# PERCEPTIONS ON ISLAM & MUSLIMS

A STUDY OF THE UK POPULATION

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*"Who is better in speech than one who calls to God, works righteousness and says 'I am one of those who submit'?"*
Qur'an 41:33

This Qur'anic verse sets the scene. It establishes the theological foundations for inviting people to Islam, also known as dawah in Arabic, and it presents an aspiration for those who want to achieve the summit of human character. The notion of dawah has gained much widespread appeal in current Islamic activism and community work, especially over the past decade, however, variations exist with the understanding of the concept.

Our definition of dawah focuses on one of its specific meanings which involves inviting those who are not Muslim to adopt the philosophical foundations of the Islamic world view. Dawah is an essential part of Islam, its importance is emphasised by the nature of its obligation, as the Qur'an says *"Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, they are the ones to attain felicity."* Qur'an 3:104

We believe that one way to fulfil our responsibility is by imparting good quality information to the wider society in a way they understand, which we appreciate must be couched in the right language. Only then are we giving people the opportunity to make an informed free choice as how to use that information, and until that point liberty to make profound choices about particular world views will not exist, particularly if all that was known before had negative spin, psychological barriers and bad experiences. Therefore, unless something changes, the current state of affairs will remain as a form of intellectual oppression as it keeps the door to enquiry slammed firmly shut.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research was conducted upon the understanding that our obligation of dawah was not being adequately fulfilled through both a lack of emphasis in its obligatory nature and also in how effective current practice is. As such, the goal of the research is to make dawah more effective.

## SOCIAL & ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Islam is probably one of the most misunderstood religions. Every person has a rich heritage and individuality that require acknowledgement and understanding in order to form meaningful relationships, and for many Muslims their religious heritage is interwoven into everyday life and forms part of who they are. A failure to understand and reflect this leads to marginalisation and conflict, sowing the seeds for a polarised society, and Britain is no different.

As Muslims we often feel inhibited from talking about Islam, despite it being such a core part of our being, perhaps out of fear of rejection or a self imposed inferiority complex - there are two points to consider.

• Firstly, Islamic references tell us that on the Day of Judgement – a day so large in magnitude that pregnant mothers will drop their loads, we will be interrogated by non-Muslims as to why we did not inform them of this reality. What will we say to our Creator when knowing that Islam had such great capacity to alleviate human suffering, including depression, debt and poverty that we said nothing? Are we more conscious of our responsibility to God or to people?

• Secondly, if we have a role to play, in creating positive change and protecting the disadvantaged in society from those who wish to exploit them for their own gain, then let us see what Islam has to say in truth. And if people cannot see the beauty in the perspectives that it offers then let us all co-exist peacefully with greater insight and respect for each other's views.

Finally, for those who enjoy facts and figures this paper provides the long-awaited data and analysis that takes the temperature of British society concerning Non-Muslim perceptions of Islam and Muslims. These data are the worrying starting line – we put it to you, the reader, what steps will you personally take to positively change this negative cloud hovering over the collective conscious of our society?

# A NOTE ON THE RECENT
## YOUGOV RESEARCH

In May 2010 YouGov published research commissioned by the Exploring Islam Foundation to survey public perceptions of Islam, Muslims and the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him). The results of their research differ from our results in various ways. We believe that these differences are due to the methodologies adopted by the respective organisations. For instance the YouGov research was based upon a random sample of individuals who had already agreed to take part in surveys. This skewed the results of the YouGov research as literature on research methodologies has shown that responses to questions would not be representative of the entire population in this context. In contrast, our methodology sought to engage with the population of Britain by attempting to justify the need for the questionnaire thereby having access to people that would not necessarily have a pre-agreement to take part in surveys.

Other methodological flaws with the YouGov research included representativeness of the sample, and the quality of data collected. The YouGov response rate - the number of completed questionnaires returned compared with the number sent - was relatively low. This means that the sample of participants that had already agreed to take part in surveys became unrepresentative by creating the problem of a self-selected sample.

The face-to-face questionnaire method we adopted has tried and tested ways of maximising participation, completion and quality of data, for example trust and rapport with the interviewer being particularly important. The online questionnaire presents challenges in this regard as there are no ways of establishing trust and rapport with the potential participants who would not normally complete the questionnaire or who may not provide accurate answers, and would therefore produce results not representative of the population.

Finally the YouGov research did not ask open-ended questions. Our research included the participant's comments on various issues to provide and present a nuanced discussion. Additionally our research did not just focus on perceptions of Islam and Muslims but also on Islamic dawah, subsequently informing us of its effectiveness and reach. To our knowledge this is something that has never been done before in the Western world.

# SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

## INTRODUCTION

The publication begins by examining the historical and contemporary relationship between Islam and the West. Quoting from Edward Said and Elizabeth Poole the origins of the East-West interplay are explored, before providing evidence from the work of Foucault and Van Dijk of the strength of the media to ensure power to be exercised over those who are known through discourse so that it becomes a "regime of truth".

Using the verse of the Qur'an below to provide evidence, discussion then moves to the need for Muslims to research and educate others on the reality of Islam, rather than its pseudo image resonating in the collective conscious of British society,

"*Who is better in speech than one who calls to Allah, works righteousness and says: 'I am of those who bow in Islam'*"? Qur'an 41:33

## METHODOLOGY

The report outlines the methodology used to capture information on Non-Muslim perceptions:

• A statistically robust sample of 500 randomly selected Non-Muslims representative of British society interviewed

• Complete face-to-face street questionnaires by contracted non-Muslims to non-Muslims to encourage open, honest answers

• Open-ended and closed questions with space for comments

• Selection bias reduced by highlighting the importance of the study

• Demographic data collected and cross tabulated with responses

# SUMMARY OF THE REPORT
# HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS

The summary of the results below are based upon the analysis of the raw data. They do not represent the numerical findings. Please refer to the 'Quantitative and Qualitative Results Findings' section to understand this section. The raw data can be found under the 'Quantitative Results' and 'Qualitative Results' sections.
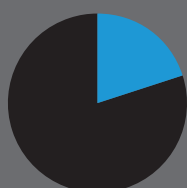
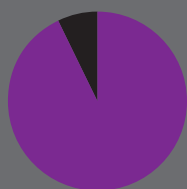**80%** have less than very little knowledge about Islam

**51%** learnt Islam from school

**95%** had come into contact with the Bible

**20%** had come into contact with the Qur'an

**93%** had very little knowledge or no knowledge at all about the Qur'an

**40%** did not know who Allah is

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

# SUMMARY OF THE REPORT
# HIGHLIGHTS OF RESULTS

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5% described Islamic dawah material as quite positive and very positive.

71% had never did not come into contact with any dawah material.

70% did not change their perceptions about Islam after coming into contact with dawah material. 14% slightly worsened or significantly worsened.

76% had never spoken to a Muslim about Islam.

63% had no change in their perception after interacting with a Muslim. 13% had perceptions that significantly worsened or slightly worsened.

62% preferred not to receive any information about religion.

27% had negative perceptions regarding Muslims

75% believed Islam and Muslims had provided a negative contribution to society

32% believed that Muslims are a major cause of community tension

2% responded positively concerning perceptions about Islamic law

76% did not agree to the statement that Muslims positively engage in society

36% did not know who the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was

61% did not respond positively when asked about the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)

71% of all participants did not agree that the media is negatively biased towards Islam and Muslims

63% did not disagree to the statement that "Muslims are terrorists"

70% did not disagree with the statement "Muslims preach hatred"

94% did not disagree with the statement "Islam oppresses women"

86% did not disagree with the statement "Islam is outdated"

72% did not agree with the statement "Muslims are law abiding"

85% did not disagree with the statement "Islam is irrational"

71% did not agree with the statement "Muslims are peaceful"

73% did not disagree with the statement "Islam cannot positively contribute to modern society"

# QUALITATIVE DATA
## SELECTED QUOTATIONS

When asked about their perception of the Prophet Muhammad(pbuh):

*"I don't like the idea of chopping off people's hands and feet sometimes without making sure they are innocent. It's not a fair way."*

*"Don't know, don't care. We don't choose religion when we were born and where we were born."*

When asked what about material on Islam had given a negative impression:

*"Some I find negative, some I'm neutral don't let it affect me I find some doctrine to be negative and customs concerning women."*

*"Because they twist what they preach, not according to the Qur'an."*

When asked what contribution Islam and Muslims had had on British society:

*"They have took our country over it's not England any more we have to make changes to please them."*

*"If I had my way I'd kick them all out of here and it's not something I want to talk about."*

# CONCLUSIONS

The general population has displayed a negative perception concerning religion, Islam and Muslims. The dawah has had limited reach and it has not improved perceptions about Islam. There has also been a consistent trend of apparent neutrality; we believe this indicates apathy and indifference coupled with genuine ignorance about religion and specifically Islam. To put it into further context we believe that this perception lies on the negative end of the spectrum as options to provide positive answers were available in the questionnaire and other key questions, including the qualitative results, had negative responses.

Overall participants did seem to voice a range of opinions, mostly on the negative end of the spectrum, on subjects ranging from the role of women through to Muslim contribution, which presumably relates to information they had gained from sources other than Muslims and Islamic literature. This highlights a worrying trend about information in this modern age – that it is now largely imparted by Chinese Whispers or current narratives formed by those who have the power to shape discourse, rather than an educated interest in the literature or scholarly authority.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the results we have highlighted a number of recommendations under the following headings (for more details see the relevant section):

- Disseminate the results and implement our recommendations

- Resource and finance existing dawah organisations

- Disseminate information about the Prophet Muhammad

- Develop a dawah strategy with student organisations

- Attend dawah training courses

- Create a new language by removing overtly religious connotations and build concepts

- Promote religion and show Islam's uniqueness

- Plan for positive community engagement

- Show the good nature of the Muslim community

- Develop engaging Islamic education at school

- Review existing dawah activities

- Use all formats and mediums

- Show similarities and differences to the Bible

- Expand upon the research and repeat the study

- Promote Islamic civilisation and Islam's solutions to modern problems

- Promote Muslim women as agents of positive change

- Remove psychological and mental barriers that prevent Islam from being understood

- Invite people to adopt the Islamic world view

# WHY THIS RESEARCH?

WESTERN PERCEPTIONS

There is an alleged crisis of cohesion in the UK. This crisis has manifested itself in debates on multiculturalism, religion, Britishness and immigration. Although this is not the primary area of our research, it highlights an interesting backdrop to what we intend to investigate. Many commentators have attributed some "causal" link between Islam, Muslims and this contemporary problem of "broken Britain", so how do we unravel this perceived link?
We understand that most social problems require a multi-causal approach; however the West's interaction with Islam and Muslims is an essential area that needs to be brought to light in order to appreciate the background to this research.

The significance and backdrop to how the West views Islam and Muslims has been considered in a number of ways by respective authors. The oft-quoted Edward Said in *Covering Islam* attributes the relationship between the West and Islam to being deeply rooted in an extensive history, spanning centuries, dominated by what he calls "Orientalist" thought. He describes a "radically simplified type of thinking", "an imaginative and yet drastically polarised geography dividing the world into two unequal parts...the 'different' one called the Orient, the other, also known as 'our' world, called the Occident or the West". He describes Islam as being perceived as a monolithic thing that evokes hostility and fear and, as a Christian himself, suggests this may represent a view of it as a formidable competitor and late-coming challenge to Christianity. He goes on to suggest that Islam was criticised as early as the Middle Ages and that this has been illustrated in how the West personifies the religion and all that is associated with it to this day.

# WHY THIS RESEARCH?

In *Reporting Islam,* a more contemporary piece, Elizabeth Poole picks up on this "them and us" polarity of Said's, putting it in the context of "shifts in the global power equation, due to the collapse of communism" which she argues led to "anxieties and attempts by the West to maintain its hegemony". She suggests that 'Political Islam' arising out of colonialism and oppression has allowed the West to set up Islam as its new enemy. She expands on Said's historical perception that the relationship set up in the media harks back to the days of the Crusades and the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, right the way through to the establishment of a New World Order.

She also refers to the Runnymede Trust report, *Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia*, the report found that Muslim cultures were perceived as being unchanging and monolithic, barbaric and primitive and threatening (amongst other adjectives). The report, she describes, also advocated that Islamophobia is assumed to be unproblematic. Poole later goes on to present an argument put forward by other academics and researchers, that the press also problematises other minority groups, such as the Afro-Caribbeans and questions whether discourses previously applying to such other groups have shifted to an "acceptable enemy: Muslims?"

In subsequent chapters, Poole presents the idea of "discourse analysis", based upon the French theorist Foucault, whereby "power is exercised over those who are known through discourse...those who produce discourse therefore have the power to enforce its validity so that it effectively becomes a 'regime of truth'". She references van Dijk who propounded that the media contribute to "discourse environments", and have the authority to reproduce moral norms, theoretical explanations and techniques of social control. Hence certain interpretations are said to be reinforced over others and the media has set the tone regarding perceptions of Islam and Muslims.

In more recent years, within a post 9/11 context, the spotlight on Islam and Muslims has intensified. In *Islamophobia – Making the Muslims the Enemy* Peter Gottschalk and Gabriel Greenberg ask "If you are sceptical about the notion of 'Islamophobia', get a piece of paper and brainstorm. Write down, with as little thought and as much honesty as possible, all the words that come to mind when you think of the words 'Islam' or 'Muslim'. What names, places, events, ideas, practices, and objects do you associate with these terms?" Written with the assumption that a fear and hatred for Islam and Muslims has increased, this book highlights the long-simmering resentments, suspicions and fears that have manifested themselves via casual demonizing and demeaning of Islam and Muslims – a phenomenon common on all shades on the political spectrum.

# THEOLOGICAL BACKDROP

Regardless of political, historical and practical realities, as Muslims we have a timeless obligation to educate and present the message of Islam to the wider society. This obligation being deeply rooted in our source texts, namely the Qur'an and the prophetic teachings – also known as the Sunnah, highlights the importance and necessity of inviting people to Islam.

The Arabic word dawah, commonly used by Muslims for educating and presenting the message of Islam, literally means invitation. This invitation includes inviting those who are not Muslim to understand and embrace the world view of the Islamic tradition. All Muslims have a duty to invite others to the religion of Islam according to their individual capacity and circumstance. Inviting people to Islam is in fact one of the greatest tasks of all and those who follow that path are following in the footsteps of the most enlightened and those who are singled out by God himself, the Qur'an states,

*"Who is better in speech than one who calls to Allah, works righteousness and says: 'I am of those who bow in Islam'"?* 41:33

The significance of dawah has also been realised by many religious and non-religious traditions. One tradition of particular concern, from an Islamic dawah point of view, is the Christian tradition. Christianity has always seen itself as a religion that seeks to promote its world view and actively persuade people of its teachings. For example one Christian organisation, Campus Crusade for Christ International, raised $677 million in 2008 for their activities. They had at that point 25,000 full-time missionaries, had trained 225,000 volunteers and operated in 191 countries. We would argue that this organisation is symbolic of the success of Christian missionary work in the past 50 years. We believe that it is time to re-vive the dawah in the West in order to successfully challenge the competing world views that attempt to occupy the space of influence and intellectual leadership concerning religious and ideological world view. We hope this research is a step forward in that direction.

A common question raised with regards to research is that since the Islamic source texts propound on the obligation and method to educate and invite the wider society to Islam, is there a need for research? We believe that if the historical and social context of the Prophet's (peace and blessing be upon him) life and his message is analysed, the need for research will become apparent. The socio-historical context at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) is unlike the context that the current Muslim community now faces. During that time the culture and language was relatively homogenous, the educators and propagators of Islam during that period knew the culture, linguistic environment and the social consciousness apparent in Arabia, so we can argue that they knew how to deliver the message of Islam to the wider society. In contrast to this our current context is a society that can be best described as heterogeneous, so different communities have linguistic, cultural and intellectual barriers. Therefore this research is needed to break these barriers – by understanding non-Muslim perceptions and views - thereby emulating the manner and context of the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) which will facilitate the success of inviting people to Islam.

In summary, a number of interconnected perspectives on how the West views Islam and Muslims have been examined by various authors, all of which assume an underlying tension. In addition to this, our religious obligation to convey the message of Islam to the wider society coupled with an understanding of the necessity of research - in order to be successful in our fulfillment of this obligation - makes it necessary that we should investigate non-Muslim perceptions concerning Islam and Muslims in contemporary Britain. This will assess the role of the Muslim community and what it needs to do to educate the wider society about itself and its way of life - Islam.

The paper seeks to use the results of the research to inform organisations involved in Islamic dawah. This research paper will present the results of the non-Muslim perceptions questionnaire, provide insights and implications of the findings and provide recommendations for the Muslim community and organisations involved in presenting Islam to the wider society.

# METHODOLOGY

To capture the perceptions of non-Muslims the research method we used was face-to-face street questionnaires. According to G. Bishop, A. Tuchfraber and R. Oldendick, questionnaires are easy to analyse and people tend to feel more comfortable using them as people are more likely to have had experience with them. M. Jahoda, M. Deutsch and S. Cook state that written questionnaires also reduce interviewer bias because there is uniform question presentation.

However, the lack of an interviewer limits the researcher's ability to probe responses, this is why we decided to have face-to-face structured questionnaires where the interviewer would probe. According to David Walonick, structured questionnaires often lose the "flavour of the response" because respondents want to provide justification and context to their answers. In this light we decided to include open ended questions so we could overcome this disadvantage by recording the verbatim.

The questionnaire we developed was designed to gauge individual's perceptions about Islam and Muslims. The questionnaire began with a few non-threatening and easy to answer questions as research by S. Levine and G. Gordon suggested that if the first items are too difficult or threatening, there is little chance that the participant will complete the questionnaire. One of the key research criticisms we encountered during our preliminary investigation into the right method of research included that participants who respond to questionnaires answer questions differently than those who do not, this was reported in the study *A Study Of Interview refusals* by S. Benson, W. Booman and K. Clark. To minimise the effect of this potential problem we instructed the interviewer to provide an engaging and compelling case for the need for this research, for instance the interviewers stated that the research was important for community cohesion. This way it attracted people who wouldn't normally complete the questionnaire.

Since we felt that this research should be as nuanced as possible we decided that in the relevant questions we should provide a middle alternative such as "neither agree nor disagree". According to G. Bishop in his *Experiments with the middle response alternative in survey questions,* he states that "offering respondents a middle alternative in a survey question will generally make a significant difference in the conclusions that would be drawn." Providing a middle option attracts a substantial number of participants who may be unsure of their answer and in doing so would provide a more nuanced result. This was a useful strategy as the results have shown some interesting trends concerning the middle option.

# THE QUESTIONNAIRE PROCESS

The questionnaire was completed by a random sample of 500 English-speaking people living in Britain; this ensured that the gathered information was of the highest, most statistically robust standard. The research was conducted in November 2009 by DJS Research.

We decided to use DJS Research after completing a thorough procurement process, and additionally we felt that using an external team rather than an internal team would ensure more accurate results. In other words, having Muslims coming from an Islamic organisation to carry out the face-to-face questionnaires would severely affect the responses as many Muslims are visibly religious and this would obviously affect the participant's answers. We asked the research company to ensure that the interviewers were not Muslim to ensure that the responses we received were as true as possible. Uncompleted questionnaires were not accepted in to the final analysis.

**1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION:** This provided a general breakdown of the demographic data of the participants.

**2. KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RELIGION:** This section aimed to understand how much knowledge about religion and Islam the respondents had.

**3. DISSEMINATION OF IDEAS:** These questions were designed to probe respondents about how they received religious and Islamic information in the past and how they would prefer to receive information in the future.

**4. PERCEPTIONS:** This section was designed to provide a summary of the current perceptions individuals hold about Islam and Muslims.

The questionnaire utilised both closed and open-ended questions. Where the participants were asked to rank their different perceptions of Islam and Muslims, they were given a five point scale from which to choose their response. Where open ended questions were utilised, comments were written down verbatim, thereby providing data for qualitative analysis.

Each question was broken down and cross tabulated with the demographic data, including:

• Gender • Age • Geographical region
• Religion • Household income

In this research paper a summary of the results will be provided for each question. For those questions that were qualitative in nature a summary of the findings will be presented with accompanying selected quotations. Conclusions will be outlined in the discussion on the results findings.

## QUANTITATIVE RESULTS: GRAPHS & TABLES

### DEMOGRAPHICS – AGE

| Age | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 16 - 20 | 10% |
| 21 - 24 | 9% |
| 25 -34 | 15% |
| 35 - 44 | 15% |
| 45 - 54 | 23% |
| 55 - 64 | 13% |
| 65 + | 13% |
| NS | 1% |



### GENDER

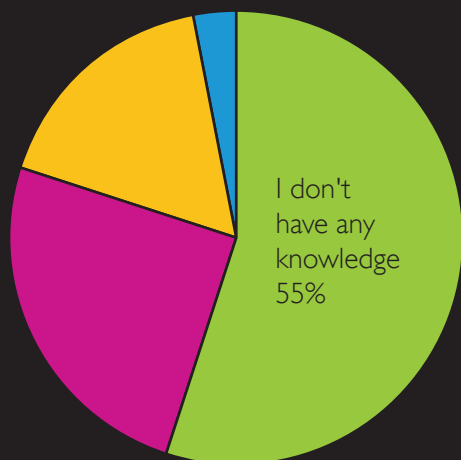| Male | Female |
|---|---|
| 50% | 50% |

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

# HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ISLAM?

I don't have any knowledge 55%
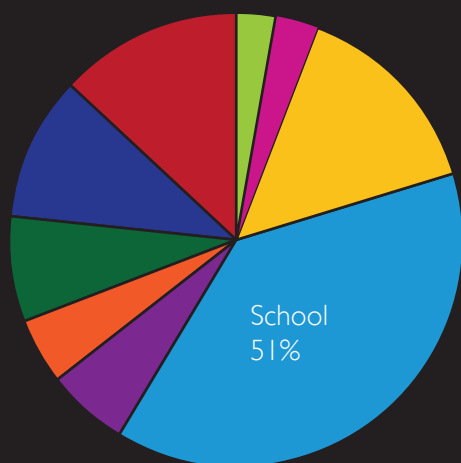
| How much do you know about Islam? | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| I don't have any knowledge | 55% |
| I have very little knowledge | 25% |
| I have basic knowledge | 17% |
| I am knowledgeable | 3% |
| I am an expert | 0% |
| NS | 0% |

# HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TAUGHT OR ACTIVELY SOUGHT INFORMATION ON THE ISLAMIC FAITH?
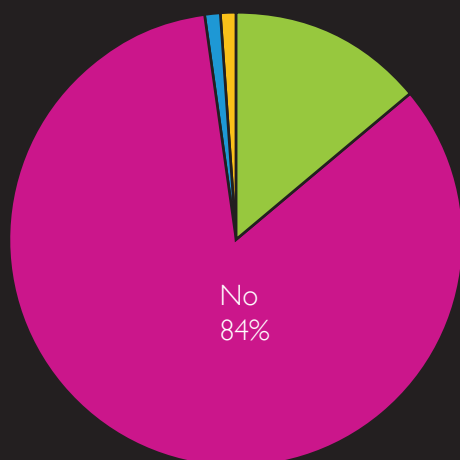
No 84%

| Have you ever been taught or actively sought information on the Islamic Faith? | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| Yes | 14% |
| No | 84% |
| Don't know | 1% |
| Declined to answer | 1% |
| NS | 0% |

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

# WHERE DID YOU LEARN ABOUT ISLAM?



| Where did you learn about Islam? | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Family | 4% |
| Place of Worship | 4% |
| Friends/Neighbours | 19% |
| School | 51% |
| College | 8% |
| University | 6% |
| Workplace | 10% |
| Media | 14% |
| Other | 17% |

This was a multiple response question. Percentages are reflective of the total sample.

# WHICH HOLY TEXTS HAVE YOU COME INTO CONTACT WITH?
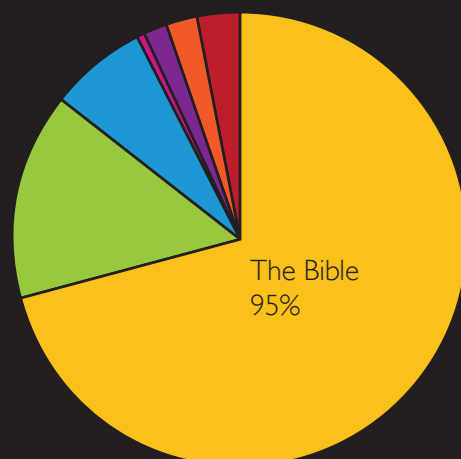


| Which holy texts have you come into contact with? | Percentage |
|---|---|
| The Bible | 95% |
| The Qur'an | 20% |
| The Torah | 9% |
| The Tripitaka | 1% |
| The Vedas | 2% |
| The Guru Granth Sahib | 3% |
| Other | 0% |
| Decline | 4% |

This was a multiple response question. Percentages are reflective of the total sample.
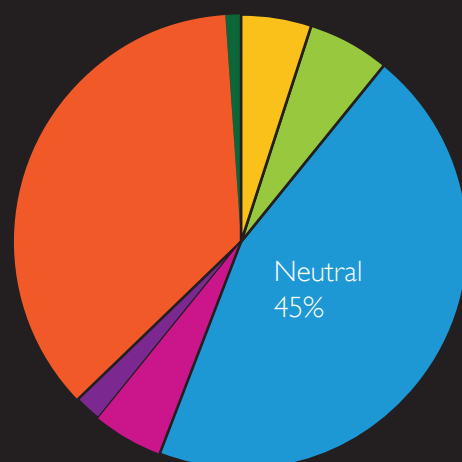
Numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

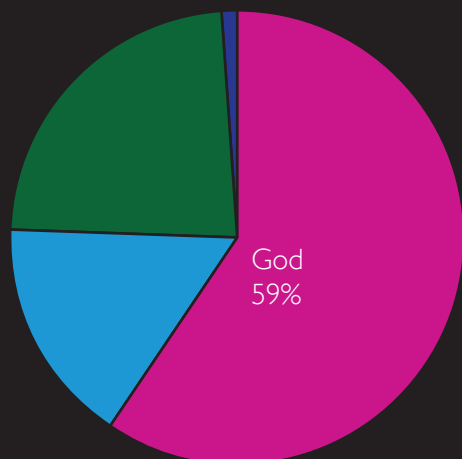# HOW WOULD YOU RATE YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF THE QUR'AN?
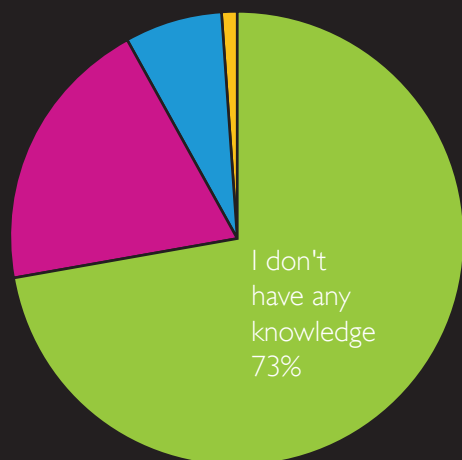
| How would you rate your knowledge of the Qur'an? | Percentage |
|---|---|
| I don't have any knowledge | 73% |
| I have very little knowledge | 20% |
| I have basic knowledge | 7% |
| I am knowledgeable | 1% |
| I am an expert | 0% |
| NS | 0% |

# WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS WOULD BEST DESCRIBE YOUR PERCEPTION ABOUT THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD?

| Which of the following statements would best describe your perception about the Prophet Muhammad? | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Very Negative | 5% |
| Quite Negative | 6% |
| Neutral | 45% |
| Quite Positive | 5% |
| Very Positive | 2% |
| Don't know | 36% |
| NS | 1% |

Numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

# FROM THE FOLLOWING LIST CAN YOU IDENTIFY WHO OR WHAT ALLAH IS?



| From the following list can you identify who or what Allah is? | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| A Planet | 0% |
| God | 59% |
| A Prophet of Islam | 16% |
| An Angel | 0% |
| An Idol | 0% |
| A month in the Islamic Calendar | 0% |
| Don't Know | 23% |
| Other | 1% |

# HOW WOULD YOU BEST DESCRIBE THE MATERIAL (WRITTEN AND VISUAL) THAT YOU HAVE COME INTO CONTACT WITH THAT AIMS TO EXPLAIN AND INTRODUCE ISLAM?
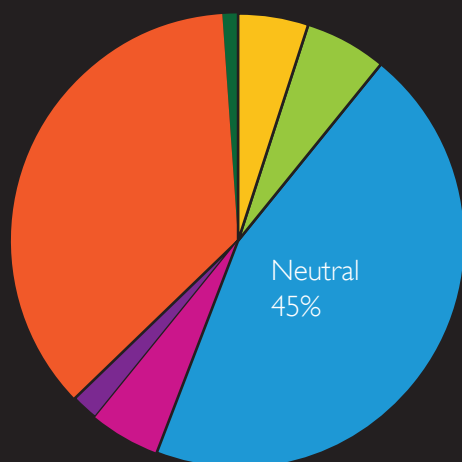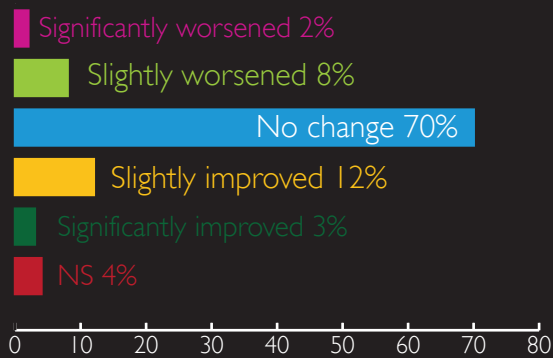


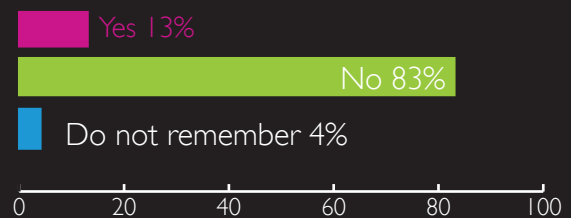| Which of the following statements would best describe your perception about the Prophet Muhammad? | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| Very Negative | 5% |
| Quite Negative | 6% |
| Neutral | 45% |
| Quite Positive | 5% |
| Very Positive | 2% |
| Don't know | 36% |
| NS | 1% |

Numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

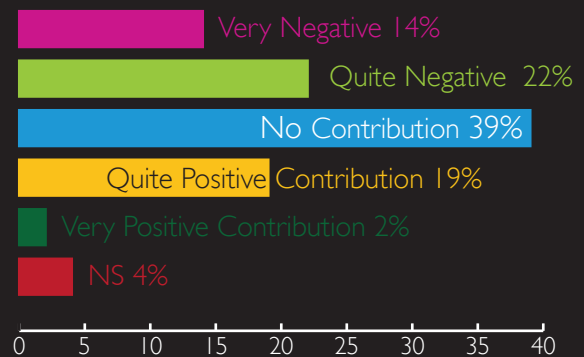## AFTER READING OR WATCHING MATERIAL WRITTEN BY MUSLIMS TO EXPLAIN THEIR RELIGION HOW DID YOUR PERCEPTION OF ISLAM CHANGE?

Significantly worsened 2%
Slightly worsened 8%
No change 70%
Slightly improved 12%
Significantly improved 3%
NS 4%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80

## THROUGH WHAT MEDIUM DO YOU PREFER INFORMATION TO BE TRANSFERRED?

Audio/Radio 3%
Lectures 3%
Leaflets 7%
Magazine Articles 5%
Social Networking Sites 0%
Exhibitions 0%
DVD's 1%
Internet 7%
YouTube 0%
Community Events 3%
One to One's 3%
I Don't Know 6%
Prefer not to receive information 62%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80

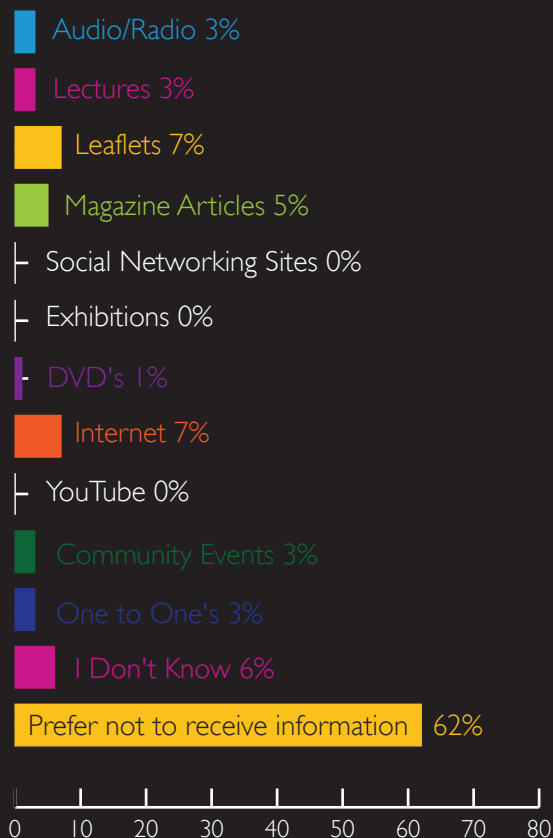## HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED INFORMATION ON A RELIGIOUS TOPIC THAT YOU PARTICULARLY LIKED AND/OR THAT HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON YOU?

Yes 13%
No 83%
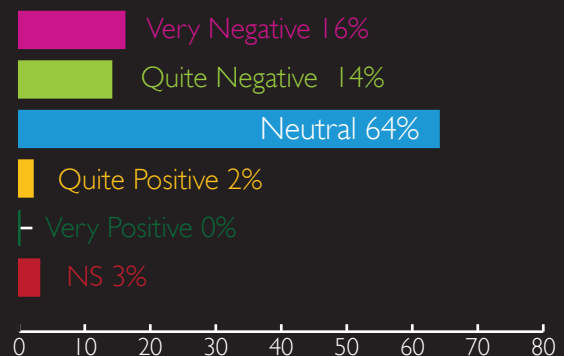Do not remember 4%

0 20 40 60 80 100

## WHAT CONTRIBUTION DO YOU THINK ISLAM AND MUSLIMS HAVE HAD ON BRITISH SOCIETY?

Very Negative 14%
Quite Negative 22%
No Contribution 39%
Quite Positive Contribution 19%
Very Positive Contribution 2%
NS 4%

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40

## HOW WOULD YOU BEST DESCRIBE YOUR PERCEPTION OF ISLAMIC LAW (ALSO KNOWN AS SHARIA)?

Very Negative 16%
Quite Negative 14%
Neutral 64%
Quite Positive 2%
Very Positive 0%
NS 3%

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

## HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR PERCEPTION OF MUSLIMS IN GENERAL?

- Very Negative 11%
- Quite Negative 16%
- Neutral 55%
- Quite Positive 15%
- Very Positive 3%
- NS 1%

## DO YOU THINK MUSLIMS ARE THE MAJOR CAUSE OF COMMUNITY TENSIONS?

- Yes 32%
- No 25%
- Don't know 27%
- Decline to answer 16%
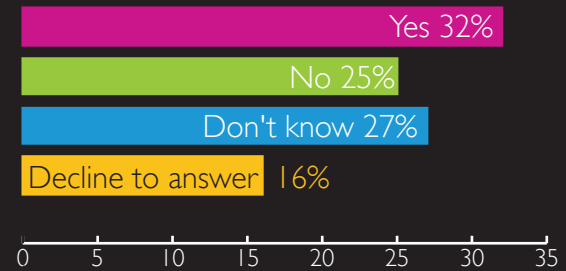
## HAVE YOU EVER SPOKEN TO A MEMBER OF THE MUSLIM FAITH ABOUT THEIR RELIGION?
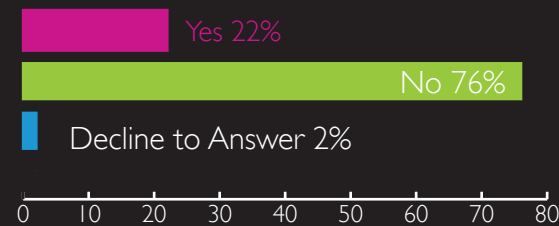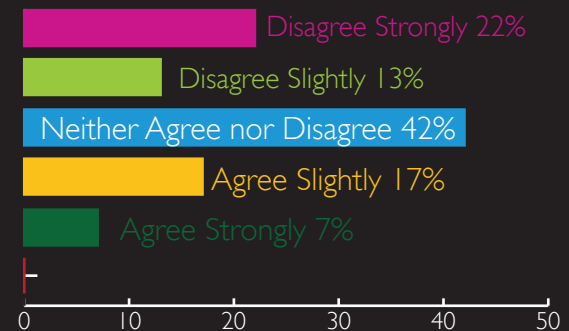
- Yes 22%
- No 76%
- Decline to Answer 2%

## "MUSLIMS SHOULD DO MORE TO TEACH PEOPLE ABOUT THEIR FAITH"

- Disagree Strongly 22%
- Disagree Slightly 13%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree 42%
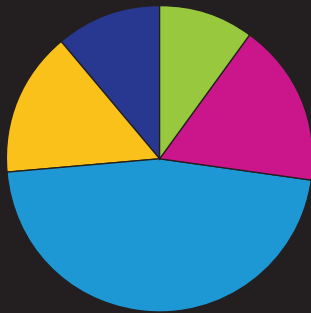- Agree Slightly 17%
- Agree Strongly 7%

## AFTER BEING APPROACHED BY OR AFTER HAVING SPOKEN WITH MUSLIMS ABOUT THEIR FAITH, HOW DID YOUR PERCEPTIONS CHANGE?

- Significantly Worsened 6%
- Slightly Worsened 7%
- No Change 63%
- Slightly Improved 16%
- Significantly Improved 8%

## "MUSLIMS POSITIVELY ENGAGE IN SOCIETY"

- Disagree Strongly 18%
- Disagree Slightly 18%
- Neither Agree nor Disagree 40%
- Agree Slightly 17%
- Agree Strongly 6%
- NS 0%

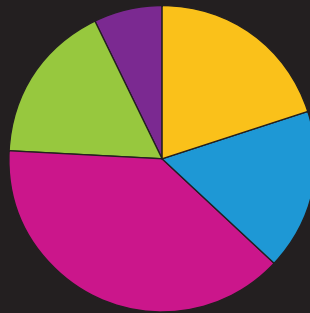The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.
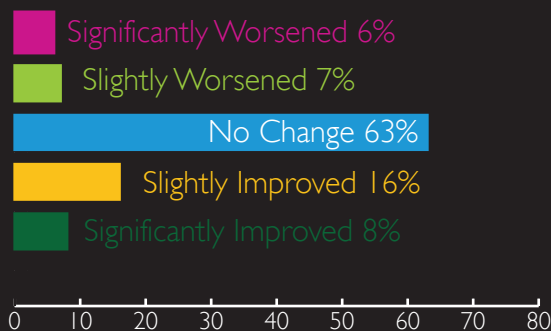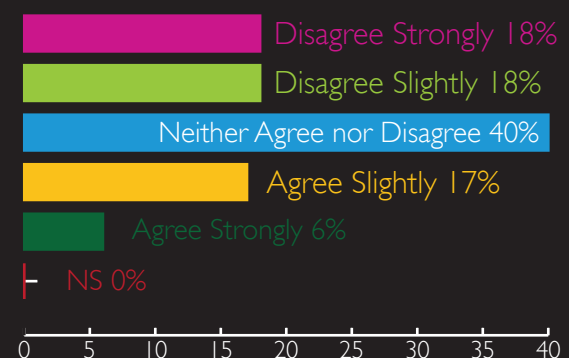
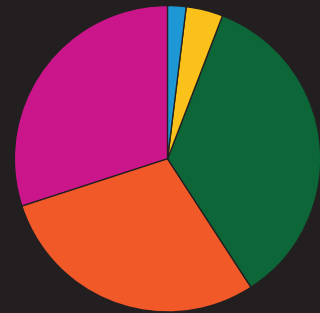## "ISLAM CANNOT POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO MODERN SOCIETY"

10% Disagree Strongly

17% Disagree Slightly

46% Neither Agree nor Disagree

15% Agree Slightly

11% Agree Strongly
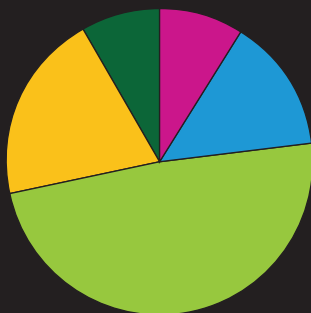
## "MUSLIMS ARE TERRORISTS"

20% Disagree Strongly

17% Disagree Slightly

39% Neither Agree nor Disagree

17% Agree Slightly

7% Agree Strongly
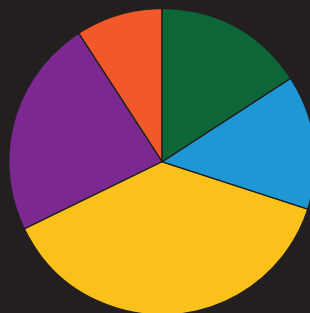
## "ISLAM OPPRESSES WOMEN"

2% Disagree Strongly

4% Disagree Slightly

35% Neither Agree nor Disagree

29% Agree Slightly

30% Agree Strongly

## "THE MEDIA IS NEGATIVELY BIASED TOWARDS ISLAM AND MUSLIMS"

9% Disagree Strongly

14% Disagree Slightly

48% Neither Agree nor Disagree

20% Agree Slightly

8% Agree Strongly

## "MUSLIMS PREACH HATRED"

16% Disagree Strongly

14% Disagree Slightly

38% Neither Agree nor Disagree

23% Agree Slightly

9% Agree Strongly

## "ISLAM IS OUTDATED"

7% Disagree Strongly

7% Disagree Slightly

50% Neither Agree nor Disagree

19% Agree Slightly

17% Agree Strongly

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.
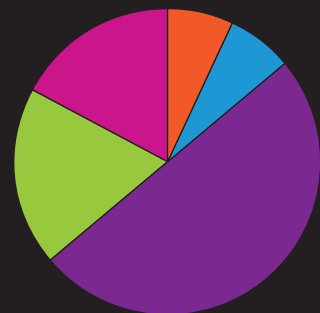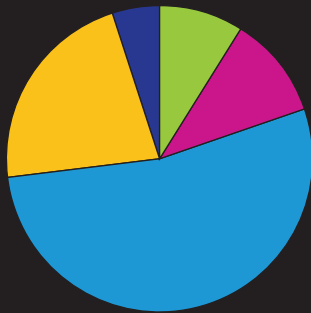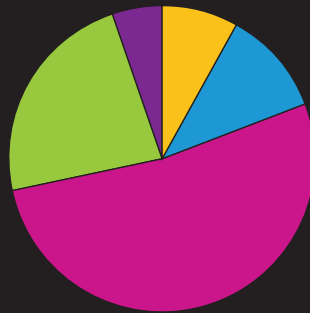
## "MUSLIMS ARE LAW ABIDING"

9% Disagree Strongly

11% Disagree Slightly

54% Neither Agree nor Disagree

22% Agree Slightly

5% Agree Strongly

## "MUSLIMS ARE PEACEFUL"

8% Disagree Strongly

11% Disagree Slightly

52% Neither Agree nor Disagree

23% Agree Slightly

5% Agree Strongly

## "ISLAM CANNOT POSITIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO MODERN SOCIETY"
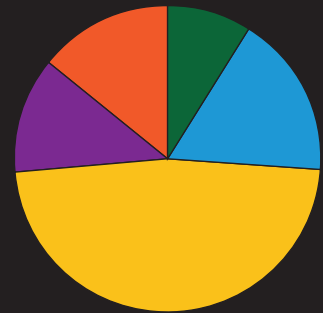
9% Disagree Strongly

17% Disagree Slightly

47% Neither Agree nor Disagree

12% Agree Slightly

14% Agree Strongly

## "ISLAM IS IRRATIONAL"

5% Disagree Strongly

9% Disagree Slightly

59% Neither Agree nor Disagree

17% Agree Slightly

9% Agree Strongly

# WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT ISLAM?
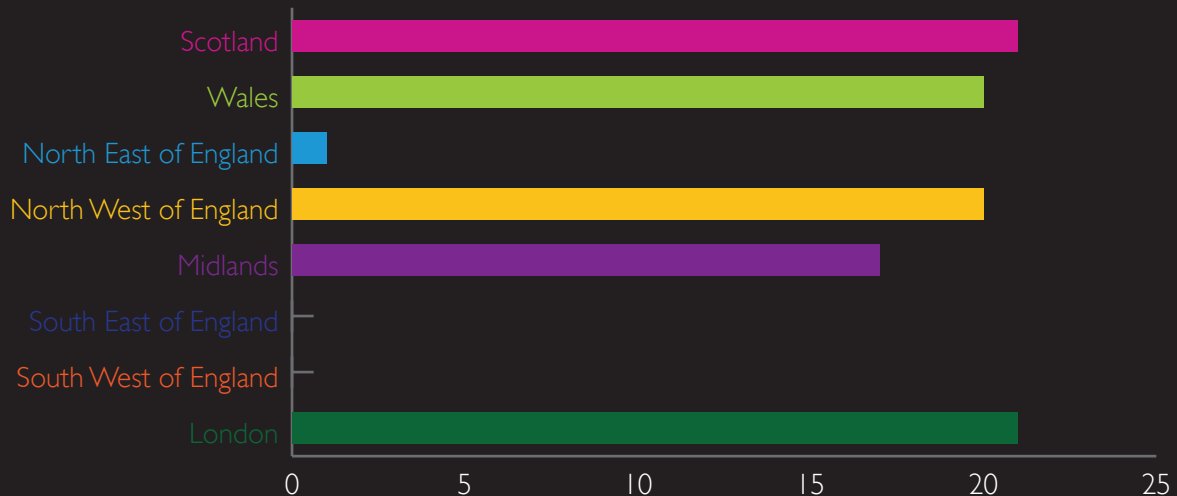
Yes 7%

No 77%

Don't Know 10%

Decline to answer 5%
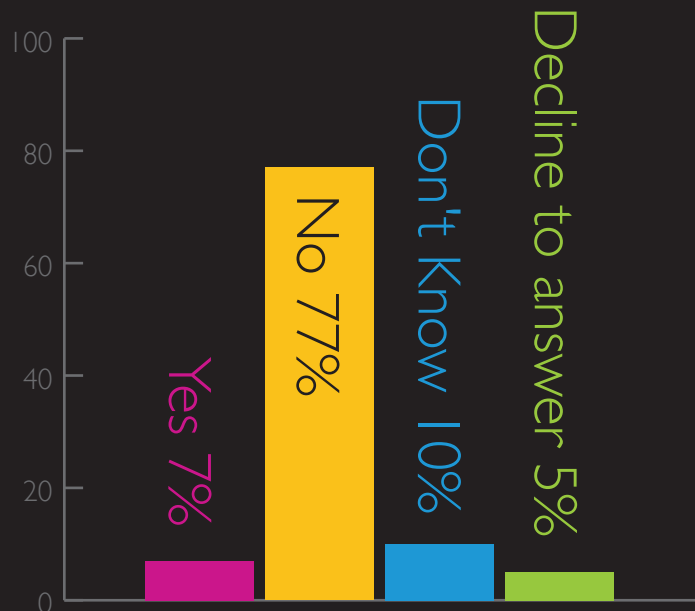
The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

# WHICH GEOGRAPHICAL REGION DO YOU LIVE IN?

| Region | Value |
|---|---|
| Scotland | 21 |
| Wales | 20 |
| North East of England | 1 |
| North West of England | 20 |
| Midlands | 17 |
| South East of England | 0 |
| South West of England | 0 |
| London | 21 |

(x-axis: 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25)

# HOW RELIGIOUS ARE YOU?

| | Value |
|---|---|
| Not Religious at all | 37 |
| Not very Religious | 23 |
| Unsure/Neutral | 9 |
| Quite religious | 20 |
| Very religious | 8 |

(x-axis: 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40)
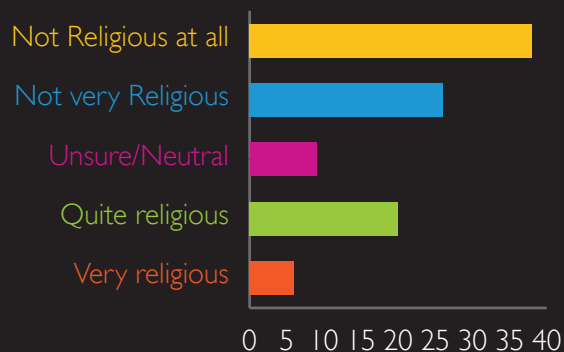
# WHICH RELIGIOUS GROUP DO YOU BELONG TO?

| | Value |
|---|---|
| None/Atheist | 33 |
| Christianity | 58 |
| Buddhism | 0 |
| Hinduism | 1 |
| Judaism | 0 |
| Sikhism | 1 |
| Other | 3 |
| Decline to answer | 2 |

(x-axis: 0 10 20 30 40 50 60)

# WHICH BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ETHNIC ORIGIN?

White British 78%

White Irish 3%

White Other 6%

Mixed White & Black Caribbean 2%

Mixed White & Black African 1%

Mixed White & Asian 0%

Other Mixed Background 0%

Asian or Asian British 0%

Indian 1%

Pakistani 0%

Bangladeshi 0%

Other Asian Background 0%

Caribbean 4%

African 2%

Other Black Background 1%

Chinese 1%

Other Ethnic Group 0%
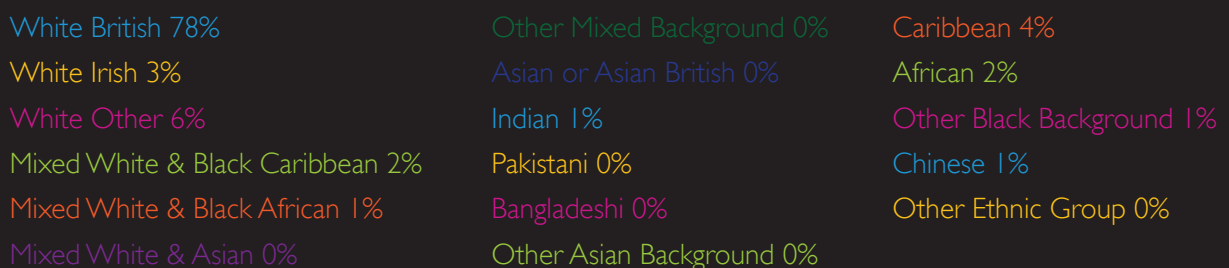
The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

# QUALITATIVE RESULTS:
## GRAPHS & TABLES

The qualitative data was based on the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, which were transcribed by the interviewers. Thematic analysis was used as the method for analysing the qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a way of seeing, as well as a process for coding qualitative information. The encoding process required an explicit code to be derived. The codes may be a list of themes which are indentified, and are directly observable in the data. Thematic analysis, as stated by R. Boyatzis in T*ransforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development,* is also a way of converting qualitative data into quantitative data. We identified various themes from analysing the data and counted the frequency of each theme in the participant's answers to the open-ended questions.

# WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

[ In response to the participant's answer to: which of the following statements best describe your perception of the Prophet Muhammad (peace & blessing be upon him)? ]
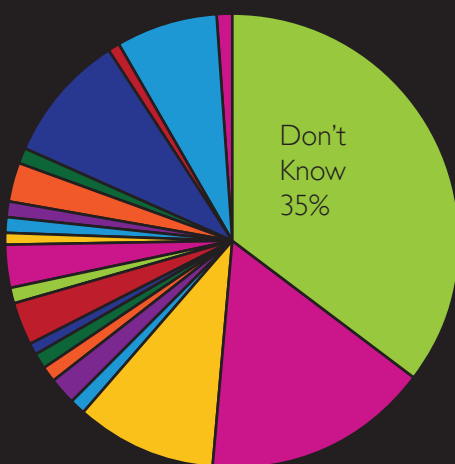


Don't Know 35%

Selected Quotations
*"I don't know what he is about I have never heard of him before."*
*"What is this Muhammad?"*
*"I have no first hand knowledge no interest either. So I wouldn't comment any differently."*
*"I don't like the idea of chopping off people's hands and feet sometimes without making sure they are innocent. It's not a fair way."*
*"Don't know, don't care. We don't choose religion when we were born and where we were born."*

| Themes | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| Don't know | 35 |
| Don't know anything | 16 |
| Have not heard of the Prophet | 10 |
| He is the same as Jesus | 1 |
| I don't know enough | 2 |
| I don't agree with Muslim beliefs | 1 |
| I don't like religion | 1 |
| I don't think about it | 1 |
| I have my own religion | 3 |
| I have no problems with Muhammad | 1 |
| I have no problems with Muslims | 3 |
| I know about Islam | 1 |
| Muhammad was a good person | 1 |
| I would like to know more | 1 |
| Islam is Extreme/Preaches Hate | 3 |
| Muslims tried to convert me | 1 |
| Neutral | 9 |
| Terrorism | 1 |
| Teachings of Muhammad (pbuh) | 7 |
| We share similar beliefs | 1 |

## WHAT ABOUT THE MATERIAL, WRITTEN OR VISUAL, MADE YOU THINK THIS?

[In response to the participant's answer to: on a five point scale, how would you best describe the material, both written and visual, that you have come into contact with that aims to explain or introduce Islam?]
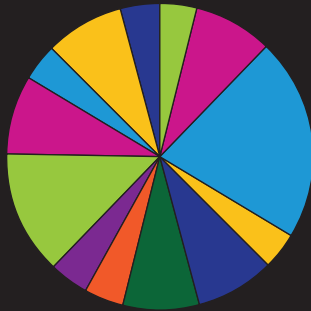
4% Difficult to understand

8% Don't know

21% Experience of Muslims

4% I'm Christian

8% Media

8% Not enough information

4% Not studied Qur'an

4% Prejudice

13% School teaching is neutral

8% Similar to Christianity

4% Teachings are not based on Qur'an

8% Treatment of women

4% Want to read neutral information

### Selected Quotations

"In this country because of the prejudice about them."

"Mostly material get is negative of Islam. Leaflets through the door, evangelical Christians handing out leaflets."

"Qur'an comes after the Bible it's my belief that the Bible is the true word of God and not the Qur'an."

"Haven't had enough information."

"Some I find negative, some I'm neutral don't let it affect me. I find some doctrine to be negative and customs concerning women."

"Because they twist what they preach, not according to the Qur'an."

## COULD I ASK YOU WHAT ABOUT THE MATERIAL MADE YOU FEEL THIS WAY?

[In response to the participant's answer to: after reading or watching material written by Muslims to explain their religion how did your perceptions change?]
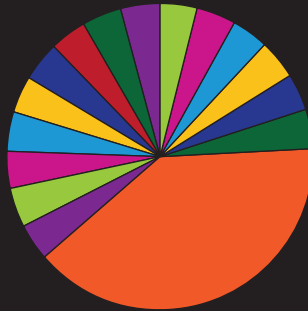
4% Biased information

4% Don't know

4% Every religion has Fanatics

4% Experience of Muslims

4% Greater respect for family life

4% I liked it

39% Made no difference

4% Misrepresented information

4% My friends explained views

4% Similar to Christianity

4% Non directive

4% Not enough material

4% Not interested

4% Not into Religion

4% Not received information

4% The words used

### Selected Quotations

"It made no impression on me."

"I'm not interested in any information so it wouldn't change my views either way."

"Because my friends have explained some things. I didn't understand why women cover up for instance so it's changed my mind."

"Like every information you read you don't always get influenced by it."

"Not enough material."

"I thought it was a biased description."

## WHAT WAS THE INFORMATION AND WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT IT?

[In response to the participant's answer to: have you ever received information on a religious topic that you particularly liked and/or that had a positive impact on you?]
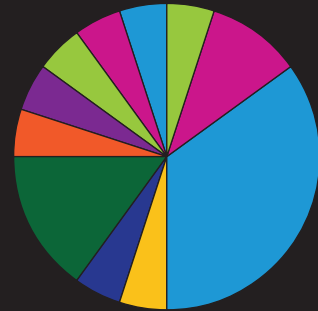
5% Buddhism

10% Catholicism

35% Christianity

5% Don't know

5% Don't wish to answer

15% Islam

5% Jehovah's Witness

5% Life after Death

5% Purpose of life

5% Salvation Army

5% Second coming of Jesus

### Selected Quotations

"It is the Catholic faith I have been brought up with this and that is what I believe."

"Information I received about my Catholic religion, confirmed my beliefs."

"About Christianity, how we all should worship God, had just lost my sister to cancer and got great comfort from it."

"I've read rather a bit about Christianity and I see a lot of truth in it, it makes religion seem acceptable."

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

## WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

[In response to the participant's answer to: what contribution do you think Islam and Muslims have had on British Society?]
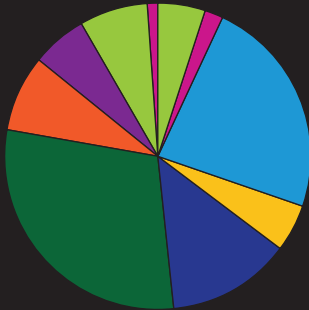
5% Contribute to economy

2% Different values

23% Don't know

5% Don't want to say

13% Forcing Islam on us

29% Negative contribution

8% Neutral

6% No contribution

7% Positive contribution

1% Respect others and Contribute to Society

### Selected Quotations

"Because it doesn't fit into our society, because they look down on us the way we live."

"Because they have no respect for women."

"I think bigamy isn't a valid point of law. It's just silly."

"Because I witnessed a stoning once and it wasn't pleasant."
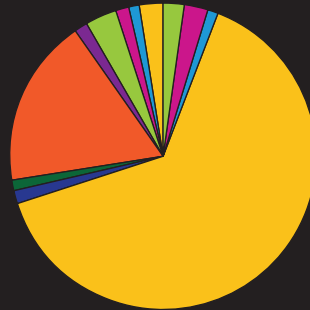
"It is quite brutal cutting hands and arms and things in Saudi Arabia and they won't allow it in this country and they are dangerous to the West."

"I don't know anything about it."

## WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

[In response to the participant's answer to: how would you best describe your perception of Islamic Law (also known as Sharia)?]

2% Against Polygamy

2% Disagree with it

1% Doesn't fit with British Society

54% Don't know

1% Forcing Islam on others

1% Freedom of choice

15% Negative Perception

1% No opinion

3% Not interested

15% Oppression of women

1% Positive perception

1% Similar beliefs

2% Very Strict

### Selected Quotations

"They have took our country over it's not England any more we have to make changes to please them."

"They don't like personal freedom, they need to develop their own ways and not force them on others."

"They take all our jobs for a start."

"They are not Christians and they do not have the same values."

"If I had my way I'd kick them all out of here and it's not something I want to talk about."

## WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

[In response to the participant's answer to: how would you describe your perception of Muslims in general?]
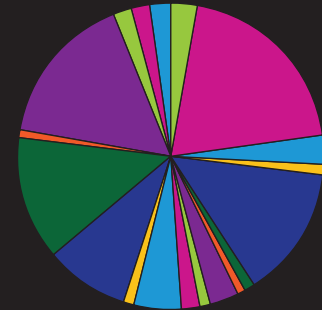
3% Different Beliefs

20% Don't know

3% Don't know any Muslims

1% Forcing Islam on to us

14% I have Muslim friends

1% Muslim values are positive

1% Muslims are ignorant

3% Muslims are rude

1% Muslims are terrorists

2% Muslims cause more trouble

5% Muslims don't integrate

1% Muslims work hard

9% Negative view of Muslims

13% Neutral

1% No contact with Muslims

16% No opinion

2% Oppression of women

2% Positive experience of Muslims

2% Terrorism

### Selected Quotations

"It's because they all cause trouble. Probably 10 times more than other religious groups."

"Again because you hear about terrorists you are bound to feel negative."

"I have friends, nice people."

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

## WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

[In response to the participant's answer to: After being approached by or after having spoken with Muslims about their faith, how did your perceptions change?]



10% Became more positive

3% Don't know

6% Forcing Islam on us

6% I understood their Beliefs

13% Insight into Islam

3% Islam is similar to Christianity

3% Muslims cause tension

3% Muslims stick together

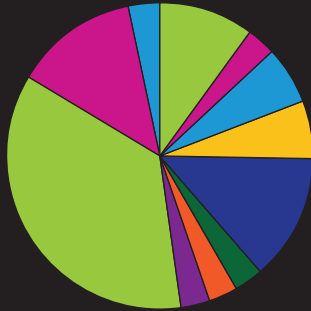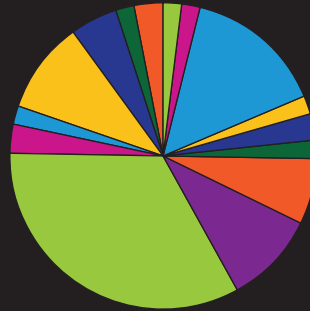35% My perception didn't change

13% Neutral

3% Some Muslims are Respectful

### Selected Quotations
"None whatsoever. I accept my friend as it's his religion not mine."
"Because he was advocating his way of life forcefully."
"It made no difference to me."
"It really had no effect on me."

## IN YOUR OPINION WHY DO YOU THINK THAT MUSLIMS ARE OR ARE NOT A CAUSE OF COMMUNITY TENSION?



2% Clash of Beliefs

2% Extremist

15% Forcing Islam on us

2% Ignorance

3% Immigration

2% Muslims are inflexible

7% Muslims are troublemakers

10% Muslims don't integrate

34% Not a cause of tension

3% Not sure

2% Politics

10% Terrorism

5% Unemployment

2% War in Afghanistan

3% World Affairs

### Selected Quotations
"All the news about the people and everything going on in Afghanistan."
"Because they try to force their ways upon us."
"Can blow you all to bits it's in the news."
"Only from first hand experience I'm not aware of any community tension caused by Muslims."
"Because they don't integrate they are trying to take over our country."

## COULD I ASK YOU WHY YOU WOULD LIKE TO OR NOT LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ISLAM?
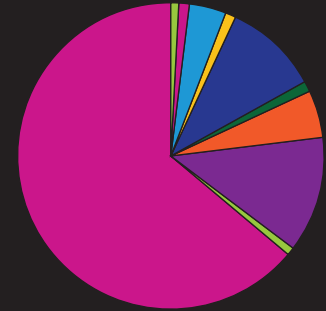


1% Educate oneself about other's faith

1% I disagree with Religion

4% I don't know enough

1% I don't like Islam

10% I know enough

1% I know many Muslims

5% I want to understand more about Islam

12% It's not my Faith

1% Muslims are terrorists

63% I'm not interested

### Selected Quotations
"Not interested in their faith."
"I get stuff about religions from many religions but I wouldn't go into it from what I have heard about the religion. I wouldn't be interested in it."
"Well it's not my faith."
"I think I have enough knowledge and a Qur'an at home."
"Because I disagree with religion in general and the way that it's worded."
"Know enough already."
"Because I am not interested, it's not our culture."
"Because if you understand where people are coming from everyone can work together more."
"They have nothing at all that interests me to know or learn about Islam."

The numbers have been rounded off, hence overall percentages may total over 100%.

# QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE
# RESULTS FINDINGS

## IGNORANCE ABOUT ISLAM

**80%** had less than very little knowledge about Islam

**51%** learnt Islam from school

**95%** had come into contact with the Bible

**20%** had come into contact with the Qur'an

**93%** had very little knowledge or no knowledge at all about the Qur'an

**40%** did not know who Allah is

When the participants were asked "How much do you know about Islam?" the vast majority expressed, which amounted to 80% of respondents, that they had very little knowledge or no knowledge at all about the religion. This level of ignorance was consistent across gender, household income, all age groups and religious categories. In addition to this key question 84% stated that they have never been taught or actively sought information about the Islamic faith, a demographic category that seemed to break the trend was the location "London" where 25% of Londoners have been taught or actively learnt about Islam. We believe that this overall result indicates a lack of reach of dawah, in addition to this, and from a community cohesion perspective, a lack of knowledge about minority communities which can be a major cause of heightened tensions and disharmony.

Out of all the participants who have learnt about Islam the main areas of learning included,

• Friends/neighbours 19%
• School 51%
• Media 14%
• Workplace 10%

A significant demographic category was that 100% of all 21 – 24 year olds had learnt Islam from school, a similar result of 88% was for 16 – 20 year olds. 75% of the "other religion" demographic category learnt about Islam from school, this is in contrast to 49% "Christian" and 56% "non-religious". We believe that this exhibits a potential issue with the religious education in schools.

Since schools are the main areas of learning about Islam, and the majority of the population are ignorant about the religion, then it follows that the level or importance of religious education in schools must be questioned. However, in the context of a secular society like Britain these results may be indicative of a general lack of interest in religion.

When the participants were asked about which religious texts they came into contact with 95% had engaged with the Bible and only 20% with the Qur'an. Concerning the 20% of the participants who had come into contact with the Qur'an the demographic categories that have shown significant contrasts to the results included 35% of participants in the A/B household earnings category and 37% of Londoners.

93% of all participants had very little knowledge or no knowledge at all about the Qur'an and this was consistent across all demographic categories. These results contextualise the fact that the majority of the population have no or limited knowledge about Islam. Since the Qur'an is the main book of Islam, and it has not been read or understood then this provides a reason for the general lack of knowledge about Islam. We believe that this can also suggest that dawah activities have had limited reach as the general population have not interacted with the Qur'an and its message.

Since the word Allah represents the name of God in Islam and can be argued to be a unique and oft repeated word in the Islamic tradition, we thought that to ask what participants thought the word meant would represent an interesting dimension concerning the population's knowledge about Islam. In response to the question only 59% knew it was God with approximately 40% attributing the word to,

• the Prophet of Islam
• an Angel
• an Idol
• a month in the Islamic calendar
• don't know

There were no significant differences apparent within the demographic categories. We believe this result highlights the limited impact current dawah activities have had, as a basic term in Islamic theology is yet to fully be understood by the wider community, this however must also be contextualised with the fact that there is an indifference and apathy towards religion in general, something which will be expanded on below.

# PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAMIC / RELIGIOUS INVITATION & EDUCATION

5% described Islamic dawah material as quite positive and very positive.

71% never came into contact with any dawah material.

70% did not change their perceptions about Islam after coming into contact with dawah material. 14% slightly worsened or significantly worsened.

76% had never spoken to a Muslim about Islam.

63% had no change in their perception after interacting with a Muslim. 13% had perceptions that significantly worsened or slightly worsened.

62% preferred not to receive any information about religion.

When the participants were asked about visual and audio material that aims to explain or introduce Islam only 5% described the material as quite positive and very positive. The interviewer further probed the participants to answer the following open ended question "What about the material, written or visual, made you think this?" The key results of the coded responses included [the results of the open ended questions were based on the total that responded and not to the entire sample of participants],

• 21% attributing this to the "experience of Muslims"
• 13% to "School teaching is neutral"
• 8% to "Similar to Christianity"
• 8% to "Treatment of Women
• 8% to "Don't know"

Some of the quotations included *"Haven't had enough information"* and *"Because they twist what they preach, not according to the Qur'an."*

This result is in context of 71% of all participants never coming into contact with any material, with a significant demographic category of 89% of 21 – 24 year olds. For the participants who did come into contact with material to explain or introduce Islam, 70% did not change with regards to their perceptions about Islam with 14% slightly worsened or significantly worsened. There were no significant differences amongst demographic categories. These results repeat our observations above that there is a lack of dawah activities in Britain. What we believe to be of great concern is that the activities that have been done have had a minimal and negative impact. The related open ended question which was framed as "Could I ask what about the material that made you feel this way?" produced varied responses with a majority of them coded as "Made no difference" at 39%. Other coded responses included, 4% "Biased information", 4% "Experience of Muslims", 4% "Not enough material", 4% "Misrepresented information" and 4% "Not into religion". Some of the quotations included *"It made no impression on me"*, *"I thought it was a biased description"* and *"I'm not interested in any information so it wouldn't change my views either way"*.

A result that has put dawah into context was when 76% of all participants answered "no" to the question if they have ever spoken to a Muslim about Islam. This result was fairly consistent across all demographic categories. To the 22% that answered positively to this question 63% had no change in their perception after interacting with a Muslim, 13% had perceptions that significantly worsened or slightly worsened. When the participants were probed "Why do you say that?" 35% of the responses were coded as "My perception didn't change", 13% "Neutral" and 13% "Insight into Islam". Some of the quotations included *"It made no difference to me"* and *"They are trying to rule everybody they want everyone to join their religion"*.

We believe that this particular result shows that not only have audio and visual materials had no impact but individual Muslims have not engaged with the wider society in a manner that has had a positive effect. This may suggest that the Muslim community does not know how to present Islam to non-Muslims, lacks motivation to do so and may not understand the theological dimensions and importance of educating the wider society about Islam. Further to this, if we were to examine population ratios between Muslims and the rest of British society we would conclude that this may also have something to do with resources and there being not enough Muslims involved in this type of work.

A result that was particularly interesting was that 62% of all participants preferred not to receive any information about religion in general, however in contrast to this, 34% of the religious group categorised as "other" preferred not to receive any information about religion. There was also a thin spread of preferences in receiving information which included,

• LECTURES • AUDIO • MAGAZINE ARTICLES
• EXHIBITIONS • INTERNET • YOUTUBE

We believe that this highlights a collective apathy and indifference about religion; although this may seem obvious in our secular society it does further contextualise the lack of knowledge about Islam. In addition to this it highlights the need to develop dawah strategies in order to break this apathy and indifference.

When the participants were asked "Have you ever received information on a religious topic that you particularly liked and/or that had a positive impact on you?" 83% of all participants replied "no". 98% of participants in Edinburgh had the same result and 94% of the "other religion" demographic category also replied "no". We believe this may explain the apathy and indifference to religion in general because if people have not had positive experiences with religion it can be a reason for this perspective. In light of this a plan for positive engagement between Islam and Muslims with the wider society may be required to dissolve the current apathy and indifference. Although a significant portion of the population never had a positive view on religions, the open ended question "What was the information and what did you like about it?" showed that 55% expressed a liking towards Christian related material in contrast to 15% of Islamic material. Some of the quotations included *"Information received about my Catholic religion, confirmed my beliefs"* and *"About Christianity, how we should worship God, had just lost my sister to cancer and got great comfort from it"*. We believe this qualitative result further highlights the conclusion that dawah activities have had limited reach and have not been effective.

Significantly, and we argue this indicates apathy, fear and a sense of conscious ignorance about Islam, 77% of all participants did not want to know more about Islam. This result was relatively consistent across all demographic categories. To contextualise this further 77% did not agree in any way that Muslims should do more to teach people about their faith, although this includes 42% of people who neither agreed nor disagreed. However since the option of agreeing was available we would argue that this further indicates an apathy about religion in general and indifference to the Islamic faith. The significant difference amongst the demographic categories was that the "other religion" category was more neutral and was less inclined to disagree strongly that Muslims should do more to teach people about the Islamic faith. In general we believe this correlates strongly with the general view of the population that they do not want to receive information about religion, hence this may be a problem with the population's views on religion in general rather than specific issues about Islam. Although this may not seem obvious due to the current media and political narrative, we suggest this may be one of many underlying causes of the contemporary symptoms of Islamophobia and misconceptions about Islam. This conclusion is supported by the qualitative results related to this point. When the participants were asked "Could I ask you why you would like to or not like to learn more about Islam?" the key results where coded in the following way: 63% "I'm not interested", 12% "It's not my faith" and 10% "I know enough". The quotations included *"Because I disagree with religion in general and the way it's worded", "Because I am not interested, it's not our culture"* and *"Know enough already"*.

# PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ISLAM AND MUSLIMS

27% had negative perceptions regarding Muslims

75% believed Islam and Muslims had provided a negative contribution to society

32% believed that Muslims are a major cause of community tension

2% responded positively concerning perceptions about Islamic law

76% did not agree to the statement that Muslims positively engage in society

36% did not know who the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was

61% did not respond positively when asked about the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him)

71% of all participants did not agree that the media is negatively biased towards Islam and Muslims

63% did not disagree to the statement that "Muslims are terrorists"

70% did not disagree with the statement "Muslims preach hatred"

94% did not disagree with the statement "Islam oppresses women"

86% did not disagree with the statement "Islam is outdated"

72% did not agree with the statement "Muslims are law abiding"

85% did not disagree with the statement "Islam is irrational"

71% did not agree with the statement "Muslims are peaceful"

73% did not disagree with the statement "Islam cannot positively contribute to modern society"

27% of all participants, when asked about their perceptions regarding Muslims in general, responded negatively, this however varied across locations as 40% of all participants from Birmingham had negative views including 38% of all participants from Manchester. This is contrasted to 18% of all participants expressing a positive view; however 31% of Londoners had a positive perception concerning Muslims. What may seem more interesting is that 55% had a neutral perception concerning Muslims in general; this may indicate apathy for other minority community members or genuine ignorance about Muslims which has been further highlighted in the results above. We believe that this negative and indifferent perception about Muslims is due to the current media narrative, the political focus on minorities and Muslims, foreign policy and security concerns of the general public, in addition to Muslim inactivity and lack of dawah. This conclusion is further supported by the qualitative results related to this question. In response to the question "Why do you say that?" the relevant results were coded in the following way: 20% "Don't know", 16% "No opinion", 13% "Neutral" and 9% "Negative view on Muslims". Some of the quotations included *"Don't know"* and *"They won't conform to our society in any way, our dress, our thinking, our eating. We have to change for them which isn't right. We wouldn't be able to do the same in their country."*

75% of all participants when asked about what kind of contribution they felt Islam and Muslims have had on British society, felt that they had provided generally a negative contribution, the responses ranged from "very negative", "quite negative" and "no contribution". This perception was relatively consistent across all demographic categories. From a qualitative perspective when the participants were asked "Why do you say that?" they responded, and their answers have been coded, in the following way: 29% "Negative contribution", 23% "Don't know", 13% "Forcing Islam on us" and 8% "Neutral". Some of the quotations included *"They are not Christians and they do not have the same values"* and *"If I had my way I'd kick them all out of here and it's not something I want to talk about".*

32% of all participants believed that Muslims are a major cause of community tension, 27% stating that they do not know. This result was relatively consistent across all demographic categories. When the participants where probed "In your opinion why do you think that Muslims are or are not a cause of community tension?" the relevant responses where coded in the following way, 15% "Forcing Islam on us", 10% "Muslims don't integrate", 10% "Terrorism", 7% "Muslims are trouble makers" and 5% "Unemployment". The quotations included various views for instance "Because they try and force their ways on us", "Can blow you to bits it's in the news" and "All the news about the people and everything going on in Afghanistan".

We believe these perceptions have built mental and psychological barriers that make it difficult for the Muslim community to invite and present Islam to the wider society. Although these perceptions are due to various contexts, as mentioned above, we argue that behavioural changes need to be made within the Muslim community to actively and positively engage with the non-Muslim population, as this will break down the barriers that prevent successfully presenting Islam to the wider community.

When asked about their perceptions concerning Islamic law only 2% of participants responded positively. 64% had a neutral position which indicates a lack of knowledge if we contextualise this to other results about knowledge concerning Islam. However we believe that this also indicates apathy and indifference as it seems to correlate with the relevant results mentioned above. 30% of all participants had a negative perception, this we believe is not surprising if we peg this result in the current and ongoing media furore concerning Islamic law. These results were relatively consistent across demographic categories. The related open ended question that was expressed as "Why do you say that?" highlights the lack of knowledge as 54% produced statements that were coded as "Don't know". However our view is that the negative perception has been fuelled by the media onslaught and this is supported by the fact that 15% of the statements made by the participants were coded as "Oppression of women", 15% "Negative perception" and 2% "Against polygamy". Some of the quotations included *"Because they have no respect for women", "I think bigamy isn't a valid point of law. It's silly."* And *"It is quite brutal cutting hands and arms and things in Saudi Arabia and they won't allow it in this country and they are dangerous to the West."*

76% of participants did not agree in any way to the statement that Muslims positively engage in society. Although this includes 40% who neither agreed nor disagreed, this again highlights the negative perception about Muslims in British society since the participants were given an option to agree. To the following statement, which is similar to the one above, "Islam cannot positively contribute to modern society", 72% of all participants did agreed. Again this is in context of 46% of people neither agreeing nor disagreeing with the statement, this trend of apparent neutrality highlights an apathy or indifference concerning religion, Islam and its adherents. However this is still concerning as the participants had an option to disagree with the above negative statement. These results were relatively consistent across demographic categories. We believe that this further supports our view that a plan for positive engagement between Islam and Muslims with the wider society may be required to dissolve the current apathy and indifference.

36% of all participants did not know who the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was. In response to asking their perceptions about the Prophet 61% didn't respond positively, this is in context of 45% expressing a neutral perception. This result is particularly interesting as this apparent neutrality and indifference cannot be shown to be negative or positive as the option of "do not know" was available. Therefore we can conclude that this neutrality may be due to a genuine lack of knowledge of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The related open ended question that was asked, expressed as "Why do you say that?", further exhibited this lack of knowledge and neutrality. The coding of key responses presented the following results, 35% "Don't know", 16% "Don't know anything", 10% "Haven't heard of the Prophet" and 9% "Neutral". The quotations include *"I don't know what he is about I have never heard of him before", "What is this Muhammad?"* and *"Don't know, don't care. We don't choose religion when we are born and where we were born."*
To the statement "The media is negatively biased towards Islam and Muslims" 71% of all participants did not agree. Again this is in context of 48% of people expressing neutrality which highlights apathy and indifference. Since the option to disagree was available it can be assumed that this apparent neutrality lies on the negative spectrum.

To the statement "Muslims are terrorists" 63% did not disagree, however, and this was a trend with all of the 'agree or disagree' questions, there was an apparent expression of indifference and neutrality as 39% neither agreed nor disagreed. This indifference or neutrality still exhibits negative perceptions due to the fact that the statement has severe implications and that there was an option to disagree. When the participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statement "Muslims preach hatred" 70% did not disagree, however the trend of indifference or neutrality remained consistent as 38% neither agreed nor disagreed, although this more likely represents a negative perception as the option to disagree was available. These results were relatively consistent across demographic categories.

To the statement "Islam oppresses women" 94% did not disagree with 30% agreeing strongly, 29% agreeing slightly and 35% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This result seems to have slightly broken the trend of indifference and neutrality as more people gave direct answers. We suggest that this is due to the controversy over women and Islam in the West which includes highly contested symbols such as the hijab and burka, and therefore leads to stronger negative perceptions. 86% of all participants did not disagree with the statement "Islam is outdated" with 50% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. This result again exhibits the indifference and neutral positions that seem apparent. However, this must be contextualised with the fact that the participants had the option to disagree. To the statement "Muslims are law abiding" 72% did not agree, this is in context of 54% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Again we would suggest that this exhibits the indifference and neutral positions that the overall results of this research indicate. However, this must be contextualised with the fact that the participants had the option to agree. These results were fairly consistent across demographic categories and we believe that all of the results above further highlight the need for positive engagement and a wider reach of dawah activities and strategies.

85% of all participants did not disagree with the statement "Islam is irrational", this is contextualised with 59% neither agreeing nor disagreeing. Since the option to disagree was available this result exhibits the negative trends indicated in this research. A significant variable that needs to be highlighted here is location where 86% of participants in Edinburgh neither agreed nor disagreed to the statement; we suggest this may be due to genuine ignorance about Islam as the statement in question points towards knowledge rather than emotional, social or psychological factors.

71% of all participants did not agree with the statement "Muslims are peaceful" however 52% neither agreed nor disagreed, again this is still an expression of a negative perception in our opinion because the option to agree was available. In light of this 28% of all participants agreed that Muslims are peaceful. A demographic category that was inconsistent with other variables was location where 53% of all Londoners agreed that Muslims are peaceful. If we correlate this result with other significant differences in the "London" variable, we believe that Londoners tend to have more knowledge and a more positive view concerning Islam and Muslims.

To the statement "Islam cannot positively contribute to modern society" 73% did not disagree, this is put into context again as 47% neither agreed nor disagreed. Participants in Edinburgh expressed a sense of greater indifference and neutrality as 74% neither agreed nor disagreed, however the option to disagree was available which still indicates a negative perception.

An interesting point that we feel needs to be raised is that overall participants seemed to voice a range of opinions, mostly on the negative end of the spectrum. This must presumably be based upon a shallow understanding of Islam as the research has shown that non-Muslims have minimal knowledge of Islam and they have not been effected or gained knowledge from Muslims or relevant material. This highlights a worrying trend about information in this modern age – that it is now largely imparted by Chinese Whispers or current narratives formed by those who have the power to shape discourse, rather than an educated interest in the literature or scholarly authority. On this point it leads us to our recommendations on how to deal with this and related issues.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

### Disseminate the Results and Implement Our Recommendations
In light of the findings we recommend to publicise the data amongst relevant organisations in Britain in order to create awareness and to motivate relevant parties to implement our recommendations.

### Resource and Finance Existing Dawah Organisations
The results of the research have shown that there is a substantial lack of knowledge concerning Islam and Muslims amongst the non-Muslim community. This includes a lack of reach of dawah activities throughout Britain. In this light we recommend that resourcing, financing and supporting current dawah organisations such as iERA (Islamic Education and Research Academy) is essential to ensure that a wider reach is achieved across the whole of the non-Muslim community. This will therefore enhance community cohesion in Britain as organisations such as iERA have a holistic and comprehensive approach in presenting Islam to the wider community which includes community projects, public discussions and neighbourly activities.

### Disseminate Information About the Prophet Muhammad
This research indicated a substantial lack of knowledge concerning the Prophet of Islam. Many non-Muslims did not know who the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) was. Therefore we recommend that the centrality of the Prophet (peace and blessing be upon him) to the message of Islam and details of his prophetic character must be widely disseminated to the non-Muslim community. We also recommend that the publications developed for dawah that do not discuss the life or centrality of the Prophet should briefly elaborate who he was. For instance, the following phrase can be used: "This is what the Prophet Muhammad, who according to Muslims is the final Prophet, sent as a mercy to the whole of humanity, taught us."

# RECOMMENDATIONS

### Develop a Dawah Strategy with Student Organisations

This research has shown that the majority 21 to 24 year olds have never come into contact with any material educating and inviting people to Islam. This is of particular concern as this age group has been shown by psychologists to be the period where people form, change and adopt religious and political philosophies. This indicates a substantial gap in presenting Islam at University and the working environment. We recommend that a university strategy in co-operation with FOSIS (Federation of Student Islamic Societies) and university ISOC's (Islamic Societies) must be developed to address this issue.

### Attend Dawah Training Courses

The general trend of this research suggests that the Muslim community does not know how to invite people to Islam and lacks motivation to do so. We recommend that organisations involved in community and dawah work should encourage its members to attend the relevant courses available for the Muslim community. iERA under its Mission Dawah project has developed a comprehensive one-day-intensive dawah training course that has been very successful since its inception in October 2009. The training is delivered globally with a current focus in Britain, for more information please visit www.missiondawah.com.

### Distribute the Qur'an

This research showed that there was a lack of knowledge concerning the main source text for the Islamic faith – the Qur'an. We have already mentioned this indicates a lack of dawah activities including its limited reach across Britain, however we recommend that a good translation of the Qur'an with a relevant introduction to explain how to approach the text must be distributed to the non-Muslim community. In addition to this, when the Qur'an is mentioned in relevant publications it should include its definition as the majority of the people have not come into contact with the divine book. The definition of the Qur'an can include "The book revealed to Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him) that Muslims believe to have come from God". We also recommend increasing the availability of Qur'ans to be made available in hotel rooms, waiting rooms, prisons, airports, and airplanes, for example.

### Create a New Language by Removing Overtly Religious Connotations and Build Concepts

This research has shown that the population in general has an apathy and indifference towards religion and Islam. This indicates that in this post-secular society there seems to be no psychological or social drivers to increase an interest in religion, and particularly Islam. We recommend that a strategy needs to be developed to ensure that publications and all relevant messages are captured by the target audience. This may include couching the language of relevant presentations and publications in a new language that is appealing and engaging. This can be done by removing overtly religious connotations and explaining the uniqueness and comprehensive nature of the message of Islam. In addition to this, concepts and messages that attract the intellectual and emotional context of the target audience must be used; with an obvious link to the key message that needs to be delivered.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

Religious terminology must be changed to be more engaging and relevant. The reasons for this include the population's apathy to religion and lack of interest to learn more about different religions, specifically Islam. We recommend that publications must develop a strategy whereby the introduction is couched in terminology that evokes interest and thought, distancing the language from overly religious undertones. Significantly we would recommend that the initial concepts delivered via publications and presentations are universally accepted rather than religiously focused, this way it would develop a strategy of systematic thinking. For example, if a particular publication engages with the topic of God, the following sentence would not be ideal, "God, the unseen, unique, immaterial being." Rather, initial concept building sentences must be announced to create that systematic approach, as the above sentence is overtly religious and will probably close the secular indifferent mind. Concept building sentences can include "One of the questions asked by young, old, layman and philosopher alike is why something exists rather than nothing?" We would argue that the above recommendations are supported by the fact that, according to this research, the majority of the population is not religious and therefore may not respond to overtly religious language.

**Promote Religion and Show Islam's Uniqueness**

We also recommend that there should be an overall strategy to show that Islam is not just a religion thereby highlighting the importance and relevance of the Islamic way of life. In addition to this we suggest that religion in general must be shown to have been misconstrued in our post-secular society, thereby removing the mental obstacles apparent in the wider community. Regarding showing that Islam is not just a religion, a focus may be required to divorce the apparent view that all religions are the same and that they have experienced the same history. It must be highlighted that Islam must not be viewed through the eyes of European history or understood by fallacious references to Catholic intolerance and coercion in the past. Rather, Islam and its history must be viewed without a reference to the historical or intellectual baggage that is specific to Europe and Britain. Superimposing a specific negative history to understand another world view is fallacious and only skews understanding. To really understand Islam, or any other world view for that matter, it must be understood as it intends to be. Concerning the importance of religion, certain concepts in publications may include explaining how religion links to more positive behaviours and that the current cliché of "I can be good without God" may be false. For instance in 2000, Political Scientist and Professor Robert Putnam surveyed 200 volunteer organisations and showed that there was a positive correlation between religiosity and membership of volunteer organisations. Also the Index of Global Philanthropy 2007 states, "Religious people are more charitable than non-religious not only in giving to their own congregations, but also – regardless of income, region, social class, and other demographic variables – significantly more charitable in their secular donations and informal giving."

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Plan for Positive Community Engagement**

This research has shown that people have not had positive experiences with religion, and therefore can explain the strong trend of apathy and indifference. In light of this we recommend that a plan for positive engagement between Islam and Muslims with the wider society is required to dissolve the current apathy and indifference. This is further contextualised by the result that three quarters of participants do not think Islam and Muslims have had a positive impact on British society. We therefore recommend that an effort needs to be made to show the contrary, this is particularly important as these opinions have developed negative mental barriers presenting barriers when non-Muslims investigate about the truth of the philosophical foundations of the Islamic worldview.

**Show the Good Nature of the Muslim Community**

This research has showed that the majority of participants did not have a positive impression about Muslims. Therefore we recommend that publications and lectures should highlight the good nature of the Muslim community. As mentioned above, these perceptions may form mental barriers thereby acting as barriers to learning about Islam.

**Develop Engaging Islamic Education at School**

This research has shown that schools are the main source of information about Islam. In light of this we recommend that a strategy is developed to ensure accurate and engaging Islamic education is delivered at school age. Publications and presentations aimed at that age group must be engaging and relevant, as this research has shown a lack of information retention concerning religious education. Additionally publications must be easily read and accessed by people at school level or at the relevant age group. We believe for this to be successful, a review of all material addressed to that age group must be undertaken.

**Review Existing Dawah Activities**

This research has shown a concerning trend that dawah activities have not fulfilled their objectives and have at times worsened perceptions. We strongly recommend that there should be a review of all current material and methods adopted by Muslims to deliver the message of Islam.

**Use all Formats and Mediums**

This research expressed a preference across all formats and mediums, therefore we recommend that all dawah products should be delivered in a wide range of formats and mediums, including audio, radio, leaflets, magazine articles, DVDs and the Internet.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Show Similarities and Differences to the Bible**

This research showed that almost all participants have come into contact with the Bible. We recommend that since the target audience may have a biblical bias - and this may mean that readers may superimpose biblical pre-conceptions about revelation onto other religions - an effort is required to show similarities but also differences with the Qur'an. For example the Qur'an can be stated to be a multi-dimensional text unlike a book that starts with "In the beginning" and "the end" that also includes political, social and economic themes rather than only spiritual.

**Expand Upon the Research and Repeat the Study**

This research is the first research of its kind to investigate non-Muslim perceptions about Islam and Muslims, with a focus on dawah. However, since the effective use of face-to-face questionnaires is constrained by time, to have extended the questionnaire would have been impractical and counterproductive. In light of this we recommend to expand upon the research by enquiring into people's reasons as to why they were apathetic about religion. This would include questions concerning what can be done to stir their interest and how their curiosity can be stimulated. Additionally we could ask those who did not wish to know more about Islam and find out their detailed reasons. Further research can be expanded to include asking those who think Muslims are a source of community tension about how they feel this can be solved. Similar and many more different questions and research methods can be employed to investigate further the perceptions of non-Muslims. Another key recommendation is to repeat the study after implementing a wave of changes in dawah activities, and to compare the results with this paper's findings.

**Promote Islamic Civilisation and Islam's Solutions to Modern Problems**

The trends of this research have strongly suggested that the non-Muslim population feel that religion is irrelevant in today's modern society. Combined with apathy and indifference to religion we recommend the Muslims and subsequently non-Muslims are educated on the significant impact that Islamic civilisation has had on the Western world, its unique worldview in providing political and social solutions, including Islam's ability to address unprecedented problems facing the modern world. The issue of global economy is a good example to highlight Islam's relevancy in the 21st century. Islam addresses the issue of global poverty by dealing with the number one problem in economics: the distribution of resources. This stems from the geo-political view announced by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessing be upon him). The Prophet stated that human beings have limited essential needs and there are enough resources in the planet to cater for these needs. This is in contrast to the Western (or capitalist) view that there are unlimited needs and not enough resources. The latter creates excessive competition whereas the Prophetic view facilitates distribution, thereby dealing with the number one economic problem. Although this is not the space to elaborate in detail, it is a useful insight on the applicability of Islam in the modern world.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

**Promote Muslim Women as Agents of Positive Change**

This research showed a general trend of negativity regarding Islam and Muslims. However an interesting result was the increased negative perception concerning Islam's treatment of women. This is correlated with many of the open ended responses not directly related to gender issues however still mentioning their negativity towards the role of women in Islam. Therefore we recommend promoting Muslim women as ambassadors of change given that society is polarised on the subject of gender oppression – who better to give the alternative perspective? This must obviously be in line with Islamic social norms and practices. Additionally publications and presentations must be developed addressing this issue.

**Remove Psychological and Mental Barriers that Prevent Islam from Being Understood**

This research highlighted the trend that non-Muslims have a negative view on Islam and Muslims. As mentioned before this negative view can form mental barriers preventing the message of Islam to penetrate the minds of the wider community. Therefore we recommend to work in conjunction with other Muslim organisations who aim to combat misconceptions on Islam so that those involved in dawah have a greater knowledge when presenting Islam to non-Muslims and can quickly dispel misconceptions before moving back to the core concepts of Islam.

**Invite People to the Islamic Worldview**

This research has highlighted an important view held by iERA that in order to be successful in dawah, dealing with all the apparent negative perceptions and misconceptions of the non-Muslim community may be counterproductive in wanting to convince them of the truth of the Islamic worldview. The research has shown that on all points concerning perceptions about Islam and Muslims the responses could be best described as negative. So how can dawah organisations deal with this? A view adopted by iERA is that responding and dealing with each of these perceptions actually contradicts the essence of Islam. Islam fundamentally expounds upon the idea of submission to God and its moral philosophy is driven by the view that God is determinative of what good is, and since he has announced himself to mankind in the form of the Qur'an, then that becomes the anchor for all moral teachings. Therefore it can be argued that linking all of our actions as Muslims to our worldview will not only show people the truth of the philosophical foundations of the Islamic faith but it will also contextualize and provide the conceptual framework for non-Muslims to understand aspects of Islam they had negative perceptions about, in addition to highlighting the validity and human relevance of our view for life.

We appreciate that many more recommendations can be made from the results we have presented. However our main intention in this section is to provide the impetus to initiate a positive discussion amongst various organisations to discuss the way forward for the dawah and the Muslim community in Britain. From this discussion we believe we will all be able to implement a plan of action to enhance, develop and widen the reach of the dawah. While we understand that more needs to be done and more can be said with regards to the results, we pray that this was the beginning of more research activities to inform our dawah thereby facilitating its success, insha'Allah.

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