

Understanding Your Voters



Wherever you are standing as a candidate...

In the 2010 General Election, British Muslims will represent more than **one million** eligible votes. To give this some measure in terms of national averages, this equates to just over 1,500 voters per constituency across all 650 seats. Importantly for our democracy, **every constituency** has some Muslim votes, although the numbers **vary greatly**, from a handful of people at the lowest end to over **30,000** votes at the highest end.

What do people really think?

Read on to learn about our focus groups.

... **YOU** are part of an amazing, mature and enviable democracy with an incredible history. A national story that is entwined with the histories of so many peoples.

Proud of its vibrant diversity, Britain today is home to people of many different cultures, religions, colours, ethnicities and languages. And these differences overlap and mingle as time goes on. That is certainly true of one cluster of voters: British Muslims.

This guide is available to all candidates standing in this election and has been produced by the Policy Research Centre to support your campaign team's understanding of British Muslim voters.

It will help you consider some issues we think will be important to Muslim voters, based on research to explore this. Also, and just as important, it will help you place anxieties many others may have concerning 'the Muslims' within a more informed picture.

With the British Empire giving way to the Commonwealth in the post-War years, Muslims from the former colonies came as a hardworking labour force to help rebuild this country and also to seek economic benefits.

As the communities settled and grew, new socio-economic challenges and intergenerational issues surfaced. Some competing questions of identity also emerged, but a gradual process of integration could be observed...



...But, the terrorist attacks in London on 7 July 2005 derailed that gradual process as British Muslims, particularly young Muslims, suddenly came under intense scrutiny.

Despite these tensions, Britain is a tolerant nation, where Muslim citizens feel secure, valued and at home. The UK also has one of the most diverse Muslim populations in the world and this can yield dividends of historic proportions.

In a global economy, having a workforce and citizenry with cultural connections to the growth sectors of the world economy can be an invaluable asset, greatly enhancing the prospects for better relations between 'east and west' in a tense world.

“The way politics is presented today doesn't translate to a young person”

The UK Muslim population is 1.6 million or 2% of UK households

Source: Census 2001

232 constituencies of England and Wales have a local Muslim population of over 1000

1 in 3 British Muslims are Londoners

Over 50% of Muslims are British born

86% of Muslims in England feel a strong sense of belonging to Britain

National average 87%. Source: CLG Citizenship Survey: Apr to Sept 2009

Party 'Generally Supported', by Religion (2005)

	Christian Voters	Muslim Voters
Conservatives	8%	10%
Labour	70%	49%
Lib Dem	12%	23%
Won't say & Floaters	10%	18%
	100%	100%

Electoral Commission BME Voter Survey, MORI 2005

ELECTION 2010 The Focus Groups

In order to explore issues important to Muslims the Policy Research Centre conducted focus groups in the South, Midlands and North of England.

Here is a summary of what the participants, who spanned three generations, said:

ISSUE

Rising intolerance and the rise of the far right

Attitudes towards most things 'Muslim' are unfair. Muslims are seen as a 'problem' and are often made a scapegoat of society's many challenges.

It is particularly difficult in the current climate for Muslims to find employment - a real feeling that having a Muslim name on your CV counts against you!

The rise of the extreme right is part of a worrying shift towards anti-Muslim racism, which is becoming more common.

ISSUE

Recession and employment fears

A bleak outlook with many fears: the rise and rise of living costs, the number of young and older people out of work, the widening gap in house prices between neighbouring areas, crime becoming normal, it is difficult to find work whether or not one went on to further education.

Taxes are not spent on local towns and community infrastructures, but disproportionately on Government's 'big plans' nationally.

The contribution of the religious voluntary sector is not recognized.

ISSUE

The rising cost of education

A society split between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' as quality education at compulsory and further levels becomes increasingly beyond the reach of many.

Tuition fees are a barrier and more needs to be invested in vocational qualifications.

There is too little support in inner city schools where pupils are consistently under achieving.

Effective mentoring schemes are needed for failing schools.

"We live parallel lives between communities - this needs addressing"

"Education is the real issue in this country"

"There is a lack of support and mentoring for young pupils in inner city schools"

"Domestic issues seem to get overlooked because we are spending so much time and money on foreign issues"

"It's important to vote as these decisions affect your life, it's your duty, we must be involved in our country's decision making"

ISSUE

Justice and the erosion of civil liberties

Much concern about encroaching legislation targeting Muslims, about stop and search fears and misuse of powers. Feelings of a whole faith group under watch.

The need for equality in the eyes of the law so Muslims are treated fairly and proportionately.

A sense that racism and discrimination exists in institutions such as the Police.

ISSUE

A Government selectively listening

Government pays lip service to issues that adversely or chiefly affect Muslims - it does not have the teeth to challenge anti-Muslim views - and MPs are disinterested in them.

Dissenting Muslim voices on broader and foreign policies are conveniently ignored.

ISSUE

Unethical foreign policy

Strong feelings that there is dishonest and double speak by the Government - that Britain is really pursuing unethical political interests in the Muslim world - knowing full well the real cost is very high and very wrong!

“Boys fear being stopped by the police because of government policies; Muslims feel targeted”

“9/11 changed my outlook, for the first time I felt I had to justify my religion and politicians don't understand what that is like”

“Nearly 2 million people marched against the war, the Government paid no attention to that”

Find out more about the constituencies with the highest Muslim populations on our website:
www.policyresearch.org.uk

Policy Research Centre

The Policy Research Centre, based at the Islamic Foundation in Leicestershire, specialises in research, policy advice and training on issues related to British Muslims.

The Centre brings together policy, academic and community expertise to inform and shape current policy thinking. We work with civil society, Muslim communities and government, serving as a hub of analysis and communication on policy matters and to foster good community relations.

Our services include:

- Publishing research, briefing and seminar papers to facilitate dialogue.
- Providing training to enhance understanding of Muslim communities.
- Responding to government consultations, papers and policy proposals or reforms.
- Conducting surveys and opinion polls to map Muslim policy concerns.
- Providing resources, data and briefings to community groups.

