

The impact of counterterrorism law and policies on the Muslim Communities in Britain

Methodology

- Research commissioned by the Equality and Human Rights Commission GB
- Case studies of four local areas
- Four Focus groups with ordinary local residents (three Muslim residents and one non-Muslim local residents)
- Interviews with civil society bodies, community organisations, practitioners, politicians and policy makers, local and national
- Review of literature, existing data sets

Varied and Diverse experiences of Muslim communities

- People's experiences and perceptions of policing are mediated by their age, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic position.
- Diversity of Muslim communities = Diversity of impact
- Population of 2.5 million but young age profile
- One third of the Muslim population in England and Wales live in the 10 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods
- Ethnic and religious diversity



• Geographical concentration: 50 per cent of UK Muslims live in London

Durham
University

Perceptions of threat

- Perceptions of the threat that Britain faces from terrorism inform people's evaluation of the necessity and proportionality of counter-terrorism measures.
- There is a damaging disconnect between the state and communities in their conceptions of 'threat'
- The high threat level claimed by government did not resonate with everyday experience of living in their local area.

Perceptions of threat

‘I think it could go anywhere; I don’ t feel at all threatened in Britain, I don’ t know anyone who personally feels they are threatened by terrorism but there is a general fear... it may be different in Bradford; but in Leicester we feel very blest [sic] and lucky... We are supposed to feel that the hammer could fall and crush our heads at any time. Just this week we are told that if Britain were to withdraw from Afghanistan then this would happen or that would happen, before a bomb has even gone off. We are supposed to be revved up; the climate of terror is not something that terrorists create, we do that ourselves.’ (Non-Muslim, male, Leicester)

Perceptions of threat

‘The general Muslims in this area just want to try and get a job, earn money, get through life and practise their faith, this idea that people are extremists is I think so, so, minuscule, it’s so, so minuscule that it doesn’t translate to the reality of what’s being perceived.’ (Youth worker)

Perceptions of threat

‘Yes, there is denial about extremism, but it sits alongside denial about pre-marital sex, drugs, gangs, domestic violence, abuse and all the other things parents find too difficult to talk about.’ (Youth worker)

Community conceptions of threat

‘The biggest issue [here] isn’ t terrorism or counter-terrorism, it’ s the breakdown of families. That is the issue that has killed the community here... The whole thing is blown out of proportion. How many families have been ripped apart because the police have asked stupid questions? How many have had a nervous breakdown, because of that? I’ m not saying you shouldn’ t be dealing with that issue... but nobody is catering for these guys who are on drugs, on alcohol.’ (Youth worker)

Community conceptions of threat

‘The people who are terrorists are the drug dealers; they are also terrorising people. There are people who bomb places... I don’t think terrorism is restricted to those people, I feel like a drug dealer is as much a terrorist as the next man because he’s killing the people from the inside. You don’t see them [drug addicts] blow up, but they’re taking drugs and dying and their families are just as affected. They’re just as bad... I don’t believe that the police don’t know who the dealers are, everyone in the local area knows. How can they not see that?’ (Muslim, male, Birmingham)

Community conceptions of threat

- A state- centric approach to threat that is unable to acknowledge or respond to community conceptions of threat will struggle to attract community acknowledgement and cooperation.
- The English Defence League (EDL) are, for many Muslims in this research, a visible and real manifestation of violent extremism and one that many are more likely to encounter than an Al Qa' ida extremist.

Lessons for policy makers

- State action need to address issues that communities view as a threat.
- Measures that are perceived as targeting Muslims as a group or community were of greater concern than measures that target individual suspects or the whole general population.
- The targeting of funding to Muslim communities under PVE contributed towards a sense of being treated as a 'suspect community' and was perceived to generate resentment from other communities.
- Need for increased transparency, information and accountability

