

Home Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Hate Crime and its violent consequences](#), HC 609

Tuesday 13 Dec 2016

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 13 Dec 2016.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Yvette Cooper (Chair); James Berry; Mr David Burrowes; Byron Davies; Nusrat Ghani; Mr Ranil Jayawardena; Tim Loughton; Stuart C. McDonald; Naz Shah; Mr David Winnick.

Questions 127-210

Witnesses

[I](#): Bharath Ganesh, Researcher, Tel MAMA, Fiyaz Mughal, Founder, Tell MAMA, and Miqdaad Versi, Assistant General Secretary, Muslim Council of Britain.

[II](#): Dr Chris Allen, Lecturer in Sociology, University of Birmingham, Dr Imran Awan, Associate Professor in Criminology, Birmingham City University, and Murtaza Shaikh, Co-Director, Averroes.

Written evidence from witnesses:

- [Muslim Council of Britain](#)
- [Tell MAMA UK](#)
- [Dr Imran Awan](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Bharath Ganesh, Fiyaz Mughal and Miqdaad Versi.

Chair: We will start our evidence session and welcome our witnesses but, before we do, can I just ask Naz Shah to declare her interests?

Naz Shah: I am the co-chair of the APPG on Islamophobia and I work with Miqdaad through the Labour party on work that we are doing. I regularly work with Tell MAMA as well, through my work with the APPG.

Q127 **Chair:** Thank you very much. Can I welcome the witnesses and just ask you very briefly to introduce yourselves and say which organisations you are from?

Bharath Ganesh: My name is Bharath Ganesh. I am a senior researcher at Tell MAMA. I am focused mainly on recording data on anti-Muslim incidents and am responsible for writing the reports that we put out.

Fiyaz Mughal: I am Fiyaz Mughal, founder of Tell MAMA and previously the director, from 2012 to 2016.

Miqdaad Versi: I am Miqdaad Versi, Assistant Secretary General of the Muslim Council of Britain. A lot of my work is related to Islamophobia and I wrote the written submission to the Home Affairs Committee.

Q128 **Chair:** Can I start by asking each of you to tell us how much of an increase you think there has been in Islamophobia, how much you think that that is reporting, how much you think there are different things that are causing an actual rise, and what causes you would identify?

Miqdaad Versi: Obviously Tell MAMA will be able to give the statistics in much better detail than I can. What I can bring, hopefully, to the conversation is that from a media-monitoring perspective the kind of hatred that seems to be coming out within the media is highly problematic and does seem to have been on the rise in the last few years. Even in the last week we have seen some really atrocious headlines.

So that is one part of the story that I think is very clear, and it is perhaps correlated to the broader increase in Islamophobia in the wider public. In terms of my friends, and in terms of the reports I receive as a relatively well-known Muslim community individual, I have seen far more people within my community, among friends I know, who have experienced this. There are now about 10 to 15 people I know personally who have had to deal with Islamophobia in terms of hate crime and verbal assaults, and even a physical assault, and if that is happening to me it is happening to many people across the country.

Fiyaz Mughal: We would concur with what Miqdaad has said about the press, but let me just go back to your initial question: has there been an increase in reporting for the Muslim community? The answer is: possibly—we don't know. The second part of that question is: is there a correlation



between national and international incidents and very sharp spikes in anti-Muslim hatred? The answer is yes, there are very clear correlations in the data that comes to us directly from victims within Muslim communities that shows very clear, very large spikes in reporting, and recording, around major national and international incidents. These spikes are gaining in amplitude—they are not getting less. Each spike we are finding correspondingly gets higher and higher and higher, and the background noise—the amplitude—is getting wider and wider. So there is an issue here. It is an ongoing issue and it is a widening issue.

Bharath Ganesh: I would add a few things on top of what Fiyaz has said. One thing is that it is incredibly difficult to identify what is causing the increase in our numbers. If we break it down qualitatively, we see that there are quite a few reasons why we might suggest that there is an increase in the level of Islamophobia. If we look at the activity of the far right online, for example, we see that there has been a huge spike in activity, particularly in 2016, and I am sure we will have time to get into that a bit later. In particular, it has been the kind of rhetoric that has been used during elections and campaigns. This is also a transnational network—it is important to remember that it has global reach. So that is one part of it.

The other thing is that the majority of the incidents that were reported to Tell MAMA back in 2012, 2013 and even 2014 were online incidents. Those are things that were happening on social media platforms. Now a much larger proportion—the majority of our incidents—are coming in as offline incidents. Most of our outreach happens on social media, so we would expect a high level of online reports. The fact that we are getting so many offline reports does speak to the fact that more people know about Tell MAMA, yes, but I think it also gives us a good indication that because of the large increase in offline attacks that we have been seeing there is a likelihood that the level of Islamophobia is also increasing in general.

Q129 **Chair:** Is your sense that you are seeing an increase in the number of perpetrators or that those who are being Islamophobic are becoming more vocal or more active?

Bharath Ganesh: I think we are seeing a mix of the two. It is hard to count how many perpetrators because we have changed some of our data-collection procedures to better record the number of perpetrators we have had, so I cannot comment on whether there has been an increase since 2012, for example. However, I can say that the number of people who are exposed to Islamophobic and anti-Muslim rhetoric has definitely increased. When we look at the incidents qualitatively—what is said to people and that kind of thing—we see that it frequently references the sorts of things you hear in the media. For example, after Brexit there were numerous incidents of a Muslim being told, “We’re out of the EU now. What are you still doing here?” That is quite an odd thing, because the EU referendum was a referendum on membership in a political union, not a referendum on migrants or people of other religions in the UK.



Fiyaz Mughal: There is also a very strong strain of misogyny that is wrapped up in the anti-Muslim hatred. We need to be very clear about this. The majority of the perpetrators are male—they are predominantly male—and the age range in our 2015 report went from 15 to 35-year-olds to 13 to 18-year-olds. So something is creating a generational shift in the kind of perpetrator base we are seeing. Let me go back to the issue of intersectionality, which is impacting on individuals. The majority of the victims are female, so what we have in a large number of cases is misogyny, misogynistic language and sexualised language mixed in with anti-Muslim hatred to humiliate the woman. Predominantly it is women who are the focus of this hatred.

Q130 **Chair:** You talked about the shift to 13 to 18-year-olds. Is that a shift away? Are you seeing less for 15 to 30-year-olds, or is it just that as part of the increase it is the 13 to 18-year-olds where it has increased?

Fiyaz Mughal: We are seeing a slight clustering in that 13 to 18-year-old area of the age range. More work needs to be done on whether that is because social media is effectively bleeding into a younger generation. We are not sure, but there is certainly clustering in a younger population, and that is a significant shift from three years ago, when our age range was pretty much between 15 and 35.

Q131 **Chair:** Thinking about 13 to 18-year-olds, does that tend to be targeted at other young people? Is that part of what is happening in schools, or is it just aimed more widely?

Fiyaz Mughal: We know that one in 10 of the incidents that came in to Tell MAMA in 2015 were incidents at school. That is a significant number. Is it targeted towards perpetrators who are younger? Well, no. Actually, the age range is quite disparate—quite wide. These are young individuals, sometimes openly abusing women, who may be 25, 30 or 35. There is a sense in those young people that they can clearly vocalise what they have come across or what they are thinking.

Q132 **Chair:** Do you have any suggested explanations about what is driving that, particularly among young people?

Fiyaz Mughal: Much more research needs to be done on this area, but social media is certainly not helping.

Bharath Ganesh: We have seen an immense increase in confidence from the far right and the self-fashioned alt-right, as we have seen in the United States. Those narratives are definitely penetrating into younger age groups than we would expect. Typically, we have thought that those sorts of perpetrators were older—in their 30s, 40s and 50s—but actually it appears that quite a few young people are being exposed to those narratives and that kind of rhetoric.

Q133 **Chair:** Are some of the alt-right, or far right, things that you have talked about UK-based, or international and US-based?

Bharath Ganesh: It is kind of a big mix. We have seen UK-based young people on Twitter who are getting their information from far-right sources



in the US, and from people in France, Germany, the Netherlands and other parts of Europe who are also far-right, as well as from some of the ideologues we have in the UK. A large transnational echo chamber is forming—in fact, it has been in place for some time—and it appears that younger people are being more and more influenced by that rhetoric.

Q134 **Naz Shah:** I want to ask a couple of questions. Yesterday, a man shouted, “I want to kill a Muslim,” before threatening a Muslim woman and going on to stab a Muslim man. To ask an open question, where is that coming from?

Miqdaad Versi: I mentioned this before but I feel that I need to mention it again. The research from the University of Cambridge concluded that mainstream media reporting about Muslim communities is contributing to an atmosphere of rising hostility towards Muslims in Britain. A roundtable in Stockholm looked at this issue across Europe and came to similar conclusions. The biggest driver of anti-Muslim hatred within the wider population—of which there is a lot—is the media. We have figures to that end, whether it is the 37% of the British population who would support policies to reduce the number of Muslims in the UK, the 50% who think that Islam is a threat to western civilisation, or the 30% of young children between the ages of 10 and 14 who think that there are too many Muslims in the UK. Whichever poll you want to choose, all of them corroborate one another in saying that there is a real view of Muslims in wider society that is not positive, at least within a significant proportion of the population.

Where is that coming from? Well, at least some of the academics seem to think that the media are one of the biggest drivers. In the last couple of weeks I have seen about 10 different headlines that have been wholly Islamophobic, such as, “New £5 notes could be BANNED by religious groups as Bank CAN'T promise they're Halal”—I mean, seriously? This is what is happening. I have 10 examples, including “Four in ten British Muslims want...Sharia Law enforced in UK.” *The Sun* mentions the “Muslim suburbs where...wife-beating and marital rape are standard” in an article by Trevor Kavanagh, who is a member of the media regulator—that is what he said. Another example talks about isolated British Muslims seeing the UK as 70% Islamic.

It is really problematic that headlines are saying these things that are so dangerous. This weekend we had an article in *The Sun* that was talking about OAPs, with a picture, and then something that said, “Cut-out-and-keep guide. Here's what terrorists look like”. There was a big picture of a white man and a white woman, saying “They are OAPs; they are nice guys”, and then “Here's what terrorists look like”, with a picture of Osama bin Laden with the big beard, a picture of a woman with a headscarf and a picture of another Muslim. Three Muslims, out there—this is what they look like. That happened just a couple of days ago. This is the reality we face and I feel that it needs to be looked at very closely.

There are processes in place. There are answers to this. Lord Justice Leveson did have an inquiry. There were specific things that were put in place. We have section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which can be



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implemented as a policy by the Government if it chooses to do so. There are policies in place that can start to try to change this, but that has not happened. I wanted to bring that forward because it is a very important point.

Fiyaz Mughal: Can I just add something important to that? Miqdaad mentioned the issue of *The Sun* saying this is what a terrorist looks like. We had a lot of complaints from Sikh organisations and groups that said, “Frankly, that also targets us, in the way that Osama bin Laden potentially looks. Nobody can tell the difference between a Sikh and a Muslim so it also impacts on us.” So these are wider community cohesion issues that are happening—much wider than we think.

Miqdaad is really the guy who deals with the press on this—it is his specialism—but I want to bolt on another area about social media. I know that this Committee and others have looked at this time and again, but I am going to go back to it because it is a significant and ongoing problem and it affects many parts of our country and our communities. Facebook have been very responsive and, I think, responsible, but the fact that Twitter continue to be in a position where they are obstinate and obfuscatory and sometimes do not take action on what are clearly far-right networks is a problem.

Just to give you an example, we have been engaging with Twitter for the last two and a half weeks on clearly extremist far-right networks. It is clear. We have had to do the police’s work and put the networks together, explain what the networks are, and give names and identities that are open source to Twitter to say, “Here is the evidence.” We have reported through their channels. Those accounts are still open, 14 days later. One account has tweeted out more than 2,500 times in those 14 days. This is what we are dealing with. We are dealing with global corporations that think they can carry on with “business as normal” while our police forces, our communities and this state that we live in have to pick up the bill. It cannot be picked up anymore.

The number of police officers who are running around because of some guy in San Francisco wanting to create a platform from which to make money is not acceptable. We need to say that, we need to be firm and we need to haul them in and say, “Why are you not acting?” It is not just us. The Jewish community has been systematically affected. LGBT communities have been systematically affected. Women are systematically affected. There is the appalling abuse that the Channel 4 presenter, Cathy Newman, gets—including just yesterday. This cannot carry on.

Q135 **Chair:** On the example that you just gave, if that is a network based here in the UK and it is still live at the moment, what response have Twitter given you? What is the current response?

Fiyaz Mughal: Nothing.

Q136 **Chair:** So you have had no response from them at all.



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Fiyaz Mughal: We have had a couple of emails saying, "Send us more and more information." We have. There is an ongoing criminal case with one individual and all that evidence has been given. We have mapped it out for them and we have had no response, 14 days after going through the whole process with them. By the way, we have spent four years reporting one account, and in four years it has gone to Police Scotland—they have done nothing—and Twitter have done nothing, and the individual has now become the focal point for extremist far-right activity in the United Kingdom.

Q137 **Chair:** You talk about a network. Can you describe what you mean by a network?

Fiyaz Mughal: We mean individuals who will open up websites, name and shame members of the Muslim community, give addresses of where they are going to speak and put them at risk in terms of their social activities. These are individuals who regard Muslims as groomers and paedophiles who should be deported—if not eradicated—from this country. This is the language we are dealing with. After the murder of Jo Cox, there is a real risk to individuals in our country that organisations and corporations like Twitter simply disregard when it comes to these issues. That cannot continue anymore.

Bharath Ganesh: In this particular instance, there was an account that was taken down by Twitter, and another user on Twitter had said, "Follow my friend, they have a new account," so within a few days that person had almost a few thousand followers. In terms of the network, they all know each other, they work with each other and they work together to get their message out, so we see tight co-operation between different members of this network.

Q138 **Naz Shah:** Following on from that, we have heard a lot of evidence on hate crimes in a previous session, but what is it that in your opinion is missing from the political response? What do we need to do to get this right?

Fiyaz Mughal: Well, you have heard my position on social media, and I think we need to be robust on that. We also need to be particularly robust on, and have a much more robust approach towards, politicians who use scenarios—I will go back to this—and poster campaigns showing individuals who might be of a different race or wearing headscarves. These have been used in the run-up to campaigns. Those have serious impacts on our communities. We need to be politically robust enough to say that if there is a responsibility to ensure safety and security in our country, we need to tackle, challenge and stand up to people who are promoting such rhetoric. That is the second thing.

The third thing, which I think is very important, is that our police forces need to be given the ability to do their job in the online world. I meet police officers who are dedicated and committed every day of our working lives. The fact that they do not have adequate training in what happens online—that ongoing support in how they deal with online cases—is a



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barrier to their work. It is not because of the good leadership we find in police forces; it is because resourcing is a major issue for all these police officers on the frontline in dealing with the online world.

I would sincerely ask that we ask corporations like Twitter, which give not a single cent or pound to our country—they take from our country, but they do not give a single cent—to reinvest some of their profits in our police services to provide that training to front-line officers who are managing the fallout from those organisations' platforms. That is what I would ask.

Miqdaad Versi: When it comes to the actual things that we need to get done, I think I have talked about media, and the institution of section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 is one area that can help with the idea of media.

I concur with Fiyaz about social media—I think that is a really important part of the overall message—but we also have to recognise that we need political leadership. When there are issues that are completely and utterly unacceptable, done by individuals from the political elite, they have to be called out for what they have done. Whether it is the run-up to the mayoral campaign or to the Brexit referendum, at any of these times we cannot have a situation in which that type of rhetoric can pass and big posters can be put up, changing the fabric of what many people think is acceptable.

This is the biggest challenge: we have social acceptability for Islamophobia in broader society. That is the biggest danger. Several years ago Baroness Warsi talked about passing the dinner table test, but I think it has gone even further now. It is now mainstream in newspapers to attack Muslims for a range of different issues. It is mainstream for some politicians to talk about Muslims in a very negative way. We need to change that, and it is a big part of what we need to do to go forward.

The final area is education. As Fiyaz was saying, there are more perpetrators among young children. We have polls showing that the views of Muslims among young children is more and more negative than it used to be in the past. This is worrying. If 30% of young children think that there are too many Muslims in the UK, what will that mean for our future? We need to do much better. Some of the work on the Government strategy on this is dealing with that, and I think it is very good that it is doing so. We need more in that area, so that our young children can be very much part of our ongoing society.

Q139 Naz Shah: Yesterday the Prime Minister announced adopting a definition of anti-Semitism along with 56 other countries in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. There does not seem to be a universal understanding of what Islamophobia is, or can you tell me otherwise, Mr Mughal?

Fiyaz Mughal: The answer is no, there is no universal definition of what Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred is. You are absolutely right. Could I



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just add a few caveats? Tell MAMA warmly accepts the adoption yesterday of the definition of anti-Semitism, because we have seen the damage that anti-Semitism has created, in the last five years, within Jewish communities. We work very closely with Jewish communities and are very honoured to be in that position. We have some strong partnerships. When we have members of the Jewish community being held to account for the State of Israel, that is anti-Semitism. When we have members of the Muslim community being held to account for Iraq and Syria, that is anti-Muslim bigotry. There are some very clear similarities—but clearly some differences—in where the two communities have come from.

We warmly accept the Prime Minister's step. We value the incredible work she has been doing on hate crime. We stand with Jewish communities in the definition of anti-Semitism. I was looking at the definition yesterday, and if you take out "anti-Semitism" and put in "anti-Muslim" that definition stands absolutely around Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. I will finish by saying that through the work of Sir Eric Pickles—he has been pushing this—and through the work of Jewish communities in Europe, which have been absolutely steadfast in working towards this, what the Prime Minister has done has opened up the door for solid definitions of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia in the future. We must welcome those, appreciate that and congratulate Jewish communities, Sir Eric Pickles and the Prime Minister on taking this stance.

Q140 Nusrat Ghani: Just to clarify: there is no preferred definition of Islamophobia but you are arguing that if we took the term "anti-Semitism" out of the statement that was agreed by 57 countries and put in "Islamophobia", that would work and would be adopted by many countries.

Fiyaz Mughal: It would absolutely stand firm and it could easily be adopted across. It is an opening trailblazer for other communities to follow.

Q141 Nusrat Ghani: Can I just take you back to the Macpherson report that looked at institutional racism? Do you think there is an opportunity, or the capacity, to try to identify research and calculate whether there is institutional Islamophobia in this country?

Fiyaz Mughal: The answer is absolutely. We have quite a number of cases of individuals who come to us talking about institutional Islamophobia. Let me explain what that would be. It basically is that people have been sacked from work because they have tried to pray or have wanted to pray and it has not affected their work. People have not got promotions. People have got poor service in goods and services. We have had individuals who have approached us to say, "Look. This is unacceptable." So there is that issue.

Q142 Nusrat Ghani: Mr Mughal, we recently produced a report on anti-Semitism and looked at institutional anti-Semitism. For it to be institutional, we did not look at one-off incidents; it was a thread of incidents. When people are coming forward and giving evidence to you



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from within an organisation—an institution—are there numerous examples, or just one?

Fiyaz Mughal: There are numerous examples. Usually, in the vast majority of cases, there will be numerous incidents impacting on the one individual that will be happening over a period of time. It is not just a one-off; it continues in their line of work and in their duty of work.

Q143 **Nusrat Ghani:** Turning to Mr Versi, I am going to ask a slightly nuanced question and I hope that the Committee will go with me on this. We have talked about Islamophobia, and I want to talk about Islamophobia within Muslim communities. No doubt you saw “Muslims Like Us” on the BBC recently. Does the Muslim Council of Britain represent every Muslim on that TV programme?

Miqdaad Versi: The Muslim Council of Britain is an umbrella body. We represent our affiliates. That is all we can do; it is all we can claim a mandate for, because those affiliates pay for membership and therefore are our affiliates. We can say that we can represent the 500-plus affiliates, the mosques, charities and schools across the country that choose to affiliate with the Muslim Council of Britain. Do we say that that is representative of the broader society as a whole? Well, we think it is relatively reflective, but it cannot be considered to be entirely reflective of the entire society. It would not be fair to try to pretend that.

Q144 **Nusrat Ghani:** When you submitted evidence to the Committee, and quite often when you quote to the media, you claim to represent the Muslim community in Britain. So do you represent—

Miqdaad Versi: Can I just ask where you said that we claim to represent the entire Muslim community?

Q145 **Nusrat Ghani:** Whenever—I can give you examples. Just a moment. Do you represent the character Fehran on “Muslims Like Us”, who is the gay Muslim?

Miqdaad Versi: I think that there are gay Muslims in many communities across the UK. The way that we work is that we are an affiliate-based body. We represent our affiliates and as much as any individuals, gay Muslims or otherwise, are part of those affiliates we can claim to represent them. Those are the people who elect those leaderships, and those leaderships elect us. What we want to claim a mandate for is who we represent—those who elect us. I think that is how most organisations will work, and that is what we can claim a mandate on.

Rather than some kind of compound question, the last time the simple question “Is the Muslim Council of Britain representative of your views?” was asked, a majority of Muslims said yes. This is the BBC ComRes poll last year, from January. If you look at individual examples where they try to change the question and try to twist things, that is different. But when it comes to the simple question, “Does it represent your views?”, they answer yes.

Q146 **Nusrat Ghani:** You say you represent 500 mosques. Are any of those



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Ahmadi or Ismaili mosques?

Miqdaad Versi: None of them are Ahmadi. I do not believe any of them are Ismaili.

Q147 **Nusrat Ghani:** So you do not represent Ahmadis, you do not represent Ismailis and you are not sure if you represent Muslims who are gay, but you claim to represent the majority of Muslims in this country.

Miqdaad Versi: I do not want to make a claim that I cannot support, and I will not do so. What I will say is that we have affiliates, they vote for us and we represent those 500-plus affiliates' views. The latest poll suggests that a majority of Muslims think that we represent their views. Can we say—

Q148 **Nusrat Ghani:** Which Muslims? Just Sunni Muslims, I assume.

Miqdaad Versi: This was a poll done of British Muslims. So we can ask BBC ComRes.

Q149 **Nusrat Ghani:** I have one final question. We talked about the rise, especially within schools, of incidences of Islamophobic activity. Is there a rise of Islamophobia across or between Muslims who are of different faiths?

Fiyaz Mughal: The answer to that is that absolutely there is. There are peaks of intra-Muslim bigotry that had we have recorded against the Ahmadiyya community after the murder of Asad Shah, even though the murder was not linked to him being Ahmadiyya. We picked up a peak of those attacks just yesterday. Pakistan has also caused an impact on the community here. But let me be very clear. We know that there is intra-Shi'a bigotry, there is intra-Ahmadiyya bigotry and there is bigotry against LGBT Muslims because they report it to us in Tell MAMA.

The fact is, if we are talking about tackling hate, intolerance and prejudice, if we do not tackle the intolerance within and beyond communities, it gives the far right and other extremist groups the absolute hook they want to attack Muslim communities. We cannot be impartial in standing against hatred. If we find it against gay Muslims, we will stand with the community wherever they are, and we must take that approach right the way through. It is a human rights approach.

Q150 **Mr Winnick:** The Chair will be pleased that my questions will probably be fewer than those of my colleague. Be that as it may, without wishing to be complacent, any form of prejudice is undesirable, let alone hatred. What was said about social media is relevant, bearing in mind the inquiry we had into anti-Semitism. But would it not be right to say that the large majority—perhaps, to go further, the overwhelming majority—of Muslims in this country go about their business like the rest of the residents without hindrance or difficulties? While recognising the valid points that you make, is it a fair assessment that the large majority of Muslims are able to go about their lawful business like anyone else?



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Miqdaad Versi: I think that is probably fair. I think most Muslims are able to continue their normal lives. I think, though, there is a fear within a larger proportion of Muslims, because most Muslims probably know somebody who suffers from abuse, either verbal or otherwise. So if you know someone who has suffered from verbal abuse, social media abuse or physical abuse when it comes to Islamophobia, that is obviously going to be something that affects you.

I know individuals who are real people, very much part of society—a journalist who works at the BBC and someone who is a pharmacist—working day in, day out, and they are worried about going on the train. There is a real worry among many communities. So while I agree it does not affect the majority in that way, I think the fear is much more prevalent.

Bharath Ganesh: I would like to add to Miqdaad's point. What we have seen from mapping out incidents from Tell MAMA data as well as from the Metropolitan Police is that a significant amount of incidents happen in the places that people frequent every day. We are talking about main arterial roads between places, where people are commuting from home to work. We see that 20% of all our incidents happened on the transport network in 2015—that is buses, coaches and trains as well as bus stops and rail platforms. What we have seen is that anti-Muslim hate crime tends to happen between the places where people go every day. We have had a huge number of incidents that happened at places of business and while people were shopping. It may not be the case that Muslims are not able to go about their daily business, but they are targeted and are experiencing incidents in those everyday circuits.

Q151 **Mr Winnick:** Mr Versi, I think you made the point about politicians who can exploit the situation. It is now totally unacceptable, except on the extreme right, or the Nazi right, if you like, to have a go at Jews—there are no votes in it, as far as the mainstream political parties are concerned—but when it comes to Muslims, that's not quite the attitude taken by some mainstream politicians. In some respects, is it a sort of modern anti-Semitism?

Miqdaad Versi: Sorry, what do you mean by—

Q152 **Mr Winnick:** Politicians use at various stages anti-Muslim prejudice. Would you describe that as a sort of modern-day—in Britain, at least—anti-Semitism?

Miqdaad Versi: I don't want to make comparisons. We can talk about the Catholics in the UK, we can talk about the black communities in the '80s and we can talk about anti-Semitism. There are definitely lessons to be drawn from our history. It is very important that we learn from that, even when it comes to media organisations and the way that gay people are represented in the media, or transphobia within the media in the last couple of years. I have talked to managing editors who have told me that there has been a material change in the last couple of years, because things have moved on. I fully agree that this is something that can



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change, as it has done in other communities and groups, which we identified earlier.

Q153 Mr Winnick: I wonder if I can give you a quote. It arises from the election for the London Mayor. A former Conservative Minister, Lady Warsi, accused the opponents—after all, party-wise, she was an opponent—of Sadiq Khan. She said that supporters of the opponents of Sadiq Khan engaged in unambiguous bigotry, far exceeding the bounds of electioneering. Do you think there is justification in the accusation made by the former Conservative Minister?

Fiyaz Mughal: I think that some of the campaigning that took place was uncalled for. I think that some of the campaigning stressed a link towards standing on platforms with extremists and terrorists. I think that some of the literature that we saw coming to us from far-right groups that were using Sadiq's picture and circulating it certainly had overtones of anti-Muslim bigotry. Do I think that another candidate who was not Muslim would be subjected to that? The answer, in my view, is no. Although the press has every right to look at who shares a platform with organisations and individuals, the amount of press coverage that Sadiq got was way over and above what any other individual would have got in that scenario. I think there is an element of that.

Miqdaad Versi: Consistency is very important here. You don't have the exact same approach and the exact same questions put to other faiths and other politicians. That is why it is very important that we have political leadership and agreement by all that this is not acceptable. We cannot have the social acceptability and even the political acceptability of Islamophobia mainstreamed in society.

Q154 Mr Winnick: There was a leaflet distributed, it appeared, to Hindus and Sikhs warning that their jewellery may be at risk. I don't know what Sadiq Khan would do with their jewellery—flog it, perhaps. That was outright racist, wasn't it?

Fiyaz Mughal: I am not sure about the context of that, but if anyone's jewellery is at risk, it is from individuals who are criminals, and I don't see Sadiq Khan being in any way, shape or form that kind of an individual. Let me just say this: that campaigning must never happen again within our very liberal, open and diverse capital. I think the voters made their response to that campaign very clear. It is not who we are, and it is not what we stand for. One of the greatest selling points of Britain—Great Britain—is the fact that we are able to absorb, live with, coexist and get on with our lives. That is the greatest asset we have.

Miqdaad Versi: What is very important here is that we did not have cross-party, senior people talking about how bad this campaign was and how it would not happen again. There were individuals who did so, but that was not an institutional response. We need to ensure that, institutionally, this does not happen again.

Q155 Mr Winnick: The Chair will be pleased to know that this is my final question; I said I would not ask as many questions as my colleague on



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the right. They were very interesting questions; I am not criticising. With the election of President Trump and his anti-Muslim rhetoric about banning Muslims from the United States—he has claimed he will; hopefully he won't—and all the rest of it, do you think it is possible that that could have an unfortunate impact in Britain? Leaving aside the extremists and the outright racists, do you think it could be that negative in Britain?

Bharath Ganesh: I would say that it is not only possible—there is causal evidence that that is the case.

Q156 **Mr Winnick:** Like what?

Bharath Ganesh: For example, in our 2015 report, about 200 perpetrators were reported to us on Twitter. Some of them were responsible for crimes; some were responsible for hate incidents. More than 60 of them mutually followed Donald Trump. Donald Trump's rhetoric was inspiring and giving confidence to far-right narratives and to those who committed hate crimes on Twitter who were reported to Tell MAMA. His rhetoric was directly linked to Twitter users in the United Kingdom who were engaging in that kind of behaviour.

Miqdaad Versi: Even more, we have seen examples where the rhetoric of Donald Trump has then been used directly within far-right circles in the UK, whether that is that Muslims do not report terrorism or those kind of nonsensical, unjustifiable accusations that are made by the most senior members of the future American Government. That kind of thing is very worrying, especially when that rhetoric is the basis of many far-right groups here, which literally copy and paste the reporting of those comments.

It is not just what Donald Trump has said. Many of the people who now surround him have previously said outrageous things about Muslims that are also spreading. Their statements, when they come out in *The Sun* or the *Daily Mail*—guess what? They are only reporting statements that were made elsewhere. That is the problem. They are just going to be reporting this stuff so they can spread this. It becomes more socially acceptable.

Bharath Ganesh: I want to add a few things. One example is Steve Bannon, the editor of Breitbart News, who Donald Trump is surrounding himself with. He has invited Pamela Geller, a known anti-Muslim extremist, on to his platform numerous times and put out her blog posts and interviewed her frequently. Again, those are things that are being posted by members of the far-right in Britain, for example on a website we know of called Fahrenheit211. Again, they are posting stuff that Pamela Geller is saying.

The linkage between the far-right in the United States and in Britain is extremely strong. I would say that they are actually quite responsible for many of the ways in which anti-Muslim rhetoric has developed recently.



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Fiyaz Mughal: In fact, just yesterday the Breitbart site posted a whole text from Pamela Geller, who was banned by the Home Secretary. That is what we are talking about: re-posting and cross-information transfer.

Q157 **Mr Jayawardena:** Can we just step back from the links that are being suggested and look at some of the polling that is driven by conversations, and therefore evidence, with people in this country? A 2015 YouGov poll found that 55% of voters in Britain thought that there was a fundamental clash between Islam and the values of British society. Those are not my views, they are the views of 55% of British voters. Do you think that such views constitute Islamophobia?

Bharath Ganesh: I think there is a difference in whether or not those views constitute Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. I think those views are representative of a broadening anxiety towards Muslims that has been distributed by the different things that we have talked about today. In that sense, yes, there is a broadening anxiety towards Muslims. Does that qualify as anti-Muslim hatred? Of course not.

Q158 **Mr Jayawardena:** So you would not say that suggesting that there is a clash between Islam and the values of British society is Islamophobic?

Bharath Ganesh: Again, it goes into the debates that people have had about what Islamophobia means. That is why I have been trying to qualify it as a broader anxiety towards Muslims—a frustration or problematisation of Muslims. That is absolutely what that represents.

Miqdaad Versi: The Runnymede Trust gave the definition that many people go by right now. It talked in 1991 about Islamophobia being defined as “unfounded hostility towards Islam, and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims.” The reality is that something like that might contribute towards a broadening view of Muslims in a negative context and, therefore, is likely to stoke Islamophobia. But we have to be careful. Of course you can have a critical view of Islam. Of course you can think, “I disagree with Islam. I think it is fundamentally wrong and against the values I stand for.” People can have those views. What is very dangerous is if that stokes views of hatred of actual Muslims on the ground, and if people put out hatred of individual Muslims, but say, “I hate Islam”, as a means to cover it. That is the problem.

Q159 **Mr Jayawardena:** That is helpful. Perhaps I can refer to some other evidence from polling, which says, “The more religious character and general social conservatism of British Muslim communities does not detract from the essentially secular character of most Muslim lifestyles. In terms of their everyday concerns and priorities, British Muslims answer no differently from their non-Muslim neighbours.” Although, perhaps, some polls show that there might be a clash, others would suggest that there is much less of one.

You said earlier, Mr Versi, that there were suggestions that Muslims did not report terrorism and that that was unfounded. Would you agree that the Muslim community in Britain perhaps does not help its own cause? When asked, “How prominent do you think are extremist views within



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Muslim communities?", more than a quarter chose the option, "Extremist views do not exist". Do you not think that actually undermines what you said?

Miqdaad Versi: The reality is that if individuals on the ground do not know anyone who is an extremist, they do not—

Q160 **Mr Jayawardena:** Do they not watch the news?

Miqdaad Versi: That is the point. Some people—understandably, perhaps—think that sometimes the media might overblow things. I do not think it is acceptable—I want to make it very clear. There is extremism. It exists. It is unacceptable and we need to fight together as a society to tackle it. I do not want to pretend for any moment that that is not the case. I am trying to explain that we have to be very careful about how we read polls. Every academic—I am sure that the academics who come later will say this—will say that, if you look at an individual poll by itself, you have to be careful.

Q161 **Mr Jayawardena:** That is why I am comparing two—to provide you with that context.

Miqdaad Versi: Exactly. For example, a poll was done earlier this year that said that Muslims are more sympathetic to terrorism than wider society. The latest poll said the exact opposite—that Muslims are actually less sympathetic to terrorists than wider society.

Q162 **Mr Jayawardena:** Perhaps I can put another statistic to you: 31% thought that the US Government were behind the September 11 attacks. How can that be defended?

Miqdaad Versi: It can't be defended. It is really worrying that the *New York Times* said that in America, half the population believe that the US Government were hiding something about 9/11. These conspiracy theories are, unfortunately, very prevalent. In the UK, 35% of the broader population, according to the poll you are citing, believe in conspiracy theories. I agree that there are problems here, and that we need to tackle them, but we have to realise that this is not a Muslim-specific problem. These are challenges that we face as a society.

Q163 **Mr Jayawardena:** The 9/11 statistic is very specific.

Fiyaz Mughal: I think you raise issues that show the complexity of what we are dealing with in a wide variety of areas. Given that we work within Muslim communities and given that our work is around anti-Muslim hatred, we have also come in for attacks from small sections of Muslim communities for being "too Jew-friendly", for being the friends of Zionists—because our chair is Jewish—and for being in the pay of Mossad. These are just the daily regurgitations we come across from groups who purport to be tackling Islamophobia. Let me tell you, those groups also have some sway in this House. It is extremely troubling in our society to come across the mindsets of those who live in our country and promote this absolute nonsense, corrode communities and give that absolute view to extremists beyond the Muslim community that all Muslims are like that.



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I make no bones about this: we have to tackle that group head-on as well, and make it very clear that their conspiracy, anti-Semitism, hatred of other communities and unipolar view of life will be challenged. I will say this: the Home Office needs to have a spine in challenging these groups. A number of times I have gone to the Home Office and said to civil servants, "Have a spine and give us the ability to challenge", and they have run away.

Q164 **Mr Jayawardena:** Can you give us some examples?

Fiyaz Mughal: Yes, I will give you examples. I have asked for projects to be enacted that absolutely untangle the narrative of such groups.

Mr Jayawardena: Which groups?

Fiyaz Mughal: I can give you some groups—MEND and CAGE, for example. Let us be honest, these groups attack us daily because of our view that we work with Jewish communities. This is something that this House needs to understand, and it needs to say to the Home Secretary and the Home Office that there is a time when we have to stand up for core values. We talk about British values; now is the time to stand up for them.

Q165 **Mr Jayawardena:** Thank you very much. That is really helpful. Perhaps I can turn to one other area that I want to look at. Do you think that we might be overblowing an issue that does not affect lots and lots of people up and down the country for a political agenda that you might be suggesting some are following? The reason I ask that question is that in a poll, against a control group, on racial and ethnicity-based harassment, 77% of British Muslims said that there was no problem, against 50% in the control group—far more British Muslims said that there was no problem with harassment. Indeed, the same effect was found for religiously founded harassment: 79% of British Muslims said that there was no problem, against 55% in the control group. I put it to you that while there is always the possibility that there are quirks in polling samples, actually the discussion around harassment revolves around third-party stories, rather than reality.

Bharath Ganesh: First, I would want to know what the sample size on that poll was.

Mr Jayawardena: It was 3,040.

Bharath Ganesh: Do you know where those people were recruited from?

Mr Jayawardena: Well, it is statistically valid, so it will have been a random sample across the country.

Miqdaad Versi: It is not a random sample. Policy Exchange—

Q166 **Mr Jayawardena:** It is an ICM poll, so it is statistically valid.

Miqdaad Versi: But it is in areas where there is a greater than 20% Muslim population, so it is specific areas where they have picked that up from.



Bharath Ganesh: One of the interesting things about that is that if you are looking at people from areas of high Muslim population, we do not see a high correlation of hate crimes with those areas. There might be some kind of skewing from that poll, which might merit further research.

Q167 **Mr Jayawardena:** May I provide a point of information that might help you answer? When we had some experts on social media come in front of us, actually the retweeting and the liking of replies to tweets and so on generated an awful lot more coverage than the original tweets themselves that had highlighted, "I've been abused." It is very easy to ramp up, I would argue, the reality of harassment against what might be seen as a metric in terms of the number of tweets you might find that include discriminatory or harassing commentary.

Bharath Ganesh: I think I see what you are trying to say about how it is easy for a story about an incident of harassment to ripple across a network online very quickly. I agree with you that that is the case. But I think the implication that I am hearing in your question—perhaps I am wrong—that this is not that much of a problem is totally incorrect. Polls are one thing, but if you go and sit down to talk with people in Muslim communities, for them this is a significant concern and a significant anxiety. I am not saying that it is No. 1. When a Muslim goes to the polls, that might not be the only thing they are thinking about; they might be thinking when deciding who to vote for, "What's my tax situation going to be?" or "Are the schools in my area going to be supported?" They have the same concerns as everyone else, but I would say that it is very surprising to see that such a high proportion of Muslims do not feel that Islamophobia is a problem. I have talked to many Muslims since I have been in the UK—over five years—and I can tell you that Islamophobia is a concern for all of them.

Q168 **Mr Jayawardena:** Can I get an answer from Mr Versi on this? The reference I make, again, is to research done by Demos, which found that less than 1% of 99,000 tweets with the #postrefracism or #safetypin hashtags actually represented unique instances of hate crime.

Miqdaad Versi: We need to look at different things differently. When the Metropolitan police are putting out figures that say that hate crime against Muslims has gone up by 70% in the last year; when Tell MAMA have similar figures that talk about a massive spike in hate crime against Muslims; when just this weekend we saw somebody going out and saying, "I want to kill a Muslim" and stabbing an individual, I think it is very important to put the context in place of a rise in Islamophobia, to an extent, that that poll does not represent in reality.

Bharath Ganesh: I would just add that that Demos study was based on an algorithm that scraped things up. The stuff that we at Tell MAMA are looking at, for example, are things that people have seen and reported to us. That tells a different story.

Q169 **Stuart C. McDonald:** It is interesting that so far, with the exception of the Leveson stuff, you haven't spent your time advocating for legislative



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changes. Would you say that that is because you think there are dangers in greater restrictions on what people can say, or is it because you think the issue here is of using the powers we already have, but better?

Bharath Ganesh: I think it is very much an issue of using the powers that we have in a more effective way. One of the things that we have put out in our reports, as well as in our submission to the Committee, was the fact that the current counter-extremism strategy and the current hate crime strategy are focused on forms of the far right and neo-Nazism that were applicable five or six years prior, or maybe even longer ago than that. There is a significant need to quickly update the way that we analyse the far right and neo-Nazism today, and to start understanding that extremism is not limited to Muslim communities; it is actually spreading throughout.

We are seeing an increasing polarisation in the United Kingdom, in terms of the public sphere, and we are seeing more and more support for the far right. We have counter-extremism powers that aren't designed to circumscribe speech but to provide support for deradicalising people. Those powers are there, but they are being used disproportionately on Muslims at the moment. I think that there is a lot of scope for people who don't support British values from other communities to be included in those deradicalisation programmes.

Q170 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Mr Mughal, would you support changes to hate speech laws?

Fiyaz Mughal: The answer to that is no. There is a fine balance that we have between the right of free speech and European conventions, and I think that the balance is just about right; it is the question of implementation that is the key here. I wouldn't suggest changes in law; I would suggest it is how we enact current laws and put those into practice right the way through to the front-desk level of our police forces.

I also want to add that the CPS has been very positive and progressive in the way that it wants to tackle issues. Its reading of the law and its ability to tackle some of these issues needs, I think, to be raised and commended. We will commend it because it has been extremely proactive. So, no change in the law, but how we enact and put into practice current laws needs to be more robust, I think.

Stuart C. McDonald: Mr Versi?

Miqdaad Versi: As a whole, I agree that we need to have that very strong balance between free speech and hate. It is a very important part of our society that we are able to be open as to who we are. There is a slight area: there is protection against discrimination for some religious minorities, such as Sikhs and Jews, that doesn't extend to Muslims, according to the Race Relations Act 1976.

Some people are saying that there should perhaps be a review of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006. That is what the Law Commission advised. I think that is potentially something to think about, and we



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shouldn't just rule it out entirely, but I agree that the vast majority of the Muslim community's concerns are not to do with the legislation but its implementation. That is the real area that needs to be worked on. Leveson, and the implementation of section 4 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, is something that can and should be done.

Q171 Tim Loughton: Mr Winnick rather hijacked my line of questioning; perhaps I can rephrase it in a rather more measured way. You have spoken quite a lot about the media reporting of inciteful language, and you have spoken quite a lot about what politicians perhaps have not said to condemn some of that. What rhetoric by mainstream politicians do you think could be held responsible for promoting Islamophobia and other forms of hate crime?

Miqdaad Versi: I gave examples in the submission. For example, "Nigel Farage said that Muslims want to form 'a fifth column and kill us', and that there has never before been a migrant group that wants to 'change who we are and what we are.'" That is the type of rhetoric used by Nigel Farage prior to the general election. The Conservative peer Baroness Sayeeda Warsi said, "There is a simmering underbelly of Islamophobia in the Conservative Party." Around the EU referendum we had the famous "breaking point" poster. There are lots of examples.

Tim Loughton: By UKIP, though.

Miqdaad Versi: By UKIP.

Q172 Tim Loughton: Can we park UKIP on one side—we all know where they are coming from—and look at the more mainstream parties? Perhaps UKIP has become a mainstream party. That quote from Baroness Warsi referred to an opinion without giving examples. We were keen in the anti-Semitism inquiry to get to the heart of examples from all the parties, which is why the Committee was particularly keen that all the parties were questioned before us as to what they were doing about specific examples of anti-Semitism.

It would be useful to have some specific examples of where policies, speeches or stunts by mainstream politicians, be it Ministers, shadow Ministers, Back Benchers or whatever, have specifically made your job harder, particularly Tell MAMA—the reports coming in that had been triggered and given rise to people saying "If an MP is saying it, that must make it acceptable to repeat these sorts of feelings or to take them to a new level."

Miqdaad Versi: I am very happy to share some of those offline. I do not have any to hand, but I can write to the Committee if that's helpful.

Q173 Tim Loughton: That would be helpful. Perhaps some specific examples that Tell MAMA has had—

Bharath Ganesh: I do not have many specific examples to hand. I am going to flip to the section where we do have some information on this.



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Fiyaz Mughal: In the meantime, let me add that I think we are very fortunate to have the politicians we have. People out there might not like that, but I think we are very fortunate to have you here. Frankly, I am glad that I live in the United Kingdom, bearing in mind what is happening in Europe and in the United States.

Five or six years ago, a Conservative Government were not looking at these areas. Today, they are seriously looking at these areas—not only anti-Semitism but anti-Muslim hatred. We hear from some sections of Muslim communities that this Government are at fault and that this Government have a problem. Well, I cannot answer for this Government on a lot of things, but in the area of hate crime let me tell you that this Government and this Prime Minister, who was previously Home Secretary, have been firm, robust and absolutely fair.

The work on anti-Muslim hatred is supported through the work we do, and we have found Ministers to be open, receptive, willing to listen and willing to act. They know one thing, and I say this pretty clearly: if they don't tackle anti-Muslim hatred, they give succour to extremism. The fact is that, thankfully, we can walk into a Minister's office, with that Minister listening to us and taking anti-Muslim hatred seriously. I say that because many Muslims out there in Muslim communities constantly say, "The Government are against us. The state is against us. The state doesn't want us to be Muslim, and they don't want Islam." I am sorry, but I have never heard such rubbish in all my life. Today, from the Home Office through to DCLG and the FCO, they are seriously looking at anti-Muslim hatred. I am so glad that we live in the United Kingdom today as Muslims. Although we may have difficulties—let us not detract from what Miqdaad and others have said—we can and will overcome these difficulties, and we must maintain that sense of hope.

Tim Loughton: I think we would all say "Hear, hear" to that. Those are very strong and helpful words. The reason for my questioning is in no way to make a party political point but to draw a division between what politicians are actually saying and what they are represented, or misrepresented, as saying. I think a lot of the criticism we have had is rather more in the domain of the media. You quoted some very good examples, Mr Versi. Very often they are not based on what a mainstream politician has said. They are misconstruing or building up something that may have been on social media or is third-hand. Very often it is to do with the fringes of politics or general morons, and all of a sudden it becomes a mainstream story and supposedly the Government or politicians are in some way connected to it. I think the distinction where there is a case to answer for the media and social media—we have had this with the anti-Semitism report and others—more responsible reporting of what people actually do think.

Can I just quickly come on to another point? If you can give some more examples, that would be really helpful. I am playing devil's advocate to try to drill down on this.

Chair: You are about to change subject, but before you do—I will come



back to you—I just want to follow up. Having further examples would be immensely helpful. It is also about recognising that there may be a difference between what Government do and what political parties do in campaigns. There can often be heightened language used in political campaigns. It would be very helpful if you have further examples of that that you want to challenge us with, because kind as it is of you to support politicians, in this Committee we also want to know where there are challenges.

Q174 Tim Loughton: Absolutely, I endorse that. I just want to come back to what Government do and have done. If one looks specifically at the Prevent strategy, for example, the Committee has been quite critical about the way that the Prevent strategy has been presented and handled. Do you think that the way this Government have presented the Prevent strategy and framed counter-radicalisation has led to Islamophobia or to people using that as a hook or an excuse, or is the media again misrepresenting it in a way that can cause these sorts of problems? One criticism that there certainly has been of Prevent—I have been critical of it—is that it very much concentrates on Muslims. What about the far right? It does not get much of a look in there, but clearly there is a serious problem with some of the maniacs on the far right. Could the Government—this Government and Government generally—have done things differently in the way that they present policies such as Prevent?

Miqdaad Versi: Prevent is a large topic. The concerns within Muslim communities are quite widespread when it comes to Prevent in particular, and it feeds very much into what Fiyaz was saying about Muslim communities feeling that the Government are against them. The Prevent policy and the perceived lack of work on Islamophobia is seen as a big reason why the Government are against them. I think that is the feeder or the driver. I do not have direct evidence to support that, but that is my feeling and understanding.

When it comes to Prevent in particular, the concerns are very widespread that Muslim communities are targeted. That is not just because of examples that have happened, but because of the way it is sometimes presented. Certain politicians talk about Prevent and the focus on Muslims when 10 times more people have been killed in Northern Ireland from terrorism than in the rest of the UK in the past 10 years. I do not want to diminish what is happening in the UK—not at all—but not treating all things equally is a very important issue.

David Anderson, who is the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, said that it is extraordinary that the Government are not talking to Muslim groups such as the Muslim Council of Britain on issues such as counter-extremism. It is worth noting that that is what independent people are saying about the issue. When we need to get the trust back, that is important.

Adding to what Fiyaz said from a slightly different perspective, the cross-party working group to tackle Islamophobia was set up by the Government in 2012, I think. One of the individuals who is speaking later, Chris Allen,



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resigned from that group, as did Matthew Goodwin. They felt that the Government were not giving the group sufficient support to do the work. There is something there that needs to be done. This needs to be taken seriously. This is an area that needs further work.

Bharath Ganesh: A lot of the work that we have done on the Prevent strategy suggests that—it was developed and piloted in 2007, and it had one form of approach until about 2010. That approach was very much community-oriented. Various community groups got funding. Since then, we have seen more of a centralisation of the strategy and much more control within the criminal justice framework and the Home Office. That has certain advantages, but it has also brought out a lot of disadvantages. One of the big disadvantages is that in many places where the Muslim community could have had ownership of the delivery of Prevent, that has not happened. There has not been enough consultation with Muslim communities in the delivery of Prevent. I think that has been the biggest drawback.

In terms of dealing with the far right more effectively, having that dialogue and doing a better job of it would address some of the concerns that we have with the far right. So I think that the way the policy is structured and being delivered is leaving communities out, and that needs to change.

Chair: Two other Committee members want to ask questions, and I think Naz Shah will want a very brief follow-up question, but I am conscious that we have let this first panel run a long time, because your evidence has been very helpful. I ask you to give us short answers, even when we ask you very long questions, given the time we have left. I will call David Burrowes and James Berry, and then I will come back to Naz Shah.

Q175 **Mr Burrowes:** Picking up on the point about where the growing threat is to the Muslim community, is it from the far right, or would you say it is more broadly from racists and those who exhibit xenophobia?

Miqdaad Versi: I think it is a mixture. I think the statistics will come from Tell MAMA, but my understanding and feeling is that there are people who are using what they see in the media and elsewhere—Trump and other spike phenomena—to justify their actions. Sometimes it is not people who have always been members of far-right groups; it is individuals with bigoted views in general who are latching on to a broader movement, but maybe—

Q176 **Mr Burrowes:** The reason I ask is that in terms of definitions, you tend to look at the broader suite in relation to racism and xenophobia, rather than specifically Islamophobia. Is there a danger of trying to bespoke this issue, when really we need to tackle the issues of racism and xenophobia at heart?

Fiyaz Mughal: That is a really good point. The answer is yes, we need to tackle the issues of wider racism. The one in 10 figure I gave at the beginning of this evidence session starts at school, so we need to do a lot of community education work to start the process of trying to counter



some of the prejudice, bigotry and racism. That is a lot of the work that can counter some of the more extreme elements that we find in society over time.

You asked where the risk is. The risk today is of a lone wolf actor doing something against members of Muslim communities, and we are seeing more of those people being more aggressive and more targeted in their approach to Islamic institutions such as mosques. People willingly say on social media, "I want to go to this local mosque and stand outside and throw a pig part into the mosque." It is that much more focused, aggressive stance we are seeing, and that is of concern as well.

Q177 Mr Burrowes: Drawing on the example of people outside mosques, you made a parallel with the Jewish community and the good relationship we have. Do you think there is a case for particular funding and support like the CST—Community Security Trust—gets? Do you think there is a parallel for the Muslim community?

Fiyaz Mughal: The answer to that is absolutely. One of the reasons we set up Tell MAMA was absolutely to parallel what the CST was doing. That is why the CST worked together to effectively support us when we started our work. Over time, that ethos has been lost somewhere in the Home Office, and what has been produced is a central fund that will fund any faith institution for security measures.

The fact of the matter is that the risks we are seeing towards Islamic institutions mean that there has to be a definitive, identical structure like the CST that looks at support for security for mosques and for volunteers to stand outside mosques and ask people, "How are you? Who are you? What are you doing?" in the long term. Let's be clear that we are not asking for the securitisation of mosques—we would like cohesive and open communities. What we are asking for is this. The CST model has been absolutely brilliant for Jewish communities, and there is a wide-open gap for Muslim communities. There is an existing body, and the best relationship we have with other faith communities is with CST and Jewish communities. It is an open goal, if you ask me.

Bharath Ganesh: I would just like to add very briefly that the current funding pot that Fiyaz mentioned is about £2.4 million, and it requires applicants to put up 20% of the funding on their own. It is important to note that the Muslim community is clustered in areas of deprivation in the United Kingdom, so sometimes that funding, or raising that kind of money, might not be possible for many mosques. That is something that should be considered in the policy.

Q178 James Berry: Do you agree that a balance has to be struck between the press not feeding Islamophobia, as you outlined at the outset of the evidence, and the press shedding a light on issues that arise in minority communities that might otherwise go unchecked?

Miqdaad Versi: Yes, of course there should be a balance. I am not aware of Muslim communities talking about the fact that newspapers shouldn't talk about real issues. If they are talking about a fact on the ground, it is



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very important that it is talked about. That is part of what journalism is all about. But the problem is not that. The problem is the way in which it is packaged, the way in which it is sensationalised, the way in which it is brought out much further. For example, Dame Louise Casey had a report that came out. The way in which that was reported, picking out individual elements instead of talking about it overall, sensationalising and changing those elements and then deciding to say, "That's what the report said," is a problem. If they had instead just said, "Here are problems within Muslim communities that need to be dealt with and this is the reality of what is going on," the concern would be very different.

To add to that, it is about consistency. The report talks about a range of different communities. It talks about the fact that the majority of issues when it comes to domestic violence are in white British communities. That is not a front-page story. I am not saying that we should necessarily say that journalists should not be free. Of course they should be free to do that, but to do so in a way that is consistent, fair and open and does not sensationalise stories and make up stuff that is not real.

Q179 James Berry: I think that the headline you cited was that 70% of Muslims think that this is a majority Muslim country. I have looked at the Casey report just now, and I think that that probably refers to part of her report where in one school the pupils thought that 50% to 90% of the country was Asian, correctly because they lived in a majority Asian area.

Miqdaad Versi: Correct.

James Berry: But that was something that featured in her report, so what was wrong with that specific report?

Miqdaad Versi: If they had decided to report that I would not have had a problem. *The Mail on Sunday* retracted that article and had a correction basically saying that it was incorrect. The *Daily Mail* has said the same as well. *The Sun* is, I believe, in the process of changing or might be changing its article on this. The *Daily Express* hasn't come back to me yet and *The Times* is currently under investigation with IPSO on this issue. All five newspapers decided to misrepresent those stories and say something that was factually incorrect. If they had said, "One school in a majority area has some weird views," I would be like, "Okay, that is a reality report. That's fine." If they decide to make a massive story out of it and disproportionately target Muslim communities, that is just inaccurate. It is dangerous and has implications for what Muslims feel on the ground.

There is a narrative being created whereby Muslims are criminals, Muslims are terrorists, Muslims are this and so on. So when you have to deal with important issues, if they are somehow tagged on to this broader narrative it is a problem. Just because, for example, a criminal does a criminal act, the fact that they happen to be Muslim is irrelevant to that case, but if that happens to be the front-page story of a newspaper it is problematic. That is the kind of thing I am talking about.

Q180 James Berry: On something that Mr Mughal said, I think that most of us here—probably all—do not like quite a lot of what we hear from a lot of



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Donald Trump's coterie, but the fact of the matter is that those individuals are now going to occupy senior White House positions, senior Cabinet positions. They will be world figures, so it will be very difficult for the press not to report things they say, even if those things are Islamophobic, in the same way as the press has to report the bile we hear from the President of the Philippines or the dictator in North Korea. How would you suggest the press deal differently with comments that people in those senior positions make?

Fiyaz Mughal: I would not dictate in any way, shape or form to the press. Those are hard-won freedoms that we have. What I will ask is that where there are commentators in newspapers, newspapers seriously look at some of the views that commentators are promoting and ask themselves, "Does this actually sell papers for us in the long term in new markets? Is this what we are providing in terms of social good to our country?" They need to ask themselves some real questions about some of the views that are coming from commentators, which I think are pretty toxic.

I wouldn't touch the press—I think the press needs to have a free hand at what it is doing—but I would ask for some moderation in some of the views that are on the websites for press articles. You get reams of anti-Muslim hatred. Moderators need to do one of two things: either moderate them or switch them off. I think there is a place today for that to happen. That does not affect the right of the press to report, and it does not affect opinion, but it stops those haters coming in and having the oxygen to air their views.

Q181 **James Berry:** That is very similar to the social media issues. I think most of us completely agree with every word of what you said earlier—I certainly do. One final question: do you think there is a role for the Muslim community in creating its own counter-narrative? I know the Ahmadiyya community often invites the press in, and it has had some very favourable stories in the *Evening Standard*. I know that the Muslim Council of Britain, whenever there is a terrorist atrocity in the name of Islam, always puts out a statement saying it is not in the name of Islam and explaining why it is doctrinally against what is written in the Koran. Do you think there is a bigger role for the Muslim community there?

Miqdaad Versi: I think the Muslim communities can always do more. There is a long way to go, in terms of trying to change that narrative on the ground locally with your friends, neighbours and schools. It is about being participatory members of society as much as possible. To an extent, that has happened in many regards, but of course more can be done.

We have to recognise that bad news, sensationalism and negative ideas about Muslims sell. We have a narrative out there that Muslims are bad. A newspapers can put out a front page that is really negative and stokes hatred, and the next day it can say, "Oh sorry, that was wrong," and put a correction on page 2 in a small font. We have to recognise where the balance of power lies. Many parts of the media speak to millions of people, and that is the greatest source of concern for me, in particular.



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Chair: A final quick question from Naz Shah.

Q182 **Naz Shah:** I have just a couple of questions. Fiyaz, you said earlier when we were talking about the London mayoral campaign that that must never happen again. Is that because it was Islamophobic?

Fiyaz Mughal: The answer is yes, it was punching those buttons. Secondly, it caused division in our capital, and it can't happen again.

Naz Shah: Thank you. The second thing that I want to bring you back on is this. You complimented the Prime Minister's response to hate crimes, but you had an incident at the Tory party conference, and for that one you weren't as complimentary. On your blog, you said that your staff had been stripped of their dignity. Your service users or clients are people who report Islamophobia, and certainly LGBT issues. What was the response you have had from the Conservative party on that?

Fiyaz Mughal: To give you some context, this was when we tried to do a fringe event at the last Conservative conference. Unfortunately, we were thrown out of our own fringe; we never got access to it. We made a number of complaints. One of our staff members said he was homophobically abused, and the director of Tell MAMA, who is sitting in the Public Gallery, also felt intimidated. The response we got back did not answer the concerns about the LGBT issues and what happened to the director of Tell MAMA. They just rebutted us and said that the Conservative party hopes that, in the future, we register early. That was their response to us.

Q183 **Naz Shah:** That's not the first time, is it?

Fiyaz Mughal: In relation to other groups, I think there is a history of other Muslim groups trying to get in. I don't know the context of that. I just want to say this: we tackle hatred; that's the nature of our work. If we turn up and we can't even get access to our fringe because, frankly, we are treated in such an undignified manner, I think sections of the Conservative party itself need to seriously look at what they are doing with individuals like us, when their own Government sponsor and support us.

Q184 **Naz Shah:** This is my final question. I am just going to read something from that blog of yours and refer back to Mr Jayawardena's question, particularly to you, Miqdaad, about the victim mentality. In your statement, Tell MAMA said: "Our work is difficult enough as it is challenging some groups within Muslim communities who sell a view that Muslims are perpetual victims. We have to constantly challenge that destructive view. There are others beyond Muslim communities who believe that Muslims should not be seen or heard. There are also those who believe that anti-Muslim hatred does not exist and that Muslims 'bring it upon themselves'. In the middle of these toxic views, we try and undertake our work under a barrage of abuse, threats and intimidation over the last 5 years, both from groups selling the perpetual victim narrative and those on the extreme far right."

That brings me to my question, first to Miqdaad, about the poll that Mr Jayawardena referred to—the most recent Policy Exchange poll. I know



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we have had conversations about it. Can you just explain how dangerous it is? What is your view on it?

Miqdaad Versi: Firstly, was the polling itself done by a reputable agency? It is worth noting about Policy Exchange, who did this poll, that BBC “Newsnight” has accused them of fabricating evidence in the past. Let’s just keep that in mind when we talk about any poll done by an agency—let’s understand the context.

The real danger is when an individual poll is misrepresented, whether that is by a right-wing think-tank that refuses to show where its donations come from, or by broader society. It is problematic. For example, that poll says that only 50% of Muslims report to the police. The question was, if you happened to be worried about someone close to you—because they might be talking to terrorists, for example—what would you do? Like the rest of the population, 20% said, “You know what, we’ll talk to them first, or we’ll talk to family,” and then 50% said that they would talk to the police. That figure was actually higher for Muslims than for broader society—in other words, more Muslims would report to the police.

Because of the way that the question was asked, the way you represent it is very dangerous. If you had a simple question, “Would you report it to the police?”, 95% of Muslims would say they would. So the problem is that the way things are reported is a major part of the problem.

Q185 **Naz Shah:** But is there a victim mentality? Would you agree or disagree?

Fiyaz Mughal: Yes, sadly there is a section. I am a Muslim myself and I have been doing this work for 20 years. There is a section that has absolutely been fomented and structured over a period of time, where the view is that the Government, the west and other communities are against Muslim communities and that victim narrative is being cycled. Once you create that mindset, you create an individual who starts to disentangle themselves from wider society. If we just look at the bottom line, they will actually earn less, they will have fewer future options in their life and fewer future experiences, and actually it is deeply destructive to the individual.

Q186 **Naz Shah:** I am just trying to unpick that. On the one hand, you say that there is a massive increase in hate crime against Muslims—and yet there is this victim mentality. Is it the victim mentality that is increasing the hate crimes, or are they both—

Fiyaz Mughal: There is definitely an increase in hate crimes and hate incidents, because we see it when it tallies with international incidents. There is a clear tally within the civil society activity of some groups within Muslim communities. When I say “victim mentality”, I am not talking about victim mentality around hate crimes.

Q187 **Naz Shah:** I am talking about hate crimes.

Fiyaz Mughal: Okay. If we look at the hate crime element, there is some degree to the cycling of view that the overwhelming issue affecting Muslim communities is anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia. That is the



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difference. The reality is that there is an issue and it is impacting on Muslims' lives, but it is not the overwhelming issue that takes women away from doing their shopping or takes them away from leaving the home. That is the bit, I find, that when exacerbated starts to impact on the mentality of individuals and reduce their ability to be mobile in their own lives.

Chair: We need to move on to our second panel. Before you go, some further information that would be useful from you would include, first, some of the cases you referred to of problems with Twitter or other social media. That includes the example of far-right networks that you referred to, but any others would be very helpful too. We will be taking evidence from social media companies in the new year. Secondly, any more information on how schools have responded to some of the issues around young people that we touched on at the beginning would be useful. Thirdly, any information on inter-Muslim hatred and how that is being dealt with would be useful. Fourthly, any more information about trigger events, which we covered briefly, and what recent trigger events there have been, would be useful. That would be immensely helpful.

Thank you for your evidence and your time. We will now move on to our second panel. Thank you.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Imran Awan, Murtaza Shaikh and Dr Chris Allen.

Q188 **Chair:** Thank you very much for joining us. I apologise; this is slightly later than we had asked you to come for. Welcome.

Can I ask each of you to introduce yourselves and your organisations? Please also respond to the question from the very beginning, which is to tell us your view on what the reason for the increase of Islamophobia—or not—has been. We are particularly concentrating in this discussion on online abuse and hate crime.

Dr Chris Allen: Good afternoon. My name is Chris Allen. I am an academic from the University of Birmingham, and I have been researching Islamophobia since the late 1990s. I was co-author of the EU report on Islamophobia in the 15 EU member states post-9/11, among other things.

In terms of the question, I would say that the statistics definitely show that there has been an increase in the levels of Islamophobic hate crime over the past number of years. One of the things that we have to bear in mind on this is that there has not been any kind of systematic or consistent approach to actually recording Islamophobic hate crime. If you look back even five years ago, the evidence we have is very sketchy. Organisations such as Tell MAMA, previously, but also changes within the police forces and the recording of using the flag around Islamophobia, have become useful. However, I would say, in terms of that, that there are still significant problems, in looking across at other forms of expression of hate crime and getting something that is consistent.

Just briefly, to open—I'm sure we will take this a little bit further—I think one of the things in terms of the media and hate crime, and the relationship between those, is that the media tend to inform what I would suggest is a kind of white noise that exists around Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting. It kind of informs the tone of the debate; it informs the tone of the discussion; and by default it informs the tone of people's views and attitudes towards Islam, whether that is a form of anxiety, a form of threat or a fear. I think that one of the things that we can do is to look at the media and see that, in some way, the white noise that exists somehow validates the idea, views or attitudes of the perpetrators of hate crime.

Dr Imran Awan: I am Dr Imran Awan. I am an associate professor of criminology at Birmingham City University. I have looked a lot at Islamophobia, especially on the internet and online spaces.

In terms of coming to your question and trying to delve a bit deeper into some of the triggers and causes, some of the work I did recently, in particular, was around the link between online and offline anti-Muslim hate crime. The idea is that, in effect, there is a continuity, and that they shouldn't be looked at in isolation. The idea is that, for victims in particular, if they suffer online, offline those experiences become a reality.



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I can give you some examples. We had a case of somebody who had a Twitter account created about him saying that he was from Rochdale or Rotherham, that he was a paedophile and various other things. When he spoke to us he said that he had found it hard to find a job, because people were looking at those social media posts and linking the two together—“Hang on, this guy must be a paedophile”—even though he was innocent and had gone through a whole police investigation and so forth. I think there is a real continuity and a link, in the sense that we shouldn’t look at them separately.

The other thing is that, for a lot of the victims that I have spoken to through my research, there is a real sense of them living in fear in the offline world. For example, we had one lady who said she had to change the security locks on her door because somebody had found her address and knew where she lived, and that had impacted on her on a day-to-day basis. Another individual said that when she went to work she was performing badly at her job because of the threats she was experiencing online.

Trigger events have been discussed a lot. From some of the work I have done, I know it is important to note that they don’t spike only when we look at international events. That does happen, because we live in a globalised community, but local and regional events such as Rotherham and the Trojan horse scandal also lead to an escalation that spikes and then goes down after the first 48 hours, if you like—apart from with Brexit, since when we have seen a real increase.

Trigger events do lead to escalation. As Tell MAMA has reported previously, Muslim women are most likely to be the victims, and males are most likely to be the offenders. I think you started off by saying that this is about online hate. What is interesting is that victims of online anti-Muslim hostility in particular remain less visible in the criminal justice system. We hear less about them, which may be for a number of reasons, including trust and reporting mechanisms, and some of them feel that nobody’s going to take them seriously.

Before I pass over to someone else, I will end on this. The sense of fear, especially for women, is a really gendered dimension in terms of how they have to deal with it. Men are much more unlikely to report incidents because of a fear that they are going to be considered weak. It is the visible identity that is quite often the trigger point, because a Muslim woman might have been wearing a headscarf or a male had a beard, or they were discussing Islamic issues on social media. In a nutshell, that summarises some of the points we were asked about.

Murtaza Shaikh: My name is Murtaza Shaikh. I am the co-director of a think-tank called Averroes. Our main areas of work are Islamophobia, extremism and integration, one of the reasons being that we think they are incredibly related and interdependent. We also do some work on capacity building within the Muslim community to engage better with politics, Parliament and so on.



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In terms of our written submission, the main point that impacts on social media is the idea of whether there is a need for legislative change in the specific area of hate speech, and how that can be used to stem Islamophobia. The only data we have that I have come across that is specifically to do with online Islamophobia is a Demos report, which clearly indicated a consistent increase and spikes that correlated with terrorist incidents abroad, most prominently Nice, Normandy and the ones that took place elsewhere in France. We obviously have the figures from the Home Office and Tell MAMA as well.

I agree with Chris that we do not really have a uniform approach to collecting this data. It shouldn't really be just think-tanks and third-party organisations doing this work, because without the data we can have questions such as "Does it exist?", "Is it going up?", "Is it imagined?", "Is it perception?" and so on. Those are all valid points to make. I would also emphasise, for example, with Imran, that it is not just about data. As Tell MAMA said earlier, it is very important to get those qualitative pieces of research and information about the experiences people go through.

The last point would be that we cannot ignore the idea of perceptions within the Muslim community, because the perception itself becomes a hindering factor when you operate in the outside world. I would link the social media to the outside world as well. Let's say you are a Muslim woman who wears the face veil. If you have the mentality that the outside world is Islamophobic and you think everyone hates you, you are going to behave in that way. The same goes for wider society. If wider society thinks that these people think in a certain way or they buy into some of the narratives and tropes that are pushed forward, they also have uneasiness. That doesn't aid integration and interaction.

Q189 Chair: How are people changing their behaviour in response to online abuse?

Dr Imran Awan: One individual who we spoke to said that she had suffered some horrendous abuse. There were fake profiles created about her using her pictures. Somebody was saying to her, "We know where you live and where you go to work." She stopped taking the specific public transport route she normally took—she would go the other way. In the evenings, she would purposely not travel because she said, "After this specific time, it is quite dangerous and I'm more vulnerable."

There is a real linkage with how this online behaviour was leading her to feel a sense of real fear. There is another element. I talked about impact before. In one case, a lady was taking anti-depressants because of this and she was suffering anxiety. She said that it impacted the way she was taking her child to school. The school was talking to her, saying, "Is everything okay?" There was a real sense of a lack of self-esteem and confidence, and there was anxiety and fear because you never know whether that online space will come out and actually do something.

Dr Chris Allen: Whether it is online or offline—with any form of hate crime on whatever basis it is being perpetrated—we have to remember



that you could be attacked randomly or be the victim of a crime that does not involve the recognition of who you are. We have to put that in context with hate crime.

Hate crime cannot be seen to be random, because it specifically targets the part of your identity that is probably the most important to you. If you are attacked online or in the street, you are being attacked—if it is motivated by Islamophobia—because you are Muslim. It is the very core of your identity that is being attacked, targeted and identified. In some ways, even if a random comment is tweeted, saying, “I hate you because you are Muslim”—it would probably be a lot worse than that—the fact is that it is actually touching you much more closely.

The research from somewhere like Victim Support, for example, shows that the impact of hate crime on the individual is much more significant than crimes that do not target your identity. We have to remember that. Whether it is offline in the street or online, it is still about that core attack on your individual identity. That is where the impact comes from.

Someone such as Paul Iganski, who has been researching hate crime of other manifestations, will say that when someone is attacked in a hate crime, it has a ripple effect. It is not just the fact that you feel threatened, attacked and anxious as a result of the attack on you because of who you are and what you are. Your family also feels that. The anxiety goes into your family and into your networks. We have to stress that whether it is online or offline, the impact and the attack is based on the same premise. That is an important point to make.

Dr Imran Awan: I was just going to reiterate that point. These are message crimes. It is sending a message to the victim because of their perceived identity. The ripple effect impacts quite a lot of people, as well as that individual—anybody else who is part of this group, whether it is a family network or somebody else. It sends a clear message that if this is what you believe in or this is what you are combating, you are fair game.

Q190 Chair: In terms of the perpetrators of abuse, we heard earlier about far-right networks online, about the age of perpetrators being increasingly younger, and about forms of abuse. Do you have anything to add to that evidence?

Dr Imran Awan: There is quite a lot of evidence now that says that younger people are more likely—in terms of the types of abuse, there is evidence. It is also about the nature of the abuse that is given out and the way in which perpetrators are very co-ordinated. There has been a lot here today about the far right. What is interesting in some of the work that I have done is that some of these are just ordinary people, as well as the far right. There is a sophisticated network. When you look at some of the profiles of these individuals, you find people who are teachers and who have lives—ordinary citizens like you and I—who are involved in some of this rhetoric.



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Trigger events have been discussed—Woolwich, for example, or Paris. From some of the work we have done, it seems that there are more mundane events. Halal meat sees a spike in anti-Muslim hostility, online especially, as do things to do with sharia. In 2013, when Channel 4 decided to do the call to prayer, there was a huge emphasis of anti-Muslim hostility. It is quite interesting the way those events map out.

Dr Chris Allen: In terms of the idea that young people are becoming increasingly prone to using it as a medium for hate, actually, that is probably because young people are using social media across all walks of their lives. This is becoming very much the norm and very much the way in which they communicate, so the fact that hate crime and hate speech is being manifested there is something that we should not really be too surprised about.

The research shows as well that the vast majority of hate crime, whether it is perpetrated online or offline, is not perpetrated by networks or by the far right. I would say that there is a similarity between Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, in that there is a very noticeable and identifiable hardcore element that uses these mediums to put forward a very specific ideology—one which would hate Jews or Muslims, depending on where you look at that.

I add that, as research shows, the vast majority of hate crime, online or offline, is undertaken by ordinary people. It is about the context within that—the things that motivate those people suddenly to wish to say something that is atrocious, shocking or threatens somebody because of who they are. That is where the issue is. There is a very specific network of hardcore Islamophobes or anti-Semites that work in these areas, but we should not put the sole emphasis on those.

Murtaza Shaikh: I would also agree with the sentiment that a lot of ordinary people are involved in online hate speech. That is reflected in the polling that we have seen. It is a sort of chicken-and-egg situation: are we going to blame the media for promoting certain ideas and narratives, or are we going to say, "Look, what happened with the Brexit vote?" We can say that Sadiq Khan won in London, but it is not as if his opponent did not get any votes whatever. If that was a national vote, perhaps it would have been different; perhaps it would have been more like Brexit. We have these sentiments proliferating through society. Social media provides a medium for those to be expressed.

As we said in our written submission, the anonymity—especially on Twitter, compared with other platforms—allows the worst of ourselves to come out. If you want to see what people are actually thinking, they are not saying it on the street; social media is the place to go to see that. If hate speech is the fuel for hate crime, where else is the bulk of hate speech expressed other than on social media? We have looked at the guidelines and enforcement mechanisms of different social media companies, and not just the two big ones; that included YouTube, Yik Yak and some others that are in our written submission.



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You will find that none of them has a robust policy on hate speech—except Facebook concedes that it is willing to look at this area. The others only really get involved when it is to do with harm or threats of violence. We can see some of those issues reflected in the work that has been done on gender hate crime. It is not really clear whether they are into promoting free speech or whether, like the tabloids, the more traffic they have and the more things that are trending, the better it is for them. Those things are not clear. Maybe they will be able to highlight what the reason is.

Q191 Stuart C. McDonald: A couple of quick questions. Have any of you done any research on the extent to which fake news has become a generator of Islamophobic sentiment and on whether it is a significant problem? Nope. Thank you very much.

Dr Chris Allen: If you want to give us some money, we will do the research. I will happily take it on. You can make that commitment now if you want.

Q192 Stuart C. McDonald: I will maybe suggest to somebody else that they make that commitment. Secondly, as you will know, the Government have announced that they will be working alongside the Independent Press Standards Organisation to improve the standard of guidance and training available to journalists. Will that be effective in any way, shape or form? Do we need to go much further than that?

Murtaza Shaikh: What does it mean? Guidance and training in what, exactly? That would presume that journalists don't know what they are doing. The most prominent recent case was with Fatima Manji of Channel 4. IPSO acquitted the journalists involved. If you are saying, "He needs to be deradicalised" or something, then maybe, but I think we would need to look at the elaboration of what it means. But IPSO itself and the way it regulates definitely need to be looked at.

My view has always been that when it comes to social media companies, IPSO or regulators, it is not good enough for them to fall back on saying, "Well, we're just abiding by the law." It is their job to go beyond the law, if possible, and to look out for other things. When journalists are going after people's identity just for being Muslim or for wearing visible religious symbols—I cannot see how that is enough to justify them having the freedom to express the views that they did about that reporter not reporting on a terrorist news story.

Q193 Stuart C. McDonald: Dr Awan?

Dr Imran Awan: I would just add that if any sort of training is given, it is important to go to editors, for example, and to look at the types of language they use and at the idea of understanding where anti-Muslim sentiment is, to have the language and a better picture, so we can say, "Actually, using this terminology is not good in this instance." More editorial checks—the sensitive nature of particular stories was discussed previously—and any sort of training or workshops for journalists would be a positive thing; they would be able to see Islam and the language used about Muslims in a different light.



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Dr Chris Allen: In some ways, there is a correlation between academia and journalism: you have somehow to maintain that sense of integrity and freedom. I do not think that, in any way in which we speak about the media, we would want to put any curbs on journalistic freedom or journalistic integrity.

We also have a sense of responsibility. That is maybe where the differences begin to become apparent. If I, one of my colleagues or, for example, Imran were to produce research evidence and try deliberately to misrepresent our findings, we would be held accountable for that. One of the issues is that there are many times when a lot of us who have researched this—and a lot of people in communities as well—feel that there is not that accountability when it comes to journalism.

What I would like—it is obviously a very sensitive balance in trying to get there—is to try to ensure that in some way there is a clear transparency, in terms of the accountability of journalists. In the previous session, a lot was said about the issue of misrepresentation; there are the very small things around “a Muslim community” as against Muslim communities. These very fine nuances can send out a very different message. On those big, broad headlines, what I would like to see is not a curtailing of the integrity or freedom of journalism, but the imposition of more of a sense of responsibility, and then accountability when that responsibility is not apparent.

Murtaza Shaikh: There are two categories here. There are articles that are put forward in the media that you could say potentially stoke hatred, but that they would say are based on facts; there are also those that are completely false and fabricated, as we have discussed. Is there a mechanism of accountability for when that happens? There is: IPSO. But the problem is that that process of accountability is not enough to deter the newspapers. When there is a retraction or an apology, it appears on page 52 in small type. The response to the infringement of the regulations should be proportionate. If it was a huge headline that is highly problematic and not based on facts, then the apology should be equivalent to that, and there should be serious, punitive consequences—financial punitive consequences. If the deterrence is not there, then the money you make from selling the papers outweighs the minor embarrassment.

Q194 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Is that not quite a dangerous road to go down? Are we not threatening to infringe freedom of speech and so on?

Murtaza Shaikh: In the specific context of newspapers, what freedom-of-speech excuse is there to lie?

Q195 **Stuart C. McDonald:** Do you not then have the risk of defensive journalism? People might become scared to take on certain stories, just because they are scared of the consequences.

Murtaza Shaikh: That is why I split it into two categories. One is how you frame a story, which is a separate discussion. I am talking about stories that are completely fabricated or based on false premises—that are just



not factually correct. It is every newspaper's responsibility to report actual stories, surely.

Q196 James Berry: Dr Allen, you raised an interesting point about social media. You were saying that perhaps there are a lot of people with these views, but they are expressing all their views on social media, including the unpleasant ones. When we had the Chief Rabbi giving evidence, he made an interesting point. With anti-Semitism, if Mrs and Mr Smith are at the dinner table in Nottingham having an anti-Semitic conversation, it doesn't really affect him, but when it is in his hand, there to see on Twitter, it really does affect him. I think it goes a bit further than that: it eggs other people on, and it normalises those views if you see them all the time.

Social media companies claim that it would not be financially possible to police the traffic on their platforms, because they would have to employ so many people. Do you think that that is a responsible approach for companies who put these platforms out there?

Dr Chris Allen: Again, there needs to be context. There is an interesting analogy that I use with my students: the things you say in your front room, you do not say in the space of the university. We have become sophisticated enough to know what we can and cannot say in public. A lot of the time, our prejudices, whether they are minor prejudices or are full blown, as the Chief Rabbi was saying, are such that we become nuanced and sophisticated in that respect. On social media, it has become the same. Without wanting to play down any sort of bigotry or hatred, if you are just texting it to your friend, is that any different from having that view in your front room? Where it becomes problematic is when somebody tweets and they have two followers. Does that make an impact? What if you have 1,000 followers, and then somebody else with 1,000 followers retweets, and then it is retweeted and retweeted? I don't think we can talk about this in blanket terms.

The analogy actually goes a little further. Once it goes into the public space and public discourse, whether via more traditional mainstream media or social media, it definitely leads to a sense of normalisation. If you constantly see diatribes against any particular group—we can look back at this over many years and across different paradigms—it becomes very normal to "other" a particular group. I am not in any way trying to underestimate the problem, but I think we need to look at it in a more sophisticated way.

As for how you manage it on social media, I really don't know. With some forms of social media, it is very private between a very small group; with other forms, such as Twitter or Facebook, it tends to go to a much larger audience. I was chatting about this yesterday; one of the things that came out of the Demos presentation was that some social media platforms have more users than some nations have citizens. How you do it, I don't know, but I think the way forward is to look at enforcement. When it is reported as a problem, we then look at whether we can use the legislation that is in place to enforce the curbing of that particular behaviour. That is where



legislation and policy work best: in curbing behaviours. That is where we can really make an impact. It is about using the legislation we have as a consequence of the reporting, so that it still comes from the individual who feels vilified or attacked, or who has become a victim. We can enforce it more from that point of view.

Q197 James Berry: Do you think that social media companies could and should do more?

Dr Imran Awan: I think they should. We spoke to somebody—I will just use their quote. A picture was put up of her avatar, and it said “You burkha-wearing slut”. That was posted, retweeted, shared and so forth. When we spoke to her, she told us “Social media companies do not act quickly enough”. That reaction is important. Quite a lot of what we are seeing is reactive elements to deal with this, not proactively trying to look at counter-messaging, protocols or things like that.

Social media companies recently signed up to a code of conduct. I think much more needs to be done about providing a duty of care to users and others, so that when people sign up, even to social media companies, if they make reckless statements, there is somehow an element of—I hate to use the word—naming and shaming people. I have had discussions in the past with Facebook and Twitter and have said it would be good to have a traffic light system. If people are creating a problem once, you give them a warning, and then after that you penalise them and take them off. But we know that this is a financial market.

My conversations with Twitter often end with them saying, “Sometimes people send tweets at different times of the night. They might be drunk, so we tell them to sit on it, that what they’ve said is wrong, and to maybe come back.” I don’t think it’s acceptable. What is the broader context? I think the response to posting and sharing harmful content should also be part of the wider strategy.

That is probably somewhere social media companies work with the CPS and other organisations to look at guidance given to prosecutors in dealing with the types of language we see online. Unfortunately, we have spoken to quite a lot of people who reported things, but it took forever for Twitter or others to come back to them with a plausible answer. For example, Twitter came back to that lady and said to her, “That hasn’t breached our guidelines.” Okay, so what are the guidelines? Then you go back to the CPS.

Also, this is a multitude of platforms, in the sense that it is not just social media companies. Let’s take the police, for example. It is important to note that there is so much on social media that the police cannot feasibly deal with everything. It is like finding a virtual needle in a haystack, but if the people that we spoke to have a lack of trust in the police offline, and if the police do not have adequate resources to tackle online, you can see how mistrust breeds mistrust in the online space as well. It goes back to that connection. That would be my summary.



Q198 James Berry: It is interesting that one thing we explored in one of our previous reports was one of our colleagues being trolled with the hashtags #filthyjew or #filthyjewbitch. That is very easy to identify. Even now, just while I have been sitting here, I have found dozens of tweets using that hashtag. It would be very easy, because it is quite specific, for Twitter to automatically quarantine any message with that and review it before allowing it to go out, or maybe just not allow it at all, because it is obviously going to be offensive and highly derogatory, but they do not seem to take any proactive responsibility, because doing so would mean that they are responsible for what is on their platform, including copyright breaches and other things. It seems that they have created something that they say is so big that it is impossible to police in any way.

Dr Imran Awan: Absolutely. It is like the hashtag #killallmuslims that was trending.

Q199 James Berry: Yes. I bet you can find stuff on there now.

Dr Imran Awan: You can still find stuff on there now. People are creating multiple accounts. When we did our study, we found quite a lot of derogatory terms for Muslims—referring to them as “musrats”, “vermin”, “disease”. Those were not being picked up by Twitter, because they had not understood that “musrats” was a demeaning way to describe Muslims. The language of that is also a problem. You referred to it. There is a link, as Chris mentioned before, between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in that context as well.

Dr Chris Allen: But just in that respect, wouldn’t somebody just remove the hashtag? Then you wouldn’t be able to pick it up.

Q200 James Berry: That is true, but Twitter have chosen not to do that, in spite of being criticised in a previous report by the Select Committee.

Dr Chris Allen: So you could actually stop that immediately; all you would need to do is remove one character.

Murtaza Shaikh: When Twitter reports on trends, it picks up the word as well as the hashtag. It doesn’t just pick up the hashtag; it picks up the actual word.

Q201 Chair: Can I ask you for more precise examples of things that either Twitter or any other social media could do that they are currently not doing? The more precision, the better. For example, issues raised with us around Twitter include, first of all, the length of time to provide any kind of response; secondly, not having high enough standards, and potentially having different kinds of standards in terms of content; thirdly, not using algorithms or other kinds of approach to identify abuse; fourthly, not preventing repeat abuse, so even if somebody has a criminal case against them, they can simply reappear as someone else and set up a new account.

Those are four I have had raised with me in terms of Twitter, but there are a whole series of other social media companies and forums. Maybe the Twitter ones are ones you think are appropriate or are not, but the



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more specificity—we go around the houses a lot with quite general requests of social media companies. Are there specific things that you think they could and should do that they do not?

Murtaza Shaikh: The concept behind these companies is to do with user content. Like YouTube has, other social media companies should have means by which users can flag posts. Of course, it is people who are seeing these posts, and it is people who are feeling or suffering the hate, so they should be able to report it themselves.

The anonymity on Twitter is a huge problem, and it is something that they need to look at. For them, it will be a big thing because, if they introduce any further checks on identity, it will hamper their own performance and edge over Facebook. I would go back to having more robust guidelines. Even where guidelines exist, we have already heard that enforcement is not fast enough. It is just not acceptable for social media companies to say, “We have created a monster that we cannot control.” At least come up with guidelines that put out your intention to try to stop this sort of hate speech, and then we can talk about how we enforce it. That is not yet the situation in many companies.

Dr Imran Awan: I reiterate some of the points I made earlier. We have had discussions with Facebook in which they were quite interested in the idea of a traffic light system where you give somebody a warning before you name and shame them, but they were also worried about that element. A specific report button, or something that looks at racism and bigotry, could be important. Twitter has been in discussions about anti-harassment tools, but at the moment the idea is to block, mute, report, which does not deal with it, especially when we are trying to deconstruct what a tweet was about. On the one about “filthy Jews”, for example, why isn’t there a way of reporting it as racial prejudice and hostility? Why isn’t there some sort of mechanism? A report button might be one suggestion.

There could also be contextual analysis when people send such tweets. For example, Twitter has said many times that “This doesn’t breach our community guidelines” if someone calls somebody a “Paki”, for example. A proactive element has to say, “How many of this individual’s tweets are you checking? Is this person a serial offender? When did they commit the offence? Are they using images and pictures? Are they inciting hatred? They may not be breaching the law, but is it inciting racial hatred?” There needs to be a much deeper evidence base.

An online archive of hate incidents would be really helpful so that, after somebody reports an incident, they are able to collect evidence to help a prosecution. Users often take screenshots, which might be one form of evidence, but why does Twitter not have a mechanism through which an individual can store files that can be swiftly moved on to the police and other agencies? You would then have an archive that helps to improve the prosecution rate.

This is an interesting finding when we talk about barriers to reporting hate crime: some of the victims we spoke to said that, first, they were not



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aware that they were the victim of a hate crime. They said, "Really? Is this a hate crime?" They weren't aware. Secondly, they were not sure how to report and how to gather material evidence. Quite often when we hear about case studies of people who have been prosecuted, it is celebrities who have been victimised, but some sort of case study where we can see that happening would help. I think that could be done through an online archive system.

Dr Chris Allen: My view is probably slightly different. I think it is such a huge problem that I am not sure you can really police this too well. People can immediately remove a hashtag, and they can close one account and reopen another account. The whole nature of it gives you that fluidity to use it in whichever way you wish, whether for good or bad.

The only way forward is to take it from the victim's point of view and look at prosecuting on that basis. I am not sure that you can really police it from the top down.

Dr Imran Awan: I definitely agree that it is an issue for the police, but even social media workshops or training for people within social media companies would be advantageous.

Q202 **Chair:** Mr Shaikh, you referred to Yik Yak and others not having any community standards at all.

Murtaza Shaikh: No, I was speaking in relation to this particular issue. What we are talking about is hate crime specifically, and then we can split it into the different protected heads, saying, "We protect for this, and this, and this." When it comes to the kind of speech they consider hateful that they should not regulate, most companies do not have anything about that. When it comes to Twitter and YouTube, it is purely about violent threats or imminent harm—things of that nature. Even where there are some guidelines that refer to racial or religious hatred, it has to be directed towards a specific individual. It cannot be a general statement. Like I said, when it comes to religious hatred, Facebook was the only company that made a distinction between whether you are going after the person, saying, "Muslims this and Muslims that. Effing Muslims", or whether you are criticising the religion generally—no matter how misinformed and no matter how hateful. That is the correct route to go down, if we are going to talk about regulation.

Q203 **Naz Shah:** Dr Awan, this question is specifically to you. In 2014, following the "Trojan horse" issue in Birmingham schools, you were quoted as saying: "Muslim communities in Birmingham feel vilified and that they are being unfairly labelled as extremists. To me the most significant outcome of this whole affair is the damage caused to community cohesion and diversity, which was one of Birmingham's key strengths." I would like you to expand and elaborate on that. I would like to understand what your view is on the Government response. Can the Government's response and tone impact on hate speech following such incidents?



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Dr Imran Awan: In terms of the “Trojan horse” issue, what is interesting is that as a regional or local event, it was leading to quite a level of anxiety and fear within Muslim communities. The study that you are referring to was one where we went out to speak to children, teachers and others who had been impacted by the “Trojan horse” affair. The key salient message often was, “It is political rhetoric that has led to this.” There was a real sense that they felt that they were being vilified and that it was impacting on their children’s education.

What is interesting is that a local regional event like that still spurs a level of animosity online, in the sense of people targeting people because they were linked to that particular school. For example, it was Park View School—it is now called Rockwood Academy, I believe—where hashtags were being used to target teachers or children who went into that school. They were seeing this level of animosity, and this comes back to what I mentioned before about trigger events. Not all of them necessarily have to be international. You can see local, regional events like the “Trojan horse” affair. That was the impact it was having on the people we spoke to.

Q204 **Naz Shah:** So it continued to have an impact.

Dr Imran Awan: Yes.

Murtaza Shaikh: What was the last part of the question? I didn’t catch the last part.

Q205 **Naz Shah:** I am trying to understand whether the Government’s response or tone can impact on hate speech following incidents like this.

Dr Chris Allen: Can I come in on that? In the previous session, there was a question about mainstream politicians making statements about problem issues. There was a prime one in terms of the “Trojan horse” incident. Tony Blair used the UN platform to make a comparison in June 2014. He said that the Islamic extremism that inspired Boko Haram to kidnap 200 girls in Nigeria was the same Islamic extremism that was evident in Birmingham schools. I think that that is a prime example of completely and utterly inaccurate statements about Muslims. From that, what you get in the media is the reporting of that and the assumption that it does not matter whether they are in Afghanistan or in Sparkbrook in Birmingham, or whether they are in Nigeria or in Small Heath in Birmingham—all Muslims are the same and their capabilities are the same.

I think there are another couple of things, particularly in the Birmingham context. Both Imran and I work and do a lot of our research in the city. The “Trojan horse” incident did not happen in a vacuum in the city. A few years before we had Project Champion, where we had more than 200 cameras—CCTV and ANPR cameras—put around two of the most densely populated Muslim areas in the city. Initially, it was said that they were there because those were high-risk, high-crime areas, but then it came out that they were funded by money for counter-terrorism.

One of the things that you get with this—“Trojan horse” comes on the back of this—is the idea that there is no smoke without fire. Why do these



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things keep happening? When you have Tony Blair saying this, when you have the police putting up 200 cameras around Muslim areas, when you have a letter being published in national newspapers that even the West Midlands police said quite soon afterwards was a hoax, you are feeding into this background noise—this white noise—that exists around Muslims in the city. There can't be smoke without fire. There must be Muslims in there who are terrorists. There must be Muslims who are waiting to do these things. It creates animosity between Muslims and non-Muslim communities within the city. I think that that becomes really problematic. We can look at the American media—Fox News—where Birmingham is described as an area run by sharia police. That suddenly goes out to a global audience.

If you look at the way in which all this ties up—Imran was talking about the online spaces, and you begin to get hate speech coming through there—you can see the way in which the offline and the online connect. You can see the way in which the political discourse actually feeds into that. You can also see the way it has an impact at a social level as well.

Murtaza Shaikh: I also wanted to go back to the earlier question about which mainstream politicians are saying things that may be contributing to sentiments within the public. Schools is a good example. In relation to the question, I would say that the rhetoric that was coming out of David Cameron, and specifically how it was entrenched in the counter-extremism strategy that he presided over, contains a host of things, including the "Trojan horse" affair, which feed into these tropes and narratives. It is very difficult to see how they can be classified or be linked or related to a yet hazy concept of extremism. It includes the incident with Lutfur Rahman in Tower Hamlets, which is given as an example of corruption and extremism, FGM, the paedophile rings and the taxi drivers—what does that have to do with Islamic extremism?

I gave evidence to the citizens commission on public participation and integration of Muslims, which asked for further evidence—I can forward it to the Committee—on a similar question. I produced a very long document of things that David Cameron had said that are not Islamophobic but are in the blurry, hazy area that Nigel Farage is in a lot of the time. It leaves the space open for a connection between, for example, ISIS and Muslims generally. I think that if you leave that space open, you are not the one populating it, but it does eventually get populated.

Q206 **Mr Winnick:** If something's wrong, it is no consolation that it is worse elsewhere. I accept that entirely, but when one looks at various places in Europe at the moment, particularly France and Holland—one can name one or two other places, but one has France in mind, in particular—presumably you would agree that the situation here is nowhere near that, when it comes to prejudice and hatred against Muslims.

Dr Chris Allen: Last year was the 50th anniversary of the first piece of race relations legislation in the UK, and I think we were the first country in Europe to introduce that type of legislation. We have a great tradition of being at the forefront of seeking to tackle any form of discrimination. One



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of the great things about us is that, when we look at proportionality, we have legislation that protects the trans community as much as it does the black and Asian communities, which are much more significant. From my interactions at a European level, I would say that in many ways we are advanced here, but I don't think we should sit back; we should take it forward.

One of the people on the previous panel spoke about the event in Sweden. The Swedish Government were talking about how to tackle Islamophobia. I participated in that event, and Sweden were very keen to look at the example set by Britain. All of these things are extremely positive. All of our history of trying to tackle discrimination—any discriminatory phenomena—is fantastic. We should be credited for that but we should keep pushing on with it. That is why, in terms of Islamophobia and other forms of discrimination that are beginning to emerge, we should still strive to be at the forefront.

Q207 Mr Winnick: I will continue on the basis that you agree with that—if you do not, obviously you should have told me at the time. I asked the previous panel about the political impact on anti-Muslim prejudice. I believe you were in the room. I mentioned the situation in the United States: the triumph of Trump and the blatantly anti-Muslim rhetoric he used. He would never have got away with it if he had used such rhetoric against Jews. Do you feel that the impact of Trump and the fact that, unfortunately as I see it, he succeeded in his campaign—he is President-elect, as you know—will have any impact on public opinion in this country?

Murtaza Shaikh: Trump appears to be part of an international increase in the appeal of the right, as it were—the populist right. We discussed Steve Bannon and Breitbart in the previous session. It is important to note, for example, that his website was one of the main influences that came out in the trial of Anders Breivik. When we look at what happened to Thomas Mair as well, we can see that his influence is also of the far right. What Trump represents is the link between that extreme far-neo-Nazi white-supremacist right and the general public. He occupied that space in the middle. If you want to know whether that has an impact on the UK and on what the public think here, you just have to look at the figures in support of UKIP. I think they represent a similar kind of politics. If their support goes up, we can see that it does have a knock-on effect.

Dr Imran Awan: I think that some research was done recently about when Trump was elected and there was a rise in hate incidents in the US. What is interesting in terms of the UK context is that there was quite a lot of fear at the time, with people worried, especially about the idea of banning Muslims going to the United States of America. But, going back to social media, what is interesting is the power to counter that narrative, and there are quite a lot of good examples, where people are using hashtags to say, "I am a Muslim, I am American and I am proud". With that type of language, if you can flood the use of social media especially with a positive counter-message, you suddenly see the level of spike decrease as well, because people are now thinking, "Actually, hang on



here". This is coming back to your question about social media companies. Maybe their helping to push that hashtag higher and higher up the trend is always a good thing.

So yes, it could have an impact, but I was quite happy with the way in which people were responding through those hashtags, and also there is a wider question of using humour and satire to counter it. Sometimes we do not take that seriously enough. That type of thing is really powerful, especially when people are using things to try to demonise and dehumanise individuals.

Murtaza Shaikh: I just wanted to add that there is a direct impact. For example, it just came to me that, when there was the discussion about the Muslim ban, Katie Hopkins and Melanie Phillips immediately published a column supporting it. Whatever happens there, it does create debate and discussion here.

Dr Chris Allen: The Southern Poverty Law Center, which records hate crimes on various markers in the US, saw that in the week after the election in the US the same number of anti-Muslim incidents—hate crimes—was reported in one week as was reported in the previous six months. What we see is a sharp impact. The reason why that is important is that, if you look at the work of Stuart Hall, who was the first black professor in the UK and pushed forward the idea of culture studies, he said that political discourse informs common sense. He said that politicians with their discourse and what they tell the public through their rhetoric will create what is common sense. Common sense is not a kind of grassroots thing or a kind of ground-up thing that we believe in; it is something we are told, and we are informed and shaped. If the President of the United States is saying it is okay to hate Muslims it becomes very difficult to stop the perpetrators of hate crime because they will say, "Well, if he can say it, why can't I?" I think that is where the impact will be; it will be in terms of the tone.

Q208 **Mr Winnick:** Point well taken. Dr Awan, you mentioned satire. I am just wondering whether some of the programmes on television that include Muslims poking fun at each other—at fellow Muslims—help. The general feeling is that that gets us away from the sorts of issues that we have been discussing and looks at people as human beings like all other human beings are, with their weaknesses and the rest of it.

Dr Imran Awan: Absolutely. One of the proudest things about being British is our sense of humour. Using satire and that type of light-hearted humour, and reversing the pernicious ideology of people saying, "Well, Muslims aren't contributing" and the idea that they're an "other" and there is a "this" and a "them" can have a real impact. People might say, "Actually, I live next to a Muslim. I've never, ever asked them about this question. I think I am going to ask them this time because I'm open enough to ask them because I've seen something that's quite interesting." There is a space for having that, of course being respectful of various other things to do with free speech and so forth.



Dr Chris Allen: One of the issues around normalisation is absolutely crucial. At the moment, Muslims and Islam are still seen to be “other”. If you look at the 2008 research from the University of Cardiff, it shows that the tendency now among the press and broadcast media is to present Muslims not as a violent other but as a kind of cultural other—“They’re against our way of life, our culture, our values” and so on. I think that anything that brings Muslims into being seen as normal rather than abnormal or “other” is fantastic. One of the things that should be in there is when you start to see Muslims being asked about issues that are not Muslim issues. My view—this is something that came up in the last session—is that Muslim groups should not be releasing statements and press releases about events involving Muslims in other parts of the world if they do not specifically affect them, because the implication is still there that they are somehow linked to those. Let’s talk to Muslim groups about non-Muslim issues. That would be great.

Q209 **Naz Shah:** Dr Allen, I understand you have been critical at times of the definitions of Islamophobia. Do you feel it should be on the Government to either adopt or clearly define a working definition that separates legitimate criticism from an act of hate?

Dr Chris Allen: Yes. I was thinking about this in the previous session, which I wanted to join in with. One of the reasons is that we have not had any policies that have necessitated a definition. We have various different sources. I have tried to define it in a very academic way. The Runnymede Trust has tried to define it in a much more mainstream, accessible way. The Council of Europe has come up with definitions as well. I get the feeling that we are moving to a space where we need to begin to negotiate some form of definition that is widely acceptable. Unfortunately, I have not seen the definition of anti-Semitism that was accepted yesterday. I would be very interested to look at that.

In terms of policy and legislation, it would be very easy. There are strong similarities between racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia and Islamophobia. There is no hierarchy. On the whole, they all function in exactly the same way. We are probably now in a space where we need to begin to work together to come up with a definition, and maybe using the definition of anti-Semitism is a good starting point. If we could get that definition, it would be a major step forward. If we have a policy and political drive to get that, it may be taken more seriously than if an academic tries to write a 60-page book on what it means.

Murtaza Shaikh: It is imperative we move in that direction. Perhaps the adopted definition of anti-Semitism can provide the impetus for that. If you look at a lot of the discussion and debates that go on about what should be done about Islamophobia and what is happening on different levels—social media, traditional media and on the street—the ambiguity of what it means and what it should mean play into that. On one spectrum we have people who say, “It doesn’t exist; how can you be phobic of a religion?”, and on the other hand you have some elements who are potentially misinformed and say that any criticism related to religion should be banned. Our view, which we have elaborated, is that we are in a



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post-world war two, post-holocaust, post-Stephen Lawrence society. It does not really make sense, from any perspective whatsoever, that the abuse, insults, bigotry or hatred aimed towards Muslims for being Muslim are any different from the lessons we have learned from those past events, whether that is to do with black people or Jewish people.

Chair: We are about to run out of time, so we will have a final question from Nusrat Ghani.

Q210 **Nusrat Ghani:** I am sorry that you were not able to be in the first session, Dr Allen. I think what is important about what was adopted by 56 countries on anti-Semitism was that everyone accepted what having a Jewish identity is. What I was trying to draw out in the earlier session is that there are many different forms of Muslims who identify themselves as Muslims, but that there are other Muslim representatives who do not. There can be Islamophobic incidents within the Muslim community. If we were to come up with what you are suggesting—what I was suggesting—it is going to be quite difficult across the Muslim community to accept who can and cannot feel they have been a victim of Islamophobic behaviour.

Dr Chris Allen: And that is absolutely fine. I would imagine, within Jewish communities, that there are actually differences of opinion that are exactly the same. I would say, as a white British person living in Birmingham who was born just across the water, I don't really have too much in common with my Brummie colleagues a lot of the time. We do not have to agree on everything. Also, with the proscription of National Action, no one is actually asking me to apologise for them or even assuming that they speak for me.

I think that we can have that space where we can actually have differences of opinion. We can have Muslims who agree with us on some things and Muslims who do not agree. I think, when it comes to hate crime, irrespective of whether it's a gay Muslim, a heterosexual Muslim, a male or a female, that person is being attacked because they are Muslim. That is the issue, and that is what we should always remember in terms of that. It is about the hate crime, not about what type of Muslim they might be.

Dr Imran Awan: That definition point of view is also important for the victim. A lot of the research shows that victims are not aware whether they have been a victim of a hate crime, so we could have some sort of solid interpretation—"You fall into this category or you don't".

Coming back to the point mentioned on intra-violence and intra-Islamophobia, especially against certain communities because of what they believe in, I think it is also important for them to feel confident—"Actually, hang on; we're suffering Islamophobia within our own community." That is an important factor.

Murtaza Shaikh: When it comes to discrimination law and minorities and so on, it is normally the perception of the perpetrator that matters.



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Chair: Thank you very much. We appreciate your time and your evidence.