

A NATIONAL SURVEY

ATTACKS UPON MOSQUES AND ISLAMIC INSTITUTIONS IN THE UK

MUSLIM
CENSUS ✓

mend



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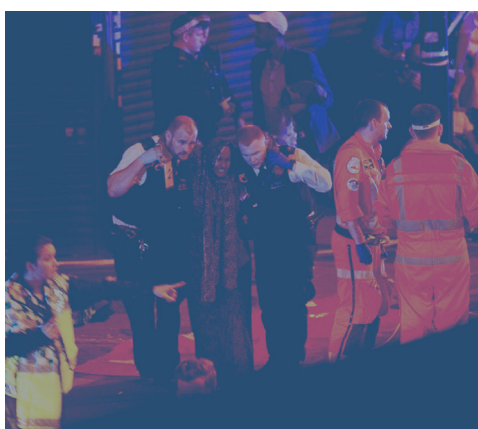
*Overall, **35%** of Mosques experience a **religiously motivated attack** at least once a year.*

Of the mosques that have experienced attacks, 83% have been attacked at least once a year. Overall again, 9% report that their Mosque or Islamic institution is the target of attacks “very frequently” defined as at least every 3 months.

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Attacks upon Mosques and Islamic Institutions in the UK – A National Survey



Introduction

Attacks on Mosques rose to peak attention after the Christchurch shootings of March 2019 in New Zealand. A far-right white supremacist entered both Al Noor Mosque and Linwood Islamic Centre, both mosques in the Christchurch area, killing 51 people and injuring 40. What followed in the UK, almost immediately, were several attacks on Mosques including one man attacking 5 different Mosques across Birmingham.

Since then, we have continued to see several attacks occur against Mosques over the past few years. Even amidst the pandemic, we have witnessed attacks such as the arson attack against Didsbury Mosque in Manchester, and the stones and eggs pelted at worshippers of Ilford Islamic Centre. Recently, over the blessed month of Ramadan, a [mosque was attacked](#) by a group armed with bottles and hockey sticks.

Home Office data showed that between March 2020 and March 2021, under half (45%) of all religious [hate crime offences](#) were targeted against Muslims, a figure that has been largely consistent in recent years, and much greater than for any other religious community.

Since part of this towards places of worship, it is imperative that we have data on the scale of the problem of hate crimes and security threats directed towards mosques, to better inform government and policy makers on how to address this .

Muslim Census has collaborated with [MEND](#), a not-for-profit organisation that helps empower British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics, to survey mosques and Islamic institutions across the UK to understand the hate crimes and security threats, and what measures they have taken to address these.

Methodology

We asked Mosques or Islamic institutions to take part in an online survey from June to September 2021, and 113 Mosques responded. All responses were given by either an imam of the mosque, CEO, Trustee, Committee Member or other leadership position. The demographic characteristics of the sample are as follows:

SIZE OF MOSQUE:



**Under 200 person capacity (23%),
201-500 (33%), 501-1,000 (24%),
1,001 and above (21%)**

LOCATION:



Greater London (30%), North West (18%), Yorkshire (16%), Scotland (12%), West Midlands (8%), South East (6%), Wales (2%), East Midlands (1.8%), North East (1.8%), South West (1.8%)

1,800
**Mosques across
the UK**



There are approximately just over 1,800 Mosques across the UK. Our survey captured over 6% of this. Statistically, this would be considered a reasonably significant sample. However, whilst the survey results can give us useful information, the usual limitations of extrapolating data apply. It is possible that there are factors that led to certain mosques responding and not others, but having considered these we are confident that this is a reasonably representative sample also.



*Home Office data showed that between March 2020 and March 2021, **under half (45%) of all religious hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims.***

Key Findings

Almost **half of Mosques** or Islamic institutions we surveyed have experienced **religiously motivated attacks** in the **last 3 years**.

The most **common** form of **attack** experienced by Mosques is **vandalism** followed by **theft**.

17% of Mosques who have experienced an attack in the last **3 years**, have also experienced **physical assault** - including the **stabbing** of an imam.

35% of Mosques experience a **religiously motivated attack** at least **once a year**

15% of Mosques saw an **increase in attacks** during the COVID-19 **pandemic**.

Of those Mosques who **experienced** a religiously motivated **attack** or **threat of attack**, **85%** reported these incidents to the **police**.

Only 55% of Mosques were **satisfied** with the police **response**.

Just 4% of Mosques **secured funding** for the Places of Worship (POW) **scheme**.



Attacks on Mosques:

The nature and frequency of attacks and its impact on the Muslim community

Almost half (42%) of Mosques or Islamic institutions we surveyed have experienced religiously motivated attacks in the last 3 years.

The most common form of attack is vandalism with 51% of Mosques who were attacked reporting this. One Mosque described how *“a member of the public hurled a stone the size of an adult’s fist at the main entrance of the community centre adjacent to the mosque. We later found out that the same individual had been targeting other mosques in London.”*

Other Mosques reported individuals breaking windows, vandalising worshippers’ vehicles, and spraying racist graffiti on the mosque building.

34% Mosques who have experienced attacks have been burgled with individuals mostly stealing money from donation boxes. This was followed by online abuse, faced by 32% of Mosques. Mosques described receiving threats of physical violence on popular social media platforms as well as general abuse.

Finally, and perhaps most worryingly, 17% of Mosques have faced physical abuse directed at staff or worshippers. One mosque reported that an Imam was stabbed outside the front entrance.



Almost half of Mosques or Islamic institutions experienced religiously motivated attacks in the last 3 years.

4 Mosques out of the 113 have also been victims of arson attacks in the last 3 years.

Our findings highlight the need for the further protection of Mosques, their staff and their worshippers. The increase in attacks during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic is unsurprising given the Islamophobic nature of some of the social and online discourse that has been reported elsewhere, including a [report by MEND](#) on online hatred during the pandemic.

Frequency

Overall, 35% of Mosques experience a religiously motivated attack at least once a year. Of the mosques that have experienced attacks, 83% have been attacked at least once a year. Overall again, 9% report that their Mosque or Islamic institution is the target of attacks “very frequently” defined as at least every 3 months.

Clearly, attacks on Mosques are not one-off instances triggered by specific incidents - Mosques in the UK are faced with multiple attacks. The environment we operate in has huge implications for our general health and wellbeing, and feeling under constant threat will certainly impact Mosques and the wider Muslim community.

Research suggests that the more someone feels targeted by racist actions and behaviours, the greater the damage to their mental health. In addition to considering how the Government can support Mosques once attacks have actually occurred, it is also important to consider what can be done to prevent these attacks occurring in the first place (see later).

Surprisingly, even with the lockdown of the entire country, 15% of Mosques saw an increase in attacks during the COVID-19 pandemic. This rise could be due to a range of factors, individuals may simply have more spare time to carry out hate crime, whether in person or online, or this could reflect the wider trend of rising hate crime and anti-Muslim sentiment. In any case, it simply adds to the evidence that Mosques need further protection, even when they are not actively in use.



IMPACT

As well as affecting the targeted Mosque directly, 64% of Mosques reported that the attacks had a negative impact on the wider community. Responses ranged from worshippers being discouraged from attending the Mosque due to the attacks, to creating a sense of fear and loss of confidence in police action. The impact of a single attack can have far-reaching consequences on the whole community.

This further highlights the importance of protecting Mosques. Fearing crime itself has been shown to reduce community cohesion. As Muslims, we are all aware of the importance of community in our faith and it is imperative to make sure our faith spaces are protected and individuals can worship in peace. This is particularly true for women and the elderly who are likely to be disproportionately affected by

crime in the wider community. Studies have shown these groups fear crime the most and are therefore more likely to be deterred from visiting the Mosque. This is not just theoretical, data from the Islamophobia Response Unit shows that visibly Muslim women (i.e. those wearing the hijab) are more likely to be victims of Islamophobic hate crime and abuse.

To emphasise how detrimental the impact of attacks on Mosques can be, some Mosques have stated that they are hiding incidents in an attempt to mitigate any negative impacts to the wider community. This is tragic, and is likely to have led to an underreporting of the problem in some mosques, impacting on our ability to accurately assess the true magnitude of the problem.

POLICE RESPONSE

Of those Mosques who experienced a religiously motivated attack or threat of attack, 85% reported these incidents to the police. Whilst research suggests Muslims are more likely to distrust the police, engagement with the police is, on balance, positive – it is the first step towards justice and means that hate crimes against Muslims are documented.

Indeed, 28% of respondents noted that the police provided extra surveillance to the mosques as a result of their reports. Therefore we should be working to increase the community's engagement with the police.

However, there were 15% of those who deemed it not necessary to contact the police and report the attack. Responses such as "Committee were reluctant



thinking no outcome would come out of reporting” suggests there is still work to be done by the police to instil trust within Mosques in the UK.

In addition, only 55% Mosques were satisfied with the police response, with 38% reporting that no police action was taken. Clearly, whilst funding to protect Mosques in the first instance is needed, there needs to be better police response and ongoing engagement, when Mosques are actually attacked. For every positive response, such as calling the police *“cooperative and helpful”*, there were detailed concerns such as the below questioning the effectiveness of action - *“The police were quick to respond by meeting us and logging the crime but follow up was very poor and for a direct threat to be made that involves death, it lacked seriousness deserved and we never really got to the bottom of the outcome and asked if we were satisfied with it.”*

The historical Places of Worship (PoW) funding scheme

The PoW protective security funding scheme provides funding for protective security measures, such as CCTV, fencing and intruder alarms, to places of worship and associated faith community centres that are vulnerable to hate crime. The scheme is open to all faiths, apart from the Jewish community, who receive a Government grant administered by the Community Security Trust.

Historically £3.2 million was available under the PoW scheme in 2020/21 - up from £1.6 million in 2016, when the full amount was allocated. This funding covered all faiths, excluding Jewish, which means it aimed to protect Churches, Gurdwaras, Mosques, Temples and other associated faith community centres and places of worship.

There are approximately 2,187 Gurdwaras, Mosques and Temples located in the UK.

If we add approximately 40,300 church buildings in the UK and associated faith community centres, we obtain a total figure of approximately 42,500 places of worship. For a pot of £3.2 million this would have equated to just £75 per place of worship! – a pitifully small amount.

Only 14% of respondents (16 mosques) applied for this historical Places of Worship (PoW) funding in the past three years, and only 33% were successful. This meant that just 4% of the total sample overall received funding from the PoW scheme. This is a very low figure and more research is needed as to (a) why more mosques did not apply and (b) why more mosques were not granted the funding.

One reason for (a) is likely to have been the application process. To receive funding, religious centres had to provide evidence they are vulnerable to hate crime

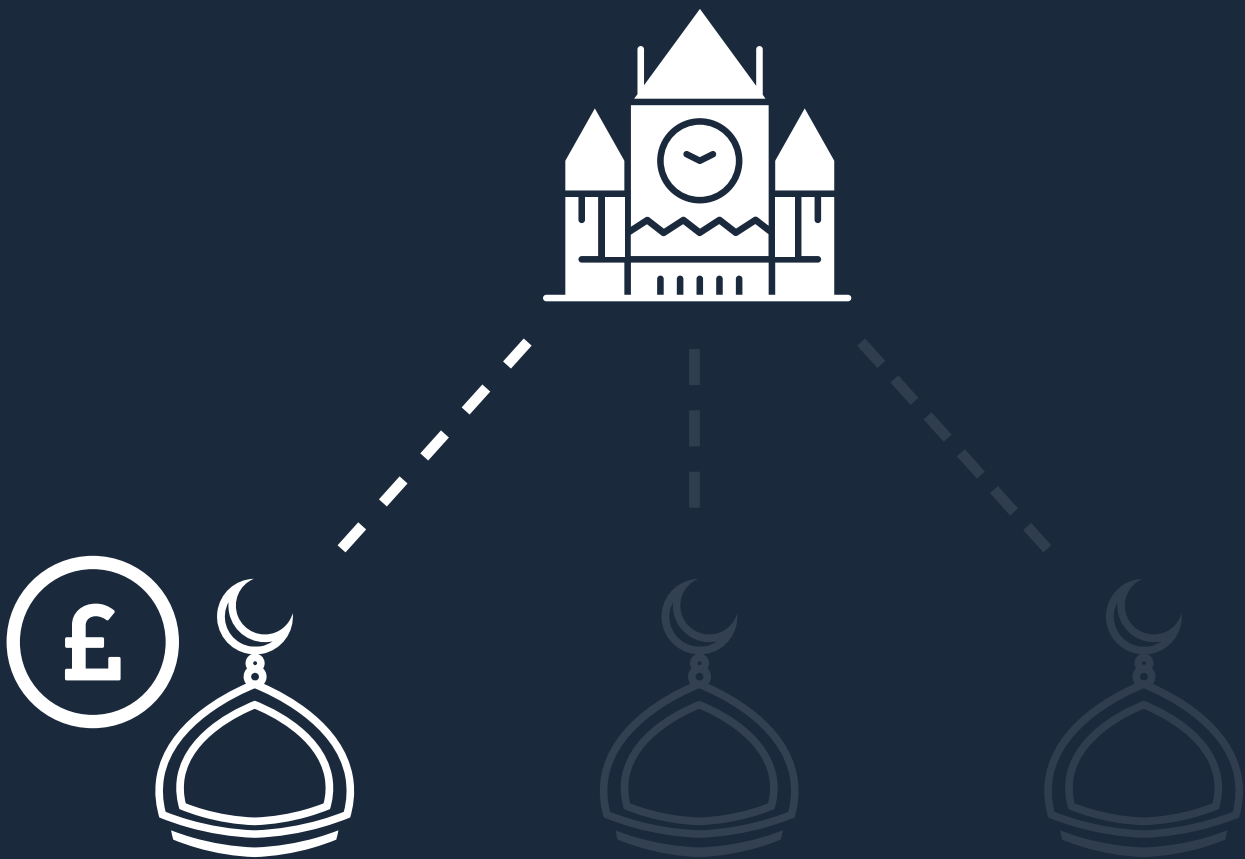
and complete an online application form. A government contractor then conducted a site assessment to provide a quote for the cost of the security measures – centres had to contribute 20% of the costs.

Providing evidence of vulnerability to hate crime was the most commonly cited reason making it difficult to apply, with 50% of Mosques giving this reason.

This was followed by the site assessment, and contributing 20% of the costs to the security measures, with one Mosque reporting that they were unable to complete the tough and strict pre-requisite of the application, which deterred them from applying again in the future. This is likely to disproportionately affect smaller Mosques who would be less able to contribute such costs.

Of Mosques that were successful, 50% were happy with the security measures installed. However the remaining 50% did not install any security measures as the costs were too high even with government funding. One Mosque claimed it would have been much cheaper to get the measures installed privately. Not only is this detrimental for Mosques receiving the funding, but it means the scheme was perhaps not fulfilling the government's value for money obligations if the government was choosing a significantly more expensive contractor.

Only a **third of mosques** who applied for the government's places of worship funding received it



The new Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme' for 2022/23

In May 2022, the Government suddenly announced a new 'The Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme', for the financial year 2022/23. This means that Mosques and Muslim faith schools / community centres have been given access to £24.5 million for security measures to protect their premises. This includes requesting security measures such as CCTV, secure fencing, intruder alarms and hiring security guards.

The process is similar to the previous one, with each mosque having to demonstrate the following;

- *"hate crimes or hate incidents have happened at your place of worship, or*
- *hate crime has happened in your local area and you think there is a high chance that your place of worship could be targeted itself"*

The guidance continues,

"You will need to provide evidence that the community at your place of worship is vulnerable to the kind of hate crime that targets people because of their religion and race As part of the application form you will be asked to provide evidence of hate crimes your community has experienced at your place of worship – please provide as much detail and supporting evidence as you can."

Now considering that the government's own data shows that nearly half of all religiously motivated hate crime is directed at Muslims, we question the degree to which mosques should need to demonstrate that they have been victims of hate crime historically or are vulnerable to such hate

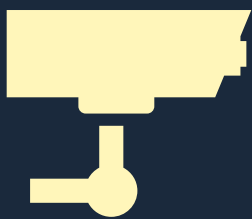
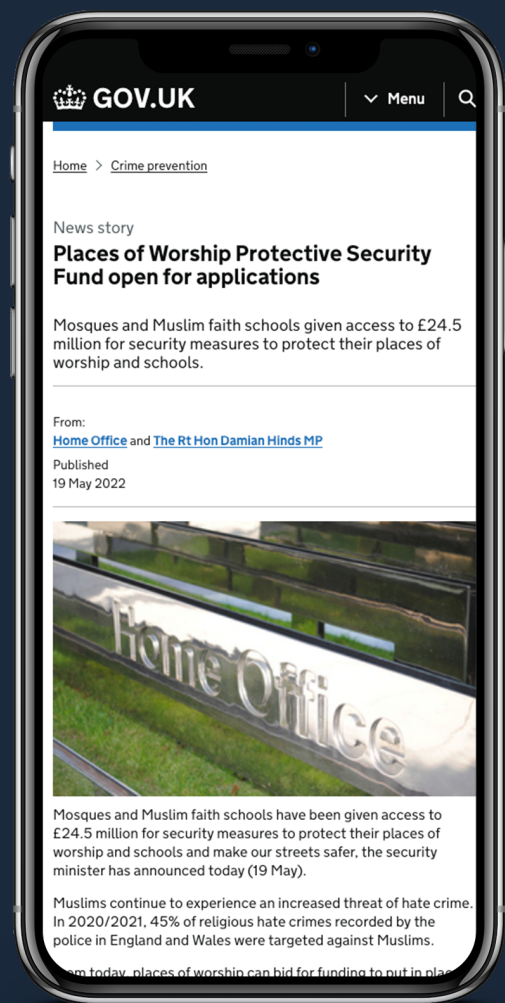
crimes in the future. It appears that to qualify for the funding a place of worship has to have experienced previous hate crimes first. Surely the emphasis should be on preventing future hate crimes, and one way to do this would be to remove the threshold for providing evidence of past hate crimes.

Even if applicants are successful at this first stage, there is then a second stage involving an on-site assessment by a security company, Esotec Limited. They will recommend any security measures required and will install any that are funded

There is then a third stage where any recommendations by Esotec have to be approved by an *"Independent Advisory Panel. The panel is made up of representatives from the Sikh, Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities who have expertise on security issues in relation to their respective faiths."* This panel has the power to only part-fund or reject the application.

Whilst we appreciate that funding from the public purse cannot be given indiscriminately, we do question whether such a complicated three-stage process is necessary, and whether it will deter mosques from applying for such funding.

Mosques and Muslim faith schools / community centres have been given access to £24.5 million for security measures to protect their premises. This includes requesting security measures such as CCTV, secure fencing, intruder alarms and hiring security guards.



Conclusions

This is one of the first studies on Islamophobic hate-crimes towards mosques. We found;



Almost half (42%) of Mosques or Islamic institutions experienced **religiously motivated attacks** in the last **3 years**



Nearly **two-thirds** of Mosques reported that the attacks had a **negative** impact on the **wider community**



Of those that reported an attack, **only 55%** of Mosques were **satisfied** with the police response



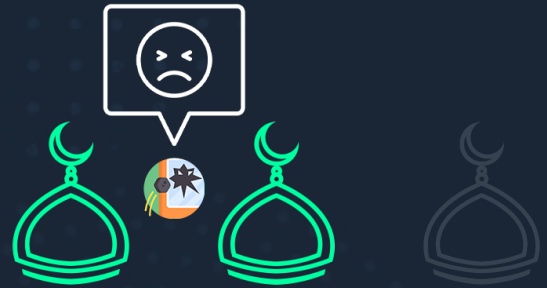
Only **one-third** of mosques **who applied** for Places of Worship scheme **received funding** – this equates to only 4% of the total sample

Recommendations

- Although we welcome the increased funding in the Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme, we call upon the government to;
 - Streamline the application process to make it easier for mosques to apply
 - Reduce the threshold for having to demonstrate historical attacks to increase the likelihood for a successful bid
 - Prioritise the prevention of future attacks by removing the need to demonstrate actual attacks in certain cases
- We call upon the mosque community to apply for this scheme
- We call upon the police to improve links with their local Muslim community and mosques, to implement swift action when such attacks occur, and a full explanation when no action is taken



Of those that reported an attack, **only 55%** of Mosques were **satisfied** with the police response



Nearly **two-thirds** of Mosques reported that the attacks had a **negative impact** on the wider community



Almost half of Mosques or Islamic institutions experienced **religiously motivated attacks** in the last 3 years.



Only **one-third** of mosques who applied for Places of Worship scheme **received funding** – this equates to **only 4%** of the total sample

For further comment or if you would like access to the data collected, please contact www.muslimcensus.co.uk/contact

Acknowledgements

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