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The Dinner Table Prejudice

Islamophobia in Contemporary Britain

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and Amy Unsworth



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND HEADLINE FINDINGS

It starts with, okay, the truth is in the Bible so we need to go and follow the Bible; it can't be challenged in some people's mind. And I know that's a very simplistic view of Christianity but as far as Islam goes that's how Muslims are required to view the world, the way [...] it was written down 1,300, 1,400 years ago [...].

Research interview, British member of the public¹

The purpose of this report is to help shed light on the extent and nature of Islamophobia in the UK. We ask what it is, show how widespread it is, and provide one answer to the complex question of why, when compared with most other forms of prejudice, Islamophobia attracts so little public censure. To do this, we use a survey designed by us and administered by YouGov, which examines what British people think about Islam, Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities. We use this data not only to highlight the pervasiveness of Islamophobia in the UK but also to argue that Islamophobia comes in two distinct varieties, racial and religious. While we agree with recent definitions of the term that Islamophobia is a form of racism that targets Muslims, we also demonstrate that it manifests as a distinctively anti-*religious* prejudice.

The reason it is important to recognise this religious form of Islamophobia - which, like the quote above, paints Islam as inherently literalistic - is that, within British society, it is located differently to anti-Muslim racism. In Britain, hostility to ethnic and religious minorities, including Muslims, tends to be more common among people who are politically conservative, nationalistic and from lower social grades. What we show using this survey is that prejudice towards Islam and its teachings does not follow this pattern. This prejudice is more evenly spread across political groups and more common among educated middle classes. Based on this survey and supporting interview data, we propose that religious Islamophobia acts as the 'acceptable face' of anti-Muslim prejudice: it is a 'softer' prejudice that stymies efforts to secure broad agreement on what Islamophobia is and how to challenge it. This variety of Islamophobia tends to be neglected in anti-racist activism, which typically focuses on differential treatment and street-level harassment of Muslims. We argue that opposing anti-Muslim prejudice means opposing *both* these forms of Islamophobia, albeit potentially in different ways.

We have strived to make this report as accessible as possible, keeping technical statistical analyses to a minimum (and mostly in the footnotes). It necessarily enters at times into conceptual discussions about what 'race' is and what constitutes prejudice against a religious tradition. This is because we need to fend off misguided (in our view) arguments about whether Islamophobia is a form of racism, whether one can be prejudiced against a religious belief, or whether Islam is 'more literalistic' than other religions. For those who do not need to be persuaded about these underlying arguments, or who simply lack the time to engage with them, our key findings are summarised below.

- 1. Muslims are the UK's second 'least liked' group, after Gypsy and Irish Travellers:** 25.9% of the British public feel negative towards Muslims (with 9.9% feeling 'very negative'). This compares with 8.5% for Jewish people, 6.4% for black people, and 8.4% for white people. Only Gypsy and Irish Travellers are viewed more negatively by the British public, with 44.6% of people viewing this group negatively (Figure 5).
- 2. More than one in four people, and nearly half of Conservative and Leave voters, hold conspiratorial views about Sharia 'no-go areas':** 26.5% of the British public agree that 'there are areas in Britain

¹ Interview with the lead author quoted in Stephen H. Jones et al., "That's How Muslims Are Required to View the World': Race, Culture and Belief in Non-Muslims' Descriptions of Islam and Science," *The Sociological Review* 67, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 173, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026118778174>.

that operate under Sharia law where non-Muslims are not able to enter'. This increases to 43.4% among Conservative voters and Leave voters. In addition, 36.3% of British people, and a majority of Conservative voters (57.3%) and Leave voters (55.5%), also agree that 'Islam threatens the British way of life' (Figure 10).

- 3. Support for prohibiting all Muslim migration to the UK is 4-6% higher for Muslims than it is for other ethnic and religious groups:** 18.1% of people support banning all Muslim migration to the UK (9.5% 'strongly support'). The figure for overall support for other groups is 14.7% for Pakistanis, 14.1% for black African/Caribbean people, 13.1% for Christians, 11.8% for Sikhs and 12% for Jews (Figure 6).
- 4. The British public is almost three times more likely to view Islam as inherently literalistic than other religions:** 21.1% of British people believe Islam teaches its followers that the Qur'an must be read 'totally literally', which is far higher than the figure for any other religious tradition examined in this survey. The figure for Islam compares with 7.5% for Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, 3.9% for Sikhism and the Guru Granth Sahib, and 4.8% for Christianity and the Bible (Figure 4).
- 5. British people are more confident in making judgements about Islam than other non-Christian religions but are much more likely to make incorrect assumptions about it:** British people acknowledge their ignorance of most non-Christian religions, with a majority stating they are 'not sure' how Jewish (50.8%) and Sikh (62.7%) scriptures are taught. In the case of Islam, however, people feel more confident making a judgement, with only 40.7% being unsure. This is despite the fact that people are much more likely to make the incorrect assumption that Islam is 'totally' literalistic. Prejudice toward Islam is not simply ignorance, then, but miseducation and misrecognition (Figure 4).
- 6. Islamophobia is *not* associated with Anglican identity, belief in God or practicing a religion:** At first glance, Anglican identity seems to engender Islamophobic views. 29.7% of British people who identify as Anglican view Muslims negatively, compared with just 25.2% of people with no religion (Figure 11). Anglicans are also much more likely to agree that Sharia 'no-go zones' exist in Britain than non-religious people (35.1% compared with 22%: Figure 10). Looking at the data in depth, however, reveals a more complex picture. People who attend religious gatherings and who believe in God are less likely to view Muslims negatively than people who do not do these things: 23.5% of 'believers' view Muslims negatively compared with 29.8% of 'unbelievers' (Figure 11). Moreover, Anglicans' negativity towards Muslims (and indeed other minority groups) is not due to their religious identity but because Anglicans tend to be older than non-religious people. Once age is controlled for, any 'Anglican effect' disappears.
- 7. Hostility towards religion in general is significantly associated with prejudice towards Islamic belief:** Anti-religious sentiment among the British public, measured via the development of an 'anti-religion scale', is significantly correlated with the assumption that Islam teaches its followers that the Qur'an must be read 'totally literally', but it is *not* correlated with assumed literalism of any other religion (Table 1).
- 8. People from middle and upper class occupational groups are more likely to hold prejudiced views of Islamic beliefs than people from working class occupational groups:** When asked their views about Muslims, or most other ethnic or religious minority groups, older people, men, working-class people and Conservative and Leave voters are consistently less likely to hold positive views and more likely to hold negative views. When we measure prejudice towards Islamic beliefs, however, it is more evenly spread across political groups (Figure 16) and the place of middle and working-class people switches. People from higher social grades are 4.8% more likely to view Islam as 'totally' literalistic than people from lower social grades (Figure 14). This difference is statistically significant even after controlling for other demographic variables.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islamophobia is among the most widespread forms of prejudice in the UK, with clear effects for anyone to see. In Britain, Muslims suffer among the greatest workplace penalties of any ethnic or religious group.² Attacks on Muslim institutions are common: some forty-four mosques and similar institutions were attacked in the wake of the brutal murder of Lee Rigby in 2013, for example.³ Anti-Muslim views are found even among people who are tolerant of other minorities.⁴ Yet despite this – or perhaps because of it – Islamophobia struggles for public recognition. The extent and character of racism, antisemitism and Islamophobia have all been vigorously debated in recent years amidst the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and controversies over antisemitism on the political left. Only in the case of Islamophobia, though, is *the term itself* regularly placed in question. Only in the case of Islamophobia do mainstream political commentators argue explicitly that there is ‘not nearly enough Islamophobia’.⁵ Political conversations about the subject focus on terminology, with actual public expressions of Islamophobia rarely receiving attention and even more rarely facing any consequences.

One of the reasons Islamophobia seems to elude recognition is confusion about its status as either a religious prejudice or a phenomenon akin to racism. Definitions of Islamophobia published since the term was popularised in the 1990s have varied, with some emphasising religious stereotypes and others racial discrimination. But neither of these types of definition has been successful in fending off damaging objections. When Islamophobia is defined as racism, the definition is often brushed away with the claim that Islam is ‘not a race’. When it is defined in terms of religion, the same critics object that a religion is a body of ideas to which one may or may not subscribe, so should not be given the same protection as characteristics – like race or gender – which one cannot choose.⁶ The debate about Islamophobia has accordingly acquired a circular quality, with meaningful conversations on the subject struggling to get off the ground.

The purpose of this report, and the research that underlies it, is to bring some clarity to the muddled picture of what contemporary Islamophobia looks like and how it can be understood and combated. We use a nationally representative survey that includes a range of questions about various ethnic and religious minorities, including Muslims, as well as about Islam and other belief systems. This allows us to look at the parallels and differences between Islamophobia and other forms of prejudice.

In the report, we argue that there are two distinct, but overlapping, types of Islamophobia, one that corresponds to other forms of racism and another that is better understood as anti-religious prejudice. The first can be viewed as anti-Muslim, the other as anti-Islamic. We show that these two forms of prejudice emerge differently in British society. Like most forms of prejudice towards ethnic and racial groups, anti-Muslim prejudice is much more common among specific demographics, notably men, older people, those in manual occupations and Conservative and Brexit voters. The only thing that distinguishes this variety of Islamophobia from other forms is that it is – with the notable exception of Gypsy and Irish Travellers – much more common in Britain than other forms of prejudice. Anti-Islamic prejudice, on the other hand, is more evenly spread across political persuasions and more common

2 Nabil Khattab and Ron Johnston, “Ethno-Religious Identities and Persisting Penalties in the UK Labor Market,” *The Social Science Journal* 52, no. 4 (December 2015): 490-502, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2014.10.007>.

3 This figure is derived from a database compiled by Tell MAMA. See: <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?ie=UTF8&t=m&source=embed&oe=UTF8&msa=0&mid=1AffP6cYvVPOJqVm9vtTK0KrkTtc&ll=53.5152652688151%2C-2.694593000000007&z=6>.

4 Ingrid Storm, Maria Sobolewska, and Robert Ford, “Is Ethnic Prejudice Declining in Britain? Change in Social Distance Attitudes among Ethnic Majority and Minority Britons,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 68, no. 3 (2017): 410-34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12250>.

5 Rod Liddle, “Why Boris Is Wrong about Burkas | The Spectator,” *The Spectator*, August 11, 2018, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/why-boris-is-wrong-about-burkas>.

6 Both of these objections are made in John Jenkins, “Defining Islamophobia: A Policy Exchange Research Note” (London: Policy Exchange, 2018), <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Defining-Islamophobia.pdf>.

among higher social grades. It is, to borrow Baroness Sayeeda Warsi's memorable phrasing, the UK's 'dinner table' prejudice.⁷

On the basis of our data, we argue that Islamophobia cannot be understood or combatted without *both* these forms of prejudice being acknowledged. There are good reasons to treat prejudice against groups of people and against systems of belief differently in policy; we make no argument here for legal measures to protect belief systems against criticism, even misguided or prejudicial criticism. Indifference and inaction are not, however, the only alternatives to legal measures. Drawing on our own and others' research, we show that anti-Islamic prejudice offers an important support to anti-Muslim hostility, helping to normalise and minimise it. Failing to understand and challenge anti-Islamic prejudice, we argue, ultimately means facilitating the view that Islamophobia is regrettable, but ultimately comprehensible given Islam's (irrational) nature.

7 Sayeeda Warsi, "Baroness Warsi's Sternberg Lecture Speech," Gov.uk, January 20, 2011, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/baroness-warsi-s-sternberg-lecture-speech>.

2. METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a survey designed by the authors with support from YouGov. It was conducted by YouGov between 20th and 21st July 2021 using an online interview with members of YouGov's participant panel, comprising over 185,000 individuals. Panellists were contacted at random by email based on sample criteria, which were designed to gather data on a representative sample of the adult population of Britain. In total, 1667 people completed the survey. Prior to analysis, the sample was weighted by age, political measures, gender, social grade, region and level of education to ensure representativeness, with the census, Labour Force Survey, Office for National Statistics estimates, and other large-scale data sources being used to inform target quotas.⁸

Survey development

The survey was developed in response to a large-scale (123 interviews and 16 focus groups) qualitative study carried out by the lead author and a research team between 2014 and 2017 in the UK and Canada.⁹ In this study, which examined people's views about science and religion, a distinction emerged among the participants who evaluated Islam negatively: while some expressed intolerance towards both Islam as a belief system *and* Muslims as a group, others expressed tolerance towards Muslims as people but nevertheless made highly stereotypical generalisations about Islam as a belief system. (We provide some illustrative quotes from this study in section 7 and the executive summary.) This distinction correlated with social and political differences, with people in the former group tending to be conservative and from a range of class backgrounds while the latter were typically middle class, in professional roles and politically and socially liberal.¹⁰ The study suggested the existence of a 'softer', more 'liberal' Islamophobia, one that stereotypes a group of people (Muslims) while avoiding overt comments about them.

This study hinted that there is a complicated relationship between being prejudiced towards Muslims and being prejudiced toward Islam, one that deserves systematic analysis. Our survey was designed to provide such analysis using quantitative methods that draw on a larger and more representative sample of participants than a smaller interview-based study. The questions in this survey were designed to compare what people think about religion - and the teachings of different religions - with what people think about Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities. Alongside demographic measures such as voting record, age, and gender, we gathered data on four themes:

1. Public perceptions of religious belief in general and of the key tenets of different religious traditions;
2. Public perceptions of Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities as groups of people;
3. Public willingness to tolerate Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities, and public levels of support for discriminatory treatment;
4. Public agreement with common indicators of antisemitic and Islamophobic prejudice, including belief in anti-Muslim/anti-Jewish conspiracies.

Many of the survey items we used to investigate tolerance and prejudice replicated, or were adapted from, established questions found in surveys such as the British Social Attitudes Survey.¹¹ Some questions about perceptions of religion also replicated established measures used in the US, notably

⁸ For full details of sample methodology and weighting see: <https://yougov.co.uk/about/panel-methodology/>.

⁹ This multi-disciplinary research team was led by Fern Elsdon-Baker with the qualitative research team being led by Rebecca Catto. For details see: <https://sciencereligionspectrum.org/>.

¹⁰ For full details of this study see Jones et al., "That's How Muslims Are Required to View the World."

¹¹ See <https://www.bsa.natcen.ac.uk/>.

the General Social Survey (GSS).¹² To the best of our knowledge, no major survey exists that has endeavoured to test what people think about the teachings of different religious traditions.¹³ These questions were thus all designed by the authors with contributions from YouGov. All survey items were tested by the authors in cognitive interviews, followed by revision and further testing.

A note on representativeness

Among social scientists, the representativeness of online nonprobability samples, such as YouGov's 'active sampling', has been widely debated, notably in relation to election outcomes in the UK. Some social scientists have expressed concerns about representative claims made basis on nonprobability approaches due to online sampling methods lacking an overarching sampling frame. However valid these concerns are, we are not persuaded they amount to an argument against using online sampling. Probability sampling has suffered from increasingly high non-response rates in recent years, making them not only prohibitively expensive but less reliable.¹⁴ A recent study by the Pew Research Center has indicated that probability samples are not necessarily superior to nonprobability samples (and notably, in Pew's study YouGov's sampling method outperformed other vendors using similar methods).¹⁵ Nevertheless, underrepresentation of minorities remains a major problem in nonprobability surveys, including in this one. In this survey, most ethnic and religious minorities are underrepresented, making samples too small for robust analysis. Of course, this is not fatal for this study as we are interested in the majority's views about minority populations. Still, it remains a weakness in our claims about 'British people' and explains why minority views are not reported.

12 See <https://gss.norc.org/>.

13 There are some examples of small surveys looking at religious literacy and illiteracy, but these typically do not test prejudice and usually only focus on one religion. For details see Stephen H. Jones, "Religious Literacy in Higher Education," in *Religious Literacy in Policy and Practice*, ed. Adam Dinham and Matthew Francis (Bristol: Policy Press, 2015), 185-204.

14 Courtney Kennedy et al., "Evaluating Online Nonprobability Surveys" (Washington DC: Pew Research Center, May 2, 2016), <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2016/05/02/evaluating-online-nonprobability-surveys/>.

15 Doug Rivers, "Pew Research: YouGov Consistently Outperforms Competitors on Accuracy," YouGov, May 13, 2016, <https://today.yougov.com/topics/economy/articles-reports/2016/05/13/pew-research-yougov>.

3. RESEARCH CONTEXT: DEFINING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE UK

Over the last twenty-five years, there has been a shift in how Islamophobia is perceived and defined by civil society organisations and policymakers, with people talking less about religion and more about racism and discrimination. In 1997, the race equality think tank Runnymede published its hugely influential report *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, which did much to popularise the term in the UK and was one of the first attempts to define what Islamophobia is. Religion was central to this report, with Islamophobia being linked to 'closed' views of Islam.¹⁶ Fast forward a quarter of a century and revised definitions published in 2017 by Runnymede and in 2018 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims take a different approach, defining Islamophobia, respectively, as 'anti-Muslim racism' and 'racism against Muslimness'.¹⁷ If they appear at all, questions about religious belief now have a less prominent position, with the focus falling instead on the differential treatment of Muslims in society.

The main reason this shift has taken place is that prejudice against religious belief is hard to isolate from reasonable criticism and cannot – in a free society, at least – be outlawed in the way that discrimination and abuse can. Aligning Islamophobia with racial discrimination allows one to bypass debates about hostility toward Islam and focus instead on discriminatory treatment and abuse. This is most clearly illustrated in the 'long-form' version of the 2017 Runnymede definition, authored by Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, which applies to Muslims the exact wording of the United Nations International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination:

*Islamophobia is any distinction, exclusion or restriction towards, or preference against, Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslims) that has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.*¹⁸

This and the APPG definition of Islamophobia can be understood as an attempt to develop what the liberal philosopher John Rawls called an 'overlapping consensus'.¹⁹ These definitions move us past complicated philosophical and sociological questions about the boundary between religious criticism and prejudice and allow the focus to fall on where there is most agreement: treatment of people. For whatever one's view of Islam, most people in Britain do – as we will see – oppose treating Muslims differently.

In practice, such consensus has not been forthcoming. The new definitions have had some successes in building agreement across parties and organisations, with nearly all British political parties and over 20 councils formally adopting the APPG definition.²⁰ The idea that Islamophobia is a form of racism has, however, been vigorously resisted by centre right civil society organisations,²¹ sections of the

16 Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (London: The Runnymede Trust, 1997).

17 Farah Elahi and Omar Khan, eds., *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All* (London: Runnymede, 2017); All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims, "Islamophobia Defined: The Inquiry into a Working Definition of Islamophobia" (London: APPG on British Muslims, 2018).

18 Elahi and Khan, *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, 7; the UN definition can be found in Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights), "International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination," United Nations: Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, 1965, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>.

19 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

20 At the time of writing, at least 22 councils have adopted the definition along with the Greater London Authority. All major UK political parties have adopted the definition for use in internal processes, with the exception of the English Conservatives. For details see: <https://www.islamophobia-definition.com/endorsements/political-parties-and-local-councils/#councils>.

21 Jenkins, "Defining Islamophobia."

police (later withdrawn)²² and, most notably, the Conservative party and the government it leads.²³ (The Conservative party pledged to develop its own definition in 2019 but, despite publishing its review into Islamophobia in 2021,²⁴ this has still not been published.) Critics have argued that to define Islamophobia as racism is philosophically incoherent and for that reason possibly dangerous, giving religious leaders rights and protections they should not have.

This recent history of Islamophobia and public policy in the UK, then, presents this report with two opening questions, which will guide our analysis:

1. Can Islamophobia legitimately be viewed as a form of racism?
2. If Islamophobia *is* a form of racism, where does prejudice against religion fit in?

Is Islamophobia a form of racism?

Rawls famously advocated building overlapping consensus by keeping public debates on the philosophical surface, avoiding reference to 'comprehensive doctrines' whose tenets will always be disputed. A brief reading of reports such as Elahi and Khan's can give the impression that those who define Islamophobia as racism are trying something similar, advocating a 'surface' understanding of racism that bypasses discussion not only of Islam as a belief system but also of racism's underlying justifications, such as the idea that certain groups are 'naturally inferior' to others. There is some truth in this. Elahi and Khan's definition plays down the role of ideas, emphasising how in practice frequently 'prejudicial attitudes about a group develop to justify the economic or political disadvantages experienced by that group', rather than the other way around.²⁵ But it is not fair to say that their and similar authors' writings about Islamophobia don't engage with the philosophy of race and racism. On the contrary, new definitions of Islamophobia are the result of engagement with two recently developed ideas about what 'race' is and how it applies to different groups in society. Looking at these two ideas briefly will give us a sense of why aligning Islamophobia and racism makes sense.

The first of these is that 'race' can be better understood as a social process by which groups of people are placed into a hierarchy rather than a natural biological reality. This is not, of course, to deny that people differ in appearance or that biology determines these differences, but it is to say that it is via social processes that people's different appearances acquire significance. As the theorist of race and racism, Stuart Hall, put it, there are 'differences of all sorts in the world [... but] it's only when these differences are organised in language, within discourse, within systems of meaning, that these differences can be said to acquire meaning and become a factor in human culture and regulate conduct'.²⁶ Past attempts to racially classify Irish people as 'Iberian' act as an instructive reminder of how flexible racial thinking has often been, as do the various absurd systems of racial classification developed by European philosophers and scientists in recent centuries.²⁷ Fundamentally, today we can only see such attempts as a way of organising people into social strata. It follows from this that racism is not dependent on the existence of 'races', but rather *generates* classifications by which to organise people and place a value on them.²⁸ Of course, if one accepts this, it makes no sense to argue that Muslims must form a 'race' for Islamophobia to be a form of racism.²⁹

22 Dominic Kennedy, "Terror Police Warn against New Rules on Islamophobia," May 15, 2019, sec. news, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/terror-police-warn-against-new-rules-on-muslim-hate-p2pfzbqhx>.

23 BBC, "Government Rejects Islamophobia Definition Ahead of Debate," *BBC News*, May 15, 2019, sec. UK Politics, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-48283337>.

24 Swaran Singh, "Independent Investigation into Alleged Discrimination Citing Protected Characteristics within the Conservative and Unionist Party in England, Wales and Northern Ireland" (London: The Conservative and Unionist Party in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, 2021), <https://singhinvestigation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Singh-Investigation-Report-for-download.pdf>.

25 Elahi and Khan, *Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All*, 7.

26 Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, ed. Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 364.

27 For examples see Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Penguin, 2000), 47.

28 Narzanin Massoumi, Tom Mills, and David Miller, eds., "Islamophobia, Social Movements and the State: For a Movement-Centred Approach," in *What Is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 5.

29 Which is argued in the Foreword by Trevor Phillips published in Jenkins, "Defining Islamophobia," 7.

The second idea is that Islam has been, and is today, *racially coded*. In many countries, being Muslim is associated with ethnic group membership and skin colour. In Britain, for example, being Muslim is typically associated with being South Asian or Arab.³⁰ Imagery denigrating Islam has also often utilised somatic tropes such as the 'bulbous nose and bushy eyebrows' familiar from the history of antisemitism in Europe.³¹ Islamophobia is a centuries-old prejudice and, as with antisemitism, it prefigured modern racism, with depictions of Muslims (or to use the time-appropriate terms, 'Moors', 'Turks' or 'Saracens') echoing the tropes later used to classify racial groups. In early European representations of Muslims and Islam, the Prophet Mohammed was frequently presented as a dark-skinned, satanic threat.³² The argument that Islamophobia and racism are separate, then, involves ignorance of Europe's history as well as its current reality.

These two arguments – about the malleability of 'race' and the racialisation of Islam – come together in an understanding of Muslimness as, in Nasar Meer's words, a 'quasi-ethnic sociological formation'.³³ Since the post-World War II decline of 'scientific' racism, stereotypes about ethnic groups have become less and less reliant on claims about biology. Stereotypes about British South Asians, for example, have rarely referred to biological inferiority and have instead emphasised cultural backwardness – but these still justify racially motivated assaults ('Paki-bashing').³⁴ Similar stereotypes are now applied to Muslims in Britain (and elsewhere), with claims made about Muslims' violent and predatory behaviour and signifiers of group membership – from physical appearance to dress and practice – being targeted as a result. This targeting and stereotyping is something *externally imposed* in much the same way that racial classifications were imposed upon colonised peoples in the past. It is therefore dangerously misleading to claim that Islamophobia is not racism because Muslims *choose* to follow Islam.

30 Leon Moosavi, "The Racialization of Muslim Converts in Britain and Their Experiences of Islamophobia," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 2015): 44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513504601>.

31 Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Tariq Modood, "The Muhammad Cartoons and Multicultural Democracies," *Ethnicities* 9, no. 3 (September 1, 2009): 439, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796809337427>.

32 Nasar Meer, "Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (March 1, 2013): 385-98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734392>.

33 Nasar Meer, "The Politics of Voluntary and Involuntary Identities: Are Muslims in Britain an Ethnic, Racial or Religious Minority?," *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313220701805901>.

34 Tariq Modood, "'Difference', Cultural Racism and Anti-Racism," in *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, ed. Tariq Modood and Pnina Werbner (London: Zed Books, 1997), 154-72.

4. DOES PREJUDICE AGAINST RELIGIOUS BELIEF MATTER?

For all these reasons and more, we agree that Islamophobia can legitimately be described as a form of racism. But where does religion fit into this picture? In this report, we have a specific interest in prejudices that are manifested in misleading or straightforwardly false claims *about the tenets of Islam*, rather than prejudice directed against visible manifestations of Muslimness, such as worship or dress. This is not because we think of the latter as of little importance. On the contrary, there is a clear relationship between street-level abuse of Muslims and visible signs of belief.³⁵ Wearing a *hijab* or *niqab* has been targeted in particular, and this is why, unusually for racialized harassment, Islamophobia disproportionately affects women rather than men.³⁶ Visible signs of religiosity are, however, easier to incorporate into definitions of Islamophobia as a form of racism. These can be understood as signs of group membership that cause an individual to be targeted for discriminatory treatment.³⁷ Stereotypes about the beliefs Muslims hold are harder to assimilate: these are intangible, not as clearly related to discriminatory practices, and take us back to the realm of ideas. There remains a question, then, about whether stereotypes of the beliefs that Muslims hold matter, and why.

Anti-religious sentiment in Britain

This is where it is helpful to turn to our data. What we will do now is look at how people in the UK view religion and religious belief, and then how they perceive the beliefs held by different religious groups – including Muslims – living in the UK.

In recent decades, religion has lost much of its status in Britain, with ‘no religion’ overtaking ‘Christian’ as the preferred self-designation of British people (in some surveys, at least).³⁸ Although religion – and Anglican Christianity in particular – retains privileges at the state level, secular and non-religious identities are increasingly dominant, to the point where one can reasonably describe Britain as ‘one of the few no-religion countries in the world today’.³⁹ One of the things our survey shows, however, is how Britain is not only *non-religious* but *anti-religious* – a place where religion has become, as the sociologist Linda Woodhead puts it, a ‘toxic brand’.⁴⁰ As Figure 1 shows, more British people agree than disagree, by a margin of almost two to one, with the claim that ‘religious people tend to be less rational than non-religious people’ (36.5% compared with 18.8%). A clear majority of Britons also think that ‘people with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others’ (64.6%) and that ‘looking around the world, religions bring more conflict than peace’ (71.4%). What is remarkable is that this view of religion as a source of conflict is shared by most people who identify with a religion. In our survey, 74.9% of Anglicans and 55% of Roman Catholics agreed that religion brings more conflict than peace; the figure for non-religious people was 78.9%.⁴¹

35 Nasar Meer, “Semantics, Scales and Solidarities in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (March 1, 2013): 503, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734382>; Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, “Refutations of Racism in the ‘Muslim Question,’” *Patterns of Prejudice* 43, no. 3–4 (2009): 341–42.

36 Chris Allen, Arshad Isakjee, and Özlem Ögtem-Young, “‘Maybe We Are Hated’: The Experience and Impact of Anti-Muslim Hate on British Muslim Women” (Birmingham: Institute of Applied Social Sciences, University of Birmingham, 2013).

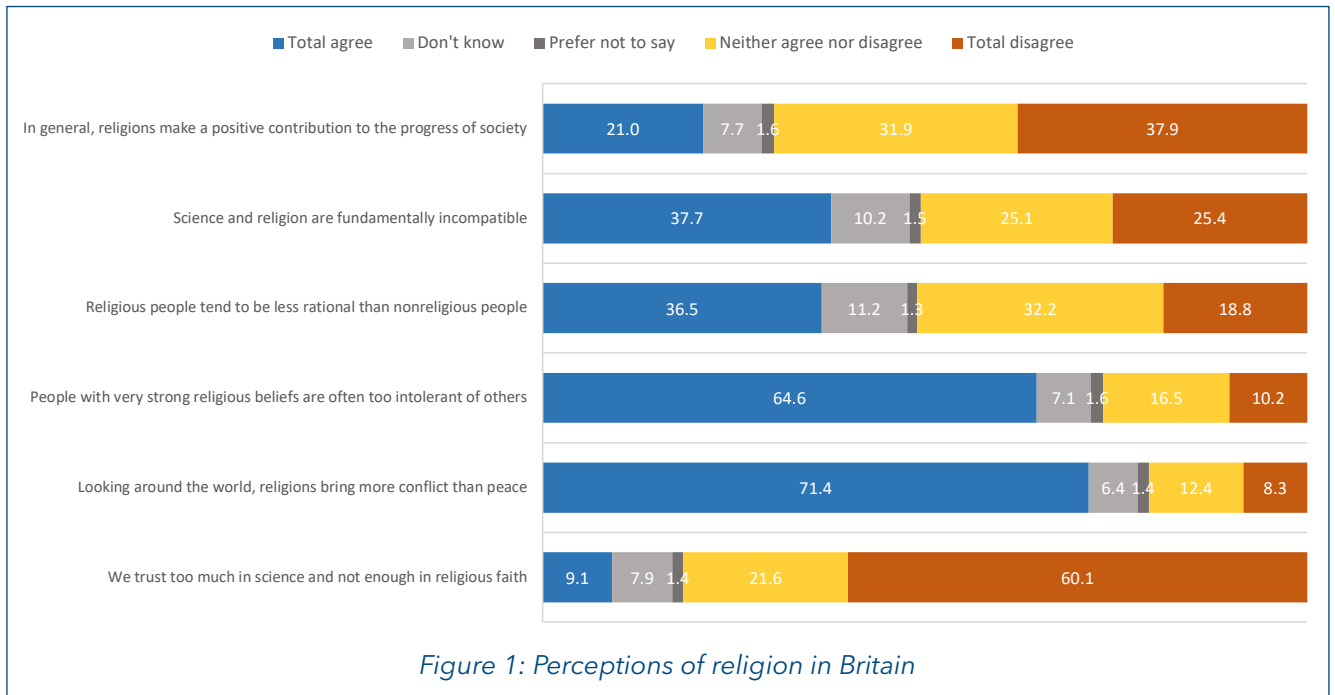
37 For a helpful discussion of Islamophobia as the targeting of group membership see Nasar Meer and Tariq Modood, “The Racialisation of Muslims,” in *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*, ed. S. Sayyid and Abdoolkarim Vakil (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2010), 83.

38 The UK census is the one notable exception to this, although that may change when the latest census data, collected in 2021, are released.

39 Linda Woodhead, “The Rise of ‘no Religion’ in Britain: The Emergence of a New Cultural Majority,” *Journal of the British Academy* 4 (2016): 245, <https://doi.org/10.5871/jba/004.245>.

40 Woodhead, 258.

41 The small percentage difference between Anglicans and nonreligious people does obscure that *strong* agreement with this question was much more common among the latter group (44.9% compared with 32.8% for Anglicans). This description also only holds when one looks at religious identification, and not when one looks at religious practice and belief, as we discuss later in this report.



The final item in Figure 1 offers a useful illustration of how the situation in the UK contrasts with other countries. This replicates a question from the USA’s annual General Social Survey and asks respondents for their level of agreement with the statement, ‘We trust too much in science and not enough in religious faith’. In the USA, agreement with this question has hovered around 50%, falling to near 40% since around 2010.⁴² In our survey of the UK population, however, the percentage agreement is less than a quarter of that, at just 9.1% (with 60.1% disagreeing). In the USA people tend to both be more religious and place much more trust in religion than they do in the UK.

To say the British are hostile towards religion does not, however, mean they are *prejudiced* towards it. Historians and social scientists, such as David Martin, have developed powerful arguments against the idea that Europe’s historical wars can be viewed simply as the product of religious irrationalism.⁴³ But the very fact that his and other similar arguments need to be laid out in theoretically rich texts suggests that this is a debatable question and not simply an indicator of chauvinism. Such data tell us almost nothing about anti-Muslim views, in particular. In the USA, after all, Islamophobia is significantly more prevalent among those who support a public role for Christianity.⁴⁴

Measuring prejudice against Islam as a belief system

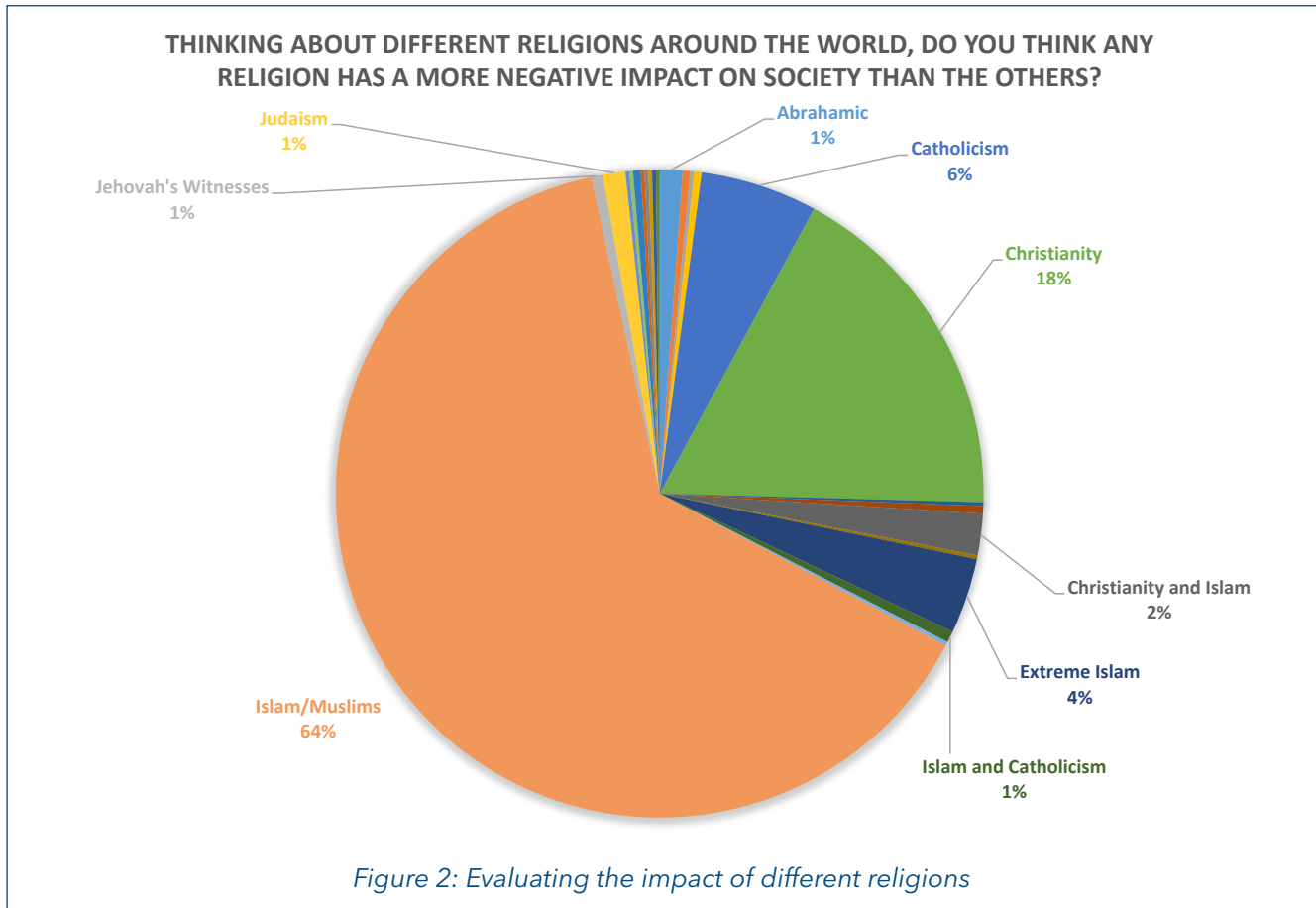
To look at prejudice against Islam as a belief system, one needs to dig a little deeper. One of the ways we did this is to follow our questions about religion with a question asking participants if they see any *specific* religion as having ‘a more negative impact on society than the others’. The responses to this question are summarised in Figure 2. Unlike all the other questions in our survey, this was an open response question with no prompts. (It was located at the start of the survey at a point before any religious traditions had been mentioned.) This open format tends to result in a low response

42 Jonathan P. Hill, “Survey-Based Research on Science and Religion: A Review and Critique,” in *Science, Belief and Society: International Perspectives on Religion, Non-Religion and the Public Understanding of Science*, ed. Stephen H. Jones, Tom Kaden, and Rebecca Catto (Bristol: University of Bristol Press, 2019), 26–27.

43 David Martin, *Does Christianity Cause War?* (Vancouver: Routledge, 2006).

44 Andrew L Whitehead, Samuel L Perry, and Joseph O Baker, “Make America Christian Again: Christian Nationalism and Voting for Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election,” *Sociology of Religion* 79, no. 2 (May 19, 2018): 147–71, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srx070>.

rate, and indeed only 518 respondents (or 31.1% of the survey sample) named a particular religion (or religions) as having a more negative impact on society than the others. Despite this, 20.3% of the total survey sample – and a remarkable 64% of those who entered a response – named Islam as the ‘most negative’ religion. A further 7% listed Islam alongside another religion or a subsection of Islam (such as ‘Islamic extremism’). Notably, hostility to religion in general, which we measured by combining the questions in Figure 1, was also significantly associated with singling out Islam as the ‘worst religion’.⁴⁵



This still does not go as far as we need to identify prejudice against Islam, however. To do this, we included further questions asking respondents to evaluate different religious traditions, not as groups of people but as sets of teachings. The question we will focus on here, presented in Figure 4, asked respondents whether they thought different religions teach their followers that their sacred text should be taken literally or symbolically, with participants being given four options on a scale ranging from ‘totally symbolically’ to ‘totally literally’. They were asked the same question about four religions: Christianity, Sikhism, Judaism and Islam. In this report, we use people’s responses to this question as an indicator of prejudice against a specific belief system.

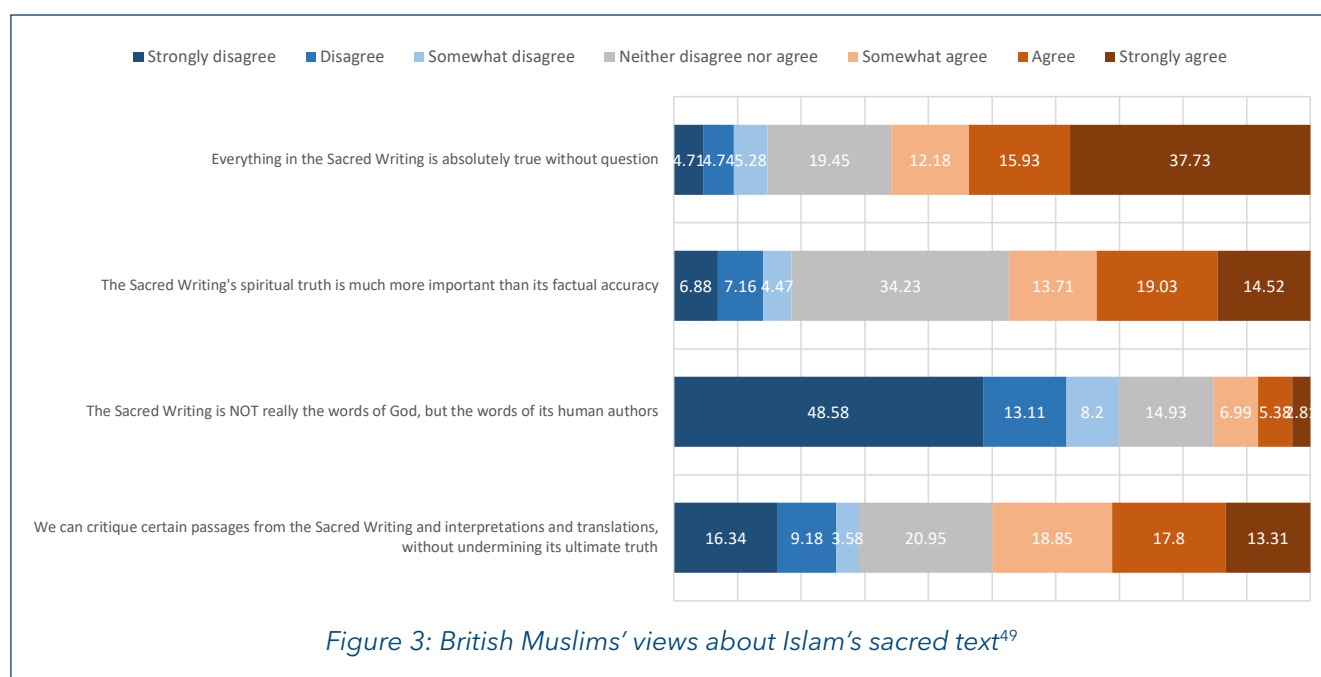
Of course, for all the religions listed above, there is a wide range of reasonable opinions about whether mainstream religious teachings involve the literal or symbolic interpretation of sacred texts. They are all multifaceted and complex, with a huge range of movements, each of which has their own traditions of interpretation. In the Christian tradition, to take the best-known example, interpretation

⁴⁵ This is based on a chi-squared test cross-tabulating coded qualitative responses with the three point anti-religion scale discussed in Figure 13. Among those hostile to religion the observed to expected count for Islam/Muslims was 160 to 134. In the case of Christianity the same count was 58 to 38, while for non-responses the count was lower than expected, 340 to 386 ($P = < 0.001$). The association between hostility to religion and Islamophobia is examined in more depth in Table 1.

covers the full spectrum from those who view the Bible as inerrant to those who see it as a human product. Precisely for that reason, though, we argue that viewing any religion as ‘totally’ literalistic, without *any* scope for poetic meaning or historical context, is an indicator of prejudice.

There is a long history of the Islamic tradition being depicted as inherently literalist.⁴⁶ The French Orientalist Ernest Renan marked Islam out as implacably opposed to philosophy and scientific inquiry as far back as 1883.⁴⁷ Muslims do, of course, overwhelmingly agree that the Qur’an is a revelation from God. It is emphatically not the case, however, that the Qur’an is only ever interpreted literally. In mainstream traditions of Qur’anic exegesis, verses (*ayat*) of the Qur’an are divided into those whose meaning is clear (*muḥkamāt*) and unclear or parabolical (*mutashābihāt*), with some traditions suggesting that in the latter case the meaning is known to God alone.⁴⁸ There are Arabic words (e.g., *ta’wīl*) to describe esoteric or mystical interpretation of the Qur’an, as well as words to describe analogical reasoning from scripture in Islamic law (*qiyas*). Historical contextualisation plays a particularly notable role in the Islamic tradition. The Qur’an is a text that refers, sometimes obliquely, to specific events but it does not have a chronological structure. It is almost impossible to interpret without contextualising using supporting historical texts (such as biographical literature on the Prophet Muhammed).

The current perceptions of British Muslims reinforce this point. In one 2017 survey on public attitudes to science, by Fern Elsdon-Baker and Salman Hameed, a weighted sample of 508 British Muslims, along with other religious populations, were asked a series of questions about the interpretation of scripture (see Figure 3). The responses overwhelmingly confirmed that Muslims view the Qur’an as the revealed word of God and ultimate source of knowledge, with 65.8% agreeing that ‘Everything in the Sacred Writing is absolutely true without question’ (compared with 14.7% who disagree). They also, however, strongly indicated support for the notions that interpretation is necessary and that the Qur’an’s ‘truth’ should not be understood in a narrow, literalistic sense. 47.2% agreed that ‘The Sacred Writing’s spiritual truth is much more important than its factual accuracy’, compared with



46 See Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (London: Vintage, 1997).

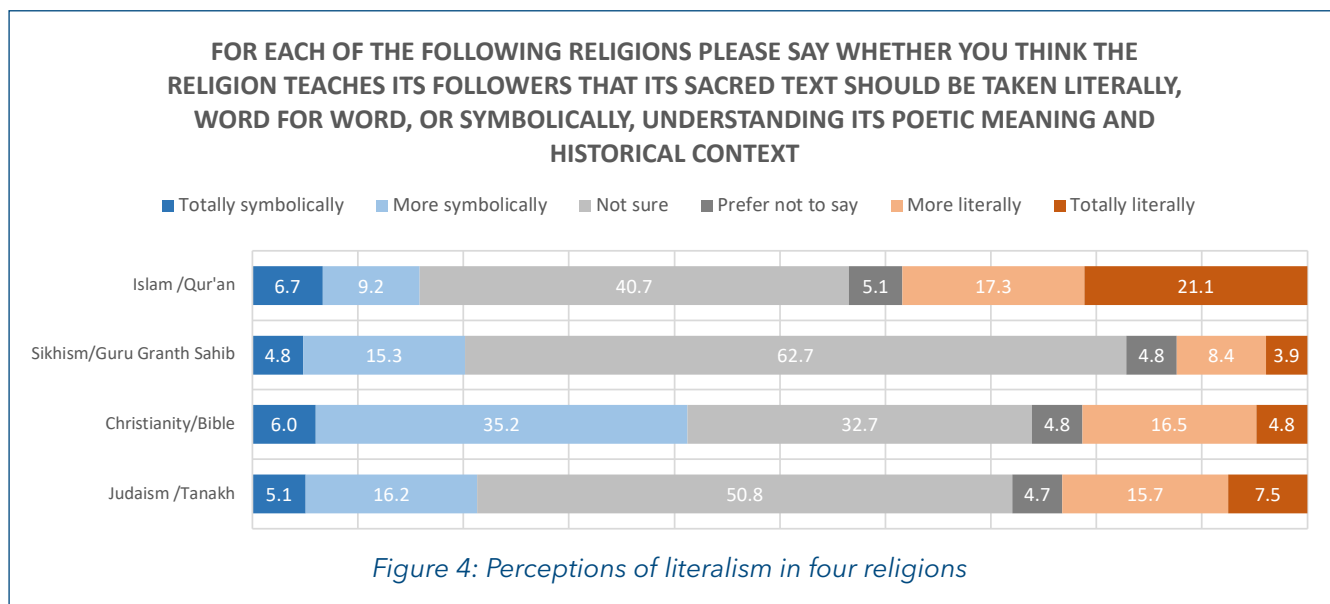
47 Ernest Renan, "Islamism and Science," in *Readings in Orientalism*, ed. Bryan S. Turner, vol. 1: Orientalism: Early Sources (London: Routledge, 2000), 199-217.

48 Leah Kinberg, "Muḥkamāt and Mutashābihāt (Koran 3/7): Implication of a Koranic Pair of Terms in Medieval Exegesis," *Arabica* 35, no. 2 (1988): 143-72.

49 This data is not in the public domain and has been cited with permission. For further details please contact the lead author.

18.6% who disagreed. In light of this, the idea that *all* Muslims must read the Qur’an literally can only be seen as a crass stereotype.

This stereotype of Islam as an inherently literalistic tradition nonetheless persists. As we can see from Figure 4, by a clear margin respondents were much more likely to say that Islam teaches its followers that the Qur’an must be read ‘totally literally’. 21.1% said that the Qur’an is always read in this way, compared with 7.5% for Judaism, 3.9% for Sikhism, and 4.8% for Christianity. The responses to this item raise intriguing and important questions about ignorance and its relationship to prejudice. Most respondents acknowledged that they were uncertain or ignorant about other non-Christian religions, with a majority picking ‘not sure’. In the case of Islam, however, respondents felt, by a margin of between 10% and 20%, more confident to give an answer *even though they were more likely to give an incorrect answer*. What this suggests is that prejudice toward the Islamic tradition is not simply a matter of ignorance but *misrecognition*. It also suggests that Islamophobia is not just about racism toward Muslims as people but involves, in the words of Joe L. Kincheloe *et al.*, the ‘systemic miseducation about Islam itself’.⁵⁰



Anti-religious views as anti-Islamic prejudice?

One other line of analysis, presented in Table 1, further illustrates the links between being hostile toward religion in general and prejudiced toward Islam. We combined the answers respondents gave to the questions in Figure 1 to create an overall scale for how hostile each respondent is to religion. (Although the questions in Figure 1 cover different themes, they form an internally consistent scale.)⁵¹ We then correlated this with respondents’ answers to the questions about religious literalism presented in Figure 4.⁵² We found that anti-religious sentiment was significantly correlated with assumed literalism of Islam but *not* with assumed literalism of any other religion. This evidence, again, suggests that hostility to religion is related to prejudice toward Islam.

50 Joe L. Kincheloe, Shirley Steinberg, and Christopher D. Stonebanks, eds., “Foreword: Re-Education against Miseducation,” in *Teaching Against Islamophobia*, New edition, Studies in the Postmodern Theory of Education 346 (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc, 2010), x. We are grateful to Anna Piela, Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, and Beata Abdallah-Krzepkowska for alerting us to this definition.

51 The Cronbachs alpha score, which measures a scale’s internal consistency, is 0.815 for the anti-religion scale. (A coefficient of 0.70 or higher is usually considered acceptable in social scientific studies.) The item ‘Science and religion are fundamentally incompatible’ could be removed from the scale with no effect on scale reliability, while removing the item ‘We trust too much in science and not enough in religious faith’ reduces the Cronbachs alpha score to .801. Removing both these items gives a Cronbachs alpha score of 0.796. Removing any of the other items has a much greater effect.

52 The analysis presented here uses Pearson’s coefficient, although, given resistance to using this measure for scale items, we also ran the same analysis with Spearman’s, with the same results.

Question item	Pearson's correlation with anti-religion scale	P-value (significance)
Islam and its scripture, the Qur'an	0.115	0.001*
Sikhism and its scripture, the Guru Granth Sahib	0.039	0.382
Christianity and its scripture, the Bible	0.004	0.895
Judaism and its scripture, the Tanakh	0.044	0.254

Table 1: Correlations between anti-religion scale and perceptions of literalism (indicates that the correlation is statistically significant)*

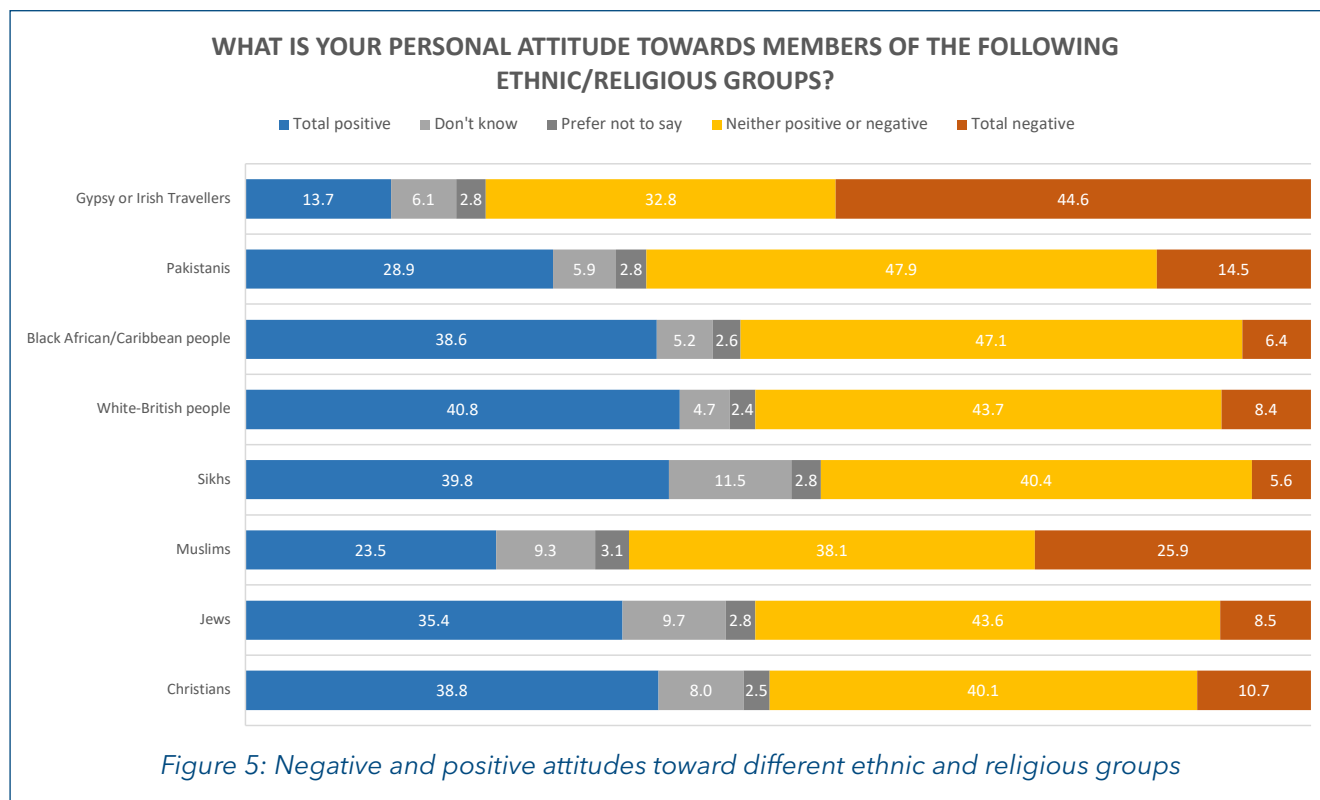
None of what we have said in this section amounts to an argument about whether or not religious beliefs deserve legal protection, of course. For the time being, we can leave that to one side and observe merely that whatever one's view on that argument, we need to acknowledge that prejudices about belief exist. We turn now to the question of how such prejudices relate to Islamophobia as racism.

5. ANTI-GROUP PREJUDICE IN BRITAIN

In this section, we look at how the British public view different ethnic and religious groups - in most cases, those populations who are targets for discrimination. We cover in this section the remaining survey themes: how positively or negatively people assess different ethnic and religious groups; whether they support differential treatment of those groups; and the extent to which they hold conspiratorial views about religious minorities, specifically Muslims and Jews. These items together provide an insight into the prevalence of what we will call consciously held racism within UK society.

Negative attitudes to minority groups

Figure 5 presents the answers to questions to how positive or negative respondents' feel about various ethnic and religious groups, including all the religious groups mentioned previously as well as Pakistanis, Gypsy and Irish Travellers, black African and black Caribbean people and white-British people. These were asked in two separate series of questions, one focused on religion and the other on ethnicity.⁵³ The surprising - and in places, highly concerning - results show that it is not Muslims who are the 'least liked' group in Britain but Gypsy and Irish Travellers, who stand out by an almost 20% margin.⁵⁴ 44.6% of respondents acknowledged negative attitudes towards this group, followed by Muslims (25.9%) and then Pakistanis (14.5%). This was the only question in this survey that asked about Gypsy and Irish Travellers. While we analyse this question in more depth later in this report, what is clear from this vast difference is there is a significant need for further investigation into public views about discrimination against Travellers.



53 A methodological note is needed here. This survey gave respondents a predetermined list of outgroups, which is a more restrictive way of measuring 'least liked' groups than open response methods and runs the risk of building in our own assumptions. For further discussion of different methodological approaches to this question theme see Paul Djupe, ed., *Religion and Political Tolerance in America: Advances in the State of the Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

54 This is broadly consistent with comparable surveys on views of Gypsy and Traveller populations. See Dominic Abrams, Hannah Swift, and Diane Houston, "Developing a National Barometer of Prejudice and Discrimination in Britain," Research Report (London: Equality and Human Rights Commission, October 2018), 30.

Negative attitudes and discriminatory treatment

It is crucial to say something at this point about what this data does and doesn't tell us. The data presented in this report give an indication of public attitudes toward ethnic and religious groups and *not* actual behaviour. We use the term 'consciously held' racism above to describe what we are measuring because this data tells us only about attitudes that people are aware they hold, that they are willing to admit to in a survey, and that may or may not translate into actions. This is particularly important to bear in mind when we look at the data on Jews, Sikhs and black African and black Caribbean people in Figure 5. Our survey respondents rated each of these groups similarly to the white-British majority; indeed, more people expressed negative attitudes to white people than black people. The difficulty this raises, for those trying to interpret the data, is that one can demonstrate very easily that in various sectors of society black people suffer the most severe discrimination and abuse of *any* group. Black people are approximately five times more likely than white people to be targeted for searches by police, for example, and crucially, approximately three times more likely than other ethnic minorities.⁵⁵ Black students also suffer the greatest penalties in universities, with an 'awarding gap' persisting even after controlling for grades on entry, degree type and institution type.⁵⁶ In some contexts, data suggests Muslims suffer the greatest penalties,⁵⁷ but the point is that it is beyond dispute that, despite our attitude data, black populations do suffer racial discrimination.

Social sanctions for prejudice

Our data can be useful in understanding discriminatory treatment, then, but attitude data like this is perhaps better understood as a way of interrogating *social sanctions* against prejudice. Racial discrimination against black people demonstrably does happen in Britain, but the fact that so few people admit to negative attitudes suggests this discrimination is publicly regarded as unacceptable. Likewise, antisemitism remains a serious problem: police statistics on religious hate crime show just under 50% are Islamophobic, but Jews are still more likely to be victims of religious hate crime when population is accounted for.⁵⁸ The fact that Jews are rated positively suggests, though, that a strong public sanction is in place against antisemitism.⁵⁹ This is further reinforced by what happens in British public life. Over one hundred UK parliamentarians recently signed a letter regarding a case of alleged antisemitism at the University of Bristol, for example,⁶⁰ while former Labour MP Chris Williamson was rightly forced to apologise after supportively tweeting about Gilad Atzmon, a musician with a record of making antisemitic comments.⁶¹ Outside of the political extremes, negative judgements about these groups tend to be clouded in euphemism: much of today's debate about antisemitism, for example, focuses on how the term 'Zionism' is, at times at least, used as a coded reference to Jews.

Muslims and Gypsy and Irish Travellers are the two standout groups in our survey because more people evaluate them negatively than positively. This suggests that not only is there discrimination against these two groups but also that there is less public sanction against openly acknowledging one's dislike. This is borne out in the contrasting way these two groups are discussed in public life. The way Islamophobia

55 House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, "The Macpherson Report: Twenty-Two Years On," Third Report of Session 2021–22 (London: House of Commons, July 30, 2021), 93, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7012/documents/72927/default/>.

56 Universities UK, "Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Student Attainment at UK Universities: #closingthegap" (London: Universities UK, May 2, 2019), <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/bame-student-attainment-uk-universities-closing-the-gap.aspx>.

57 Specifically, the following paper argues that Muslims suffer the greatest penalties in the workplace: Khattab and Johnston, "Ethno-Religious Identities and Persisting Penalties in the UK Labor Market."

58 Grahame Allen, Yago Zayed, and Rebecca Lees, "Hate Crime Statistics," Briefing Paper (London: House of Commons, December 10, 2020), 20, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8537/CBP-8537.pdf>.

59 As Keith Kahn-Harris observes, this has only emerged since World War II, with antisemitism being until then an unremarkable phenomenon. Keith Kahn-Harris, *Strange Hate: Antisemitism, Racism and the Limits of Diversity* (London: Repeater/Watkins Media, 2019), 55–59.

60 Jewish News Reporter, "100 MPs and Peers Write to Bristol University over Professor David Miller," March 5, 2021, <https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/100-mps-and-peers-write-to-bristol-university-over-professor-david-miller/>.

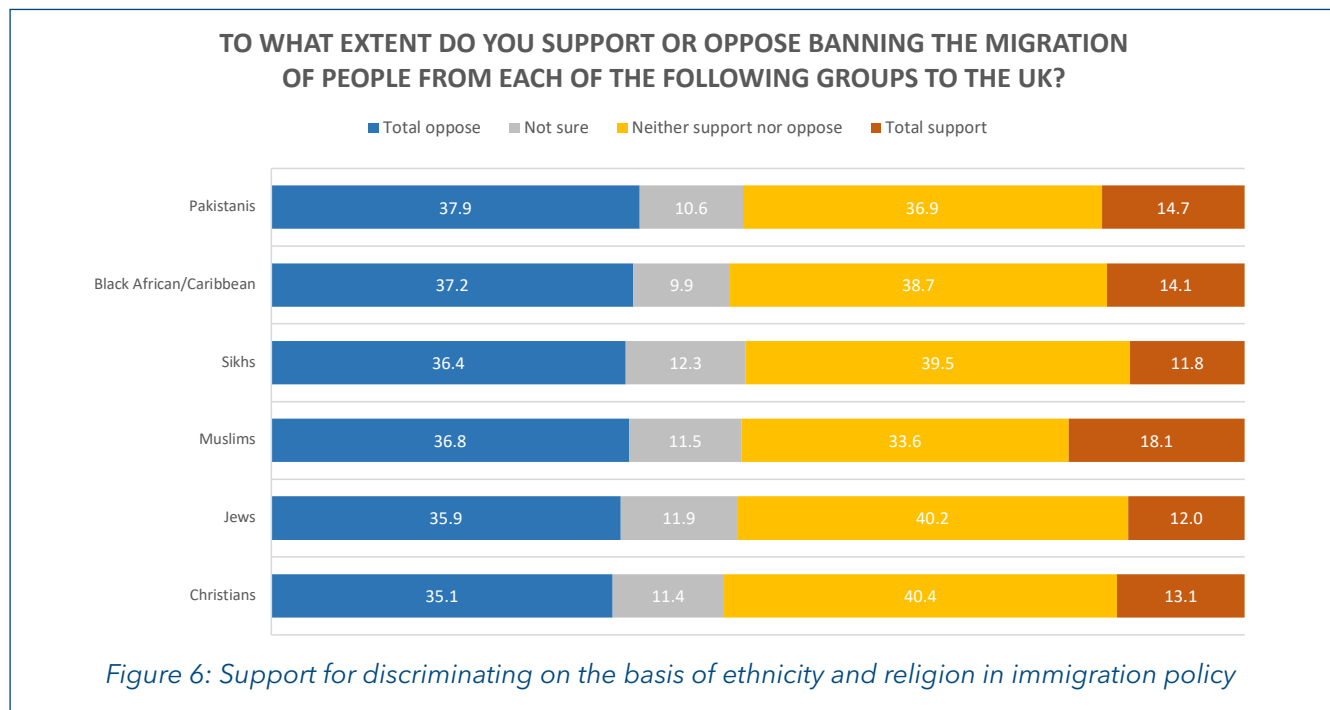
61 BBC, "Labour MP Sorry for Backing Musician Accused of Anti-Semitism," *BBC News*, December 21, 2018, sec. UK Politics, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-46652775>.

- the term - is picked apart and described as a 'myth' or a 'nonsense' even by some progressive commentators is one illustration of this.⁶² Another is the absence of censure when public figures ally themselves with individuals with a record of anti-Muslim hatred. The Conservative MP Nadine Dorries, for example, has supportively tweeted remarks made by Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, a.k.a. Tommy Robinson, the former leader of anti-Muslim street movement the English Defence League.⁶³ Unlike Williamson, Dorries has never been forced to apologise for this by her party and indeed was, in 2021, promoted by Boris Johnson to a government role as Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

The relationship between discrimination and public social sanction may be unclear, but that is not to say the latter is unimportant. Such sanctions help maintain a consensus on equal treatment and can be a factor driving mass mobilisation against injustice. The case of the English football team aligning itself - despite initial opposition - with the Black Lives Matter movement might be regarded as one example. Public sanctions may not be able to resolve institutionalised forms of ethno-religious disadvantage, but they do act as a bulwark against significant deteriorations. This is precisely why confusion about the status of Islamophobia as racism or religious hatred matters. While racism - when it is expressed overtly at least - does attract public sanction, mockery of religion does not. Indeed, it is often seen as a sign of a tolerant, liberal society. There are good reasons for this, but we will suggest below that a lack of public attention to common stereotypes about what Muslims believe is one factor behind Islamophobia being publicly tolerated.

Support for ethnic and religious discrimination

Social sanctions appear strongest when it comes to the subject of discriminatory treatment. We analysed this via a question about people's support or opposition to differential treatment of immigrants to the UK. As Figure 6 shows, support for discrimination based on ethnicity or religion in migration policy remains a minority position, with 12-14% supporting bans against immigration to the UK by certain ethnic or religious groups. With Gypsy and Irish Travellers not included in this question, Muslims are the population that stands out by around 4-6%, with 18.1% expressing support.



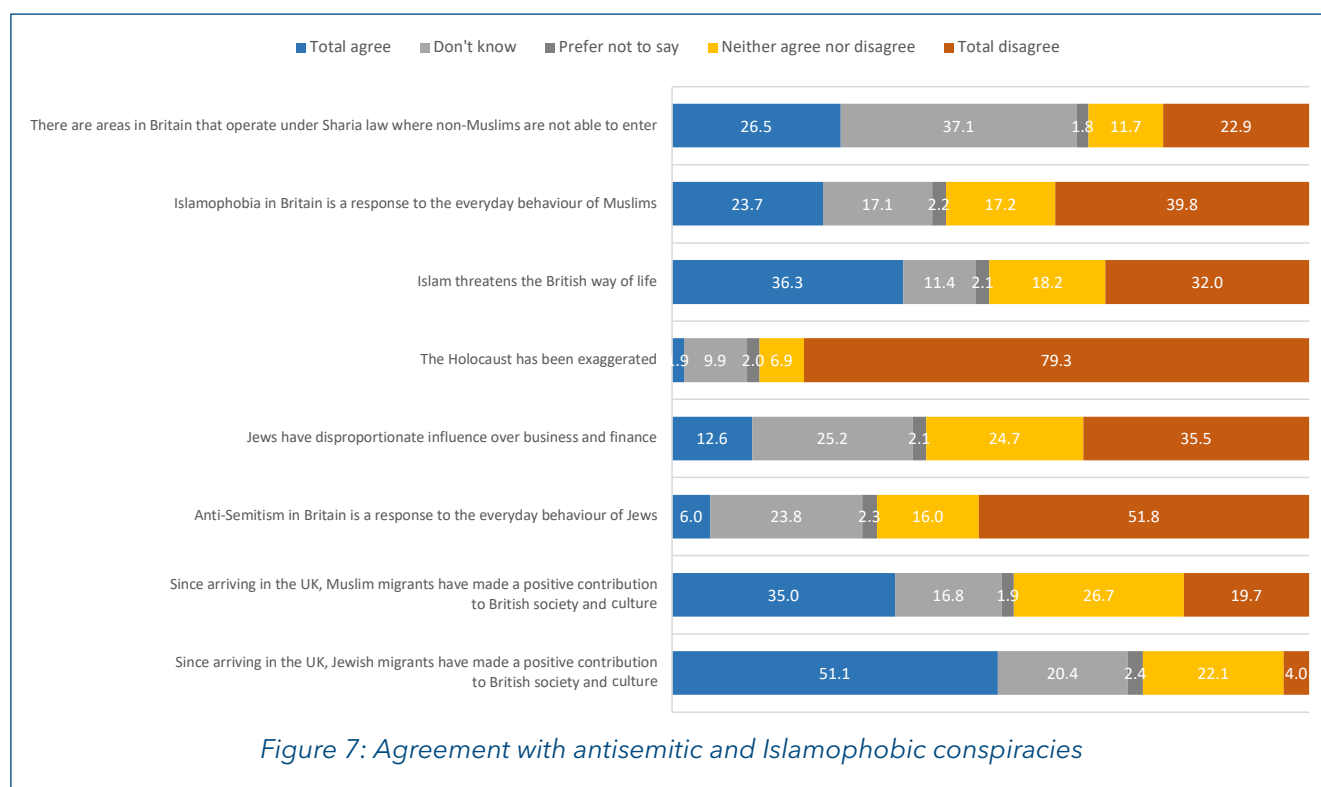
62 Kenan Malik, "Islamophobia Myth," *Prospect*, 2005, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/islamophobiamyth>; Polly Toynbee, "My Right to Offend a Fool," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2005, sec. Politics, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/jun/10/religion.politicalcolumnists>.

63 Evans, "Controversial Nadine Dorries Quotes Resurface after She's Named as Culture Minister," September 16, 2021, <https://www.indy100.com/politics/nadine-dorries-quotes-culture-secretary-b1921162>.

The fact that around 1 in 5 British people are happy to profess support for the banning of all Muslim migration to the UK is alarming, but this figure needs to be read with care. Comparing how individual respondents answered all of these six questions reveals that 5.2% of the sample answered only ‘support’ or only ‘strongly support’ for all questions, suggesting they are opposed to migration per se and do not necessarily differentiate between ethnic or religious groups. It is notable, too, that 13.1% of respondents professed support for banning Christian migration – a surprisingly high percentage given that Christianity enjoys state recognition in England.

Agreement with Islamophobic and antisemitic conspiracies

The final section of the survey asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with a range of conspiratorial or stereotyped statements about Muslims and Jews, some of which were replicated from past surveys.⁶⁴ The responses to these questions, set out in Figure 7, were consistent with these previous surveys but no less concerning because of that.⁶⁵ Stereotypes that focused on Jews received far less agreement, with 6% of people agreeing that ‘antisemitism is a response to the everyday behaviour of Jews’ and 1.9% agreeing with the most damaging antisemitic conspiracy theory, that the Holocaust has been ‘exaggerated’. Anti-Muslim views and belief in outlandish conspiracy theories were much more prevalent: 23.7% agreed that ‘Islamophobia is a response to the everyday behaviour of Muslims’; 36.3% agreed that ‘Islam threatens the British way of life’; and over a quarter of respondents (26.5%) agreed that there ‘are areas in Britain that operate under Sharia law where non-Muslims are not able to enter’.



64 Specifically, L. Daniel Staetsky, “Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain: Key Findings from the JPR Survey of Attitudes Towards Jews and Israel” (London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 2017), http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/JPR.2017.Antisemitism_in_contemporary_Great_Britain.pdf; Hope not Hate, “The Conservative Crisis Over Islamophobia,” Hope not Hate, June 21, 2019, <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2019/06/21/conservative-crisis-islamophobia/>.

65 See Hope not Hate, “State of Hate 2019: People vs the Elite?” (London: Hope not Hate, 2019), <https://www.belongnetwork.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/state-of-hate-2019-final-1.pdf>.

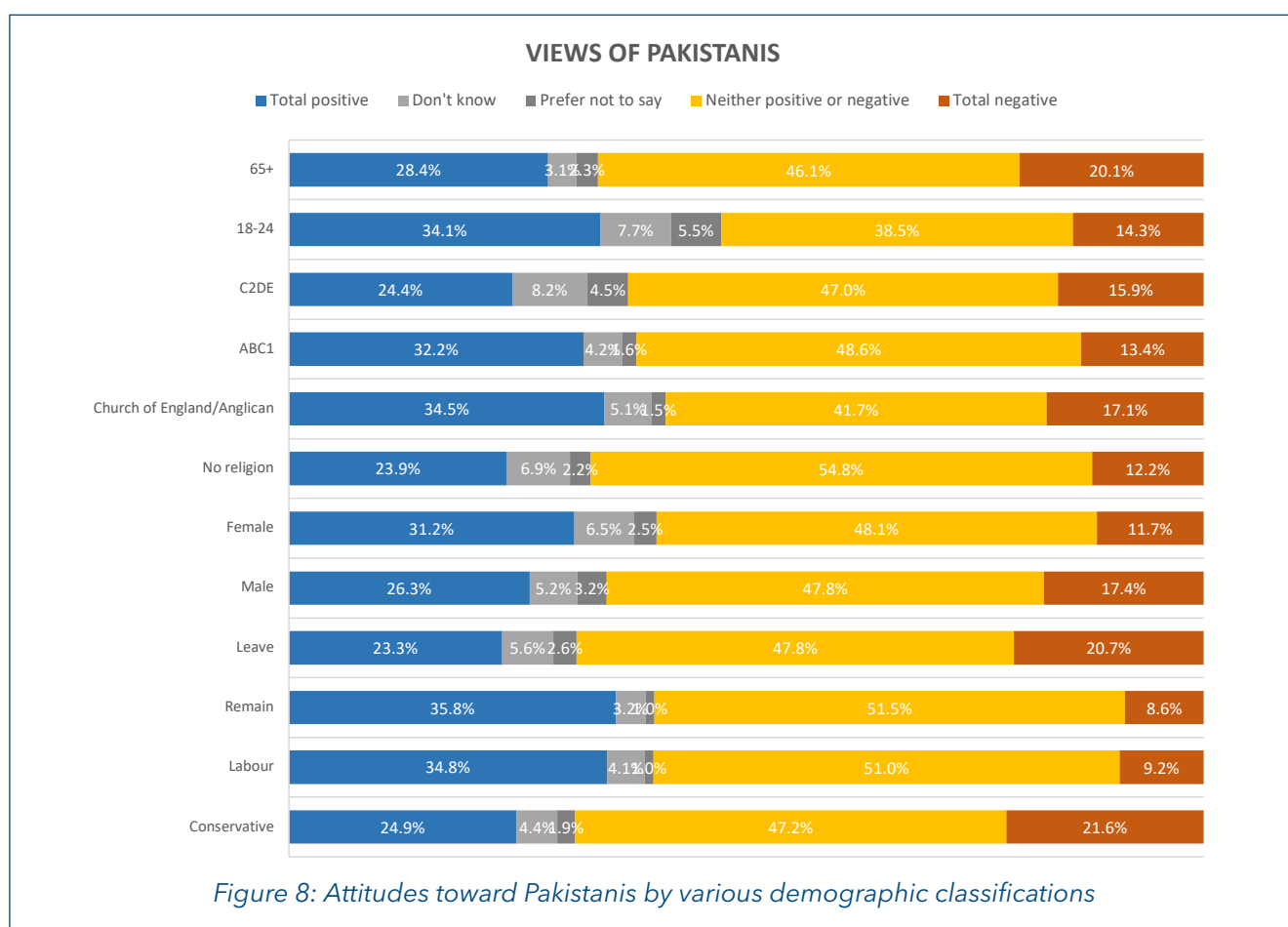
The prevalence of these beliefs – and the lack of public concern about that prevalence – are deeply worrying. One thing that needs to be said about them, however, is that in some instances agreement may be rooted in confusion as much as in strong commitment to a conspiratorial view of Muslim Britons being engaged in a conscious effort to undermine and overturn the UK’s political system. The question about Sharia law outlines an absurd conspiracy, one that merges together tabloid stories about ‘Sharia courts’ with rumours about the dangers of deprived inner-city areas. It is a vision completely removed from the application of Islamic law in the UK, which is limited to family dispute resolution centres that, in almost all cases, encourage engagement with English civil law.⁶⁶ In cognitive testing of this item, however, some interviewees expressed a level of confusion, explaining that they did not feel they could disagree because they knew of institutions in the UK that practice Islamic law, even if they knew little about them. This partly explains why respondents were uncertain about this item (37.1%). To point this out is not to downplay the dangers of this conspiracy, but it is to suggest that a lack of awareness about the Sharia and the day-to-day realities of British Muslims helps facilitate it. Or, put another way, the conspiracy is enabled to flourish by the UK’s religious illiteracy.

⁶⁶ For details see Stephen H. Jones, *Islam and the Liberal State: National Identity and the Future of Muslim Britain* (London: Bloomsbury/IB Tauris, 2021).

6. THE PROFILE OF ANTI-GROUP PREJUDICE IN BRITAIN

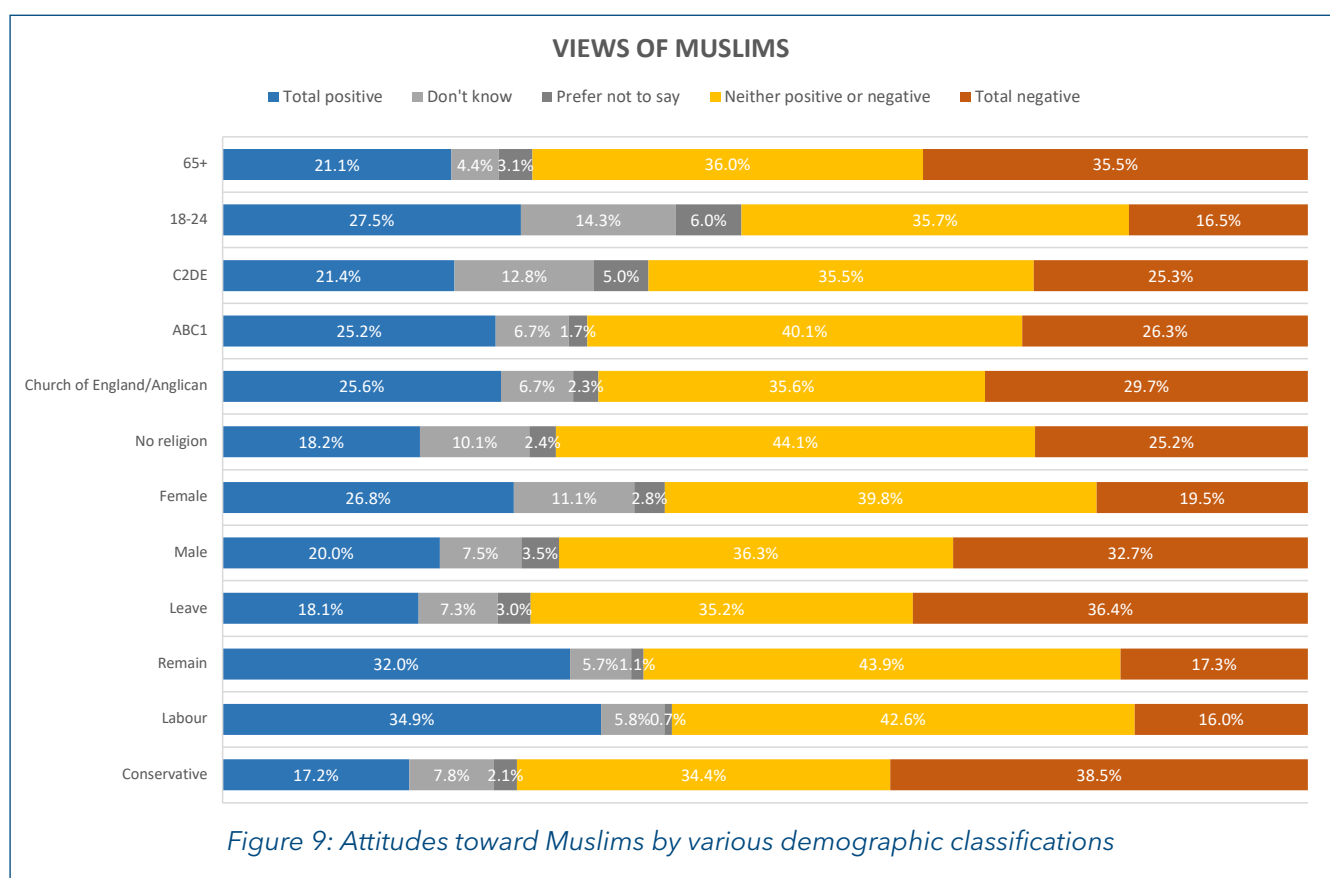
With one striking exception, prejudice towards ethnic and religious groups follows consistent patterns in the UK. It is significantly higher among men, Conservative voters, those who voted Leave in the EU referendum, and older people. It is typically higher, too, among those from lower social grades (people classified in this report as 'C2DEs', following a standard system of occupational classification). The difference in this case, however, is smaller and only statistically significant in a limited number of cases. Prejudice also tends to be higher among those who identify with the Church of England, although this, as we will see, is mainly due to this group comprising older people.

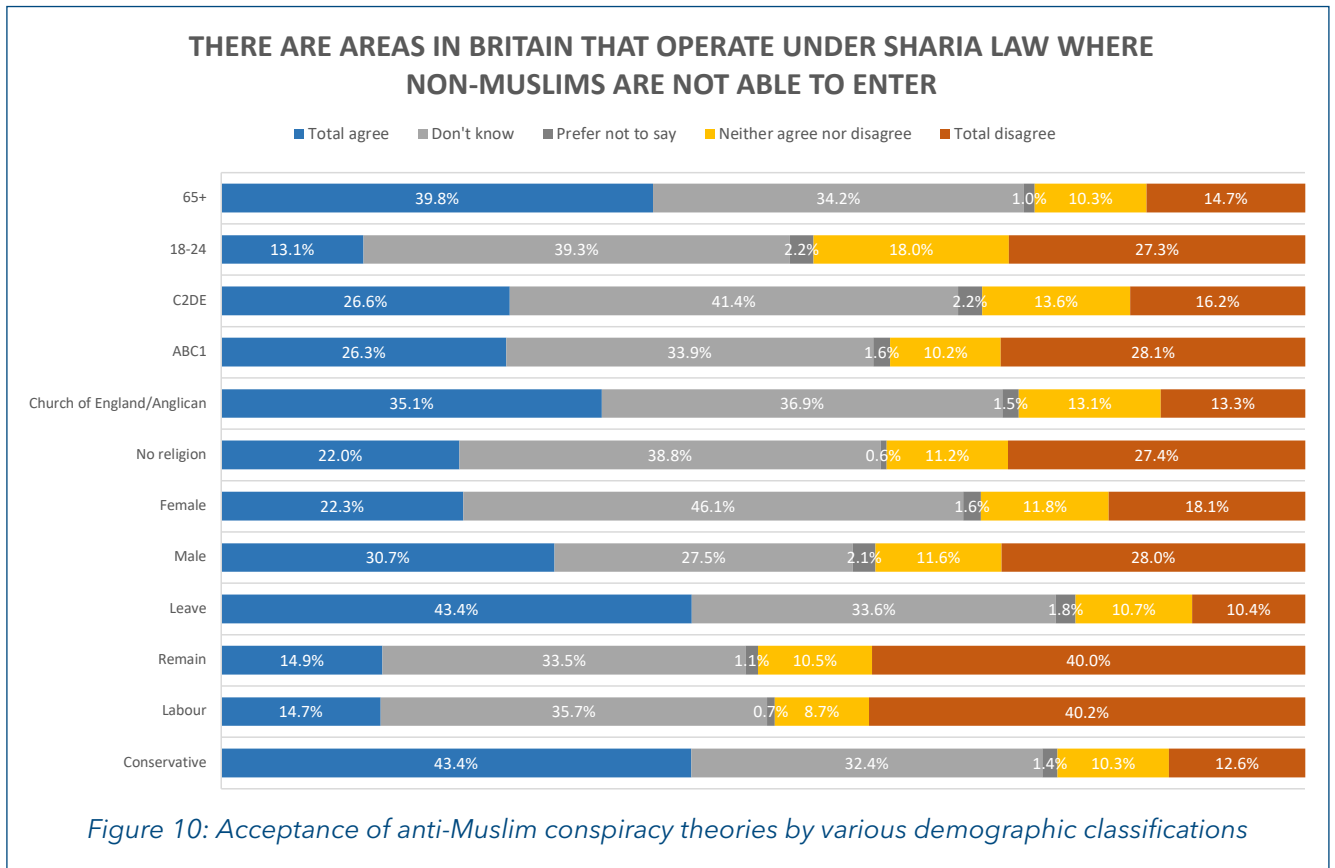
In Figure 8 we provide a breakdown of the British public's views of Pakistanis to illustrate this pattern. In this case, there is a 5.3% difference between older and younger people, a 12.1% difference between Leave and Remain, a 12.4% difference between Labour and Conservative and a 2.5% difference between C2DEs and 'ABC1s'. (This difference between C2DEs and ABC1s is not significant, although it is significant for some of the questions we asked about migration bans and integration.⁶⁷)



⁶⁷ The significance of these differences was measured using a binary logistic regression examining negative views and controlling for religion, age, gender and political party preference. We used ABC1 as the reference. For this question, $\exp(B)$ was 0.776 and the p-value was 0.077. The questions where belonging to the C2DE group did significantly increase the change of exhibiting prejudice included those focused on banning Muslim migration ($\exp(B) = 0.732$, p-value = 0.017), banning black African/Caribbean migration ($\exp(B) = 0.677$, p-value = 0.006) and whether Muslim migrants to the UK have made a positive contribution to British society and culture ($\exp(B) = 0.596$, p-value = 0.001).

This holds for views of Muslims, as Figure 9 shows. The patterns in Figure 8 are replicated, although the negativity is higher and differences between groups are sharper. Between young and old, for example, there is a 19% difference, with 35.5% of over-65s having a negative view of Muslims compared with 16.5% of 18-24s. The differences are starkest for questions focusing on anti-Muslim conspiracy theories. In the case of our question about Sharia ‘no go zones’, for example, the proportion of older people, Conservative voters and Leave voters accepting the conspiracy theory is nearly three times higher than it is for younger people, Labour voters and Remain voters (see Figure 10). We found the same pattern for other questions asked at the same point in the survey and similarly high agreement percentages. A clear majority of Conservative voters (57.3%) and Leave voters (55.5%) agreed with the statement that ‘Islam threatens the British way of life’. Among Labour, Liberal Democrat and Remain voters, the percentage figures for the same question were 18.9%, 18% and 21.6% respectively.





Anti-group prejudice and anti-Muslim racism

These questions give further support to the notion that Islamophobia should be regarded as akin to other forms of racism. The argument behind this notion is that racism creates a hierarchy of socio-cultural groups and that anti-Muslim discrimination and hatred targets perceived group membership (or ‘Muslimness’, as the APPG on British Muslims phrases it).⁶⁸ Islamophobia also, as the Runnymede definition makes clear, functions the same way as other forms of racism, resulting in structural disadvantages, acts of discrimination and hate crimes. The questions in Figure 9 and Figure 10 follow and support this reasoning. They focus on Muslims as a *group of people* and reveal dislike and irrational fear of those people. They also reveal that dislike of, and paranoia about, Muslims follows the same social patterns as other forms of racism in the UK.

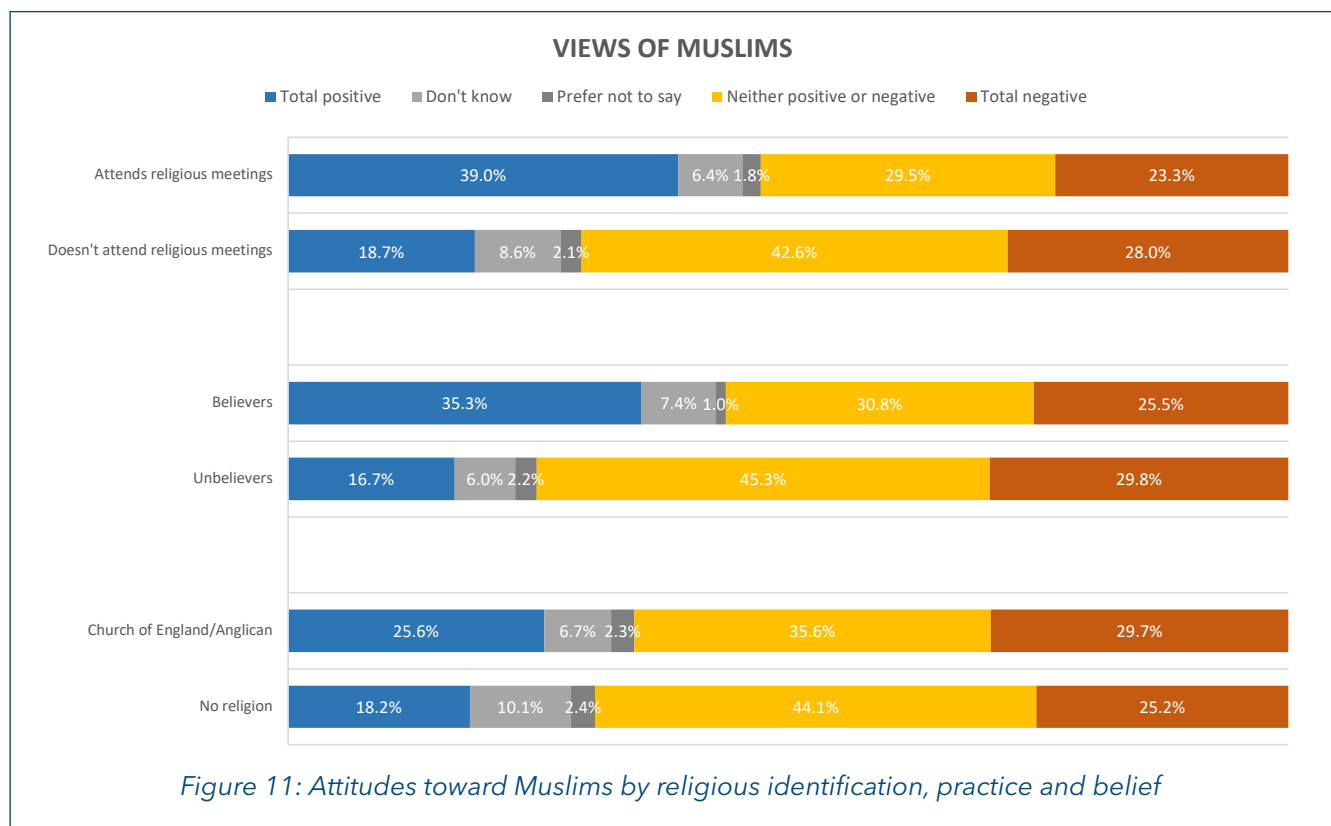
(Non)religious identity and negative attitudes toward Muslims

Over recent years, there has been lively discussion among political commentators and social scientists about whether anti-Muslim animus is principally a non-religious phenomenon, with Muslims being viewed as a threat to secular norms, or whether it stems from the view that the UK is a fundamentally Christian country.⁶⁹ Some of our data, such as in Figure 9 and Figure 10, seems to support the second view, with non-religious people tending to be less likely to take a negative view of Muslims than those aligned with the Church of England (who, on this question, are more polarised). It would be gravely mistaken to conclude from this, however, that Anglicans, or religious people, are more prejudiced toward Muslims than non-religious people. In our survey, we used three items to measure religiosity,

68 Meer and Modood, “The Racialisation of Muslims,” 83.

69 See Egbert Ribberink, Peter Achterberg, and Dick Houtman, “Secular Tolerance? Anti-Muslim Sentiment in Western Europe,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 2 (June 1, 2017): 259-76, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12335>.

which were designed to capture what are often termed the ‘three Bs’: religious belonging, religious belief and religious behaviour. We can see in Figure 11 that religious belonging follows different patterns to religious belief and behaviour. Those who feel they belong to the Church of England tend to evaluate Muslims more negatively than non-religious people, but people with strong religious beliefs and who frequently attend religious meetings tend to be more positively disposed toward Muslims than those who have no belief and those do not practice a religion.⁷⁰ Furthermore, we cannot conclude from this data that Christian identity is being used as an ethnic marker that is mobilised in opposition to Muslim minorities, as some studies of Christian nationalism have.⁷¹ What we find instead is that negativity toward Muslims and other minorities among those identifying as Anglican is largely a function of this group being much older. Once we control for age, the difference between Anglicans and non-religious people becomes non-significant.⁷²



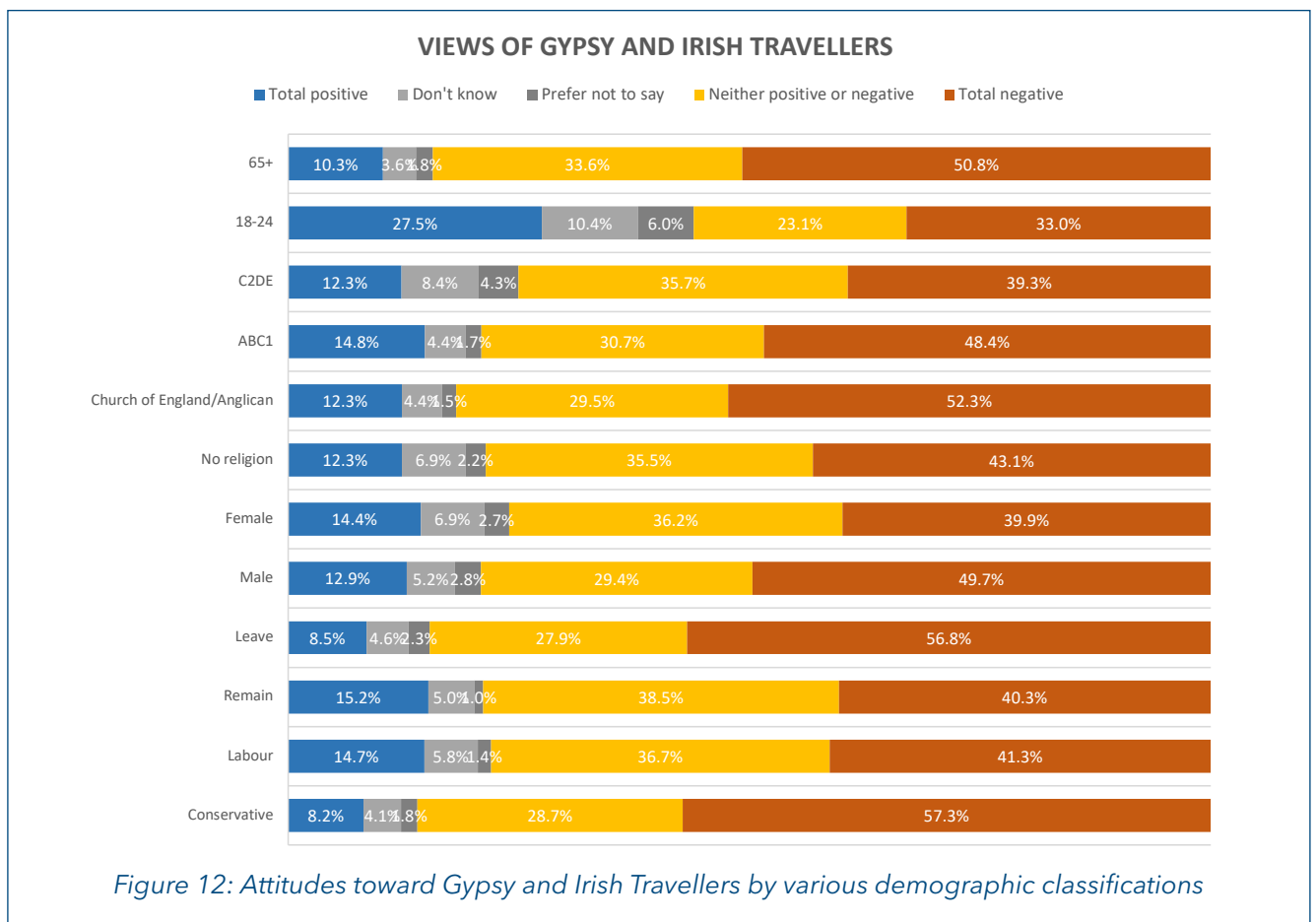
70 The questions described in Figure 11 were derived from British Social Attitudes and census questions, although we have recoded them into dichotomous measures here.

71 This is analysed further in Ingrid Storm, “«Christian Nations» Ethnic Christianity And Anti-Immigration Attitudes In Four Western European Countries,” *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24, no. 01 (2011): 75-96, <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1890-7008-2011-01-05>.

72 This is not just in the case of views of Muslims, but across all the question items on which we conducted binary logistic regressions, whether concerned with ethnic or religious minorities. Across different questions Anglican identity appears significant in a binary logistic regression model until age is controlled for. In the example of views of Pakistanis, for instance, a regression model only including religion identifies Anglican identity as a significant predictor of negativity ($\text{exp}(B) = 1.546$, $p\text{-value} = 0.009$). Once we control for age and other variables, however, this changes ($\text{exp}(B) = 1.176$, $p\text{-value} = 0.367$).

Anti-Traveller prejudice as the exception to the norm

The one group that stands out in our survey is Gypsy and Irish Travellers. This group, unlike all the others, is viewed significantly more negatively by higher social grades.⁷³ 48.4% of ABC1s view Gypsy and Irish Travellers negatively, compared with 39.3% of C2DEs. As we have already observed, there is insufficient data in our survey on Gypsy and Irish Travellers to explain the reasons behind this. One possibility is that in cases where social sanction against a group-based prejudice is lacking, people from higher social grades are happy to acknowledge their dislike. Another is that dislike of Gypsy and Irish Traveller populations is greater among rural and suburban populations - where affluent ABC1s and Gypsy and Irish Traveller sites tend to be located - rather than in inner-cities. Perhaps the most compelling suggestion is that there is a class element to anti-Gypsy and Irish Traveller prejudice, meaning it is more common among middle classes. These are all speculations, however, and require much more research to substantiate.



⁷³ This is based on a binary logistic regression model examining negative views of Gypsy and Irish Travellers. It controlled for religion, age, gender and political preference. In this model membership of the ABC1 group has an exp(B) value of 1.431 and a p-value of less than 0.001.

7. COMPARING ANTI-RELIGIOUS AND ANTI-ETHNIC PREJUDICE

In previous sections, we examined prejudices held about Islamic beliefs and prejudices held about Muslims as a group of people – or what we would term religious and racial forms of Islamophobia. We turn now to the question of how these two varieties of Islamophobia relate to one another. In arguments about Islamophobia, these two are regularly separated conceptually, most of the time in order to make the case that we should be concerned about the latter but not the former. One example of this is Fred Halliday's contention (made in 1999) that '[t]he attack now is against not *Islam* as a faith but *Muslims* as a people'.⁷⁴ A similar point is made by many people who propose replacing the term 'Islamophobia' with alternatives such as 'Muslimophobia', 'anti-Muslimism' or 'anti-Muslim hate'.⁷⁵ In its strongest forms, this separation is accompanied by the overt argument that while attacks on Muslims are indefensible, claims made about Islam are not something that opponents of racism and prejudice should take any interest in.

It is easy to see why taking 'Islam' out of 'Islamophobia' in this way is tempting. It seems to offer a solution to the problem of how to separate religious criticism and prejudice and thereby avoid stifling the former. We are not ultimately persuaded, however, that these two things can or should be fully separated. (For that and other reasons, we also don't see much value in arguing about the merits of 'Islamophobia' as a term: this word may struggle to contain the complex phenomenon it is meant to describe, but one could say the same about the terms 'racism' and 'antisemitism'.) We suggest that, as Jennifer E. Cheng has said, anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic prejudice are distinguishable but often occur 'in tandem', with one implicitly or explicitly driving the other forward.⁷⁶

To illustrate, we will refer briefly to the lead author's qualitative research mentioned in the methodology section. The interviews for this study included multiple cases of what the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah calls 'scriptural determinism', by which he means the view that a religious scripture determines its followers' worldviews uniformly and can be used as an explanation for specific actions and (real or perceived) social changes.⁷⁷ The idea that the Qur'an can only ever be read 'totally literally' might be regarded as one example of this. Another case, also quoted in our executive summary, is reproduced below. This was taken from an interview with a musician who described himself as a humanist and who, notably, saw himself as opposed to anti-Muslim prejudice:

It starts with, okay, the truth is in the Bible so we need to go and follow the Bible; it can't be challenged in some people's mind. And I know that's a very simplistic view of Christianity but as far as Islam goes that's how Muslims are required to view the world, the way [...] it was written down 1,300, 1,400 years ago [...].

What was striking about these claims about Islamic belief is that at times they were woven into racialised claims, and at others not. Another quote, taken from a focus group of self-identified humanists, is an example of where they were linked together. This is taken from a conversation about

74 Fred Halliday, "'Islamophobia' Reconsidered," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 5 (1999): 898. Emphasis in the original.

75 For an excellent summary of these debates see Jennifer E Cheng, "Islamophobia, Muslimophobia or Racism? Parliamentary Discourses on Islam and Muslims in Debates on the Minaret Ban in Switzerland," *Discourse & Society* 26, no. 5 (September 1, 2015): 563, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926515581157>.

76 Cheng, "Islamophobia, Muslimophobia or Racism?"

77 Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Mistaken Identities, The Reith Lectures, Episode 1: Creed" (London School of Economics, October 22, 2016), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07z43ds>.

scientific progress in which one participant's optimistic comment about science and society was challenged by three others:

Participant 1: [I'm optimistic about the future because] I like to see it [history] as leaving ignorance and prejudice and bigotry behind us.

Participant 2: But it [ignorance] may not continue to depreciate ...

Participant 3: No, I agree.

Participant 2: Because as demographics change I believe the birth rate amongst religious families is higher. But there is a sense that ...

Participant 1: Except that the experience of this country is that they start to conform to the kind of patterns that the rest of us conform to ...

Participant 2: I don't ...

Participant 4: I'm not sure that's true.

Participant 3: It's true about the number of religious groups, but I think there may be something about Islamic groups which is different.

In this conversation, Participant 4 then concluded with the following comment:

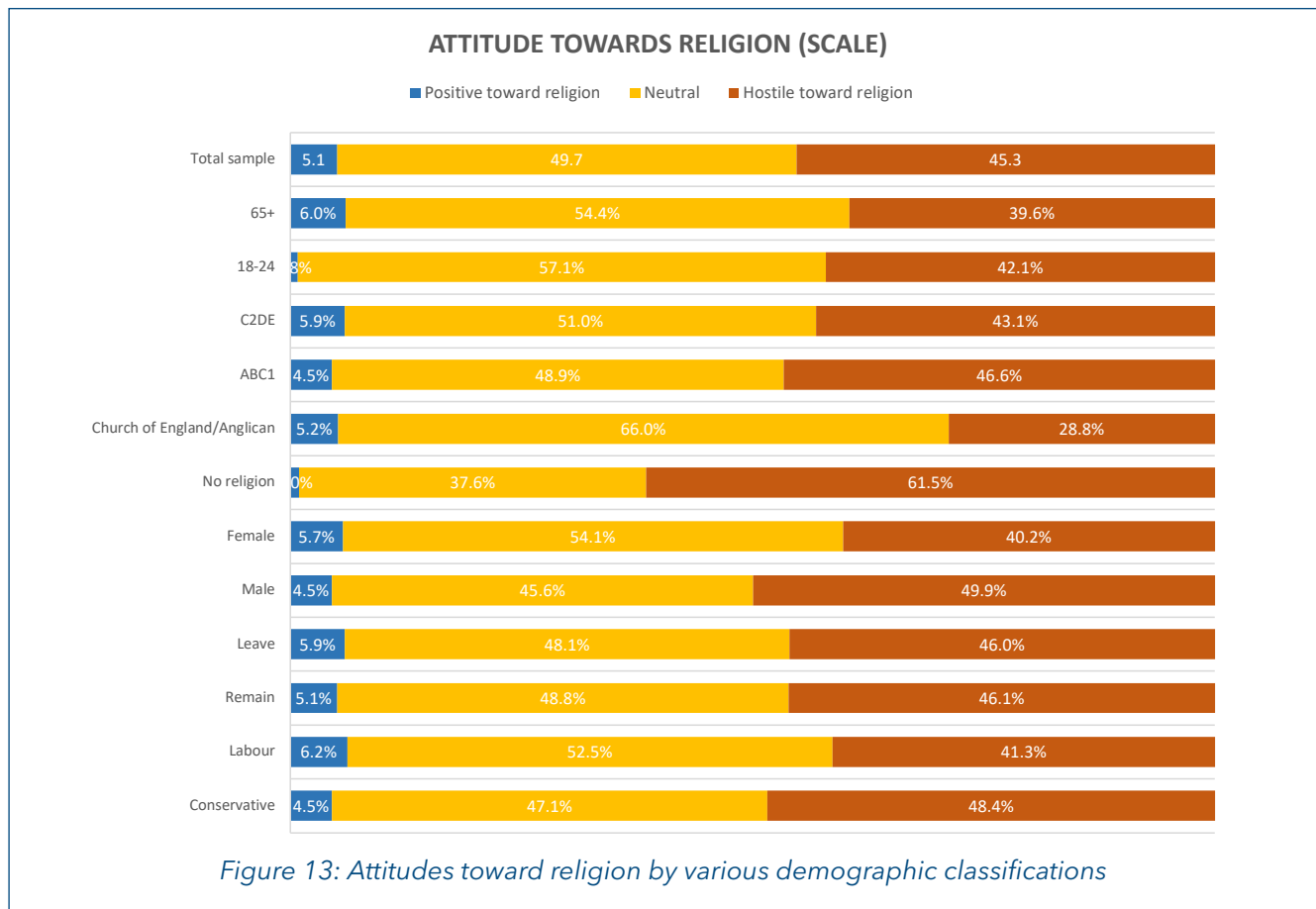
Just sitting in King's Cross Station [...], all the headscarves suddenly appear. I think, am I imagining this? But that says to me that something very, very dangerous is happening in this society. The danger is coming from Islam.⁷⁸

In this discussion, the arguments moved swiftly from claims about religious beliefs to ever-more racialised claims about cultural difference and demographic threats. In the first comment, however, this movement did not take place. Furthermore, as we observed briefly in our methodology, whether or not participants made this move usually depended on their political leanings. Among conservative, libertarian or populist interviewees, stereotypes about Islamic belief often went hand-in-hand with cultural othering and sometimes overt racism. Among progressives and liberals, however, there were multiple examples of people who were committed to tolerance and opposed to discrimination but who *still* held a scriptural determinist view of Islam. What our data suggested was that, with religion not being subject to the same social sanction as remarks about race, culture, and discrimination, narratives about Islam as a belief system allowed liberal, middle-class participants to express anxiety about Muslims without fear of censure. We encountered a very similar phenomenon in our survey data, as we will now see.

78 These quotations are taken from Jones et al., "That's How Muslims Are Required to View the World," 170-71 and 173.

Which social groups dislike religion most?

We look first at the demographic characteristics of those people who are hostile to religion in general, which are strikingly different compared with hostility toward ethnic groups. Figure 13 shows the level of hostility toward religion across various demographic characteristics, with hostility and positivity toward religion measured using the anti-religion scale covered in Table 1.⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly, non-religious people are – by over 30 percentage points – more hostile toward religion than Church of England affiliates. Hostility toward religion is also marginally higher among ABC1s, while the vast differences between Leave and Remain voters diminishes almost entirely, as do the differences between age groups and Conservative and Labour voters. Unlike hostility toward ethnic minorities, hostility toward religion appears to be spread almost evenly across political persuasions, while wealthier groups are slightly more hostile.

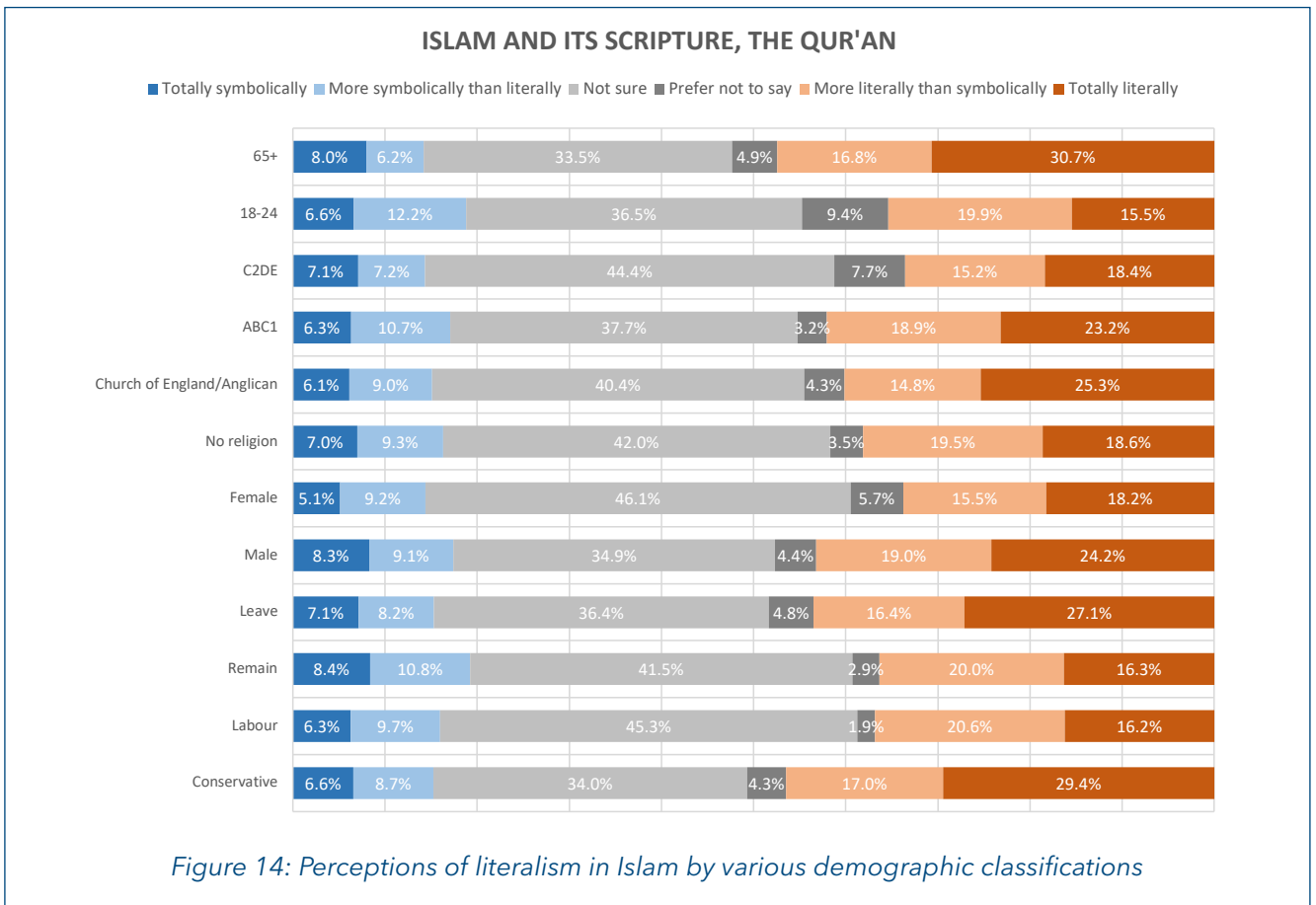


Prejudice toward Islam among different social groups

How does dislike of religion compare with the prejudices towards Islamic belief illustrated in Figure 3? As Figure 14 shows, the picture is mixed. Some of the patterns we saw when looking at anti-group prejudice return: older people, Leave voters and Conservative voters are more likely to describe Islam as ‘totally’ literalistic. It certainly is *not* the case that anti-religious sentiment and anti-Islamic prejudice are the same thing. Yet, in contrast to the questions about Muslims examined in Figure 9 and Figure 10, in this question the percentage of people who wrongly assumed the Qur’an is read ‘totally literally’ was significantly higher among ABC1s. 23.2% of ABC1s said Islam was a

⁷⁹ This version of our scale is simplified to make it easier to interpret in chart form, with scale points reduced from twelve to three.

totally literalistic religion compared with 18.4% of C2DEs – an almost 5% difference. This difference is statistically significant even after controlling for voting record, age, gender, and religion.⁸⁰ This difference appears principally because those from higher social grades are more confident in making judgements – including incorrect judgements – about Islamic scripture, while those from lower social grades are more likely to accept their lack of knowledge. Previously, we described Islamophobia as ‘systemic miseducation about Islam itself’.⁸¹ British people from higher professional occupations, who tend to be more educated, seem to suffer more from this systemic miseducation.

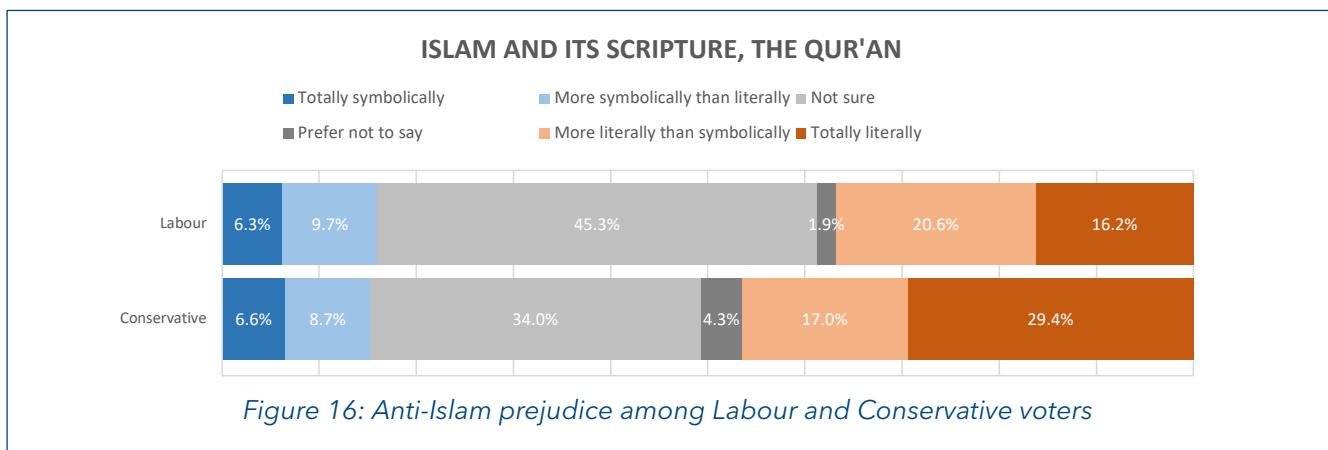
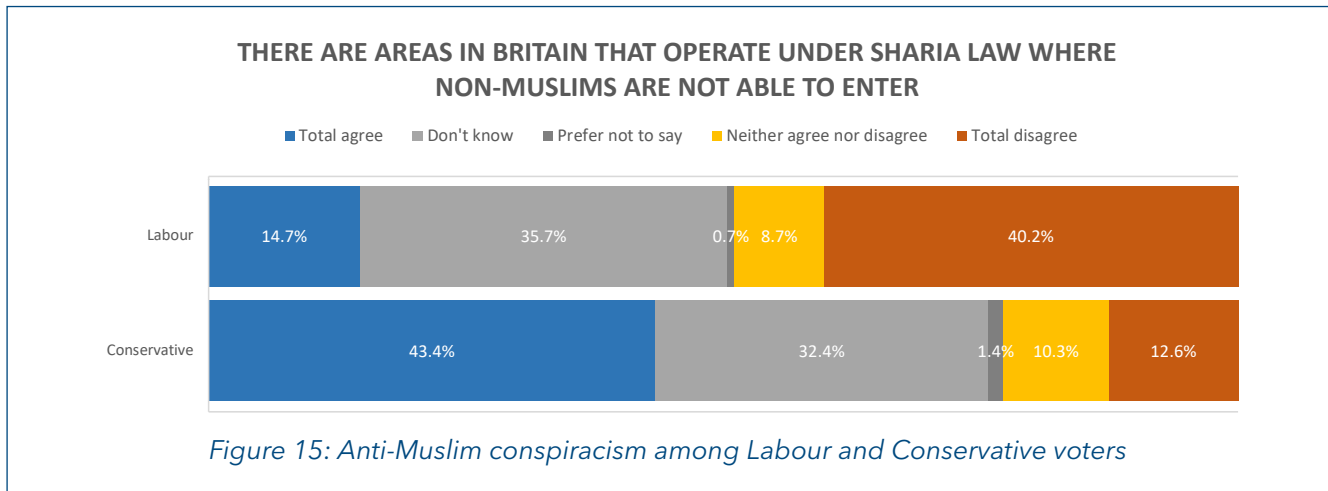


The political distribution of anti-Islamic sentiment

While Figure 14 shows anti-Islamic sentiment is more common among Conservative voters, it is nevertheless more widely distributed across the political spectrum than anti-Muslim sentiment and, even more so, anti-Muslim conspiracism. As we can see from Figure 15, the gulf between Labour and Conservative when looking at our question about Sharia ‘no-go zones’ is huge, with almost three times as many Conservative voters agreeing with the question than Labour voters. In the question about Islam and literalism, however, highlighted in Figure 16, the percentage of Labour voters agreeing with the statement is more than half the Conservative percentage.

80 We tested this using bivariate logistic regression models that examined the likelihood of belonging to the group ‘Totally literally’. We ran five models, introducing religion, age, gender, social grade and voting record to in turn to examine interactions between variables. Social grade was significant in all models where it featured. In the final model the exp(B) for ABC1 was 1.323 and the p-value was 0.028. Age, gender and Conservative votes were all significant predictors of selecting ‘Totally literally’, although notably, while Anglican affiliation was significant in the first model it was *not* significant when age was controlled for (that is, the apparent ‘Anglican effect’ was in reality a function of Anglicans being older).

81 Kincheloe, J. L., S. R. Steinberg and C. D. Stonebanks (2010) Foreword: Re-education against Miseducation. In: Kincheloe, J. L., S. R. Steinberg and C. D. Stonebanks (eds) Teaching Against Islamophobia, ix-xii. New York: Peter Lang.



Two types of Islamophobia

This data reinforces the argument that there are two forms of Islamophobia in Britain, then, one anti-religious and the other anti-ethnic. *Anti-Muslim* prejudice, which is directed toward Muslims as a group, tends to be concentrated in, though not limited to, certain classes and political persuasions, namely those from lower social grades, who are older and who are politically conservative. *Anti-Islamic* prejudice, on the other hand – the notion that Islam is inherently literalistic – is different. This form of prejudice is more common among more affluent groups. Although it remains more prevalent among conservatives, it is more evenly spread across political persuasions. The late sociologist Robert Bellah once remarked that ‘prejudice against religion is still the only acceptable prejudice among the cultural elite’. It is, he argued, the one prejudice that not only is tolerated by, but more common among, people who are affluent, educated and progressive.⁸² Whether or not this is true of religion in general, what our data shows is that this view does have a basis when one is referring to prejudice against Islamic belief. Our survey gives empirical weight to the claim made in 2011 by Sayeeda Warsi that Islamophobia has ‘passed the dinner table test’ – or now extends beyond political extremes into contexts of middle-class domestic respectability.⁸³ It adds a layer of extra detail to Warsi’s claim, though, by showing that it is the *religious* variety of Islamophobia, the one subject to least social sanction, that is particularly popular among the UK’s middle classes.

82 Robert N. Bellah, “Reading and Misreading Habits of the Heart,” *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2007): 190.

83 Warsi S (2011) Baroness Warsi’s Sternberg Lecture Speech. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/baroness-warsi-s-sternberg-lecture-speech> (accessed 11 April 2017).

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We have argued in this report that there are two types of Islamophobia that, despite being located differently in British society, lend support to one another, limiting the social sanction that is applied to anti-Muslim prejudice and making it harder to name and combat. What remains unclear, however, is what the implications of this argument are. While we support legal penalties for harassment and differential treatment of Muslims, rarely, if ever, is this appropriate for prejudices about people's beliefs.

As we mentioned in the introduction, indifference and inaction are not the only alternatives to legal penalties. The recommendations below offer initial proposals for how we might begin to address *all* the dimensions of Islamophobia in the UK. These recommendations are guided by two overarching themes. The first is that political leadership is needed in the UK to spell out what Islamophobia is and to acknowledge how widely it is tolerated. The second is that building religious literacy should be understood as one part of, and should be geared towards, anti-racist activity and policymaking concerned with equality. These practical steps, we suggest, can be made without constraining religious criticism and can instead be regarded as a vital part of citizenship education.

Recommendations

- 1. Government and other public figures should take steps to acknowledge and address the lack of social sanction Islamophobic discourses and practices trigger.** While many groups in British society are subject to discrimination and hatred, no other ethnic or religious minority, with the important exception of Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities, are subject to the same level of *open and unchallenged* hostility. This can be easily shown using survey and other data, yet it is a point that has only rarely been acknowledged even by public figures with an admirable record of opposing Islamophobia. Political leadership is required, by government but including all senior political figures in the UK, to acknowledge the pervasiveness of anti-Muslim stereotypes.
- 2. Civil society organisations and equality bodies concerned with prejudice and discrimination should acknowledge that systemic miseducation about Islam is common in British society and forms an important element of Islamophobia.** We agree that Islamophobia can be regarded as a form of racism. We argue, however, that to understand Islamophobia in only these terms is *incomplete*. Efforts to combat anti-Muslim racism must be supplemented by other forms of activity that focus on religious belief and that are not geared toward legal change. Religion has often been marginal to the work of campaigners against racial and ethnic inequality, and while the situation has improved over the last twenty years, it remains rare for equality campaigns to address miseducation about religious traditions, leading to Islamophobia (and indeed antisemitism) being neglected and poorly understood.
- 3. Provide clear guidance on clarifying when tropes about the Islamic tradition move from misguided critique to become harmful.** Much anti-Muslim hatred is justified with reference to crude and often racialised conspiracy theories, but in carrying out this research we also found evidence that some people tend toward a stereotyped view of Islam because of confusions about Muslims' beliefs and practices. Examples included people's understandings of complex topics such as the nature of the Qur'an and Sharia. Media regulators and equality bodies can play a role in addressing this. While we do not argue for laws to regulate speech about religion, bodies involved in media regulation and the promotion of equality can and should provide clearer guidance on how to avoid harmful and stereotyped representations of Islam and Muslims.
- 4. Introduce religious literacy as a component part of any large-scale equality and diversity campaign or policy initiative.** In the same way that equality research and activism has frequently

left religion on the margins, equality is rarely at the centre of public discussions about media coverage of religion and religious literacy in the UK. We argue for a fundamental change in the way that we think about religious literacy, with it being regarded as necessary to the development of a cohesive society. Religious literacy should be a core component of the promotion of equality, and the promotion of religious literacy should be justified as necessary for a just and tolerant society.

- 5. Maintain commitments to religion programming, but with renewed emphasis on combatting intolerance.** We fully support the recommendations of the APPG on Religion in the Media's recent calls for better and more inclusive coverage of religion, including their calls to protect the BBC's required religion programming hours, to expand religious literacy training, and to focus on the 'lived experience' of religion.⁸⁴ To this, we would add that a fundamental aspect of religious programming should be combatting intolerance toward religious minorities. We also urge private media companies - many of whose record of covering Islam is lamentable - to review the way they cover Muslim identity and the Islamic tradition both globally and in the UK.

⁸⁴ APPG on Religion in the Media, "Learning to Listen: Inquiry into Religious Literacy in Print and Broadcast Media" (London: APPG on Religion in the Media, April 2021), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d5a90a11f704e0001e94404/t/6076cfa162110f59120a4fcd/1618399140254/APPG+Learning+to+Listen+12+04+21+%282%29.pdf>.



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