BRITISH MUSLIM TRUST

British Future...

Understanding Anti-Muslim Hostility

Foundations for Action

REPORT

June 2026

British Future
British Muslim Trust

Published 2026 by British Future in association with the British Muslim Trust.
Fieldwork by Number Cruncher Politics. Analysis and interpretation by British Future.
Authors: Sunder Katwala, Jake Puddle and Avaes Mohammad, British Future.
Editor: Steve Ballinger.
Thanks to Tisha Dasgupta for assistance with data analysis.

© British Future and British Muslim Trust 2026. The authors' rights have been asserted.
The views and recommendations expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and of British Future, which conducted the research. British Future maintains full editorial independence. We are grateful to the British Muslim Trust for funding this research and for their advisory input.

About British Future:
British Future is an independent, non-partisan think tank engaging people's hopes and fears about integration and migration, identity and race, so that we share a confident and welcoming Britain, inclusive and fair to all.
Registered Charity number 1159291
Twitter: @BritishFuture
www.britishfuture.org

About the British Muslim Trust:
The British Muslim Trust (BMT) is a national charity working to monitor and address anti-Muslim hostility. Appointed by the UK government, BMT operates a national helpline for victims affected by anti-Muslim hate, alongside a programme of national advocacy, research and community outreach. The work of BMT is grounded in the experiences of the communities it serves.

June 2026

British Future
British Muslim Trust

Contents

— Foreword 4

— Foreword 6

— Executive Summary 8

01 Introduction and methods 13

02 Context: Attitudes towards ethnic and faith groups in Britain 15

03 Attitudes towards Muslims: survey findings 20

04 Attitudes towards Muslims: an audience segmentation 31

05 Attitudes and experiences of British Muslims 38

06 From analysis to action: signposts for effective action and alliances 50

— Acknowledgements 55

— Appendix: Survey design challenges 56

Foreword · Akeela Ahmed MBE, British Muslim Trust

The British Muslim Trust opened its doors in July 2025. In those first months we launched our helpline and began a programme of outreach and engagement, travelling to meet communities, mosques and grassroots organisations across the country. We wanted to listen and engage with communities and hear the everyday stories and challenges of their lives. What we heard has stayed with us and painted a familiar picture around the country.

Time and again, people told us that for the first time in a generation they felt their place and their identity in this country were being called into question and scrutinised in ways they had not experienced previously. These were people who told us that they had done everything that is asked of them as British citizens. They had gone to university, built careers, raised families and contributed to the life of their towns and cities. They had integrated. Despite this, they felt targeted and unsure of their place in society, because they were made to feel unwelcome in their own country.

That feeling sharpened after the “Unite the Kingdom” march in September 2025. In its wake, people came to us describing a shift – a sense that something in the wider mood of the country had changed, in attitudes towards Muslims and towards minorities more broadly. We commissioned this research, in partnership with British Future, to test that instinct against the evidence: to understand the true state of public attitudes towards Muslims in Britain today, including the depth of hostility and where it is coming from.

The findings offer both reassurance and warning. British Muslims continue to express a deep sense of belonging to this country. But that sense of belonging is weaker among younger Muslims than among their elders, and we cannot afford to let it erode or ignore the fact that young people more broadly are facing unprecedented challenges. If the next generation grows up doubting that this is their home, the loss is not theirs alone, it is the country’s. It will have unintended consequences on social cohesion and how young people connect to one another in the places where they live.

The most sombre findings concern lived experience. More than half of Muslims experienced prejudice based on their religion in the last year. Around one in four of the Muslims we surveyed reported experiencing anti-Muslim hostility in person, in a public space. Scaled across the Muslim population of Britain, that is not a statistic – it is hundreds of thousands of people, abused on a street, on public transport, at work or online, simply for who they are, their identity and background. The ramifications reach far beyond those individuals. They touch the cohesion of our communities, the strength of our economy, and the fundamental question of how we see and relate to one another as fellow citizens.

Two threads run through this evidence. The online world is plainly shaping attitudes, carrying misinformation and hostility further and faster than ever before. Too many people simply do not know a Muslim – the interpersonal contact and connection that builds trust is missing from their daily lives. Both must be addressed. The research underlines how much people value their local places and communities, and how much more this matters the further one travels from Westminster and from London. It is in those local relationships, more than anywhere else, that prejudice is undone.

Foreword · Akeela Ahmed MBE, British Muslim Trust

This briefing is a first step. Further research will follow, deepening our understanding and turning evidence into action. The findings from this research however are clear; anti-Muslim hostility must be recognised and confronted as seriously as every other form of hatred, prejudice and discrimination – no more, but no less. Muslim communities are not asking for special favours: they are experiencing unprecedented levels of hate and hostility, and overcoming it requires all of us across British society to address it. The type of country we want to live in depends on it. And we must be clear sighted in debunking the misinformation, fake news and divisive political rhetoric that are becoming ever more mainstream. The consequences of doing nothing and the chronic lack of investment in bringing communities together is written plainly in these pages. The foundations of and opportunities to build a more connected, harmonious and thriving society, that the entire country can benefit from, are also written here too.

Akeela Ahmed MBE
Chief Executive, British Muslim Trust

Foreword · Sunder Katwala, British Future

Having been born into the Britain of the mid-1970s, there were several times when I could see and feel my generation of ethnic minority Britons gain from the strengthening of social norms against the racism and prejudices of that era. The idea that racist slurs were simply 'banter' to endure seemed to fade, maybe because more people thought about those on the receiving end. My teenage children will probably never hear, if we go to a football match, the kind of overt racist chanting that was far too common when I was their age. But positive changes – in classrooms and workplaces, on public transport or in public life – rarely happened by chance; it took efforts across society.

The scope and limits of that past progress are being put to the test today. A complex cocktail of technological, political and economic changes mean that Britain undoubtedly feels much more anxious and divided than any of us would want. The rising visibility of different forms of hatred and prejudice, online and offline, are too often having distinct impacts on minority experiences of everyday life in Britain – for British Jews, for British Muslims and for ethnic minorities more generally.

Many British Muslims, across different generations, will have experienced some of these broader shifts in society but have often had distinct experiences of them too. There has been a growing voice, visibility and Muslim presence in British public life in recent generations – but this has been more sharply and vocally contested than for other minority groups. There can sometimes seem to be a very fine line between the demand for greater integration and the fear of some kind of Muslim takeover. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 7/7 a generation ago put Muslims in Britain under more scrutiny than ever before. Many political leaders did make efforts, at that time, to differentiate the challenges of terrorism and extremism from the broader presence of millions of our Muslim fellow citizens. But Muslims undoubtedly found themselves at the sharpest end of contested debates about identity and integration.

Tackling hatred towards Muslims has been a hotly contested topic. There have been several years of debate over what to call this – with arguments in politics and civic society over the merits and risks of terms like "Islamophobia" or anti-Muslim hostility, and whether or how to try to define prejudice against Muslims. With a new definition having been proposed, this new research seeks to deepen understanding of the nature of this challenge – and to provide foundations for identifying effective responses to tackle this form of hostility and hatred.

These are sobering findings, in both the scale and reach of prejudice against Muslims. It is a minority who hold sweepingly hostile views – but it is a worryingly broad one. Most British Muslims see this as a good country to be Muslim, yet the experience of prejudice is far too common. This research also shows that most people in Britain recognise anti-Muslim prejudice exists and support action to tackle it. That will require clarity about getting the boundaries right. Being clear about what should be permitted – as well as what crosses the line – is important to secure that broad consensus.

Foreword · Sunder Katwala, British Future

So the research design is careful not to prejudge, nor to regard sceptical or negative attitudes as automatically denoting hostility or hatred. Challenging hostility and prejudice against Muslims simply for being Muslim should not curtail legitimate scrutiny and debate about identity, faith or integration. Those are conversations that we need in our increasingly diverse democracy if we are to live well together.

What these findings underline, above all, is why tackling anti-Muslim hostility should not be the work of Muslims alone. It will take a whole-of-society effort, to which every institution can make its relevant contribution.

It would undoubtedly help, in public, political and media discourse about Muslims in Britain, to do more to recognise the pluralism among four million people. There is a wide range of different experiences, by gender, age and geography, of being Muslim in Britain today. The British Muslim Trust, in its first year, is undertaking important work to engage directly across Muslim citizens and communities – to understand their experiences, help those who experience hate crimes to report them, and to help shape the broader social response.

Yet the challenge of tackling hostility and prejudice against Muslims is not something that can be addressed solely by and within the 6% Muslim minority in our society today. It is foundationally about the attitudes and perceptions among the 94% who are not Muslim. Indeed, the research shows that the challenge is often sharpest among those with the least real-world contact with Muslims themselves.

The significant contrast in attitudes across different generations shows that acceptance of Muslims has become a broad social norm among some social groups – but it is much patchier among others. The pattern of attitudes shows why it will be essential to pursue effective boundaries against anti-Muslim hostility on the right, centre and left of British politics – to mitigate the risk of increasingly polarised views about prejudice boundaries. It is important that those scrutinising or critiquing the government's policy approach pair that with commitments to essential boundaries against hostile or hateful attitudes and conduct.

The challenge for all of us who want to reduce anti-Muslim hostility is to identify how to reach beyond the already confident and engage those with tougher views, in ways that will be effective. Tackling anti-Muslim hostility is one essential part of upholding a commitment to equal citizenship across every ethnic and faith group. These findings provide a starting point for how we can all contribute to that effort.

Sunder Katwala,
Director, British Future

Executive summary

Anti-Muslim hate is on the rise in Britain. Reported hate crime hit a new record in 2025, following two summers of far-right community disorder and growing experiences of online discrimination. High profile cases have also demonstrated how this hate can be misdirected towards other faith and ethnic minority communities. [1] Clear action will be needed to establish measures to stem this rising trend and engage the public in stigmatising prejudice.

It is in this context that British Future, in partnership with the British Muslim Trust, is conducting research to help establish these foundations. Using representative surveys, this briefing examines the experience of Muslims in Britain today, including their confidence in community relations, views on safety and experiences of prejudice. It also explores broader attitudes in society towards Muslims, to understand the breadth of empathy and the scale of belief in stereotypes and hateful narratives. [2] Mapping out these issues, this briefing looks to understand the drivers of hostility and how to reach and engage different groups of allies, neutral fence-sitters and hostile or prejudiced groups, in efforts to broaden the foundations for positive community relations and 'live and let live' respect. Further research later this year will also build on these findings with practical advice for organisations on effective communications, outreach and initiatives.

[1] *https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpqxrzr29pxo*

[2] *The research draws on two representative polls carried out by Number Cruncher Politics. These comprise a representative online survey of 1,013 Muslims in Britain conducted from 4th to 22nd March 2026. We also fielded a nationally representative online survey of 2,000 people from all backgrounds in Britain between 4th to 18th March 2026.*

Key Findings

Muslim respondents express confidence about their place in Britain.
Almost three quarters (73%) of Muslim respondents say Britain is a good place to be a Muslim

Yet Muslims report widespread experience of prejudice and the perception that this is rising. More than half (56%) of Muslims report personally experiencing prejudice based on their religion in the last year (a quarter, 27%, in a public space). More than half (51%) say prejudice has increased in the last year; 61% (and 69% of Muslim women) say they felt more worried about personal safety after the September 2025 'Unite the Kingdom' protest.

A narrow majority of the British public express basic acceptance of Muslims in Britain. Half (49%) agree most Muslims make a positive contribution to society, which one in six (17%) reject. A similar proportion (52%) agree Muslims born here are just as British as white non-Muslims (19% disagree).

But acceptance is shallower than needed to secure resilient foundations. In line with other studies, our survey findings show that around a third of people hold predominantly positive views about Muslims, while a third hold broadly neutral views and another one in three more negative attitudes.[3] Our analysis segments the public to understand the views and composition of these groups, particularly exploring how to isolate and contain the ideologies of those with hardened, hateful prejudices.

About twice as many people (22%) see Muslims as making an overall negative contribution to British society compared to members of other faiths such as Jews (12%) or Hindus (8%). This would chime with previous claims that anti-Muslim prejudice can be more likely to 'pass the dinner table test', requiring broader social efforts to stigmatise hate and align views towards Muslims with those of other faith minorities.

More than one in three (37%) agree with a statement that "The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture." The research also surfaces concerningly high levels of belief in misperceptions and conspiracies about Muslims. Three in ten (29%) agree that "Parts of the UK are under the control of Sharia Law and are 'no-go' zones for non-Muslims" and a similar proportion (28%) disagree. It is a minority of society – one in three (32%) – who also believe that 'Most British Muslim women who wear a hijab do so out of personal choice'. More respondents (44%) answered that 'Most British Muslim women who wear a hijab do so because they feel pressured by their family or community'.

---

[3] See Misbah Malik (2024) Doubling Down on Division: Anti-Muslim hatred in the UK since October 7th London: Hope Not Hate.

Around one in six also hold persistently strong, hostile views of Muslims. This includes concerning support for targeted discriminatory policies and treatment: 15% agree with the statement that "Muslims living in the UK should be deported to other countries." Some one in ten (9%) see violent protest outside a place of worship as justifiable in expressing views on grooming scandals (4% see it as very justifiable).

Attitudes become more positive when interaction with Muslims is more frequent. There is a consistent, statistically significant relationship between attitudes towards Muslims and self-reported social contact. This suggests those able to counterbalance media and social media narratives with lived experiences of coexistence are more resilient to hateful views. At the same time, only a third of people (36%) report frequent social contact with Muslims, a third (29%) report occasional contact, while another third (34%) seldom meet Muslims, suggesting further efforts are needed to bring people together across our differences.

Most people in Britain recognise anti-Muslim prejudice exists and support action to tackle it. The survey reveals that 60% support government action against anti-Muslim prejudice. This includes a strongly supportive 20% of people who feel "It is important that the government takes strong action to prevent anti-Muslim prejudice." It also spans a 40% group who answer "It is important that the government takes action to prevent anti-Muslim prejudice, provided there are balances to protect freedom of speech."

There is some confidence in community relations, mixed with fears for the future.
A majority (57%) of the British public agree with the statement "It is possible for Muslims and non-Muslims to live well together in towns and cities around the UK", while 16% of the public disagree. This is felt more strongly (75% agree to 6% disagree) among British Muslims.

However 6 in 10 of the general public (59%) believe it is likely that "The UK will experience increased tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the next five years" and over half (52%) see violent clashes as likely (across different views about what is driving that threat).

From analysis to action

We conclude with eight key challenges that emerge from the data – and look at the distinct roles that different institutions and networks can play in reducing prejudice, to help build a stronger social norm of accepting Muslims on equal terms. Our follow-up report, to be released later this year, will provide new qualitative research and advice to better understand the messages, messengers and practical solutions that can help to broaden acceptance of and empathy towards Muslims as a social norm across society.

1) Don't normalise anti-Muslim hostility – and don't exceptionalise Muslims.

It is important, when devising strategies to reduce anti-Muslim hostility, to recognise that it has distinct features. However, an effective counter-prejudice strategy would focus on normalising perceptions of Muslims instead of singling them out as a group that is significantly different to others. A useful goal would be to align attitudes, so opinions towards Muslims in Britain were similar to those towards other faith minorities.

2) Understand that tackling anti-Muslim hostility is everybody's business, not that of Muslims alone.

Victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes need solidarity to report and prosecute hate crimes. Yet being tough on the causes of anti-Muslim hostility depends primarily on strategies to reach beyond Muslim communities to the 94% of the population who are not Muslim. It requires effective interventions, messages and partners to reach more challenging audiences, not just those already supportive.

3) Recognise that different actors and networks can make distinct contributions to a society-wide effort.

Every institution and sector can make a significant contribution to the challenge of reducing hostility. Coalitions of Muslim and non-Muslim allies can make the case for why the definition of anti-Muslim hostility matters. The state must also play a role in addressing the one in six with prejudiced views of Muslims, to provide a safe and secure environment for Muslims to live without experiencing hatred.

4) Narrow the generation gaps.

This research shows that anti-Muslim hostility is more prevalent among older than younger people. This positive shift across generations suggests schools have been doing a good job over the last two decades. A challenge now is to explore how these efforts could engage people in intergenerational contact, involving parents and grandparents.

5) Beyond contact: testing and deploying effective communications to those least likely to have real-world contact with Muslims.

Our research suggests that the most urgent challenge is to reach effectively those segments of the public least likely to have contact with Muslims but who are in receipt of alarmist content (particularly online) that reinforce perceptions of threat, fear and cultural incompatibility. A priority should be to develop, test and pilot effective communications that resonate with these audiences, helping humanise Muslim fellow citizens and shift perceptions of Muslims as a homogenous bloc and existential threat.

6) Target efforts at those whose attitudes can be shifted.

Engaging those with negative views of Muslims that stop short of outright hostility may be an important way to insulate this group from the arguments of those voicing hatred towards Muslim citizens, There are also significant gains to be made by engaging the third of society that is broadly neutral, to strengthen condemnation of hate and broaden 'live and let live' respect in ways that make sense to the median citizen.

7) Navigating political polarisation.

There is an increasing risk that heightened polarisation creates contrasting, politicised social norms within progressive and conservative blocs and parties. Political parties that question the need for the new government definition on anti-Muslim hostility can still play a constructive role. Policy critique must be paired with a clear commitment to recognising Muslims as equal citizens and setting firm boundaries against hateful attitudes among party members and/or office-holders.

8) Understanding intergroup attitudes and challenges.

In a multi-ethnic, multi-faith Britain it will be important to understand the unique characteristics and drivers of hostility across a range of communities. There has been a significant commitment among civic and faith leaders from Muslim and Jewish communities to maintain relationships. Yet tackling anti-Muslim prejudice also offers an opportunity to build solidarity across South Asian communities and citizens in the UK, where there are currently weaker networks of engagement.

1. Introduction and methods

Britain has now seen two successive summers of community unrest targeted, at least in part, towards Muslims. Indeed, 2025 saw reported prejudice towards Muslims hit record levels, which currently accounts for half of all religiously motivated hate crimes. [4]

Following the disorder, the government has published a new, non-statutory definition of anti-Muslim hostility. The definition aims to provide guidance on how to protect legitimate critique and scrutiny of challenging issues of faith, politics, integration and extremism in British society while getting the boundaries right to exclude unlawful discrimination, hate crime and hostility towards Muslims, and towards others who can face misdirected anti-Muslim prejudice. [5]

Yet whether or how to tackle anti-Muslim hostility has been sharply debated. And the introduction of the term Islamophobia, nearly three decades ago, has produced some of the most contested debates in politics, the media and society about the boundaries of free speech and prejudice. A crucial next step is therefore to establish what comes next after the definition is in place, to build foundations for action and broader public engagement in challenging hostility.

It is in this context that British Future, in partnership with the British Muslim Trust, is conducting research to help establish these foundations. This briefing aims to explore the experience of Muslims in Britain today, including their experiences of prejudice. The briefing also sets out to understand wider attitudes in society towards Muslims: including levels of empathy, hostility and support for government intervention. Through this latter work, we also outline an attitudes segmentation of society, from the most supportive allies of the Muslim community, through to those that model neutral 'live and let live' tolerance, groups with anxieties about community relations and crucially those with hardened prejudices who are vulnerable to extremist ideologies.

By looking to understand the size and characteristics of these groups, this research aims to inspire more strategic, evidence-led initiatives to address hate crime and broader anti-Muslim hostility, and its causes: illuminating how different approaches can best mobilise opposition to prejudice across the mainstream of opinion with varied views, while containing and isolating the fringe with hardline extreme beliefs.

This represents the first publication of a more detailed research study which will conduct further qualitative opinion research with Muslims in Britain and the wider public. Further information will be released later this year, building on these interim findings, to outline practical advice for organisations on how to embed this research into action.

---

[4] *https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/clyjlx2e4l8o*

[5] *Government definition of anti-Muslim hostility https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-definition-of-anti-muslim-hostility*

The research draws on two representative polls carried out by Number Cruncher Politics. These comprise a representative online survey of 1,013 Muslims in Britain conducted from 4th to 22nd March 2026. We also fielded a nationally representative online survey of 2,000 people from all backgrounds in Britain between 4th to 18th March 2026. Data tables are available on request from Number Cruncher Politics.

The scope of this research provides an overall summary of social attitudes on anti-Muslim prejudice in Britain. We welcome more detailed studies to build on this evidence base further, examining the segments identified more closely.

2. Context: Attitudes towards ethnic and faith groups in Britain

Our survey examined the views of the public towards ethnic and faith minorities in general, to provide context in which to situate the Muslim-specific findings that follow in subsequent sections. It finds a striking generational divide in attitudes towards Muslim contribution to society, with younger people feeling more positive towards Muslims than any other group, and older respondents holding the opposite view. It further identifies Muslims, alongside Jews, as among the groups seen to face the most prejudice in Britain.

One useful starting point to understand attitudes towards Muslim people in Britain today is to look at the broader context of attitudes towards different ethnic and faith groups in British society. This quantitative research began by asking respondents for their views of the positive or negative contribution of a range of faith and ethnic groups, and for their perceptions of the levels of prejudice faced by different groups in Britain.

Overall, people in Britain are more likely to hold positive than negative attitudes about the contribution to British society made by people from minority faiths, including Muslims. However, twice as many people regard the overall contribution of Muslims to British society as negative – and indeed as very negative – than express negative views about other faith minorities in Britain.

Asking about the reputation of different faith groups illustrates that there are particularly wide generation gaps in perceptions of different minority groups in Britain. Older respondents express more positive views of other faith groups, and more negative perceptions of Muslims. But this is not the case for respondents aged under 35 – and the youngest cohort of respondents in this survey, aged 18-24, expressed more positive views about the social contribution of Muslims than they did for other faith groups in Britain today.

Figure 2.1: Negative attitudes towards Muslims are more broadly held than towards other faith minorities in Britain

	Positive (of which very)	Neither	Negative	Of which very negative	Don't know	Net (pos – neg)
Muslims	36% (12%)	31%	22%	11%	11%	**+14**
Hindus	41% (12%)	38%	8%	3%	13%	**+33**
Jews	40% (12%)	37%	12%	5%	11%	**+28**
Sikhs	41% (13%)	36%	9%	3%	14%	**+32**
Christians	52% (21%)	32%	6%	2%	10%	**+46**

Thinking, overall, of the contribution that people from this faith background make in British society today, would you regard it as positive, negative or neutral? Number Cruncher Politics survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4–18 March 2026.

Over a fifth of respondents (22%) saw the contribution of Muslims in Britain as negative – while 12% said this about the contribution of people who are Jewish, and fewer than one in ten expressed this view about people who are Hindu or Sikh in Britain.

More than one in ten respondents (11%) said that they perceive the overall contribution of Muslims in Britain as "very negative" – while 5% of people expressed a very negative view about Jewish people in Britain, falling to 3% for those expressing a very negative perception about Hindus and Sikhs in Britain.

That 6% of people are negative (and 2% very negative) about the contribution of Christians in British society illustrates that the negative views of some respondents are rooted in opposition to faith in general (as well to Christianity in particular). That view could also contribute to the negative score for minority faith groups.

These questions were intended to offer a comparable snapshot of how far there is a broad 'group reputation' of those from different faith groups in Britain – of warmth, neutrality or negativity.

It is important to recognise that respondents may answer such a question, asking them for a view about the overall social contribution of groups of people in society, in different ways. For example, some respondents may identify a positive contribution because they have a particular positive experience or relationship with people from that specific background. Others may be seeking to express a general commitment to or confidence about the presence of ethnic and faith diversity, or be seeking to signal empathy and acceptance towards those from groups whom they are concerned may be facing discrimination or prejudice from others.

Some respondents could see neutral answers as a logical way to treat people as individual people – preferring not to generalise in ways that could be seen as positive or negative stereotyping. However, those taking that approach would not contribute to distinct reputational scores for different groups, which depend on those respondents with more and less positive perceptions of some groups than others. Other people may feel that they lack sufficient knowledge or information about particular minority groups, or minorities in general.

Those who hold prejudiced and hostile attitudes towards a particular group – or towards all groups – would be most likely to perceive a very negative contribution by the group as a whole. So the comparative snapshot is particularly useful in illuminating different potential reasons why people might hold negative views. This could include a general scepticism towards all religious faiths in general for some, or a sweeping rejection of all ethnic and faith minorities for others. It also helps us to better understand how broader views about integration and diversity may relate to intolerance, prejudice and hostility across groups, or towards Muslims specifically. In particular, the comparative lens allows more focus on the extent to which some people hold distinctly negative attitudes towards Muslims in particular, and whether this is more or less common among particular demographic groups, before going on to explore in more depth which negative perceptions can and cannot fairly be described as expressions of anti-Muslim hostility.

It is worth noting that this question about group contribution picks up a somewhat wider gap between negative attitudes towards different faith groups – while there was a narrower range in the "positive contribution" reputation scores for different faith minority groups from the general public.

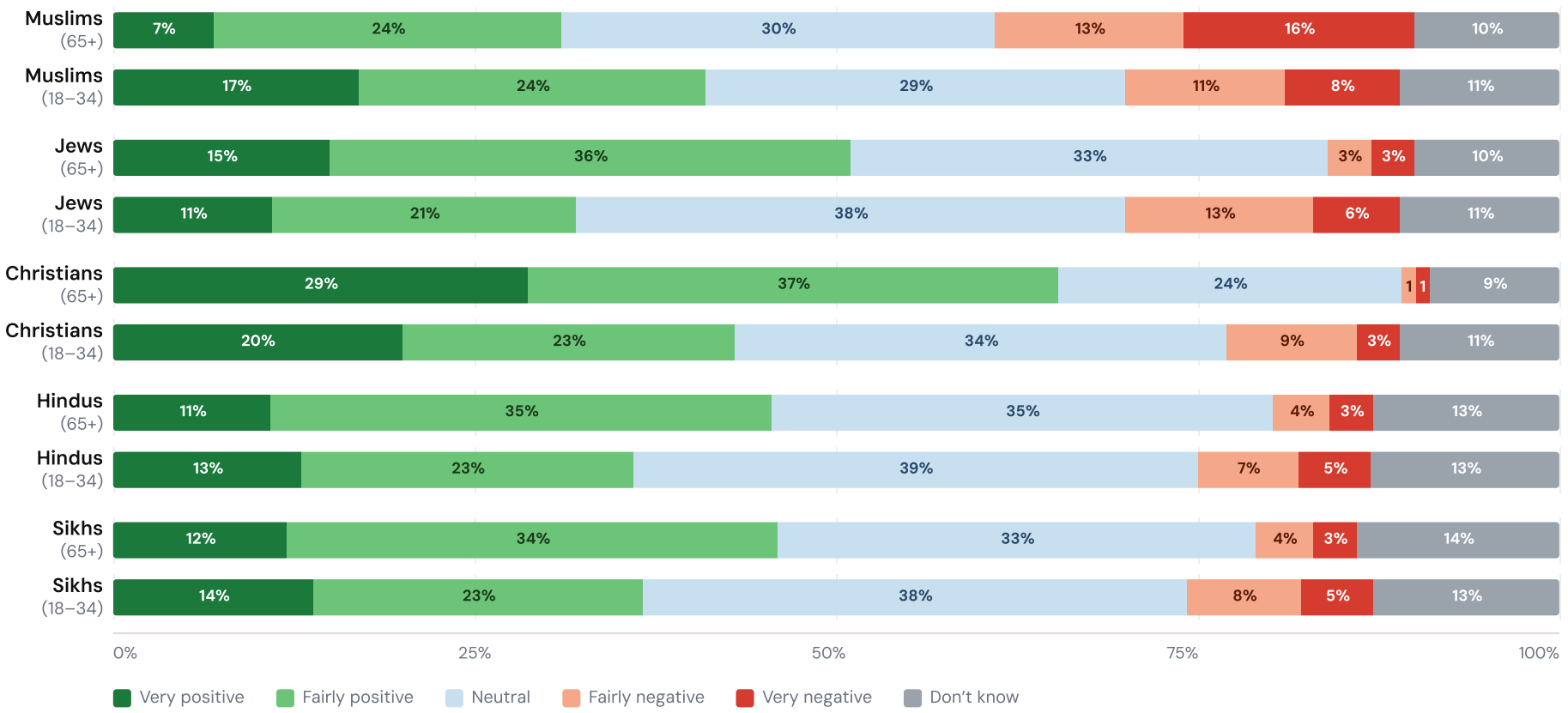
The "very positive" score is almost identical across faith minority groups at 12-13%, while being nearly twice as high for Christians (which is a faith group whom almost half of the population personally identify with as their religion, at least nominally).

There is a small but significant 5% gap between the 36% who perceive Muslims making a positive contribution to British society and the 40-41% who said the same of Hindus, Sikhs and Jews. This is a view held much more frequently by older than younger people.

Older people are considerably more likely to differentiate strongly between Muslims and other faith minorities in Britain

The difference in reputation of different faith groups is significantly wider among older than younger groups. Respondents aged over 65 were four times as likely to see the contribution of people who are Muslim as negative (29%) than say the same for other faith minority groups (6-7%). There is also a considerably wider gap in positive attitudes among the oldest respondents than among the population as a whole, with a 15% gap in those seeing a positive contribution from Muslims (31%) than for Sikhs and Hindus (46%) and a distinctly higher score for people from a Jewish background (51%).

Figure 2.2: Attitudes of different age groups towards contribution of minority faith groups



Thinking, overall, of the contribution that people from this faith background make in British society today, would you regard it as positive, negative or neutral? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey 4-18 March 2026, n=506 respondents aged 65+ and n=493 respondents aged 18-34

The graph above highlights the striking difference in attitudes towards Muslims, compared to those toward other minority faith groups, between older and younger people.

What is more, the youngest respondents of all in this survey (18-24s) stood out as holding distinctly pro-Muslim views, compared to their attitudes towards other faith minorities in Britain. While the sample size, at 204, is smaller than the 18-35s referenced above, and so findings should be seen as indicative, our survey found that Muslims emerged as the faith group with the most positive overall group reputation with this younger age group. Some 43% of respondents aged 18-24 saw Muslims as making a positive contribution (16% very positive), and 16% a negative contribution, with 7% seeing that as very negative. Among respondents under 24, the net gap between positive and negative contribution scores across faith groups were Muslim +27, Christians +24 Hindus +18, Sikhs +15.

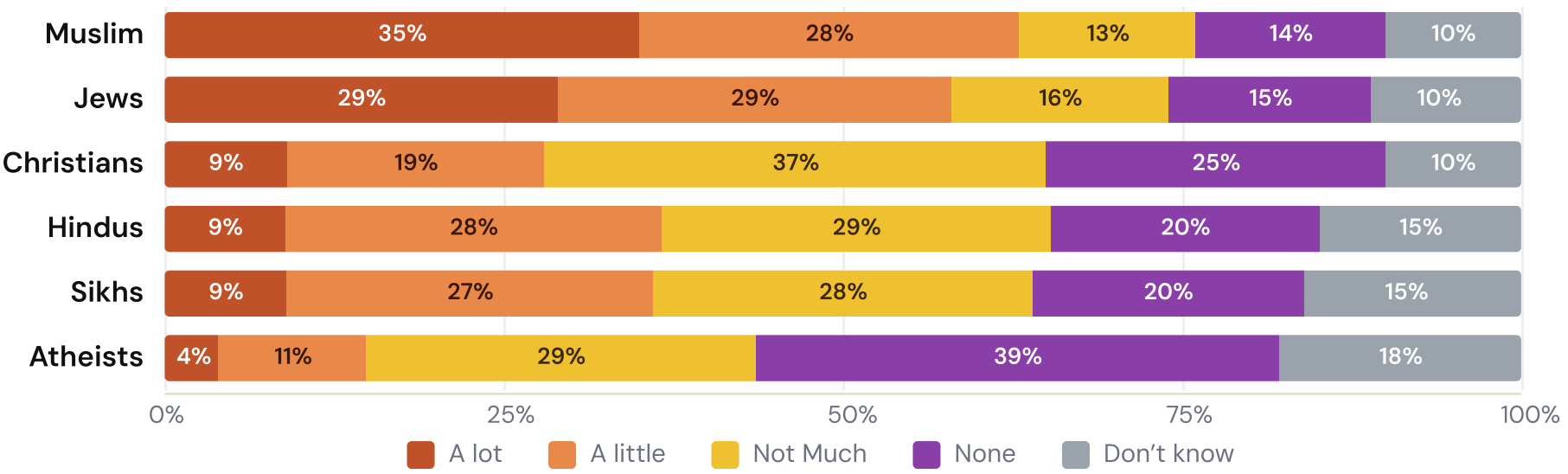
More concerning was a coolness in attitudes among this age group towards the contribution of the Jewish community in Britain. The Jewish net score with the youngest respondents fell to +5, with 27% perceiving a positive contribution but 22% holding a negative perception, while neutral responses were most common. Both of these findings among the 18-24s highlight the increasing polarisation of attitudes across generations, with different dynamics among the oldest and youngest groups. As mentioned above, the smaller sample size of 18-24s means further research would be necessary to better understand what I behind this distinct pattern of attitudes. What can be reported with more confidence, however, is that people under 35 see far less difference between Muslims and other faith minorities than those over 65 do.

Who faces prejudice in Britain today?

Asked how much prejudice a range of different groups face, this Spring 2026 survey found a public perception that Muslims are particularly likely to experience prejudice in British society today. Around a third (35%) of people feel that Muslims face a lot of prejudice, while 29% perceive a lot of prejudice against Jews and 27% perceive a lot of prejudice against black people. Only 18% feel there is a lot of prejudice against Asians in general. Around 1 in 10 people perceive a lot of prejudice against Hindus or against Sikhs – and 1 in 10 perceive a lot of prejudice against white people, and against Christians (9%)

Responding on a four-point scale, a majority of respondents put the amount of prejudice against Muslims (63%), Jews (58%), Black people (59%) and Asian people (53%) in the top two categories. This finding can be taken to represent a somewhat broad majority consensus on some of the groups who remain more likely than others to face prejudice in British society today – in contrast to the more marginal view that it is now racism towards the majority group which has become particularly prevalent in an increasingly diverse society.

Figure 2.3: Public perceptions of prejudice against different faith groups



For each of the groups listed, please say how much prejudice, if any, there is against them? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026.

There were relatively narrow social and political differences in responses, though graduates and those in socioeconomic groups ABC1 were more likely to perceive "a lot" of prejudice against Muslims. There was a significant but not enormous gap by party politics, with 31% of Conservatives, 34% of Reform voters, 38% of Lib Dem voters and 46% of Labour voters perceiving "a lot" of prejudice against Muslims. 42% of those who voted Remain and 33% of those who voted for Leave perceive "a lot" of prejudice against Muslims.

These narrow gaps partly reflect that an understanding of the existence of prejudice can and does cross political groups. It is a sentiment which, overall, tends to correlate with empathy and solidarity for Muslim fellow citizens when they do face hostility and hatred. However, the perception that there is a lot of prejudice towards Muslims was also held by 41% of those who themselves hold hostile views of Muslims: some within this group may see prejudices towards the out-group as both widespread and legitimate.

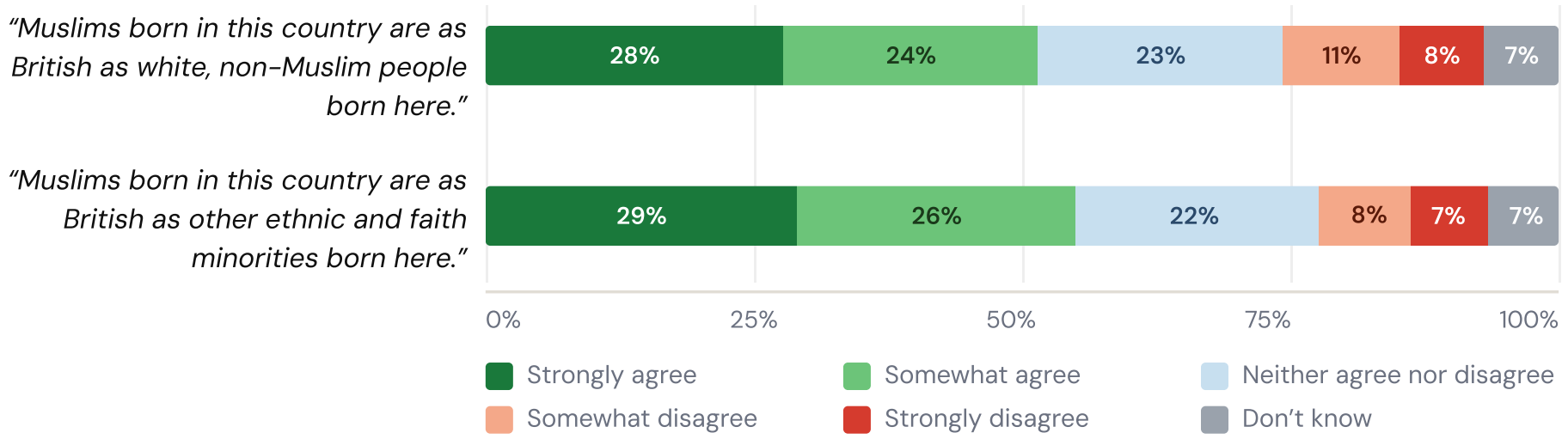
3. Attitudes towards Muslims: Survey Findings

The following chapter draws on our nationally representative survey to outline the views of the general public towards Muslims. It finds a narrow foundation for tolerance and acceptance. Just over half of people see Muslims as equally British to white, non-Muslim people. Six in ten (61%) support government action to address anti-Muslim hate if this includes free speech protections. However, the research also reveals a complex picture of negative attitudes, including hostilities and prejudices. These range from broader social concerns such as perceptions of the hijab and belief in misinformation about no-go zones, through to a one-in-six group with hardened grievances who would favour deportations of British Muslims and one in ten who support violent protest.

A narrow majority of the British public express acceptance of Muslims in Britain.

Our survey finds that a consistent yet narrow majority hold tolerant views of Muslims in Britain. Just over half (52%) agree with the statement that "Muslims born in this country are as British as white, non-Muslim people born here", while one in five (19%) disagree and a further 30% are neutral or answer 'don't know'. A similar pattern emerges (55% agree and 15% disagree) when respondents are shown a statement "Muslims born in this country are as British as other ethnic and faith minorities born here".

Figure 3.1: Majority attitudes towards British identity of Muslims



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

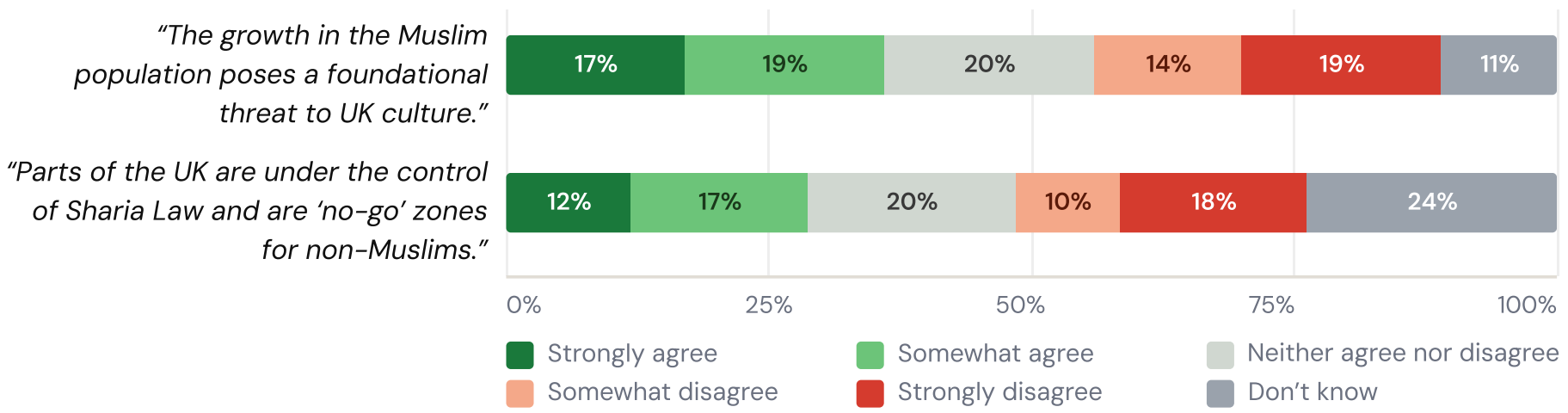
Views vary substantially based on respondents' level of self-reported contact with people who are Muslim. Where people report having interactions daily or often, belief in Muslims as British is markedly stronger (64% agree/12% disagree) than among those who rarely or never have such opportunities to mix (38% agree/27% disagree).

Attitudes towards Muslims' British identity are also notably split by party vote. Some three quarters (72%) of 2024 Labour voters agree that Muslims are as British as white, non-Muslims born here and 10% disagree, while Reform UK voters are split (35% agree; 37% disagree).

Acceptance is shallower than needed to secure resilient foundations against prejudice, while misinformation and negative perceptions about cultural threat are widespread

Although we find a slim majority hold baseline accepting attitudes, there is a broad section of society who hold negative views about the cultural integration of Muslims in Britain. More than one in three (36%) agree with a statement that "The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture", while 33% disagree. Meanwhile three in ten (29%) agree that "Parts of the UK are under the control of Sharia Law and are 'no-go' zones for non-Muslims" and a similar proportion (28%) disagree.

Figure 3.2: A sizeable minority agree with negative statements about Muslims in Britain



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

Responses are again split by party vote and vary sharply based on reported interactions with Muslims. There are also steep differences, particularly in belief of the existence of 'no-go zones', based on media trust. 41% of those who prefer to get information from independent journalists directly via social media agree that parts of the UK are 'no-go' areas, compared with 27% who prefer sourcing information from media organisations such as the BBC and Sky.

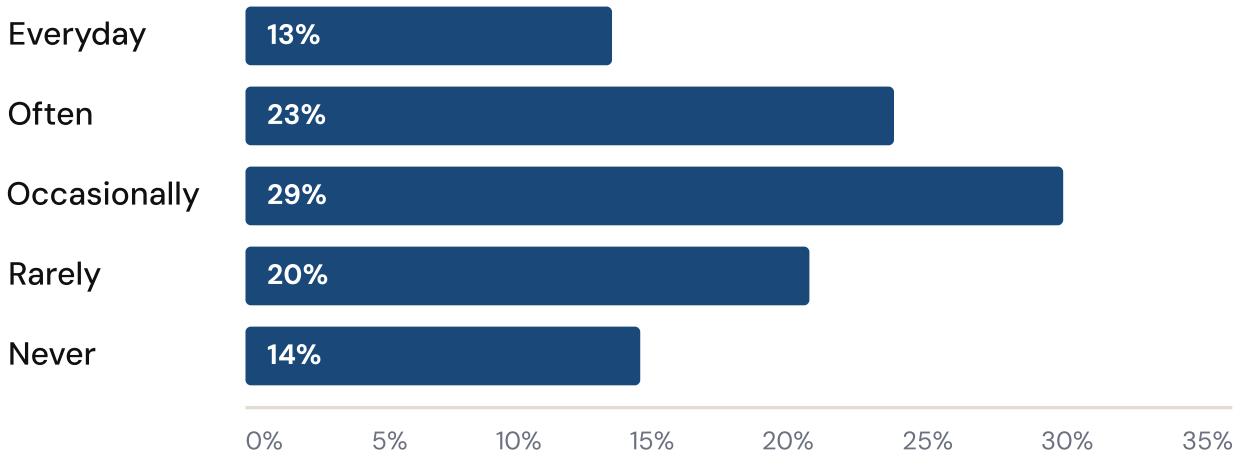
Regular social contact significantly impacts attitudes towards Muslims, with one in three reporting daily or frequent interaction.

A third of people (36%) report frequent social contact with Muslims (and this is "everyday" for 13%). A third (29%) report occasional contact, while another one in three (34%) seldom meet Muslims ("never" for 14%).

Throughout survey responses we find a highly statistically significant relationship between the regularity of interaction with Muslims and respondents' levels of acceptance towards Muslim people in the questions. This echoes a large body of evidence, which finds that positive, sustained social contact between in-groups and out-groups can improve trust, expand mutual empathy and reduce prejudice.[6]

Those with little or no contact will largely form their views on Muslims more through media, online or second-hand anecdotal reports within a febrile national conversation about integration, where alarmist narratives and misinformation are widespread. Increasing the bridging relationships between people from different backgrounds can help to ground attitudes in lived relationships, particularly around themes of cultural compatibility, people's capacity to live together peacefully and in reducing belief in conspiracies or stereotypes.

Figure 3.3: Public levels of contact with Muslims in everyday life



How frequently do you interact with people you know are Muslim in your day-to-day life? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

However, there are stark differences in where existing contact is taking place. Around half of people aged 18-24 (43%) claim to interact with people who are Muslim daily or often, compared to one in six (18%) over-65s. Similarly respondents in the most urbanised parts of the UK are twice as likely to have contact with Muslims daily or often (49%) than those in the least densely populated areas (23%).[7] Where contact is unable to happen organically, for example in low-diversity areas, this highlights that a range of initiatives may be needed – such as education, media and social media strategies – to engage those who will have more social distance from Muslims in their daily life.[8]

[6] *See, for example Christ, O., Schmid, K., Lolliot, S., Swart, H., Stolle, D., Tausch, N., Al- Ramiah, A., Wagner, A., Vertovec, S. and Hewstone, M. (2014) 'Contextual effect of positive intergroup contact on outgroup prejudice' in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(11), 3996-4000*

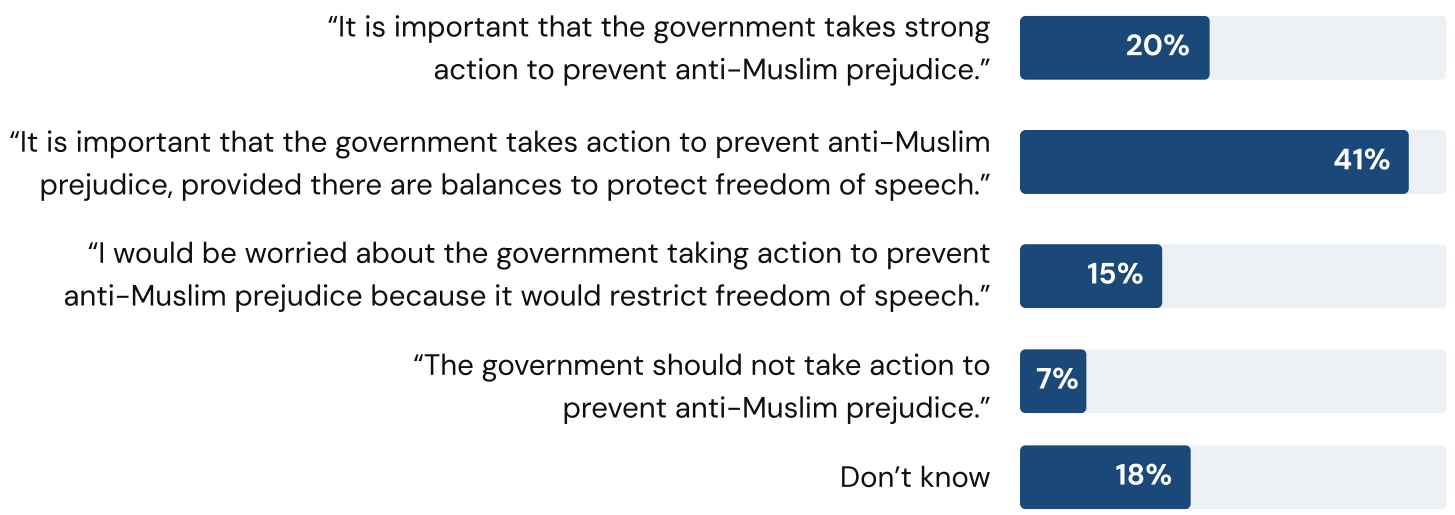
[7] *Based on the comparing the most urbanised quartile to the least urbanised quartile using 2021 census population density data.*

[8] *Academic research finds that positive social contact does not have to be in-person, but that second hand or 'contextual contact' (e.g. knowing that others in your country/area mix positively) can yield improvements in trust and empathy. This opens the possibility for communications campaigns to produce similar benefits where these can platform communities living together well. See Christ, O et al. (2014) 'Contextual effect of positive intergroup contact on outgroup prejudice' in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 111(11), 3996-4000.*

Most people in Britain support action to tackle anti-Muslim prejudice

Our survey reveals that a clear majority (61%) support government action against anti-Muslim prejudice. That includes a strongly supportive 20% of people who feel the government should take strong action but also spans a 41% group who answer that government action is important, provided there are balances to protect freedom of speech. Around one in seven people (15%) worry about doing this due to the risk to free speech, and 7% are opposed to doing so at all.

Figure 3.4: Public support for tackling anti-Muslim prejudice and preserving free speech



Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

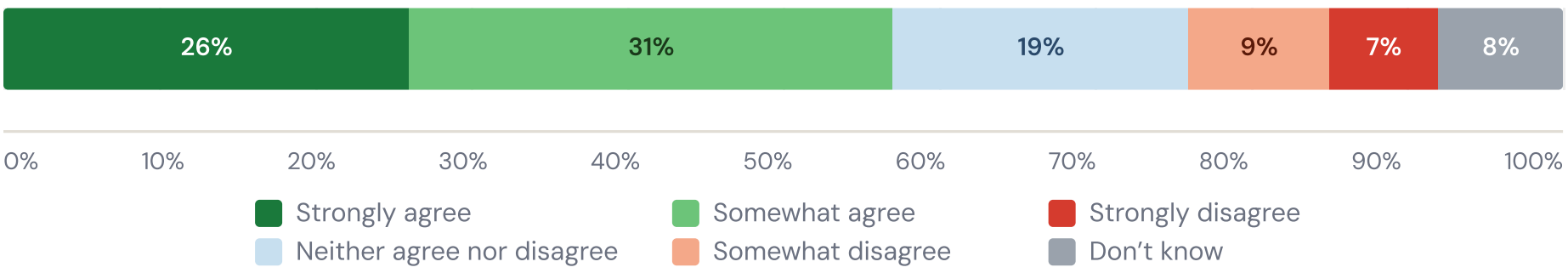
A majority of voters for Labour (79%), the Conservatives (62%) and the Lib Dems (77%) would support government action provided it maintains protections of free speech. By contrast support for action is lower (36%) among Reform UK voters. One in four (25%) Reform UK voters would be worried that action would restrict freedom of speech while a further quarter (23%) answer that the government should take no action to prevent anti-Muslim prejudice.

Opposition to action against prejudice similarly correlates with themes of trust in the media. Respondents who prefer to get information from independent journalists directly from social media are approximately twice as likely to voice concerns about free speech (24%) or firm opposition (10%) to any government action on anti-Muslim hate, compared to those who source information from mainstream media sources like Sky or the BBC (13% concerned about free speech; 5% opposed entirely).

Most people believe Muslims and non-Muslims can live well together, but a majority are pessimistic and fearful about future relations

A majority (57%) of the British public agree with the statement "It is possible for Muslims and non-Muslims to live well together in towns and cities around the UK", while only one in six (16%) disagree. Confidence among British Muslims is comparatively higher (75% agree/6% disagree) yet across both surveys it is only a small minority that do not believe in the potential for peaceful coexistence.

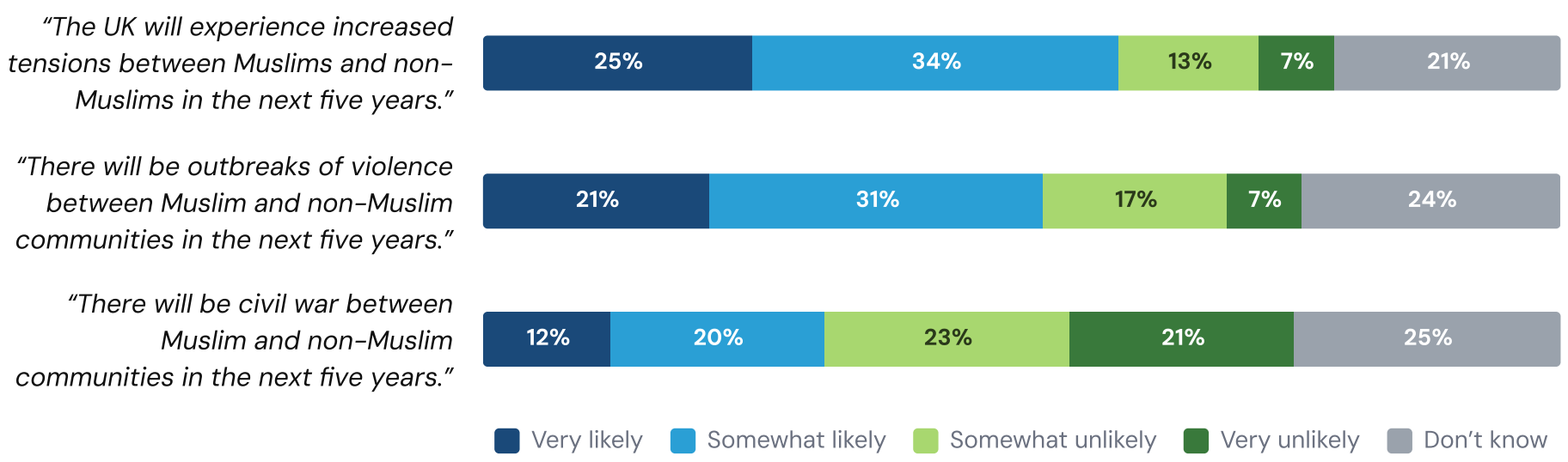
Figure 3.5: Public confidence in inter-community relations



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "It is possible for Muslims and non-Muslims to live well together in towns and cities around the UK"? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

However, while the majority believe it is possible for Muslim and non-Muslim communities to live together cohesively, over half (59%) of the general public are worried for the future and answer that it is likely that "The UK will experience increased tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims in the next five years". Over half (52%) see violent clashes as likely (across different views about what is driving that threat). A one in three group (32%) hold strong threat perceptions that it is likely there will be civil war in the next five years, although a larger proportion (44%) see this as unlikely.

Figure 3.6: Perceptions of future tensions and violence



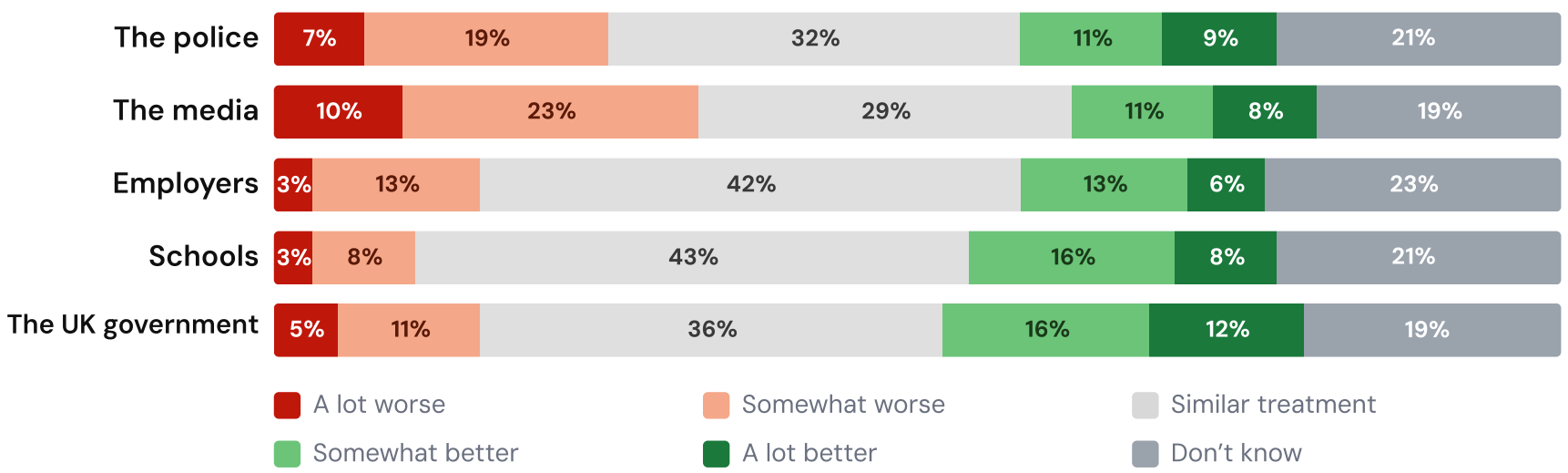
"How likely or unlikely do you think it is that..." Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

Concerns about the risk of conflict are higher among older participants. A majority (60%) aged over-65 feel it is likely there will be outbreaks of violence in the next five years, nearly twice that of those aged 18-24 (35%). By party political vote, right-leaning participants also show a higher concern about potential flashpoints. Three quarters of Reform UK voters see violence as likely (48% very/ 28% fairly) as do two thirds of Conservative voters (34% very / 30% fairly), while this anxiety is shared by around half of Labour voters (15% very likely / 39% fairly) and Lib Dems (13% very / 34% fairly).

The public hold split views on Muslims' treatment by major institutions

Asked how Muslims are treated compared to the wider public, there is a one in four section of the public (28%) who express the view that Muslims receive favourable treatment by the Government, while a larger group feel Muslims are treated similarly (36%) and one in six (16%) answer that Muslims are treated worse.

Figure 3.7: Perceptions of how institutions treat Muslims in Britain



Would you say that these institutions treat people who are Muslim better, similarly or worse than they treat the rest of the public, overall? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

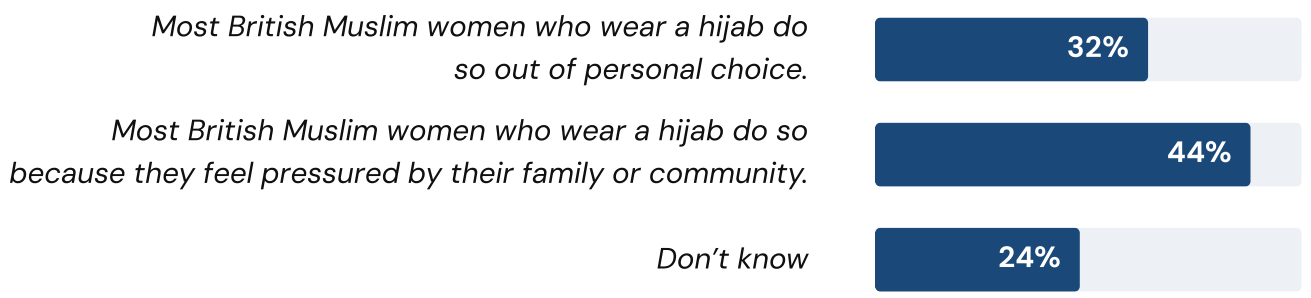
Views differ by respondents' political vote. Reform UK voters are distinct with a majority (60%) believing that Muslims receive preferential treatment compared to 35% of Conservative voters and 21% of Labour voters. White respondents are also twice as likely (31%) than ethnic minority respondents (15%) to feel Muslims receive better treatment. Older participants also show higher concern, with one in three aged over-65 (34%) answering that Muslims are treated better by the government than other groups, a view shared by only one in four (22%) aged 18-24.

On treatment by the media, the survey reveals comparatively more mixed attitudes. One in three (33%) answer that Muslims are treated worse, while a similar proportion (29%) say treatment is about the same and 19% feel the group receives preferential coverage.

Around 4 in 10 hold sceptical attitudes about why women wear the hijab

It is a minority of society – one in three (32%) – who believe that 'Most British Muslim women who wear a hijab do so out of personal choice'. More respondents (44%) answered that 'Most British Muslim women who wear a hijab do so because they feel pressured by their family or community', while one in four (24%) answered 'Don't know'. Findings were similar between male and female respondents.

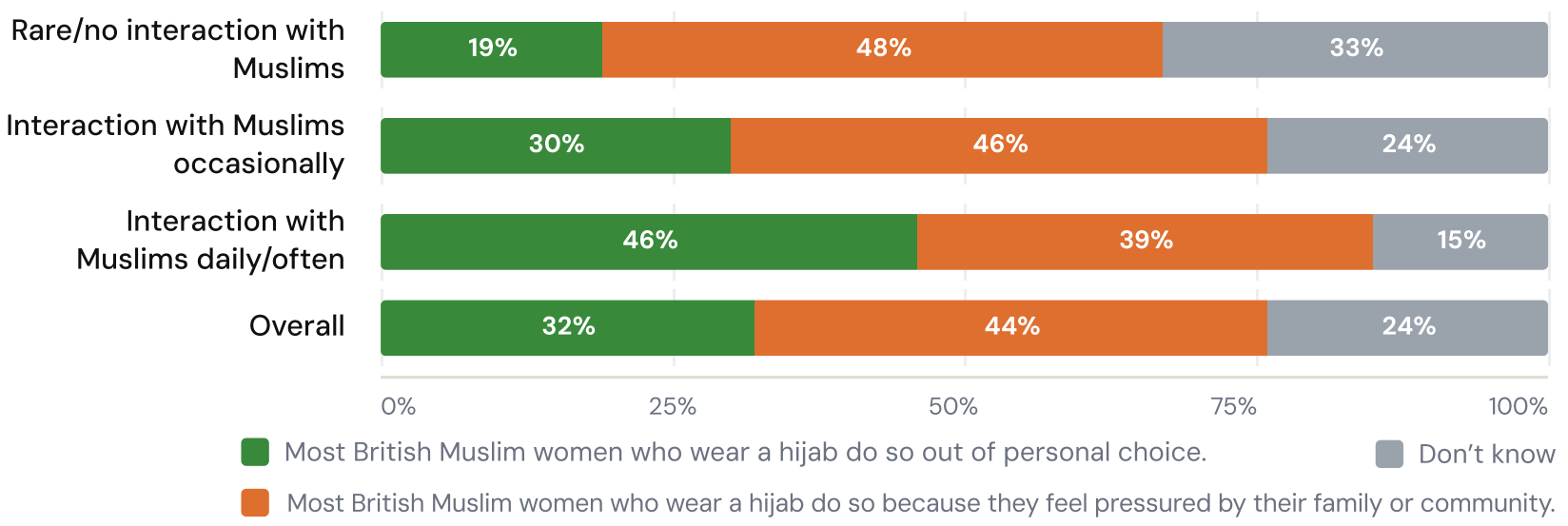
Figure 3.8: Public attitudes towards women wearing the hijab



Thinking about the reasons why British Muslim women might wear a hijab, which of the following comes closest to your view?
Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

The finding suggests that broader awareness initiatives are needed to open debate on the context and nuances of why some Muslim women wear the hijab and its cultural meaning. The findings flip (46% personal choice / 39% pressured) among those who report regular or daily interactions with people who are Muslim, suggesting that opportunities for contact, discussion and cultural awareness shift attitudes. This pattern is similar among younger people, who also tend to report more mixing, with 38% feeling that the hijab is a personal choice, while this drops to 21% among those aged over 65.

Figure 3.9: Public attitudes to hijab wearing, by frequency of contact with Muslims

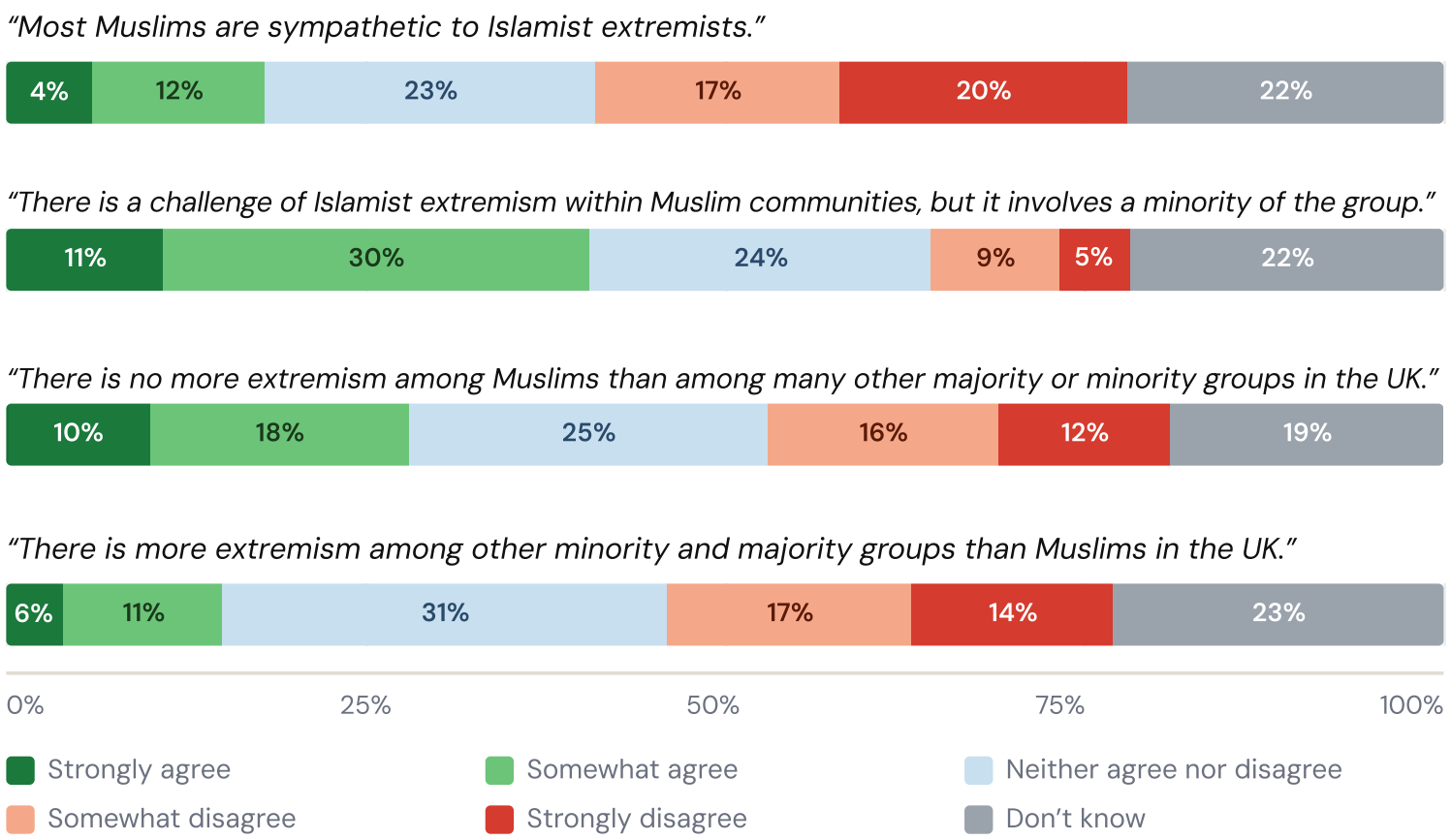


Thinking about the reasons why British Muslim women might wear a hijab, which of the following comes closest to your view?
Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

A 15-20% group believe in sweeping stereotypes and are open to or supportive of discriminatory policies against Muslims.

There is a persistent 15-20% who believe in overt prejudiced statements against Muslims. For example, on questions of extremism, some one in six people (18%) in the full sample agree that "Most Muslims are sympathetic to Islamist extremists", while 37% disagree.

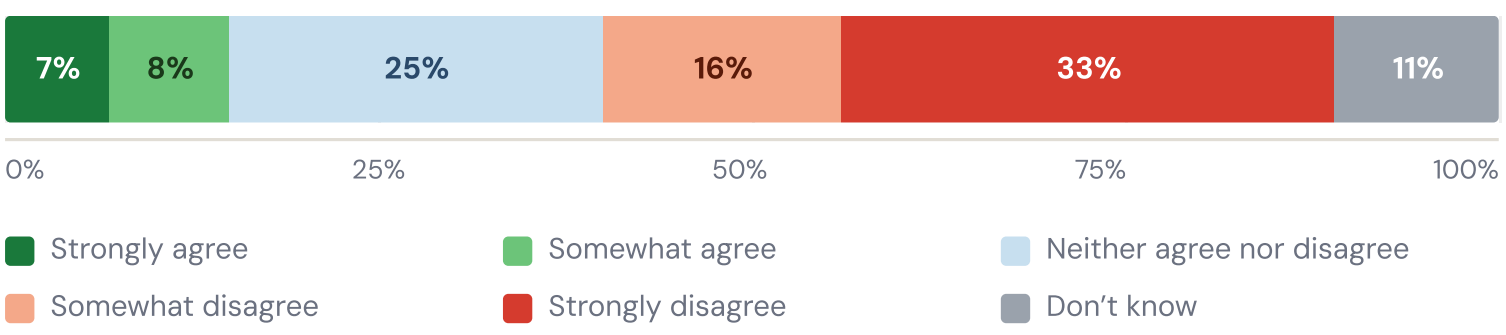
Figure 3.10: Majority public perceptions of Islamist extremism and the British Muslim community



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

One in seven (15%) agree with the statement that "Muslims living in the UK should be deported to other countries", while half the public (49%) disagrees and one in three (36%) are neutral or don't know.

Figure 3.11: Levels of public support for deportation of British Muslims



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Muslims living in the UK should be deported to other countries"? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

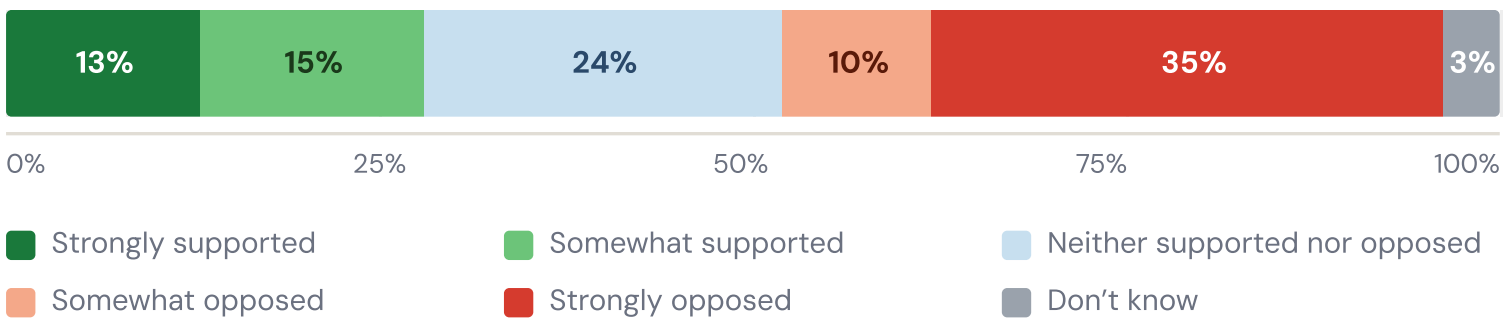
Support for deportations is twice as high (20% agree/33% disagree) among people who never or rarely interact with Muslims, compared to those who mix with Muslims daily or often (10% agree/64% disagree). Similarly, support is twice as high (24%) from those who prefer to source information from "an independent journalist posting information directly on social media" compared to respondents who prefer information from "a large media organisation such as the BBC or Sky" (13%).

More people opposed than supported the 2025 Unite the Kingdom protest (while around half are unaware it took place).

We asked survey respondents: "Are you aware of the 'Unite the Kingdom' protest, organised by Tommy Robinson, that took place in London last September?" Survey fieldwork asked respondents about the 2025 protest that took place prior to the more recent event in May 2026.

Just over half the public (54%) reported that they were aware that the march had taken place, with 35% saying they were not (and 11% answering 'Don't know'). Among those who were aware of it, a follow up question found that 28% supported the march and 45% opposed the protest, with one in four remaining neutral.

Figure 3.12: Levels of public support for the Unite the Kingdom September 2025 protest



To what extent did you support or oppose the Unite the Kingdom protest? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of n = 1,080 GB adults aware of the protest, 4-18 March 2026

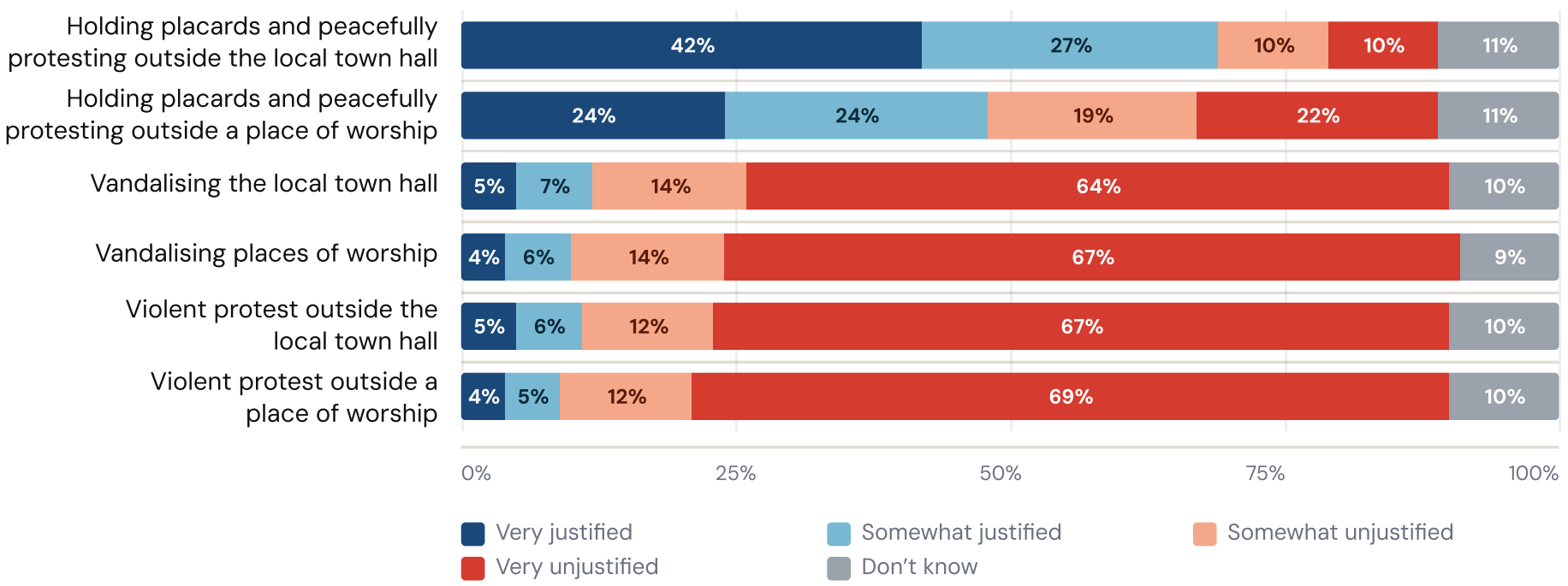
Support is nearly twice as high (38%) among people who rarely or never report interactions with Muslims than those who have frequent or daily contact (23%). Similarly, those who trust information direct from social media (44%) were twice as likely to support Unite the Kingdom as those who get their news from large media organisations such as the BBC and Sky (22%).

Major differences emerge, too, by party vote. While a small minority of voters for Labour (14%), Conservatives (26%) and Liberal Democrats (9%) supported the 'Unite the Kingdom' protest, this rises to 65% of 2024 Reform UK voters. Vice versa, 11% of Reform UK voters opposed the protest compared with 72% of Labour and 43% of Conservative voters.

One in ten see violent protest as justifiable – a group that skews younger

Our survey sought to explore how people feel it is justifiable to make their voices heard through a range of tactics, from peaceful protest to vandalism and violence. We asked this across themes of terrorism, international conflict and grooming scandals.

Figure 3.13: Public attitudes to types of protest against grooming scandals



If people want to express their views about the following issues, which of the following actions do you think would be justified or unjustified?
Grooming scandals. Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

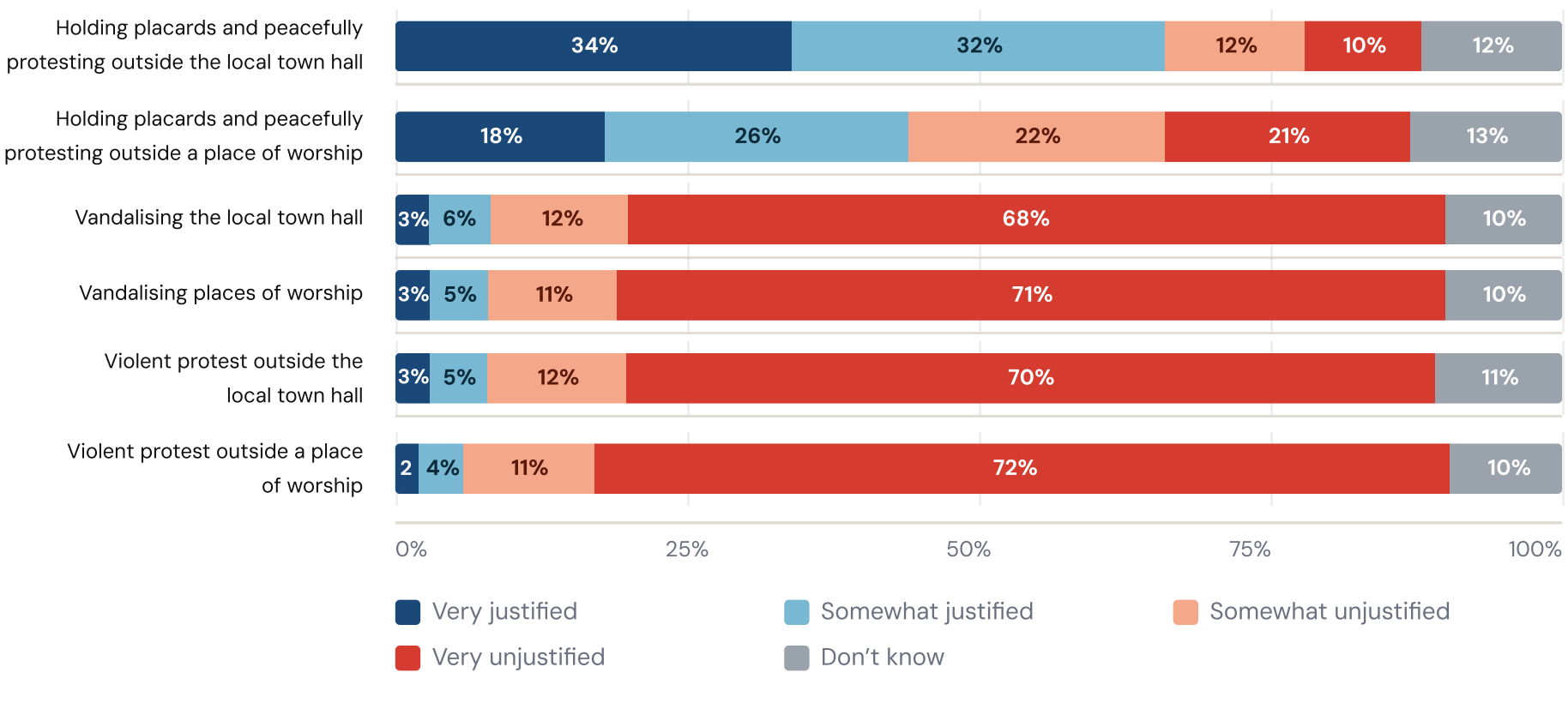
On the issue of grooming scandals, a broad majority (69%) view peaceful protest outside a town hall as justified to express one's views. This shrinks to half (48%) who would see peaceful protest outside a place of worship as justified, where a similarly sized portion of the public (41%) would feel this was unjustified.

Our results then indicate a worrying fringe of one in ten in Britain who would see vandalism (10-12%) or violent protest (9-11%) as justifiable. As a small portion of our sample, breakdowns of this group are limited and further studies are needed to understand its composition. However, in contrast with other survey findings this group is distinctly younger. It is concerning that one in five 18-24 year-olds (19%) report that they would see violent protest outside a place of worship as justifiable in response to a grooming scandal, as would one in seven (15%) of those aged 25-34, compared to just 4% of over-65s.

Respondents who prefer information from independent journalists directly from social media are twice as likely to see violent protest as justifiable (16%) compared with those who prefer large media organisations such as the BBC or Sky.

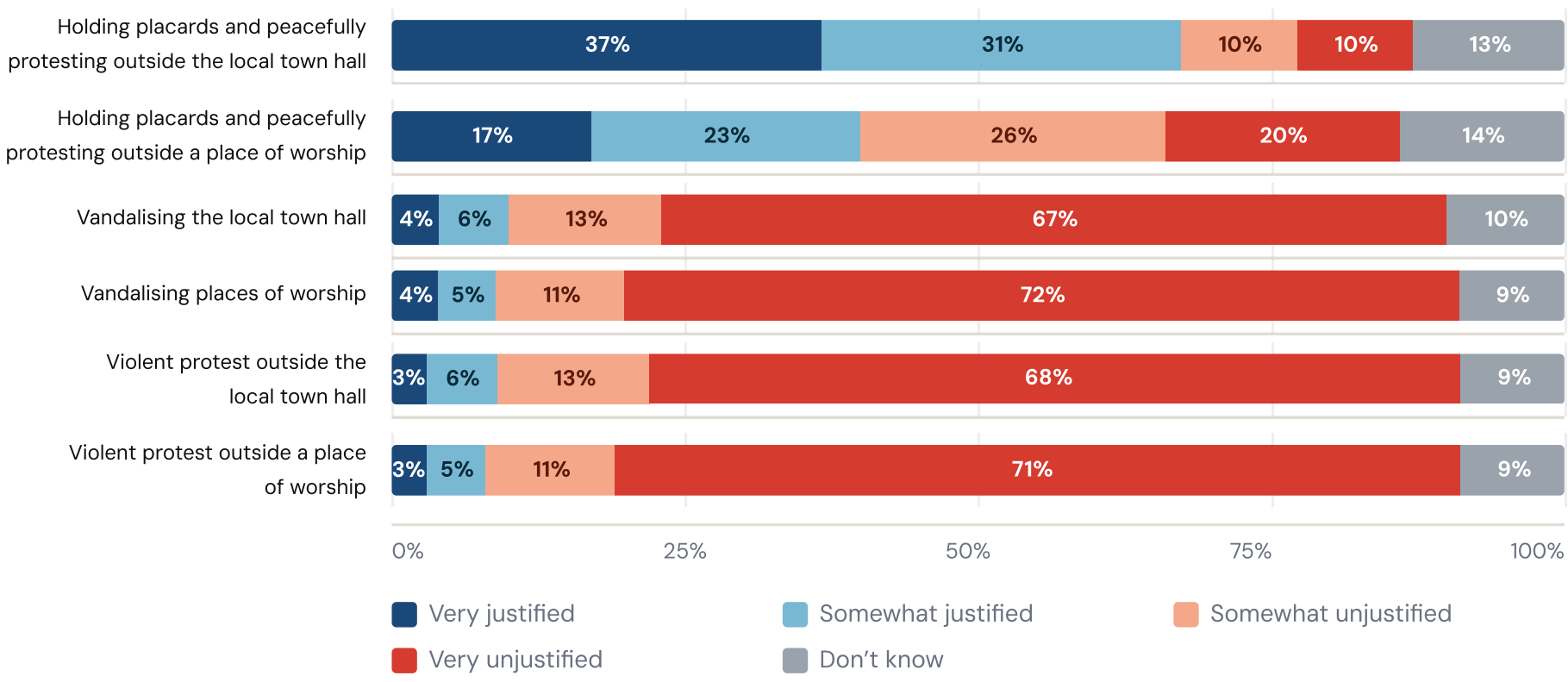
We asked the same question about protests concerning international conflict – given politicised arguments about protests over the Israel-Palestine conflict – as well as on the issue of terrorism. Our polling finds consistent, similar results across the three issues, suggesting that those open to violence or vandalism are not activated by one particular grievance. In all cases there is around a one in ten (8-10%) group open to these methods, of whom 2%-4% see violence as 'very justified'.

Figure 3.14: Public attitudes to types of protest on international conflict



If people want to express their views about the following issues, which of the following actions do you think would be justified or unjustified? International conflict. Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

Figure 3.15: Public attitudes to types of protest about terrorism



If people want to express their views about the following issues, which of the following actions do you think would be justified or unjustified? Terrorism. Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

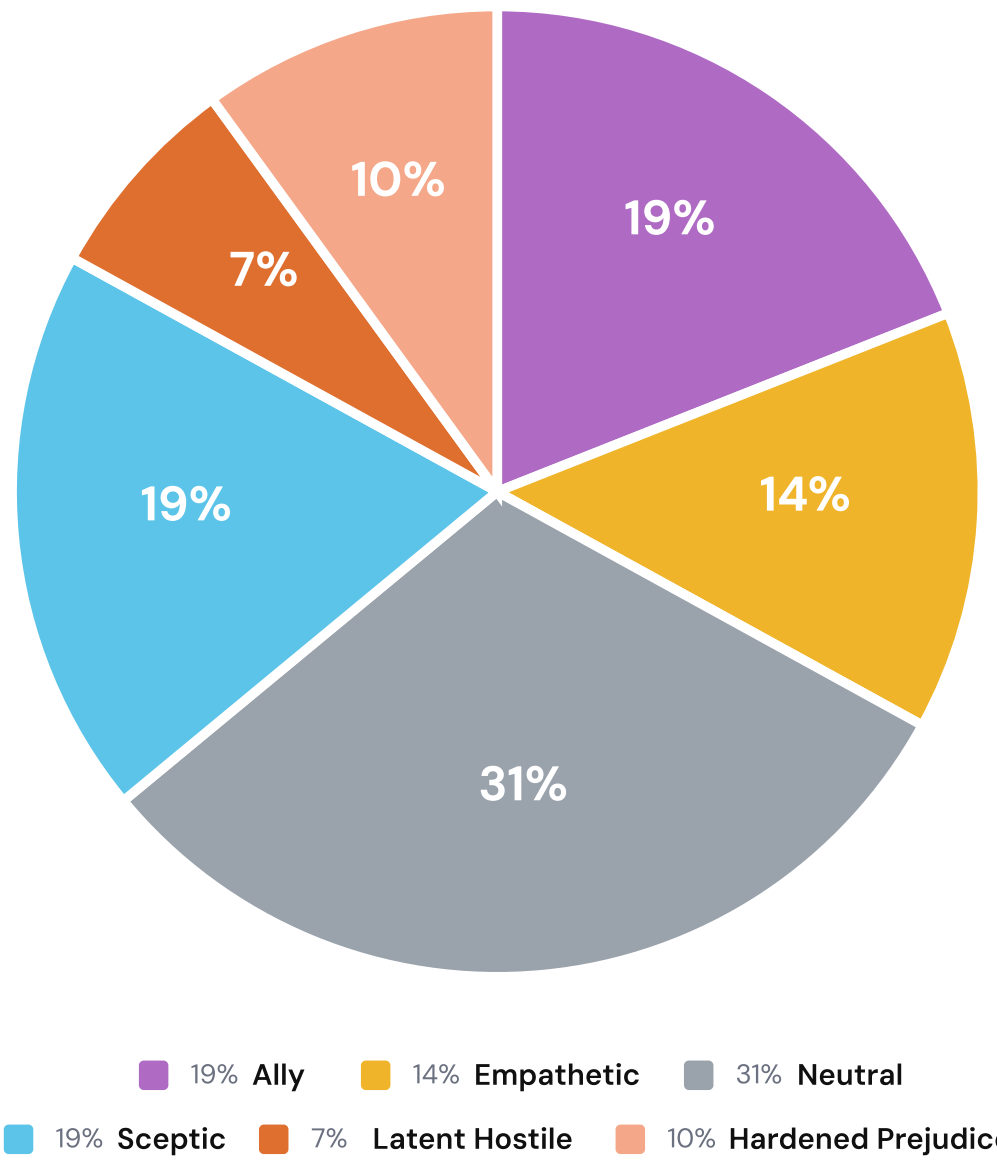
4. Attitudes towards Muslims: Segmentation

Building on our national findings from the previous chapter, this section explores how public attitudes towards Muslims can inform segmentation of the public in six groups ranging from the most supportive to the most prejudiced.

Pursuing work to counter prejudice through a segmented, strategic approach could bring new potential to identify the best messages, messengers or interventions needed to engage people with distinct levels of empathy or hostility towards Muslims in Britain.

Our **future research** will build upon this framework to deliver practical advice on how organisations and spokespeople can effectively broaden overall public opposition to (and condemnation of) prejudice, isolating those with hardened hateful views.

Figure 4.1: Attitudes segmentation of the GB public views towards Muslims.[9]



Based on Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026

[9] *Based on Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 2,000 GB adults, 4-18 March 2026*

Our research into how the British public view Muslims sought to better understand and segment which groups are more accepting, more concerned and more hostile in their attitudes. Overall, the survey paints a similar picture to previous studies, such as those by Hope Not Hate: finding that around one in three people in Britain hold broadly positive views of Muslims, a third hold mixed or neutral views and a final one in three hold broadly negative attitudes.[10] Comparisons of belief in specific conspiracies, such as no-go zones, also show little change. This would suggest that there has been little overall movement in attitudes since 2024. Further research will also continue to improve the detail of this segmentation, with a view to delivering practical advice later this year for groups and individuals tackling anti-Muslim prejudice.

The segmentation below outlines the contours of how Britons differ in their attitudes, with a view to further analysis of how each group can be reached more effectively, to challenge overt hatred and violence among those with the most extreme views to normalising acceptance and respect towards Muslims among the mainstream majority of the public.

The six groups

Our segments are based upon two survey response questions, which also neatly aligned with responses on a range of issues (see the previous chapter). Firstly, respondents were arranged based on their response to a question: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? “The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture”. Ally = Strongly disagree. Empathetic = Somewhat disagree. Neutral = Don’t know / Neither agree nor disagree. Sceptic = Somewhat agree. The 17% who answered strongly agree comprised our Latent Hostile and Hardened Prejudice groups. Within this, the Hardened Prejudice group (10% of sample) answered that Muslims born in this country are less British than white, non-Muslims. The Latent Hostile group (7% of sample) balance strong negative views of Muslims with an acceptance that Muslims born in this country are British.

Allies (19%)

We find that around one in five members of the British public are ‘Allies’: a group likely to provide active support to anti-prejudice efforts.

This is the group that strongly disagree with the statement “The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture.” Allies overwhelmingly (88%) support action on anti-Muslim hate, with half (49%) wanting strong action.

Most allies (62%) feel Muslims are treated worse than other groups in the media. This segment tends to view debates about grooming, extremism and integration as disproportionately targeted towards Muslims versus other faith or cultural groups.

[10] *See Misbah Malik (2024) Doubling Down on Division: Anti-Muslim hatred in the UK since October 7th London: Hope Not Hate.*

The group tends to be under 55, although the proportion of the public who hold these attitudes is relatively even between 18-55-year-old age bands. Allies are more likely to be university graduates and to be in socioeconomic grades A, B or C1. Their lifestyle also tends to involve daily or regular interaction with people who are Muslim, with their attitudes shaped more closely through lived realities than second-hand stories, news articles or social media content. The group tends to be under 55, although the proportion of the public who hold these attitudes is spread relatively evenly between those aged from 18 to 55.

Politically, this group tends to hold more liberal attitudes towards immigration. It skews towards having voted for left-of-centre parties such as Labour and the Liberal Democrats but also comprises a substantial group who did not vote at the last General Election.

Empathetic (14%)

Approximately one in seven Brits are in the Empathetic segment. This section of society holds broadly accepting views of Muslims and 'somewhat disagrees' that "The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture." A broad majority (71%) acknowledges that Muslims face prejudice in society. Most (55%) feel that Muslims make a positive contribution to society (only 12% say negative) while the vast majority (78%) believe it is possible for Muslims to live well together with non-Muslims.

The Empathetic segment comprises a group that will be less vocal but is nonetheless opposed to stereotyping and prejudice of Muslims, for example on issues of extremism. They would provide softer support, when engaged, in counter-prejudice campaigns. The majority (72%) supports government action against anti-Muslim prejudice, yet the balance is more substantially towards policies that balance protections of free speech.

Compared with Allies, the Empathetic segment comprises a similar proportion of university graduates and non-graduates and is less skewed by socioeconomic grade, meaning that members of this segment could be useful peer messengers with closer contact to more hostile sections of society. The group is more likely to be 18-34. While less likely than allies to have daily interaction with people who are Muslim, a large proportion still report at least occasional social contact.

Politically, the group is similar to the Allies group: more likely to vote for left-of-centre parties in the 2024 General Election (although a large portion also did not vote). While some also hold largely positive views on immigration, there is a greater portion who are 'balancers', seeing both pressures and gains to society from migration.

Neutral (31%)

Around a third of society fall into a neutral category, spanning those who are more apolitical, those who balance concerns and pro-tolerance views, and people who see Muslim integration as too contentious an issue to engage with. The group answers 'neither agree nor disagree' or 'don't know' when asked if they agree or disagree with the statement: "The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture."

This pattern of sitting on the fence proves consistent across other survey questions, particularly on contentious issues such as grooming or extremism. Around half (51%) are still open to supporting government action against anti-Muslim prejudice, where this includes protections of free speech. However, many are likely to avoid engagement in campaigns or discussions about tackling hate.

Some Neutrals also hold mixed views about gender roles and integration. One in three (34%) believe that most Muslim women in Britain are pressured to wear the hijab. Many are also undecided whether Muslims born in this country are equally as British as white non-Muslims; while four in ten (40%) agree and just a small fringe (8%) disagree, the remaining half are on the fence.

This group comprises a mix of people who are neutral for varied reasons and further research is needed to understand their detailed composition, as well as the effective routes to securing their consent for key anti-prejudice boundaries over time. However, our survey suggests that Neutrals are more likely to be female and somewhat more likely to be younger (particularly under 55). Many still report interacting with people who are Muslim but there is a higher proportion that report rarely or never having contact, which likely influences their 'don't know' or undecided responses to many questions.

Sceptics (19%)

One in five of the public are 'Sceptics' with relatively softer negative attitudes towards Muslims. This group tends to somewhat agree with the statement "'The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture" suggesting a sense of anxiety regarding social integration between Muslims and non-Muslims in Britain. The segment is also vulnerable to misinformation on the theme with half (48%) agreeing that "Parts of the UK are under the control of Sharia Law and are 'no-go' zones for non-Muslims." At the same time, most (62%) believe "It is possible for Muslims and non-Muslims to live well together," while just 13% disagree. Previous focus groups suggest Sceptics display a contrast between warmth towards fellow Muslim neighbours or colleagues in their lives – and anxiety about the overall group, which is often perceived as a monolithic bloc.

While their views are more anxious, this group remains a useful section of society for anti-prejudice campaigns to target in order to broaden societal norms against stereotyping and hate. Two thirds of Sceptics (65%) support government action to address anti-Muslim prejudice where this includes protections of free speech, while only one in five (21%) would express concerns or opposition. While the group may hold some casual prejudices, there is also noticeably less support for the most negative stereotypes than the Latent Hostile and Hardened Prejudice segments below. If reached successfully, Sceptics may provide a useful group of 'boundary setters', among those with more negative attitudes, to stigmatise the most hateful ideologies or anti-Muslim tropes. Only one in five Sceptics (20%) agree with the statement that "Most Muslims are sympathetic to Islamist extremists" while a third (28%) disagree and half (52%) are on the fence. Some 15% support the statement "Muslims living in the UK should be deported to other countries" while four in ten (41%) are opposed.

Compared to the previous segments, this group is likely to be older (comprising a quarter of people aged 55 or older). Most report at least occasional contact with people who are Muslim, although for four in ten (39%) this happens rarely or never. Politically, the group is diverse but skews socially conservative: spanning a fifth of 2024 Labour voters (19%), a quarter of Reform UK voters (26%) and a third of Conservative voters (31%).

Latent Hostiles (7%)

The final two segments both share hostile views towards Muslims, but can be distinguished based on the strength of their grievances and overt prejudices. The 'Latent Hostiles' section strongly agrees that "The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture". Where the group differs is in how radicalised they are towards the most negative stereotypes of Muslims. Namely, Latent Hostiles either agree with the statement "Muslims born in this country are as British as white, non-Muslim people born here", or provide a neutral answer.

Latent Hostiles are much more likely to feel there is establishment bias in favour of Muslims. A majority (57%) feels that the government treats Muslims better than other groups in society.

Two thirds of this group (67%) believe that no-go zones exist in the UK and most (60%) supported Tommy Robinson's 2025 'Unite the Kingdom' march through London. However, there is less appetite for hostility or discrimination among this segment: Latent Hostiles are split on whether Muslims should be deported (38% agree / 29% disagree) and it is a small minority that see violent protest on issues such as grooming as justified (13%) while a broader majority (86%) would not.

This segment comprises a crucial boundary audience, which far-right organisations may attempt to mobilise through campaigns or during flashpoints such as grooming scandals or terrorist incidents. Latent Hostiles are vulnerable to further radicalisation, particularly based on their strong sense of cultural threat and susceptibility to misinformation. Equally, however, many in the group hold more mixed views about targeted policies or intimidation tactics and err towards norms of decency and humane treatment.

A key objective for those seeking to engage Latent Hostiles will be to defuse their sense of threat about the likelihood of violent tensions with Muslims; to strengthen their understanding of the boundaries between respectful debate and hateful stereotypes; and to guide this group towards democratic ways of making their voices heard – reducing the appeal of those seeking to socialise intimidation, vandalism or violence.

Latent Hostiles are much more likely to be female and aged over 60. [11] This group is significantly less likely to have contact with Muslims, and to have more trust in information from independent journalists directly from social media compared to mainstream media sources such as Sky and the BBC. Social media narratives or peer networks, rather than contact initiatives or media interventions, may prove more effective networks for reaching this audience.

There is a strong significant relationship between this group and their political vote. Latent Hostiles skew towards Reform UK and Conservative. A majority of the latent hostiles and the hardened prejudiced group (see next) hold among the most negative attitudes to the impact of immigration in Britain with both views likely to be overlapping, for example in stereotyped attitudes of people seeking asylum.

Hardened Prejudice (10%)

A final one tenth of society holds the most hardened prejudices towards Muslims. This group strongly agrees that “The growth in the Muslim population poses a foundational threat to UK culture” and believes in racialised views of national identity that consider Muslims born in this country to be less British than white non-Muslims.

The group holds persistent and strongly negative attitudes towards Muslims across the survey questions, with firmly held beliefs. These include sweeping stereotypes, ranging from the existence no-go zones (77% feel they exist) to over half (54%) believing that “Most Muslims are sympathetic to Islamist extremists”. Most people in this segment (72%) believe that the government treats people who are Muslim better than other groups, leading to more opposition to action against anti-Muslim prejudice: two thirds would be concerned about such measures even with free speech protections (35%) or would want no action at all (31%).

---

[11] *There is a statistically significant relationship between the attitudes of this group (on perceptions that Muslims pose a ‘foundational cultural threat’) and respondents aged over 60 (with p values of below 0.05). There is similarly a significant relationship between respondents who hold the attitudes of this group and those who have less interaction with Muslims (with a p value below 0.001), and respondents prefer information from social media over mainstream media sources (with a p value below 0.01). Lastly, we find a significant relationship between the attitudes in this group towards a perceived cultural threat from Muslims and respondents who voted for Reform UK and the Conservative Party in 2024 (with a p value below 0.001).*

The Hardened Prejudice group is more radicalised than others to see Muslims as incompatible with other groups in Britain. Two thirds (66%) disagree that "It is possible for Muslims and non-Muslims to live well together in towns and cities around the UK." A majority of the segment (70%) believes "Muslims living in the UK should be deported to other countries."

Two thirds (66%) of this group remain against violent protest outside a place of worship, to express views on issues such as grooming, and there may still be a role in seeking to reach this section of society as boundary setters against the types of unrest that emerged in rioting over 2024 and 2025. Yet within the Hardened Prejudice segment, some one in four (23%) would view violent protest as somewhat or very justified. Interventions for this segment will need to convey the punishments and illegality of hate speech, vandalism or violence. Where grievances have become strongly mobilised, more person-centred deradicalisation methods – a more individualised approach, building trust and dialogue to explore and address the ideological, social, and personal issues behind extremist views – may be required to prevent those most socialised towards violence from joining extremist organisations.

In their composition, the group is similar to the Latent Hostiles in its age and political composition, and its preference for information via social media over mainstream organisations such as Sky or the BBC. Similarly, the group also stands out for having little or no reported social interactions with Muslims. However, the group skews more male than the Latent Hostiles.

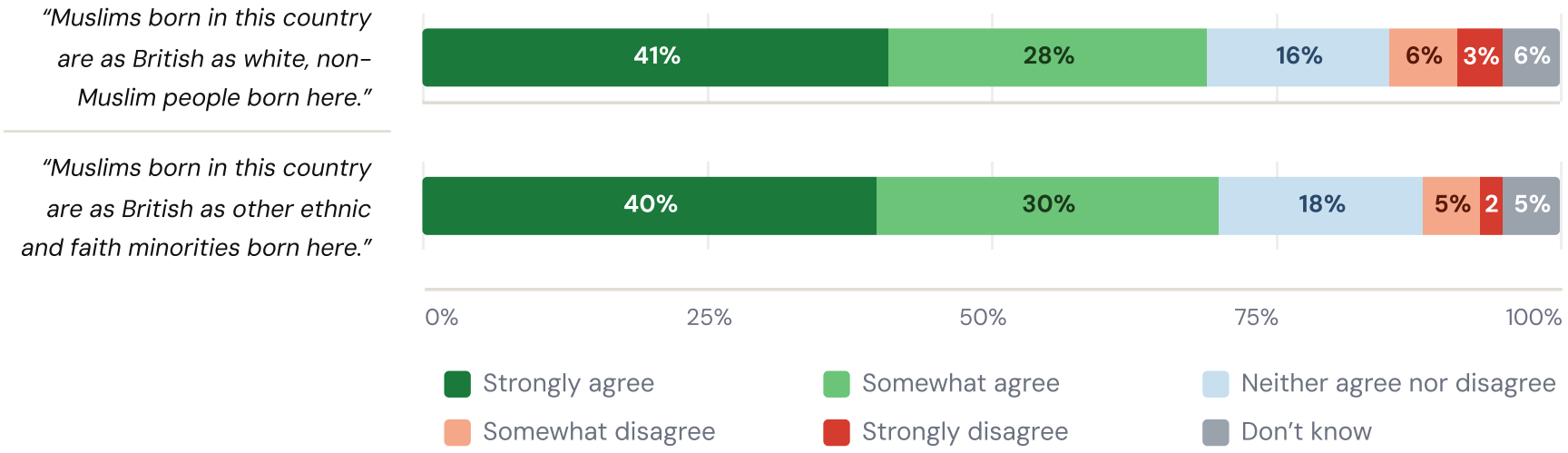
5. Attitudes and experiences of British Muslims

The following chapter draws on our nationally representative survey to outline the views of the Muslim community specifically. Like the wider public, Muslims do not all think the same and there are differences in attitudes by age, gender and other factors. Yet some trends do emerge. The survey finds a confidence in Muslims' sense of Britishness and an optimism in living well with other communities. Yet at the same time, more than half of Muslims experienced faith-based prejudice in the last year, and half feel that prejudice towards Muslim has worsened over that period. Muslims are aware of the scale of anti-Muslim prejudice and support government action in tackling this. Two-thirds of Muslims feel as British as any other community; yet a similar number share the expectations of the wider public that we will see a rise in tensions over the next five years.

Muslim respondents express confidence about their place in Britain

Our survey of 1,013 Muslims in Britain, conducted by Number Cruncher Politics, finds that over two-thirds of Muslims feel as comfortably British as their white British neighbours (69%) and other minorities (70%). Four in ten feel strongly confident in their British identity.

Figure 5.1: Muslim confidence in their British identity

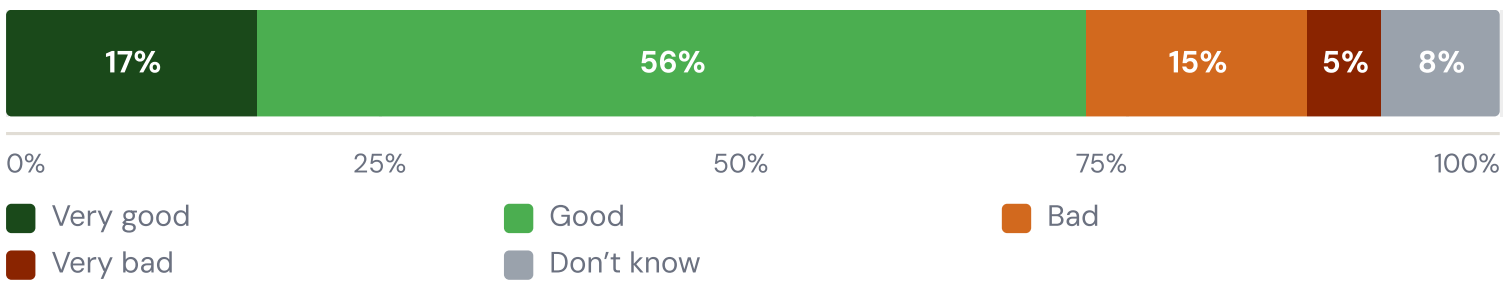


To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Confidence in Britishness was felt equally across levels of education, though a significant age disparity exists, with Muslim respondents aged 45+ feeling more confident in their British identity (81%) than those aged 18-44 (63%). Responses from men and women were similar when comparing their Britishness relative to other minority communities (70%) but men were slightly more likely to feel as British as white Britons (72%) than women (66%).

Respondents also feel positive about life in Britain, with three-quarters (73%) of Muslims stating that Britain is good place to be Muslim, compared to one in five (20%) who say it is not.

Figure 5.2: Britain is seen as a good place to be Muslim



To what extent do you think Britain is a good or bad place to be Muslim? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

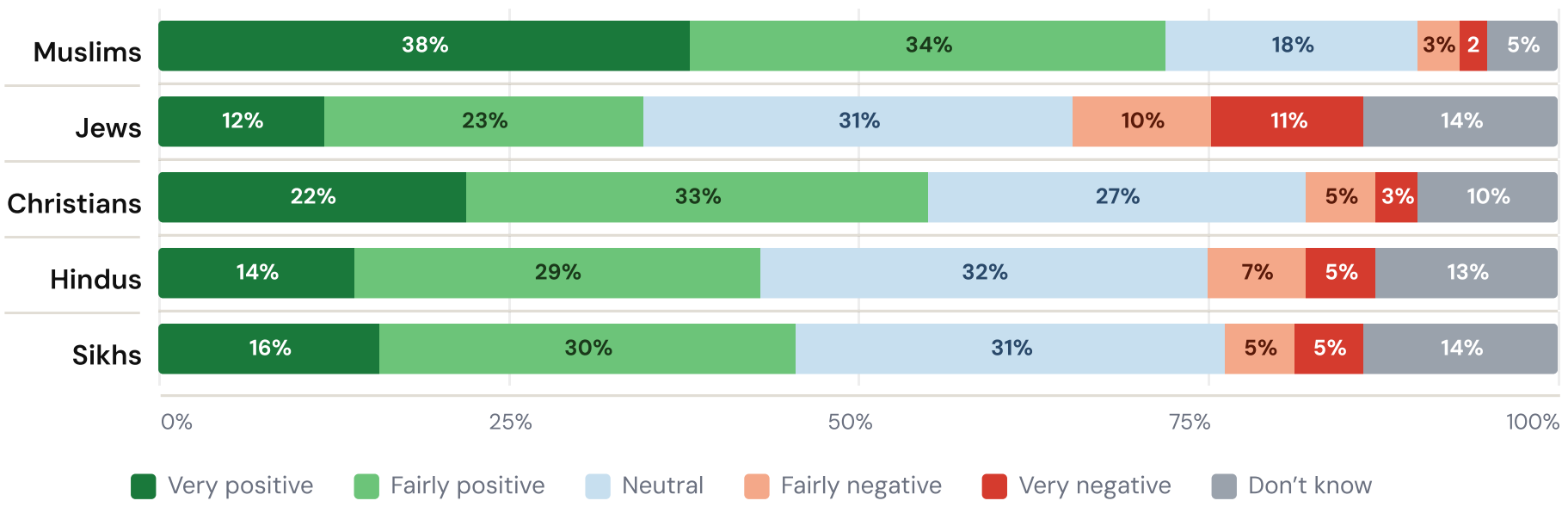
Younger respondents aged 18-24 are somewhat less likely to feel that Britain is a good place to be Muslim (68%) compared to those aged over 45 (77%). People who were born abroad also felt happier about being a Muslim in the UK (78%) than those born here (63%). Further research could help ascertain whether this is because higher expectations of equality among young, British-born Muslims are not being met; or if it is due to poorer experiences of growing up in Britain.

Freedom of religion was overwhelmingly cited, by two-thirds of respondents (66%), as the principal reason why Britain is a good place to be Muslim, with the country's diversity the second most common reason, cited by 3 in 10 respondents (29%). However only 10% selected 'feeling safe' as their main reason.

Muslims show confidence in their level of contribution

Three quarters (72%) of Muslim respondents recognise their positive contribution to Britain, with those born in the UK slightly more likely to feel this way than those born overseas (76% vs 70%).

Figure 5.3: Muslim perceptions of faith communities' contribution to British society



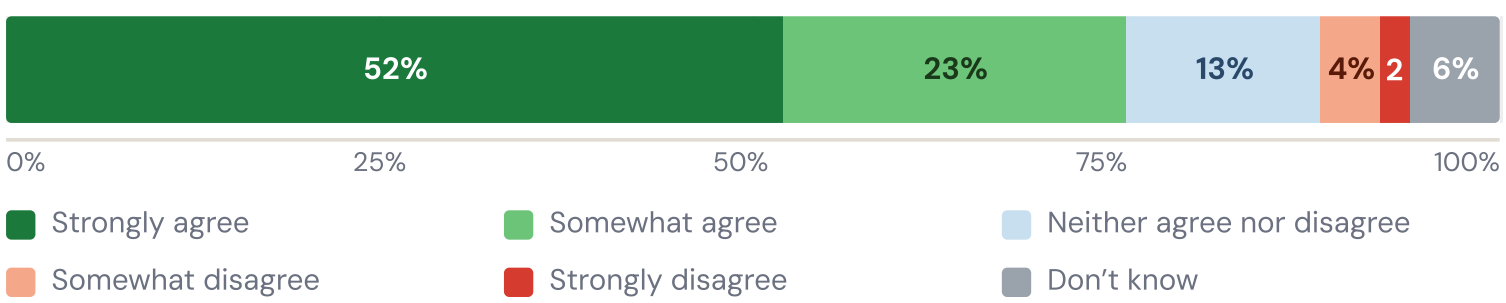
Thinking, overall, of the contribution that people from this faith background make in British society today, would you regard it as positive, neutral or negative?Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

A majority (55%) also recognise the positive contribution of Christians to UK society, with 43% acknowledging the positive contribution of Hindus and 46% saying that Sikhs made a positive contribution too. Recognition of the positive contribution of the UK's Jewish community was slightly lower, at 35%, with 31% feeling 'neutral' while 21% responded negatively. This compares with 40% positive, 37% neutral and 12% negative among the general public, based on responses to our nationally representative survey.

Muslims feel confident about inter-community relations

Three quarters of (75%) of Muslims believe that Muslims and non-Muslims can live well together in Britain, with 52% in strong agreement and only 6% disagreeing. In that respect **they are more confident about inter-community relations than the majority of the British public**, of whom 57% feel Muslims and non-Muslims can live well together and 16% disagree.

Figure 5.4: Muslims feel they can live together well with non-Muslims



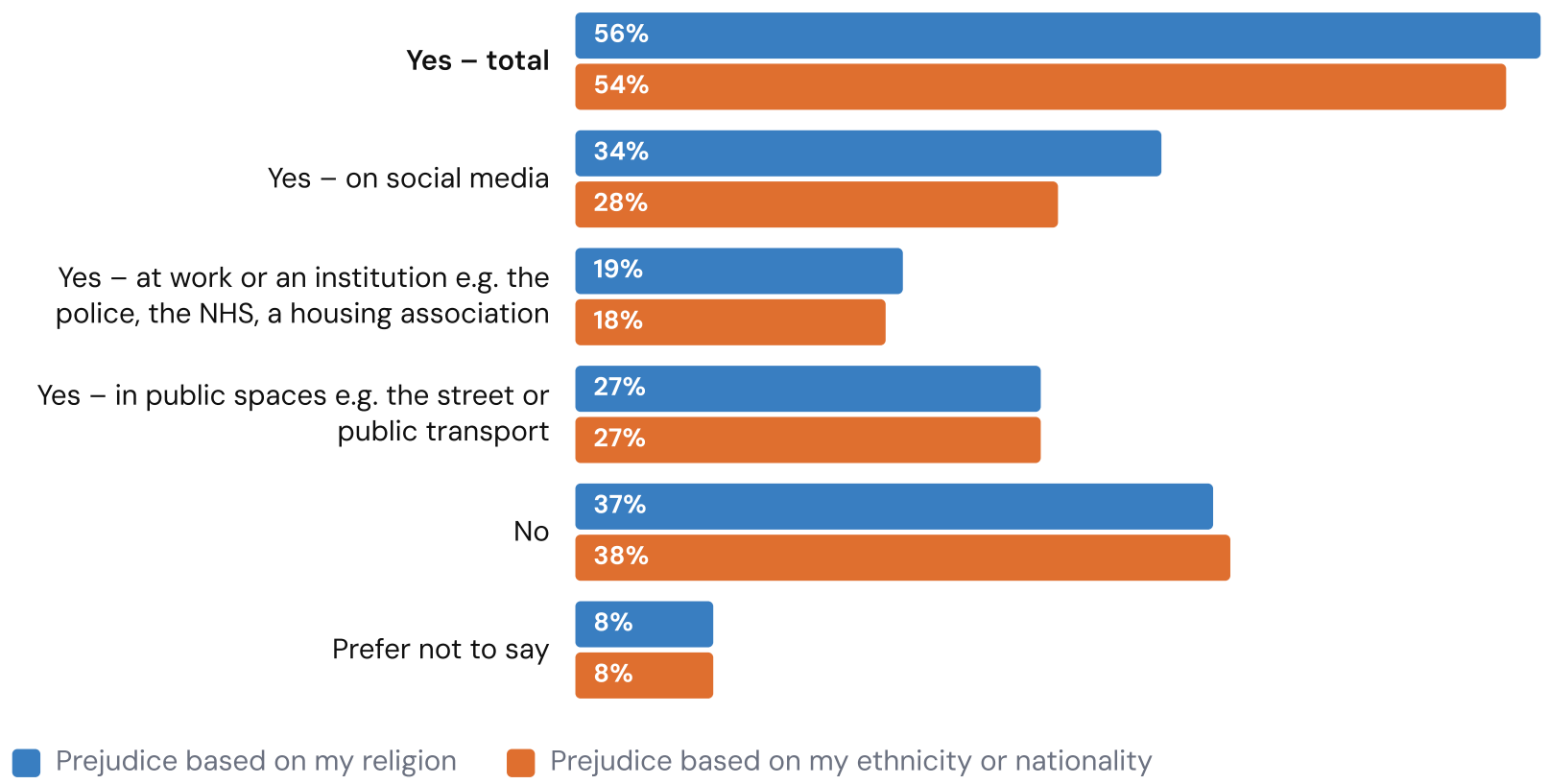
To what extent do you agree or disagree to the following statement: "It is possible for Muslims and non-Muslims to live well together in towns and cities around the UK?' Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Older respondents were most likely to feel their community could live well with others (87%). Younger respondents aged 18-24 were more ambivalent, with 66% feeling that Muslims and non-Muslims could live well together while 21% were on the fence on this question and 11% disagreed. Graduates were also ten points more likely to feel confidence in inter-community relations than non-graduates (82% vs 72%).

Widespread experience of prejudice

Despite the confidence expressed by Muslims in their standing and identity in Britain, many report having experienced prejudice, and feel that it is becoming more widespread. In total, **more than half of Muslim respondents (55%) said that they had experienced prejudice based on their religion in the last year**, with 62% reporting they had experienced prejudice based on either their religious or ethnic background.

Figure 5.5: Experience of prejudice



In the past year, have you experienced any of the following? Select all that apply. Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

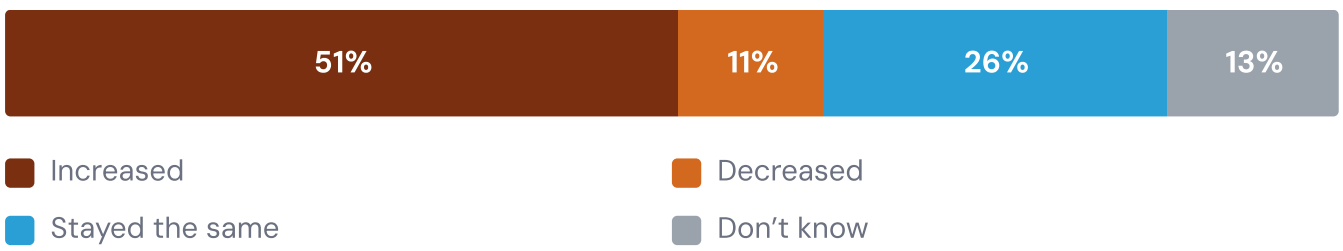
Only a minority of Muslims say they have not experienced prejudice over the last year based on their religion (37%) or their ethnicity (38%). Around one in four (27%) experienced prejudice in a public space, such as the street or on public transport, and one-fifth of respondents (19%) encountered anti-Muslim prejudice at work or in an institution like the NHS. **But the most common place to experience anti-Muslim prejudice was on social media**, experienced by 34% of respondents. Similar trends were reported when respondents were asked if people they knew had experienced prejudice in the last year.

It is concerning that younger people were considerably more likely to report having experienced prejudice, in all situations, than those aged over 45. And women, too, were significantly more likely to report having experienced faith-based prejudice in a public space than men, with a third of Muslim women (33%) saying they had experienced this in the last year, compared to 22% of men.

While a quarter of those who experienced prejudice say they reported it to friends or family, only 11% say they reported it to the police and 7% to a charity or reporting body for hate crime.

Particularly noteworthy is the finding that **half of Muslims polled feel anti-Muslim prejudice has increased since the summer of 2025.** This is felt relatively equally across different age groups and by men and women alike. Respondents born in the UK were significantly more likely to feel that prejudice has increased (63%) compared to those born overseas (44%).

Figure 5.6: Muslims feel that anti-Muslim prejudice has increased in the last year



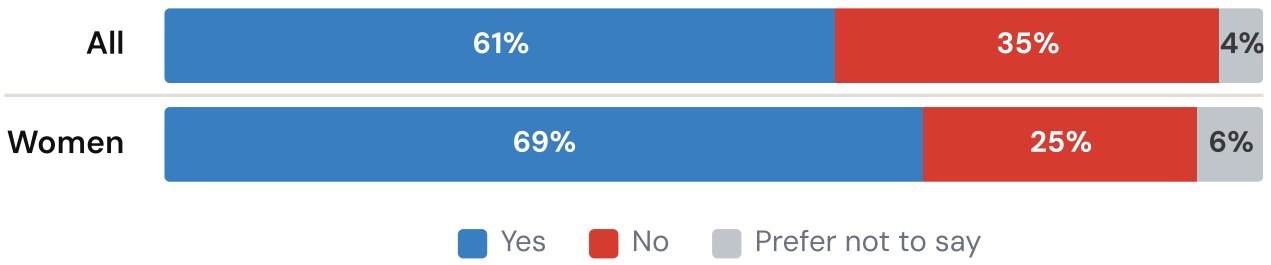
Since summer 2025 do you think that anti-Muslim prejudice has: Increased, stayed the same or decreased? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Most Muslims felt less safe after the 'Unite the Kingdom' protests last year

The fieldwork for this research took place before the 2026 'Unite the kingdom' rally, planned for 16 May. However our survey did ask a series of questions to Muslim respondents about the rally in September 2025. Most Muslims were aware of the 'Unite the Kingdom' rally that took place, with 57% saying they followed reports closely on the news and social media. Two-thirds of respondents (64%) said they changed their plans on the day or stayed at home, rising to three-quarters of those aged 18-24 (74%) – though 56% said they ignored the protests or remained indifferent.

Strikingly, **6 in 10 Muslim respondents (61%) agreed that 'I feel more worried about my personal safety after the protest',** rising to 7 in 10 Muslim women (69%).

Figure 5.7: Muslims felt concerned for safety after September 2025 Unite the Kingdom protest

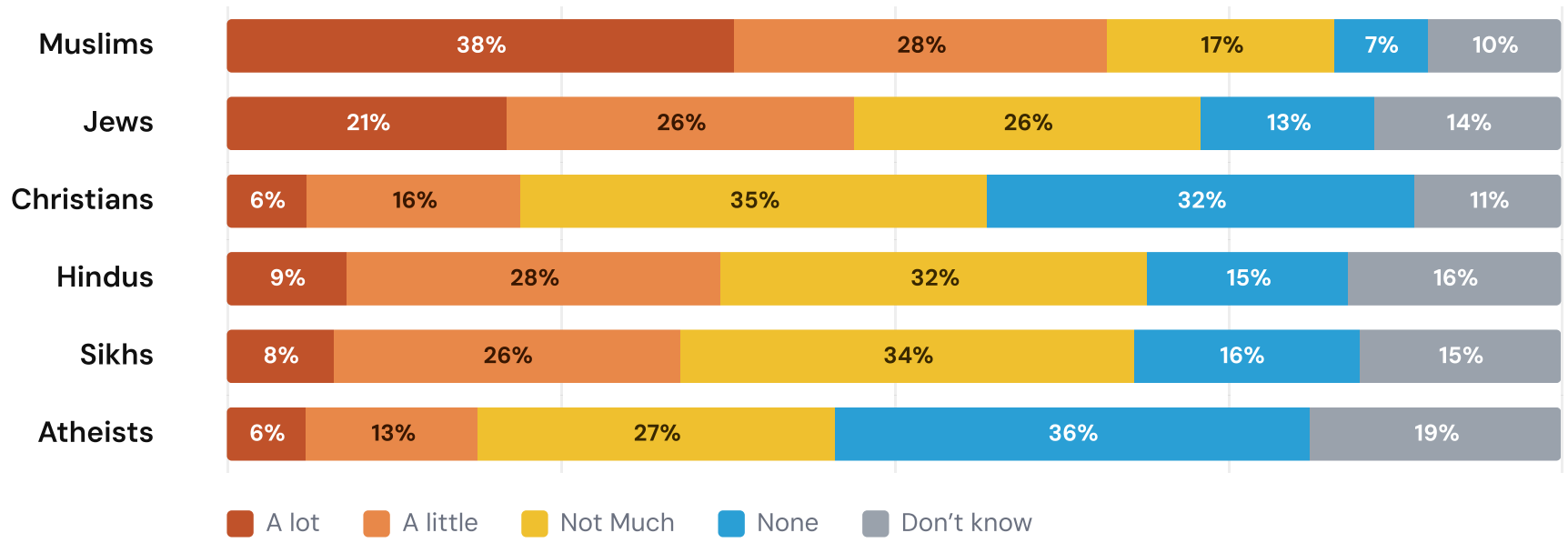


"I feel more worried about my personal safety after the protest." Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Most Muslims are aware of the scale of prejudice against them

Two-thirds of Muslims in Britain (66%) are aware of the disproportionate level of prejudice directed towards their community, with 4 in 10 (38%) feeling that Muslims face 'a lot' of prejudice. A quarter of Muslims (24%), however, feel that their community faces 'not much' prejudice or none.

Figure 5.8: Perceptions of prejudice against different groups



For each of the groups listed, please say how much prejudice, if any, there is against them? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

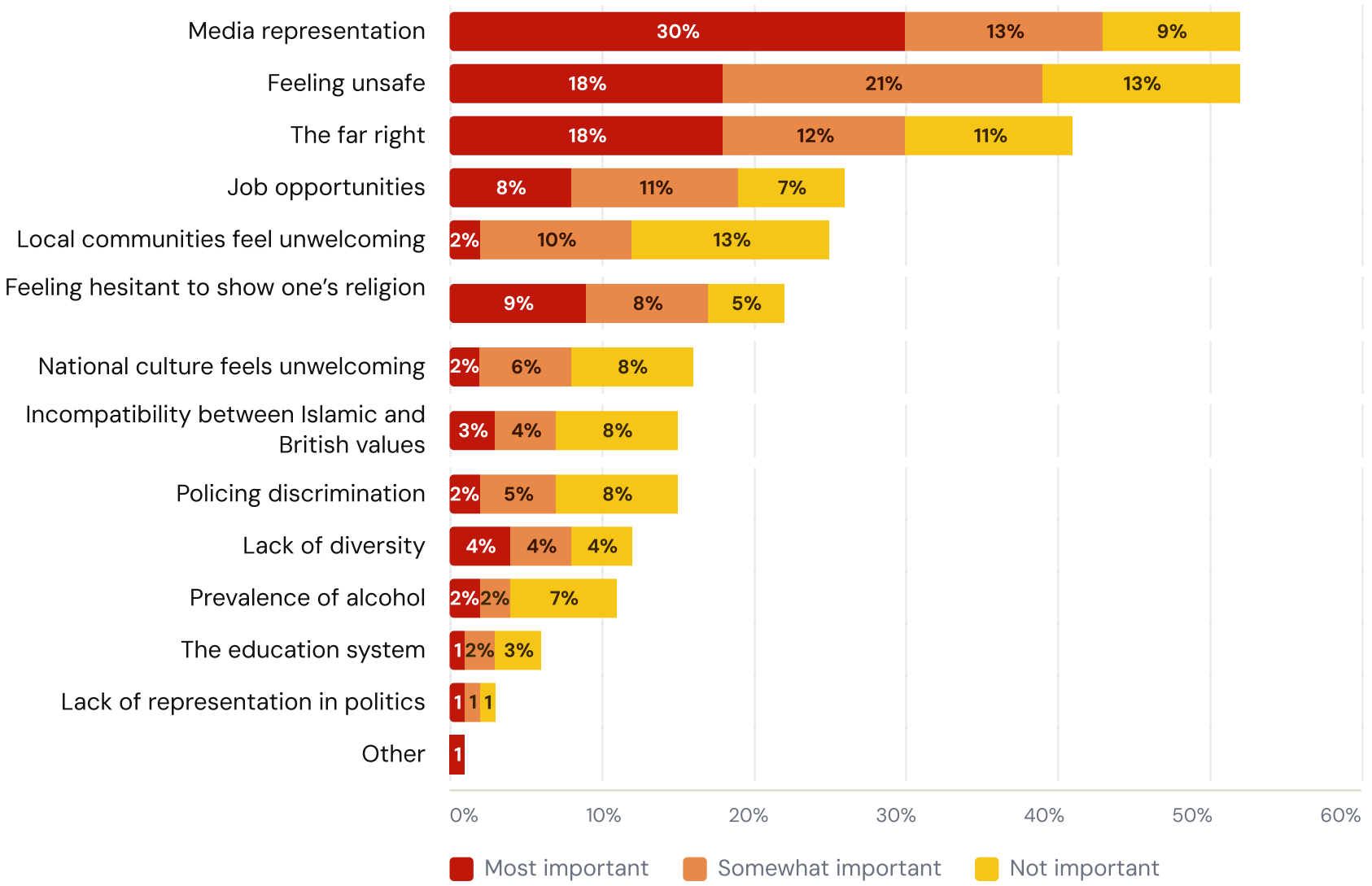
Those with a university education are more aware of prejudice towards Muslims (71%) than those without (63%), as are respondents born in the UK compared to those born overseas (79% vs 60%).

Muslims acknowledge, too, that Jewish people in Britain experience more prejudice than other groups such as Hindus and Sikhs. Half of Muslim respondents (47%) say that Jews experience 'a lot' or 'a little' prejudice; compared to 26% who say 'not much' and 13% 'none'. Muslims born in the UK are also more likely to acknowledge Jews' experience of prejudice than those born abroad, by 54% to 44%.

Media, safety and the far right – why some Muslims find Britain less welcoming

Of the 20% of respondents who felt Britain was not a good place to be Muslim, 18% cited 'feeling unsafe' and 'the far right' as their main reason, with women twice as likely as men to cite 'feeling unsafe' as their principal issue of concern (22% vs 12%). But it was media representation, cited by 30% of this group, that was most widely regarded as the principal reason for the UK not being regarded a good place to be Muslim. University graduates (57%) and those aged 25-34 (50%) were the groups citing this most strongly.

Figure 5.9: Reasons why some Muslims feel Britain is a bad place to be Muslim

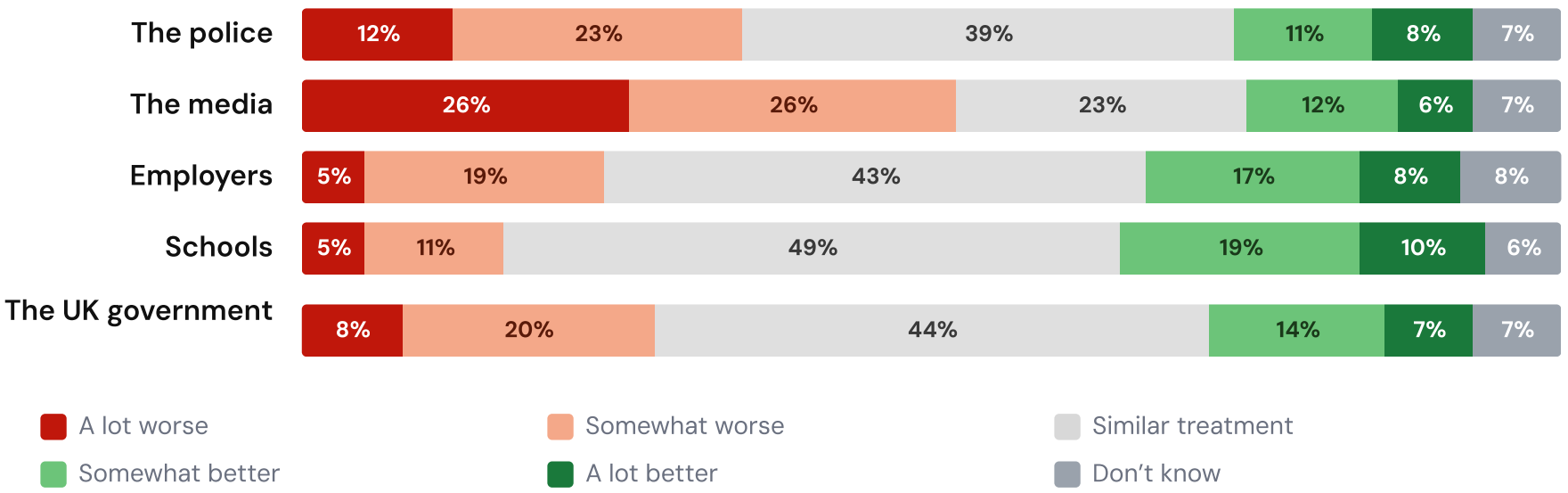


What makes Britain a bad place to be Muslim? Please rank up to three of the following with 1 being the most important reason. Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026, n= 203 respondents who answered that Britain is a bad place to be a Muslim.

When asked specifically about fairness of treatment across various institutions, once again the media scored worst, with half of all respondents feeling that Muslims are treated either 'a lot worse' (26%) or 'somewhat worse' (26%) than the rest of the public. British-born Muslims are significantly more likely to take this view, with two-thirds (65%) feeling that they are treated unfairly by the media, compared to 45% of those born overseas. Attitudes to other institutions were more positive, however. Although a third of respondents (35%) felt the police treat Muslims worse than the rest of the public, a majority showed more trust in the police, believing them to treat Muslims either the same (39%) or even better (19%) than the rest of the public. Other institutions, such as schools and employers, fared similarly, with a majority of Muslims believing their treatment to be no worse than any other group. These findings are consistent with previous studies, such as the 2020 research by Crest Advisory.[12]

[12] *Clements, J., Forman, D. and Roberts, M, Listening to British Muslims on policing, extremism and prevent, Crest Advisory 2020 https://www.crestadvisory.com/post/executive-summary-listening-to-british-muslims-on-policing-extremism-and-prevent*

Figure 5.10: Muslim perceptions of fair or unfair treatment by UK institutions

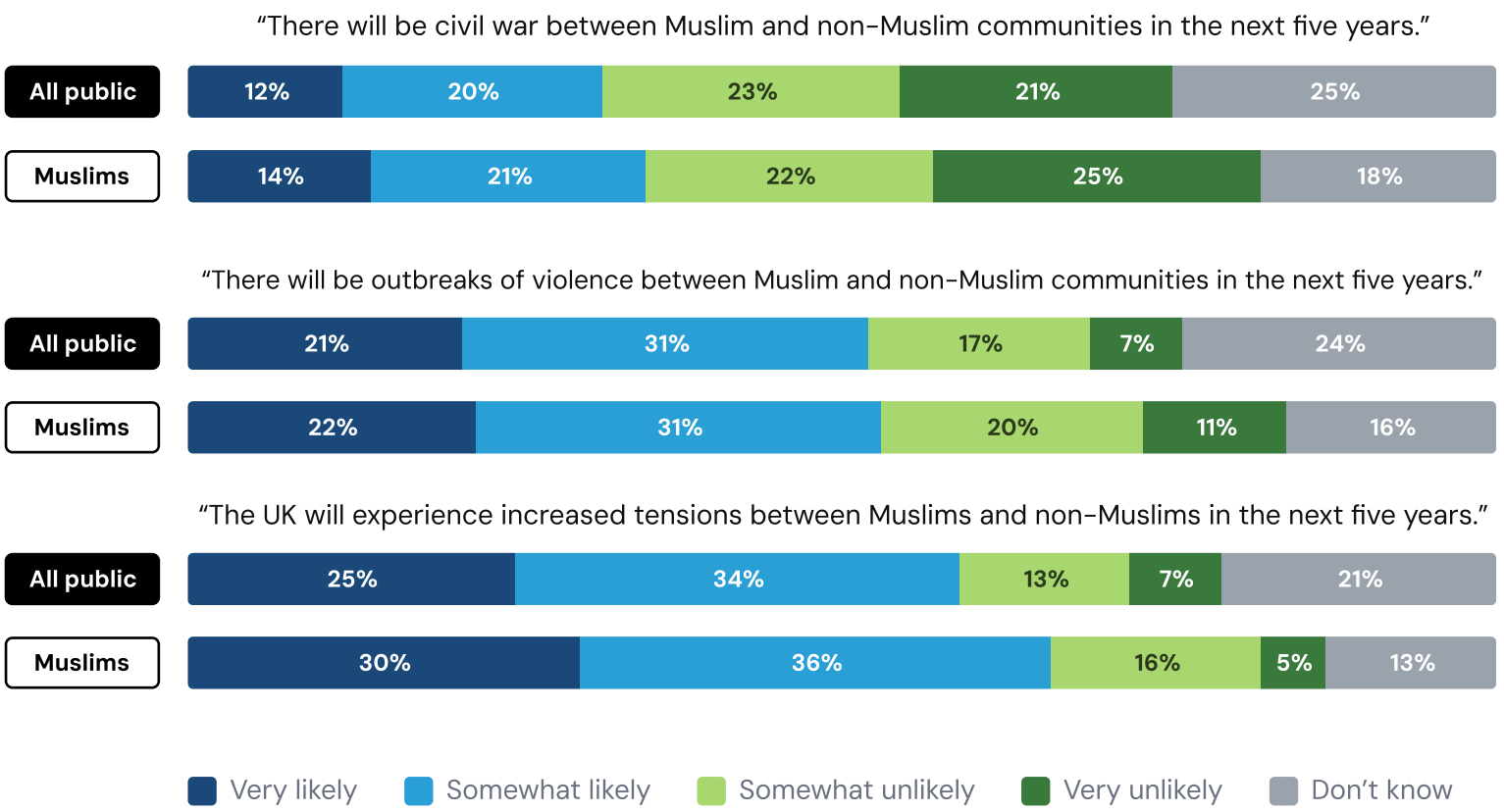


Would you say that these institutions treat people who are Muslim better, similarly or worse than they treat the rest of the public, overall? Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Muslims expect increased tensions in the UK – but no more than non-Muslims

We asked respondents to our survey, both Muslim and non-Muslim, how likely they felt a series of escalating tensions and flashpoints were to happen in Britain in the near future. Responses from the nationally representative survey of the majority public, and the Muslim-specific survey, were generally very similar.

Figure 5.11: Muslim perceptions of future tensions or violence



'How likely or unlikely do you think it is that...' Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Most Muslims expect increased tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims over the next five years (66%), as do most members of the UK public (59%).

We then asked people whether they thought there could be outbreaks of violence between Muslims and non-Muslims in the next five years. Here, Muslim responses mirrored the general public findings even more closely, with 22% of Muslims (and 21% of the general public) thinking this was 'very likely' and 31% of both groups believing it 'somewhat likely'. Muslims were more inclined to think violence is unlikely (31%) than the public as a whole (24%).

Far-right voices and memes on social media have warned of impending 'civil war' between Muslims and non-Muslims in the UK, and so we also asked all respondents how likely they felt this was to happen. Some 14% of Muslim respondents (and 12% of the general public) felt this was 'very likely' and a further 21% 'somewhat likely' (general public 20%) while 47% of Muslims, and 44% of the wider public, felt it was unlikely.

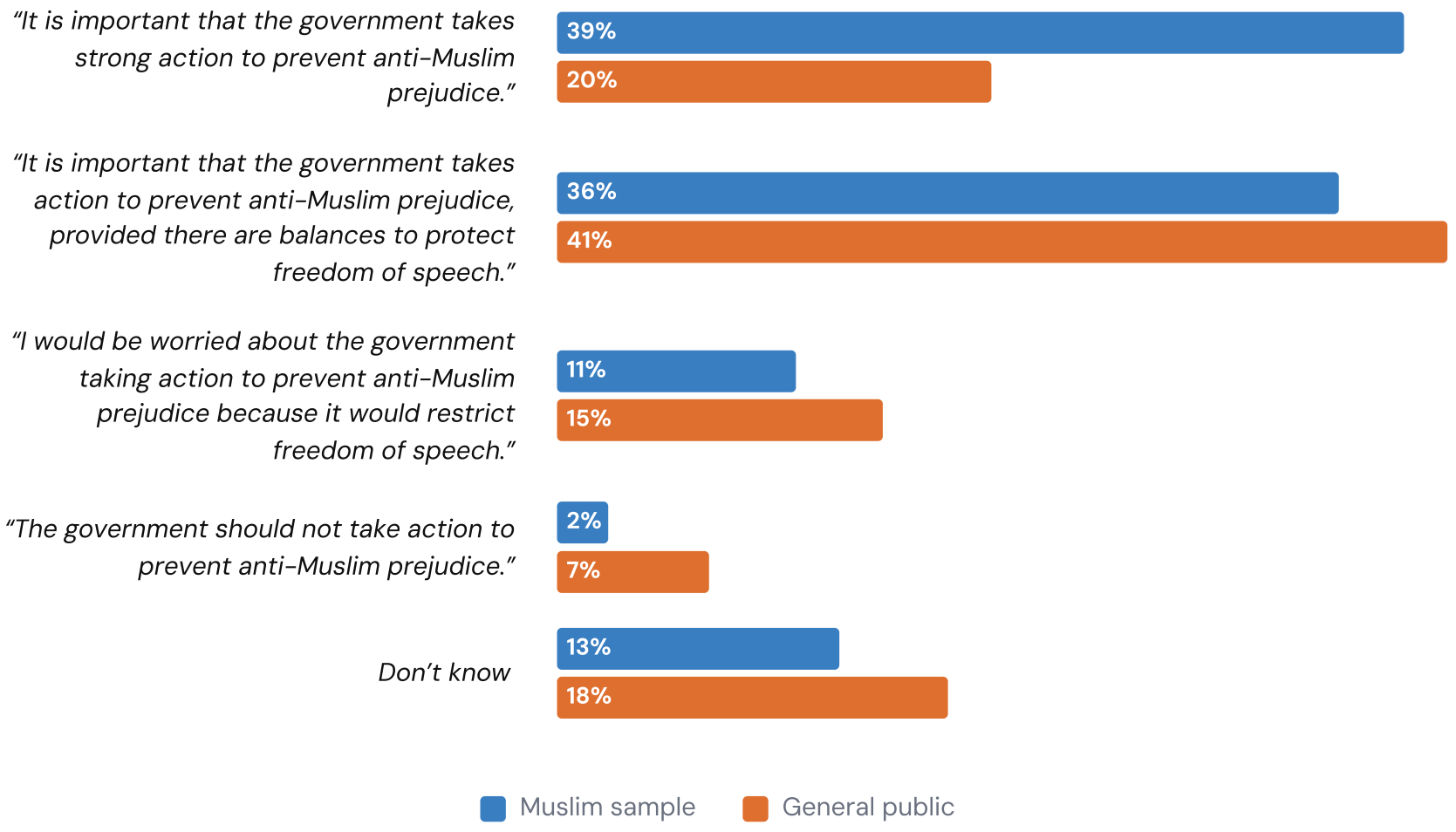
Strong Muslim support for Government action against anti-Muslim hate

In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that 75% of Muslims polled want to see stronger support from the government against anti-Muslim prejudice. This is felt more strongly among older respondents, with 81% of Muslims aged over 45 wanting government action, compared to 72% of those aged 18-44.

Half of the group who want government action (36%) caveat their support with an insistence that freedom of speech must be protected – while a further one in ten Muslim respondents (11%) prioritise freedom of speech over government action on prejudice.

As one would expect, Muslims express a more urgent need for strong government action to address anti-Muslim prejudice. Yet similar numbers also express a desire to balance that with free speech considerations.

Figure 5.12: Support for action to tackle anti-Muslim prejudice

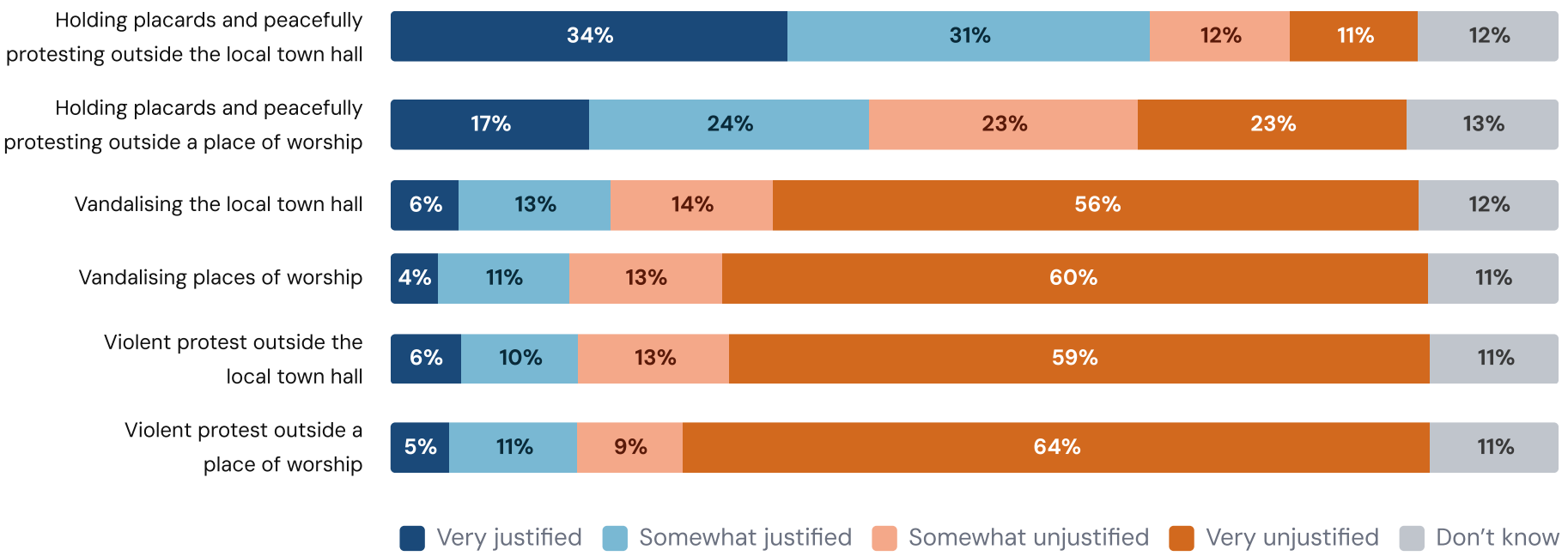


'Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?' Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Most Muslims agree on making clear distinctions about boundaries of acceptable protest

Our survey tested public attitudes among Muslims and non-Muslims to different forms of public protest about three issues: international conflicts, terrorism and grooming. Attitudes among Muslims toward protests was mainly consistent with the graph below: whether the focus was on international conflict or the other two issues, a trend of decreasing support across more extreme examples of protest was observed. Almost two-thirds of Muslims (61%-65%) polled in favour of peaceful protests outside a town hall, falling sharply to 38%-41% for peaceful protests outside places of worship.

Figure 5.13: Muslim attitudes towards different forms of protest about international conflict



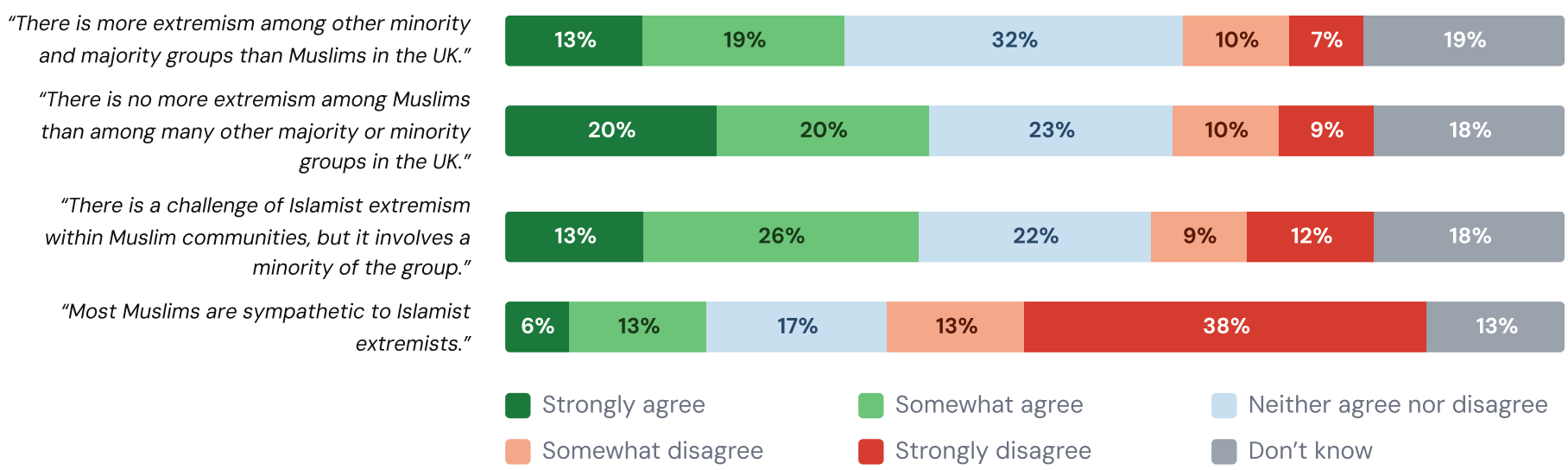
'If people want to express their views about the following issues, which of the following actions do you think would be justified or unjustified? International conflict. Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

A majority of Muslims polled were opposed to vandalism and violence anywhere, with the most significant decrease in support observed for protests of any kind outside places of worship. In this respect Muslim attitudes to protest closely resembled those of the majority public, discussed in chapter 3. Yet it is worrying that some 15-20% would consider violent protest outside a place of worship or town hall in any way acceptable, and more work will be needed to strengthen and reinforce against violence in any circumstances.

Muslim attitudes to the challenge of Islamist extremism

Our survey also asked Muslim respondents their views on a series of statements about Islamist extremism.

Figure 5.14: Muslim attitudes to the challenge of Islamist extremism



'To what extent do you agree or disagree to the following statements?' Number Cruncher Politics nationally representative survey of 1,013 GB Muslim adults, 4-22 March 2026.

Four in ten Muslims (39%) recognise there is a challenge of extremism among a section of the Muslim community, with 13% saying they 'strongly agree' and 26% 'somewhat agree' with the statement "There is a challenge of Islamist extremism within Muslim communities, but it involves a minority of the group." One in five are on the fence on this question, neither agreeing nor disagreeing, while a further fifth (21%) disagree.

A similar 40% also recognise the existence of extremism but believe it to be no more or less prevalent than in other minority groups, while a smaller yet still significant group of around a third of Muslims (32%) feel that there is more extremism among other minority and majority groups than among Muslims in the UK.

While a majority of Muslim respondents reject the assertion that "Most Muslims are sympathetic to Islamic extremists", 6% strongly agree and 13% say they tend to agree. This compares very similarly to the findings of the wider national survey, where a one in six fringe of 6% strongly agreed and 12% tended to agree.

Pluralism in Muslim attitudes

The attitudes of Muslims in Britain have historically been under-examined, compared to other minority and majority groups in society. This chapter aims to provide a general overview across a range of contemporary issues, revealing positivity about life in Britain alongside fears for the future at a time of heightened prejudice. Crucially, while media discussion has often presented Muslim opinion as a homogenous bloc, a clear theme to emerge in our findings is the level of pluralism within the British Muslim community. Muslims do not all think the same: there are differences in attitudes between men and women, between those born in Britain and those who moved here, and by factors such as age and the importance of religion in one's daily life.

Some restrictions in the size of our survey sample have limited the ability to illustrate this texture. For example, subsamples are too small to report differences between nationalities, the views of over-65s (owing to the younger median age of Muslims compared to other groups), or to unpack views by party vote (also owing to a younger sample, where under-30s are historically less likely to participate in elections). While this initial research offers important insights into Muslim life in Britain, we would welcome further quantitative studies, as well as important qualitative deep-dive research, to better understand the drivers of views surfaced in this research and how these vary within the Muslim community.

6. From analysis to action: signposts for effective action and alliances

The aim of this research has been to provide accessible starting points to deepen understanding of the reach, nature and dynamics of anti-Muslim hostility in Britain today. We hope this offers a foundation for policy-makers and practitioners to help devise effective strategies to address the issue.

We conclude with eight key challenges that emerge from the data – and the distinct roles that different institutions and networks can play in reducing prejudice, to help build a stronger social norm of accepting Muslims on equal terms.

1) Don't normalise anti-Muslim hostility – and don't exceptionalise Muslims

The research shows that anti-Muslim hostility has a broader reach than several other forms of faith or racial prejudice in Britain today.

So it is important, when devising strategies to reduce anti-Muslim hostility, to recognise that it has distinct features. There is majority support and acceptance of Muslims in Britain – though this is narrower and shallower than is needed for confidence in its resilience.

An effective strategy would focus on normalising perceptions of Muslims instead of singling them out as an exceptional group that is significantly different to others. A useful strategic goal would be to align attitudes, so opinions towards Muslims in Britain were similar or identical to those towards other faith minorities. Achieving this requires us to challenge tropes that exceptionalise Muslims as a group that poses a foundational threat to British society, or is inherently incompatible with it. Containing those with hateful and rejectionist views, while defusing stereotypes and engaging with real social challenges and wider anxieties, can broaden respect and confidence among neutral and sceptical parts of the public.

2) Understand that tackling anti-Muslim hostility is everybody's business, not that of Muslims alone

An effective approach to reducing anti-Muslim hostility must reach several different audiences to fulfil a range of distinct and adjacent objectives. Victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes need solidarity to report and prosecute hate crimes. Yet being tough on the causes of anti-Muslim hostility depends primarily on strategies to reach beyond Muslim communities to the 94% of the population who are not Muslim. It requires effective interventions, messages and partners to reach into more challenging audiences, not just those already supportive.

It cannot be the role of Muslims alone to tackle and reduce anti-Muslim hostility, especially in its sharpest forms. The data shows that contact with Muslims does play an important role in broadening acceptance over time. But it is wrong in principle and much harder in practice to expect Muslims to shift the attitudes of those with the most hostile views and the least contact with them.

3) Recognise that different actors and networks can make distinct contributions to a society-wide effort

Institutions across society can play a role in encouraging adoption of the definition of anti-Muslim hostility. This is particularly effective when Muslim voices, and coalitions of support involving Muslim and non-Muslim allies, communicate why this matters and engage with good-faith questions about how to do this. Networks to share insights about what works and how to overcome challenges could be useful.

The toughest audiences are those among the one in six with hostile views, who have the least contact with Muslims, and who are least interested in changing that. The primary leadership responsibility here should belong to the state, and other key institutions with the duty to provide a safe and secure environment for Muslims to work, study, travel and socialise without experiencing hatred and hostility. As well as encouraging acceptance of Muslims, it will require building awareness of the potential punitive consequences or illegality of hate crime among those with the strongest prejudices.

4) Narrow the generation gaps

It is a common, natural instinct that effective efforts to tackling prejudice should start young – so there is a lot of focus on what can be done in schools and for future generations. But this research shows that anti-Muslim hostility is more prevalent among older than younger people. The positive shift across generations suggests schools have been doing a good job over the last two decades – and this can entrench and extend change over time.

The bigger challenge now is to emulate across generations what has worked well with younger people. School linking projects have helped schools in areas with lower diversity ensure their pupils do have meaningful contact. There could be particular value in piloting how linking activities could build contact and perspective-taking involving parents and grandparents too. This could include showcase events with linking schools, and identifying other civic spaces that can bridge groups and generations.

5) Beyond contact: testing and deploying effective communications to those least likely to have real-world contact with Muslims

The research findings demonstrate both the power of social contact and its limits. Long-term changes in attitudes show how gradually extending contact across geographies and generations will entrench social norms. But the most urgent challenge is to reach effectively those segments of the public least likely to have contact with Muslims. This group is also most likely to be regularly receiving narratives in peer-to-peer networks, social media and elite cues from national politics and media outlets that reinforce negativity, increasing perceptions of threat, fear and hostility

The priority for practical action is to develop, test and pilot effective communications that resonate with these audiences. Advocates then need to identify the means to deploy them at scale. Effective approaches need to be found to humanise Muslim fellow citizens and shift perceptions of Muslims as a homogenous bloc and existential threat. Real-world contact may be ideal – but imagined contact can make a difference in bridging divides too. Local stories matter, but national communication is also important – especially to challenge stereotypes and disinformation about 'no-go zones' in places like Birmingham, West Yorkshire or East London. Showing everyday life and shared national moments can give distant audiences a more balanced view of these communities.

6) Target efforts at those whose attitudes can be shifted

Targeting of communications is vital and the audience segmentation set out in this report offers some helpful pointers to those working in this space. In particular, it identifies a large segment of the population that holds attitudes that are in some ways hostile to Muslims, yet stop short of outright hatred. This group may be more susceptible to arguments put forward by those with the most anti-Muslim views, seeking to harden their attitudes into hatred and, potentially, to act on those views towards Muslims in Britain. Yet this group, may also be persuadable by those seeking to reduce anti-Muslim hostility. Further research into this middle group, their concerns and the messages and messengers that would help persuade them, should be a priority.

7) Navigating political polarisation

These findings provide solid evidence that there is a distinct challenge of addressing anti-Muslim hostility in British society – though both whether do this, and how to do so effectively and fairly, are likely to remain contested questions in political debate.

British politics have not been as polarised as in Donald Trump's America – but there is an increasing risk that heightened polarisation creates contrasting social norms within progressive and conservative blocs and parties. Avoiding that depends on institutionalising effective approaches to anti-Muslim hostility within right-of-centre political, social and cultural institutions as well as those on the centre and the left.

Right-of-centre parties that question the need for the new government definition can still play a constructive role. Policy critique must be paired with a clear commitment to recognising Muslims as equal citizens, and setting firm boundaries against hostile or hateful attitudes among party members and office-holders.

8) Understanding intergroup attitudes and challenges

Patterns of positive, neutral, sceptical and hostile attitudes towards Muslims will feature across all groups in a multi-ethnic and multi-faith Britain. Policymakers and practitioners will need to consider the different dynamics or drivers of hostility across a range of communities. This will require thinking about the institutions and messengers to monitor and respond to distinct inter-minority tensions, where these risk heightening prejudices.

There has been a significant commitment among civic and faith leaders from Muslim and Jewish communities to maintain relationships, under pressure from global events and conflict in the Middle East. Extending that commitment among civic leaders across communities is more challenging – including due to the relative size and geographic distribution of the different groups, as well as differences over domestic and international politics. Shared commitments to tackling antisemitism and anti-Muslim hostility are particularly important at times when heightened tensions can be exploited to make Jews and Muslims feel less safe, with the potential to increase scepticism, fear or hostility between groups.

There are currently weaker networks of engagement across South Asian ethnic and faith communities, compared to Christian-Jewish-Muslim links and networks. Tackling anti-Muslim prejudice also offers an opportunity to build solidarity across South Asian communities and citizens in the UK. Sikhs, Hindus and others of visible South Asian appearance can face misdirected anti-Muslim prejudice, and be targeted more broadly when there is a heightened and polarised social, cultural or political climate around issues of identity, integration and diversity in society. There may also be specific challenges within and across South Asian communities, to challenge inter-community prejudices, deepen common ground and open dialogue in the wake of cross-border conflicts and faith tensions in the subcontinent, both of which can strain relations for diasporas in Britain.

Acknowledgements

We would like to say a special thank you to **British Muslim Trust** for funding this research and to Akeela Ahmed, Tara Baloch and Professor Tahir Abbas for their support with the survey, analysis and editing.

This report was authored by **Jake Puddle, Sunder Katwala and Dr Avaes Mohammad** at British Future. It was edited by Steve Ballinger of British Future.

The authors would like to give special thanks to colleagues Tisha Dasgupta for support with the survey analysis and Anna Gawryluk for her support to the entire team.

We would like to give a heartfelt thanks to **Matt Singh at Number Cruncher** Politics for his expertise, advice and support in delivering the representative surveys.

Appendix: Survey design challenges

There is a lack of detailed research into public attitudes within the UK Muslim community, and indeed into attitudes among South Asian and wider ethnic minority groups too. This lack of quantitative and qualitative data contributes to several challenges. This includes sweeping statements being made about broad groups, particularly Muslims, that treat people of different ages, geographies and backgrounds as one homogenous group; and also gatekeepers claiming to speak for one group that may not all hold the opinions that they attribute to them. So we hope that this report is a useful contribution towards addressing this shortage of data.

However, we believe that there is a clear need for further and more extensive research than was possible with this study.

The Muslim sample size for this study (1,013), combined with the relatively younger profile of the Muslim community in the UK, meant that samples of people aged over 65 were too small to report with confidence. The data suggests quite significant differences in attitudes by age, so it would be beneficial for further studies to be conducted with a larger sample to report on generational differences with confidence.

The scope of this study did not allow for qualitative research discussions with individuals, which would allow us to explore in more detail some of the findings and their meaning.

Some questions could be repeated with both the majority and minority audiences: for example we asked the national representative sample about their attitudes to women wearing the hijab, but this question was not asked of the Muslim sample. It would be useful to contrast responses from Muslim and non-Muslim women; and from men and women within the Muslim community.

We also believe there is a specific issue with the clarity of wording of a question in the survey on grooming gangs, which has produced responses that we suspect to be inaccurate – which is why they are reported in this appendix and not in the main body of the report.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents were shown four statements about child grooming gangs and asked which came closest to their views:

Among the nationally representative sample, 57% of people agreed that “Inquiries are needed to find out, in places where child grooming has occurred, who was involved and to take action against the individuals responsible.” 9% of people agreed that “There should be no more of a discussion about grooming among British Muslims as any other group in the rest of society”. Some 18% agreed with the statement “Most British Muslims are aware of the child grooming and action should be taken against the whole group to address this issue.” Some 16% said they were not aware of the issue.

Among Muslim respondents, the statement that most people selected was “Inquiries are needed to find out, in places where child grooming has occurred, who was involved and to take action against the individuals responsible.” This was chosen by 44% of respondents.

A further one in five (21%) selected “I do not know about the issue of child grooming gangs,” slightly higher than the 16% of the wider public who said they were unaware of the issue. This lack of awareness, despite extensive media coverage of the issue, may reflect the younger age profile of the Muslim population.

A smaller group, 13% of Muslim respondents, agreed with the statement that “There should be no more of a discussion about grooming among British Muslims than any other group in the rest of society”.

More surprising was the 22% who selected “Most British Muslims are aware of the child grooming and action should be taken against the whole group to address this issue” – a higher score than the 18% of the general public who chose this option. This kind of message – suggesting that whole communities were aware of what was going on with child grooming and colluded to prevent it being stopped, and so all Muslims should be punished for the actions of grooming gangs – has been put forward by voices on the far right.

We believe it is more likely that respondents misread or misunderstood this statement – perhaps interpreting ‘aware of child grooming’ as having seen it on the news, and ‘the whole group’ as referring to the whole group of abusers – than that Muslim respondents were volunteering for collective punishment. This flaw in survey design means we cannot report with confidence how Muslim or non-Muslim respondents interpreted the question or what their attitudes are on this issue, and further research may be required.

British Future

Address 13 Elliott's Place, London, N1 8HX

Website www.britishfuture.org

Email info@britishfuture.org

British Muslim Trust

Website www.britishmuslimtrust.co.uk

Email info@britishmuslimtrust.co.uk