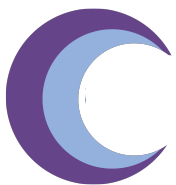


# How will Muslim women be voting in the 2024 general elections and what issues matter to them?



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## SUMMARY

Key highlights from survey responses from **85 Muslim women** who were diverse in terms of ethnicity, age and location.

11%

11% of Muslim women said they will definitely vote for Labour in 2024 compared with 61% who voted for them in 2019.

26%

26% of Muslim women were undecided voters.

32%

The Green Party is benefitting most from the Muslim vote shifting away from Labour as 32 % of Muslim women said they will vote for them in 2024 compared with 7% who voted for them in 2019.

89%

89% of Muslim indicated that the ongoing Gaza situation is likely to influence their voting decision in the 2024 general election.

88%

88% of Muslim women said they distrust / strongly distrust the Conservative Party.

76%

76% of Muslim women said they distrust / strongly distrust the Labour Party.

82%

82% of Muslim women stated that the Conservative Party had taken no action to address Islamophobia.

62%

62% of Muslim women stated that the Labour Party had taken no action to address Islamophobia.

30%

30% of Muslim women expressed a desire for immigration to be addressed.

## AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

Recent polling indicates a significant decline in support for the Labour Party among Muslim voters in the UK. This study aims to specifically investigate the voting intentions of Muslim women for the 2024 General Election compared to the previous election in 2019 and to understand the factors influencing their choices. Additionally, the research examines Muslim women's perceptions of major political parties, focusing on levels of trust and confidence in these parties' ability to address Islamophobia, a critical concern within the Muslim community.

## BACKGROUND

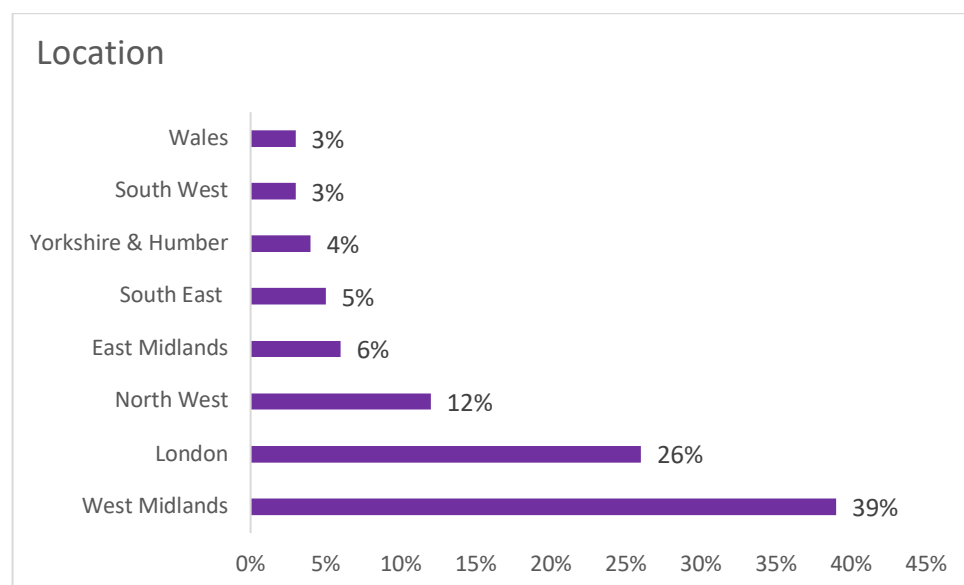
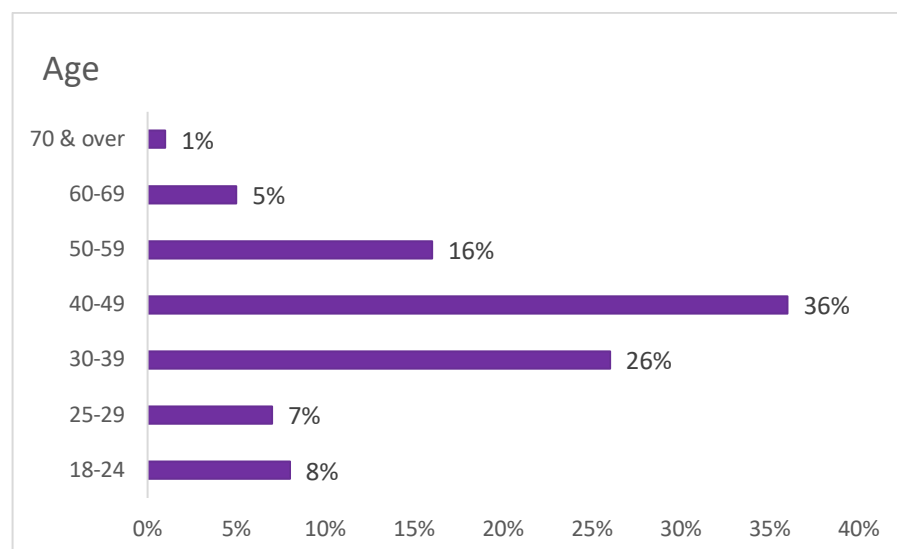
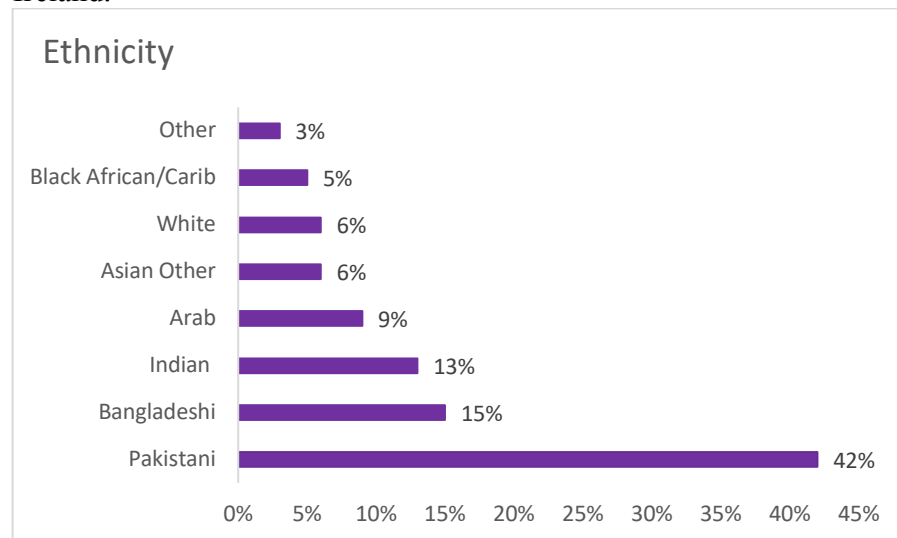
There are almost 4 million Muslims making up 6.5% of the population which means that of the 18% minority ethnic population in Britain, one in three is Muslim.<sup>1</sup> Labour is the most popular party among ethnic minority voters including Muslims. Ethnic minority voters made up 1 in 5 of Labour voters, but only 1 in 20 of Conservative voters.<sup>2</sup> Not all Muslims vote and not all Muslims vote Labour, nevertheless historically most Muslims who do vote tend to vote for the Labour Party. For example, in 31 constituencies, Muslims comprise 20% or more of the electorate and all of them have a Labour MP except in three locations - Leicester East which was Labour until Claudia Webber was expelled from the party, Rochdale which was held by Labour until it lost it in a by election to George Galloway and Dewsbury and Batley which is Conservative held, which Labour only narrowly lost 2019.<sup>3</sup> If Muslim voters start shifting away from Labour in large numbers, these seats can no longer be regarded as safe seats. Muslims can determine who will be the local MP and therefore shape the outcome of the General Election.

## METHODOLOGY

Between May 31, 2024, and June 23, 2024, the Muslim Women's Network UK conducted a small survey (via Survey Monkey) comprising twelve questions, including additional demographic inquiries. The survey covered topics such as voting intentions for the July 4, 2024 elections, past voting behaviors in the 2019 general election, factors influencing voting decisions, top concerns for the new government to address, trust levels in the main political parties, perceptions of their efforts in combating Islamophobia, and apprehensions regarding anti-Muslim prejudice during election campaigns. The survey respondents were also given the opportunity to elaborate on their responses, enriching the contextual understanding of the data collected.

Due to resource and time constraints, collecting a large survey sample was not feasible. We received a total of 107 survey responses, with majority (79%) coming from Muslim women. The analysis provided here is thus centered on a cohort of 85 Muslim women. Although this cohort is relatively small and may limit the ability to generalise findings to the broader Muslim community, the comments collected enrich the data. These reflections capture the current mood among Muslims and align with results from other surveys, thereby telling an important and meaningful story.

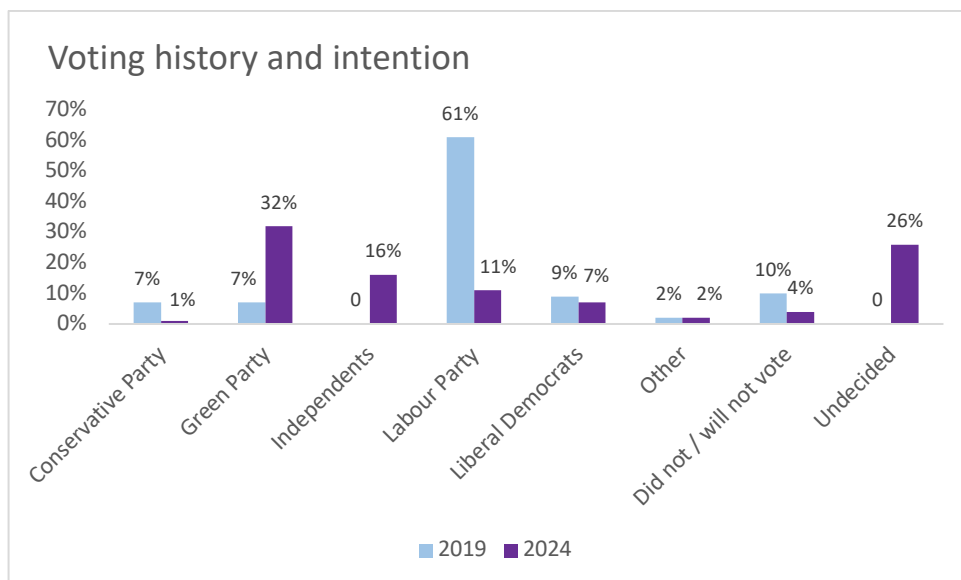
The Muslim women respondents exhibited diversity across ethnicity, age and geographical location as illustrated in the charts below. There were no responses from Scotland or Northern Ireland.



## FINDINGS

### 1) Voting Intention

In the 2019 General Elections, 61% of respondents indicated they voted for the Labour Party. However, looking ahead to July 4, 2024, only 11% expressed definite intentions to vote for Labour. This figure may fluctuate, as 26% of respondents remain undecided, a higher proportion compared to the national average of 15% undecided voters.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, between 11% and 37% of Muslim women could potentially vote for the Labour Party on election day. This suggests a notable decline in support ranging from 40% to 80% compared to the previous election. While the final figure is likely to fall within this range, it underscores the significant influence that undecided Muslim female voters can have in constituencies where they constitute a substantial portion of the electorate. The chart below demonstrates significant change in voting preferences when comparing party voted for in the 2019 general election to the party preferred in the upcoming election.



The minimal Conservative support among Muslims observed in 2019 is set to vanish by 2024, with only 7% of Muslim women reporting they voted for them previously, dropping to just 1% indicating intentions to do so again. According to survey results, the Green Party stands to gain the most from Muslim women shifting away from Labour, potentially including those who previously supported the Conservatives. While 7% of Muslim women voted Green in 2019, a substantial 32% now plan to support them on July 4, 2024. This shift could also influence the voting decisions of other family members. These findings align with data from the Labour Muslim Network, which identifies the Green Party as the most favoured among Muslim voters in the UK.<sup>5</sup> The Green Party seems to have also noticed this shift because in June 2024, Muslim Greens were recognised an official affiliate group of the party.

Distrust towards the major political parties (discussed later) and shared values are likely motivating factors drawing Muslim women towards the Green Party.

*"I'm deciding to keep consistently voting Green from now on so their voter base increases."*

*"Green only party to be pro Palestine and calling for ceasefire since day 1."*

*"The green party are willing to take a stand against the rich and the corporations."*

*They have not been out canvassing etc. otherwise I would vote Green.*

Additionally, some Muslim women are choosing independent candidates. For instance, 16% expressed intention to vote for an independent candidate, despite not having done so in the previous election. However, not all women are switching to independent candidates solely due to their anti-Labour and pro-Gaza stance. Concerns have been raised regarding the quality of certain independent candidates, especially male candidates. Candidate quality has also emerged as a concern within the Labour Party:

*"Labour has taken the Muslim vote for granted by putting up mediocre candidates in safe seats which sell us short in the commons."*

*"If I vote for labour it will only be because I am in a safe seat and the other candidates I do not know."*

The Liberal Democrats have not benefited from Muslim women moving away from the main political parties. In fact, their share of Muslim female voters has decreased from 9% in 2019 to just 7% indicating they will vote for them this year. Interestingly, while 10% of Muslim women did not vote in the previous election, only 4% plan to abstain this time. This change may be attributed to some respondents turning 18 since 2019, as 8% of respondents were in the 18-24 age bracket. Additionally, only 2% voted for other parties in 2019 and plan to do so again.

Muslim women expressed dissatisfaction with both the Conservative and Labour parties. Despite their discontent with the current Conservative government, they also lacked confidence in the main opposition, Labour, perceiving the two parties as too similar. Many felt that Labour had taken the Muslim vote for granted. It seems that if undecided voters end up supporting Labour, it will likely be due to a desire to remove the Conservative Party from government rather than genuine enthusiasm for Labour.

*"I am conflicted who the right party to vote for is."*

*"I do not have faith and trust in either the Labour or Conservative government."*

*"I am not happy with the current government and do not have much confidence in the Labour Party either."*

*"I don't feel there is any difference between the parties any longer."*

*"Who are the Labour party nowadays, they are lighter version of the Tories."*

*"I am a traditional labour voter, but very disillusioned with the current Labour Party which is more Tory than traditional labour."*

*"No confidence in Cons or labour."*

*"Had enough of both major parties lying and cheating people."*

*"Labour have lost their values."*

*"I do not trust or have faith in the main parties."*

*"Politics has deteriorated in every area and is NOT DEMOCRATIC anymore and parties are shamelessly dishonest"*

*"There are no consequences for inciting hate, for lying, for breaking promises. I am fed up!!! We deserve better than this. The entire system needs to be dismantled & rebuilt."*

The overwhelming majority (89%) indicated that the ongoing Gaza situation is likely to influence their voting decisions in the upcoming election. Some women referred to the situation in Gaza as "genocide" and criticised both the Conservative Party and the Labour Party for their stances on the issue.

*"Response to genocide from Labour Party has changed my vote."*

*"I have lost trust in the Labour party due to their response to what is happening in Palestine."*

*"The Conservative handling, and the Labour response have been disappointingly poor."*

*"I have lost trust in the Labour party due to their response to what is happening in Palestine."*

*"I will no longer be voting for Labour because of their shocking stance on the genocide in Gaza."*

*"I don't know who to vote for."*

*"I'm trying to understand how tactical voting would work and will decide closer to time."*

## **2) Trust in Political Parties**

When asked about their trust in the current governing political party, only 1% of Muslim women expressed any trust in the Conservative Party, while 76% strongly distrusted them, 12% distrusted them, and 7% were neutral. Interestingly, the main opposition party, Labour, only fared slightly better. Only 1% strongly trusted Labour, 5% trusted them, 15% were neutral, 21% distrusted them, and 55% strongly distrusted them. When the responses for distrust and strongly trust were combined these showed significant mistrust for both parties:

- Conservative Party – 88% distrust / strongly distrust them
- Labour Party – 76% distrust / strongly distrust them

The main reasons for distrusting the Conservative Party included perceptions that the party had become racist and Islamophobic, shifted to the right and mainstreamed hatred, and poorly managed the country, especially during the Covid crisis. Respondents also cited corruption, dishonesty, and a focus on serving their own interests and those of the wealthy. Additionally, they felt the Conservatives had further disadvantaged the poor, exacerbated the cost of living crisis, and deteriorated public services, particularly the NHS, which they believed was being privatised by stealth. Some of these sentiments are reflected in the following comments:

*"I don't believe the current leading Govt even have the finger on the pulse."*

*"Tories have been shameless and reckless in running this country."*

*"Boris Johnson started his trajectory of mistrust and mismanagement during Covid."*

*"Using their positions to forward their own personal agendas."*

*"Corrupt government who are only thinking of their own benefits."*

*"The current governing party is for the wealthy, it is driven by capital values, finds social values abhorrent and is keen on privatising public services to enrich corporations and donors. It is corrupt to the core."*

*"Lied about a lot of things, very dishonest."*

*"Self-serving, out of touch, dishonest."*

*"Not open and transparent."*

*"Brexit was a massive own goal - the country is poorer for this decision."*

*"They are the most corrupt party where every decision has been made to make themselves rich."*

*"They're a bunch of opportunists looking to get rich and make money for their already obscenely wealthy stakeholders at the expense of the poor, the middle class and increasingly even the modestly wealthy."*

*"The conservatives are only serving the interests of the rich and keeping them rich by providing them with tax breaks while the rest of the population suffer with cost of living and poor public services"*

*"They have broken types of laws that if anyone else had broken they would have ended up in prison."*

*"They've used 14 years to make things worse, especially for the NHS."*

*"I think they are taking public opinion to the far right and privatising the NHS by stealth."*

*"Not supporting NHS and local councils."*

*"NHS has been under funded."*

*"No real investment in public services, no real solutions for social issues facing this country and the only thing the Tories have been good at is authoritarian style leadership."*

*"Causing the cost of living, letting the NHS and the justice system fall apart."*

*All the policies in place seem to target the poor class people of colour*

*"Further disadvantaged those on the margins of society."*

*"Have let down the working class down."*

*"They are lying, racist, self-serving."*

*"Covid, NHS, Rwanda, islamaphobia in the party."*

*"State of economy, Brexit repercussions , Covid handling , Lack of funding for vital services i.e. NHS , Islamophobia."*

*"Disgraceful corrupt liars who have ruined the economy and sent society lurching towards the hate filled far right."*

*"Government have mainstreamed far-right attitudes, legitimated Islamophobic ideals and views and in no way represent the people. The government is wholly out of touch/indifferent to the struggles and needs of the general population."*

*"They are positioning themselves like the far-right Republican Party in the USA."*

*"Very disappointed by the 2 main parties stance and out-right racist and Islamophobic rhetoric."*

*"They're brazenly anti -Islamic and anti-humanity."*

*"Racist and inciting hatred towards Muslims especially."*

The main reasons for distrusting the Labour Party included: an inability to distinguish them from the Conservative Party and a likelihood of adopting similar policies favouring the wealthy and corporates; no longer being seen as a party of social equality; insufficiently holding the government to account; their stance on Gaza (not calling for a ceasefire earlier); and Islamophobia within the party. These sentiments are reflected in the following comments:

*"I believe there is now little difference between the Labour party and the Conservative party - the former is moving increasingly to the right."*

*"They're basically now just red Tories and aren't going to be 'leftist' enough to actually redistribute wealth, tax the extremely wealthy and actually fix issues of social mobility and inequality from the root."*

*"I'm hoping the labour party is better than the conservatives, but in the end they aren't particularly different - they all serve the interests of the rich and corporations."*

*"It has been hijacked by the centre right and external donors to serve their interests."*

*"The leader is more blue than red. They have shown their colours and have not stood by any pledge."*

*"Keir stammer is no different to Rishi Sunak, His a blue in red."*

*"The Labour Party has been weak in its response to the Conservatives, and I believe has failed to hold them to account."*

*"They supported brexit and Tory policies in general."*

*"I don't think trust the government under Kier Stammer's leadership, think his words have no weight and he put me to sleep!"*

*"Too much inner politics within the party and distrust."*

*"The antisemitism and islamophobia on display within the labour party has been horrifying."*

*"They are Tories in disguise and I have no trust in Kier Starmer as leader - he is so keen on being anti-Semitic, he has become the party of Islamophobia."*

*"Did not acknowledge ceasefire in gaza and Islamaphobia in the party."*

*"They are as a collective unethical and not the labour I have voted for since I came of voting age."*

*"They haven't demonstrated their alignment with social justice."*

*"These fools support Gaza genocide, and don't understand that a woman is an adult human female, not a man in a dress. They won't uphold women's rights and are blindly pro-Israel."*

*"The party under Starmer has become more right-wing. The supporting of Isreal in killing innocent civilians, children and women. Labour Party is no longer for the working class."*

*"Currently their views on Gaza are shocking , but will have to see if they fare any better than conservatives if on power."*

*"Disgraceful stance on Gaza."*

*"Keir Starmer is supposed to be a human rights lawyer but thinks Israel has a right to defend itself, when it doesn't even have a right to exist under international law."*

*"Gaza has to be the last straw as to how they treat people both in and out of their party."*

*"The Gaza genocide has shown who stands for what."*

### 3) Issues of Concern

When Muslim women were asked which issues were most important to them personally that they wished a new government to address, the top five issues in order were as follows:

- Cost of living (91%)
- Health service (68%)
- Ethical standard of politicians (62%)
- Education (56%)
- Foreign Affairs (49%)

The top issue was the cost of living, with the Muslim women expressing concern not only for themselves but also for the poorer segments of society: *“The increase in inflation and the day to day costs increasing is impacting the lower working class. Causing debt and stress. Children going without food and clean clothes is unacceptable.”*

The second most significant concern was NHS and 68% of Muslim women were concerned about it, especially the state of funding for it and expressed a desire for increased investments instead of reliance on the private health sector. Some respondents said that they are willing to pay extra tax, if this leads to having a better NHS:

*“We need to properly fund the NHS. Invest in the NHS get them to carry out tasks rather than the private sector.”*

*“I don’t mind being taxed extra if we have better NHS, housing and education.”*

*“They’ve used 14 years to make things worse, especially for the NHS. They are the reason I have left the NHS after nearly 25 years of service as a Dr.”*

The ethical standards of politicians also emerged as a top concern, with a severe lack of trust in politicians and the Conservative Party being described as corrupt and dishonest: *“It matters to me what the moral compass of our country’s politicians have!”*

Muslim women expressed concerns about double standards in foreign policy and called for and maintained to all countries:

*“Foreign policy needs to hold all countries to same standards if Russia is an aggressor than so is Israel. We also need to keep our noses out of other countries.”*

*“Gaza - the double standards i.e. Russia Vs Israel.”*

*“Double standards reflected in statements made on Ukraine and Palestine.”*

*“Globally, we have a negative impact or none, at best. We are losing compassion and good character.”*

*“Human lives have different value based on colour, geography and asset value.”*

It is notable that approximately 30% of Muslim women expressed a desire for immigration to be addressed. This is significant to emphasise because currently, the issue is often framed as a concern primarily among a specific segment of society, such as white voters. Established

minority communities are frequently not consulted about their perspectives on immigration; and this survey result indicates this may be an area to explore in depth. The viewpoints of established minority communities should not be disregarded, as a considerable number expressed concerns about immigration, as illustrated by some of the comments:

*“Immigration policy is a mess, doing nothing about those who come here on visas but don't leave on expiry but forcibly removing those who are fleeing conflicts we have caused.”*

*Immigration needs fixing, we need to get rid of those who stay illegally after visa expiry but help those who are fleeing conflicts.*

When the Muslim women were asked which issues were most important to the country that they wished a new government to address, the top five issues in order were as follows:

- Cost of living (94%)
- Health service (73%)
- Ethical standard of politicians (60%)
- Education (56%)
- Housing (49%)

There was little distinction between the personal issues Muslim women wanted addressed and those they felt were crucial for the country. The top four concerns—cost of living crisis, health services, ethical standards of politicians, and education—remained consistent. However, housing took fifth place this time instead of foreign policy. Housing may have ranked higher due to the fact that Muslims are more likely to reside in social rented homes, such as those provided by councils or housing associations (26.6% compared to 16.6% of the overall population).<sup>6</sup> As encapsulated by one comment, Muslim women seek a better integration of these issues:

*“A progressive society has to be holistic & connect dots between safe housing, job security, promoting a ‘greener’ way of living, wages that pay all bills, investment in robust mental health services & an iron-clad commitment to tackling male violence against women & girls! If we invest in communities e.g. youth services then that will pay back in the long term.”*

#### **4) Anti-Muslim Hate Speech and Islamophobia**

An overwhelming majority of Muslim women (87%) expressed significant concern about the potential use of Islamophobic or anti-Muslim hate speech by certain candidates and their supporters during the election campaigns. A few women specifically raised concerns about Nigel Farage, leader of Reform UK.

Both major parties faced criticism for their handling of racism and Islamophobia, which influenced some women's voting decisions. The normalization of hostility towards Muslims was identified as a significant concern. A large majority of Muslim women (82%) stated that the Conservative Party had taken no steps to address Islamophobia and, in fact, were seen as contributing to the issue:

*“They're not doing anything because they're a racist party.”*

*“They are part of the problem.”*

*“They're an openly racist party.”*

*“They are fueling anti-Islamic sentiments.”*

*“They fuel anti-Muslim hate.”*

*"They have made it worse."*

*"Actively Islamophobic."*

*"They don't care about Muslims because they assume we will all vote Labour (we won't)."*

*"The Conservatives are fueling the anti-Muslim prejudice to distract from the real issues facing the country."*

*"They're actively stoking it."*

*"If anything, they are openly hostile to the Muslim community, comfortable in using Islamophobic tropes and develop policies that adversely impact the Muslim community."*

*"It's the opposite, they are being actively and openly anti-Muslim."*

*"I don't think they value us."*

*"It impacts job opportunities for women and religious/ ethnic minorities. It's a scary time to be Muslim."*

*"Nigel Farage mentions at every interview that equality should be scrapped and hate speech against Muslims."*

*"Nigel Farage - need i say more. He leads a minority party yet is given a huge media platform to spew his islamophobic tropes."*

*"We are an easy target."*

*"It is becoming normal and more of a hostile environment for Muslims."*

*"It is becoming normal and more of a hostile environment for Muslims."*

*"More dangerous is the deep seated covert racism and anti-islam ethos . We are accepted only to a point."*

*"Muslims face this on a daily basis."*

However, Muslim women also expressed doubts that the Labour Party would effectively address Islamophobia - 62% of respondents said the party had taken no action to challenge Islamophobia. They believed that the party, including its leader Sir Keir Starmer, did not prioritize Muslim concerns enough and had not taken sufficient action thus far:

*"Labour's clearly no longer invested in what the Muslim voter base is concerned about, so I doubt tacking anti-Muslim hatred is high on their agenda."*

*"There has been no proper crackdown on islamophobia."*

*"Why would they? I don't think they value us."*

*"Islamophobia has never been confronted/punished by Starmer. He has welcomed anti-Muslim candidates with open arms."*

*"I have lost trust in the Labour party due to their treatment of women of colour."*

## CONCLUSION

The survey findings reflect a significant shift in Muslim women's intended voting behaviour in the upcoming election. The Labour Party appears to have lost the trust of Muslim women, even amongst those who may still consider voting for them. Consequently, the party faces significant challenges in rebuilding relationships with Muslim communities. The growing demographic of younger Muslim voters, particularly Generation Z, also presents implications for the future of Labour's support among Muslims. These younger voters, who increasingly gather information from platforms like TikTok and prioritise ethical considerations, may diverge from their parents' tradition of steadfast Labour support. Their evolving perspectives are likely to influence the voting decisions of their families, thereby shaping broader electoral trends.

If the Labour Party fails to reconcile with Muslim voters by addressing their concerns in the coming years, they risk facing a similar predicament in five years. This includes potential losses in constituencies where Muslims constitute 20% or more of the electorate. Even if they manage to hold onto these seats in the upcoming election, it may be with narrower margins, posing significant challenges ahead.

The Conservative Party also needs to work on winning back its smaller group of Muslim supporters. Under David Cameron's leadership, the party made significant efforts to appeal to minority voters, and it seems he had some success. However, these modest gains have been undone as the party has shifted back towards the right.

The survey results present an opportunity for the Green Party, as Muslim voters seem to be gravitating towards them rather than the Liberal Democrats. The Green Party could capitalise on this momentum by appealing to young Muslims who are socially conscious about a wide range of issues, not limited to foreign affairs.

Currently, the main reasons for voters shifting away from the two main parties is the situation in Gaza and the lack of action on Islamophobia. In the future, other issues may become significant. For instance, Muslims tend to have poorer physical and mental health outcomes<sup>7</sup> and were disproportionately affected by Covid;<sup>8</sup> they have the highest percentage of individuals with no qualifications; they are less likely to own their homes (as mentioned earlier), they are more likely to be unpaid carers; they have higher unemployment rates;<sup>9</sup> and are more likely to be subjected to hate crimes.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, 40% of the Muslim population lives in the most deprived areas of England and Wales, and Muslim households are more likely to be in poverty than any other religious group in the country.<sup>11</sup> Muslim voters may now insist on quicker progress in leveling up their communities. Historically, they may not have fully grasped or wielded their influence at the ballot box. However, it appears that the Muslim electorate has now awakened and is determined not to have their vote taken for granted any longer.

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