

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

Written Evidence to the Citizens  
Commission on Islam,  
Participation & Public Life  
PART 1: A FOCUS ON BIRMINGHAM

Dr Chris Allen

APRIL 2016

School of Social Policy, College of Social Sciences

All correspondence about this written submission should be directed to:

Dr Chris Allen

c.allen.2@bham.ac.uk

+44 (0) 121 414 2703

Department of Social Policy and Social Work, School of Social Policy, College of Social Sciences, University of Birmingham

<http://www.drchrisallen.uk>

## **Disclaimer**

Responsibility for any errors lies with the author.

## INTRODUCTION

---

1. This evidence is comprised of the findings from various pieces of research, statistics and datasets from the past decade or so.
2. All sources are duly referenced including the findings from my own research.

## BIRMINGHAM, MUSLIMS & ISLAM: AN OVERVIEW

---

3. Perceptions of Birmingham can be oppositional when it comes to Muslims and Islam. On the one hand, Birmingham has been referred to as a city that is “totally Muslim where non-Muslims just simply don’t go”<sup>1</sup> while on the other, observers have suggested that it is the “best place in Europe to be pure Muslim”<sup>2</sup>.
4. What is known is that outside of London, Birmingham is one of the UK’s most multicultural cities.
5. While the concept of multiculturalism has come under political scrutiny in recent years, Birmingham’s multiculturalism is what sociologist Paul Gilroy would refer to as factual rather than prescribed<sup>3</sup>. In this respect, Birmingham’s multiculturalism is experienced convivially through everyday experiences of living within and alongside different communities and people. In this respect, Birmingham’s everyday multiculturalism is ordinary, taken-for-granted and to some extent, unexceptional.
6. A significant minority within Birmingham’s multicultural population is its Muslim communities, the largest outside of London.
7. According to the 2011 Census<sup>4</sup>, there are 233,923 people in Birmingham who identify as Muslim. This is equivalent to 21.8% of the city’s population, a percentage that is significantly higher than the 4.8% average for Muslims in England and Wales.
8. Not only does Birmingham have the youngest demographic of any city in Europe, the youth demographic among its Muslim population is also particularly striking. Of those

---

<sup>1</sup> Steve Emerson, US terrorism expert on Fox News, 2015  
<http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/jan/11/fox-news-steven-emerson-birmingham-muslims>

<sup>2</sup> Ed West, 2011 <http://tinyurl.com/MuslimBum>

<sup>3</sup> Paul Gilroy. *Multiculturalism and Post-Colonial Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2006).

<sup>4</sup> Office of National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census>

who identified as Muslim in the 2011 Census, 97,099 were children. This means that 41.5% of Birmingham's Muslims are aged 16 years or under<sup>5</sup>.

9. Outside of the capital, Birmingham's Muslim communities are some of the most diverse in Britain comprising both 'old' and 'new' Muslims.
10. Birmingham's 'old' Muslim communities – which outnumber its 'new' equivalent - arrived in the city from the Indian sub-continent and East Africa in the decades following the Second World War.
11. While the majority of these 'old' Muslims are of Pakistani heritage, they are far from homogeneous and include Punjabis, Sindhis and Blauchis as also those who identify as Pashtun. Predominantly though, the majority (between 60-70%) are of Mirpuri or Kashmiri heritage.
12. Birmingham's 'new' Muslims arrived more recently and came from a wider range of geographical locations including Eastern Europe, West Africa and the Middle East. Their arrival has led to a growth in Muslim communities in the city of Somali, Kurdish, Iraqi and Iranian heritages. The city is also home to both white and black converts to Islam.
13. It is important to note that indigenous and heritage cultures shape and inform religious affiliation and practice in the city. Given the majority of Birmingham's Muslims are of Pakistani heritage – and Mirpur specifically – so the culture of Pakistan and Mirpur flavours how Islam is understood, interpreted and practiced in the city.
14. Within the diversity that exists within Birmingham's Muslim communities, tensions do sometimes occur.
15. These can take place along ethnic lines as in 2005 when in the Lozells area of the city there were two nights of violent confrontations between groups of Black Caribbean and Pakistani heritage people. Those clashes were sparked by allegations of the gang rape of a teenage girl of Black Caribbean heritage by men of Pakistani heritage. However, no evidence has ever been found to support the allegation nor has a victim ever been officially identified<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>5</sup> Office of National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census>

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, 2005 <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/oct/24/race.ukcrime>

16. At other times, tensions have occurred along religious lines. For instance in 2008 it was widely reported in the media that the Alum Rock Road area of the city was a ‘no-go area’ for Christians following a handful of confrontations with Muslims<sup>7</sup>.
17. At times, tensions exist both within and between Muslim communities also. For example in 2014, a man died following an outbreak of violence in the Sparkbrook area of the city between groups of men with Afghan and Pakistani ethnicities. The precise cause for the outbreak of violence remains unknown<sup>8</sup>. Similarly too, anecdotal evidence suggests that there have been tensions between Sunni and Shia Muslims as also some aggression being shown towards the Ahmadiyya community.
18. There have also been a number of incidents in the city involving Muslims and their communities that have attracted adverse national attention, in the media as also the political spaces.
19. Nonetheless, these handful of examples are quite exceptional and do not accurately reflect the successful, positive contribution that Muslims make to the success of Birmingham on a day to day basis.

## **BIRMINGHAM’S MUSLIMS: THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT**

---

20. Similar to other minority communities in the city, the majority of Birmingham’s Muslims live in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods. This is important because as research has shown, living in deprived areas directly correlates to health, low family income, and educational underachievement<sup>9</sup>. Unsurprisingly, indicators of deprivation show that Birmingham’s Muslims experience a higher rate of unemployment and economic inactivity than others in the city<sup>10</sup>.
21. The majority of Birmingham’s Muslims (71.7%) live in seven of the city’s most deprived wards: Sparkbrook (19,372); Bordesley Green (18,629); Washwood Heath (16,847);

---

<sup>7</sup> The Telegraph, 2008 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2058935/Police-advise-Christian-preachers-to-leave-Muslim-area-of-Birmingham.html>

<sup>8</sup> The Daily Express, 2014 <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/486565/Violence-leaves-one-dead-and-two-injured-in-Birmingham>

<sup>9</sup> Richard Wilkinson & Kate Pickett. The spirit level: why equality is better for everyone. London: Penguin (2010).

<sup>10</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, 2015 [https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport\\_2015.pdf](https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf)

- Springfield (13,461); Lozells and East Handsworth (10,853); and Nechells (8,822)<sup>11</sup>. Of these, Bordesley Green, Washwood Heath and Nechells are in the top 1% of most deprived Super Output Areas in the UK. The socio-economic situation of many of the Birmingham's Muslims therefore would seem to have the very real potential to detrimentally impact their ability to actively participate in the public life of the city.
22. This is not the situation for all of the city's Muslims however. So while Birmingham is home to the highest number (44,687) of Muslim 'low achievers' (Never Worked and Long-term Unemployed Population) in the UK, it also home to the highest number (6,033) of Muslim 'high achievers' (Higher Managerial, Administrative and Professional Occupations)<sup>12</sup>.
23. The young demographic of Birmingham's Muslims is again important in this respect due to the adverse impact it is likely to have in the medium and long term in relation to employment, and education.
24. The potential impact on education can be illustrated by the fact that in a number of wards across the city, Muslims account for more than 80% of the school age population. In Washwood Heath, 86% of all children aged between 5 to 15 years are Muslim<sup>13</sup>. It is worth noting that this ward was one of those most affected by the Operation Trojan Horse allegations (see below) including Park View School (now Rockwood Academy).
25. In terms of educational attainment, Muslim children of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage have improved markedly in the last two decades. Likewise, the gender attainment gap has narrowed for those same two groups<sup>14</sup>.
26. In the independent sector, some Muslim schools in Birmingham have recently topped the city's league tables in terms of GCSE level attainment.
27. The fact that Muslims make up more than 80% of the school age population in some areas of the city raises a number of pertinent and pressing questions about educational provision. While some of these are considered in more detail in the following section, the shadow cast by Operation Trojan Horse is likely to overshadow and indeed inform

---

<sup>11</sup> Arshad Isakjee & Chris Allen. "A catastrophic lack of inquisitiveness': A critical study of the impact and narrative of the Project Champion surveillance project in Birmingham." *Ethnicities* 13, no. 6 (2013): 751-770.

<sup>12</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, 2015 [https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport\\_2015.pdf](https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, 2015 [https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport\\_2015.pdf](https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Muslim Council of Britain, 2015 [https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport\\_2015.pdf](https://www.mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/MCBCensusReport_2015.pdf)

many of the discussions about how the educational needs of an increasingly diverse population might be met. Given the political salience of the matter and the likely continued interest of the national media, it is likely that Birmingham and its Muslims communities will continue to be problematized as regards education in the city

## **OPERATION TROJAN HORSE & BIRMINGHAM'S EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES**

---

28. In 2014, a letter published in the Sunday Telegraph described what became known as 'Operation Trojan Horse': an alleged plot by 'Islamist hardliners' to 'takeover' around 25 state schools in Birmingham<sup>15</sup>.
29. Attracting national attention in both the political and media spaces, West Midlands Police questioned the validity of the allegations because it believed the letter to be a hoax<sup>16</sup>.
30. Nonetheless, the allegations prompted what became the largest educational investigation in British history. This investigation was four pronged, with the Department for Education, OFSTED, Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Police all undertaking separate approaches. It must be stressed that none of the investigations found any evidence whatsoever of a 'plot' to 'takeover' any schools in Birmingham or elsewhere.
31. Over the past decade my research has shown Muslims are increasingly perceived to be problematic: a threatening, ever-more homogenised and undifferentiated 'Other'<sup>17</sup>. There is little doubt that the allegations made via Operation Trojan Horse will feed into this process of problematizing and Othering.
32. This can be illustrated by the way in which the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair made unfounded claims about the situation in Birmingham. While making a speech on the

---

<sup>15</sup> Chris Allen, Operation Trojan Horse: examining the 'Islamic takeover' of Birmingham schools, The Conversation (2014) <https://theconversation.com/operation-trojan-horse-examining-the-islamic-takeover-of-birmingham-schools-25764>

<sup>16</sup> Chris Allen. Operation Trojan Horse: how a hoax problematized Muslims and Islam, Discover Society (2014) <http://discoversociety.org/2014/07/01/operation-trojan-horse-how-a-hoax-problematised-muslims-and-islam/>

<sup>17</sup> Chris Allen. Islamophobia. Farnham: Ashgate (2010).

international stage, Blair claimed that there was a direct link between the kidnapping of 200 girls in Nigeria by Boko Haram and the ‘extremism’ that he alleged was evident in Birmingham’s schools<sup>18</sup>. Completely unsubstantiated, it is again necessary to stress that there was no tangible evidence of extremism uncovered in any of the schools investigated in Birmingham.

33. However, the OFSTED investigation did uncover a handful of incidents in a small number of schools that were problematic as regards school governance. Soon after, five of the city’s schools were placed in special measures<sup>19</sup>.
34. Over the past decade, my research has also shown how it is commonly perceived that Muslims and Islam are largely incompatible with the British – or ‘our’ – values, norms and way of life. There is little doubt that the allegations made via Operation Trojan Horse will also feed into and further reinforce this perception also.
35. This is because the allegations inferred – without substantiation - that Birmingham Muslims who were participating in what were entirely normal, respectable and responsible activities – e.g. becoming active within their children’s schools, taking on the role of school governor and so on – were in fact being far from normal, respectable and responsible. Instead, the allegations conveyed the message that Muslims were engaged in something that was far more underhanded, insidious and even dangerous.
36. Consequently, those Muslims who might want to actively participate in their children’s education in the future – or indeed actively participate in other aspects of public life – might now find it much more difficult to do so. If they do, then they might find themselves under greater scrutiny and monitoring.
37. Given that young Muslims account for more than 80% of the school age population in certain wards across the city, the barriers to participation that Muslim parents might encounter therefore present a significant challenge.
38. Another legacy of the Operation Trojan Horse allegations will be to make conversations and discussions about ensuring Muslim pupils feel confident and able to engage in the educational system while having their cultural and religious needs met will have been made far more difficult. This will not only affect Muslims. All conversations and

---

<sup>18</sup> The Telegraph, 2014 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationnews/10900955/Trojan-Horse-plot-driven-by-same-warped-Islamic-extremism-as-Boko-Harams-says-Tony-Blair.html>

<sup>19</sup> The Guardian, 2014 <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/jun/09/trojan-horse-row-birmingham-schools-special-measures-ofsted>

discussions about how to ensure that all pupils in the city have a wide range of educational, social and cultural interactions and experiences will have been made more difficult. Such conversations and discussions are of course essential if all pupils - irrespective of their religious, cultural, ethnic and socio-economic background - are to feel confident about their role within a cohesive and multicultural society as opposed to being problematized and marginalised and therefore restricted from actively participating in public life.

39. Set out below are a number of issues relating to Muslims and education provision that might require further consideration.
40. In many of the city's schools, uniform policies and the provision of cooked lunches have been adapted to accommodate the religious and cultural requirements of Muslims. Given the success of these and that they were historically seen to be examples of good practice<sup>20</sup>, so it is likely that there will be requests to accommodate those same religious and cultural requirements in other areas of educational provision. Some areas where such might occur include in relation to matters of sexual modesty – in particular, the segregation of pupils for physical education and swimming after puberty - and for single-sex secondary schools<sup>21</sup>. Similar may also arise in relation to meeting the statutory requirements relating to the provision of Religious Education and Collective Worship in Muslim majority schools.
41. Such calls for greater accommodation are posited in a number of reports and policy documents published by a number of British Muslim organisations including the Association of Muslim Social Scientists<sup>22</sup>, the Muslim Welfare House Trust<sup>23</sup>, and the Muslim Council of Britain<sup>24</sup> among others. For them, the need for greater accommodation is far from unexpected.
42. A number of issues where there might be further calls for accommodation were highlighted by the Operation Trojan Horse investigations. One of these relates to the wearing of the hijab in schools which attracted significant political and media coverage. As the Home Secretary, Theresa May put it at the time of Operation Trojan Horse in a

---

<sup>20</sup> Chris Hewer (2001) Schools for Muslims, Oxford Review of Education, 27:4, 515-527.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Hewer (2001) Schools for Muslims, Oxford Review of Education, 27:4, 515-527.

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.fairuk.org/docs/muslims\\_on\\_education\\_policy\\_paper.pdf](http://www.fairuk.org/docs/muslims_on_education_policy_paper.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://mwht.org.uk/downloads/Understanding-the-Educational-Needs-of-Muslim-Pupils.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/MCBschoolsreport07.pdf>

letter to the then Education Secretary, Michael Gove: “We do, however, need to recognise that many moderate Muslims, as well as people of other religions, believe that covering one's hair is a religious requirement and some parents will therefore want their children to do so”<sup>25</sup>. The covering of girl's heads should therefore be understood as something that is not only likely to be preferred but increasingly expected within the school setting. Having noted that, it is necessary to ensure that no pupil is forced to dress in a particular way.

43. The issue of sex education is also likely to be an issue where greater accommodation might be called for. While different interpretations exist, it is likely that attitudes towards sex outside of marriage, consent to sex within marriage and the issue of homosexuality would be understood and shaped through the lens of religion and theology. Given that for some the issue of sex outside of marriage and homosexuality would be seen to be sinful, there is potential for the provision of sex education to be increasingly seen as promoting social and cultural norms that go against certain religious teachings and scriptural interpretations.
44. Finally, there is the issue of the accommodation of prayer into education provision including the broadcast of the midday call to prayer, the observance of Friday prayers and the organisation of lunchtime prayers within the school environment. Historical research showed that when a handful of Muslim majority schools in Birmingham made provision of a dedicated room for pupils to use during the school day for prayers this was identified as an example of good practice<sup>26</sup>. If once seen to be good practice, why might it not be good practice in the contemporary setting? If it continues to be seen to be good practice, then to what extent might the accommodation of the call to prayer or the observation of Friday prayers also be good practice therefore?
45. In the wake of Operation Trojan Horse, any moves towards greater accommodation of religious or cultural needs is likely to be extremely contested and placed under intense scrutiny; not least because such moves towards greater accommodation could be interpreted as evidence of a ‘takeover’. As such, necessary conversations and discussions that are likely to be required in relation to education provision in

---

<sup>25</sup> The Guardian (2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2014/jun/04/theresa-may-letter-michael-gove-in-full>

<sup>26</sup> Chris Hewer (2001) Schools for Muslims, *Oxford Review of Education*, 27:4, 515-527.

Birmingham have the very real potential to further problematize Muslim pupils, parents and communities as also present further barriers to active participation in public life.

## **RADICALISATION & COUNTER-TERROR POLICIES**

---

46. At the time of Operation Trojan Horse, research highlighted how Muslims in Birmingham were already weary from the impact of the now defunct Project Champion<sup>27</sup>.
47. Project Champion was a scheme that involved the secret installation of more than 200 overt and covert CCTV and ANPR cameras in densely-populated Muslim areas in the city as part of a counter-terrorism initiative.
48. For detailed information about the scheme and its effects on Birmingham's Muslims communities, please see the submission to the Commission by Dr Arshad Isakjee.
49. Understood as sending a "very clear message" to Muslims in the city, research showed that the impact of Project Champion was to decrease feelings of cohesion, increased tensions and anxieties between different communities and, most worryingly, greater fears of the likelihood of street-level Islamophobia<sup>28</sup>. In addition, Project Champion provoked greater suspicion and mistrust about Muslims and Islam in the city. This has resulted in Birmingham's Muslims being demarcated as a suspect community<sup>29</sup>.
50. While some good community work has taken place in Birmingham as part of the Government's PREVENT programme, anecdotal evidence suggests that this has been hampered by the belief that it indiscriminately stigmatises Muslims, many of whom are all-too-aware of increasingly being seen through the lens of counter-terrorism and de-radicalisation.
51. The pessimism that accompanied this was undoubtedly exacerbated by Operation Trojan Horse which as stated previously, will have a detrimental impact on the ability and willingness of Muslims in Birmingham to actively participate in public life.

---

<sup>27</sup> Arshad Isakjee & Chris Allen. "A catastrophic lack of inquisitiveness': A critical study of the impact and narrative of the Project Champion surveillance project in Birmingham." *Ethnicities* 13, no. 6 (2013): 751-770.

<sup>28</sup> Arshad Isakjee & Chris Allen. "A catastrophic lack of inquisitiveness': A critical study of the impact and narrative of the Project Champion surveillance project in Birmingham." *Ethnicities* 13, no. 6 (2013): 751-770.

<sup>29</sup> Imran Awan. "'I Am a Muslim Not an Extremist': How the Prevent Strategy Has Constructed a 'Suspect' Community." *Politics & Policy* 40, no. 6 (2012): 1158-1185.

52. Given that a tiny minority of Birmingham’s Muslims have however been implicated in terrorism-related offences over the last decade, effective policies and approaches to counter radicalisation and terror in the city remain a necessity. These will however need to ensure inclusivity and openness as indeed the need to recognise the limitations of community-based action in the short and medium term. Achieving this will be extremely difficult not least because those who do become radicalised typically act secretly, out of view of local communities and away from the public arena. A key challenge for Birmingham’s policymakers and statutory authorities then is how to ensure that the fight against radicalisation plays out in a way that does not earmark all or indeed blanket sections within the diversity of Birmingham’s Muslim communities as risks and threats.

## ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE CITY

---

53. In the wake of Project Champion and Operation Trojan Horse, my research has shown how the city’s non-Muslim communities are likely to be more suspicious and mistrusting of Muslims on the perception that ‘there is no smoke without fire’<sup>30</sup>.

54. This is extremely problematic because my wider research has shown how greater suspicion and mistrust affords greater credence to the negative and typically unfounded stereotypes that inform and shape Islamophobic attitudes about both Muslims and Islam<sup>31</sup>. More concerning is the fact that my research also shows that these same negative and unfounded stereotypes are a major motivating factor for the perpetrators of Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes<sup>32</sup>.

55. The task of accurately illustrating the scale and prevalence of such Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes in Birmingham is however extremely difficult to ascertain. The same is true of the national picture also.

56. This is because of a number of factors.

57. The first of these is the lack of separate monitoring in relation to Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes by the police and statutory agencies. This includes the lack of

---

<sup>30</sup> Chris Allen. Dark legacy of Birmingham's 'Trojan Horse' episode (2014)  
<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/thebirminghambrief/items/2014/06/dark-legacy-of-birminghams-trojan-horse-episode.aspx>

<sup>31</sup> Chris Allen. Islamophobia. Farnham: Ashgate (2010).

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Githens-Mazer & Robert Lambert. "Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime: UK case studies 2010" Exeter: EMRC, University of Exeter (2011).

aggregation that takes place in relation to all ‘religiously motivated’ hate crime incidents and hate crimes also<sup>33</sup>. While the Metropolitan Police have been recording Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes separately for the past two years<sup>34</sup> - and indeed making the data publicly available - other police forces have failed to follow suit. I have been informed that West Midlands Police do record Islamophobic incidents and hate crime separately but this remains unverified and no evidence of any recorded data has been established<sup>35</sup>.

58. However, the Prime Minister and Home Secretary announced in October 2015 that legislation would be introduced that would require all police forces by law to separately record Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes<sup>36</sup>. While this is extremely positive, some concern must be expressed about why this this was enacted via counter-terror legislation in preference of extending existing legislation relating to hate crime. In doing so, it is possible that it could convey an extremely negative message to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

59. The second relates to the fact that there has been a tendency in the past for religiously motivated hate crimes to be inaccurately recorded as racially motivated<sup>37</sup>. This is not always because of a lack of awareness on behalf of the police but because there are times when race and religion are seen to overlap. An example of this might be when a Muslim is verbally abused by being called a ‘Paki Muslim’.

60. The third relates to the under-reporting of all forms of hate motivated incidents and crimes<sup>38</sup>. Islamophobia is not exceptional in this respect. What is exceptional however is the extent of under-reporting that is estimated as regards Islamophobia. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (formerly the European Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia) suggests that the percentage of victims of Islamophobia

---

<sup>33</sup> Matthew Feldman & Mark Littler, Tell MAMA Reporting 2013/4 Anti-Muslim Overview, Analysis and ‘Cumulative Extremism’ (2014) <http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/finalreport.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> BBC News (2015) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-34138127>

<sup>35</sup> Verbally confirmed by a senior officer within West Midlands Police.

<sup>36</sup> The Guardian (2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/oct/13/police-must-record-anti-muslim-hate-crimes>

<sup>37</sup> Matthew Feldman & Mark Littler, Tell MAMA Reporting 2013/4 Anti-Muslim Overview, Analysis and ‘Cumulative Extremism’ (2014) <http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/finalreport.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> University of Leicester Hate Crime Project, Findings and Conclusions (2014) <http://www2.le.ac.uk/departments/criminology/research/current-projects/hate-crime/documents-and-images/findings-and-conclusions-full-report>

choosing not to report could be as high as 70%<sup>39</sup>. According to the government funded third party reporting mechanism Tell MAMA the picture is even more concerning with the suggestion that a mere 3% of all Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes are reported to the police<sup>40</sup>.

61. Finally, research has shown that Muslim women who follow more conservative forms of Islam have been shown to be extremely reluctant to report their experiences of Islamophobia to the police primarily on the basis of cultural issues, e.g. not wanting to report to a male officer<sup>41</sup>. Anecdotally, it has also been suggested that Muslims are reluctant to report to the police due to a fear of being spied on especially if they give police their personal information<sup>42</sup>.
62. Any attempt to present a true picture of the scale and prevalence of Islamophobia in Birmingham – as indeed nationally - is therefore only going to be speculative at best. This of course makes the reality of Islamophobia extremely easy to dismiss which feeds into the hands of certain detractors of Islam and Muslims as also the far-right milieu<sup>43</sup>. In this way, the debate about ‘proving’ Islamophobia which is typically countered by ‘it does not exist’ is a cyclical one that is sadly, self-perpetuating. What is without doubt however is that Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes do occur in the city and can be easily verified by news reporting, academic research, third party monitoring and anecdotal evidence.
63. From adopting this approach, the vast majority of Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes are what might best be termed ‘low-level’ for instance, verbal abuse, being spat at and having head scarves or face veils forcibly removed. ‘High-level’ incidents and hate crimes on the other hand might refer to harassment, physical assault and violence<sup>44</sup>.
64. Noting this, research confirms that the likelihood of ‘low-level’ incidents and hate crimes is a further reason why victims choose not to report them to the police. Nonetheless,

---

<sup>39</sup> EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, Making Hate Crime Visible in the European Union: Acknowledging Victims’ Rights, 2012 [http://report-it.org.uk/files/fra-2012\\_hate-crime\[1\].pdf](http://report-it.org.uk/files/fra-2012_hate-crime[1].pdf).

<sup>40</sup> M. Feldman & M. Littler, *Tell MAMA Reporting 2013/4 Anti-Muslim Overview, Analysis and ‘Cumulative Extremism’*, 2014 <http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/finalreport.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup> See, EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, Making Hate Crime Visible in the European Union: Acknowledging Victims’ Rights, 2012 [http://report-it.org.uk/files/fra-2012\\_hate-crime\[1\].pdf](http://report-it.org.uk/files/fra-2012_hate-crime[1].pdf); and M. Feldman & M. Littler, *Tell MAMA Reporting 2013/4 Anti-Muslim Overview, Analysis and ‘Cumulative Extremism’*, 2014 <http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/finalreport.pdf> among others.

<sup>42</sup> C. Allen & J.G. Nielsen, *Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU following 9/11*, 2002.

<sup>43</sup> Chris Allen. *Islamophobia*. Farnham: Ashgate (2010).

<sup>44</sup> C. Allen & J.G. Nielsen, *Summary report on Islamophobia in the EU following 9/11*, 2002.

both academic and third sector research has shown that irrespective of whether low-level or high-level, all are as likely to have the same detrimental impact on not only the victims but so too their families, friends and communities<sup>45</sup>.

65. While so, there have been a number of 'high level' Islamophobic incidents in Birmingham in recent years. The most shocking was the brutal murder of 82 year-old Mohammed Saleem on his way home from his local mosque in Small Heath in April 2013. Shortly after, the Ukrainian national Pavlo Lapshyn was found guilty of his murder. Lapshyn was also found guilty of attempting to detonate nail bomb at three mosques in nearby Tipton, Walsall and Wolverhampton.

66. Other high level Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes in the city include:

- a young Muslim man being attacked and left with life-threatening injuries outside a mosque in Small Heath<sup>46</sup>;
- a Muslim woman being doused in alcohol while travelling on a train in the city<sup>47</sup>; and,
- a Muslim woman being abused and threatened by a fellow passenger on a bus who intimated he would set her on fire<sup>48</sup>.

67. In Birmingham, Islamophobic incidents are also routinely directed towards the material and physical structures associated with Muslims and Islam as per the three nail bomb attacks on nearby mosques previously.

68. Other examples include:

- eight Muslim-owned shops, restaurants and boutiques being attacked in the Small Heath and Sparkbrook areas of the city<sup>49</sup>;
- the mosque in nearby Cradley Heath being destroyed by arson<sup>50</sup>; and,
- the proposed Langley Islamic Culture Centre being gutted following an arson attack<sup>51</sup>.

---

<sup>45</sup> Chris Allen, Arshad Isakjee, & Özlem Ögtem Young. "Maybe we are hated" The experience and impact of anti-Muslim hate on British Muslim women. University of Birmingham (2013) <http://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/maybewearehated.pdf>.

<sup>46</sup> Birmingham Mail (2012) <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/two-arrested-after-man-attacked-186253>

<sup>47</sup> Birmingham Mail (2015) <http://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/helpless-muslim-woman-showered-alcohol-10238092>

<sup>48</sup> BBC News (2015) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-34966040>

<sup>49</sup> Independent (2015) <http://indy100.independent.co.uk/article/muslimowned-shops-in-birmingham-attacked-with-guns-and-hammers--xym9dNkyox>.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Githens-Mazer & Robert Lambert. "Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime: UK case studies 2010" Exeter: EMRC, University of Exeter (2011).

69. Another factor in trying to better understand the scale and prevalence is to acknowledge how in the wake of terror-related incidents irrespective of whether they occur in the UK or elsewhere in the world, there tends to be a ‘spike’ – a sharp increase – in the number of Islamophobic incidents and hate crimes. An example of this can be seen in the wake of the Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris in January 2015 and the spate of Islamophobic graffiti that appeared in various locations across the University of Birmingham’s Edgbaston campus days later<sup>52</sup>.
70. Another factor in relation to the scale and prevalence of Islamophobia is what might best be termed the far-right milieu. In the wake of terror-related incidents as also Project Champion and Operation Trojan Horse, a number of different groups that exist within the far-right milieu tried to not only exploit the ensuing suspicion and mistrust shown towards Muslims but so too establish anti-Muslim and anti-Islam campaigns especially those seeking to oppose the building of new mosques in and around the city.
71. Most recently, PEGIDA attempted to protest against Muslims and Islam in the city. Previously, the English Defence League did similar. Around the outskirts of the city, those such as the British National Party and Britain First have also been active. A particular site for confrontation and opposition has been in nearby Dudley where various groups from within the far-right milieu have been actively campaigning and protesting for more than a decade and a half<sup>53</sup>.
72. Despite the fact that a full picture of the scale and prevalence of Islamophobia is difficult to establish for Birmingham and its surrounds, it is vital that the realities and potential impacts of Islamophobia are neither dismissed nor overlooked in glib or meaningless ways. As research has shown, the failure to tackle Islamophobia has the very real potential to provoke feelings of insecurity, vulnerability and alienation amongst Muslims. Similarly, it has the potential to weaken governmental measures that seek to reduce and prevent extremism while also creating a major barrier to improving cohesion and integration among communities.

---

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Githens-Mazer & Robert Lambert. "Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hate crime: UK case studies 2010" Exeter: EMRC, University of Exeter (2011).

<sup>52</sup> Huffington Post (2015) [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/01/20/islamophobic-graffiti-birmingham-uni\\_n\\_6505534.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/01/20/islamophobic-graffiti-birmingham-uni_n_6505534.html)

<sup>53</sup> Chris Allen. Between Critical and Uncritical Understandings: A Case Study Analyzing the Claims of Islamophobia Made in the Context of the Proposed ‘Super-Mosque’ in Dudley, England. *Societies*, 3(2), (2013) pp.186-203.

73. Essentially, the failure to tackle Islamophobia will detrimentally impact the ability and indeed willingness of Muslims and their communities to actively participate in public life in Birmingham and indeed Britain more widely.