



TONY BLAIR
INSTITUTE
FOR GLOBAL
CHANGE

Resonating Narratives

The scale of Islamist
and far-right
extremism among
British young people

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The fieldwork for this report was carried out by **Savanta ComRes in May 2019 and October 2019**. We acknowledge that some responses to the survey and the online communities might have been determined by the context at the time and so they could differ at present. Nonetheless, we judge that the survey results are still relevant in showing some of the extremist tropes that are resonating with young people and the factors associated with holding these views.

Foreword

by Tony Blair

Counter-extremism is heavily politicised. For years, leading politicians have failed to engage constructively, shying away from tackling divisive groups head on. But the rise in identity politics should not stop us from making greater efforts to bridge divides and identify and root out those seeking to damage the social fabric of our communities.

In 2020, governments across the world have had to deal with the unprecedented health and economic challenges posed by the spread of Covid-19. While the priority of every government at the moment should be to protect lives and the economy by building in the necessary infrastructure to live with the virus as we wait for a vaccine, let us not forget that the problems that existed before Covid-19 will continue to exist afterwards. If anything, Covid-19 will only exacerbate the problems that were there before.

This year marks 15 years since the 7/7 terrorist attacks, which led to a shift in the way we looked at security in Britain. Avoiding a similar event was the core aim of my government's renewed and updated focus on counter-extremism. Yet extremism, both violent and not, is an ever-evolving challenge. As new extreme movements gain momentum, political leaders must be equipped to tackle this threat effectively. Even during the spread of Covid-19, extremist groups have found a reason to mobilise and promote their hateful rhetoric.

Yet it is imperative that we continue to tackle the threat of extremism from across the ideological spectrum. The rise of the far right and the increased threat of Shia extremism, for example, demand that we take an objective look at all forms of extremism. All political movements are struggling with extremism, both within and on the fringes of their own parties. This makes it harder to accuse any one community of suffering from this problem. We therefore have an opportunity to unite behind a new focus, not just on violent extremism but on the dangerous ideologies behind extremism in the UK.

This report, the third and last in a series that seeks to push UK counter-extremism policy in a more practical and cohesive direction, highlights the pressing need for a renewed political focus. The narratives my Institute have identified are clearly resonating with a sizeable minority, one we cannot ignore out of convenience. Dangerous views about immigrants and minorities “invading” Britain, the state of democracy and even the use of violence are being spread among our young people.

Any and all government counter-extremism policies are bound to be criticised: Extremist groups have a vested interest in maligning policies as a gateway to their more damaging worldview. By framing counter-extremism as a targeted, police state–style apparatus, extremist groups prey on young people’s feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty in an otherwise febrile political atmosphere. That these programmes have a reputation for opacity does not help.

We must be clear: Much of the blame lies at the feet of these extremist groups. They cannot continue to operate with the impunity that the political system currently allows them. Yet the drivers this report identifies also point to a more complex picture, one in which the information ecosystem of young people pushes extreme narratives to the fore.

However, this research shows there are also reasons to be optimistic. An overwhelming majority of those surveyed hold positive views of the future and their own agency. Many of those suffering from discrimination, like young Muslim women, still prove hopeful and resilient. These are the feelings we must foster, to build this same resilience in those who are less sanguine. Positivity, diversity and critical thinking are a bulwark against dangerous ideas.

As we continue to reflect on the impact of Covid-19 on our lives, including skyrocketing unemployment figures, fears of recession and entrenching of political division, we should be mindful of how they can provide the material conditions in which extremism emerges. To avoid exacerbating existing tensions, the government must refocus its agenda on extremism in the UK. This agenda must be one that crosses the narrow political divides and identities that hold progress back. One that relocates counter-extremism as a cross-government endeavour, bringing diffuse and disconnected policies together. And one that is unapologetic to those guilty of hate. The resources my Institute has produced show clear examples of divisive extremism. Only by calling these out can we stop them from further damaging the social fabric that is vital for the well-being of our societies.



Tony Blair

Executive Chairman of the Tony Blair
Institute for Global Change
Former Prime Minister of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland

Executive Summary

This report, the final in the *Narratives* series, seeks to understand the extent to which Islamist and far-right ideas are resonating with young people in the UK. It tests the narratives explored in our previous reports in this series, *Narratives of Division: The Spectrum of Islamist Worldviews in the UK* and *Narratives of Hate: The Spectrum of Far-Right Worldviews in the UK*, which found three key narratives embedded in both groups:

- the idea that there is an irreconcilable conflict between the West and Islam,
- in-group victimisation, and
- anti-establishment views seeking to delegitimise the government.

We partnered with Savanta ComRes to carry out a poll of 1,011 Muslims and 1,011 white non-Muslims (WNM) aged 18 to 30 in May 2019. We also convened two online communities, one for each group, with 57 total participants from both samples in October 2019.

KEY FINDINGS

- **There is a significant minority of young people who agree with nonviolent extremist statements.** One-fifth of both groups surveyed consistently agree with extreme positions across themes depicting Islam and the West in conflict, promoting feelings of victimisation and anti-establishment sentiment. For example, 17 per cent of Muslims and 16 per cent of WNM think democracy is broken and we should replace it, while another 17 per cent and 23 per cent respectively think there is little value in engaging with politics.
- **A smaller but not negligible minority sympathise with violence.** Around 13 per cent of those surveyed believe violent action is sometimes necessary and justified to achieve change. Fifteen per cent of Muslims surveyed agree that people should go out to fight to defend their religion or culture with force (9 per cent for WNM). However, most respondents – half of both Muslims and WNM – agree that there is never a justification for terrorism or political violence.
- **Out of the statements about extremism, victimisation is the most prominent theme for British Muslims.** More than one-third of Muslim respondents (34 per cent) think they are systematically targeted in the UK and globally, while almost 17 per cent of WNM think that British culture is under threat from invasion.
- **Out of the statements about extremism, the most prominent theme for British white non-Muslims is the West versus Islam.** Thirty-one per cent of WNM surveyed hold very negative views about Islam, including that it promotes violence and that there are no-go areas where sharia law dominates. WNM are more likely than Muslims to agree there are tensions between British and Muslim identities (36 and 30 per cent respectively).
- **Respondents' agreement with extremist positions likely reflects how they receive and process information.** A regression analysis of the data shows that agreement with extremist messages can be linked to:
 - negative feelings about their future or a lack of agency,
 - limited diversity within social networks, and
 - experience of discrimination.

Other factors included affinity with divisive groups and disagreement with domestic and foreign policies of the government.
- **There are demographic and behavioural indicators for those more likely to agree with extremist messages.** They tend to:
 - say they have been discriminated against,
 - have homogenous social networks in terms of race and religious belief,
 - lack social integration and inter-group contact,
 - have a negative outlook or feel powerless when it comes to the future, and
 - be male.

Policy Recommendations

Aside from depicting the scale of the problem, our data show that agreement with extremist messages could be linked to:

- negative feelings about the future or a lack of agency,
- limited diversity within social networks, and
- experience of discrimination.

On the back of these findings, we make the following recommendations to policymakers:

RECOGNISING THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Policymakers should recognise that nonviolent extremist views are pervasive and that it is a problem that does not solely affect one community. Our data show that both Muslims and white non-Muslims present similar levels of agreement with extremist statements, which should be a powerful tool to avoid politicising the issue and focus on constructing a non-biased approach to countering extremism.

Our two previous reports showed the ideological overlap between non-violent Islamist and far-right activists with violent extremists. Given the resonance of these non-violent ideas with a significant percentage of young people, policymakers cannot shy away from countering these ideas in a more vocal way. This requires designing specific programmes that challenge the underlying ideology of extremism.

ENHANCED SCHOOL CURRICULA

A fifth of young people surveyed agree consistently with extremist sentiments. Extremist groups prey on real and perceived vulnerabilities. While our poll showed a significant proportion feel positive about their future (75 per cent), there is a significant minority who feel they have no control over it (25 per cent). Other polling has highlighted political events (61 per cent), employment (73 per cent) and money (60 per cent) as key reasons for this.¹

Policymakers should promote initiatives that teach young people how to talk about difficult issues. Our Institute has developed a resource for educators to help schools talk about issues such as religion, identity and agency – topics we found in our survey that can be bulwarks against extremist views. The Department for Education (DfE) should make further resources and funding available to schools to train teachers in these materials. Our Generation Global programme has, since 2009, reached 550,000 students in 40 countries, and has been demonstrated to increase open-mindedness and critical thinking.²

It is a priority that young people are able to critically reflect on the content they encounter, both online and offline, and reach their own judgements on veracity.

Ofcom and DfE should **expand government support for formal media literacy programmes.** Learn to Discern brought together 15,000 Ukrainian citizens to explore their media consumption.³ Participants in half-day sessions discussed the type of news they consumed and critical questions on source, evidence and balance. An impact study showed participants were better at identifying disinformation and recognising where news came from than the average.⁴ Anecdotal evidence also suggests that they were better at crosschecking sources and more confident in media literacy. Learn to Discern has since been rolled out in the US, Jordan, Serbia and Indonesia.⁵

Ofcom has a formal duty to promote media literacy, but it has not kept pace with the new media environment. **Ofcom, or any proposed online regulator, should take responsibility for programmes like Learn to Discern,** helping to develop a curriculum for children through schools, and adults through community centres. IREX, which runs Learn to

Discern, is funded by private and philanthropic organisations. Government should seek support from UK-operating tech companies to fund a UK version. This would be mutually beneficial, improving the health of platforms and media literacy.

Government must **continue to understand the online information ecosystem.** HateLab is a publicly funded data hub for measuring and countering hate speech. Their data are crucial to the Home Office's National Online Hate Crime Hub, which channels reports of online hate to reduce the burden on frontline officers.⁶

HateLab received £1.7 million from the UK's Economic and Social Research Council and the US Department for Justice.⁷ Additional support from the Ministry of Justice or Home Office could expand its impact when it comes to tackling non-violent extremism.

Continued government support for such projects, potentially expanding them to other manifestations of extremist speech (like those in our toolkit) is vital to understanding digital conversations and building appropriate interventions.

BETTER ENGAGEMENT

Anti-government narratives are core to extremist rhetoric. Agreement that government aims to make life better for people “like me” was almost nonexistent among Muslim participants in our poll, while 23 per cent of WNMJs believe they should boycott the government, and that democracy is broken and should be replaced. Our focus groups show there is hope: Messages about broken democracy or illegitimate political systems resonate because young people view government as opaque and unaccountable. There is a huge openness for more transparent, community-level politics, especially from Muslim respondents.

“[Elected representatives] are working towards making the changes I want to happen in order for the local area and the country in general to improve. They actively go out into the community, meet people and then act upon what they talked about. They talk the talk and walk the walk. They earn my trust.”

Muslim, male, aged 22-25, London

The Home Office and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) **should broaden new models of community engagement to incorporate counter-extremism policy.** The Citizens' Economic Council run by the RSA shows that regional engagement on complex policy issues leads to improved understanding and trust. The success of this led to a broader rollout from the Bank of England. Likewise, international examples, such as Justin Trudeau's town halls, citizen assemblies like the Ireland abortion debate or the French Grand Débat, have helped expand input into policy agendas.

For these examples to work in counter-extremism they need to go beyond set-piece consultations. Young people in our online discussions were sceptical of engagement that is opportunistic or brand-orientated for politicians. Instead, non-political figures such as civil servants, local government and practitioners should lead discussions through less traditional spaces, such as residents' associations, LGBT societies and youth clubs. This moves beyond traditional gatekeepers and speaks to mixed communities, rather than simply doing a checkbox consulting of faiths or ethnicities.

A FOCUS ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND DIVERSITY

The final area our research points to is a greater focus on increasing social mixing. Lack of social diversity is linked to agreement with extreme messages in all surveyed categories.

- Forty-four per cent of Muslims and 47 per cent of WNM's surveyed who feel that the government spends too much on social integration agree with statements presenting a clash between the West and Islam.*
- Forty-seven per cent of both groups who agree that multiculturalism has made Britain a worse place to live and/or that cultures should live separately also agree with the sentiment of boycotting and replacing democracy.
- Forty-seven per cent of WNM's who think that multiculturalism has made the UK a worse place to live and/or that cultures should live separately also believe that British culture is under threat from invasion.

This is not a recent problem. Successive governments have identified integration as a challenge to communities. Despite the Casey review into integration outlining several recommendations to government, the aftermath of the Brexit referendum made progress challenging.⁸ The Conservative government was criticised for focusing solely on the recommendation for English language skills for Muslim women. Similarly, while the National Citizenship Service was allocated £1.5 billion, it was mired by mismanagement and lax control on spending priorities – reaching just 12 per cent of eligible young people.⁹

The debate must now focus on better supporting young people. This offers both a sustainable solution and a chance to influence upwards. Recent work on climate change shows educating children about the issue led to their parents growing more concerned.¹⁰

DfE should **support schools in sharing spaces, events and experiences.** Young people and schools are not responsible for a lack of diversity. They merely reflect residential choices. However, schools can help overcome homogeneity. The Bradford Schools Linking Programme is one example. Working in partnership with the council and cultural institutions, 226 schools are engaged in programmes that discuss identity but also share messages and resources between classes, helping young people experience a different point of view.¹¹

The DfE should **develop a specific funding stream to ensure schools lacking in diversity can link to others** in their local area. The Linking Network, which supports efforts like these, has an annual spend of £442,000. We recommend scaling this project up to significantly widen the number of schools it reaches. Local specialist schools in science, music or sports could be encouraged to share facilities and run mixed classes or events.

Social mixing should be expanded to parents. Parents4all is an EU-funded scheme in Scotland, Spain, Germany, Greece, Italy and Lithuania.¹² It teaches parents about intercultural mixing, supporting them to have conversations with their children. For example, in Scotland two sets of training materials, administered by professionals, teach parents how to develop intercultural skills, covering topics like self-perception and othering.¹³

The government will either need to seek continued external membership of Erasmus or commit funding from 2021 to cover shortfalls. Additional financing could expand programmes to high migrant-recipient areas and those lacking diversity. Some hotspots for extremist sentiment that our survey has identified, such as London, Scotland (where the programme already runs) and the West Midlands, should be prioritised to help reinforce the benefits of school-to-school mixing.

A BOLDER STRATEGY

To challenge the underlying ideology of extremism, we need a singular and powerful strategy. Any revision to the counter-extremism strategy should capitalise on the chance to bring cohesion to efforts across departments, including the Home Office, the MHCLG and DfE – as well as financial support from the Treasury.¹⁴

We believe this strategic new vision for counter-extremism policy should be:

- **Crossbench.** Extremism is a politicised issue, with both Labour and Conservatives marred by political scandals about anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. There is an opportunity to reform and look at extremism as a whole.
- **Cohesive.** Extremist views are pervasive in society. Better coordination across agencies, communities and government departments is needed to tackle it effectively.
- **Courageous.** We cannot be afraid to call out and challenge extremism when we see it, its damaging effects and the ill-intentioned actors who spread it.

The Challenge

Defining and understanding the scale of extremism, particularly in its non-violent form, has long been a challenging task for policymakers.

Recent research in the UK suggests that the public and practitioners alike are worried about extremism. Polling carried out on behalf of the Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) found that 73 per cent of respondents were concerned about rising extremism, while a report from 2019 for the Mayor of London found that a quarter of Londoners had experienced or witnessed views promoting, endorsing or supporting extremism over the course of the previous year.¹⁵ However, less than a quarter of Londoners were confident that they could spot the signs of extremism.¹⁶ This echoes research from the CCE, which showed that 75 per cent found the government's current definition of extremism unhelpful.

To address this gap, our past reports in this series, *Narratives of Division* and *Narratives of Hate*, have provided a spectrum of ideas depicting a scale of views from mainstream to extreme on the key themes present in Islamist and far-right extremism rhetoric, which could serve as a useful tool to create a working definition of extremism (see Methodology).

However, arriving at a suitable definition of extremism is only half of the picture, as there is a dire need to understand the cut-through of these extremist narratives in society. In order to get a picture of the scale of the problem, as well as identifying factors behind agreement with divisive or extremist views, we partnered with Savanta ComRes to poll 2,000 young Brits aged 18–30, with two separate samples of 1,000 Muslims and 1,000 white non-Muslims.

Our polling found that while most respondents do not agree with extremist statements, violent or non-violent, there is a significant minority that do. Around one-fifth of both Muslims and white non-Muslims in our survey agree with non-violent extremist statements, while 10 per cent show some sympathy towards violent extremism. For some specific narratives, the percentage of respondents who agree are even higher than one-fifth, showcasing how some narratives are particularly strong within the far right or Islamism.

Neil Basu, the Metropolitan Police Assistant Commissioner, has warned that while the biggest terrorist threat to the country is posed by Islamist extremism, far-right terrorism is the fastest-growing threat.¹⁷ Indeed, referrals to Prevent for far-right concerns have been steadily increasing in recent years.¹⁸ Yet remarkably, levels of agreement in our poll with extremist statements are equally high for white non-Muslims and Muslims, showing that extremism is not a problem of just one community.

Since the fieldwork for this report was carried out in May and October 2019, the world has had to come to grips with the coronavirus pandemic, which has rapidly swept the world, forcing countries into an unexpected lockdown and a subsequent economic crisis. We acknowledge that the findings of this report,

particularly relating to respondents' views on the erosion of trust in government, would look radically different given this new context. Daily data compiled by Savanta ComRes since the pandemic started shows that there has been a swift decrease in approval ratings of the Prime Minister, members of the Cabinet and the Leader of the Opposition.¹⁹ Generally, approval ratings of the UK government as a whole have decreased from 23 per cent in mid-March 2020 to minus 6 per cent in July 2020.²⁰

Likewise, a recent survey of more than 2,000 UK adults carried out by Savanta ComRes in July 2020 suggests that a significant percentage still think that Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are not a problem (28 per cent and 31 per cent respectively).²¹ Yet our survey points to a small but significant pocket who agree with divisive and extreme statements relating to Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. On the anti-Semitism question, our poll shows that 12 per cent of British Muslims and 7 per cent of British white non-Muslims respondents think that people are too apologetic about anti-Semitism in Britain, while approximately one-sixth of both groups of respondents think that the Holocaust is a tragedy, but that it is time to move on. Meanwhile, on Islamophobia, 19 per cent of both samples think there is an unresolvable conflict between Islam and the West. Fourteen per cent of white non-Muslim respondents believe that there are no-go areas in the UK where sharia law dominates.

Several of the factors that this report highlights as connected to extremism, such as feeling a lack of agency and hopelessness about one's future, have potentially increased in these unprecedented times. For such a multifaceted challenge like extremism, understanding which factors are likely to be driving agreement with extremist views can help in better orienting counter-extremism decisions.

The Data

This section offers a deep dive into the polling data that is the basis of this report. It looks at the key narratives from our previous work and how these relate to the attitudes of young people.

Three key narratives are shared between Islamist and far-right extremist groups:

- Islam versus the West
- Victimisation
- Anti-establishment

In our previous reports, we created a table showcasing a range of views, from mainstream to extreme, on these three themes. The aim of these tables was to showcase a spectrum of ideas that shows how extremism can build on a foundation of divisive statements. We adapted these five statements to form the basis of our polling questions so we could gauge the level of agreement with the more extreme end in the spectrum. Throughout this report, we identify these extreme statements with the symbols “◐” and “●”. This allows us to link the statement and its response to its position on our tables depicting a spectrum of views from mainstream to extreme. For a detailed explanation on our methodology, please see the Methodology section at the end of this report.

Our data show that there is a significant but not negligible minority that hold extreme views in these themes. A fifth of respondents consistently agree with extreme positions on British and Muslim identities, the place of their groups in society and the role of government, while around 10 per cent hold positive views towards violence.

The data also show that there is a correlation between agreeing with extremist statements and other attitudinal and behavioural responses. There are demographic and behavioural indicators for those vulnerable to extremism. Those who are likely to agree with more extreme messages tend to:

1. say they have been discriminated against,
2. have homogenous social networks in terms of race and religious belief,
3. lack social integration and inter-group contact, and
4. have a negative outlook or feel powerless when it comes to the future.

The following analysis quantifies the level of agreement with extremist messages while drilling down into subsets of data to understand the strength of each of the factors mentioned above.

ISLAM VERSUS THE WEST

Overview

A significant percentage of British Muslims (BMs) and British white non-Muslims (WNMs) surveyed agreed with statements presenting a conflict between Islam and the West.

- Nineteen per cent of both BMs and WNMs think there is an unresolvable conflict between Islam and the West.
- Nine per cent of BMs and 4 per cent of WNMs agree with the idea that conflict between the West and Islam would be a good thing.

These correspond to the two most extreme positions in our scale of divisive narratives (see Figure 1). In addition, a substantial percentage of WNMs had very negative views about Islam (see Figure 2):

- Fifteen per cent think Islam promotes violence.
- Fourteen per cent believe that there are no-go areas where sharia law dominates.

Out of the five statements about Islam tested, the two negative statements account for 31 per cent of all responses. This suggests that non-violent positions related to Islam versus the West resonate strongly, particularly with WNMs.

Below are some key indicators correlated with agreement with any of the two groups of extremist messages in this category (see Figures 1 and 2).

“It is hard to integrate [cultures from Islamic countries] into British culture as it is completely different to theirs and thus leading to micro communities.”

WNM, male, aged 22-25, London

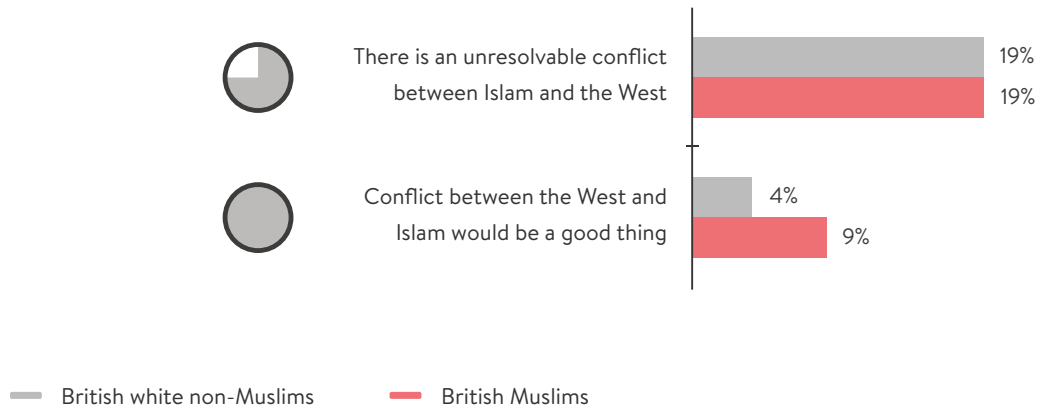
Main Indicators

In this category, the correlations were stronger for WNMs than for BMs.

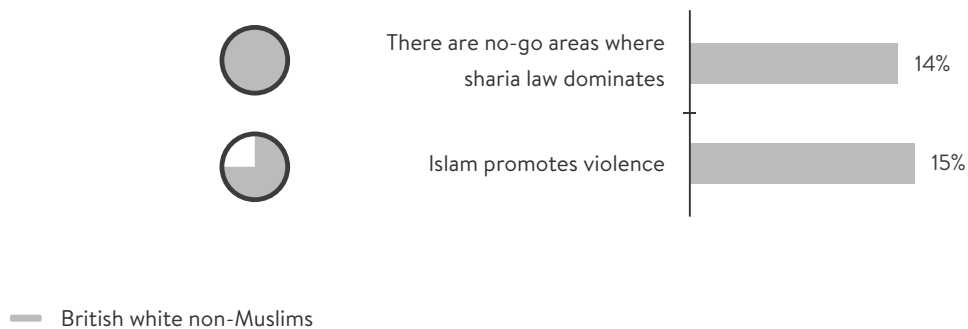
Agency

WNM and BM respondents who feel a lack of agency over their future were more likely to agree with extreme statements than those who do not feel a lack of agency. A high number of WNMs who feel they have no control over their future and who do not think that their future will be positive (39 and 33 per cent) agreed with negative statements about Islam (see Figure 4).

Lack of agency is also an issue for BM respondents. Forty-one per cent of those who feel no control over their future and 38 per cent of those who think that their future will not be positive also agreed with the two most extreme statements about the West and Islam (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 1 Negative statements showing the West and Islam in conflict

Source: Q11: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: Muslim and British identities are different, but you can have both/ There are tensions between British and Muslim identities/ There is no conflict between being Muslim and being British/ There is unresolvable conflict between Islam and the West/ Conflict between the West and Islam would be a good thing/ None of these. Base size: All respondents (2,022).

FIGURE 2 Negative statements about Islam

Source: Q13b: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: Some interpretations of Islam are problematic, but I do not have anything against the religion as a whole/ Islam is oppressive to women and minorities/ Islam is a peaceful and diverse religion/ Islam promotes violence/ There are no-go areas in Britain where Sharia law dominates/ None of these. Base size: All British white non-Muslim respondents (1,011).

Discrimination

Most WNM who say they face discrimination because of their race (49 per cent) and political views (40 per cent) also agree with negative statements about Islam (see Figure 4). Out of those who feel discriminated for their race, WNM are more likely than BM (37 versus 28 per cent) to agree with the most extreme statements about Islam and the West (see Figure 3).

Thirty-five per cent of WNM and 36 per cent of BM who feel discriminated against for their political views agreed with extreme statements about the West and Islam (see Figure 3, and see Methodology*).

Social Mixing

Forty-four per cent of BM and 47 per cent of WNM who feel that the government spends too much on social integration agree with statements presenting a clash between the West and Islam (see Figure 3).

Fifty-four per cent of all WNM who think that the government is spending too much on social integration also agree with statements depicting Islam as a negative influence (see Figure 4). This subset is almost twice as likely to agree with these statements as WNM who think the government is not spending enough on social integration or is spending the right amount.

BM who do not have friends from another race (35 per cent) are more likely than BM who have friends from another race (26 per cent) to agree with negative statements about the relationship between Islam and the West (see Figure 3). The same is true for WNM (41 versus 37 per cent; see Figure 4).

Case Study:

British White Non-Muslims: Race or Culture?

Depicting the West and Islam in opposition is the most prevalent narrative for WNM out of all the extremist statements in the survey and attitudes towards Islam are very negative. Relatedly, multiculturalism is also a source of tension, with 18 per cent agreeing that multiculturalism has made Britain a worse place to live and that cultures should live separately.

“Do not try to scream your religion down our throats, because firstly the UK is not really that much of a religious country anymore to be honest and secondly our culture is very, very different to Islamic countries.”

WNM, male, aged 22-25, London

However, as opposed to the two-fifths of WNM respondents who have negative attitudes about Islam, only a small minority stray into clear white supremacist views such as that all Brits should strive to ensure our country is white (7 per cent) and that you are not truly British unless you are white (6 per cent).

This suggests that far-right sentiment in the UK is framed around culture rather than race. Troublingly, the factors of agreement with racialised far-right positions are the same as those focused on culture: agency, discrimination and social mixing. This might indicate a potential to develop more racialised views.

“The minority are ruining it for everyone, causing chaos and terror, therefore how can we keep letting more people in and trust them.”

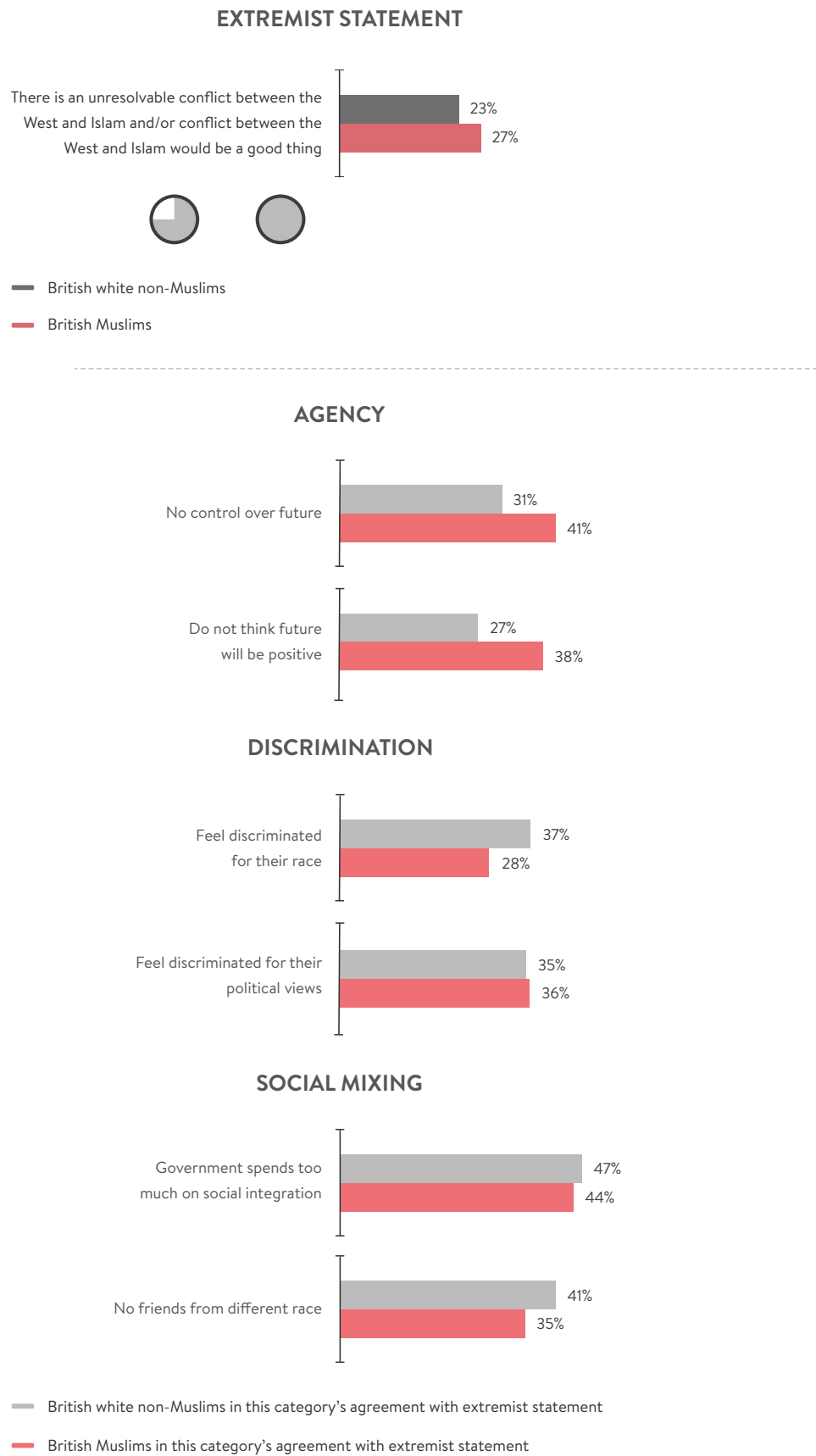
WNM, male, aged 26-30, Scotland

In terms of agency, WNM who feel no control over their future and who do not think their future will be positive are more likely than those who feel able to positively influence their future to think that all Brits should strive to be white (16 and 13 versus 6 per cent).

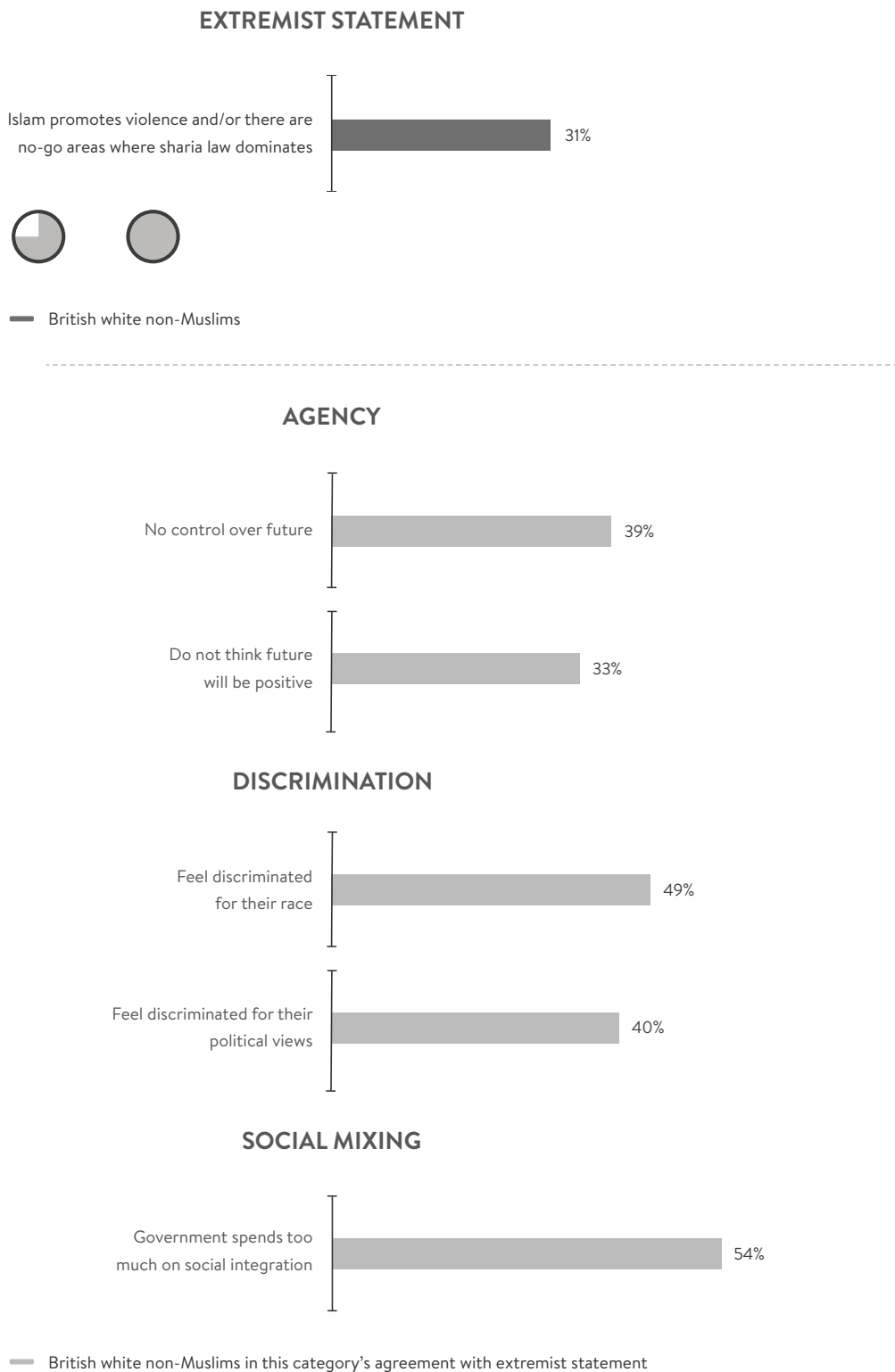
On discrimination, WNM who feel subject to a great deal of discrimination are more likely than those who report never feeling discriminated against to agree with statements suggesting racial supremacy (12 and 13 versus 5 and 4 per cent).

Regarding social mixing, WNM who think the government is spending too much on social integration are almost three times as likely as those who think it is not spending enough to agree with this pair of statements (17 and 18 versus 6 per cent).*

We cannot ignore the prevalence of anti-Semitism in this subset. Twenty-six to 29 per cent of respondents who think that Jewish people have used the Holocaust to their advantage agree with statements related to white supremacy.

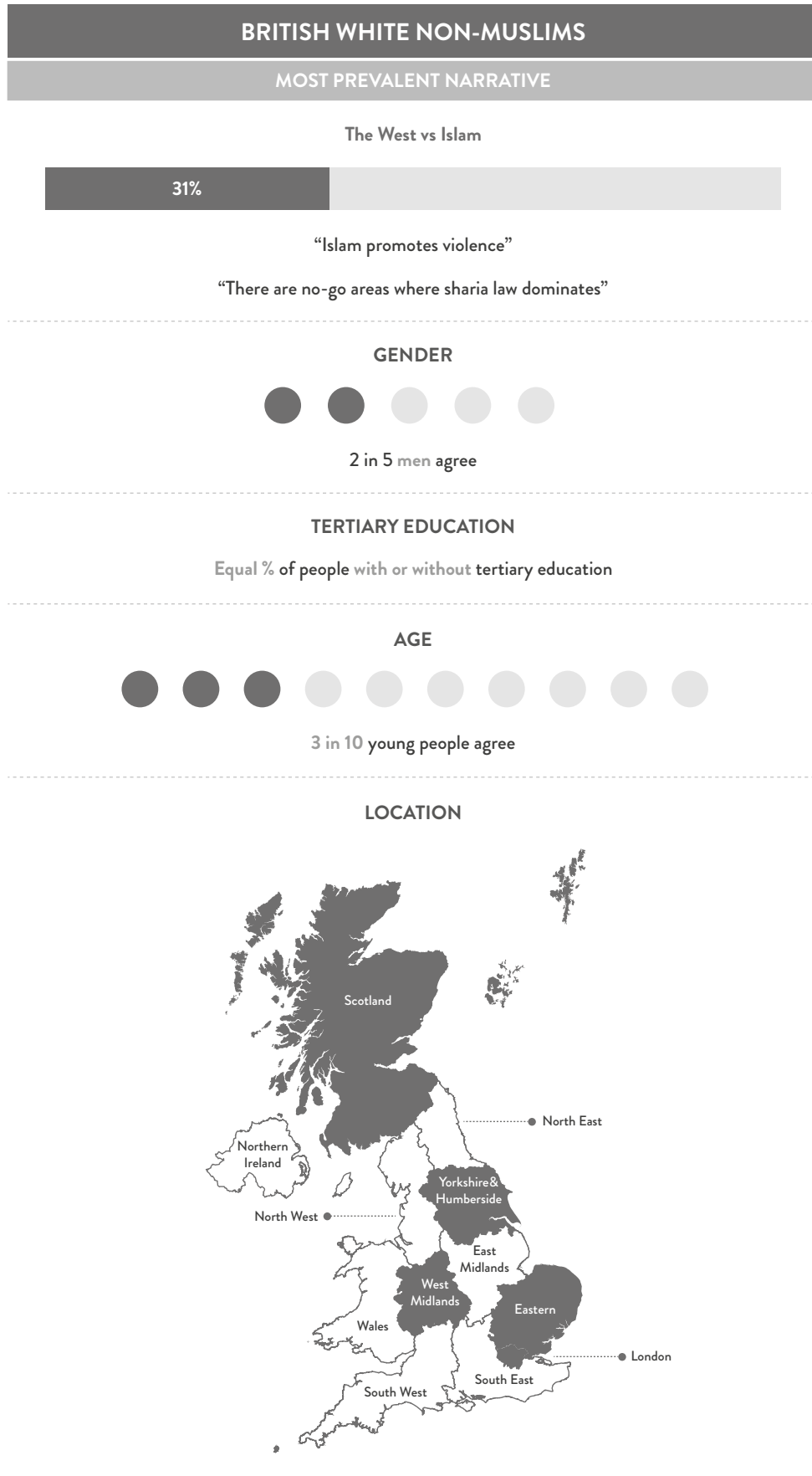
FIGURE 3 Indicators correlated with agreeing with extremist statements about the West and Islam

Source: Q13b: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: NET: There is unresolvable conflict between Islam and the West/ Conflict between the West and Islam would be a good thing. Base size: British Muslims (269), British white non-Muslims (227).

FIGURE 4 Indicators correlated with agreeing with combination of extremist statements about Islam

Source: Q13b: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: NET: Islam promotes violence/ There are no-go areas in Britain where sharia law dominates. Base size: white non-Muslim respondents (308).

FIGURE 5 Disaggregation of demographic indicators linked to most prevalent extremist statement for white non-Muslims



VICTIMISATION

Overview

A significant percentage of BMs agreed with statements that promote feelings of victimhood, making it the most prevalent narrative for this group out of all the statements about extremism. This is the idea that a specific group is being singled out for unjust treatment. Thirty-four and 18 per cent of BMs agree with the two most extreme positions about victimisation tested in the poll, versus 17 and 12 per cent of WNM (see Figure 6).

Fourteen per cent of WNM agreed with the idea that government policies disproportionately support minority groups ahead of white people, which corresponds to the middle or third most extreme

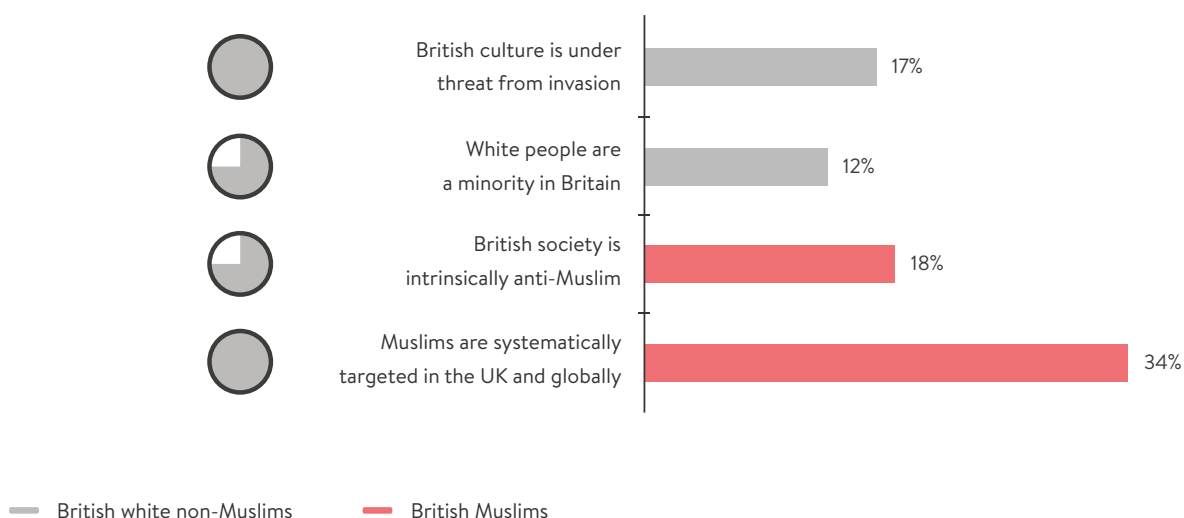
position in our scale, as presented in our previous report, *Narratives of Hate*. WNM participants in our online community forum spontaneously mentioned that immigrants and minority groups are getting better treatment from the government, with the common myth of migrants receiving more benefits being brought up during discussions.

“I think the government has a very weak immigration policy as it is quite easy for people to take advantage of it and live here without a job and just live on benefits.”

WNM, male, aged 18-21, South East

Below are some key indicators correlated with agreeing with any of the four extremist messages in this category.

FIGURE 6 Statements that suggest feelings of victimhood among BMs and WNM



Source: Q9a: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: Muslims are systematically targeted in the UK and globally/ Anti-Muslim sentiment is widespread in society/ Government policies/surveillance disproportionately impact Muslims/ British society is intrinsically anti-Muslim/ There is no anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK/ None of these. Base size: All British Muslims (1,011).

Q9b: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: Everyone can be discriminated against, even if they are white/ British culture is under threat from invasion/ White people are increasingly discriminated against in the UK/ Government policies disproportionately support minority groups ahead of white people/ White people are a minority in Britain/ None of these. Base size: All British white non-Muslims (1,011).

Main Indicators

In this category, the correlations are stronger for BMs than WNM.

Agency

BM respondents who feel they have no control over their future, and who think their future will not be positive, are more likely to agree that British society is inherently anti-Muslim than those who feel able to positively shape their future (24 versus 18 per cent, see Figure 8). This corresponds to the second most extreme statement in our spectrum on victimisation (see Methodology).

Agency is also important for WNM. Those who feel no control over their future (24 per cent) are more likely than those who think they can positively influence their future (17 per cent) to agree with the idea that British culture is under threat from invasion (see Figure 7).

Discrimination

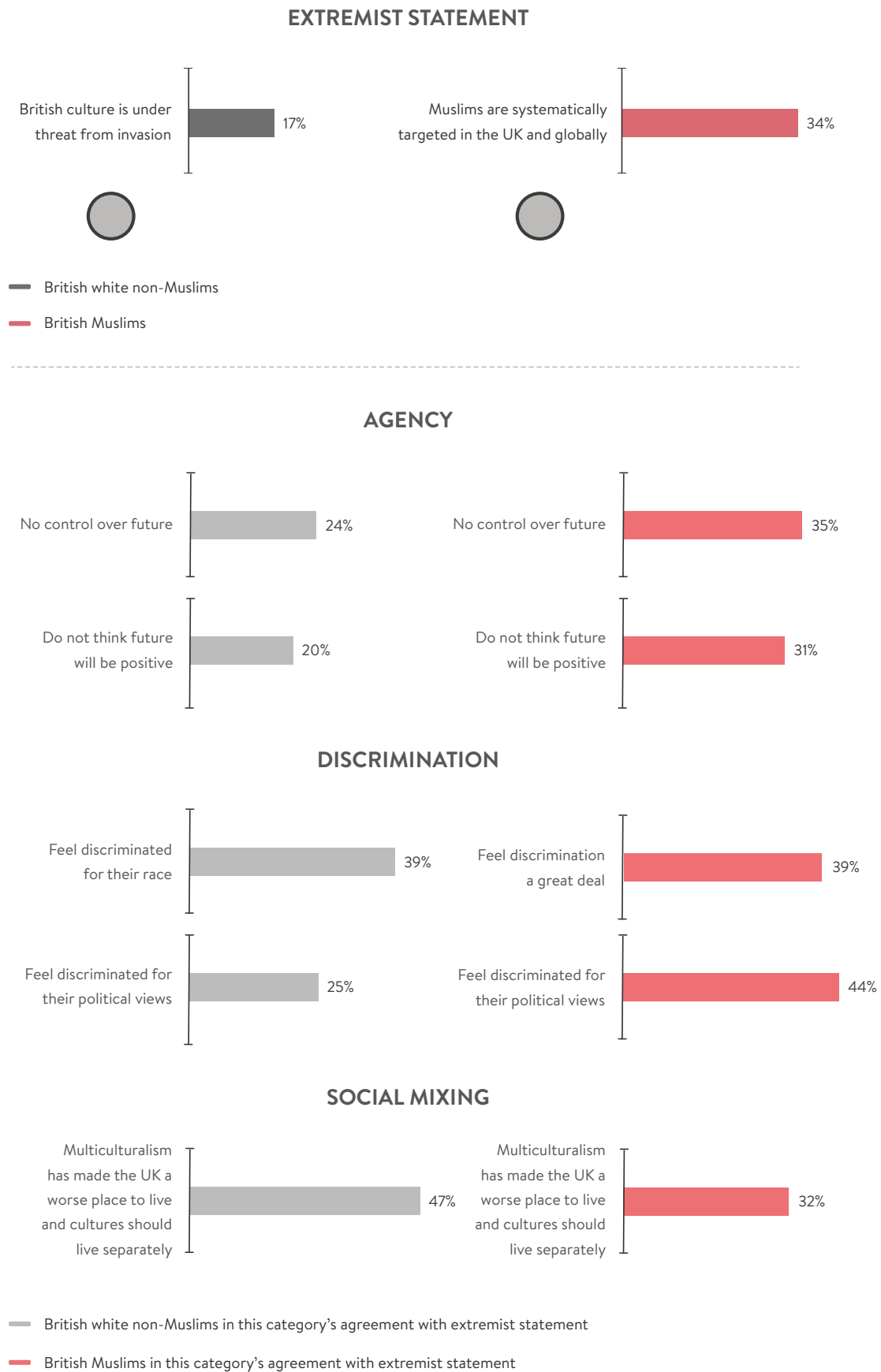
Muslims who have faced discrimination are almost twice as likely as those who have not to agree with the idea that Muslims are systematically targeted in the UK and abroad, which is the most extreme position among those tested (37 versus 20 per cent). Forty-four per cent of those who feel discriminated against for their political views, and 39 per cent of those who feel discriminated against for their race or religion also agreed with this statement (see Figure 7).

In the case of WNM, 39 per cent of all of those who feel subject to discrimination for their race agree with the statement that British culture is under threat from invasion, which is the most extreme position of those tested. Feeling discriminated against for their political views also correlates with picking this statement (25 per cent), although no more than other options (see Figure 7).

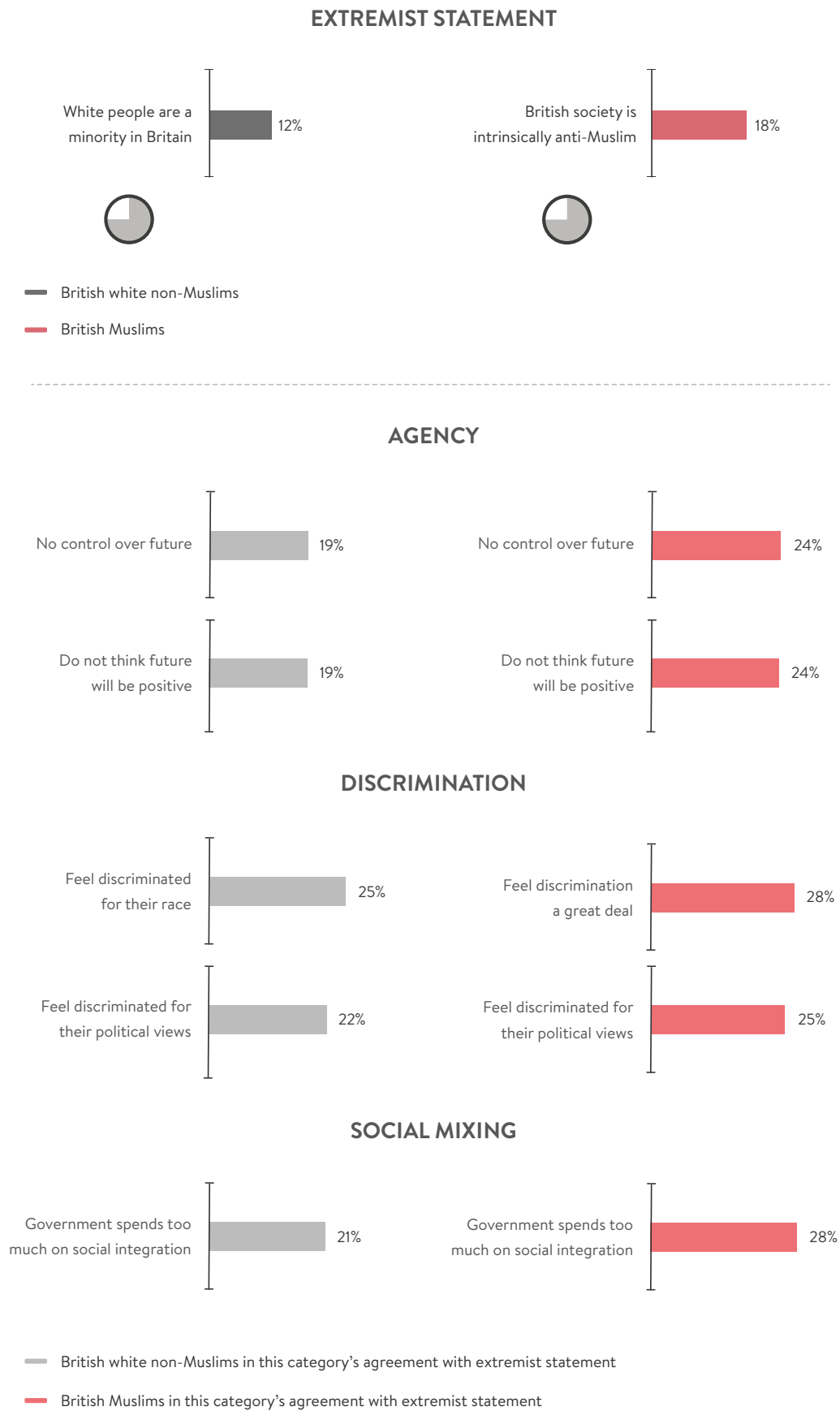
Social Mixing

Forty-seven per cent of WNM who think that multiculturalism has made the UK a worse place to live and/or that cultures should live separately also believe that British culture is under threat from invasion (see Figure 7).

There is less correlation for BM. Thirty-two per cent of those who think multiculturalism has made Britain a worse place to live and/or that cultures should live separately also think that Muslims are systematically targeted in the UK and globally (see Figure 7). Twenty-three per cent of BM who agree with negative sentiments about multiculturalism also think British society is intrinsically anti-Muslim (see Figure 8).

FIGURE 7 Indicators correlated with agreeing with the most extremist statements about victimisation

Source: Q9a: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: Muslims are systematically targeted in the UK and globally. Base size: British Muslims (178). Q9b: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: British culture is under threat from invasion. Base size: British white non-Muslims (120).

FIGURE 8 Indicators correlated with agreeing with the second most extremist statements about victimisation

Source: Q9a: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: British society is intrinsically anti-Muslim. Base size: British Muslims (178). Q9b: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: White people are a minority in Britain. Base size: British white non-Muslims (120).

Case Study:

British Muslims: Victimisation or Discrimination?

One-third of BMs agree with the sentiment that Muslims are systematically targeted in the UK and globally. This result is worrying as it corresponds to what *Narratives of Division* identified as the most extreme position.

The poll suggests that some indicators, such as lack of agency, limited social mixing and feelings of discrimination, are particularly salient when it comes to agreement with extremist statements. However, there is also correlation between this statement and positive sentiments on agency and integration.

An equal number of respondents who feel they can influence their future positively and who feel they have no control over their future agree with this statement (35 per cent). When it comes to integration, BM respondents who think the government is not spending enough on social integration are 1.5 times more likely to agree with this statement than those who think the government is spending too much on social integration (41 versus 26 per cent).

Yet a significant percentage of respondents who show alignment with the other extremist narratives (38 per cent West versus Islam, and 40 per cent anti-establishment views) also agree with this statement.

Likewise, 51 per cent of those who think that Jewish people have used the Holocaust to their advantage pick this answer.

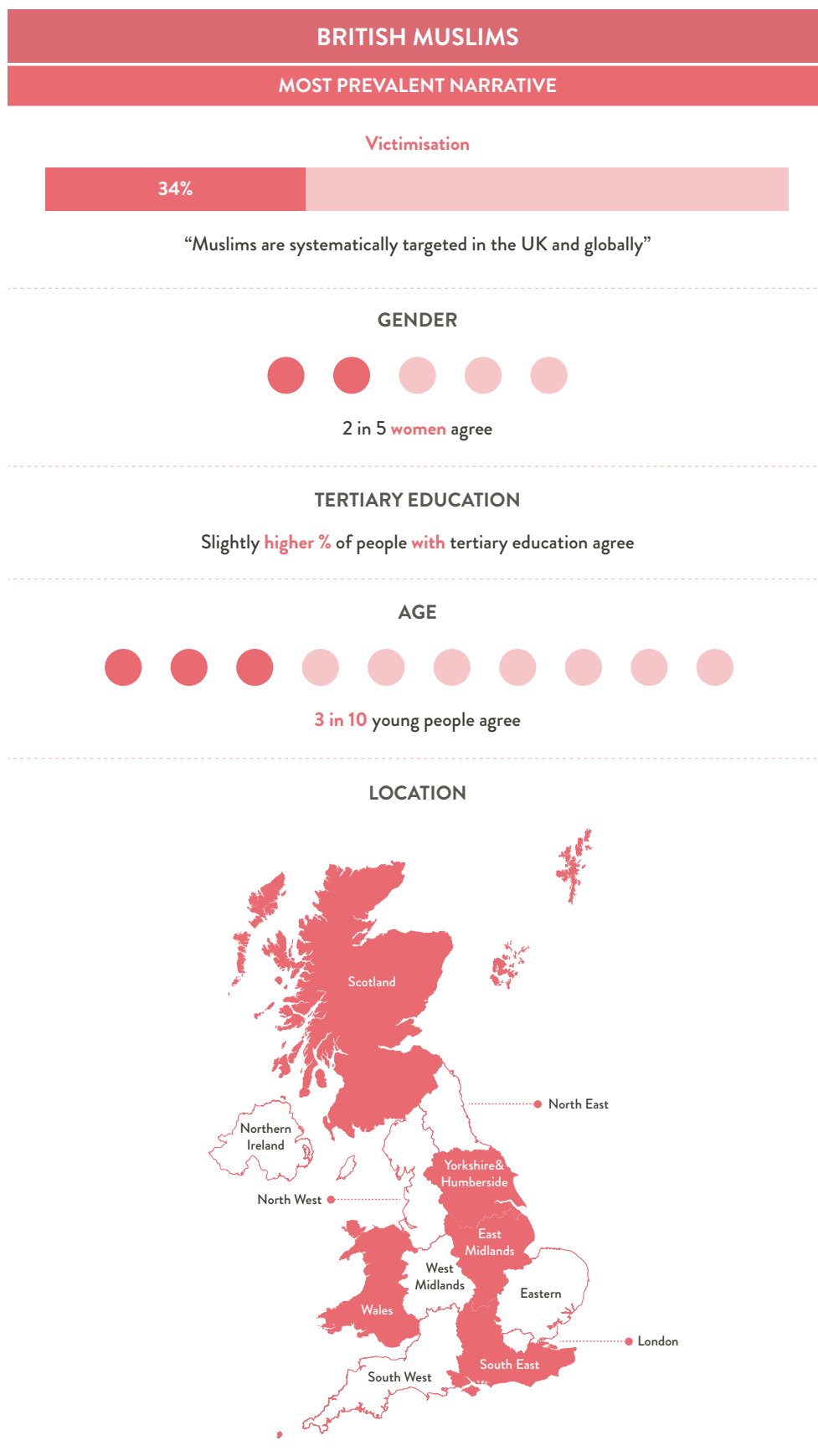
Discrimination is strongly correlated with this sentiment, with BMs who face discrimination being almost twice as likely to believe in systematic targeting as those who do not feel discriminated against (37 versus 20 per cent). Many Muslim participants in our online community report that anti-Muslim sentiment is common in society, media and government. Other prevalent indicators included being female (40 per cent) or from Asian or black ethnicity (34 and 38 per cent), all of which relate to very evident realities of discrimination. Those of black ethnicity constituted a low base size in our sample.*

This speaks to how prevalent discrimination is for Muslims in the UK and exemplifies the difficulty in separating discrimination from victimisation. Worryingly, extremist groups can exploit this to promote their worldviews. This is an ever-pressing issue for policymakers to start tackling.

“I often feel that Muslims are disproportionately targeted in both Government and wider society (...) having a PM who openly referred to women in niqabs as letterboxes perfectly summarizes how normalized Islamophobia has become within British politics.”

Muslim, male, aged 22-25, London

FIGURE 9 Disaggregation of demographic indicators linked to most prevalent extremist narrative for British Muslims



DELEGITIMISING THE GOVERNMENT

Overview

Twenty-three per cent of WNM and 24 per cent of BM agree with the most extreme positions in this category: that democracy is broken and/or that the government should be boycotted (see Figure 10). Additionally, one in ten BM respondents believe that engaging with non-Muslim institutions, such as UK politics, undermines the Muslim community (11 per cent), that you are not a true believer (9 per cent) or that you are a traitor to Islam (9 per cent) (see Figure 11).

Twenty-three per cent of WNM and 17 per cent of BM agree that there is little value in engaging with the political system, which corresponds to the middle or third most extreme position in our scale (see Methodology). We unpicked this statement in the online communities and found that many experienced obstacles in fully engaging with the system, with some WNM pointing to the confusing and ever-changing nature of politics as a deterrent to engaging with the system.

“I feel as though it is a long process to engage with the political system rendering it very frustrating and off putting. I feel as though a lot of effort needs to be put in before your voice is heard.”

Muslim, male, aged 22-25, London

“Current affairs such as Brexit do make it difficult to try and engage in a system so scattered and confused.”

WNM, male, aged 18-21, London

“I think there is a very little value in engaging in the political system as it is very hard for an individual to influence it.”

Muslim, male, aged 22-25, London

“I feel like many people do not engage in the political system, and I can understand that given how often it changes, and it can get very complicated.”

WNM, male, aged 18-21, Yorkshire and Humberside

Below are some key indicators correlated with agreeing with any of the two groups of extremist messages in this category (see Figures 10 and 11).

Main Indicators

Agency

More BM than WNM (37 versus 30 per cent) who think their future will not be positive agree with negative statements about democracy (see Figure 12). Those who feel they have no control over their future are more likely than those who feel able to positively influence their future (36 versus 22 per cent) to agree with sentiments about boycotting and replacing democracy.

BM who do not think their future will be positive or who feel no control over their future (19 and 17 per cent; see Figure 13) are twice as likely as those who feel able to influence their future (7 per cent) to think that engaging with non-Muslim institutions, like UK politics, means you are a traitor to Islam.

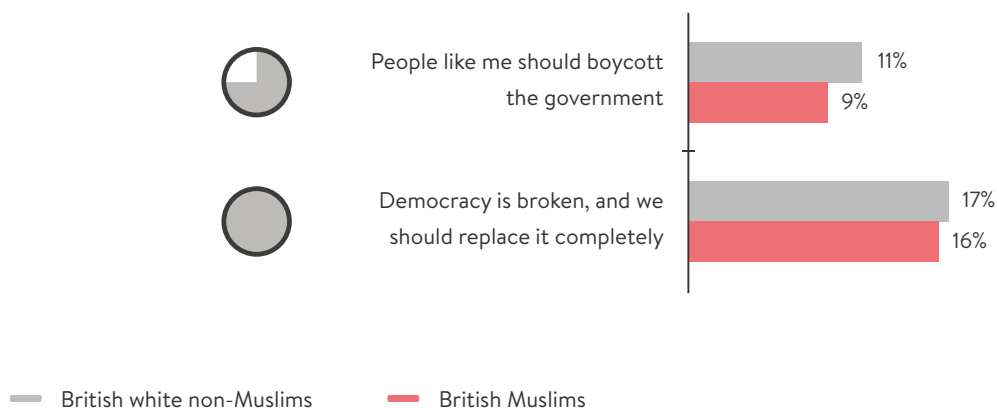
Discrimination

Of those who face discrimination a great deal, more BM than WNM agree with ideas of replacing and boycotting democracy (41 versus 31 per cent; see Figure 12). The total of BM who report feeling discrimination (25 per cent) are more likely to agree with the idea that democracy is broken than those who never face discrimination (4 per cent).

The targeted characteristics of discrimination are significant. More WNM who feel discriminated against for their political views agree with these negative statements about democracy than BM who feel the same (46 versus 36 per cent; see Figure 12).

Social Mixing

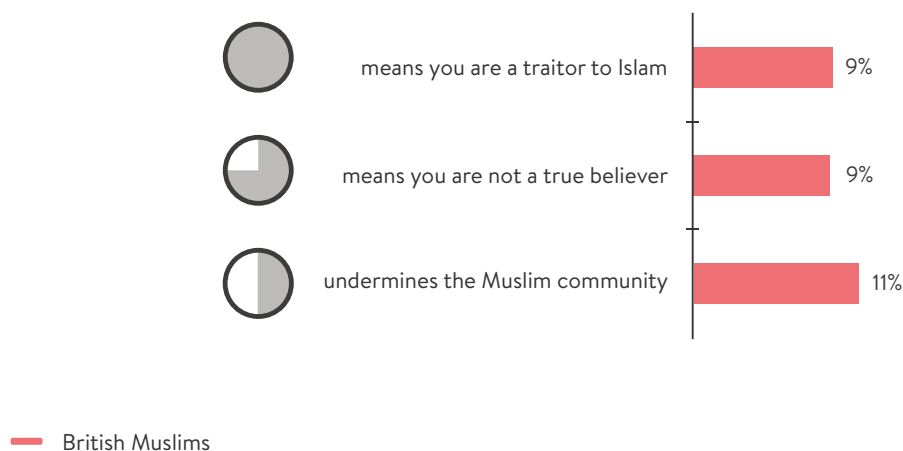
BM who do not have friends from a different race or religion are more likely to agree with statements about replacing democracy versus those who do (30 and 27 versus 23 per cent on average). They are also more likely to agree with the idea that engaging with non-Muslim institutions, such as UK politics, means you are a traitor to Islam (religion: 23 versus 8 per cent; race: 24 versus 8 per cent; see Figure 13).*

FIGURE 10 Agreement with extremist statements about democracy

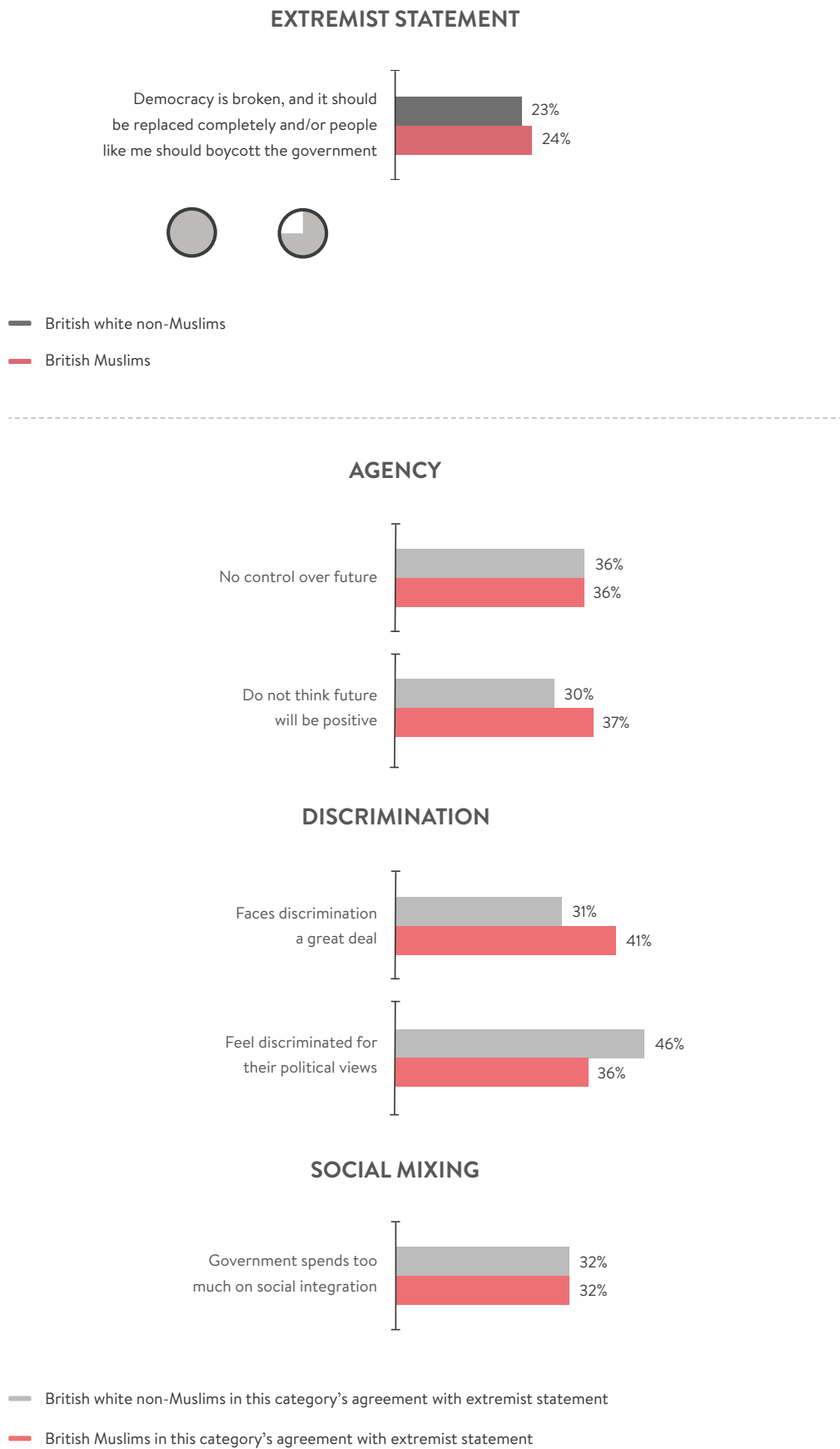
Source: Q10: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: I have criticisms about the government but believe in democracy/ I oppose some government policies but am open to engaging with government to improve them/ There is little value in engaging with the political system/ Democracy is broken, and we should replace it completely/ People like me should boycott the government/ None of these. Base size: All respondents (2,022).

FIGURE 11 Agreement with extremist statements about Muslims and UK politics

Engaging with non-Muslim institutions, like UK politics,

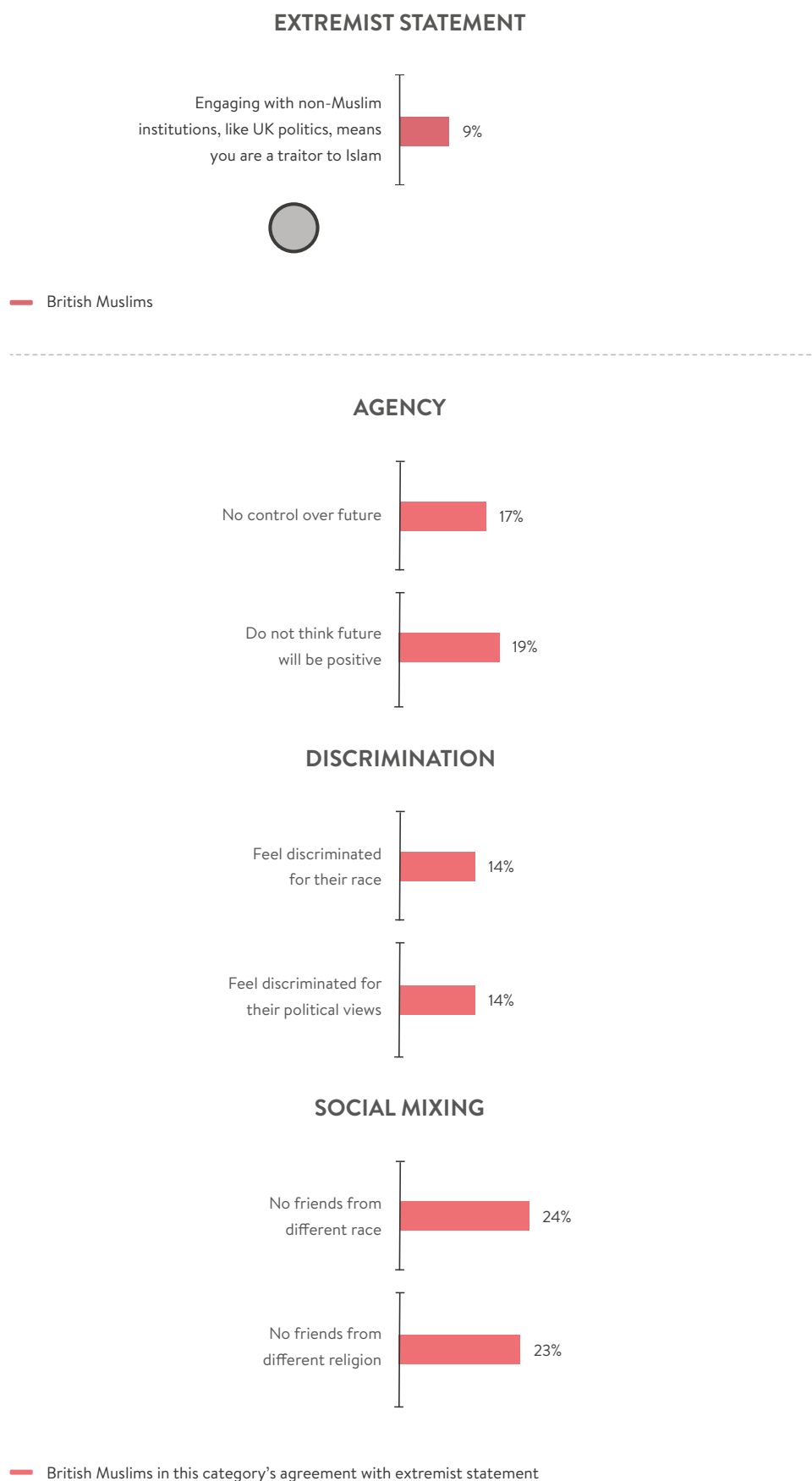


Source: Q13a: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: Muslims are diverse and so are their political views/ There are certain issues that good Muslims should care about/ Muslims should have a united stance on political issues/ Engaging with non-Muslim institutions, like UK politics, undermines the Muslim community/ Engaging with non-Muslim institutions, like UK politics, means you are not a true believer/ Engaging with non-Muslim institutions, like UK politics, means you are a traitor to Islam/ None of these. Base size: All British Muslims (1,011).

FIGURE 12 Indicators correlated with agreeing with extremist statements about democracy

Source: Q10: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: NET: Democracy is broken, and we should replace it completely/ People like me should boycott the government. Base size: British Muslims (235), British white non-Muslims (242).

FIGURE 13 Indicators correlated with agreeing with extremist statements about Muslims and UK politics



Source: Source: Q13a: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: Engaging with non-Muslim institutions, like UK politics, means you are a traitor to Islam. Base size: All British Muslims (90).

Thirty-two per cent of both BMs and WNM who think the government is spending too much on social integration also agree with negative statements about democracy and the government (see Figure 12).*

Forty-seven per cent of both BMs and WNM who agree that multiculturalism has made Britain a worse place to live and/or that cultures should live separately also agree with the sentiment of boycotting and replacing democracy.

Case Study:

Trust in Government

In addition to the quantitative survey, we also carried out a 57-person online qualitative study to explore in detail this significant issue of distrust in government.

In general, participants in our online communities generally distrusted the government but were more likely to support local government. This gives credence to the theory that contact can improve levels of trust. Actions by local government are visible and therefore trusted, whereas Westminster is seen only through distant rhetoric that can reinforce scepticism. Those from a working-class background are more likely to agree with the claim that there is little value in engaging with the political system.

“I do believe that [elected representatives] are trying their best to improve our local community. As they are from the local area, so they know that the problems that the local area are facing and try to help tackle them.”

Muslim, female, aged 22-25, North West

Muslim respondents display higher levels of distrust and are more likely to say that they have never trusted the government than their non-Muslim counterparts. Comments from government spokespeople came up time and time again, often in relation to perceived Islamophobia.

It is likely that the political context in which the online communities work took place might have

influenced the respondents' answers, with several linking their lack of trust in the system to current political challenges such as Brexit. The online communities were conducted in October 2019, while Prime Minister Boris Johnson was attempting to get his Brexit deal through Parliament.

“The Brexit vote has resulted in such a big mess, but the majority decided to leave yet MPs are not carrying out the will of the people – therefore why bother voting?”

WNM, female, aged 26-30, West Midlands

“I do think democracy is broken, especially after Brexit and the Cambridge Analytica scandal. Right-winged politicians illegally, unethically and unfairly got their way.”

Muslim, male, aged 22-25, London

Yet our online communities also revealed a worrying underlying openness to authoritarian political solutions to rebuilding trust in government, including measures of securitisation and government control.

“If the government was to work alongside a social media outlet that is commonly used by terrorist organisations, like WhatsApp, they could have a team of people whose job it is to go through people of interest's conversations, looking for anything dangerous.”

WNM, female, aged 18-21, South East

Given that polls show falling support for democracy among young people, this is especially worrying. However, it should be caveated that responses may be instinctive, showing more a lack of information and time to process complex challenges rather than support for strongman governments. They could reflect underlying feelings of fear and insecurity.²²

These are the feelings that can potentially be exploited by extremist groups. By presenting simple solutions to complex challenges, extremist groups can hijack this instinctive sentiment to build support for their broader agenda.

VIOLENCE

While half of both BM and WNM respondents agree that there is never any justification for terrorism or political violence, a smaller but not negligible minority sympathise with violent messaging:

- Thirteen per cent of both groups believe that violent action is sometimes necessary and justified to achieve change.
- Fifteen per cent of BMs agreed that people should be prepared to go out to fight to defend their religion or culture with force (compared with 9 per cent of WNM, see Figure 14).

Our online focus groups show that the majority of participants do not see violence as an acceptable vehicle for change. Some participants see violence as circumstantial and cite examples from history or current affairs in which violent resistance helped bring about democracy. This could indicate a willingness for ends to justify the means.

Our polling also confirms that there is an overlap between non-violent and violent extremist views. Between one- and two-fifths of those who agree with extremist messaging about victimisation, the West versus Islam, anti-establishment views and anti-Semitism also buy into the idea of defending their culture or religion with force.

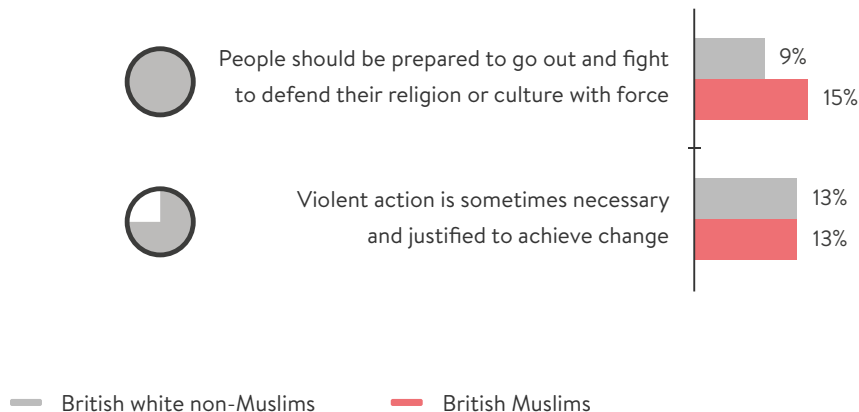
“Resorting to violence can become a means of expressing frustration. Does that make it right? No. Should you have to be forced to protest for your basic rights? No. So it is quite circumstantial.”

Muslim, male, aged 22-25, London

“People who are disproportionately affected by issues may resort to violence if they feel desperate, or that there is no other way to get what they want/need.”

WNM, female, aged 18-21, South East

FIGURE 14 Agreement with statements about violence



Source: Q12: From the statements below, please select the statements you agree with the most: There is never any justification for terrorism or political violence/ Some acts that are considered terrorism could be a response to government policies/ Certain groups are justified in their use of armed resistance/ Violent action is sometimes necessary and justified to achieve change/ People should be prepared to go out and fight to defend their religion or culture with force/ None of these. Base size: All respondents (2,022).

Methodology

The Spectrum of Islamist-Inspired and Far-Right Worldviews

Our previous two reports in this series provided a resource mapping views from mainstream to extreme on the key narratives of Islamist-inspired and far-right groups (see Tables 1 and 2 below). Underpinned by a quantitative analysis of non-violent and violent extremists' public statements, these frameworks present gradations in ideology to help chart the grey area between divisive language and extremism.

Quantitative Survey

Savanta ComRes conducted an online survey of 1,011 young British Muslims and 1,011 young non-Muslim white Britons aged 18–30 in May 2019, as well as a regression analysis (Key Drivers Analysis) of the survey data. Data from the online survey were weighted to be representative of:

- Muslims by age, gender, region and ethnicity in Britain.
- White non-Muslims by age, gender and region in Britain.

The aim of the survey was to explore the extent to which the divisive “us vs them” political narratives of Islamist and far-right groups are resonating with young people in the UK. To do so, we designed a list of survey questions that matched each of the categories from the spectra in our previous reports (see Tables 1 and 2). These are: victimisation, Islam versus the West, delegitimising the government or anti-establishment, “good” Muslim versus “bad” Muslim, the centrality of Islam in politics and justification of violence. We also added questions reflective of a spectrum of views on anti-Semitism, multiculturalism and Islam.

We adapted the five gradations of the spectra to form the basis of our polling questions so we could gauge the level of agreement with the more extreme end of the spectrum. Throughout this report, we identify these extreme statements with the symbols “◐” and “◑”. This allows us to link the statement and its response to its position on our tables (see Table 1 and Table 2) depicting a spectrum of views from mainstream to extreme.

Within the data, as portrayed throughout this report, some questions prompted multiple answers from respondents. Therefore, the sum of the total responses sometimes exceeds 100 per cent. Additionally, there are references to aggregated responses that combine multiple responses. This is marked as relevant.

Within this report, there are references to quantitative data with a base size of less than 100 respondents. This is a result of the niche audience interviewed, and the even more specific sub-samples analysed. These are clearly indicated with an asterisk (*). As a result, those data points should be used for indicative purposes only. This is to be expected, since extremist views are held by a minority. While the findings have pinpointed strong correlations between extremist views and issues such as agency, discrimination and social mixing, we should bear in mind that extremism is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by just one factor.

Savanta ComRes ran a series of regression analyses to understand the statistically significant factors that lead respondents to agree with extremist statements in the survey. This compared the dependent variable or “extremism coefficient” – which measures the degree of agreement with extremist statements – with other attitudinal, demographic or media consumption factors.

Qualitative Study

From 30 September to 4 October 2019, Savanta ComRes ran two online communities with 57 adults of the same characteristics in an online platform. One group consisted of young British Muslims, the other young white non-Muslims. Respondents engaged in interactive conversations and participated in creative tasks including picture books and “ideastorms”. The research questions for this study were:

- Why do young people not trust the government?
- What could government do to restore young people’s trust in the system?

TABLE 1 A range of positions from mainstream to extreme on six key Islamist narratives









		Victimisation	“Good Muslim” vs “Bad Muslim”	Islam vs the West	Delegitimising the Government	The Centrality of Islam in Politics	Justification of Violence
Mainstream		Raises awareness of anti-Muslim incidents	Does not label Muslims with different views as disloyal	Sees no conflict between being Muslim and British	May criticise but does not reject the political system	Sees Islam as a spiritual guide, which may influence political views	Makes no attempt to justify violence
		Sometimes uses alarmist rhetoric about anti-Muslim discrimination permeating society	Occasionally questions motives of Muslims with different views	Highlights distinct Muslim and Western identities but sees no clash	Takes a strong stance against existing policies but open to engagement	Sees Muslim identity as a reference point for activism.	Provides some justification for violence
		Sees victimisation as a consequence of a security state	Regularly portrays some Muslims as being against fellow Muslims	Emphasises tensions between West and Muslims world	Sees little value in engaging with a system seen as against Muslims	Believes Islam should have a central role in politics	Openly supports violent international groups
		Sees victimisation as systemic and inevitable	Uses hostile language against Muslims seen as traitors	Portrays West as antagonistic towards Muslims	Actively seeks to delegitimise govt in eyes of Muslims	Supports Islamic governance or a unified authority over Muslim states	Believes violent jihad can be justified
Extreme		Believes in global conspiracy against Muslims	Classifies all Muslims who do not hold same views as apostates	Perceives inherent unresolvable conflict between Islam and West	Rejects Western democratic model and advocates complete overhaul	Advocates a global Islamic caliphate	Directly encourages violence

TABLE 2 A range of positions from mainstream to extreme on four key far-right narratives

	Islam vs the West	Victimisation	Anti-Establishment	Justification of Violence
Mainstream	 Sees no conflict between being British and Muslim	Does not believe people are discriminated against for being white	May criticise but does not reject wider political system	Does not condone violence
	 Criticises some aspects of Islam and multiculturalism	Believes political correctness can make it harder to be white	Believes certain “elites” are responsible for an unjust system	Provides some justification for violence
	 Believes in protecting British culture against multiculturalism	Believes that society is privileging minority groups ahead of white people	Accuses the “elites” of betraying the “people”	Argues that violent action is sometimes justified to achieve change
	 Sees Islam as a growing and violent threat	Believes Britain is becoming unsafe for white people	Advocates drastic changes to the democratic system which it sees as corrupt	Openly supports individuals and groups who have committed acts of violence
Extreme	 Believes that the Christian West should unite against Islam	Believes there is a global conspiracy to replace the white race	Advocates complete overhaul of political system and rejection of democracy	Urges people to fight to defend their religion or culture with force

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