

Summer 2024 Disorder Inquiry
Home Affairs Committee
December 2024

Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) is a national Muslim women's organisation in Britain (www.mwnuk.co.uk) that has been advancing equality, promoting women's empowerment, and connecting voices since 2003. We are a small national charity (reg. no. 1155092) that works to improve social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls. Our membership also includes women of other faiths or of no faith and men who support our work. We find out about the experiences of Muslim women and girls through research and our helpline enquiries. We identify policy and practice gaps and use this information to inform decision makers in government as well as informing our community campaigns at a grassroots level.

We also develop resources and train women, so they are better aware of their rights. We have a separate website for our national helpline (www.mwnhelpline.co.uk) that provides advice and support on a range of issues including domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, female genital mutilation, hate crimes, discrimination, mental health etc.

Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) published in September 2024, '**Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences.**' The research sought to understand concerns and experiences related to Islamophobia / anti-Muslim hate, both prior to and following the widespread riots that followed the Southport stabbings on 29 July, 2024.

Of the 191 Muslims that responded to the survey (which was conducted in August), 67% said they had experienced some type of online / offline hate incident in the previous five years. However, 80% of those who had these experiences did not report the incidents anywhere. This is worrying because it is important to capture incidents even if they do not meet the criminal threshold for prosecution so that the scale of anti-Muslim hate can be fully understood so that appropriate policies and legislation can be developed. Other findings included only 17% of Muslims being very worried about their safety before the riots, rising to 73% after the riots.

Our responses to the questions asked in this inquiry will be based on the experiences and concerns raised in our report ***Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences (September 2024)***: <https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/resourcesDetail.php?id=307> .

We have answered the questions relevant to us below:

What was the nature and extent of disorder in July and August 2024:

We do not agree with the wording of the proposed question, which suggests that the marches were 'peaceful.' It is concerning that key influencers on social media played a significant role in fueling tensions, often exacerbating the situation, and many of these individuals have not been held accountable for their actions. They were able to avoid facing any real consequences, while misinformation, particularly from political figures, further worsened the situation during the riots. This contributed to a heightened sense of division and unrest. There is widespread concern that such events could have been prevented or mitigated had there been a stronger effort to address the spread of false information and hold those responsible accountable. If we are to learn from such incidents, it is essential that we take proactive steps to promote transparency, ensure accountability, and reduce the influence of misinformation in shaping public sentiment during times of crisis.

In our report ***Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences (September 2024¹)*** some respondents were not surprised by the riots but were shocked by how quickly they spread across cities. While they acknowledged the role of deliberate misinformation spread by some public figures on social media, and the platforms' failure to remove such content, most of the blame within the survey responses was directed at politicians, individuals with large social media followings, and mainstream media, rather than the rioters themselves. Frequently mentioned names in the survey responses included Suella Braverman, Nigel Farage, Tommy Robinson, Katie Hopkins, Priti Patel, Lee Anderson, Boris Johnson, and Elon Musk. There was concern amongst respondents who felt that these figures had, whether directly, indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, radicalised others and emboldened the far right through their platforms and positions over a number of years. Many respondents felt such individuals had, to varying degrees, normalised anti-Muslim hatred and empowered extremist views. Robert Jenrick was also criticised and accused of Islamophobia for suggesting that Muslims who shout 'Allahu Akbar' should be arrested. Respondents noted that expressing racist and anti-Muslim views had become easier and feared it would likely worsen. They also pointed out that when anti-Muslim hate or Islamophobia was expressed, it often went unchallenged or was not confronted with sufficient urgency or strength by other politicians, leading to the perception that silence equalled complicity.

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¹ https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/Anti-Muslim-Hate-Report-concerns-and-experiences.pdf

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Please see quotes from respondents below:

- *"Politicians have made Islamophobic statements and the drip feed has been building."*
- *"Politicians and media have legitimised Islamophobia so this was bound to erupt at some point."*
- *I more so resent the politicians for stoking the flames and starting it all up."*
- *"There is a rise in Islamophobia has been instigated by irresponsible media & some public figures and politicians."*
- *"Anti-Muslim hatred being normalised by politicians and mainstream media."*
- *"The riots did not come out of nowhere. They are the direct result of not calling out Anti-Muslim and Anti-immigrant racist views."*

There was commendation for the new Labour government, with respondents expressing relief that the previous administration was not responsible for addressing the riots. They appreciated the prompt identification, arrest, charging, prosecution, and sentencing of the perpetrators. However, some criticism was directed at the government for being slow to label the violence as anti-Muslim hate and Islamophobia. Respondents felt that a stronger condemnation of Islamophobia, on par with the stance taken against anti-Semitism, would have been more reassuring. There is now an expectation for the government to swiftly implement plans to proscribe the EDL (and / or affiliates) as a terrorist organisation, clamp down on online hate, address the root causes of the riots, and tackle negative attitudes towards Muslims.

Please see quotes from respondents below:

- *"Instead of using the terms 'thuggery' and 'far-right,' the riots should have been called for what it is, acts of terrorism and done by white extremists."*
- *"Pleased with the response but more needs to be done to target the online ring leaders spreading false information."*
- *"I am glad the government acted swiftly to arrest and punish but we also need a long-term plan to tackle hatred of Muslims."*

How did police forces respond to disorder in July and August 2024:

The police were especially praised for their handling of the riots. Although Muslims expressed low confidence in the police regarding hate crime reporting, many still commended their efforts. They acknowledged that police officers had been placed in danger by politicians and others who had incited the riots, and they expressed gratitude for the officers' bravery in risking their lives to protect the Muslim communities.

Please see quotes from respondents below:

- *"Police are great. They have put themselves in danger whilst politicians have been stirring hate!"*
- *"Police forces up and down the country worked tirelessly to keep people safe, despite being outnumbered, attacked and injured themselves."*
- *"The police did an absolutely fantastic job and are a credit to our country"*

What challenges, if any, did the political focus on the disorder place on policing in general, and the decisions of individual officers?

The rise of the far-right, which has not been adequately addressed, is exploiting fears about Muslims and hence why the riots spread quickly in many other cities after Southport. Over the past decade, poverty in the UK has worsened, with increases in food bank use, more families living in temporary accommodation, a shortage of affordable housing, declining job security, and over stretched public services. While economic hardships have largely resulted from political decisions, minority groups such as Muslims and refugees are being scapegoated, a pattern also seen across Europe. Social media and other media platforms also play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of Muslims by enabling the rapid spread of misinformation and anti-Muslim hate speech. For instance, misinformation falsely suggesting that the Southport suspect was a Muslim asylum seeker being allowed to spread across the social media networks, which contributed to the disorder across the UK.

As recommended in the ***Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences (September 2024)***² report legislation needs to be strengthened so it more effectively addresses the stirring up of racial and religious hatred, which should include considering to proscribing the EDL (and / or affiliates) as a terrorist organisation. We also recommend more robust legislation to more effectively hold social media companies to account for allowing the spread of misinformation and for failing to remove content that incites religious and racial hatred

**On behalf of Muslim Women's Network UK,
Neelam Rose (Advocacy Officer)
December 2024.**

² https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/go_files/resources/Anti-Muslim-Hate-Report-concerns-and-experiences.pdf