

Muslim opinions and opinions of Muslims: British experiences

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Overview

- Historical background: Islam in Britain
- National surveys about Muslims
- National surveys of Muslims
- Manchester/Harvard/Notre Dame case study
- Concluding reflections
- Further reading

Historical background: Islam in Britain (1)

- Muslim presence in Britain since at least 8th century
- But only quantitatively and socially significant since Second World War
- Muslim immigration linked to trade and colonisation, especially in Indian sub-continent
- Only 10,000 Muslim migrants c. 1920, 20,000 in 1951
- Substantial male Muslim economic immigration in 1950s and 1960s
- 250,000-300,000 Muslims by 1970
- Immigration Acts 1962 and 1971 ended primary flow of economic migrants
- Continuing influx of dependents

Historical background: Islam in Britain (2)

- British-born second generation from the 1970s
- Refugees from Africanisation policies in 1970s and later sectarian/ethnic conflicts
- 1,000,000 British Muslims by late 1980s
- Heightened public profile in 1988-90, through Rushdie affair, First Gulf War etc.
- Islam thought to be increasingly overtaking mainstream Christian denominations in terms of practice
- Developing Islamophobia in 1990s – Runnymede Trust Commission (1996-97)

Historical background: Islam in Britain (3)

- 1,600,000 Muslims in 2001 census (possibly modest underestimate), disproportionately young (71% under 35) and spatially concentrated
- Growing concern in 2000s about lack of Muslim integration/rejection of British/western values and related demands (faith schools, Sharia, religious dress)
- Increasing association of Islam with radicalism/terrorism, especially 9/11, 7/7, opposition to wars in Iraq/Afghanistan, foreign policy on Israel/Palestine
- 2,500,000 Muslims estimated from Integrated Household Survey 2009-10
- 7,000,000 Muslims projected (by Kaufmann, 2010) by 2029, assuming continuing immigration, above-average fertility and below-average secularisation

National surveys about Muslims: chronology

- Prior to late 1980s Islam/Muslims not feature *per se* in national surveys
- Until then Muslims defined by ethnicity/nationality (Asians), not religion, and covered in ethnic surveys, if at all
- 15 surveys on Islam/Muslims in 1988-2000, 7 of them in 1990
- 154 surveys 2001-10

2001	13	2006	33
2002	5	2007	15
2003	9	2008	18
2004	15	2009	10
2005	19	2010	17

National surveys about Muslims: methodology

- Fieldwork conducted by reputable polling agencies using established methodologies for national sample surveys
- Sample size typically 1,000 or 2,000
- Telephone and, latterly, online surveys predominate
- Mostly omnibus surveys, often with only a handful of Muslim-related questions
- Majority of surveys event-driven, perhaps measuring opinion at times of greatest awareness/disapproval – therefore, essential to understand the time contexts
- Limited strict replication of questions, thereby limiting construction of time-series
- No agreed scale/index for measuring attitudes to Muslims (but Brockett devised six-item AMPI scale for a local study) and no psychological profiling

National surveys about Muslims: sponsors

- Several academic surveys, including British Social Attitudes (BSA) Surveys, 2003, 2008 and Scottish Social Attitudes Surveys, 2003, 2006
- Several European Commission and other international surveys
- Several government Citizenship Surveys
- Some Muslim-sponsored surveys: IQRA (1990), Islamic Society of Britain (2002), Muslim Voice UK (2006), Islamic Education and Research Academy (2009), Exploring Islam Foundation (2010)
- But mostly British-based print and broadcast media clients

National surveys about Muslims: topline findings (1)

- There is extensive negativity towards Muslims but no absolute level of Islamophobia, nor are views necessarily consistent between questions
- Attitudes vary according to the measure, with five clusters of negativity, ranging from one-fifth (hard core Islamophobes) to three-quarters of adults
- Most negative cluster have limited or no knowledge of Islam, no interest in finding out, oppose the introduction of Sharia and the subordinate status of Muslim women and press for tough action against Muslim extremists
- Least negative cluster regard Islam as warlike and 'un-British' and are unwilling to have Muslim neighbours or to vote for a Muslim

National surveys about Muslims: topline findings (2)

- Measure for measure, negative attitudes were higher or static in 2007-10 compared to 2001-06, so the situation is worsening
- In particular, 9/11 and 7/7 had a transformational effect on negativity, as regards perceptions of integration, loyalty and radicalism
- Knowledge of Islam/Muslims has improved somewhat but is still limited, mostly deriving from television/newspaper coverage which is often negative
- Direct contact has grown but over one-half still have no Muslim friends
- Negative attitudes to Islam/Muslims correlate with lack of knowledge/proximity

National surveys about Muslims: topline findings (3)

- Double standards are prevalent, a widespread recognition that Muslims suffer discrimination coexisting with personal coolness and prejudice
- In particular, Muslims are heavily criticised for failing to integrate and yet little effort is made to bridge the gulf between the Muslim and majority communities
- Islamophobia is the most pervasive of all forms of religious prejudice, easily outstripping anti-Semitism but also hostility to all other religions, including atheism
- Britain is somewhat less Islamophobic than Western Europe but has now overtaken the USA in terms of Islamophobia

National surveys about Muslims: demographic variables

- Men are more negative than women
- Old are more negative than the young
- DEs are more negative than the ABs
- Lesser educated are more negative than the better educated
- Tories are more negative than the LibDems, but BNP/UKIP are most negative and Greens most positive
- London and Scotland are most positive, with Midlands and the North sometimes most negative
- Insufficient data exist to generalise about other variables, including ethnicity and religious affiliation

National surveys of Muslims: chronology

- First surveys by Harris in 1989 and NOP in 1991
- 39 surveys 2001-10
- Includes Citizenship Surveys but not Labour Force Surveys
- Includes three special surveys of young Asians, women and students
- Excludes two surveys of London Muslims
- Excludes three surveys of dubious methodology

2001	4	2006	8
2002	4	2007	4
2003	0	2008	3
2004	2	2009	6
2005	7	2010	1

National surveys of Muslims: methodology (1)

- British Muslims do not constitute a homogeneous entity – a community of communities
- Community size and spatial concentration make conventional national sampling problematical
- Samples have to be specially devised, including by filtering, making surveys of Muslims relatively expensive
- Some surveys are restricted to areas of greatest Muslim density
- Recontacts and snowballing are widely employed
- Women and elderly are harder to reach
- Few surveys have interviewed in the vernacular

National surveys of Muslims: methodology (2)

- Mostly surveys conducted by telephone but some have been face-to-face or online
- Absence of firm demographic data for weighting prior to publication of 2001 census (from February 2003)
- Typical sample size is only 500, limiting disaggregations (eg age analysis restricted to under and over 35)
- Outsider provenance – mostly surveys of Muslims by/for non-Muslims, and often event-driven and media-led
- Muslim-led surveys often methodologically deficient, although Muslim Voice UK did mount a brief experiment with an online Muslim panel

National surveys of Muslims: topline findings (1)

- Far more religious than other Britons, including young Muslims, although they practice less than their elders
- Growing Muslim identity, especially over Sharia, face-veils, faith schools, facilities for Muslim prayer in schools/workplace, and somewhat more favoured by younger than older Muslims
- Stricter on most aspects of morality than other Britons, especially sex and alcohol
- Overwhelming majority feel attached to Britain, more so since 7/7, but stronger still to Islam, notably among the young
- But ambivalence about integration because of the perceived conflict of Islamic and British values/culture

National surveys of Muslims: topline findings (2)

- Also overwhelming opposition to British foreign policy (Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel/Palestine), somewhat more among the young
- Significant minority is anti-Semitic (or, rather, anti-Zionist)
- Ambivalence about freedom of speech, especially when the outcome of toleration may be criticism of Islam
- Much scepticism about official accounts of 9/11 and 7/7, and reservations about counter-terrorism strategy
- Some ambivalence in denunciation of 7/7 and use of violence generally, by one-fifth among young

National surveys of Muslims: topline findings (3)

- Most (and especially young) sense a growing Islamophobia, particularly linked to 9/11 and 7/7
- Some evidence of growing alienation from mainstream British society, but this is not just the preserve of radicals or Muslim youth generally
- Serious alienation perhaps affects one-fifth, but far fewer (5-10% of young) hold radical views, which follow a political rather than a religious Islam
- Notwithstanding, over four-fifths express satisfaction with life in Britain and are optimistic about their prospects

Manchester/Harvard/Notre Dame case study (1): methodology

- Led by Robert Putnam, David Voas, David Campbell
- Funded by John Templeton Foundation
- Complements 2008 BSA Survey
- Fieldwork by Ipsos MORI in February-March 2009
- Questionnaire in English, Sylheti and Punjabi
- Random sample within output areas that had at least 10% Muslims
- Face-to-face interviews with 480 British Muslims 18+
- 85% South Asian, 85% British citizens, 55% aged 18-34, 35% born in UK
- Some questions put to half-samples only
- Significant refusals (eg sexual morality) or don't knows (eg Sharia)

Manchester/Harvard/Notre Dame case study (2): personal religiosity

- Seven in eight say religion extremely or very important in daily life (BSA 15%)
- 82% say religion is very important to their sense of identity (BSA 16%) versus 55% for ethnicity (BSA 29%)
- Two-thirds very or moderately spiritual (BSA 34%)
- 84% endorse literalist view of scripture (BSA 10%) and 44% creationism (BSA 14%)
- Weekly attendance at services claimed by 30% of 18-34 and 50% of 35+ (BSA 10%)
- Prayer several times a day claimed by 45% of 18-34 and 60% of 35+ (BSA 5%)
- Two-thirds read Qur'an at least weekly (BSA 11%)
- 71% observe Ramadan fasting fully and 17% mostly

Manchester/Harvard/Notre Dame case study (3): religion in society

- 60% agree that religion is a private matter which should be kept out of public debates on socio-political issues (BSA 71%)
- 54% disagree that it is proper for religious leaders to influence voting of individuals (BSA 73%)
- 45% say that religion is very or somewhat important in making decisions on politics (BSA 19%)
- Two-thirds acknowledge basic truths in many religions (BSA 74%)
- 24% (29% of 18-34, 19% of 35+) are cool towards Jews (BSA 13%)
- 38% agree and 32% disagree that Britain is deeply divided along religious lines (BSA 52% and 16%)

Manchester/Harvard/Notre Dame case study (4): Islam in society

- 58% very strongly belong to Britain and 29% fairly strongly
- No consensus about a natural conflict between being a devout Muslim and living in a modern society
- 52% oppose right to speak in favour of bin Laden or al-Qaeda (BSA 66%)
- Headscarves worn (by respondent or wife) by 58% of 18-34 and 77% of 35+
- 57% support a greater role for Sharia courts
- 22% of 18-34 and 14% of 35+ have experienced Islamophobia during previous two years
- 87% broadly satisfied with life in Britain (BSA 83%)

Manchester/Harvard/Notre Dame case study (5): morality

- 75% say there are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good or evil (BSA 37%)
- 60% of 18-34 and 78% of 35+ view pre-marital sex as always wrong (BSA 8%)
- 58% of 18-34 and 74% of 35+ regard homosexual acts as always wrong (BSA 30%)
- 45% of 18-34 and 58% of 35+ oppose legal recognition of same-sex relationships (BSA 26%)

Concluding reflections (1)

- Surveys demonstrate a developing divide between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Britain, despite a parallel growing acceptance of the role of Muslims in public life (promoted by equal opportunities legislation)
- This division does have religious and moral roots, in that there is a contrast (and conflict) between the stricter faith and morality of Muslims and the secularity and ethical liberalism of society as a whole
- Although concerns about terrorism have fuelled this Islamophobia, its continuing growth now seems to be partly independent of those concerns (there has been no significant terrorist incident on British soil since 2007)

Concluding reflections (2)

- Majority population is now responding as much to the rapid growth in the Muslim population and its mounting socio-political influence and expectations, compounded by a sense that Islam is somehow 'un-British', and fed by the media whose coverage remains largely negative
- Government response has hitherto disproportionately concentrated on counter-terrorism (Home Office) and community cohesion (DCLG), with no substantive changes to the foreign policy which is a primary cause of Muslim alienation (FCO)
- Beyond Government, enhanced inter-faith networking will only help to a limited extent, since there is no national authority structure in British Islam and most Britons no longer look to religious leaders for guidance

Concluding reflections (3)

- Ultimately, therefore, mutual respect and understanding between Muslims and non-Muslims is a matter for individuals and communities, through active citizenship at the grass roots
- Principal sign of hope from the national surveys is that, among non-Muslims, the young are much less Islamophobic than their elders; at the same time, among Muslims, Islamic identity is strengthening with the young
- More streamlined and methodologically enhanced survey research among Muslims and non-Muslims would improve the evidence base on which future public policy could be built

Appendix: further reading (1)

SURVEYS

<http://www.brin.ac.uk/news/>

Allen, Jodie and Wike, Richard (2009) 'How Europe and its Muslim populations see each other', *Muslims in Western Politics*, ed. Abdulkader Sinno, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 137-60.

Bleik, Erik (2009) 'Where do Muslims stand on ethno-racial hierarchies in Britain and France? Evidence from public opinion surveys, 1988-2008', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43: 379-400; and *Anti-Muslim Prejudice: Past and Present*, ed. Maleiha Malik, London: Routledge, 2010, 169-90.

Field, Clive (2007) 'Islamophobia in contemporary Britain: the evidence of the opinion polls, 1988-2006', *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 18: 447-77.

Appendix: further reading (2)

- Field, Clive (forthcoming) 'Young British Muslims since 9/11: a composite attitudinal profile', *Religion, State and Society*.
- Field, Clive (forthcoming) 'Revisiting Islamophobia in contemporary Britain: opinion poll findings for 2007-10', *Islamophobia in Western Europe and North America*, ed. Marc Helbling, London: Routledge.
- Wike, Richard and Grim, Brian (2010) 'Western views toward Muslims: evidence from a 2006 cross-national survey', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 22: 4-25.

Appendix: further reading (3)

GENERAL

Allen, Christopher (2010) *Islamophobia*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Ansari, Humayun (2004) *The Infidel within: Muslims in Britain since 1800*, London: C. Hurst & Co.

Gilliat-Ray, Sophie (2010) *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hussain, Serena (2008) *Muslims on the Map: A National Survey of Social Trends in Britain*, London: Tauris Academic Studies.

Kaufmann, Eric (2010) *Shall the Religious Inherit the Earth? Demography and Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, London: Profile Books.

Contact details

Thank you – any questions?

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