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Majority-Muslim Hate Crimes in England: An Interpretive Quantitative Analysis

JÖRG FRIEDRICHS 

Abstract

This article derives insights on majority-Muslim hate crimes in North England from a voluminous police dataset of racial and religious hate crimes in two districts. The ethnic identities of complainants and suspects, as recorded in the dataset, are used to establish patterns of perpetration and victimization in the wider context of majority-Muslim community relations. To make the most of a patchy evidence base and gain help with interpretation, I present preliminary results of my data analysis to hate crime practitioners in police, local government and civil society. The most striking findings are that hate crime practitioners explain the higher incidence of hate crimes late at night and during weekends with alcohol and nightlife socializing; that minorities, whether Asian Muslim or White British, are overrepresented as victims in their own residential area; and that there is more victimization among male than female Muslims, calling into question the narrative of “gendered Islamophobia.”

Keywords: hate crime; North England; White British; South Asian; Ethnic Pakistani; Ethnic Bangladeshi

1. Introduction

Evidence-based research on hate crime is challenging, for at least three reasons. First, hate crime is a contested social and political construct. Second, granular and reliable data are few and far between. Third, it is tempting to conflate empirical observation and moral condemnation. These challenges are particularly acute for majority-Muslim hate crimes in liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom, given the level of contestation surrounding minority discrimination, the scarcity of reliable data on religious hate crimes, and widespread moral condemnation of Islamophobia.

Regardless of such obstacles to empirical research, there is no question that majority-Muslim hate crimes are of great social and political importance. Muslims are the largest religious minority in the UK (2011 Census). Especially in the politically charged atmosphere since 9/11, racial and religious hatred between the White British majority and

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Muslim minorities has been perceived as a bellwether of strains in community relations. Thus, a recent history of racial and religious hate crime in the UK devotes a lengthy chapter to “Islamophobia and the social cohesion agenda.”¹

This article examines a police dataset of almost 15,000 incidents of racial and religious hate crimes that were recorded between 2004 and 2018 in Bradford and Calderdale, two North English districts. The focus is on majority-Muslim hate crimes, with view to understanding perpetration and victimization in the context of community relations, including the question of Islamophobia.

It falls beyond the scope of this article to survey the general literature on hate crime.² It is worth noting, however, that the more specific literature on racial and religious hate crimes in England concentrates on victimization and mostly relies on fieldwork, interviews, and surveys. For instance, Chakraborti (2018) has conducted extensive fieldwork with more than 2000 victims of hate crime.³ Awan and Zempi (2017, 2020) have interviewed smaller samples of Muslim and Muslim-looking victims of Islamophobic hate crimes to appreciate their victimization experience.⁴ Paterson et al. (2020) rely on a survey of 347 respondents to show that “Islamophobic hate crimes not only traumatize direct victims, but are likely to spread fear and anger throughout Muslim communities.”⁵ Bradford Hate Crime Alliance has conducted a survey to suggest that “Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim sentiment does exist within Bradford and within the country.”⁶ Myers and Lantz (2020) have compared the Crime Survey of England and Wales with the US National Crime Victimization Survey to explore patterns of under-reporting.⁷ Clayton et al. (2016) have conducted participatory research “alongside a group of passionate individuals going through the last throes of their occupation” in third party reporting.⁸

Few studies, by comparison, rely on police data and examine not so much victimization but rather what racial and religious identities of complainants and suspects can tell us about community relations. Dancygier (2010) and Walters and Krasodomski-Jones (2018) examine police data from London and find that, while minorities are overrepresented as victims and underrepresented as offenders when compared to their population share, minority people can be offenders and majority people can be victims, too.⁹ Craig et al. (2012) harness police data on hate crime in North-East England to show that racism is “an issue for all public and private agencies in the region.”¹⁰

While these studies show that police data offers a valuable source for evidence-based research, such studies remain rare. In what follows, I harness a unique police dataset to study majority-Muslim hate crimes in two North English districts. The study includes critical reflection on data limitations and triangulation of findings with the contextual understanding of hate crime practitioners.

The article starts with background on majority-Muslim relations in North England, both from a wider perspective and with particular view to majority-Muslim hate crimes. I then specify the evidence base, a police dataset of majority-Muslim hate crimes in two North English districts, and explain the research design. To facilitate interpretation of the data, I discuss data visualizations with knowledgeable hate crime practitioners.

My key findings are that hate crime practitioners privilege data quantity over quality; attribute the increase of recordings in recent years to better reporting rather than a real rise in hate crimes; and explain the higher incidence of hate crimes late at night and during weekends with alcohol and nightlife socializing. In addition to this, I find that minorities, whether Asian Muslim or White British, are overrepresented as victims in their own residential area; find no correlation between dramatic events and the incidence of hate

crimes; and find more victimization among male than female Muslims, questioning the narrative of “gendered Islamophobia.”

2. Majority-Muslim Relations in North England

In the last population census (2011), the population of England was 79.8% White British. While only 0.17% of White British were Muslim, two of Britain’s largest minorities were overwhelmingly Muslim. Ethnic Pakistanis were 2.1% of the population and 91.5% Muslim. Ethnic Bangladeshis were 0.8% of the population and 89.9% Muslim. 5.0% of the English population were Muslim.

Many North English towns, in particular, combine high levels of racial and religious diversity with a significant presence of low-income White British communities. In many cases, these towns are economically marginal and politically neglected.¹¹ This is particularly true about the former “textile towns” of West Yorkshire. While the majority in West Yorkshire remains White British, as in most of England, towns like Bradford and Halifax have particularly significant South Asian Muslim minorities of Pakistani and, to a lesser extent, Bangladeshi descent.¹²

Relations between West Yorkshire’s mostly South Asian Muslim minorities and members of the white British majority are manifold. Most of the time, they are non-confrontational.¹³ Yet, high levels of communal segregation and brittle community cohesion have raised public concern, including with regards to hate crime.¹⁴

Shortly before 9/11, in July 2001, Bradford saw “race riots” in reaction to rallies by the British National Party and National Front.¹⁵ In 2005, three Muslim men from Leeds were involved in planning and executing the 7/7 bombings in London. Mostly ethnic Pakistani Muslim men from towns in West Yorkshire have been in the news related to organized child sexual exploitation of mostly White British girls from low-income families, also known as “child grooming”.¹⁶ Due to all of this, the media has sometimes depicted the former textile towns of West Yorkshire as sites of contestation between White British and Asian Muslim communities.

The media often points to low-income, White majority neighborhoods as hotbeds of anti-Muslim resentment. Indeed, the British National Party made inroads into such neighborhoods during the 2000s. In the aftermath of the Cantle Report,¹⁷ there was a sense in low-income White British communities that policies designed to promote “community cohesion” and “multiculturalism” mean preferential treatment for minority communities. It appears that this grievance has caused anti-Muslim backlash in low-income White British communities. Interviews with “white working class” residents suggest that many are suspicious of “forced” integration, but also less sympathetic towards white nationalist groups than the media sometimes suggests.¹⁸

Nationally, coverage of the 2001 riots fed into a perception of young Muslim men in West Yorkshire as violent. Many young Muslim men have found this narrative frustrating, as they see the “race riots” as self-defense against white nationalism.¹⁹ In West Yorkshire and elsewhere, Muslims have had to contend with the securitization of Islam after the 7/7 attacks. The association of Pakistani Muslim men with child grooming adds further stigma.²⁰

Locally, this can lead to anti-Muslim slurs, destruction of property, and physical altercations. The police record some of these incidents as hate crimes, although underreporting is likely to be high. Anti-Muslim aggression is not always reported but may spur a “self-policing of personal mobility” whereby members of geographically concentrated Asian Muslim communities fear to venture outside of Muslim-majority residential areas.²¹

2.1. Bradford and Calderdale

This research zooms in on two adjacent districts in West Yorkshire: Bradford and Calderdale. In mid-2018, Bradford had 537,200 inhabitants whereas Calderdale had 210,100. Both districts consist of a city (Bradford) or town (Halifax) and its hinterland. Bradford and Halifax are only 10–15 km apart and have much else in common. Both are former “textile towns” with declining industries. From the 1960s, both have received significant numbers of labor migrants, mainly from the Mirpur area in the Pakistani-administered part of Kashmir.²² Census data shows that the Muslim minorities in Bradford and Calderdale have increased significantly since these early days.

In the 2011 Census, 63.9% of Bradford’s residents were White British. Bradford had a large and dispersed Muslim minority of 24.7%. Most Muslims were of South Asian origin: 77.9% Pakistani, 7.2% Bangladeshi. Seven of Bradford’s 30 electoral wards had a Muslim majority. One had a Muslim plurality, and another a Muslim minority greater than 40% (Figure 1, Panel A).

In Calderdale, 86.7% were White British. Calderdale had a smaller and more concentrated Muslim minority of 7.3%. As in Bradford, most Muslims were South Asian: 88% Pakistani, 3.5% Bangladeshi. Of Calderdale’s 17 electoral wards, only Park ward in Halifax had a Muslim majority. The next largest Muslim minorities were 15.6% in Warley, and 9.8% in Skircoat (Figure 1, Panel B).²³

There has been further demographic change since the 2011 Census.²⁴ The largest influx of labor migrants has been from Eastern Europe, notably Romania and Poland. The second largest influx is from New Commonwealth countries, notably Pakistan and India. Asylum seekers from other parts of the world—especially Iraq, Iran, Albania, Sudan, Afghanistan and Eritrea—have added further to the diversity of Muslim minorities in Yorkshire and the Humber although, interestingly, the third largest group of asylum seekers hails from Pakistan. There are also significant numbers of asylum seekers from Bangladesh and India. Overall, therefore, it is safe to say that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Bradford and Calderdale remains South Asian.

There are some significant differences between Bradford and Halifax as well. Bradford is a city of unknown size (more than 300,000 inhabitants; population data does not differentiate between the urban and rural parts of Bradford District) whereas Halifax is a town of about 90,000. Bradford has a history of ethnic riots,²⁵ whereas Halifax has not experienced any riots of note. Bradford and Halifax have Muslim minorities of similar ethnic stock but,

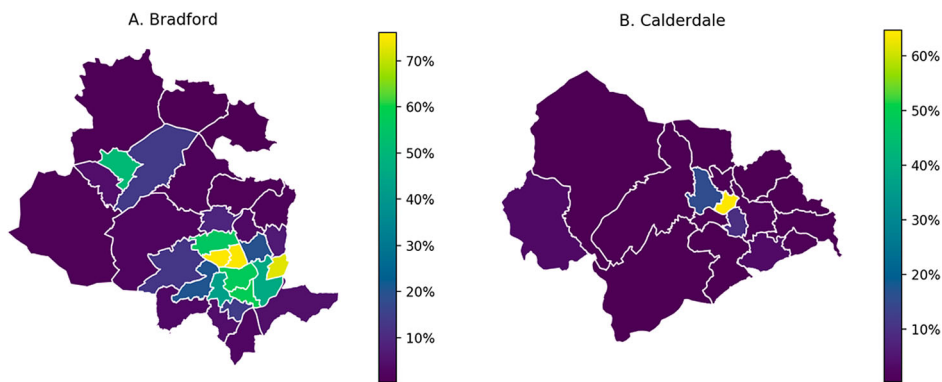


Figure 1. Percentage of ethnic Pakistani and Bangladeshi residents (2011 Census).

as we have seen, their size and settlement patterns are different. I would have expected these differences to play out in important ways. To my surprise, however, I have not found any significant differences between Bradford and Calderdale as far as majority-Muslim hate crimes are concerned.

2.2. Majority-Muslim Hate Crimes

Majority-Muslim hate crimes are a special case of religious hate crimes. The Home Office began collecting information on religious hate crimes only in April 2016, and such information remains patchy. For example, in 2019/20 the Home Office recorded 6,822 religious hate crimes in England and Wales, compared to 76,070 racial hate crimes. As we shall see, religious hate crimes are often conflated with racial hate crimes. It is impossible to neatly separate the two categories.

In line with guidance from the College of Policing,²⁶ I define a racial or religious hate crime as any criminal offence that is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or religion, or perceived race or religion.

The College of Policing stipulates, further, that the police will believe the accuser:

The perception of the victim, or any other person, will decide whether the crime is recorded as a hate crime. (...) It is necessary to provide sufficient evidence for the prosecution to prove hostility to the court for a conviction to receive enhanced sentencing, however, this is not required for recording purposes.²⁷

What is more, the police are not allowed to record ethnicity or religion of victim or offender unless victim or offender volunteer to state their own or the other's perceived identity.

While understandable, this hardly makes police data more reliable. In a report, the UK authority responsible for police supervision states: "[W]e have concerns about the accuracy of the hate crime data forces give to the Home Office."²⁸ What is more, publicly available data are at a high level of aggregation. The Home Office publishes annual reports and related data appendices,²⁹ but their granularity does not reach beneath the level of entire police forces and the primary data is not available.

While here is little hope to gain an accurate picture without reliance on actual police data, publicly available data from the Home Office is of limited help. In what follows, I circumvent this problem by relying on district-level data obtained through freedom of information requests. Even so, the data has its limitations, as we shall see in the next section. Therefore, I strike a careful balance between quantitative, qualitative and critical methods.

3. Data and Methods

In a series of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, I asked West Yorkshire Police for events data on hate crimes in the districts of Bradford and Calderdale.³⁰ In response, West Yorkshire Police released a voluminous dataset covering racial and religious hate crimes since the start of recordings in the 1990s (available in the Supporting Information). Early recording is scarce, but there is voluminous data for 2004–18 (Figure 2).

For Bradford, the dataset has 11,168 entries for the period from 2004 to 2018. For Calderdale, it has 3,390 entries for the same period. This is an impressive number of observations, and far more granular than what the Home Office has published. Yet, there are stifling data limitations that make it impossible to rely on conventional methods of data analysis, such as inferential statistics.

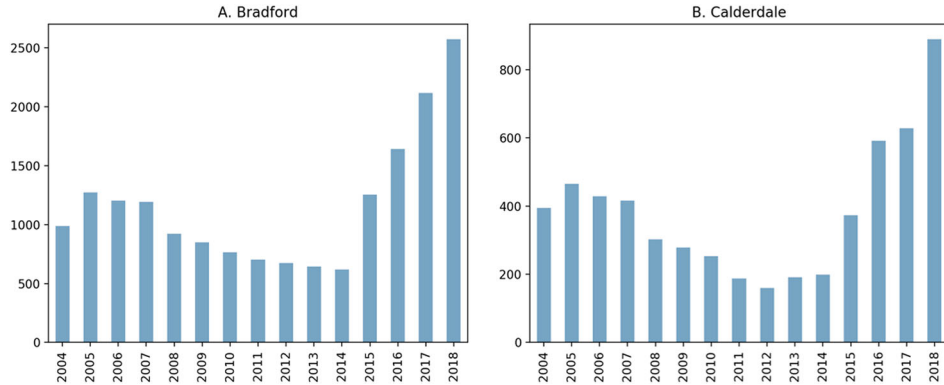


Figure 2. Number of observations.

3.1. Data Limitations

Ideally, the dataset would record for every entry the date and time of the event, the ethnicity and gender of victim and offender, the neighborhood or ward where the event has taken place, the offence type (e.g. offence against the person), and the outcome (e.g. charge/summons). A closer examination, however, reveals that in only 7.8% of the cases do we know the ethnicity of both victim and offender. In many more cases, we know only the ethnicity of either victim (35.8%) or offender (4.6%). In most cases, we do not have any information regarding ethnicity (51.8%). The situation is not much better with regard to the gender of victim and offender. To make matters worse, the amount of missing data has increased in recent years, rather than decreased (Figure 3).

The notion of hate crime itself is deeply political and inherently contested. As we have seen, data on hate crime is notoriously unreliable, not only in West Yorkshire but at the national level. One problem could be the underrepresentation of Muslims in the police force. Despite serious efforts by West Yorkshire Police to increase minority representation, Asian or Asian British are 12.6% of the population in West Yorkshire, but only 3.5% of police officers are Asian or Asian British.³¹ In a situation like this, it stands to reason that Asian Muslims will be less likely to report hate crimes.

Identity categorization poses another challenge. Strictly speaking, the categories of interest are “White British non-Muslim” and “South Asian British Muslim.”

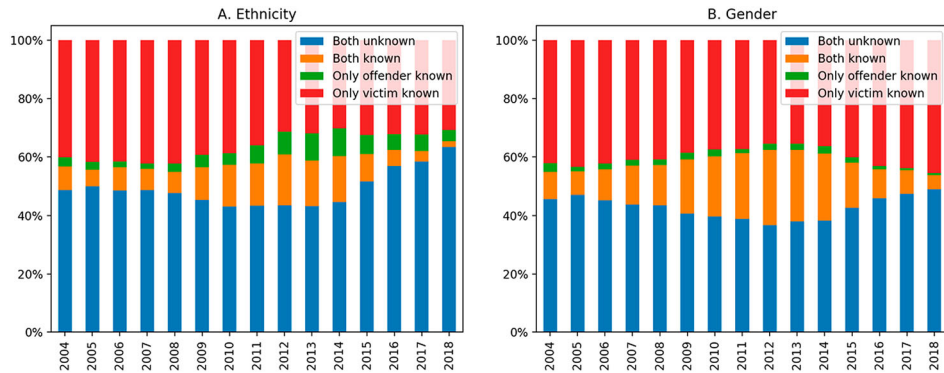


Figure 3. Percentage of known/unknown data.

However, these categories are not available. Like other British constabularies, West Yorkshire Police has started collecting information on the religious identity related to hate crime only recently, and it is hopelessly incomplete. I was therefore compelled to use ethnicity as a proxy. This is suboptimal but seems justified in light of the 2011 census. First, White British converts to Islam are only 0.2% in Bradford and 0.1% in Calderdale, so almost all White British are non-Muslim. Second, most Muslims in Bradford and Calderdale are Pakistani or Bangladeshi, as we have seen. Third, 94% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage people in Bradford and Calderdale are Muslims. In this particular context, it is not too much of a stretch to consider ethnic South Asians from Pakistan and Bangladesh as a proxy for Asian Muslims (for readability, I sometimes write “white” for White British and “Muslim” for South Asian Muslim).

3.2. Interpretive Quantitative Analysis

The police and other actors, from the Crown Prosecution Service to civil society organizations, objectify hate crimes by presenting them as hard and fast data. Despite the contested nature of such data, police data remains indispensable for informing the debate with evidence-based research.

Yet, as we have seen, the data limitations are serious indeed. In a situation where the majority of the relevant information is missing, relying on inferential statistics would be unconscionable. Therefore, I rely on a blend of descriptive quantitative-statistical and qualitative-critical methods instead.

I do so by grounding my procedure in what Babones calls interpretive quantitative research,³² deriving careful inferences through a hermeneutic strategy of “quantitative *verstehen*”³³ rather than from inferential statistics.

In interpretive quantitative research, statistics are used to shed light on the unobservable data generating processes that underlie observed data. Key tenets of interpretive quantitative methodology are the triangulation of research results arrived at by analysing data from multiple perspectives, the integration of measurement and modeling into a more holistic process of discovery and the need to think reflexively about the manner in which data have come into existence.³⁴

3.3. Research Design

Given data limitations, this research relies on descriptive rather than inferential statistics. With the help of a research assistant, I converted the most interesting findings into data visualizations and gathered them in a slideshow (available in the Supporting Information). With the slideshow on my laptop, I held interviews with practitioners to discuss the slides (participants are named with their consent; otherwise, anonymity is kept).

1. Group interview at West Yorkshire Police in Bradford with two officers who have hate crime in their working portfolio—I call them “Officer 1” and “Officer 2”—and Martin Baines, retired police officer and chair of Bradford Hate Crime Alliance (May 16, 2019).
2. Interview with Sail Suleman, Cohesion and Equality Officer with special responsibility for hate crime reduction at Calderdale Council in Halifax (May 16, 2019).
3. Interview with the director of a civil society organization in Bradford (July 3, 2019).

Two of my five interlocutors were White British. Three had an ethnic minority background. The selection criterion was not demographic representation but contextual understanding. In each interview, I presented the slides and invited participants to comment on the validity or otherwise of my “findings”: Did they believe they reflect real phenomena, or did they consider them spurious? I also asked my interlocutors to help me interpret the visualizations. Given the unique contextual understanding of the practitioners, an affirmative answer regarding validity and a compelling interpretation increased my confidence. By contrast, a negative answer or unconvincing interpretation reduced it. I took a probing attitude, which often led to animated discussion.

This qualitative-quantitative assemblage is inductive rather than deductive, allowing for careful inference. In the remainder of this article, I show how I have derived findings from the interplay of quantitative data analysis with qualitative interviews, while also relying on my critical faculties in interrogating not only data but also participants. The triangulation of empirical data, contextual knowledge and critical interrogation increases the validity of findings and protects from premature conclusions. In the footsteps of Babones (2016),³⁵ I hope my interpretive quantitative approach is sufficiently persuasive to spur others to engage in similarly reflexive research.

4. Discussion and Findings

To enhance reflexivity, I created an atmosphere where research participants and I would challenge each other. For example, two participants challenged my focus on Muslims on a point of principle. Martin Baines from Bradford Hate Crime Alliance said he wanted to question me on why I am interested in religion rather than race, and demanded a justification. The director of the civil society organization in Bradford stressed that his organization avoids confusing ethnicity with religion and criticized me for using Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicity as a proxy for “Muslim.”

I explained that I am not the one to have invented the focus on religious identity, as British society is already interested in Islamophobia. I suggested that, as a social scientist, it is my professional duty to study real or perceived issues rather than avoiding them. I pointed out that a large majority of Muslims in Bradford and Calderdale are ethnic Pakistanis and Bangladeshis. I also reminded them that data on religious hate crime is poor, forcing me to rely on a proxy. They accepted these arguments.

Next, I challenged them back. Why is there less information on religious than ethnic hate crime, despite the introduction of religious hate crime as a separate category? The director of the civil society organization finds that police officers and other people reporting hate crimes “jump at race.” Sail Suleman, the Hate Crime Coordinator at Calderdale Council, similarly finds that “people go to race rather than religion by default; often, they also default on anti-social behaviour rather than hate crime.” He further suggests that, in the interest of prosecution, professionals tend to record hate crimes whichever way the evidentiary threshold is lowest, with the threshold being lower for hate crimes based on race than on religion. Here and elsewhere, injecting critical reflexivity helped me to learn important background about my data that I would not otherwise have known.

4.1. Data Quantity versus Quality

As we have seen, the dataset suffers from a large amount of missing and incomplete data. When I pointed this out to my interlocutors at West Yorkshire Police, it triggered an animated discussion as to whether one should prioritize the quality or quantity of data. Thus,

creating a critical reflexive atmosphere allowed me to switch into observer mode for part of the interview.

Martin Baines opened the discussion by stating that the amount of missing and incomplete data “makes it really difficult.” Officer 2 objected that information might be missing for a reason. When a graffiti appears overnight, there are usually no witnesses so the identity of the offender remains unknown. In other cases, a report might refer to a social media interaction where establishing victim and offender identity is difficult. “The victim may not be the one reporting, or may ask to remain anonymous.” Officer 2 also pointed out that police officers must not use their own judgment in determining identities, not even in the case of White British people. Someone might look white but be of Asian heritage. Conversely, an Anglicized name like “Adam” might belong to a Muslim. Officer 2 pointed out that, in such cases, the correct procedure is to record “not known.”

Officer 1 added that online reporting “has gone through the roof.” At this point, Baines cautioned that “more data coming in can also be a problem,” but Officer 1 begged to disagree: “It is not a problem. We want people reporting.” For example, Officer 1 applauds a mobile phone app³⁶ for hate crime reporting “because we are encouraging people; we’d rather know there was an incident on a bus in Manningham, even if we don’t know the age of the victim or the age of the perpetrator.” Ending the debate, Baines volunteered the following formula to settle the issue: “We used to want all of the information. Now, it is different. We welcome whatever people are comfortable reporting.”

In Halifax, Suleman told me that “the Hate Crime Partnership in Calderdale encourages people to report everything that happens so that we get a better picture of what is going on: hotspots, who the suspects are and so on, to help us allocate the right resources. Third party reporting is encouraged.” In Bradford, by contrast, the director of the civil society organization expressed concerns about the trade-off between data quality and quantity: “If you ask people to report any incident—say, someone behind you shouts ‘Paki’ but you do not know who they were—then you will get a lot of offender-less hate crimes below the criminal threshold.” In online reporting, an anonymous informant might write, “My neighbour called me ‘Paki’.” In a case like that, authorities would not know the gender of either party. He further suggested that, if one encourages reporting too much, it may overstretch the capacity of the police and civil society groups to deal with every report. There will be many reports that do not meet the criminal threshold. This will drive down the response rate and the conviction rate, leading to a disappointing experience for complainants.

Finding 1: *Hate crime practitioners prioritize data quantity over quality; they are aware that this may produce a flurry of records that are of limited usefulness.*

4.2. Rising Numbers of Hate Crimes?

There is an ongoing debate as to whether the rise of hate crimes in recent years is due to better recording or a real rise in frequency. In the face of public perceptions of skyrocketing hate crimes, the Home Office (2020) notes the following paradox. On the one hand, the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that, since the late 2000s, people have experienced a 38% *decrease* of hate crimes. On the other hand, police data shows a significant *increase* since the mid-2000s. While acknowledging that the 2016 Brexit referendum and the 2017 terrorist attacks may have contributed to temporary spikes in hate crimes, the Home Office finds that the long-term increase in the data is “mainly driven by improvements in crime recording by the police.”³⁷

I was curious how participants would position themselves in this debate. I showed them charts with annual numbers of racial and religious hate crimes in Bradford and Calderdale (Figure 2), pointing out that figures have risen sharply since 2014/5 and asking for an explanation. My interlocutors at West Yorkshire Police did not mention Brexit or the Brexit campaign. Instead, Officer 1 explained that an inspection report published in 2014 had exposed general weaknesses in crime reporting by West Yorkshire Police.³⁸ In response to this critical report, West Yorkshire Police undertook serious efforts to improve its performance. Officer 1 said with pride that their force has become “outstanding in the way we collect our hate crime data,” while warning that “you cannot place too much confidence in data before 2015.” Officer 1 also told me that, while there is now better reporting and less underreporting, one cannot infer from the increase of hate crimes recorded per year that there has been a real rise in the frequency of hate crimes.

Baines agreed that West Yorkshire Police got “better at doing it,” although underreporting remains a concern. He recalls that, in 2013, Bradford launched its first partnership strategy to improve collaboration with civil society organizations representing the communities. This included an action plan to increase pathways to reporting, including online reporting. “There were targets to increase the numbers of reports.” Baines finds that the notion of setting targets for how many reports the police should receive from civil society organizations might sound strange, but he remembers that West Yorkshire Police did get more reports from its civil society partners. Suleman also finds that the increase in observations is due to better recording rather than a real rise in frequency.

Only the director of the civil society organization in Bradford finds that there has been a real rise in the frequency of hate crimes due to changes in social context and political “narrative.” As cases in point, he mentions far right marches, a general move to the right, conservative politicians using offensive language such as Boris Johnson comparing female Muslims to letterboxes, and the Home Office deliberately creating a “hostile environment” for migrants. He suggests that this sort of discourse and behavior has encouraged and almost legitimized hate crime locally.

Finding 2: *Participants mostly agreed with the Home Office assessment that the rise of hate crimes in recent years is due to better reporting rather than a real rise in frequency.*

4.3. Offending and Victimization

Another interesting finding relates to the percentages of recorded offenders and victims. As far as offenders are concerned, a large majority are White British and a small minority Asian Muslim, as one might expect given the population shares. One might expect the reverse pattern for victims: a large Muslim majority, and a small white minority. However, that is not the case. While there are more Muslim than white victims, the number of white victims is far from insignificant; 30% of recorded victims are white, not too far from the percentage of Muslim victims (Table 1).³⁹

When I pointed out to participants that the dataset records a non-trivial percentage of white victims of ethnic and religious hate crimes, it caught them off guard. “I am not sure what this tells me” (Baines). “It is impossible to comment” (Officer 1). “It is difficult to comment” (Suleman). Only the director of the civil society organization in Bradford risked an explanation, citing “area battles between Asians and whites” and fights over drug dealing as possible explanations.

Another surprising finding from the data analysis is that, in recent years, there has been a decline in the percentage of Muslim victimization and a concomitant rise in white victimi-

Table 1. Percentage of recorded offenders and victims.

	A. Bradford			B. Calderdale		
	White British	Asian Muslim	Other	White British	Asian Muslim	Other
Offender	70%	19%	11%	84%	12%	4%
Victim	30%	38%	32%	30%	40%	30%

zation (Supporting Information, Slides 27-46). The effect is weak, but it exists for both Bradford and Calderdale. Again, my interlocutors were reluctant to comment. “I am not sure what that tells us” (Baines). “It is difficult to take any conclusions from it” (Officer 1). “Without looking at details, it is difficult to comment” (Suleman).

While there was frank conversation on white offending and Muslim victimization, participants clearly found it awkward to comment on Muslim offending and white victimization. This reticence might be a nod to conventional multiculturalist assumptions whereby whites tend to be offenders and ethnic minorities victims; or it might be related to an implicit “victim hierarchy” whereby members of the majority qualify less than ethno-religious minorities as victims of hate crime.⁴⁰

Even more interestingly, the analysis suggests that minorities are overrepresented as victims in their area, regardless of whether they are Asian Muslim or White British. Muslims are overrepresented as victims in white-majority areas but underrepresented in Muslim-majority areas. Whites are overrepresented in Muslim-majority areas but underrepresented in white-majority areas (Supporting Information, Slides 17-26).

Baines finds that “this is not a surprise. You are less likely to be a victim in a community where there are more of you. When there are fewer of you, you are more vulnerable.” Suleman gives a similar explanation: “minimal contact with the other community.” For instance, “a Muslim in Park ward would be surrounded by the South Asian heritage community; elsewhere, he would be more likely to be a victim.” While this may appear normal to people living in segregated towns, I find it depressing because it suggests that segregation avoids conflict whereas contact leads to tension, contrary to the cherished idea that more contact between communities fosters “cohesion.”⁴¹

A critical reader might caution that minorities in the numerical sense may not be minorities in the sociological sense. While this is true, White British minorities in Muslim majority areas of Bradford and Halifax are minorities both in the numerical and in the sociological sense. Many of them are low-income people, often elderly, who cannot afford to move out. Ethnographic research conducted by the author in Halifax, Birmingham and Tower Hamlets suggests that, far from enjoying white privilege, “white working class” people in Muslim majority areas can be quite vulnerable.

Finding 3: *The data analysis suggests that minorities are overrepresented as victims in their residential area. Asian Muslims are overrepresented as victims in white-majority areas but underrepresented in Muslim-majority areas. White British are overrepresented as victims in Muslim-majority areas but underrepresented in white-majority areas.*

4.4. Hate Crimes and Dramatic Events

The Home Office (2020) reports increases in hate crime surrounding the 2016 Brexit referendum and after the 2017 terrorist attacks.⁴² Based on its own data regarding Islamo-

phobic hate incidents (a wider category than hate crimes), a civil society group sounded the alarm in 2018:

Tell MAMA recorded a 475% increase in the number of offline anti-Muslim incidents reported in the week following the UK 2016 EU referendum. However, this spike was dwarfed by the 700% increase recorded in the week following the Manchester Arena attack on 22 May 2017, with 72 reports recorded seven days after the terror attack, compared with 9 reports in the previous week.⁴³

This sounded rather alarming, and there was much reporting about it.⁴⁴ Recent scholarship based on actual hate crimes, rather than hate incidents, finds a 19–23% increase in hate crimes around the time of the Brexit referendum.⁴⁵ While this seems much less alarming, I was expecting to find an association between dramatic events and the frequency of hate crimes in West Yorkshire. To my surprise, I found no such association (Supporting Information, Slides 47–55).

When I asked my interlocutors at West Yorkshire Police for comment, they claimed it as a success. Martin Baines, who was Bradford's Community and Race Relations officer between 1996 and 2005, referred to his experience at the time. He recalls that, spurred by a murder incident in 2000 and the 2001 race riots in Bradford, West Yorkshire Police strengthened community engagement.

We created teams of officers to work with communities in times of crisis, and not just after the crisis. We developed a process for monitoring and dealing with tensions in the communities. We created a civic network. A good strong civic infrastructure. (...) We had a plan. So, when the London bombings happened, we got to work immediately. Within an hour, we sent key messages. Within three hours, we held meetings and got the media on board. The next day, there was a vigil led by the Bishop of Bradford. Communities came together.

Baines said he would have expected an increase in hate crime because two of the London bombers were from nearby Leeds. Yet, Bradford did not experience any increase. He is proud that his work to promote community engagement has left a legacy. "Since I have left the job, colleagues have developed these mechanisms for bringing people together even further. When the English Defence League held its march, it was a non-event. People stood shoulder to shoulder."⁴⁶

Others, however, believe that hate crimes do increase after dramatic events, even if police data does not show it. Thus, Suleman pointed to his impressions from observing the scene in Halifax:

We do hear and see the impact when we listen and look to local communities in takeaway restaurants, as well as taxi drivers. It does not end up recorded and reported. It does not hit the official police recording system.

Similarly, the director of the organization in Bradford recalls his group did notice an increase in hate during and after the Brexit campaign. "In talking with the community, we also notice fear after terrorist events such as the recent attack in Christchurch. When you talk to the community, they would say they have experienced incidents around those events." Apparently, this refers to non-crime hate incidents rather than hate crimes that might end up in the police database.

Finding 4: Some participants celebrated the lack of correlation between dramatic events and the frequency of hate crimes as a success of community engagement. Others pointed to anecdotal evidence that non-crime hate incidents rise in frequency after dramatic events.

4.5. Hate Crimes and the Night Time Economy

As we have seen, Asian Muslims are the majority of the population in some wards but they remain a minority in Bradford and Calderdale generally. Many members of the Muslim community, especially men, work in the night time economy, for example as taxi drivers and in takeaway restaurants. This means they must frequently venture outside the relative safety of their neighborhood. As we shall see, doing so puts them at an increased risk, especially late at night and during weekends.

The dataset allows for a disaggregation of hate crimes by time of the day and day of the week. The data analysis suggests a crescendo in the frequency of hate crimes during the day. Late at night, the number of Muslim and male victims skyrockets more than white and female victims (Figure 4). According to the director of the civil society group in Bradford, the sharp fall in the number of recorded hate crimes just after midnight “must be about how it is logged and stuff.”

Interlocutors unanimously stressed the importance of the “night time economy” in driving hate crimes late at night and early in the morning. Officer 1 highlighted drinking and fast food restaurants. Officer 2 suggested that the key factor might be engaging in nightlife socializing rather than drinking alcohol per se. The director of the civil society organization in Bradford made similar comments. Suleman highlighted the taxi trade, in addition to drinking and takeaways.

Interlocutors agreed that many if not most Muslims victimized late at night and early in the morning are taxi drivers and workers in fast food stores. According to Suleman, almost all taxi drivers in Halifax are Muslim men from Pakistan. “Female Muslim taxi drivers hardly exist.” Similarly, many if not most workers in takeaway restaurants are Muslim men. “People are out and about. There is quite a lot of drinking. Reports are unlikely to come from the people doing the drinking. Reports are more likely to come from taxi drivers and the takeaway industry.” With regard to Bradford, the director of the civil society organization told me essentially the same thing.

Whites offend, and Muslims are victimized, disproportionately on Saturdays and Sundays. Baines stated the obvious: “During the weekend is when most social interaction takes place; it is common sense.” No such trend appears for Muslim offenders and white

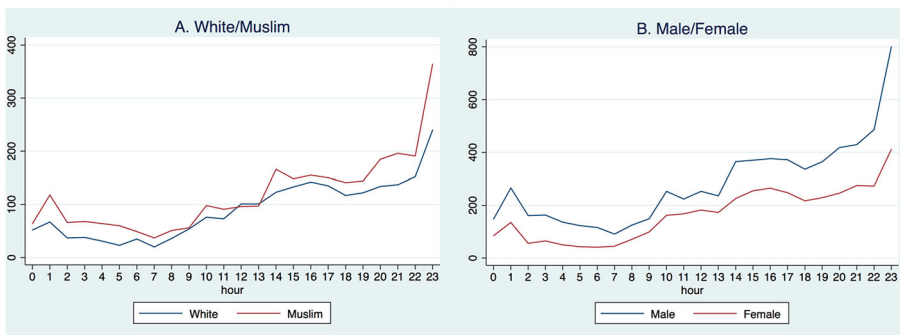


Figure 4. Number of victims by hour of day.

victims, possibly due to alcohol prohibition and different patterns of nightlife socializing among Muslims (Figure 5).

Finding 5: *Alcohol consumption and nightlife socializing are key drivers behind the increased levels of Muslim victimization during the night and on weekends.*

4.6. Gendered Islamophobia?

It seems that white men and women are at similar risk of victimization, but for Muslims the pattern is different. Muslim women are less than 8% of all victims at any time of the day; Muslim men are between 15% around noon and more than 20% late at night and early in the morning (Figure 6).

When I asked the director of the civil society organization in Bradford for an explanation, he reminded me that Muslim men run much of the night time economy. Unlike Muslim men, “not many Muslim women would be going out. If they go out, they would be going out with family.” In a similar vein, Officer 2 indicated that some Asian women “are not allowed to go out.” This is a cultural practice within the family circumstances of Asian women in the officer’s professional experience.

While this makes sense, the low incidence of female Muslim victimization is at variance with the widely accepted notion of “gendered Islamophobia”.⁴⁷ For example, Professor Peter Hopkins of Newcastle University states that “most victims of anti-Muslim hatred

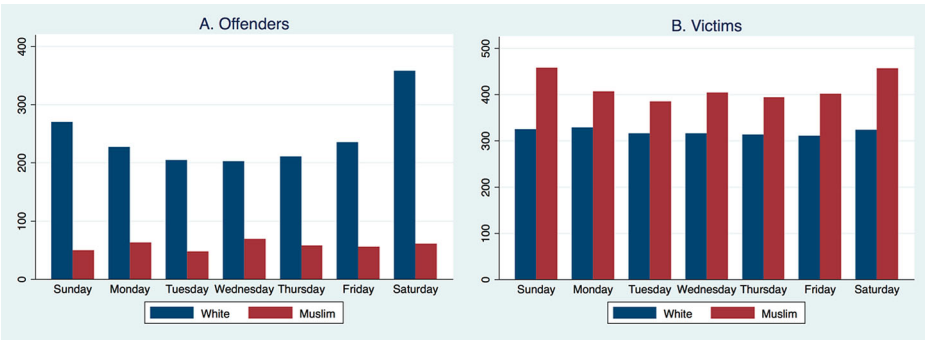


Figure 5. Number of offenders/victims by day of week.

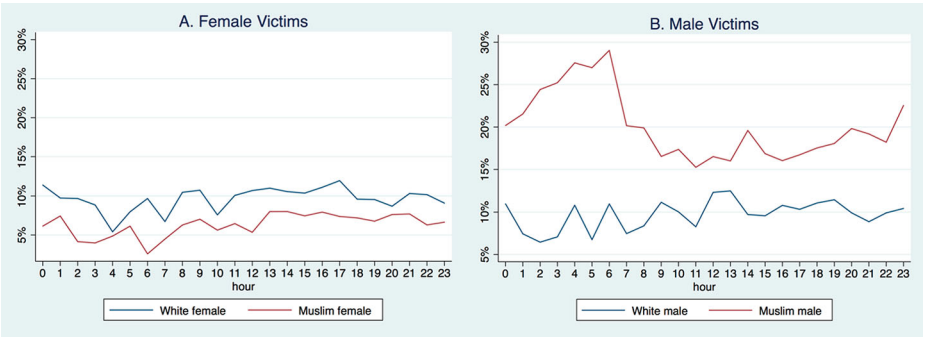


Figure 6. Percentage of victims by hour of the day.

are women.”⁴⁸ Given the prevailing narrative of gendered Islamophobia, I was surprised that Muslim women constitute only a small share of hate crime victims, at least in the dataset from West Yorkshire Police.

When I told the director of the civil society organization that I would have expected more female Muslim victims, he stressed underreporting. In his view, Muslim women are quite likely to be victims but not likely to report. He offered a scenario: “An Asian mum is bringing the children to school and pushes her smallest child in a pram. She does that three times a day. Suddenly someone shouts at her ‘you Paki bitch.’ She keeps quiet, takes the children to school, and goes home.”

He explained that the daily climax of Muslim victimization starts when mums pick up the little children for lunch; intensifies in the afternoon when schools break up; continues when people return from work; and takes off in the late evening when people go out. This would suggest that, until the late afternoon, many if not most Muslim victims should be women. In other words, male Muslim victimization should outpace female Muslim victimization only from the late afternoon.

However, the recorded data does not support this. As we have seen, police data from West Yorkshire suggests that there are more than twice as many male Muslim victims at any time of the day. It is of course possible that Muslim women are less likely to report, as the director of the civil society organization suggests; but the effect would have to be extremely strong to reconcile Figure 6 with the narrative of gendered Islamophobia.

It is also possible that Muslim women are more likely to be victims of non-crime hate incidents such as verbal harassment, while Muslim men are more likely to be victims of outright hate crimes. What is more, a Muslim woman might be more likely to report to civil society groups like Tell MAMA than to the police, especially when she lacks proficiency in English or is unable to identify the harassers.

However, this is speculative and there should be more research on the gendered aspects of anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate incidents (comparison of data on hate incidents versus hate crimes; police constabularies other than West Yorkshire; Crime Survey of England and Wales).

Finding 6: *The data suggests low levels of female Muslim victimization. The magnitude of the gap between male and female Muslim victimization raises doubts about the validity of the “gendered Islamophobia” narrative, at least in the case of West Yorkshire.*

5. Conclusion

We have found that hate crime practitioners prioritize data quantity over quality; attribute the increase of recorded hate crimes to better reporting rather than a real rise in hate crimes; and explain the higher incidence of hate crimes late at night and during weekends with alcohol and nightlife socializing. We have also found that minorities, regardless of whether they are Asian Muslim or White British, are overrepresented as victims in their residential area; have found no correlation between dramatic events and the incidence of hate crimes; and have found more victimization among male than female Muslims, questioning the narrative of “gendered Islamophobia.”

No merely quantitative analysis of hate crime data could have yielded these results. Only a creative adaptation of interpretive quantitative methods⁴⁹ has been able to shed light on such critical aspects of majority-Muslim hate crime as the night time economy and “gendered Islamophobia.” What has worked in this instance was a combination of interpretive sociology with quantitative data analysis and critical engagement, interrogating seemingly

objectified data and debating the ways knowledgeable hate crime practitioners interpret such data.

In a spirit of critical reflection, interviews were closer to debating than information gathering. At West Yorkshire Police, interlocutors found some of my findings sensitive and expressed concern that they “might play right into the hands of the extremists.” When Officer 1 had stated this at the close of the interview, Officer 2 and Baines repeated the exact same words and nodded ominously. In an interesting side remark, Baines further commented that hate crime is “an evolving agenda.” Might my findings interfere in unwelcome ways with that agenda, exposing some blind spots?

On the one hand, I am slightly disappointed that interlocutors at West Yorkshire Police see some of my findings as problematic, rather than welcoming them as a contribution to evidence-based policing. On the other hand, I am highly conscious that West Yorkshire Police deserves credit for not only releasing a unique dataset but also giving me an interview with such an open mind.

Majority-Muslim hate crimes are indeed “sensitive.” Yet, it would have been wrong to suppress any relevant findings. On the contrary, I hope readers will find value in receiving my unadulterated findings. One upshot is that we should not take shibboleths like structural racism and gendered Islamophobia as gospel but put them to empirical scrutiny in concrete research settings.

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Supporting Information

The police dataset and related slides used for this research are available from the Oxford University Research Archive at <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:ab3c1d64-bda2-4169-aeca-b23a58eb17a2>

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