Community Tensions, Hindutva, and Islamophobia

Leicester City: A Case Study

● ● ●

August 2025

About the Authors

The UK Indian Muslim Council (UK-IMC)

The United Kingdom-Indian Muslim Council (UK-IMC) is an advocacy organisation established in 2022 to engage with civil society and interfaith groups, government bodies and law enforcement agencies and facilitate meaningful dialogue on behalf of Indian Muslims; those residing in the UK, and in India.

The UK-IMC strives to empower and celebrate the contribution of British Muslims of Indian heritage, with a vision of mobilising stakeholders in the UK to advocate for the betterment of rights of Indian Muslims and other minorities in the UK and in India; and strives for the empowerment of Indian Muslims and other marginalised groups, thus promoting justice and equality for all.

Since its inception the UK-IMC has focussed its efforts around four key priority areas:

- Political lobbying,

- Research and documentation,

- Awareness campaigns,

- And stakeholder engagement.

In doing so, The UK-IMC seeks to effectively address the threats posed by forces of hate and divisiveness to our social cohesion and multicultural ethos, while ensuring that the voice of Indian Muslims in the UK is heard.

Community Policy Forum

Community Policy Forum is a non-profit independent think-tank seeking to promote a human rights-centred policy landscape that is evidence-driven and community-rooted in its approach to structural inequalities facing Muslim communities in the UK.

Our mission is to address the structural inequalities facing Muslim communities in the UK by:

- Scrutinising legislation and affecting policy change through political advocacy at both domestic and international levels.

- Connecting policymakers to evidence-based research and ensuring that academic research has social impact.

- Empowering Muslim organisations to directly engage with policymaking and ensuring that policy development is informed by the diverse lived experiences of Muslim communities.

Table of Contents

Foreword

By Professor S. Sayyid
University of Leeds

From placing newspaper advertisements aimed at discouraging migration from Uganda to its emergence as Britain's first hyper-diverse city, Leicester serves as a valuable barometer of the postcolonial transformations that have reshaped British society since 1945. The story of Leicester demonstrates that the ideals of tolerance, comfort with difference, and the celebration of diversity are not innate qualities of individuals, cultures, or societies. Instead, they are the hard-won fruits of tireless and often thankless labour by individuals and communities collaborating for a better future. The multicultural Leicester we celebrate today stands as a powerful testament to the campaigns and mobilisations of the past. Campaigns that recognised that anti-racism is not merely a slogan but a necessity for building a just society.

In 2022, the vision of Leicester as a paradigmatic multicultural city was endangered by the outbreak of disturbances involving two of its largest religiously marked communities: Muslims and Hindus. The shock of the Leicester riots was that this confrontation occurred between communities that had, for decades, cooperated and collaborated in opposing racism, jostling together and contributing to the creation of a distinct BrAsian presence.* While there have been other instances of conflict between segments of Britain's religiously/ racially

> **[This] report's methodology and orientation reflect a vital principle of restorative justice: the necessity of centring the voices of those most affected... The testimonies that this report has helped to gather provide one example of one way of pushing back on Islamophobia. Let the victims of Islamophobia, not Islamophobes, hold the stage.**

*See Sayyid (2006: 5–7) for a discussion of the concept of BrAsian, which refers to the formation of a new identity that cannot be reduced to its British or Asian constituent parts. This appears in: Sayyid, S. (2006) "Introduction, BrAsians, Postcolonial People, Ironic Citizens in A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain, edited by Ali, N., Kalra, V. and Sayyid, S. London: Hurst.

marked minorities (e.g. Birmingham, 2005), these are rare events. It would, however, be irresponsible to dismiss the events of late August 2022 as a freak occurrence without any long-term effects or lessons to be learnt.

The rarity and sustained nature of the 2022 Leicester disturbances make them particularly jarring and require explanation, rather than hasty dismissal as a continuation of the Muslim-Hindu conflict going back to the 8th century. For what is at stake is not only that the riots threatened to undermine the achievements of Leicester as a beacon of hyper-diverse conviviality, but the riots also risked seemingly confirming the old racist canard that multiculturalism was a failed experiment that produced communal tensions rather than social cohesion. Understanding what happened in Leicester has national significance because, without this understanding, we risk such disturbances repeating themselves, and undermining the multicultural settlement that continues to characterise contemporary Britain.

Riots are rarely products of spontaneous combustion, as has been well established in the academic and policy practitioner literature. Sparks require a powder keg to become an explosion. The merit of this report lies in its rejection of monocausal or culturalist explanations and its documentation of the complex interplay of factors, including the simmering tensions that have been allowed to fester and produce the conditions for the riots.

Reading this rich, meticulous, and compelling report prompts reflection on three central observations, each of which speaks not only to the specific context of the Leicester riots but also to wider political and social currents shaping Britain. First, the report's methodology and orientation reflect a vital principle of restorative justice: the necessity of centring the voices of those most affected. By conducting a wide-ranging qualitative survey with nearly 500 participants, the report not only generates insights into the events of late August 2022, what led up to them, but also by allowing them its participants to voice their experiences, helping to undo the various forms of narratives that have sought to obfuscate the riots.

An aspect of Islamophobia is how Muslim voices and concerns are systematically and consistently marginalised, distorted, or dismissed. There is a widespread sense among many Muslim communities that, from Guantánamo to Gaza, their concerns fail to register in the national conversation. Their voices and the voices of their representative bodies are excluded, creating a democratic deficit. Muslim communities too often find that they are being gaslit and their concerns, whether about housing, policing, foreign policy, media, education or civil liberties, do not prompt fruitful national debate. The testimonies that this report has helped to gather provide one example of one way of pushing back on Islamophobia. Let the victims of Islamophobia, not Islamophobes, hold the stage.

Second, it is critical to emphasise that Hindutva is not identical to, but an interpretation of, Hinduism. This is an important distinction which explains why, for so long and contrary to Orientalist (and frankly racist assumptions) Hindus and Muslims were able to live in the same city, sharing the rough and tumble of urban life without disturbances like those that occurred in August 2022. Hindus and

Muslims are not doomed by their history or cultural DNA to live forever in animosity. Because Hindutva is only one interpretation of Hinduism, caution must be exercised when invoking the category of Hinduphobia in its defence. There is a telling disconnect between the resources available to conceptualise Hinduphobia and the poverty of its definition. At present, the use of the term Hinduphobia remains polemical, not analytical.

It is striking, as this report illustrates, how public bodies and figures that have persistently resisted acknowledging the very existence of Islamophobia, (despite over thirty years of sustained academic research, numerous policy reports, and well-documented lived experiences), were remarkably quick to declare that criticism of those responsible for the riots was driven by Hinduphobia. It is not Hinduphobic, nor Islamophobic, nor any other form of racism, to oppose the use of violence to curtail civil rights.

Third, the events in Leicester should be situated within a wider pattern of global Islamophobia. This was not a spontaneous or isolated episode of urban unrest, but rather part of a longer trajectory of targeted racism directed at Muslimness or perceived Muslimness. The Leicester unrest foreshadowed, for instance, the Southport riots of 2024, in which mosques were damaged, individuals considered to be Muslims were assaulted in public spaces, and refugee hostels were torched. These acts of violence sit alongside institutional examples of racism that are directed at Muslimness, such as the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair, where Islamophobic narratives succeeded in producing a moral panic that demonised Muslim educators and parents for trying to make their schools more responsive to the long-neglected needs of their students.* The gamut of global Islamophobia runs from micro-aggressions to genocide, from assaults on persons and property, to structural discrimination in employment, housing, education, healthcare provisions, to state-sponsored intimidation and incarceration, to media gaslighting and online harassment. As several publications have noted, global Islamophobia has local inflections. There is, however, a family resemblance of talking points, policy options, and street provocations that reveal the connected nature of Islamophobic discourse by a veritable **Islamophobia industry**. Islamophobia explains much of the conditions that made the Leicester riots possible.

What makes this report particularly urgent is the way it illustrates the cumulative effects of institutional neglect, political complicity, and ideological hostility. The Leicester events did not occur in a vacuum but in an environment shaped by two decades of policies forged during the global 'war on terror'. Many of these policies continue to shape British society, eroding civil rights and a culture of dissent and democratic accountability. The complicity of local actors, the influence of Hindutva, and the failure of political leadership (both national and local) to act decisively against Islamophobia all contributed to the Leicester unrest.

*A letter (which many argue was forged) triggered a sequence of events that culminated in a moral panic over an alleged plot to Islamise schools in Birmingham (Holmwood and O' Toole, 2018). See Holmwood, J. and O'Toole, T. (2018). *Countering Extremism in British Schools? The Truth about the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair*. Bristol University Press.

In this light, the report is not merely an account of one episode of unrest; it is an anatomy of a wider failure: of politics, of representation, of accountability, and a call not to allow the dismantling of the multicultural settlement that has made cities like Leicester so distinctive. The report's recommendations should not only be read but also implemented. The Leicester riots do not have to be the future, but a reminder that a good society is something we achieve, not just inherit. The Leicester of today, its transformations, its hyper-diversity, is not only something to be celebrated in civic ceremonies and pronouncements; it is also something to be cherished, because it allows us to imagine a better more inclusive and just future.

Executive Summary

## Methodology and Purpose of this Report

This report offers analysis and conclusions drawn from a survey of almost 500 members of Leicester's Muslim community that was conducted by the UKIMC during 2023-2024. The research explores the community's experiences prior to, during, and since the riots, as well as their perceptions regarding its origins, the responsible instigators, responses from the local authorities, and how it was represented in public, political, and media narratives.

Understanding Hindutva

Hindutva is a political ideology that is distinct from Hinduism. It is a form of ethno-nationalism that advocates for Hindu supremacy and frames religious minorities as dangerous and suspect outsiders that can never be fully integrated into Indian society. It centres on:

- **Exclusivist nationalism:** The assertion that India belongs primarily to Hindus, with other religious and cultural groups seen as outsiders or second-class citizens.

- **Homogenisation of diversity:** The aim to subsume India's pluralistic traditions under a singular Hindu identity, erasing regional, linguistic, and religious differences.

- **Antagonism towards minorities:** Especially targeting Muslims and Christians, who are portrayed as threats to the integrity and purity of the Hindu nation.
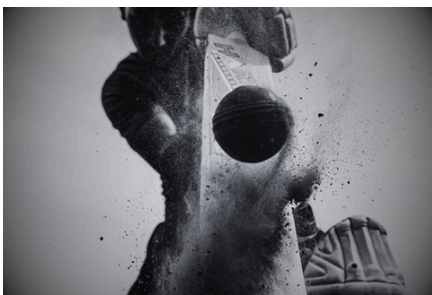
Origins of the Tensions

The violence witnessed in 2022 did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, it was a breaking point in the city's communal dynamics that exposed long-standing tensions. Whilst Leicester has historically been celebrated for its multiculturalism, there was a gradual erosion of these relations in the years preceding the riots. Patterns of anti-social behaviour and divisive provocations, especially during key events, such as cricket matches and religious festivals were repeatedly cited by participants as contributing factors. Within communities, there was a growing sense of grief and loss regarding the damage done to previously harmonious inter-community relationships and Leicester's identity as an inclusive and multicultural city.

Identifying Instigators

Participants went to great lengths to stipulate that the provocations and violence experienced by Leicester's Muslim community should not be attributed to their Hindu counterparts as a whole, but rather to a minority of "*extremists*" adhering to divisive Hindutva ideologies. Many pointed to the importation of these ideologies through immigration, as well as the deliberate mobilisation of adherents from other parts of the UK that came into the city for the purpose of stoking tension and violence.

Respondents were also clear that leaders from both Hindu and Muslim communities now have a responsibility to show true leadership and guidance to anyone seen to be promoting hatred. They highlighted the need to empower, support and train local community leaders, as well as being guarded against providing unchallenged platforms to speakers that preach hatred.

Media and Political Narratives

During and since the disturbances, a Hindutva-driven digital ecosystem, comprising of social media influencers, organisations, bots, and anonymous accounts from both the UK and India, has played a significant role in inflaming tensions and driving Islamophobia.

At the same time, participants felt that political and media framings of the unrest overwhelmingly presented Muslim communities as the aggressors, or else depicted the violence as a clash between two equal sides. These framings were felt to invisibilise the ways in which Muslim communities had been purposefully victimised, targeted, and harassed. This sense of Muslims being unfairly blamed for the violence created a great sense of frustration and abandonment.

Moreover, the former government's track record of addressing Islamophobia and the involvement of figures such as Michael Gove in the planned inquiry gave participants little confidence in the political appetite or ability to treat the unrest in an objective manner.

Key Patterns of Violence, Intimidation, and Anti-Social Behaviour

Survey participants identified patterns of anti-social behaviour, violence, and an undercurrent of growing community hostilities that had been steadily increasing in intensity for several years prior to the outbreak of the riots. Meanwhile, the riots themselves were perceived to be characterised by direct experiences of violence, intimidation, and extreme ethno-religious ideologies in the form of Hindutva-inspired racism and abuse.

In particular, respondents reported patterns of public alcohol consumption, loud music, fireworks, targeted littering, and sexual harassment, as well as targeted physical attacks, arson, and organised marches that were characterised by Hindutva slogans and the weaponisation of nationalist symbols as a tool to threaten, intimidate, and assert dominance over Muslim communities.

Institutional Failures

Participants painted a troubling picture of perceived police bias and complicity, as well as a range of practical barriers to reporting, which has exacerbated community distrust of the authorities during the intense period prior to, during, and since the riots. Due to the widespread and uniform nature of this perception, whether or not the perception of bias is an accurate reflection of reality is less important than addressing this perception amongst Muslim communities. Unless local police forces engage with communities to address concerns about these biases (both real and perceived), they will not be able to overcome barriers to trust that now seem to characterise the relationship between Muslim communities and local law enforcement as a result of the handling of community tensions.
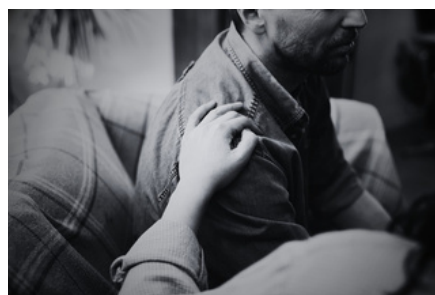
Psychological Impact

The psychological impact of the riots appear to be far-reaching and long-lasting. Respondents relayed feelings of intense anxiety, fear, and lingering depression, as well as grief and confusion in the face of the deterioration of previously warm relationships between Leicester's Muslim and Hindu communities. This is compounded by frustration directed at perceived outsiders who have entered the local area, seemingly with the specific aim to incite tensions.

At the same time, there is a correlation with wider research indicating extensive barriers to Muslim community access to mental health services.

A Roadmap for the Future

This report concludes by offering a roadmap of potential initiatives, policies, and legislative changes to address the causes and impacts of the Leicester riots and prevent similar phenomena from occurring elsewhere across the UK.

While the roadmap itself is detailed and comprehensive, offering almost fourty recommendations, it can be distilled to **Ten Key Policy Pledges:**

The Ten Key Pledges

1. Establish Statutory Funding for Interfaith and Community Dialogue Mechanisms.

Establish local interfaith dialogue forums supported by government funding, with a statutory duty for local authorities to facilitate regular inter-community grievance redressal and reconciliation sessions. Train and accredit community mediators to de-escalate tensions, supported by government grants.

2. Legislate a National Youth Inclusion Strategy.

Establish a National Youth Inclusion Fund to support youth-led initiatives, mentorship, civic education, and cross-community sports and arts programs. Prioritise critical thinking and digital literacy across the national curriculum. Mandate funding for youth civic engagement schemes, especially in areas of high deprivation and tension.

3. Increase Funding to Support Community Infrastructure and Welfare.

Commit to multi-year ring-fenced funding for community centres, youth spaces, language access programs, and economic empowerment projects to support integration, wellbeing, and social inclusion, especially within deprived areas and amongst minoritised communities.

4. Support New Migrants and Refugees in Community Life.

Expand local support and funding for language support, cultural orientation, and community participation pathways for newly arrived immigrants. Establish community engagement benchmarks tied to central government funding that encourage newly arrived people to actively participate in local activities and civic spaces.

5. Reform Policing to Promote Trust, Representation, and Fairness.

Legislate mandatory unconscious bias, Islamophobia awareness, and historical context training for police officers and empower them to recognise instances of nationalist slogans and symbols being used as tools of intimidation. Reassess how resources are allocated during events that may act as potential flashpoints (such as cricket matches) and enforce clear, rights-respecting protocols for public demonstrations to ensure equitable and effective policing. Launch an inquiry into how the riots were organised, including the identity of instigators, the role of social media, and the adequacy of police responses. Reform recruitment policies to increase representation from minoritised backgrounds, and prioritise transparent local community-police liaison panels.

6. Scrap PREVENT and Enact a New Holistic, Rights-Based Approach to Preventing Politically Motivated Violence.

Repeal the PREVENT duty and legislate for a strategy that is rooted in public health, education, and promoting societal wellbeing. Address the systemic causes of radicalisation, including economic deprivation, disempowerment, social exclusion, and the slashing of social services that allows grievances to fester.

7. Recognise and Tackle a Broad Range of Divisive Ideologies within the National Security Strategy.

Amend the focus of counter-extremism efforts to appropriately recognise and address diverse threats, including far-right and Hindutva ideologies. This must include strict due diligence guidelines on the platforming of known hate speakers by elected officials and public bodies. Reform diplomatic policy to ensure human rights conditionality in UK–India relations and address the role of foreign funding in communal conflicts.

8. Enact Legislative Reform to Tackle Islamophobia.

Amend the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 to close threshold disparities and properly capture Islamophobic abuse. Urgently adopt a definition of Islamophobia in statutory guidance and implement robust guidelines across government. Launch an independent inquiry into elected figures who have failed to confront, tacitly endorsed, or actively echoed divisive and hate-filled rhetoric, with a view to adopting a comprehensive strategy to discourage and combat Islamophobic discourse by political figures.

9. Reform Media and Online Regulation to Combat Disinformation and Hate.

Amend the Online Safety Act to limit the definition of "recognised news publisher" to outlets regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System. Prioritise initiatives to increase diversity within newsrooms and reinstate Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 or legislate equivalent protections to uphold independent press regulation.

10. Deliver Intersectional Mental Health and Violence Support.

Remove the UK's reservation of Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention and remove requirements for police forces in England and Wales to share the data of victims experiencing violence with Immigration Enforcement, thereby ensuring protection for migrant women experiencing violence. Increase funding for specialist VAWG services for Muslim, disabled, and racially minoritised women. Mandate cultural competence training for healthcare professionals and expand community-led Muslim mental health initiatives, with NHS-backed funding and academic collaboration.

Wider recommendations offered throughout this report include:

- Establishing regular community dialogue forums where representatives from both communities can discuss grievances, misconceptions, and pathways to reconciliation.

- Creating youth engagement programs, including sports events, leadership training, and educational workshops, to facilitate positive inter-community interactions.

- Organising cross-cultural events to highlight commonalities and encourage mutual respect.

- Establishing community mediation networks and training local leaders to act as mediators in resolving disputes to prevent tensions from escalating.

- Providing community welfare funding and long-term investment in community infrastructure, especially to support community centres and recreational facilities, as well as initiatives that promote economic empowerment, language support, and social inclusion opportunities.

- Supporting Youth Engagement by establishing mentorship programs, projects promoting social media literacy, critical thinking skills, and civic education, positive youth diversion programs, social opportunities, and leisure facilities.

- Supporting recently arrived immigrants by providing opportunities for and encouraging participation in community activities as well as strengthening language support services.

- Enhancing community policing to build long-term trust, facilitate cooperation, and ensure cultural and religious sensitivities are understood.

- Enforcing clear protocols for managing provocative marches to protect human rights to freedom of expression and assembly, while also preventing inflammatory gatherings from infringing upon the non-discrimination rights of others or escalating into violence.

- Instituting officer training that incorporates an understanding of the tensions in their historical and global context, unconscious bias training, and an understanding of how Islamophobia manifests itself across society.

- Addressing structural inequalities across policing through transparent policies, increased representation within the police force, and active engagement with community leaders to ensure policing strategies are fair, effective, and sensitive to the lived experiences of those most affected by discrimination and violence.

- Enforcing robust guidelines for festivities and the regulation of public spaces, especially concerning noise levels, public alcohol consumption, the use of fireworks/crackers and littering in public spaces.

- Scrapping the PREVENT strategy and developing a new approach that includes promoting a holistic societal wellbeing by addressing the root causes of radicalisation, including systematic disempowerment, economic deprivation, and the slashing of social services that allows grievances to fester.

- Recalibrating the focus of counter-extremism efforts to appropriately recognise and address diverse threats, including far-right and Hindutva ideologies.

- Protecting Human Rights in the Global Context through robustly advocating for human rights in international relations, providing platforms for diaspora communities to engage in constructive dialogue, and addressing concerns about foreign funding and political influences in communal conflicts.

- Strengthening the Online Safety Act or introducing new legislation to enhance protections against the spread of disinformation in online spaces and address the lack of regulation governing comments sections on news websites.

- Reforming press regulation, including through amending the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' contained within the Online Safety Act to ensure that it encompasses only those regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System.

- Either reinstating and commencing Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 or implementing an equivalent to safeguard an independent system of press regulation.

- Enhancing religious and cultural literacy in the press and increasing diversity within newsrooms.

- Making amendments to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 to address the threshold disparity contained within the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and explore ways to ensure that the legislation properly captures Islamophobic abuse.

- Ensuring the government robustly rejects and counters Hindutva ideologies by classifying Hindutva as a threat in line with the threat posed by fascist, ethno-nationalist, and far-right politically motivated violence, addressing the public platforming of Hindutva speakers by politicians, and challenging the Indian government by ensuring that human rights are central to diplomatic discussions.

- Urgently adopting a definition of Islamophobia alongside robust accompanying guidelines.

- Holding mainstream politicians to account for failing to confront, tacitly endorsing, or actively echoing divisive and hate-filled rhetoric by initiating an independent investigation into the role of parliamentarians in fuelling hatred, with a view to adopting a comprehensive strategy to discourage and combat Islamophobic discourse by political figures.

- Addressing Islamophobia within schools by addressing Islamophobic bullying and supporting religious accommodations, such prayer spaces.

- Enhancing teacher training to enhance cultural competency, eliminate unconscious bias, empower teachers to recognise instances of Islamophobia, and equipping them with tools to foster inclusive classrooms.

- Prioritising anti-racism education to highlight the role of minority communities in building UK society and promote common values and shared histories, while also addressing racial and religious discrimination explicitly and providing historical context on systemic racism and Islamophobia.

- Encouraging school and community collaborations, including organising workshops that promote interfaith dialogue, confronting hate speech, facilitating student exchanges and visits to places of worship, and developing mentorship programs that pair students from different backgrounds with community leaders who exemplify positive interfaith relations.

- Expanding extracurricular programs, youth-led initiatives, and youth-led grassroots activism to encourage youth interaction across different communities, reduce prejudices, and build long-lasting relationships.

- Fostering critical thinking and digital literacy to equip young people with the tools and knowledge to assess online narratives and to reduce their susceptibility to misinformation and extremist propaganda.

- Promoting civic education and teaching young people how to actively engage with democratic processes as a vehicle to protect their interests and address their grievances.

- Establishing a national youth inclusion fund to provide programs that support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing leadership and civic engagement opportunities.

- Having due regard for intersecting forms of discrimination during discussions surrounding making misogyny a hate crime to ensure that recognition is given to the multiple layers of discrimination many women and Muslim women especially face that make them acutely vulnerable to hate crime.

- Removing the UK's reservation of Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention, which obliges states to provide protection to migrant women and remove requirements for police forces in England and Wales to share the data of victims experiencing violence with Immigration Enforcement.

- Increasing funding for specialist services supporting victims of violence against women and girls with intersecting protected characteristics, such as Muslim women, disabled women, ethnically minoritised women, and women with insecure immigration statuses and no recourse to public funds.

- Funding studies on Muslim mental health needs and promoting cross-sector collaboration between academia, public health, and faith-based organisations while advocating for greater inclusion of Muslim voices in shaping national mental health policies.

- Increasing cultural competence amongst healthcare practitioners by offering enhanced training and supporting initiatives to encourage more Muslim professionals to enter the mental health field.

- Addressing the barriers Muslims face in accessing mental health services, especially language barriers and a lack of awareness of medical rights and how to navigate the healthcare system.

- Strengthening mental health outreach within communities by expanding grassroots mental health initiatives and increasing funding for community-led mental health initiatives that provide culturally sensitive counselling, peer support groups, and signposting to available services.

- Committing resources to a sister-study to this research, in order to comparatively explore the experiences of Leicester's Hindu and wider-faith community, thus providing a holistic picture that is inclusive of all perspectives.

Introduction

The Leicester riots of 2022 marked a significant turning point in the city's social fabric. Once heralded as a beacon of multicultural harmony, Leicester found itself at the centre of escalating communal tensions that culminated in widespread unrest. While media narratives and political discussions attempted to dissect the causes of the violence, less attention has been given to the profound and lasting impact on local communities, particularly Leicester's Muslim population. Indeed, the reverberations of the events that shook the city's residents in 2022 continue to be felt long after the media coverage has largely dissipated.

At the same time, as this report attests, for many Muslim residents who experienced the tensions and violence first-hand, there is a great sense of confusion, frustration, and invalidation surrounding the public perceptions of the unrest - perceptions that the Muslim community feel are largely unbalanced and unfairly demonise Muslims by relying on Islamophobic tropes and failing to recognise the victimisation that they have experienced.

This report seeks to address these gaps, offering a detailed analysis of how the riots unfolded, their origins, and their consequences, while centring the lived experiences of those most affected. It is by seeking to understand the perceived causes and lasting damage that we may truly begin a process by which to diagnose and heal the continuing fractures and put mechanisms in place to prevent such violence from happening in the future.

Moreover, while the use of Islamophobia as a political tool by supporters of Hindutva has been well documented in India, by exploring the role of Hindutva ideologies in stoking violence and division across Leicester, this report seeks to offer a new dimension and insight into the study of Islamophobia in the UK.

Consequently, this report can be broadly split into three parts. Firstly, a contextualisation of the historical and demographic landscape of Leicester, as well as painting a broad understanding of Hindutva ideologies, their underpinnings, and how the movement operates.

Secondly, we attempt to provide a deep analysis of the lived experiences of Leicester's Muslim population through qualitative research conducted by the United Kingdom Indian Muslim Council (UKIMC) in collaboration with Community Policy Forum. This research garnered the perspectives of almost 500 local Muslim residents and highlights not only the immediate effects of the riots but also the long-term challenges they have created for inter-community relations, law enforcement credibility, and the social cohesion of Leicester's diverse population.

Finally, by exploring these issues, we conclude by providing evidence-based policy recommendations and community-driven solutions in the form of a proposed

roadmap to prevent future conflicts of a similar nature. In particular, this roadmap articulates proposals to address eight key themes identified throughout the research:

- The deterioration of local community relations and the need to strengthen them.

- Fractures in the trust and confidence that Muslim communities have in local police and authorities. that must be addressed.

- The rising influence of Hindutva and the need to combat violent and hate-driven ideologies.

- The role of the mainstream media and online platforms in spreading misinformation, disinformation, and divisive propaganda.

- The role of mainstream politicians in platforming and legitimising divisive ideologies and the subsequent need for government leadership.

- The need for educative initiatives and extra curricular opportunities to foster critical thinking, active citizenship, and interfaith opportunities amongst younger populations.

- The intersecting nature of differing forms of discrimination that make Muslim women particularly vulnerable to abuse and violence, especially in times of hightened community tension.

- The long-term emotional and psychological impacts of the violence on Leicester's Muslim community and the need to address existing barriers that Muslim communities frequently face when accessing mental health support.

A Note on Language

Throughout this report, there are references to "communal tensions", "communal unrest", "communal conflict", and "communal violence". We recognise the problems that arise with such language and the justified criticism that such language can be used under the guise of neutrality to present an equity of responsibility or involvement, thereby obfuscating the true power dynamics and invisibilising dynamics of aggression and victimisation. It is not our intention to do this and we hope that we have been true to our goal of honestly platforming the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants who sacrificed their time, energy, and emotions to relay potentially traumatic experiences. Consequently, we ask the reader to interpret such phrases through the lens of the limitations of the English language and not as an attempt to in any way remove power from these valuable testimonies.

Scope and Limitations of this Study

The focus of this report and the wider research to which it attests is the experiences and perspectives of Leicester's Muslim community and the lasting impacts that the city's tensions have had on their lives and wellbeing. However, there is no intention to invisibilise nor dismiss the experiences and perspectives of Hindu and other faith communities across Leicester, including those of no faith.

The expertise and remit of both the UKIMC and Community Policy Forum lies in the structural inequalities facing Muslim communities in the UK. As such, this research is intended to respond to the needs and concerns across Muslim communities that have arisen surrounding the lasting damage caused by the unrest and the Islamophobia that has underpinned the public understandings of the challenges that Leicester faces.

As such, we firmly believe that this research makes an important contribution to restorative justice by ensuring that the voices of those affected by the violence are platformed and acknowledged.

However, we would strongly urge that a sister-study is conducted that is capable of comparatively exploring the experiences of Leicester's Hindu and wider-faith community, thus providing a holistic picture that is inclusive of all perspectives. We recommend that appropriate resources are allocated to such a venture and would welcome opportunities for collaborative and co-produced research in the future that may encompass diverse perspectives and promote inter-community partnership and healing.

We would also reiterate that the key to this research is a focus on perspectives. While it is possible to disagree with, rationalise, or contextualise a perspective (for example, communities may hold a perspective of police actions while not having the necessary information to situate those actions within the broader theatre of police operations, responsibilities, and information available), that does not mean that these perspectives should be dismissed, particularly if the aim is to achieve restorative justice and heal divisions within our society. Indeed these perspectives represent the lived realities of those that offer them.

However, we would also recommend that further resources are allocated to facilitate future research that situates these perspectives within the broader context; for example, combining these perspectives with police data and an analysis of wider socio-economic factors (such as the impact of funding cuts to local services), so that these experiences may be understood in the holistic context through which they have been produced.

Methodology

This report is based on evidence collected during research conducted by *the UK Indian Muslim Council* (UKIMC) during 2023-2024. The basis of this research was a qualitative survey exploring how Leicester's Muslim community experienced the violence witnessed in 2022 and its subsequent impacts. By using a qualitative framework, we were able to explore participants' experiences prior to, during, and since the riots, as well as their perceptions regarding its origins, the responsible instigators, responses from the local authorities, and how it was represented in public, political, and media narratives.

Beyond the collection of personal data, participants were asked to answer 28 questions that were a mixture of score-based and textual answers requiring detailed descriptions of their experiences, thereby allowing a full exploration of their perceptions and understandings of the context surrounding the violence.
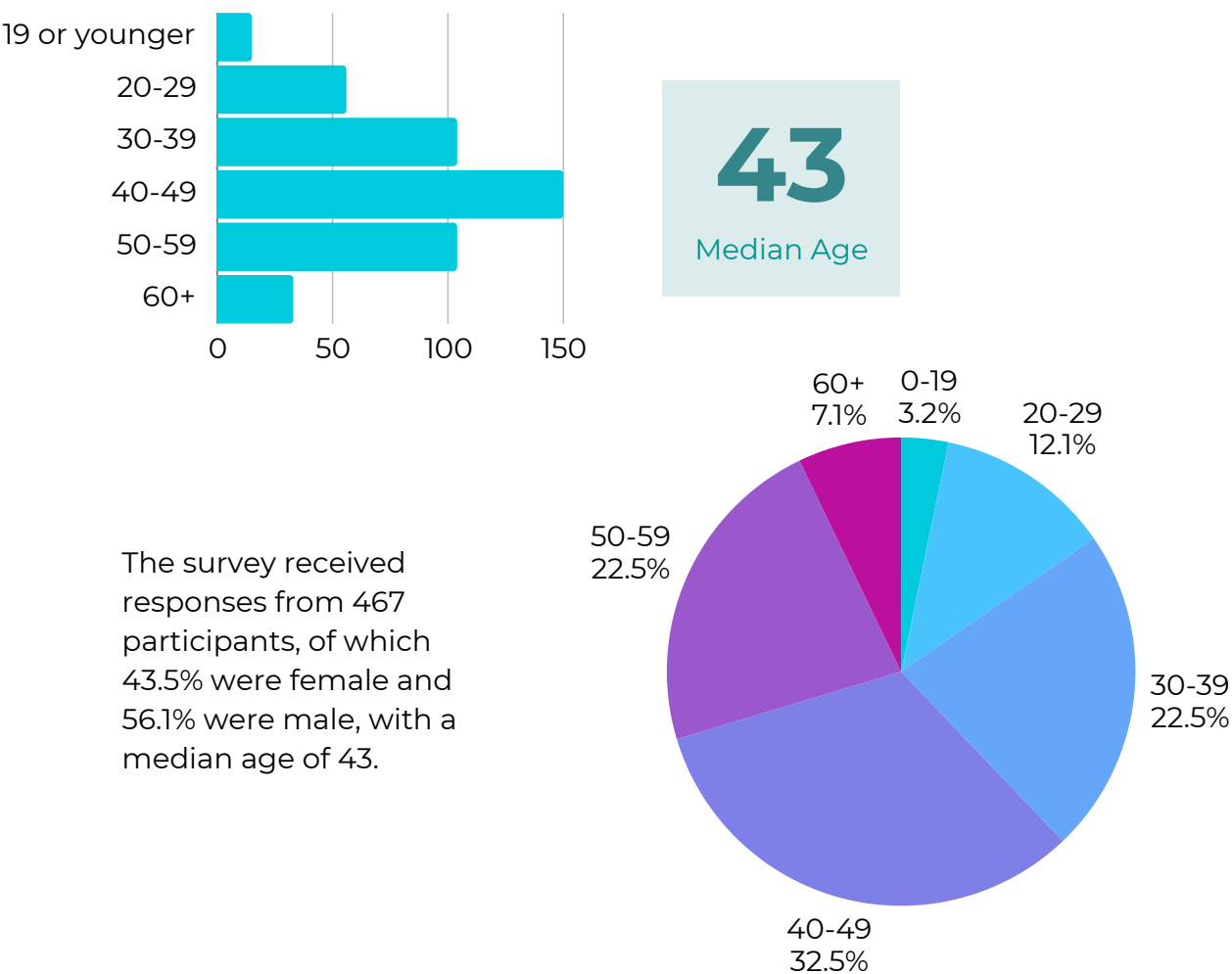
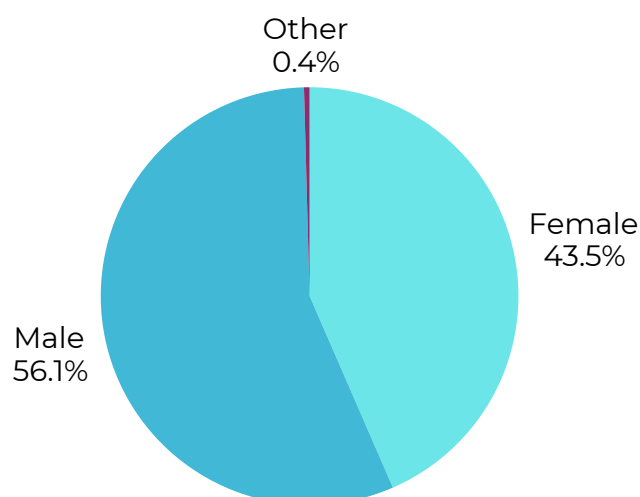***Figure 1:*** *Age spread of participants*

43
Median Age

The survey received responses from 467 participants, of which 43.5% were female and 56.1% were male, with a median age of 43.

60+
7.1%

0-19
3.2%

20-29
12.1%

30-39
22.5%

40-49
32.5%

50-59
22.5%

Leicester's Muslim population encompasses a diverse socio-economic and linguistic demographic profile. Therefore, male and female UKIMC volunteers were utilised in order to engage participants and assist with the logistics of filling out the survey where required. This was intended to mitigate individuals being excluded from participation due to potential linguistic, time-based, technological, or other barriers that may have otherwise hindered their ability to engage with the survey.

While the survey was mainly disseminated through social media and leafleting, utilising volunteers also allowed the research to be further disseminated in places and formats that are accessible to a wider population. As but one example, within academic research, there are a variety of acknowledged barriers that can make research with Muslim women challenging, therefore, to ensure a reflective sample of Muslim women within the research, female UKIMC volunteers were able to access women's prayer and communal congregation spaces in order to reach voices that may otherwise have been excluded.

However, despite best efforts, limitations surrounding resources and capacity did result in a participant population that is older than the general age demographics of Muslim communities as a community. Indeed, the median participant age was 43 and only 15.3% of participants were below the age of 30. Consequently, we would recommend that further study is needed to fully capture the experiences and perspectives of Leicester's Muslim youth.

The survey responses reveal deeply troubling patterns of targeted violence, intimidation, and the failure of institutional responses to mitigate escalating conflict. The analysis found throughout this report synthesises recurring themes in the data to highlight community perceptions of the underlying causes of the tensions, patterns of behaviour, and their broader implications. While wider context has been added throughout these discussions where necessary, we have endeavoured to restrict this analysis as far as possible to the experiences and perceptions directly reported within the survey data.

A Picture of Leicester

Leicester is one of the most diverse cities in the UK, renowned for its rich cultural and religious plurality. Central to this diversity are the city's significant Muslim and Hindu communities, which have shaped the city's cultural, social, and economic landscape. Understanding the history and demographics of these communities provides essential context for analysing the emergence and evolution of tensions.

A History of Migration

The Muslim and Hindu communities in Leicester have played a crucial role in shaping the city's identity, contributing to its economy, cultural heritage, and social fabric. Their histories, rooted in migration and resilience, reflect broader themes of postcolonial movement and multiculturalism in Britain.

Before the significant waves of migration in the mid-20th century, Leicester had a relatively small South Asian presence. British colonial rule in India fostered early connections between the subcontinent and the UK, with a handful of traders, seafarers, and students making their way to British cities, including Leicester. However, it was not until the mid-20th century that Leicester's Hindu and Muslim communities began to take root in significant numbers.

The largest influx of South Asian migrants to Leicester occurred after World War II, driven by Britain's need for labour in industries such as textiles, manufacturing, and construction. Leicester, with its growing industrial sector, became a key destination for migrants from India, Pakistan, and later East Africa.

The first major **wave** of South Asian migration to Leicester occurred during the 1950s and 1960s, when Britain undertook a campaign to actively encourage migration from its former colonies to support labour shortages in industries such as textiles and manufacturing, in an effort to rebuild the UK's post-war infrastructure. South Asian migrants subsequently sought employment in Leicester's textile industry in particular, which was experiencing a post-war boom. During this time, Hindus predominantly arrived from Gujarat and Punjab, while Muslim migration largely originated from Pakistan (primarily Punjab and Mirpur) and India (notably Gujarat). The Mirpuri community, in particular, settled in areas such as Highfields and Spinney Hill, establishing some of Leicester's first mosques and Islamic centres.

During the 1970s, the President of Uganda, Idi Amin, ordered the expulsion of the country's Asian minority, giving them 90 days to leave the country. This led to almost **40,000** Ugandan Asians emigrating to the UK having been forced to leave behind their homes and businesses in the country of their birth. This was a pivotal moment in Leicester's demographic shift, with many of these displaced people, particularly Gujaratis of both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds, seeking refuge in Leicester, despite **resistance** from local authorities—who even published advertisements in Ugandan newspapers discouraging migrants from settling in Leicester. The arrival of thousands of Ugandan Asians in the early 1970s thus transformed Leicester's ethnic landscape,

bringing a wave of entrepreneurial talent that would play a crucial role in the city's economic development, with these **communities** building extensive networks, opening businesses and establishing religious and cultural institutions that remain central to Leicester's identity.

Current Demographics

According to the 2021 Census, Muslims comprise approximately 23.5% of Leicester's population, making Islam the second-largest religion in the city. The **Muslim** population includes South Asian groups, particularly those of Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Indian heritage, alongside Somali and Middle Eastern communities. Key **areas** with significant Muslim populations include Evington, Spinney Hill, and St Matthews.

Meanwhile, **Hindus** account for 17.9% of Leicester's residents, forming one of the largest Hindu communities in the UK. The **majority** of Leicester's Hindus trace their heritage to Gujarat, with a substantial number arriving via East Africa. Areas such as Belgrave and Rushey Mead are well known for their strong Hindu presence, and Leicester is known for **hosting** one of the most vibrant Diwali celebrations outside of India.

Particularly prior to the riots in 2022, Leicester has been **celebrated** as a model of multiculturalism, with interfaith initiatives and shared economic spaces fostering strong relations between different communities. As will be articulated throughout this report, the fifty-years preceding the outbreak of violence in 2022 were largely perceived to be "harmonious", with diverse communities living and working side-by - side. However, while these disturbances are largely not reflective of the broader historical relationships between the communities, they underscored the need for urgent dialogue and community cohesion efforts.

Understanding Hindutva

Among the socio-economic, cultural, and localised dynamics identified by local communities within UKIMC's survey, a recurring theme that was consistently highlighted by participants was the role of Hindutva ideologies and politics in the violence that characterised the riots in 2022, as well as the underlying tensions that ignited them. As such, a full understanding of how communities experienced the frictions and their continuing impact cannot be achieved without an understanding of Hindutva. To this end, the following chapter delves into the origins, evolution, and contemporary manifestations of Hindutva as a political ideology, with a specific focus on its implications for inter-community relations in multicultural communities like those found across the UK.

What is Hindutva?

Hindutva is a modern political ideology distinct from Hinduism. While Hinduism is a spiritual tradition emphasising diversity and coexistence, Hindutva is a socio-political ideology that advocates for Hindu supremacy and seeks to define India's identity as fundamentally tied to Hindu culture, history, and values – to the exclusion of the roughly 20% of India's **population** that is not Hindu (14.2% of the country are Muslim, while the remaining 6% comprises mostly of Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains). Thus, Hindutva is a form of **ethno-nationalism** that seeks to define India – a secular nation-state* – exclusively through a Hindu identity. Its ultimate **objective** is the establishment of a "*Hindu Rashtra [Hindu nation] where some Indians will be more equal than others*".

Hindutva's proponents have historically framed religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, as outsiders whose loyalty to India is suspect. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, often regarded as the architect of Hindutva, articulated these ideas in his 1923 text *Essentials of Hindutva*. Savarkar argued that Muslims and Christians could never fully integrate into Indian society because India was not their "Holy-land," implying that their spiritual allegiance lay elsewhere, above their connection to India as a "fatherland". As such, Savarkar outlined a vision of India where citizenship and national belonging were contingent upon a shared Hindu identity, marked by common ancestry and a sacred geography.

M.S. Golwalkar, who in 1944 became the leader of the **Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)** – a far-right paramilitary organisation founded in 1925 – further entrenched these exclusionary ideas. Golwalkar drew **inspiration** from European fascist movements, including Nazi Germany and Mussolini's Italy. In his **book** *We, or, Our Nationhood Defined*, he **praised** Nazi Germany's racial policies, writing: "*To keep up the purity of the Race and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races - the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindusthan to learn and profit by.*" In 2006, the RSS attempted to distance itself from some of Golwalkar's writings.

> **Hindutva a political ideology that is distinct from Hinduism. It is a form of ethno-nationalism that advocates for Hindu supremacy and frames religious minorities as dangerous and suspect outsiders that can never be fully integrated into Indian society.**

*India's constitution defines it as a secular country, however, the word 'secular' was only added to the preamble in 1976 to reflect the secular principles that are embodied by the constitution's original articles.

Like Savarkar, Golwalkar characterised Muslims as perpetual outsiders with whom Hindus could not possibly coexist in India, referring to Muslims and Christians as "internal threats". He claimed that Muslims harboured deep-seated hostility towards Hindus, **arguing** that "*whatever we believed in, the Muslim was hostile to it. If we worship in the temple, he would desecrate it…If we glorify woman as a symbol of sacred motherhood, he would like to molest her. He was tooth and nail opposed to our way of life in all aspects.*" He also **decried** India's Muslim history as "*degenerating contact with the debased 'civilizations'*", thereby depicting Hindus as being engaged in an ongoing struggle to resist Muslims and **asserting** that, "*ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindusthan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu Nation has been gallantly fighting to shake off the despoilers.*"

Thus, Hindutva's foundational principles include:

- **Exclusivist nationalism:** The assertion that India belongs primarily to Hindus, with other religious and cultural groups seen as outsiders or second-class citizens.

- **Homogenisation of diversity:** The aim to subsume India's pluralistic traditions under a singular Hindu identity, erasing regional, linguistic, and religious differences.

- **Antagonism towards minorities:** Especially targeting Muslims and Christians, who are portrayed as threats to the integrity and purity of the Hindu nation.

Hindutva ideology has been institutionalised through the RSS and its affiliates, collectively known as the **Sangh Parivar** (the family of the Sangh). This network includes student, trade union, and women's wings, alongside its international religious wing, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). At its political forefront is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), India's ruling party, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The RSS and BJP have entrenched Hindu nationalism at the core of Indian politics and society, with the RSS mobilising grassroots support and the BJP advancing its agenda through policy and governance. Together, the Sangh Parivar have worked to disseminate Hindutva principles, both within India and across the global Hindu diaspora – the consequences of which have been poignantly illustrated in Leicester's continuing tensions.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)

The RSS operates as the ideological backbone of the Sangh Parivar, a network of organisations working towards establishing a Hindu Rashtra. **Described** in a *Guardian* piece as the "*holding company of Hindu supremacism*", the RSS has played a pivotal role in propagating Hindutva ideology. The RSS has over 5 million **members**, making it the **largest** volunteer group in the world. Its influence extends deeply into the BJP, with approximately 3 in 4 BJP ministers being RSS members. Notably, Narendra Modi is a lifelong **member** of the organisation.

The RSS was founded by K.B. Hedgewar in 1925, who **stated** that, "*the Sangh wants to put in reality the words 'Hindustan of Hindus.' Hindustan is a country of Hindus. Like other nations of other people (eg. Germany of Germans), this is a nation of Hindu people.*" He claimed that Hindu society faced "*daily onslaughts by outsiders*", including Muslims, and stated: "*It is to fulfill this duty of protecting the Hindu society that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has come into existence.*" In 1927, RSS co-founder, B.S. Moonje **described** the RSS as an institution which could produce "*the military regeneration of the Hindus*" and unify the people in line with "*the idea of fascism.*"

Over the course of the last century, members of the RSS have been accused of executing violent attacks, including plotting assassinations, inflaming communal tensions, and stoking riots. In 1948, RSS member Nathuram Vinayak Godse **assassinated** the leader of India's independence movement, Mahatma Gandhi. Although the RSS was temporarily **banned** following the assassination, and Godse was executed for the crime and widely condemned as a traitor, his image has been **rehabilitated** in recent years by Hindu nationalists, portraying him as a patriot and martyr.

The RSS has been **linked** to numerous anti-minority incidents across India, marked by widespread violence and fatalities. These include the **1983 Nellie massacre** in Assam (over 2,000 Bengali Muslims killed); the **1984 Sikh massacre** in Delhi (nearly 3,000 Sikhs killed); the **1989 Bhagalpur riots** in Bihar (over 900 Muslims killed); the **1992 nationwide riots** following the destruction of the Babri Masjid (up to 2,000 Muslims killed), the **2002 Gujarat riots** (over 1,000 Muslims killed), and the **2008 Odisha violence** (over 100 Christians killed).

Most recently, in February 2020, four days of violence in Delhi saw Hindutva mobs **massacre** at least 53 people, over three-quarters of whom were Muslim, while injuring more than 350 others. The mobs also burned down four mosques, along with hundreds of homes, shops, and vehicles, causing an estimated **$4 billion** in damages. Sixteen RSS members were **arrested** and charged with murder and rioting.

A century since its founding, the RSS remains an important force in India, not just as a socio-cultural organisation, but one that very clearly has political aims, primarily to establish a Hindu-only state.

Hindu Nationalism in India

Hindutva's rise must be understood against the backdrop of colonial and post-colonial India. During British rule, the socio-political landscape was marked by communal tensions and the politicisation of religious identities. Hindutva consequently emerged as a reactionary force, seeking to counterbalance what its proponents perceived as the appeasement of minorities under colonial policies and the influence of Islamic and Western cultures.

The partition of India in 1947 further entrenched Hindutva's appeal, with the trauma of communal violence fostering a sense of victimhood among India's Hindu population. Post-independence, Hindutva gained momentum during periods of political instability, economic liberalisation, and social upheaval. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 and the Gujarat riots in 2002, both events marked by violence and deep societal divisions, are pivotal moments in Hindutva's ascendancy, showcasing its capacity to mobilise mass support and consolidate political power.

The Babri Masjid, a 16th-century mosque in Ayodhya in Northern India, became the focal point of the Hindutva movement's agenda to reclaim India's 'Hindu heritage'. Hindutva proponents argued that the mosque had been built on the birthplace of Lord Ram, with some claiming that it had been built over a pre-existing Hindu temple (however, the existence of a temple on the site remains **contested** by archaeologists). After six years of agitating, the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, spearheaded by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and supported by the BJP, culminated in the mosque's demolition in 1992 by an **organised mob** of at least 75,000-**150,000** Hindus, while Indian authorities watched. This act of destruction unleashed a wave of communal violence across India, resulting in thousands of deaths, predominantly among Muslims. These deaths included reports of police indiscriminately shooting peaceful Muslims in cities such as Mumbai, where at least **900 people** were killed.

The destruction of Babri Masjid and what it represented was a watershed moment in the rise of Hindutva, becoming a key element of the BJP political strategy for the next three decades. In the intervening years, its destruction and various legal battles to build a Hindu temple in its place have become symbolic of the Hindutva cause – to destroy, invisibilise, reimagine, supplant, and dominate non-Hindu histories, contributions, and culture in India.

> The destruction of Babri Masjid and various legal battles to build a Hindu temple in its place have become symbolic of the Hindutva cause:
>
> **to destroy, invisibilise, reimagine, supplant, and dominate non-Hindu histories, contributions, and culture in India.**

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP)

The VHP, the cultural wing of the RSS, is notorious for its Hindu nationalist and anti-Muslim agenda. The organisation has been directly implicated in several episodes of communal violence in India, most notably the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid. In a 1994 **article** for the Journal of the American Academy of Religion entitled *The Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Roots of Hindu Militancy*, James G. Lochtefeld, a Professor of Religion at Carthage College, Wisconsin, noted:

> *"The most prominent organization behind the demolition was the [VHP]... together with their allies in the [BJP]... both of these groups are unabashedly, even militantly Hindu, and claim to be standing up for the rights of Hindus against a series of governments whose 'preferential treatment' of minorities – in particular, Muslims – had made Hindus second-class citizens in their 'own' country."*

The VHP also played a key role in the 2002 Gujarat riots, a horrific episode of anti-Muslim violence that is discussed in greater detail below. A UK government **inquiry** into the riots described the events as a "*systematic campaign of violence*" bearing "*all the hallmarks of ethnic cleansing*". The inquiry concluded that the violence had been "*planned, possibly months in advance*" by the VHP and was carried out with the support of the BJP-led state government, headed by then-Chief Minister of Gujarat and current Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. The inquiry stated: "*As an architect of the BJP's Hindu nationalist agenda, which it has pursued since coming to power in 1995, [Modi] is a believer in the VHP's ideological motivation.*"

The VHP continues to be actively involved in the current wave of communal violence across India. In August 2023, the VHP and its youth wing, the **Bajrang Dal,** organised a **demonstration** in Nuh, a Muslim-majority district less than 100 km from New Delhi. Protesters brandished weapons, including guns, and chanted Islamophobic slogans, sparking clashes when Muslim counter-protesters threw stones and set vehicles ablaze. The unrest led to widespread anti-Muslim attacks, including in the nearby city of Gurugram, where a Hindu mob set a mosque on fire and **murdered** its 22-year-old imam. Following the violence, the BJP-led state government **systematically** bulldozed the homes and shops of hundreds of Muslims it alleged were involved in the violence, many of whom were also arrested.
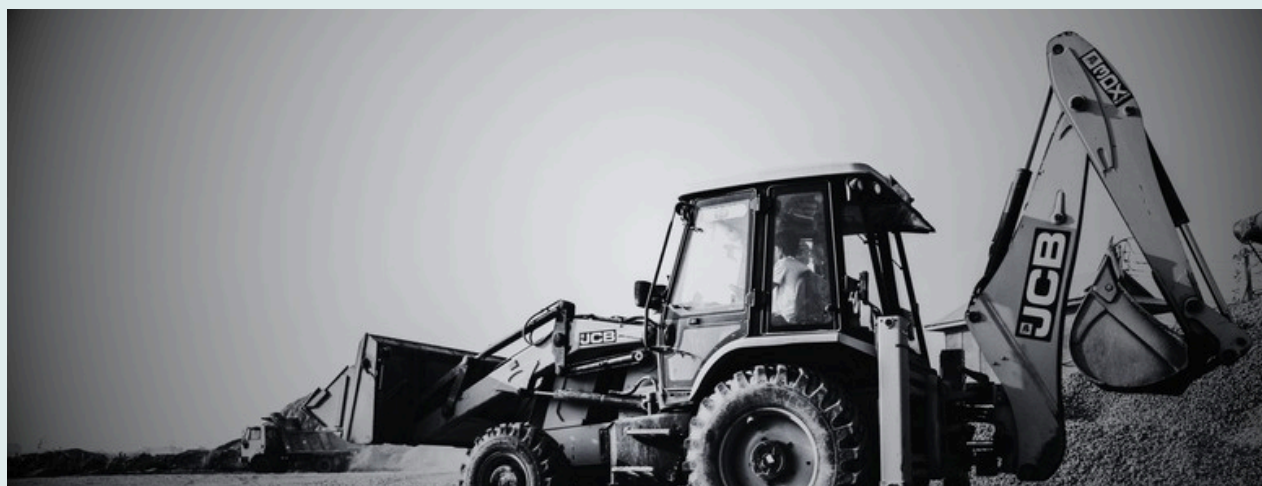
The Gujarat riots of 2002 further underscore Hindutva's role in fostering communal tensions. The riots were sparked when a train **carrying** Hindus travelling to express their support for building a Ram temple at the site of the Babri Masjid was attacked and set on fire, resulting in the deaths of 59 people. In **retaliation**, hundreds of Muslims were killed by Hindu mobs, tens of thousands more were displaced, Muslim-owned homes and businesses were torched, Muslim graves and mosques were destroyed, and at least 250 women and girls were **reportedly** gang-raped before being burned and hacked to death in front of their male relatives. This became one of the worst episodes of anti-Muslim violence in India's post-independence history, with many referring to the violence as "**genocidal**" and characterising it as a "**pogrom**".

Reports indicated that Hindutva organisations played a direct role in orchestrating the violence, with state authorities accused of complicity or negligence under the then-Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi. Human Rights Watch **argue** that "*strong evidence links the Modi administration in Gujarat to the carefully orchestrated anti-Muslim attacks*", referencing **reports** that police were given no orders to save Muslims (or else actively **encouraged** the rioters to kill Muslims) and **documenting** threats and intimidation directed against witnesses, whistleblowers, and those campaigning for justice orchestrated by the Hindutva's political supporters.

For proponents of Hindutva, the anti-Muslim violence embodied by the Gujarat riots was viewed as an ideological victory. Following the violence, in a veiled threat to India's minority communities, the RSS **warned** those that oppose the building of a Ram temple that, "*their real safety lies in the goodwill of the majority.*" This threat rests on the ability of the Hindutva movement to mobilise mass public action – in effect an articulation of the belief that laws alone cannot protect India's minority communities. Meanwhile, like the RSS, the VHP **celebrated** the violence as an act of nationalism and described it as "*the first positive response of the Hindus to Muslim fundamentalism in 1,000 years*" (a **reference** to the arrival of Islam in the Indian subcontinent) and further demanded a blanket ban on madrassas and a unilateral handing over of the Babri Masjid site.

Events like these have set the scene for Hindutva ideologies to be mobilised in justifying discrimination and violence against minority communities across India. Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, Hindu nationalism has become increasingly assertive, militant, and violent. Numerous reports document a sharp rise in **hate speech**, open **calls** for violence against minorities – particularly Indian Muslims – discriminatory **laws** targeting Muslim communities, and government-led actions such as **renaming** towns, **rewriting** historical narratives in school curricula, and **demolishing** mosques; all of which is aimed at reshaping India into a Hindu-exclusive nation.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India

Since Modi assumed office in 2014, Islamophobia has surged across India, targeting the country's largest minority community. Incidents of anti-Muslim harassment and violence have escalated dramatically, with mob attacks and **public lynchings** becoming alarmingly frequent. Perpetrators often record these attacks and share them on social media, emboldened by the apparent lack of consequences. Chants of "Jai Shri Ram" (Victory to Lord Ram), a religious slogan **co-opted** by Hindu nationalists, are commonly heard during such acts of violence. A 2022 **report** by The Bridge Initiative highlighted the "*near-daily episodes of harassment, public beatings and mob assaults, destruction of property, and lynchings*" that have created a pervasive climate of fear among India's more than 200 million Muslims. The report further noted that the first eight stages of genocide, as defined by experts, are already present in the country.

Born in Gujarat in 1950, Narendra Modi **joined** the RSS at the age of eight. He became the chief RSS organiser for Gujarat in 1981, responsible for coordinating the branches and activities of the Sangh Parivar. In 1987, he **transitioned** to the BJP, serving as the organisation secretary for Gujarat. Under his leadership, the BJP secured its first ever majority in Gujarat's state assembly in 1995. Modi was promoted to Secretary General of the BJP in 1998 and **became** Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001, a position he held until his election as Prime Minister in June 2014. In 2024, Modi became the **second** Prime Minister in Indian history, after India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, to win three consecutive terms in office.

As discussed previously, Modi's role in the 2002 Gujarat riots, during his tenure as the state's Chief Minister, is extensively documented. A UK government inquiry held Modi **"directly responsible"** for the violence, while a BBC documentary released in January 2023 **concluded** that Modi had "*prevented the police from acting to stop violence targeted at Muslims and cited sources as saying Modi had specifically ordered authorities not to intervene*". The Modi government dismissed the documentary as a "**propaganda piece**" and **banned** its broadcast in India. In 2005, Modi was **denied** a U.S. visa on the grounds that he was deemed "*responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom*", specifically referencing the violence in Gujarat between February and May 2002. He was granted entry to the U.S. only after assuming office as Prime Minister in 2014.

As Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has been instrumental in stoking hostility toward Muslim and other minority communities in India. In January 2024, he **inaugurated** a Hindu temple on the site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya – a deeply provocative act that "*embodies the triumph of Modi's muscular Hindu nationalist politics*". The temple stands on the ruins of the mosque destroyed by Hindutva mobs in 1992, an event that triggered widespread communal violence resulting in the deaths of over 2,000 people, the majority of them Muslims.

Similarly, Modi's 2024 re-election campaign was characterised by divisive rhetoric. At a rally on 21st April 2024, he **referred** to Muslims as "*infiltrators*" and accused the Indian National Congress, his main opposition party, of planning to redistribute wealth to

"those who have too many children". The Congress party condemned these remarks as hate speech, though Modi **denied** attempting to incite communal divisions. Such rhetoric aligns with the BJP's long-standing **strategy** under Modi, exploiting fears of a Muslim takeover that trace back to colonial-era anxieties.

This climate of hostility underscores the deep entrenchment of Hindutva-inspired nationalism in Indian politics and society, fostering an increasingly dangerous environment for minority communities. Under Modi's leadership, Hindutva has become the ideological platform of the BJP, bringing it into the mainstream and profoundly reshaping India's political and cultural landscape.

Since Modi assumed office in 2014, Islamophobia has surged across India. Incidents of anti-Muslim harassment and violence have escalated dramatically, with mob attacks and public lynchings becoming alarmingly frequent. Perpetrators often record these attacks and share them on social media.

A 2022 report by The Bridge Initiative highlighted the "*near-daily episodes of harassment, public beatings and mob assaults, destruction of property, and lynchings*" that have created a pervasive climate of fear among India's more than 200 million Muslims. The report further noted that the first eight stages of genocide, as defined by experts, are already present in the country.

The Global Reach of Hindutva

The far-reaching influence of Hindutva extends beyond India's borders, impacting diasporic communities in countries like the UK. The global expansion of Hindutva ideology, driven by the Sangh Parivar, underscores its growing influence in the global context. On its **website**, the RSS itself notes that its "*sphere of influence has been spreading far and wide, not only inside Bharat [India] but also abroad*". Indeed, the Sangh Parivar has established a presence in several countries, including the United States, Canada, and the UK, illustrating the international reach of the Hindutva movement.

The United States

A 2022 **report** by the South Asia Citizen Web examined the infrastructure and influence of Hindu nationalist organisations in the U.S. from 2014 to 2021. The report revealed that between 2001 and 2019, seven Sangh-affiliated charitable groups spent at least $158.9 million on their programmes, with much of this funding being sent to groups in India. These funds **supported** Hindu nationalist projects, such as "*influencing legislation on the context of textbooks and academic output related to religion and history*". Some of the groups identified by the report as being '**Sangh influencers**' in the U.S. included the All India Movement (AIM) for Seva, Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of America, India Development and Relief Fund, Param Shakti Peeth, PYP Yog Foundation, **Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) of America**, and Sewa International.

Key events in the U.S. have highlighted the strength of the Sangh Parivar's network and the **globalisation** of Hindu nationalism:

- The 2019 "**Howdy, Modi!**" event in Houston, Texas, organised by the Texas India Forum, featured Modi alongside U.S. President Donald Trump. It was held in a stadium and attended by 50,000 people, making it the **largest-ever** gathering for a foreign political leader in the U.S..

- In August 2022, Hindu nationalist groups invited Sadhvi Rithambara, a close ally of Modi and head of the VHP's women's wing, to speak at an event in the U.S. state of Georgia. Rithambara has a long-documented history of **Islamophobia**, having played a key role in the 1992 **demolition** of the Babri Masjid. She was **arrested** for inciting nationalist violence, including the deadly riots that followed. The Liberhan Commission, appointed by the Indian government to investigate the demolition and the subsequent unrest, **concluded** in 2009 that Rithambara was instrumental in pushing India "*to the brink of communal discord*". As such, her participation in the 2022 event in Georgia drew widespread condemnation from civil society organisations.

- The 2022 Indian Independence Day **parade** in Edison, New Jersey, hosted by the Indian Business Association, featured a bulldozer adorned with images of Modi and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. While a bulldozer may appear innocuous, it has become a potent **symbol** of Hindu nationalism in India, used by the Modi government to demolish Muslim homes and businesses. The display sparked public backlash, including from Edison's mayor, who **denounced** the bulldozer as an unwelcome "*symbol of division and discrimination*". The Indian Businesses Association subsequently issued an apology for having it at the parade.

- In February 2025, Modi visited the U.S. to meet with President Trump, now in his second term in office. The two leaders **convened** in the Oval Office to discuss key issues, including bilateral trade and defence. While the visit lacked the pomp of Modi's 2019 trip, it drew attention for his **meeting** with Elon Musk in Washington. Beyond being the world's richest man, Musk is one of Trump's closest advisers and the head of the newly created U.S. Department for Government Efficiency (DOGE). Musk has gained **notoriety** for promoting Islamophobia and far-right ideologies, and on Trump's inauguration day, appeared to perform a **Nazi salute** while addressing a pro-Trump rally. Modi's growing ties with Trump and Musk further highlight the deepening connections between Hindutva and the global far-right.

Canada

In Canada, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) and the World Sikh Organization (WSO) **released** a 2023 report detailing the activities of the RSS network in the country. The report categorises these activities into four areas:

- Humanitarian relief, social services, and fundraising;

- Education, ideology, and shakhas (branches);

- Global political influence;

- And Islamophobic, anti-Sikh, and casteist rhetoric.

The report **characterises** the work focused on service initiatives as a strategy to "*legitimise and perpetuate the RSS's ideologies, while entrenching its wider presence under the guise of an ideologically neutral humanitarian network*".

Moreover, the report underlines the role of the Overseas Friends of the BJP (OFBJP), a network of lobbying organisations with chapters in the US, UK, Australia, and Canada, in advancing Hindu nationalist goals. It **documented** numerous incidents of anti-Muslim, anti-Sikh, and casteist rhetoric disseminated in Canada by community leaders affiliated with mainstream organisations. The report **warns** that hostility against Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Dalits has become increasingly "*socially legitimised, emboldened, and now threatens to destabilise India's large diaspora populations across the world, including in Canada*".

Hindutva in the UK

In the UK, several prominent individuals and organisations have either aligned themselves with proponents of Hindutva or minimised the risks posed by this movement, while simultaneously amplifying anti-Muslim rhetoric and tropes.

A prominent example is Bob Blackman, the Conservative MP for Harrow East since 2010, who has a long history of anti-Muslim behaviour. This is evidenced by Blackman **joining** Islamophobic Facebook groups, **sharing** anti-Muslim posts on social media, and **retweeting** figures like Tommy Robinson.

Meanwhile, a 2022 Byline Times **article** revealed that Blackman had received substantial funding from far-right Hindu nationalist organisations linked to the BJP and RSS, and had frequently visited India at the invitation of pro-RSS groups. In 2017, as Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Hindus, Blackman **hosted** an event for Tapan Ghosh, a Hindu nationalist known for inciting religious tensions. Ghosh has openly **endorsed** the Rohingya genocide, labelled all Muslims as "jihadis," and advocated for forced birth control of Muslims.

In September 2022, Blackman **wrote** to the then-Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, blaming "*Islamist extremists*" for recent clashes between Hindus and Muslims in Leicester. This narrative contradicted media reports and eyewitness accounts, which showed that violence stemmed from internal tensions within the city and was further fuelled by Hindutva ideologies. Provocative acts by Hindu groups, including a masked march of 200 men chanting "*Jai Shri Ram*", are **well-documented**. Nonetheless, Blackman and other anti-Muslim figures pushed a misleading narrative portraying Muslims as the sole aggressors, downplaying the role of Hindutva extremism.

Furthermore, Blackman is **associated** with the Henry Jackson Society (HJS), a neo-conservative think-tank with strong ties to Conservative politicians. HJS has been **criticised** for promoting an anti-Islam agenda, labelling Muslim organisations as "*extremist*", and publishing reports framing British Muslims as prone to violence or radicalism. These reports have influenced government policies, providing justification for measures like the PREVENT programme, which the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination have **urged** should be suspended.

In November 2022, HJS published a **report** by Charlotte Littlewood that denied the presence of "*Hindutva extremist organisations operating in Leicester*", instead claiming that social media influencers, predominantly Muslim, were spreading fake narratives to incite violence. However, a June 2023 **documentary** by VICE, which examined the spread of far-right Hindu nationalism, explicitly cited the violence in Leicester as an example of how Hindutva supporters are stoking tensions globally. Ignoring on-the-ground reporting and video footage that clearly showed Hindu nationalist slogans being chanted in Leicester, the HJS report presents a biased and misleading account of the events. Littlewood went as far as to **describe** the turmoil in Leicester as a "*predominantly Islamist attack on Hindus*". Therefore, she does not merely downplay the role of Hindu nationalism in Leicester, but appears to deny its

existence outright, whilst actively promoting Islamophobic narratives.

There is also a symbiotic **relationship** between Hindutva and far-right right voices in the UK. Notably, in September 2022, Nupur J Sharma, editor-in-chief of the right-wing Indian news platform OpIndia, conducted an **interview** with British anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant activist **Tommy Robinson**. Sharma, a far-right **propagandist** known for promoting anti-Muslim conspiracy theories, described Robinson as "*one of [the] UK's foremost activists... talking about radical Islam and Islamism*". During the interview, Robinson reinforced Hindutva narratives, claiming that "*Pakistani Muslims are the aggressors... They are into selling heroin, they control drugs, they control violence*" and accusing them of carrying out "*oppression" against Hindus*". Sharma further alleged that "*about 200 [Hindu] families have been possibly displaced*" from Leicester due to the unrest, a claim **refuted** by Leicestershire Police, who stated they were unaware of any such displacement. Robinson escalated the rhetoric, **asserting**: "I*'ve been inundated by English men who don't want to allow what's happening... saying, 'When are we going to Leicester?'*" He added: "*I'd bring hundreds of men to Leicester tomorrow [if the Hindu community asked for it].*"

Several organisations operating within the UK have expressed or supported Hindutva sentiments. These groups have grown increasingly active, particularly during and following the 2022 Leicester unrest. They have frequently leveraged these events to disseminate Islamophobic narratives and disinformation. While these organisations generally operate independently and do not necessarily form a coordinated Hindu nationalist network in the UK, their involvement in political, social, and public spheres continues to amplify, propagate, reinforce, and normalise Hindutva ideologies across the country. Prominent organisations include:

The Overseas Friends of the Bharatiya Janata Party (OFBJP): The OFBJP plays a significant role in advancing Hindu nationalist narratives in the UK. It has actively propagated Islamophobic **disinformation**, particularly in response to the 2022 unrest in Leicester, **portraying** Muslims as extremists targeting Hindus and denying claims of Muslim victimisation.

The OFBJP has further engaged in British electoral politics, **leveraging** the Kashmir issue and **accusing** the Labour Party of being anti-India or anti-Hindu. During the 2019 General Election, it actively campaigned against Labour, **targeting** 48 marginal constituencies and urging Hindu voters to support the Conservative Party. These activities highlight the OFBJP's efforts to exploit localised and India-related issues to bolster Hindu nationalist sentiment.

Vishva Hindu Parishad UK (VHPUK): VHPUK is the British branch of the far-right Hindu nationalist organisation, the VHP. According to its UK **website**, "*in each country, the local organisation works independently in pursuit of the **objectives** of the VHP in harmony with the laws of that country*". Its stated goals include promoting Hindu Dharma (religious duties) and culture, fostering interfaith relationships, and "*working to create an effective voice for [the] Hindu community world-wide*". VHPUK is headquartered in Leicester and has numerous branches nationwide.

Like several other Hindu nationalist organisations, VHPUK placed sole blame on Muslims for the unrest in Leicester. In September 2022, the organisation **wrote** to then-Prime Minister Liz Truss with allegations that "*a large number of Hindus of Leicester, their places of worship, their cultural and religious symbols have been wantonly targeted and damaged by Islamic extremists and hoodlums*". The letter further claimed that "*the riots are merely the most recent manifestation of Islamic extremism.*" This narrative perpetuates harmful Islamophobic stereotypes while disregarding the role of Hindu nationalists in inciting the violence, thus presenting a distorted account of events.

Sewa UK: Sewa UK is a branch of Sewa International, the global welfare wing of the RSS. It claims to focus on humanitarian efforts among the Indian diaspora, particularly in response to crises like natural disasters and **COVID-19**. However, it has been However, it has been **accused** of funding RSS projects in India and fuelling religious extremism.

The organisation has a history of supporting Hindu nationalist movements, such as **diverting** funds raised for the 2001 Gujarat earthquake to Hindutva groups involved in the 2002 Gujarat pogrom. In light of these revelations, the late Labour peer **Lord Adam Patel resigned** from Sewa International, condemning it as "*a front for controversial militant Hindu organisations*" and expressing his "*regret [for] ever having been part of this racist organisation*". In 2016, Sewa UK made a £2,000 **donation** to Bob Blackman to fund a visit to India.

INSIGHT UK: INSIGHT UK, a self-described grassroots movement for British Hindu and Indian communities, has been widely criticised for spreading Islamophobic narratives and misinformation. During the 2022 Leicester unrest, it issued a **statement** blaming "*extremist Muslims*" for violence against Hindu communities, ignoring evidence of Hindu nationalist involvement and exacerbating communal tensions. Similarly, the organisation **condemned** a 2023 BBC **documentary** on Narendra Modi's role in the 2002 Gujarat riots, accusing the BBC of bias despite the UK Government holding Modi directly **responsible** for the violence.

On social media, INSIGHT UK has consistently propagated Islamophobic rhetoric. It **promotes** harmful conspiracies like "*Love Jihad*" a baseless claim that Muslim men lure Hindu women into marriage to forcibly convert them. The organisation has also **distorted** accounts of anti-Muslim violence in India, employing hashtags such as #HindusUnderAttack to misrepresent events where mosques were burned, and Muslims were attacked and **killed** by Hindutva mobs. Its inflammatory language extends to **describing** Pakistan as "*a global hub of Islamist terrorism and religious persecution*". These actions reveal a persistent pattern of divisive rhetoric closely aligned with Hindutva ideologies.

Hindutva and the UK Government

In a significant recent development, the UK government has for the first time explicitly acknowledged the role of Hindutva ideologies in exacerbating communal tensions. This recognition, which appears in both a leaked National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) intelligence report and the government's official Rapid Analytical

Sprint Report on **extremism**, potentially marks a turning point in how British authorities approach and conceptualise threats emerging from ideologically motivated groups rooted in transnational nationalist politics.

Central to this shift in narrative is the UK Home Office's Sprint Report, commissioned in response to rising far-right activity following the Southport killings in August 2024. For the first time, the report **names** "Hindutva nationalist extremism" as having "played a part in inciting hate among local communities" during the 2022 Leicester riots. The report's explicit naming of Hindutva as an ideological driver of unrest marks a watershed moment. It draws a distinction between Hinduism – a diverse and pluralistic faith – and Hindutva as a broad ideology of Hindu nationalism.

According to the Sprint Report, Hindu nationalist extremism is not just an imported ideology but a growing domestic concern. It situates Hindutva alongside misogynistic online subcultures such as the "manosphere" as ideological ecosystems that can breed extremism. The analysis also references Hindutva's global dimension, particularly concerns over India's **overseas activities** – including involvement in violent attacks on Sikh activists in Canada and the US—as contributing to heightened tensions in diasporic communities.

Further reinforcing this shift in discourse is a confidential report by the National Police Chiefs' Council, **leaked** to the media. The NPCC warns that Hindutva extremism threatens to worsen relations between British Hindus and other religious communities, particularly Muslims and Sikhs. The report highlights instances of Hindu nationalist groups in the UK forming alliances with far-right figures over shared Islamophobic narratives. One alarming detail is the warm reception given by parts of Indian media and British Hindutva supporters to the far-right agitator **Tommy Robinson** – an indicator of growing ideological convergences between Western white nationalist movements and Hindutva groups.

The intelligence document also describes attempts by Hindutva-aligned groups to influence British politics. It notes their targeted campaigns during the 2019 UK general election, wherein Labour was portrayed as "anti-Hindu" due to Jeremy Corbyn's vocal criticism of the Indian government's policies in Kashmir. Furthermore, the NPCC notes provocative slogans such as "Jai Shri Ram" (which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters of this report and which have become rallying cries for violent Hindutva mobs in India) are increasingly becoming a tool of abuse used to assert religious dominance in UK settings. The report links such rhetoric, along with propaganda **films** promoting Hindu nationalist ideology, to a rise in communal tensions.

The UK government's formal recognition of Hindutva extremism has major implications. First, it challenges the long-standing and broad reluctance among policymakers and media to scrutinise non-Islamist forms of extremism, particularly those rooted in diasporic nationalism. Second, it underscores the need for a more expansive, ideologically neutral understanding of extremism—one that recognises the multiplicity of threats beyond the traditionally racialised focus on Muslim communities.

The inclusion of Hindutva in official discourse also provides validation for Muslim, Sikh, and Dalit groups who have long warned of rising intimidation and hate speech fuelled by Hindu nationalist actors in the UK. Until now, many of these concerns were dismissed or marginalised. With this recognition, civil society may find more institutional support for community-led monitoring, education initiatives, and conflict resolution mechanisms.

Finally, these reports raise urgent questions about the role of foreign governments and ideologies in shaping domestic extremism. With documented cases of interference in UK elections and alignment with far-right actors, the threat posed by Hindutva is not just communal – it is also political.

Methods Used by the Hindutva Movement

The Hindutva movement employs a range of strategies to further its ideological agenda, both in India and internationally. These methods include institutional capture, globalising narratives of victimhood, political networking, silencing critics, manipulating research, and leveraging economic and cultural outreach.

One of the key tactics is **establishing** organisations to serve as vehicles for Hindutva ideology. In the **UK**, groups such as those mentioned above, alongside others such as the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), the Hindu Council UK, and the National Hindu Students Federation, have been instrumental in advancing their agenda. Some of these organisations, such as Sewa International and Sewa UK, have been **accused** of channeling funds to entities involved in communal violence in India. Similarly, institutions like the 1928 Institute **attempt** to present themselves as progressive and aligned with historical anti-colonial movements while subtly promoting Hindutva narratives.

Another **significant** strategy is the conflation of criticisms against Hindutva ideologies and practices with 'Hinduphobia.' By framing such criticism as systemic prejudice against the Hindu religion and its followers, rather than opposition to the political ideology, proponents of Hindutva frame themselves as the victimised party and aim to equate this concept with established forms of discrimination like antisemitism and Islamophobia. The result is a powerful tool for silencing and discrediting critics, while using the resulting impression of victimhood to further justify Hindutva hostility directed at Muslims and other minorities who are presented as the aggressors.

Furthermore, the Hindutva movement is well-known for targeting critics through intimidation and censorship. In the US, academics **critiquing** Hindutva have faced online harassment, including death threats and casteist abuse. In the UK, journalists and academics such as **Chris Allen** have faced unprecedented levels of online abuse and threats.

Politically, the movement also seeks to **cultivate** influential allies by engaging with politicians and leveraging local dynamics. In the UK, this includes **hosting** private meetings and public events with figures like Conservative MP, Bob Blackman, and nurturing allies in Parliament. These efforts often involve framing Hindutva-linked

concerns in ways that resonate with progressive values, such as combating racism, to attract broader support.

Finally, the movement **leverages** economic and cultural outreach to advance its goals. Business leaders and influencers often align with Hindutva ideology under the guise of promoting Indian nationalism. Additionally, parallels are drawn with Zionism, advocating for global Hindu solidarity and urging policies modelled on Israel's strategies, particularly in regions like Kashmir.

Through these multifaceted approaches, the Hindutva movement seeks to embed its ideology in global discourse, leveraging narratives of victimhood, co-opting political and cultural spaces, and silencing dissent to consolidate its influence.

Origins of the Tensions

Figure 3: How would you describe the level of communal tension/ incidents you experienced **prior** to the Leicester riots?
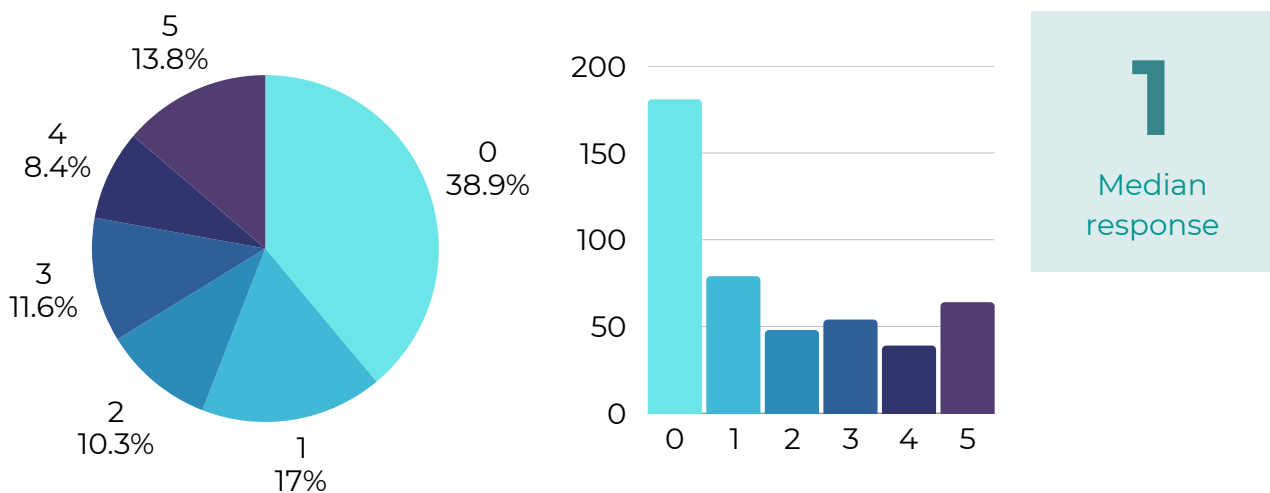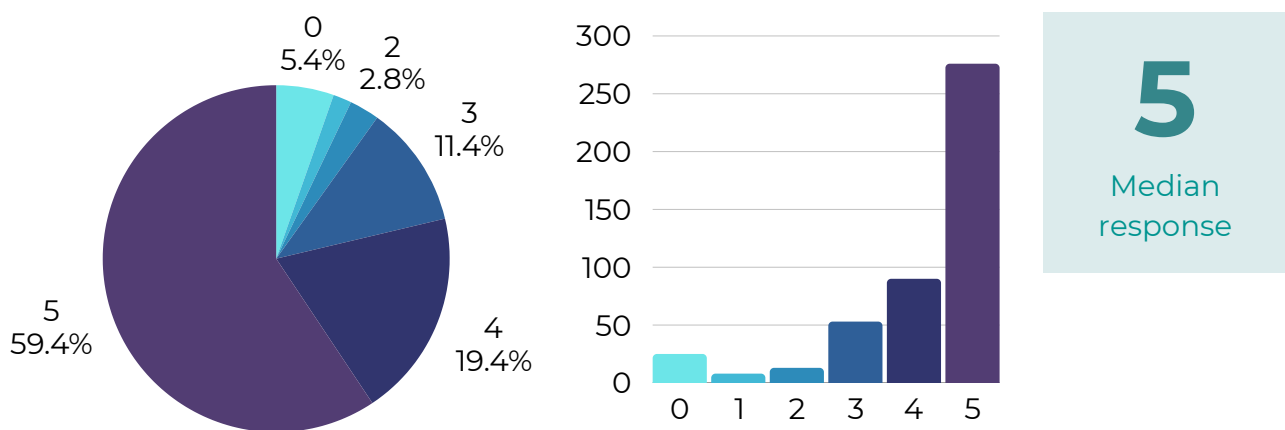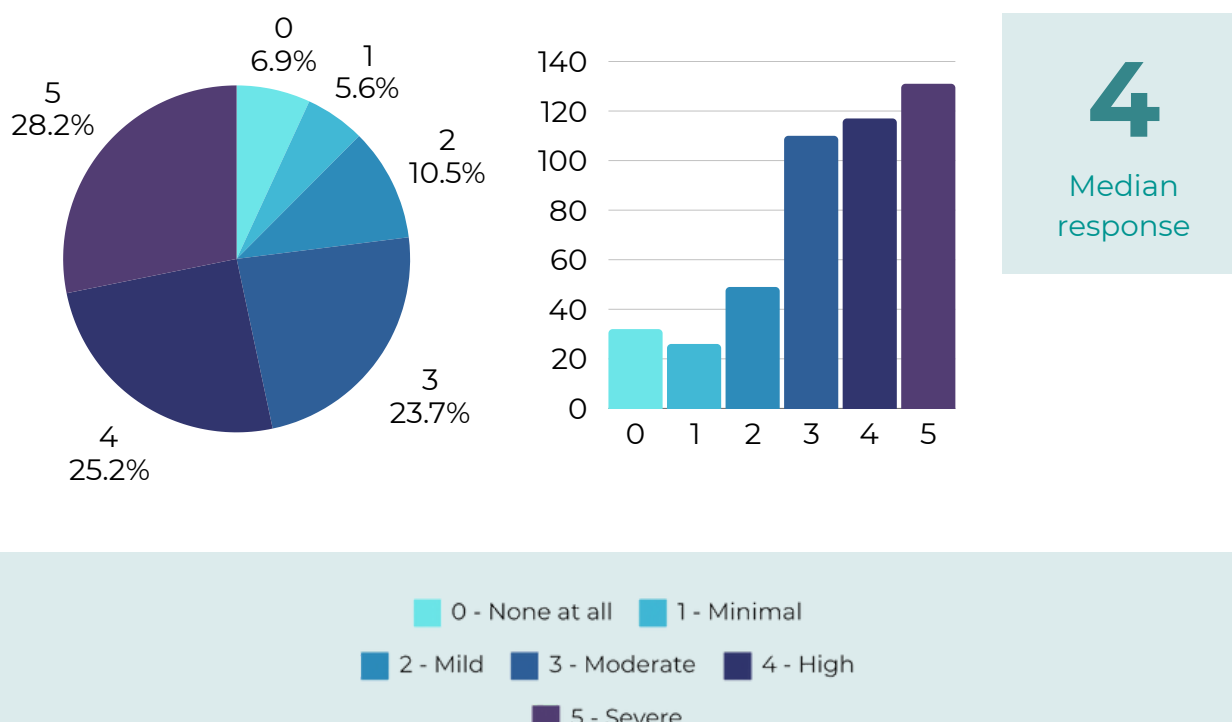

Figure 4: How would you describe the level of communal tension/ incidents you experienced **during** the Leicester riots?

0 - None at all   1 - Minimal
2 - Mild   3 - Moderate   4 - High
5 - Severe

Figure 5: How would you describe the level of communal tension/ incidents you experienced **after** the Leicester riots?

Pie chart:
- 0: 6.9%
- 1: 5.6%
- 2: 10.5%
- 3: 23.7%
- 4: 25.2%
- 5: 28.2%

4 Median response

Legend:
- 0 - None at all
- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Mild
- 3 - Moderate
- 4 - High
- 5 - Severe

In late August 2022, violent clashes between groups of Hindu and Muslim men erupted in Leicester, with mainstream media attributing the initial spark to an international **cricket match** between India and Pakistan on 28 August. Videos emerged and were circulated on social media showing large groups of men carrying Indian flags, marching through Leicester while chanting "**death to Pakistan**." During this period, a police officer and a Sikh man were violently attacked, the latter reportedly **mistaken for a Muslim**. The violence escalated over the following nights, with footage shared over social media depicting violence being committed by members of both Muslim and Hindu communities across Leicester.

On 17 September 2022, tensions peaked when a group of around 200 Hindu men marched through a predominantly Muslim area, chanting "*Jai Shri Ram*" — a phrase linked to Hindu nationalist violence in India that will be discussed in greater detail throughout this report. Allegations of attacks on Muslims led to a gathering of Muslim men, with police having to separate the two groups. Bottles and other projectiles were reportedly thrown, and a Hindu temple flag was forcibly removed. The next evening, further confrontations saw a mosque defaced with graffiti and a Hindu flag burned.

While the media highlighted the cricket match as a trigger, both survey responses and local sources indicate that relations between some of Leicester's Hindus and Muslims had been deteriorating for some time prior to the outbreak of violence due to socio-political and economic factors, including austerity measures and cuts to local services, as well as rising levels of anti-social behaviour and changing attitudes due to the importation of Hindutva ideologies and global politics.

The following discussion seeks to use the survey data collected to outline how the origins of the conflict were perceived by Muslim communities across Leicester.

Situating the riots

Many respondents pointed to evidence that the 2022 Leicester riots did not occur in a vacuum, rather, they marked a breaking point in the city's communal dynamics, exposing long-standing tensions that had been simmering beneath the surface. While Leicester has historically been celebrated for its harmonious multiculturalism, survey respondents pointed to a gradual erosion of these relations in the years leading up to the riots. Patterns of anti-social behaviour and divisive provocations during key events such as cricket matches and religious festivals were repeatedly cited as contributing factors.

> *we [Muslims and Hindus] have lived side by side and in peace and harmony since we immigrated from Africa in the 70's. We've grown up together, broken bread together. Been there for each other. Like brothers and sisters.*

However, respondents frequently described Leicester's strong inter-community cohesion and collaborative spirit, which had characterised much of the city's social landscape before the mid-late 2010s. These dynamics allowed the city to navigate tensions for decades until growing frustrations around anti-social and provocative behaviours, as well as Hindutva ideologies imported from India began to undermine *this foundation. As one participant observed,"we [Muslims and Hindus] have lived side by side and in peace and harmony since we immigrated from Africa in the 70's. We've grown up together, broken bread together. Been there for each other. Like brothers and sisters."* This is in line with descriptions of other participants, who often highlighted Leicester to be a *"multicultural city where many religions have lived peacefully and respected one another, for many many many years"* and a *"city where people care for one another and live in harmony and peace despite of their colour, race, or religion."*

On a scale of 0-5, 38.9% of survey respondents categorised the level of communal tension prior to the riots as 0

> *Leicester has always been a multicultural place with people from all walks of life getting along in peace and harmony. These gang[s] of Hindutvas came all the way from London to cause trouble. It is widely believed that the origins of this unwarranted provocation of the Muslim community is from India and the ruling BJP party.*

(none at all) with only 13.8% rating tensions as 5 (severe). The median response identified the level of tension during this time to be a 1 (minimal). There is then a steady shift in these perceptions with only 5.4% and 6.9% of respondents rating communal tensions as 0 during and after the riots respectively; this is in contrast to 59.4% and 28.2% classifying tensions as severe and median responses of 4 (high) and 3 (moderate).

Thus, what can clearly be seen in Figures 3-5 of this report is a sharp escalation in the perception of tensions from a fairly low level before the riots, peaking during the riots, and then slightly subsiding after the riots but remaining at a level that far exceeded the levels witnessed previously. As observed by one participant, "*before the riots both [Hindu and Muslim] communit[ies were] living with peace and harmony, but after the riots things ha[ve] changed... people from each community look [at] each other as a threat.*" Another respondent described the riots as creating "*a divide between communities that previously lived in harmony*", while others discussed the riots having "*undone decades of harmony and coexistence*" and how they are now "*wary of Hindu neighbours and colleagues, wondering whether they are Modi supporters*".

> ***Members of the community were left traumatised and angry and some would not come out of their house in the fear of being attacked...they didn't feel safe walking on the streets. Some members of the community like myself were angry because we've lived side by side and been to school with Hindus have Hindu neighbours and Hindu friends and we were all left wondering why now[?] What['s] changed after 40 years of living in harmony[?]***

Among the responses, there was a huge sense of loss regarding the damage done to inter-community relationships and Leicester's identity as an inclusive and multicultural city. One participant commented that:

"There was a great loss in the community. We have always held great relations but due to these incidents trust was lost. Communities who once were so intertwined have become distant. Now it is about rebuilding the trust which will take time. We are still fearful at times. Some Muslims do not feel safe. I still do not go out alone, or with my children in the evening, without my husband. I avoid certain places. I prefer to stay home. I worry how much this has left me anxious. Any incident I hear of, I wonder if it is happening again. When it is not to do with that, I feel relief. I hope it never happens again and we can live in harmony like we always did before."

For many survey participants, there was a strong desire to return to the past community dynamics. One respondent argued that "*'living together separately' isn't a healthy option in our beautiful Leicester that is multicultural and has*

attracted people nationally and globally".

Local Catalysts

As previously mentioned, media accounts at the time presented the riots as being triggered by an international cricket match. However, as this report demonstrates, there are a multitude of socio-political and economic catalysts that all contributed to the eruption of violence. At this juncture, it is important to examine four specific catalysts that all heightened tensions to the point of eventual violence:

> " *We all used to live in harmony and there was mutual respect. I feel that this is lost... I feel scared to leave my house and go to the corner shop and I am sure there are many Muslims and Hindus that feel like this too.* "

- The Muslim community centre controversy,

- The 2019 General Election,

- Cricket matches,

- Cultural and religious festivities.

The Muslim Community Centre Controversy

In January 2018, the rejection of an application to establish the Belper Education Centre — a Muslim community center in Leicester's Belgrave area — was one of the first overt signs of rising tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The proposal to convert a vacant warehouse into a nursery and prayer space was rejected by Leicester City Council, citing concerns about noise, traffic, and parking. Despite adjustments to address these issues, **the application was denied**, and the council stated that factors related to religion and potential community tensions were not relevant to the decision.

However, the council received around 1,500 objections, many of which expressed anti-Muslim sentiments. Some objections argued against having a Muslim institution in a predominantly Hindu area, indicating a perceived need to protect the **Hindu character of Belgrave**, while citing Islamophobic views as justification for the objections. Many objectors were reportedly not local to Leicester, suggesting a wider concerted effort to prevent the centre's establishment and a broader mobilisation to demonise Muslim communities as an innate threat to their Hindu counterparts.

2014
Narendra Modi's First Election Win: **Celebrations** erupt in parts of Leicester following the election victory of India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi. Modi's nationalist policies and rhetoric have drawn international attention, especially among Indian diaspora communities.

2016
Brexit Referendum: The UK votes to leave the European Union, causing increased tensions around immigration, identity, and community relations. Leicester, with its diverse population, begins experiencing heightened divisions as funding cuts and political discourse exacerbate existing challenges.

2018
The Muslim Community Centre Controversy

2019
Narendra Modi's Re-Election: **Celebrations** are held in Leicester, once more reflecting the city's divided Indian diaspora. Modi's leadership is polarising, with supporters praising his policies and critics accusing him of fostering Hindu nationalism and marginalising minority communities, particularly Muslims.

May 2022
30 **Hindu men attacked** a Muslim man

Aug 2022
Asia Cup Cricket Match Incident: **Following**, a cricket match between India and Pakistan in Dubai, Indian fans in Leicester gather, chanting slogans such as "Pakistan Murdabad" ("death to Pakistan"). This marks the beginning of rising tensions that would come to be known as the riots.

Contextual Factors

- **New Arrivals from Gujarat:** A recent **influx** of immigrants from Daman and Diu, a Union Territory in Gujarat, has added complexity to Leicester's demographics. This includes Hindus and Muslims with Portuguese passports.

- **Austerity Measures:** Years of austerity and reductions in funding for community-building initiatives, education, and youth services have weakened Leicester's ability to manage and resolve communal tensions.

> **As a Muslim I feel tension increases when election time comes[.] I feel this is... what [brought] this on in the first place.**

The 2019 General Election

The December 2019 General Election further inflamed religious tensions in Leicester. The Conservative candidate, Bhupen Dave, lost narrowly to Labour's Claudia Webbe. A leaflet circulated under the banner "*Operation Dharmic Vote*" called on the Dharmic community — Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, and Buddhists — to support Dave, portraying Webbe as "**poison**" due to her affiliation with Jeremy Corbyn and alleged anti-Hindu and anti-India stances. Although Dave lost, the Conservative vote share in Leicester East increased significantly, indicating that Hindutva and Islamophobic sentiments had gained significant traction.

While Operation Dharmic Vote was not officially part of Dave's campaign, it was led by his associate, **Mukesh Naker**, a Conservative Party member with ties to Hindu nationalist groups. Nakar had previously organised similar campaigns in Harrow East, urging British Hindus to vote against Labour candidates. This Operation Dharmic Vote campaign contributed to an increase in tensions between Leicester's Hindu and Muslim communities, a divide that persisted through the 2022 riots.

In the broader context of British politics, the infiltration of Hindutva into the 2019 election was marked by anti-Labour messaging on platforms like **WhatsApp**, accusing the party of being "*anti-India, anti-Hindu, and anti-Modi.*" There were further implications that any within the Indian diaspora who continued to support the Labour Party should be considered "*traitors to their ancestral land, to their family and friends in India and to their cultural heritage*".

This narrative was fuelled by Labour's stance on the Kashmir issue, with Jeremy Corbyn condemning India's actions in revoking Article 370, which granted Kashmir special autonomy. The Overseas Friends of BJP (OFBJP) also campaigned to sway Indian voters in marginal seats, urging them to support the Conservative Party.
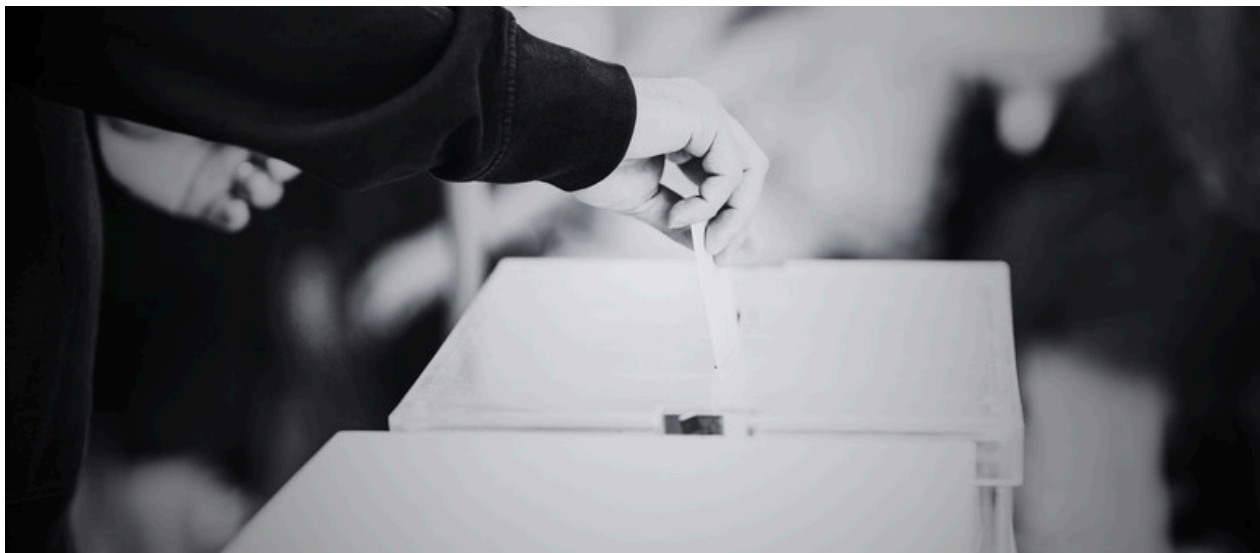
Cricket Matches

Across a great deal of public commentary regarding the roots of the Leicester riots, cricket matches have been identified as key ignition points for the violence. However, survey participants were very clear that "*cricket was just an excuse*" for violence and aggression for a number of years, but had not been a trigger for the violence in themselves. In reality, they appear to have been used by small minorities as a tool to provoke other communities and articulate established hostility.

Matches between India and Pakistan were cited as flashpoints. As observed by one respondent;

> "*a group of people came out after watching the cricket match. They blocked the road. The youngsters came out in large numbers [and] approached me holding bottles of [alcohol]. When I asked the result of the match, they said 'it is one of theirs' in Gujarati language assuming that I am supporting Pakistan, although I was speaking to them in Gujarati and myself an Indian, in order to provoke me. They were also chanting 'Bharat Mata ki jai'.*"

'Bharat Mata ki Jai', translates to "victory for Mother India" or "long live Mother India" and is a motto used by the Indian army.

Specific instances of violence were also cited amongst the responses, for example, "*a young Muslim Pakistani was attacked with glass bottles and cricket bats as Pakistan had won [against] India in a cricket match*". One respondent described situations where "*after the cricket games between Pakistan and India I have seen and heard them shout various hate chants towards us Muslims outside our mosques and also blocking the whole of Green Lane Road and disturbing the whole neighbourhood at stupid times. The chants were saying 'death to Muslims' in Hindi outside our mosques and local streets.*"

As concluded by a number of participants, "*this has nothing to do with cricket or any other sport. This was by design an organised disturbance to the balance of harmony by these people with extreme views which they've brought over here. They get away with these view back where they come from [in India] because the political regime allows it.*"

An important dynamic underlying tensions surrounding cricket matches is that competition between India and Pakistan has been appropriated by agitators and translated into rivalries between Hindus and Muslims. However, as several respondents pointed out, many of Leicester's Muslim community (including respondents themselves) are Indian by ethnicity or birth and, therefore, support the Indian team. This is indicative of the exclusionary politics contained within Hindutva ideologies, wherein Muslims and others are seen as outsiders, regardless of national, ethnic, and other affiliations. This ideology not only marginalises these groups but also erases the shared histories, contributions, and connections that bind Indian communities together across religious lines.

> **I experienced an incident a few years ago following a cricket match between India and Pakistan where crowds of Indian fans were all over Green Lane Road and causing traffic to be held up, abusing anyone that looked Muslim. I was in the car with my wife and young children at the time and we were told to 'go back to our country' which was ironic considering we were all born here and the aggressive individual could [clearly] not speak English very well.**

Cultural and Religious Festivities

Survey participants also highlighted the role of cultural and religious festivals as significant catalysts for escalating communal tensions in the lead-up to the Leicester riots. Multiple participant accounts pointed to the celebration of events such as Diwali and Indian Independence Day as moments of heightened provocation, particularly when festivities were held near mosques and at prayer times, wherein certain individuals were perceived to be purposefully using celebrations as a way to cause targeted disruption, disrespect, and harassment towards Muslim communities. For instance, playing loud music late at night, deploying fireworks and firecrackers, littering (especially the throwing of bottles of alcohol), and shouting nationalist chants were all viewed as provocations. A participant described groups "*playing loud music at early hours in the morning in built up residential areas, dancing and having riot styled parties in streets [and] displaying orange flags [in order] to intimidate, instigating violence etc.*"

Respondents reported perceiving these actions as deliberate provocations. One respondent noted, "*I saw a group of Hindu men gathered in front of Baytul Ilm Masjid*... *exactly at the prayer time to burst the fire crackers in order to celebrate the Ganapati Festival. They bursted the firecrackers. It looked like a provocation.*" Such displays were seen as attempts to assert dominance, with frustrations around activities reportedly spilling over into Muslim-majority residential areas late at night. Loud music and street dances reportedly disturbed residents and added to feelings of intimidation. A participant highlighted an instance of groups playing "*music in the street very loudly, because [they had] been kicked out from the hall because the hall [closes] at 10:30 pm [and] after the hall they were [playing] the music in [the] street until 12:30 am to 1 am*". Another participant recounted the playing of music on the streets after the closure of the hall late at night and added that "*it was disturbing the neighbourhood. This happened for a few days. The neighbourhood kept ringing the police but they did not do anything... There [was] a group that attacked people and that's when the neighbourhood got absolutely terrified... we were afraid to go out on our daily routine.*"

*Baytul Ilm Masjid is a mosque on Spinney Hill Road

Meanwhile, respondents recalled incidents where groups were "*disturbing holy mosques (Baytul Ilm) by playing loud music at the time of prayers to see a reaction from the teachers at the mosque. The mosque kindly asked them to move away from the mosque, [but] they did not compromise with this until the mosque b[r]ought up calling the police. After this incident on their holy festival they were using fireworks after the curfew which they would [use to] annoy Muslim [families].*"

Overall, the intersection of cultural celebrations with provocative behaviour and communal rivalries contributed to a sense of alienation and fear within Leicester's Muslim community during the riots.

> *Whenever there are festivals or any other events happening there is no consideration for the time etc. Loud music, chanting, drinking, fireworks – it will go on late into the night. No one will think of the children that go to school or may be frightened or for anyone that is trying to sleep. As long as they are having a good time. Even the authorities dont seem to do anything about it… after 11pm the noise etc continues but its 'allowed' as [it's] a festival. If it was an Islamic festival being celebrated till the early hours [I] am sure there would be uproar in the community.*

There is evidence that the violence witnessed in 2022 did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, it was a breaking point in the city's communal dynamics that exposed the long-standing tensions that had been simmering beneath the surface. While Leicester has historically been celebrated for its harmonious multiculturalism, there appears to have been a gradual erosion of these relations in the years leading up to the riots. Patterns of anti-social behaviour and divisive provocations during key events such as cricket matches and religious festivals were repeatedly cited as contributing factors. Within communities, there appears to be a growing sense of grief and loss regarding the damage done to previously harmonious inter-community relationships and Leicester's identity as an inclusive and multicultural city.

Identifying Instigators

Contrary to many public and political narratives framing the tensions as a result of Muslim aggression, survey respondents highlighted Islamophobic sentiments that had been festering across Leicester for a number of years and which had been used to instigate hostilities through repeated anti-social behaviour, intimidation, and growing instances of abuse.

However, participants often went to great lengths to emphasise that the tensions do not have a religious cause and were keen to highlight their affection for their Hindu brothers and sisters and a great sense of grief due to the fractures that have been created in a previously harmonious relationship that had lasted for half a century. Instead, anger was directed at what was considered a minority of individuals promoting and importing Hindutva ideologies and politics from India; "*the Hindu community are good people, it is the recent Hindu immigrants from Daman who are bringing in the RSS ideology to the UK. They are trying to create tension with the existing Muslim and Hindu community.*"

> *Hinduvta supporting mobs specifically targeted Muslim communities with unprovoked attacks. Displaying their hate fuelled mindsets and aggression. This group mainly consisted of male youth fairly new to the UK who seemed to hold grievances from their far right ideologies from India. Asian communities in Leicester have always lived harmoniously together prior this.*

Thus, the majority of respondents connected the change in decades-long inter-community stability to the recent arrival of communities from Daman and Diu (a union territory in the northwest of India). According to participants, these recent migrants were central to rising patterns of anti-social behaviour due to a lack of respect for local norms (resulting in issues such as spitting, littering, and public urination) and the importation of Hindutva ideologies and hostilities that have characterised Indian politics and society for many years.

It is worthy of note that the arrival of this community also occurred during a period of austerity, where public services (such as English language classes) were heavily cut. This not only creates barriers to communication, but the deterioration of local amenities, events, and services that can bring diverse communities

together and foster a joint sense of belonging. Unfortunately, the impacts of this lack of opportunity for social engagement appears to have far reaching consequences for community relations across Leicester.

One respondent explained that:

"there has been a large influx of Indian migrants from Daman... the migrants have lacked any formal education, training or work skills... There remains a huge lack of social skills leading to anti-social behaviour... [including] littering and constant flytipping... spitting... gatherings of men at junctions blocking pavements and causing intimidation for young women and children – typically drinking alcohol at all hours... late night functions/parties causing noise and disturbance... [unregulated] street parties... blocking roads and causing traffic problems".

> **The recent migration of the Daman community into the area has been the root cause of the issues. These individuals are poorly educated and have fishery backgrounds. They do not understand tolerance and peace and have only ever lived in chaos and violence. They have [a] group mentality.... The issues were not instigated overnight but [have] been a gradual build up of events.**

From a methodological standpoint, we must endeavour to faithfully relay the authentic lived experiences of our participants, including their expressed concerns surrounding the role of recent immigrants in a perceived importation of extremist Hindutva ideologies and proliferation of anti-social behaviours perceived to be at odds with local norms.

However, we fully recognise the sensitivities surrounding immigration, identity, and social cohesion and **wish to make it unequivocally clear that our intention is not to stigmatise or scapegoat immigrant communities.** We acknowledge the significant challenges faced by immigrants, including discrimination, integration pressures, and economic hardship. **It is imperative that our findings are not misused to fuel xenophobic narratives or provide ammunition to far-right ideologues who seek to exploit social tensions for divisive ends.**

We include these perspectives as ignoring or dismissing the concerns expressed by communities would be a disservice to the pursuit of meaningful social cohesion. It is crucial to engage with these perceptions in a way that fosters constructive dialogue, addressing grievances while upholding principles of fairness and non-discrimination. Our work aims to inform policy solutions that strengthen community relations and promote a shared sense of belonging for all residents of Leicester, regardless of background.

The increase in migrants from Daman and Diu was deemed to be central to a rise in Hindutva ideologies and anti-Muslim hostilities that mirror those found across India under Modi and the BJP. Many participants noted that, "*I believe that the Hindu and Muslim communities have lived in harmony for many years in Leicester. I genuinely feel this was caused by recent migrants from the area of Daman in India. Certain elements of extremist far right Islamophobic politics being played out in India has been allowed to enter Leicester and hence we had these tensions.*" Consequently, much of the anti-social behaviour discussed throughout the survey responses was described as active and intentional instances of provocation and hatred targeting Muslim communities as a reflection of the Islamophobia engrained within Hindutva ideologies and local Indian politics. The dynamics of these patterns of anti-social behaviour will be discussed more fully in the next chapter of this report.

> **There were no issues within Leicester like this before the new wave of immigrants came especially from Daman, a small city in Gujarat, India. They have brought their ideology to the UK in order to further terrorise Muslim communities outside of India as this is what is happening 'back home'. Leicester is the most multicultural city in the UK and the people of Leicester are proud to hold such a title when there is harmony between all communities.**

Regarding the riots themselves, it is worthy of note that many participants pointed towards agitators that came to the city from London and other areas of the UK, with the expressed purpose of intimidating and harassing Muslim communities. Indeed, it is notable that on the 19th September, *The Guardian* **reported** that half of those arrested were not from Leicestershire. Multiple accounts reference "*radical youths that came by coach from London to cause disruption and chaos*" and describe how "*the city was gripped with fear especially as coaches from London had arrived with masked men who were allowed to walk freely through Muslim areas damaging property and singing fascists slogans*". There remains a great concern regarding the lasting damage of social media **disinformation,** including the veracity of accounts pointing to coaches arriving in Leicester from London, however, this should not distract from the overwhelming consensus of participants that outside instigators had a role to play in the violence.

> **This was caused by non Leicester residents [in order] to cause trouble in a peaceful harmonious community – Hindus and Muslims have lived side by side in Leicester for many years and this type of incident has been unheard of. This was propagated by a right wing group from India who do not represent the views of the Leicester community**

According to respondents, "*The[y] came to instigate trouble and fuel a divide in our beautiful multi-faith community where everyone helps everyone regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. They came to [incite] fear and create a war between religions as they have done in India.*" As such, there was an acute awareness amongst survey participants that the origins of the violence and tension should not be attributed to Leicester's Hindu community as a whole. Rather, across many responses, instigators were consistently described as "*extremists*", with many noting the active intent to create division between Leicester's Hindu and Muslim communities; "*it was clear that these extremists were here to damage the civil harmony that Leicester was so proud of*". One participant described "*extremists from India attacking a lone Muslim on the street and breaking into another Muslims house and attacking the family – Hindu people in Leicester are lovely and peace loving people who I as a Muslim call them my brother and sisters – unfortunately Hindu immigrants from India with BJP party narratives have [brought] this silliness into Leicester which is normally peace loving with Hindu and Muslims side by side*".

However, there was also frustration amongst the participants and a perception that leaders within Leicester's Hindu community had not done enough to condemn instigators nor correct biased public narratives, instead allowing Muslim communities to be unfairly demonised. One participant pointed out that;

"*there is now a divide between Hindus and Muslims in Leicester as the Hindu community did not condemn the two youths being attacked by Hindu gangs and neither did they condemn the mob of over 300 plus causing trouble on Green Lane Road, there is a lot of BJP Hindus in Leicester who have migrated here and have caused tensions because they kill and abuse Muslims in India and are coming with racist rhetoric here also.*"

This was mirrored in other accounts, including participants highlighting that, "*there needs to actually be condemnation from leaders of communities from both sides, this was clearly not evident from the Hindu community, where they mainly remained silent*". Consequently, "*Hindu community leaders should be more active in condemning such attacks and push for more respect and understanding.*"

> ***Prominent members of the local Muslim community came out openly to [condemn] the hostilities shown and violence but no such statement was made from anyone from the Hindu community which felt biased.***

Consequently, while respondents were clear that the Hindu community was not responsible for the violence, leaders from both communities now have a responsibility to show true leadership and guidance to anyone seen to be promoting hatred. In particular, respondents highlighted the need to empower, support and train local community leaders on both sides to "*educate their communities on the need for peace and tolerance and respect for everyone*". At the same time, "*community leaders from both groups need to come together and the same message needs to be said through all places of worship*".

Moreover, several participants raised concerns that not enough is being done to reject hateful ideologies, with respondents pointing to invitations that have allegedly been extended to "*extremist preachers [from] India who sow seeds of hate*". Respondents were very clear that providing these speakers unchallenged platforms within Leicester can only cause greater division and will damage attempts to repair inter-community relationships.

While this is especially important within Leicester itself, it is also important that such preachers are not given national platforms. As mentioned previously, in 2017, Bob Blackman MP (then the chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus), hosted **Tapan Ghosh**, who has links to EDL founder, Tommy Robinson, and who "*is on record for calling upon the United Nations to control the birth rate of Muslims, praising the genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Burma and also said Muslims should be forced to leave their religion if they come to a western country*". Consequently, it is essential that communities on both sides are actively engaged in challenging all those who seek to incite hatred and violence if delicate community relations are to be repaired.

> *Although most of the Hindu community do not hold those extreme views it was immensely sad to see that not one leader of the Hindu community came out and spoke against those marching through the city attacking businesses and individuals. All the Muslims wanted was reassurance that this group was not part of the mainstream Hindu community... Imams and other leaders in Leicester from the Muslim community came denouncing any unprovoked action from the Muslims yet to date I cannot recall... even one Hindu priest [who did the same]. Also there have been certain preachers visiting the temples from outside of the UK who hold absolutely abhorrent views regarding Muslims that makes one ponder what spirituality he must be preaching whilst in Leicester.*

Participants went to great lengths to stipulate that the provocations and violence experienced by Leicester's Muslim community should not be attributed to their Hindu counterparts as a whole, but rather to a minority of *"extremists"* adhering to divisive Hindutva ideologies. Many pointed to the importation of these ideologies through immigration, as well as the deliberate mobilisation of adherents from other parts of the UK that came into the city for the purpose of stoking tension and violence.

Respondents were also clear that leaders from both Hindu and Muslim communities now have a responsibility to show true leadership and guidance to anyone seen to be promoting hatred. They highlighted the need to empower, support and train local community leaders, as well as being guarded against providing unchallenged platforms to speakers that preach hatred.

Media and Political Narratives

In identifying the origins of the tensions and assigning accountability, there was a clear sense among the survey participants that public and political understandings of the riots did not capture the nuance of lived community experiences and failed to accurately reflect the role of Hindutva ideologies and politics that had been increasingly imported from India over the decade preceding the riots in 2022

Because of this, there was a palpable sense of frustration that the narrative has become characterised by Islamophobia, resulting in Leicester's Muslim communities being increasingly maligned and unfairly demonised by manufactured and biased media and political narratives. Consequently, overcoming the damage done by the riots and restoring community relations will require an acknowledgement of the role of Islamophobia in its public framing.

UK Media Reporting

The UK media's reporting of the Leicester unrest largely **mischaracterised** the realities of the situation by framing it as an equal, two-sided issue. This narrative not only distorts the nature of the violence but also obscures the underlying dynamics and perpetrators involved. For instance, chants by Hindutva mobs, such as "*death to Pakistan*" and "*death to Muslims*", were **depicted** merely as "racist and hateful chanting" by outlets like the BBC, stripping the events of their explicit Islamophobic intent. Similarly, prominent right-wing outlets such as **The Times**, **The Telegraph**, and **The Daily Mail** frequently employed vague and misleading terms like "*clash(es)*", "*disorder*", and "*Hindu and Muslim gangs*". These euphemisms create a false equivalence between the two groups, suggesting mutual aggression rather than acknowledging targeted Hindutva provocations. Such language choices actively shape public perceptions of violence and its perpetrators, which obscures accountability and blurs the lines of culpability.

> *It seems the media always portrays the Muslims as the bad guys even though all we [are] trying to do is live at peace*

When Muslim communities are inaccurately portrayed as equally culpable in instances of violence, or when their victimhood is minimised, it reinforces harmful stereotypes and biases that depict Muslims as inherently prone to violence. **Research** by the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) underscores this systemic issue, showing that Muslims are routinely erased as victims not only in the UK but globally. Media **coverage** of Hindutva violence in India often employs neutral or misleading language – terms like "*riots*" or "*religious tensions*" fail to capture the deliberate and targeted nature of these attacks, instead implying equal responsibility on both sides.

The impact of this reporting goes beyond misinforming the public – it alienates Muslim communities by marginalising their lived experiences and disregarding their narratives. This can perpetuate feelings of disenfranchisement and exclusion among these communities, further eroding their trust in mainstream media institutions.

Figure 6: Article in The Times, 19 September 2022.
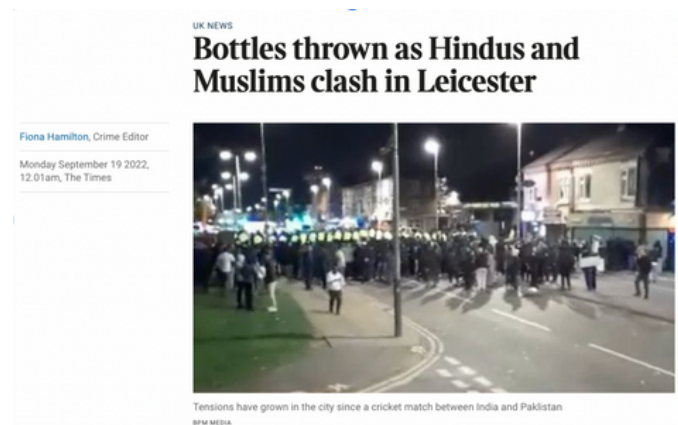

Figure 7: Article in The Telegraph, 21 September 2022.

Figure 8: Article in The Daily Mail, 22 September 2022.

Figure 9: *Article in The Telegraph, 19 September 2022.*

Hindutva narratives

The role of Hindutva narratives, particularly the responses from the Indian embassy and Indian commentators, significantly contributed to how the Leicester riots were framed in the public discourse. This framing, influenced by external factors, exacerbated divisions and demonised Muslim communities, undermining efforts to foster understanding and community relations.

Following the riots, the Indian embassy issued a **statement** highlighting the "*violence perpetrated against the Indian Community in Leicester and vandalization of premises and symbols of Hindu religion*", and calling for the protection of Hindus. The statement was largely considered as focusing on Hindu victimhood, neglecting the broader context of the tensions and failing to acknowledge the experiences of Muslim communities who were also subject to harassment and violence.

> *Watching Indian news channels at the time, the broadcasting was biased and one-sided causing more tension and resentment as Hindus were being portrayed as 'victims' rather than unrest from both sides.*

Additionally, Indian media outlets were accused of **sensationalising** the events and portraying Muslims as the aggressors, reportedly **with** "*no context, unverified videos*", and "*inflammatory headlines.*" For example, *Firstpost*, an Indian news website categorised as having a centre-right editorial position, covered the Leicester tensions with the **headline** "*Anti-Hindu rampage in UK: Muslim gangs terrorising Hindus, vandalising property after India's T20 win over Pakistan*". The article has been **criticised** for lacking any context and for **featuring** "*unverified videos of social media users claiming Hindus were under attack.*"

A similar headline also **appeared** on *The Print* that read "*UK: Pakistani organized gangs target Hindu areas in Leicester*", below which was a photo with the words "*Mass Gang attack on Hindus in Leicester, UK*".

The UK Government Response

The government's response to the Leicester unrest has centred on an independent review, though its trajectory has shifted significantly since October 2022. Initially, Leicester City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby **appointed** Dr. Chris Allen, an Associate Professor in Hate Crime Studies at the University of Leicester, to investigate the disturbances. However, Dr. Allen **stepped down** within a week due to a boycott by local Hindu organisations and was targeted with extensive social media **abuse**.

In May 2023, Michael Gove, then Secretary of State for Levelling Up, **appointed** Lord Ian Austin, a former Labour MP, to lead the review. This appointment drew widespread criticism due to Lord Austin's history of Islamophobic remarks, including a **tweet** he posted in 2021 and a 2024 post **referencing** "*Islamist murderers and rapists*" that has since been deleted but which led to his **suspension** from a housing association role. His close ties to the Henry Jackson Society further compounded **concerns** about his impartiality. Muslim organisations, civil society groups, and Leicester councillors have strongly criticised Lord Austin's appointment. The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) **warned** that Lord Austin's appointment undermines the "*credibility and legitimacy*" of the review, while the Leicester-based Federation of Muslim Organisations **called** for a reviewer with a balanced perspective. Meanwhile, several Leicester City councillors have **boycotted** the review, arguing that Lord Austin's involvement compromises its integrity and renders its findings meaningless.

Consequently, while the future of the independent review remains unclear (at the time of writing, there is a lack of public evidence regarding its current status), several participants noted a lack of faith in the review as truly independent, with the involvement of figures such as Michael Gove being highlighted for particular criticism: *"no serious attempt [is] being made by the government[2] to call it out for what it is. Instead the government led by Michael Gove is seeking to pour fuel to the fire to increase the tensions because of his and his governments hatred for Muslims"*. Michael Gove has been repeatedly **criticised** for his anti-Muslim connections and policies, including for his involvement with the Henry Jackson Society and the **Trojan Horse Affair**.

Figure 10: Labour Muslim Network quote-tweet of a post by Ian Austin, 21 July 2021.

2. The UKIMC survey was conducted prior to the 2024 General Election. As such, all quotes are referring to the previous political establishment.

> *Islamophobia is real and it exists. Both main political parties, Conservatives and Labour have a deep seated Islamophobia problem... The government and opposition seem unwilling to tackle and or recognise this. I understand the government wants to not call Islamophobia Islamophobia but instead Anti-Muslim hatred. This is a smoke screen and plays into 'culture' wars or 'identity' wars and right-wing theories. If the government is willing to let it slide, I doubt any government appointed person [especially] by Michael Gove will be independent.*

Moreover, there was a general frustration among participants regarding the perceived Islamophobic leanings of the government at the time, and therefore, a lack of confidence that political representatives were capable of effectively navigating the tensions; "*this government needs to change its narrative. I find them stoking the tensions between communities. They are racist and islam[o]phobic. It starts from the top.*"

The Role of Social Media

Survey respondents frequently pointed to the role of social media in spreading disinformation and skewed interpretations of the realities of the riots. One participant noted that, "*there are elements on all sides that are using social media to spread lies and further propaganda and tensions*", while other respondents reported lots of "*Islamophobic posts on social media. A lot of anti-Muslim sentiment from other religio[n]s who primarily side with the Hindus and wrongly blame Muslims for the riots.*"

An extensive digital ecosystem, comprised of social media influencers, organisations, and anonymous accounts from both the UK and India, played a significant role in inflaming tensions during the disturbances in Leicester in 2022. As one respondent observed, "*an India lead Modi BJP social media machine has continually spread lies and Islamaphobic/racist content*". As Mayor Soulsby **told** BBC Radio 4: "*I've seen quite a selection of social media stuff which is very, very, very distorting now and some of it just completely lying about what had been happening between different communities.*"

For instance, Nupur J Sharma falsely **claimed** on Twitter (now X) – as she did in her **interview** with Tommy Robinson, which is discussed earlier in this report – that "*several families (some say 200) have been displaced from Leicester and are unwilling to go back because they are scared of the violence by Islamists*". In direct response to her tweet, Leicestershire Police **clarified** that they were unaware of any displacement of Hindu families, suggesting the possibility that these claims were fabricated to stoke fear and misrepresent the situation by casting Muslims as the aggressors. As of August 2024, Sharma's tweet had garnered 11,000 likes and 5,000 retweets, underscoring the widespread reach and impact of this disinformation.

Echoing Sharma's claims, Charlotte Littlewood of the Henry Jackson Society stated in a *GB News* **interview**: "*I have knowledge of at least six, potentially nine, families having left the area because of fear of violence. Some of them have now returned but hide their outwardly Hindu symbols.*" She further noted that she was "*finding it hard to get hard evidence that this is Hindu nationalism. It's looking more and more like a territorial dispute particular to Leicester.*" Although Leicestershire Police had debunked these assertions, Sharma contested this by **retweeting** Littlewood's interview and endorsing it as a credible source. Littlewood's claims gained significant **traction** on social media, including in an *OpIndia* article about the alleged displacement of Hindu families from Leicester, which was **retweeted** nearly 2,500 times within days.

Furthermore social media played a central role in mobilising Hindutva sentiments, which in turn fuelled the violence in Leicester. Between 17th and 21st September 2022, at the peak of the unrest, approximately 60,000 tweets used **hashtags** like "#ProtectLeicesterHindus", "#StopLeicesterIslamicTerrorism", "#HindusUnderAttackInLeicester", "#HindusUnderAttackUK", and "#HinduHateInUK." According to fact-checking organisation *Logically*, 20,000 of these tweets were **geo-tagged**, and of that number, 18,000 (81%) originated from accounts in India, while only 1,200 (6%) came from UK accounts. This was further corroborated by a BBC

> ❝ *I've seen a rise in pro-Hindutva/anti-Muslim posts on social media and a corresponding rise in fear and anxiety amongst Muslims who have already had at least 2 decades of being dehumanised in UK media.* ❞

investigation, which found that tweets related to the Leicester unrest surged between 17th and 21st September, with nearly 150,000 such tweets on September 19th alone, a large portion of these were geotagged to India. Many accounts had no profile picture and were created within the previous month, indicating "*inauthentic activity*" – suggesting that anonymous users were deploying multiple accounts to spread disinformation and anti-Muslim sentiment.

Therefore, the impact of social media disinformation in provoking tensions between Hindu and Muslim communities in Leicester cannot be overstated. It is clear that a coordinated disinformation campaign by Hindutva-aligned online accounts spread rapidly, fuelling unrest and deepening divisions in Leicester. Moreover, an organised and coordinated social media campaign by Hindutva-aligned groups and individuals has seemingly left Leicester's Muslim communities feeling voiceless, frustrated, and isolated, with their experiences being ignored.

A Besieged Community

Respondents expressed that the Islamophobia inherent in the media and political framing of the tensions, combined with deep grievances with how local law enforcement responded to the tensions (a topic that will be covered in a later chapter of this report) have left Leicester's Muslim communities feeling victimised and abandoned.

According to many respondents, the culmination of years of anti-social behaviour, episodes of targeted violence, intimidation, and harassment (all of which local authorities reportedly overwhelmingly failed to act upon) resulted in an atmosphere of genuine fear amongst Muslim communities when the riots started and large groups of masked and armed Hindutva supporters marched through Muslim-majority areas of the city. As a result, while respondents largely condemned those involved in violence on both sides, many highlighted that there was a prevailing sense of Muslim communities needing to defend themselves; "*what you witnessed was a community who was left to defend itself against racists who don't even live in the city*".

This feeling was exacerbated by images of police officers escorting marches that were seen to be threatening local communities. As one respondent explained, "*A lot of Muslim men that were there [were as] a reaction to [the] violence [and] came out to defend [us] because there was no one to defend the community as the police appeared to part of the racist thugs. So we were left to defend ourselves. The community were disgusted that none of these mobs were arrested*".

> *The incitement started weeks before the riots... [They] kept on chipping away at the Muslim community with their anti-social behaviour. We kept on reporting it however to no avail. The straw that broke the camel's back is when they marched through areas of Leicester with their faces covered with a police escort. The taunting and behaviour became too much to bear... They came fully equipped with weapons... We only came with our hands.*

> *Groups of mobbed youths waving orange flags, aggravating local citizens and shops, displaying intimidating behaviour, shouting racially intimidating slogans and causing local residents to rise up in defence. Social media [was] then used to spiral things out of control on both sides.*

> *There is so much unawareness of Hindutva mobs that have very strong beliefs against Muslims which is also evident in the suffering of Muslims in India, and more so in areas which are strong believers of the BJP party. This needs to be publicised and protection must be given to British Muslims.*

As such, political and media framings which depicted Muslim communities as the aggressors, or else presented the violence as a clash between two equal sides, were felt to invisibilise the ways in which Muslim communities had been purposefully victimised, targeted, and harassed. Moreover, the sense of Muslims being unfairly blamed for the violence, particularly in the media, created a great sense of frustration amongst participants; "*I felt as a Muslim we were being targeted with minimal support from the community and especially the police. Muslims were being blamed for riots which were instigated by [Hindutva groups]*". One participant highlighted that they "*feel the police did not handle the whole situation well and blamed the Muslims for the riots but [did] not address the root causes – blaming cricket for the clashes which is a load of rubbish*".

Among participants, there was a sense that Muslim communities will not be fully protected until the government, media, and Hindu communities themselves recognise the role of Hindutva ideologies and Islamophobia in creating and escalating the tensions. Until the Islamophobia inherent in Hindutva politics is recognised and understood as a dangerous form of hatred, it cannot be properly dealt with by authorities and Muslim communities will be left unprotected. As one participant argued "*the police are out of touch and uneducated. They marched with racist thugs and did not even know what they were saying. They are so out of touch with what's going on in other countries and how [it impacts the UK]. How can they protect us if they are so oblivious?*"

> ***Terrorist Hindutva groups [came and]... started the riots... Muslims are not to blame – good Muslims and Hindus want to live side by side [and] have no hate.***

> ***The government appeared to be extremely slow to recognise the provocative nature of the marches... and seemed oblivious to the events unfolding in India where the Muslim minority were being targeted by the Indian government.***

Furthermore, a misrepresentative public understanding of the events that transpired in Leicester can only serve to exacerbate the Islamophobia that Muslims in Leicester and across the UK already face. According to survey respondents, 33.1% described the level of Islamophobia as 0 (none at all) prior to the riots, with a median score of 1 (minimal). During the riots, this median score rose to 4 (high) before falling to 3 (moderate) in the aftermath of the riots.

Figure 11: How would you describe the level of Islamophobia you experienced **prior** to the Leicester riots?

1

Median response
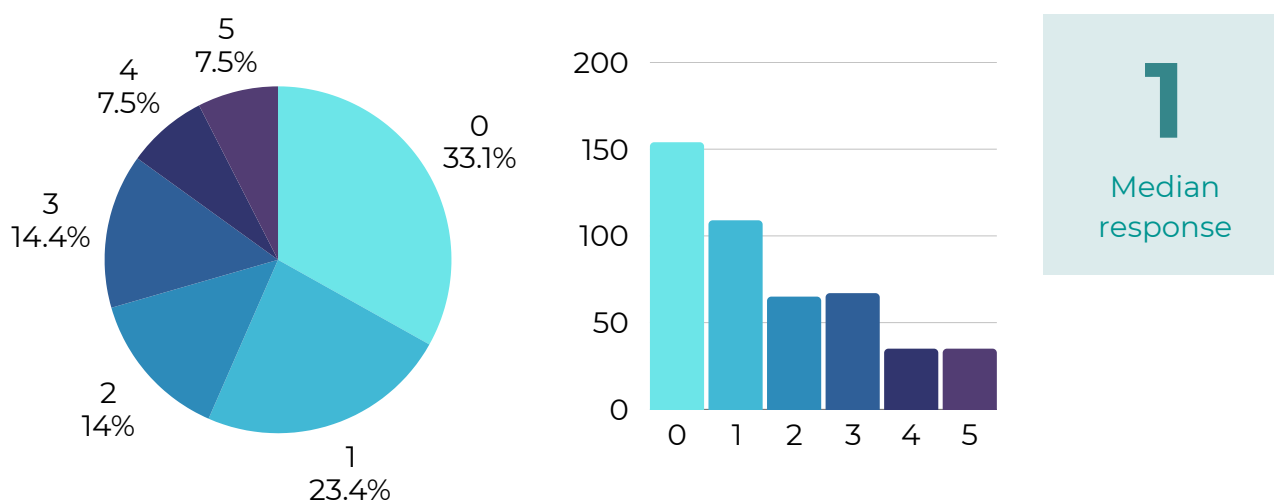
Figure 12: How would you describe the level of Islamophobia you experienced **during** the Leicester riots?

4

Median response
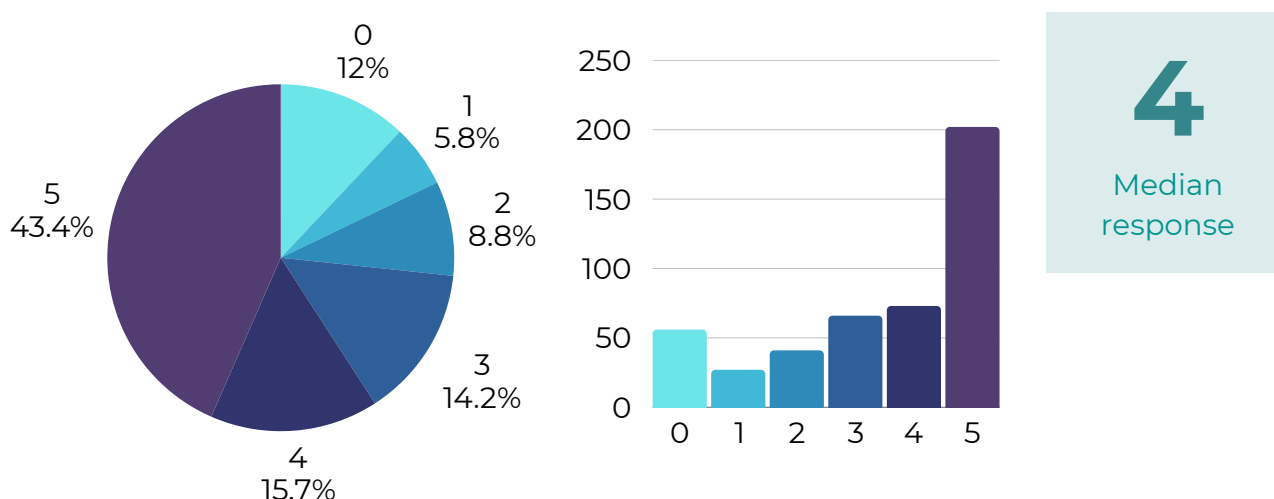
- 0 - None at all
- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Mild
- 3 - Moderate
- 4 - High
- 5 - Severe

Figure 13: How would you describe the level of Islamophobia you experienced **after** the Leicester riots?

Pie chart:
- 0: 14%
- 1: 11%
- 2: 10.3%
- 3: 17.6%
- 4: 22.6%
- 5: 24.5%

Bar chart (x-axis: 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; y-axis: 0 to 120):
- 0: ~64
- 1: ~50
- 2: ~48
- 3: ~82
- 4: ~105
- 5: ~114

3

Median response
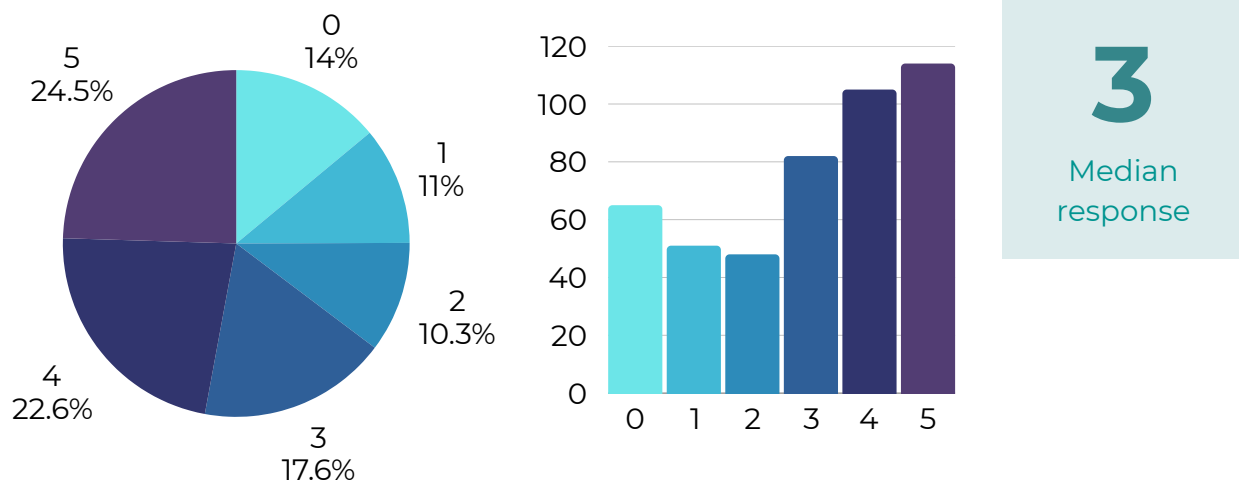
Legend:
- 0 - None at all
- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Mild
- 3 - Moderate
- 4 - High
- 5 - Severe

As such, with Muslim communities in Leicester continuing to face raised levels of Islamophobia, it is essential that accurate narratives are publicly reported and disinformation is not allowed to be propagated as a tool to further tensions.

During and since the disturbances, a Hindutva-driven digital ecosystem, comprising of social media influencers, organisations, bots, and anonymous accounts from both the UK and India, have played a significant role in inflaming tensions and driving Islamophobia.

At the same time, participants felt that political and media framings of the unrest overwhelmingly presented Muslim communities as the aggressors, or else depicted the violence as a clash between two equal sides. These framings were felt to invisibilise the ways in which Muslim communities had been purposefully victimised, targeted, and harassed. This sense of Muslims being unfairly blamed for the violence created a great sense of frustration and abandonment.

Moreover, the former government's track record of addressing Islamophobia and the involvement of figures such as Michael Gove in the planned inquiry gave participants little confidence in political appetite or ability to treat the unrest in an objective manner.
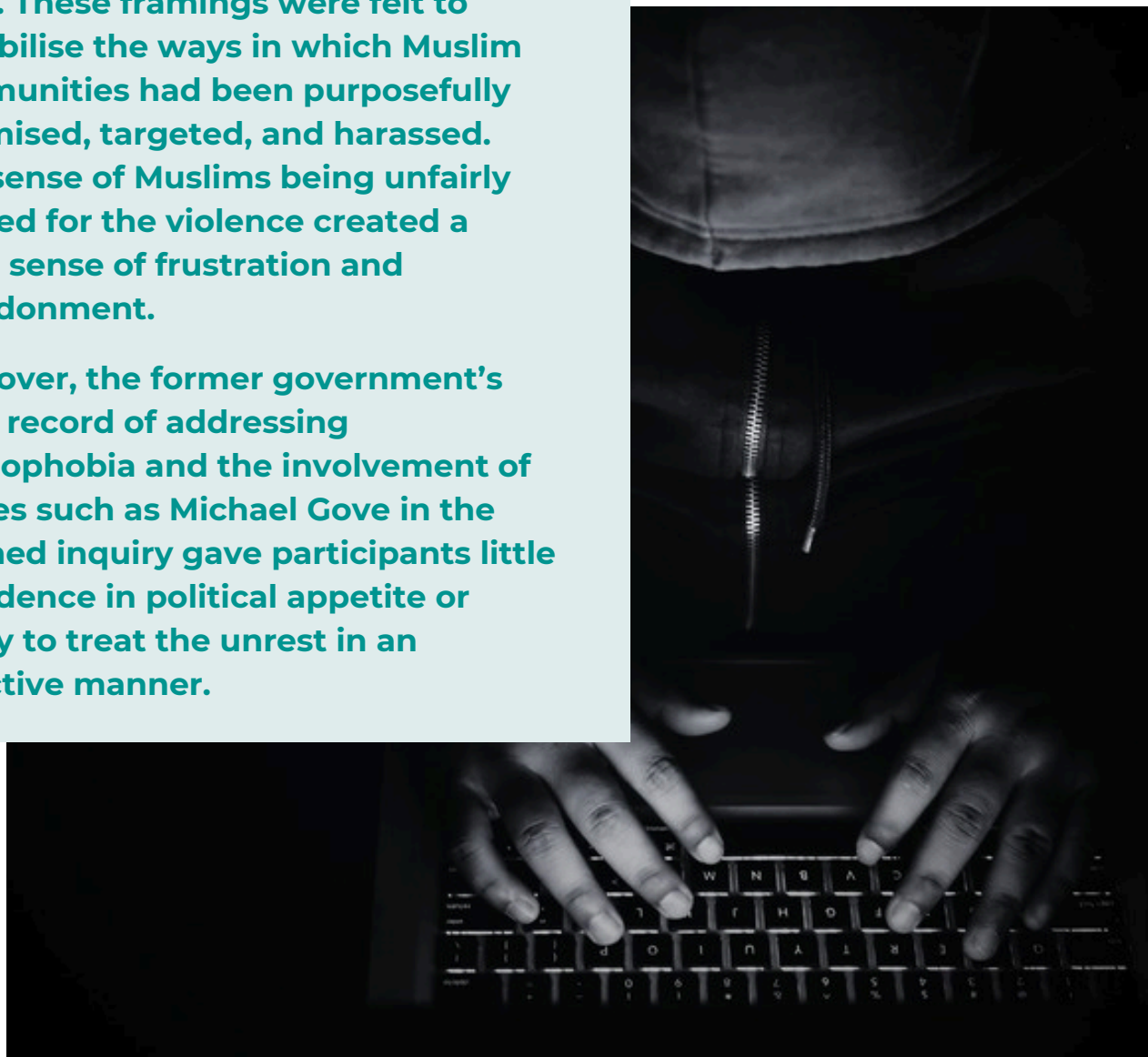
Key Patterns of Violence, Intimidation, and Anti-Social Behaviour

QUESTION: Can you briefly describe the specific incidents or situations where you experienced communal tension/incidents during the Leicester riots?
(201 responses – 8,580 words)

Keywords found amongst survey responses highlight recurring themes such as locations (Green Lane Road), targeted groups (Muslim), targeted properties (mosques, shops, cars), origins of the violence (Hindutva, men, India, BJP), concerns about police responses (police), psychological responses (scared), actions (chanting, shouting, throwing), and descriptions (group, balaclavas, extremist, loud, weapons).

Hindu/s	112 occurrences
Muslim/s	94 occurrences
Group/s	70 occurrences
Police	65 occurrences
Chant/ing	64 occurrences
Green Lane Road	64 occurrences
Men	59 occurrences
Covered faces/ balaclavas/ masked	56 occurrences
Area/s	56 occurrences
Weapon/s/ bat/s/ bottle/s/ baton/s/ brick/s/ rock/s/ knife/knives/ club/s	50 occurrences
People	48 occurrences

India/n	46 occurrences
Shout/ing/ scream/ing	45 occurrences
Road/s (not including Green Lane Road)	45 occurrences
March/es/ed/ing	43 occurrences
Thug/s/ mob	38 occurrences
Attack/ed/ing	38 occurrences
Mosque/s/ Masjid/s	37 occurrences
Car/s	33 occurrences
Riot/ed/ing	30 occurrences
Scary/ed/ frightened/ing terrified/ying/ fear/ful/ afraid	29 occurrences
Shop/s/ping	28 occurrences
Walk/ing	26 occurrences
Intimidate/d/ing/ory	25 occurrences
Hindutva/ nationalist/ BJP/ RSS/ Modi	40 occurrences
Young	21 occurrences
Child/ren	18 occurrences
Noise/ loud/ly	18 occurrences
Vande Mataram/ Bharat Mata ki Jai/ Jai Shri Ram	16 occurrences
Throw/n/ing/ threw/ chucking	15 occurrences
Provoke/ing/ provocation	14 occurrences
Cricket	14 occurrences
Youth/s	13 occurrences
Beat/en/ing	12 occurrences
Extremist/s	12 occurrences
Music	12 occurrences

QUESTION: Can you briefly describe the specific incidents or situations where you experienced anti-social behaviour/ incidents during the Leicester riots? (205 responses – 5,749 words)

Keywords found amongst survey responses highlight recurring themes such as locations (Green Lane Road, Spinney Hill Park), targeted groups (Muslim, women), properties/ areas targeted (mosques, parks), origins of the anti-social behaviour (Hindutva, men, groups, gangs), concerns about police responses (police), anti-social behaviour (shouting, littering, drinking), and descriptions (loud, late).

Drink/ing/ alcohol/ beer	91 occurrences
Loud/ noise/s/y	65 occurrences
Hindu/s	64 occurrences
Street/s	63 occurrences
Group/s/ gathering	58 occurrences
Muslim/s	53 occurrences
India/n	49 occurrences
Park/s (not including Spinney Hill Park)	49 occurrences
Music	47 occurrences
Area/s	45 occurrences
Mosque/s/ masjid/s	34 occurrences
Late/ night/s/ past midnight	33 occurrences
Men	32 occurrences
Litter/ed/ing/ rubbish/ trash	32 occurrences
Chant/ing	30 occurrences
Car/s	29 occurrences
Road/s (not including Green Lane Road)	29 occurrences
Green Lane Road	28 occurrences
Cricket	27 occurrences
Shout/ing/ scream/ing	21 occurrences
Gang/s/ thug/s/ mob/s	20 occurrences
Police	18 occurrences
Bottle/s	17 occurrences

Firework/cracker/s	16 occurrences
Hindutva/ nationalist/ BJP/ RSS/ Modi	15 occurrences
Intimidate/ing	15 occurrences
Young	14 occurrences
Women/ female	13 occurrences
Spinney Hill Park	13 occurrences
Provoke/ing/ provocative/ provocations	12 occurrences
Throw/ing	12 occurrences

As previously mentioned, throughout the survey data, respondents were clear that the riots had not occurred in a vacuum. Instead, they were the result of simmering tensions across Leicester that reached a boiling point in the summer of 2022. Indeed, survey participants identified patterns of anti-social behaviour, occasional violence, and an undercurrent of growing community hostilities that had been steadily increasing in intensity for several years prior to the outbreak of the riots. Meanwhile, the riots themselves were perceived to be characterised by direct experiences of violence, intimidation, and extreme ethno-religious ideologies in the form of Hindutva-inspired racism and abuse. The following chapter seeks to explore these experiences and perceptions of violence and anti-social behaviour reported throughout the survey responses.

Anti-social behaviour

Survey respondents consistently pointed to a pattern of anti-social behaviour that, while particularly acute during the time of the riots, predated the riots and had been steadily growing in intensity and severity for several years. As previously mentioned, many respondents suggested that the rise in patterns of anti-social behaviour coincided with a rise in migration to the area, with recent arrivals from Daman and Diu being frequently identified as central figures perpetuating anti-social behaviour targeting Muslim communities. According to one participant;

> *On our street th[ere] is a communal council area [where a lot] of fly tipping and littering was taking place during [the years preceding the riots]. Finally [the] council got fed up and took the seats out due to this. Also on our street... very loud music is [still] being played on regular basis and dancing in the middle of the road which blocks the whole road for other road users during the festival time. There should be a regular community educational and information training provided on how to live in the UK cleanly and peacefully with other community and respect every community. This has only happened [in the last] 4 to 5 years when... people from [Diu]/ Daman have come. We have never experienced [these] things before.*

In discussing experiences of anti-social behaviour, participants identified issues surrounding public drinking, loud music, littering, public urination, spitting, sexual harassment, and intimidation as recurrent forms of anti-social behaviour. These behaviours were reported to be a habitual and growing trend. However, specific events, such as cricket matches and religious celebrations were perceived to lead to an increase in this behaviour.

Public Drinking: This was a recurrent theme within the data that has reportedly caused a great deal of distress amongst Leicester's Muslim residents. Indeed, "drink/ing/ alcohol/ beer" was the keyword most frequently found in all the survey responses to the question specifically dealing with experiences of anti-social behaviour. According to respondents, a growing problem in recent years has been the occurrence of large groups of men congregating in Muslim-majority areas and drinking alcohol throughout the day and late at night in public spaces, such as play parks, street corners, and car parks.

These occurrences are seemingly often accompanied by instances of loud music, shouting, swearing, fighting, sexual harassment, littering, public urination, and spitting. These types of behaviours would naturally cause nuisance and distress in any community. However, for Muslim communities, alcohol is religiously forbidden. Consequently, public drinking on the scale reported in Muslim majority areas has been

> *I have seen alcohol bottles left outside my local mosque... and also have seen them dancing outside disturbing us whilst prayers going on*

experienced with an additional layer of distress, especially when bottles of alcohol have been perceived to be purposefully littered in and around Muslim properties, such as mosques and homes, or when drunken behaviour has disturbed religious observances. "*I have seen alcohol bottles left outside my local mosque... and also have seen them dancing outside disturbing us whilst prayers going on.*" This behaviour has seemingly remained an issue since the riots, with one participant observing a continuing pattern of people "*drinking heavily in the streets and leaving bottles at doorsteps of Muslims and mosques. Being loud in the early hours of the morning (1-4am) especially as it being in a Muslim majority area this felt like it was being done for a reason.*"

Spitting Pan: Pan is a chewable mixture of herbs and spices, often containing tobacco and/or menthol that is used to help digestion and freshen breath. Across South Asian communities, spitting pan in public is considered unhygienic and disrespectful, with the residue leaving bright stains that are difficult to remove. In India, a series of **laws** and **public campaigns** have been launched to curb the problem and to encourage those who use pan to spit it into designated waste receptacles. Respondents highlighted this as a problem that has become increasingly prevalent in Leicester, with pavements being stained in largely Muslim areas and Muslim-owned property being targeted. One respondent's account detailed a trend of "*cars with Indian flags [and] antisocial Islamophobic behaviour of deliberate nature... [I] had red pan spit on*

my door a few times". In light of the fact that the public spitting of pan is accepted as a disrespectful act across South Asian communities, its continued occurrence and the specific targeting of Muslim homes should be understood as a deliberately provocative pattern of intimidation and harassment.

Loud Noise, Music, and Fireworks: After drinking, loud noise and music were identified most frequently among participants regarding experiences of anti-social behaviour, with respondents discussing "*loud dancing and music on streets on school nights*", "*loud music after the 11pm watershed, disregarding impact to neighbours*", and "*playing loud music outside the mosques and waving [their] flags looking to provoke reactions.*" While many comments exhibit anger and frustration regarding the general inconsideration shown to neighbours by playing loud music late at night, there were also accounts of noise and music appearing to be weaponised against Muslim communities as a method for continued harassment and intimidation.

Indeed, many participants recounted instances of loud music being played from cars while idling or being driven slowly outside mosques at prayer times. As mentioned previously, cricket matches were often cited as a catalyst for tensions, with one participant recalling India supporters after a particular match "*celebrating with loud music and parading in known Muslim areas. The music was especially loud when we Muslims were inside the mosques trying to focus on our prayers. I can only describe their behaviour as them taunting us Muslims to provoke a reaction and potentially a fight.*"

Similarly, fireworks and firecrackers appear to have been a point of contention for some time, with survey respondents observing instances of fireworks being "*very loud and [going] on till 4 am, they don't seem to take in consideration that there are elderly people living by themselves, pets… young children and… people who have work to attend and they all need to have proper sleep*". One participant recounted the role of fireworks in initiating a campaign of racist and Islamophobic abuse. They recalled that the police were "*on patrol on our street and they noticed firework[s] during [a Hindu] festival taking place illegally on the street which was causing danger to… the street and livelihood of the people living here. Then police warned them and took the fireworks… the opposite neighbour negatively blamed us for calling the police which we [had not]… This was confirmed and clarified by police that no one called the police, they were just doing their normal patrol on the street… [The police] warned the neighbour [not to continue] this kind of harassment or racist Islamophobic remarks in the future.*"

> *The music was especially loud when we Muslims were inside the mosques trying to focus on our prayers. I can only describe their behaviour as them taunting us Muslims to provoke a reaction and potentially a fight.*

Sexual Harassment: Many respondents discussed issues with women being harassed in public spaces, especially instances involving alcohol and groups of men. Participants described "*gatherings of men at junctions blocking pavements and causing intimidation for young women*", "*groups of Indian men drinking and playing loud music… cat calling women at night*", and groups of men standing on street corners "*intimidating locals and making women feel violated*". One participant described a children's play park that had been adopted by groups of men as a "*link up spot to drink and when a female would walk [past] they would say a lot of things to make these females uncomfortable*". The gendered dynamics of the tensions will be discussed in greater detail further below.

> *My wife [and] daughter can't walk in certain area[s] after dark [because] they get taunted… They play loud music outside the mosque intentionally to create nuisance to local residents. They drink and urinate in corners with no shame.*

> *Spinney Hill Park was once a safe place to enjoy family recreation… groups of Hindu Indians who have recently settled in North Evington area over past 5 years have turned it into a[n] unsafe no go area. This is due to large groups drinking in the summer near the old crazy golf course in front of the police station. This has led to anti-social behaviour, women and young girls [are] no longer allowed to enjoy Spinney Hill Park for fear of being abused by these groups or harassed.*
>
> *Over the last few years [I] have reported this to [the] police regarding anti-social behaviour, [but] nothing concrete was done about it. I believe that these reports from Muslims have been ignored by local authorities which essentially led to an outcry of communal tension. Loitering and littering of empty beer cans reported to park council too, only to be told not much can be done… the Muslim community have been let down and left isolated.*

Littering: Excessive littering and fly-tipping were also cited amongst participants as chronic problems that were growing steadily before being exacerbated during the riots. One respondent described "*huge amounts of littering and constant flytipping around the local streets. This has been going on for years, with dangerous items like bottles, food and glass thrown recklessly in parks and streets*". Again, respondents linked these behaviours to newly arrived migrants, whom they described as lacking social awareness and respect for local norms. As participants observed, "*Large groups congregate daily at Sparrow Park, drinking and shouting. Sometimes fighting. Litter is thrown everywhere across the neighbourhood, similar to the behaviours displayed in Indian villages. Fly tipping anywhere possible. Spitting on streets*" and "*the park which used to be clean has so much litter and so many alcohol bottles and cans.*

You think twice about taking kids to the park... [recently arrived communities] do too much dumping of old items outside which cause[s] Leicester to be full of trash and rats".

"

These newly arrived Hindutva thugs who don't know the first thing about UK think this is India and Modi is the prime minister and they can do whatever they want. They hang around all over Green Lane Road in bunches of men. They would assemble in a group of nearly 25-30 every single night on prospect road in the car park next to the care home and blast music, swear loudly in Gujrati, drink beer non stop and then urinate everywhere.

We complained to the police using the non emergency number many times. Nothing happened. Then we called 999. The police would come after hours by which time they would have all gone. The next morning there would be a[n] incredible amount of beer cans and take away boxes littered everywhere. Nobody listened to us or addressed our concerns. This was happening in the middle of a Muslim majority neighbourhood where we find these things very offensive. But nobody helped.

The beer cans literally turned into a mini mountain of beer cans as this group would come every single night. The council were also informed by phone and by filling in the form on their website. They sent people to clean up after weeks. Those poor guys spent the whole day cleaning. That's how many cans there were. This carried on for nearly two years.

Once one of the local residents approached this group and told them to stop this behaviour. That same night his car was set on fire and exploded....! The fire engine came and after extinguishing the fire told the resident that it was arson. Still the police didn't do anything. The group stopped coming for a few days and then started coming again...! I feel that if the authorities had done their job from the beginning then the tensions wouldn't have escalated.

Then when it was India's Independence Day the Hindutva Hindus came out in their cars with saffron orange racist and fascist flags in a massive procession and drove through High Fields and near many local mosques deliberately trying to intimidate the Muslims. They actually stopped outside the mosque and started chanting Hindutva slogans.

Who do they think they are? Where was the police and the media when all this was happening to the local Muslim community????? Then it's so funny that when the Muslims came out after two years of silent suffering and confronted the Hindutva thugs then all of a sudden the entire police force from Leicester and Nottingham came out. Then the Hindutva changed the narrative and started blaming the Muslims....! What hypocrisy. What double standards.

"

> *Indian boys and men, they always look for Pakistanis and provoke [and abuse them]... when [another] Pakistani helps then it escalates... [Around cricket matches] they use provoking ways like bad things written about Pakistan and Pakistanis, that India will rule and kill us all [or] defeat us, they bring in things like grooming and religion and bacon... [I] remember eating a cheeseburger and the Indians came in... saying we will kill you like we killed their God [because] they worship the cow so don't want us non-Hindus eating it. [They said] that Muslim[s] can stop alcohol so they can stop us from eating beef – [this is] not true [because] Sharia [is] only for Muslims not non-Muslim[s.] We don't force non-Muslim[s] to follow us.*

Intimidation: According to participants, a pattern of large groups of men congregating in public areas and displaying the behaviours cited above has created an atmosphere of intimidation for Muslim communities. Multiple respondents suggested that they are increasingly unable or hesitant to perform daily activities in public places. One respondent detailed that "*the Willowbrook Play Area is always littered with adults [who] are drinking heavily, revving cars and parking dangerously... [it] feels like it's an area where they don't want Muslims to approach. I have children ranging from 1 to 13 [and this is] a park we used to visit quite regularly a few years ago [but] now not so much [as there are] too many adults and drunks and [it is] very noisy... [This] also applies to the other two parks we visit*".

Ultimately, the normalisation of anti-social behaviours and the perceived failure of the police and council to effectively manage these issues has contributed to a sense of lawlessness and neglect, with Muslim residents reportedly feeling victimised and abandoned.

Organised Marches and Provocative Behaviour

Respondents frequently described large groups of Hindu men, often masked, chanting Hindutva slogans (the significance of these slogans will be discussed further below). These marches passed through predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods like Green Lane Road and Spinney Hill, often escalating to altercations and attacks. These marches were frequently described by participants as intimidating and were commonly associated with acts of violence.

Respondents detailed multiple instances of physical aggression, with marchers often armed with weapons such as cricket bats, glass bottles, and bricks, while exhibiting aggressive behaviour, such as shouting and throwing projectiles – all of which significantly heightened the perceived danger and alarm within these communities. The marches were reported to be frequently accompanied by vandalism targeting property, including shops and mosques. Reports included descriptions of smashed windows and defacement of mosques, underscoring a pattern of targeted property damage. These incidents collectively illustrate a pervasive atmosphere of hostility and fear, profoundly impacting the sense of safety and security in the affected neighbourhoods.

> *We saw a massive number of masked men marching aggressively down Spinney Hill Road towards Green Lane Road. They were chanting anti-Islamic slogans and Hindutva slogans like they do in India. Surprisingly there were 2-3 police officers with them. Instead of stopping them they let them carry on marching and chanting….! As if the police were not even trying to stop it before it escalated. As if the police were like escorting the masked thugs.*

> *I [encountered] masked men who had weapons on them being marched side by side by Leicestershire Police, I think they were being marched back to their coaches... this mob started chucking glass bottles and bricks at us all under the watchful eye of the police who instead of getting rid of this mob of about 300 plus thugs they came to us and started pushing us away. They were all chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' whilst doing this and [the] majority were wearing masks or balaclavas, we urged the police to react as a few knives and sticks were seen amongst them but the police were being heavy handed with us.*

> *A group of people came out after watching the cricket match. They blocked the road. The youngsters came out in large numbers [and] approached me holding bottles of alcohol. When I asked the result of the match, they said 'It is one of theirs' in Gujarati language assuming that I am supporting Pakistan, although I was speaking to them in Gujarati and [am] myself an Indian, in order to provoke me. They were also chanting 'Bharat Mata ki Jai'...*
>
> *During the riot... I saw a group of Hindu men marching covering their faces... [I] eventually stopped my taxi service and went home fearing that this would be something big and I may be attacked if I continue my service. It reminded me of similar incidents that I witnessed back home in India in 1992, where people had come to damage things and beat people.*
>
> *After the riot, I received a WhatsApp voice note from a couple of Hindu and Muslim friends in Gujarati language. The voice note goes like this: 'We know that we have done it. But the police are after the Muslims and they are getting blamed. That's a good thing for us. Although our cars have been damaged, let's remain calm for now. We will take revenge later. We will break their cars. We will do it later. The fact that Muslims are being accused for the damages we caused might work to our advantage, as we can gain sympathy for it.' The voice note was delivered in an accent typical of someone hailing from Daman and Diu.*

Targeted attacks on Muslims

Amongst the survey responses, there were numerous accounts of Muslims being attacked, with young men being beaten, shops vandalised, and homes targeted. Respondents recounted specific instances long before the riots where individuals were harassed in public spaces, such as outside mosques, whilst shopping, or on their way home, particularly women and children who visibly adhered to Islamic dress. This seemingly occurred alongside the deployment of intimidation tactics such as road blockages, bottle throwing, targeted littering, and the use of racist and Islamophobic slurs.

These reports highlight a pattern of targeted aggression and suggest a deliberate attempt to create an atmosphere of fear and exclusion among Leicester's Muslim community that cannot be removed from the ignition of the riots themselves and the violence that occurred.

As one respondent, Ali, highlighted;*

> "*There were many incidents that led to this major incident that was bubbling away for many months. Attacking Muslim individuals just because they were Muslims. The scuffle after an international cricket match that stemmed from the provocative*

*All names have been changed for anonymity.

slogans like 'Pakistan Murdabad' ['death to Pakistan']. The attack on a Sikh man as he was perceived as a Muslim... One of my closest friend's brother... was attacked. I know him and his brother very well. The 18 year old boy was smoking at a tiny park outside his house along with his Somali friend... Two cars pulled over and recorded him asking his name... 10-15 thugs started badly beating him up with sticks and stabbed him with knives. This was a murder attempt."

The pervasive use of violent and discriminatory tactics points to a broader issue of organised incitement to religiously motivated violence. It raises significant concerns about the safety and wellbeing of Muslim individuals in these areas during the time of the riots.

Respondents' accounts noted instances of a *"Hindu mob intimidating and shouting derogatory anti-Muslim chants. [If] anyone [came into] their path [the mob was] after their life".* According to respondents who witnessed the riots, *"if they [saw] a Muslim, they just used to attack them because of [their] religion".*

> *My neighbour was severely beaten by a group in May 2022. He is a Muslim boy around 18 years old at the time. He was attacked by a large group of Hindu men... I saw him after this attack and his face was a complete mess. I also witnessed the hoards of Hindu men on bridge road some months later. I... opened the door to men marching down the street. Quite a few were holding bats and poles and had face coverings. They passed and about an hour later... I saw a small group of Muslim men standing around and about 200 Hindu men opposite them with some police presence in between. There was a lot of shouting and bottles amongst other thing[s] were being thrown.*
>
> *Other than these recent incidents I can testify to many racist and sexual slurs and gestures towards myself and my family... The local Hindu lads would stand around... [and try] to intimidate us as we walked past.*

The impact of the perception of threat directed at local Muslim communities was significant. Many respondents expressed fear and insecurity, leading them to avoid certain areas. This sense of threat and the resultant changes in behaviour underscore the profound social and psychological effects of such events on community dynamics and cohesion – a topic which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

Gendered dynamics

The survey responses reveal significant gender dynamics that shaped the experiences of individuals during the unrest. These dynamics illuminate how gender intersected with ethnic and religious identities, creating unique vulnerabilities, particularly for women and young people across Leicester's Muslim communities.

The weaponisation of sexual violence is often used as a deliberate strategy in episodes of communal tension and conflict to harm and humiliate the 'enemy' community. It serves not only as an attack on individuals, but as a symbolic assault on the collective identity, dignity, and cohesion of the targeted group. In the context of communal tensions, women are frequently perceived as bearers of cultural and religious identity. Violations against them are intended to send a broader message to their community, asserting dominance and instilling fear. Acts of sexual violence, such as harassment, assault, or threats, are used to reinforce power dynamics and demonstrate the aggressor's control. These actions are exacerbated in environments where group behaviour escalates unchecked, as seen during riots or large-scale public gatherings.

As previously mentioned, sexual violence was a **defining feature** of the 2002 riots in Gujarat, and proponents of Hindutva have frequently mobilised sexual violence to humiliate communities, assert dominance, and perpetuate cycles of fear and trauma. The weaponisation of sexual violence appears to be a recurring theme throughout the survey responses, with accounts highlighting the targeting of Muslim women, particularly women wearing Islamic dress, through acts of intimidation and harassment. As previously mentioned, respondents cited instances before, during, and since the riots where women in Islamic dress, such as hijabs, were singled out for verbal abuse and derogatory comments. These attacks often occurred in public spaces like parks, streets, or near mosques, and were often described as deliberate attempts to provoke fear and assert dominance. Such targeted behaviour underscores the intersectionality of gender and religious identity, where visible markers of faith amplified vulnerability.

> *I was coming from work... and saw large groups of young [Muslim] men standing near the roundabout and talking amongst themselves. Some were shouting and a young fellow of Somali origin was trying to calm them down by saying 'violence and shouting will not solve anything. You can do better and let's go home.' Whereas on the opposite side [of the road]... there was another group shouting loudly and some were holding some colourful cloth and shouting in Hindi language – it was a very large crowd on that side and lots of police were trying to restrain them. I was scared and quickly crossed the road to get back home. I wear a scarf and did not want to be a target. I followed some young men going towards my area as did not feel safe walking home alone.*

One respondent noted that during the riots they, "*personally witnessed them seemingly march past mosques again inciting violence and targeting Muslim women with hijabs and chanting*". Another participant recounted that they were "*walking down Green Lane Road and saw multiple armed men in balaclavas threatening veiled women and smashing windows, shop doorfronts and cars.*" Another account details how "*I witnessed a group of 300 plus thugs marching with police escorts. It wasn't a peaceful as they claimed. They were carrying weapons. On Green Line Road, I witnessed a Muslim girl was being attacked in the car… Her car was smashed. The police allowed them to come to the area and let them carry what they were doing.*"

While only a minority of survey accounts indicate an escalation to physical violence, the reports of sexual harassment are indicative of a continuum of sexualised aggression that underscores the broader tensions. The impacts of this kind of violence are far-reaching, with direct victims often experiencing profound physical and psychological trauma, while wider communities grapple with fear, loss of mobility for women, and damage to intercommunal relations. One participant noted that;

"over many days during the riots I was very fearful for the safety of my wife and daughter who both wear headscarves and could've been easily identified as Muslim in an area where there was continuous chanting in reference to the BJP. I also witnessed the waving of discriminatory flags and support of a well known group within Indian who is known for attacking Muslims".

Weaponisation of nationalist symbols

As previously mentioned, survey participants repeatedly pointed to large groups of aggressive young men chanting slogans in Muslim-majority areas both before and during the riots. These slogans included "*Vande Mataram*", "*Bharat Mata ki Jai*", and "*Jai Shri Ram*"; slogans that are heavily associated with Hindutva nationalist rhetoric in India.

"*Vande Mataram*" translates to "*I praise you, Motherland*" or "*I bow to you, Motherland*" and is the title of a poem which was the patriotic cry of the Indian independence movement, the first two stanzas of which have been adopted as the national song of India. It is worth noting that there remain debates surrounding this song, due to its representation of India as a goddess in the following stanzas, thus creating discomfort amongst many Indian Muslims who feel that it contradicts Islamic principles, and therefore, sits uncomfortably with India's religious plurality. As such, it can be argued that chanting this slogan is not only a nationalist symbol but taken in the context of being chanted in Muslim-majority areas, is a symbol that specifically ostracises and excludes Muslims as a provocation.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, another slogan reported by participants, "*Bharat Mata ki Jai*", translates to "*victory for Mother India*" or "*long live Mother India*" and is a motto used by the Indian army.

*Meanwhile, "Jai Shri Ram" is a Hindu chant that translates to "hail Lord Ram" or "victory to Lord Ram", however, it has been used as a political slogan by the BJP and the VHP since the 1980s, and has since become commonly used as a **call to violence***

against people of other faiths, and Muslims in particular. It is important to recognise that, as a religious phrase, "*Jai Shri Ram*" is an innocent component of Hindu devotion and is unproblematic when used in a religious context. However, the manner in which it has been adopted by India's religio-nationalist elements in the form of the Hindutva movement, means that its usage becomes inherently exclusionary and threatening when it is specifically deployed against Muslim communities in Muslim-majority areas. Indeed, as **reported** by the BBC, lynch mobs targeting Muslims in India have transformed the Hindu chant into a "*murder cry*". Consequently, it is through this lens that Leicester's Muslim communities experienced these chants, and considering the usage of these slogans as a tool to incite violence across the Hindutva movement, it is difficult to argue that such instances are anything other than intentionally threatening and provocative.

In addition to reporting instances of chanting such slogans, respondents consistently mentioned the use of orange/ saffron attire, flags and other symbols tied to Hindutva ideology. Like some of the above slogans, the colour saffron is a central symbol within Hindu worship and practice. However, it has been adopted by the RSS in a number of militarised

> *Whilst at Jameah Mosque for regular prayers, I first heard a lot of commotion outside of the mosque. When we came out from completing our prayers, there were a line of 8-9 cars with people hanging out of the window taunting those who were leaving the mosque. The cars had stopped right outside of the main entrance and were carrying Indian flags with chants of 'Jai Shri Ram' on the street. I didn't understand what was happening but it looked like they had come clearly to taunt the people praying inside.*
> *As the days went on there were marches down Green Lane Road with a few hundreds of people with the same chants of 'Jai Shri Ram'. These are the same chants that are made by the right wing Hindu nationalist party in India during their raids and marches that we see on television so I am shocked to see the exact same scenes in the UK.*

 practices, for example, **saluting** a saffron flag during drills. The RSS **mission statement** specifically laments "*the endless appeasement of the Muslim population*".

Consequently, the use of these symbols, combined with chanting and physical intimidation in Muslim-majority areas, were reported as provocative and reminiscent of similar nationalist marches conducted by the RSS and other similar organisations in India.

> " Loads of cars deliberately driving past Jame Masjid Asfordby St, playing loud Indian music, waving India flag, standing on the car roofs also saying 'Jai Shri Ram' as if they were actually in India, deliberately proactively trying to create tensions with Muslims by doing these sort of chanting actions in majority [Muslim] areas trying to spark and inflame tensions. "

Survey participants identified patterns of anti-social behaviour, violence, and an undercurrent of growing community hostilities that had been steadily increasing in intensity for several years prior to the outbreak of the riots. Meanwhile, the riots themselves were perceived to be characterised by direct experiences of violence, intimidation, and extreme ethno-religious ideologies in the form of Hindutva-inspired racism and abuse. In particular, respondents reported patterns of public alcohol consumption, loud music, fireworks, targeted littering, and sexual harassment, as well as targeted physical attacks, arson, and organised marches that were characterised by Hindutva slogans and the weaponisation of nationalist symbols as a tool to threaten, intimidate, and assert dominance over Muslim communities.

Institutional Failures

The survey responses highlight widespread frustration among respondents regarding the role of the police and local authorities. Central to these concerns is the perceived ineffectiveness of police responses to reported incidents and allegations of bias. Additionally, the findings underscore significant underreporting of incidents by Muslims, often driven by often driven by despondency and a lack of trust in law enforcement .

Allegations of Bias and Complicity

A prominent theme emerging from the data is the widespread criticism of the police for perceived bias in their handling of communal tensions and violence during the Leicester riots. Many respondents expressed the belief that law enforcement failed to act impartially, instead favouring Hindu communities at the expense of the safety of Muslim communities.

Respondents recounted numerous incidents that fuelled these perceptions. Some highlighted police escorts afforded to groups described as aggressive, masked, and armed with weapons and projectiles. These groups reportedly marched through predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods while chanting Hindutva slogans and other inflammatory calls for violence, including "*death to Muslims*". One respondent recalled: "*the Hindutva chants were being made and they had been escorted around the city by the police. On my way home they also threw a glass bottle towards me which smashed near my feet and the police did nothing.*" Another participant pointed to a Hindutva march through Highfields, a Leicester neighbourhood with a large Muslim population, noting that "*the attendants of the march were masked up and were displaying a clear rioting behaviour... The continuous chants [and] slogans were about BJP rule. the police allowed this march to take place as any other bystander [who challenged] them would be pushed away*".

> *I don't trust the police, that['s] why I didn't report any of these. They were biased to Hindus. During the riot, I witnessed the police were very heavy-handed specifically on Muslims. There was abuse of power. Everything was one-sided.*
> *The police dropped the investigation related to the attack on my friend's brother claiming that they have no evidence to identify the culprits, despite the fact that they have collected all the CCTV visuals. Police were biased to Hindu communities.*

Numerous accounts also alleged a stark disparity in the way police treated Muslim

individuals compared to Hindu groups. Respondents described instances of heavy-handed tactics employed against Muslims while Hindu groups appeared to be treated more leniently. One particularly striking allegation stated that;

"T*his mob started chucking glass bottles and bricks at us all under the watchful eye of the police who instead of getting rid of this mob of about 300 plus thugs they came to us and started pushing us away. They were all chanting 'Jai Shri Ram' whilst doing this and [the] majority were wearing masks or balaclavas, we urged the police to react as a few knives and sticks were seen amongst them but the police were being heavy handed with us and moved us away from there*."

Another respondent corroborated this account, observing that, "*I witnessed the police were very heavy-handed specifically on Muslims. There was abuse of power. Everything was one-sided.*"

Some respondents went further, accusing the police of complicity in allowing communal disturbances to escalate. One respondent, for instance, recounted a Hindutva march involving masked men who were "*carrying weapons*" and "*chanting racist slogans*", while police escorts "*were there and allowed it to happen. It appeared the police were involved and part of this disgusting plan.*"

> **These reports paint a troubling picture of perceived police bias and complicity, further exacerbating community distrust during an already intense period. Due to the widespread and uniform nature of this perception, whether or not the perception of bias is an accurate reflection of reality is, in many ways, less important than addressing the perception amongst Muslim communities. Unless local police forces engage with communities to address concerns about these biases (both real and perceived), they will not be able to overcome barriers to trust that now seem to characterise the relationship between Muslim communities and local law enforcement as a result of the handling of community tensions.**

Police Inaction

Respondents expressed a profound sense of frustration and abandonment regarding the police responses to anti-social behaviour and incidents of violence both prior to and during the unrest of 2022. One participant recounted an incident: "*I was coming back from prayers and then some Hindus came with balaclavas and started screaming and shouted at me there was a police car and they did not help or say anything whatsoever*". The respondent added: "*I felt scared that just because I'm a Muslim [they're] doing this to me*". Another respondent described multiple clashes in Leicester from 2017 onwards where Indian supporters attacked Pakistani fans and

other local Muslims following India vs. Pakistan cricket matches. Reflecting on one such incident in 2022, the respondent stated that, "*I raised my concern over the phone with our local police at Spinney Hill Park Leicester, however the police completely disregarded my concerns, and I was merely asked to call 999 if something did happen.*"

> **In the streets in and around the Green Lane area before the riots it felt like number of Hindutva thugs were going out [fighting and causing] violence and racial abuse where they attacked Muslim kids and women[. T]his became a regular occurrence 3 months before the riots, police did absolutely nothing about this, victims and family have had to look for evidence for the police as police failed to carry out their duty**

Others highlighted the perception that police inaction actively worsened the violence. A Muslim taxi driver, for example, reported a group of drunken youths chanting "*Bharat Mata Ki Jai*" as they approached his vehicle after a cricket match. Despite calling the police and being assured that officers would be dispatched, he stated that no one came and suggested that, "*had the police intervened then and realise[d] the evolving issues, the Leicester riot would not have happened.*" Another respondent "*reported a group of young Hindu men in a large group running towards [L]eicester street*". Although they called the police, the response was minimal as "*a single person police car arrived on scene 10 minutes later by this time the group had moved on*". These accounts underscore a recurring sentiment among respondents; that the police either failed to act promptly to prevent unrest or their delayed response allowed tensions to escalate unchecked. This perception of inaction contributed to the deepening of frustration and mistrust within the affected communities.

Indeed, the police's inability to prevent or contain provocative marches through sensitive areas was a recurring theme in the data, with respondents expressing deep frustration over the police's approach to managing the riots. Many felt abandoned by the authorities, fuelling fears of further violence. Respondents emphasised that the police should have taken more decisive action to disperse gatherings or prevent escalation. One respondent highlighted that instances of "*clear provocation [were] allowed by the Leicester police and council through a Muslim majority area and not [too] far away from an incident involving a young Muslim boy having his house broken into by a group of young Hindu men and being beaten*".

Meanwhile, accounts of marches, chanting, and provocative actions occurring with minimal police intervention were common. Respondents reported numerous incidents where officers failed to de-escalate tensions or intervene effectively to prevent violence. One respondent described that large groups were "*playing loud music outside of Masjids, troubling women, attacking Muslim boys... throwing beer bottles and bricks at unarmed Muslim men and hiding behind the police.*" These

accounts underscore a pervasive perception of inadequate policing, which not only failed to contain the violence but also heightened community tensions and mistrust.

Underreporting of incidents and community mistrust in police

A significant number of respondents chose not to report incidents, with many citing the belief that reporting would not make a difference. Many expressed a lack of trust in law enforcement or felt their complaints would not be taken seriously, discouraging them from coming forward.

Several respondents perceived that the police routinely failed to take adequate action to prevent or address incidents of inter-community tension, which dissuaded them from reporting. Many felt that the police inaction was an intentional approach to dealing with concerns raised by Muslim communities. One respondent remarked: "*I haven't reported as I don't have trust in [the] police on how they handle Muslim concerns.*"

> **"I felt there was no point in reporting to the police as I felt the police were very one sided when dealing with cases as they were more sympathetic towards the Hindu community."**

Some respondents specifically recounted instances where police were present during Hindutva marches and other racist incidents but failed to intervene when Muslim bystanders faced aggression or racism. One respondent described a march towards Green Lane Road, stating; "*The people in the march [were] throwing glass bottles, shouting, and screaming...that led to [a] stand off between Muslim and Hindus. The police didn't do anything specifically. They could have stopped or diverted the march, but the police didn't do that.*" The respondent added that they did not report the incidents "*because the police were witnessing everything that I witnessed*".

This perceived passivity reinforced the belief that reporting incidents would yield no meaningful outcomes, fostering a sense of futility and disillusionment within the community. As a result, many refrained from reporting incidents altogether, which in turn obscures the true extent of criminal behaviour during the riots.

Furthermore, some respondents faced significant challenges in reporting incidents. Several described feeling too "*scared*" or "*petrified*" to report, while others highlighted practical difficulties. One respondent explained that they "*attempted to report by phone [but there were] too many instructions on [the] phone and my disability agitated me*", indicating that certain disabilities can create barriers to reporting hate incidents. Another respondent recounted persistent late-night disturbances caused by Hindu youth, including singing and dancing during festivals such as Diwali. Despite reporting the disturbances to Leicester City Council, they were redirected to the police, who in turn referred them back to the council. Frustrated by these bureaucratic difficulties, they "*got fed up of reporting as no action [was] being taken*

by [the] authorities". These instances underscore that even when individuals are willing to report incidents, obstacles such as fear, inaccessibility, and uncoordinated responses from authorities can hinder their ability to do so effectively.

According to the survey data, the community's perceptions of the police's handling of tensions appear to have resulted in the erosion of trust in local law enforcement. This is starkly illustrated in the comments of one respondent, in particular; "*police didn't help and made matters worse by being one sided and either [Chief Constable] Rob Nixon was given the wrong feedback by his officers [regarding the] Green Lane Road march or he lied to the public... the statement from Rob or any officer was a pack of lies – the police lost all the people who respect them that day.*"

> **Even when individuals are willing to report incidents, obstacles such as fear, inaccessibility, and uncoordinated responses from authorities can hinder their ability to do so effectively.**

Another respondent echoed these sentiments: "*I felt there was no point [in reporting] as no action was being taken even when racist comments were being made by the mob [in front] of the police. I lost all confidence.*" These remarks underscore the profound damage to Muslim community trust, driven by perceptions of bias and incompetency from law enforcement during a critical period of unrest in Leicester.

Trends in Reporting

While most respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the police's handling of incidents, a few acknowledged positive experiences, such as police dispersing gatherings or apologising when made aware of the full context. One respondent recounts: "*I rang [the] local police station on separate occasions about the many youths stirring up and gathering in the evenings. Police vans did arrive to disperse them.*" Incidents reported to the police included noise complaints, public drinking, and antisocial behaviour, with some individuals using online platforms like police websites to file their reports. Others described face-to-face interactions with officers during neighbourhood surveys or routine patrols. In many instances, police were already present during incidents, reducing the necessity of reporting.

However, these instances were exceptions to the prevailing perception of ineffectiveness and lack of accountability. A number of respondents who reported incidents to the police expressed frustration over their concerns not being taken seriously or a lack of follow-up action. Some referenced specific crime numbers, indicating that formal reports were made, yet they felt disillusioned with the ineffective responses. One respondent described their experience reporting a Hindutva march on Spinney Hill Road, which was escorted by police: "*I spoke to a number of police officers on that evening about this. One apologised. One said he doesn't know anything about it. The third denied that police escorted it. I told him I saw the police not even trying to stop it.*" This underscores a troubling inconsistency in police responses and a lack of accountability, further deepening community frustration and mistrust.

A few respondents provided CCTV footage to the police but expressed disappointment regarding the lack of feedback or action based on the evidence submitted. One respondent noted: "*All [the] evidence was taken from my CCTV by the police who came nearly every other day asking for the camera information. It was provided and no feedback was given.*" Another respondent stated: "*The police dropped the investigation related to the attack on my friend's brother claiming that they have no evidence to identify the culprits, despite the fact that they have collected all the CCTV visuals. Police were biased to Hindu communities.*" Such accounts highlight a recurring frustration among respondents, reinforcing the perception that the police failed to take reports of violence or unrest seriously. This sense of neglect further undermined confidence in law enforcement and exacerbated feelings of anger and mistrust.

Beyond law enforcement, several respondents mentioned reporting issues to the local council or via platforms such as the *OneLeicester* app, often citing complaints like antisocial behaviour and littering. A few also reached out to city wardens or parks departments, with varying degrees of success. Issues were frequently raised during community meetings with police and local politicians, reflecting some level of community engagement. In some cases, respondents worked with local councillors to address ongoing concerns, though the outcomes were mixed.

Respondents' accounts reveal a significant disconnect between the reporting of incidents and their effective resolution, pointing to broader issues of inefficiency and poor communication from law enforcement and wider authorities. These experiences underscore persistent challenges in police-community relations, where a lack of trust and confidence in the police serve as critical barriers to reporting incidents and thus meaningfully addressing them.

> *The police dropped the investigation related to the attack on my friend's brother claiming that they have no evidence to identify the culprits, despite the fact that they have collected all the CCTV visuals. Police were biased to Hindu communities.*

Psychological Impact

The survey also sought to explore the psychological effects of the Leicester riots on local communities. It revealed patterns of deep trauma that seemingly continue to impact communities and highlights ways that local residents have changed their daily behaviours in response to the conflict.

According to the survey participants, only 8.3% of respondents sought any form of support or counselling to cope with the emotional impact of these experiences and only 9.9% felt that they could benefit from additional support at the time that the survey was conducted. However, respondents consistently recounted the negative psychological reactions and consequences of their experiences during the riots.

QUESTION: How did the experience of Islamophobia, communal tensions, or witnessing antisocial behaviour during the Leicester riots or other events make you feel?
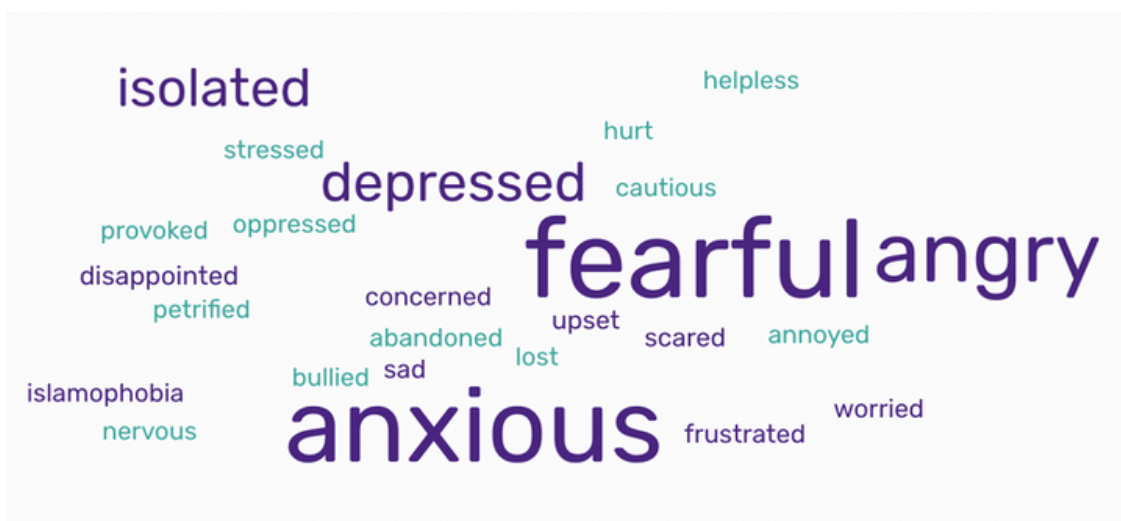
310	FEARFUL	3	SAD	1	HELPLESS
289	ANXIOUS	3	WORRIED	1	CAUTIOUS
217	ANGRY	3	FRUSTRATED	1	PETRIFIED
109	DEPRESSED	2	CONCERNED	1	LOST
103	ISOLATED	2	ISLAMOPHOBIA	1	BULLIED
5	DISAPPOINTED	2	ABANDONED	1	PROVOKED
4	SCARED	2	OPPRESSED	1	STRESSED
3	UPSET	2	ANNOYED	1	NERVOUS
		1	HURT		

As the survey findings indicate, the overwhelming tone of the emotions reported to have been felt during the riots was strongly negative. Fearful and anxious are the most frequently cited emotions, highlighting a strong sense of personal threat and vulnerability among participants. These feelings likely stem from the unpredictable nature of violence and the heightened Islamophobia experienced during that time. Anger emerged as the third most commonly identified emotion among participants, with many expressing frustration directed toward the authorities. Comments such as "*lack of police support*", "*let down by the authorities and the police*", and "*I am angry that the police don't help more about the wrong information and lies*", underscore a shared perception of institutional failings outlined in the previous chapter of this report.

There was also a great deal of sadness, anger, and confusion expressed regarding the shattering of previously warm relationships between Leicester's Hindu and Muslim populations, much of which was again attributed to external influences and imported ideologies. One respondent noted that they were "*really sad that people we have grown up with[,] suddenly with [the arrival of] a new group of people became enemies. People... from outside instigating fights and Indian outlets and newspapers promoting hate and Islamophobia.*" In noting the importation of ideologies and inter-community animosities from India, another respondent declared "*go fight all the crap there. Don't bring this shit to Leicester*".

> *Sadness to witness this behaviour after years of living in harmony with Hindus. It's the recent arrivals that have started this; the RSS followers.*

> *I was to scared to walk to work. I would keep looking over my shoulder, it was a very frightful experience, scared of walking in streets where I've lived all my life. This was a very traumatic experience, witnessed [for the] first time in Leicester. Leicester was a very peaceful city before. Being born and bred here I was left devastated. I would fear for my children to go out the house.*

An examination of the emotion clusters selected by participants reveals the dual nature of their emotional responses, with "Angry, Fearful, Depressed' standing out as the most prevalent combination, with 60 respondents identifying this precise combination of emotions. Fear was an emotion that was commonly associated with immediate impacts on daily life — vividly illustrated by one participant recounting how they felt "*housebound*". Depression, on the other hand, emerges from the pervasive atmosphere of the events and their aftermath, reflecting a profound sense of despair and emotional exhaustion. This cluster encapsulates the complex interplay of immediate distress and lingering psychological burden.

It's interesting to note the high count of 'isolated' amongst the emotions, suggesting that communal tensions not only affect individual well-being but also disrupt perceptions of community bonds and wider support networks.

> *There has not been in the 20+ years of living in Leicester, anything like the gross and open incitement from the Hinduvta... Hindus and Muslim and many others of other faith have lived in Leicester peacefully. This element of incitement can only have been bought in from outside. It is very sad indeed how an outside element want to break and divide a very peaceful [and multi-faith community in] Leicester.*

The overwhelming prevalence of negative emotions, particularly fear, anxiety, and anger, underscores the profound psychological impact of Islamophobia, communal tensions, and antisocial behaviour. The presence of multiple emotions in individual responses indicates complex and multifaceted emotional experiences. The data suggest that such events not only evoke immediate emotional reactions but also contribute to longer-term feelings of depression and isolation.

These findings are supported by research that considers the psychological impact of experiencing hate crimes and Islamophobia. A **report** by the *Muslim Mind Collaborative* highlights that hostile environments, following incidents like, for example, the Leicester riots, go beyond just marginalising Muslim communities but

> *Leicester is multi cultural community and these men were mostly out of Leicester. These was a stir up from outside and it makes you feel scared and sad because after the stir up we have to live with the same community.*

also contribute to poor mental health. For example, 70% of Muslims who suffer from mental health issues "*have also experienced Islamophobia, exacerbating conditions like chronic stress, anxiety, and depression.*"

Furthermore, the report also **stresses** how the normalisation of anti-Muslim rhetoric fosters toxic environments that amplify fear, anger, and division, deepening mistrust in mainstream support services. Further **research** conducted by *the Muslim Census* following the far-right riots that swept the UK in 2024 reiterates the feelings of fear, uncertainty and lack of safety that were shared by the respondents with 92% of UK Muslims feeling less safe in the aftermath. While *the Muslim Census*' research focuses on how Muslim communities felt since the August 2024 riots, the findings remain highly relevant to the experiences of Muslim communities during and after the Leicester riots, highlighting consistent patterns of fear, anger, and alienation in response to Islamophobia and communal tensions.

Accessing Support

As previously mentioned, the survey also aimed to determine whether participants sought support or counselling to manage the emotional impact of their experiences. In response, an overwhelming majority (92%) indicated they did not seek any form of support, while a small minority (8%) did. Additionally, the survey inquired whether respondents felt they might need further support, such as counseling, to address mental health challenges. 91%, said that they do not feel the need for additional support, and a small minority, of 9%, saying that they will need further support. This pattern mirrors broader research findings highlighting the low uptake of mental health services among Muslim communities – for example, **studies** show that between 2021 to 2022 "*only 2.6% of Muslims referred to NHS Talking Therapies completed their treatment course.*" This low uptake is often attributed to stigma, lack of culturally competent resources, and reliance on alternative coping mechanisms such as family, community, and faith-based practices. **Research** by the *Lantern Initiative* shows that 44% of the Muslims they surveyed felt that "*current mainstream counselling provision did not cater to needs relating to faith issues*" with "*69% said they would recommend faith-based counselling*". Additionally, studies have shown that perceived stigma within tight-knit Muslim communities can discourage individuals from seeking professional help due to fears of judgment or reputational harm. Additionally, a lack of mental health professionals trained to understand and address cultural and religious nuances may lead to a disconnect between the services offered and the needs of Muslim clients, further reducing engagement.

While this context provides a lens to begin to explore the survey's results, more work and in depth research is needed to fully understand how Muslim communities in Leicester experience and engage with mental health services.

> *Before we used to live together in harmony. The situation now is as a Muslim you feel tense to go into Hindu areas.*

Changing Behaviours

The survey responses reveal further deep-seated issues arising from the unrest and the deterioration of inter-community relations between Hindus and Muslims. A significant theme reported in the data is a profound loss of trust between Hindu and Muslim communities – a loss that is often accompanied by expressions of regret, grief, and nostalgia for the strong community bonds that once characterised Leicester.

Many respondents spoke of feeling suspicious, hesitant, and wary in ways they had not experienced before. This erosion of trust has led to widespread fear and insecurity, with individuals expressing concerns about their safety even in their own neighbourhoods. As one respondent shared, they "*cannot even walk outside of [their] homes without feeling scared, fearful, and unsafe.*" For others, the anxiety is particularly acute in areas where Muslims are a minority, and there is a notable hesitancy about attending public events or venturing out at night, especially for women and children.

A recurring theme is the visible increase in social division and hostility. Respondents observed that the sense of unity that once existed between the communities has been replaced by a stark separation, often fuelled by external influences and ideological differences. This division is felt acutely in daily interactions, with some reporting overt hostility such as dirty looks and aggressive behaviour – this appears to be especially experienced by those who visibly express their Muslim faith, for example through hijab and other forms of dress.

> *Hindu families around the area are [now] avoiding [letting] their children play with Muslim children and sometimes cars will pass you when alone and give you fearful looks*

The impact of these events on daily life and community cohesion has been profound. Many respondents described changes in their routines to avoid potential conflict, such as avoiding certain areas or shops and adopting increased security measures, such as refusing to go shopping or travel alone. One respondent noted staying away from predominantly Hindu areas and advising their family on how to handle instances of Islamophobia.

Additionally, the sense of community has eroded significantly. Events that were once celebrated jointly, like Indian Independence Day, have become segregated, with some respondents observing reluctance from the Hindu community to participate in multicultural gatherings.

Ultimately, the unrest has left a significant personal and psychological toll on many individuals. Respondents frequently mentioned feelings of trauma, stress, and anxiety stemming from the events. Personal relationships have also suffered, with once-friendly interactions becoming strained or ceasing altogether. As one respondent noted, "*the friendship is not the same as before.*" The impact has extended to children, with reports of school-aged children being affected by the tensions and divisions within the community.

Beyond the visible fractures in the community, the psychological and emotional toll on individuals — manifesting in trauma, stress, and strained personal relationships — underscores the lasting impact of the unrest. Moving forward, rebuilding trust, fostering dialogue, and addressing these underlying issues will be crucial to healing and restoring community cohesion.

The psychological impacts of the riots appear to be far-reaching and long-lasting. Respondents relayed feelings of intense anxiety, fear, and lingering depression, as well as grief and confusion in the face of the deterioration of previously warm relationships between Leicester's Muslim and Hindu communities. This is compounded by frustration directed at perceived outsiders who have entered the local area, seemingly with the specific aim of inciting tensions.

At the same time, there is a correlation with wider research indicating extensive barriers to Muslim community access to mental health services.
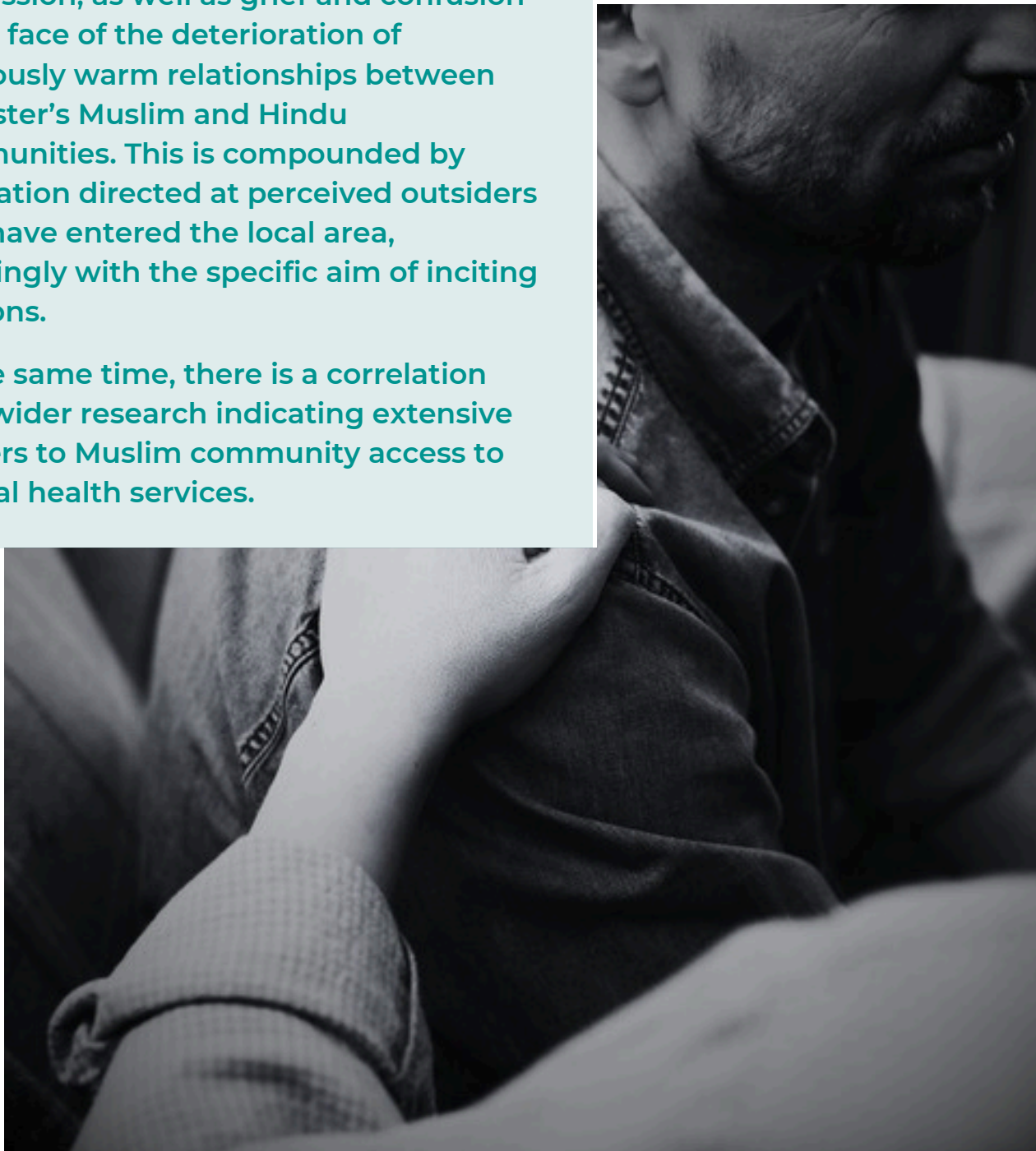
A Roadmap for the Future

This research has identified a number of key themes embedded within how Leicester's Muslim community has experienced the ongoing tensions in the city and the deteriorating inter-community relationship with their Hindu neighbours.

Urgent efforts are now required to:

- Restore the previously harmonious relationship between the city's Hindu and Muslim communities that had been characterised by warmth for 50 years prior to the recent violence.

- Address the fracture in trust between Leicester's Muslim community and local law enforcement.

- Recalibrate political and media narratives to accurately reflect the realities experienced by communities and to avoid the infiltration of prejudicial tropes and biases.

- Address the proliferation of ideologies built upon hatred and division.

Achieving these aims requires active and conscientious engagement with community perspectives. As stated previously, in many cases, the impact of perceptions can be just as significant as the reality. As such, it is imperative that authorities, in particular, openly engage with community concerns for trust to be restored and progress to be made.

Consequently, we humbly offer the following wide-ranging recommendations for policy and community interventions that reflect the concerns raised during the course of this research.

1   Initiatives to Strengthen Community Relations

To rebuild trust between Hindu and Muslim communities in Leicester, concerted efforts must be made to foster dialogue, encourage youth engagement, and promote cross-cultural understanding.

The following initiatives should be considered:

- **Establishing Dialogue Forums:** Establishing regular community dialogue forums where representatives from both communities can discuss grievances, misconceptions, and pathways to reconciliation would allow open communication and positive collaboration between communities.

- **Promoting Youth Engagement Programs:** This must include creating youth-oriented initiatives, including sports events, leadership training, and educational workshops, to facilitate positive inter-community interactions.

- **Organising Cross-Cultural Events:** Encouraging shared cultural and religious celebrations that highlight commonalities and create mutual respect would be beneficial in reuniting fractured communities.

- **Establishing Community Mediation Networks:** Training local leaders to act as mediators in resolving disputes and preventing tensions from escalating is necessary to prevent similar tensions from escalating into violence in the future.

- **Providing Community Welfare Funding:** Long-term investment in community infrastructure is essential to fostering unity. Much of the anti-social behaviour reported throughout this research cannot be separated from the impacts of austerity measures and decimation of local services that impact the quality of life for local communities and limit opportunities and forums for positive social interaction and engagement, especially amongst youth populations. In particular, there needs to be increased funding to support community centres and recreational facilities, as well as initiatives that promote economic empowerment in marginalised areas. Investment in language support services is also essential for recent immigrants to be able to fully enjoy social inclusion opportunities within the local community.

- **Supporting Youth Engagement:** Mentorship programs should be established that connect youth with positive role models, as well as promoting social media literacy, critical thinking skills, and civic education to counter extremist narratives. Tackling anti-social behaviour should also include enhancing positive youth diversion programs, social opportunities, and leisure facilities.

- **Supporting Recent Arrivals:** New immigrants must be supported in adapting to local norms and positively socialising within the local community. Such efforts should include providing opportunities for and encouraging participation in community activities to foster integration, as well as strengthening language support services to facilitate communication and employment opportunities.

2   Policing and Public Order

The research suggests that widespread frustration surrounding perceived bias, complicity, or else a lack of understanding of socio-political community dynamics amongst the local police and council left Muslim communities feeling abandoned. This appears to have a significant impact on their trust and confidence in local authorities. In rectifying this situation, there are a number of areas that should be explored, including reformed police practices and efforts to address anti-social behaviours:

- **Enhancing Community Policing:** Strengthening the relationship between the police and local communities may include assigning dedicated officers to specific neighbourhoods to build long-term trust, as well as prioritising partnerships with community leaders to facilitate cooperation and ensure cultural and religious sensitivities are understood.

- **Enforcing Clear Protocols for Managing Provocative Marches:** Guidelines must be enforced to protect human rights to freedom of expression and assembly while also preventing inflammatory gatherings from infringing upon the non-discrimination rights of others or escalating into violence. Community liaison officers and senior officers must have active communication with local communities so they may quickly and accurately understand the nuances of underlying political ideologies driving these marches and with which they may be unfamiliar.

- **Instituting Officer Training:** Enhanced officer training should incorporate an understanding of the tensions in their historical and global context, including the ways in which Hindutva ideologies are being imported into the UK and how nationalist slogans and symbols can be used as tools of intimidation. It should also include unconscious bias training and an understanding of how Islamophobia manifests itself across society.

- **Promoting Transparency:** Ensuring accountability in police operations is critical. Involving community representatives in oversight committees and open forums to assess law enforcement responses to periods of unrest would provide greater transparency to the pressures facing police forces and generate greater confidence by allowing communities to feel invested in and engaged with their local forces.

- **Addressing Structural Inequalities Across Policing:** Addressing the challenges facing the relationship between the police and vulnerable communities, including women, Muslims, and ethnically minoritised groups, is crucial. A history of **racial profiling** and **discrimination** has eroded trust in law enforcement. Building meaningful relationships between the police and these communities requires transparent policies, increased representation within the police force, and active engagement with community leaders to ensure policing strategies are fair,

effective, and sensitive to the lived experiences of those most affected by discrimination and violence.

- **Guidelines for Festivities and Regulation of Public Spaces:** Public order must be maintained to prevent communal conflicts from escalating. In particular, clear guidelines must be set and enforced concerning noise levels, public alcohol consumption, the use of fireworks/crackers and littering in public spaces. To prevent celebrations causing disruption to local communities, specific areas should be designated for large gatherings and public music to minimise disruptions. There must also be an examination of how resources are allocated during other events that may act as potential flashpoints (such as cricket matches).

- **Ensuring Accountability:** An inquiry is needed to fully understand how the riots were organised, including the identity of instigators, the role of social media, and the adequacy of police responses, particularly in light of Leicester Police's **confirmation** that the marches occurred without prior notice or permission.

3 Combatting Violent Ideologies

A leaked Home Office report from January 2025 **warned** of the rising threat of "*Hindu nationalist extremism*" and its role in the Leicester riots – marking the first time Hindutva has been addressed at length in a major UK policy document.

Until now, politicians have been largely unwilling to fully acknowledge the role of Hindutva ideologies in the unrest we saw in Leicester in 2022. Failing to recognise its influence severely hinders efforts to understand and address divisions within communities. In this context, the Government-commissioned report's recognition of Hindutva as an "extremist ideology" marks a crucial and positive step forward.

The influence of transnational and domestic ideologies that promote violence, including Hindutva, must be assessed and mitigated. However, Community Policy Forum and the UKIMC are firmly of the belief that the current apparatus that would be the central pillar for addressing extremism, the PREVENT strategy, is fundamentally flawed in its language, logical underpinnings, and application, thereby making it unfit for purpose, structurally discriminatory, and counter-productive. As such, we cannot support recommendations that would attribute greater credibility to this strategy.

Instead, we strongly feel that strategies to combat violent ideologies must focus on the holistic wellbeing of society and countering the spread of disinformation. These include:

- **Holistic Societal Wellbeing:** The PREVENT strategy must be urgently scrapped. Instead, the government must develop a new approach to radicalisation that includes addressing its root causes, including systematic disempowerment, economic deprivation, and the slashing of social services that allows grievances to fester within communities – grievances that can then be taken advantage of by nefarious actors and agitators of all different ideologies. As previously stated, investment in community welfare funding is paramount.

- **Recalibrating the Focus of Counter-Extremism Efforts:** For too long, the PREVENT strategy in particular has had a disproportionate focus on Islamically-inspired risks of politically motivated violence. It is imperative that efforts to counter violent extremism appropriately recognise and address diverse threats, including far-right and Hindutva ideologies.

- **Protecting Human Rights in the Global Context:** UK policymakers must recognise the impact of global events and politics on local tensions and the importation of transnational violent ideologies. This must involve robustly advocating for human rights in international relations, providing platforms for diaspora communities to engage in constructive dialogue, and addressing concerns about foreign funding and political influences in communal conflicts.

4 Online Safety, Mainstream Media, and Legislative Protections.

As discussed earlier in this report, the Hindutva movement relies heavily on a digital network of influencers, broadcasters, organisations, and bots to saturate online spaces with its ideology and silence critics. This network has similarities with those of other violent ideologies, including those of the far-right. Consequently, our recommendations and analysis of online safety in this regard mirrors Community Policy Forum's analysis of the danger posed by the far-right outlined in its recent report, ***From Hate Speech to Politically Motivated Violence***.

Indeed, online platforms have become a crucial tool for spreading propaganda and conspiracy theories, leveraging beneficially framed news stories and political analysis, recruiting new members, and coordinating activities. Thus, social media has allowed violent ideologies to access wider audiences than ever before by bypassing traditional media channels and engaging directly with potential supporters. This has been assisted by a lack of effective content moderation and **biases** in algorithms that are designed to identify users' preferences and **amplify** content accordingly – "*a passing interest [in a piece of far-right content] can lead to a user being bombarded with extremist material*".

The anonymity and decentralised nature of the internet, alongside a legislative landscape that has failed to keep pace with the rapid expansion of social media platforms and communications technologies, has allowed groups advocating violent ideologies to operate more freely and avoid legal repercussions. Online forums, chat rooms, and encrypted messaging apps have thus become spaces where such activists can share ideas, plan activities, and coordinate campaigns. Therefore, the interconnected landscape of misinformation, disinformation, divisive rhetoric, and social media manipulation underscores an urgent need for strategies to combat the spread of hate speech and protect vulnerable communities in the digital age.

The principal legislative mechanism for governing social media platforms is currently the Online Safety Act 2023 (OSA). Community Policy Forum has raised concerns about the effectiveness of this piece of legislation since before it was enacted. With regards to addressing the spread of violent ideologies such as Hindutva, the OSA has several notable gaps:

1. Disinformation: As pointed out by **Julian Petley**, Section 179(1) of the Online Safety Act reforms parts of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and the Communications Act 2003 to produce a false communications offence if a person posts messages containing information that they know to be false and intend it to cause "*non-trivial psychological or physical harm to a likely audience*". However, this offence is too **narrowly drafted** to address large swathes of disinformation that is used to stoke division and hatred against vulnerable communities. In reality, it would be exceedingly difficult to prove that a person knew what they were posting was false and that they intended to cause harm.

2. Comments Sections: As Community Policy Forum observed when the OSA was being debated in Parliament, comment sections on websites remain outside the

scope of the OSA's regulation. When one considers the content and nature of comment sections, particularly those of mainstream newspapers, such as *the Daily Mail,* it is on these platforms that one often encounters the most "*egregious forms of racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, and anti-trans sentiments... This has been demonstrated numerous times, with one public* [**experiment**](link) *posting Nazi propaganda on the comments section of the Daily Mail. The experiment highlighted the popularity with which such rhetoric is received on the platform, with direct quotes from Adolf Hitler being 'up-voted' amongst the comments.*"

Moreover, when it comes to ideologies that specifically scapegoat Muslim communities (a prominent feature of both Hindutva and far-right rhetoric), the content published by many right-wing news publishers can only be seen to invite such divisive discussions, as they have a long-held reputation for prejudicial and sensationalist stories about Muslims and other minority communities. In 2016, both *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* were highlighted for criticism by the *European Commission against Racism and Intolerance* for playing a "*prominent role in encouraging prejudice*" against vulnerable groups. Therefore, it can be of little surprise that comment sections on mainstream newspaper websites are breeding grounds for these ideologies. With the OSA failing to cover these spaces, they represent a significant gap in need of urgent oversight.

3. Religiously Motivated Hate: For the most part, the OSA does not create new offences, especially in relation to the spread of hate. Instead, it seeks to hold platforms accountable for dealing with and removing content that is already illegal under existing legislation. However, when it comes to Muslims specifically, the existing protections to combat Islamophobia are limited. The Malicious Communications Act 1988 (which was drafted long before the advent and explosion of social media) protects against the sending of messages that are indecent, grossly offensive, threatening, or false with the intent to cause distress or anxiety to the recipient. Similarly, the Communications Act 2003 makes it an offence to send a message that is grossly offensive, indecent, obscene, or of a menacing character. However, both of these provisions require communication directed at a specified victim. Much of the content disseminated within the Hindutva online network demonises and dehumanises Muslims as a group and is not necessarily explicitly threatening – even if intent were possible to prove – thus it likely falls outside of the scope of these protections.

Moreover, there is a disparity in protections offered by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 (RRHA) in terms of how hatred is addressed depending on whether it is motivated by race or religion. Racial protections include words or behaviours that are abusive, insulting, or threatening. In comparison, religious protections only extend to threatening words or behaviour. Additionally, the burden of proof threshold for religiously motivated hatred is significantly higher, requiring proof that the accused intended to incite religious hatred, whereas it is enough for an accused to have been aware that their actions were likely to incite racial hatred, thereby covering reckless conduct. Muslims do not constitute a race. Therefore, much of the abusive and insulting content directed at them as a group on social media is difficult to prosecute under the RRHA due to the incredibly high threshold of intent and the exclusion of

material that isn't explicitly threatening.

The logic surrounding this disparity is based on fears of the potential curtailment of freedom of expression (Article 10 of the Human Rights Act) when it comes to the criticism of religion. This is a delicate balance that must be carefully considered, however, we would argue that the current balance in favour of freedom of expression insufficiently protects the human rights of Muslim communities – specifically non-discrimination under Article 14 and the right to life under Article 2 that includes a responsibility placed on the state to ensure one's safety. Consequently, we strongly urge the government to review this disparity and explore ways to ensure that the legislation properly captures Islamophobic abuse, especially in light of the ability of Islamophobic abuse and insults to translate into physical violence.

4. Media exemption: This is another aspect of the OSA that Community Policy Forum highlighted as a concern during its progress through Parliament. It is our position that the act's exceptions for the content of 'news publishers' risks exacerbating existing dangers posed by the continued failure to implement the regulatory framework established by the Royal Charter, and can only result in increasing the barriers to addressing disinformation aimed at demonising minority communities.

It has long been established that the mainstream press and broadcast news play a central role in platforming and normalising divisive ideologies targeting Muslim communities through sensationalist and distorted reporting. **Surveys** undertaken in February 2021 reveal that 54% of people perceive journalists and reporters to be purposefully trying to mislead people by saying things that they know are false or gross exaggerations. Meanwhile, the current regulatory system is ill-equipped to deal with press abuses against minority communities, resulting in the perpetuation of conspiracy theories and abusive tropes as legitimate 'news'.

One of the most significant ways that the media (and tabloid newspapers especially) have contributed to the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim ideologies is through sensationalist reporting that capitalises on public insecurities and fears. Publications such as *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail*, and *The Daily Express* have gained notoriety for their provocative headlines and sensational stories that capitalise on inflammatory language and imagery, especially when covering issues related to Muslim communities and Islam.

Research by *the Centre for Media Monitoring* (CfMM), analysing many thousands of articles, has found that British Muslims are habitually misrepresented in UK news media. Their November 2021 **report** analysed around 48,000 online articles and 5,500 broadcast clips from a wide range of news organisations, finding that nearly 60% of articles, and 47% of news broadcast clips, presented Muslims and/or Islam in a negative light. Moreover, more than 20% of articles associated Muslims and/or Islam with terrorism and/or extremism, thus reaffirming stereotypes that depict Muslims, particularly Muslim men, as inherently threatening (tropes frequently leveraged by supporters of Hindutva to justify violence against Muslim communities).

Thus, headlines frequently play into anti-Muslim narratives that paint Muslims as dangerous and problematic, thereby reinforcing fears and prejudices of those already

sympathetic to Hindutva and far-right ideologies but also introducing such ideas to a broader audience in a way that makes them seem more legitimate.

Moreover, mainstream media are also responsible for the deliberate framing of issues or controlling the narrative in stories in such a way that shapes public perceptions in a way that benefits the anti-Muslim ideologies of Hindutva and the far-right. As but one example, the selective use of images is known to distort the public perception and understanding of stories, however, *the **Daily Mail*** recently used an image of a Muslim security guard who had disarmed an attacker against a headline "*Knifed 'at random': Leicester Square 'knifeman' who stabbed mother and daughter, 11, did not know them, police believe*". The irresponsible use of images in this way distorts the understanding of the identity of the attacker and perpetuates a carefully constructed narrative in line with such tabloids' political agendas.

Other examples demonstrate a more explicit, intentional, and concerted framing of reporting in a way that fits a media narrative actively framing Muslim and minority communities as uniquely problematic. For example, during the pandemic, there was a distinct media narrative that Muslims were responsible for the spread of COVID-19. For instance, in June 2020, right-leaning news outlets, including the Telegraph, the Daily Mail, and the Sun all ran the same **story** with headlines stating that half of the UK's imported COVID-19 cases were from Pakistan. This headline was based on highly skewed evidence – 30 cases over a three-week period in June 2020, in comparison to estimates of imported infections in the thousands during previous months, of which the vast majority **originated** from European countries on account of British citizens returning from abroad. This led to Muslims being smeared by **"hate propaganda"** within mainstream UK news media. Moreover, the timing of this report coincided with

increased lockdown measures in the city of Leicester. Consequently, Muslim organisations **highlighted** the connection between such reporting and hatred being directed at Leicester's Muslim community as the supposed cause of these measures. Instances such as these cannot be separated from the rising community tensions during the years preceding the Leicester riots that created the environment for violence to erupt.
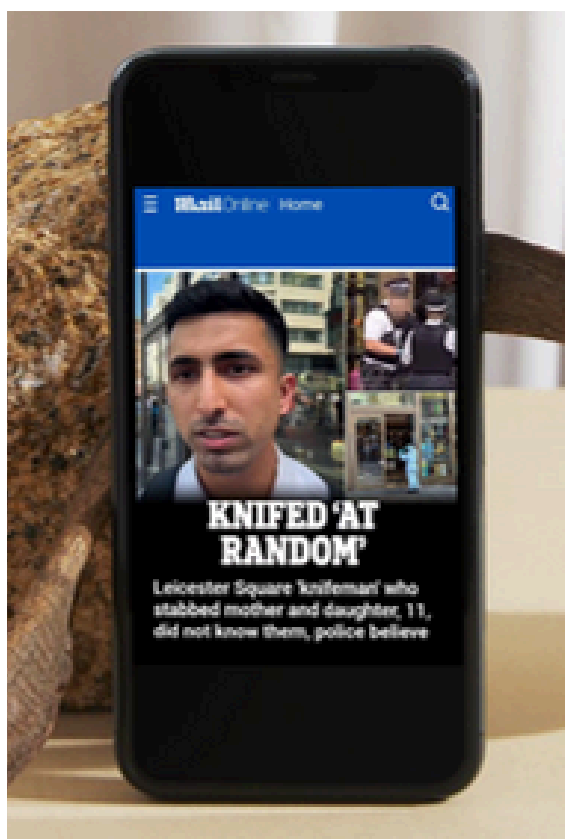
Figure 11: Image used by the Daily Mail to illustrate a story about a stabbing. The man pictured is the security guard who intervened to prevent the attack.

The mainstream media also plays a crucial role in amplifying far-right social media content. Stories and videos that originate on social media (especially those that use emotive language and an air of outrage) often get picked up by mainstream outlets and translated into 'news' stories, which can lend them an air of legitimacy and blur the lines between fringe and mainstream content. Moreover, concerning the recent far-right riots and as pointed out by Bethany Usher:

"algorithmic amplification on social media platforms means that false news spreads and images of mob violence can encourage more people to join in. Such dynamics of **hypercriminality** *– whereby sensational digital crime content fuels real criminality and vice versa – mean that we need a drastic rethink of the* **codes of practice** *for the production for journalistic crime content production across news, documentary, podcast, and social media platforms. Producers must consider the political, social, and representational dimensions of their work"*.

At the same time, mainstream media publications themselves use social media platforms to disseminate their content to wider audiences. In 2024, Community Policy Forum published a **report** based on research by Keele University into Islamophobic discourse on social media platforms. Within this **research**, there was a noted prevalence of what was termed "*reiterative racism*" across online spaces. This was particularly highlighted in examining social media interactions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, where there was a repetitive mainstream reporting of COVID cases found in the Muslim community (as discussed concerning the framing of narratives above). The articles and commentary posted by media outlets to their social media accounts in these cases were not necessarily explicitly anti-Muslim but lacked contextualisation, with a selective focus on Muslims, thus building an association between Muslims and the spread of the virus and furthering far-right conspiracy theories blaming Muslim communities for outbreaks.

Consequently, considering these patterns, addressing the dangers of Hindutva, far-right, and other anti-Muslim ideologies in online spaces must include consideration of the role of the mainstream media, as it is their content that often serves to mobilise and legitimise prejudicial, racist, and Islamophobic tropes across society at large. This pattern has severe repercussions for Muslim communities in public spaces, with the violence of the far-right riots in 2024 and the Leicester riots in 2022 being prime examples of where such rhetoric can lead. The riots are indicative of how vilifying representations foster a hostile environment that can lead to harassment and violence directed at Muslim and minority communities. Certainly, hate crime data published by the Home Office reveals that Muslims represent the religious group experiencing the highest levels of religiously motivated hate crime in England and Wales, constituting **44%** of the total religious hate crimes recorded by police in the year ending March 2023 and **38%** in the year ending March 2024 (a numerical increase of 13% compared to the previous year). This is especially concerning in light of the fact that even senior political figures with columns in major news media publications have contributed to this normalising and legitimising of hostility towards minority communities. For example, Islamophobic instances famously **increased** by 375% in the week following Boris Johnson's comparison of Muslim women to "letterboxes".

Despite these concerns, the OSA contains exemptions for news publishers that

present a significant gap which, if left unaddressed, will render wider attempts to address online disinformation and hatred futile.

Sections 18 and 19 of the OSA provide special protection for news publishers and journalistic content against heavy-handed regulation. These are sensible provisions if we are to assume that the current regulatory system governing the UK's press landscape is fit for purpose. Indeed, in theory, one could assume that gross inaccuracies and press abuses would be dealt with robustly by the existing regulatory system, meaning that the potential dangers of nefarious content reaching online spaces are mitigated. However, as will be discussed in detail below, civil society has long pointed to severe failings of the current press regulatory system that leave minority communities vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, if press abuses cannot be addressed within the existing press regulation system, and they are not being suitably addressed through online regulation, a vehicle is created through which online hate can spread.

Moreover, the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' laid out in Section 56 of the OSA is exceptionally broad. According to the act, a recognised news publisher is any entity that:

- Has a registered address in the UK and publishes information about its owner,

- Publicises news-related material that is created by more than one person in the course of a business (this does not need to be a business with a view to a profit),

- Has an editor and an editor's code of practice,

- And has a complaints process.

It is important to recognise that there are no requirements for the entity to be a member of any kind of regulator. Nor is a minimum threshold of standards stipulated that must be upheld within an entity's editorial code (for example, standards of accuracy) and the workings of a complaints process. Under these conditions, it would be remarkably easy for entities to claim the status of a news publisher despite publishing factually incorrect, prejudicial, and harmful but legal content whilst sheltering from accountability behind an editor's code and a complaints process that the entity itself has produced and has control over.

Consequently, we feel that countering the types of online hatred that drive divisive and violent ideologies must include moves to amend the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' under the OSA to ensure that it encompasses only those regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System. Not only would this address problematic content on social media that cannot be efficiently addressed by a competent regulator, but it would also further incentivise publications to become members of such a regulator as not to do so would leave them governed by the oversight of individual social media platforms.

As it stands, there are very limited avenues to address press abuses inflicted on minority communities. As recently **highlighted** by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the UK must;

"develop and adopt a media strategy addressing the responsibility of journalists and broadcasters to avoid the use of hate speech and stereotypes in describing minority communities, and closely and effectively scrutinize newspapers and broadcasters with respect to content that incites racial discrimination and hatred or strengthens xenophobic attitudes".

Research has consistently demonstrated that the current primary regulator of the UK press, the *Independent Press Standards Organisation* (IPSO) is ineffective and unfit for purpose. In fact, the *Press Recognition Panel* recently published a report highlighting that "*the Government has stated on a number of occasions that the existence of [IPSO] as the regulator of large sections of the UK newsprint press has removed the need for the measures to ensure independent press regulation that Parliament voted for following the Leveson enquiry and report. And yet, a comprehensive review of available data demonstrates that IPSO is not a fully operating regulator of the UK press.*" As a result, the UK public has been left "*as **unprotected** as ever from potential press harms*".

In particular, IPSO continues to be incapable of tackling racism and discrimination for a variety of reasons, including that its procedures for dealing with complaints mean that, in practice, they are unable to consider complaints relating to discrimination against groups of people. Consequently, while it may be possible for a named individual to pursue a case of discrimination against a major newspaper (though seldom successful), there is no recourse for blanket discrimination against a group of people, such as Muslims. As a result, since its foundation in 2014, despite receiving many thousands of complaints relating to discrimination, to our knowledge, IPSO has **upheld** only three, none of which related to religion or race.

In reality, the system of press regulation in the UK has seen little improvement since the Leveson Inquiry (2011-2012), which concluded that British newspapers were not effectively regulating themselves, thereby leaving the public vulnerable to abuse, including intrusions, inaccuracies, and harassment. The Leveson recommendations led to a new regulatory framework that was designed to be independent of both the Government and industry to protect the interests of the public. Central to this new regulatory order was Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which was designed as a carefully calibrated mechanism to ensure that all news publishers can be held to account either through an approved regulator or through the courts. It underpins the system by:

- Providing an incentive for newspapers to voluntarily become members of a Leveson-compliant regulator.

- Providing a disincentive for newspapers not to become members of a Leveson-compliant regulator.

- Providing a low-cost route to justice for victims of press abuses.

- Protecting newspapers from expensive legal threats from wealthy claimants.

Ultimately, under Section 40, if a newspaper is regulated by an approved regulator and a relevant legal case is brought against them, the claimant is liable for the costs

(win or lose) if they refuse the implemented arbitration system. On the other hand, if a newspaper is not party to an approved regulator (and therefore not part of a low-cost arbitration system) the newspaper would be liable for the claimant's costs, win or lose (unless this is considered inappropriate by a judge).

The previous Government continually refused to enact Section 40 and it was finally repealed with the passing of the Media Act, despite being originally passed by cross-party agreement. Without the enactment of Section 40 or a suitable alternative, the only Leveson-compliant press regulator is IMPRESS, which includes a membership of roughly 120 titles that are largely small, specialist, or local in nature. In comparison, IPSO's membership includes almost every major news publication in the UK, as well as a large number of local, regional, and special-interest publications. Consequently, with IPSO remaining ineffective, until Section 40 or a meaningful alternative is enacted, there is little protection for victims of press abuses.

As **noted** by the Press Recognition Panel prior to the passing of the Media Act, the repeal of Section 40 without a meaningful alternative would;

"fundamentally undermine the system of voluntary independent press self regulation that was agreed cross-party following the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry. This abandons the public to intrusive and harmful press practices unless they can afford to challenge such conduct through the courts. Even when individuals do have the means to challenge the press through the courts, these processes are expensive and can take years to resolve."

There have been a variety of suggestions for alternatives to the complete repeal of Section 40 found in the Media Act. However, we are currently unaware of any proposed alternatives that sufficiently protect the freedom of speech for publishers, encourage publishers to join an approved regulator, and provide protection to the public simultaneously. Consequently, we believe that it is essential that Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 is reinstated and either the provision is commenced with immediate effect or an equivalent put in place alongside alternative mechanisms to safeguard an independent system of self-regulation.

At the same time, changing the definition of a recognised news publisher under the OSA to include only those regulated by a Leveson-compliant regulator would further encourage publications to voluntarily become members of a regulator that is fit for purpose and capable of tackling press abuses.

Consequently, efforts to tackle the proliferation of violent ideologies must include:

Strengthening Online Safety: We call on the government to either strengthen the Online Safety Act or introduce new legislation to enhance protections against the spread of disinformation in online spaces and address the lack of regulation governing comments sections on news websites.

- **Reforming Press Regulation:** The failures of the current regulatory system are systemic and embodied by the current monopoly held by IPSO. Urgent reform is required, including amending the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' contained within the Online Safety Act to ensure that it encompasses only those regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System. Furthermore, Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 must be either reinstated and commenced with immediate effect, or an equivalent to safeguard an independent system of self-regulation must be put in place.

- **Enhancing Religious and Cultural Literacy in the Press:** The press industry must develop and adopt strategies addressing the responsibility of journalists and broadcasters to avoid the use of hate speech and stereotypes in describing minority communities. This must include initiatives to increase cultural and religious awareness amongst journalists and increase diversity within newsrooms.

- **Making Amendments to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006:** The government should consider reviewing and addressing the threshold disparity contained within the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and explore ways to ensure that the legislation properly captures Islamophobic abuse.

5 Government Leadership

Addressing the causes and ongoing impacts of the 2022 Leicester riots requires strong and proactive leadership from the UK government. While local initiatives are essential in fostering inter-community trust, it is ultimately the responsibility of national policymakers to implement structural changes that prevent the recurrence of such tensions.

Key aspects of government leadership must include:

- **Rejecting and Countering Hindutva Ideologies:** The rise of Hindutva-aligned hatred in the UK has played a critical role in stoking community tensions. The government must take decisive steps to combat the spread of these ideologies, including classifying Hindutva as a threat in line with the threat posed by fascist, ethno-nationalist, and far-right politically motivated violence. They must also show robust leadership in addressing the public platforming of Hindutva speakers and ideologies provided by politicians who have cultivated ties with Hindutva-aligned groups. Moreover, the UK should challenge the Indian government on its role in promoting Hindutva nationalism and its impact on British communities, ensuring that human rights and interfaith harmony are central to diplomatic discussions.

- **Adopting the Definition of Islamophobia:** While the Labour Party **adopted** the APPG definition of Islamophobia in 2019, the government has since distanced itself from it, **citing** a review of its approach to tackling Islamophobia and recently **launched** "a new working group... to provide government with a working definition of Anti-Muslim Hatred/Islamophobia". This trajectory threatens to dangerously mirror the stance of the previous Conservative government, which not only rejected the APPG definition but also **failed** to deliver on its promise to propose an alternative. This prolonged inaction has left a vacuum at the heart of the UK's efforts to combat Islamophobia – a vacuum that can only be widened by a continued failure to endorse a working definition. Indeed, without a formal definition, Islamophobia remains an ambiguous concept, making it harder to track, prosecute, and address, thereby leading to under-reporting, ineffective hate crime enforcement, and unchecked online hate speech. This lack of clarity undermines the government's ability to implement effective anti-discrimination policies. Consequently, it is imperative that a definition is urgently arrived at and adopted alongside robust guidelines that balance the need to protect the freedom of expression with the need to adequately capture Islamophobia in all its forms and protect Muslim communities from abuse and systemic discrimination.

- **Making Amendments to the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006:** Beyond the inability to tackle hatred in online spaces, the aforementioned threshold disparity contained within the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 impacts how Islamophobic hate crime is approached offline in public life. Consequently, the government should consider reviewing and addressing this threshold disparity from this perspective as well and explore ways to ensure that the legislation properly captures Islamophobic abuse in both online and offline spaces.

- **Holding Mainstream Politicians to Account:** As was highlighted in Community Policy Forum's recent **report** into the far-right, the role of politicians in failing to confront, tacitly endorsing, or actively echoing divisive and hate-filled rhetoric plays a vital role in normalising these ideologies and legitimising such positions in the eyes of the public, thereby emboldening agitators and their supporters. Moreover, the UK's major parties (including Labour and the Conservative Party) have had long-standing issues of **Islamophobia** within their ranks. Consequently, the government should initiate an independent investigation into the role of parliamentarians in fuelling hatred, with a view to adopting a comprehensive strategy to discourage and combat Islamophobic discourse by political figures. This investigation should be conducted with a view to creating robust mechanisms ensuring that cases are effectively investigated and sanctioned and that public officials are encouraged to distance themselves from and condemn such speech when it occurs.

- **Investing in Communities:** As previously mentioned, addressing the community tensions witnessed throughout Leicester requires heavy investment in community welfare funding and efforts to prioritise a holistic societal wellbeing. Indeed, economic crises provide fertile ground for divisive ideologies to capitalise on public discontent and redirect frustrations toward scapegoated communities. At the same time, political commentators and mainstream politicians often tacitly endorse this reductionist logic, preferring to overlook the political decision-making that has led to these hardships, and providing space for agitators to deflect blame onto Muslims and other minority communities. Thus, there is an opportunity for the government to show true leadership by openly and honestly recognising the roots of economic deprivation and the collapse of local services across the UK and directly engaging with local communities to constructively address them.

6   Education

This research has highlighted deep-seated community tensions that had been building in Leicester for several years prior to 2022, exacerbated by misinformation, extremist ideologies, and social division. While the government, law enforcement, media, and community leaders have a role to play in addressing these issues, long-term solutions must also be rooted in education and youth engagement. Investing in these areas can prevent the recurrence of such conflicts, promote social cohesion, and foster mutual understanding among future generations.

Key initiatives should include:

- **Addressing Islamophobia within Schools:** As Community Policy Forum outlined in their report, **_Muslim Voices, Election Choices,_** research has shown that teachers often lack a proper understanding of Islam, thus inadvertently perpetuating stereotypes within classroom discussions and leaving Muslim students feeling frustrated and isolated, thereby damaging their relationships with staff and peers. This is exacerbated by a lack of staff diversity within schools, impacting both Muslim students and teachers as neither have appropriate role models reflective of their experiences. Meanwhile, Islamophobic bullying remains prevalent, yet schools lack the policies and willingness to address it adequately. At the same time, schools are often reluctant to nurture students' religious and cultural identities, despite evidence that this nurturing is essential for them to develop a healthy sense of self and confidence as equal members of society. As such, encouraging and supporting educational institutions to provide simple religious accommodations, such as space to pray, would assist students in developing well-rounded identities while also normalising differing religious identities amongst student bodies, thereby allowing space for the appreciation and respect for difference.

- **Enhancing Teacher Training:** To ensure educators can effectively facilitate sensitive discussions, professional development programs should be explored which focus on enhancing cultural competency, eliminating unconscious bias, recognising instances of Islamophobia, and equipping teachers with tools to foster inclusive classrooms

- **Prioritising Anti-Racism Education:** In countering divisive rhetoric, intensive educational initiatives are needed that highlight the role of minority communities in building the society that we have today. Efforts must be made to teach students about different religious and cultural traditions, highlighting common values and shared histories. At the same time, educational efforts must be made to address racial and religious discrimination explicitly, providing historical context on systemic racism and Islamophobia whilst also encouraging critical discussions about identity, belonging, and the dangers of sectarian and divisive ideologies.

- **Encouraging School and Community Collaborations:** Schools should partner

with local religious and cultural organisations to provide students with lived experiences of interacting with diverse communities. These initiatives could include hosting workshops and events that promote interfaith dialogue, confronting hate speech, facilitating student exchanges and visits to places of worship, and developing mentorship programs that pair students from different backgrounds with community leaders who exemplify positive interfaith relations.

- **Expanding Extracurricular Programs, Youth-Led Initiatives, and Youth-Led Grassroots Activism:** Extracurricular activities that encourage youth interaction across different communities can reduce prejudices and build long-lasting relationships. Key recommendations include: (1) Establishing interfaith youth councils that bring together young leaders from different backgrounds to discuss and address communal issues. (2) Expanding funding for sports, arts programs, and leadership development workshops that include participants from diverse communities. (3) Providing safe spaces for young people to engage in dialogue about their experiences, fears, and hopes for a more cohesive society. (4) Funding youth-led social action projects that address community tensions and promote reconciliation. (5) Providing training in conflict resolution, public speaking, and advocacy. (6) Establishing youth advisory boards within local government structures to ensure young voices are heard in policymaking.

- **Fostering Critical Thinking and Digital Literacy:** The role of social media in spreading misinformation and inflaming tensions during the riots highlights the urgent need for digital literacy programs. Students must be equipped with the tools and knowledge to assess and question online narratives in order to reduce their susceptibility to misinformation and extremist propaganda. Schools and community groups should, therefore, implement digital literacy curricula that teach students how to identify fake news and misinformation, as well as topics such as online safety and the dangers of radicalisation. Helpful initiatives could also include programs encouraging young people to become digital ambassadors and training on effective ways to counter harmful narratives with positive content in ways that promote unity. Peer-led social media education programs and partnerships with technology companies to promote digital citizenship would also be beneficial.

- **Promoting Civic Education:** Young people must be taught how to actively engage with democratic processes as a vehicle to protect their interests and address their grievances. Prioritising this knowledge and participation in active citizenship empowers young people to be confident social actors, thereby reducing the attraction of politically motivated violence (predicated on a variety of ideologies) as a means to voice their grievances or else disengaging from public life due to frustration.

- **Establishing a National Youth Inclusion Fund:** As with many other areas of this roadmap, investment is key. Regarding young people, it is essential that the government provides investment to programs that support young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in accessing leadership and civic engagement opportunities.

7   Violence Against Women and Girls

In line with wider research on gendered Islamophobia, this study has also highlighted the frequently intersecting nature of Islamophobia and misogyny. At the same time, there remain significant gaps in the UK's current strategy to tackle violence against women and girls (VAWG), especially when that violence intersects with multiple protected characteristics, as is the case for Muslim women.

As such, alongside wider strategies to address VAWG across society, we strongly urge policymakers to:

- **Have Due Regard for Intersecting Forms of Discrimination during Discussions Surrounding Making Misogyny a Hate Crime:** While the status of misogyny as a category of hate crime remains a topic of debate, there must be recognition of the multiple layers of discrimination many women face that make them especially vulnerable to hate crime. This is especially true for Muslim women, for whom gender discrimination is frequently compounded by discrimination on the basis of their religion and ethnicity (as well as other protected characteristics they may hold).

- **Remove the UK's Reservation of Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention:** In 2022, the UK Government ratified the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the Istanbul Convention). While this is laudable progress, the UK Government's strategy to combat VAWG is continuing to fail to adequately protect all women equally due to the UK's **reservation** on Article 59, which obliges states to provide protection to migrant women. Meanwhile, a recent report from the Domestic Abuse Commissioner has revealed that migrant victims and survivors of violence in the UK are often prevented from reporting their abuse to the police and other statutory services, as police forces in England and Wales have been shown to share victims' data with Immigration Enforcement. Consequently, perpetrators remain unperturbed as victims are unable to come forward for fear of criminalisation, detention, and other enforcement action taken against them, including their potential removal from the UK.

- **Increase Funding for Specialist Services:** Funding for sexual violence and domestic violence services continues to be severely neglected, especially in terms of specialist services for those with intersecting protected characteristics. In particular, concerns have been raised about the lack of specialist service provision for disabled women, ethnically minoritised women, and women with insecure immigration statuses and no recourse to public funds. This lack of specialist services has a particular impact on Muslim victims of violence, for whom public, institutional, and structural Islamophobia act as barriers to accessing support - barriers that are further compounded if those victims are from migrant backgrounds. More information can be gleaned from Community Policy Forum's 2024 **submission** to the UN Human Rights Committee.

8 Victim Support

While mental health services are under acute strain across the UK, access to these services remains a particular challenge for many Muslim communities. Stigma, cultural barriers, institutional discrimination, and a lack of culturally competent services prevent many Muslims from seeking and receiving the support they need. In addition, Islamophobia, gendered discrimination, and socio-economic inequalities further exacerbate mental health issues within these communities. As such, it is of little surprise that a **survey** of 1,077 young British Muslims conducted by Muslim Youth Helpline in 2019 indicates high levels of poor mental health, with 63% of respondents having suffered from anxiety, 52% from depression, and 32% reporting having had suicidal thoughts. Worryingly, over a third (37%) of respondents aged 16-22 said they did not go to anyone for support the last time they had an issue pertaining to their mental health.

Traumatic experiences related to the Leicester riots and their aftermath necessitate urgent attention to be given to the victim support and mental health services available and accessible to Muslim communities. As such, we recommend the following initiatives:

- **Funding Studies on Muslim Mental Health Needs:** While the research surrounding the mental health experiences of ethnically minoritised communities is a burgeoning field, the knowledge landscape is largely still lacking in research specifically about Muslim communities. Therefore, investing in this area would provide fruitful areas for development. This must be accompanied by promoting cross-sector collaboration between academia, public health, and faith-based organisations while also advocating for greater inclusion of Muslim voices in shaping national mental health policies.

- **Increasing Cultural Competence Amongst Practitioners:** Healthcare providers in all fields must possess cultural attunement if they are to deliver respectful and effective care. Understanding patients' cultural and religious backgrounds, needs, and sensitivities helps practitioners to communicate more effectively, understand their patients, and make appropriate care decisions. This awareness fosters trust and rapport, improving patient satisfaction and adherence to medical advice. By incorporating cultural competence into healthcare, providers can address the unique needs of minoritised patients, ultimately enhancing health outcomes and reducing disparities. For Muslim communities specifically, practitioners should be offered training modules that address Islamophobia's mental health impact and how racial and religious discrimination shapes mental health outcomes. At the same time, initiatives must be implemented to encourage more Muslim professionals to enter the mental health field through scholarships and mentorship programs.

- **Addressing the Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services:** There are a wide

range of barriers that limit Muslim communities' access to suitable mental health support. Prominent hurdles include language barriers and a lack of awareness of medical rights and how to navigate the healthcare system. These barriers may lead to individuals not seeking necessary care, missing out on available treatments, or failing to advocate for themselves effectively, particularly if they do not understand their rights as patients and how to navigate the healthcare system. This can result in delayed diagnoses, untreated conditions, and overall poorer health. Thus, addressing these barriers is paramount.

- **Strengthening Community Outreach:** This must include expanding grassroots mental health initiatives and increased funding for community-led mental health initiatives that provide culturally sensitive counselling, peer support groups, and signposting to available services.

The Ten Key Pledges

Ultimately, the roadmap provided above can be distilled into ten key policy pledges:

1. Establish Statutory Funding for Interfaith and Community Dialogue Mechanisms.

Establish local interfaith dialogue forums supported by government funding, with a statutory duty for local authorities to facilitate regular inter-community grievance redressal and reconciliation sessions. Train and accredit community mediators to de-escalate tensions, supported by government grants.

2. Legislate a National Youth Inclusion Strategy.

Establish a National Youth Inclusion Fund to support youth-led initiatives, mentorship, civic education, and cross-community sports and arts programs. Prioritise critical thinking and digital literacy across the national curriculum. Mandate funding for youth civic engagement schemes, especially in areas of high deprivation and tension.

3. Increase Funding to Support Community Infrastructure and Welfare.

Commit to multi-year ring-fenced funding for community centres, youth spaces, language access programs, and economic empowerment projects to support integration, wellbeing, and social inclusion, especially within deprived areas and amongst minoritised communities.

4. Support New Migrants and Refugees in Community Life.

Expand local support and funding for language support, cultural orientation, and community participation pathways for newly arrived immigrants. Establish community engagement benchmarks tied to central government funding that encourage newly arrived people to actively participate in local activities and civic spaces.

5. Reform Policing to Promote Trust, Representation, and Fairness.

Legislate mandatory unconscious bias, Islamophobia awareness, and historical context training for police officers and empower them to recognise instances of nationalist slogans and symbols being used as tools of intimidation. Reassess how resources are allocated during events that may act as potential flashpoints (such as cricket matches) and enforce clear, rights-respecting protocols for public demonstrations to ensure equitable and effective policing. Launch an inquiry into how the riots were organised, including the identity of instigators, the role of social media, and the adequacy of police responses. Reform recruitment policies to increase representation from minoritised backgrounds, and prioritise transparent local community-police liaison panels.

6. Scrap PREVENT and Enact a New Holistic, Rights-Based Approach to Preventing Politically Motivated Violence.

Repeal the PREVENT duty and legislate for a strategy that is rooted in public health, education, and promoting societal wellbeing. Address the systemic causes of radicalisation, including economic deprivation, disempowerment, social exclusion, and the slashing of social services that allows grievances to fester.

7. Recognise and Tackle a Broad Range of Divisive Ideologies within the National Security Strategy.

Amend the focus of counter-extremism efforts to appropriately recognise and address diverse threats, including far-right and Hindutva ideologies. This must include strict due diligence guidelines on the platforming of known hate speakers by elected officials and public bodies. Reform diplomatic policy to ensure human rights conditionality in UK–India relations and address the role of foreign funding in communal conflicts.

8. Enact Legislative Reform to Tackle Islamophobia.

Amend the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 to close threshold disparities and properly capture Islamophobic abuse. Urgently adopt a definition of Islamophobia in statutory guidance and implement robust guidelines across government. Launch an independent inquiry into elected figures who have failed to confront, tacitly endorsed, or actively echoed divisive and hate-filled rhetoric, with a view to adopting a comprehensive strategy to discourage and combat Islamophobic discourse by political figures.

9. Reform Media and Online Regulation to Combat Disinformation and Hate.

Amend the Online Safety Act to limit the definition of "recognised news publisher" to outlets regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System. Prioritise initiatives to increase diversity within newsrooms and reinstate Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 or legislate equivalent protections to uphold independent press regulation.

10. Deliver Intersectional Mental Health and Violence Support.

Remove the UK's reservation of Article 59 of the Istanbul Convention and remove requirements for police forces in England and Wales to share the data of victims experiencing violence with Immigration Enforcement, thereby ensuring protection for migrant women experiencing violence. Increase funding for specialist VAWG services for Muslim, disabled, and racially minoritised women. Mandate cultural competence training for healthcare professionals and expand community-led Muslim mental health initiatives, with NHS-backed funding and academic collaboration.

Acknowledgements

Community Policy Forum and the UKIMC would like to extend our gratitude for the contributions of the people who worked tirelessly to make this report a reality, including:

- UKIMC's team and volunteers for their coordination and collection of the research data.

- Community Policy Forum's team for the production of this report.

Contact

Community Policy Forum
www.communitypolicyforum.com
research@communitypolicyforum.com
@PolicyCommunity

The UK Indian Muslim Council (UKIMC)
www.ukimc.org
info@ukimc.org
@UKIMCouncil