

BRITAIN'S NEW BLASPHEMY POLICE? UNDERSTANDING ISLAMIST ANTI-BLASPHEMY ACTION IN THE UK

BY CHARLOTTE LITTLEWOOD



**CENTRE ON
RADICALISATION
& TERRORISM**

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About the Author

Charlotte Littlewood is a research fellow at the Henry Jackson Society. She is a PhD candidate in Arab and Islamic studies with the University of Exeter University. Her research focuses on minority within Muslim minority conflict in the UK, in particular the persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the extent to which the UK is able to support this community.

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Summary

Ideology

- Holding or expressing anti-blasphemy views in the UK is not in itself a criminal offence. However, some individuals and organisations are making full use of the UK's rights to free expression to try to repress free expression by those they deem blasphemous.
- Extreme anti-blasphemy ideology¹ manifests across some Islamic sects and Muslim majority states, however, it is particularly prevalent in Pakistan, especially within the Sunni Barelvi sect, from which a number of individuals and organisations have influence in the UK.
- Two organisations found to be frequently linked to anti-blasphemy action in the UK are Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and elements of the Khatme Nabuwaat movement. Praise of two individuals is also frequently linked to anti-blasphemy action: praise of the late Khadim Rizvi, and praise of the late Mumtaz Qadri.
- Anti-Ahmadism² is highly prevalent amongst those involved in anti-blasphemy action.

Response

- Some local councillors' responses to extreme anti-blasphemy incidents in the UK have, at times, seemingly supported the anti-blasphemy action taken and a few councillors have shown some signs of support for Khatme Nabuwaat.
- Extreme anti-blasphemy actors have worked with schools and local authorities in response to incidents deemed blasphemous.
- Schools have suspended teachers and students for actions deemed blasphemous.
- Cinemas and publishing houses have withdrawn products that have been deemed blasphemous for fear of risk to safety.
- Members of a community that sought asylum in the UK from extreme anti-blasphemy action no longer feel the UK can effectively offer them asylum.

Recommendations

- This paper calls for a Government investigation into the two recent anti-blasphemy incidents in Wakefield and Batley; a renewed Department for Education policy on responding to blasphemy incidents; a policing strategy that works with at-risk institutions to improve confidence and improve fast and expert-led responses to anti-blasphemy incidents; and an investigation into the potential proscription of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan and certain Khatme Nabuwaat organisations in Pakistan and Bangladesh.

¹ See "Understanding the ideology".

² Officially the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, or the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, is an Islamic revival movement originating in Punjab, British India, in the late 19th century. It is considered heretical/blasphemous by sections of the wider Muslim community.

About Us



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About The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.

CENTRE ON RADICALISATION & TERRORISM

About The Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism

The Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism (CRT) at the Henry Jackson Society is unique in addressing violent and non-violent extremism. By coupling high-quality, in-depth research with targeted and impactful policy recommendations, we aim to combat the threat of radicalisation and terrorism in our society.

Contents

About the Author	2
Acknowledgements	2
Summary	3
About The Henry Jackson Society	4
About The Centre on Radicalisation and Terrorism.....	4
Foreword by Tim Loughton MP	6
Introduction	7
Methodology	10
Setting the UK's current context: The Rushdie Affair.....	12
Key terms and relevance	15
Anti-blasphemy UK case studies	22
Case study 1: Batley Grammar School.....	22
Case Study 2: Wakefield	30
Case Study 3: Cineworld, The Lady of Heaven	39
Case Study 4: The Jewel of Medina.....	44
Sectarian anti-blasphemy action	46
Murder of Asad Shah	46
Analysis.....	49
Conclusion	50
Recommendations	51

Foreword by Tim Loughton MP

This report is a troubling read, which identifies extreme anti-blasphemy action as a growing risk to key tenets of our liberal democratic system, including the right to freedom of speech and freedom of religion. Those in positions of power need to be very careful not to endorse such a movement without better understanding its complex motivations and potential dangers. This new report offers an essential briefing on the drivers of anti-blasphemy action in the UK today.

Among the many victims of the anti-blasphemy agenda are Ahmadiyya Muslims, a sect deemed blasphemous by some and who continue to suffer violent persecution, not just in Pakistan but here in the UK. More broadly, UK publishing houses and cinemas have been intimidated and on occasion attacked on grounds of blasphemy. A teacher remains in hiding, an autistic boy received death threats and all the while schools, local authorities and even the police have seemingly cooperated with protesters. This simply cannot continue.

Charlotte Littlewood provides not just an overview of the problem, but also renewed and robust guidance for at-risk institutions. Her toolkit to identify potential signs of an extreme anti-blasphemy ideology should be shared widely among Prevent and policing teams in the UK. The UK must not shirk on our responsibility to stand for our values and defend at-risk minorities.

It is time to afford extreme anti-blasphemy action the same attention we afford the likes of Al-Qaida and ISIS. If the attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices in France are anything to go by, this ideological extremism has no lesser propensity for violence..

Introduction

Blasphemy is the act of saying or doing something that disrespects God or religion.³ The common law offences of blasphemy and blasphemous libel were abolished in England and Wales by the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.⁴ The Pew Research centre found that 79 countries and territories out of the 198 studied around the world (40%) had laws or policies in 2019 banning blasphemy.⁵ Blasphemy is punishable by death in seven countries: Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania and Somalia.⁶

Blasphemy within the Islamic context has a range of meanings. According to section 295 of Pakistan's Blasphemy law, blasphemous acts can include the defacing of the Quran⁷ and criticism of the Prophet Muhammad.⁸ According to some interpretations of the Quran and hadith, depicting the Prophet Muhammad is blasphemous. Images of the Prophet Muhammad have been central to numerous violent anti-blasphemy acts,⁹ most tragic being the attack on the offices of the satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo in 2015 which left 17 dead.¹⁰

Some schools of thought hold that it is blasphemous for someone who identifies themselves as Muslim to belong to a religious group that is perceived to have "deviant" interpretations of Islam, such as the Ahmadiyya. What may be understood as sectarianism to some is blasphemy to those who do not accept certain sects or practices as being within the fold of Islam. Under Pakistan's Ordinance XX, it is a criminal offence for an Ahmadi to identify as Muslim.¹¹

As a result of persecution abroad, persons and groups accused of blasphemy have sought asylum in the UK. However, violence and intimidation in the name of defending Islam is now resulting in blasphemy being unofficially regulated on the UK's streets and in schools, cinemas and publishing houses. This has left some asylum seekers looking to leave the UK as it no longer feels safe for them here.¹²

This report seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of extreme anti-blasphemy action in the UK and the potential problems pertaining to the responses. Such a contribution was called for by William Shawcross in his independent review of Prevent:

An area of particular importance requiring more attention is that of violence associated with accusations of blasphemy and apostasy. It is vital that Prevent proactively seeks to address this ideological threat, given the serious challenge it poses to our national culture of free speech – which must be fiercely protected – as well as to the safety of individuals and the public.¹³

³ "blasphemy", Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blasphemy>.

⁴ "Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008", legislation.gov.uk, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/4/part/5/crossheading/blasphemy>.

⁵ Villa Virginia, Jan 2022, Pew Research Centre, "Four in ten countries and territories worldwide had blasphemy laws in 2019", <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/25/four-in-ten-countries-and-territories-worldwide-had-blasphemy-laws-in-2019-2/>.

⁶ "Blasphemy Laws by Country", End Blasphemy Laws, <https://end-blasphemy-laws.org/countries/>.

⁷ 295 Pakistan penal code, 1982.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Duffy Liam, "Violence Against Perceived Blasphemers In The West: From Khamenei's Fatwa To The Present", The Counter Extremism Project, July 2023, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/Violence%20Against%20Perceived%20Blasphemers%20in%20the%20West_July%202022.pdf.

¹⁰ Petrikowski, N. Peter, "Charlie Hebdo shooting", Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 April 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Charlie-Hebdo-shooting>.

¹¹ Ordinance XX, 1984.

¹² See "Murder of Asad Shah" later in this paper.

¹³ William Shawcross, "Independent Review of Prevent", House of Commons, 8 February 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, p.147.

Shawcross also commented on the prevalence of Khatme Nabuwaat links to action taken in the name of blasphemy. This concern has been given due consideration throughout.

It is common for narratives around blasphemy in the UK to have a connection back to hard-line Pakistani clerics and/or the Khatme Nubuwwat movement, which has a well-established presence in Pakistan.¹⁴

This report provides a survey of several high-profile anti-blasphemy incidents in the UK as a basis for informing policy discussions, providing insights into the challenges faced by frontline workers, and contributing more generally to a broader academic understanding of the subject. An understanding of the why, the who and the how is pivotal if the UK Government is going to effectively work towards a safe, equal, tolerant Britain.

Freedom of expression in the UK allows for the expression of anti-blasphemy sentiment, however this very expression, in and of itself, intends to curtail such freedoms. Whilst not a crime to participate in anti-blasphemy protests, this ideology in its most extreme form has been seen to motivate criminal action, from property damage through to murder, and it presents a challenge to the fundamental freedoms and values that underpin a liberal democracy.

Why is blasphemy regulation antithetical to an individual rights-based liberal democracy?

Blasphemy laws infringe upon the right to freedom of expression, freedom of religion and the freedom to critique ideologies. Multicultural and diverse societies require these freedoms in order that communities with differing religions and ideas may live and be treated equally alongside one another.

Freedom of expression

As stated in the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: "Freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are indispensable conditions for the full development of the person... They constitute the foundation stone for every free and democratic society."¹⁵

The individual's ability to critique ideas and norms is crucial for social progress. If one idea or belief is afforded more protection than another, it may stifle progress outside of that belief.

Freedom of religion

Freedom of religion is limited when anti-blasphemy action infringes on the rights of other faiths to worship freely. Blasphemy regulations tend to favour the protection of one or a few religious beliefs at the expense of others. Indeed, as per international human rights law and EU law, freedom of religion is not about protecting religions from criticism but about respecting people's rights to practise the religion of their choice.¹⁶

Religious pluralism within a secular system

Blasphemy regulations grant religious institutions or authorities the power to enforce their beliefs through legal means. This undermines the secular nature of the state and can lead to the privileging of certain religious groups.

¹⁴ William Shawcross, "Independent Review of Prevent", House of Commons, 8 February 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, p.148.

¹⁵ "Human Rights Committee, 102nd Session, General Comment No. 34", Human Rights Committee, 12 September 2011, <https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrc/docs/GC34.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Choudry v. United Kingdom*, 27949/95, Council of Europe: European Commission on Human Rights, 13 May 1996, <https://www.refworld.org/cases,COECOMMHR,3ae6b63114.html>; *Dubowska and Skup v. Poland*, 33490/96, 34055/96, Council of Europe: European Commission of Human Rights, 18 April 1997, https://www.stradalex.com/en/sl_src_publ_jur_int/document/echr_33490-96_001-3654.

Potential for reciprocal radicalisation

Some argue that the rise of the anti-blasphemy agenda in the UK has seen a reciprocal rise in far-right extremism.¹⁷ Matthew Collins, a former leader of the National Front, said membership of the far-right movement rose by 40 per cent over the Rushdie Affair:

“We’d never heard of Muslims. We didn’t know what Islam was. We weren’t there to defend Salman Rushdie because he wasn’t white anyway, we didn’t like him,” he said. For the far right, fighting Muslims “is what it’s been about ever since.”¹⁸

Far-right groups claim that exceptional treatment towards minority groups has left the white working class aggrieved.¹⁹ This grievance is exacerbated when there are anti-blasphemy incidents that seemingly are not met with the same Government opposition and police enforcement as other forms of protest.²⁰

¹⁷ Joelle Fiss, “Anti-blasphemy in the digital age: When hardliners take over”, Brookings, September 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/anti-blasphemy-in-the-digital-age-when-hardliners-take-over/>.

¹⁸ Dominic Kennedy, “British activist was behind Iran’s fatwa on Salman Rushdie”, *The Times*, 25 February 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/british-activist-was-behind-iran-s-call-to-kill-salman-rushdie-7cd22753s>.

¹⁹ Daniel Trilling, “Tommy Robinson and the far right’s new playbook”, *The Guardian*, 25 October 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/25/tommy-robinson-and-the-far-rights-new-playbook>.

²⁰ See “Case study 1: Batley Grammar School” later in this paper.

Methodology

This paper provides details and analyses for five recent anti-blasphemy action case studies in the UK.

Each case study aims to identify and examine the following key aspects: the leaders of the protests or action; the ideological driver behind the action; and the responses of both frontline workers and the Government. The case studies cannot be exhaustive in highlighting all responses or all persons and groups involved in the incident; they instead draw upon evidence publicly available that is relevant to the instigation of an incident and significant to analysing its response.

Case selection

Case studies have been chosen based on the availability of relevant data, the significance and impact of the cases, and their representation of different ideological drivers and responses.

Physical impact is the threshold for inclusion of a case study in this report. The incident must have resulted in either the blasphemous actor or business experiencing a physical change in circumstances (going into hiding, being physically attacked) or the removal of products.

This is not an exhaustive list of cases but a selection of anti-blasphemy incidents in the UK that have had the highest degree of impact on persons or businesses from the Rushdie fatwa to the present. The aim is to identify ideological overlaps and patterns and key causes for concern regarding Government and front-line responses.

Following each case study, key ideological overlaps and key concerns regarding the frontline response will be analysed, before turning to practical recommendations.

Understanding the ideology

What do we mean by extreme anti-blasphemy action?

Anti-blasphemy action becomes extreme when it goes beyond peaceful protest to violence or threat of violence in the name of preventing religious offence. This can include threats to life and/or property.

Islamist-inspired violence is often associated with Salafi-jihadist style terror attacks. Violence in the name of anti-blasphemy lacks the same level of academic attention. Little research has so far been done to observe the underpinning ideologies of anti-blasphemy incidents or how incidents relate to one another.²¹ However, anti-blasphemy action has no lesser propensity for violence. The attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices for the magazine's caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad saw 17 people murdered;²² French teacher Samuel Paty was beheaded for showing his class an image of the prophet;²³ and publishers of various novels deemed blasphemous have been attacked.²⁴

The anti-blasphemy agenda, as we will see, also reaches across sects and ideological fissures, creating a coalescence of extreme and dangerous anti-democratic sentiment with the potential

²¹ William Shawcross called for greater attention to be paid to Khatme Nabuwaat and its relation to blasphemy in his "Independent Review of Prevent".

²² Petrikowski, Nicki Peter, "Charlie Hebdo shooting", Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 April 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Charlie-Hebdo-shooting>. Accessed 8 July 2023.

²³ Kim Willsher, "Teacher decapitated in Paris named as Samuel Paty, 47", *The Guardian*, 17 October 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/17/teacher-decapitated-in-paris-named-as-samuel-paty-47>.

²⁴ Jamie Doward and Mark Townsend, "Firebomb attack on book publisher", *The Observer*, 28 September 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2008/sep/28/muhammad.book.attack>.

for violence. It also acts as a cause that can be competed over – to be the most devoted and boldest defender of Islam.

This study is informed by five specific cases, discussing the ideologies, organisations and individuals involved. Anti-blasphemy action has and will continue to manifest across many sects, not all of which are reflected in this UK study. Anti-blasphemy action in France, for example, is often driven by salafi-jihadist thinking,²⁵ whereas the UK case studies demonstrate a particular strand of anti-blasphemy thinking particular to the UK context.

²⁵ Duffy Liam, "Violence Against Perceived Blasphemers In The West: From Khamenei's Fatwa To The Present", The Counter Extremism Project, July 2023, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2023-06/Violence%20Against%20Perceived%20Blasphemers%20in%20the%20West_July%202022.pdf.

Setting the UK's current context: The Rushdie Affair

On 14 February 1989, the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, issued a fatwa:²⁶

I inform all zealous Muslims of the world that the author of the book entitled *The Satanic Verses* – which has been compiled, printed and published in opposition to Islam, the Prophet, and the Qur'an – and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its contents, are sentenced to death.

I call on all zealous Muslims to execute them quickly, wherever they may be found, so that no one else will dare to insult the Muslim sanctities.²⁷

The response

In 1991, the Italian translator of *The Satanic Verses* was stabbed and the Japanese translator was stabbed to death.²⁸ In the summer of 1993, an Islamist mob killed 35 people in an arson attack against the Turkish translator of the book²⁹ and a few months later the Norwegian publisher was injured in a gun attack.³⁰ On 12 August 2022, Salman Rushdie was stabbed multiple times as he was about to give a public lecture in New York.³¹

The Rushdie Affair awoke a race for the “true” vanguard of the Prophet. Islamic states fought to be the Prophet's boldest champion, with the fatwa against the author positioning Iran as a frontline actor on an anti-blasphemy crusade whilst ideological groups competed to protest the loudest. Despite national and sectarian divisions, all were united in their goal to defend what they saw as Islam's honour.

The British roots of the Rushdie Affair

While the Iranian fatwa gave the campaign against Rushdie's novel global attention, its roots lay elsewhere. Rushdie had already critiqued the South Asian Islamist organisation Jamaat-e-Islami in his earlier novel *Shame*,³² and the organisation was therefore primed to launch a campaign against his next book. It organised protests and petitioned Indian MPs, framing it as a Western attack on Islam.³³

Kenan Malik, in *From Fatwa to Jihad*, his pivotal study on the fatwa, explains:

With a general election (in India) due in November, the result of which was too close to call, no politician was willing to alienate an important Islamic organisation. A ban on *The*

²⁶ A fatwa is a legal ruling on a point of Islamic law given by a qualified Faqih in response to a question posed by a private individual, judge or government.

²⁷ Sarah Haque, “Who is Salman Rushdie? Author whose book *The Satanic Verses* made him a target,” *The Guardian*, 13 August 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/aug/13/who-is-salman-rushdie-author-whose-book-the-satanic-verses-made-him-a-target>.

²⁸ Hikari Hida and Mike Ives, “Rushdie attack recalls 1991 killing of his Japanese translator”, *The Japan Times*, 14 August 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/08/14/national/crime-legal/salman-rushdie-hitoshi-igarashi-murder/>.

²⁹ Hugh Pope, “Muslim Mob Torch Hotel, Killing 35: Turkey: The Target is the translator of Rushdie's ‘Satanic Verses’. He escapes by firefighters' ladder”, *Los Angeles Times*, 3 July 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-07-03-mn-9699-story.html>.

³⁰ Henrik Pryser Libell and Richard Martyn-Hemphill, “25 Years Later, Norway Files Charges in Shooting of ‘Satanic Verses’ Publisher”, *The New York Times*, 10 October 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/10/world/europe/norway-satanic-verses.html>.

³¹ Maya Yang, “Salman Rushdie stabbing suspect pleads not guilty in court appearance”, *The Guardian*, 18 August 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/aug/18/salman-rushdie-stabbing-suspect-court-appearance>.

³² Salman Rushdie, *Shame* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1983).

³³ Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Legacy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2017), Chapter One.

Satanic Verses was inevitable, whether anyone had read the book or not, and whatever its 'literary and artistic merit'.³⁴

Across the border in Pakistan the story thereafter has been one of increasing Islamisation, reflected in the mounting legislation against blasphemy and later attempts to export the anti-blasphemy agenda on a global scale.³⁵

Exportation of the anti-blasphemy agenda: Pakistan's former prime minister, Imran Khan, pledged to revive a campaign to impose global blasphemy laws at the UN. A series of resolutions against "defamation of religions" were submitted to the UN on behalf of an inter-governmental organisation of 56 countries with significant Muslim populations (the Organisation of the Islamic Conference/ Organisation of Islamic Cooperation). The resolutions were passed as non-binding resolutions, but the OIC says that its goal is to create an international law against "defamation of religions".

It is thought that the Iranian fatwa itself originated with Kalim Siddiqui (1931-1996), the former director of the now-dissolved Muslim Institute and the founder of the since-dissolved Muslim Parliament of Great Britain. He had travelled to Iran with his assistant at the time of the fatwa and was at Tehran Airport when Dr Khatami, then the Minister of Islamic Guidance, later president of the Islamic Republic, came to meet him and asked what he knew about Rushdie and the book. Journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown said that "the fatwa would not have been issued had the Britons not made that trip. The origins of the fatwa were here."³⁶

Iran then became synonymous with the anti-blasphemy agenda. Khomeini saw the fatwa as an opportunity to stake his claim as the protector of a global ummah or Muslim nation.³⁷ However, the anti-blasphemy fervour that inspired the fatwa originated in the Asian sub-continent and its British diaspora.

As Indian politicians attempted to "win the hearts and minds of 100 million Muslims",³⁸ and Muslim states competed to lead the defence of the global ummah, several Islamic anti-blasphemy organisations emerged in the UK. In December 1988 and January 1989, 8000 protesters gathered in Bradford and Bolton to burn a copy of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.³⁹ Many commentators contend that the Rushdie Affair was the birth of British Islamism. Ed Hussain, author of *The Islamist*, commented on the impact of the affair: "We'd gone from opposing an author to opposing the British Government. We'd been completely politicised."⁴⁰

The Salaam Portal summarised how a stand against blasphemy was foundational to the development of a number of Muslim activist groups and organisations still active today:

... the most positive outcome of the Rushdie Affair was that it permitted some level of coordination and networking among Muslim community bodies and activists, leading to the formation of UKACIA, which in turn was a precursor of a more ambitious initiative to unite British Muslims—the Muslim Council of Britain.⁴¹

³⁴ Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Legacy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2017), Chapter One.

³⁵ "Pakistani PM Khan congratulates Muslim world as UN adopts resolution against Islamophobia", *Arab News PK*, 15 March 2022, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2043186/pakistan>.

³⁶ Kennedy, "British Activist Was behind Iran's Fatwa on Salman Rushdie".

³⁷ Lydia Wilson, "Responses to the Rushdie Attack Show What Khomeini's Fatwa Was About", *New Lines Magazine*, 22 August 2022, <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/responses-to-the-rushdie-attack-show-what-khomeinis-fatwa-was-about/>.

³⁸ Kenan Malik, *From Fatwa to Jihad: The Rushdie Affair and Its Legacy* (London: Atlantic Books, 2017), Chapter One.

³⁹ "Letters: The Satanic Verses affair marked a low point for politicians", 7 October 2018, *The Observer*, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/oct/07/satanic-verses-salman-rushdie-low-point>.

⁴⁰ "Salman Rushdie radicalised my generation", *BBC News*, 14 February 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-47225607>.

⁴¹ Accessible here: <http://www.salaam.co.uk/ukacia/>.

Kalim Siddiqui and The Muslim Institute

Kalim Siddiqui was a significant imam in the UK. Despite being Sunni, he had a deep admiration for the Iranian revolution,⁴² viewing it as a revolution in which local Muslims overthrew the Western-backed Shah. As well as being pivotal in the issuing of the fatwa, he went on to found the Muslim Parliament and Muslim Institute, where he wrote a manifesto for “survival”. The manifesto provides insight into how the anti-blasphemy agenda was carved out in the UK.

The Muslim Manifesto (1990) – key areas of concern

“The penetration of the secular creed into Anglican thought is a matter of deep regret.” p.29

“It is a matter of deep regret that the Government, all political parties and the mass media in Britain are now engaged in a relentless campaign to reduce Muslim citizens of this country to the status of a disparaged and oppressed minority.” p.1 (therefore) “Muslims must develop their own identity and culture within Britain and as part of the global Muslim community, the Ummah.”

On *The Satanic Verses*:

“The British Government refuses to acknowledge the validity of the Muslim position. In this conflict rational argument has come up against a blank wall of colonial and cultural presuppositions.”

“At some stage we may have to engage in a campaign of civil disobedience in Britain. *The Satanic Verses* is not an ordinary ‘book’, it amounts to a declaration of war on Islam and Muslims.”

“The obvious solution to *The Satanic Verses* affair is for this book to be unconditionally withdrawn by the author and his publishers. We realise that withdrawal cannot mean the recall of all copies. However, withdrawal must mean (a) an undertaking that existing stocks in shops and warehouses will be pulled, (b) no further editions will be published in any shape or form, (c) the book will be removed from public libraries, and (d) anyone who wants to return his copy will receive a full refund. In addition, the author and publishers will pay an agreed sum to relieve the suffering of those, mainly in India, Kashmir, Pakistan and Bangladesh, who have been bereaved, maimed or injured in protests against *The Satanic Verses*. Muslims in Britain will continue to pursue the author and publishers of *The Satanic Verses* until this conflict is satisfactorily resolved. We are a law-abiding community seeking a peaceful settlement of a dangerous conflict. Such conflicts, unless peacefully settled, often lead to violence.” p.28

Wider calls for action:

“The Muslim community may have to define ‘no go’ areas where the exercise of ‘freedom of speech’ against Islam will not be tolerated... The one thing we must not do is surrender to the demands of rampant, immoral secularism.” p.29

The Rushdie Affair marked the start of a new kind of blasphemy code in the UK: one imposed not by law but by intimidation and the threat of violence, leaving government and politicians often unsure how to respond. Just as Kalim Siddiqui set out within the Muslim Manifesto of 1990: “The Muslim community may have to define ‘no go’ areas where the exercise of ‘freedom of speech’ against Islam will not be tolerated.”⁴³

⁴² Wilson, “Responses to the Rushdie Attack Show What Khomeini’s Fatwa Was About”.

⁴³ Ibid.

Key terms and relevance

The case studies include references to ideologies, political organisations, key events and key individuals that may be unfamiliar or their broader influence in the UK (beyond the case studies) may be unknown. This section provides definitions and any relevance to a wider discussion on blasphemy and the UK.

Barelvism

Barelvism is a Sunni revivalist movement founded by theoretician Ahmed Raza Khan Barelvi (1856-1921). Barelvis perceive themselves as “Aashiq-e-Rasool” (true lovers of the Prophet),⁴⁴ valuing this as a fundamental belief to the movement. This has resulted in an absolute position against blasphemy which followers “are prepared to go to any extent to safeguard.”⁴⁵ There is a subculture of competition between Barelvi sects with all “eager to show they honor the Prophet of Islam the most”.⁴⁶

As the movement has grown in popularity, it has splintered into more radical factions that “differ with each other over ideological and political issues”.⁴⁷ These divisions appeared as a result of historical rivalry between the Barelvis and Deobandis.⁴⁸ Representing the second largest Sunni population in Britain, after Deobandis, the Barelvi community is estimated to control about 25 per cent of the 1,700 British mosques.⁴⁹

Deobandism

Deobandism was founded in 19th-century British India. The movement created a network of madrassas throughout India (and subsequently Pakistan) with the aim of creating a cadre of ulema (or religious leaders) capable of issuing fatwas on all aspects of everyday life based on a strict interpretation of the Quran.⁵⁰ The movement became the face of the struggle against British colonial rule and was intent on carving out an Islamic state in the Indian subcontinent.⁵¹ In fundamentalist Deobandi “Westernisation”, “secularisation” and traditionalist Barelvi Sufi Islamic teachings are vehemently rejected.⁵² These fundamentalist subsects seek an “untainted” Islam, thereby limiting the decision-making power of followers to narrow parameters.⁵³

The anti-blasphemy agenda is also at the heart of the Deobandi movement due to its “emphasis on puritanism”.⁵⁴ The Khatme Nabuwaat movement is essentially Deobandi.⁵⁵

⁴⁴ Muhammad Suleman, “Institutionalisation of Sufi Islam after 9/11 and the Rise of Barelvi Extremism in Pakistan”, *Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 10, no. 2 (2018): 6-10, 10.

⁴⁵ Suleman, “Institutionalisation of Sufi Islam after 9/11”, 6-10, 10.

⁴⁶ Rashad Ali, “Blasphemy in Pakistan: The Twisted Theological Race to the Bottom”, *European Eye on Radicalization*, 5 November 2018, <https://eeradicalization.com/blasphemy-in-pakistan-the-twisted-theological-race-to-the-bottom/>.

⁴⁷ Suleman, “Institutionalisation of Sufi Islam after 9/11”, 6-10, 7.

⁴⁸ Kriti M. Shah, “Pakistan’s Ugly Truth: The Rise of Radical Barelvi Islam”, Observer Research Foundation, 13 November 2018.

⁴⁹ David Goodhart, “Islam in Britain: No excuse for ignorance”, *Prospect*, 17 July 2014, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/culture/46504/islam-in-britain-no-excuse-for-ignorance>.

⁵⁰ “Reviewed Works: *Islam and Muslim History in South Asia* by Francis Robinson; *The ‘Ulama of Farangi Mahall and Islamic Culture in South Asia* by Francis Robinson”, Review by: Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third Series, Vol. 14, No. 3 (November 2004), pp.253-263 (11 pages).

⁵¹ Kamran Bokhari, “The Long Shadow of Deobandism in South Asia”, *New Lines Magazine*, 23 November 2021, <https://newlinesmag.com/essays/the-long-shadow-of-deobandism-in-south-asia/>.

⁵² Christine C. Fair, *The madrassah challenge: Militancy and religious education in Pakistan* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2008).

⁵³ Templin, James D., “Religious Education of Pakistan’s Deobandi *Madaris* and Radicalisation”, *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses* 7, no. 5 (2015): 15-21.

⁵⁴ Khadijah Elshayyal, *Muslim Identity Politics: Islam, Activism and Equality in Britain* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2020), 67.

⁵⁵ “International Khatme-Nabuwat Movement”, Mosque Finder, <https://mosquefinder.co.uk/international-khatme-nabuwat-movement.html>. Archived: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230616100639/https://mosquefinder.co.uk/international-khatme-nabuwat-movement.html>.

44 per cent of UK mosques are Deobandi.⁵⁶ According to Dr Khadijah Elshayyal, in her thesis “Muslim Identity politics: Islam, activism and equality in Britain”, Deobandi missionary action via Deobandi schools and seminaries (Dar Uloom) have graduated the most consistent stream of British-trained imams and religious leaders.⁵⁷

Mumtaz Qadri

Salman Taseer, Governor of Punjab, argued that Pakistan’s blasphemy laws discriminated against religious minorities and sought liberal reforms. Mumtaz Qadri, a Barelvi⁵⁸ and Taseer’s bodyguard, killed him in Islamabad in 2011 for his position. Qadri was convicted and executed in February 2016. An estimated crowd of more than 100,000 people attended the funeral of Mumtaz Qadri, and he has since been hailed as a hero and martyr.⁵⁹

The largest body of the Barelvi group, the Jamaate Ahle Sunnat Pakistan (JASP), whose directions are considered binding on every other organisation that follows the same school of thought, issued a statement:

No Muslim should attend the funeral or even try to pray for Salmaan Taseer or even express any kind of regret or sympathy over the incident... We pay rich tributes and salute the bravery, valour and faith of Mumtaz Qadri.⁶⁰

The Home Office has come under criticism for allowing Pakistani clerics who praised Mumtaz Qadri to tour the UK.⁶¹

I have no reservations in saying that inadequate Home Office entry clearance procedures are allowing the entry into this country of individuals who pose a direct threat to our democracy and our social cohesion.⁶²

Siobhain McDonagh, MP, Parliamentary questions

Thereek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) / Khadim Rizvi

Founded by the late Khadim Rizvi, following a protest campaign seeking the release of Mumtaz Qadri, the group is known for its protests in opposition to any change to Pakistan’s blasphemy law.⁶³ Most of the party’s members belong to the Barelvi movement and it secured over 2.2 million votes in the 2018 elections.⁶⁴ The party organised the 2021 Pakistani protests.⁶⁵

⁵⁶ David Goodhart, “Islam in Britain: No excuse for ignorance”, *Prospect*, 17 July 2014, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/culture/46504/islam-in-britain-no-excuse-for-ignorance>.

⁵⁷ Khadijah Elshayyal, *Muslim Identity Politics: Islam, Activism and Equality in Britain* (London; New York: I. B. Tauris, 2020), 68.

⁵⁸ Jamestown Foundation, “Sufi Militants Struggle with Deobandi Jihadists in Pakistan”, *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 9, issue 8, 24 February 2011, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4d67513f2.html>.

⁵⁹ Jon Boone, “Thousands at funeral of Pakistani executed for murdering governor”, *The Guardian*, 1 March 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/01/funeral-pakistani-mumtaz-qadri-executed-salmaan-taseer>.

⁶⁰ Salman Siddiqui, “Hardline Stance: Religious bloc condones murder”, *The Express Tribune*, 5 January 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/99313/hardline-stance-religious-bloc-condones-murder/>.

⁶¹ Tom Porter, “Pakistani ‘hate preacher’ who glorifies Islamist murder welcomed by Archbishop of Canterbury”, *International Business Times*, 21 June 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/pakistani-hate-preacher-who-glorifies-islamist-murder-welcomed-by-archbishop-canterbury-1571418>.

⁶² “UK Security and Entry Clearance Procedures”, Hansard, 29 June 2016, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-06-29/debates/4EA92A14-905B-4370-8COD-8176A6E3F6D0/UKSecurityAndEntryClearanceProcedures>.

⁶³ Asad Hashim, “Tehreek-e-Labbaik: New far right campaigns against ‘blasphemy’”, *Aljazeera*, 6 July 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/features/2018/7/6/tehreek-e-labbaik-new-far-right-campaigns-against-blasphemy>.

⁶⁴ Mazhar Abbas, “The future of TLP in Pakistan’s politics”, *Geo News*, 26 April 2021, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/347390-the-future-of-tlp-in-pakistans-politics>.

⁶⁵ Cyrielle Cabot, “Islamist Party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Fuels Anti-France Violence in Pakistan”, *France 24*, 17 April 2021, <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210417-islamist-party-tehreek-e-labbaik-fuels-anti-france-violence-in-pakistan>.

2021 TLP-led protests

Leader Saad Rizvi, son of Khadim Rizvi, was arrested, reportedly to deter TLP supporters from further demanding the expulsion of France's ambassador. In response to Rizvi's arrest, TLP supporters blocked highways and clashed with police across the country over the course of two days, killing at least four people and wounding dozens of others, including at least 60 police officers.

The Pakistani Government declared the TLP a terrorist organisation and banned it on 14 April 2021.⁶⁶ Following further pressure from the TLP, the Government subsequently lifted the ban and released Rizvi.⁶⁷

TLP protests calling for the expulsion of the French ambassador were also held in London by British-Pakistani TLP supporters.⁶⁸

Anti-Ahmadism

The Ahmadiyya Muslim faith was founded in 1889 in the Punjab. Followers believe in a prophet after the prophet Muhammad causing them to be viewed as heretical by some and blasphemous under law in Pakistan.

There have been various incidences of violence against the Ahmadiyya. The Lahore Riots in 1953 were one of the most explicitly violent displays of anti-Ahmadi hatred in Pakistan to date. The riots were foreshadowed by an increasingly popular anti-Ahmadi movement led by the Majlis-i-Ahrar (*Ahrar*) group, who were the first to demand that Ahmadis be declared "a non-Muslim minority" in 1949.⁶⁹

The right-wing political organisation was first created in 1931⁷⁰ and was committed to achieving a non-Muslim status for Ahmadis and removing members of the community from all key government jobs.⁷¹ The riots lasted from 1 February 1953 until 14 May, when martial law was implemented. However, the violence still resulted in an estimated 2000 deaths.⁷²

The anti-Ahmadi sentiment underpinning the riots encouraged support from other actors, including members of the *ulema* and Jamaat-e-Islami. across popular channels.⁷³ Anti-Ahmadism ultimately developed into a crucial philosophy for organisations vying for formal state power.⁷⁴

In 1974 Pakistan amended its constitution to declare Ahmadis non-Muslims. With the introduction of Ordinance XX in 1984, Ahmadis were prohibited from "declaring their faith publicly, propagating their faith, building mosques, or making the call for Muslim prayers".⁷⁵

⁶⁶ Shakeel Qarar, "Government bans TLP under anti-terrorism law", *Dawn*, 15 April 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1618391>.

⁶⁷ Asad Hashim, "Pakistan frees far-right TLP chief after deal following protests", *Aljazeera*, 19 November 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/11/19/pakistan-releases-tlp-chief-saad-rizvi>.

⁶⁸ Sakina Fatima, "Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan protests outside Pak mission in London", *The Siasat Daily*, 16 April 2021, <https://www.siasat.com/tehreek-i-labbaik-pakistan-protests-outside-pak-mission-in-london-2124891/>.

⁶⁹ Sadia Saeed, "Political Fields and Religious Movements: The Exclusion of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan", *Political Power and Social Theory*, 23 August 2012, 189-223.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Peter R. Blood, *Pakistan: A Country Study*, Google Books (DIANE Publishing, 1996), https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=DRMTO7mn7hIC&dq=ahmadiyya+ji&pg=PA217&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=ahmadiyya%20ji&f=false.

⁷³ Sadia Saeed, "Political Fields and Religious Movements: The Exclusion of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan", *Political Power and Social Theory*, 23 August 2012, 189-223.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ "Statement of Amjad Mahmood Khan, Esq.", Chris Smith House, 13 July 2021, https://chrissmith.house.gov/uploadedfiles/amjad_mahmood_khan_testimony_before_tlhrc_-_7-13-21_-_final.pdf, 2.

As of 1991, such acts are classified as blasphemous and therefore punishable by death.⁷⁶ In 2010, again in Lahore, 86 Ahmadis were killed during Friday prayers.⁷⁷

Anti-Ahmadi sentiment appears to be a priority for a number of groups and preachers that have managed to gain influence in the UK. There have allegedly been leaflets distributed calling for the death of Ahmadis,⁷⁸ and also attempts to boycott their businesses;⁷⁹ organisations exist in the UK with the primary purpose of opposing the Ahmadi belief⁸⁰ and a local election was disrupted by anti-Ahmadi extremists.⁸¹

For the most extreme example of anti-Ahmadism in the UK, see “Murder of Asad Shah”, later in this paper.

Khatme Nabuwaat (KN)

Majlis-e-Tahaffuz-e-Khatme Nabuwaat (“The League to Protect the End of Prophethood”) is a religious movement in Pakistan that aims to protect the belief in the finality of the prophethood of Muhammad, based on the concept of Khatam an-Nabiyyin.⁸² It was founded in the 19th century, in pre-partition India, in opposition to the founding and growing of the Ahmadiyya Muslim sect. Its followers consider the Ahmadiyya belief in subsequent prophets after the prophet Muhammad to be a violation of Khatam an-Nabiyyin. Therefore, they deem Ahmadis (to which they often refer using the pejorative term Qadiani) to not be Muslim.⁸³

Some KN materials have accused Ahmadis of being allied with “British imperialists” – in a Pakistani publication, Jews and Zionists are said to be in a fight to undermine Islam.⁸⁴ On another Pakistani KN website, Ahmadis are described as “dual infidels” who should meet capital punishment.⁸⁵

Separately, on the website of Khatme Nubuwwat Academy London, a different leaflet describes Ahmadis as infidels and juxtaposes two historic figures killed for claiming prophethood alongside a section on the founder of the Ahmadi faith showcasing his claims to prophethood.⁸⁶

KN is a loose collection of groups that promote this ideology, often identifiable by having Khatme Nabuwwat or Khatam-an-Nabiyyin in their name.

⁷⁶ “Pakistan: Use and abuse of the blasphemy laws”, Amnesty International, 26 July 1994, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA33/008/1994/en/>, 4-5.

⁷⁷ “Pakistan: Prosecute Ahmadi Massacre Suspects,” Human Rights Watch, 27 May 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/05/27/pakistan-prosecute-ahmadi-massacre-suspects>; Iqbal Mirza, “Mob attack over alleged blasphemy: Three Ahmadis killed in Gujranwala”, *Dawn*, 28 July 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1122143>.

⁷⁸ Tom Porter, “Hate leaflets calling for killing of Ahmadi Muslims distributed across London”, *International Business Times UK*, 8 April 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/hate-leaflets-calling-killing-ahmadi-muslims-distributed-across-london-1553591>.

⁷⁹ Omar Oakes, “Worshippers told at Tooting Islamic Centre to boycott Ahmadiyya shops”, *Wimbledon Times*, 14 October 2010, <https://www.wimbledonguardian.co.uk/news/8451539.worshippers-told-at-tooting-islamic-centre-to-boycott-ahmadiyya-shops/>.

⁸⁰ “Khatme Nubuwwat Academy, London”, Khatme Nubuwwat, <http://www.khatmenubuwwat.org/>.

⁸¹ Omar Oakes, “Tooting election race infected by anti-Ahmadiyya hate campaign”, *The Guardian*, 14 October 2010, <https://www.yourlocalguardian.co.uk/news/8451614.tooting-election-race-infected-by-anti-ahmadiyya-hate-campaign/>.

⁸² KAMRAN, T. (2015). The Pre-History of Religious Exclusionism in Contemporary Pakistan: Khatam-e-Nubuwwat 1889-1953. *Modern Asian Studies*, 49(6), 1840-1874.

⁸³ “Khatme Nubuwwat Academy, London”, Khatme Nubuwwat, <http://www.khatmenubuwwat.org>.

⁸⁴ Bashir Ahmad, “Ahmadiyya Movement: British-Jewish Connections”, Abdur Rashid, Islamic Study Forum, 1994, <http://alhafiez.org/rashid/bjc.pdf>.

⁸⁵ Maulana Muhammad Yousaf Ludhianwi, “Difference between Muslims and Qadiani”, Khatu-E-Nubuwwat, <http://www.khatm-e-nubuwwat.com/pumphlets/eng/1.htm>.

⁸⁶ “The Belief of Khatme Nubuwwat”, by Abdul Rahman Bawa, available at [khatmenubuwwat.org: http://khatmenubuwwat.org/index.php?content_id=227&title=Leaflets&menu_id=292&option=cms](http://khatmenubuwwat.org/index.php?content_id=227&title=Leaflets&menu_id=292&option=cms).

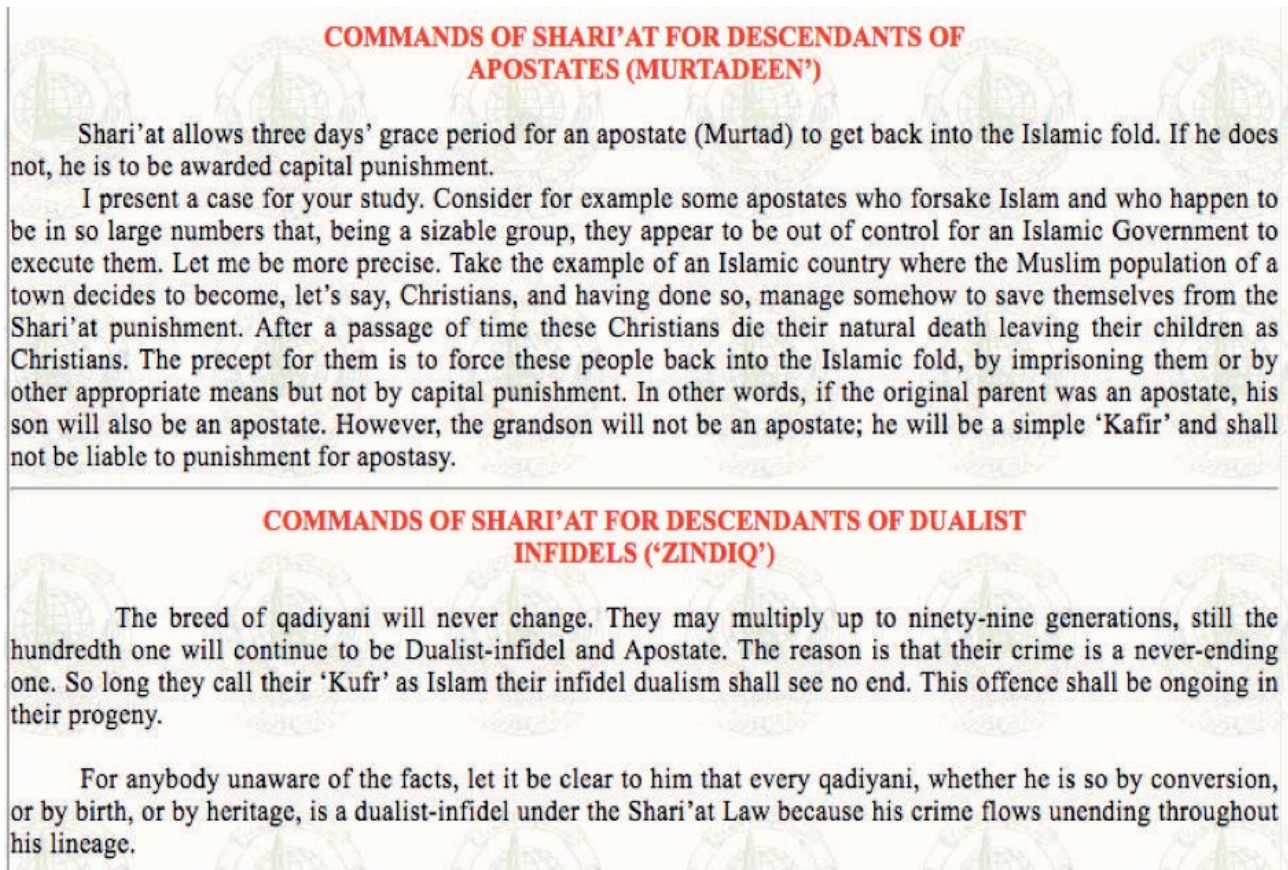


Figure 1: Screenshot of a pamphlet on the Pakistan-based *khatm-e-nubuwwat.com* website explaining the difference between Muslims and "qadiyani"⁸⁷

UK relevance

In April 2016, flyers were found in Stockwell Green Mosque in South London which seemed to say Ahmadiis should face death if they refused to convert to mainstream Islam.⁸⁸ The leaflets claimed they were created by a former-head of Aalmi Majlis-e-Khatm-e-Nabuwwat (AMKN) in Pakistan, which, until recently, listed Stockwell Green Mosque as its "UK headquarters".⁸⁹ Toaha Qureshi, a mosque trustee, denied all connection to the leaflets and to AMKN, saying the organisation was a hate group and the leaflets may have been left there maliciously.⁹⁰

However, while there is no evidence of Mr Qureshi's connection to the leaflets or their sentiments, he does appear to have connections to the broader Khatme Nabuwaat movement. A Toaha Qureshi is currently listed as being a trustee of the Khatme Nabuwaat Centre London by the Charity Commission.⁹¹

KN events and conferences have been held regularly in the UK across a number of venues.

In 2010, the UK-based Ummah TV channel was sanctioned by Ofcom for subjecting a religious denomination's views to abusive treatment after broadcasting a KN program which referred

⁸⁷ Maulana Muhammad Yousaf Ludhianwi, "Difference between Muslims and Qadiyani," Khatu-E-Nubuwwat, <http://www.khatm-e-nubuwwat.com/pumphlets/eng/1.htm>.

⁸⁸ Caroline Mortimer, "Leaflets calling for Ahmadi Muslims to be killed if they do not convert found in south London mosque", *Independent*, 11 April 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/leaflets-calling-for-ahmadi-muslims-to-be-killed-if-they-do-not-convert-to-mainstream-islam-found-in-south-london-mosque-a6979471.html>.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ <https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/charity-search/-/charity-details/328715/trustees>.

to Ahmadis as “filth” to be avoided by mainstream Muslims. The channel “made an unreserved apology for any offence caused” and stated it was implementing measures to ensure material of a similar nature could not be broadcast again.⁹²

The issue of Khatme Nabuwaat speaking tours was raised through UK media channels in June 2023 in the wake of the president of Tahreek-A-Khatme-Nabuwaat Bangladesh, Eyanatullah Abassi, touring the UK and speaking at various venues.⁹³

Separately, a recording emerged of a council Labour group leader and his deputy chanting “Tajdaar Khatam e Nabuwaat Zindabaad” whilst brandishing literature that has Khatme Nabuwaat written on the front. Also in the video is what appears to be Ahmadiyya Muslims.⁹⁴ The two men said they were acting in a private capacity, not in their roles as councillors. They added that they do not support any group or condone violence, discrimination or hatred against any person, persons or group, and that the demonstration had no link to any organization which uses or promotes violence or hatred against others. They also suggested that it would be inaccurate to suggest that the chants promoted any group or movement or violence or hatred, but were simply a statement of belief in the finality of Mohammed as a prophet.⁹⁵

Nonetheless, the chanting and leafletting apparently in close proximity to an Ahmadiyya faith stall raises serious questions over anti-blasphemy sentiment among political leaders.

The leaflet being handed out at the demonstration was published by the Global Khatme Nabuwaat Movement. The leaflet calls Ahmadis ‘liars’ and ‘apostates’ and speaks positively of a historic incident where blasphemers were killed. It describes the organisation’s founding purpose as:

“(we have established this organisation) so that we may publicize the belief of ‘the Finality of Prophethood’ and expose the conspiracies of the Qadianis.”⁹⁶

Dr Azhar Siddiq, External Affairs Secretary of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Walsall, said, “An Ahmadiyya Muslim faith stall was targeted with KN chanting and leafletting on 22 June in Park Street, Walsall town centre.”⁹⁷ West Midlands police said they had carried out enquiries, but no criminal offences had been identified.

IHRC

The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) was established by Khomeinist activists in 1997 as part of the legacy of Kalim Siddiqui.

IHRC has close ties to the Iranian regime, and is considered the most consistently pro-Iran voice in the UK.⁹⁸

⁹² Taylor, “Hardliners call for deaths of Surrey Muslims”; “Ofcom Broadcast Bulletin 167, 11 October 2010”, Ofcom, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0031/45499/issue167.pdf.

⁹³ Abassi appearing at various UK venues: <https://www.facebook.com/dr.anayetullahabbasi/posts/pfbid0Cc29iGyZdx5WcrnP9C32AnNndtEGkbNprwDvtUkz8qYL26ZF4WgD7PYeTun4SSzK>; <https://www.facebook.com/dr.anayetullahabbasi/videos/232268266260200/>; <https://www.facebook.com/dr.anayetullahabbasi/posts/pfbid0gDofJog22uZPgkhTbqUczwZDXxiyUGmGm8u66QetTvk7ezoNLwddweZyInfPdF5tl>.

⁹⁴ Video available via @bilalmahmooduk, *Twitter*, <https://twitter.com/bilalmahmooduk/status/1674165852453720065>.

⁹⁵ Peters Charlie, July 2023, “walsall labour councillors sectarian chanting leaflet latest”, <https://www.gbnews.com/news/walsall-news-labour-councillors-sectarian-chanting-leaflet-latest>.

⁹⁶ Copies of the leaflet available upon request. Images of it available: Peters Charlie, July 2023, “walsall labour councillors sectarian chanting leaflet latest”, <https://www.gbnews.com/news/walsall-news-labour-councillors-sectarian-chanting-leaflet-latest>.

⁹⁷ Dr Siddiq provided comment on 29 June 2023.

⁹⁸ Richard Spillett, “Jeremy Corbyn is slammed for backing ‘Iran-supporting propaganda group’ run by firebrand leaders who blamed Grenfell on ‘Zionists’ and say the West is ‘the enemy’”, *Mail Online*, 10 October 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7557865/Jeremy-Corbyn-slammed-backing-pro-Iran-campaign-group.html>.

Al-Muhajiroun

Al-Muhajiroun (Arabic for “the Emigrants”) is a proscribed Salafist organisation. It is an offshoot of Hizb ut-Tahrir. Over the years its supporters have been implicated in political violence, including terrorist attacks within and outside Great Britain.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Commission for Countering Extremism, “What is to be done about Al-Muhajiroun? Containing the emigrants in a democratic society,” GOV.UK, 7 October 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-is-to-be-done-about-al-muhajiroun-containing-the-emigrants-in-a-democratic-society>.

Anti-blasphemy UK case studies

Case study 1: Batley Grammar School

Date: 22 March 2021

Location: West Yorkshire

Incident deemed blasphemous

- On 22 March 2021 a caricature of the Prophet Muhammad was shown to year nine pupils.¹⁰⁰
- An independent review into the incident stated that the image was displayed on more than one previous occasion for educational purposes.¹⁰¹
- A pupil from the school claimed a teacher had warned the class before displaying the image.¹⁰²

The impact

- Posts on social media¹⁰³ encouraged locals to attend a protest outside Batley Grammar School in West Yorkshire on account of images of the Prophet being shown to pupils by a teacher.

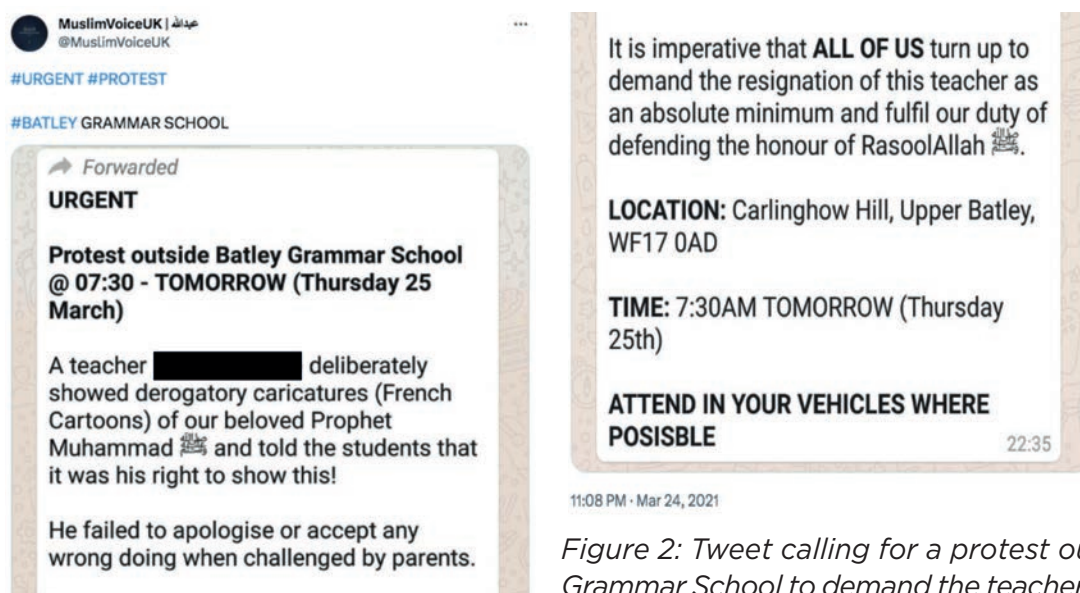


Figure 2: Tweet calling for a protest outside Batley Grammar School to demand the teacher's resignation¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ "Batley Grammar School: Teacher suspended over Prophet Mohammed image row can return to classroom", *Sky News*, 27 May 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/batley-grammar-school-teacher-suspended-over-prophet-mohammed-image-row-can-return-to-classroom-12318003>.

¹⁰¹ Eleanor Busby, "Batley Grammar: Teaching at centre of row over Prophet Mohammed image allowed to return to class", *Evening Standard*, 27 May 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/batley-grammar-teacher-prophet-mohammed-image-b937439.html>.

¹⁰² Connor Teale, "Batley Grammar School pupils say teacher is not racist as they condemn suspension and protests", *Examiner Live*, 29 March 2021, <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/batley-grammar-school-pupils-say-20277068>.

¹⁰³ @muhammadadil.shahzad.75, *Facebook*, 26 March 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/muhammadadil.shahzad.75/posts/279444973714866>; Archived: <https://www.facebook.com/login/?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fmuhammadadil.shahzad.75%2Fposts%2F279444973714866>; MuslimVoiceUK (@MuslimVoiceUK), *Twitter*, 24 March 2021, 11:08PM, <https://twitter.com/MuslimVoiceUK/status/1374860660346122243?s=20>.

¹⁰⁴ MuslimVoiceUK (@MuslimVoiceUK), *Twitter*, 24 March 2021, 11:08PM, <https://twitter.com/MuslimVoiceUK/status/1374860660346122243?s=20>.

- Teacher suspended.¹⁰⁵
- Temporary school closure.¹⁰⁶
- Teacher in hiding.¹⁰⁷

Ideological underpinnings

Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi, a Barelvi cleric, urged former PM Boris Johnson to condemn the teacher's actions:



Figure 3: Tweet describing how Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi wrote to PM Johnson regarding Batley affair¹⁰⁸

Imam Mohammed Amin Pandor

Imam Pandor was reported to have liaised with Batley Grammar School over the images of the Prophet shown to the class.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Richard Adams and Maya Wolfe-Robinson, "Batley teacher suspended after showing Charlie Hebdo image can return", *The Guardian*, 26 May 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/may/26/batley-teacher-suspended-after-showing-charlie-hebdo-image-can-return>.

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/batley-grammar-school-cartoon-school-shuts-b1822833.html>.

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/year-prophet-muhammad-batley-school-23493076>.

¹⁰⁸ Samri Reports 2 @SAMRIReports2, *Twitter*, 3 April, 2021, 1.44AM: <https://twitter.com/SReports2/status/1378146759868870659>

¹⁰⁹ "Yorkshire school apologises after teacher shows blasphemous images of Prophet Muhammad", *5Pillars*, 25 March 2021, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/03/25/yorkshire-school-apologises-after-teacher-shows-blasphemous-images-of-prophet-muhammad/>.



Figure 4: Pandor at Batley Grammar School ¹¹⁰

In a clip recorded at a meeting of Khatme Nabuwaat in Manchester in 2019, he claims to have refused to admit Ahmadi Muslims to an interfaith meeting unless they met conditions which they would clearly find humiliating. He uses the derogatory term “Qadiyanis” throughout. ¹¹¹ Below he can be seen praising Khadim Rizvi, founder of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan.



Figure 5: Mohammed Pandor describes a video of Khadim Rizvi with the heading “Our ulama” (ie, our body of learned Muslim scholars) ¹¹²

¹¹⁰ David Jagger, “Batley Grammar teacher suspended over Prophet Muhammad cartoon”, *Telegraph & Argus*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/19187240.batley-grammar-teacher-suspended-prophet-muhammad-cartoon/>.

¹¹¹ Habibi, “The nasty arrogance of Mohammed Pandor”, *YouTube* video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=95uYoJ26Xlc>.

¹¹² Habibi (@habibi_uk), *Twitter*, 29 March 2021, 11:14AM, https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1376477874627182593?t=_bloYZiE9c8phdqEQYEReg&s=19; Original video: <https://www.facebook.com/100009727057060/videos/939282206406006>.

Muhammad Adil Shahzad

Shahzad was central to the Batley school protests, appearing outside the gates to issue recorded statements.¹¹³



Figure 6: Shahzad appears in a Facebook video outside Batley Grammar School¹¹⁴

“Mr Shahzad says he and his followers are ‘fighting an academic war’ against the enemies of Islam, has said people should not be ‘brainwashed by freedom of speech’ and warned that riots could erupt if similar incidents were repeated.”¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Jake Ryan, “Imam brands Muslim MPs who backed a teacher at the centre of the Prophet Muhammad cartoon row ‘coconuts’ and may have broken hate crime laws”, *Mail Online*, 15 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9582545/Imam-brands-Muslim-MPs-backed-teacher-centre-Prophet-Muhammad-cartoon-row-coconuts.html>.

¹¹⁴ Imam Muhammad Adil Shahzad, *Facebook*, 26 March 2021, https://www.facebook.com/muhammadadil.shahzad.75/videos/279444840381546?locale=en_GB.

¹¹⁵ Ryan, “Imam brands Muslim MPs who backed a teacher at the centre of the Prophet Muhammad cartoon row ‘coconuts’”; Muhammad Adil Shahzad, *Facebook*, 2 April 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/100049480966112/videos/283953013264062/>; Archived: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230613094847/https://www.facebook.com/100049480966112/videos/283953013264062/>.



Figure 7: Shahzad calls his followers to defend the honour of the Prophet¹¹⁶

He has suggested schools should sack teachers who share such material without hesitation:



Figure 8: Shahzad urges parents to oppose the sharing of “inappropriate material on Islam” in schools¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Imam Muhammad Adil Shahzad, *Facebook*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/muhammadadil.shahzad.37/posts/pfbid034qQELBiZsGNdPRYrFUKah6RDptQ2rdyH763BNwHkiXRpxsQHQTGo2WpBYJZPkzl>.

¹¹⁷ Muhammad Adil Shahzad, *Facebook*, 7 May 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/muhammadadil.shahzad.75/posts/305635811095782>.

Shahzad frequently comments on the finality of the Prophet.¹¹⁸ He calls Ahmadi and Shia Muslims “enemies of Islam” and uses the derogatory term “Qadiyanis” for Ahmadi Muslims.¹¹⁹ He has named Khadim Rizvi “the leader of the mujahideen” and a “fearless lion”.¹²⁰

Responses

Government response

Gavin Williamson, Education Secretary:

Called the reaction to the teacher sharing the images of Prophet Muhammad “completely unacceptable”.¹²¹ Said that teachers should not be threatened for doing their job.¹²²

Robert Jenrick, the Communities Secretary, said that it is important to defend free speech.¹²³

Department for Education Statements:¹²⁴

- “the nature of protest we have seen, including issuing threats and in violation of coronavirus restrictions, are completely unacceptable and must be brought to an end.”
- “Schools are free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in their curriculum, including where they are challenging or controversial, subject to their obligations to ensure political balance. They must balance this with the need to promote respect and tolerance between people of different faiths and beliefs, including in deciding which materials to use in the classroom.”
- “It is never acceptable to threaten or intimidate teachers.”

Regarding the independent investigation: “parents, families and the local community” should “recognise the findings of the investigation” and “welcome and support” the Trust’s plan to “strengthen its oversight of the curriculum”.¹²⁵

Local MP and Local Government response

Tracy Brabin, Labour MP for Batley and Spen:

Condemned the threats made to the teacher but welcomed the school’s apology.¹²⁶

¹¹⁸ Muhammad Adil Shahzad, “Finality of Prophethood Conference”, *Facebook*, 24 March 2022, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=508506947475333&set=a.218581836467847&locale=en_GB.

¹¹⁹ Imam Muhammad Adil Shahzad, “Final jummah of Ramadan”, *Facebook* (from 15:45), <https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=560076764975644>; Archived: [/web/20230613103959/https://www.facebook.com/login/?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fmuhammadadil.shahzad.37%2Fvideos%2F560076764975644%2F](https://web.archive.org/web/20230613103959/https://www.facebook.com/login/?next=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fmuhammadadil.shahzad.37%2Fvideos%2F560076764975644%2F).

¹²⁰ Habibi (@habibi_uk), *Twitter*, 16 March 2023, 7.17pm https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1636446658174001169.

¹²¹ Joe Middleton and Alastair Jamieson, “Gavin Williamson condemns protest at school where Muhammad cartoon shown in religious studies class”, *Independent*, 26 March 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/batley-grammar-school-prophet-muhammad-teacher-cartoon-protest-b1822370.html>.

¹²² Sean Morrison, “Gavin Williamson condemns threats against teacher suspended for showing class image of Prophet Mohammed”, *Evening Standard*, 26 March 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/gavin-williamson-teacher-suspended-shows-class-cartoon-prophet-mohammed-b926357.html>.

¹²³ Tidman Zoe, “Batley Grammar School announces independent investigation into Prophet Muhammad cartoon incident”, *Independent*, 31 March 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/batley-grammar-school-muhammad-b1825025.html>.

¹²⁴ “Prophet Muhammad cartoon sparks Batley Grammar School protest”, *BBC News*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-56524850>.

¹²⁵ “Batley Grammar School: Teacher suspended over Prophet Mohammed image row can return to classroom”, *Sky News*, 27 May 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/batley-grammar-school-teacher-suspended-over-prophet-mohammed-image-row-can-return-to-classroom-12318003>.

¹²⁶ “Batley school protests: Identifying prophet row teacher ‘unacceptable’”, *BBC News*, 27 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-56537585>.

Kim Leadbeater, Labour MP for Batley and Spen:

"I am pleased that measures will be put in place to ensure that the offence caused does not happen again – and I welcome what the school has said about that – but it is completely unacceptable that a teacher was forced into hiding and his family were put at risk."¹²⁷

Kirklees Council:

Banned a free speech rally/counter-protests.¹²⁸

School response

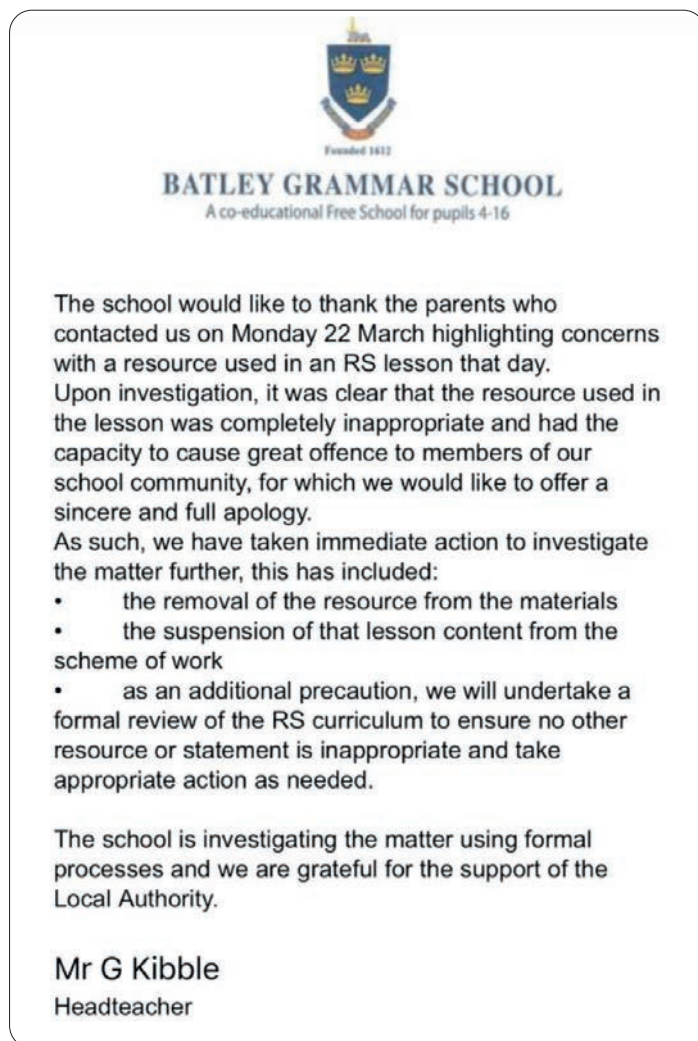


Figure 9: Headteacher's apology statement, issued on 25 March 2021¹²⁹

Gary Kibble, Headteacher, delivered an apology statement:

I wanted to speak to you all today because I know members of our community wanted to hear from me personally... The school unequivocally apologises for using a totally

¹²⁷ Adams Richard, "Batley teacher having shown Charlie Hebdo image can return", *The Guardian*, 26 May 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/may/26/batley-teacher-suspended-after-showing-charlie-hebdo-image-can-return>.

¹²⁸ Tony Diver, "Exclusive: Batley free speech rally banned by town's Labour council", *The Telegraph*, 23 June 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/06/23/exclusive-batley-free-speech-rally-banned-towns-labour-council/>.

¹⁴⁹ Mark Duell and Jack Wright, "Grammar school head issues 'unequivocal apology' and suspends 'RE teacher who showed class Prophet Muhammad cartoon'", *Mail Online*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9401527/Furious-parents-protest-Prophet-Muhammad-cartoon-shown-class.html>.

inappropriate image in a recent religious studies lesson. It should not have been used... We have immediately withdrawn teaching on this part of the course and we are reviewing how we go forward with the support of all the communities represented in our school. It is important for children to learn about faiths and beliefs, but this must be done in a respectful, sensitive way.¹³⁰

Independent investigation by the Batley Multi-Academy Trust:

The teacher “genuinely believed” that the image had “an educational purpose and benefit”.

In respect of the views of our school community the Trust is clear that it is not necessary for staff to use the material in question to deliver the learning outcomes on the subject of blasphemy; or any such images of the type used on 22 March for use in any Trust RS lessons, or any other lessons.¹³¹

The Trust added that it “will not avoid addressing challenging subject matter”, but at the same time is “committed to ensuring that offence is not caused”.

Analysis

Some involved in this case have praised extreme religious clerics from Pakistan who call for the death of blasphemers. They have also expressed anti-Ahmadism. Those who can be seen to have praised hard-line clerics and/or organisations who call for the death of blasphemers and/or praised Mumtaz Qadri should not be involved in work related to community cohesion, nor with institutions that have any kind of safeguarding role such as schools.

The apology from the school and the support for it and for the restriction on sharing the images in the future given by local MPs Tracy Brabin and Kim Leadbeater sets a worrying precedent, even if the latter condemned the threats to the teacher. Non-religious schools should not be beholden to religious restrictions. The teacher, having warned the pupils beforehand and given an opportunity for them to leave the classroom, had afforded protection from offence whilst ensuring the lesson could still be delivered.

The subsequent investigation into the incident was framed to look at how the images came to be shared and its conclusions hinged on whether the teacher intended to cause offence, and whether sharing them was necessary for the lesson's aims. The framing of the review in this manner does not give any due attention to the threat against the school and teacher. It does not attempt to investigate how a class exercise resulted in protests and death threats.

The DfE-issued statement was initially bold, but it later supported the findings of the Trust's investigation, therefore supporting restrictions on potentially religiously offensive learning materials. The DfE needs to be consistent and proactive in responding to these kinds of incidents. A clear and balanced stance would be one which allowed for pupils to withdraw from a potentially personally distressing experience whilst ensuring no legal materials have a blanket restriction.

The council's decision to take measures to ban the free speech protest on health and safety grounds, whilst allowing the school protest to go ahead, communicates preferential treatment towards one cause and community, creating potential for reciprocal radicalisation.

¹³⁰ Connor Teale, “Batley head teacher issues unequivocal apology for use of completely inappropriate Prophet Muhammad cartoon in RS”, *Examiner Live*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/west-yorkshire-news/batley-head-teacher-issues-unequivocal-20256891>.

¹³¹ “School to no longer show Prophet Mohammed”, Humanists UK, 27 May 2021, <https://humanists.uk/2021/05/27/school-to-no-longer-show-prophet-mohammed/>.

Case Study 2: Wakefield

Date: 22 February 2023

Location: Kettlethorpe High School, Wakefield, West Yorkshire

Incident deemed blasphemous

- A 14-year-old male pupil with autism, from a non-Muslim family, was challenged, after losing a video game with friends, to buy a Quran and bring it into school. The same pupils had brought a Bible in a previous week as part of a similar dare.
- The Quran was brought onto the school premises and then read aloud on the school tennis courts. Reportedly, the Quran was knocked from the pupil's hands to the floor, causing it to become scuffed.
- On social media, early discussions expressed concern that the book had been spat on and burned, prompting backlash.¹³² Kettlethorpe High School denied that the Quran was ever kicked around or spat on.¹³³

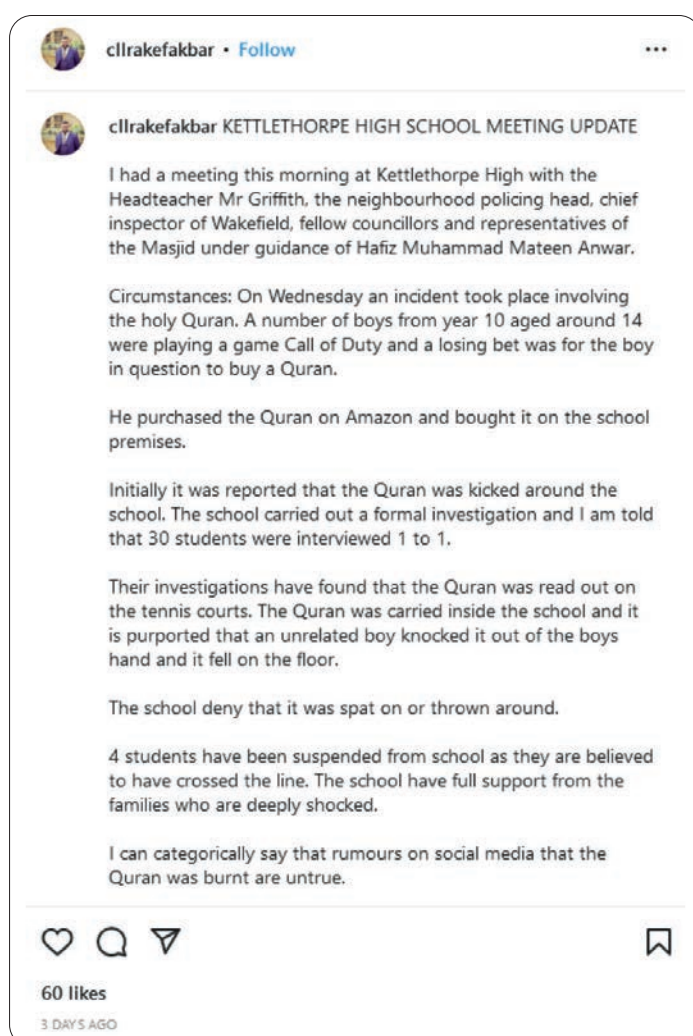


Figure 10: Cllr Akef Akbar details the damage to the Quran and subsequent investigations¹³⁴

¹³² Tom Slater, "When a Wakefield boy brought a Koran to school", *Spiked*, 27 February 2023, <https://www.spiked-online.com/2023/02/27/when-a-wakefield-boy-brought-a-koran-to-school/>.

¹³³ "Four students suspended from Wakefield school after Quran is desecrated", *5Pillars*, 24 February 2023, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2023/02/24/four-students-suspended-from-wakefield-school-after-quran-is-desecrated/>.

¹³⁴ @cllrakefakba, *Instagram*, 24 February 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/CpC-r6iDo_U/?igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==.

The impact

- The school examined CCTV footage and conducted more than 30 one-on-one interviews before deciding to suspend the 14-year-old and three others for a week.¹³⁵
- The boy and his family reportedly received multiple death threats and threats of violence. It was reported there was an arson threat to the family home.¹³⁶ Other sources reported one death threat from a peer at school that was handled by the school.¹³⁷
- The West Yorkshire Police found “minor damage” to the book and determined no crime had been committed.¹³⁸ They issued a non-crime hate incident.
- Community leaders discussed whether to protest outside the school, with leaders from Jamia Masjid Swafia, the local Wakefield mosque, concluding: “there will NOT be a protest outside the school as they have agreed to further investigate the matter and have suspended 4 students. However, we are NOT at rest!”¹³⁹

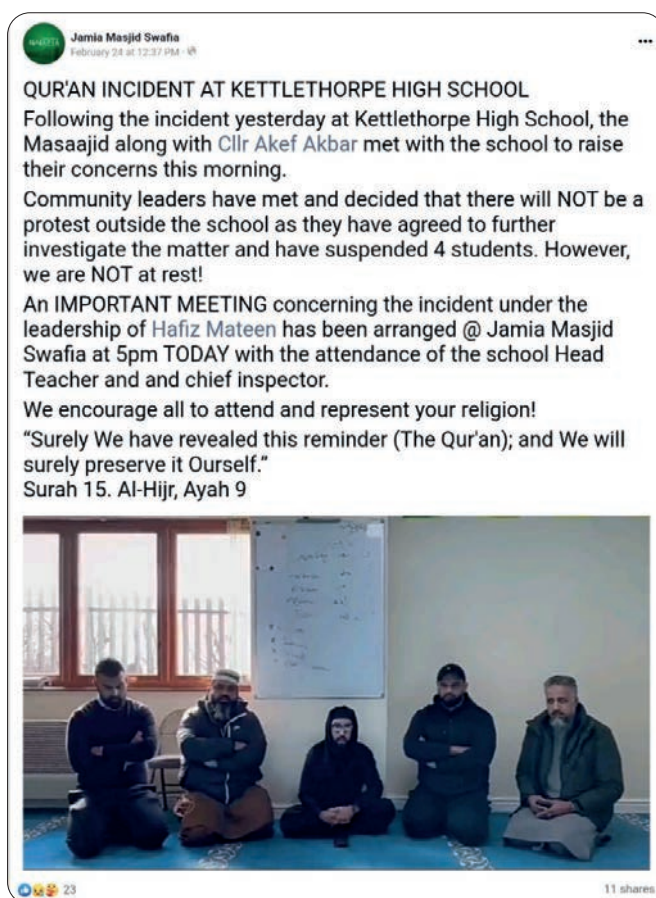


Figure 11: Jamia Masjid Swafia publicises a meeting at the mosque and calls for no further protests outside the school¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵ “Four students suspended from Wakefield school after Quran is desecrated”.

¹³⁶ Esther Hartley, “Letter to the CEO of the Charity Commission asking her to open an investigation into the mosque at the centre of recent events in Wakefield”, Free Speech Union, 9 March 2023, <https://freespeechunion.org/letter-to-the-ceo-of-the-charity-commission-asking-her-to-open-an-investigation-into-the-mosque-at-the-centre-of-recent-events-in-wakefield/>.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth Haigh, Chris Brooke and Rory Tingle, “Boy who ‘accidentally dropped a copy of the Quran at Wakefield school’ receives ‘death threats’: Teenager is left ‘absolutely petrified’ by messages, says mother”, *Mail Online*, 1 March 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11809601/Boy-dropped-copy-Quran-Wakefield-school-left-petrified-death-threats.html>.

¹³⁸ Rory Tingle, Elizabeth Haigh and Chris Brooke, “Police should delete any data held on autistic 14-year-old boy who ‘faces death threats’ after a Quran was dropped ‘accidentally’”, *Mail Online*, 2 March 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11812017/Police-delete-data-held-four-school-pupils-accidentally-dropped-Quran.html>.

¹³⁹ Jamia Masjid Swafia, *Facebook*, 24 February 2023, available at: https://www.facebook.com/masjidswafia/videos/896734801622268/?locale=en_GB.

¹⁴⁰ Jamia Masjid Swafia, *Facebook*, 24 February 2023, available at: <https://twitter.com/GaryOfLancs/status/1636148178360705024>; https://www.facebook.com/masjidswafia/videos/896734801622268/?locale=en_GB.

- On the Friday, a filmed meeting was held at the local mosque, led by Imam Muhammad Mateen Anwar. Two teachers of the mosque were also on the panel but did not speak. Chief Inspector Andy Thornton and Inspector Glen Costello represented West Yorkshire Police alongside the school's headteacher Tudor Griffiths and independent councillor Akef Akbar.¹⁴¹

Imam Anwar: "When it comes to the honour of the Qur'an, we will stand and defend the honour of the Qur'an no matter what it takes... Any Muslim in Wakefield... will never tolerate (the) disrespect of the holy Qur'an. Never! (Why? Because) we will sacrifice our lives for it."¹⁴²

On the topic of the damage to the pages: "The slightest bit of disrespect is not accepted and is not going to be tolerated at any point, in any city, in any country, by any Muslim. And that's a fact of the matter... Maybe there is more to this than (the book) just falling on the ground."¹⁴³

Mother of the autistic boy's contribution to the panel

She said her son had been "very, very silly" and "completely disrespectful". She said her son "hasn't eaten since Wednesday afternoon, when this occurred", due to his anxiety.

She mentioned the beating and death threats to her son, which made him "absolutely petrified" to return to school, but added "I don't want anybody to be prosecuted because of the stupidity of my son and his friends... Going forward, I will make sure that he does more research on Islam."¹⁴⁴

Ideological underpinnings

The local mosque

The local mosque was deeply involved in the response to the incident, and expressed a desire to help calm tensions. However, it has also over a period of time welcomed several preachers holding extreme anti-blasphemous views.

Although there is no suggestion that these preachers said anything illegal or extreme during their visits, the mosque as a charity is expected to do due diligence on visiting speakers. Speakers who have spoken at Wakefield's Jamia Masjid Swafia mosque and have expressed support for Mumtaz Qadri, Khadim Rizvi, Khatme Nabuwaat and/or have expressed anti-Ahmadism in the past include.

Hassan Haseeb ur-Rehman

Current custodian of the Holy Shrine of Eidgah Sharif in Rawalpindi, Pakistan, where he continues to give lectures.¹⁴⁵ He spoke at the Janazah (funeral) for Mumtaz Qadri. He made a social media post after Qadri's execution in January stating, "Every person who loves Islam and Prophet is in grief for the martyrdom of Mumtaz Qadri."¹⁴⁶ He reportedly met with members of Mumtaz Qadri's family.

¹⁴¹ Jamia Masjid Swafia, "Community meeting in relation to the Qur'an incident", *Facebook*, 24 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=220999650384772.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Eidgah Sharif, "Darbar-e-Aalia Eidgah Sharif", <https://www.eidgahsharif.org/>.

¹⁴⁶ Porter, "Pakistani 'Hate Preacher' Who Glorifies Islamist Murder Welcomed by Archbishop of Canterbury".



Figure 12: Tweet indicating ur-Rehman met with Mumtaz Qadri's brother¹⁴⁷

He can be seen in other online videos expressing his support with a banner of Qadri's face behind him.¹⁴⁸ He has preached at Jamia Masjid Swafia.

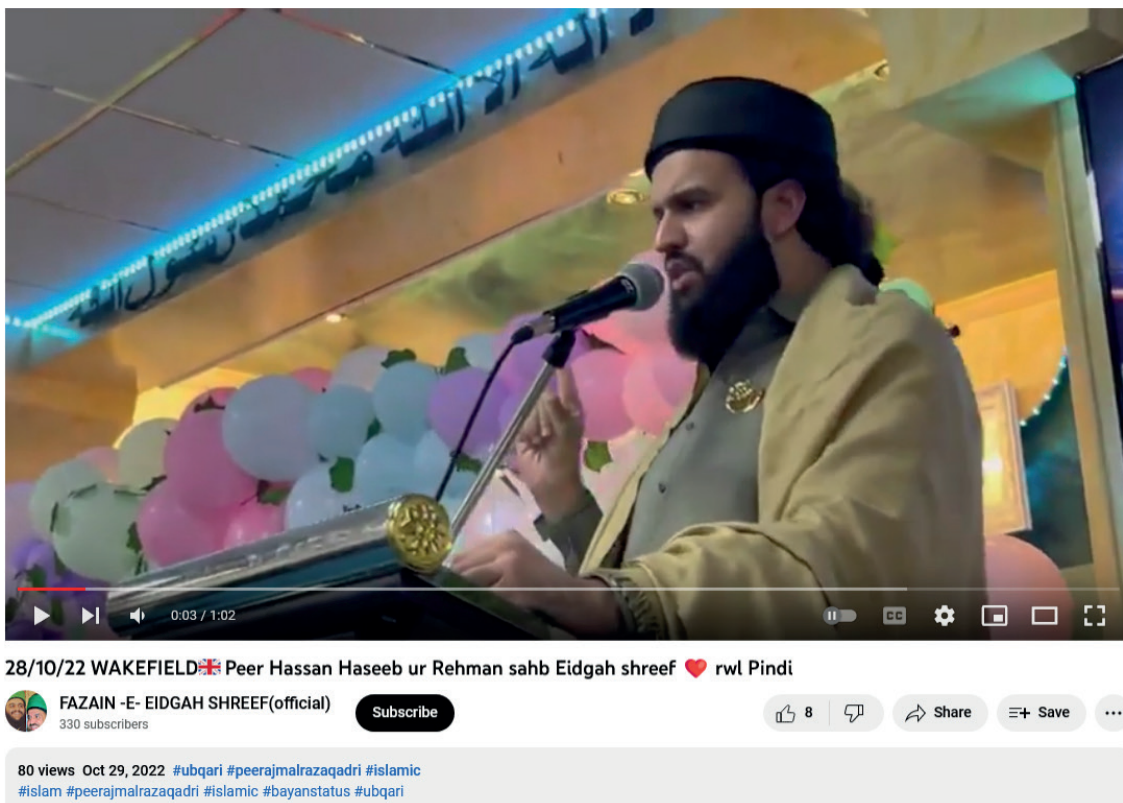


Figure 13: YouTube video showcasing ur-Rehman speaking at Jamia Masjid Swafia in October 2022¹⁴⁹

Lead Commissioner on the Commission for Countering Extremism, Dame Sarah Khan, has raised concerns about ur-Rehman preaching in the UK:

Last week I raised concerns about Sheikh Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman, a prominent Muslim preacher in Pakistan who visited the UK to talk about countering terrorism and interfaith dialogue.

However behind these fine words, he has a history of promoting hatred and intolerance. He described Mumtaz Qadri who murdered Pakistani Governor, Salman Taseer who

¹⁴⁷ HassanHaseeburRehman (@EidgahOfficial), *Twitter*, 20 November 2015, 2:55PM, <https://twitter.com/EidgahOfficial/status/667717908127199233?s=20>.

¹⁴⁸ Habibi (@habibi_uk), *Twitter*, 20 March 2023, 7:26PM, https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1637898503505494023?s=20.

¹⁴⁹ Fazain-E-Eidgah Shreef (official), "Peer Hassan Haseeb ur Rehman sahb Eidgah shreef", *YouTube* video, 28 October 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zeWTa5Ntc_s&ab_channel=FAZAIN-E-EIDGAHSHREEF%28official%29.

challenged the country's blasphemy laws as a "martyr" and "holy warrior." The same laws that are used to persecute the Ahmadiyya."¹⁵⁰

Owais Raza Qadri

A supporter of Mumtaz Qadri. Videos online show him performing a na'at he dedicated especially to Mumtaz Qadri.¹⁵¹ He spoke at an event at Jamia Masjid Swafia in Wakefield in 2022.¹⁵²

Abid Hussain Chishti

Spoke at the Ghazi Mumtaz Qadri conference, the purpose of which is to praise Qadri as a defender against non-Muslims.¹⁵³ Spoke at the Jamia Masjid Swafia mosque.¹⁵⁴

Muhammad Adil Shahzad

Adil Shahzad was central to the Batley Grammar School protests. See case study one for more information, including details on Shahzad's anti-Ahmadi rhetoric and praise of Khadim Rizvi. He has preached at the Swafia mosque multiple times.¹⁵⁵

Responses

Government response

The Home Secretary, Suella Braverman:

Expressed that she was "deeply concerned" with the handling of the case in Wakefield noting that it raised "a number of broader issues" regarding the treatment of religion in schools across Britain.¹⁵⁶ "We do not have blasphemy laws in Great Britain, and must not be complicit in the attempts to impose them on this country," she wrote in an article in *The Times*.¹⁵⁷

She declared in the same article that the Home Office would work with the DfE to issue new guidance, outlining students' protection from punishment over actions perceived as blasphemous.

The education sector and police have "a duty to prioritise the physical safety of children over the hurt feelings of adults", she stated, adding that schools "do not have to answer to self-appointed community activists".¹⁵⁸

Initially, a non-crime hate incident (NCHI) was recorded by the police. The Home Office subsequently published updated guidelines for police around the recording of NCHIs, which

¹⁵⁰ "Thoughts before speaking at the Ahmadiyya Convention", Commission for Countering Extremism, 3 August 2018, <https://extremismcommission.blog.gov.uk/2018/08/03/thoughts-before-the-ahmadiyya-convention/>.

¹⁵¹ Tayyiba Production, "Alhaj Owais raza Qadri dedicate to Mumtaz Qadri shaheed [Mehfil e Noor 2016]", *YouTube* video, 27 June 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBeJfOjm2GY>.

¹⁵² Habibi (@habibi_uk), *Twitter*, 20 March 2023, 7:26PM, https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1637898507557257217?s=20.

¹⁵³ BNA (SOUND & FILMING), "Ghazi Mumtaz Qadri Conference Part 13 Qari Abid Hussain Chisti", *YouTube* video, 17 March 2016, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWB4XcwfFQw.

¹⁵⁴ Jamia Masjid Swafia, "The grand Mawlid", *Facebook*, 3 October 2022, https://www.facebook.com/masjidswafia/photos/pb.100071200278794.-2207520000./5301119866665792/?type=3&locale=en_GB.

¹⁵⁵ Adil Shahzad, "Who is your Lord?", *Facebook*, 21 July 2022, https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=586481689677858&set=a.119302739729091&locale=en_GB.

¹⁵⁶ Poppy Wood, "Suella Braverman to issue blasphemy guidance for schools following Quran incident in West Yorkshire", 4 March 2023, *MSN*, <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/news/world/suella-braverman-to-issue-blasphemy-guidance-for-schools-following-quran-incident-in-west-yorkshire/ar-AA18dhMJ?ocid=msedgdhp&pc=U531&cvid=a210d148258c4f4c87431bf330055148&ei=225>.

¹⁵⁷ Suella Braverman, "Suella Braverman: We do not have blasphemy laws in Great Britain", *The Times*, 4 March 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/suella-braverman-we-do-not-have-blasphemy-laws-in-great-britain-9ps9lj8r5>.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

came into effect in June 2023.¹⁵⁹ This new code specifically referenced cases of NHCIs in schools, stating that if a complaint “does not amount to a crime” then “the appropriate police response would be to refer the matter to the school management team, and to offer advice to the complainant about available support.” Additionally, “an NCHI record should not be made on policing systems.”¹⁶⁰

Minister of State for Education, Nick Gibb:

“There is no blasphemy law in this country and schools should be promoting the fundamental British values of the respect for rule of law, individual liberty and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.”¹⁶¹ He continued to say that the DfE would be working closely with the school’s headteacher and local authorities to support them, adding that “all decisions” regarding school suspensions “should be reasonable, fair, and proportionate.”¹⁶²

However, additional DfE guidance proposed by Braverman on how schools should deal with the incident has not been given (see the DfE response below).

DfE response

The Department for Education told the *Express*: “We are aware of the incident that took place at Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield last week and we are offering support to the school at this time. The school followed standard disciplinary procedures in response to this incident. We will always back headteachers to take the appropriate action required to maintain calm and supportive classroom environments.”¹⁶³

The Department was “assured that the school acted appropriately when ‘considering all the known facts’ of the incident and ‘taking the pupils’ views into account’ as well as ‘considering’ those views ‘in light of their age and understanding.’”¹⁶⁴

The DfE “told *Schools Week* they ‘do not plan to issue additional guidance on managing blasphemy related incidents’. They said there is a range of existing guidance – such as on behaviour, exclusions and the political impartiality – to help schools make decisions on how to meet ‘the needs of their pupils and to manage and resolve concerns and complaints’.”¹⁶⁵

This contradicted the Home Office, which said: “As the home secretary set out”, they are “looking to draft new guidance around blasphemy incidents and will work with other departments.” A DfE spokesperson said they “will support the Home Office on education related elements of their guidance”¹⁶⁶ but the Department rejected any plans for school guidance on blasphemy as of April 2023.¹⁶⁷

¹⁵⁹ “Success: Home Office publishes new Code for police on ‘blasphemy’”, Humanists UK, 13 March 2023, <https://humanists.uk/2023/03/13/success-home-office-publishes-new-code-for-police-on-blasphemy/>.

¹⁶⁰ Home Office, “Non-Crime Hate Incidents: Code of Practice on the Recording and Retention of Personal Data (accessible)”, GOV.UK, 3 June 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice-on-the-recording-and-retention-of-personal-data-accessible>.

¹⁶¹ “Kettlethorpe High School: Nick Gibb condemns death threats as Wakefield pupils alleged to have damaged Koran”, *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 3 March 2023, <https://www.yorkshireeveningpost.co.uk/education/kettlethorpe-high-school-nick-gibb-condemns-death-threats-as-wakefield-pupils-alleged-to-have-damaged-koran-4049609>.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Max Parry, “Headteacher ‘backed’ by Government for suspending boys over ‘slight damage’ to Quran”, *Express*, 2 March 2023, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1741316/Quran-damaged-boys-suspended-school-Wakefield-department-for-education>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Samantha Booth, “DfE snubs Braverman pledge for new blasphemy guidance”, *Schools Week*, 9 March 2023, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/df-e-snubs-braverman-pledge-for-new-blasphemy-guidance/>.

¹⁶⁶ Samantha Booth, “Home Office U-Turn on blasphemy guidance”, *Schools Week*, 11 March 2023, <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/home-office-u-turn-on-blasphemy-guidance/>.

¹⁶⁷ Baroness Barran, “Schools: Blasphemy – Question for Department for Education”, UK Parliament, 17 April 2023, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2023-04-17/HL7123>.

Local Government response

Councillor, Akef Akbar:

Whilst sitting on the mosque panel, Akbar said the boy was “rightfully” expelled from the school.¹⁶⁸

Remarking on the threats directed at the boy: “As Hafiz Mateen said, passions do flare and sometimes we let them out in the wrong manner.”¹⁶⁹

Remarking on the boy’s mother: “to her credit, she understands the situation and has advised the police that she does not want any of these children to be prosecuted and she only asks that *Ahle Sunnat* (the Barelvi movement) is not harmed.”¹⁷⁰

School response

The school’s first response was to investigate the incident and suspend four of the boys involved.

Imam Hafiz Muhammad Mateen Anwar, along with a mediator and Councillor Akef Akbar, attended a meeting at the school on the morning of 24 February. It was reported that the school enlisted the mosque in order to calm the tensions spreading online.¹⁷¹

During the panel, headteacher Tudor Griffiths expressed that it was “a very sad day for our school... And we appreciate the very quick response that we have from the wider community to meet with the school this morning.” He pledged that the school would “continue to work, as a community, with your colleagues from the mosque.” Concluding, Griffiths said, “rest assured, this is a very serious matter” and “if more consequences have to follow, that will be the case.”¹⁷² The teacher had nothing to say about the death threats or the welfare of the suspended boys and their parents.

During the panel, with Griffiths sitting alongside him, Imam Anwar said that Griffiths “agreed” with Anwar that he would work with him “moving forward, simultaneously to ensure that the children are educated with regards to the honour that these aspects of Islam have with the Muslims.” Anwar also said of Griffiths, “He’s given me his word.”¹⁷³

Police response

The incident was initially reported by police as a non-crime hate incident but following new guidance issued relating to NCHI it would likely follow that it has been removed.¹⁷⁴

At the panel discussion, Chief Inspector Andy Thornton thanked the imam and “members of the community... who worked tirelessly hard today to try and dampen down tensions... There is an element of awareness and education that needs to be embedded within the school and

¹⁶⁸ Jamia Masjid Swafia, “Community meeting in relation to the Qur’an incident”, *Facebook*, 24 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=220999650384772 (time stamp: 34:50).

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Harry Lambert, “Once upon a time in Wakefield”, *The New Statesman*, 25 March 2023, <https://www.newstatesman.com/the-weekend-report/2023/03/inside-wakefield-koran-incident>.

¹⁷² Jamia Masjid Swafia, “Community meeting in relation to the Qur’an incident”, *Facebook*, 24 February 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=220999650384772.

¹⁷³ Jamia Masjid Swafia, “Community meeting in relation to the Qur’an incident”. (39:15-39:35).

¹⁷⁴ Rory Tingle, “Home Secretary Suella Braverman expresses ‘concern’ after police recorded a ‘hate incident’ at school...”, *Mail Online*, 1 March 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11807633/Police-record-hate-incident-slight-damage-Quran.html>.

the wider community of Wakefield.” He criticised the boys for their “lack of appreciation and lack of understanding” about how their actions impact on the “wider community”. Concluding: “Really, really deep-hearted thanks from me in regards to the tolerance and the understanding shown, thank you.”¹⁷⁵

Additionally, West Yorkshire Police were said to have given “words of advice” to the pupil who sent the 14-year-old autistic boy death threats.¹⁷⁶

Ongoing police response:

The incident led to apparent reciprocal radicalisation, with an individual outside the UK threatening to burn a Quran in Wakefield, and subsequently being banned from entering the UK. This situation was communicated to locals by the West Yorkshire police via the statement below.



Figure 14: Tweet from the West Yorkshire Police¹⁷⁷

Analysis

It is inappropriate for a religious institution to become involved in matters of an unrelated school. The incident should have been internally dealt with and was not a matter for police or religious leaders. Seemingly, new guidance issued to the police regarding non-crime hate incidents reflects this.

¹⁷⁵ Jamia Masjid Swafia, “Community meeting in relation to the Qur’an incident”.

¹⁷⁶ “Police speak to child about death threats after Quran damaged at Wakefield school”, *BBC News*, 4 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64835023>.

¹⁷⁷ West Yorkshire Police (@WestYorksPolice), *Twitter*, 21 March 2023, 10.39 AM, <https://twitter.com/WestYorksPolice/status/1638128155209736193?s=20>.

The concern the school, however, must have felt, being only around ten miles from Batley Grammar School, meant it proactively sought to mitigate any risk. It is a concern that schools feel the need to respond in this manner to accusations of blasphemy.

In March 2023, the Charity Commission opened a regulatory compliance check on the Jamia Masjid Swafia mosque. The case is ongoing, and the Commission has made no finding of wrongdoing at the time of publishing. A spokesperson for the Commission said “We have opened a regulatory compliance case to assess concerns raised with us about Jamia Masjid Swafia. We are carefully considering the issues raised to determine our next steps.”¹⁷⁸

One councillor publicly supported the anti-blasphemy action taken and played down the threats made in response. This suggests problematic political influence over how blasphemy incidents are responded to.

The DfE must take into account the needs of the communities that make up the pupils in a classroom. However, this must be considered secondary to the ability to teach freely and safely. As with the first case study, consistent, clear and robust messaging is required from the DfE, something that requires renewed policy. Confused statements from the DfE opposing and subsequently supporting the Home Secretary demonstrate a lack of robust and consistent messaging which must be made a priority. A Government investigation into both Wakefield and Batley cases would give the insight necessary to underpin renewed DfE guidance.

The guidance issued to the police with respect to non-crime hate incidents is welcomed.

¹⁷⁸ Charity Commission Press Office (email communication, 18 July 2023).

Case Study 3: Cineworld, The Lady of Heaven

Date: December 2021 to June 2022

Location: Bradford

Incident deemed blasphemous

- “The Lady of Heaven” is a film about the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, written by the Twelver Shia cleric Yasser Al-Habib, who is considered problematic by sections of both the Shia and the Sunni communities.¹⁷⁹ On 20 January 2004, Habib was reportedly convicted of “questioning the conduct and integrity of some of the ‘companions’ of the prophet Muhammad.”¹⁸⁰

The impact

- In February 2021, Hamid Baeidinejad, the Iranian diplomat who served as the Iranian Ambassador to the United Kingdom from 2016 to 2021, wrote on Twitter that the film was divisive and aimed to create hatred between Muslims and undermined the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad.



Figure 15: Tweets from Hamid Baeidinejad¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ “Who Is Yasser Al-Habib – the man behind Lady of Heaven?”, *5Pillars*, 6 June 2022, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2022/06/06/who-is-yasser-al-habib-the-man-behind-lady-of-heaven/>.

¹⁸⁰ PEN International, “Writer, journalist and researcher Yasser Al-Habib sentenced to one year in prison; reports of ill-treatment in prison”, *IFEX*, 9 February 2004, <https://ifex.org/writer-journalist-and-researcher-yasser-al-habib-sentenced-to-one-year-in-prison-reports-of-ill-treatment-in-prison/>.

¹⁸¹ Hamid Baeidinejad (@baeidinejad), *Twitter*, 1 February 2021, 12:25PM, <https://twitter.com/baeidinejad/status/1356217788877197313>.

- Protests took place outside cinemas in Bradford, Leeds, Sheffield, Bolton, Blackburn and Birmingham when the film was screened. One placard read “It’s not OK to offend 1.8 billion”, a reference to the estimated Muslim population worldwide.¹⁸²
- More than 120,000 people signed an online petition describing the film as “racist” and calling for it to be removed from all UK cinemas.¹⁸³
- Roshan Salih, editor for the Islamist news platform 5 Pillars, wrote a review for the site describing the film as “pure, unadulterated sectarian filth”.¹⁸⁴ In the spring of the following year, he also shared a warning message to cinemas on Twitter.



Figure 16: Tweet from Roshan Salih¹⁸⁵

- On 7 June 2022, Cineworld announced that “The Lady of Heaven” would be removed from its theatres. “Due to recent incidents related to screenings of The Lady of Heaven, we have made the decision to cancel upcoming screenings of the film nationwide to ensure the safety of our staff and customers.”¹⁸⁶
- Vue pulled some screenings, although the film was still listed at some of its venues.¹⁸⁷

Ideological underpinnings

Pakistan’s Minister for Religious Affairs, Pir Noorul Haq Qadri, wrote a letter to Pakistan’s Prime Minister stating:

The movie is a deliberate effort by the enemies of Islam to create unrest among Muslim Ummah and to provoke sectarian conflict between Shia and Sunni [communities] by twisting and fabricating some historical incidents.

¹⁸² Iram Ramzan, “How predictable, how cowardly, that cinema bosses should cave in to the mob instead of standing up for free speech...”, *Mail Online*, 8 June 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10898277/The-Lady-Heaven-controversy-Cineworld-Showcase-cancel-film-predictable-cowardly.html>.

¹⁸³ “Why Is the Lady of Heaven so controversial? Protests across the UK and petition signed by 120,000 people lead to film being pulled from some cinemas”, *Sky News*, 9 June 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/why-is-the-lady-of-heaven-so-controversial-protests-across-the-uk-and-petition-signed-by-120-000-people-lead-to-film-being-pulled-from-some-cinemas-12630723>.

¹⁸⁴ Roshan Muhammed Salih, “Lady of Heaven: pure, unadulterated sectarian filth”, *5Pillars*, 24 December 2021, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/12/24/lady-of-heaven-pure-unadulterated-sectarian-filth/>.

¹⁸⁵ Roshan M Salih (@RmSalih), *Twitter*, 26 May 2022, 11:48AM, <https://twitter.com/RmSalih/status/1529776580352000000>.

¹⁸⁶ Gemma Peplow, “The Lady of Heaven: Film about Prophet Muhammad’s daughter pulled by Cineworld following protests and ‘blasphemy’ criticism”, *Sky News*, 8 June 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/the-lady-of-heaven-film-about-prophet-muhammads-daughter-pulled-by-cineworld-following-protests-and-blasphemy-criticism-12629975>.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The letter further added:

In order to curb the sectarian conflict among Shias and Sunnis – Grand Ayatullah Naser Makarem Shirazi of Iran has issued a decree that strictly condemns all concerned with the production, release and propagation of the said movie.¹⁸⁸

Hamid Baeidinejad

The Iranian diplomat was an early initiator in calling for a ban of the film in the UK.

Shahid Ali

Shahid Ali was involved in calling for and organising the protests.¹⁸⁹

Shahid Ali has expressed support for TLP, declaring them to be martyrs with respect to those killed in the protests that called for the expulsion of the French ambassador in 2021.¹⁹⁰ See the section “2021 TLP-led protests” earlier in the report.

Ali appeared at a 2021 conference which publicised, among other topics, the “filthy beliefs” of the “Qadiyani” (the pejorative term used for the Ahmadiyya).¹⁹¹

Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) involvement

“IHRC condemns the controversial film ‘Lady of Heaven’, currently playing in cinemas up and down the country. We urge Muslims in Britain to unite in opposition of the film.”¹⁹²

Responses

Government response

Removal of Imam Qari Muhammad Asim:

Qari Asim was removed from his role as deputy chair of the Government’s Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group after he supported the campaign to ban the film. The Government saw that his support of an initiative that aimed “to limit free expression” precluded him from continuing:

You have encouraged an ongoing campaign to prevent cinemas screening the film “Lady of Heaven”, a clear effort to restrict artistic expression, and the campaign you have supported has led to street protests which have fomented religious hatred.

You wrote on Facebook on 6 June that “We have been working with many brothers and Imams across the country to liaise with the cinemas....Some Imams have taken a view to protest and others are in dialogue with the cinemas trying to resolve the situation”.

Resolving the situation, as you made clear, meant cancelling screenings. You wrote that “in some places we have been successful and those cinemas will no longer be showing the movie”.

¹⁸⁸ Kalbe Ali, “Govt bans ‘sacrilegious’ movie made in Britain”, *Dawn*, 4 January 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1599534>.

¹⁸⁹ Shahid Ali, *Facebook*, 6 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/Shahid.Ali1203/photos/pb.100063896582449.-2207520000./754095512698063/?type=3>; Shahid Ali, *Facebook*, 6 June 2022, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=752048536236094&set=pb.100063896582449.-2207520000>.

¹⁹⁰ Shahid Ali, *Facebook*, 27 October 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/Shahid.Ali1203/photos/pb.100063896582449.-2207520000./612213143552968/?type=3>.

¹⁹¹ Mufti Qasim Zia Al-Qadri, “Mufti Shams ul Huda will be answering your questions today LIVE, share with all”, *Facebook*, 15 April 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/ShaykhMuftiqasimzia/posts/pfbid02hdGZKUrKQqhiYez4LZBLv64b8c6XKqoCc2V9UVPqpxFaWLhm1FT9gybSXpP8FrdHI>.

¹⁹² “United Against the Lady of Heaven Film”, IHRC, 21 June 2022, <https://www.ihr.org.uk/united-against-the-lady-of-heaven-film/>.

Your support for further action was made clear. You advertised “a protest [that] has been organised in Leeds” and provided details of its timing and location.¹⁹³

In response, Mr Asim said he remains “fully supportive of open public dialogue and scholarly debate around historical narratives between Sunni and Shia perspective that does not fuel hatred or division in communities.” He added, “The government’s letter did not take into account my continued support for responsible free speech around controversial issues.”

Mr Asim also said he “did unequivocally condemn anti-Shia hatred” heard at the Leeds protests to his congregation, and that the government had not contacted him before making its decision and there had been “no opportunity to clarify any misunderstandings”.¹⁹⁴

Health Secretary, Sajid Javid:

Stated that he was “very concerned about cancel culture in the UK” after screenings of the film were pulled from cinemas.¹⁹⁵

Dame Sara Khan, Independent Adviser for Social Cohesion and Resilience:

For years, MPs, local authorities and central government have failed to defend our democratic values with sufficient vigour. I have seen how religious mobs have been have been appeased, in the hope that protests disperse – a tactic that often works in the short-term. But this represents a failure of leadership, and only galvanises fundamentalists who now know that if they engage in such behaviour their unreasonable demands will be met. In the long run, as our democratic values are eroded, social cohesion in our country will be dangerously undermined.¹⁹⁶

She queried what support Cineworld received from politicians and police before it decided to cancel the screenings.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, “Letter to Imam Qari Asim”, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1081996/DLUHC_to_Imam_Qari_Asim_-_11062022.pdf.

¹⁹⁴ *BBC News Online*, “Qari Asim: Imam removed as government adviser over film protests”, 13/06/2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-61771695>.

¹⁹⁵ Nadia Khomami, “Sajid Javid attacks ‘cancel culture’ as UK cinemas pull ‘blasphemous’ film”, *The Guardian*, 8 June 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2022/jun/08/sajid-javid-voices-cancel-culture-concerns-as-blasphemous-film-pulled-from-uk-cinemas>.

¹⁹⁶ Sara Khan, “Religious mobs are a threat to British democracy”, *The Telegraph*, 9 June 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/06/09/religious-mobs-threat-british-democracy/>.

¹⁹⁷ Charles Hymas and Craig Simpson, “Stand up to ‘religious mobs’ who forced Cineworld to cancel film, politicians told”, *The Telegraph*, 8 June 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/06/08/stand-religious-mobs-forced-cineworld-cancel-film-politicians/>.

Baroness Claire Fox:



Figure 17: Baroness Claire Fox of Buckley responds to protests in Sheffield over “The Lady of Heaven”¹⁹⁸

Analysis

“The Lady of Heaven” case study demonstrates how anti-blasphemy action can unite Islamist activists across sects. This incident had roots in Iran and drew support from the IHRC. However, another anti-blasphemy actor is seen to have supported TLP.

Dame Sara Khan’s remarks were particularly pertinent. She highlighted the strategic flaw in attempting to appease religious extremists and queried how much police support Cineworld had received.

It is not practical to have police officers at every cinema or publishing house where material is deemed blasphemous. Quick response times and contact with police who have a greater understanding of extremism, that being SO15, should be incorporated into a policing strategy for handling companies that are at risk of platforming blasphemous materials.

¹⁹⁸ Claire Fox (@Fox_Claire), *Twitter*, 6 June 2022, 2:07PM, https://twitter.com/Fox_Claire/status/1533797750143320065.

Case Study 4: The Jewel of Medina

Date: 2008–2009

Location: UK (whilst this case had global ramifications, this study will focus on the UK only)

Incident deemed blasphemous

- *The Jewel of Medina* is a novel by Sherry Jones that tells the story of Aisha (614–678), Muhammad's youngest wife.
- Daniel Kalder describes the book as “a romantic historical novel, which just happens to use sacred figures as its central characters.”¹⁹⁹
- Academic Denise Spellberg commented that the book was a “very ugly, stupid piece of work” and “softcore pornography”,²⁰⁰ warning publishers of publishing for fear it would invite protest.

The impact

- The novel was scheduled to be released in 2008 by Random House but, due to fear of reprisal, the project was cancelled:

After sending out advance editions of the novel THE JEWEL OF MEDINA, we received in response, from credible and unrelated sources, cautionary advice not only that the publication of this book might be offensive to some in the Muslim community, but also that it could incite acts of violence by a small, radical segment.

We felt an obligation to take these concerns very seriously. We consulted with security experts as well as with scholars of Islam, whom we asked to review the book and offer their assessments of potential reactions.

We stand firmly by our responsibility to support our authors and the free discussion of ideas, even those that may be construed as offensive by some. However, a publisher must weigh that responsibility against others that it also bears, and in this instance we decided, after much deliberation, to postpone publication for the safety of the author, employees of Random House, booksellers and anyone else who would be involved in distribution and sale of the novel. The author and Ballantine subsequently agreed to terminate the agreement, with the understanding that the author would be free to publish elsewhere, if she so chose.

- Gibson Square Books picked up the publication of the book. The London home of Martin Rynja, publisher at Gibson Square, was firebombed.²⁰¹
- Ali Beheshti, 40, of Tavistock Gardens, Ilford; Abrar Mirza, 23, of East Field Road, Walthamstow; and Abbas Taj, 30, of Field Road, Forest Gate, were found guilty of conspiracy to recklessly damage property and endangering life.²⁰²
- Jones postponed her publicity tour, and Gibson Square Books announced that she had decided to delay publication although Jones denied this.²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ Daniel Kalder, “In Search of the Jewel of Medina Controversy”, *The Guardian*, 5 March 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/mar/05/sherry-jones-jewel-medina>.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Doward and Townsend, “Firebomb attack on book publisher”.

²⁰² Tom Kelly, “Muslim extremists jailed for arson attack on Mohammed book publisher's home”, *Mail Online*, 8 July 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1198111/If-choose-live-country-live-rules-says-judge-jails-Muslim-extremists-arson-attack-publishers-home.html>.

²⁰³ Sherry Jones, “We must speak out for free speech”, Index on Censorship, 19 May 2009, <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2009/05/sherry-jones-we-must-speak-out-for-free-speech/>.

Ideological underpinnings

- Abbas Taj, one of the co-conspirators, “is noted for dressing his young daughter in an ‘I Love al-Qaeda’ hat, among other public displays of support for terrorism. According to The Times, he waved banners at protests against the infamous Danish cartoons promising a 9/11 in Europe and calling for death to those who ‘insult Islam’.”²⁰⁴
- Soon after the firebombing, radical Muslim clerics warned of further attacks, and on 6 October 2008, Al-Muhajiroun released an article that called the book “blasphemous” and Jones “an enemy of Islam”. Jones thereby joined a list of targeted artists like Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Theo van Gogh and Salman Rushdie.²⁰⁵

Analyses

The Jewel of Medina case demonstrated the readiness of publishing houses to cancel publications for fear of anti-blasphemy protest. A policing strategy that works with at-risk companies would further strengthen confidence in policing which would in turn strengthen the ability of publishing houses to publish content deemed blasphemous.

The Jewel of Medina case also demonstrated the breadth of ideologies involved in anti-blasphemy action. We have now seen anti-blasphemy action can manifest across a number of ideologies, although in the UK the threat comes, in the main, from Barelvi organisations and individuals.

²²⁸ Sherry Jones, “We must speak out for free speech”.

²²⁹ Rod Nordland, “Jewel of Medina Publisher Firebombed”, *Newsweek*, 10 October 2008, <https://www.newsweek.com/jewel-medina-publisher-firebombed-92133>.

Sectarian anti-blasphemy action

This paper has analysed cases that pertain to an action that was deemed to disrespect Islam and/or the Prophet Muhammad. Sects with “deviant approaches” can be seen as disrespecting Islam by virtue of their beliefs whilst still asserting they are Muslim. This is true for Asad Shah, an Ahmadiyya Muslim, and Jalal Uddin, a Sufi, who were both murdered.

Jalal Uddin was murdered for practicing Suffi magic by those inspired by ISIS.²⁰⁶

Murder of Asad Shah

Date: 24 March 2016

Location: Glasgow, perpetrator travelled from Bradford

Incident deemed blasphemous

Asad Shah, an Ahmadiyya Muslim, posted videos on social media that expressed religious pluralism and made claims of Prophethood.²⁰⁷

The impact

Tanveer Ahmed, a Barelvi, travelled from Bradford to Glasgow where he stabbed Asad Shah multiple times, dragged him into the street and brutally stamped on his head and neck with such force that every bone in his face was broken.²⁰⁸ Tell MAMA, a hate crime reporting service, documented 29 anti-Ahmadi incidents in 2016 (the year of Asad Shah’s murder), an increase of 20 from 2015.²⁰⁹ Asad Shah’s family moved to Scotland from Pakistan after being persecuted for their Ahmadiyya faith. They now do not feel safe in the UK.²¹⁰

Ideological underpinnings

In court, Ahmed raised his fist and shouted in Arabic: “Here I am present, Oh Prophet!” to cheering from supporters in the public gallery.²¹¹ He went on to release a statement through his lawyer: “If I had not done this others would and there would have been more killing and violence in the world.”²¹²

According to news articles at the time, Tanveer Ahmed’s Facebook page regularly praised Mumtaz Qadri.²¹³ His Facebook posts from the day of the killing were all in praise of different individuals who killed blasphemers, with the last post focusing on Qadri.²¹⁴

²⁰⁶ Osborne Samuel, “Manchester United steward guilty of ISIS inspired murder of 71 year old Rochdale Imam”, *Independent*, September 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/manchester-united-steward-murder-imam-guilty-verdict-jalal-uddin-death-mohammed-syeedy-latest-a7311656.html>.

²⁰⁷ Secunder Kermani, “Why was shopkeeper Asad Shah murdered?”, *BBC News*, 7 July 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-36732596>.

²⁰⁸ Libby Brooks, “Man admits murder of Glasgow shopkeeper Asad Shah”, *The Guardian*, 7 July 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/jul/07/man-admits-murder-of-glasgow-shopkeeper-asad-shah-shawlands>.

²⁰⁹ “A Constructed Threat: Identity, Intolerance and the Impact of Anti-Muslim Hatred, Tell MAMA Annual Report 2016”, TELL MAMA, 2 November 2017, <https://tellmamauk.org/constructed-threat-identity-intolerance-impact-anti-muslim-hatred-tell-mama-annual-report-2016/>.

²¹⁰ Kermani, “Why was shopkeeper Asad Shah murdered?”.

²¹¹ Sajid Iqbal and Calum McKay, “Asad Shah murder: Killer Tanveer Ahmed releases prison message”, *BBC News*, 31 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-38815366>.

²¹² Euan McLelland, “Pictured: Taxi driver who admits killing fellow Muslim shopkeeper because ‘he disrespected Islam by claiming he was a prophet’”, *Mail Online*, 7 April 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3527759/Pictured-Taxi-driver-admits-killing-fellow-Muslim-shopkeeper-disrespected-Islam-claiming-prophet.html>.

²¹³ “Khatm-e-Nabuwat & Dawat-e-Islami linked to murder of Ahmadiyya Muslim Asad Shah”, *Rabwah Times*, 6 April 2016, <https://www.rabwah.net/khatm-e-nabuwat-dawat-e-islami-linked-to-murder-of-ahmadiyya-muslim-asad-shah/>.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

A Facebook page run by Rizvi's followers shared a number of audio messages created by Tanveer Ahmed in jail. Messages included Ahmed justifying his own actions and repeating slogans: "the penalty for blasphemers is for their heads to be cut off".²¹⁵ In another he describes Khadim Hussain Rizvi as his "mentor".²¹⁶

Tanveer Ahmed called Mumtaz Qadri's brother from prison to boast about the murder.²¹⁷

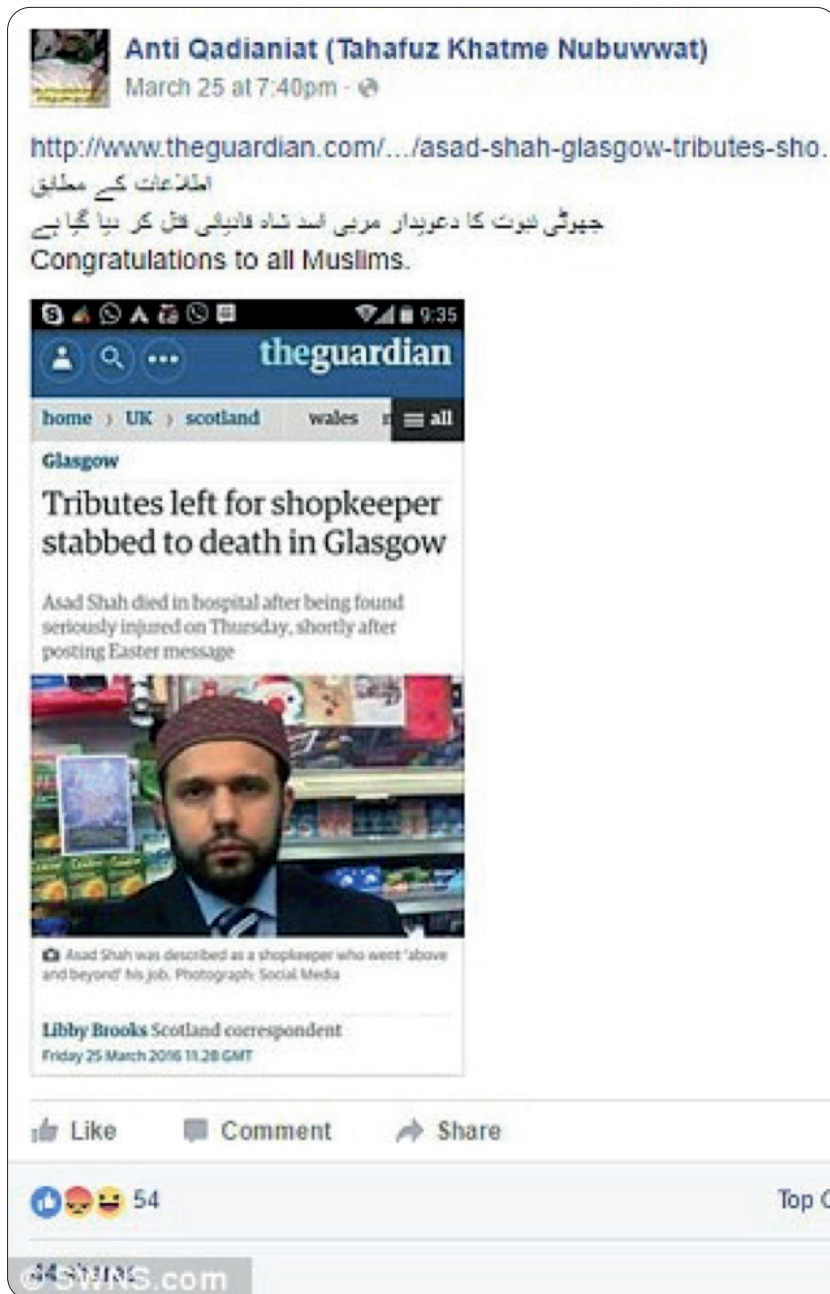


Figure 18: A closed Khatme Nabuwaat Facebook group shared news of Asad Shah's murder with "Congratulations to all Muslims"²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Secunder Kermani and Sajid Iqbal, "Murderer Tanveer Ahmed inspires Pakistani hardliners from Scottish jail", *BBC News*, 1 March 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-39112840>.

²¹⁶ Iqbal and McKay, "Asad Shah Murder: Killer Tanveer Ahmed Releases Prison Message".

²¹⁷ Secunder Kermani, "How Pakistan inspired the Glasgow shopkeeper killer", *BBC News*, 10 August 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-37032419>.

²¹⁸ Anthony Joseph, "Facebook page celebrates over killing of peace-loving Muslim shopkeeper as murder suspect appears in court", *Mail Online*, 29 March 2016, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3513888/Facebook-page-posts-Congratulations-Muslims-message-peace-loving-Islamic-shopkeeper-stabbed-death.html>.

Tanveer Ahmed's actions were also praised by Khadim Hussain Rizvi. In one video, Rizvi is heard describing the number of times Shah was stabbed.²¹⁹ Other worshippers are heard shouting "Allahu Akbar!"²²⁰ In another video, Rizvi pays tribute to Tanveer Ahmed, saying he "has surprised the whole of Europe".²²¹ These videos were then circulated via Rizvi's social media channels, with the suggestion that their actions should be copied by "true Muslims".²²²

An estimated 400 supporters of Tanveer Ahmed gathered outside his family's home in the city of Mirpur, in Kashmir, for a rally in his honour. The crowd chanted slogans praising Ahmed as "brave" and "courageous". One man attending said: "The whole of Pakistan knows who he is."²²³

Responses

The Ahmadiyya Community released a statement condemning the murder and stating:

In any society, all members of the public have a right to safety and it is up to the Government and police to protect members of the public as best they can. In this context, it is up to the Government to root out all forms of extremism and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has been speaking about the importance of this for many years (sic).²²⁴

Asad Shah's murder not only illustrated to the UK how dangerous the anti-blasphemy ideology can be but also just how pervasive anti-Ahmadism is in the UK and its ability to act as a measure of anti-blasphemy sentiment. Tanveer claimed, "If I had not done this others would and there would have been more killing and violence in the world." He receives UK fan mail and visits from people who view him as a hero.²²⁵

²¹⁹ Idris Qadri, "Allama Khadim Hussain Rizvi Ghazi Tanveer Ahmed Qadri NEW 2016", *YouTube* video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KX3aRbrquSY>.

²²⁰ Fiyaz Mughal, "We have turned a blind eye to extremism against the British Ahmadi Muslim community", *The New Statesman*, 9 June 2021, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2018/07/we-have-turned-blind-eye-extremism-against-british-ahmadi-muslim-community>.

²²¹ Iqbal and McKay, "Asad Shah murder: Killer Tanveer Ahmed releases prison message".

²²² Mughal, "We have turned a blind eye to extremism".

²²³ Kermani and Iqbal, "Murderer Tanveer Ahmed inspires Pakistani hardliners from Scottish jail".

²²⁴ Statement by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK on the Horrific Murder of Mr Asad Shah, Glasgow, March 2016: <https://loveforallhatredfornone.org/statement-by-the-ahmadiyya-muslim-community-uk-on-the-horrific-murder-of-mr-assad-shah-glasgow/>.

²²⁵ Charlotte Littlewood, "Britain's blasphemy problem", *The Article*, 9 December 2019, <https://www.thearticle.com/britains-blasphemy-problem>.

Analysis

This study has investigated the ideological underpinnings of five key anti-blasphemy incidents in the UK. The cases demonstrate that defending the Prophet and more widely Islam from disrepute can be seen as a cause of ideological convergence and even competition between sects and countries.

By virtue of appearing in more than one case study, certain groups and ideologies have been identified as containing elements within them that are particularly active in anti-blasphemy activity: praise of Khadim Rizvi, founder of the once proscribed TLP; praise of Mumtaz Qadri, who murdered the politician Salman Taseer; expressions of Anti-Ahmadism; and affiliation to Khatme Nabuwaat.

The response from central government has often been clear in its opposition to the anti-blasphemy agenda and firmly in support of freedom of speech. Following the dropping of the Quran at Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield, Home Secretary Suella Braverman declared that new guidance was to be issued to the Department for Education on how to manage blasphemy-related incidents. The Education Secretary at the time, Gavin Williamson, responded that the threats made against the teacher at Batley Grammar School were completely unacceptable and teachers should not be threatened for doing their job.

Whilst local MPs have opposed extreme anti-blasphemy action, at times they have not been robust on values of freedom of speech. Indeed, a freedom of speech-centred approach has been lacking throughout.

Cinemas and publishing houses have been seen to respond with withdrawals of films or books deemed blasphemous for fear of attack. Schools have been seen to suspend teachers and students and issue apology statements with no mention of threats made to the staff or pupils concerned. There is a clear sense of fear, perhaps beholden to a lack of belief in police protection or a robust stance on anti-blasphemy action.

Perhaps of greatest concern was the response of the police to the incident in Wakefield. The initial issuing of a non-crime hate incident raises the concern that British police are regulating perceived blasphemy as "hate". This may send a message that the police may not adequately manage a protest or threat of violence for those accused of blasphemy but will rather accuse the perceived blasphemer. The new guidance was necessary both in its content and the rapid delivery of it.

The withdrawal of screenings/books, the actions of the schools and the response of the police suggest that there is a tacit blasphemy law operating in the UK.

Conclusion

Extreme anti-blasphemy action for the sake of defending Islam has had devastating impacts on lives in the UK. It poses a serious threat to social cohesion, individual liberties and the peaceful coexistence of diverse communities within the United Kingdom. The threat is perhaps not taken as seriously as Salafi-jihadist style terror, yet it is nonetheless one that has a potential to inspire intimidation, violence and even mass killings.

This paper has found that anti-blasphemy sentiment cuts across various Muslim sects and ideologies. Some sects have been seen to unite under the cause whilst Islamist groups and Muslim majority states have been seen to compete to be the boldest defender of the Prophet. However, praise of certain key individuals or affiliation to certain groups are indicators of holding an extreme anti-blasphemy ideology. In most cases, such views will be expressed within the law. However, they have the potential in some cases to develop into threatening and even violent action. Knowledge of these possible warning signs is key to improving resilience to extremist infiltration into the UK via visiting preachers, charitable organisations and even those in political positions who may hold extreme anti-blasphemy views.

Praise of Mumtaz Qadri and Khadim Rizvi have been highlighted as of particular concern as possible indicators of more extremist views, as have links to or praise of TLP. Activities of some Khatme Nabuwaat organisations have also demonstrated extreme anti-blasphemy sentiment, regularly expressing anti-Ahmadism and in some cases being seen to praise the murder of Ahmadi Asad Shah. Radical anti-blasphemy clerics from Pakistan and Bangladesh espousing these views have entered the UK to preach and have preached at institutions linked to extreme anti-blasphemy action in the UK.

Central Government responses often have strong rhetoric, however some local councillors take a contradictory and problematic position at times, including some who apparently actively promote Khatme Nabuwaat.

The responses of schools, publishing houses and cinemas have been inconsistent and potentially led by fear. The Department for Education itself has gone as far as to suggest censoring school materials, suggesting an internalisation of blasphemy regulation at an institutional level. Robust support in the face of anti-blasphemy action for these institutions via central government and policing is a must.

Accepting a tacit anti-blasphemy law is antithetical to our democratic values whilst also a threat to national security. Schools, cinemas and publishing houses need commitments to be made to their assured safety in the face of threats and renewed and robust guidelines on how to respond to threats of anti-blasphemy action.

Recommendations

The recent incidents of protest and violence related to blasphemy in the United Kingdom demand immediate attention and action from the Government. By undertaking thorough investigations into the cases in Wakefield and Batley, reviewing proscription of TLP, and providing training to law enforcement agencies, the Government can effectively address this issue and preserve the values of freedom, tolerance and peaceful coexistence that are the bedrock of our society.

Wakefield and Batley investigations unit

The UK Government should establish an interdepartmental task force (DfE, DLUHC, Prevent, CCE) to investigate the incidents at Batley Grammar School and Kettlethorpe High School. The investigation should be an extension of this study, one that aims to identify the root causes of these incidents, the key instigators and the links to extremist organisations and preachers abroad. This comprehensive understanding will enable the Government to formulate evidence-based policies and strategies that effectively counteract and prevent such incidents in the future.

Home Office

1. Strengthen immigration policies

- Enhance the screening process for visa applications, particularly for individuals intending to visit the UK for religious or preaching purposes. Implement robust background checks, including assessments of past activities, affiliations and statements made by applicants. This requires Urdu language specialists.
- Establish clear guidelines for assessing and determining the admissibility of individuals based on their potential to incite violence, hatred or extremist ideologies. To include key indicators noted in this report: praise of Mumtaz Qadri, praise of Khadim Rizvi, affiliation or support of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan.

2. Develop a watchlist and database

- Establish a centralised watchlist and database containing information on known extremist preachers, their activities and affiliations.
- Continuously update and maintain this database to ensure its accuracy and reliability.
- Share this information with relevant government departments, intelligence agencies, border control authorities and law enforcement agencies to facilitate effective monitoring and enforcement.

3. Investigate Khatme Nabuwaat in Pakistan and Bangladesh

Further research is needed into the KN network within Pakistan and Bangladesh. Findings may potentially support the proscription of certain KN organisations in the region. Their proscription would ensure conferences and events linked to any proscribed KN organisations would be prevented from taking place in the UK whilst also preventing UK citizens from fundraising for them.

4. Proscribe Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan

A consolidation of evidence pertaining to TLP and its calls for violence and involvement in violent unrest in Pakistan is needed to make the case for proscription. Proscription will help prevent political and financial support of the group from the UK.

Prevent

Anti-blasphemy action has the potential for violence, therefore countering its manifestation falls within the remit of Prevent.

- The Home Office needs to deliver training around extreme anti-blasphemy to councillors via local authority Prevent teams, and ensure that they are aware of high-risk groups/ persons. This will help them to avoid appearing publicly supportive of them.
- Local Prevent leads should support local authorities in their due diligence checks. Praise of Mumtaz Qadri, Khadim Rizvi and TLP, association with Khatme Nabuwaat or expressions of anti-Ahmadism should be treated as causes for concern.
- Frontline worker training (Workshop to Raise Awareness of Prevent) needs to incorporate this ideology as a potential risk when delivering training to those obliged to safeguard persons from radicalisation.

Policing

Development of an anti-blasphemy action response strategy:

- Training delivered to institutions deemed at risk of being accused of blasphemy (for example schools, publishing houses and cinemas) on core public messaging and safety processes, with the aim of supporting their ability to maintain freedom of speech.
- Establishment of a contact unit based within S015 for concerns raised around anti-blasphemy action, to work in much the same way as raising a Prevent concern.
- S015 to ensure fast response time to threats via the contact unit and with the potential to readily deploy officers.

This increased contact between expert police units and at-risk institutions should speed up response times to an incident and improve confidence so that institutions are less likely to remove products, dismiss staff or issue apologies moving forward.

Department for Education

New guidelines should be issued to the DfE. DfE messaging should prioritise the safety of staff and pupils and the ability to teach without censorship. Teachers should take into account the personal sensitivities of their pupils by allowing pupils to know in good time that they will be sharing potentially offensive materials and giving them the option to withdraw from the lesson. This guidance can be incorporated into the already available guidance on teaching on political issues.

DfE responses to anti-blasphemy incidents in schools need to be timely, robust and consistent, again with a prioritisation of freedom of speech and staff and pupil safety. If schools have followed new procedures, as above, on sharing potentially offensive materials, they must not apologise but point to fulfilment of due process. This relies on the fulfilment of the recommendations above pertaining to policing.

UN

We are anticipating the UN Secretary General's oral report on Freedom of Religion or Belief-related threats to international peace and security, which is due in June 2024. We urge the UN to take a strong stance against blasphemy laws within this report, paying particular attention to the situation in Pakistan and its attempts to export anti-blasphemy action.

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By Charlotte Littlewood

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**CENTRE ON
RADICALISATION
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