



The Islam Research Group

Muslims in Britain



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With input from 'AC'

The Muslim population of the UK in 2018

Demographics

42. The ten-yearly UK national census figures show that the population self-identifying as Muslim is growing rapidly in numerical terms and even faster as a proportion of the UK population.

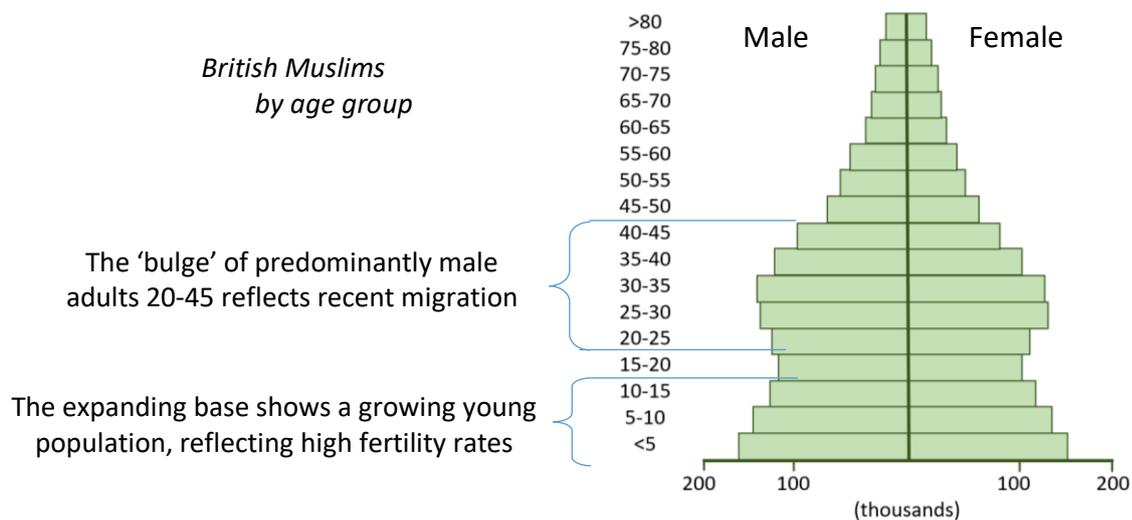
Census year	Number of Muslims in the UK	Muslims as a % of UK population
1961	50,000	0.1
1971	226,000	0.5
1981	553,000	1.1
1991	950,000	1.9
2001	1.6 million	3.1
2011	2.7 million	4.8

Over the past three decades the proportion of British people who are Muslims has increased at approximately 70%¹ each decade, doubling every thirteen to fourteen years.

The Pew Research Centre's report *Europe's Growing Muslim Population* published in November 2017 estimated that UK was at that time 6.3% Muslim.

It is also reported, based upon the 2011 Census figures, that:

- Approximately 50% of Muslims living in the UK are British born;
- The British Muslim population is youthful with a half under the age of 25 and a third under 15; and
- Muslim women have on average one more child than the UK's non-Muslim population (2.6 to 1.6)



¹ 72% from 1981 to 1991, 68% from 1991 to 2001, and 69% from 2001 to 2011.

43. The overall population of the UK is currently growing at approximately 0.5% (approximately 325,000 people) per annum. Of this growth only about 40% is due to natural population growth, with the majority of population growth resulting from net immigration. Two thirds of the population growth from 2001 to 2011 was accountable to the increase of the Muslim population.

The Pew Research report referred to above predicted that by 2050 the Muslim proportion of the overall UK population will have grown to:

9.7% on the basis of zero migration;

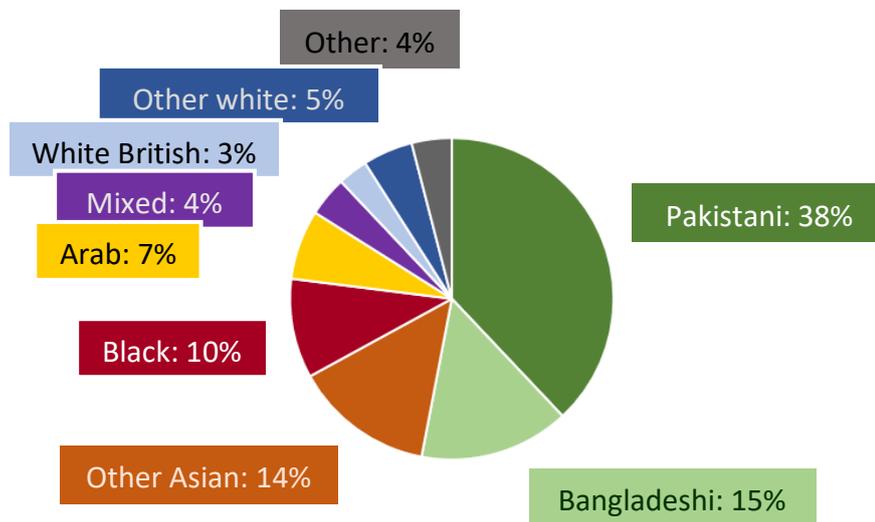
16.7% on the basis of a 'medium migration scenario' (estimates for immigration reasons other than asylum seeking); and

17.2% on the basis of current levels of immigration.

Whether or not these projections are precisely realised, it seems inevitable that the Muslim proportion of the UK population will continue to grow at a rapid rate and will very likely have exceeded 10% of the population before the 2031 census. It is a matter of simple mathematics that, barring extremely dramatic and unforeseeable events, the UK will become a Muslim-majority nation, during the lifetime of people alive now.

Ethnicity

44. According to the 2011 census the British Muslim population has the following ethnic composition:



Over half British Muslims are from Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage. In fact it has been estimated that 70% of the Pakistani-British population (over a quarter of all British Muslims) have family origins in the region around one city: Mirpur in Azad Kashmir²

² Dawn 15.3.2006 cited Wikipedia entry on Mirpur

Geographical distribution

45. According to the 2011 census:

37% of all British Muslims live in London. The largest concentrations of Muslim are in Tower Hamlets (which was 37.8% Muslim) and Newham (32%), where many are of Bangladeshi heritage. There is a high Pakistani population in Waltham Forest, and significant Somali, Arab and Persian communities in the West.

A further 12-14% live in each of three regions: West Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire/The Humber regions, where the majority are of Pakistani extraction.

Within these areas Muslims tend to live in high density urban areas with the largest Muslim populations living in:

- Birmingham: 234,000 (21.8%)
- Bradford: 129,000 (24.7%)
- Manchester: 79,000 (15.8%)
- Leicester: 61,000 (18.6%)
- Kirklees: 61,000 (14.5%)
- Oldham: 40,000 (17.7%)
- Blackburn: 38,000 (27%, the highest proportion local authority outside London)

Other Muslim concentrations exist in Pendle, Burnley, Keighley and Rotherham. In Dewsbury in Kirklees one ward, Savile Town, reported in the 2011 census as 98.7% Muslim.

In the south, both Slough and Luton were over 23% Muslim in 2011.

- Luton: 50,000 (24.6%)
- Slough: 32,600 (23.3%)

The 2001 and 2011 censuses show the Muslim proportion of urban populations in the cities with the largest Muslim populations appears to be increasing in line with the national figure of 50% per decade:

% Muslim population in four cities with largest Muslim populations³

	2001	2011
London	8.4	12.4
Manchester	9.1	15.8
Birmingham	14.3	21.8
Bradford	16.1	24.7

Common sense dictates that all the figures and percentages given in this paragraph (other than for Savile Town) will have increased significantly in the last seven years. At the time of writing (May 2018) Bradford must already be approaching one third Muslim and Birmingham over a quarter.

³ *British Muslims in Numbers*, Muslim Council of Britain 2015 survey based upon the 2011 census data.

Religious denomination

46. Muslimsinbritain.org, a website compiled by Mehmood Naqshbandi, has produced a database of mosques in the UK and an overview document: 'UK Mosque Statistics / Masjid Statistics' which at time of writing this tract had last been updated in September 2017.

This database records 1975 mosques and prayer rooms in the UK. According to Naqshbandi the predominant Islamic tradition or 'theme' of these mosques are as represented in the chart on the following page⁴.

The notes on the right hand margin of the table are this author's not Mr Naqshbandi's:

⁴ An introductory comment from the editor reads:

"Very few UK masjids have a congregation that is not doctrinally diverse, and there is a certain taboo associated with naming a particular masjid as being of a particular factional denomination. The idea of such denominations is often considered offensive: within it is an implication of the firqa annajaat, the successful faction, in reference to a hadith which described all but that one (described as 'the people of my Sunnah and my Community' – the ahl as-Sunnah wa'al Jama'ah) as being destined for hellfire. However taboo it may be, firstly it is overwhelmingly obvious to any but a very casually observant Muslim that any particular masjid is very clearly an adherent of a particular body of thought such as, for South Asian dominated communities, the Deobandis or the Bareilvis."

Mosque denomination

Masjid 'theme'		% of total
Deobandi	797	41.2
Barelvi	459	23.7
Other Sufi	79	4.1
Salafi	182	9.4
Arabic or African mainstream Sunni	60	3.1
Maudoodi-inspired, 'Islamic Movement	51	2.6
Ikhwaan	9	0.5
Ibadi	1	0.1
'Idiosyncratic or Modernist'	4	0.2
Unaffiliated Sunni	4	0.2
Shia (Twelver etc)	59	3.1
Shia (Ismaili)	45	2.3
Shia (Bohra)	9	0.5
Non-denominational prayer rooms, etc	144	7.4
Non-Muslim, Qadiani	25	1.3

Deobandi: An ultraconservative movement established in India in 1867 following the Indian Mutiny, dedicated to purging un-Islamic influences from the lives of its followers.

Barelvi: An uncompromising movement drawing on Sufi devotional practices, especially fierce in reaction to criticism of Islam/Mohammed.

Salafism: An ultraconservative movement commonly called **Wahhabism** after its founder Mohammed ibn Abd al-Wahhab, 1703-92) originating in Arabia in the seventeenth century seeking to emulate the *salaf* – the first three generations of followers of Mohammed. This is highly influential in the Gulf region, especially Saudi Arabia.

The movement founded by Abul A'la Maududi (1903-79) pursuing a literal and political application of the Quran, prominent in campaigning for the establishment of Pakistan as a Muslim state.

The Society of Muslim Brothers (commonly known as **the Muslim Brotherhood**) was founded in Egypt 1928 and is dedicated to promoting the application of sharia law through political means. It is proscribed in Russia and several Arab states.

Qadiani (commonly called the **Ahmadiyya** movement after its founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, 1835-1908, who declared himself to be both the Mahdi predicted by Islam and the biblical Messiah) is conspicuous in seeking a peaceful interpretation of the Quran. However the Ahmadiyya community is rejected as non-Muslim by virtually all mainstream Islamic movements.

47. Commentators commonly use the qualifiers '*fundamentalist*' or '*radical*' in relation to Muslims to indicate an ultra-conservative/literalist approach to the Quran. It is suggested that neither term is appropriate for the phenomenon being described.

'Fundamentalist' is a term borrowed from Christianity (where it makes sense to characterise some Christians by their belief that the Bible is inerrant since traditional established churches do not make this claim). However, since the essence of Islam is the belief that the Quran is the verbatim and final instruction from God which may not be challenged or disappplied by human will, Islam is an inherently fundamentalist belief system, and all Muslims, even as they may differ in their interpretations of what the Quran says, are in their own way fundamentalists.

For the same reason the notion of a '**radical**' Muslim – implying one who has departed from an established way of thinking by the creation of a new doctrine – is, in relation to Islam, self-contradictory.

It is suggested that the more apposite term to borrow from Christianity is '**puritan**', indicating a person with an uncompromising zeal to purge from the practise of faith, if not everyday life, any activity that might distract one from the single-minded pursuit of a conservative religious tradition.

Adopting this term it will be seen from the table above that 1498 of 1759 mosques (excluding non-denominational prayer rooms and the Ahmadiyya movement) are operated by or in doctrinal accord with one or another Islamic puritan movement.

Segregation

48. In December 2016 the Government published the **Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration** chaired by Dame Louise Casey, DBE, CB. This report expressed grave concerns at the isolated nature of some Islamic communities in the UK (mainly England).

“People of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicity tend to live in more residentially segregated communities than other ethnic minority groups ... Blackburn, Birmingham, Burnley and Bradford all include wards with between 70 and 85% Muslim populations...”⁵

In one passage that was widely reported at the time of the report’s publication, Dame Casey wrote:

“Taken together, high ethnic minority concentration in residential areas and in schools increases the likelihood of children growing up without meeting or better understanding people from different backgrounds. One striking illustration of such segregation came from a non-faith state secondary school we visited where, in a survey they had conducted, pupils believed the population of Britain to be between 50% and 90% Asian, such had been their experience up to that point.”⁶

49. The report suggested the following factors contributing to Muslim segregation:

1. Transnational and consanguineous marriages

Dame Louise Casey draws attention to the high incidence of transnational marriages within the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (ie British-Pakistani and British-Bangladeshi men and women marrying people from Pakistan and Bangladesh). The report states that:

*“Rates of integration in some communities have been undermined by high levels of transnational marriages – with subsequent generations being joined by a foreign-born partner creating a **‘first generation in every generation’** phenomenon in which every new generation grows up with a foreign-born parent. This seems particularly prevalent in south Asian communities. We were told on a visit to one northern town that all except one of the Asian councillors had married a wife from Pakistan. And in a cohort study at the Bradford Royal Infirmary 80% of babies of Pakistani ethnicity had at least one parent born outside the UK.”⁷*

This phenomenon of transnational marriages is not merely a matter of Britons from South Asians having a preference for spouses from their ancestral culture, but is closely connected with a factor that the Casey review does not explicitly recognise, the high incidence of consanguineous marriages in the British-South Asian community.

⁵ 1.30

⁶ 1.37

⁷ 1.21

In ***On British Islam: Religion, Law and Everyday Practice in Shari'a Councils*** (2018) John R Bowen tracks the immigration pathways of the various Muslim communities to Britain. He addresses the '*first generation in every generation*' phenomenon referred to in the Casey report from the perspective of these family bonds.

"Most immigrant populations adapt to host country demographic patterns ... But for there to be clear 'generations' there must be a process of settlement and local marriage. Immigrants marry others who have also settled in the host country, and when the children of all those 'first generation' immigrants marry, they marry either each other or native women and men who are not of the same immigration origin, which creates a 'second generation'.

Such has not been the case for British Pakistanis. On three dimensions British Pakistanis continue to marry close, both in the family and across continents.

First British Muslims generally have been overwhelmingly marrying their co-ethnics. Surveys taken in 1997 -2002 found that 98% of Bangladeshi women 94% of Pakistani women and 92% of Indian women married co-ethnics.

Second British Pakistani Muslims prefer to marry 'close' in two senses: more than one half marry first cousins, and most Mirpuri Muslims (the majority of British Pakistanis) marry someone from the same village.

Finally, observers place the rate of transcontinental marriage at 57-69% and they find that these percentages have remained stable in recent decades".⁸

In 2010 a *Dispatches* documentary '***When cousins marry***' estimated that 75% of British Pakistanis married a relative. Bowen cites research into British-Pakistanis in Oxford placing the figure at 87% with 59% of marriages between first cousins. A research project, ***Born in Bradford***,⁹ reporting in 2013, found that over a four year period 37% of all Pakistani-heritage children born in Bradford hospitals had been born to parents who were first cousins. Whatever the actual rate of close-cousin and first cousin marriages, they are clearly exceptionally high.

Bowen offers the views that the rate of close-cousin marriages is not merely higher in the UK than in Pakistan (where he estimates they constitute 36-50% of marriages) but that this rate is actually increasing as immigration to the UK through other means than marriage is becoming more difficult.

⁸ Page 19

⁹ Sheridan, E., Wright, J., Small, N., Corry, P. C., Oddie, S., Whibley, C., et al. (2013). Risk factors for congenital anomaly in a multi-ethnic birth cohort: an analysis of the Born in Bradford study. *The Lancet*, 382(9901), 1350-1359.

The result, he reports, is the ‘narrow banding’ of Muslim communities in the UK as neighbourhoods develop in which residents share extraordinarily close bonds of kinship, within a ‘patchwork of communities’ replicating social networks from South Asia: Mirpur in the northern mill towns, Attock in Bradford and Birmingham, Jelum in Waltham Forest, Gujarati East Africa in Leicester and Sylhet, now in Bangladesh, in East London.

Consanguineous marriages have obvious important public health implications. They also manifest a deliberate collective approach within Britain’s most populous Muslim subset to exclude meaningful integration with the wider British community - or even with their coreligionists from other cultures – and instead to nurture an entirely closed and conservative inward-looking society.

Two further factors that the Casey Report identify as contributing to Muslim segregation are:

2. Parallel legal systems

“We heard about discriminatory practices against women which in some cases are causing serious harm. Some women’s rights groups have accused Sharia Councils and other parallel legal systems of denying vulnerable women and children access to equality and human rights. There have been claims that some Sharia Councils have been supporting the values of extremists condoning wife beating, ignoring marital rape and allowing forced marriage.”¹⁰

3. Inequality and division linked to ‘regressive religious and cultural ideologies’

“Concerns raised with us throughout our engagement suggest that inequalities and divisions are persisting. And they appear to be worsening in some more isolated communities where segregation, deprivation and social exclusion are combining in a downward spiral with a growth in regressive religious and cultural ideologies”¹¹

¹⁰ 8.40

¹¹ 1.61. It is also worth noting Dame Casey’s scathing comments concerning interfaith dialogue:

10.9: ‘Concerns were also expressed to the review team that much of the work avoided addressing the more challenging integration issues. It was put to us that some of the interfaith work not only avoided the difficult conversations that were needed but had also provided an unchallenged platform or legitimacy to those whose views and values actually undermined cohesion. We were told that the strong desire of some in the inter-faith community to be inclusive had left some initiatives feeling soft in their impact: “like preaching to the converted” and a “coalition of the willing”. It was said that they had been unable to reach more troublesome ends of different faiths and seemed unwilling to challenge regressive and intolerant practices’.

50. Inevitably, this process of segregation has an impact on education, undermining one of the key elements to creating a more cohesive society in the future. In her **2016-17 Ofsted Annual Report** Amanda Spielman, the Chief Inspector of Ofsted, warned:

“A core function of education is to pass on what one generation knows to the next. Part and parcel of this is spreading the values and culture that bind us as a society. There is no tension between this and religious pluralism. In fact, any proper teaching of fundamental British values encourages respect and tolerance for others’ views. In the overwhelming majority of state-funded schools, whether faith or not, these values are embedded in the school’s ethos and teaching.

However, there are also those who seek to isolate young people from the mainstream, do not prepare them for life in Britain or, worse, actively undermine fundamental British values. Within state education, there are schools spreading beliefs that are widely shared within the community that the school serves but that clash with British values or equalities law The fact that this reflects a cultural norm in that community does not mean that children can be disadvantaged in their education...

In even more extreme cases, children are being educated illegally in unregistered settings. This means that there are no safeguards in place to make sure children are either safe or receiving a decent education... [Some] settings are deliberately left unregistered to avoid regulations on the quality of education young people should receive. From conversations with former pupils of unregistered faith settings, we have learned that the curriculum can be very restricted. They can leave education with limited, if any, ability to read and write in English, no qualifications and no skills to get work. Clearly, this leaves children unprepared for life in modern Britain and means we have no way of knowing whether they are being taught to respect fundamental British values. Current legislation is inadequate to tackle unregistered schools...

Tensions between belief systems and British values create a motivation for some communities to try avoiding the educational and safeguarding standards that are expected of schools. While this manifests itself in different ways, the root cause is the same. This matters, because the British values of democracy, tolerance, individual liberty, mutual respect and the rule of law are the principles that keep society free from the radical and extreme views that can often lead to violence.”

Attitudes

51. Five surveys of British Muslims have been conducted in recent years to elicit their attitudes and values.

January February 2015 ComRes/R4 Today

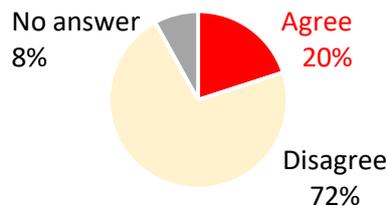
In late January/early February 2015, shortly following the attacks on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices in Paris (7 January), a ComRes poll of 1000 British Muslims was carried out for Radio 4's *Today* programme.

On general matters, 85% of respondents stated that they felt a sense of loyalty to the UK with only 6% stating that they felt a disloyalty to the UK.

However, more worryingly, when presented with the statement:

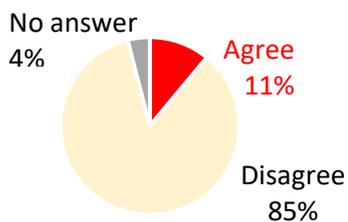
'Western society can never be compatible with Islam'

the response was:

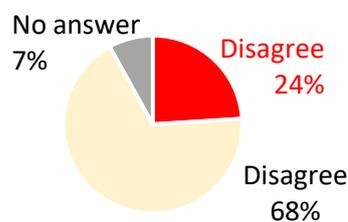


On the specific issue of the Charlie Hebdo attacks 78% of respondents subscribed to the statement that they found cartoon depictions of Mohammed *'deeply offensive personally'*, and the sample gave the following responses to specific statements.

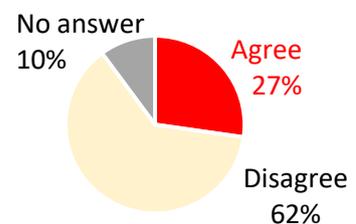
'Organisations which publish images of the prophet Mohammed deserve to be attacked.'



'Acts of violence against those who publish images of the Prophet Mohammed can never be justified.'

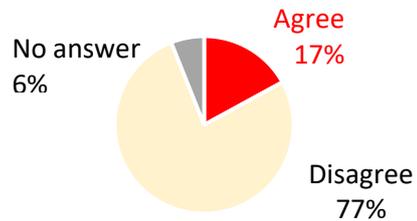


'I have some sympathy for the motives of the behind the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris.'

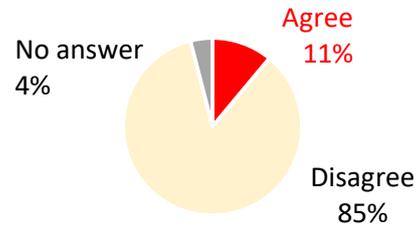


The following responses to statements also indicate an isolationist Islam-centred outlook.

'It is appropriate that Muslims who convert to other religions are cut off by their family.'



'I feel sympathetic to Muslims who want to fight against western interests.'

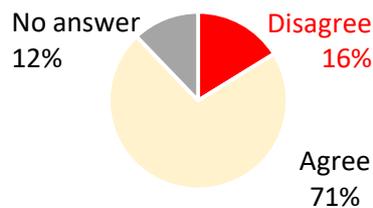


March and November 2015 Survation/Sky News/the Sun

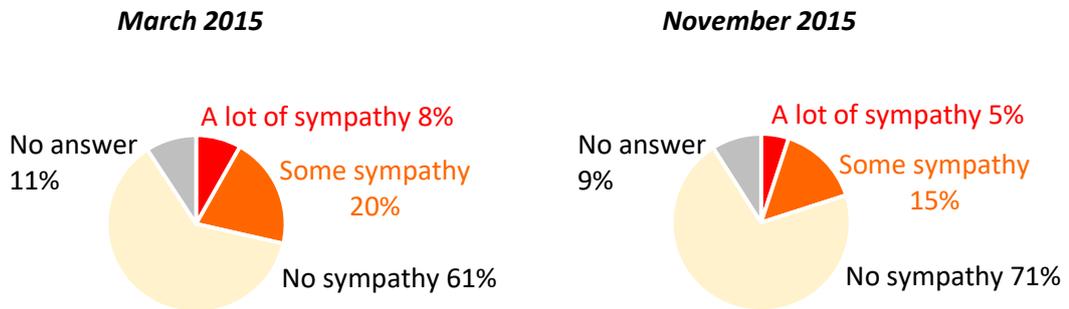
One month after the ComRes/Radio 4 poll and then again in November 2015 Survation conducted telephone polls of a thousand British Muslims for Sky News (in March) and *The Sun* (in November)

In March respondents were asked to respond to a similar statement to one of the ComRes questions concerning the compatibility of Islam and Western/British society, and gave a broadly similar response.

'Generally speaking the values of British society are compatible with the values of Islam'.



The surveys both also asked respondents to indicate whether they had 'a lot of sympathy, some sympathy or no sympathy for young Muslims who leave the UK to join fighters in Syria'



The Sun was heavily criticised, including by Survation itself, for publishing the later figures under the headline '1 in 5 British Muslims' Sympathy for Jihadis'. The headline was criticised for presenting 'sympathy' as synonymous with support, and 'fighting in Syria' as synonymous with jihad. It was pointed out by commentators that the Syrian civil war was complex with not all factions identifying as jihadist. Technically 'young Muslims leaving the UK to join fighters in Syria' was broad enough to include Muslim aircrew serving with the RAF.

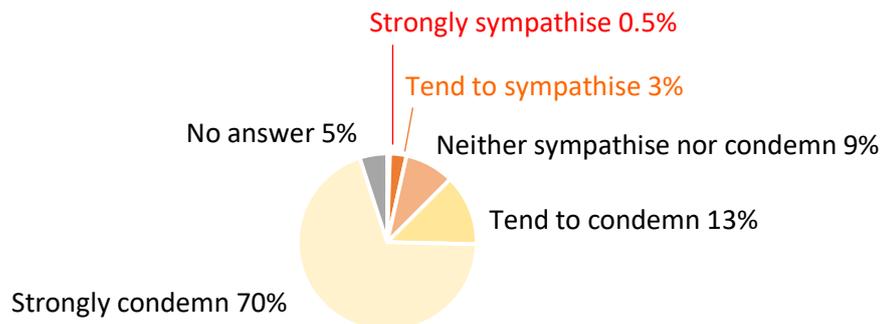
It is accepted that these criticisms have some validity. However, it must also be accepted that most Muslims respondents asked such the question would have had a fair idea as to the values that the questioner was driving at, and how their answers would inevitably be interpreted.

April 2016 ICM/Channel 4 'What British Muslims Really think'

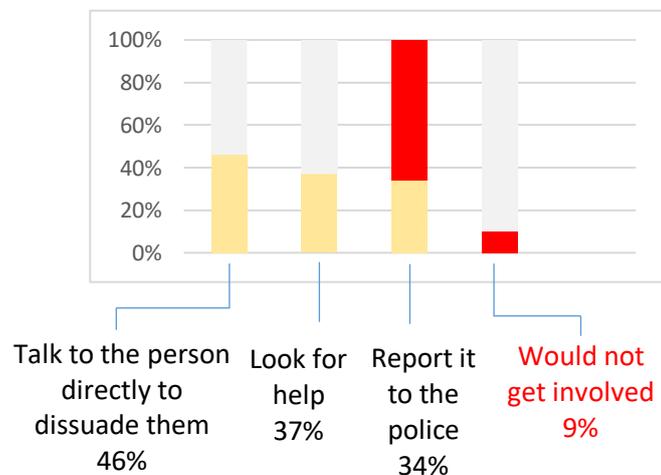
In April 2016 (shortly following the Brussels terror attacks in March 2016 - which had been carried out by members of the same cell that had carried out the Paris terror attacks of November 2015) ICM carried out a thousand face-to-face in-home interviews of British Muslims, living in areas with a >20% Muslim population. The data was interpreted and presented by Trevor Philips, former chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, in a Channel 4 documentary *What British Muslims Really Think*.

On issues of political violence the findings seemed to indicate that whilst respondents did not sympathise with terrorism in general, two thirds of Muslims questioned would not commit to reporting members of their own community who were getting involved with Syrian terrorism to the police and respondents seemed to make an exception to their general disapproval of violence when it came to attacks on those who had insulted Mohammed.

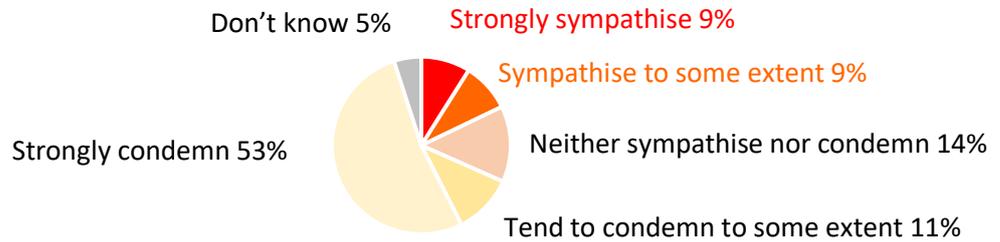
- *To what extent do you sympathise or condemn with people who commit terrorist acts as a form of political protest?*



- *'If you thought that someone who is close to you was getting involved with people who support terrorism in Syria, would you... (excluding don't knows)*



- Please tell me whether you sympathise or condemn people who take part in violence against those who mock the Prophet:



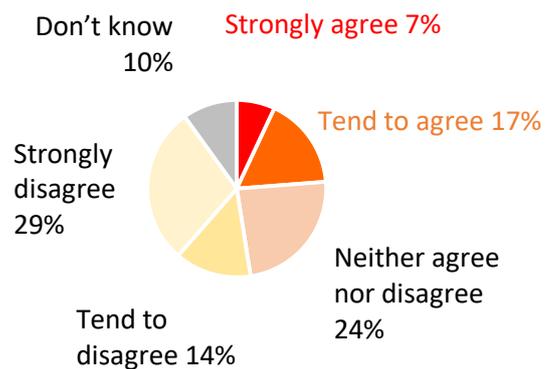
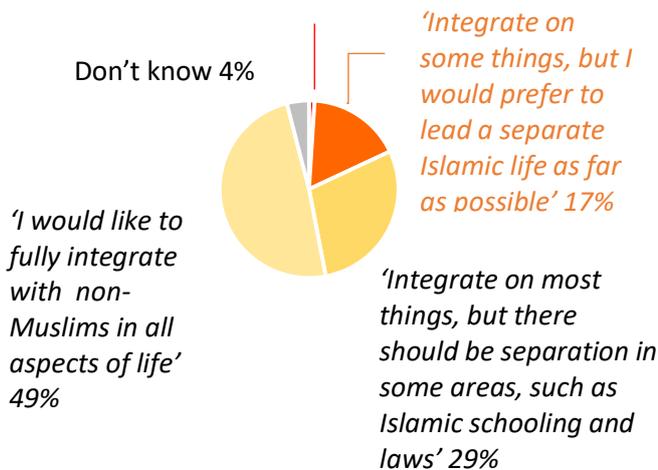
(Aggregate refusal to condemn attacks on those mocking Mohammed: 32%)

On broader Sharia values a worrying 24% would support the application of Sharia law instead of British law in some areas of the UK – and only 29 who would strongly disagree to such a division. 18% expressed a preference for living as separate Islamic life as far as possible.

If you had the choice, which one of the following would you consider to be the ideal way for you to lead your life in Britain today?

'To what extent, if at all, would you support or oppose there being areas of Britain in which Sharia law is introduced instead of British law?'

'I would like to live in a fully separate Islamic area in Britain, subject to Sharia Law and government' 1%



Answer to more specific Sharia-related questions were surprisingly enthusiastic:

52% thought that homosexuality should be illegal (of these 38% said that they strongly held this opinion);

31% thought it acceptable for a British Muslim to have more than one wife;

39% thought wives should always obey their husbands (15% strongly);

64% thought Muslim girls should be allowed to wear niqabs in school (40% strongly)

5% sympathised (2% completely, 3% 'to some extent') with stoning adulterers

78% thought it should be illegal to publish pictures 'making fun of the Prophet'.

December 2016 Policy Exchange ‘Unsettled belongings’

The fullest survey to date of British Muslim opinions, based upon over three thousand interviews representing a cross section of Muslims, was produced in the report *Unsettled Belonging: A Survey of Britain’s Muslim Communities* (December 2016) by Policy Exchange.

The conclusions of this survey, as reported by the Policy exchange, are:

- Muslims could not be said to be represented by Muslim-specific organisations such as the Muslim Council of Britain. Only 20% stated that they wished such organisations to act as a conduit for their views and within that subset there was no consensus as to which organisation might speak for them, with (excluding the 24% ‘Don’t knows’) the highest support for any one organisation being 13% for the Islamic Foundation. However, in answer to a different question, 54% of the total sample stated that they wished Muslim organisations to present an Islamic view on social and moral issues. The report authors offer the interpretation that most Muslims see such voices as ‘*background noise*’ rather representative of their views.
- When asked ‘*whether they would support the introduction of Sharia Law – broadly defined, to include civil law on questions of financial disputes*’ 43% said they supported this proposition, whereas 22% opposed it. However the report writers noted ‘*This surprisingly hard-line response became less well defined when respondents were asked specific questions concerning their support for Islamic banking, faith education etc*’.

The authors’ interpretation of this discrepancy was:

“... It is possible to identify a gap between an issue as seen in the abstract and the way it is viewed at a more tangible, practical level. ‘Sharia law’ as a concept considered in general terms, is one that many Muslims are not willing to reject, and significant numbers state a Panglossian preference for it: it is something that they might like in the best of all possible worlds. However, in their day-to-day lives, this is not an issue that drives many Muslims in the UK. The practical problems that surround Sharia ensure that many show little interest in those Sharia-compliant measures that do exist. In this context, expressing support for Sharia is a way of saying something about one’s identity and religion, rather than voicing a commitment to a specific policy and legal objective.”

52. It is suggested that this conclusion is broadly correct and reflects all the earlier polls referred to above. It seems entirely consistent with the generally peaceful and law-abiding behaviour of British Muslims that the vast majority see Islam as an expression of their cultural identity and a vehicle for their private and public spiritual practices, but do not seek to rigidly follow it, without question or scruple, in its full austere form as preached and practiced by Mohammed. Comparable claims could probably be made for the adherents of any religion in the modern secular age.

Indeed, the efforts that many Muslims go to in order to persuade others that Islam teaches peaceful tolerance is itself evidence of a significant disconnect between the true values held by most Muslims and the scriptures from which they claim to derive them.

Progressive or Liberal movements in British Islam (or lack thereof)

53. As demonstrated in *What is Islam, Undisputed facts and Irrefutable Reason* published elsewhere on the IRG site, the values of liberalism and tolerance are the antithesis of the unambiguously violent and intolerant instructions contained in the text of the Quran as it was practised and preached by Mohammed. Nevertheless, some have suggested that within Europe's liberal secular milieu, Islam may undergo a reform movement that would lead to it becoming more liberal and tolerant.¹²

Logically this may occur through:

- an acceptance by Islamic movements that individuals have the right to independently interpret the message of the Quran, in ways that diverge from classical Islamic theology and jurisprudence (a principle with some basis in early Islamic philosophy);
- either the abandonment of the principle that the words and deeds of Mohammed provide a moral exemplar that all Muslims are bound to emulate, or a rejection of the historical accounts of Mohammed's life as being inherently unreliable;
- a search, consciously guided by modern notions of morality, to discover an inner meaning of tolerance and compassion beneath the specifics of the Qurans texts (such as, one might argue, Christianity adopts for some passages of the Old Testament).

The author is aware of no sign that such a movement is underway in the British Islamic institutions.

Only a handful of very small pressure groups that could possibly be presented as attempting to reform Islam in a more secular liberal direction. These include:

British Muslims for Secular Democracy (BMSD)

A small campaigning group, established in 2006 by Nasreen Rehman and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, and relaunched in February 2018.

BMSD's asserted aims are to:

“Raise awareness within British Muslims and the wider public, of democracy particularly ‘secular democracy’ helping to contribute to a shared vision of citizenship (the separation of faith and state, so faiths exert no undue influence on policies and there is a shared public space.)

¹² Eg *The Right Time for An Islamic Reformation*, Salman Rushdie, Washington Post 7.8.2005; *We Need a Muslim Reformation*, Naser Khader, Newsweek 26.3.2015; *Give Us Time, This is Islam's Reformation*, Usama Hasan, The Times 18.11.2015; *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Harper (2015).

Encourage religious understanding and harmony, respect for different systems of beliefs, and encourage an understanding and celebration of the variety of Muslim cultures, values and traditions which are present in British society."

BMSD proposes to work towards these aims through 'facilitating discourse', 'challenging Islamophobia', 'opposing radicalism and intolerant beliefs' 'identifying the causes of deprivation and social exclusion' and 'showcasing muslim history, culture etc'.

Its self-description website explicitly states that it:

"is not a theological group but one that advocates civic engagement and good citizenship. We are not concerned with judging or being judged on the basis of religious practice. If you call yourself a 'Muslim', you are most welcome to be a part of our movement.

As such, the BMSD appears focussed on promoting greater tolerance by Muslims and greater tolerance of Islam by non-Muslims, through appeals to harmony and mutual respect. It's website offers no indication that the organisation might be a vehicle for challenging Muslims' understanding of the beliefs and practices of Islam.

Quilliam

Quilliam is a think tank and lobby group established in 2008 to challenge Islamism - which it defines as 'political Islam' - and to "develop a western Islam that is at home in Britain and Europe."

Quilliam has produced a significant number of publications in relation to the former aim, focussing on practical measures to avoid people being drawn into extremism, promoting the peaceful practise of Islam within a secular legal frame of reference; and arguing for Muslims to respect the freedom and rights of non-Muslims. It has historical links with the government's anti-extremism 'Prevent' strategy and was for a time publicly funded.

However, the group steers clear from directly engaging with the text of the Quran or the historical accounts of Mohammed's life, and has not proposed a theological or historical basis to challenge or reject the specific instructions in Islam's foundational texts. Its most prominent member, Maajid Nawaz, wrote in *Islam and the Future of Tolerance* (2015):

"My honest view is that Islam is not a religion of war or of peace – it's a religion. Its sacred scripture, like those of other religions, contains passages that many people would consider extremely problematic. Likewise all scriptures contain passages that are innocuous. Religion does not inherently speak for itself; no scripture, no book, no piece of writing has its own voice. I subscribe to this view whether I'm interpreting Shakespeare or interpreting religious scripture."

It is suggested that whilst this approach to Islamic scripture may appeal to those who are anxious to neatly sidestep those 'problematic' passages in the interests of social harmony, it seems unlikely to challenge the beliefs of those who genuinely believe that the Quran was God's instruction for His people to follow.

Inspire

Inspire, a group focussing on women's rights in Islam, was founded by Sara Khan, also in 2008, and like Quilliam is closely linked with forming the Prevent strategy. In January 2018 Khan was appointed Lead Commissioner for the Home Office's Commission for Countering Extremism. The last update on its website was her farewell blog in February 2018 and it is unclear whether the organisation it is still active.

The **Inclusive Mosque Initiative** seeks to improve inclusivity of Mosques including disabled access and equal space for women. Although it engages in initiatives that are liberal in nature – for example setting up 'pop-up' prayer spaces linked with inter faith initiatives - it makes no effort to challenge traditional understandings of Islam and seems to have made little inroads into conventional mosque management.

The German reformer **Seyran Artes** who set up a small liberal mosque in Germany with a mixed gender prayer room and explicitly gay-friendly invitation announced in 2017 plans to establish her second mosque in London, although no further details have been announced since.

In summary there is no sign of the emergence of any prominent Muslim religious organisation or movement advocating a creatively moderate/liberal reading of Islamic scripture and prepared to publicly resile from the classical illiberal understanding of Islam.

An Islamic 'reformation' in the wider world

54. To those who do call for an Islamic 'reformation' one answer that has been given is that Islam is globally currently undergoing something like the Protestant Reformation experienced by Christendom in the sixteenth century. This is characterised, not by a subjugation of religious scriptures to modern notions of secularism and progressive values, but rather by a revived puritan intensity to interpret those scriptures strictly. It may be that, as with the protestant reformation, this increased literalism is spurred on by an increased rate of literacy that has outstripped its supporting culture of academic analysis; and also by a newfound political class awareness.

At the time of writing (Autumn 2018) the global Islam community seems increasingly to be adopting strict interpretations of their faith. A large proportion of Islamic countries are either:

- Ruled by harsh and illiberal regimes applying laws based to some extent upon the Quran (including Bahrain, Brunei, Iran, Kuwait, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mauritius, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, and the Gaza Strip);
- Experiencing profound political instability due to powerful terrorist groups citing the Quran as justification for their actions (including Mali, Libya, Somalia, The Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Pakistan); or
- Ruled by oppressive secular regimes that either justify illiberal policies either by raising the spectre of strict Islamic groups taking power in their place (Egypt) or appeal to their populist agenda (Turkey).

In some countries conservative Islamic communities have been permitted to set up regional legal systems applying Sharia law, such as Northern Nigeria, the Indonesian province of Aceh, the Pashtun-dominated Federally Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan and Mindanao in the Philippines.

Although the political situation in each of the above states involves local complications and power struggles, the result is a great swathe of territory stretching almost uninterrupted from the Atlantic coast of Africa to the Pacific coast of south east Asia in which, apparently genuine attempts to apply the Quran's instructions are resulting in human rights abuses and curtailed freedom on a colossal scale.

Muslims in Britain: A summary

55. The proportion of the British population identifying as Islam is growing rapidly, and the UK will in all likelihood become a Muslim majority country within the lifetime of people alive now.

Whilst many young Muslims no doubt desire to live a liberal western lifestyle and wear their Islam lightly, Muslim communities within the UK:

- are developing high Muslim density enclaves in urban areas that are becoming increasingly segregated from non-Muslim population, many members of which are non-UK born;
- contain a significant minority – typically between 5-20% - that see their adherence to Islam as the identity that defines them, to the exclusion of and in opposition to secular notions of liberal democracy and the rule of law;
- tend to harbour particularly conservative views, some of which are intolerant by modern standards: in particular attitudes to homosexuality and freedom of speech;

and

- respond to any influence seen as critical of Islamic values, in particular disrespect to Mohammed or the Quran, with fierceness, seriously deterring challenge to those views.

Most mosques are operated by adherents of ultraconservative Islamic traditions. There is no sign within Islamic communities of any process of theological questioning that might lead to a more liberal or progressive interpretations of Islam taking root in their institutions.

Far from being anxious to honestly discuss the details of the doctrines of Islam and the life and of Mohammed with a view to adapting Islam to fit in with a tolerant secular liberal democracy, it is suggested that these topics have become an embarrassing, almost painful, taboo, discussion of which by non-Muslims is distinctly unwelcome.

Whilst the proportion of British Muslims who genuinely seek the imposition of shariah law on their own communities may be relatively small, the number who vehemently resist any criticism of the Quran and Mohammed is very much larger. For many, probably the vast majority of British Muslims, the second limb of the *shahada* (the declaration that '*There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his Messenger*') may well be a pious traditional utterance; the full ramifications of which are purposefully not dwelt on too closely. However, by their adoption and fierce defence of it they effectively shield the violently intolerant beliefs of the minority, who follow the Quran as it was practised and preached by Mohammed, from challenge and criticism.

What the future may hold

56. As the number of people in the UK who hold, even nominally, to the values set out in the Quran grow in both absolute and relative terms, and in particular as Muslim majority urban areas become larger and more heavily religiously segregated, it seems inevitable that the resulting Islamic counter culture will render it increasingly remote from national structures of secular authority, especially when that authority runs counter to the Quran's intolerant message.

The British state's weakened authority to govern in Muslim-majority cities is likely to be manifested in at least three ways:

- Those following the instructions of the Quran in ways that are illegal under British law (including violence to non-Muslims, women and homosexuals) are likely proliferate, protected and encouraged by the tacit acquiescence of the wider Muslim community. Any sectarian counter culture will tend to nurture criminality, but within Muslim communities this phenomenon is likely to be exacerbated by the belief that certain criminal acts are divine sanctioned and the fact that any robust and principled criticism of the underlying values by non-Muslims will itself be seen as antagonistic by the surrounding Muslim community.

It will be remembered that Mohammed established the early Muslim community by robbery, enslavement and intimidation by violence, including sexual slavery in opposition to existing power structures. This is the context for which the Quran was written and in which Mohammed acted and there is no reason to doubt that those inspired by his example will seek to do likewise.

One prominent example has already been seen with the discovery of numerous child sexual exploitation gangs operating for long periods in Aylesbury, Bristol, Peterborough, Newcastle, Oxford, Rochdale, Rotherham, Telford and Huddersfield. Very large numbers of almost exclusively non-Muslim girls were sexually exploited by gangs consisting almost exclusively of Muslim men. In Rotherham approximately 1400 girls were groomed over ten years. This behaviour is readily traced to the Quran's endorsement of the marriage of premenarchal girls and its instruction that a Muslim man is entitled to have sex with those whom their right hands possess.

- As Muslim majority towns and cities become ever more segregated from the wider community, Islamic religious leaders are more likely to find congregations increasingly receptive to the values of the Quran given its original meaning. Islamic mores, including dress and gender segregation, will increasingly 'normalise' the enforcement of the Quran's instructions isolated from the wider society's defence of individual freedom and tolerance under the law.

It seems more than likely that:

- sermons by 'puritan' religious leaders will come to wield greater influence over local Muslim communities than they do at present;
- social pressure to submit disputes to the rulings of Islamic arbitration tribunals, currently operating throughout the UK on a voluntary basis, will

increase until they become effectively unavoidable within the Muslim communities in which they operate, establishing a parallel legal system of shariah law; and

- organisations will form around imams and mosques that will increasingly accrue power coming to form an alternative power structure to local government. Given the Quran's instructions to wage war on unbelievers *'until there is no more fitna and all is for Allah'* these are likely to create a hostile environment for those people that Muslims are instructed to treat as corrupting influences: such as the adherents of non-Muslim faiths, homosexuals, those wearing immodest dress; or commercial manifestations of what they may see as western decadence such as bars or some shops.
- Inevitably given the UK's democratic political system, local authorities and police authorities that are elected by constituencies that are overwhelmingly or exclusively Muslim will come to reflect Islamic values in their exercise of public power. It hardly seems speculative to predict that from time to time Muslim politicians will seek to garner votes by promoting their Islamic credentials and promising policies that are endorsed by the Quran.

Over time it is likely that local bylaws and the provision of local services will come to focus on discouraging 'un-Islamic' behaviour such as immodest dress, the sale of haram food and drink including alcohol, the free mixing of men and women, homosexuality and alternative lifestyles, walking of dogs, and so on. Inevitably, bylaws so framed would be enforced by uniformed council officers who are themselves Muslim and supported by the police who are accountable to locally elected police authorities, effectively creating shariah patrols within the British legal system.

Such trends will have the effect of making life difficult, possibly intolerable, for non-Muslims seeking to live a liberal western lifestyle within Muslim majority areas. In December 2016, *France24* broadcast a *Focus* documentary addressing the phenomenon of streets and cafes in a Muslim majority district of Paris in which women were completely absent from the public space. The item went on to interview a white French woman about her life in a Muslim majority district in Lyon. She said:

"We wear dark clothes, trousers, no skirts or obvious make-up. Lipstick is obviously out of the question. We erase ourselves, try to be the most discreet possible.

[The interviewer asked why]

Why? Because we are scared. Simple as that."

Under such conditions, areas are likely to turn rapidly from being Muslim majority to almost exclusively Muslim. Indeed, it is all too easy to envisage Muslim gangs motivated by religion, psychopathy or by the consolidation of alternative power structures, specifically engaging in the confessional 'cleansing' of areas of non-Muslims.

A Conflict Scenario

Given this process the time must surely come, possibly as early as in two or three decades time, when a Muslim town or city will be brought into conflict with the national government.

One possible scenario is here suggested:

- A local authority in one or more Muslim area uses its public power that is fundamentally irreconcilable with the common law and/or human rights. The government suspends the local authority/authorities concerned.
- However, faced with mass protests, exacerbated by acts of terrorism and/or communal violence unprecedented in the UK, the government finds itself unable to reimpose the rule of law by unarmed police alone and is forced to deploy the armed forces.
- The situation deteriorates into a full scale urban insurgency aimed at establishing one or more Sharia autonomous areas if not fully independent Islamic states within the British Isles.
- The government is inhibited from taking robust measures against Muslim majority urban centres by the fact that the national Muslim population renders many MPs in the House of Commons dependent on Muslim voters. Members of the cabinet resign provoking a political crisis. Some MPs, sensing an opportunity, even join the insurgency.
- No doubt such events would be accompanied by a severe economic crisis and possibly the widespread breakdown of law and order
- The country is faced with the prospect of a war of partition.

Conclusion and comment

57. Logic and experience offer no reason to believe that trends towards the implementation of Sharia already seen with such dreadful consequences in North Africa, the Middle East and further afield will not replicate themselves in increasingly segregated Muslim communities in the British Isles. The White Cliffs of Dover contains no filter that removes regressive and violently intolerant views when individuals immigrate into the UK; nor does it change the meaning of intolerant passages from the Quran and hadith literature; nor insulate us from cultural trends occurring elsewhere.

It is sadly self-evident from recent history that once the *shahada* has been proclaimed as a principle for organising society, the desire by peace loving individuals and communities to avoid its logical consequences offers little or no protection against zealots who apply it as it is written in the Quran and practised and preached by Mohammed. Those whose preference is for a comfortably moderate interpretation of Islam, barely applied to them except on their own terms, are around the world finding themselves unable to prevail over those who, whether for devout or self-serving purposes, strive to apply traditional, militant interpretations with puritan zeal. By this time-honoured confession of faith, however lightly it was intended, the former concede to the latter the moral legitimacy for intolerant, often brutal, actions; and condemn their own voices of moderation to be dealt with as apostasy and blasphemy.