The Home Office consultation on protecting places of worship

A Briefing from Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND)

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Muslim Engagement
& Development

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MEND's contribution to the consultation

Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) recently submitted evidence to the Home Office consultation into protecting places of worship. The submission sought to explore the dangers facing mosques and Islamic institutions across the UK, as well as the needs of these institutions in terms of security. The available space provided within the submission limits the depth of discussion that is possible. However, this accompanying briefing seeks to provide context and further nuance to the evidence supplied in the submission itself.

It is poignant that the close of this consultation coincides with a plethora of reminders as to the tangible dangers of the growing far-right threat. Indeed, the closing of the consultation comes:

- 14 days after 137 arrests were made following "sickening" violence by far-right "racist thugs" in London amidst a month of peaceful protests supporting the global Black Lives Matter movement.[1]

- 13 days after the anniversary of Jo Cox's murder by Thomas Mair in a far-right act of terrorism.[2]

- 9 days after the anniversary of the terror attack in Finsbury Park in 2017.[3]

- 9 days after three mosques in Stockton experienced "a spate of racist attacks", including having the word "KKK" graffitied across the walls.[4]

- 6 days after a banner that read "White Lives Matter Burnley" was towed by an aeroplane over Etihad Stadium during a match against Manchester City.[5]

- 5 days after Europol published its report noting that the UK had the highest number of far-right terror attacks and plots across Europe in 2019.[6]

The Home Office states that "we would like to understand the reasons why people might or might not feel safe when attending their place of worship."[7] For Muslims, the answer to this question is multifaceted but is often underpinned by perceptions of Islamophobia that can be found across every level of society. The threat of racially and religiously motivated violence in the form of Islamophobia is a constant presence in the daily lives of British Muslim communities and urgent action is required to combat all forms of hatred which leave innocent individuals vulnerable to marginalisation, discrimination, and even attack.

Considering MEND's expertise in Islamophobia and how it manifests itself across society, we feel that we can provide valuable insights into issues surrounding the protection of Islamic institutions. As such, MEND hopes that our recommendations may provide guidance to the Home Office in developing a robust strategy to protect religious institutions, particularly from threats emanating from the far-right.

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[1] Smith, Mikey. 2020. "'Sickening' Violence By Far-Right 'Racist Thugs' Leads To 137 Arrests". Mirror. https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/sickening-violence-far-right-racist-22196247.

[2] Booth, Robert, Vikram Dodd, and Nazia Parveen. 2016. "Labour MP Jo Cox Dies After Being Shot And Stabbed". The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jun/16/labour-mp-jo-cox-shot-in-west-yorkshire.

[3] Weaver, Matthew, Matthew Taylor, Jessica Elgot, Bonnie Malkin, Kevin Rawlinson, Steven Morris, and Damien Gayle et al. 2017. "Finsbury Park Mosque Attack: Suspect Named As Darren Osborne, 47-Year-Old Who Lives In Cardiff – As It Happened". The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2017/jun/19/north-london-van-incident-finsbury-park-casualties-collides-pedestrians-live-updates.

[4] Guillot, Toni. 2020. "Probe Into Racist Graffiti Sprayed Onto Stockton Mosques Continues". Gazettelive. https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/probe-racist-graffiti-sprayed-onto-18466426.

[5] "Burnley 'Ashamed And Embarrassed' By Banner Flown Above Etihad Stadium During Man City Game". 2020. BBC Sport. https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/53145201.

[6] Europol. 2020. "EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat)". https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020.

[7] Home Office. 2020. "PROTECTING PLACES OF WORSHIP Government Consultation". Home Office. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877230/31-03-12_Protecting_Places_of_Worship_Consultation.pdf.

Executive Summary

Hate Crime

Over recent years, British Muslims have suffered from increasing levels of hate crime, with major socio-political events, such as terror attacks and the EU referendum, often further mobilising acts of hostility towards Muslims and minorities more generally. Indeed, in the wake of the June 2016 referendum, there was a considerable increase in hate crimes nationally. Home Office statistics detailed a 44% rise in racially or religiously aggravated offences in the month following the referendum result compared to the same month the previous year.[8] Meanwhile, Home Office data also indicates that just under half (47%) of religiously aggravated hate crime offences in 2018-19 were targeted against Muslims.[9] As such, Muslims are the most likely group to experience a religiously motivated hate crime.

In their consultation, the Home Office seeks to determine whether certain groups are more vulnerable than others. While Muslims are a group that is particularly vulnerable, studies have shown that the threats experienced by Muslim women are compounded by a gendered dynamic that is often innately embedded within Islamophobic hate crime. This trend can be seen within the reports received by MEND, within which 75% of hate crime reports come from Muslim women. This number rises to 80% when just looking at physical attacks alone - meaning that Muslim women are overwhelmingly the targets of acts of violence and aggression.

Moreover, the Racial and Religious Hatred Act, 2006, currently contains a disparity between the protections afforded on the grounds of race versus the protections afforded to religious groups. Since Muslims are not legally defined as a racial group, the protections afforded to race under this legislation, and which protects communities such as Jews and Sikhs, does not extend to Muslims. At the same time, within the protections against religious hatred, there is an added condition that it must be proven that the perpetrator *intended* to stir up racial hatred. This requirement of intent makes the burden of proof within this legislation almost unachievably heavy. The consequence is that, since the legislation was enacted in 2006, only a very small number of successful prosecutions have occurred under incitement to religious hatred legislation.

The ability to successfully prosecute cases of abuse is central to the ability to protect communities from that abuse. Consequently, MEND would repeat its calls to the Government in urging it to commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protections afforded to religious communities.

Widespread use of Islamophobic rhetoric

Islamophobic rhetoric is prevalent throughout UK media, political, and public discourse. Attention must be paid to how hate-filled rhetoric is manifest across different platforms and mediums, as well as to how such rhetoric leaves communities vulnerable to abuse.

Social media

Social media offences and hate speech online is a growing area of concern as more and more people utilise the anonymity of the web to share or post hateful messages. As such, there remains a great deal of scope to ensure that hate speech is efficiently tackled on social media platforms. Currently, abusive posts are largely brought to the attention of social media

[8] Full Fact Team, "Hate Crime in England and Wales," Full Fact, October 17, 2017, accessed June 20, 2018, https://fullfact.org/crime/hate-crime-england-and-wales/.

[9] Hate Crime, England And Wales, 2018 To 2019". 2020. *GOV.UK*. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2018-to-2019.

companies only if users themselves report them, and recourse is often at the discretion of the social media company and according to their self-imposed community guidelines.

Demos have noted that, between March 2016-March 2017, 143,920 Tweets were sent from the UK that were considered to be derogatory and anti-Islamic – this amounts to almost 400 per day.[10] Such anti-Muslim sentiments are particularly acute following incidents such as the London Bridge attack in 2017, following which the Guardian reported that 32 of the top 100 most shared tweets expressed negative sentiments about Muslims.[11]

Last year, the UK Government committed to the reviewing and updating of domestic legislature governing cyberspace to make the UK "the safest place in the world to go online".[12] This resulted in the Online Harms White Paper.[13] However, crucial concerns still remain unresolved, particularly regarding the remit of the protections and the mechanisms through which protections will be enforced:

- **Platforms included within the remit of the white paper:** As it is currently written, the remit of the white paper is limited to User Generated Content (UGC). Therefore, this appears to exclude newspaper websites from oversight as they are not UGCs, but rather project harms without the influence of users. Crucially, concerning the devastating attack on mosques in New Zealand in 2019, the white paper notes that there was a "co-ordinate cross-platform effort to generate maximum reach of footage of the attack".[14] However, there is no acknowledgement of platforms such as MailOnline, the Sun, and the Mirror, which shared footage of the attacks and the attacker's manifesto on their websites.[15] Moreover, the Minister for Digital and Culture, Caroline Dinenage, recently confirmed that the Government's proposed online harms regulatory regime will not only exclude online newspaper outlets, but also exclude the comments sections on these websites. According to Dinenage, IPSO is currently moderating newspaper comment sections in a manner that is "clear and effective".[16] This is categorically and demonstrably devoid of truth, and there is a large collection of evidence that IPSO cannot be considered an appropriate vehicle to protect against the online harms that plague many of the UK's major news publishers, both in terms of published content and in terms of the user-generated content in their comments sections. Considering the reach of newspapers in online spaces, to exclude them from the same levels of oversight as social media platforms has the potential of devaluing any protective benefits of the online harms strategy as a whole.

- **Method of protection:** The Government has proposed regulation by an independent regulator, as opposed to primary legislation enforced by law. However, considering the severity of some of the abuse that can be found on online platforms and the enormity of the challenge for a single regulator, combined with the unprecedented failure of regulators set up in similar circumstances such as IPSO, MEND firmly believes that primary legislation is the only mechanism that would have sufficient weight to tackle the current problems effectively.

[10] Carl Miller and Josh Smith, "Anti-Islamic content on Twitter", Demos, April 2017. Accessed: 29th May, 2018. https://demos.co.uk/project/anti-islamic-content-on-twitter/.

[11] Mark Townsend, "Anti-Muslim online surges driven by fake accounts", The Guardian, November 2017. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/nov/26/anti-muslim-online-bots-fake-accounts.

[12] "Online Harms White Paper", *Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office*, April 2019. Accessed: March 12th, 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper.

[13] "Online Harms White Paper", *Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office*, April 2019. Accessed: March 12th, 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Jim Waterson, "Facebook removed 1.5m videos of New Zealand terror attack in first 24 hours", *The Guardian*, March 2019. Accessed: March 16th, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/17/facebook-removed-15m-videos-new-zealand-terror-attack.

[16] "Parliamentlive.tv," Parliamentlive.tv, accessed May 21, 2020, https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/e5ed9e46-6100-475e-9f29-c5918a096eed

Failure to subject newspapers to the same level of oversight as social media platforms has the potential of devaluing any protective benefits of the online harms strategy as a whole. As such, MEND strongly urges the Government to reconsider this position and ensure that the remit of their strategy expands to include newspaper websites and their comments platforms.

Moreover, in order to ensure that the Government's strategy is robust enough to bring about positive change, MEND urges the Government to implement primary legislation to deal with social media offences and hate speech online and commit to working with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle hate speech online in consultation with Muslim grassroots organisations.

Divisive political discourse

Public figures are also responsible for the mainstreaming of Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric. They must show greater maturity and responsibility when discussing issues involving minority communities. In particular, they must take care not to cause hysteria for the sake of political popularity and agendas. Certainly, the perpetuation of Islamophobic rhetoric is in no way limited to the extreme fringes of the far-right. In 2019, MEND released a report, *From 'Letterboxes' to 'Ragheads': Over 100 Examples of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party*, detailing over 120 incidents of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party.[17] Far from highlighting a small population of traditional 'keyboard warriors' the report demonstrates that Islamophobia is endemic and is being fuelled on online platforms even by some of the most senior members of our Government.

When senior political figures engage and promote such Islamophobic views in public spaces, they serve to legitimise hate-filled discourses and transform them into mainstream narratives, thereby providing tacit approval for the continuation of such hatred across all social and political discourses.

Hatred in the press

Studies have shown that, with 21 negative references to Muslims within the British press for every single neutral or positive reference,[18] the media plays an integral role in spreading prejudice, stereotypes, and xenophobic views of British Muslims. These negative representations of Muslims are incredibly detrimental to community cohesion and the subsequent ability of British Muslims to fully participate and engage as equal members of society.

A poll conducted by YouGov in 2002 found that of the Britons surveyed, 74% knew "nothing or next to nothing about Islam" and 64% stated that what they did know was "acquired through the media".[19] Meanwhile, MEND's commissioned ComRes poll, 2018, found that the majority of Britons also agreed that the mainstream media was a key source in perpetuating Islamophobia in our society.

Considering the role of newspapers in the mainstreaming of Islamophobic hatred and abuse, it is clear that reform is needed within the press industry. As such, MEND urges the Government to:

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[17] "From 'Letterboxes' to 'Ragheads': Over 100 Examples of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party" (London: MEND, 2019) https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Islamophobia-in-the-Conservative-Party-MEND.pdf

[18] See Baker, Paul, Costas Gabrielatos, and Tony McEnery. *Discourse analysis and media attitudes: the representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge: University Press, 2013.

[19] Chris Allen, "A review of the evidence relating to the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media", *University of Birmingham*, October 24, 2012, accessed 20.06.2018, https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/IASS/news-events/MEDIA-ChrisAllen-APPGEvidence-Oct2012.pdf

- **Commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation.**

- **Commit to the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within the media.**

Developments during COVID-19

In recent months, the Online Far-Right Space (OFRS) has been particularly active in capitalising on the COVID-19 pandemic to promote theories that Muslims are a unique threat to public health in relation to COVID-19. Indeed, groups in the UK have popularised these conspiracies on social media, with counter-terrorism police recently investigating far-right groups accused of "trying to use the coronavirus crisis to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment".[20] Specifically, social media sites are replete with insinuations that Muslims are flouting lockdown measures, with mosques featuring prominently in unsubstantiated claims that Muslims are continuing to hold communal gatherings. Increasing patterns of Islamophobic conspiracy theories and abuse in online spaces has thus led to fears that Muslims and mosques may be susceptible to a wave of Islamophobic attacks as lockdown measures are lifted.[21] Any government response should, therefore, be mindful of the potential for misdirected frustration regarding the inevitable socio-economic repercussions of the crisis to be targeted at minority communities.

The threat of the far-right

The dangers of online hatred and conspiracy theories translating into far-right violence directed at minority communities should not be underestimated. One of the most unavoidable reminders of this danger in recent times is the tragic events in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019, when an attacker opened fire on worshippers in two mosques during Friday prayers. Closer to home, the murder of Jo Cox by Thomas Mair in 2016 and the murder of Makram Ali by Darren Osborne in the Finsbury Park attack in 2017 are reminders of the need to radically recalibrate the ways in which far-right violence is understood and tackled within security discourse and strategies. Meanwhile, the MEND ComRes poll in 2018 showed that 61% of the British public people believe that far-right political groups are responsible for Islamophobia in the UK.

According to the Global Terrorism Index, 2019 witnessed a 320% increase of far-right incidents over the past five years worldwide,[22] highlighting that these are not isolated events but part of a broader far-right phenomenon of espousing a xenophobic and ethno-nationalist agenda that must be urgently tackled. Meanwhile, Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu recently announced that right-wing ideologies pose the fastest-growing terror threat to the UK.[23] At the same time, the latest figures from Europol demonstrate that the UK reported the highest number of far-right terror attacks and plots across Europe in 2019.[24]

Such threats that emanate from the far-right raise concerns for the safety for members of minority communities, as well as buildings and properties belonging to or representing these communities (such as mosques, schools, and community centres). When it comes to the vulnerability of mosques specifically, this could arguably be a result of their physical and visual representation of Islam, and their significance as a community hub for Muslim communities. Mosques visually and physically represent an identity that is often pitted

[20] Nazia Parveen, "Police Investigate UK Far-Right Groups over Anti-Muslim Coronavirus Claims," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, April 5, 2020), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/police-investigate-uk-far-right-groups-over-anti-muslim-coronavirus-claims

[21] Lizzie Dearden Home Affairs Correspondent @lizziedearden, "'Dangerous' Conspiracy Theories Could Spark Wave of Islamophobic Attacks When Lockdown Lifts, Report Warns," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, April 19, 2020), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-muslim-lockdown-conspiracy-theories-tommy-robinson-katie-hopkins-a9471516.html

[22] Institute For Economics & Peace. 2019. "Global Terrorism Index 2019 Measuring The Impact Of Terrorism". http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf.

[23] Dearden, Lizzie. 2019. "Far Right Poses Fastest Growing Terror Threat To UK, Head Of Terror Police Says". The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terror-attack-plots-uk-far-right-wing-extremism-threat-met-police-neil-basu-a9112046.html.

[24] Europol. 2020. "EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat)". https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020

against the perceived dominant group identity and is thus considered by some to be a threat to what it means to be British. This is particularly evident in anti-immigration and far-right protests,[25] which often have banners displayed with such slogans as "ban mosques" or "no more mosques",[26] lest it becomes part of the "Islamification of Britain" process.[27] Meanwhile, between 2017-2020, 27 mosques reported an Islamophobic offence to MEND.[28]

The rise of the threat of the far-right necessitates comprehensive strategies to protect vulnerable communities against far-right abuse and violence. MEND, therefore, calls upon the Government to clearly and urgently outline its plan to tackle far-right politically motivated violence in the UK.

Protecting Muslims and Islamic institutions

There are a variety of issues that the Government must address in order to ensure the safety of Muslim places of worship. Of particularly urgent need of address are current policies surrounding funding and the recording of incidents, as well as tackling the current lack of an official definition of Islamophobia.

Funding for security

One of the greatest obstacles to protecting mosques and Islamic institutions remains the lack of funding provided to ensure their security. While the Government rightfully provides funds of £14 million per year for synagogues and Jewish schools, there remains no regular funding for mosques, with the last 'Places of Worship Security Fund' launched in 2016 providing only £2.4 million to be distributed across mosques, churches, temples, gurdwaras, and other institutions.[29] The government has recently pledged £1.6million funding to mosques for security.[30] However, this must be accompanied by a comprehensive risk analysis in order to develop effective strategies and devise funding plans that are proportionate to the threats that mosques face.

As such, the Government must commit to financing mosque security in a manner that is proportional to risk, in line with what is already correctly provided to Jewish religious institutions.

Police responses and the accurate recording of attacks

As with the development of any social policy, the first step in addressing a problem is understanding it in terms of scale, origin, and consequences. Accurate data is central to that aim. However, there appears to be a disparity in how hate crimes against religious institutions are recorded between different police constabularies across the country. In response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted by MEND which asked about hate crimes that targeted "mosques" and those that targeted "religious institutions", a number of police forces responded that they do not record the data in a retrievable format. Other police forces responded that whilst they do record data for attacks targeting "religious institutions" they were unable to provide specific data in terms of breakdown for the particular religious institutions (i.e. mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras).

Without standardisation of how incidents are being recorded, it is very difficult to perform an accurate risk analysis that could be used to formulate funding strategies and protective

[25] "Islamophobia behind far-right rise in UK, report says", *BBC News*, February 2019. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47280082.

[26] Peter Walker, "Ukip's Gerard Batten reiterates his belief that Islam is a 'death cult'", *The Guardian*, February 2018. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/feb/18/ukip-gerard-batten-islam-muslims-quran.

[27] Dale Hurd, "Islamic Takeover: Why Mass Immigration Signals 'the End of Britain'", *CBN News*, March 2017. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2017/march/why-mass-immigration-may-mean-the-end-of-britain.

[28] "Help Protect Your Mosque!" Muslim Engagement and Development, June 18, 2020. https://www.mend.org.uk/help-protect-your-mosque/

[29] "Home Office Grants £14 Million Funding For Security At Jewish Institutions". 2020. GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-grants-14-million-funding-for-security-at-jewish-institutions.

[30] "Places Of Worship To Get Security Funding Boost". 2019. GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/places-of-worship-to-get-security-funding-boost.

policies to safeguard Islamic institutions. It is, therefore, essential that strategies are introduced to promote the accurate and standardised recording of hate crimes against religious institutions across all police constabularies.

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Defining Islamophobia

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Defining Islamophobia is essential as it will provide much-needed clarity in legislation and policies that are intended to protect vulnerable minorities, including in relation to any proposed strategies to protect mosques and Islamic institutions. However, the Government has yet to accept a definition of 'Islamophobia', having rejected one put forth by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Muslims; a definition that has been accepted by all other mainstream political parties in the UK. Therefore, the absence of an agreed definition will severely curtail the ability to develop strategies to protect mosques and Islamic institutions from abuse.

Thus, in order to provide clarity to policy development and implementation, MEND urges the UK Government to:

- **Adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG for British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."**

- **Apply the above definition in conjunction with the guidelines proposed by MEND, which can be found in MEND's briefing here.**

Conclusions and recommendations

Throughout this briefing, MEND has offered a variety of recommendations to alleviate the vast array of forces that contribute towards an increased vulnerability of Muslim communities to abuse and violence. There are three key actors that MEND believes must play an important role in addressing the fuelling of Islamophobia across society and protecting Muslim places of worship from attack: the Government, places of worship themselves, and the police.

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MEND urges the Government to…

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- Commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protections afforded to religious communities.

- Clearly and urgently outline its plans to tackle far-right politically motivated violence in the UK.

- Commit to financing mosque security in a manner that is proportional to risk, in line with what is already correctly provided to Jewish religious institutions

- Adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG for British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness", and apply the above definition in conjunction with the guidelines proposed by MEND, which can be found in MEND's briefing here.

- Ensure that the remit of the strategy outlined in the Government's Online Harms White Paper is expanded to include newspaper websites and their comments platforms.

- Implement primary legislation to deal with social media offences and hate speech online and commit to working with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle hate speech online in consultation with Muslim grassroots organisations.

- Commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation.

- Commit to the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within the media.

MEND urges mosques and Muslim institutions to…

- Proactively engage with organisations such as The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) as a grassroots Muslim third-party reporting service. The IRU is able to provide mosques and local Muslim communities with:

    o Reporting and data collection services, including assistance in liaising with the police, local councils, and other stakeholders.

    o Signposting services to legal and emotional support.

    o Educative and training resources and events.

MEND urges the police to…

- Examine its current policies, procedures, and training mechanisms to ensure that Islamophobic instances, particularly those involving mosques and religious institutions, are recorded accurately.

- Proactively engage with organisations such as The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) as a grassroots Muslim third-party reporting service. The IRU is able to provide the police with:

    o Reporting and data collection services.

    o Assistance in facilitating engagement between victims, the police, and local stakeholders.

Hate crime

Over recent years, British Muslims have suffered from increasing levels of hate crime, with major socio-political events, such as terror attacks and the EU referendum, often further mobilising acts of hostility towards Muslims and minorities more generally. Indeed, in the wake of the June 2016 referendum, there was a considerable increase in hate crimes nationally. Home Office statistics detailed a 44% rise in racially or religiously aggravated offences in the month following the referendum result compared to the same month the previous year.[31] The impacts of these crimes are long-lasting, with many victims left feeling anxious and fearful for their safety.

Hate crime is defined by the Home Office as "any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's race/religion/sexual orientation/disability/ or who is transgender, or perceived race/religion/sexual orientation/disability/ or who is perceived to be transgender".[32]

The total number of religiously aggravated hate crimes recorded by the Home Office during 2018/19 was 8,566, which translates to around 165 offences every week and 24 offences every single day.[33] Meanwhile, statistics also indicate that just under half (47%) of religiously aggravated hate crime offences were targeted against Muslims.[34] As such, Muslims are the most likely group to experience a religiously motivated hate crime.
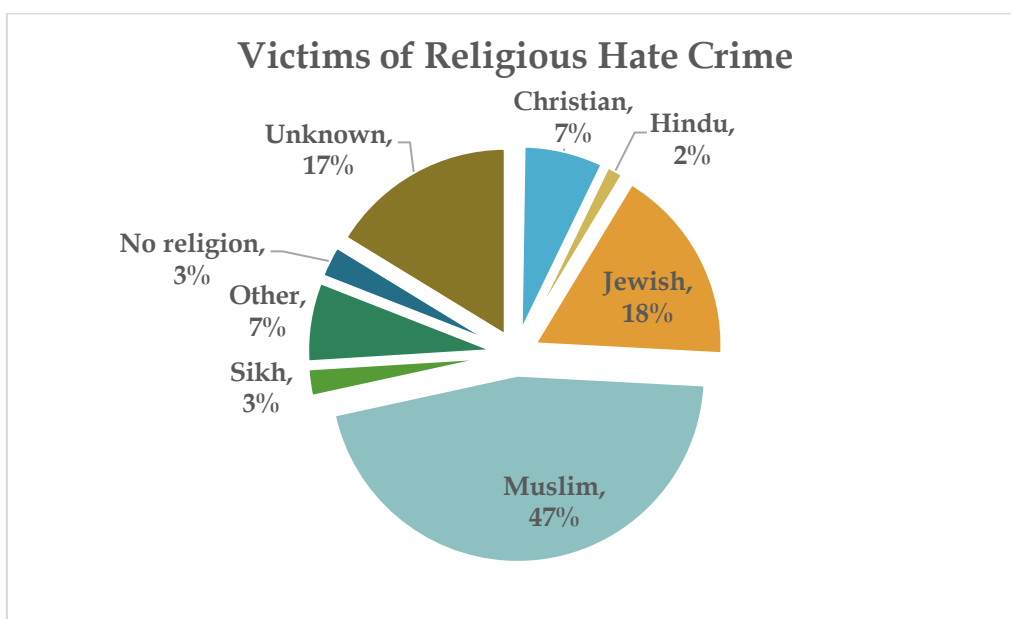
Hate crime in England and Wales, 2018/19[35]

Indeed, a recent report from Citizens UK, focusing on the impact of hate crime in Nottingham, found that 3 in 5 of the city's Muslim population have been victims of hate crime, more than any other religious group in the city.[36] Similarly, research conducted by the University of Sussex, "The Sussex Hate Crime Project", examined the direct and indirect effects of hate

[31] Full Fact Team, "Hate Crime in England and Wales," Full Fact, October 17, 2017, accessed June 20, 2018, https://fullfact.org/crime/hate-crime-england-and-wales/.

[32] 2020. *Report-It.Org.Uk.* https://www.report-it.org.uk/files/hate_crime_definitions_-_v3_0.pdf.

[33] "Hate crime, England and Wales, 2018/19", Home Office, October 2019. Accessed: 8th November 2019. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2018-to-2019.

[34] Hate Crime, England And Wales, 2018 To 2019". 2020. *GOV.UK.* https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2018-to-2019.

[35] "Hate crime, England and Wales, 2018/19", Home Office, October 2019. Accessed: 3rd June 2020.
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/838451/hate-crime-1819-hosb2419-tables.ods.

To ease digestion of data, hate crimes perpetrated against those perceived to be Buddhist (19 incidents) have not been plotted, as when aggregated the percentage of hate crimes perpetrated against those perceived be Buddhist compared to the total was 0%.

[36] Andy May, "Nottingham Citizens Hate Crime Study Reveals Surge in Verbal and Physical Harassment," Citizens UK, accessed June 20, 2018,
http://www.citizensuk.org/hate_crime_study_reveals_surge_in_verbal_and_physical_harassment_in_public.

crimes on both Muslim and LGBT communities and discovered that of the Muslim respondents:

- 71% reported that they had been a victim of hate crimes, predominantly consisting of verbal and online abuse.

- 45% reported that they had been verbally abused more than three times over the past three years.

- 29% reported that they had been physically attacked more than three times over the past three years.

- 83% reported that they knew someone who had experienced hate crimes. [37]

Moreover, Islamophobic hate crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service in London rose almost 50% in just two years,[38] as the graph below demonstrates.

Islamophobic hate crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service
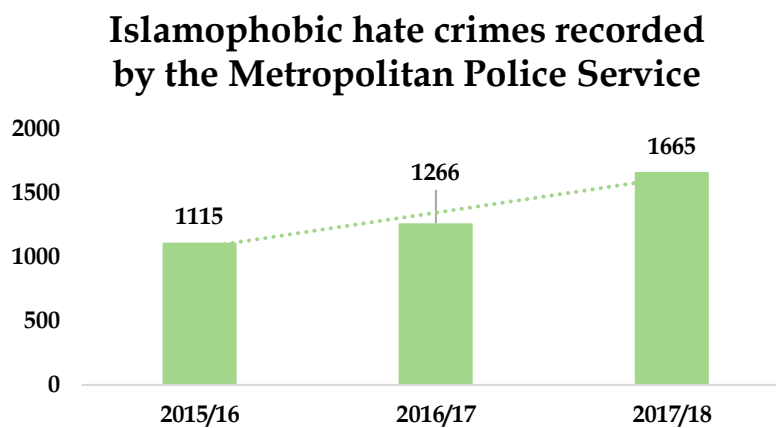
Metropolitan Police Service crime statistics[39]

This trend is also observed at a national level, where the number of reported hate crimes increased by 17% between 2016/17 and 2017/18.[40] Three-quarters of these hate crimes were racially aggravated, while 9% were religiously aggravated.[41] Furthermore, the number of religiously aggravated offences increased by 40% in 2017/18.[42]

MEND's Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) is at the forefront of tackling these types of crime and supporting victims through the process. The types of crime reported to the unit range from verbal abuse to physical assault. The following are but two cases that the IRU has dealt with in the past few years.

A gentleman was attacked by two men and their dog. The victim's three small children (all under the age of five) witnessed the attack. The eldest child has suffered severe mental

[37] Jenny Paterson et al., "THE SUSSEX HATE CRIME PROJECT," University of Sussex, January 2018, accessed June 20, 2018, https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=sussex-hate-crime-project-report.pdf&site=430

[38] 'MPS FY 2016/17 Crime Statistics,' Tableau Public, accessed May 08, 2017, https://public.tableau.com/profile/metropolitan.police.service#!/vizhome/MPSFY-201617CrimeStatistics/NOTES.

[39] 'MPS FY 2016/17 Crime Statistics,' Tableau Public, accessed May 08, 2017, https://public.tableau.com/profile/metropolitan.police.service#!/vizhome/MPSFY-201617CrimeStatistics/NOTES.

[40] Home Office, *Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2016/17*, by Aoife O'Neill, October 17, 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf.

[41] Home Office, *Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2016/17*, by Aoife O'Neill, October 17, 2017, accessed May 10, 2018, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/652136/hate-crime-1617-hosb1717.pdf.

[42] "Hate crime, England and Wales, 2017/18", Home Office, October 2018. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748598/hate-crime-1718-hosb2018.pdf.

difficulties since the attack, which has culminated physical symptoms. The family has since sought mental health support.[43]

In an example from September 2017, Ms Zaynab Hussein was walking home after taking her children to school when Mr Paul Moore intentionally hit her with his car. As she lay on the ground, Mr Moore turned his vehicle around and drove over her again. During the attack, Mr Moore also attempted to run over Muslim children who were making their way to school, including a 12-year-old girl. He would later gloat to his brother that he ran over a "P**i". Ms Hussein suffered fractures of the pelvis, legs and her arm; with doctors noting that she would not be able to walk again. MEND supported Ms Hussein and her family throughout the aftermath and court process, including assisting with interactions with the police, media, and local council. MEND also attempted to support the wider community by organising platforms for the police to engage with local residents to discuss their concerns. Mr Hussein later stated that "My family and I would like to thank the passers-by who helped my wife in her time of need, also we would like to thank Leicestershire police, the CPS, the prosecution legal team, the court and MEND for helping bring justice to my family and for ensuring our story is heard".[44]

Gendered Islamophobia

In their consultation, the Home Office seeks to determine whether certain groups are more vulnerable than others. While Muslims are a group that is particularly vulnerable, studies have shown that the threats experienced by Muslim women are compounded by a gendered dynamic that is often innately embedded within Islamophobic hate crime. This trend can be seen within the reports received by MEND, within which 75% of hate crime reports come from Muslim women. This number rises to 80% when just looking at physical attacks alone - meaning that Muslim women are overwhelmingly the targets of acts of violence and aggression. As the perpetrators are overwhelmingly males, it is clear how gender violence and hierarchical structures of gendered power are intrinsic to Islamophobic hate crime. Female victims are almost exclusively visibly Muslim, meaning they were wearing the hijab (headscarf), niqab (face veil), or abaya/jilbab (full-length outer garment) when they were targeted in public. In one case reported, a veiled Muslim woman was pelted with food and called a "f***ing ninja" by a passenger in a white van who then sped away.[45]

The study "Still No Place for Hate" also provided evidence that Muslim women are particularly vulnerable to abuse and criminal acts.[46] Researchers revealed that one respondent had been told to take off her "f***** headscarf" in the city centre. Another Muslim woman said, "I wear the Islamic dress, and the perpetrator was shouting that I was hiding a bomb. On another incident whilst driving in my car, a passer-by was shouting and calling me Bin Laden."[47] Other victims reported being called a "terrorist s***" and being spat on their hijab. One woman described travelling on the bus with her sons, aged two and four, and being told by a fellow passenger that she was raising terrorists.[48]

Another study undertaken by Dr Hannah Mason-Bish and Dr Irene Zempi, entitled: "Misogyny and Islamophobia: street harassment at the intersections",[49] drew upon the experience of British Muslim women who wear the niqab and had suffered from harassment in public. The study noted that "all the participants reported feeling unsafe in public spaces because of concerns that they were likely to be approached, intimidated, threatened or

[43] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. TK67/13

[44] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. HZ36/25

[45] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. SS36/18

[46] Jason Pandya-Wood, "Still No Place for Hate: Analysis of the Findings of the Nottingham Citizen's Hate Crime Survey including Recommendations," Nottingham Citizens, May 10, 2018, accessed June 20, 2018, https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/newcitizens/pages/2982/attachments/original/1525939473/Still_No_Place_for_Hate_-_Final.pdf?1525939473.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Hannah Mason-Bish and Irene Zempi, "Misogyny and Islamophobia: street harassment at the intersections", University of Sussex. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/76134/3/Misogyny%20paper%20revised%20versionaccepted%20versionMArch2018.pdf.

attacked" because of "previous experiences".[50] They noted that in the context of a society where sexual harassment is so widespread, the niqab can be perceived as "sexual 'non-availability' of Muslim women" which means that men "find it difficult to forgive those who 'disrupt' the 'pattern of the masculine gaze'". The consequence is that Islamophobia manifests itself with a framework of misogyny, with some participants reporting that they had received comments such as: "I want to cut that black thing off your face!"; "Show me what you're wearing under there!"; and, "Give us a flash!".[51]

Underreporting of Islamophobic hate crime

A critical problem facing Muslim communities in tackling the widespread prevalence of Islamophobic hate crime is the significant level of underreporting, which results in an incomplete and inaccurate picture of the rate of hate crime targeting Muslim communities. As with all types of hate crime and other forms of violent crime, a significant number of cases are not reported due to factors such as victims facing intimidation from the suspect; anxiety from the incident; a lack of confidence in the police; and a lack of knowledge regarding how to report an incident. There are also concerns that there are issues of misreporting religiously aggravated hate crimes as racially aggravated hate crimes. This is particularly relevant for cases of Islamophobia due to the way it is frequently conflated with other forms of racism, and as such, it may become difficult to determine the true motivation of a perpetrator.

The Home Office has also provided a conservative estimate as to how many religiously aggravated hate crimes actually occur. This was derived using incidence rates and population estimates. The Home Office estimates that there were around 39,000 religiously aggravated hate crimes during 2018/19, nearly five times the recorded offences.[52] It is, therefore, imperative that further initiatives are promoted to encourage greater levels of reporting in order to glean an accurate understanding of the scale of these incidents.

The impacts of Islamophobic hate crime

The effects of hate crime are often long-lasting and impact, not only the individual victim, but also their wider social circle and local communities. Data from the Crime Surveys of England and Wales shows that victims of hate crimes were almost three times as likely (36% versus 13%) to report being "very much" emotionally affected by the incident than victims overall and were twice as likely to experience symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, anxiety, depression, or panic attacks.[53]

Another adverse consequence of hate crimes is that of avoidance behaviour following an attack, for example, avoiding certain roads or areas, or avoiding going out altogether. In a study of the impact of racial discrimination on mental health, Wallace et al. found high rates of avoidance behaviour after incidents of racial discrimination.[54] The study uncovered rates of avoidance were highest in the Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups with rates of 10-20% reported. Whilst the research did not record the nature of the incidents, it is likely that much of this abuse was religiously rather than racially motivated, as the study also noted slightly lower rates in the Indian group.

Community-wide avoidance behaviour can be seen in the previously mentioned tragic attempted murder of Zaynab Hussein in Leicester in 2017. This attack which left the local

[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] "Hate crime, England and Wales, 2017/18", Home Office, October 2018. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/748598/hate-crime-1718-hosb2018.pdf
[53] Hannah Corcoran, Deborah Lader, and Kevin Smith, "Hate Crime, England and Wales, 2014/15," Home Office, October 13, 2015, accessed June 20, 2018, http://reportit.org.uk/files/ho_hate_crime_statistics_201415.pdf
[54] Stephanie Wallace, James Nazroo, and Laia Bécares, "Cumulative Effect of Racial Discrimination on the Mental Health of Ethnic Minorities in the United Kingdom," American Journal of Public Health 106, no. 7 (2016),

community fearful of going out is an example of how avoidance behaviour can extend beyond the individual victim and impact the local community at large.[55]

Whilst it has been established that the emotional impacts of hate crime on victims are vast, the effects of specifically Islamophobic hate crime on mental health remain largely unexplored in research. As such, the trauma associated with these types of crimes remains poorly understood. Testimonies from victims reveal a picture of social isolation, depression, and anxiety. Many victims of Islamophobic hate crime discuss how they avoid crowded spaces and public transport and report that they choose to stay indoors more often, take time off work, and avoid public spaces – revealing how hate crime can impede their participation in public life.

Also reported are some female victims' desires to remove the hijab after being targeted. This points to a loss in confidence and an underlying fear that displaying a symbol of their faith in public will make them more prone to abuse. Panic attacks, flashbacks, sleeplessness, and anxiety are also commonly observed psychological impacts.

Spitting incident victim,	*Victim on public transport,*	*Victim of physical assault,*
Female, 32, Birmingham	*Female, 24, London*	*Female 28, London*
"After the attack, I've been afraid to leave the house. I spend most of my time indoors. I don't even want to go out and do the shopping. I hate being out even in my own local area. I don't feel safe anymore."	"I don't want to take the tube or buses anymore. I feel really anxious in public spaces after being targeted in this way. I just try to walk everywhere or get a lift from a family member."	"I feel so paranoid walking the streets; I feel like everyone is out to attack me. I'm super self-conscious in public now."

Legislative imbalances

Currently, the Racial and Religious Hatred Act, 2006, contains a disparity between the protections afforded on the grounds of race versus the protections afforded to religious groups. Since Muslims are not legally defined as a racial group, the protections afforded to race under this legislation, and which protects communities such as Jews and Sikhs, does not extend to Muslims.

In terms of racial hatred, a person is protected against abusive, insulting, or threatening words or behaviour. However, the protections afforded on the basis of religion only extend to threatening words or behaviour. This specifically excludes the protection from abusive or insulting words or behaviour that is included under racial hatred.

Moreover, within the protections against religious hatred, there is an added condition that intent must be proven. In other words, it must be proven that the perpetrator intended to stir up religious hatred. This differs from incitement to racial hatred, wherein the *likelihood* that the offence would have stirred up racial hatred is enough to prosecute; there is no need to prove that the perpetrator *intended* to stir up racial hatred. This requirement of intent makes the burden of proof within this legislation almost unachievably heavy. Indeed, the intention of the perpetrator is virtually impossible to prove. The consequence is that, since the

legislation was enacted in 2006, only a very small number of successful prosecutions have occurred under incitement to religious hatred legislation.

> **The ability to successfully prosecute cases of abuse is central to the ability to protect communities from that abuse. Consequently, MEND would repeat its calls to the Government in urging it to commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protections afforded to religious communities.**

Widespread use of Islamophobic rhetoric

Islamophobic rhetoric is prevalent throughout UK media, political, and public discourse. Attention must be paid to how hate-filled rhetoric is manifest across different platforms and mediums, as well as to how such rhetoric leaves communities vulnerable to abuse.

Social media

Social media offences and hate speech online is a growing area of concern as more and more people utilise the anonymity of the web to share or post hateful messages. As such, there remains a great deal of scope to ensure that hate speech is efficiently tackled on social media platforms. Currently, abusive posts are largely brought to the attention of social media companies only if users themselves report them, and recourse is often at the discretion of the social media company and according to their self-imposed community guidelines. However, the scale and ferocity of this abuse must be addressed in order to understand the manner in which hostility towards mosques and Muslim institutions are ingrained within a trajectory of Islamophobic hatred across social media platforms.

In the wake of the Manchester Arena attack in 2017, Andrew Emery was given a two-year prison sentence after posting Islamophobic messages on Facebook saying: "It is time we started to fight back. The Government won't do **** because of the PC brigade. Every time we have a terrorist attack, we should burn a mosque, preferably when it is full." This was followed by another post three hours later which said "To all the British murderers and serial killers out there, do us all a favour and concentrate on the Muslim community", while another post stated, "BURN A MOSQUE TODAY AND FEEL BETTER".[56] According to the prosecutor, Harpreet Sandhu, these comments were not confined to Emery's Facebook friends but were visible to a public audience.

While the severity of these comments opened a legal recourse through existing hate crime legislation, the lack of primary legislation governing online spaces means that the huge swathes of extreme Islamophobic content online remains unchallenged. Ultimately, without primary legislation, the threshold for action is so high that it is virtually impossible to challenge the most heinous of abuses directed at Muslims unless it explicitly includes threats of violence. Abuse that does not meet that threshold is ultimately under the remit of the community guidelines of the platform in question. Indeed, in the case of Emery, this was not an isolated or uncharacteristic incident. As observed by the prosecution in the case, previous comments included, "Trump had the right idea trying to stop Muslims entering his country. Maybe we should do it so we would only have to worry about the scum already here".[57] There are potentially fatal consequences for allowing the spread of hate-filled rhetoric, as even rhetoric that does not explicitly include threats of violence can form the basis for the motivations behind atrocities that have been witnessed in Christchurch in New Zealand, Halle in Germany, the murder of Jo Cox by Thomas Mair in 2016, and the murder of Makram Ali by Darren Osborne in the Finsbury Park attack in 2017.

Moreover, the vitriol in Emery's statements is in no way exceptional nor unprecedented. In an example from January 2019, a video clip was widely circulated of a man filming himself hurling racist and Islamophobic abuse at school girls in East London.[58] In the two-minute clip, the suspect can be heard making references to Dr Mengele, an SS officer and physician, infamous for his role in the Nazi regime for conducting inhumane experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz concentration camp. Abhorrent language litters the video, including reference to the girls as "black c***s" who are going to "breed like f***ing rats" and calling for their

56 Tom Usher, "Man Jailed for Vile 'Burn a Mosque Today and Feel Better' Facebook Posts," Metro (Metro.co.uk, December 13, 2019), https://metro.co.uk/2018/07/01/man-jailed-after-posting-vile-rants-about-burning-down-mosques-and-getting-revenge-7674023/.

57 Ibid.

58 "Man arrested after disturbing racist video goes viral", MEND, February 2019. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://www.mend.org.uk/news/man-arrested-disturbing-racist-video-goes-viral/.

sterilisation. He continued "This was England," and "We're going to be f***ed with this lot. I think what we might have to do is think of something like old doctor Mengele […] so the c**ts can't f***ing multiply".

Meanwhile, Demos have noted that, between March 2016-March 2017, 143,920 Tweets were sent from the UK that were considered to be derogatory and anti-Islamic – this amounts to almost 400 per day.[59] Such anti-Muslim sentiments are particularly acute following incidents such as the London Bridge attack in 2017, following which the Guardian reported that 32 of the top 100 most shared tweets expressed negative sentiments about Muslims.[60]

A more recent report by Demos, entitled *Russian Influence Operations on Twitter*, considered the exploitation of 'Twitter bots' by the Russian state, looking at a dataset of "9 million tweets from 3,841 blocked accounts" which were associated with the Internet Research Agency (IRA).[61] The report found that there was a significant amount of effort expended by the network of bots to propagate hate rhetoric against Muslims in particular. Indeed, the "most widely-followed and visible troll account" shared more than 100 tweets, 60% of which related to Islam. One such tweet was "London: Muslims running a campaign stall for Sharia law! Must be sponsored by @MayorofLondon! #BanIslam" another was "Welcome To The New Europe! Muslim migrants shouting in London "This is our country now, GET OUT!" #Rapefugees". The report found that the most frequent topic of tweets sent during the six months prior to the 2016 EU referendum was "Islam" and "Muslims".[62]

Another report by the New York-based research institute, *Data & Society*, entitled *Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube*,[63] was a project that aimed to highlight a network of far-right and non-far-right channels that operate in synchrony to spread far-right narratives. They are described as the Alternative Influence Network (AIN), with the report investigating 81 channels on YouTube that gave platforms to around 65 political influencers. The report describes "political influencers" as individuals "who shape public opinion and advertise goods and services through the 'conscientious calibration' of their online personae" by building audiences and "selling" them far-right ideology. Members of this network include infamous far-right activists such as Stephen Yaxley Lennon, also known as Tommy Robinson, founder of the English Defence League (EDL) which is considered an "Extreme Right Wing activity" group by Max Hill, QC, the former Independent Reviewer of Counter-Terror Legislation; Richard Spencer, a prominent American white supremacist; and Lauren Southern, a Canadian far-right activist who was denied entry to the UK because of her anti-Islamic views.[64]

Regulating hatred online

Last year, the UK Government committed to the reviewing and updating of domestic legislation governing cyberspace to make the UK "the safest place in the world to go online".[65] This resulted in the Online Harms White Paper.[66] However, crucial concerns still remain unresolved, particularly regarding the remit of the protections and the mechanisms through which protections will be enforced.

[59] Carl Miller and Josh Smith, "Anti-Islamic content on Twitter", Demos, April 2017. Accessed: 29th May, 2018. https://demos.co.uk/project/anti-islamic-content-on-twitter/.

[60] Mark Townsend, "Anti-Muslim online surges driven by fake accounts", The Guardian, November 2017. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/nov/26/anti-muslim-online-bots-fake-acounts.

[61] "New Demos analysis finds Russian influence operations on Twitter targeted at UK were most visible when discussing Islam", Demos, November 2018. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://demos.co.uk/press-release/new-demos-analysis-finds-russian-influence-operations-on-twitter-targeted-at-uk-were-most-visible-when-discussing-islam/.

[62] "Social media and the propagation of far-right hate", MEND, November 2018. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://www.mend.org.uk/news/social-media-propagation-far-right-hate/.

[63] Rebecca Lewis, "Alternative Influence: broadcasting the reactionary right on YouTube", Data&Society, September 2018. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://datasociety.net/output/alternative-influence/.

[64] "Social media and the propagation of far-right hate", MEND, November 2018. Accessed: 29th May, 2019. https://www.mend.org.uk/news/social-media-propagation-far-right-hate/.

[65] "Online Harms White Paper", *Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office*, April 2019. Accessed: March 12th, 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper.

[66] "Online Harms White Paper", *Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office*, April 2019. Accessed: March 12th, 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper.

Platforms included within the remit of the white paper

As it is currently written, the remit of the white paper is limited to User-Generated Content (UGC). Therefore, this appears to exclude newspaper websites from oversight as they are not UGCs, but rather project harms without the influence of users. Crucially, concerning the devastating attack on mosques in New Zealand in 2019, the white paper notes that there was a "co-ordinate cross-platform effort to generate maximum reach of footage of the attack".[67] However, there is no acknowledgement of platforms such as MailOnline, the Sun, and the Mirror, which shared footage of the attacks and the attacker's manifesto on their websites.[68]

Moreover, the Minister for Digital and Culture, Caroline Dinenage, recently confirmed that the Government's proposed online harms regulatory regime will not only exclude online newspaper outlets, but also exclude the comments sections on these websites (which does indeed constitute user-generated content). According to Dinenage, IPSO is currently moderating newspaper comment sections in a manner that is "clear and effective".[69] This is categorically and demonstrably devoid of truth, and there is a large collection of evidence that IPSO cannot be considered an appropriate vehicle to protect against the online harms that plague many of the UK's major news publishers, both in terms of published content and in terms of the user-generated content in their comments sections.

In reality, comments sections on some of the largest newspaper publishers in the country are characterised by abusive and prejudicial content and remain essentially unregulated. Public experiments have been performed posting Nazi propaganda on the comments section of the Daily Mail, which have highlighted the popularity with which such sentiments are received on the platform, with even direct quotes from Adolf Hitler being "up-voted" to prominence amongst the comments.[70] Other examples from the Daily Mail comments section include abusive messages directed at Malala Yousafzai after she won the Nobel prize, including calls to "send her back home" and "praise some British kids for a change."[71]

[67] Ibid.

[68] Jim Waterson, "Facebook removed 1.5m videos of New Zealand terror attack in first 24 hours", *The Guardian*, March 2019. Accessed: March 16th, 2020. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/17/facebook-removed-15m-videos-new-zealand-terror-attack.

[69] "Parliamentlive.tv," Parliamentlive.tv, accessed May 21, 2020, https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/e5ed9e46-6100-475e-9f29-c5918a096eed

[70] "What Happens When You Comment on Daily Mail Articles with Hitler," indy100 (indy100, August 10, 2015), https://www.indy100.com/article/what-happens-when-you-comment-on-daily-mail-articles-with-actual-nazi-propaganda--Zy4ccsnBEx

[71] Tom Pride, "Daily Mail Readers' Vile, Racist Attacks on Malala for Winning the Nobel Peace Prize," Pride's Purge, October 11, 2014, https://tompride.wordpress.com/2014/10/10/daily-mail-readers-vile-racist-attacks-on-malala-for-winning-the-nobel-peace-prize/

Car passenger launches foul-mouthed racist tirade of abuse at Muslim worshippers paying their respects to the dead at a cemetery as part of Eid rituals

By Keiran Southern For Mailonline
Updated at 11:49 am on 2 September 2017

📷 +5

- A woman was filmed shouting 'f***ing p****!' at Muslims in Dewsbury, West Yorks
- The blonde-haired middle-aged woman abused worshippers celebrating Eid

In the 29-second clip posted to Facebook, the racist is seated in the passenger side of a red Mini and can be heard shouting 'F*** off! You f***ing p****! Come on, film me you f***ing black c****! You British f***ing p****.'

▶️

Newest	Oldest	**Best**	Worst

Comments have been moderated in advance.

TommyTwoTaps, London, United Kingdom, 4 hours ago
Freedom of expression. Just like when they burn our flag.

Reply   ⬆️ 40   ⬇️ 3

Comments have been moderated in advance.

Mike, Oxford, United Kingdom, 7 hours ago
Doesn't shock me, the only thing that does is the suppression of free speech.

Reply   ⬆️ 59   ⬇️ 10

mike, Garden County, United Kingdom, 7 hours ago
The woman should have kept her thoughts to herself. But I ask, why is the British media so obsessed with muslims and what happens within their religion. How about some focus on OUR religion? Christmas is coming, no doubt with the prolification of 'happy holidays ' cards and non relevant school Nativity plays.

Reply   ⬆️ 4130   ⬇️ 695

Comments have been moderated in advance.

Moober, Manchestet, United Kingdom, 1 hour ago
Well said lady

Reply   ⬆️ 484   ⬇️ 325

Comments have been moderated in advance.

LukeMcC278, Belfast, United Kingdom, 7 hours ago
Islam isn't a race. She has a right to her own opinion.

Reply   ⬆️ 69   ⬇️ 21

Comments have been moderated in advance.

Fiona999, Plymouth, United Kingdom, 1 hour ago
What about anti-white racism?

Reply   ⬆️ 567   ⬇️ 133

Comments have been moderated in advance.

Kirkham11, Stafford, United Kingdom, 7 hours ago
Stop calling it racist

Reply   ⬆️ 2836   ⬇️ 1004

A story published on the Daily Mail and associated comments.[72]

Considering the reach of newspapers in online spaces, to exclude them from the same levels of oversight as social media platforms has the potential of devaluing any protective benefits of the online harms strategy as a whole.

Method of protection

The Government has proposed regulation by an independent regulator, as opposed to primary legislation enforced by law. However, considering the severity of some of the abuse that can be found on online platforms and the enormity of the challenge for a single regulator, combined with the unprecedented failure of regulators set up in similar circumstances such as IPSO, MEND firmly believes that primary legislation is the only mechanism that would have sufficient weight to tackle the current problems effectively.

For a more detailed understanding of the issues surrounding online harms, read MEND's submission to the Home Affairs Committee **here**.

> **Failure to subject newspapers to the same level of oversight as social media platforms has the potential of devaluing any protective benefits of the online harms strategy as a whole. As such, MEND strongly urges the Government to reconsider this position and ensure that the remit of their strategy expands to include newspaper websites and their comments platforms.**
>
> **Moreover, in order to ensure that the Government's strategy is robust enough to bring about positive change, MEND urges the Government to implement primary legislation to deal with social media offences and hate speech online and commit to working with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle hate speech online in consultation with Muslim grassroots organisations.**

72 @DMReporter, *Twitter*, September 2017. Accessed: 20th May 2020. https://twitter.com/dmreporter/status/904286247182532608

Divisive political discourse

Public figures are also responsible for the mainstreaming of Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric and must show greater maturity and responsibility when discussing issues involving minority communities. In particular, they must take care not to cause hysteria for the sake of political popularity and agendas. Accusations of Islamophobia have been directed at both major political parties in recent times. Indeed, reports such as MEND's analysis of Islamophobia within the Conservative Party[73] and the recently leaked internal Labour Party report[74] demonstrate the need to address Islamophobia within their ranks. If political leaders do not take meaningful steps towards eliminating hate within their own parties, they cannot hope to inspire tolerance and understanding across society.

Certainly, the perpetuation of Islamophobic rhetoric is in no way limited to the extreme fringes of the far-right. In 2019, MEND released a report, *From 'Letterboxes' to 'Ragheads': Over 100 Examples of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party*, detailing over 120 incidents of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party.[75] Far from highlighting a small population of traditional 'keyboard warriors' the report demonstrates that Islamophobia is endemic and is being fuelled on online platforms even by some of the most senior members of our Government. As but one example, Nadine Dorries, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Care, has a reputation for promoting Islamophobic rhetoric on social media platforms, and frequently retweets and comments upon materials from known far-right and Islamophobic sources. Most recently, she was heavily criticised after for sharing a video from a Twitter account which "regularly posts anti-Islam messages and other far-right content". The video falsely claimed that Keir Starmer, the leader of the opposition, obstructed the prosecution of grooming gang members when he led the Crown Prosecution Service.[76] The issue of grooming gangs has been regularly used by infamous far-right figures such as the founder of the EDL and Pegida UK, Tommy Robinson, to direct hatred towards Muslims. Indeed, Dorries has been known to participate in the perpetuation of such narratives through retweeting content from Tommy Robinson.[77]

An interesting example of Dorries' approach to Muslims on social media can be found in her response to a tweet by the Mayor of London after Sadiq Khan shared a video regarding Islamophobic hate speech that had been directed to him. In response, Dorries tweeted: "How about, 'it's time to act on sex abusing grooming gangs,' instead? #TelfordGrooming #Rotherham #Priorities #leadership". [78]

[73] "From 'Letterboxes' to 'Ragheads': Over 100 Examples of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party" (London: MEND, 2019) https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Islamophobia-in-the-Conservative-Party-MEND.pdf

[74] "Leaked Labour Party Report Reveals Islamophobia and Inaction Within the Party," Muslim Engagement and Development, April 22, 2020, https://www.mend.org.uk/leaked-labour-party-report-reveals-islamophobia-and-inaction-within-the-party/

[75] "From 'Letterboxes' to 'Ragheads': Over 100 Examples of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party" (London: MEND, 2019) https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Islamophobia-in-the-Conservative-Party-MEND.pdf

[76] Walker, Peter, and Steven Morris. 2020. "No 10 Rebukes Tory Mps Over Misleading Keir Starmer Video". *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/may/14/labour-urges-tory-mps-to-admit-keir-starmer-video-was-doctored.

[77] @NadineDorries, *Twitter*, March 2017. Accessed: 14 May, 2019. https://twitter.com/NadineDorries/status/843589240961273856.

[78] @NadineDorries, *Twitter*, March 2018. Accessed: 14 May, 2019. https://twitter.com/NadineDorries/status/973488121701683200.

A tweet by Ms Dorries in response to Islamophobic hate speech experienced by Mr Khan.[79]

Both Telford and Rotherham fall outside the remit of the Mayor of London (as they are not located in London). Therefore, it would appear that Dorries used social media as a tool to reinforce inaccurate Islamophobic tropes.

Meanwhile, following Boris Johnson's article referring to Muslim women who wore the burka as "bank robbers" and "letterboxes",[80] Dorries argued that Johnson's comments did not go far enough.[81] She stated "I'm disappointed Boris didn't go further. He could have called for a ban on the burka".[82] She further suggested that "these women are not free to choose their own husbands" and women were being forced to wear the burqa to hide their "bruises."[83] Such sentiments fuel Orientalist tropes and ignore the agency, voices, and experiences of Muslim women themselves, further marginalising them from socio-political life.

A tweet by talkRADIO quoting Nadine Dorries following Mr Boris Johnson's article.[84]

When senior political figures engage and promote such Islamophobic views in public spaces, they serve to legitimise hate-filled discourses and transform them into mainstream narratives,

[79] @miqdaad, *Twitter*, September 2018. Accessed: 16th May, 2019. https://twitter.com/miqdaad/status/1041587306442973184.

[80] Boris Johnson, "Denmark has got it wrong. Yes, the burka is oppressive and ridiculous - but that's still no reason to ban it", *The Telegraph*, August 2018. Accessed: 2nd May, 2019. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/05/denmark-has-got-wrong-yes-burka-oppressive-ridiculous-still/.

[81] James Hingle, "Nadine Dorries: Boris Johnson's burqa article didn't go 'far enough'", *talkRADIO*, August 2018. Accessed: 1st May, 2019. https://talkradio.co.uk/news/nadine-dorries-boris-johnsons-burqa-article-didnt-go-far-enough-18080827492.

[82] Hingle, "Nadine Dorries: Boris Johnson's burqa article didn't go 'far enough'".

[83] Ibid.

[84] @talkRADIO, *Twitter*, August 2018. Accessed: 22nd May, 2019. https://twitter.com/talkRADIO/status/1027090369186590720.

thereby providing tacit approval for the continuation of such hatred across all social and political discourses.

Hatred in the press

In conducting research for our submission to the House of Lords Select Committee inquiry into citizenship and civic engagement, [85] MEND noted that one of the most significant barriers faced by Muslim communities was felt to be a toxic atmosphere of hatred that is fuelled and maintained by the effects of stereotyping, misrepresentation, and stigmatising discourse in print and online media. Indeed, studies have shown that, with 21 negative references to Muslims within the British press for every single neutral or positive reference, [86] the media plays an integral role in spreading prejudice, stereotypes, and xenophobic views of British Muslims. These negative representations of Muslims are incredibly detrimental to community cohesion and the subsequent ability of British Muslims to fully participate and engage as equal members of society.

In the fast-paced world in which we live, the majority of the public lacks the time and resources to go out of their way to thoroughly research, critically analyse, and evaluate every article that they read. Therefore, the British press has considerable power over public narratives and perceptions surrounding important issues. As such, the repetitive negative misrepresentation of a particular community by newspapers inevitably results in distorted understandings and, ultimately, the fostering of prejudices. Indeed, numerous polls have shown that the British public derives much of its information from the media and is generally quite ill-informed about the Islamic faith and Muslims. A YouGov poll conducted in 2018 by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) found that of the 1,629 Britons surveyed, 90% had not been inside a mosque in recent years. [87] Another poll conducted by YouGov in 2002 found that of the Britons surveyed, 74% knew "nothing or next to nothing about Islam" and 64% stated that what they did know was "acquired through the media". [88] MEND's commissioned ComRes poll, 2018, found that the majority of Britons also agreed that the mainstream media was a key source in perpetuating Islamophobia in our society.

Considering the overly negative representation of minorities and British Muslims within the British press, the media's significant role in forming public understanding has detrimental impacts which are acutely felt by minority social, ethnic, and religious communities, and Muslims in particular. What should perhaps be even more concerning is that negative perceptions are arguably often being fed to the public in a calculated method to drive profit. This was noted by the Chair of the Ethics Council at the National Union of Journalists, Professor Chris Frost, who highlighted to the Home Affairs Select Committee during an evidence session in 2018 that "one of the best ways to sell newspapers…is to raise issues of fear…pick a group which an 'other' group…at the moment a good one is Muslims". [89]

Certainly, notable tabloid publications have developed an infamous reputation for publishing controversial, xenophobic, and Islamophobic stories, including The Sun and The Daily Mail; both being singled out for criticism by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). [90] The ECRI accused the Daily Mail, of playing a "prominent role in encouraging prejudice" against vulnerable groups, whilst also reporting that both the Daily Mail and the Sun "are responsible for most of the offensive, discriminatory and provocative

[85] "MEND submission to the House of Lords Select Committee Hearing on Citizenship and Civic Engagement", *MEND*, September 8, 2017, accessed 20.06.2018, https://mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/MEND-Submission-to-the-House-of-Lords-Select-Commitee-Hearing-on-Citizenship-and-Civil-Engagement_v1.pdf

[86] See Baker, Paul, Costas Gabrielatos, and Tony McEnery. *Discourse analysis and media attitudes: the representation of Islam in the British Press*. Cambridge: University Press, 2013.

[87] "90% of people haven't been inside a mosque – change that this weekend!" *Muslim Council of Britain* (MCB), February 13, 2018, accessed 20.06.2018, http://www.mcb.org.uk/90-of-people-havent-been-inside-a-mosque-change-that-this-weekend/

[88] Chris Allen, "A review of the evidence relating to the representation of Muslims and Islam in the British media", *University of Birmingham*, October 24, 2012, accessed 20.06.2018, https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/IASS/news-events/MEDIA-ChrisAllen-APPGEvidence-Oct2012.pdf

[89] "Oral Evidence: Hate crime and its violent consequences", *Home Affairs Select Committee,* February 2018. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/oral/78630.pdf.

[90] "ECRI Report On The United Kingdom", *Council of Europe*, October 4, 2016, accessed 20.12.2017, https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/united_kingdom/gbr-cbc-v-2016-038-eng.pdf

terminology". Concluding that "hate speech in some traditional media continues to be a serious problem",[91] the report highlighted articles such as the Sun's "Rescue boats? I'd use gunships to stop migrants", in which the columnist, Katie Hopkins, likened migrants to cockroaches, and also highlighted The Sun's front-page headline "1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis" which was subsequently found to be wholly inaccurate and a forced retraction was issued. Furthermore, in 2017, the Daily Mail was banned as a reliable source on Wikipedia due to its "reputation for poor fact checking and sensationalism".[92]

"Rescue boats? I'd use gunships to stop migrants", by Katie Hopkins in the Sun.[93]

The Sun tweets about "Rescue boats? I'd use gunships to stop migrants" by Katie Hopkins.[94]

Meanwhile, newspapers serve to further legitimise online hatred. While they are often considered to be excluded from responsibility for online harms (as appears to be the position

[91] "ECRI Report On The United Kingdom", *Council of Europe,* October 4, 2016, accessed 20.12.2017, https://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/united_kingdom/gbr-cbc-v-2016-038-eng.pdf

[92] Jackson, Jasper. " Wikipedia bans Daily Mail as 'unreliable' source." The Guardian. February 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/feb/08/wikipedia-bans-daily-mail-as-unreliable-source-for-website.

[93] Naharnet Newsdesk, "U.N. Rights Chief Urges Britain to Combat Tabloid Hate Speech," Naharnet, accessed June 5, 2020, http://m.naharnet.com/stories/en/176706-u-n-rights-chief-urges-britain-to-combat-tabloid-hate-speech)

[94] John McCarthy, "Update: The Sun Didn't Delete Katie Hopkins 'Show Me Bodies Floating in Water' Tweet in Midst of Today's Front Page," The Drum (The Drum, September 3, 2015), https://www.thedrum.com/news/2015/09/03/update-sun-didnt-delete-katie-hopkins-show-me-bodies-floating-water-tweet-midst)

of the Government's Online Harms White Paper),[95] their role in disseminating "fake news" and misinformation cannot be overlooked within the context of online harms and the resulting vulnerability of minority communities to abuse.

On a very basic level, newspaper websites, such as that of *the Daily Mail*, receive millions of visitors every day. As such, an abusive post of Facebook may accrue thousands of views, but it is unlikely to receive the same online public visibility as posts by major online newspapers. Indeed, as of 1st April 2020, the Daily Mail's website is the 10th most viewed website in the UK,[96] averaging over 365million visits per day, with each visitor viewing almost ten pages, and over 15% of traffic being directed from social media platforms.[97]
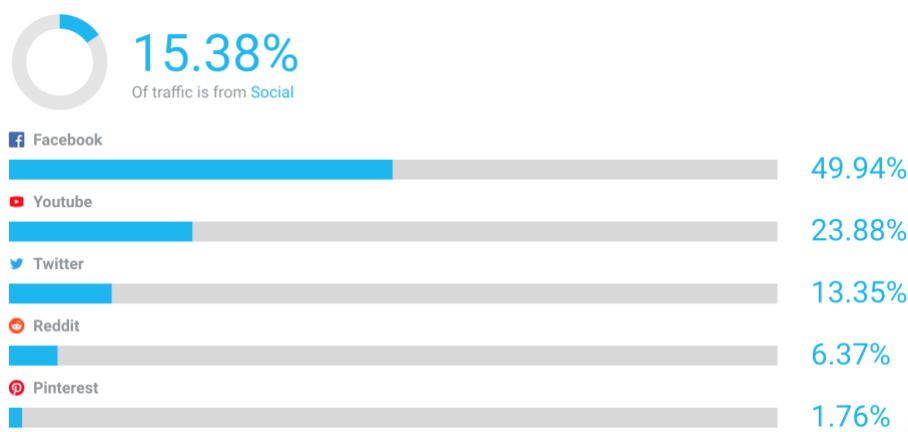
Percentage of traffic originating from social media sites to dailymail.co.uk.[98]

Moreover, after visiting the Daily Mail's website, the top two destination sites of users are Twitter and Facebook.[99]
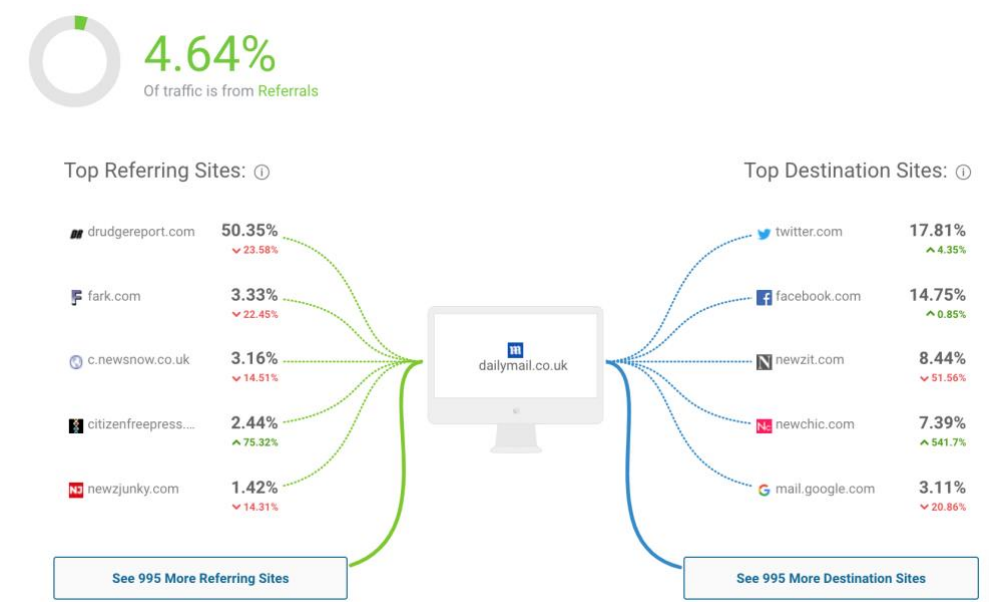
[95] "Online Harms White Paper", *Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport and the Home Office*, April 2019. Accessed: March 12th, 2020. https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper.

[96] "Top Sites Ranking for All Categories in United Kingdom," Top Websites in United Kingdom - SimilarWeb Website Ranking, accessed May 21, 2020, https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/united-kingdom

[97] Ibid.

[98] "Top Sites Ranking for All Categories in United Kingdom," Top Websites in United Kingdom - SimilarWeb Website Ranking, accessed May 21, 2020, https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/united-kingdom

[99] Ibid.

Consequently, the direct link between newspapers and social media platforms cannot be underestimated, particularly considering the ever-transforming landscape of news consumption, wherein almost half of the population now rely on social media for receiving news.[101]

As concluded by the European Commission against Racism (ECRI), there is a relationship between bias media reporting and the vulnerability of minority communities, with the ECRI advising "the media to take stock of the importance of responsible reporting, not only to avoid perpetuating prejudice and biased information, but also to avoid harm to targeted persons or vulnerable groups," and noting that, "in light of the fact that Muslims are increasingly under the spotlight as a result of recent Isis-related terrorist acts around the world, fuelling prejudice against Muslims shows a reckless disregard, not only for the dignity of the great majority of Muslims in the United Kingdom, but also for their safety."[102]

Certainly, this warning has been echoed by academic studies, such as those found in Monish Bhatia, Scott Poynting, and Waqas Tufail's *Media, Crime and Racism,*[103] which explore the tangible and violent impacts on communities when media representations are used to racialise crime and criminalise minorities. Meanwhile, recognising the unambiguous link between media representations and public perceptions, Rt Hon Baroness Warsi Of Dewsbury, giving evidence to the Home Affairs Select Committee on Hate Crime and its Violent Consequences on the impact of media representation on hate crime, noted that "There is evidence to show that this does play into the way people react on the street, the kind of things people quote back when they engage in hate crime".[104] Indeed, in the month following the result of the June 2016 referendum, Home Office statistics detailed a 44% rise in racially or religiously aggravated offences compared to the same month the previous year,[105] with the University of Leicester Centre for Hate Studies noting how the rise in such hate incidents had been "fuelled and legitimised by politicians and by the media".[106]

The discriminatory practices and agendas that are fueled by newspaper editors are in need of immediate attention and redress, particularly regarding current mechanisms holding newspapers to account. The space in this briefing does not allow for a full analysis of the current press regulator IPSO's flaws, however, MEND and other organisations such as Hacked Off have written extensively on these failings, and further information can be found on our own website **here,** and on the website of HackedOff **here.**

Considering the role of newspapers in the mainstreaming of Islamophobic hatred and abuse, it is clear that reform is needed within the press industry. As such, MEND urges the Government to:

- **Commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation.**

- **Commit to the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within the media.**

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[100] Ibid.

[101] "Half of People Now Get Their News from Social Media," Ofcom, July 24, 2019, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/latest/features-and-news/half-of-people-get-news-from-social-media

[102] Lizzie Dearden, "The Sun and Daily Mail Accused of 'Fuelling Prejudice' in Hate Crime Report," *The Independent*, October 8, 2016, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/media/press/the-sun-and-daily-mail-fuelling-prejudice-racist-violence-hate-crime-speech-uk-ecri-report-a7351856.html

[103] Monish Bhatia, Scott Poynting, and Waqas Tufail, eds., *Media, Crime and Racism* (S.l.: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2019)

[104] "Oral Evidence: Hate crime and its violent consequences", *Home Affairs Committee,* February 20, 2018, accessed 20.06.2018, http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/oral/78630.pdf

[105] Full Fact Team, "Hate Crime in England and Wales," Full Fact, October 17, 2017, accessed June 20, 2018, https://fullfact.org/crime/hate-crime-england-and-wales/.

[106] "Politicians and Media Fuel Hate Crime in Britain, Say University of Leicester Experts," University of Leicester, June 29, 2016, https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/press/press-releases/2016/june/politicians-and-media-fuel-hate-crime-in-britain-2019-say-university-of-leicester-experts)

Developments during COVID-19

Pandemics often present a uniquely opportune moment for the spreading of misinformation amidst public nervousness at a time when public information is frequently slow to be disseminated. The coronavirus pandemic itself has been associated with the spread of misinformation at such a scale that the World Health Organisation termed it an "infodemic" before the outbreak was even considered a pandemic; "an over-abundance of information (some accurate and some not) that makes it hard for people to find trustworthy sources and reliable guidance".[107]

At the same time, the Online Far-Right Space (OFRS) has often acted as the producer, sustainer, and propagator of conspiracy theories that are used to substantiate far-right thought. It is, therefore, perhaps unsurprising that the current pandemic has been utilised by far-right forces to disseminate dubious information that fuels a far-right ideological worldview at the expense of minority communities. In recent months, the OFRS has been particularly active in capitalising on the current crisis to further themes of perceived threats posed by Muslim communities. Traditionally, popular far-right narratives surround images of Muslims as threats to security and public safety. These themes have been furthered by theories that Muslims are also a unique threat to public health in relation to COVID-19.

International conspiracies connecting Muslims to the spread of the coronavirus continue to abound.[108] In India, where the persecution of the minority Muslim community by the Hindutva agenda has now been well document, evidence has emerged demonstrating how the pandemic is being used to spread further Islamophobia. The term "corona-jihad" has gained particular momentum, denoting the theory that Muslim communities in India are actively undermining the Government to spread coronavirus as a form of warfare and terrorism.

At the same time, groups in the UK have popularised these conspiracies on social media, with counter-terrorism police recently investigating far-right groups accused of "trying to use the coronavirus crisis to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment".[109] Specifically, social media sites are replete with insinuations that Muslims are flouting lockdown measures, with mosques featuring prominently in unsubstantiated claims that Muslims are continuing to hold communal gatherings. Increasing patterns of Islamophobic conspiracy theories and abuse in online spaces has thus led to fears that Muslims and mosques may be susceptible to a wave of Islamophobic attacks as lockdown measures are lifted.[110] Any government response should, therefore, be mindful of the potential for misdirected frustration regarding the inevitable socio-economic repercussions of the crisis to be targeted at minority communities.

A report produced by members of the Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group (AMHWG) investigated posts from major social media platforms during the pandemic and noted several key themes emerging amongst anti-Muslim narratives. In particular, these themes include:

- Associating mosques with continued communal gatherings and the spread of COVID-19;

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[107] World Health Organization. 2020. "Novel Coronavirus(2019-Ncov) Situation Report - 13". https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200202-sitrep-13-ncov-v3.pdf.

[108] Omar Suleiman, "Like India, Sri Lanka Is Using Coronavirus to Stigmatise Muslims," Coronavirus pandemic | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, May 20, 2020), https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/india-sri-lanka-coronavirus-stigmatise-muslims-200519134939934.html

[109] Nazia Parveen, "Police Investigate UK Far-Right Groups over Anti-Muslim Coronavirus Claims," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, April 5, 2020), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/police-investigate-uk-far-right-groups-over-anti-muslim-coronavirus-claims

[110] Lizzie Dearden Home Affairs Correspondent @lizziedearden, "'Dangerous' Conspiracy Theories Could Spark Wave of Islamophobic Attacks When Lockdown Lifts, Report Warns," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, April 19, 2020), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-muslim-lockdown-conspiracy-theories-tommy-robinson-katie-hopkins-a9471516.html

- Claims that Muslims are failing to observe social distancing rules and are "super-spreaders" of the virus, including the assertion that the "UK's Muslim population is responsible for a quarter of the country's COVID-related deaths";

- Arguments that the police are giving favourable treatment to Muslims due to fears of being accused of racism.[111]

Professor Imran Awan, the co-author of the report, noted that: "The COVID-19 crisis has been used to create 'others' of Muslims, blaming them for the spread of the virus. The spread of fake news online is contributing to this extremely worrying trend".[112]

Indeed, a variety of fake stories and images have circulated online depicting Muslims as flouting social distancing measures by attending mosques for congregational prayers.[113] Many of these stories include historic images and videos of mosques in operation prior to lockdown measures being enforced. Such misinformation has led to police being inundated with false complaints by members of the public, with some posting messages online calling for the demolition of all mosques to "cure" COVID-19.[114]

These conspiracies have been given further impetus by far-right voices and commentators, including Daily Mail commentator, Andrew Pearce, who suggested that "If families gather for holy month of Ramadan will there be a huge spike in Covid cases. Doctors are very worried".[115] Similarly, Katie Hopkins (who has since had her Twitter account suspended and transitioned to Instagram)[116] inferred that the UK police should follow the example of India in deploying violence against Muslims during the lockdown. In a video she shared on Twitter Muslim worshippers in India can be seen being beaten by police using a 'lathi' (a wooden stick that can measure up to 1.8m). This was accompanied by a comment suggesting that Humberside Police force should perhaps aspire to the same measures.[117]

[111] Roxanakhanwilliams, "CORONAVIRUS, FEAR AND HOW ISLAMOPHOBIA SPREADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA," Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group, April 20, 2020, https://anti-muslim-hatred-working-group.home.blog/2020/04/20/coronavirus-fear-and-how-islamophobia-spreads-on-social-media/

[112] Lizzie Dearden Home Affairs Correspondent @lizziedearden, "'Dangerous' Conspiracy Theories Could Spark Wave of Islamophobic Attacks When Lockdown Lifts, Report Warns," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, April 19, 2020), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-muslim-lockdown-conspiracy-theories-tommy-robinson-katie-hopkins-a9471516.html

[113] Vikram Dodd, "Fears of Rise in UK Terrorist Recruits as Anti-Radicalisation Referrals Collapse," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, April 22, 2020), https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/apr/22/fears-of-rise-in-uk-terrorism-recruits-after-anti-radicalisation-referrals-collapse-coronavirus

[114] Lizzie Dearden Home Affairs Correspondent @lizziedearden, "'Dangerous' Conspiracy Theories Could Spark Wave of Islamophobic Attacks When Lockdown Lifts, Report Warns," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, April 19, 2020), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-muslim-lockdown-conspiracy-theories-tommy-robinson-katie-hopkins-a9471516.html

[115] Aina Khan, "Anger as Right-Wing UK Voices Suggest Ramadan Virus Spread," News | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, April 13, 2020), https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/anger-wing-uk-voices-predict-ramadan-virus-spread-200413170844190.html?xif=

[116] Twigger, Will. 2020. "Katie Hopkins Says She's 'Proud' Of White Lives Matter Banner After Twitter Ban". Mirror. https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/washed-up-katie-hopkins-breaks-22239683.

[117] @KTHopkins, Twitter, March 2020. Accessed: 20st May, 2020. https://twitter.com/kthopkins/status/1243625444139769858

A tweet from Katie Hopkins' account.[118]

Meanwhile, Tommy Robinson shared a video on his Telegram channel allegedly showing British Muslims attending prayers at a "secret mosque" in Birmingham.[119] The West Midlands police subsequently dismissed these claims. However, the video had been watched more than 14,000 times[120] and continues to be shared as evidence of Muslim communities allegedly undermining the British state.[121]

Furthermore, it appears that some elements of the OFRS are simultaneously advocating for the use of the virus to target the enemies of the far-right (i.e. minorities). Researchers have found that neo-Nazi groups, particularly across Europe and the US, are celebrating the pandemic, considering it a catalyst to break down society so that they can form a better one. Simon Lindberg, Leader of the Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), claimed that: "[COVID-19] might be precisely what we need in order to bring about a real national uprising and a strengthening of revolutionary political forces".[122] Such 'accelerationists' are reportedly urging their members to contract the virus and then go to minority-dominated areas to spread it. Leaks from channels on Telegram have shown how neo-Nazi members are being urged to cough on doorknobs in synagogues, to spray saliva on police officers, and to cough on minority community members.[123] In one case where an individual was arrested for coughing on a grocery store employee in New Jersey, US, the OFRS claimed that he should be "exalted to sainthood".[124] However, due to the subversive nature of communication practised by the groups, further efforts are still required to investigate how prevalent the sentiment is in the larger far-right movement.

[118] @KTHopkins, *Twitter*, March 2020. Accessed: 20st May, 2020. https://twitter.com/kthopkins/status/1243625444139769858

[119] Nazia Parveen, "Police Investigate UK Far-Right Groups over Anti-Muslim Coronavirus Claims," The Guardian (Guardian News and Media, April 5, 2020), https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/police-investigate-uk-far-right-groups-over-anti-muslim-coronavirus-claims

[120] Imran Awan, "Coronavirus: Conspiracy Theories and Fake Videos Fuel Rise in Islamophobia," The Conversation, May 7, 2020, https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-conspiracy-theories-and-fake-videos-fuel-rise-in-islamophobia-137107

[121] Lizzie Dearden Home Affairs Correspondent @lizziedearden, "'Dangerous' Conspiracy Theories Could Spark Wave of Islamophobic Attacks When Lockdown Lifts, Report Warns," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, April 19, 2020), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-muslim-lockdown-conspiracy-theories-tommy-robinson-katie-hopkins-a9471516.html

[122] Colborne, Michael. 2020. "As World Struggles To Stop Deaths, Far Right Celebrates COVID-19". *Aljazeera.Com*. https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/world-struggles-stop-deaths-celebrates-covid-19-200326165545387.html.

[123] Ibid.

[124] Michael Colborne, "As World Struggles to Stop Deaths, Far Right Celebrates COVID-19," Coronavirus pandemic | Al Jazeera (Al Jazeera, March 26, 2020), https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/world-struggles-stop-deaths-celebrates-covid-19-200326165545387.html)

The threat of the far-right

The activity of OFRS has very tangible consequences, and as mounting conspiracy theories are given life on online spaces during the current pandemic, there are concerns that Muslims and mosques may be vulnerable to a wave of Islamophobic attacks as lockdown measures are increasingly lifted.[125] Any government response should, therefore, be mindful of the potential for misdirected frustration (which has until now largely been contained to online spaces as a consequence of lockdown) to be violently targeted at minority communities as public restrictions are increasingly eased.

The dangers of online hatred and conspiracy theories translating into far-right violence directed at minority communities should not be underestimated. One of the most unavoidable reminders of this danger in recent times is the tragic events in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019, when an attacker opened fire on worshippers in two mosques during Friday prayers. In his manifesto, he credited his motivation to the "Great Replacement" theory, claiming that he wished "to show the invaders that our lands will never be their lands, our homelands are our own and that, as long as a white man still lives, they will NEVER conquer our lands".[126] The "Great Replacement" theory itself posits that non-White populations are actively erasing white people through measures that are both violent in nature ('jihad') and non-violent (for example, through migration, reproduction, and miscegenation). The theory also often suggests that this erasure of White people and culture is not a passive occurrence, but a result of an active conspiracy by minority communities against the naïve White populace.

Closer to home, the murder of Jo Cox by Thomas Mair in 2016 and the murder of Makram Ali by Darren Osborne in the Finsbury Park attack in 2017 are reminders of the need to radically recalibrate how far-right violence is understood and tackled within security discourse and strategies. Meanwhile, the MEND ComRes poll in 2018 showed that 61% of the British public people believe that far-right political groups are responsible for Islamophobia in the UK.

Far-right violence is not a new nor isolated phenomenon. According to the Global Terrorism Index, the UK suffered 12 far-right attacks in 2017,[127] and in 2019 the index documented a 320% increase of far-right incidents over the past five years worldwide,[128] highlighting that these are not isolated events but part of a broader far-right phenomenon of espousing a xenophobic and ethno-nationalist agenda that must be urgently tackled.

Meanwhile, Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu recently announced that right-wing ideologies pose the fastest-growing terror threat to the UK. According to Basu, increases in Islamophobic, antisemitic and racist abuse can be seen as a "proxy" for rising "extremism", and must be tackled to reduce the terror threat.[129] At the same time, the latest figures from Europol demonstrate that the UK reported the highest number of far-right terror attacks and plots across Europe in 2019.[130]

Home Office data indicates that the majority of terror-related suspects arrested in 2019 (47%) were of white ethnicity, the highest proportion since March 2004 for the second consecutive

[125] Lizzie Dearden Home Affairs Correspondent @lizziedearden, "'Dangerous' Conspiracy Theories Could Spark Wave of Islamophobic Attacks When Lockdown Lifts, Report Warns," The Independent (Independent Digital News and Media, April 19, 2020), https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-muslim-lockdown-conspiracy-theories-tommy-robinson-katie-hopkins-a9471516.html

[126] Jane Coaston, "The New Zealand Shooter's Manifesto Shows How White Nationalist Rhetoric Spreads," Vox (Vox, March 15, 2019), https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/3/15/18267163/new-zealand-shooting-christchurch-white-nationalism-racism-language

[127] Samuel Osborne, "Number of far-right terror attacks increases as overall deaths from terrorism fall, report finds", *Independent*, December 2018. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/politics/global-terrorism-index-farright-attacks-increase-overall-deaths-fall-institute-for-economics-peace-a8667031.html

[128] Institute For Economics & Peace. 2019. "Global Terrorism Index 2019 Measuring The Impact Of Terrorism". http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf

[129] Dearden, Lizzie. 2019. "Far Right Poses Fastest Growing Terror Threat To UK, Head Of Terror Police Says". The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terror-attack-plots-uk-far-right-wing-extremism-threat-met-police-neil-basu-a9112046.html

[130] Europol. 2020. "EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat)". https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2020

year[131] and the most recent Home Office Data (2019-2020) shows that the number of far-right prisoners is at a record high level, with 44 "extreme right-wing" prisoners in custody for terror offences across Great Britain.[132]

Meanwhile, research conducted by Queen Mary's University published in 2019 examined sympathies for violent protest and terrorism (SVPT) amongst different ethnic and religious groups.[133] It uncovered that twice as many white Britons (15%) expressed extremist sympathies with SVPT versus those of Pakistani origin (8%) and that 18% of Christians were found to hold extremist views, compared to 8% of Muslims.

Moreover, despite media coverage suggesting that Islamism inspires a large proportion of terrorist attacks, Europol figures show that less than 2% of all terrorist attacks across Europe were 'religiously motivated' between 2009-2013.[134] In reality, separatist and ethno-nationalist organisations pose a significant threat across EU countries.[135] Indeed, 64% of terrorist attacks in 2019 were perpetrated by such ethno-nationalist or separatist individuals or groups.[136]

While the murder of Jo Cox in 2016 and the attack at Finsbury Park in 2017 are arguably the most prominent examples of far-right violence in the recent UK context, they are by no means isolated incidences. The following is a (non-exhaustive) list of cases of far-right violence over the last five years:

- **September 2015**: The neo-Nazi white supremacist, Zack Davies, was jailed after being radicalised online and using a claw hammer and machete to attack Dr Sarandev Bhambra in an attempt to decapitate him because he was Asian.[137]

- **June 2016:** Thomas Mair murdered Jo Cox.[138] Thomas Mair believed that White people faced an existential threat and once wrote that the "white race" faced a long and "very bloody struggle". However, it is reported that perhaps his greatest hatred was against those he condemned as White "collaborators": the liberals, the left and the media.[139]

- **June 2017:** Darren Osborne drove a van into a group of Muslims outside Muslim Welfare House in Finsbury Park. 51-year-old Makram Ali was killed in the terrorist attack.[140]

- **November 2017:** Zaynab Hussein was walking home after taking her children to school when Paul Moore intentionally hit her with his car. As she lay on the ground, Moore turned his vehicle around and drove over her again. During the attack, Moore also attempted to run over Muslim children, including a 12-year-old girl. He would later gloat to his brother that he ran over a "P**i".[141]

[131] Dearden, Lizzie. 2020. "More White People Arrested Over Terrorism Than Any Other Ethnic Group For Second Year In A Row". *The Independent*. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/white-people-terror-offences-number-ethnic-group-asian-home-office-a9376846.html.

[132] "Operation Of Police Powers Under The Terrorism Act 2000, Financial Year Ending March 2020". 2020. GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-financial-year-ending-march-2020?utm_source=61dfd134-b5fa-4d90-8604-e42334e0cd99&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=daily.

[133] Lizzie Dearden, "White British people 'twice as likely to hold extremist views as people of Pakistani descent", *Independent*, March 2019. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/white-british-people-extremist-views-pakistani-research-a8822801.html.

[134] Beenish Ahmed, "Less Than 2 Percent Of Terrorist Attacks In The EU. Are Religiously Motivated", *Think Progress*, January 2015. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://thinkprogress.org/less-than-2-percent-of-terrorist-attacks-in-the-e-u-are-religiously-motivated-cec7d8ebedf6/#.vqflohn7s.

[135] "European Union Terrorism Situation And Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2016", 2016. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016.

[136] " EU Terrorism Situation & Trend Report (Te-Sat)," Europol, June 27, 2019, https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat-report)

[137] Brian Whelan, "National Action's Zack Davies guilty of attempted murder", *Channel 4 News*, June 2015. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.channel4.com/news/national-actions-zack-davies-guilty-of-attempted-murder.

[138] Booth, Robert, Vikram Dodd, and Nazia Parveen. 2016. "Labour MP Jo Cox Dies After Being Shot And Stabbed". The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jun/16/labour-mp-jo-cox-shot-in-west-yorkshire.

[139] Cobain, Ian, Nazia Parveen, and Matthew Taylor. 2016. "The Slow-Burning Hatred That Led Thomas Mair To Murder Jo Cox". The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/nov/23/thomas-mair-slow-burning-hatred-led-to-jo-cox-murder.

[140] Weaver, Matthew, Matthew Taylor, Jessica Elgot, Bonnie Malkin, Kevin Rawlinson, Steven Morris, and Damien Gayle et al. 2017. "Finsbury Park Mosque Attack: Suspect Named As Darren Osborne, 47-Year-Old Who Lives In Cardiff – As It Happened". The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2017/jun/19/north-london-van-incident-finsbury-park-casualties-collides-pedestrians-live-updates.

[141] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. HZ36/25

- **August 2018:** Peter Morgan was jailed for possessing a cache of bomb-making equipment and manuals at his home, and had already begun to build a bomb. Police also found neo-Nazi and Islamophobic literature, as well as computer files on types of torture.[142]

- **December 2018:** Neo-Nazi couple, Adam Thomas and Claudia Patatas, who named their baby son after Adolf Hitler, were imprisoned for their membership to National Action, a terrorist group that a judge warned wants to use "serious violence and murder" to "overthrow of democracy" in the UK.[143]

- **March 2019:** After watching the live stream of the terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand, the day before, Vincent Fuller attacked cars with non-white drivers with a baseball bat before searching the streets for more targets armed with a knife. During the attack, he is reported to have shouted "All Muslims should die, White supremacists rule. I'm going to murder a Muslim."[144]

- **May 2019**: Jack Renshaw, an EDL supporter and former leader of the BNP youth wing, was imprisoned after he plotted to murder Rosie Cooper, MP, as part of his campaign to achieve a "white Britain by any means necessary". He stated that "The refugee problem is part of a bigger problem, it's a symptom of a disease," he added. "That disease is international Jewry. In World War Two, we took the wrong side… National Socialists there to remove Jewry from Europe once and for all. Instead, we let these parasites live among us." [145]

- **June 2019**: Michal Szewczuk and Oskar Dunn-Koczorowski were imprisoned for inciting terror attacks against Jewish people, non-white people and anyone "perceived to be complicit in the perpetuation of multiculturalism".[146]

- **July 2019**: Neo-Nazi, Daniel Ward, was jailed for his membership to National Action, the banned far-right terrorist group. A search of his home revealed "air weapons, steel BB ammunition, a rifle bayonet and extreme right-wing propaganda".[147]

- **September 2019**: 16-year-old, Kieran Cleary was convicted of terrorism offences after researching "extreme right-wing and anti-Muslim material" and attempting to build a bomb at aged just 15, as well as declaring his intent to "go on a rampage".[148]

- **January 2020:** A 16-year-old neo-Nazi, who cannot be named, was jailed after having written a manifesto which identified schools, pubs and council buildings as potential sites to bomb.[149]

- **May 2020**: Filip Golon Bednarczyk from Luton, pleaded guilty and was convicted for terror offences after admitting to possessing explosive material with plans to make bombs at home.[150] He had downloaded the Christchurch terrorist's manifesto and

[142] Carrell, Severin. 2018. "Far-Right Terrorist Caught With Bomb-Making Kit Is Jailed". The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/16/peter-morgan-scottish-far-right-terrorist-bomb-making-kit-jailed-12-years.

[143] Lyons, Izzy. 2018. "Neo-Nazi Couple Who Named Their Son After Adolf Hitler Jailed For Membership Of Far-Right Group". The Telegraph. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/12/18/neo-nazi-couple-named-son-adolf-hitler-jailed-membership-far/.

[144] Dearden, Lizzie. 2019. "White Supremacist Jailed For Launching Far-Right Terror Attack A Day After Mosque Shootings". The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/vincent-fuller-jailed-sentence-christchurch-mosque-shooting-prison-latest-a9099266.html.

[145] Lizzie Dearden, "National Action terror plot: How once-ridiculed BNP Youth leader planned neo-Nazi machete attack", *Independent*, July 2018. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/national-action-terror-plot-jack-renshaw-bnp-edl-rosie-cooper-machete-dog-a8451126.html.

[146] Dearden, Lizzie. 2019. "Teenage Neo-Nazis Jailed For Threatening To Attack Prince Harry And Other Targets". The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/neo-nazi-trial-terror-prince-harry-michal-szewczuk-oskar-dunn-koczorowski-a8963396.html.

[147] "Fanatical' Neo-Nazi Terrorist Group Member Who Called For 'Race War' Jailed". 2019. Expressandstar.Com. https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2019/07/19/fanatical-neo-nazi-terrorist-group-member-who-called-for-race-war-jailed/.

[148] Dearden, Lizzie. 2019. "Boy With Extreme Right-Wing Views Tried To Build Bomb And Threatened To 'Kill Many People'". The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/kieran-cleary-bomb-kill-right-neo-nazi-bradford-jacek-tchorzewski-a9113946.html.

[149] Bird, Steve. 2020. "British Neo-Nazi Teenager Jailed For Planning Terrorist Attacks On Home City". The Telegraph. https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/07/british-neo-nazi-teenager-jailed-planning-terrorist-attacks/.

[150] "Man Convicted After Pleading Guilty To Terrorism And Explosives Offences". 2020. *Metropolitan Police*. http://news.met.police.uk/news/man-convicted-after-pleading-guilty-to-terrorism-and-explosives-offences-401832.

shared memes supporting the terror attack, which left 51 mosque attendees dead and inspired further atrocities around the world.[151]

- **June 2020**: four British neo-Nazi "die-hards" were convicted for being members of National Action, the banned terrorist group.[152] During the trial, jurors were shown messages in which the four joked about gassing synagogues, using a Jew's head as a football, and exclaiming "Rot in hell, bitch", after hearing of Cox's murder.[153]

- **June 2020:** 137 arrests were made following "sickening" violence by far-right "racist thugs" in London amidst a month of peaceful protests supporting the global Black Lives Matter movement.[154]

Mosque attacks in the last five years

Such threats that emanate from the far-right raise concerns for the safety for members of minority communities, as well as buildings and properties belonging to or representing these communities (such as mosques, schools, and community centres). When it comes to the vulnerability of mosques specifically, this could arguably be a result of their physical and visual representation of Islam, and their significance as a community hub for Muslim communities. Mosques visually and physically represent an identity that is often pitted against the perceived dominant group identity and is thus considered by some to be a threat to what it means to be British. This is particularly evident in anti-immigration and far-right protests,[155] which often have banners displayed with such slogans as "ban mosques" or "no more mosques",[156] lest it becomes part of the "Islamification of Britain" process.[157]

National cases

In response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted by MEND in 2019 which asked about hate crimes that targeted "mosques" and those that targeted "religious institutions", a number of police forces responded that they do not record the data in a retrievable format. Other police forces responded that while they do record data for attacks targeting "religious institutions" they were unable to provide specific data in terms of breakdown for the particular religious institutions (i.e. mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras). The data that could be retrieved shows that between 2013-2015 there were at least 138 attacks against mosques, and at least 200 reported attacks in 2016-2018. However, considering the disparity in how forces are recording this data, the actual number of attacks targeting mosque is likely to be many times the figures mentioned above.

Considering the lack of standardisation in recording, combined with the renowned underreporting of Islamophobic offences, it is virtually impossible to document all the cases of attacks against mosques and Islamic institutions over the last five years. However, as but a selection of examples:

- **June 2016-April 2018:** David Parnham (who called himself "Muslim Slayer")[158] sent letters to mosques and politicians across the country, including white supremacist

[151] Dearden, Lizzie. 2019. "Revered As A Saint By Online Extremists, How The Christchurch Shooter Inspired Copycat Terrorists Around The World". *The Independent*. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/brenton-tarrant-christchurch-shooter-attack-el-paso-norway-poway-a9076926.html.

[152] "Four UK Neo-Nazis Jailed For Membership Of National Action". 2020. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/09/four-uk-neo-nazis-jailed-for-membership-of-national-action.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Smith, Mikey. 2020. "'Sickening' Violence By Far-Right 'Racist Thugs' Leads To 137 Arrests". Mirror. https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/sickening-violence-far-right-racist-22196247.

[155] "Islamophobia behind far-right rise in UK, report says", *BBC News*, February 2019. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47280082.

[156] Peter Walker, "Ukip's Gerard Batten reiterates his belief that Islam is a 'death cult'", *The Guardian*, February 2018. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/feb/18/ukip-gerard-batten-islam-muslims-quran.

[157] Dale Hurd, "Islamic Takeover: Why Mass Immigration Signals 'the End of Britain'", *CBN News*, March 2017. Accessed on: 19/07/2019. https://www1.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2017/march/why-mass-immigration-may-mean-the-end-of-britain.

[158] Dearden, Lizzie. 2019. "White Supremacist Behind 'Punish A Muslim Day' Jailed For 12 Years". The Independent. https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/david-parnham-court-punish-muslim-day-sentence-white-supremacist-trial-a9090186.html.

imagery and threats to Muslims, such as "slaughtered very soon" and "P*** filth", as well as bomb hoaxes and fake anthrax.[159] Letters sent in March 2017 encouraged recipients to attack ethnic minorities and pledged that Parnham would donate £100 to charity for each killing. These letters culminated in the "Punish a Muslim Day letters" offering a scorecard of awards for attacks ranging from pulling off women's headscarves, to torture, acid attacks, "butchering" Muslims with guns, knives and vehicles and bombing mosques.

- **December 2016:** Islamophobic graffiti was spray-painted on a mosque in Scotland. The words "Saracen go home" and "Deus Vult", a Latin term meaning "God wills it". Both are crusader slogans which have become popular with far-right groups in recent years.[160]

- **May 2017:** the Jamia Qasmiya Zahidia Islamic Centre in Oldham, Greater Manchester, experienced an arson attack hours after the Manchester Arena attack. The door was set alight and badly damaged, but fortunately, there were no fatalities. [161]

- **June 2017:** Andrew Emery was convicted for posting Islamophobic messages on Facebook saying: "It is time we started to fight back. The Government won't do **** because of the PC brigade. Every time we have a terrorist attack, we should burn a mosque, preferably when it is full." This post was followed by another one three hours later which said, "To all the British murderers and serial killers out there, do us all a favour and concentrate on the Muslim community", while another post stated, "BURN A MOSQUE TODAY AND FEEL BETTER".[162]

- **June 2017:** Darren Osborne drove a van into a group of Muslims outside Muslim Welfare House in Finsbury Park. 51-year-old Makram Ali was killed in the terrorist attack.[163]

- **November 2017:** A threatening letter containing a loose white powder was delivered to Didsbury Mosque. Dr Faizan Awan, a spokesperson for the mosque, noted that the threatening later was the latest in a series of attacks on the mosque. Two weeks before this incident, a box containing pork was delivered to the mosque.[164]

- **April 2018:** Neo-Nazi, Connor Ward, was convicted for planning terror attacks against mosques in Scotland. The police had found an array of weapons at Ward's house, including ball bearings that can be used in pipe bombs; rocket tubes capable of firing projectiles; a stun gun; knuckle dusters; knives; and deactivated bullets. They also found he had downloaded thousands of pieces of far-right propaganda and documents on military strategies and firearms. They also discovered a book Ward had authored entitled '*Combat 18 British Mosque Address Book*'. [165]

- **June 2018**: The Jamia Masjid Abu Huraira Mosque and Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha Gurdwara in Leeds suffered arson attacks.[166]

[159] "Man Admits 'Punish A Muslim' Offences", *BBC News*, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-45838506.

[160] May Bulman, "Mosque Sprayed With Islamophobic Graffiti In 'Worrying' Attack", *The Independent*, 2016, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/mosque-sprayed-islamophobic-graffiti-god-willing-police-scotland-north-lanarkshire-hate-crime-a7481926.html.

[161] Rachael Revesz, "Mosque Attacked In Suspected Revenge For Manchester Bombing", *The Independent*, 2017, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/oldham-mosque-attack-manchester-bombing-arson-revenge-suspected-police-a7751866.html.

[162] Tom Usher, "Man Jailed for Vile 'Burn a Mosque Today and Feel Better' Facebook Posts," Metro (Metro.co.uk, December 13, 2019), https://metro.co.uk/2018/07/01/man-jailed-after-posting-vile-rants-about-burning-down-mosques-and-getting-revenge-7674023/

[163] "Finsbury Park Attack: What We Know So Far", *BBC News*, 2017, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40323769.

[164] Beth Abbit, "Frightened Children Locked In Mosque After Malicious Letter Containing White Powder Was Hand Delivered", *Manchester Evening News*, 2017, https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/didsbury-mosque-suspicious-white-powder-13859103.

[165] "Man Jailed For Planning Mosque Attacks", *BBC News*, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-43725367.

[166] Harry Cockburn, "Arson Attacks On Muslim And Sikh Places Of Worship In Leeds Being Treated As Linked Hate Crimes", *The Independent*, 2018, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/leeds-arson-attack-hate-crimes-mosque-muslim-sikh-gurdwara-a8385176.html.

- **August 2018:** The Masjid Qamarul Islam mosque and the Al-hijrah mosque in Birmingham had their windows smashed by heavy-duty catapult ball-bearings.[167]

- **September 2018**: Three people drove a car into a group of worshippers outside the Al-Majlis Al-Hussaini Islamic Centre in Cricklewood, North-West London, after making several anti-Islamic remarks, including taunts of "dirty Muslims". [168]

- **January - May 2019:** An Islamic school in Newcastle suffered a series of racist "vandalism". In the first attack in January, swastikas and the words "moslem terorists" [sic] were scrawled on the walls of the school.[169] Then, in March, copies of the Qu'ran were ripped up and windows were smashed.[170] In May the school received a series of malicious Islamophobic letters containing images of Jimmy Savile with a caption calling the Prophet Muhammad a "paedo".[171] These repeated attacks lead to fears of a potential arson attack. As expressed by the school's principal, Muhammad Abdulmuheet: "Our biggest fear now is someone will burn down the building."[172]

- **April 2019:** Stephen Bishop was imprisoned for plotting to bomb Baitul Futuh Mosque in London, as "revenge" for the Manchester Arena attack.[173]

- **January 2020:** Islamophobic slogans were spray-painted near North Brixton Islamic Cultural Centre.[174]

- **June 2020:** Three mosques in Stockton experienced "a spate of racist attacks", including having the word "KKK" graffitied across the walls.[175]

Case studies from the Islamophobia Response Unit

Between 2017-2020, 27 mosques reported an Islamophobic offence to The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU).[176] As but a handful of case studies:

- **June 2017:** Al-Quba mosque in Sherwood has been subjected to several incidents, including one in which pork was smeared on the front door of the mosque.[177]

- **July 2017:** A package was delivered to Khizra Masjid containing threats and bacon.[178]

- **July 2017:** Darul Ummah Centre received hate mail containing a powder-like substance which was later deemed harmless by a special police unit.[179]

- **January 2018:** Four members of Generation Identity, an international far-right group that supports identitarianism and the great replacement theory (which asserts that non-White populations are actively erasing White people), glued an A2 sized poster

[167] "Two Birmingham Mosques Attacked With Catapults", *The Guardian*, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/16/two-birmingham-mosques-attacked-with-catapults.

[168] "Three Hurt As Car 'Swerves Into Crowd' Outside Islamic Centre", *BBC News*, 2018, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-45570907.

[169] Eleanor Busby, "'Racist' Attack On Islamic School Once The Set Of Byker Grove Leaves Staff Afraid Of Arson", *The Independent*, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/newcastle-islamic-school-muslim-bahr-academy-racist-hate-crime-attack-islamophobia-swastikas-a8752021.html.

[170] Tom Wilkinson, "Six Teenagers Arrested Over Islamic Centre Attack In Newcastle", *The Independent*, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/newcastle-islamic-attack-teenagers-arrested-bahr-academy-a8841531.html.

[171] Eleanor Busby, "Islamic School In Newcastle Sent Hate Mail In Third Attack On Centre", *The Independent*, 2019, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/islamic-school-newcastle-bahr-academy-police-hate-mail-vandalism-byker-grove-a8917356.html.

[172] Ibid.

[173] "Man Jailed For 'Revenge' Mosque Bomb Plot", *BBC News*, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-47879119.

[174] Andrew Griffin, "Site Near Brixton Islamic Centre Spray Painted With Islamophobic Slogans", *The Independent*, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brixton-islamophobic-slogans-north-islamic-centre-islamophobia-a9267071.html.

[175] Guillot, Toni. 2020. "Probe Into Racist Graffiti Sprayed Onto Stockton Mosques Continues". Gazettelive. https://www.gazettelive.co.uk/news/teesside-news/probe-racist-graffiti-sprayed-onto-18466426.

[176] "Help Protect Your Mosque!" Muslim Engagement and Development, June 18, 2020. https://www.mend.org.uk/help-protect-your-mosque/.

[177] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. QA85/26

[178] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. AS41/10

[179] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. ID16/05

to Didsbury Mosque, before posting the images on social media.[180] The group has since been banned from platforms such as Facebook.[181]

- **May 2018:** Colchester masjid received an Islamophobic letter covered in a white substance that was later confirmed by police to be harmless.

- **October 2018:** Masjid Al Towbah received a poster containing Islamophobic slurs, such as "Prophet, paedophile", and a CD containing indecent images of children. When the police report was made, the officers reported that other masjids in the area had received similar hateful material.[182]

- **February 2019:** Threatening comments were made over Facebook against a mosque in Lincoln in response to the local Visit My Mosque campaign. Threats included "am coming with C130gunship smash down ok".[183]

- **May 2019:** Two men were injured in a hit and run outside of Masjid At-Taqwa in Leicester.[184]

- **July 2019:** Badges displaying St George's flag (a famous crusader symbol commonly used by the far-right) were strewn across the car park of Khizra Masjid, seemingly in an attempt to intimidate worshippers.[185]

- **March 2020:** A man entered Faizan- E-Medina mosque in Derby. The suspect began shouting abuse to the Muslim worshipers, including waving a Bible and arguing that Muslims were insulting Christians. On leaving the mosque, he drove into two cars of worshippers.[186]

- **April 2020:** The private ambulance owned by Masjid-E-Umer was vandalised with graffiti.[187]

> **The rise of the threat of the far-right necessitates comprehensive strategies to protect vulnerable communities against far-right abuse and violence. MEND, therefore, calls upon the Government to clearly and urgently outline its plan to tackle far-right politically motivated violence in the UK.**

[180] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. YA87/13

[181] "Facebook Pulls The Plug On Far-Right Generation Identity". 2018. Aljazeera.Com. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/06/facebook-pulls-plug-generation-identity-180622103135419.html.

[182] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. TM12/18

[183] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. GY62/23

[184] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. AP41/31

[185] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. AM35/02

[186] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. MF99/20

[187] MEND, Islamophobia Response Unit: Case No. MI16/22

Protecting Muslims and Islamic institutions

There are a variety of issues that the Government must address in order to ensure the safety of Muslim places of worship. Particularly urgent is the need to address current policies surrounding funding and the recording of incidents, as well as tackling the current lack of an official definition of Islamophobia.

Funding for security

One of the most significant obstacles to protecting mosques and Islamic institutions remains the lack of funding provided to ensure their security. While the Government rightfully provides funds of £14 million per year for synagogues and Jewish schools, there remains no regular funding for mosques, with the last 'Places of Worship Security Fund' launched in 2016 providing only £2.4 million to be distributed across mosques, churches, temples, gurdwaras, and other institutions.[188]

The Government has recently pledged £1.6 million funding to mosques for security.[189] However, this must be accompanied by a comprehensive risk analysis in order to develop effective strategies and devise funding plans that are proportionate to the threats that mosques face.

At present, this funding appears disproportionate to the risk that Muslims face. Indeed, Muslims are subject to 47% of religious hate crimes and Jewish communities are subject to 18%.[190] However, in April 2020, the Prime Minister commendably increased security funding for Jewish institutions in light of a rise in anti-Semitic attacks, committing £14 million to support the security of over 400 synagogues and 150 Jewish schools (equivalent to almost £25.5k per institution).[191] Meanwhile, the £1.6million pledged to support 1825 mosques amounts to a mere £877 per institution.[192]

> **As such, the Government must commit to financing mosque security in a manner that is proportional to risk, in line with what is already correctly provided to Jewish religious institutions.**

Police responses and the accurate recording of attacks

With the threats facing Muslim institutions, it is essential to examine the current policies and procedures intended to protect them. As with the development of any social policy, the first step in addressing a problem is understanding it in terms of scale, origin, and consequences. Accurate data is central to that aim. However, there appears to be a disparity in the way that hate crimes against religious institutions are recorded between different police constabularies across the country. In response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted by MEND which asked about hate crimes that targeted "mosques" and those that targeted "religious institutions", a number of police forces responded that they do not record the data in a retrievable format. Other police forces responded that while they do record data for attacks targeting "religious institutions" they were unable to provide specific data in terms of breakdown for the particular religious institutions (i.e. mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras).

[188] "Home Office Grants £14 Million Funding For Security At Jewish Institutions". 2020. GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-grants-14-million-funding-for-security-at-jewish-institutions.

[189] "Places Of Worship To Get Security Funding Boost". 2019. GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/places-of-worship-to-get-security-funding-boost.

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[191] "Home Office Grants £14 Million Funding For Security At Jewish Institutions". 2020. GOV.UK. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-office-grants-14-million-funding-for-security-at-jewish-institutions.

[192] Muslims in Britain. 2017. "UK Mosque Statistics / Masjid Statistics". http://www.muslimsinbritain.org/resources/masjid_report.pdf.

> **Without standardisation of how incidents are being recorded, it is virtually impossible to perform an accurate risk analysis that could be used to formulate funding strategies and protective policies to safeguard Islamic institutions. It is, therefore, essential that strategies are introduced to promote the accurate and standardised recording of hate crimes against religious institutions across all police constabularies.**

Defining Islamophobia

Defining Islamophobia is essential as it will provide much-needed clarity in legislation and policies that are intended to protect vulnerable minorities, including in relation to any proposed strategies to protect mosques and Islamic institutions. However, the Government has yet to accept a definition of 'Islamophobia', having rejected one put forth by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Muslims; a definition that has been accepted by all other mainstream political parties in the UK. Therefore, the absence of an agreed definition will severely curtail the ability to develop strategies to protect mosques and Islamic institutions from abuse.

For an understanding of how to approach a definition of Islamophobia, see MEND's briefing **here**.

> **Thus, in order to provide clarity to policy development and implementation, MEND urges the UK Government to:**
>
> - **Adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG for British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."**
>
> - **Apply the above definition in conjunction with the guidelines proposed by MEND, which can be found in the above briefing.**

Conclusions and recommendations

Throughout this briefing, MEND has offered a variety of recommendations to alleviate the vast array of forces that contribute towards an increased vulnerability of Muslim communities to abuse and violence. There are three key actors that MEND believes must play an essential role in addressing the fuelling of Islamophobia across society and protecting Muslim places of worship from attack: the Government, places of worship themselves, and the police.

MEND urges the Government to…

- Commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protections afforded to religious communities.

- Clearly and urgently outline its plans to tackle far-right politically motivated violence in the UK.

- Commit to financing mosque security in a manner that is proportional to risk, in line with what is already correctly provided to Jewish religious institutions

- Adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG for British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness", and apply the above definition in conjunction with the guidelines proposed by MEND, which can be found in MEND's briefing here.

- Ensure that the remit of the strategy outlined in the Government's Online Harms White Paper is expanded to include newspaper websites and their comments platforms.

- Implement primary legislation to deal with social media offences and hate speech online and commit to working with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle hate speech online in consultation with Muslim grassroots organisations.

- Commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation.

- Commit to the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within the media.

MEND urges mosques and Muslim institutions to…

- Proactively engage with organisations such as The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) as a grassroots Muslim third-party reporting service. The IRU can provide mosques and local Muslim communities with:

  o Reporting and data collection services, including assistance in liaising with the police, local councils, and other stakeholders.

  o Signposting services to legal and emotional support.

  o Educative and training resources and events.

MEND urges the police to…

- Examine its current policies, procedures, and training mechanisms to ensure that Islamophobic instances, particularly those involving mosques and religious institutions, are recorded accurately.

- Proactively engage with organisations such as The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) as a grassroots Muslim third-party reporting service. The IRU can provide the police with:

    o Reporting and data collection services.

    o Assistance in facilitating engagement between victims, the police, and local stakeholders.

Appendix

MEND's responses to the questions posed by the Home Office's consultation into protecting places of worship

11.a) **Please describe how safe it feels to attend your place of worship.** Please pick one answer.

— Completely safe

— Somewhat safe

— Neither safe nor unsafe

— Somewhat unsafe

— Completely unsafe

— Don't know - If you selected this, please go to **question 12a**

— I do not have a place of worship - If you selected this, please go to **question 13a**

b) If you selected one of the options on the scale at question 11a, we would like to understand the reasons why people might or might not feel safe when attending their place of worship. **Thinking of the answer you gave to the previous question, could you explain why you chose that answer?** (maximum 300 words)

Perceptions of Islamophobia impact British Muslims' senses of security in public places. Over recent years, British Muslims have suffered from increasing levels of hate crime, with Home Office data indicating that 47% of religiously aggravated hate crime offences in 2018-19 were targeted against Muslims. As such, Muslims are the most likely group to experience a religiously motivated hate crime. At the same time, disparities within the Racial and Religious Hatred Act between the protections afforded on the grounds of race versus religion, combined with the added requirement to prove intent, often makes the threshold for prosecuting Islamophobia unworkably high under this legislation.

The fear of attack is exacerbated by the mainstreaming of Islamophobic rhetoric across social media, the press, and within political discourse. With 21 negative references to Muslims within the British press for every single neutral or positive reference, the media plays an integral role in spreading prejudice, stereotypes, and xenophobic views of British Muslims. Therefore, and especially considering the reach of newspapers in online spaces, it is of great concern that newspapers have been omitted from the oversight proposed in the Government's online harms strategy. Moreover, the perpetuation of Islamophobic rhetoric is in no way limited to the extreme fringes of the far-right. MEND's report, *From 'Letterboxes' to 'Ragheads,'* details over 120 incidents of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party. The report demonstrates that Islamophobia is being fuelled, not only by traditional "keyboard warriors", but even by some of the most senior members of our Government.

Simultaneously, threats emanating from the far-right raise concerns for the safety for members of minority communities, as well as buildings and properties belonging to or representing these communities. For a more in-depth analysis of far-right threats and attacks, see MEND's recent article here: https://www.mend.org.uk/three-years-after-the-terrorist-attack-in-finsbury-park-and-the-threat-of-the-far-right-continues/.

13.a) **Thinking about other places of worship that you are familiar with but do not usually attend, are you aware of any hate crimes that have targeted them in the past five years? This might include places of worship in your local area, ones you have visited in the past, or that friends or family attend.** Please pick one answer.

— Yes, there have been hate crimes

— No, there have not been any hate crimes - If you selected this, please go to **question 14a**

— Don't know - If you selected this, please go to **question 14a**

b) **If you answered yes to question 13a, please tell us more about these incidents, including why you consider them to be hate crimes, what happened, where, when, and any other details you think are relevant.** (maximum 300 words)

Between 2017-2020, 27 mosques reported an Islamophobic offence to The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU).

- **June 2017:** Al-Quba mosque has been subjected to several incidents, including pork being smeared on the front door.

- **July 2017:** A package was delivered to Khizra Masjid containing threats and bacon.

- **July 2017:** Darul Ummah Centre received hate mail containing a powder-like substance.

- **January 2018:** Four members of Generation Identity glued an A2 sized poster to Didsbury Mosque, before posting the images on social media.

- **May 2018:** Colchester masjid received an Islamophobic letter covered in a white substance.

- **October 2018:** Masjid Al Towbah received a poster containing Islamophobic slurs, such as "Prophet, paedophile", and a CD containing indecent images of children. When the police report was made, the officers reported that other masjids in the area had received similar hateful material.

- **February 2019:** Threatening comments were made over Facebook against a mosque in Lincoln in response to the local Visit My Mosque campaign. Threats included "am coming with C130gunship smash down ok".

- **May 2019:** Two men were injured in a hit and run outside of Masjid At-Taqwa in Leicester.

- **July 2019:** Badges displaying St George's flag (a famous crusader symbol commonly used by the far-right) were strewn across the car park of Khizra Masjid, seemingly in an attempt to intimidate worshippers.

- **March 2020:** A man entered Faizan- E-Medina mosque in Derby. The suspect began shouting abuse to the Muslim worshipers, including waving a Bible and arguing that Muslims were insulting Christians. On leaving the mosque, he drove into two cars of worshippers.

- **April 2020:** The private ambulance owned by Masjid-E-Umer was vandalised with graffiti.

For a more in-depth analysis of attacks against mosques nationally in the last five years, see MEND's recent article here: https://www.mend.org.uk/help-protect-your-mosque/?preview_id=75119&preview_nonce=70eb2258db&preview=true&_thumbnail_id=75120.

14.a) **In your opinion, have patterns of hate crime in and around places of worship changed at all over the past five years? This could include changes in the frequency or type of hate crime experienced, or changes to the levels of concern about hate crime.** Please pick one answer.

    ⬜ Yes, there has been a change

    ⬜ No, there hasn't been any change - If you selected this, please go to **question 15a**

    ⬜ Don't know - If you selected this, please go to **question 15a**

b) **If you answered yes to question 14a, please describe how you think patterns of hate crime have changed and any evidence you have seen of this. Examples of evidence could include personal experiences, experiences of people you know, information in the media, or research.** (maximum 300 words)

Islamophobic instances are increasing across the country. Islamophobic hate crimes recorded by the Metropolitan Police Service in London rose by almost 50% in just two years (from 1,115 in 2015/16 to 1,665 in 2017/18). At a national level, the number of reported hate crimes increased by 17% between 2016/17 and 2017/18. Three-quarters of these hate crimes were racially aggravated, while 9% were religiously aggravated. Furthermore, the number of religiously aggravated offences increased by 40% in 2017/18.

Of particular importance is the observation that major socio-political events, such as terror attacks and the EU referendum, often further mobilise acts of hostility towards Muslims and minorities more generally. Home Office statistics detailed a 44% rise in racially or religiously aggravated offences in the month following the 2016 EU referendum result compared to the same month the previous year.

At the same time, the Online Far-Right Space (OFRS) has been capitalising on the COVID-19 pandemic to popularise conspiracies theories on social media, with counter-terrorism police recently investigating far-right groups accused of "trying to use the coronavirus crisis to stoke anti-Muslim sentiment". Specifically, social media sites are replete with insinuations that Muslims are flouting lockdown measures, with mosques featuring prominently in unsubstantiated claims that Muslims are continuing to hold communal gatherings. Increasing patterns of Islamophobic conspiracy theories and abuse in online spaces has thus led to fears that Muslims and mosques may be susceptible to a wave of Islamophobic attacks as lockdown measures are lifted. Any government response should, therefore, be mindful of the potential for misdirected frustration regarding the inevitable socio-economic repercussions of the crisis to be targeted at minority communities.

15.a) **In your opinion, are there any faith institutions other than places of worship (for example, community centres, old age homes, schools), where people may feel unsafe?** Please pick one answer.

⎯ Yes, there are

⎯ No, there are not - If you selected this, please go to **question 16**

⎯ Don't know - If you selected this, please go to **question 16**

b) **If you answered yes to question 15a, please outline these faith institutions and why people might feel unsafe there.** (maximum 300 words)

Islamic schools are also frequent targets of abuse. As but two examples:

November 2017: Children in an Islamic school based in Didsbury Mosque in South Manchester were placed on lockdown for several hours after a threatening letter containing a loose white powder was delivered. Dr Faizan Awan, a spokesperson for the mosque, noted that the threatening later was the latest in a series of attacks. Two weeks before this incident, a box containing pork was delivered to the mosque.

January - May 2019: An Islamic school in Newcastle suffered a series of racist "vandalism". In the first attack in January, swastikas and the words "moslem terorists" [sic] were scrawled on the walls of the school. Then, in March, copies of the Qu'ran were ripped up and windows smashed. In May the school received a series of malicious Islamophobic letters containing images of Jimmy Savile with a caption calling the Prophet Muhammad a "paedo". These repeated attacks lead to fears of a potential arson attack. As expressed by the school's principal, Muhammad Abdulmuheet: "Our biggest fear now is someone will burn down the building."

16. **Thinking about any concerns about safety and/or hate crime incidents you may have already discussed, can you describe what impact they have had, if any?** Impacts could include, for example, emotional, financial, or changes in behaviour, and could include impacts on yourself, the place of worship/faith institution, or the wider community. (maximum 300 words)

Data from the Crime Surveys of England and Wales shows that victims of hate crimes were almost three times as likely (36% versus 13%) to report being "very much" emotionally affected by the incident than victims overall and were twice as likely to experience symptoms such as difficulty sleeping, anxiety, depression, or panic attacks.

An adverse consequence of hate crimes is often that of avoidance behaviour following an attack, for example, avoiding certain roads or areas, or avoiding going out altogether. A study on the impact of racial discrimination on mental health by Wallace et al. found high rates of avoidance behaviour after incidents of racial discrimination, with the highest rates of avoidance amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani groups.

While it has been established that the emotional impacts of hate crime on victims are vast, the effects of specifically Islamophobic hate crime on mental health remain largely unexplored in research. As such, the trauma associated with these types of crimes remains poorly understood. Testimonies from victims reporting to the IRU reveal a picture of social isolation, depression, and anxiety. Many victims of Islamophobic hate crime discuss how they avoid crowded spaces and public transport and report that they choose to stay indoors more often, take time off work, and avoid public spaces – revealing how hate crime can impede their participation in public life.

Also reported to the IRU is some female victims' desires to remove the hijab after being targeted. This points to a loss in confidence and an underlying fear that displaying a symbol of their faith in public will make them more prone to abuse. Panic attacks, flashbacks, sleeplessness, and anxiety are also commonly observed psychological impacts.

18.   Below are a number of groups which some people might consider to be more vulnerable than others when in or around their place of worship. **Thinking about these groups within a faith community, please indicate how vulnerable you think each group is.** This could be within your own faith community or one you are familiar with.

Group	Level of vulnerability					
	Not at all vulnerable	**Slightly vulnerable**	**Moderately vulnerable**	**Very vulnerable**	**Extremely vulnerable**	**Don't know**
Women	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
Men	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
Older people	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
Children	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
Religious/faith leaders	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
People with physical or mental health conditions or illnesses	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
Minority gender identity or sexual orientation groups	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬
Ethnic minority groups	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬	▬

19. **Are there any other groups you think are vulnerable?** Please list these groups. (maximum 100 words)

> Muslim communities

20. **If you think some groups are more vulnerable than others, please explain why you think they are particularly vulnerable and any specific needs they have.** If your response relates to a specific faith community, please make it clear which faith you are referring to. (maximum 300 words)

As previously mentioned, Muslim communities and their places of worship are particularly vulnerable to abuse, experiencing the highest levels of religiously motivated hate crimes than any other group.

Moreover, Muslims experience discrimination and abuse both in the form of religious hatred, as well as racial hatred. Indeed, it is often impossible to distinguish between the two motives when dealing with Islamophobic hate crime. As such, Muslims are vulnerable on the grounds of being a religious group, but also frequently on the grounds of being an ethnic minority as well.

Meanwhile, studies have shown that the threats experienced by Muslim women are further compounded by a gendered dynamic that is often innately embedded within Islamophobic hate crime. This trend can be seen within the reports received by the IRU, within which 75% of hate crime reports come from Muslim women. This number rises to 80% when just looking at physical attacks alone - meaning that Muslim women are overwhelmingly the targets of acts of violence and aggression. As the perpetrators are overwhelmingly males, it is clear how gender violence and hierarchical structures of gendered power are intrinsic to Islamophobic hate crime. Female victims are almost exclusively visibly Muslim, meaning they were wearing the hijab (headscarf), niqab (face veil), or abaya/jilbab (full-length outer garment) when they were targeted in public.

24. **Thinking about the needs of any vulnerable groups referred to earlier in the consultation (for example, women, men, children, elderly), what more could be done to reduce their vulnerability and meet their specific needs?** For example, this may include tailored training, advice, or facilities. We are interested in any ideas you may have. Please include as much detail as possible. (maximum 500 words)

There remains no regular funding for mosques, with the last 'Places of Worship Security Fund' launched in 2016 providing only £2.4 million to be distributed across mosques, churches, temples, gurdwaras, and other institutions. The Government has recently pledged £1.6million funding to mosques for security. However, this funding appears disproportionate to the risk that Muslims face. Indeed, Muslims are subject to 47% of religious hate crimes, while Jewish communities are subject to 18%. However, in April 2020, the Prime Minister commendably increased security funding for Jewish institutions in light of a rise in anti-Semitic attacks, committing £14million to support the security of over 400 synagogues and 150 Jewish schools (equivalent to almost £25.5k per institution). Meanwhile, the £1.6million pledged to support 1825 mosques amounts to a mere £877 per institution. **As such, the Government must commit to financing mosque security in a manner that is proportional to risk, in line with what is already correctly provided to Jewish religious institutions.**

There appears to be a disparity in how hate crimes against religious institutions are recorded between different police constabularies across the country. In response to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests submitted by MEND which asked about hate crimes that targeted "mosques" and those that targeted "religious institutions", a number of police forces responded that they do not record the data in a retrievable format. Other police forces responded that while they do record data for attacks targeting "religious institutions" they were unable to provide specific data in terms of breakdown for the particular religious institutions (i.e. mosques, synagogues, gurdwaras). **Without standardisation of how incidents are being recorded, it is virtually impossible to perform an accurate risk analysis that could be used to formulate funding strategies and protective policies to safeguard Islamic institutions. It is, therefore, essential that strategies are introduced to promote the accurate and standardised recording of hate crimes against religious institutions across all police constabularies.**

Defining Islamophobia is essential as it will provide much-needed clarity in legislation and policies that are intended to protect vulnerable minorities, including in relation to any proposed strategies to protect mosques and Islamic institutions. However, the Government has yet to accept a definition of 'Islamophobia', having rejected one put forth by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Muslims; a definition that has been accepted by all other mainstream political parties in the UK. Therefore, the absence of an agreed definition will severely curtail the ability to develop strategies to protect mosques and Islamic institutions from abuse. **Thus, in order to provide clarity to policy development and implementation, MEND urges the UK Government to adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG for British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness", and apply the above definition in conjunction with the guidelines proposed by MEND, which can be found here:** https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/MEND-Briefing-Paper-Islamophobia.pdf

25. **In your opinion, what do you think the roles of the following organisations should be?** Please consider what you think these institutions currently do well and what they could do differently.

- Places of worship and other faith institutions or networks

- Central Government, including the Home Office and/or the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

- Charities, police, local Government, councils and other local organisations

(maximum 500 words)

MEND urges the Government to:

- Commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protections afforded to religious communities.

- Clearly and urgently outline its plans to tackle far-right politically motivated violence in the UK.

- Commit to financing mosque security in a manner that is proportional to risk, in line with what is already correctly provided to Jewish religious institutions

- Adopt the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG for British Muslims: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness", and apply the above definition in conjunction with the guidelines proposed by MEND, which can be found here: https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/MEND-Briefing-Paper-Islamophobia.pdf.

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MEND urges mosques and Muslim institutions to:

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  o Reporting and data collection services, including assistance in liaising with the police, local councils, and other stakeholders.

  o Signposting services to legal and emotional support.

  o Educative and training resources and events.

MEND urges the police to:

- Examine its current policies, procedures, and training mechanisms to ensure that Islamophobic instances, particularly those involving mosques and religious institutions, are recorded accurately.

- Proactively engage with organisations such as The Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) as a grassroots Muslim third-party reporting service. The IRU can provide the police with:

- o Reporting and data collection services.

- o Assistance in facilitating engagement between victims, the police, and local stakeholders.

How MEND can assist parliamentarians, policymakers, and community stakeholders

- Providing briefings, information, analysis, and expertise on issues impacting Muslim communities.

- Arranging opportunities for parliamentarians, policymakers, and community stakeholders to engage with their local Muslim communities.

- Conducting research within Muslim communities.

- Connecting parliamentarians, policymakers, and community stakeholders to other local stakeholders.

If MEND can be of any assistance to your work, please feel free to contact info@mend.org.uk.