HOPE HATE

DOUBLING DOWN ON DIVISION

Anti-Muslim hatred in the UK since 7th October

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Misbah Malik

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Introduction

Despite broader improvements in race relations in Britain over the last few decades, negative attitudes towards Muslims remain starkly prevalent. Anti-Muslim hatred in the UK has been described as passing the "dinner-table test", whereby its presence has become normalised and unchallenged within large swathes of society. Indeed, our polling over the last few years has consistently found a third of the population maintain negative attitudes towards Muslims.

This high baseline of anti-Muslim sentiment has contributed to a volatile situation in the UK, whereby flashpoints can easily trigger heightened hatred that can, and has, transcended into hate crimes and violence targetting British Muslims. We saw this in 2017 following the series of prolific terrorist attacks, and more recently with the nationwide far-right riots following the murders of three young girls in Southport.

These trigger events do not only have to happen on British soil to dampen attitudes towards British Muslims. International events, particularly those in the Middle East, have historically always been a catalyst for hardening domestic attitudes towards both Muslims and Jews. Events such as the Rushdie affair, the Gulf Wars, and the Iraq War have all had a polarising effect on public attitudes towards Muslims. With 80% of the UK claiming they are following the current events in Israel and Palestine, the conflict and its escalation since 7th October is no exception.[1]

Since Hamas's widely condemned attack on Israel on 7th October and Israel's disproportionately brutal response, the pro-Palestine movement in the UK has swelled in size, visibility and diversity, with hundreds of thousands regularly taking to the streets of London to protest. British Muslims have been at the heart of this response, and subsequently also at the heart of many of the criticisms aimed at the wider movement. Just as the conflict has provided fresh contexts for people to re-engage with pro-Palestine activism, it has also reinvigorated anti-Palestine and anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK.

The consequences of this for British Muslims are severe. Tell MAMA, the leading agency on monitoring anti-Muslim hate, has recorded a 335% spike in hate crimes from 7th October 2023 to 7th February 2024 compared to the same time period the previous year, a record high since the charity began in 2011.[2]

British Jews have also faced similar consequences, as events in Israel and Palestine frequently drive increased antisemitism in the UK. The Community Security Trust (CST) recorded reports of 4,103 anti-Jewish hate incidents in 2023, a rise of 147% compared to 2022. Two-thirds of incidents happened on or after 7th October, a 589% increase in reports from the same time period in 2022.[3]

This report aims to dig deeper into anti-Muslim hatred in the UK since 7th October, and paint a more detailed picture of both the causes and impacts of it.

Using nationwide polling, we have sought to answer two main questions:

- How has the conflict affected public perceptions of British Muslims?

- What are the narratives driving this?

Our polling found that, whilst there remains a favourable majority, 7th October has triggered a doubling down of anti-Muslim sentiment amongst those already most hostile. For this group, which we name the 'responsive hostiles' the conflict has provided a refreshed context upon which to apply pre-existing anti-Muslim tropes and rhetoric. We are therefore able to see how anti-Muslim hate since 7th October maps onto and exacerbates pre-existing division in society, and subsequently, what this means for wider cohesion.

With over half of the reported hate crime incidents being cases of hate speech online, we also look at social media discussions about Muslims and Islam in the UK and reveal a significant increase in anti-Muslim narratives immediately after 7th October and increased levels for the rest of 2023. Our report finds that it is primarily existing anti-Muslim ideas and conspiracy theories that gain increased momentum rather than narratives directly related to Israel-Gaza.

We also assess the role of mainstream politicians and media as key vehicles for anti-Muslim sentiment, not just passively allowing but often actively encouraging anti-Muslim hatred. Our analysis matches key divisive rhetoric and discriminatory policies used in the political mainstream to their adoption in wider public attitudes, highlighting the top-down dissemination of the narratives that drive anti-Muslim hatred on the ground.

In particular, we analyse the role of inflammatory narratives from politicians and the media in instigating the violent disorder on Armistice Day, which saw 2,000 far-right activists and football hooligans descended on central London, under the pretence of "protecting" the Cenotaph from a pro-Palestine demonstration.

Despite these hardening attitudes, there are many reasons to be hopeful. Indeed, those hostile to Muslims remain a minority. There remains a favourable majority - 72% of the population with either progressive or neutral attitudes towards Muslims. Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that anti-Muslim hate has no place in our communities (66%) and there is an undeniable desire to heal divides; 70% want to see the Government take action to improve cohesion,[4] and 61% specifically want to see more programmes of work that bring communities together.[5]

This report highlights both the need but also, promisingly, the appetite for a Government strategy that addresses anti-Muslim hatred, not just the specific fallout from the conflict in Israel and Palestine, but also the root anti-Muslim sentiment that underpins and drives it. Without addressing the latter, and removing anti-Muslim hatred from the 'dinner-table', community relations will remain volatile.

Resilience must be proactively invested in so that communities are able to reject inflammatory narratives that seek to spread hatred. There still remains opportunity for successful cohesion initiatives that address the fallout of the conflict, as well has anti-Muslim sentiment more broadly. Most promisingly, these are likely to have a positive reception and buy-in from a sizable and diverse majority who want to heal divides.

Public attitudes towards British Muslims since 7th October

HOPE not hate has undertaken polling to find out what the nation thinks about the conflict in Israel and Palestine, and how it is influencing attitudes towards Muslims and Islam domestically. This includes 1589 adults in December 2023[6] and 24,952 people in January 2024[7] and 1106 people in June 2024,[8] all weighted to be nationally representative. We also draw from historic polling that tracks anti-Muslim sentiment over the last few years.

The anti-Muslim baseline

Over the last few decades there has been notable progress in attitudes towards diversity, reflective of improvements in race relations more broadly. Whilst this trend is due to a combination of intersecting factors, it is likely largely driven by two powerful, long term social trends: generational shifts in tolerant attitudes and rising education levels.[9]

However, the extent of anti-Muslim sentiment in Britain remains stark. Our polling since 2018 has consistently found a third of the population maintain negative attitudes towards Muslims.

Many commentators argue that anti-Muslim prejudice has become so engrained and normalised in British society that is has passed, to use Baroness Warsi's memorable phrase, the "dinner-table-test".[10] This is an important consideration when assessing how flashpoints such as the Israel-Palesitne conflict impact anti-Muslim sentiment, as any peak in hate crimes or dip in attitudes should be contextualised against an already high baseline.

Attitudes towards the conflict

In response to our polling from June 2024,[11] 80% of respondents say they are following the events in Israel and Gaza, a 5% increase from when we first asked the question in December 2023.[12] 24% say they sympathise more with the 'Palestinian side', an increase of 3% from our polling in December 2023.[13] 23% sympathise with 'both sides equally', 22% with 'neither side' and 15% with the 'Israeli side'.
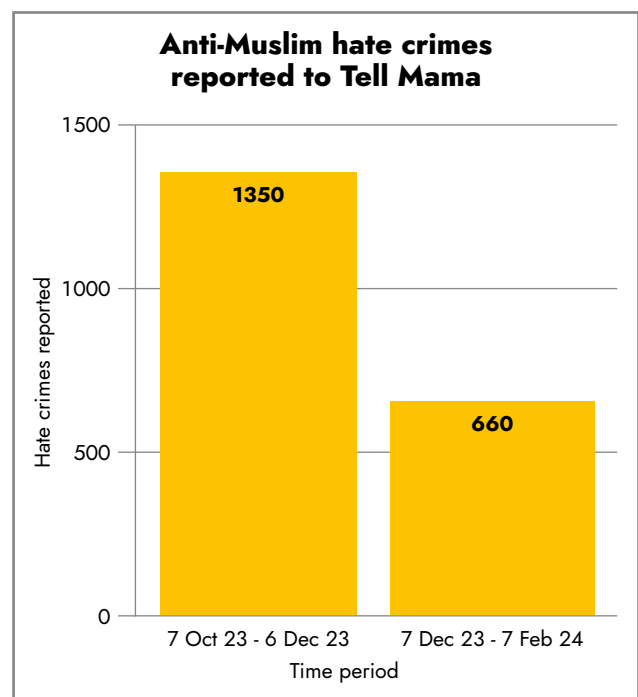
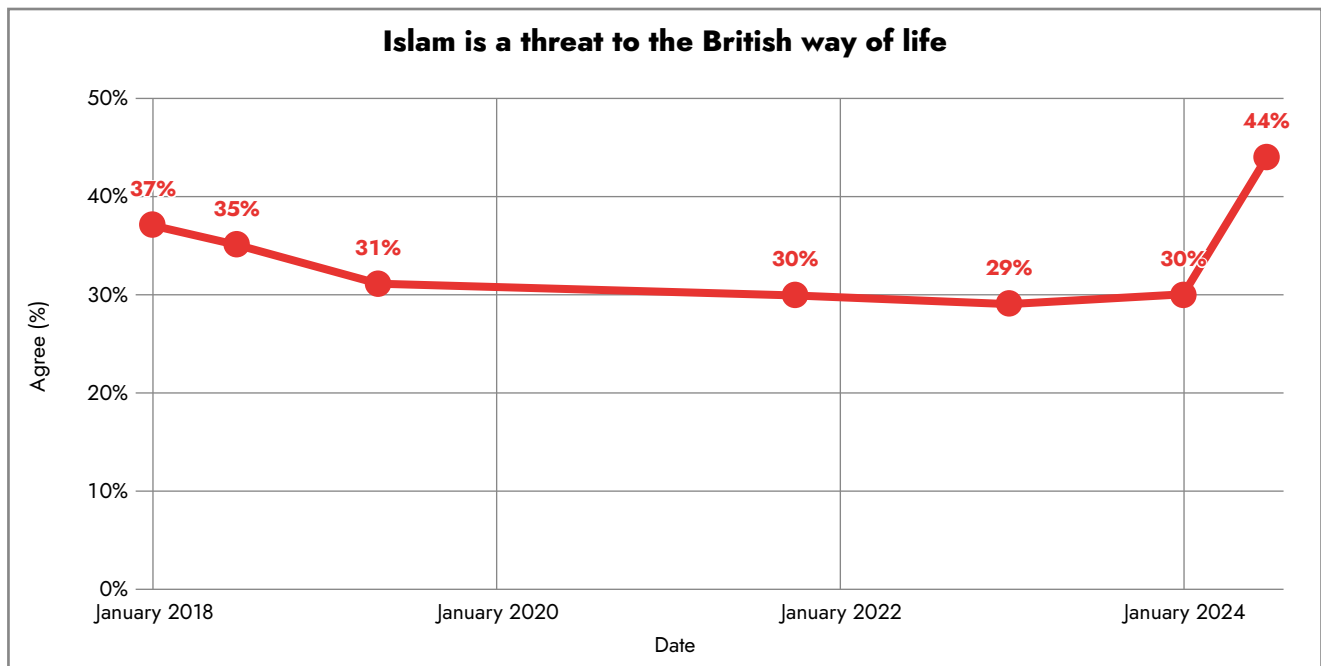In the UK context, the majority are concerned about the fallout that the conflict is having domestically and there is an overwhelming desire to overcome and heal divides forming. 64% are concerned about the increasing levels of hatred in the UK since the escalation of conflict, and most agree that this hatred has no place in our communities (75%).[14] Looking forward, only 16% do not think that people in the UK with different views on the conflict can live together peacefully, indicating appetite and opportunities for cohesion initiatives.

Attitudes towards Muslims

Prior to the conflict, our polling shows that the level of anti-Muslim sentiment within society since 2019 was high, but relatively stable. The series of prolific terrorist attacks in 2017 saw anti-Muslim hatred peak, but successful Government intervention saw these figures reduce over the next 18-24 months. Since 2019, anti-Muslim attitudes remain high but relatively unchanged; on average, approximately one third of Britons harbour anti-Muslim sentiment. However, the events following the 7th October seem to be reversing this progress.

Police forces across the country monitored

Anti-Muslim hate crimes reported to Tell Mama

- 7 Oct 23 - 6 Dec 23: 1350
- 7 Dec 23 - 7 Feb 24: 660

(Y-axis: Hate crimes reported; X-axis: Time period)

Islam is a threat to the British way of life

rising hate crimes between 7th October and 7th November 2023 compared to the same period in 2022.For example, West Yorkshire Police recorded that Islamophobic offences rose to 49 from 29, representing the biggest increase in such incidents. Similarly, Tell Mama reported a 335% spike in hate crimes from 7th October 2023 to 7th February 2024 compared to the same time period the previous year, a record high since the charity began in 2011.[15]

Whilst hate crimes peaked immediately following 7th October and have since been decreasing, our public attitude polling shows a delayed onset to increased hostility towards Muslims. Demonstrably, perceptions of Islam as a "threat to British way of life" remained relatively unchanged in January 2024 from the previous year, seemingly negligibly affected by the "hate march" rhetoric we saw dominate headlines in late October 2023. This narrative perpetuated by some senior Government officials attempted to portray pro-Palestine solidarity demonstrations as violent and a threat to Jewish communities, making London a "no-go zone" for them.

However, between January 2024 and July 2024, this rose by 14%, with now almost half (44%) of the population viewing Islam as incompatible with British way of life.[16]
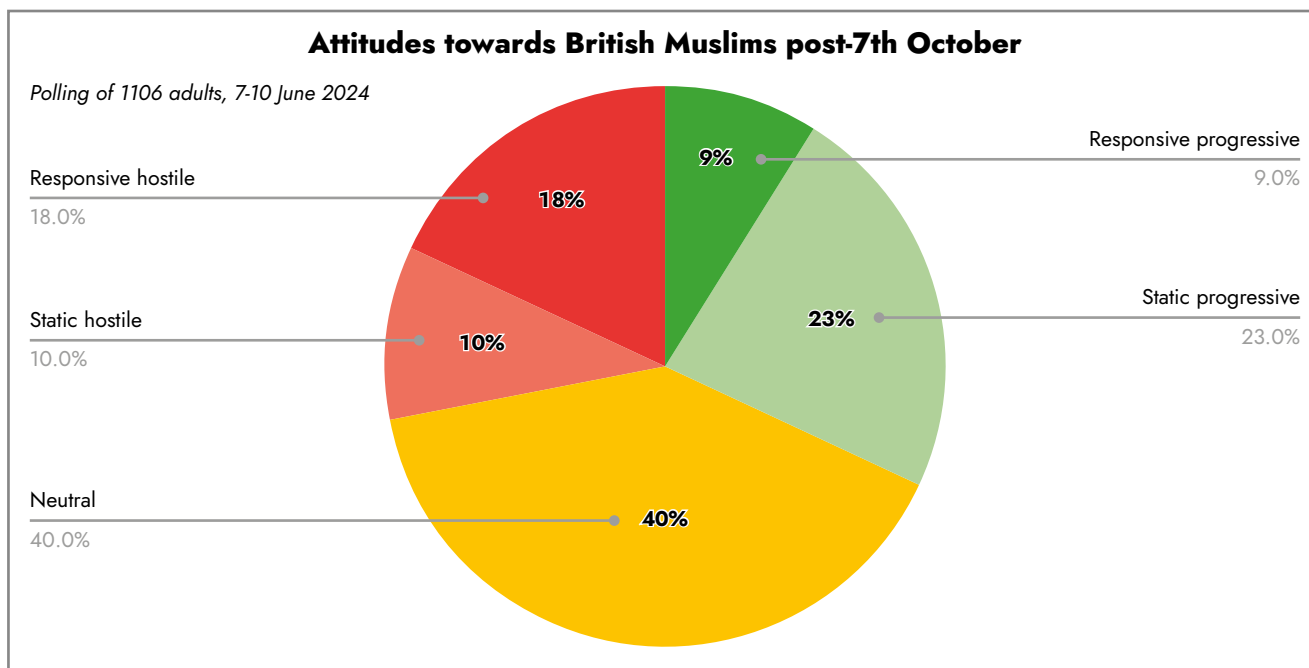
Violence or conflict involving Muslims has historically always been a catalyst for escalating anti-Muslim hostility. For example, Tell Mama reported a 700% increase in hate crime reports the week following the Manchester Arena attack on 22nd May 2017, where 22 people were killed in a terrorist attack at an Ariana Grande concert. They also noted a marked shift towards more serious offline incidents

such as physical attacks, threatening behaviour and abuse more generally. Our *Fear and Hope* report in 2017 also found that the attacks offset previous improvements in attitudes towards Muslims, with lasting impact on public perceptions. Notably, 42% of those polled said their suspicions of Muslims in Britain had increased as a result of recent terror attacks.[17]

The events of 7th October and what has since followed is no exception to this. In order to decipher how the conflict has impacted public perceptions of Muslims, alongside broader questions about general attitudes, in June 2024 we also asked the following question: *Thinking about ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the way British Muslims are responding to it, have your views of British Muslims been affected?* For those who said their views had been affected, we asked: *Would you say your views toward British Muslims have grown more positive or more negative?* For those who said their views had not been affected, we asked: *Would you say your views toward British Muslims are generally positive or negative, or are they neutral?*[18]

This allowed us to split the population into 5 groups:

1. Responsive hostile: Those who have *more* negative attitudes towards Muslims since 7th October

2. Static hostile: Those who already had negative attitudes towards Muslims, but these have not been exacerbated since 7th October

3. Neutral: Those who have remained neutral towards Muslims both pre- and post- 7th October

4. Static progressive: Those who already had positive views towards Muslims, but these have not been exacerbated since 7th October

Attitudes towards British Muslims post-7th October

Polling of 1106 adults, 7-10 June 2024

Responsive hostile
18.0%

Static hostile
10.0%

Neutral
40.0%

Responsive progressive
9.0%

Static progressive
23.0%

9%
18%
10%
40%
23%

5. Responsive progressive: Those who have *more* positive attitudes towards Muslims since 7th October

Whilst the escalating anti-Muslim hostility since 7th October discussed prior is a huge concern, there remains a favourable majority of 72% for whom the conflict has not emboldened anti-Muslim sentiment; the 'responsive progressives', static progressives, and 'neutrals'.

Within this group, 56% believe Muslims have successfully integrated into British society (versus 45% national average). These attitudes extend to support for multiculturalism more broadly; 57% believe that Britain is a successful multicultural society (versus 48% national average), and 54% agree that immigration has been good for Britain (versus 46% national average).

In contrast to this favourable majority, there persists a small yet active minority who are hostile towards Muslims. In our polling, 28% identified having negative views of Muslims in relation to the conflict. Worryingly, 64% of this group admitted that their attitude towards Muslims had grown *more* hostile as a result of the conflict; this translates to 18% of the whole population who are 'responsive hostiles'. For this group, the conflict has hardened their hostility towards Muslims, presenting an opportunity to recommit to their anti-Muslim views with refreshed narratives. This presents the biggest threat; this group is not just hostile but reactive and volatile, and therefore more likely to be mobilised by inflammatory narratives surrounding flashpoints.

Crucially, we see this escalated hostility concentrated amongst the demographics most predisposed to anti-Muslim prejudice. Notably, men over the age of 65, educated to below degree level, who align themselves with right wing political parties or ideology, are twice as likely than the average to be 'responsive hostiles' (33% vs 18%).
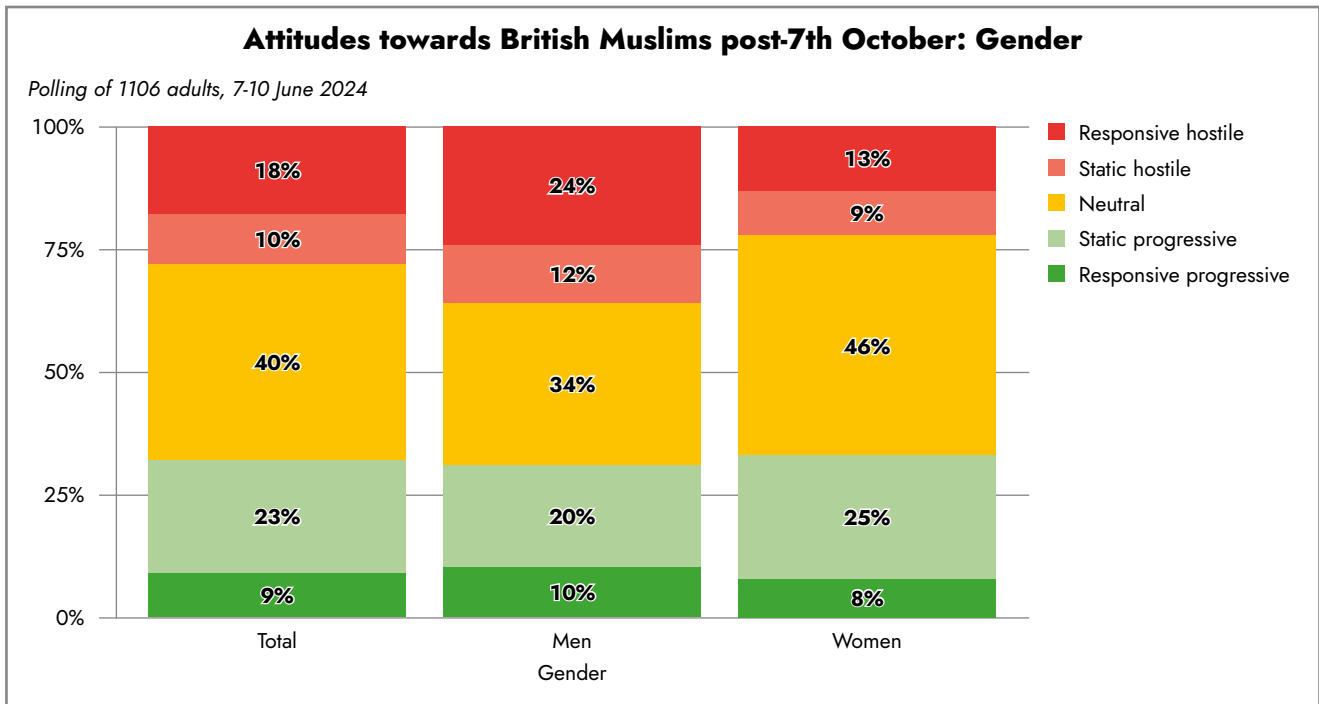
These 'responsive hostiles' were already more likely to have negative attitudes towards Islam outside of the conflict context, and be sceptical of multiculturalism more broadly; polling from January 2023 shows those in these demographic groups were twice as likely to think that having a wide variety of backgrounds has undermined British culture (57% versus 31% national average) and that Islam is a threat to British values (58% versus 29% national average).[19]

Thus whilst wider public attitudes towards Muslims have worsened since 7th October, this hostility is concentrated in demographics already most susceptible to anti-Muslim narratives. This highlights the dangers of failing to address the root causes of anti-Muslim sentiment. Preventing future events from triggering heightened hostility like we have seen in the fallout of 7th October requires interventions that target anti-Muslim hatred more broadly.

Who are the 'responsive' hostiles?

Initiatives that address anti-Muslim hatred must understand who makes up the 'responsive hostiles' to ensure that interventions are appropriately targetted. This is also important for understanding how and where reactions to the conflict may map onto pre-existing divisions, and so where there may be a need for broader, more holistic interventions that tackle the root causes of anti-Muslim sentiment beyond the specific conflict context.

Attitudes towards British Muslims post-7th October: Gender

Polling of 1106 adults, 7-10 June 2024

Legend:
- Responsive hostile
- Static hostile
- Neutral
- Static progressive
- Responsive progressive

Total: 18% / 10% / 40% / 23% / 9%
Men: 24% / 12% / 34% / 20% / 10%
Women: 13% / 9% / 46% / 25% / 8%

X-axis: Gender

GENDER

Men are twice as likely to be part of the 'responsive hostiles' than women (25% versus 12%).

This is unsurprising. Many far right groups and radical right narratives evoke heavily gendered discourses that advocate for traditionally dominant and aggressive masculinity. As a result, we see men heavily over-represented in far right groups, and more likely in general to have hateful attitudes across a range of issues.

Anti-Muslim hatred is no exception; even prior to the conflict context, 34% of men believed Islam is incompatible with British way of life, compared to 25% of women.

Crucially, gender plays a role in not just the perpetrators but also the victims of anti-Muslim hatred. It is also important to note how gender intersects with multiple axis of oppression, and how anti-Muslim hatred largely plays out as a form of gender-based violence impacting Muslim women. In over 65% of the anti-Muslim cases recorded by Tell MAMA between 7 October 2023 and 7 February 2024, women were the target.[20]
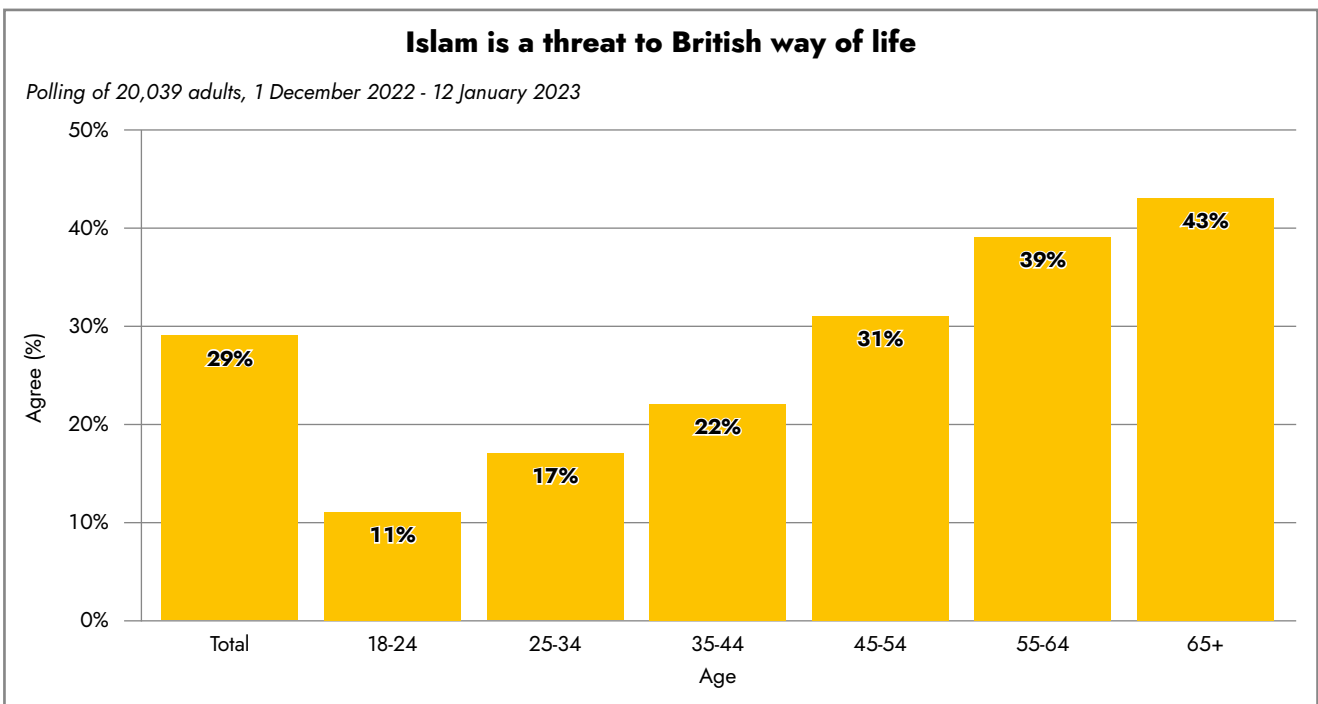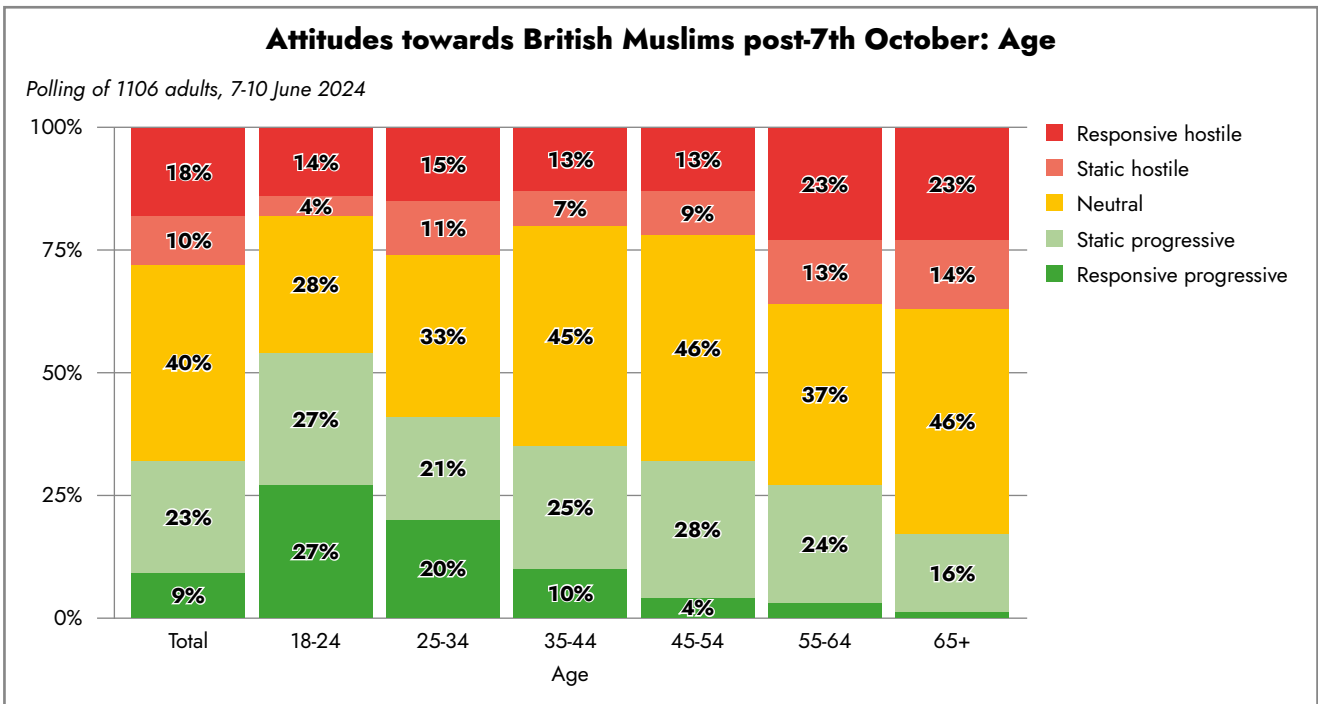

Photo: Azurevanilla ash

AGE

Younger cohorts were much more likely to have had their attitudes towards British Muslims impacted, both positively and negatively by the conflict. Those aged 18-24 are almost twice as likely than those aged 65 and above to be in responsive groups (41% versus 24%).[21]

There are a number of reasons for this, engagement with content on social media likely to be one. As both sides of the conflict accuse mainstream media of either misrepresenting or completely failing to

document, many have turned to social media to both share information and express outrage as events unfold. Therefore as news coverage of the conflict tails off, those who are most active on social media, continue to engage with the discourse. Whilst 83% of the population use social media,[22] research has shown that Gen Z are the most active in terms of the number of hours spent online.[23]

Assessing the direction in which attitudes have changed, those in the top two age cohorts are more likely to have exacerbated negative sentiment than

Attitudes towards British Muslims post-7th October: Age

Polling of 1106 adults, 7-10 June 2024

Age	Responsive progressive	Static progressive	Neutral	Static hostile	Responsive hostile
Total	9%	23%	40%	10%	18%
18-24	27%	27%	28%	4%	14%
25-34	20%	21%	33%	11%	15%
35-44	10%	25%	45%	7%	13%
45-54	4%	28%	46%	9%	13%
55-64	—	24%	37%	13%	23%
65+	16%	—	46%	14%	23%

Islam is a threat to British way of life

Polling of 20,039 adults, 1 December 2022 - 12 January 2023

Age	Agree (%)
Total	29%
18-24	11%
25-34	17%
35-44	22%
45-54	31%
55-64	39%
65+	43%

those in the younger cohorts, and therefore to be part of the 'responsive hostiles'. This trend flips and becomes even more pronounced when assessing 'responsive progressives." to "This trend flips and becomes even more pronounced when assessing 'responsive progressives'.

This reflects the general generational shift towards liberalism, and the pre-existing acute generational divide in attitudes towards British Muslims. Prior to 7th October, those aged 65+ were already four times as likely to view Islam as a threat to British way of life than those aged 18-24 (43% versus 11%).[24] Again, we see how the conflict has provided an opportunity for those already harbouring anti-Muslim sentiment to double down on their hostility.

AGE AND GENDER

However, the generational differences in the 'responsive hostiles' are not as pronounced as we might expect. Assessing both age and gender together highlights some important and interesting nuances.
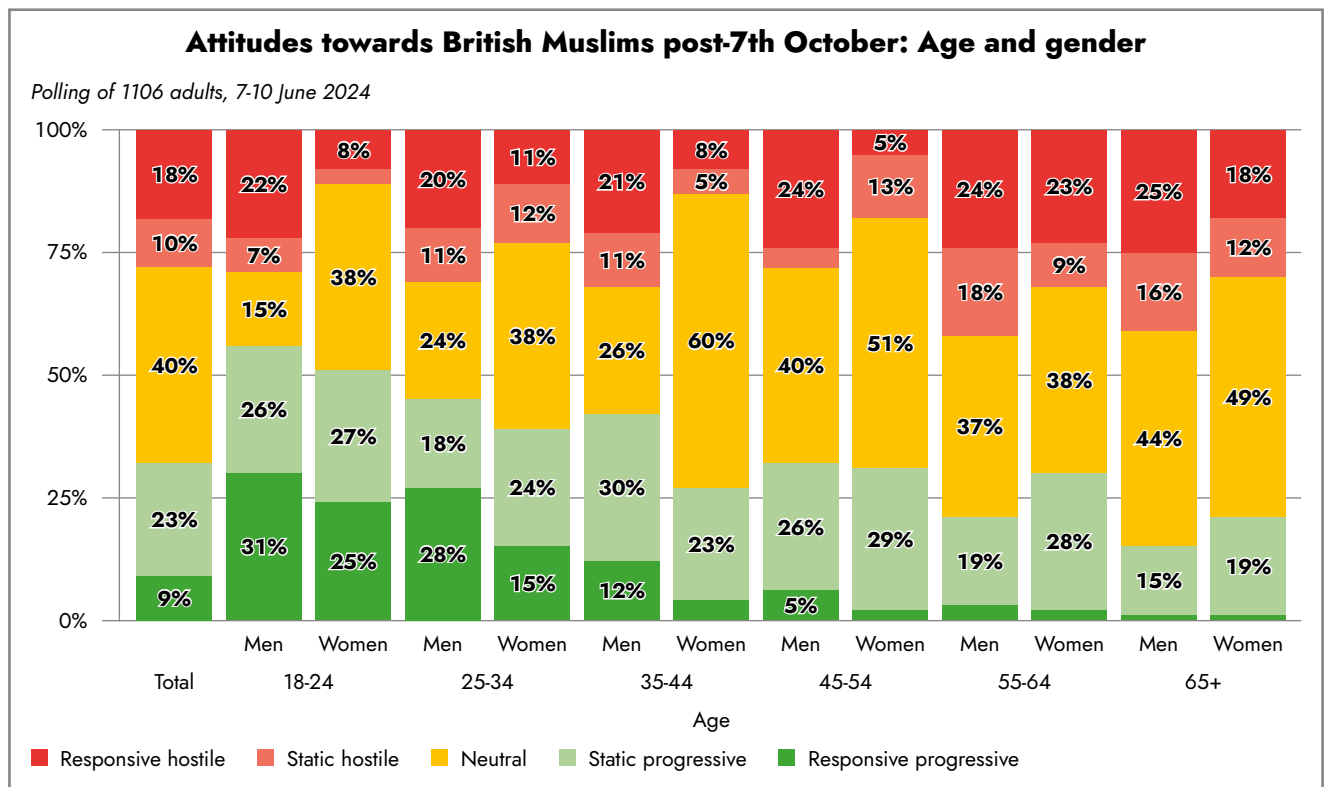
Interestingly, the proportion of men in the 'responsive hostile' group is fairly consistent across all ages, ranging between 20-25%.[25] Whilst there is a general tendency towards more liberal attitudes in younger generations, this only seems to be the case for women.

Thus the trend of younger women becoming more socially liberal contrasts heavily with the persistence

of hateful attitudes in a notable proportion of young men. Young men aged 18-24 are almost three times as likely to be 'responsive hostiles' than young women (22% versus 8%). Comparatively, older men aged 65+ are only 7% more likely than older women.

This raises two important considerations. Firstly, that traditional perceptions of anti-Muslim hatred as a fading issue in younger 'woke' generations risks ignoring a notable and growing part of the problem. Secondly, this adds to a growing collection of data drawing attention to the deepening fractures in younger generations along gender lines, and the importance of considering the potential fallout of this in wider cohesion initiatives.

Aside: The results in this graph show the 45-54 age group as an anomaly to the observation about generational gender divides, where men are almost 5 times more likely than women to be 'responsive hostiles'. This can be explained by the fact that only 7% of women in this age group reported having their attitudes affected at all, skewing the results to automatically be much lower than their male counterparts. 7% is surprisingly low, suggesting this group is notably disengaged from rhetoric surrounding the conflict and/or Muslims. There could be many reasons for this, including the fact that they spend less time online than younger cohorts, and are more likely to be in work and/or with younger children and therefore have less time to keep up with news than the older cohorts.

Attitudes towards British Muslims post-7th October: Age and gender

Polling of 1106 adults, 7-10 June 2024

Legend: Responsive hostile | Static hostile | Neutral | Static progressive | Responsive progressive

The great gender divergence

Increasingly, analysis of public attitudes to a range of key socio-cultural and political issues are identifying a growing divergence in the attitudes of young men and young women, not just in the UK but globally. This phenomena has quickly become a major talking point across multiple disciplines; the Economist's *Why Men and Women are Drifting Apart* article from March 2024 holistically captures the growing body of research seeking to understand its complex drivers, as well as the far-reaching and destabilising implications.[26]

Back in 2020 our *Youth, Fear and Hope* report identified these worrying trends. Most significantly, young men who felt emasculated by changing gender and social norms appeared increasingly sympathetic to far right narratives.[27]

But these gendered differences are not just prevalent in discussions about patriarchy or feminism. Much research points to the #MeToo movement as a pivotal trigger event for the development of reactionary views in young men[28]. However, they are pushing back against 'woke' culture more generally, resulting in reactive attitudes across a number of divisive issues; young men are also more likely to hold conspiratorial, anti-LBTQ+, anti-immigrant and, as this report explores, anti-Muslim views.

For many, anti-feminism has become the door through which they have become exposed to an increasingly broad range of hateful views across a variety of topics. Crucially, the views of so-called 'misogyny influencers' like Andrew Tate usually exist as part of a wider, hateful worldview that extends beyond just anti-feminism.

This is all situated against a background of escalating culture wars around issues like trans rights and #MeToo, a mainstreaming of conspiracy theories post COVID-19 and the explosion of online misinformation resulting from a lack of responsibility shown by social media companies. This has continuously provided fresh content for hateful actors to exploit for divisive purposes, underpinned by a growing anti-politics sentiment that speaks to the increasingly disenfranchised youth.

This is reflected in political participation. Across Europe we have seen young men fuel the rise of the

Andrew Tate

far right,[29] and in the recent UK general election, 12% of young men voted for Reform, compared to just 6% of young women, the biggest gender gap of all age cohorts.[30]

As well as political implications, this has wider socio-cultural ramifications. Gendered differences in hateful attitudes have always existed, but this gap is alarmingly increasing in younger generations. We are yet to see if young men will grow out of these reactionary attitudes or if they will follow the trend of shifting even more to the right as they grow older, further increasing divides. Regardless, this divergence within an age cohort raises worrying concerns about future cohesion.
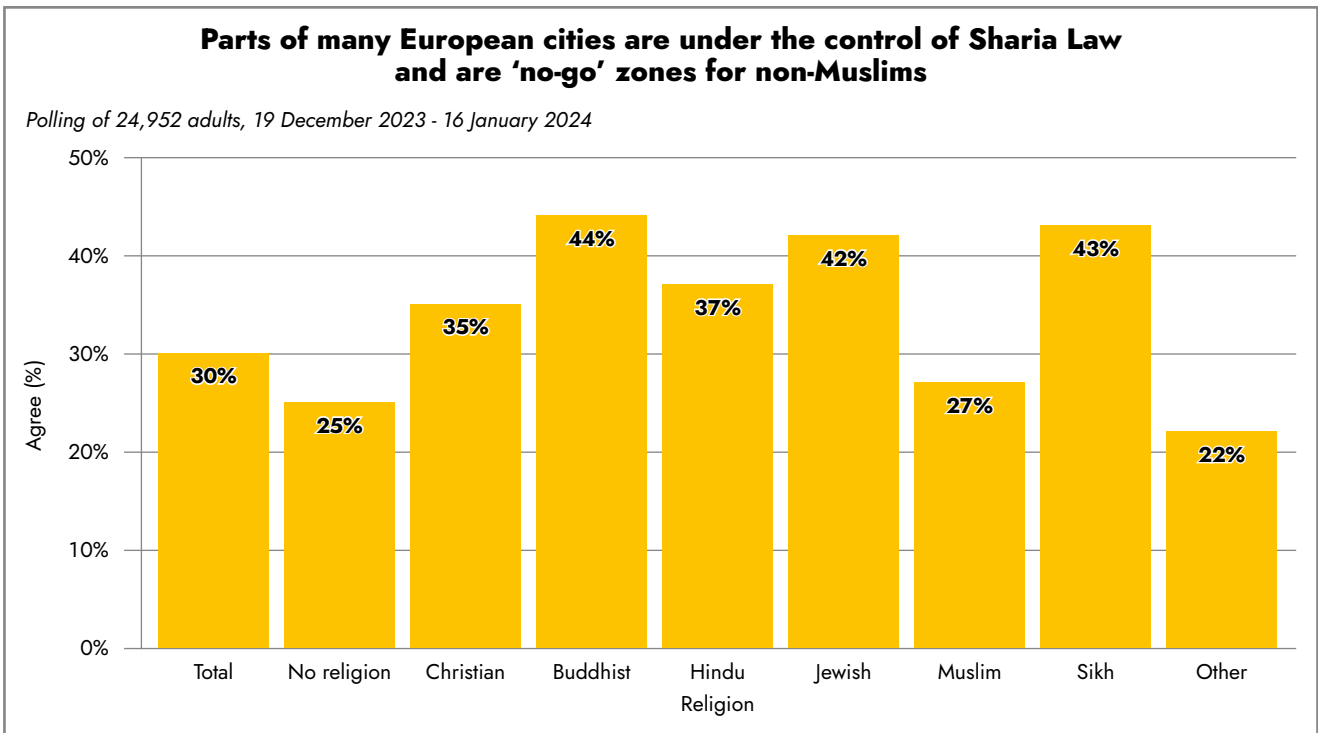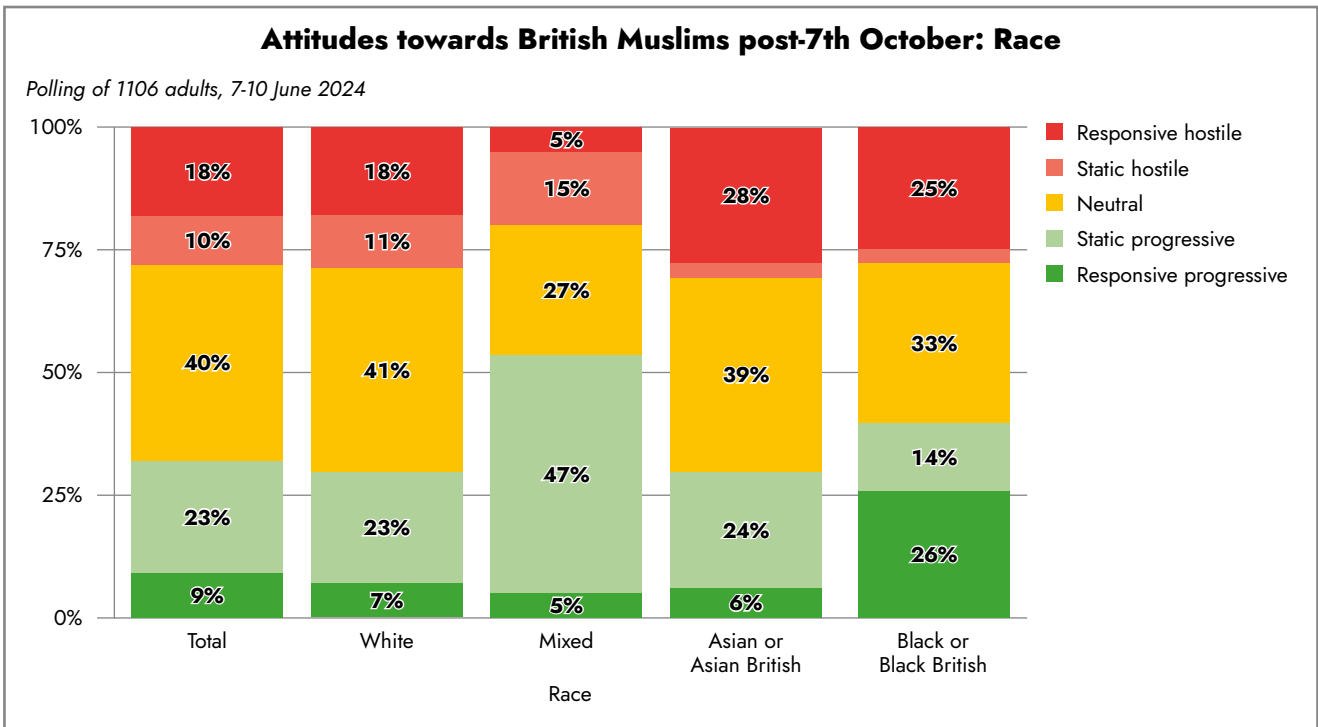
RACE AND RELIGION

Asian and Black respondents are more likely than White respondents to be 'responsive hostiles'.

This can partially be explained by considering the influence of relationships between ethnic minority and religious communities. However, our larger polling where these groups are weighted to be nationally representative indicates the presence of

anti-Muslim sentiment within these communities.

For example, Buddhist, Jewish, Sikh and Hindu respondents were more likely than Christian respondents and respondents with no religion to believe the conspiracy theory that parts of Europe are under the control of Sharia Law and are 'no-go' zones for non-Muslims.[31]

Just as the conflict in Israel and Palestine is feeding

Attitudes towards British Muslims post-7th October: Race

Polling of 1106 adults, 7-10 June 2024

Legend:
- Responsive hostile
- Static hostile
- Neutral
- Static progressive
- Responsive progressive

Race	Responsive hostile	Static hostile	Neutral	Static progressive	Responsive progressive
Total	18%	10%	40%	23%	9%
White	18%	11%	41%	23%	7%
Mixed	5%	15%	27%	47%	5%
Asian or Asian British	28%		39%	24%	6%
Black or Black British	25%		33%	14%	26%

Parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are 'no-go' zones for non-Muslims

Polling of 24,952 adults, 19 December 2023 - 16 January 2024

Religion	Agree (%)
Total	30%
No religion	25%
Christian	35%
Buddhist	44%
Hindu	37%
Jewish	42%
Muslim	27%
Sikh	43%
Other	22%

anti-Muslim hate in the UK, other international contexts and anti-Muslim politics also contribute to anti-Muslim sentiment domestically. Legacies of partition and the importing of interfaith tensions resulting from current and past geopolitical events in South Asia are just some explanations for the prevalence of anti-Muslim hate from ethnic minority respondents.

Widespread perceptions of anti-Muslim hate as predominantly an issue within white, non-religious or Christian communities risk neglecting a sizeable portion of the problem. Crucially, solutions that seek to address anti-Muslim hatred that either overlook or completely neglect to acknowledge its presense within other minority communities are limited in their ability to prompt widespread change.

Muslim-Jewish relations

NICK LOWLES

One of the casualties of the conflict in Gaza has been the relationship between Jewish and Muslim communities, with attitudes from one towards the other deteriorating badly since 7th October. Many Muslims, angry at the suffering of the Palestinian people and what they view as the indifference from Western powers, have become increasingly critical of the supporters of Israel and its actions. Many Jewish people have felt scared of pro-Palestine mobilisations and what they perceive as antisemitic rhetoric wrapped up in the language of anti-Zionism.

The views of British Muslims and British Jews are obviously shaped by the society around them, be it what they see on the news, the accounts they follow on social media and the opinions of their friends.

Of course, attitudes within both communities are broad and certainly not homogeneous. A HOPE not hate poll of 25,000 people, conducted in January 2024, shows this clearly. Of the 1,242 Muslims polled, 73% had sympathy for the Palestinian cause in the conflict, 5% for the Israeli side, 10% sympathised with both equally and 12% supported no-one or did not know.

Of the 232 Jewish people who were polled, 48% supported the Israeli side and 12% the Palestinians. A quarter, 24%, sympathised with both sides equally and 16% either supported neither side or did not know.

While this poll might not have been totally representative of either community from a statistical basis, given who in both communities are most likely to complete online polls, it does highlight the broad divergence of opinion within each community.

The growing polarisation between both communities has, of course, been exacerbated by the actions of hardliners on both sides, both from within their respective communities and from "supporters" outside the communities.

On the pro-Palestinian side, the hardline Islamist group, 5 Pillars, has not only stridently attacked the very concept of Israel and a Jewish state, but it has provided a platform for some of Britain's most hardline Nazis (like Nick Griffin and Mark Collett) to share their Jewish conspiracy theories. Outside the Muslim community, some on hard left groups and individuals like David Millar, talk up antisemitic narratives about Jewish influence and control under the guise of anti-Zionism.

On the Jewish side, there have been many incendiary and dehumanising articles by the likes of Melanie Phillips, who viewed any talk of a ceasefire or holding Israel accountable for possible war crimes as tantamount to support for Hamas terrorism and surrendering to Islamism. From outside the community, the likes of Douglas Murray has eagerly portrayed the Hamas assault on Israel as reflective of Islam more generally and proof that Europe needs to expel its Muslim communities before the conflict comes here.

From diametrically opposing views, both extremes demonise and vilify the other, making it almost impossible for any moderate or nuanced voices to be heard, often for fear of being branded a sell-out or traitor. Showing any sympathy for the position of Israelis after 7th October and are a Zionist stooge. Showing sympathy for the plight of the Palestinian civilians and calling for a ceasefire and you are a Hamas apologist. Within this context, dialogue becomes increasingly difficult.

What has become increasingly evident across many in both communities is the lack of empathy and understanding towards the views of the other. Many Jewish people – rightly or wrongly – do view the regular pro-Palestine demos in central London as 'hate marches', and many steer clear of central London on these days. Conversely, most of those attending the demos are doing so to show their solidarity with the Palestinian people and are furious that they are being labelled as 'hate marches'.

Likewise, many Jewish people have shown their solidarity with the Jewish people of Israel by displaying the Star of David. Many Muslims have shown their solidarity with the Palestinians by displaying the Palestinian flag. Many – in both communities – view the displaying of the other flag as an act of dominance and subjugation of the other.

Melanie Phillips

Dismissing the concerns of the other community, or reinterpreting the motives of the other, only further entrenches divisions and widens the polarisation. While there must be no compromise to, or excuse for, anti-Muslim hatred and antisemitism – and both have been on display – this task becomes harder when people view the other as homogeneous blocks. As our polling shows, this is not the case.

If we had a Government that sought to calm tensions, counter divisions and create forums for people to talk respectively, then maybe we would be in a better place. This could have given confidence for more diverse and moderate voices to be heard and extremists to be held to account for their rhetoric. Sadly, this was not the case. Indeed, we

had a Government that inflamed the situation, only making the suspicion and hostility between communities worse.

While the conflict in Gaza has deepened divisions between the Muslim and Jewish communities, there are grounds for hope. A quarter of British Muslims and Jews (24% each) believe the other have "similar habits, customs and values" to themselves, while just under a half of each group (both 47%) think they are very different.

While there is a gulf between the two sets of opinions, and against the increasing polarisation as a consequence of the conflict in Gaza, the fact that a quarter have positive views of the other provides us a platform from which to build.

POLITICAL LEANING

In June 2024, we asked respondents who they intended to vote for in the General Election scheduled for 4th July 2024. Overall, those with right leaning political beliefs are twice as likely to be 'responsive hostiles' than those with left leaning political beliefs (27% versus 13%).[32]

As this report will later explore, whilst anti-Muslim sentiment is present across the political spectrum, it has long been utilised and peddled by right wing politicians to appeal to right wing voters. The conflict in Israel and Palestine is another example of how around international events are narrated to fuel anti-Muslim sentiment domestically.
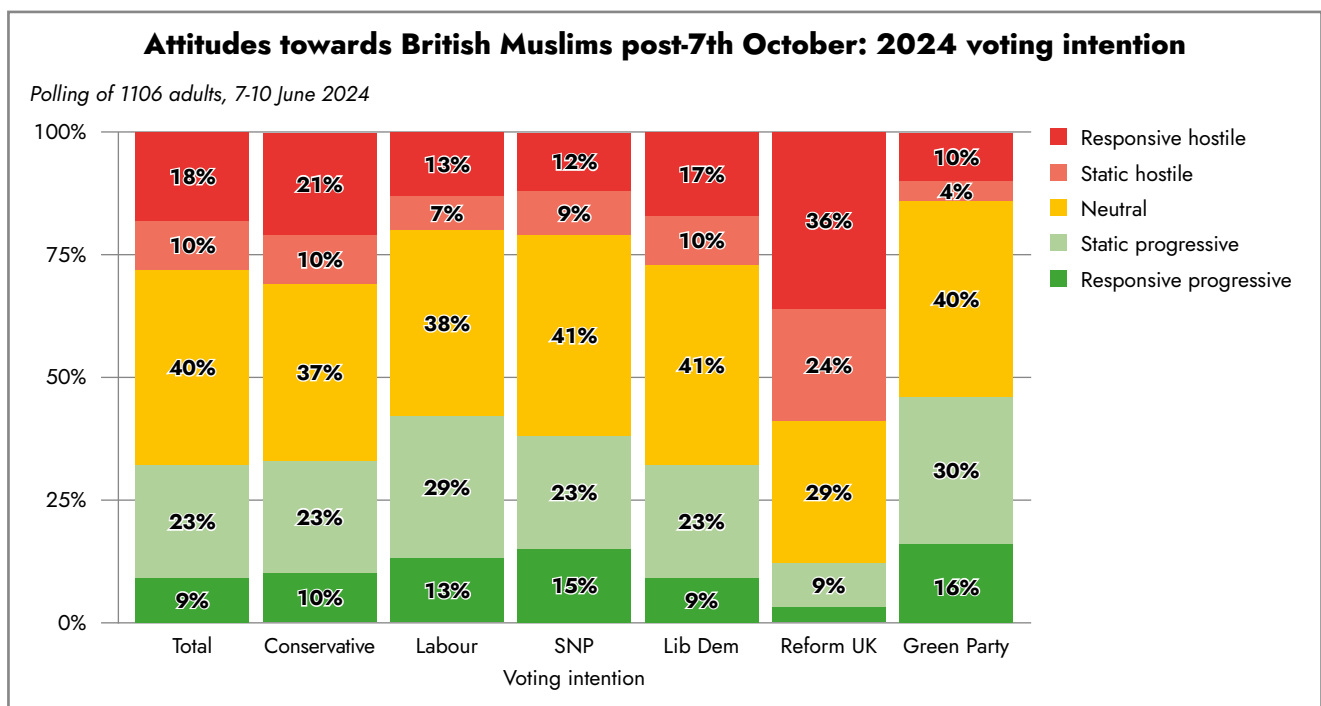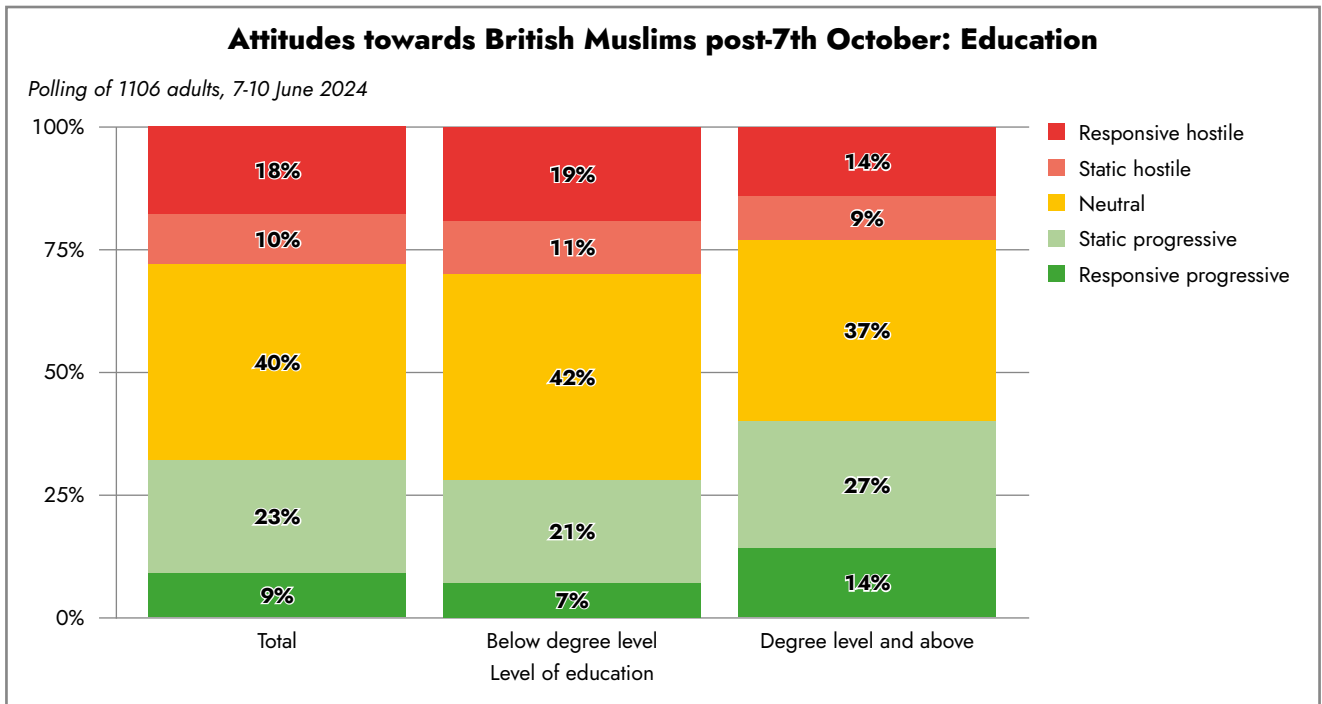
EDUCATION

Level of education is a fault line in anti-Muslim

sentiment, although notably not as significant as other characteristics.

Education has a much more notable impact on propensity for the conflict to have exacerbated positive attitudes than negative attitudes." to "Level of education has a more notable impact on positive attitudes than negative attitudes. Those educated to degree level or above are twice as likely to be in the 'responsive progressive' group than those educated to below degree level (14% versus 7%).[33]

This reflects pre-existing fault lines whereby having lower levels of education makes you more likely to adopt anti-Muslim sentiment, as well as disciminatory attitudes more broadly. Education has long been empirically identified as having a liberalising influence on attitudes by promoting egalitarian attitudes and heightened commitments to democratic norms of equality and tolerance.
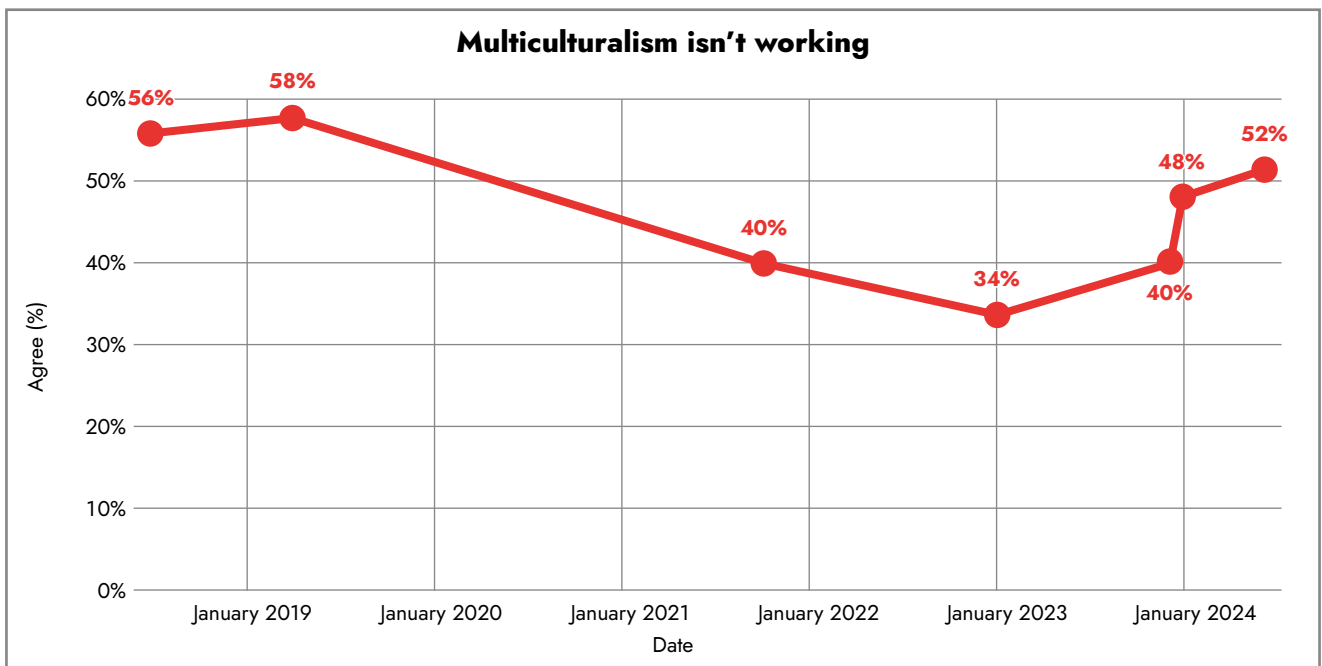

Attitudes towards British Muslims post-7th October: 2024 voting intention

Polling of 1106 adults, 7-10 June 2024

Attitudes towards British Muslims post-7th October: Education

Polling of 1106 adults, 7-10 June 2024

Legend:
- Responsive hostile
- Static hostile
- Neutral
- Static progressive
- Responsive progressive

	Total	Below degree level	Degree level and above
Responsive hostile	18%	19%	14%
Static hostile	10%	11%	9%
Neutral	40%	42%	37%
Static progressive	23%	21%	27%
Responsive progressive	9%	7%	14%

Level of education

Impact on wider cohesion

Despite it being a relatively small proportion of society who are 'responsive hostiles', these exacerbated negative attitudes towards Muslims are impacting wider cohesion, and people seem to be conscious of this. 52% acknowledge that the conflict has worsened tensions between communities in the UK.[34]

Perceptions of multiculturalism more broadly have also been notably impacted. Prior to October[35], the number of people who either directly opposed multiculturalism or believed it was failing was falling, reflective of the discernible progressive shift in attitudes and improvements in race relations more broadly. Since then however, this has risen, and continues to rise.

Our polling from December 2023 showed a 6% increase in scepticism to multiculturalism over the previous year.[36] This trend has continued; today, there is even more consensus that multiculturalism isn't working, up 12% in the last 6 months. Alongside this, there is heightened awareness of increasing tensions between different ethnic groups in the UK, from 53% in December 2023[37] to 60% in June 2024.[38]

Multiculturalism isn't working

Date	Agree (%)
	56%
January 2019	58%
January 2022	40%
January 2023	34%
January 2024	40%
	48%
	52%

What do Muslims think?

Over half (52%) of Muslim respondents reported that their personal safety has been affected since 7th October, a sobering reminder of the real and palpable consequences behind hate crime statistics.[39]

Despite this however, Muslims show a notable degree of positivity and optimism about community relations. They are much less likely than the national average to think that tensions between different ethnic and religious communities have worsened since 7 Oct (30% versus 52%), and twice as likely to think relationships between different communities in the UK will improve over the next few years (37% versus 19% average).[40]

There are several reasons why this might be the case. It is likely to be a deliberate rejection of the mainstream rhetoric around 'hate marches' and 'no go zones' that has sought to pit communities, particularly the Muslim and Jewish community, against each other.

Additionally, many commentators have noted the increasing diversity of the pro-Palestine movement. What traditionally has been seen in the UK as a cause championed by Muslims alone, the demonstrations in recent months have drawn an increasingly diverse crowd, including an energetic Jewish bloc.

There has also been a notable secularisation of the framing of the conflict; whereas historically it has often been presented as a religious 'Muslim Vs Jews' conflict, it is now being viewed outside the lens of religion altogether and instead as an issue of secular and objective human rights and international law, drawing in many more people to the movement.

Therefore whilst there is undoubtedly growing tensions between those who are pro-Palestine and those who are not, the growing number of different communities feeding into the pro-Palestine moment are likely to have provided a new and invigorated sense of solidarity and union, offsetting the enhanced hatred coming from a minority of the population.

Muslim communities themselves are particularly keen for initiatives that bridge divides, and looking to political leadership to set the tone for this. 86% want the Government to work towards improving cohesion, the most popular way to do so being programmes of work that bring communities together (26%).[41] There is undeniably an appetite from British Muslims to work with the Government to heal division, an opportunity for collaborative and successful work with community buy-in that should not be missed.

Photo: Mary Carson

EXACERBATED FAULT LINES

This broader impact on cohesion and attitudes to multiculturalism can be explained by the fact that attitudes towards the British Muslims since 7th October map onto pre-existing fault lines in society, accentuating existing divides. The conflict is not just increasing tensions between the hostile groups and Muslims, but more broadly between the hostile groups and the favourable groups. This is feeding into a wider picture of escalating divergence around key socio-cultural issues.

Crucially, on the opposite end of the spectrum to the 'responsive hostiles' exist the 'responsive progressives'. This group denotes the 9% of the population for whom the conflict has reinforced positive sentiment towards Muslims.

We have discussed above how men over 65 educated to below degree level, who align themselves with right wing political parties or ideology are overrepresented in the 'responsive hostiles'.

In contrast to this, young women with degrees, who politically subscribe to left leaning parties are four times more likely to be part of the 'responsive progressives' (37% versus 9%). For them, the conflict has allowed them to recommit to their preexisting affiliation to more tolerant attitudes.

Crucially, we see both of these demographic groups at the heart of various culture wars across a broad range of issues, doubling down on their beliefs at every given opportunity. Subsequently, we see the conflict enhancing the divides that already exist within society, enhancing polarisation at either end. Their reactions to the conflict are influenced by pre-existing attitudes towards not just Muslims but tolerance and progressivism more broadly. Most worryingly, their doubling down on these attitudes in the context of the conflict is contributing to escalating division and polarisation within the UK that already exists across multiple issues. This indicates implications not just for the Muslim community at the receiving end of this hatred, but also for wider cohesion and divergence between both of these groups. Notably, both of these groups are less likely than the average to believe that those with different views on the conflict can live together peacefully.[42]

However, promisingly, the demographic makeup of the broader favourable majority is generally reflective of wider society. Thus, despite entrenched views and enhanced polarisation at either end of the spectrum, there remains a diverse majority committed to peaceful coexistence within and between communities. This implies the likelihood of an overwhelmingly positive reception from this majority to Government interventions that stamp out hate and bridge divides.

THE 'NEUTRALS': RISKS AND OPPORTUNITIES

59% of the favourable majority have neutral, rather than positive, views about Muslims, making up approximately 40% of the wider population.[43] Similarly, 42% of polling respondents answered 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know' when asked if pro-Palestine demonstrations were 'hate marches', and 45% answered the same when asked if pro-Palestine demonstrations supported Hamas.[44]

This sizable portion of the population appears disengaged from discourse around the conflict. Regardless of whether this is intentional, due to lack of interest, or lack of exposure, this neutral group presents both opportunities and risks for cohesion.

Crucially, they could very easily be engaged by the wrong people, caught up by the emotive and inflammatory rhetoric by those seeking to use the conflict to spread anti-Muslim hatred. Targeted interventions and positive messaging work with this group will not only prevent this, but could kickstart more long-term, sustainable change where they become mediators between the hostile and progressive groups.

Looking forward to a hopeful future

There is undeniably a huge desire for improved relations, and ambition to stamp out hate. As laid out, there remains a favourable majority of the country who are concerned about the rising anti-Muslim sentiment coming from the hostile minority, and willing to engage with initiatives that heal divides.

Overwhelmingly, respondents agreed that anti-Muslim hate has no place in our communities (66%) and that it is wrong to blame an entire religion for the actions of a few extremists (63%).[45] The hostile groups, both responsive and stable, are a clear minority; basic humanity and the human desire for social connection overrides the specific context of this conflict which otherwise is seen to drive people apart based on the 'side' they take.

However, there is a distinct lack of optimism, rooted in recognition that the 'responsive hostile' group is becoming increasingly emboldened, and divides are deepening. The number of people who believe those with different views on the conflict can co-exist peacefully has decreased, from 57% in December 2023[46] to 45% in June 2024.[47] Similarly only 19% think that relationships between different communities will get better over the next few years,[48] dropping by 10% over the last 6 months.

Despite this, there is a clear desire for interventions and leadership from above, and a willingness to engage in initiatives that seek to bridge divides. 70% want to see the Government take action to improve cohesion,[49] and 61% specifically want to see

more programmes of work that bring communities together.[50]

There is a disjuncture between overwhelming public desire for solutions from the favourable majority, and perceptions of waning political will to implement them. There is a missed but still present opportunity for successful cohesion initiatives that addresses the fallout of the conflict, with positive reception and buy-in from a sizable and diverse majority who want to heal divides.

Online anti-Muslim hatred after 7th October

PATRIK HERMANSSON

The October 7 attacks by Hamas and the devastation brought against Gaza since have resonated globally and continue to take significant space in the national conversation in the UK. A surge in cases of both antisemitism and anti-Muslim hate here shows how faraway events also impact local communities and increase tension here.

This article examines the broader impact of these events on anti-Muslim sentiments in the UK by using data from social media platforms Twitter/X and Telegram. There has been a significant increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric in the UK, much of which regurgitates existing narratives and conspiracy theories rather than directly relating to the case of Israel-Palestine. In other words, the war has given justification to more openly express strong anti-Muslim hate.

The dataset

This article uses two sources of data. The first source is Twitter data for the period of July 1 to December 31, 2023, matching the keywords: "Muslim," "Muslims," or "Islam," but filtered to only include accounts based in the UK. The social listening tool Zignal is used to access this data and relies on its filtering.

The search terms are intentionally broad to capture as much data as possible to help us understand the rhetoric around Muslims in the UK. A large part of the dataset on Twitter/X will not be hateful or negative. However, while hateful slurs are naturally used to express hate against Muslims, it is often not the case. Racism is often expressed in other ways that cannot be easily identified by keywords, and the sampling allows for the discovery of broader topics of conversation such as immigration and specific conspiracy theories.

The second dataset is from far-right public chat rooms on Telegram, a messaging app that supports large group chats and has come to replace both Twitter/X and many other social media apps within the far right, largely because of its very lax moderation practices. This data is accessed for the same time period to better understand how explicitly far-right spaces have responded.

Much of the rhetoric used against Muslims after October 7, 2023, in the dataset builds on the same basic idea: that Muslim people everywhere can be held accountable for the actions of Hamas. This view is translated to a British context and adapted to well-known racist narratives. Political leaders who are Muslim are attacked and questioned, and the loyalty of all Muslims in the UK is questioned. It is also used to add fuel to the anti-immigration rhetoric, which has in recent years grown stronger.
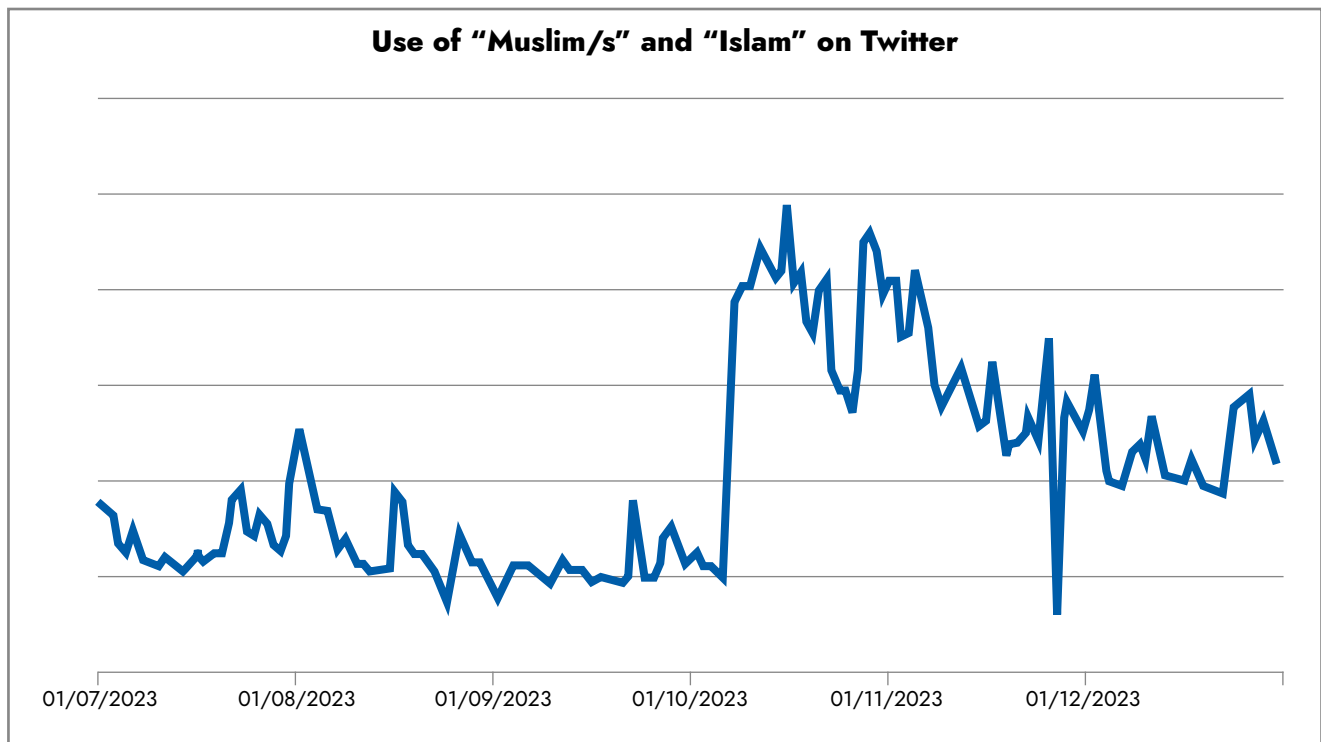
Fuel to existing anti-Muslim narratives

On October 7 and in the following days and weeks, there was a large spike in mentions of Muslims and Islam on Twitter/X. Most of this relates to Israel-Gaza and highlights a strong polarization where users support either Israel or Palestine. Another large group of the posts report and share news content or condemn the attack by Hamas or the retaliation by the Israel Defense Forces.

However, alongside this, there is a notable upsurge in broader anti-Muslim ideas and conspiracy theories. Using a deep learning model to extract common topics and themes from the Twitter/X posts, we find a large amount of content that expresses hate and calls for violence against Gaza and Palestinians but also Muslims elsewhere.

The events caused a notable increase in the expression of anti-Muslim hatred, and the strong reactions were not just limited to the events themselves. A large portion of content does not directly reference or relate to Israel-Gaza but is instead based on pre-existing narratives that have been reframed or given new or additional attention in relation. Many of these narratives and ideas are already frequent in anti-Muslim contexts and associated with the far right.

The three largest anti-Muslim themes that spiked after October 7 among British users on Twitter/X are: anti-immigration (a topic that has long been closely associated with anti-Muslim views), conspiracy theories relating to civilizational conflict between the West and accusations of disloyalty of British Muslims and the Muslim world, and hatred against Muslim public figures in the UK.

Use of "Muslim/s" and "Islam" on Twitter

01/07/2023   01/08/2023   01/09/2023   01/10/2023   01/11/2023   01/12/2023

Anti-immigration and being 'incompatible' with Britain

A significant portion of the messages in our dataset concerns Muslim immigration to the UK and Europe. The increase in attention relates to how closely anti-immigration and anti-Muslim rhetoric have become entwined in the last decades. Far-right activist groups in the UK have long focused on Muslim immigration as their primary target, often arguing that Islam is incompatible with cultures in Britain. While a part of these messages relates to potential increased migration from Palestine to the UK and Europe in the wake of the war, this is not a significant portion of the content.

Rather, the focus is on the existing anti-Muslim trope of immigration bringing in violent Muslims into the UK. The attacks on October 7 fed into the existing idea of Islam and Muslims being inherently violent and immigration therefore dangerous. It is a view that conflates the actions of a specific organization with Muslims in general and Islam as a whole. A post echoing this view on the evening of October 7 read, "it is time for Europe to stand with Israel and immediately end all Muslim immigration" and received 468 retweets and 3,800 likes. Another post read: "UK has facilitated the invasion and are now losing control. Most Muslim culture is not compatible with Western civilisation. The West is sowing the seeds of its [sic] own demise."

Many posts also increasingly took on a conspiracy theorist element over the coming weeks. One post which received 122 retweets read: "Islamaphobia [sic] was a fake term coined by Muslim lobbying groups in the wake of 9/11 to deter criticism of Islam and its role in Western society. It has no real significance beyond smearing those who oppose mass immigration."

Our dataset shows that the anti-immigration topic rose immediately after the attack; however, it continued to rise during the month until peaking in the last week of October. The increase over time was driven by the start of pro-Palestinian demonstrations. The planning of a demonstration on Remembrance Day (November 11) became a focal point on social media. Then Home Secretary Suella Braverman called the upcoming demonstration a "Hate march," focusing on its, according to her, antisemitic message.

In part because of its clash with Remembrance Sunday, it was also argued by some to be disrespectful against British traditions. A post which was shared extensively read: "The reason why muslims & immigrants want to disrespect Remembrance Sunday is because they have no connection to our history, culture or sacrifices."

Civilisational conflict

The idea of a coming civilisational conflict between the West and Muslim countries has for a long time existed in the far right but is ordinarily not expressed in explicit terms. Rather, conspiracy theories that focus on the supposed intentional weakening of the West and Europe through Muslim immigration and influence are more commonly seen. These are also found in our Twitter/X dataset but the violence of the attack following war put focus on the narrative

Use of "immigration" and "immigrants" within the dataset
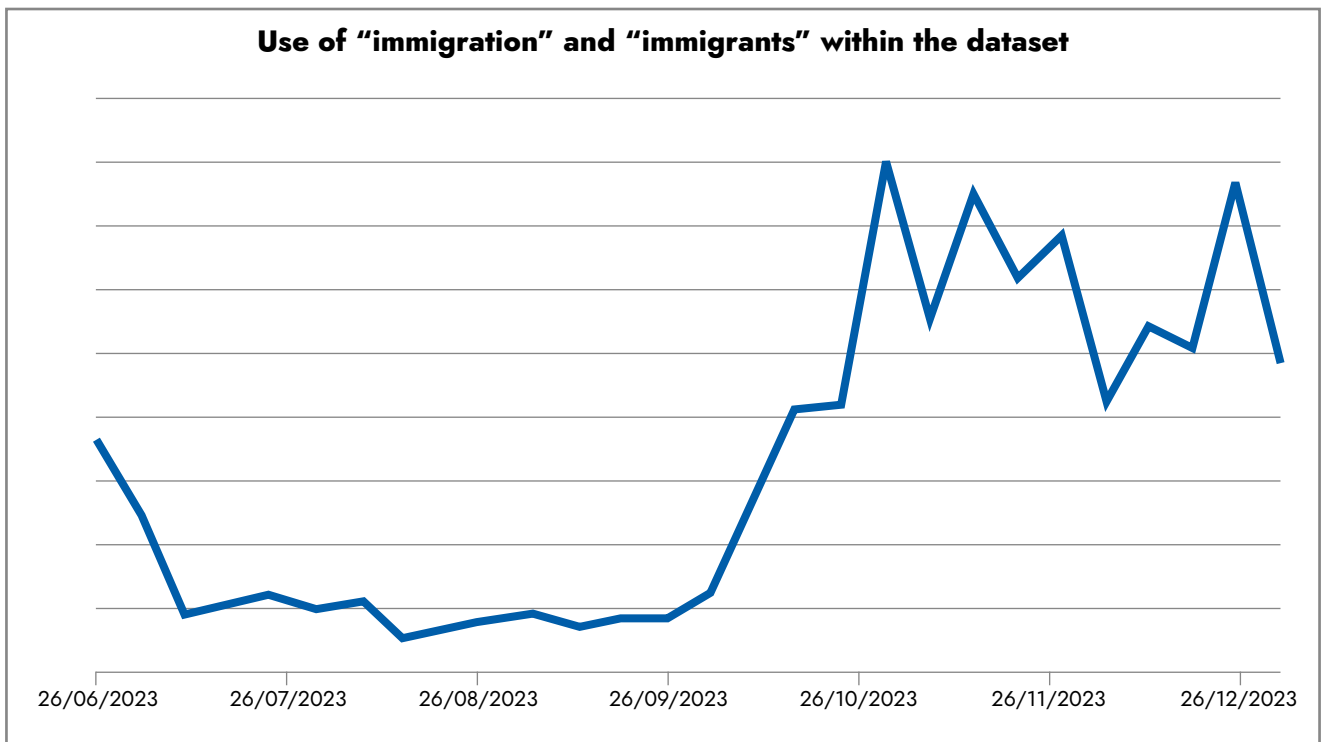
of armed civilisational conflict. A post on October 9 from a British Twitter/X user read:

> IF THE UK ENTER INTO WW3 & FIGHT ALONGSIDE ISRAEL AGAINST MUSLIM ALLIES IRAN, IRAQ, TURKEY, AFGHANISTAN, SYRIA, JORDAN ….
>
> *WILL UK CITIZENS THAT ARE MUSLIMS FIGHT ON THE SIDE OF THE UK OR FIGHT WITH THEIR FELLOW MUSLIMS ?*
>
> *WOULD SOME UK MUSLIM CITIZENS FIGHT AGAINST THE UK OVERSEAS ?*

The thread received over 4,000 reposts and 6,300 likes. The idea of a civilizational conflict also rests on the idea that Muslims in the UK and the West are loyal not to their current countries or societies but rather to other Muslims. The assumption is that Muslim people in the UK are not an integrated part of society, but rather invaders, secretly loyal to external powers.

The narrative taps into current tension and re-armament in Europe following the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. By framing the discussion around a potential global conflict, these posts tap into broader anxieties about national security and cultural preservation. These posts also tie into conspiracy theories of world elites orchestrating war and conflict for their own gain.

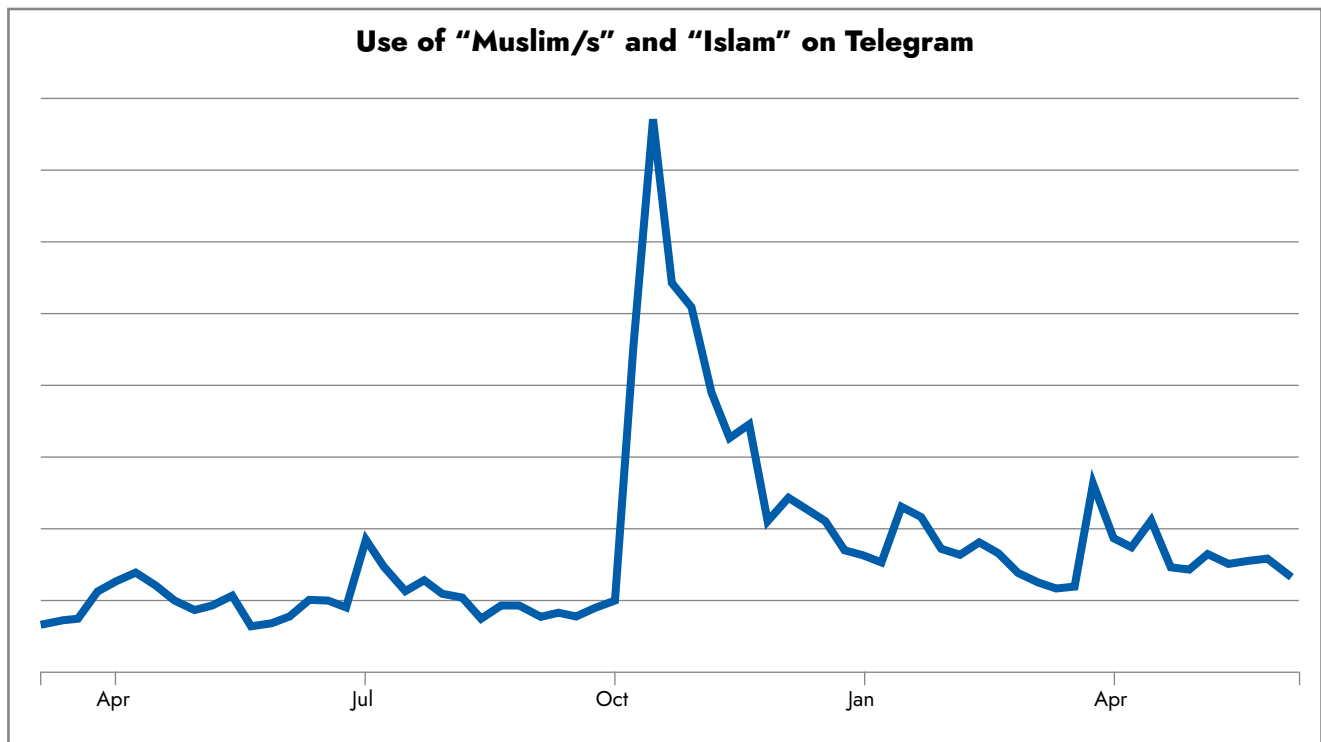## Hate against British Muslim political figures

Sadiq Khan and Humza Yousaf, then First Minister of Scotland, were two of the most frequently targeted

Sadiq Khan and Humza Yousaf

public individuals in the days after the October 7 attacks and some of the most frequently mentioned

Use of "Muslim/s" and "Islam" on Telegram

individuals in Britain during the time period in our dataset.

Khan and Yousaf were both accused of supporting Hamas despite both of them condemning the group's attack. Both leaders were also frequently targeted with an increased amount of anti-Muslim racism in the weeks following the attack. The accusation of disloyalty is also frequently found in these posts. A post which contains both antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism targeted at Yousaf read:

> I'm not saying the Jews are angels, stereotypes don't materialise from nothing, but Muslims are worse by an order of magnitude, once the Muslims become the majority or weasel there [sic] way into power like humza yousaf or Leo varadkar they serve only themselves

Khan was frequently accused of favoring Muslims over Jewish Londoners because of personal loyalty and applying different levels of policing towards pro-Palestinian and pro-Israel demonstrations. This narrative also has a conspiracy theorist element; "Don't forget Sadiq Khan is in charge of the Met Police & he is a Muslim," one user wrote.

Far-right response

Far-right chat groups are ordinarily overwhelmingly anti-Muslim. Mentions of Muslims or Islam are rarely used in a positive way. It is therefore unlikely that the events of October 7 significantly changed or impacted views on Muslims within this milieu to a significant degree. However, the events caused an increased focus on Muslims, which can have real-world consequences.

There is an exceptional spike on October 7 and the days immediately after the attack of messages mentioning "Muslim(s)" or "Islam." Whereas the time period from March to October had an average of approximately 4,500 messages per week across the far-right chats tracked, with smaller peaks reaching 9,000, the week of October 7 saw a rise to 24,000. Since the attack occurred on a Friday, this also does not fully take into account the magnitude of the increase. The following week counted 37,000 messages—an approximately 820% increase. The levels stayed significantly elevated for the rest of the year.

The data shows how the far right's interest was affected significantly by this external event and that it is reframed towards pre-existing issues. In this case, most messages mentioning Muslims or Islam use existing racist tropes and conspiracy theories in mostly two categories: they are anti-immigrant and focus on the danger and violence of Muslims, and they purport the anti-Muslim conspiracy theory of the Great Replacement, which holds that Muslim immigration into Europe is orchestrated in order to change the demographic makeup of European countries and make Muslims the majority population.

This is notably similar to the language used on the mainstream platform Twitter/X, where these narratives are among the most popularly espoused in the dataset, with the exception that Twitter/X also has a significant amount of support for Palestine and neutral messages reporting on the events of October 7, both of which are less prevalent in the Telegram dataset. The content on Telegram is, however, more explicitly violent.

"Hate March" comment fueling the far right

Speaking after a Cobra meeting on October 30, 2023, then Home Secretary Suella Braverman called a planned demonstration in support of Palestinians a "Hate march," arguing that it called for the "erasure of Israel from the map."[51]
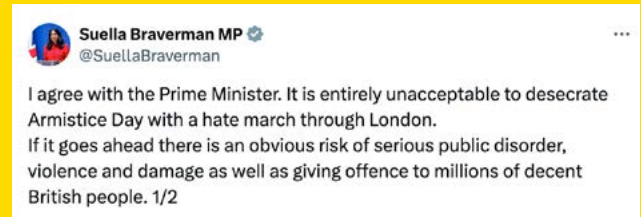
The demonstration was supposed to be held on Armistice Day, which further helped fuel discontent. Later that week, on November 3, Braverman tweeted a similar message reiterating that the demonstration was a "hate march" and that it was "unacceptable to desecrate Armistice Day."[52]

The comment caused an immediate reaction from far-right chat groups on Telegram, which shared and reiterated Braverman's comment immediately. Having not used the phrase previously to any significant degree, it resonated with the far-right, which were both overwhelmingly anti-Muslim and agreed with the framing that holding the march on Armistice Day was an insult.
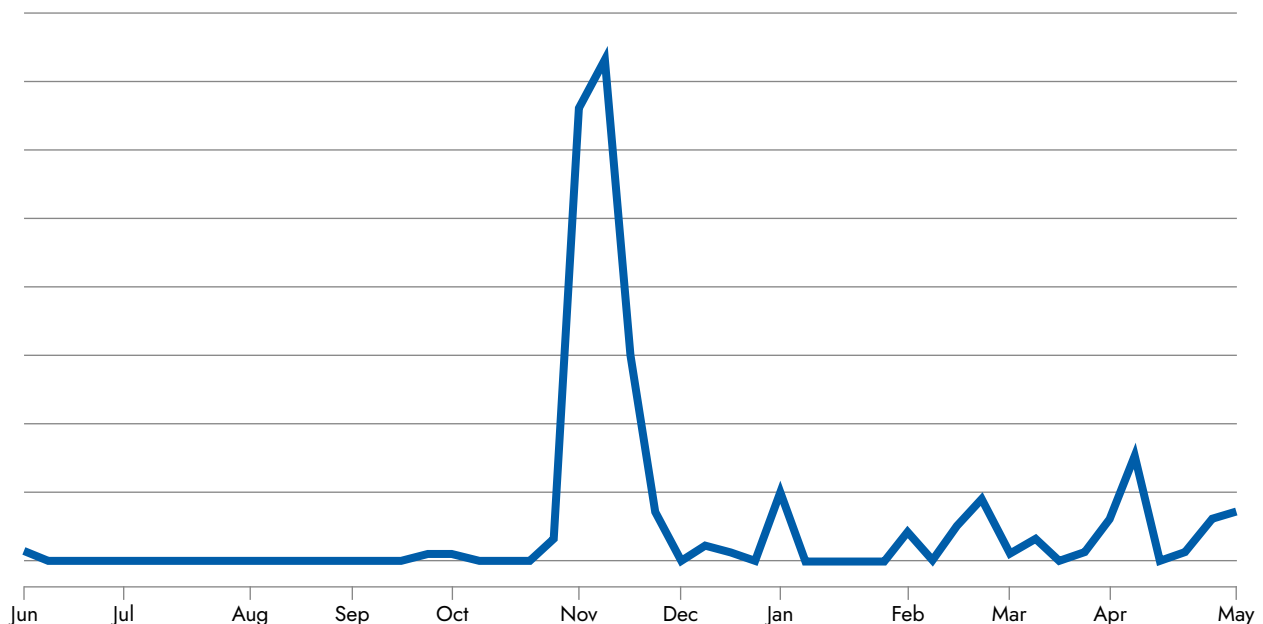

The framing of the protest as not just illegitimate and violent but as an insult against Britain resonated in far-right contexts and helped spur the narrative that Muslims and Islam were incompatible with life in Britain. One Twitter/X user posted on October 31: "The reason why muslims & immigrants want to disrespect Remembrance Sunday is because they have no connection to our history, culture or sacrifices." In a similar vein, Stephen Yaxley Lennon AKA Tommy Robinson posted on his Telegram ahead of the demonstrations, "Our Government is against us. Allowing pro Hamas Islamists to protest on the most sacred day in the British calendar is of course an example of that."

The amplification of Braverman's message shows how far-right narratives sometimes originate in the mainstream and how national leaders have the ability to insert narratives into fringe far-right environments. The language Braverman used aligned with what far-right activists already thought, and through her position as Home Secretary, she gave legitimacy to the view.

Suella Braverman MP
@SuellaBraverman

I agree with the Prime Minister. It is entirely unacceptable to desecrate Armistice Day with a hate march through London.
If it goes ahead there is an obvious risk of serious public disorder, violence and damage as well as giving offence to millions of decent British people. 1/2

Count of messages Per Week

Jun | Jul | Aug | Sep | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May

Mainstreaming anti-Muslim hate online

The events of October 7 had an immediate effect on the social media conversation in the UK. It opened a valve for anti-Muslim racism and amplified an already harsh atmosphere against Muslims. Notably, the dataset shows that only a minority of anti-Muslim messages directly relate to Israel-Gaza; rather, it helped to amplify well-trodden conspiracy theories and racist narratives.

The difference between our far-right Telegram dataset and the more mainstream Twitter/X dataset is notably small. Both mainstream and far-right platforms focus on similar issues, and the way they are expressed is only marginally different. It indicates that those who spread it feel that they are within the bounds of acceptable debate.

Anti-muslim hatred in the political mainstream

International events and, crucially, the political and media rhetoric that accompanies them, have historically been a catalyst for hardening domestic attitudes amongst those already predisposed to certain views. Events such as the Rushdie affair, the Gulf Wars, and the Iraq War have all had a polarising effect on public attitudes towards Muslims.

The escalation of conflict in Israel and Gaza has proven to be no exception to this. It has provided refreshed polarising narratives and the opportunity for people to reaffirm and recommit to existing values and mindsets.

But how does a conflict thousands of miles away trigger such intense repercussions in the UK, and what can an incoming Government learn from how this has played out so far?" to "But how does a conflict thousands of miles away trigger such intense repercussions in the UK, and what can the Government learn from how this has played out so far?"

Political rhetoric

Narratives perpetuated by political leadership are crucial here. The last few years in particular have seen the Conservative party sliding to the right, with much of their messaging echoing the extreme rhetoric of organised far-right actors and groups as they attempt to appeal to an increasingly right wing group of supporters. Culture war arguments targeting 'invasions' of asylum seekers, the "misguided dogma of multiculturalism" and lefty 'activist lawyers' have become increasingly normalised and divisive.

Time and time again mainstream political figures have echoed far-right clash-of-civilisations rhetoric that condemns Islam and Muslims as culturally incompatible with, and subsequently a violent threat to, the 'progressive' Western world. This has long been the cornerstone to anti-Muslim ideology and underpins the link between instability in the Middle East and heightened Islamophobia in the UK. These narratives originated during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, where televised 'Death to America' chants kick started the 'guilty by association' fallacy used to implicate all Muslims worldwide as part of a violent monolith. The major catalyst however was 9/11, which institutionalised and preserved this trope through the War on Terror.

Shehab Khan ITV
@ShehabKhan

2024 - Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman comes out and says Islamists are in charge of Britain now.

Suella Braverman: Islamists are in charge of Britain now

Former home secretary says UK is 'sleep-walking into ghettoised society' that threatens free expression

Charles Hymas, HOME AFFAIRS EDITOR

22 February 2024 • 9:29pm

Unsurprisingly therefore, almost immediately after the conflict escalated in October, the political mainstream - both politicians and the media - jumped to propagate a narrative that lazily but dangerously draws from Islamophic tropes.

Straight off the bat the then Home Secretary Suella Braverman villanised pro-Palestinian demonstrations as "hate marches", in a gross and inflammatory mischaracterisation. Labour MP Zarah Sultana was accused by Conservative MP Andrew Percy of giving a "free pass to the terrorists" by calling for a ceasefire, and then asked by the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to "call on Hamas and the Houthis to de-escalate the situation",[53] playing on an Islamophobic trope that, as a Muslim, Sultana not only supports Hamas but has ties with them. Later, Sunak claimed that "mob rule is replacing democratic rule" in the UK and that extremist groups "at home [are] trying to tear us apart".

The media

The media is pivotal in disseminating this fear towards incompatible and violent Muslims. Inflammatory headlines about the threat of "jihad on our streets"[54] and a religious war[55] that will "unite Muslims under one Islamic caliphate"[56] mobilise fear that can exacerbate community tensions and hasten breakdown of community relations.

The Centre for Media Monitoring published a report in March 2024 detailing the shortcomings of the British Media's output of the conflict. It found that not only were Israeli voices favoured over Palestinian voices, dehumanisation of Palestinians were often allowed on air with no considerable pushback, contributing to the legitimisation of anti-Muslim rhetoric. Furthermore, Palestinian symbols were overwhelmingly used to illustrate stories on anti-Semitism and there was widespread misrepresentation of pro-Palestine protests and protesters as inherently dangerous.[57]
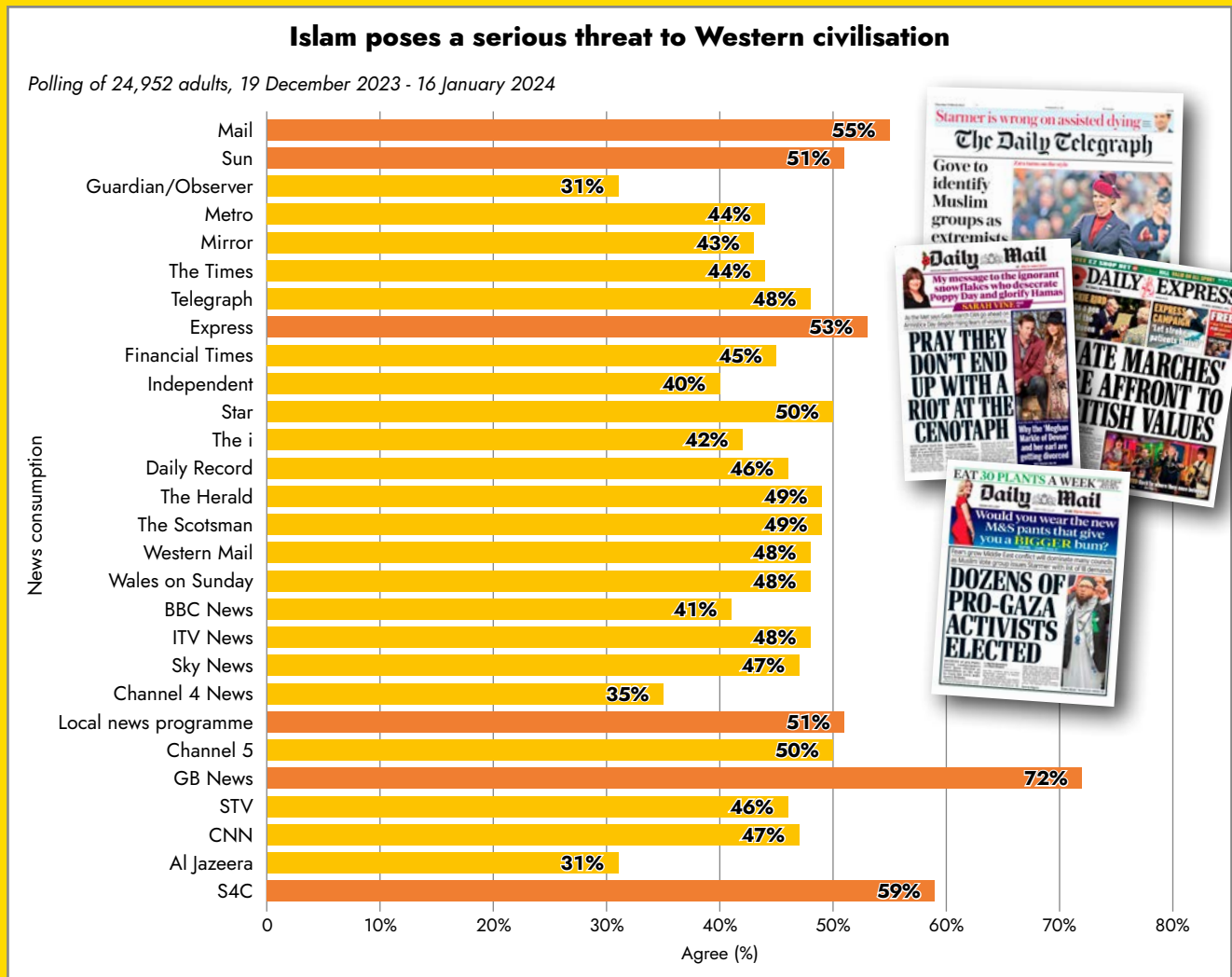
The concentration of these narratives in right wing press circles in particular further enhances polarisation. It is no surprise, for example, that those who get their news from the Daily Mail or GB news are more likely to think that Islam is a serious threat to Western civilisation.[58]

It is no surprise that these media outlets are perpetuating anti-Muslim rhetoric given those in charge of them. Paul Marshall, for example, co-owner of *GB news* and recent winner of the bid to buy *The Spectator* has himself endorsed Islamophic, racist and homophobic content online.

Back in February, HOPE not hate revealed hateful social media activity from Marshall, concealed behind a private and anonymised Twitter account. This activity found him to be liking extreme anti-Muslim conspiracies, amongst other hateful content, endorsing tweets calling for mass-deportations and suggesting the UK's "sizeable Islamic presence" makes a civil war imminent.[59]

Worryingly, Marshall is also in the running to buy *The Telegraph*, which would set him to be among the most powerful media owners in the country. The influence this would afford him exacerbates fears about the increasing role that the right wing media would play in spreading anti-Muslim, far-right narratives.

Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation

Polling of 24,952 adults, 19 December 2023 - 16 January 2024

News consumption	Agree (%)
Mail	55%
Sun	51%
Guardian/Observer	31%
Metro	44%
Mirror	43%
The Times	44%
Telegraph	48%
Express	53%
Financial Times	45%
Independent	40%
Star	50%
The i	42%
Daily Record	46%
The Herald	49%
The Scotsman	49%
Western Mail	48%
Wales on Sunday	48%
BBC News	41%
ITV News	48%
Sky News	47%
Channel 4 News	35%
Local news programme	51%
Channel 5	50%
GB News	72%
STV	46%
CNN	47%
Al Jazeera	31%
S4C	59%

Securitising dissent

Narratives about Islam and Muslims as antithetical to the values of the West have been frequently deployed to villainise, securitise and curb dissent about foreign policy in particular. The motives and identity of anti-war demonstrators in 2003 for example were routinely discredited within the discourse of 'deviance' and 'incivility', relegating their protests to the realm of disorder and violence much like the pro-Palestine 'hate marches' have been.

Situated against a backdrop of incremental erosion of democratic safeguards through laws such as the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023, the political response to this situation is part of a broader trajectory of undermining scrutiny and silencing political opposition from particular actors.

In March 2024, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Michael Gove launched a new definition of extremism in response to "the pervasiveness of extremist ideologies in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Israel on 7 October".[60] Whilst a valid cause that should receive attention, many have viewed this to be an attempt to specifically clamp down on Palestinian solidarity and Muslim 'mob rule', and an opportunity to press forward with the recommendations from the Shawcross report, itself already criticised for its overt anti-Muslim framing.

Discriminatory definitions of extremism and how they feed into the Prevent system have long been documented and criticised as a tool to target and demonise Muslims and stifle their political agency.[61] More than ever, we see (counter)extremism being used as a political tool guided by an ideological agenda, and not as a means of bringing genuine and long-term public security. The expansion of government and law enforcement powers to stifle legitimate political engagement is being used to specifically target Muslims and expressions of Palestinian solidarity.

This is problematic for a number of reasons. Broadly, the implementation of these policies further feeds into rhetoric about 'violent' Muslims in a chicken-and-egg loop as they 'confirm' and therefore justify anti-Muslim narratives.

Securitising Muslim dissent also stifles Muslim political agency through self-censorship as public engagement feels increasingly unsafe, an effect that is not only discriminatory but contradictory to values of a healthy, pluralistic democracy and raises serious wider concerns about the state of democracy.

This is also hugely counterintuitive and counterproductive to the aims of counter-extremism. Securitising dissent risks escalating fear and distrust of authorities, and Government refusal to engage with Muslim communities and organisations about their concerns regarding

Photo: Socialist Appeal

Prevent only compounds and escalates this further. The resulting perceptions of censorship and disenfranchisement is for many a precursor for extremism; it underpins the anti-politics movement and encourages people to seek out alternative forms of representation which makes them vulnerable to radicalisation. The impact on self-censorship also makes it so much harder to identify genuine risks of radicalisation, as people withdraw from engagement with authorities as it feels unsafe.

A green light for anti-Muslim hate

The Conservative Party's response to the conflict not only legitimised but actively encouraged widespread Islamophobia veiled behind the facade of security concerns. Assessing the views of the 'responsive hostiles', it is clear these narratives and policies have cut through and play a significant role in the heightened hatred. 65% of this group think those attending a pro-Palestine demonstration are supporting Hamas (versus 30% average),[62] 59% think that the demonstrations are 'hate marches' (versus 28% average),[63] and 61% think that pro-Palestine demonstrations are motivated by a hatred for Jews and a desire to see the destruction of Israel (versus 31% average).[64]

Whilst important to stress that these views about British Muslims and pro-Palestine supporters are being adopted by a minority of the population, there are wider implications to consider. Worryingly, 63% of the public are concerned about the threat of an Islamist terror attack in the UK in the context of the ongoing conflict.[65] Whilst divisive narratives may not be affecting widespread attitudes towards British Muslims in particular, they are clearly tapping into fears and perceptions of violence associated with Islam that do exist more broadly.

Between free speech and hate speech

The UK's Public Order Act (POA) lays out the ways in which people may be prosecuted for 'stirring up hatred' against religious groups.

An ongoing conversation in this space is the thresholds for which religious hate crimes can be persecuted (Part IIIA of the POA, added in 2006), specifically how and why it differs from the threshold for racial hate crimes (Part III of the POA). The problem comes down to the fact that the former is more restrictive and difficult to convict under; religious hatred requires proof of *intent* to stir up hatred, and does not include speech that is 'insulting'.

Many of those who work in religious hate speech and law argue that the threshold for religious hatred should be lowered to match that of racial hatred, in order to avoid creating what has been described as a 'hierarchy of hatred'.

However, there is valid concern that lowering the threshold risks blurring the boundaries between criticism and hatred, and criticism and legitimate debate of religion is something that must be upheld in healthy democracy. Indeed, conversations about hate speech are often approached as a dilemma of competing values, with free speech and individual autonomy variously pitted against dignity, equality and other notions of harm.[66]

One potential solution to this balance could involve using the Rabat Plan of Action,[67] published by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2012. The Rabat Plan sets out a clear, six-part test to ensure both vulnerable minority groups and freedom of expression are protected. Crucially, the Rabat Plan also acknowledges the importance of the wider socio-cultural context within which hate crimes occur. Subsequently, among the key factors proposed in the Rabat Plan of Action are the collective responsibility of public officials, religious and community leaders, the media and individuals to nurture social consciousness, tolerance, mutual respect, and intercultural dialogue.

Legislating for such a contextual and nuanced issue is difficult and often problematic. However, the Rabat Plan presents a missed opportunity for the Government to use clear, UN-backed guidance to strengthen the efficiency of its hate crime laws by considering how contextual nuance can be coded into legislation to strengthen protections for everyone.

Roles and responsibilities of a new Government

Whilst it was a Conservative Government that pursued this anti-Muslim agenda in the post 7th October landscape, the drivers and consequences of this do not simply disappear with a change of Government.

Crucially, anti-Muslim hate is not only an issue of the political right. The left has also perpetuated dangerous Islamophobic stereotypes and policies that demonize and securitise Muslim communities. Under Tony Blaire and Gordon Brown, new Labour years were deeply hostile for Muslims. Indeed, it was this Government that pursued the War on Terror, arguably setting the narrative of Muslims as the "enemy within" and the blueprint for a securitised community.

Anti-Muslim hatred off the back of 7th October does not automatically end because the Conservatives are no longer in power. Labour must have a plan to address the fallout that the previous Government not only ignored but actively encouraged. This should include specific resources and interventions at the community level that seek to rebuild trust and cohesion in communities where anti-Muslim hate has thrived, repairing the relations that have broken down.

However, this will only be successful if Labour also commits to ensuring that its own party, as well as the political mainstream more broadly, is not an enemy of progress. Labour must make a concerted effort to ensure that it does not provoke, legitimise or even risk downplaying anti-Muslim sentiment. They must recognise the influence that the political mainstream has in setting the direction for public opinion and therefore both the risks and opportunities that reside here, seeking nuance that can and should underpin responsible and successful leadership and policy.

This should include clear standards and red lines for language and narratives that violate their responsibility to pursue community cohesion, with repercussions when they're crossed, applicable to all levels of government officials. Similarly, Labour has a duty to address the consequences of the democratic backsliding pursued by their predecessors, and engage with the pro-Palestine movement as a legitimate form of democratic participation and protest.

Muslim Communities Ignored: A Failure of Government Engagement

NICK LOWLES

The failure of the Government to engage with any Muslim organisation post 7th October not only highlights a longstanding policy failure but reflects increasingly anti-Muslim attitudes at the heart of the administration.

Within days of the murderous Hamas attack in Israel, Suella Braverman, the then-Home Secretary, announced £3 million of extra funding to protect schools, synagogues and other Jewish community buildings. On the same day, the Prime Minister met representatives from UK policing and the Jewish community with ministers in Downing Street for discussions on policing protests. The aim of both initiatives was to protect an increasingly frightened British Jewish community against any violent reprisals.

The Jewish community was genuinely scared. The Community Security Trust recorded a 400% increase in antisemitic incidents in the days following the Hamas attack. Jewish schools were closed and extra security guards were posted at community buildings and synagogues.

The Government, quite rightly, was not prepared to let British Jews be targeted.

However, the same concerns were not shown to Britain's Muslim communities, who were similarly coming under attack. There was no immediate offer of support, no roundtables and no immediate funding to provide security to community buildings.

In fact, quite the opposite. They were ignored, vilified and ostracised.

When Suella Braverman wrote to police chiefs on 10th October urging them to watch for rising antisemitism, there was no similar concern for anti-Muslim hatred.

A Freedom of Information Act from Open Democracy found no evidence that the Home Office held any meetings, phone calls, emails or briefing papers from the same period of time regarding the possibility of publishing a similar letter about hate towards Muslim and pro-Palestinian groups.

Given Braverman was the Home Secretary, the Government's failure to reach out to reassure and protect the Muslim communities of Britain should not be a great surprise. She has long considered Islam a threat to Britain and Europe, dismissing concerns about Islamophobia within the Conservative Party as "hysteria". In a speech less than a fortnight before the Hamas attack, Braverman claimed "the misguided dogma of multiculturalism" had proved "toxic" for Europe and that Britain had allowed people to come to the UK with the aim of "undermining the stability and threatening the security of society".

Worse still, only a month before the Hamas attacked, Braverman publicly backed key anti-Muslim commentator Douglas Murray, telling Parliament that he held "mainstream, insightful and perfectly decent political views".

It would be easy to put the Government's approach down to the increasingly extreme views of Suella Braverman, but that fails to see a pattern of behaviour that has dominated official policy and action for several years.

Disengagement

It was in the final years of the Tony Blair Government, as Britain was reeling from growing Muslim anger at Britain's involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and then public revulsion at the 2005 terrorist attacks, that official policy towards Britain's Muslim communities changed. There was increasing concern – and pressure – about the Government funding and even engaging with individuals and groups who were seen to excuse Islamist extremism at home and abroad.

Eventually, Hazel Blears, the then Communities Secretary, announced more stringent rules for who the Government would and would not engage with. The consequence of this meant that the Government broke off links with many national Muslim community organisation that they considered insufficiently immune from extremism and illiberal views.

While refusing to engage with such organisations might have made moral sense, all it did was push

these very organisations towards the likes of George Galloway and Respect, who at the time was linking opposition to the foreign wars the UK was engaged in with domestic grievance politics.

The short-sightedness of this approach was evident in the Spring of 2013, when Mohammed Saleem and then British soldier Lee Rigby were murdered. At a time of heightened tensions, when the anti-Muslim English Defence League was attempting to stir up hatred with demonstrations and protests across the country, the Government had no meaningful connections with any prominent Muslim organisations, let alone a strategy to reassure communities and calm tensions.

The fallout from this led to significant changes within Government, as they realised they needed to do more to engage with Muslim communities. While there was no change to its relationship with larger Muslim organisations, the Government, spearheaded by the then Home Secretary and later Prime Minister, Theresa May, changed its approach to engaging with key individuals and more local groups.

The fruits of this approach became apparent in 2017, after a series of terrorist attacks in London and Manchester tested the cohesiveness of British society. Literally within minutes of the first attack, on Westminster Bridge, an action plan kicked in to bolster, support and amplify moderate, unifying messages. Key community leaders – Muslim and non-Muslim – were called into the Home Office and offered any support they needed. The driving focus was in preventing extremists, from all sides, dominating the agenda.

This approach was in sharp contrast to what had happened back in 2013 and also what again happened in October 2023. In fact, the situation in 2023 was far worse. In 2013, the Government neutral positioning left a vacuum for extremists to fill. Ten years later, there was nothing neutral about the Home Secretary's response. Suella Braverman was a partisan actor.

Refocusing counter-extremism

The more engaged and collaborative approach devised under May's stewardship withered with her departure as Prime Minister. Boris Johnson was largely indifferent to anti-Muslim hatred and even community cohesion more generally. His libertarian beliefs quickly ended attempts by May to establish a working group to help create a working definition of Islamophobia.

But it was his appointment of Michael Gove to the post of Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in September 2021 that really began to shift policy. An unwritten policy of indifference increasingly became open hostility.

Michael Gove has been at the forefront of pushing for a more combative approach to tackling Islamism

for two decades. In the aftermath of the 7/7 terrorist attacks, Gove wrote *Celsius 7/7*, a book which called for a frontal assault on the ideology behind the terrorist attacks and a condemnation of liberal society that he accused of allowing this extremism to flourish.

He was a member of David Cameron's Task Force on violent extremism, set up after the murder of Lee Rigby, where he proposed forcing all mosques into signing a charter of non-violence and creating an extra layer of screening for any Muslims taking jobs in the civil service. Fortunately, these suggestions were rejected by Cameron and the police.

One consistently fierce critic of Gove has been Baroness Warsi, a former deputy chair of the Conservative Party and former minister under David Cameron. In 2017, she commented:

> *"Politically I find his views and what I saw in Government deeply, deeply worrying,"* she commented in 2017.

> *"I'm just pleased the Conservative Party didn't feel he was fit to be Conservative leader. If Michael had been left to run this [anti-extremism] policy in the way he would run it, we would be seeing the kind of things that we're now seeing in the White House."*

> The *"Gove-esque view of the world"* is *"very much in line"* with the anti-Muslim policies of Donald Trump and his *"crazy people"*, she added.

> *"The only difference is in Britain there are too many other rationals among the politicians to say: we're not going down that route."*

Under Gove's stewardship, the Communities department began to dismantle what little work it was already doing on anti-Muslim hated. The Government's Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, formed in 2012 with the encouragement of Nick Clegg, the then Liberal Democrat Deputy Prime Minister, withered and died.

Next came the removal of moderate Leeds imam Qari Asim as a government advisor last year, after he allegedly backed calls for a film about Prophet Muhammad's daughter to be banned.

Qari Asim had been central to governmental engagement with Muslim communities for more than a decade and had fronted up numerous government initiatives, led interfaith dialogue between Jews and Muslims and been strident in his condemnation of all forms of extremism over the years.

While he was to later admit that the wording of his offending Facebook post was not the best, anyone who knew him, including civil servants and numerous government ministers who have worked with him over the years, knew that he was not an extremist or an intolerant Islamist as Government briefings tried to suggest.

That he found out about his sacking through a letter posted up on social media was even more reprehensible.

While Qari Asim was publicly removed as an advisor, several other Muslims involved directly or indirectly in the Prevent and other counter-extremism programmes told HOPE not hate at the time that they left their jobs under Gove's tenureship after effectively being frozen out or sidelined.

The fact that moderate Muslims, many of them progressive Muslim women, felt forced to leave their jobs, not only reflected badly on where the UK's counter-extremism strategy was going but should have set alarm bells ringing. If the most moderate Muslim officials and community leaders could no longer stomach the direction of travel then there was almost no chance of wider community involvement.

Gove was just one of a number of hardline anti-Islamist actors who became increasing central in the Government's approach to extremism and cohesion during this period.

In January 2021, William Shawcross was appointed as the new Independent Reviewer of Prevent, the counter-terrorism programme that had been created in 2007 but dogged by controversy ever since.

Of course, Shawcross was anything but independent, having previously been director of the Henry Jackson Society, which had led calls for a more combative approach to Islam for many years.

Shawcross himself had a long history of strident views attacking Islam and Islamists. In one article, written in 2006 he railed against a fifth column of Islamists seeking to destroy British society. In another, published shortly before the 2010 General Election, Shawcross criticised what he saw as Labour's appeasement of Islamism, claiming that the party's immigration policy was designed to dilute Britishness and empathised with those who felt no choice but to support the British National Party (BNP).

In 2012, as a director of the neoconservative think tank, the Henry Jackson Society, he said: "Europe and Islam is one of the greatest, most terrifying problems of our future. I think all European countries have vastly, very quickly growing Islamic populations.".

These strident views alone should have prevented him from undertaking a review into Britain's counter-extremism policy, but clearly he was picked precisely because of his ideological position.

Rather than trying to build a consensus that could take Prevent forward and build cross-community consensus, it doubled-down on one side of the argument, ensuring that Prevent will remain distrusted.

In accepting all 34 recommendations for the programme, Home Secretary Suella Braverman said: "The review is unflinching. Prevent needs major reform."

"Prevent has shown cultural timidity and an institutional hesitancy to tackle Islamism for fear of the charge of Islamophobia. Prevent's focus must be solely on security, not political correctness."

Receiving less attention, but no less important, was the recommendation for Prevent to shift its emphasis away from identifying and addressing vulnerabilities to protecting the public from those inclined to pose a security threat.

The Review said that not only does Prevent focus too much on far-right extremism and not enough on Islamist extremism, but the definition of what constitutes far-right extremism itself is too broad and Islamist extremism too narrow.

"Prevent is a security service, not a social service," commented the Home Secretary.

As HOPE not hate wrote at the time, "The Shawcross Review is an ideological assault on current counter-extremism policy, designed to dramatically shift the focus and scope of its remit."

Reset moment

The capture of Britain's counter-extremism and community engagement strategies by the so-called neo-Conservative Right greatly contributed to the total lack of engagement with Muslim communities in the immediate aftermath of 7 October and the failure to offer community reassurance and cross-community bridge-building.

Politicians will always have their own political views and will always seek to shape policy accordingly, but a central role of Government must be to prevent events increasing and worsening community tensions and conflicts. This did not happen last autumn and Suella Braverman actually poured petrol on the fire.

It is imperative that the new Government reflect on what has occurred, both how the past administration dealt with the immediate impact of 7 October but also the wider counter-extremism and cohesion strategy. Failure to do so will see mistakes happening again and communities further divided.

From rhetoric to violence

How incendiary and often false claims by politicians and the media led to violent disorder on the streets of London on Armistice Day

NICK LOWLES

A WhatsApp group, populated with current and former football hooligans, and inspired by political and media rhetoric, became a key organising platform that led to violent disorder in central London on Armistice Day – Saturday 11 November.

A total of 126 people were arrested on the day, the vast majority of them part of a 1,500-strong mob who were protesting against the much larger pro-Palestinian demonstration and more were arrested afterwards. It was the worst public disorder London had seen since far right sympathisers protested against a Black Lives Matter march in the summer of 2020.

The WhatsApp group, run by Glasgow-based Millwall fan, Steve Dolin, had 680 members at the beginning of November where the conversations were generally about football, drinking and reminiscing about fights in the good old days. There was very little talk about events in the Middle East or even about the pro-Palestine demos that had been taking place in London over the previous weekends.

Indeed, a protest organised by the far right group Turning Point UK to "protect" the Cenotaph against an earlier pro-Palestine demo attracted just 25 people.

All this changed on 2nd November as some Government ministers and elements of the media raised the prospect of the Cenotaph being "desecrated" by pro-Palestinian protestors on Armistice Day.

One of the most prominent voices pushing this narrative was the right wing commentator Douglas Murray. He tweeted: "UK Hamas supporters are now planning a 'million man March' on Remembrance Sunday. They plan to defame our war-dead and desecrate the Cenotaph itself. This is the tipping point. If such a march goes ahead then the people of Britain must come out and stop these barbarians."

This incendiary tweet was seen over three million times and 'liked' by 35,000 people.

Also pushing the idea that the Cenotaph was going to be targeted by pro-Palestinian supporters was Tommy Robinson and his key supporters.

"The world will be watching, they MUST cancel this march. This is the day to remember our War Dead in all conflicts during our countries [sic] history," wrote Danny Roscoe, who works for Robinson's Urban Scoop.

"We will be bussing in Patriots to defend our statues and capital. We expect the same treatment from the WOKE police."

"This needs the biggest effort from all MEN. Drop your plans, get to London and protect our city and statues!"

These tweets caused outrage in the hooligan fraternity and immediately the tone of Dolin's WhatApp group changed, with many angry messages being almost instantly circulated.

Within 24 hours the first details of a counter-protest were being posted up on the group.
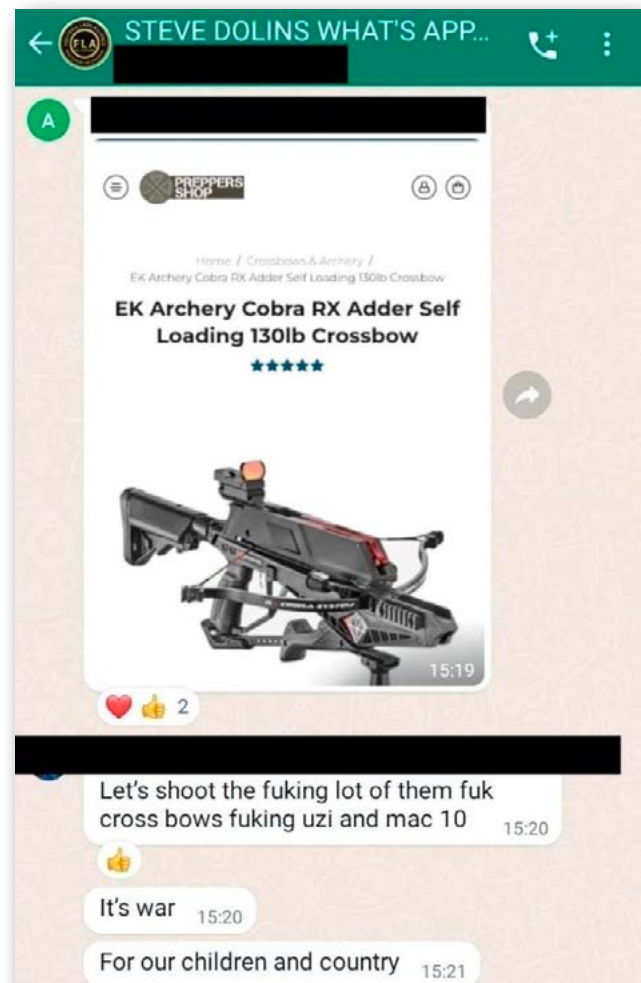
"Time for us all to reunite protect our war memorials on Remembrance Sunday," wrote Steve.

"Think we have all just had enough now mate," replied Gary.

Very quickly members of the group posted up reports of who was likely to come.

"Millwall will turn out I reckon", one person posted. Another said that Gillingham would show too. "Small but naughty" Callum E added.

Quite quickly anger turned to threats of violence and retribution.

A video was circulated by a former British soldier who expressed his anger at "Hamas Palestinian supporters taking to the streets of our capital city and calling for Jihad against Christians and the police, who are pathetic, do nothing."

He went on: "The Cenotaph is a monument that is as sacred to us a any church or any mosque to any other religion. I understand now there are rumours that these same Hamas sympathsiers, terrorists, are going to come down to London on Remembrance Sunday and try and hijack our march. Our veterans march, our time when we pay our respect to our fallen, our dead.

"And this is a message to any Hamas sympathiser, Palestinian scumbag – try it. Fucking try it. We will exert a violence on you that you have never experienced. Don't mess with the veterans because we have the backing of the football supporters and you won't get anyone more patriotic than them.

"Try it Hamas. You are scum."

This video was met with mass approval on Dolin's WhatsApp group, which was growing rapidly. A week after the participants began talking about the protests, the group had swelled to 1,500 people – the maximum permissible for a WhatsApp group.

Others posted similar messages. Billy Charlton, a Chelsea hooligan and nazi, posted up the video of Brenton Tarrant's deadly attack on a mosque in New Zealand in 2020. The same video was also reported in the WhatsApp group by 'H', an active participant in the group. At least two people had been imprisoned under terrorism legislation for promoting the very same video.

The Met Police's assertion that the pro-Palestine demo was not going anywhere near the Cenotaph did nothing to pacify the hooligans. The police were woke liars, many wrote, and could not be believed.

The Met's intervention did little to reduce the temperature, largely because politicians and the media initially ignored them.

The then Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak, described pro-Palestinian protests planned for London on Armistice Day as "provocative and disrespectful".

Sunak also claimed that there was a "clear and present risk that the Cenotaph and other war memorials could be desecrated" on a day when thousands of marchers were due to take to the streets, adding that any protest "would be an affront to the British public and the values we stand for.."

The Security Minister, Tom Tugendhat, wrote to the Metropolitan Police claiming that the pro-Palestine march was "of great concern".

He told Times Radio: "It is a moment where we remember those we lost, and I think for the whole country the Cenotaph is sacred ground and the idea that on a day like Remembrance Day you would have a protest going past it, I don't think that is acceptable."

The Daily Mail gave considerable coverage to Sunak and Tugendhat's intervention, adding, some way down the article, a quote from a protest organiser insisting that they had no intention of marching through Whitehall on the day.

By now, the hooligans were beginning to mobilise. Steve Dollin's WhatsApp group was full of aggressive messages from people across the country demanding action and retribution. There were many who were delighted by this turn of events, believing that a civil war between Britons and Muslims was both inevitable and desirable.

The atmosphere was not helped by the total breakdown in the relationship between the Home Secretary and Sir Mark Rowley, the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. Worse still, it was spilling out into the open.

On Wednesday 8th November, just two days before the Armistice Day protest, Home Secretary Suella Braverman penned an article in *The Times* where she accused the Met Police of two-tier policing. In the article, she claimed that police chiefs appeared to care more about avoiding "flak" from tackling such "mobs" than ensuring public safety.

> "Unfortunately, there is a perception that senior police officers play favourites when it comes to protesters," she wrote.

> "During Covid, why was it that lockdown objectors were given no quarter by public order police yet Black Lives Matters demonstrators were enabled, allowed to break rules and even greeted with officers taking the knee?

> "Rightwing and nationalist protesters who engage in aggression are rightly met with a stern response yet pro-Palestinian mobs displaying almost identical behaviour are largely ignored, even when clearly breaking the law? I have spoken to serving and former police officers who have noted this double standard.

> "Football fans are even more vocal about the tough way they are policed as compared to politically connected minority groups who are

favoured by the left.

"It may be that senior officers are more concerned with how much flak they are likely to get than whether this perceived unfairness alienates the majority. The government has a duty to take a broader view."

Bravermann's public thinly veiled attack on the most senior police officer in the country was with many Conservative ministers and commentators believing that she had gone too far. Not so the hooligans, many of whom posted up messages in support of her and what she had said.

As Armistice Day approached, the rhetoric on the WhatsApp group grew ever more aggressive, with numerous people posting up threats of violence against Muslims.

Much of their anger was directed against London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who had long been a target for the far right. He was called "a rat", "a traitor" and there were even some calls for him to be killed.

Three fake videos were circulated on the day before the protest, all claiming to be of Sadiq Khan promoting the Palestinian cause and one even calling for Remembrance Sunday to be suspended.

Each video uploaded onto the WhatsApp group was met by further fury and threats of violence.

On the day itself, several people posted up running commentaries of what was happening, including videos and photos from on the ground. Some members of the WhatsApp group were also arrested for violence and disorder.

The violence was the worst we have witnessed in central London for many years. The clashes lasted several hours, as small groups of far right supporters and hooligans battled with police and pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

While Steve Dolin's hooligan WhatsApp group was pivotal in encouraging people to protest, providing a platform on which to issue threats of violence, many were inspired by the dangerous rhetoric, much of it false, by certain politicians and media outlets that the Cenotaph was seriously under threat.

"The scenes of disorder we witnessed by the far right at the Cenotaph are a direct result of the home secretary's words," London Mayor Sadiq Khan commented. "The police's job has been made much harder."

Southport and beyond

This report has evidenced how trigger events that strain community relations can be exploited and inflamed by bad actors to spread hatred. This is particularly volatile where there is underlying hostility already widely prevalent within society that can be tapped into, as is the case with anti-Muslim hatred. Our exploration into anti-Muslim hatred since 7th October has shown how those with ill-intentions and a wider agenda to increase division in our communities have taken advantage of the conflict in Israel and Palestine and used it to create new anti-Muslim narratives that have reinvigorated pre-existing anti-Muslim sentiment.

As we have stressed throughout this report, whilst there is a need to address the specific fallout that the conflict has had on communities, it is also important that this is done alongside a wider programme of work that addresses anti-Muslim hatred more broadly. There will always be events outside of the Government's control that strain community relationships and bad actors who will attempt to exploit these events to inflame hatred. The success of their ability to do this rests heavily on the existence of an 'anti-Muslim baseline' that they are able to speak to.

Unfortunately, the consequences of failing to address this hostile baseline are increasingly apparent. Since the conflict in Israel and Palestine escalated in October 2023, we have already seen two other major events where heightened anti-Muslim hatred has again been triggered. The riot in Harehill Leeds in July 2024 and the nationwide far-right riots in August 2024 following the murders of three girls in Southport were both found to have had anti-Muslim narratives and disinformation at the heart of the calls for violence. Crucially, the same people who took advantage of the conflict in Isreal and Palestine were the ones who used the events in Harehill and Southport to inflame anti-Muslim hatred.

Harehill in Leeds was at the centre of turmoil on the night of 18th July following the removal of four children from their Romanian parents by social services. This prompted outrage from local residents, leading to a protest that quickly spiralled out of control to a police car being overturned and a double-decker bus set on fire.

Photo: StreetMic LiveStream

These disturbances were quickly inflamed by top figures on the right who spread mis- and disinformation about them being instigated by South Asian and Muslim residents. Nigel Farage attributed the riots to "mass migration from the Indian subcontinent", Tristan Tate incorrectly blamed the Bangladeshi community for the violence and Tommy Robinson posted on X that "imported families" were responsible for trying to burn down the area. These comments have since been widely condemned for fuelling racial tensions that escalated violence, spreading misinformation and targeting hate towards Muslims and South Asians. For example Councillor Mothin Ali who was present where the violence was unfolding attempting to calm the situation faced false accusations of instigating the violence.

Less than a month later, we saw Muslim communities again targeted by violence directed at them by far right agitators spreading mis- and disinformation following the tragic murders of three young girls in Southport. Despite no official information being released by the police, it took only a number of hours for misinformation claiming that that attacker was a Muslim, 'illegal' immigrant who arrived by boat last year spread online. The fake name and identity would go on to be viewed by potentially 1.7 billion people across social media platforms.[68]

Far right agitators continued to further agitate around this misinformation. Tommy Robinson posted a seven minute long video onto X with the caption: "There's more evidence to suggest Islam is a mental health issue rather than a religion of peace". In this video he recklessly tells his 800,000 followers: "They're replacing the British nation with hostile, violent, aggressive migrants ... Your children don't matter to [the Labour government].". Nigel Farage further stoked the flames by taking to X and asking "whether the truth is being withheld" about the identity and terror-status of the incident, further fuelling speculations that this was an Islamist attack.

This led to nationwide far right riots over the next two weeks, which saw senseless violence targeting Muslims, migrants and ethnic minority communities more broadly. This included mosques being vandalised, people being pulled out of cars and attacked, and hotels for people seeking asylum in Tamworth and Rotherham being set alight with people still inside.

What should have been a period of mourning for the country became hijacked by violent displays of anti-Muslim and anti-migrant hatred. What is particularly worrying is the speed with which this shift occurred. Even after the police released the identity of the attacker with the explicit aim to "remove some of the misreporting" around it, misinformation continued to spread, and riots continued to be organised.

The sheer volatility of anti-Muslim hatred in our communities has never been more apparent, as has the dangerous efficiency of far right antagonism

around it. Again and again we see the same group of people exploiting trigger events to pursue their hateful agenda and increase division. Whilst the violence from this particular event has dissipated, it leaves the question of what the next trigger event will be that sparks the next bout of violence towards Muslims that further divides communities.

This stresses even further the importance of wider work that addresses anti-Muslim hatred beyond just specific trigger events. Lowering the 'anti-Muslim baseline' would reduce the number of people who buy into divisive narratives pushed around flashpoints. This would hugely lower volatility around trigger events by building up community resilience to far right antagonism and hatred more broadly.

Recommendations for addressing Anti-Muslim Hate

This report has highlighted the need for interventions that address anti-Muslim hatred emerging from the fallout of the conflict on Israel and Palestine. However, it has also raised the important consideration that this hatred is largely fed by pre-existing attitudes towards Muslims. Therefore whilst targeted interventions that address specific flashpoints are important, this must exist alongside measures to address underlying anti-Muslim sentiment that exists more broadly.

Without this broader stream of work, the situation will remain volatile. We will continue to see flashpoints trigger a rise in hate and division. Since the conflict in Israel and Palestine escalated in October 2023, we have already seen two other major trigger events where this has played out. The riot in Harehill Leeds in July 2024 and the nationwide far-right riots in August 2024 following the murders of 3 girls in Stockport were both found to have had anti-Muslim narratives and disinformation at the heart of the calls for violence.

Addreessing and lowering this broader anti-Muslim sentiment will preventatively build resilience to future trigger events that would otherwise provide an opportunity for people to double down on their hateful attitudes.

Make tackling anti-Muslim hatred a Government priority

CREATE A STRATEGY

There is a clear need for a centralised strategy to address anti-Muslim hatred, particularly as it relates to the fallout of the conflict in Israel and Palestine but also addressing the pre-existing sentiment that contextualises this. This must include:

- A clear plan for how both the causes and impacts of both online and offline anti-Muslim hated will be monitored centrally, and funding to support this work;
- A plan for partnering with those who are locally embedded and best placed for disseminating the strategy, including local authorities, religious groups, schools, and community organisations, with resources and practical guidance for partners on how to address anti-Muslim tensions;
- Funding for programmes that work with and

for the Muslim community; initiatives like the Interfaith Network, whose funding was controversially withdrawn earlier this year[69], are crucial vehicles for the implementation of this work.

BUILD UP EXPERTISE

For any strategy to be effective, the Government must invest time and resources to its formulation, making sure there is a solid and nuanced understanding of the causes and impacts of anti-Muslim hatred. This should include:

- Swiftly appointing an independent advisor for anti-Muslim hatred;
- Reconvining the cross-party anti-Muslim hatred working group;
- Restarting work towards a working definition of Islamophobia.

REBUILD CONNECTIONS WITH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

The previous Government's response to the conflict has massively fractured the relationship between the Government and British Muslims. Any work on tackling anti-Muslim hatred must have buy-in from Muslim communities. We welcome Labour's appointment of a Minister for Faith; it is crucial that this role is utilised to lead proactive initiatives that rebuild reciprocal dialogue and trust.

Ensure the political mainstream is not contributing to the problem

ESTABLISH CLEAR RED LINES

Inflammatory narratives used and endorsed by the political mainstream about pro-Palestine activism and British Muslims more broadly has historically shaped wider society level anti-Muslim hatred. Politicians have the duty to promote peace and security not threaten it; there must be a zero tolerance for divisive rhetoric from those with political influence, with clear red lines and appropriate repercussions when they are crossed.

PROTECT THE RIGHT TO DISSENT

Long-term democratic backsliding as well as targeted curbing of dissent from British Muslim

communities in particular has played a huge role in the demonisation of their participation in the pro-Palestine 'mob'.

- The Government must not only uphold the right to peaceful protest but actively support and engage with it as a form of legitimate opposition that has a rightful place within the norms of a healthy democracy.

- As well as reversing the last few years of democratic backsliding, this must also include a new review into the Prevent process, undertaken by an independent and neutral body, with a focus on how its ideological bias towards certain types of extremism not only inhibits its effectiveness at counterterrorism but limits the rights of Muslims. This should be used to overhaul the current process and start from scratch using a specific, easily understandable and ideologically blind definition of extremism.

Invest in resilience

CREATE A COHESION STRATEGY

The Government urgently needs a community cohesion strategy which oversees:

- Short term/reactive: Preventing and responding to community flare ups following flashpoints and trigger event;

- Long term/proactive: Proactively building up community resilience to hate.

Within each of these timeframes there must be a two pronged approach:

- Amplifying the voices of the sensible, moderate majority to collaboratively distribute narratives of inclusion and tolerance that are resilient to hate;

- Targeting the extreme fringes with interventions that address the root causes of hatred.

The strategy should include action plans for:

- Creating a cross departmental cohesion working group to oversee the strategy and its implementation;

- Funding, empowering and partnering with local leadership, including local authorities, religious groups, schools, community organisations and civil society groups;

- A tension monitoring programme that proactively identifies trigger points for cohesion flare ups and allows for preventative intervention before tensions spill over, as well as reparative work to address the fallout.

Endnotes

1 Polling of 1106 adults, weighted to be nationally representative. Undertaken by FocalData between 7 June 2024 - 10 June 2024.

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6 Polling of 1589 adults, weighted to be nationally representative. Undertaken by FocalData between 30 November 2023 - 1 December 2023.

7 Polling of 24,952 adults, weighted to be nationally representative. Undertaken by FocalData between 19 December 2023 - 16 Jan 2024.

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Polling of 10,383 adults, weighted to be nationally representative. Undertaken by YouGov, between 28 June 2018 - 6 July 2018.

Polling of 6118 adults, weighted to be nationally representative. Undertaken by YouGov between 16 April 2019 - 1 May 2019.

Polling of 3000 adults, weighted to be nationally representative. Undertaken by Stack Data Strategy between 8 October 2021 - 14 October 2021.

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39 Polling of 1106 adults in Britain between 7 June 2024 - 10 June 2024.

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