breath, the same people are ready to lend credence to those very theories. **40% of respondents on our Muslim-only survey agreed that conspiracy theories (such as those surrounding 9/11) ‘often contain elements of truth’.** This figure, it should be noted, is only marginally up on the result from the control survey, where 37% agreed with the same proposition.

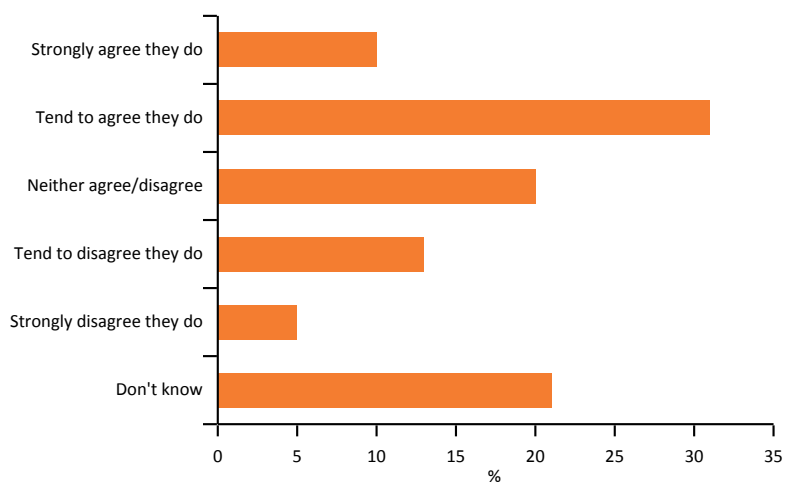
212 For breakdown of these results, see pp. 768

213 See p. 769

214 See p. 77

215 For breakdown of results to this question see pages 779

Figure 19: To what extent do conspiracy theories, such as about the 9/11 attacks contain elements of truth?



This credulity in regard to the veracity of conspiracy theories, such as those surrounding 9/11, was also reflected in focus group discussion:

“When conspiracy theorists, people say, ‘Oh, they’re just conspiracy theorists, it’s not right ... Sometimes, some of them, they have truth. Not all of them are true, but they have truth within them...”

Male, Birmingham Group 2

“I don’t class them as conspiracy theories. It’s like, they’re actual events and lies have been told.”

Male, Cardiff Group 2

Interestingly, the breakdown of the quantitative results on this question reveals that those in the higher social categories, AB and C1, were significantly more likely to agree that conspiracy theories were grounded in truth than those recorded as being C2 or DE (49–50% versus 36–37%).²¹⁶ Also, the most educated cohort of the sample – those with degrees – was much more likely to agree than those with ‘no formal education’ (46% versus 33%).²¹⁷ **Education, in other words, is clearly no obstacle to a belief in conspiracy theories.**

Another statistical variation of note, meanwhile, is that those who sympathised with acts of political violence, seemed more inclined to agree that conspiracy theories contained elements of truth (52% and 54% did so).²¹⁸

Moreover, when results are broken down by region, differences become even more striking. Amongst Welsh respondents, for example, the proportion of those who agreed that conspiracy theories contained an element of truth rose to 75%. Above average levels of agreement were also observable in the North East (49%), the East (47%) and in London (45%). By way of contrast, respondents in regions such as the West Midlands (34%), Yorkshire and the Humber (34%), the North West (31%) and especially, the South West (26%) were far less likely to agree

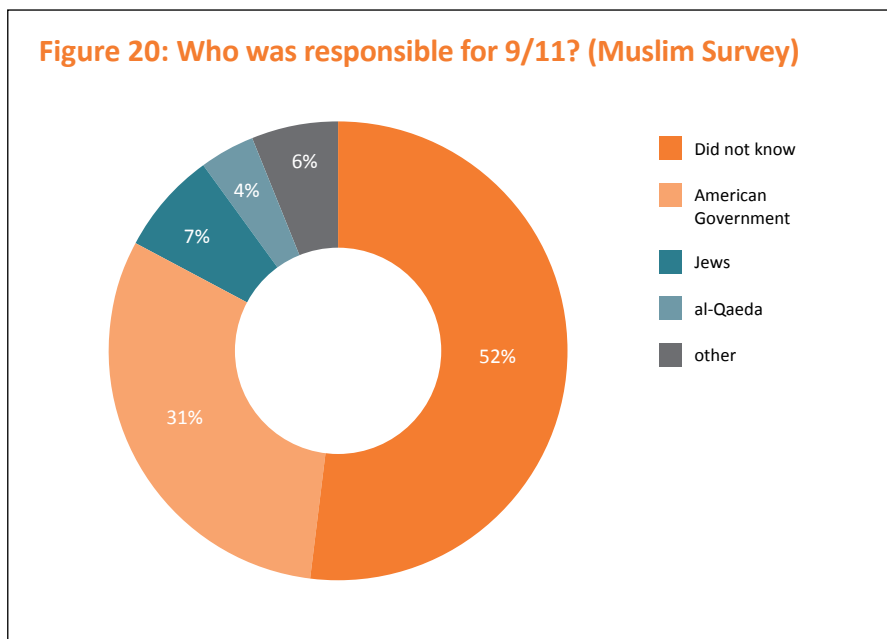
216 See p. 790

217 See p. 792

218 See p. 796

with the proposition.²¹⁹ The results also show that those who lived in areas in which Muslims formed more than 50% of the local population were significantly less likely to agree that conspiracy theories contained elements of truth (34% did so, as compared to 43% of those who lived in areas with less than 50% Muslim residence).²²⁰ Again, this seems rather counterintuitive, as one might have expected those living in areas of higher Muslim residence to perhaps be more inward-looking and more susceptible to conspiracy-based explanations of wider events. Yet, clearly, this is not the case.

Furthermore, as already mentioned, our surveys reveal that British Muslims are not significantly more credulous of conspiracy theories than the wider population (40% as opposed to 37%). However, where there does appear to be a major divergence, is in regard to the way in which such theories manifest themselves. The truth of this becomes apparent when one considers responses to a question about a specific conspiracy theory: that of responsibility for 9/11.

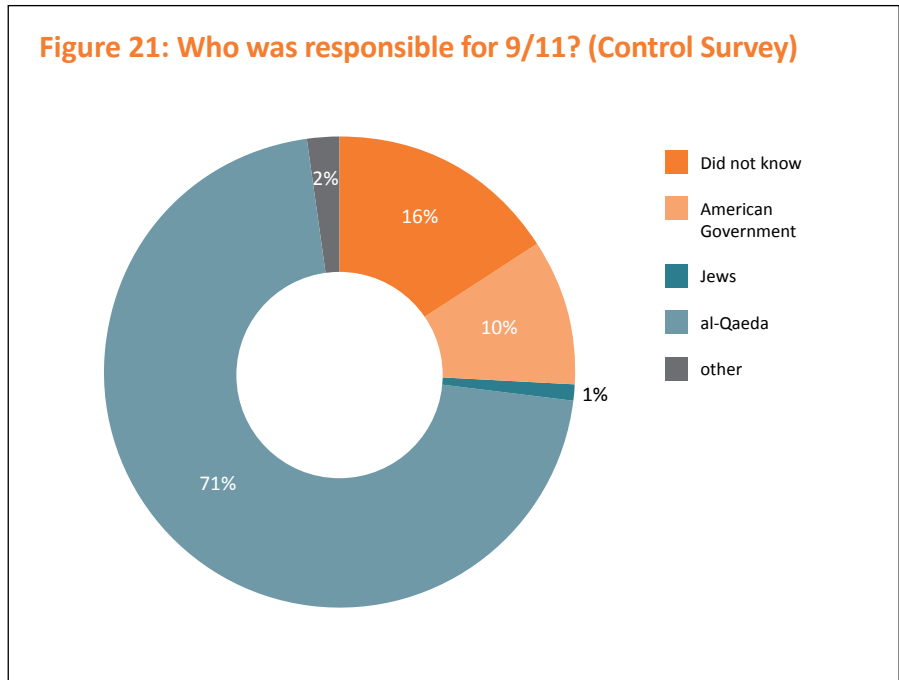


When asked who was responsible for 9/11, a majority of respondents (52%) said that they did not know. Even more remarkably, 31% of Muslim respondents said the American government was behind the attack. More people said that the 'Jews' were responsible (7%), than said al-Qaeda or some other analogous group (4%).²²¹ The significance of these results becomes apparent when seen in comparison with results from a control survey. With regards to the latter, only 10% of people claimed the American government was behind 9/11 and just 1% blamed the Jews, whereas 71% of respondents said that al-Qaeda or some analogous group was responsible.

²¹⁹ See p. 794

²²⁰ See p. 798

²²¹ See question 35a



Anecdotal evidence from our focus groups offered substantial testimony to the idea that the official account of 9/11 was not believed.

“9/11 I never believed from the day one.”
 Female, London Group 2

“When those planes hit those towers and the buildings fell, all the evidence was taken away and disposed of and it was all just hush hush hush.”
 Male, Cardiff Group 2

“OK, so 9/11, before it went down, I think three days prior to it, it was sold. The actual World Trade Centre was sold. There was a very rich guy, very heavily politically involved in America, who managed to secure an insurance policy for it. When the building went down, the fact that he’s-, it’s just such a coincidence that that insurance was paid out, then it’s a coincidence that you’re getting all of these experts coming in and saying, ‘How can a Boeing such and such take down-, these buildings are made to be even plane resistant. The metal does not burn, even at that centigrade.’ It just raises questions as to how that building did not go head over and manage to come down securely.”
 Male, Birmingham Group 1

“It looked like it was planned. It looked like it was a controlled explosion. It was unusual. I was only young when it happened, to be fair. I’ve only read up on it over the years, but it’s true; when you look into the conspiracy theories, they say the jet fuel doesn’t melt steel beams. It does look like it was a controlled explosion.”
 Female, Birmingham Group 1

Further analysis of the quantitative results from our survey of Muslim opinion shows that the youngest cohort (aged 18–24) were those most likely to say that the American government was responsible for 9/11 (39% gave this answer). Those born in the UK were more likely than those born outside Britain to blame the American government for 9/11 (37% of UK-born respondents blamed the US government, as compared to 26% of those born outside Britain). Conversely, it was those in the 55–64 year old bracket who were most likely to blame the Jews (10% of respondents in this cohort did so).²²²

The breakdown by region, meanwhile, shows that Muslim respondents in the North East were unusually likely to say that al-Qaeda or some analogous group was behind 9/11 (21% did so, as compared to just 4% overall). Elsewhere, different regions showed variations on the top-line aggregate findings. 40% of respondents in the East, for example, blamed the American government for 9/11; in the North West the equivalent figure was also an above average 36% and in Scotland it was 35%. In Wales and the South West, respondents were significantly less likely to blame the American government (18% and 16% respectively did so), but more likely to answer ‘other’, to the question of who was to blame. Finally, it is striking that in London, 11% of respondents said that the Jews were behind 9/11 (while 5% said al-Qaeda and 30% the American government).²²³

Again, these ideas were reflected in focus group discussion, where some participants were not afraid to voice a belief in conspiracies rooted in anti-Semitic tropes:

“There was no Jews that were in that day.”

Female, London Group 2

This speaks to the widely circulated, fraudulent claim that several thousand Jews failed to turn up for work on 11 September 2001, a sign that they had foreknowledge of the attack – and were therefore implicated in the crime.

Others, meanwhile, suggested that George W. Bush was behind 9/11 – a view obviously correlating with the high proportion of respondents in our quantitative survey who stated the American government was responsible. Mention was made of the fact that the planes were perhaps cargo aircraft filled with explosives; or to the various theories that the twin towers were brought down by means of controlled explosion.

For a full sense of how accepting many participants were of such conspiracy theories about 9/11, see the following exchange from one of our focus groups in Slough. The participants were all women aged between 45 and 65 years old, most of whom were middle class and whilst Muslim, did not wear the headscarf. Prior to this point in the conversation, most of the discussion had focused on more secular everyday issues of the kind noted above: education, the challenges of raising a family, work etc. When asked specifically about their views on 9/11, which had been briefly mentioned already, the following conversation occurred (each line break marks a different speaker):

²²² See pp. 802–6

²²³ See p. 804

Q. Someone mentioned 9/11, do you think it's fabricated by it?

- Yes (general agreement).
- Yes, they made the film themselves so they are showing that there was just-, I think they were blaming the Muslims.
- It was all pre-planned...
- Weren't their passports found whole as well, you know?
- Yes, I heard something like that.
- Also, in the twin towers, there's mostly Jewish people working there, not one Jew was at work that day.
- None of them were at work.
- I think they also insured the twin towers beforehand.
- It was pre-planned, yes.
- A year beforehand or something, they insured it for a vast amount of money.

Q. So are you saying that 9/11, that the whole thing was a political thing?

- Oh yes, totally.
- Yes, it was.
- Ever since then, it hasn't stopped, has it? Ever since that came on, everything has just got...
- Even the Americans agree with that.
- It was the start of blaming the Muslims.
- Yes, definitely.
- Yes, it was the start of blaming the Muslims and do something massive. I mean, why the twin towers? Why not pentagon? You know, why wasn't there anybody there, you know the plane that went? There's a lot of smoke in there, that you don't trust it, you don't trust the whole story because it doesn't seem like, you know, there are all these little bits that keep getting thrown in.
- They don't add up together.
- It doesn't add up.

What was striking about this conversation was the unanimity of views within the focus group about 9/11: there was almost total agreement that this event had been staged. Moreover, this discussion in Slough was entirely typical of those that took place in other focus groups in Manchester, Cardiff, Birmingham and central London. In each instance, it was noticeable how a gathering of otherwise 'normal', well-adjusted individuals could hold fairly outlandish views.

Of course, it should be noted, we live in an era in which conspiracy theories of all kinds enjoy remarkable credulity. Clearly, Muslims do not have a monopoly on a belief in conspiracy theories; neither are they alone in believing that 9/11 was the product of some hidden agenda. In recent times, there has been a growing recognition of how widespread conspiracy theories of this kind have become.²²⁴ From debates about 'who killed Prince Diana', to suggestions that the Illuminati dominate government and major industries, there is an abundance of wild speculation, which purports to explain signature events of the last decade and beyond. Of course, there is nothing new in this. Events like the assassination of President Kennedy and the 1969 moon landings have long attracted an array of

224 I. O'Doherty, 'Conspiracy theories are the new religion and the demented 9/11 plots have no shortage of believers', *Independent*, 7 September 2016.

hypotheses that explain ‘the truth’ of what happened. The Internet has provided a setting in which such theorising has reached new levels. It has never been easier to disseminate ideas and gain a following.²²⁵

Conspiracy theories are defined by a readiness to accept ‘unverified’ claims of conspiracy, on the flimsiest evidential basis, even as their adherents are ready to dismiss far more substantive ‘official’ accounts. As Robert Brotherton has described, this makes them ‘epistemically self-insulating’, and impervious to rational argument. Instead, adherents take refuge in the sensational and the profound belief that ‘nothing happens by chance’. Events are explained by reference to the assumedly malign intent of the purported conspirators.²²⁶

To some, conspiracy theories are simply a fun, often absurd form of distraction; yet as others have pointed out, they do perhaps need to be taken seriously when they become engrained and speak to a wider worldview.²²⁷

What is surely significant is the fact that on this specific question about 9/11, British Muslims seem much more likely to believe in conspiracy theories than do the population generally. This would seem to confirm that while Muslims are no more and no less likely to adhere to such theories, in a general sense, there is a difference in the way in which that mindset manifests itself. This, in turn, is crucial, because many British Muslims understand the conspiracies allegedly behind 9/11 in a way that speaks directly to them.

Hence, as we observed in our focus groups, there is a suggestion that the attacks of 9/11 were carried out with a deliberate view towards blaming Muslims – and that this was why problems like racism and Islamophobia have got worse in the period since, as the following statements suggest:

“I think they needed to find a race, or a religion that needed to be a scapegoat... And I think that’s how 9/11 sort of came about.”

Male, London Group 1

“I think before 9/11 there was racism, but after 9/11 there is more Islamophobia.”

Female, Birmingham Group 2

Furthermore, 9/11 was seen by many, not just as an isolated incident in this regard, but as part of an on-going series of events, by which Muslims were unfairly targeted and blamed for events, behind which lay more sinister machinations.

“Isis, if you look back in how it was created, it was created by America.”

Female, Slough Group 2

“I think going on to conspiracy theories and stuff like that, it’s easy to spin a particular lie to hide the realities of what’s going on. It’s a geopolitical war between America and the West and Russia, and you’ve got the Middle East in between. It’s an easy excuse to cover it up.”

Male, Birmingham Group 1

225 M. Wood, ‘Has the internet been good for conspiracy theorising?’, *Psypag Quarterly*, 88 (September 2013), pp. 31–34; C. Shure, ‘Insights into the Personalities of Conspiracy Theorists’, *Scientific American*, 1 September 2013, available at, www.scientificamerican.com/article/insights-into-the-personalities-conspiracy-theorists/

226 R. Brotherton, ‘Towards a definition of “conspiracy theory”’, *Psypag Quarterly*, 88 (September 2013), pp. 9–14. See also, in the same edition, C. Thresher-Andrews, ‘An introduction into the world of conspiracy’, pp. 5–8

227 See, for instance, C. Caryl, ‘Skeptics of the World, Unite!’, *Foreign Policy*, 26 April 2010; D. Jolley, ‘The detrimental nature of conspiracy theories’, *Psypag Quarterly*, 88 (September 2013), pp. 35–8

“Well I believe that where this Palestine thing is ongoing, I think that this is Israel’s way of coming into power kind of thing, they’re joined up with America and it’s getting rid of the Muslims. So there are things that happen that they’re actually covering up but they’re actually paying out for those things themselves, using their own people to do these different things but labelling them as the Muslims doing them.”

Female, Slough Group 2

“It’s hard to explain [the conflict in Syria], but it’s basically nothing to do with religion, but I will say it’s linked to the new world order when they decide to kill them, then they’re going country by country.”

Female, London Group 2

“The US is in control of every single thing.”

Female, London Group 1

In London, for instance, one young male participant asked pointedly, “did anyone ever hear about ISIS ten years ago?” Ten years ago, he noted, all the focus had been on al-Qaeda, then ISIS “popped up”. Others joined in, wondering where ISIS could have come from – the manner and tone of the questioning suggesting that they were not convinced of its authenticity. As one female participant stated explicitly, “ISIS is a creation of few very smart people” [Female, London Group 1]. Another talked about seeing pictures on the internet of ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi sitting in meetings with Mossad and MI5. [Male, London Group 2]. Such statements were part of a wider trend to see anti-Muslim conspiracies as underpinning various developments in the world.

Do such views matter? In considering the importance of this apparent readiness to see the world through a lens of conspiracy, it is worth noting how far these theories cast Muslims as the victims of nefarious intrigue. This is crucial given the extent to which radical Islamist groups feed on narratives that place a sense of Muslim victimhood at their core. Groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS portray the world as divided between Islam and ‘unbelievers’, with ‘the West’ held up as the primary manifestation of the latter. In that context, they insist that Muslims face an existential threat from the West, which demands a response – and it is this narrative, which is used to justify acts of violence and terrorism across the globe.

Many scholars tie the appeal of conspiracy theories to a lack of trust, particularly in political elites and the media.²²⁸ With regards to the latter, our survey again offers evidence to support this idea. **Respondents were asked to comment on how far they trusted a range of news and media organisations to give a balanced view of issues relating to Muslims. Of nineteen different outlets – traversing the realms of terrestrial and satellite television, social media and print newspapers – there was only one entity, which a majority of Muslim respondents said they trusted to be fair in its coverage: the Islam Channel, with 52%. By contrast, the major vehicles of mainstream media all**

²²⁸ See, for example, Thresher-Andrews, ‘An introduction into the world of conspiracy’

returned negative results, with more people saying that coverage was ‘unfair’ to some extent, than said it was ‘fair’. **With the BBC, for example, only 34% of respondents considered it fair in its treatment of ‘Muslim’ issues, while 58% judged it unfair to a greater or lesser extent. Similar, or worse figures were also returned for Channel 4 (31% fair versus 56% unfair), ITV (26% fair versus 61% unfair) and Sky (23% fair and 61% unfair).**

These perceptions of media bias were, it should be noted, significantly different from the views recorded in the control survey. There, a sizeable majority, 62% of respondents felt that mainstream television channels such as the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 were ‘fair and balanced’ in their coverage of Muslim issues. Similarly, in regard to both leading satellite channels on the one hand, and the broadsheet media on the other, a large plurality of people (49%) felt their coverage was ‘fair’, whereas fewer felt it was manifestly unfair (35%).²²⁹

Though there is not the space here to discuss the full breakdown of these headline figures, there are some patterns that can be observed amongst British Muslim opinion. If one takes the example of the BBC, for instance, one sees that younger, more educated respondents were more likely to say that they did not trust the BBC. The same was true of those born in Britain (as compared to those not), and also those who felt no sense of belonging to Britain (as compared to those who did).²³⁰ The North East was the one region where a majority of respondents said that they trusted the BBC (69%); at the other end of the spectrum were areas such as Wales, the South West and Yorkshire and the Humber, where 88%, 77% and 70% of respondents respectively said they did not trust the BBC to a greater or lesser extent.²³¹

Interestingly, those who sympathised with the use of violence, or terrorism in a context of political protest were more likely than the population as a whole to say that they trusted the BBC (48% of the former and 67% of the latter said that they did so).²³² Meanwhile, those who judged themselves less religious (1–3 on our scale), were more likely to say they trusted the BBC than their peers who deemed themselves particularly devout (43% as compared to 30%); similarly, those who were most observant, attending mosque at least four times a week, were more likely to say that they did not trust the BBC (64% of respondents in this category said this, as compared to 54% of those who said they never went to mosque).²³³

Similar (though not identical) patterns are observable from analysis of the result breakdowns for questions about ITV, Sky (in both of which, levels of trust were significantly lower overall) and Channel 4.²³⁴

In regard to the Islam Channel, meanwhile, levels of trust were higher amongst elder respondents and relatively lower amongst those considered to be ‘AB’ in terms of social category. There was also an interesting divergence in terms of educational attainment: while those with degrees were relatively less likely to say they trusted its output (47%), current students were significantly more likely to do so (61%). Those out of work and resident in social housing were also more likely to trust the Islam Channel’s coverage than those not working and either private renters or owner-occupiers. The regional breakdown also offers a different pattern from the mainstream media. Levels of trust in the Islam Channel were especially high in the East (63%), London (58%) and the South East (57%), but significantly lower in regions such as the East Midlands (43%), the North West (43%), the North East (41%), and especially in Wales, which was the one region

229 See question 36

230 See pp. 810–13

231 See p. 814

232 See p. 816

233 See pp. 818–20

234 See pp. 822–56

where a clear majority of respondents said they did not trust this channel either (65% gave this answer, as compared to just 16% who said they did trust it).²³⁵

Overall, therefore, it is clear that there is a significant confidence-gap between British Muslims and various television-based media. It is striking too that the same story emerged in regard to the mainstream print media. When asked about the fairness of their coverage, the proportion of those saying ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’, ranged from 53% (the Guardian) to 59% (the Sun). Conversely, those saying that the papers were very, or partially fair in their coverage ranged from only 9% (the Sun) to 15% (the Guardian). (On the print media, a relatively stable body of opinion (32%) did not express an opinion one way or another).²³⁶

In our focus groups, multiple participants said that they did not engage with the mainstream media in order to understand current affairs; instead, several expressed a preference for ‘social media’. Again, there is nothing particularly unique to Britain’s Muslim population about this. As has been much discussed, more and more people seem to be turning away from traditional sources of information and relying instead on internet-based social media platforms. And yet, what is interesting is that our quantitative survey showed that the performance of social media outlet platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube was also seen in predominantly negative terms, with majorities of 51–54% stating that it was unfair in its coverage.

These quantitative findings were complemented by the focus groups, which revealed much distrust of, and discontent with, the media. Multiple participants expressed unhappiness with what was felt to be a tendency within the media to ‘profile’ and unfairly pillory Muslims:

“Even with the media you don’t know whom to trust.”

Male, Birmingham Group 1

“I think, media profiling of Muslims in the UK is kind of biased, because in [the] media when you Google Muslims it’s just generally opinions about Muslims. So, you never know what an ordinary Muslim guy, Muslim family does in real life ... When you talk about Muslims you have to refer to the religion, like normal life doesn’t exist, you know?... So, when a Muslim is presented, you always refer to the religion in the media.”

Male, Cardiff Group 1

“A nineteen-year-old Muslim man killed a person in this street or that street. And when it’s not Muslim, they never put it that way, nineteen-year-old Christian, nineteen-year-old Hindu, they never do that.”

Female, London Group 1

What such comments would appear to reflect, then, is the extent to which British Muslims feel that the media is unfair in the way in which it represents them, as a community. This correlates with the embattled worldview, which feeds (and is in turn sustained by) the afore-mentioned belief in conspiracy theories. To many British Muslims, the media appears as a hostile force, intent on their demonization, which cannot be trusted.

²³⁵ See pp. 857–68

²³⁶ See question 36. For statistical breakdowns of the print media, see pp. 977–1036

Conclusions

If there is one overriding story in this survey of British Muslim attitudes it is the complexity and diversity of views. As stated at the outset, the extensive nature of our polling confirms that it is not possible to speak of a monolithic ‘community’; British Muslims live in a patchwork of communities, which agree, or disagree – to a greater, or lesser extent – on certain issues. This may seem like a trivial point, but so much of contemporary discourse seems to assume that it is possible to speak of British Muslims in singular terms. For this reason, one has to be wary of being over-deterministic in trying to reach definitive conclusions about ‘what Muslims want’. Equally, it

“If there is one overriding story in this survey of British Muslim attitudes it is the complexity and diversity of views”

is crucial not to confuse correlation with causation, when trying to identify patterns of behaviour and attitude. For the most part, here, we confine ourselves to identifying the former; generally, the latter lies beyond the scope of this report.

With that said, we believe that there is value in trying to get inside the British Muslim mind, to understand attitudes within this important population sub-group on a number of important topics. And here, it is clear that the results of our survey point in different directions. No less than any other sub-group of the British population, in fact, Muslims are capable of holding seemingly contradictory ideas simultaneously. It is possible to extrapolate patterns from our results that make sense; but equally, many do not.

On various issues, it seems clear that British Muslim opinion differs significantly from that of the wider population. Often, those differences are benign and tell what might be considered a ‘good’ news story. On the whole, for instance, British Muslims feel a greater sense of belonging to the UK, and are more ‘engaged’ and active in society than many of their non-Muslim neighbours. Yet on other matters, the variations in outlook carry more troubling implications and should be a cause for some concern.

Amongst the findings that strike us as being of particular pertinence overall to any attempt to understand the outlook of British Muslims are the following:

1. British Muslims undoubtedly comprise a more religiously conscious and observant sub-set of the UK population. Religion plays a far more prominent role in their lives and they identify with religious institutions to an extent that far outstrips that of the population as a whole (indeed, the pattern of answers on these issues is almost the inverse of those to emerge from a study of the population in general).

2. A heightened sense of religious devotion manifests in a clear social conservatism on some issues. This was not a major focus of our study, but in those areas where attitudes on such matters could be extrapolated (such as on the wearing of 'Islamic' dress, gender segregation in schools, the teaching of art and music), it seems clear that the views of British Muslims tend to be far more conservative and 'traditional' than the wider population. This is in line with the findings of previous studies, including that carried out by ICM for Channel 4 last year, which focused far more directly on this issue.
3. Our survey also replicated those earlier surveys, which suggest a relatively large level of support among British Muslims for the implementation of elements of Sharia Law; however, it is worth noting that the nature of that support is quite 'soft'. What this means is that whilst a plurality of people expressed a preference for such measures when viewed in the abstract, that support proves far less robust in practice (and hence for example, a majority of respondents said they did not favour Sharia banking). In this context, it seems plausible that a statement in support of Sharia law is less an expression of concrete political objectives and more a reflection of the afore-mentioned social conservatism, coupled with an adherence to a Muslim identity. It is also striking that our survey results suggest young people were relatively less likely to support measures of Sharia law than their older counterparts.
4. It is clear that the more religious character of British Muslim communities, and their general social conservatism, does not detract from the essentially secular character of most Muslim lifestyles. Contrary to what is often asserted on both sides of the political spectrum, the priorities and everyday concerns of the overwhelming majority of Muslims are inherently secular; that is, they concern issues such as education, crime, health and immigration. Moreover, the nature of Muslim concerns on these issues is itself fundamentally secular in character. For example, the most important question when contemplating education is its quality, rather than any emphasis on ensuring children receive a specifically Muslim education. In this regard, the exaggerated claims that are made on all sides about the 'special requirements' and uniqueness of British Muslims need to be treated with a healthy skepticism.
5. In line with the above, most British Muslims are inclined to act like any other group of people within the British polity, when it comes to their relationship with the State. Our survey showed that, whilst a majority of respondents liked the idea of Muslim organisations acting on their behalf, they did not see themselves as 'represented' by those same organisations. Furthermore, amongst those groups that purport to 'speak' for Muslims, the picture is one of fragmentation and diversity. No single, allegedly 'national' Muslim group commands anything like national support. Groups like the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) and the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), which purport to be national representative bodies, in fact have little national clout. When one moves outside London, the overwhelming majority of British Muslims have no attachment to these groups (and have mostly never heard of them). People from within those communities evince a healthy skepticism about the validity and quality of so-called 'community leaders'.

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6. An overwhelming majority of British Muslims feel a strong sense of belonging to Britain, and equally an overwhelming majority feel free to practice their faith in this country unhindered. At the same time, it is clear – as emerges especially from anecdotal evidence – that many Muslims are acutely conscious of the threat from racism and anti-Muslim bigotry; there are real fears too about ‘profiling’, stereotyping and discrimination. Without in any way wishing to diminish those fears, it is striking that this did not translate into high-level personal concern about issues such as harassment. From this, we might again conclude that there is something of a gap between the abstract and the tangible. To many, the threat from abuse and discrimination is *perceived*, on the basis of reported testimony from others, rather than something *experienced* directly. It is this that perhaps explains why the interview participant who confesses to having never experienced racism/discrimination personally, nevertheless remains convinced that these are serious problems. And in this context, of course, there is some truth to the notion that the perception is the reality. If large numbers of British Muslims believe themselves to be the victims of prejudice and injustice, this carries serious consequences, almost irrespective of whether or not such problems exist on the scale imagined. The narrative, in this case, is everything.
 7. On the question of political extremism, our survey presents a complex picture. Our questions about attitudes to violence and terrorism showed that an overwhelming majority of Muslim respondents condemned such actions (more so than did the population as a whole). This is crucial as a point of departure. Of course, as is well known, it only takes a small minority of any community to make a terrorist threat serious and sustainable (for the truth of this, one needs look only to Northern Ireland, where no more than around 10% of the population were supportive of physical force Irish republicanism, but this helped sustain a ferocious IRA campaign for three decades). That being the case, we were interested to consider whether there were any variables that positively correlate to sympathy for political violence amongst the small group of respondents expressing such views. Perhaps the most important of our findings in this context is that greater religiosity does not equate to political radicalism – indeed, across several questions, those who rated themselves less religious were relatively more likely to express sympathy for criminal, violent or terrorist acts (though the numbers are still small). Equally, our results suggest that those who sympathise with political violence cannot simply be caricatured as isolated figures who are disaffected from mainstream social and political life. On the contrary, on several indices, such individuals appear more likely to be active and engaged members of society.
 8. In regard to efforts to counter extremism, our survey offers results that at times appear contradictory. On the one hand, majority Muslim opinion seems comfortable with state intervention and steps to try and tackle extremism (such as the monitoring of madrassas and those who might seek to purvey extreme ideas). Alongside this, there is a sense that Muslims themselves should play a lead role in tackling extremism and almost 50% believed that ‘more’ should be done within Muslim communities to tackle extremism. And yet, there is also a surprisingly large strand of opinion, representing a

quarter of respondents, which seems to believe that there is ‘no such thing’ as extremism. There remains, therefore, a ‘schizophrenia’ within British Muslim communities about the challenge posed by extremism.

9. Worrying conclusions were also found on the subject of conspiracy theories – a pernicious part of the extremist worldview. Whilst strong pluralities agreed that these were a problem (c. 40%), the same proportion of people suggested that such theories contained within them elements of truth. To test the latter, we asked about responsibility for 9/11 and the answers to this question proved especially startling, with almost a third of respondents explicitly blaming the American government for the attacks; indeed, it is striking that more people blamed ‘the Jews’ for 9/11, than al-Qaeda.
10. Arguably, the acceptance of conspiracy theories amongst British Muslims reflects a lack of trust towards political elites and, in particular, the media. In regard to the latter, our survey suggests that most Muslims believe themselves to be the victims of an unfair media portrayal, which reinforces fears about stereotyping and discrimination. It is clear, therefore, that even as an overwhelming majority of British Muslims unquestionably feel a clear sense of loyalty and belonging to the UK, many remain deeply unsettled and inclined to accept narratives that foreground their own victimhood. It is that Janus-faced sentiment of ‘unsettled belonging’ that perhaps best captures the feelings of most British Muslims.
11. Looking at patterns across national-origin groups, education levels and regions a couple of things stand out. First, people who self-identify as being of Indian and Bangladeshi ethnic background, tend to be less supportive of extremism and more willing to see extremism as a serious problem. Second those with degrees are less supportive of violence. Third, region does seem to make a difference: for instance, respondents in the East Midlands (which includes Leicester) are relatively more approving of violence and relaxed on the need to tackle extremism; those surveyed in the East of England were also more relaxed on the need to tackle extremism and credulous of conspiracy theories. Finally although degrees of residential segregation or the concentration of Muslim residence does not have a consistent effect in general, there seems to be some connection between Pakistani-white British segregation and a greater sympathy for extremist views.
12. Government must not fall back into the trap of looking to “gatekeeper” Muslim organisations, like the MCB, that purport to articulate or represent the views of what is a diverse sub-group of the general population, which has fundamentally secular interests and priorities. We should not confuse an attachment to mosque and a more religious propensity, with the idea that Muslims are a religiously-bounded community, whose members blindly follow the whims of self-elected community leaders.
13. Our survey underlines the fact that greater levels of religiosity, whilst correlated to social conservatism, are not a predictor of political radicalism. Of course, there are elements of the former that are problematic. They indicate that on various issues, British Muslims are out-of-step with the

mainstream of UK opinion. However, more than ever, the government must heed the call to separate those activities that aim to address concerns about social cohesion and those that are designed to prevent terrorism. The previous government was clear on the need to draw this distinction, but there is some sense that this injunction has continued to be honoured in the breach more than in the observance.

14. The government should not be “spooked” into either abandoning, or apologising for, the Prevent agenda. Our survey shows that there is support for government initiatives to tackle the problems of radicalisation (as well as the everyday problems that Muslim communities face). Prevent is not perfect and doubtless, there is room for improvement; but those leading the contemporary ‘Preventing Prevent’ campaign seem to favour a situation in which the government abandons efforts at intervention altogether. Our survey suggests there is little appetite for this amongst Britain’s Muslim communities, who on various issues seem relaxed about government intervention and are actually supportive of traditional ‘law and order’ policies.