

Born in the UK: Young Muslims in Britain

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The views in this paper are not necessarily those of the Foreign Policy Centre.

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1. Introduction

A year ago, on a summer morning, three young Muslim men blew themselves up on the London Underground, and a fourth immolated himself on a double-decker bus. Fifty-two people died and more than 700 suffered injuries. They were old and young, Britons and non-Britons, Christians, Muslims and Jews as well as those of other religions and those of no religion at all. It was an act of indiscriminate terror. Yet over the past twelve months, the debate about the events of 7 July 2005 has focused on the question of “Islamic terrorism”. The term itself is questionable since the discovery of bombers, born and raised in Britain, and ready to kill in the name of their faith, also came as a shock to Muslims on the streets of London, Birmingham and Manchester.

In the aftershock the British government went to some lengths to find out what happened and why, inviting a hundred influential Muslims to join an advisory group called Preventing Extremism Together (PET), and publishing the “Report of the Official Account of the Bombings in London on 7th July 2005”, with its oddly redundant title. Think-tanks and academics have begun to attack the problem with scientific rigour. Now the Foreign Policy Centre is publishing *Born in the UK* on the first anniversary of 7/7 in a bid to re-assess the exclusion and alienation of young British Muslims, the temptation of radicalism and the impact of foreign policy issues (especially Iraq) on an already disaffected group. Our emphasis is unapologetically a generational one. If angry youth is seen as a *genus* of “Islamic terrorism” in this country, the anger has deep roots in the lives of many second-generation Pakistanis who find themselves stranded between Britain's imperial past and its multicultural future.

The past is a different country but a multicultural one in surprising ways. The British Empire, for instance, contained a large number of Muslims. Indeed the nineteenth-century statesman Lord Salisbury once claimed that Britain was the greatest Islamic power on earth. His period in office, during the second half of the Victorian era, witnessed a huge influx into London of refugees and dissidents from the Middle East. More recently, the city has attracted more Islamic radicals with connections to Morocco, Egypt, Syria, the Gulf and Pakistan. The radical fringe of "Londonistan", as it is known, draws in part from the alienated edges of Britain's large and overwhelmingly peaceful Muslim immigrant population. But it has been influenced, too, by Britain's ambiguous policies toward exiled radicals, a sometimes awkward blend of asylum offers, intelligence collection and criminal prosecution. Osama bin Laden opened a political and media office here as far back as 1994, and for years Abu Hamza Masri curdled the blood with his sermons at the Finsbury Park mosque allegedly visited by shoe bomber Richard Reid and trainee hijacker Zacarias Moussaoui. The history of al-Qaeda shows that, in the years before 11 September 2001, a polyglot group of intellectuals, preachers, financiers, arms traders, technology specialists, forgers, travel organisers and foot soldiers helped London to become the "the Star Wars bar scene" for Islamic radicals, in the words of Steven Simon, a former White House counterterrorism.

Nevertheless life in Britain was relatively calm because these displaced radicals supported the idea of a "covenant of security" outlawing any type of military action here on the grounds that it might jeopardise the protection London afforded to radical Muslims. It was not until the publication, in 1988, of *The Satanic Verses* that attitudes began to change in the concentrated Pakistani hinterlands and cities in the English

midlands (for example, Birmingham and Leicester) and north (for example, Bradford and Blackburn). The Tory government's policy at the time was "integration while maintaining identity" but, in practice, segregation continued to grow in the big cities, and the soothing talk of diversity and dialogue, of respect and reason, no longer worked. Salman Rushdie's novel caricaturing the Prophet Muhammad inflamed British Muslims. Tens of thousands united in a nationwide campaign to ban the book, and at the heart of the protest seemed to be a desire to assert Muslim identity or, at any rate, to highlight problems with the British model of multiculturalism. The rise of al-Qaeda and the violations of Guantanamo, Abu Ghreib and Forest Gate have only made those problems worse.

This pamphlet will outline the history of Islamism in the UK, covering most of the major figures and groups and their activities from the mid-1980s to the present day, including their connections to the global Islamist context. But it will also show why Muslim youths, boys and girls, have become attracted to these groups. Undoubtedly there is anger among Muslim youths in Britain. It is hard to find a young Pakistani on the streets of Beeston or Whitechapel who is not angry about UK foreign policy in the Middle East or the assault on Islam across the world. The world is amply populated with angry young Muslims. It is a question of some interest why a small number choose to become suicide bombers. The Prime Minister Tony Blair addresses the matter in starkly philosophical language, consigning it to an eternal contest between good and evil. "This is not a clash between civilisations," he said in a speech to the Foreign Policy Centre in March this year. "It is a clash about civilisation. It is the age-old battle between progress and reaction, between those who embrace and see opportunity in the modern world and those who reject its existence; between optimism and hope on the one hand; and pessimism and fear

on the other.” Yet it is also possible that suicide attacks, however irrational, are the only means by which the weak can humble the strong.

2. Background

The British government has resisted calls for a public inquiry into the events of 7 July 2005, but the plain facts are well known. The four suicide attacks were carried out by four British citizens – Mohammad Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer, Jermaine Lindsay and Hasib Hussain. The first three bombs went off almost simultaneously at 8.50 a.m. on the Underground. The first, in a Circle Line tunnel between Liverpool Street and Aldgate stations, was carried out by Tanweer and killed seven and injured 171. The second, on the Circle Line just outside Edgware Road, was carried out by Khan, and killed six and injured 163. The third, on the Piccadilly Line between King's Cross and Russell Square, was carried out by Lindsay, and killed 26 and injured over 340.

Just under an hour later at 9.47 a.m., Hussain detonated the fourth device on a No. 30 bus in Tavistock Square. It killed 13 and injured over 110. It remains unclear why Hussain did not detonate his bomb at the same time as the others. It may be that he was frustrated by delays on the Underground heading north from King's Cross. However, it now appears that he bought a battery after coming out of the Underground system, which could mean that he had difficulty detonating his device earlier, but that remains speculation.

Khan, Tanweer and Hussain were all second-generation British Pakistanis who grew up in Beeston and the neighbouring district of Holbeck on the outskirts of Leeds. Lindsay was a British citizen of Jamaican origin, who had grown up in Huddersfield and moved to Aylesbury after his

marriage. On the morning of 7 July, he met the other three, who had driven down from Leeds overnight, in the car park of Luton station, from where they all caught a train to King's Cross.

The four men described in the government's report are in some respects unfathomable. When Shehzad Tanweer, a talented athlete who was twenty-two years old, bought snacks at the Woodall services on the M1, four hours before his death, he quibbled with the cashier over his change. Hasib Hussain, who was eighteen, strode into a McDonald's just half an hour before he killed himself and thirteen others. When the four men took leave of one another at King's Cross station, they hugged, and appeared to be the "happy, even euphoric" members of a death cult.

Three of the bombers came from the same unexceptional background. Dreary rather than menacing, more shabby than poor, the neighbourhood of terraced houses and grey concrete nineteen-fifties tenements has changed drastically in the last thirty years. Once a suburb for young British families, Beeston is now inhabited almost entirely by immigrants, mainly people of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin. The men came first, as migrant workers in the late nineteen-sixties, to do jobs that the British no longer wished to do: hard and dirty jobs in industry, or cleaning buildings and streets. Women followed about a decade later, often as brides, usually illiterate, dispatched straight from their villages to strange men in an even stranger land. Most of the workers are now worn out, unemployed, living on welfare. Their wives still inhabit a strange country, whose language and customs they never mastered.

Their children attended secular state schools and received government and family support throughout their short lives.

(Lindsay, who converted to Islam, was more troubled and erratic). The ringleader, Mohammad Sidique Khan, even worked as an administrative assistant for the Benefits Agency and then the Department of Trade and Industry after leaving school. Yet something happened to radicalise him while he was studying business at Leeds Metropolitan University. He joined an Islamic society and perhaps his horizons narrowed when the opposite should have been happening. On graduating, he took a job as a teacher's aide in a primary school, but soon yielded to the lure of enlistment in an imagined *jihadi* militia. Khan was unemployed at the time of the London bombings. In a video statement left for posthumous broadcast, he emphasised with every pronoun he chose that he had abandoned British identity for service in an enemy army: "Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible."

The social lives of Khan, Tanweer and Hussain revolved around the youth clubs and gyms of Beeston. This was partly a sign of the failure of local mosques to address the young Muslims' dilemma of feeling torn between East and West. The preachings of Urdu-speaking mullahs imported from Pakistan are often seen as irrelevant to young people's lives. However, a room below one of the mosques was known as the "al-Qaeda gym" because it was frequented by Islamists who had begun working actively at the grassroots level, not only co-ordinating various educational and religious projects but also providing social and recreational opportunities. Each one of them had a different personality, different interests and different opinions. Some were devout, praying regularly and dressing appropriately. Others were less strict. But, in any case, it is ludicrous to attempt to pigeonhole the thoughts and feelings of such a diverse group of people.

3. Youth of Today

Nearly 40 years ago, in one of the most infamous speeches in all of British political history, the front-bench Conservative Party politician Enoch Powell prophesied the future of immigration from the Commonwealth into Britain. "Like the Roman," he declared, alluding to Virgil's *Aeneid*, "I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood'." Delivered in opposition to the introduction of housing anti-discrimination laws, the speech was rightly criticised at the time as racist fear-mongering. But Powell's comments have loomed over British immigration and assimilation debates ever since.

According to the 2001 census, there are now at least 1.6 million Muslims in Britain. By most estimates, that figure today is probably closer to two million. Half of them are of Pakistani origin, and the other half from a huge diversity of national, sectarian, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Most Muslims in Britain belong to Islam's majority Sunni branch, though accurate figures are not available for the proportion of Sunnis and Shias. Of the Muslims from Pakistan, the overwhelming majority of first-generation of migrants came from rural parts of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (particularly a district called Mirpur, near the capital Islamabad.) Britain's Muslims are predominantly young, with half aged under 25. Their families are also more likely than non-Muslim families to have dependent children. And in some local authorities, up to one-third of children are Muslims. Moreover, their age profile is distinctive: just over 30% of all Muslims are under 15, while 92% are under 50. This suggests that there is a huge population bulge of young Muslims compared with an ageing indigenous population. Any policy needs to take into consideration this particular demographic fact. One social consequence is that most white groups will simply not come into contact with Muslims, especially with the youngsters

making up most of the Muslim population, who are very largely concentrated in older, poorer urban areas.

The task of combining the requirements of faith, culture, family and country is often not an easy one, and there are signs that for some of Britain's younger Muslims, it does not come easily. The arc of the immigrant story has traditionally been that the first generation arrives, settles and has children who integrate into the mainstream. Eventually, the old country retreats to a place of myth and memory. With today's young British Muslims, that arc has twisted into a loop. Thanks to intercontinentally arranged marriages, cheap flights and telephone calls, it is easier than ever to keep in touch with Lahore and Karachi. The long distance adds to the "push-pull" factors of poverty, unemployment and racism in radicalising young British Muslims.

Many things happened as a result of the London bombings in July last year. Some were violent, some merely bizarre. The backlash against mosques and Muslim schools was perhaps to be expected, as were racist messages on Web sites and walls, and even on some of the floral tributes to the victims. Almost as predictable were some of the defensive reactions by young men of Pakistani origin, who cheered as they passed the scene of the bombing in Tavistock Square. "When the twin towers got bombed they started on Iraq," said Zaheer, 18. "Now they will use 7/7 to start on another Muslim country, like Iran."

His conspiracy theory is far from uncommon. I was told by Shahid Qureshi, a London-based correspondent for the *Frontier Post* newspaper, that it was born of anger at the treatment of fellow Muslims elsewhere. "Young people see what is happening to Muslims – 10,000 civilians dead in

Afghanistan and Iraq – and the only way they know how to express their feelings is to shout.”

It was wrong, he concluded, to put too much pressure on minority children. “We used to encourage them to work harder than other children, to go that extra length,” he said. “And many of them did, especially the girls, because education is one way of gaining independence from their fathers. But we put too much pressure on them. Even when they have done everything we asked of them, they will have disappointments. It is often harder for Muslim children to find jobs, for example. And when that happens they can get very angry indeed.”

A social-studies class I visited included Africans, Indians, Turks, Moroccans, an Egyptian, and a few whites. We had a discussion about van Gogh and Hirschi Ali, and the only girl in class who wore a veil spoke more often and more passionately than the others. The girl, who was born in Tower Hamlets to Pakistani parents, didn’t condone the murder but could “understand why Khan, Tanweer and Hussain had sought comfort in Islam.” She said that people had insulted her in the streets after the bombings, spitting at her feet or telling her to take off her veil. “When I hear people talk about ‘those fucking Pakis’, I feel defensive and really want to be Pakistani, but when I visit Pakistan I know I don’t belong there, either.” A Moroccan boy said that it was because of her English accent.

I noticed that some of the Muslim boys, who were described to me later as “quite fundamentalist”, snickered every time the veiled girl spoke, even when she argued, to loud protests from the other girls, that Muslim women were not oppressed. The whites in the class remained silent, as though afraid to enter this treacherous terrain. One of the black students made fun of the Muslims’ preoccupation with “identity” and said, “Pakistani,

Bengali, Moroccan – who the fuck cares? They're all thieves.” The others laughed, even some of the Muslims.

I came away impressed with the pupils' readiness to argue: on the surface, integration, at least at this school, seemed to be working all right. It was also clear how diverse “the Muslims” were. Those born in the UK, like the girl in the veil, seemed the most troubled, uncertain of where they belonged. Leaving the school, I passed a row of shops which told a curious story about Muslim life. While the older Pakistani and Bangladeshi women go around in the *hijab*, the younger generation, often chaperoned by men, are generally wearing the full *jilbab* or *burqa*. Among men, the older generation gossiped on the street corners in their tucked-in shirts and cotton trousers, but the younger ones, with their MP3 players and rudeboy walk, wore the full Arab *thobe* or had folded up the bottoms of their trousers to make sure they didn't touch the ground, in accordance with Wahhabi teaching.

4. British Muslims or Muslims in Britain?

There is no simple answer to the question why so many young Muslims living in the West, and Britain in particular, feel alienated from wider society. But Shiraz Maher, a former member of Hizb ut Tahrir, points to the failure of the mosques to address the problems of Muslim youth in general, and the dilemma of being caught between East and West in particular. In other words, the alienation is twofold. Ignored by white society as a whole, many young Pakistanis lead lives at odds with orthodox Islamic values due to a feeling of estrangement from the mosques. Most of the imams serving in this country have come from the Indian subcontinent with only a *madrasah* education. Few of them can speak English coherently and even fewer appreciate the challenges facing second- and third-generation Muslims growing up in the West.

Established religion is irrelevant to their day-to-day lives in modern Britain, Maher argues:

One anecdotal example of this comes from my time as a student at Leeds University. It was in the days immediately after 9/11 when there was clearly a lot of tension and debate within the Muslim community. Young people needed clear advice and a sense of direction at this critical moment in their relationship with the West. That week, at Leeds University, the imam's Friday sermon was about *wudu* [the Muslim act of ritual washing before prayers]. It was a ludicrous topic to address when the congregation was composed of over 100 university students, a prime audience of thinkers and critical minds who were looking for answers but were instead fed this mind-numbing drivel. It was typical of the way many imams in the UK simply cannot engage with the youth or address their issues in a meaningful way. And the same is true when imams have to deal with all the other problems facing young Muslims today – crime, drugs and unemployment.

Those who reject Islam's orthodoxy are forced into a double life in which they must often hide their behaviour from parents and community. Having rejected the traditional values of Pakistan leaves them more isolated than ever since "Britishness" is only a nominal aspect of their identity. At last

the thinking of the Labour government has begun to move on this front, even if it seems obvious that citizenship, assimilation, religious tolerance – the basic ideals of an open, plural society – should play a prominent part in counterterrorism strategy, as a complement to the funds so eagerly poured into concrete barriers, listening devices, and retina scanners. When the 7/7 bombers were growing up, however, any notion that an idea of Britishness should be imposed on minorities was seen as offensive. Britons themselves were having a hard time believing in Britishness. If you denigrate your own culture you face the risk of your newer arrivals looking for one elsewhere. So far afield in this case, that for many second-generation British Pakistanis, the desert culture of the Arabs held more appeal than either British or sub-continental culture. Some of them took to the extra-national worldview of radical Islam with the zeal of converts, becoming more Arab than the Arabs, in the manner evoked by the Muslim rapper Aki Nawaz, who grew up in Bradford. His album, *All is War (The Benefits of G-had)*, contains one track which uses the words of Bin Laden issuing “a statement of reason and explanation of impending conflict”, and equates him with Che Guevara. Another song describes a suicide bomber at work.

In April 2003, Omar Sharif and Asif Hanif became the first British citizens to carry out a suicide bombing abroad after killing scores of Israelis in a Tel Aviv pizza parlour. Evidence suggests Sharif Omar attended Hizb ut Tahrir meetings during his time as a student at King's College, London and was a contact of Reza Pankhurst, a British Muslim currently serving five years in a Cairo prison for his membership of the extremist organization. Banned in many countries around the world, but operating freely in Britain, Hizb ut Tahrir preaches a dangerous message that removes Muslims from the political mainstream

and breeds a clandestine subculture of anger towards the West.

Hizb ut Tahrir does not carry out acts of violence but the idea that it may serve as a conveyor belt for manufacturing terrorists was first suggested by Zeyno Baran, director of international security and energy at the Nixon Center in Washington. Her hypothesis was developed in the UK by the journalist Shiv Malik who has investigated the links between non-violent Islamist groups and the worldwide *jihad* movement. So, for example, British citizen Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh was arrested, in 2002, in connection with the murder of Daniel Pearl, the journalist, in Pakistan. Radicalised while attending the London School of Economics, he had hoped to fight in Bosnia in the 1990s but ended up instead joining a Kashmiri militant group. He was charged with organising Pearl's kidnapping, though it was allegedly al-Qaeda's operational chief, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, who killed the American journalist. British-born Saajid Badat was another worshiper at Abu Hamza's Finsbury Park mosque who went through the Afghan camps. A would-be shoe bomber, he meant to blow himself up at the same time as Reid but apparently changed his mind and dismantled the bomb. Badat, who reportedly got his orders from Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, too, was convicted last year but, as the US Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff observed recently, it is "very, very hard to detect" a *jihadi* terrorist who is "purely domestic, self-motivated, self-initiating."

5. Lies, Damned Lies and Suicide Attacks

The vast majority of British Muslims condemned the London bombings but a substantial minority were clearly alienated from modern British society and some were even prepared to justify terrorist acts. The divisions within the Muslim community go deep, and many young Pakistanis are divided over the extent of their loyalty to this country and over how Muslims should respond to recent events. To gauge the scale of the problem, the Foreign Policy Centre conducted a survey among Muslim students at Kingston University London. Nearly half of all young people from Pakistani households aged 18 to 30 are in higher education. But this is not an unmixed picture: a majority of Muslims in further education attend the former polytechnics, like Kingston, or colleges of higher education, rather than the older universities, and drop-out rates are high. Half of eligible Muslim young people are therefore not at university, and underachievement at primary and secondary levels is also worrying.

The results are predictably depressing: more than half the 325 young people interviewed said that they knew someone who had suffered discrimination. As the figures in the appendix show, 88% of these young Muslims clearly have no intention of trying to justify suicide attacks. However, six per cent insist that the 7/7 bombings were, on the contrary, fully justified. (Six per cent may seem a small proportion but in absolute numbers it amounts to about 100,000 individuals who, if not prepared to carry out terrorist acts, are ready to support those who do.) Moreover, 24% of interviewees, while not condoning the London attacks, expressed some sympathy with the feelings and motives of those who carried them out. A substantial majority, 56%, say that, whether or not they sympathised with the bombers, they can at least understand why some people

might want to behave in this way.

The responses indicate that Muslim men are more likely than Muslim women to be alienated from the mainstream. However, there are few signs in the FPC's findings that Muslims of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin are any more disaffected than their co-religionists from elsewhere. Nevertheless the sheer scale of Muslim alienation from British society that our survey reveals is remarkable. It appears that, although a large majority of British Muslims are more than content to make their home in this country, a significant minority are not. For example, the FPC asked respondents how loyal they feel towards Britain. As the figures in the appendix show, the great majority say they feel "very loyal" (46%) or "fairly loyal" (33%) but nearly one British Muslim in five, 18%, feels little loyalty towards this country or none at all. If these findings are accurate, and they probably are, well over 100,000 British Muslims feel no loyalty whatsoever towards this country.

We asked the students how they feel about Western society and how, if at all, they feel Muslims should adapt to it. A majority, 56%, said they believed Western society may not be perfect but Muslims should live with it and not seek to bring it to an end. However, nearly a third of British Muslims, 32%, are far more censorious, believing that Western society is decadent and immoral and that Muslims should seek to bring it to an end. Among those who hold this view, almost all go on to say that Muslims should only seek to bring about change by non-violent means but one per cent, about 16,000 individuals, declare themselves willing, possibly even eager, to embrace violence.

6. Conclusion

In the wake of the 7 July attacks, the Preventing Extremism Together group came up with a list of 60 recommendations, including a scheme to establish a new national advisory body for imams and mosques, and a new organization that would advise on setting syllabuses used to teach children in after-school classes. In recent weeks, however, some Muslim leaders have expressed dismay at the government's failure to implement any of the recommendations, with the exception of a roadshow of influential Islamic writers and thinkers who travel the UK giving talks at youth clubs and colleges.

With so many young people, Britain's Muslims are poised to play a large role in Britain's multicultural future. Thus it was disconcerting to hear the Prime Minister Tony Blair admit recently that he didn't know what he meant when he used the term "multiculturalism" – not least because Labour's election victory, in 1997, was a pivotal moment in the history of Muslims in Britain. The arrival of a Labour government saw the first Muslims elected to the House of Commons and to the appointment of more Muslims to the House of Lords. It also led to state funds for private Muslim schools (of which there are five) and a question on religion in the 2001 census, which in turn raises awkward questions of democracy and culture. What grates is the idea that individuals should be ushered like sheep into pens according to their religious faith, a mode of classification that too often trumps all others and ignores the fact that people are always complex, multi-faceted individuals who choose their identities from a wide range of economic, cultural and ideological alternatives. Being defined by one group identity over all others, overlooking whether you're working class or capitalist, left or right, what your language

group is and your literary tastes are, all that interferes with people's freedom to make their own choices.

The argument goes back to the Rushdie affair which led to the formation of the Muslim Council of Britain, since what begins as an opportunity for people to express themselves may ultimately force other (or the same) people into an identity chosen by the authorities. That is what is happening now, in Blair's Britain, and the Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen has called it "a real tyranny". At first glance it doesn't look like tyranny – it looks like giving freedom and tolerance – but it can end up being a denial of individual freedom since the individual belongs to many different groups and it is up to him or her to decide which of those groups he or she would like to give priority. The move towards faith schools and census questions magnifies the power and authority of religious leaders at the expense of a healthy democratic debate. Suddenly the Jewish, Hindu and Muslim organisations are in charge of all Jews, Hindus and Muslims. Whether you are an extremist mullah or a moderate mullah, whether you are Blair's friend or Blair's enemy, you might relish the idea of being able to speak for all people with a Muslim background – no matter how religious they are – but this may be in direct competition with the role of Muslims in British civil society.

When it comes to a deeply political problem such as terrorism, for the authorities to advise "action within the community" is a great mistake. In the aftermath of the 7 July bombings, for example, Britain's political class appealed to "the Muslim community" to get its act together. This was just an attempt to bring even more religion into politics. To classify Bangladeshis, for example, only as Muslims and overlook their Bangladeshi identity is seriously misleading.

By the same token, the government's policy of promoting faith schools is a mistake. To put people in a faith school is to pre-classify people into categories at a time when they can't even think for themselves. They are told that they have a very clear identity, which swamps all other identities. They are Muslims or Sikhs or Hindus and that is all you are going to get. Now of course, later on, they might be able to overcome that narrowness, but it is much harder to overcome if it has been drilled into you that that is what you are. It is not a question of hostility to religion, but a question of context.

It is one thing to disagree on British foreign policy or even to support Pakistan in a cricket match, quite another to feel complete indifference or contempt. A decade and a half ago, when Norman Tebbit proposed his infamous cricket test, it was seen as an attack on multiculturalism. From today's perspective, it seems not only uncontroversial but rather benign.

The demand for multiculturalism is strong in the contemporary world. It is much invoked in the making of social, cultural, and political policies, particularly in Western Europe and America. This is not at all surprising, since increased global contacts and interactions, and in particular extensive migrations, have placed diverse practices of different cultures next to one another. The general acceptance of the exhortation to "Love thy neighbour" might have emerged when the neighbours led more or less the same kind of life, but the same entreaty to love one's neighbours now requires people to take an interest in the very diverse living modes of proximate people. That this is not an easy task has been vividly illustrated once again by the confusion surrounding the recent Danish cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed and the fury they generated. And yet the globalised nature of the contemporary world does not afford us

the luxury of ignoring the difficult questions that multiculturalism raises.

In other words, multiculturalism is a social fact – which means that, strictly speaking, it's impossible to be against multiculturalism, just as it's impossible to return to a monoculture in many immigrant societies. The only question is how we deal with it. Supporting “faith schools” pre-dates the London bombings of 2005 as part of the Blair government's communitarian agenda. Yet it implies the same de facto communal separation as the 7/7 attacks. In contrast to multiculturalism, having two styles or traditions of education co-existing side by side, without the twain meeting must really be seen as a kind plural monoculturalism. Our primary concern should lie with the freedom of choice for individuals to live as they wish, and this is perversely threatened by the conservatism embedded within the new monoculturalism. The people of Britain cannot be seen merely in terms of their religious affiliations – as a national federation of religions. For much the same reasons, a multi-ethnic Britain can hardly be seen as a collection of ethnic communities. Yet the “federalational” view has won support in contemporary Britain. Indeed, despite the tyrannical implications of putting persons into rigid boxes of given “communities”, that view is frequently interpreted, rather bafflingly, as an ally of individual freedom. There is even a much-vaunted “vision” of “the future of multi-ethnic Britain” that sees it as “a looser federation of cultures” held together by common bonds of interest and affection and a collective sense of being.

Nevertheless a person's relation to Britain cannot be mediated through the culture of the family in which he or she was born. A person may decide to seek closeness with more than one of these pre-defined cultures or, just as plausibly, with none.

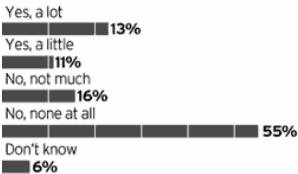
Also, a person may well decide that her ethnic or cultural identity is less important to her than, say, her political convictions, or her professional commitments, or her literary tastes. It is a choice for her to make. Indeed there would be a serious problem with multiculturalism if it were taken to insist that a person's identity must be defined in terms of background, or by something over which he or she has no choice. Yet that approach to multiculturalism has assumed a pre-eminent role in the twelve months since the bombings of 7 July 2005. It must be challenged for the sake of Muslims as well as Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews because it poses a threat to everybody. Perhaps Tony Blair knows more about multiculturalism than he realizes. Speaking a few days after the 7 July attacks, the Prime Minister declared: "In the end, it is by the power of argument, debate, true religious faith and true legitimate politics that we will defeat this threat."

Appendix

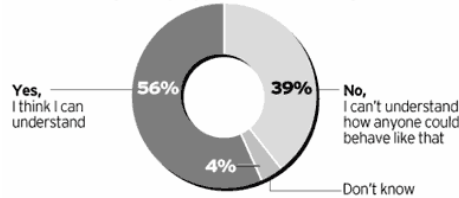
Do you think the bombing attacks in London on July 7 were justified or not?



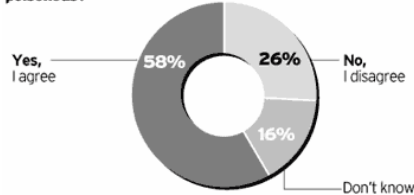
Whether or not you think the attacks were justified, do you personally have any sympathy with the feelings and motives of those who carried out the attacks?



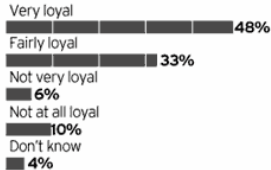
Whether or not you have any sympathy with the feelings of those who carried out the attacks, do you think you understand why some people behave in that way?



The Prime Minister has described as 'perverted and poisonous' the ideas that led the London suicide bombers to carry out their attacks. Do you agree or disagree with him that their ideas must have been perverted and poisonous?



How loyal would you say you personally feel towards Britain?



Which of these views comes closest to your own?

Western society is decadent and immoral, and Muslims should seek to bring it to an end, if necessary by violence
1%

Western society is decadent and immoral, and Muslims should seek to bring it to an end, but only by non-violent means
31%

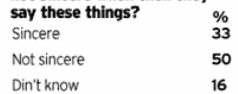
Western society may not be perfect, but Muslims should live with it and not seek to bring it to an end
56%

Don't know
11%

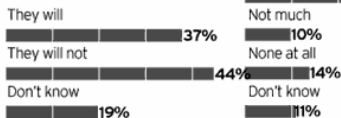
Do you agree or disagree with this statement? 'British political leaders don't mean it when they talk about equality. They regard the lives of white British people as more valuable than the lives of British Muslims.'



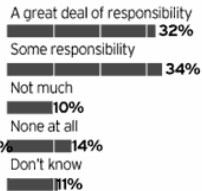
The leaders of Britain's main political parties have said that they respect Islam and want to co-operate with Britain's Muslim communities. In general, do you think Britain's political leaders are sincere or not sincere when they say these things?



If anyone is charged and put on trial in Britain in connection with the bombings on July 7, do you think they will or will not receive a fair trial?



How much responsibility do you think Muslims should now take on for preventing such crimes and bringing to justice those who commit them?



About the Foreign Policy Centre

The Foreign Policy Centre is a leading European think tank launched under the patronage of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair to develop a vision of a fair and rule-based world order. We develop and disseminate innovative policy ideas which promote:

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About the Pears Foundation UK

The Pears Foundation UK is a British based strategic grant making trust. The Foundation has invested over £20 million within the non-profit sector in the last five years.

The Pears Foundation seeks to foster strong British citizenship and identity among ethnic groups. This includes support for Jewish-Muslim theatre, the Rich Mix Community Centre, Eastside Young Leaders Academy, Kid's Company, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and work tackling youth homelessness.

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