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# "No, we vote for whoever we want to": Young British Muslims making new claims on citizenship amidst ongoing forms of marginalisation

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## Abstract

Young people's relationship with politics is routinely deemed problematic by a range of influential actors. Amidst concerns over disengagement and the potential for radicalisation, the political participation of Muslim young people is often particularly scrutinised. In contrast to such 'crisis narratives' this paper reports on qualitative research with young Muslims in a northern English city. Consistent with research on young people in general, the findings reveal widespread disillusionment with electoral politics amongst this group. Despite this, most respondents were politically engaged and voiced claims for a substantive representation which addressed mainstream and often national political issues. These claims were articulated in contrast to an older generation who were seen as prioritising local issues and representation much more closely tied to kinship and ethnic identity. These Muslim young people were asserting claims for a more mainstream citizenship marked against the political and cultural orientations of an older migrant generation and a wider social context of ongoing racism, Islamophobia and marginalisation.

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Young people's relationship with politics is routinely deemed problematic by a range of influential actors. Amidst concerns over disengagement and the potential for radicalisation, the political participation of Muslim young people is often particularly scrutinised. In contrast to such 'crisis narratives' this paper reports on qualitative research with young Muslims in a northern English city. Consistent with research on young people in general, the findings reveal widespread disillusionment with electoral politics amongst this group. Despite this, most respondents were politically engaged and voiced claims for a substantive representation which addressed mainstream and often national political issues. These claims were articulated in contrast to an older generation who were seen as prioritising local issues and representation much more closely tied to kinship and ethnic identity. These Muslim young people were asserting claims for a more mainstream citizenship marked against the political and cultural orientations of an older migrant generation and a wider social context of ongoing racism, Islamophobia and marginalisation.

## Introduction

For some decades now a range of social and political actors have deemed young people's political participation as inadequate and cause for concern. The focus of such concern typically centres on young people's lack of engagement with electoral politics, and in particular their lower levels of turnout at elections. Recently, former US Vice President and Presidential candidate, Al Gore, characterised lower youth turnout at US midterm elections as 'pathetic' (Duca 2018). Various media outlets report concern over young people's lack of electoral participation and the apparent risk this poses to democratic societies (e.g. The Economist 2017). There is some evidence to suggest that at recent elections young people may be voting at higher levels (e.g. Sloam and Henn 2019), however their lower turnout for the past couple of decades has been a source of concern for numerous governments (European Commission 2002).

While there has been widespread concern over young people's general lack of electoral participation, in recent years particular concern has focused on ethnic minority young people, especially young Muslims. In the UK, following disturbances between police and British Asian youth in northern English towns and cities in 2001 (Bagguley and Hussain 2008), official reports highlighted the apparent political disaffection of such young people from the democratic process as a key factor (Cantle 2001). Similar comments were made in a report by the Department for Communities and Local Government (2005) in the wake of the July 2005 London bombings (see also HMG 2011). Part of the concern over this apparent political disengagement by young British Muslims is that disaffection from electoral politics will leave them vulnerable to radicalisation by Islamic extremist groups. Recent research highlights the increasing presence of 'radicalisation' in public discourse and also shows how the term has shifted from one which related to a range of extreme political, religious or ideological beliefs to one which is almost exclusively associated with Islam (Silva, 2017). O'Toole

(2015) has described these discourses of disengagement and the threat of radicalisation as 'crisis narratives' that are pervasive in public and official imaginings of Muslim youth in the UK. Significantly, she also identifies a weak evidential base for claims of political disaffection and the work of her and others suggests a much more vibrant and varied range of civic and political engagements amongst ethnic minority young people in the UK.

Our paper seeks to contribute to a small but growing number of studies which identify a shift in the forms of citizenship articulated by recent generations of ethnic minority young people in established democracies. In examining political participation amongst young Muslims we locate our research in an emerging body of work which recognises the importance of religion alongside other aspects of identity in producing a distinctive set of contextual experiences which shape the political experiences of young Muslims. Despite a pervasive social context of suspicion, securitisation, Islamophobia and racism, the young British Muslims we spoke to were making more assertive claims to citizenship and seeking greater involvement with national social and political issues. Our participants articulated these greater claims to citizenship against the backdrop of their parents' generation, which they perceived as being more focused on local community issues and engagement with electoral politics more concerned with familial connections than broad policy agendas or issues. Participants put some stock in descriptive representation, seeing value in having political representatives that shared a similar ethnic and social background; but seeing themselves reflected in their political leaders was not deemed sufficient. They wanted to assert their political autonomy and support candidates who they believed would be effective representatives on a range of broad policy areas like inequality, health and education. They were also prepared to assert their claims for substantive representation (Pitkin 1967) in defiance of parents and other relatives who called on them to vote according to familial connections. Many of the young people in this research wanted to move beyond, in their view, this parochial politics, and engage more directly with the wider issues facing young Muslims in Britain more broadly. The paper proceeds in four parts. The first section outlines relevant literature on the ways in which recent generations of ethnic minority young people are practicing politics and redefining its meaning in the process. The second section describes the methods and approach of the current study before the third section addresses the key findings, followed by concluding remarks.


## Young British Muslims and a changing politics

Consistent with research findings on other groups of young people in established democracies, research with British Muslims and ethnic minority young people shows that they tend to have limited engagement with electoral politics but are engaging in new ways with a politics that is more broadly conceptualised. While research on how Muslim youth experience politics is still a nascent field, existing research indicates that their relationship with politics is shaped by some of the wider social dynamics giving form to young people's political engagements around the world. O'Toole and Gale (2013) explored 'new grammars of action' amongst ethnic minority young people engaged with a variety of social and political groups in Birmingham and Bradford, UK. Reflecting wider social trends which have seen a growth in postmaterialist values (Norris 2002) and the increasing importance of culture, identity and reflexivity for political engagement and expression (e.g. Beck 1997; Bennett 2008), O'Toole and Gale found ethnic minority young people engaging in 'DIY' activism which they sought out for its more hands-on characteristics and potential to make a concrete difference (see also Bang 2004). The use of digital technology provided for looser

networked forms of organisation (e.g. Bennett and Segerberg 2013) and the capacity to deftly move between a local and global orientation – with the national holding less significance.

As suggested above, the provisions of digital technology and the wider processes of globalisation has meant that a transnational or cosmopolitan politics is important for many young citizens, not just young Muslims (Henn and Sloam 2019). However, there are repeated findings about the importance of foreign policy and post/transnational politics for activist Muslim youth. The role of structural obstacles to the inclusion of ethnic minority young people within mainstream politics is an important driver for the appeal of post/transnational politics (O'Toole and Gale 2013), but there may also be faith-based resources making this an attractive form of engagement. Some have argued that a transnational orientation is given succour from Islam itself and the notion of the *umma.* Understood as a brotherhood or community of believers, *umma* is invoked by some as a means of political connection which binds Muslims together despite geographical, social and cultural distance (e.g. Nasir 2015). In their work with young British Muslims, O'Toole and Gale (2013) found that the political sensibilities of many respondents 'were underpinned by their awareness of a broader global community of the *umma'* (pg. 198). Significantly, they note that while faith played an important role as a spur to political action and bolstered many respondents' political orientations, this did not lead to a focus on 'Muslim causes' or the Muslim diaspora. On the contrary, respondents pursued an inclusive and universalistic understanding of justice and engaged with non-Muslims and non-Muslim organisations as part of their activism. At the time of research, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were of acute concern, but activists were concerned and engaged with a wide range of global issues – e.g. global poverty and inequality, development, terms of trade, debt – and their sphere of concern was not limited to the Middle East or their diasporic connections. Significantly, activists made links between such transnational concerns and their local contexts and they deftly traversed these different scales of engagement in what O'Toole and Gale describe as 'glocalised struggles'. Mustafa's (2016) research with young British Muslim activists found the term *umma* was not commonly invoked by participants, but the wider shift towards a post-national political orientation which emphasised universal humanity was a central finding. Lewicki and O'Toole (2017) report on two case studies of different mobilizations undertaken by Muslim women in Bristol, UK. While the focus of mobilizations was different to those discussed above – a push for more gender inclusive mosques and an anti-female genital mutilation campaign – like others, they found a similar blending of local and global scales of action and the importance of transnational links for local campaigns.

While this body of literature identifies the importance of the trans/postnational for the political subjectivities of young British Muslims, it is important to note that these are studies of activists. While there can be little doubt that process of globalisation and new communications technologies and their ease of access for many young people has made glocalised or cosmopolitan politics more relevant and accessible, the relative neglect of the national may not be as widespread for those less engaged with activist politics.

Research exploring the ways in which Muslim young people in the UK engage with and experience politics is still an emerging field.  Focusing on young Muslims in Scotland, recent work by Finlay and Hopkins (2019) argues that Islamophobia is a central factor that shapes and influences their political participation in a somewhat paradoxical manner.  On the one hand, Islamophobia functions as a mechanism to 'politically marginalise and silence' whilst also operating as a mechanism of mobilisation 'engendering resistance and participation'.  Given this context, and in line with other youth researchers (Thompson and Pihlaja 2018), we sought to *listen* to young British-born Muslims articulate their relationships with politics in their own words. In part we hope this will help give voice to their interpretations and experiences, which are far more nuanced and vibrant than dominant

narratives suggest, but also highlight the experiences of Islamophobia and marginalisation that risk the political exclusion of young Muslims. To this end we undertook extensive mixed method research in Bradford, UK in a period covering the 2015 general election and the UK's referendum on membership of the European Union in mid-2016.

## The study

The data analysed for this paper was generated as part of a larger project exploring politics in the British city of Bradford. Muslims make-up nearly a quarter (24.7%) of the city's population and it has one of highest concentrations of people of Islamic faith in the UK.   Bradford is also one of the UK's most youthful cities with over 30% of the District's population being less than 20 years old (Bradford Council 2019).   In part reflecting this demographic profile, the city has 'long been considered the thermometer and the thermostat of Muslim political issues in Britain' (Bolognani 2009: 1)

The research deployed multiple mixed methods including in-depth interviews, a questionnaire and observation at hustings and political rallies during the 2015 general election and on polling day. Most interviewees were recruited via the questionnaire and several through snowball sampling. For the purposes of this paper we draw upon a set of in-depth interviews undertaken by Author B with 15 British-born Muslims all aged between 18 and 28 years.

Issues around politics and identity can be highly emotive.  Previous work with young British Muslims has highlighted their feelings of being unfairly targeted and caricatured in research, the media and public sphere more broadly (Gillespie 2006, Author B).  The interviewer was mindful of this context and also took care to think through power dynamics in the interview process (Oakley, 2013).  At the start of each interview, having attained written consent, attention was given to ensure that participants knew their right to stop the interview, withdraw consent or have the recording stopped at any point.  Whilst none of the participants in the study withdrew consent, two did ask for the recording to be briefly stopped.  The first participant wanted to cease recording when talking about specific characters in local politics; the respondent drew upon Author B's identity as an 'insider' from within the British Muslim community to confide 'insider' knowledge of the key players in local politics, prefixing her desire for the recording to be switched off with, 'you know how it is with us'. Being from the British Muslim community assisted Author B to build rapport and trust with participants, based, in part, upon shared aspects of identity.

The second participant who wanted to cease recording during her interview draws attention to the multi-faceted identities of our participants. This interviewee asked to stop the recording when she began delving into emotionally painful memories of her family's efforts to cope with government cuts to social welfare and her mother's struggle to keep the family solvent.  Our respondents were chosen because they were young and Muslim, but for some of them, class, economics and financial circumstances were just, if not more important markers of identity than age, faith or ethnicity. This is also reflected below in respondents' comments about poverty and inequality being key issues of concern for them.

Whilst an interview schedule was created to guide the interviews, this was not rigid and ultimately the interviews unfolded in accordance with what participants wanted to say about their experiences and conceptualisations of politics.  This also enabled the interview schedule to respond to emerging questions and new political events, including, for example, the EU referendum.

All participants had some tertiary education, with some studying at the time of interview, and others having completed degrees. Significantly, they were the first generation in their family to attend university. Participants were all of Pakistani heritage except one interviewee who was of duel Indian and Pakistani heritage. As such, it is important to note that our findings speak more to the experience of young British-born Muslims of Pakistani heritage than those from other ethnic backgrounds. Ethical approval for the research was granted by Author B's university and all names used below are pseudonyms. Interviews were recorded and transcribed and varied in length between 40 minutes to over two hours.

As outlined above, existing research on the political participation of British Muslims has tended to focus on various forms of social-political activism. This work has been significant in exploring the ways in which young people are actually engaged in politics, identifying the vibrant and varied ways in which these young people are actively changing forms of political participation and shaping its meaning. Evidence from this research is significant in challenging dominant discourses which argue young people are apathetic and disengaged from politics. In the case of young Muslims this work is particularly significant as it challenges those crisis narratives which frame young Muslims as disengaged from politics and at risk of 'radicalisation' or as a challenge to citizenship and national loyalty. Nonetheless, the focus on those engaged with forms of activism may yield a partial picture of the political engagements and experiences of young British Muslims. Our sample aimed to capture a broad spectrum of engagement. Some respondents had been involved with university student union politics, others had some experience of activist and community groups and one participant was a local councillor. In general terms, the sample included young people who were interested in politics in various forms and some had experience of extra-parliamentary forms of participation. While we use the term loosely, we think Amnå and Ekman's (2014) notion of the standby citizen reflects the general political disposition of our respondents. They typically had high levels of interest in politics, following issues and events through various forms of (digital) media and in discussions with friends and some family, but modest levels of participation relative to what might be termed 'active citizens'. As such, our participants were broadly interested in various forms of politics and often had some experience of political participation, particularly it's more 'ordinary' and everyday forms (Harris and Roose 2014), but they were not 'dyed in the wool' activists and most had little direct or regular participation with electoral politics.

Analysis of the in-depth interviews involved an interpretive iterative process. Once transcribed the data were initially read to gain familiarity and look for initial similarities and divergences between accounts. Using frameworks of thematic analysis, preliminary codes were developed during the second reading and later refined and related to themes in subsequent reads and in light of discussion between authors. The rich in-depth interviews generated data on a wide range of themes, but below we focus on three key aspects of participants' experience which were common across the interviews.

## Critical and disillusioned but still politically engaged

At the outset it is worth noting that the young people who took part in this study were, unlike the claims of some media and popular accounts, politically engaged with the world around them. Their political involvement covered a range of varied forms of participation with, for example, student unions, activism, local government, community work and general engagement and interest in politics through the use of broadcast and social media, informal conversations with friends and

family or through their university studies. In line with findings from other research with young people (e.g. Marsh et al 2007; Manning 2013) they were more interested and involved with forms of politics outside the strictures of electoral politics, but they were still engaged. As will be illustrated below, they held a range of considered and nuanced views and opinions about various aspects of politics and participation.

The dominant theme to emerge from the interviews was strong criticisms of, and feelings of disillusionment toward, politics and politicians. Of course, this is a common finding amongst young people in general (e.g. Henn and Foard 2012), but it is particularly notable here for its presence across the sample and because our respondents are educated, interested and engaged with various forms of politics. Politicians were seen as an economically 'elite' class and geographic 'outsiders'. The excerpts below aim to reflect some of the range of critical and disillusioned views held by respondents, who viewed politicians as a distinct political class interested in career progression rather than genuinely engaging with constituents.

> [...] my line of thinking was that they're all [politicians] a bunch of jokers but this is the lesser of the joker. (Ali, male)
>
> I was excited that I had to vote for someone [...] when you go on social media and Facebook everyone is talking about it, [...] But you hear them [politicians] saying, "We'll do this and we'll do that for your local area," but after that you never hear of him or even see him anymore. (Arusia, female)
>
> [...] I think politicians are very skilled on the ability to not answer a question [...] that can be read as dis-genuine and that can turn people off, and I know a lot of people, including myself, who often feel quite frustrated, that's the word I would use, frustrated, really, with politics, at the moment. (Sabir, male)

Comments from the participants above reflect systemic criticisms of how politics operates. A lack of trust in politicians was widespread as was the view that they were "disconnected" (Halima, female) form local communities and the lives of "real people" (Sabir, male). Others, like Ifat (female), highlighted the socio-economic divide which separates the public from politicians with "affluent backgrounds" who attend "elite universities". For respondents like Ifat this gulf of privilege meant "they [politicians] don't give a shit about us", and do not understand the negative effects they have on wider society. In addition to socio-economic divides, respondents like Halima, Misba and Ali thought politicians did not spend enough time in their constituencies and should have been better grounded in local communities, rather than focused on London or having candidates brought in from other areas. In talking about their relationship with politics and politicians, respondents also articulated important claims for the kind of representation they were offered and the kind that they wanted.  For example, Misba's criticism in the quote below is reflective of a broader disillusionment with ethnic tokenism and the 'local' politician:

> I felt like it [2015 election] was going to be what it always is in Bradford [...] it was going to be either a Conservative guy that everybody knew or a Labour guy who everybody knew, but they're effectively two sides of the same coin. [...] it's always this, kind of, 30 to 40-year-old

bloke, Asian, he's probably signed enough passport photos, your dad knows him or he goes to the mosque and he's always at the front. Sorry, it sounds really mean, but… (Misba, female)

Misba's quote above summarises the views of many of our respondents. The idea that the political parties were less important than the candidate's 'local' credentials, from an "Asian" background, a part of community institutions such as the "mosque", a familiar face, "your dad knows him".  Yet, whereas some respondents were critical of political 'outsiders' parachuted into the city, there was also scepticism of politicians who were 'too local', who used local knowledge cynically to win support "always being at the front of the mosque" and signing passport photos, important for a community which retains transnational ties. This tension between 'local' and 'outsider' can be linked to different kinds of representation, and this is developed further below.

## Tensions of descriptive and substantive representation

A key feature of the interviews was the ways in which most respondents made assertive claims for particular forms of representation. As suggested above, some respondents clearly value descriptive representation (Pitkin 1967) and feel that political representatives should share similar characteristics and life experiences with the citizens they represent. Indeed, the lack of such descriptive representation was understood by some as a central driver in political disaffection. Several respondents thought various levels of politics needed to better reflect the diversity of the British citizenry and that diversity made politics and politicians more accessible and relevant.

> if you're Muslim, if you're from an ethnic minority, you already are made to feel as though you're an outsider here [...] You do, you feel a little bit marginalised in that sense […] when you see people from your background, and this can be in anything, not just politics, [...] it makes me think, oh, it might be a little bit easier for me to go into that, into that, into that place. (Saira, female)

> I certainly think we need to see more colour in politics, and by colour I don't just mean white or black. (Jamila, female)

Jamila explained how she liked Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, identifying with her as a British Pakistani Muslim with "a strong female voice", and as someone she "looked up to". While Jamila was ultimately very critical of David Cameron's government, she recalls her optimism at the outset of his premiership: "So when David Cameron came into power and then we saw this woman in Asian clothes, I'm like "wow, okay, you know, this is, this might be good".

Whilst several respondents thought a level of descriptive representation was beneficial, some also acknowledged that for example, non-Muslims can be "really good leaders, really, really good representatives" (Haroon, male) for Muslim citizens. Sabir felt that in general politics needed more representatives from ethnic minority backgrounds, but thought it crucial that politicians represented his concerns and argued that when they do, "does it really matter if they are white or black or Muslim or Christian?"

Although respondents thought it was important for politicians to reflect their identities and the diversity of the British public, descriptive representation was not deemed sufficient. Furthermore,

many respondents were only too aware of the shortcomings of certain forms of descriptive representation. This became particularly apparent when they discussed the political participation of their families and communities.

Above, we saw that Ifat was very critical of politicians who she felt came from a narrow, privileged background and did not understand the concerns of 'ordinary' citizens, but in the excerpt below she is emphatically not in favour of her parents' approach of voting "for their own kind", people known "within the community". In contrast to her family she wants substantive representation on issues she cares about:

> […] older generation usually vote for their own kind, someone they know within the community, [...] we have Council elections and my dad's like, "You should vote for Sajid Hussain," and I'm like, "No dad, I'm not voting for Sajid Hussain" *[laughs]* […] "No, what does he offer to the community? What is he going to do to help us?" and I think with my parents it's more about, "well that doesn't matter" *[laughs]*, it's that "we know him and he's family, we want him to win" […] So I think what matters to me and compared to what matters to my parents are two different things. (Ifat, female)

Several respondents described the way campaigners or family members would attempt to garner support for candidates by invoking family relationships and/or links with Pakistan. In their accounts of these practices, respondents routinely emphasised the lack of focus on policy or a track record of working to make things better. Henna's comments below are characteristic of these kinds of accounts:

> one of our family friends came over, said, "Oh, you know, one of my nephew's mate is running for the local MP. We want you to vote for him," and my mum was like, "Okay." Mum had already made her mind who she was going to vote for […] in the entire half an hour conversation there was not one mention of what his policies were going to be or what he was going to do for the community of Bradford. (Henna, female)

This familial/kinship based electoral mobilisation has, in recent years, received attention both in scholarship (Akhtar, 2015; Peace and Akhtar, 2015) and in policy literature (Casey, 2016). Biraderi, the Persian word for 'brotherhood' refers to kinship networks amongst Pakistani Muslim communities. Electoral mobilisations through biraderi networks has been a feature of Pakistani communities in the UK since the 1970s, when politicians from the two major political parties, Labour and the Conservatives, co-opted leaders of biraderi networks to help secure bloc votes (Akhtar, 2015). Biraderi elders were often educated or in positions of power within the community and as such were in a position to mobilise bloc votes pertaining to their particular kin groups. Members of the kin group would very often defer to the guidance of kin leaders, believing they knew best. One of our participants, reflecting on how mobilising around kinship ties works, offers a succinct summary: "where you vote for someone who's from your village or you vote for someone who's your neighbour in Pakistan" (Azim, male). Azim explains he thinks using biraderi in this way is problematic because it essentially relies on an uncritical and guaranteed political allegiance where, politicians, "No matter what they say, what they do, you're going to vote for them, we're all going to vote for them". He goes on to describe what he sees as the effects of biraderi politics:

> Its ruined politics basically…it's just ruined this place, especially here in Frizinghall because, you know, they kicked out, that guy […] he was a Green [Party] guy, David something. Anyway, they kicked him out for this whole biraderi voting system and we went down the pan. People just started fly-tipping, you know, sometimes the bins weren't even getting collected, graffiti, everything […] some other guy got in [using the biraderi system] and he did literally nothing' (Azim, male)

Some respondents also highlighted that such clan/group-based politics is not necessarily problematic and not unique to Muslims or indeed Pakistani communities (e.g. Smyth 2000). Surraya noted from her experience of living in Wales that in some white working class communities "the whole family will vote for that policy or that person." She went on to argue, "I don't think it's about ethnicity, it's about that cultural value of family solidarity." Sabire also rejected the notion that biraderi politics was linked to ethnicity and instead claimed that from his experience, friends and family develop their political views in light of the family member who is "more politically aware, the more educated, the more, the person involved in politics".

As noted above, the desire for substantive representation from effective politicians was related to the way respondents asserted their own political choice and agency and were not prepared to be instructed by family members or elders on their political views. Numerous participants made comments similar to Jamila: "[my dad] he was like "vote for this person, we know this person, he comes to our house", [...] me and my siblings and, you know, whoever was in our house, and I've got a big family, we always used to respond like "no, we vote for whoever we want to."" Several participants perceived their own political claims-making as part of a wider generational shift that other young people were also taking up.

Significantly, the ways in which respondents articulated these claims for substantive representation, focused on mainstream, national political issues. Respondents discussed the importance of adequate funding and standards of public services such as education and healthcare, employment, and forms of inequality. Some respondents felt these issues were overlooked in favour of more community based and local problems:

> […] the discussions weren't around policy, […] it was to do with the mosque [...] it was to do with oh you know, very small things whereas the big things for me which were sort of education, looking at the community in Bradford and why it's poor and funding etc. Those sort of questions they weren't interested in asking […] it was a lot of older people, for me, asking irrelevant questions. (Umair, male)

As such, our respondents were typically less interested in localised, community politics. As identified by Umair above, mosque and community-based politics have historically been important in Bradford as a means of representation and community organizing for Muslim groups and interests, and as a way of claiming public space (McLoughlin 2005). By the early decades of the 2000s, some young British Muslims were clearly demonstrating a preference for forms of political engagement which were not restricted to a local context, but pursued connections between the local and the global (Mustafa 2016; O'Toole and Gale 2013). In contrast, for our participants, Britain's foreign policy and the plight of Muslims around the world was of some concern, but they were particularly focused on mainstream political issues which related to health, education, poverty and inequality. Significantly, they articulated their concern for these with reference to local conditions in Bradford. This was illustrated during the national election campaign.  At one husting held at the University of Bradford,

George Galloway, the candidate up for re-election, raised the issue of Palestine and injustice against Muslims around the word.  Naveed, a young Muslim man in the audience, questioned how talking about foreign policy issues would help the people of Bradford.  Speaking to Naveed after the hustings it became clear that he had previously been a supporter of Galloway and his stance on foreign policy and injustices against Muslims. By the time of the 2015 general election, our research makes clear that many were disillusioned by Galloway's record as MP. Naveed explained that he was about to leave college and job prospects in Bradford were bleak: "[Galloway] can talk about Palestine all he likes but how will that bring jobs for people in Bradford?" Global issues were important, according to Naveed, but first "we needed to get our own house in order".

As noted above, some have argued that the wider trend for transnational or global citizenship orientations exhibited by many young people finds an additional resource for Muslim activists in the Islamic concept of the *umma* – a global community of Islam. It was notable that several of our respondents asked what the word meant, while others had not encountered it in a political context or thought it was an uncommon term "religious people might use" occasionally (Waqar, male). Others acknowledged the relevance of the term for forms of charity or volunteering which might prioritise Muslims, but there was also a view that *umma* should be interpreted as meaning community or "humanity" (Waqar, male) and that one's focus should not be restricted to Muslims. In Jamilas words: "there's the world we need to care about". This universalistic way of understanding the Islamic concept of *umma* is consistent with previous research (e.g. O'Toole and Gale 2013), but in general the political priorities of our participants rested more heavily on local and national connections than the trans/post-national (cf. Mustafa 2016).

## Racism, Islamophobia and the racialisation of citizenship

While we have argued above that participants in this study are staking a greater claim to mainstream citizenship, their experiences of racism and Islamophobia undermined these efforts. Experiences of racism, Islamophobia and feeling marginalised were commonplace and described by all participants. Respondents like Haroon experienced an ambient sense of scrutiny, suspicion and surveillance which undermined his sense of political inclusion and autonomy:

> I think everyday life that you know, that everyone's looking at you [...] all the light and attention is on you as a Muslim [...] so you have to ask yourself, "am I doing the right thing?" or when you're, you know, how are people thinking of you negatively or [...] "he must be part of the terrorism, why has he got a beard for?" It's not positive. (Haroon, male)

The pressure of feeling constantly judged and monitored has material consequences for political behaviour. Umair, for example, told us how he had shifted away from his earlier involvement in activism. He said this related to "responses from police", and being told by his activist friends that police were recording people's faces at demonstrations and protests, "and then they're arresting you later on in the streets." His parents were also concerned that his activism would result in him being arrested – a particular concern of his mother's was that he would end up detained in Guantanamo Bay (Mustafa 2016).  According to Umair his family were "constantly" issuing warnings like those below:

> "You shouldn't go out and do these things [demonstrate], because look on the news, they're arresting people who look like you now with a beard" etc. Or, "Why are you wearing a

Palestine scarf? Because you're just going to be identified or they're going to pull you out of the crowd," […] "Why are you getting involved in this?" and, "They're going to think you're a Jihadi,"

For Umair, the kinds of police and security responses taking place within the context of the 'war on terror' and the UK's anti-terrorism laws and Prevent Strategy (O'Toole et al. 2016) create a climate of suspicion and surveillance. A climate in which the legal and legitimate political participation of young Muslims could be used against them and also worked to stifle the political participation of young Muslims (Brown and Saeed 2015; Jarvis and Lister 2012; Mythen, Walklate, & Khan, 2013). Furthermore, these strategies function to control the terms of political engagement and participation. In Umair's words: "there's no sort of safe environment now, it's like, okay if I engage then I'm being told, "You can engage, but only on these topics."" What Umair's describing is a form of governmentality (Foucault 1991), specifically targeted at young Muslims, and reflects other governmental strategies used to shape and control the ways in which young people participate in politics (Bessant 2003; Finlay and Hopkins 2019).

Several respondents noted the increase in hate crime which followed Britain's referendum on membership of the European Union (Guardian 2019) and the way this process gave license to bigots to be more publically racist and violent. Others raised concerns about their personal safety and feeling vulnerable. In the excerpt below, Waqar describes the way he felt in the immediate aftermath of the EU referendum:

> […] it felt very alien, you know, I've been born and bred in England, you know, I know nothing else but England, and for the first time it just felt alien. […] there was a sense of not belonging here

While many people felt surprised by the outcome of the referendum, for our respondents, these feelings were compounded by a sense that the anti-immigration rhetoric of the campaign marked them out as racialised others, no longer welcome and no longer to be tolerated. As Saira noted, as Muslims with Pakistani heritage, our respondents cannot escape being racialised by others:

> I'm not just being judged as a Muslim, I'm being judged as a brown Muslim. [...] there are certain things that will never be removed from my, from my identity. So while I could change religion […] I couldn't abandon race, and I think, so, and because I can't do that, that is still the one thing that I will be judged by. (Saira, female)

For many of our participants, the referendum was an acute example of a much wider and longer term experience of racism and marginalisation. Respondents discussed experiences of interpersonal and institutional racism and, as with the Brexit vote, they made links between national and international events (e.g. the November 2015 attacks in Paris) and their local experiences of racism and Islamophobia. These accounts of racism and Islamophobia point beyond individual experiences towards the racialisation of citizenship (Taylor 1989) and the ways this can be used to undermine the political inclusion of "brown" British Muslims and control their forms of political participation.

In general, these experiences were discussed with a kind of defiance (as outlined below), but at least one respondent articulated feelings of frustration at her sense that integration meant giving up her identity. Ifat described a contrast between her father's sense that as a family of migrants they should be grateful for the privileges and opportunities that living in Britain provides, with her sense

that the demands of integration can never be satisfied – that she (and perhaps all Muslims) would never be accepted into the nation. Ifat felt that as a university student aiming for gainful employment and someone who enjoys travelling around Britain and "learning about British history", she was integrating and "getting on with my life". She also felt "attacked" and that integration would mean giving up her identity:

> [...] what does integration mean? Does that mean losing your sense of self [...] losing your Muslim identity or losing your Pakistani identity? [...] do they want me to get rid of my Muslim identity, do they want me to take off the hijab? It just doesn't make sense and I feel like everyone just hates the hijab now (Ifat, female)

Saira used similar language when she said that in recent years, "religion has been under attack". She argued that the result of this attack on religion has been a push back from younger generations of migrants who increasingly choose to define themselves through their religion over their racial identity (Franceschelli 2016; Jacobson 1997; Song 2012) This somewhat defiant attitude was more reflective of our sample and can be seen in Halima's irritation at being unable to identify, officially, simply as British:

> [...] I find it very annoying when on official papers I have to tick myself as British, British Asian Muslim or British Asian Pakistani. So there is no just British, and because I, sort of, have all my eggs in the same basket in the sense that I've got to live here, I feel that this is my country, I feel that I'm British. So I feel very much part of the UK government system because I have no option out

Halima's comments neatly encapsulate some of what may be driving the bolder claims on citizenship we have identified. Unlike the first generation of migrants, as second and third generation British-born Muslims, our respondents have all their "eggs in the same basket" in terms of political citizenship. Their connections to Pakistan were often limited to occasional holidays visiting extended family members. Indeed, Halima goes on the say that her response to her predicament is to find a way of "contributing to the government system or paying attention to what's actually happening". In line with other recent research with young British Muslims (Thompson and Pihilaja 2018), our respondents felt Britain was their home and while they maintained various criticisms of the status quo they were also committed to finding ways of making their citizenship count in ways meaningful for them. They wanted a solid claim to the public sphere, not one which would crumble under the pressure of national debates on immigration or in the aftermath of a referendum. In contrast to older generations this meant a more thoroughgoing engagement with a national, mainstream politics (O'Loughlin and Gillespie 2012). A politics which held the potential to address some of their key political concerns around forms of social and economic inequality which were part of their lived experience in Bradford.

## Concluding remarks

Young people's engagement in politics has been an object of concern for public debate, academics and policy-makers for several decades. Their lack of participation in electoral politics in particular, led to fears that they were turning their backs on democracy. In recent years, the political

integration and participation of young Muslims has been a particular focus of concern in numerous countries. Crisis narratives around young Muslims and their apparent non-integration in political/social realms, the perceived implications of this for urban disorder and their claimed susceptibility to radicalisation has helped to create a securitised context of surveillance and suspicion.   In contrast to these crisis narratives, our participants were interested in politics, engaged in political issues and were making assertive claims to citizenship. With Peucker (2016: 2), we can ask why young British Muslims would want to engage with a society and political system that questions their loyalty and belonging and positions them as  a source of potential threat warranting suspicion. The answer from our respondents is because they see themselves as a part of British society, they see their future as wrapped up in the story of British democracy and the wider political traditions and as such, want a voice in how that democracy and politics develops.

Nonetheless, our participants faced a number of impediments to their political participation and inclusion, framed primarily by parents and the state. Parents and kinship networks attempt to control political mobilisation; the state too attempts to control political activities by prescribing/curtailing legitimate arenas of participation and legitimate political actors. For our participants, these efforts by the state are experienced as marking British Muslims out as a group that deserves suspicion and scrutiny. Citizenship always creates boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and our research highlights the racialization of citizenship (Taylor 1989) and how this operates at the level of the state and in everyday contexts to undercut the full citizenship of young British-born Muslims, despite their formal status as citizens.

And yet, in the face of these barriers to political autonomy and inclusion our respondents offer resistance on both fronts.  They assert their claim to participate in the political sphere on their own terms, rather than rely on the biraderi networks that were used to mobilise the pioneer generation of Muslim migrants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 60s.  And, they were assertive in their claims to citizenship in the face of securitization, racism and Islamophobia.  For the younger generations, Britain is all they have known, connections with the countries their parents and grandparents emigrated from are weaker, they typically feel British and want to be a part of its social and political fabric. This is a distinct shift from the pioneer generation of immigrants who maintained transnational connections in the belief that as sojourners they would one day return.  Young British Muslims have no 'myth of return' and this foregrounds their desire for a more assertive citizenship.

Whilst our findings are based on a relatively small sample of British Muslims of Pakistani heritage living in the north of England, they resonate with findings from elsewhere in the UK (Akhtar 2013; Finlay, Hopkins and Sanghera 2017) and also with ethnic minority young people in other parts of the world (Harris 2013). In particular, our findings regarding young people seeking generational change in the way politics is done and the ways in which racism and Islamophobia can restrict and curtail the political participation of young people are well supported.

Given our participants were not seasoned activists and most did not directly or routinely  participate in electoral politics, the feelings of marginalisation and alienation they described means that unless the dynamics of party politics shifts considerably they are likely to become more disconnected from a national politics which perpetuates a climate of suspicion and surveillance of Muslims (Jarvis and Lister 2013) and generally does very little to engage young people.

Finally, it is important to consider the prospects of our participant's more assertive claims on citizenship. There are both structural and long-term as well as more immediate factors that give us significant cause for concern. A prevailing context of securitisation and suspicion of Muslims and the racialisation of citizenship which lies behind this context serves to undercut claims for political

inclusion by many British Muslims.  In addition, the widespread surge in populist xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment and behaviour also stand against claims for political autonomy and inclusion by young British Muslims.. In addition, claims for a more assertive citizenship are occurring amidst the turmoil of Britain redefining its relationship with the European Union. A process which has, and will continue, to dominate much of the public sphere and the activities of political elites. Thereby leaving little room for such claims to even be heard, let alone engaged with meaningfully. If these claims for a greater stake in national, mainstream citizenship are ignored there are other scales of political engagement, local and global, which may be more receptive. But ignoring this desire for a more assertive citizenship risks the political exclusion of groups of young people who already feel significantly marginalised. Young Muslims like those in this study are educated, engaged and critical citizens with a great deal to offer, we deserve a polity that can provide space for them to flourish.

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