



BRITISH MUSLIMS: DEMOGRAPHY AND COMMUNITIES

This guide gives an overview of how many Muslims there are in the UK, and how these communities are characterised



“ A major problem for Muslims in the UK has been the way they have been perceived by others. ”

KEY POINTS

- In 2011, there were 2.8 million Muslims in the UK. 4.8 per cent of the population of England and Wales were Muslim; in Scotland the figure was 1.4 per cent.
- Nearly half the UK’s Muslims were under 25 years old in 2011.
- On education and employment issues, the 2011 census showed an improving picture of attainment and progress for British Muslims compared to 2001. There was evidence of a ‘Muslim penalty’ for both women and men, however.
- In three separate scenarios, the US Pew Research Centre projected the Muslim population in the UK in 2050 to be 9.7 per cent (zero migration scenario), 16.7 per cent (medium migration scenario) and 17.2 per cent (high migration scenario).
- British Muslim communities are characterised by religion, kinship, language and ethnicity. Research has often focused on Muslims from a single ethnic group settled in a city or neighbourhood, such as Yemeni Muslims in South Shields or Bangladeshi Muslims in Tower Hamlets.
- Muslims differ from one another historically, socially, politically and demographically. They are internally differentiated too, for example by religious sect, political faction and generational differences.
- A major problem for Muslims in the UK has been the way they have been perceived by others. Anti-Islamic sentiment has had a long history in Europe, but Islamophobia (fear and dislike of Islam and Muslims) has been especially pronounced since 9/11.
- There is a long history of research on Muslims in the UK. Researchers have differentiated Muslim communities on the basis of national or ethnic origin, areas of settlement, and sectarian identity. Research on young Muslims has become important in recent decades.

BRITISH MUSLIMS TODAY: THE STATISTICS

People were asked a question about their religious affiliation for the first time in the population census of 2001, and this was then repeated in 2011. Statistical analysis of the data by the Office of National Statistics, the Scottish Government and the Muslim Council of Britain provides a useful guide to the demography of Britain's Muslims. Comparing data from 2001 and 2011 helps build a picture of religious trends.

The Muslim population of the UK increased between 2001 and 2011. England and Wales saw Muslims increase in number from 1.55 million to 2.71 million, rising from three to just under five per cent of the population (Christians declined from 72 to 59 per cent, and those reporting no religion rose from 15 to 25 per cent in the same period). In Scotland, the number of Muslims rose to approximately 77,000 (about 1.4 per cent of the population); in Northern Ireland there were reported to be 3,800 Muslims in 2011.

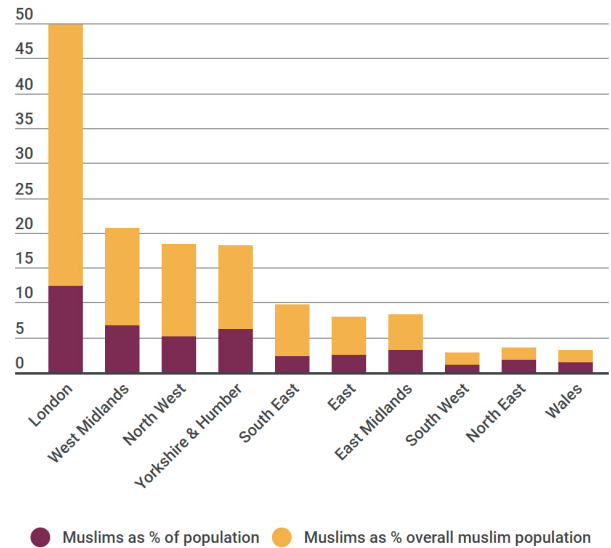


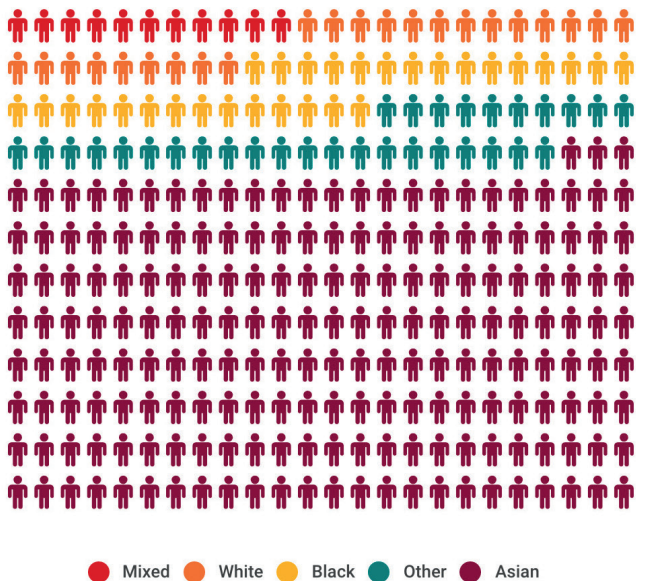
Figure 2, Census 2011, Geographical Distribution of Muslims in England and Wales

Nearly half of all Muslims were born in the UK, with most of the remainder born in South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Muslims had the youngest age profile of all the religious groups: nearly half of them were under 25 in 2011.

The Muslim population was ethnically diverse. More than two-thirds of Muslims were Asian, with the remainder from White, Arab and Black African backgrounds. Muslims with Pakistani heritage constituted the largest number (with over a million people).

In 2011, the majority of Muslims lived in Greater London, the West Midlands, Yorkshire and Humberside, the North West, and the major cities of Scotland and Wales. The census revealed where Muslims resided, down to electoral ward level. In London, Muslims made up 12.4 per cent of the population. The Yorkshire city of Bradford had the highest concentration, with just under a quarter of its population Muslim, but two London boroughs had still higher concentrations (Tower Hamlets, with 34.5 per cent, and Newham, with 32 per cent).

The White British population is the only group that lives in relative isolation from others, on average living in Districts with 85% of White British residents. All ethnic minority groups live



MIXED 3.8%	OTHER 10.7%
	ARAB 6.6%
WHITE 7.8%	OTHER ETHNIC GROUP 4.1%
BRITISH 2.9%	
IRISH 0.1%	ASIAN 67.6%
OTHER WHITE 4.9%	INDIAN 7.3%
	PAKISTANI 38.0%
BLACK 10.1%	BANGLADESHI 14.9%
BLACK CARIBBEAN 0.3%	CHINESE 0.3%
BLACK AFRICAN 7.7%	OTHER ASIAN 2.1%
OTHER BLACK 2.1%	

Figure 1, Census 2011, Ethnicity of Muslims in England and Wales

in Districts where on average they make up fewer than 10% of the residents.

(Simpson 2012: 1)

Research showed minorities, including Muslims, to be less segregated and more spread out in 2011 than they had been in 2001. However, nearly half of all Muslims in England and Wales lived in the bottom 10 per cent of most deprived local authority areas.

On education and employment issues, the 2011 population census showed an improving picture compared with ten years earlier, with a reduction in the percentage of Muslims with no qualifications, and a greater percentage of women participating in higher education and the labour market. However, only 20 per cent of the Muslim population was in full-time employment, compared to 35 per cent in the population as a whole, and unemployment was higher (at just over 7 per cent compared to 4 per cent).

Research has demonstrated a 'Muslim penalty' for both women and men from different ethnic groups in relation to economic activity and unemployment. One study found that both 'colour' and 'culture' impacted on people's chances in the employment market, with the penalty increasing as a person moved up the job ladder. British Muslims, particularly those of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage, were the most disadvantaged of UK ethno-religious groups, experiencing the double penalty of race and religion as a result of the growing Islamophobia and hostility against them.

In November 2017, as part of its Global Futures Project, the US Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life sought to project the size of the European Muslim population, including that of the UK, to 2050. It offered three scenarios, depending on differing levels of migration, with the baseline being the 2016 figure of Muslims at 4.9 per cent of the total European population:

Even if all migration into Europe were to immediately and permanently stop – a 'zero migration' scenario – the Muslim population of Europe still would be expected to rise from the current level of 4.9% to

7.4% by the year 2050. This is because Muslims are younger [...] and have higher fertility [...] than other Europeans, mirroring a global pattern.

A second, 'medium' migration scenario assumes that all refugee flows will stop as of mid-2016 but that recent levels of "regular" migration to Europe will continue [...] Under these conditions, Muslims could reach 11.2% of Europe's population in 2050. Finally, a 'high' migration scenario projects the record flow of refugees into Europe between 2014 and 2016 to continue indefinitely into the future with the same religious composition (i.e., mostly made up of Muslims) in addition to the typical annual flow of regular migrants. In this scenario, Muslims could make up 14% of Europe's population by 2050 – nearly triple the current share, but still considerably smaller than the populations of both Christians and people with no religion in Europe.

(Pew Research Centre on Religion and Public Life 2017)

Breaking these projections down by country, the Pew Research Centre estimated a UK Muslim population of 9.7 per cent (zero migration scenario), 16.7 per cent (medium migration scenario) and 17.2 per cent (high migration scenario). The countries projected to experience the greatest increase in the medium scenario, including the UK, were those that had been destinations for the highest numbers of regular Muslim migrants (e.g. from Pakistan and Bangladesh), rather than for those refugees who arrived between 2014 and 2016.

COMMUNITIES: INTERNAL CHARACTERISTICS AND EXTERNAL PERCEPTIONS

Demography tells us how many people share certain characteristics, and where those people are clustered, but it doesn't reveal whether or not that group of individuals actually constitutes a community. Neither does it identify the common ties and key factors that bind them together and separate them from others. The very concept of 'community' has been extensively debated and critiqued by scholars. In

popular usage, however, the term 'community' is used for a variety of collective types, some based on ethnicity and language, some on locality or on occupation, and others on religion or another shared interest or set of practices. Many communities include people of different ages, genders and other social characteristics, but some draw their boundaries more narrowly, and contain only those of a single age group, gender, belief system or interest group.

It is appropriate to ask the question: 'A community for whom?' In the case of 'Muslim communities', are their members involved in a meaningful relationship with one another and do they have things in common? Do they function as a community, or are they just a loosely connected group of individuals? External circumstances may play a part in how they see themselves, for example, whether they feel they are bound together as a result of external pressures. Muslims may also be treated as a community by others, by national or local government, by NGOs, scholars or other religious groups.

In both popular and scholarly discourse, British Muslim communities are identified first and foremost by their religion, but also by kinship, language and ethnicity. Yemeni, Pakistani, Somali, Bangladeshi and Turkish communities in Britain are held to connect together Muslims with a shared heritage and with family origins in another part of the world (in many cases, former British colonies). Their members may be related by blood, marriage or wider social and transnational connections, and – depending on their length of settlement – they will be made up of multiple generations. They often share a mother tongue, though later generations prioritise English. They have their own community institutions, facilities and services. Everyday practices and special events, which are often gender-specific, draw on social and cultural traditions, but the local and national context also plays a part.

British Muslim communities are internally complex and dynamic. They change over time and from one location to another. They have their own internal struggles and differences, over family matters, between the generations, and over religious and

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political differences. However, something that marks them out from others has been the way they have been perceived by outsiders.

ISLAMOPHOBIA

The term 'Islamophobia' was first used in the 1990s to refer to dislike, distrust or prejudice directed at Islam or Muslims. But such hostility has been traced back to the work of the English monk and scholar, Bede (673-735 CE), who expressed anti-'Saracen' views many centuries before Muslims began to settle in Britain. Over time, Islam was repeatedly described by clerics, travellers and other commentators as the enemy of Christianity and a threat to Europe.

Since 9/11, in addition to the stigmatisation of individual Muslims on the streets and online, their communities have often been seen as suspect, as potential sites of radicalisation, and the target of counter-terrorist strategy and initiatives. Fear of terrorism has hardened the boundary between British Muslims and other Britons, even though the number of those actively involved is very small. The popular media, and increasingly social media, has repeatedly constructed Muslims as a monolithic group different from other people in the UK. Muslims have been associated with conflict, extremism and terrorism. The way they have been reported has generated anxiety about the Islamization of Britain.

This negative representation has not only had the effect of marginalising British Muslims but also of

bringing their identity as Muslims to the fore in every sphere of life outside the home. They no longer feel like students, taxi drivers and doctors, but as Muslim students, Muslim taxi drivers and Muslim doctors, irrespective of their other roles or identities.

RESEARCH ON BRITISH MUSLIM COMMUNITIES

There have been three major academic approaches to understanding 'Muslim communities'. Researchers have differentiated them on the basis of national/ethnic origin, area of settlement or sectarian identity.

Differentiating communities by national or ethnic origin – e.g., as Yemeni Muslims or Pakistani Muslims – has meant foregrounding their social, cultural and linguistic characteristics and traditions, their migration histories and transnational connections. Such communities have been presented as part of the multicultural character of the UK. But they have also been seen as drivers of economic and cultural development back in their countries of origin, where their remittances and investment in building projects have made a material difference to the local and national economy.

In another academic tradition, communities are defined according to geography or location. People within a bounded area, such as a neighbourhood or even a city, are held to be interconnected and to have common needs, concerns and interests. Demographic information and analysis about local Muslim communities, such as Muslims in Leicester, Blackburn or Luton, is drawn on by MPs, local councils and other public bodies to better understand those they represent and serve, to deliver effective community relations and law and order, to identify and target service provision, and improve future planning for housing, education, healthcare and policing.

The focus by researchers on religious communities or groups reflects the fact that, for quite a number of Muslims, religion is considered to be more important for self-identity than nationality, ethnic background or locality. For these Muslims, their 'community' is made up of those with whom they share a particular

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religious identity as well as beliefs, values and practices, such as prayer and fasting. They spend time together, build close relationships and support the group financially.

Religious communities often link Muslims across ethnic or geographical boundaries. Some operate nationally, such as Young Muslims UK or the Muslim Council of Britain; others transnationally, such as the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order or Tablighi-Jama'at.

There is an extensive academic literature on British Muslims and Muslim communities in the UK. This is discussed in more detail in the CREST report, *Muslims and Islam in the UK* (www.crestresearch.ac.uk/BritishMuslims). In summary, some researchers have reported on the history and contemporary profile of Muslims in Britain. The majority of detailed case studies, however, have focused on specific Muslim ethnic groups settled in high density locations, such as Yemeni Muslims in Tyneside, Pakistani Muslims in Bradford, Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets, or Turkish, Somali and Kurdish Muslims in London (see further reading below). Other researchers have examined communities based on their religious rather than ethnic identity, focusing on Britain's Sufis or Salafi Muslim women.

READ MORE

This is one of a series of CREST guides on British Muslims. Download and read the full series at: www.crestresearch.ac.uk/BritishMuslims



READ MORE

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