

# Election 2019 Special: Reality Checking “Muslim Manifesto”

By Dr Mamnun Khan

[www.beingbritishmuslims.com](http://www.beingbritishmuslims.com)

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#GE2019 VOTE



*In the name of God the Most Gracious, Most Merciful*

Being British Muslims is a project that seeks to: (1) produce insights into how faith can become more meaningful and relevant in today's world; and (2) inform public debate and understanding of the multifarious crossroads, imaginings and challenges currently making and remaking British Muslim identity.

This is an independent, non-partisan, non-sectarian and non-affiliated project based on the book *Being British Muslims: Beyond Ethnocentric Religion and Identity Politics*, [www.beingbritishmuslims.com](http://www.beingbritishmuslims.com), @UKMuslims2050.

This paper is dedicated to my father Haji Faizur Rahman Khan (1944-2019). I pray that God accepts this work, counts it among the good deeds of my father, who taught me morals, and makes it a source of benefit for those who read it.

For any errors, omissions, oversights or critical feedback please contact the author through contact form in the above website.

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## 1. Summary

British Muslims have historically voted Labour, which was originally based on the socio-economics, class and welfare needs of first generation Muslims. Increasingly, in the younger second and third generations, Muslims are voting Labour on the assumption that only Labour meets the so-called “Muslim pledges/commitments.” However this has been framed in narrow, in-group, identarian terms, which: (1) is not true to the life of Muslims in the UK in that issues about the economy, jobs, taxation, immigration, health, education, trade, industry policy etc. are as relevant to Muslims as any other; (2) constrains God’s guidance as a living guidance with persuasive power to influence society more generally; and (3) testing of manifesto pledges and commitments of political parties by organisations like MEND and the MCB have been biased against the Conservative Party, discounting religiously-inspired thinking on public policy and political engagement. In fact, reality checks carried out in this paper show that, despite the populist view among British Muslims, the Conservatives do have a good track record of supporting the same “Muslim pledges/commitments.” This paper also calls on believers to change human hearts as part of bringing about betterment in society, and counsels Muslims of the dangers of taking biased political sides that fall into groupthink and moral tribalism.

## 2. Introduction

Stakes in GE2019 are big. The type of Brexit and whether it happens at all and the post-austerity fire-up of the UK present huge opportunities and risks. In practice, how the UK maximises the opportunities and mitigates the risks aren’t clear, and the range of options available are subject to intense debate. While the reality is that not all opportunities and risks will be foreseeable or controlled through policy alone, it is the responsibility of political parties to propose viable agenda for delivering the “best” outcome for the UK. Since political parties in GE2019 have very different political philosophies and perspectives on managing the economy and society, as voters we have starker choices in this election than perhaps we’ve had in recent memory. However, in determining who we vote for, we are challenged by the fact that we don’t necessarily know the fuller, holistic details on the risk-reward trade-offs and priorities. Not least as there are differences between facts and aspirational projections in a changing world that requires responding to uncertainties and crises. Nor are we ourselves purely data-driven and impartial. As individuals, we have our own dispositions, perspectives and interests which we factor in too.

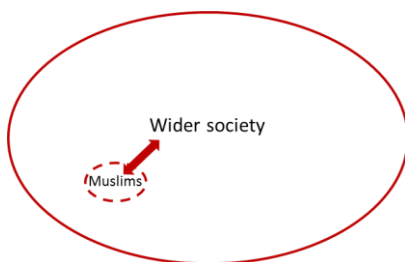
The Qur’anic story of Khidr is a good illustration of not knowing the fuller, holistic details. Musa was rebuked by God for claiming to be the most knowledgeable, and was directed to learn from a lesser known Prophet, Khidr. However, spending time with Khidr, Musa saw Khidr carryout acts which he could not rationalise, and could not bear patiently. Later, Khidr explained that he was party to God-given knowledge of events which Musa was not. This illustration is not to point out that we cannot reason – which of course we can. Rather, the point here is that, like Musa, we simply cannot know the fuller details about what the future holds especially in a changing world. This is why we are reliant on experts and journalists to make sense for us, though based on the Qur’anic view of responsibility we still need to keep a critical mind. We must remain alert to the possibility that even experts are not entirely devoid of taking wild positions, cognitive bias, expectant attention, groupthink and so on.

For British Muslims, there is no explicit divine writ that compels us all to vote for only one party. In fact, there are advantages and disadvantages in the policies of all the parties, based on our perceptions and intuitions, personal priorities, community priorities, priorities for the wider society etc. Elections are thus about making judgement calls. As believers we are responsible for seeking truth, being fair- and reasonable-minded, and acting to enjoin in good and removing harms. This general ethic of the believer is unbound by identity, race, group or nationality, and like religiously-inspired expressions they can differ from one person to another depending on context, time and circumstance. God does not burden people beyond what they can bear (2:286), and we are not responsible for things that happen outside of our control (41:46).

### 3. Flaws in the big ideas about “Muslim vote”

To help UK Muslims decide on “Muslim-centric” priorities, advocacy and representation organisations like MEND and the MCB, as well as a few organisations for religious cultivation have sought to provide steer to Muslims. While these attempts are generally made with good intentions and leadership in mind, in reality they are deeply flawed on a number of counts.

1. They assume an essentialised definition of “Muslim” whereby the public framing of what is a “Muslim pledge/commitment” is neither God-centred nor contextualised to conditions, politics and impacts that are intractably interlocked with wider society. Deciding who to vote for based on narrow, isolated or self-centred positions on matters of social policy, unwittingly serves to flaunt “mutually-assured diversity” on idealised, non-negotiable and impractical grounds. For “out-group” communities such attitudes can be easily taken as confrontational, signalling that Muslims are more deserving of something compared to other people, not least because expectant attention dictates that when the “out-group” expect or want to see something they are more likely to misinterpret cues as the thing they expect or want to see. In this kind of discourse society struggles to develop based on mutually beneficial values and much to damage is done to the image of Islam and Muslims as God-centred people.



Muslim issues are not in isolation to wider society, and much of the challenges that Muslims perceive to be specific to them are in reality part of broader impacts and challenges in society affecting a wider cross section of society, albeit perhaps in less acute forms or less highlighted in the media.

2. They are not formed on God-centred reasoning of our polity. Contextualisation of religion, for example, is meant to play a crucial role in making Islam relevant across time and space. However, I would argue this rarely happens in the UK, especially on the matter of public self-assertion. As a result we end up having the same analysis of society and the same programmes for social development (*tarbiyyah*) as if they were in South Asia or living in medieval times.<sup>1</sup>
3. They reflect and embroil Muslims into the organisation body politic which is taken as the accepted “factual” or “zero point” of reference, and aren’t reasoned from *Shari’* principles. For MEND, for instance, “they [the manifesto analysis] summarise[s] the key principles, values, and beliefs on which is

<sup>1</sup> See book: *Being British Muslims: Beyond Ethnocentric Religion and Identity Politics*, pp. 60.

MEND is founded.”<sup>2</sup> Nowhere is the God-centred basis deliberated or internalised. Similarly, for the MCB, the basis of its authority is an affiliate model where affiliates voluntarily apply for membership, but which does not specify a mandate for the MCB to determine and commit to God-centred perspectives on public self-assertion. Moreover, the idea of “Muslim perspective” can legitimately differ in a paradigm of “difference as a source of mercy,” yet these organisations do not take well to critique or dissent. Often engaging them becomes a self-validation exercise for other Muslim organisations even though the extent of godly-reasoning and deliberation are not primary drivers.

4. These attempts have tended to fit into one of the following ideas about how Muslims should vote. Here, we will review and highlight their key strengths and weaknesses.

Voting strategies	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>1. Muslims vote as a single block</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potentially enables Muslims to make a bigger political impact in elections. This can be used to influence particularly the outcome in marginal seats and force political parties to take Muslim communities more seriously.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creates in wider society the perception of Muslims as a groupthink community where dissent in political leaning isn't accepted. Yet on the ground intra-Muslim polity isn't defined by a shared religious outlook and is highly fractured along ethnic, cultural and sectarian variables.</li> <li>As high as 80% of Muslims voters already vote for Labour not necessarily on the basis of Muslim-centric pledges, but by virtue of the fact that immigrant communities from lower socio-economic classes have always preferred more socialist policies.</li> <li>As a minority group, Muslims need to make friends across all political sides, but in siding exclusively with one party Muslim polity is pegged to the fate of one political party over others, which is unnecessarily limiting and isn't the ethic of a believer.</li> <li>Block voting feeds into the identarian polarisation of society, where identity becomes the primary basis of interaction (rather than one's deliberation, humanity or godliness).</li> </ul>
<b>2. Muslims vote primarily based on Muslim-centric issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allows Muslims to focus on specific areas that are intrinsically related to their Muslim identity, and therefore evaluate political parties for the extent to which they meet such needs and demand.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ignores the fact that many things which Muslims consider to be intrinsically Muslim-centric issues e.g. Islamophobic bullying at school, are in fact only a small subset of broader issues for society to deal with, e.g. bullying generally. This reduces the Muslim view to a narrow lens, despite the fact that solving Islamophobic bullying, say, cannot be done in isolation to bullying generally. And so, by addressing bullying in general would inherently address Islamophobic bullying.</li> <li>Assumes that Muslims are driven to vote on issues of faith when jobs, health, taxation etc., are at least equally as important. Moreover, this projects Muslim-centric issues as separate to non-Muslim concerns (feeding into “us” versus “them” narrative impacting intercultural cohesion) and at the same time casts non-Muslim concerns as intrinsically not Muslim concerns. This kind of identarian exclusivity is not the way of the believer.</li> <li>Focuses on Muslim identity at the expense of ethnocentric cultural needs, despite the fact that Muslim communities are rooted in their ethno-cultural roots than a shared religious outlook.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Muslims vote tactically to maximise chances of keeping the Tories out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muslims are among the lower socio-economic classes of the UK, which has meant that historically they've voted for more socialist policies that seek to eradicating class in society. This makes it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tactical voting has worked in some individual constituencies but remains unproven at a national level. This is because there are many different types of voter shifts that happening at the same time for different reasons which can counteract the effects of tactical voting.</li> <li>In GE2019, many Independents, Liberal Democrats and the Green Party have already made pacts by not fielding candidates, the size of which could easily counteract tactical voting.</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MEND-Policy-Pledges-2019\\_Final\\_11.11.19.pdf](https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/MEND-Policy-Pledges-2019_Final_11.11.19.pdf), pp. 5. Retrieved 7 December 2019.

## 4. The macro challenges in office for Labour and Conservatives

Manifestos are increasingly like “holiday brochures” with much promise and as stated by the Institute of Government (IoG), they are increasingly not delivered on.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the promises made in manifestos often give the impression that manifestos can be delivered in full, especially as radical and big as Labour’s manifesto, and that simply by delivering the manifesto the underlying problems go away. But reality is of course far more complicated; socio-economic forces work in dialectic, and it isn’t always predictable how internal and external variables might play out. In addition, the GE2019 manifestos of both Labour and the Conservative party, which broadly pit Labour’s “big state socialism” versus “One Nation Toryism,” have been poorly costed according to the Institute of Fiscal Policy (IFS).<sup>4</sup>

Labour’s big problem is not getting a big enough majority to deliver large parts of the manifesto, and becoming heavily constrained by unresolved Euroscepticism. Jeremy Corbyn has the lowest net satisfaction of any political leader going into an election since records began in 1983,<sup>5</sup> and will likely struggle to unite the centre ground both in the Parliamentary Labour Party and worse still UK society. Labour has 242 parliamentary seats before the GE2019 which was down from 262 following GE2017. For Labour to gain a majority (326 seats) they would need at least 82 more seats (or 80 if the target is 322 excluding the 7 Sinn Fein seats), which is a very big ask. This is also complicated by the fact that the Leave vote is strong in some traditional Labour heartlands. Moreover, with the rise of Scottish nationalism in the SNP, Labour has lost much of its traditional stronghold in Scotland, which has become a structural problem which the Labour party is struggling to recover from. Going into coalition with the Liberal Democrats or the SNP, though a distant possibility will be unstable.

For the Conservatives, the main sticking point is that unless a sufficiently big enough majority is achieved delivering Brexit will be a struggle and there is a distant possibility that we could be back having another General Election soon. Currently, the Conservatives have 298 parliamentary seats (down from 317 following GE2017), which is 24 short of a majority (excluding Sinn Fein). It is likely that any majority will need to be extended by another 10-20 seats to be comfortable in Government. Net satisfaction with Boris Johnson, though much more favourable than Jeremy Corbyn, is still not good enough for the UK’s social cohesion to improve. Funding of public services, including the NHS, will be slightly less than what is needed, and getting Brexit done is unlikely on its own to heal the polarisation in society.

## 5. Conclusions about who to vote

In view of the aforementioned challenges in office for both Labour and Conservative parties, and the low likelihood of an outright majority Labour government (needing to increase the number of seats by 33% - another 82 seats), it is important that Muslims who might be minded to vote Labour consider voting for the candidate they think will most likely champion the local context. Irrespective of which party is in government, what ordinary voters including Muslims must keep in mind is the need to work with whoever is elected as their constituency MP. In this sense, in the context of Labour being less likely to be in government, voters should not forsake the “best candidate” for their constituency by thinking that they need to vote Labour for supposedly meeting “Muslim commitments.” Below is a simple guide to illustrate this.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/manifesto-tracker> for comparison of manifestos and other articles for analysis and opinions. Retrieved 7 December 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Conservative: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/election/2019/article/conservative-manifesto-an-initial-reaction-from-ifs-researchers>. Labour: <https://www.ifs.org.uk/election/2019/article/labour-manifesto-an-initial-reaction-from-ifs-researchers>. Retrieved 7 December 2019.

<sup>5</sup> Source: Ipsos MORI.

Is it a safe seat or marginal	Who is the incumbent political party?	Is the candidate competent with a proven track record?	Who to vote
Safe seat	Labour	Yes	Labour
Safe seat	Labour	No	Best known Independent or Conservative or Lib Dems
Safe seat	Conservative	Yes	Conservative
Safe seat	Conservative	No	Best known Independent or Labour or Lib Dems
Marginal seat	Labour/Conservative/Lib Dems/Independent	Vote for whichever candidate is more competent and has a proven track record	Labour or Conservative or Lib Dems or Independent

It is clear that our approach to elections has not matured at all in the last decade. I recall calling for an emphatic rethink following GE2017: “...post-GE2017, whether one votes for the Conservatives or Labour or another party, it’s in our collective interest for an emphatic rethink in the way Muslim organisations and politically active individuals engage wider political parties by reaching out to them, working with them productively for mutual benefit and holding back from needless cynicism and suspicion.”

As believers we must change human hearts as part of bringing about betterment in society. This is a Prophetic imperative in the politics of cultural self-assertion. Taking biased political sides and embroiling ordinary Muslim into it is a serious matter of conscience that organisations ought to reflect upon. Believers must resist being detached from our surrounding context and existential spaces, and must not fall into groupthink or moral tribalism.

## 6. Reality checking “Muslim Manifesto”

Here will reality check the manifesto analysis of MEND, much of which is similar to the MCB’s. What is very clear in both of them is that they are exceedingly biased against the Conservative Party. Under most Muslim commitments The Conservative Party are given very low scores (scoring 5 versus Labour’s 27 in the MEND analysis and in the MCB’s view “fails” 6 of the 10 commitments versus Labour’s all passes). As such, the reality checking here will be to check against what the Conservatives have done in government already. It is important not to be biased against one party because this needlessly polarises Muslims, fractures society and immaturely enrages Muslims as anti-Conservative. However, this is not only unfair on its own; it is counter-productive for social cohesion and progression of Muslims in society. The fact that organisation like MEND and the MCB have not exhibited greater political nuance is disappointing, especially given that it is an account of being Muslims to God, and living up to godliness associated with the privilege of representing UK Muslims.

### Racial and Religious Equality:

**MEND’s Muslim pledge** | *Commit to adopting the definition of Islamophobia produced by the APPG for British Muslims*

**Reality check** | The APPG for British Muslims’ definition of Islamophobia has been widely rejected by civil society groups, other religious and cultural groups such as Sikhs and Jews, secular society groups, advocates of free speech, and others. It has also been rejected by the only *Shari’* analysis to date conducted by Shaykh Mohammed Nizami. I have also rejected it<sup>6</sup> on the basis that the APPG’s definition: 1) is practically unworkable since it has failed to gain buy-in of wider society which is vital for change to happen on the

<sup>6</sup> See book: *Being British Muslims: Beyond Ethnocentric Religion and Identity Politics*.



ground; 2) it does not meet the required level of unambiguity required for legal standing; and 3) racializes and secularises the fundamental idea of “being Muslim,” which must anchor to God and not to identitarianism. The Government is still committed to agreeing workable definition, and unlike the APPG on British Muslims (which was led by non-*Shari’* trained members of the public), has selected Qari Asim, and imam, to lead on this.

**MEND’s Muslim pledge** | *Commit to a review of the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act with a view to strengthening legal protection afforded to religious communities.*

**Reality check** | The Conservative Government in October 2018 already announced an independent project by the Law Commission for a wide-ranging review into hate crime to explore how to make current legislation more effective. The Law Commission is due to report back in early 2020.<sup>7</sup>

**MEND’s Muslim pledge** | *Implement primary legislation to deal with social media offences and hate speech online and commit to working with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle hate speech online in consultation with Muslim grassroots organisations.*

**Reality check** | Hate speech is a very complicated area of law, and those working in it will recognise the society-wide and broader discussions that need to be had first between privacy and freedom of speech versus and online harms. Unilateral implementations without consulting industry and rights groups will simply not work. As such there is already an Online Harms White Paper<sup>8</sup> which is currently in consultation. Additionally, there are various voluntary principles such as the Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse that are under consultation. The Conservative Government has also applied political pressure to online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to take remedial action to remove hate speech in whatever form it is, and not exclusive to Muslims, though Muslims equally benefit.

Moreover, it was the Conservative Government that launched the Commission for Countering Extremism, which has to date provided structure to tackling hate that was previously lacking. Prior to this Commission for Countering Extremism, there was a lack of systematic analysis that differentiated different types and characteristics of hate such that rights restriction, hateful extremism and radicalisation were all conserved part of the same problem definition which meant that policies were not true to life. I am now expecting the Commission for Countering Extremism to recommend much greater targeted measures to reduce hate overall in society.

Lastly, it was the Conservative-led Government that set up the Working Group on Anti-Muslim Hate in 2012, and seeks to take forward proposals to tackle anti-Muslim hatred, involving Muslim stakeholders and communities whose interests they represent.

**MEND’s Muslim pledge** | *Commit to financing mosque security in a manner that is proportional to risk, in line with what is already correctly provided to Jewish religious institutions.*

**Reality check** | It was the Conservative Government that introduced the Places Of Worship protective security scheme in the Home Office in 2016 as part of its Hate Crime Action Plan, and has made it a apriority to finance security for mosques especially with the increase in hate crimes targeting Muslims e.g. in the aftermath of the Christchurch attack. However, in 2018, only 22 mosques were granted funding and a further 24 applications were rejected.<sup>9</sup> While a lot more needs to be done in the Home Office as

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/hate-crime/>. Retrieved 7 December 2019.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/online-harms-white-paper/online-harms-white-paper>. Retrieved 7 December 2019.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/30/hate-crime-22-mosques-receive-funding-security-uk>. Retrieved 8 December 2019.

highlighted by the MCB, the comparison with Jewish institutions may not be appropriate given that: (1) anti-Muslim hate is a relatively new phenomenon in Western societies as opposed to the history of anti-Semitism; (2) the nature and size of the Muslim community; and (3) the inherent mistrust Muslims have of government funding.

#### **Youth and Education:**

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to prioritising \*PSRE and PSHE within the national curriculum and ensure grassroots Muslim organisations are enlisted to assist in developing teaching materials to educate young people on the dangers of Islamophobia.*

**Reality check** | There is no data to suggest that Islamophobia in schools is a problem. Why this should be a stated priority for Muslims as opposed to things that are more pressing such as social media abuse of young Muslim girls is perplexing. In any case, the teaching of British Values as: “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs”<sup>10</sup> already provides sufficient values-based teaching against arbitrary discrimination in civil society.

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to supporting academic freedoms and initiatives to decolonise education, whilst giving greater emphasis within the national curriculum to shared histories and the contributions of minority communities in building our society.*

**Reality check** | Learning more about the problems the British Empire caused in the Age of Empire is a good thing provided that it is based on a balanced learning and is evidence based. However, why colonial studies should be a Muslim-centric priority above extensive learning about the life of the Prophet or the productive interaction of Muslim civilizations is perplexing. British academia already has high standards of academic freedom, and where there are problems it is a matter for university departments and Ofsted to look into for evidence in the first instance.

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to developing training programmes for teachers focussed on tackling and addressing bullying based on race, religion, disability, or sexuality.*

**Reality check** | Bullying is already widely addressed in school through existing materials which has been the case for decades. This problem is not limited to Muslims but touches all children regardless of race, religion, disability, or sexuality. Calling out special treatment for protecting Muslims children from bullying (by non-Muslims or Muslims) when there is no data to suggest that this is specific Muslim-focussed problem is unwarranted.

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to supporting faith school provisions in the state sector for Muslim pupils and parents.*

**Reality check** | Schools are generally inclusive places and take steps to accommodate the needs of Muslim children as much as others. This has been the case for decades, and in schools where there are large Muslim populations, the norm practice is to provide prayer and wudu facilities. Exactly what legislation would do to facilitate this any further is unclear.

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to implementing Shariah compliant student loans to encourage more British Muslim students to attend university.*

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<sup>10</sup> *The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014*, <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2014/3283/schedule/made>. See also, *Promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools*, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-fundamental-british-values-through-smsc>

**Reality check** | The Conservatives have already consulted Muslim communities (including NUS, FOSIS, IBB, Al-Qalam etc.) for feedback on a proposed *Shari'ah*-compliant student loans model to decide if it was acceptable and to begin to explore how this product might be made available through the Student Loans Company in a Sharia-compliant way.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, in 2017, The Government introduced The Higher Education and Research Bill where Clause 82 conferred the powers to implement a *Shari'ah* compliant student finance system. However, with Brexit this hasn't progress, and is unlikely to do so until Brexit is resolved.

## The Labour Market

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to tackling religious, racial and gendered discrimination in the workplace through targeted interventions at all stages of recruitment, retention and promotion. Commit to the use of name-blind applications and targeted interventions within employment aimed at tackling the 'triple penalty' and improving access to employment for British Muslim women specifically. Commit to supporting employers to recognise and accommodate religious festivals and religious observance within the workplace, including the provision of halal meat, prayer rooms, and flexible work hours during Ramadan.*

**Reality check** | The law already protects workplace discrimination of characteristics such as age, gender reassignment, being married or in a civil partnership, being pregnant or on maternity leave, disability, race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation etc.

Compelling employers to introduce name-blind applications would need to be done in consultation with employers and rights groups. Increasingly, employers are voluntarily introducing name-blind application processes, and taking steps to ensure their workforces are diverse. However, name-blind applications have problems of their own in that they may negate quota-based positive selection, such as gender and ethnicity, encouraging females into STEM etc. They can also make the hiring process longer, and employers may find it harder to assess someone's cultural fit, because you can't assess things such as personal interests. The biggest problem is that discriminatory bias can still creep in during face-to-face interviews where the employer may decide at interview stage based on unconscious cognitive bias against the colour of one's skin, accents, hijab or cultural dress etc. It also fails to address diversity and bias problems elsewhere in the organisation, including decisions around reward and promotion decisions.<sup>12</sup>

With regards to religious festivals, provision of halal meat, prayer rooms and flexible hours during Ramadan, these are already in HR best practice guides of major employers. Employers accept the data that shows that diversity helps with more productive and innovative workplaces. Issues that are local to organisations are better dealt with through internal discussions with HR departments, rather than a legally-binding enforcement.

## Media and Broadcasting

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to the full implementation of the Royal Charter on press regulation. Commit to the commencement of the second part of the Leveson Inquiry, including an investigation into the prevalence of Islamophobia within the media. Support initiatives by the broadcasting industry to promote positive portrayals of Muslims in the media.*

**Reality check** | It is unpractical to expect greater press regulation in a country like the UK that has prided in press freedom for centuries. The press plays an essential role in the checks and balances to power in the UK, and attempts to curtail press freedoms will be difficult to enforce legally. However, media monitoring

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/sharia-compliant-student-finance>.

<sup>12</sup> For strengths and weaknesses of name-blind application see: <https://www.ciphr.com/features/what-is-blind-recruitment/>. Retrieved 8 December 2019.

and standards (e.g. the Centre for Media Monitoring set up by the MCB) can be done with good success in the same way as the reputable media and charities increasingly do fact checking to counter misrepresentation or bias.

## **Crime, Policing, and the Criminal Justice System**

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to investigating structural Islamophobia within the Criminal Justice System.*

**Reality check** | The Conservative Government's justice secretary, David Lidington, has already endorsed David Lammy's (an outspoken MP on race rights) government-commissioned study, into the treatment of, and outcomes BAME individuals in the criminal justice system, saying that the Conservative Government (which becomes especially relevant in the context of "One Nation Toryism") is "committed to exposing injustice wherever it exists. Where we cannot explain differences in outcomes for different groups, we will reform."<sup>13</sup> The work has begun to put measures into practice, although there is a very long to go. The point here to note is that the Lammy Review was a Conservative government commissioned study.

## **Security and Counter-Terror**

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to independently reviewing all counterterrorism legislation enacted since 2000 with a view to curbing the encroachment of counter-terrorism policies on civil liberties.*

**Reality check** | The Government has already launched an independent review of Prevent, appointing Lord Alex Carlisle as the reviewer, which is targeted for completion in August 2020<sup>14</sup>, and the Government has conceded to judicial review of his appointed.

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to recognising the role of UK foreign policy in individuals being drawn to political violence.*

**Reality check** | Geo-political conflicts would exist without UK involvement and would draw in those committed to political violence from all around the world, including the UK, as it happened in Bosnia and the Afghan war. Hence, it is dubious to think that simply with the UK refraining from involvement in conflict situations would result in less terrorism in the UK. Perpetrators of violence do not discriminate between Western countries, for example Denmark, Norway, Sweden have all had Islamist-based political violence despite not being involved in military interventions. Moreover, in the Islamic paradigm, the law is very clear on this. No matter what one's grievances are, indiscriminate violence or killing of innocent people is absolutely unlawful in Islamic law. The moral obligation is on the individual. There are good arguments for a different kind of foreign policy but the argument made here is skulduggery and contradicts moral philosophy.

## **Political Engagement**

**MEND's Muslim pledge** | *Commit to proactively engaging and consulting with representative and grassroots organisations within British Muslim communities, including but not limited to Muslim Engagement and Development.*

**Reality check** | The Conservative Government has a proven track record of engaging grass roots organisations and prominent individuals throughout the UK. For example, the Conservative Dame, Louise

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/dec/19/london-prosecutions-could-be-dropped-or-delayed-in-pilot-scheme>.

Retrieved 9 December 2019.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-review-of-prevent>. Retrieved 9 December 2019.

Casey, conducted a long study on social cohesion meeting over 800 organisations and individuals and writing a report with recommendations highly supportive of Muslims to further the cause of social cohesion. Similarly, Lord Nick Bourne, as Conservative Communities Secretary, was in close working contact with many mosques and Muslims. Likewise, the ex-Conservative MP, now Independent candidate, Dominic Grieve QC, is a close friend of the likes of Muhammad Iqbal Bari, and chaired the Citizens UK report into “Missing Muslims.” There are other Conservative MPs like Anne Mainie who have acted beyond their remit to champion for instance the rights of the Rohingya people. Others like Brandon Lewis, the previous Chairman of the Conservative Party, have been to visit the new Cambridge Mosque etc. Many of these organisations that Conservatives MPs have engaged are much bigger and more deeply embedded with Muslim communities than MEND. For productive interactions there must be mutual understanding between Government and organisations. However both MEND and the MCB are known to be allied politically with Labour and have a long history of dismissing Government proposals, particularly on security. Government are at liberty to choose which organisations they want to work with. While this needs to be done in a fair way and must make rational sense, it would be unrealistic to expect, for example, the Government to work closely with Trade Unions that have close relationships with Labour and fund Labour activities. The same would apply here to MEND and the MCB.

**MEND’s Muslim pledge** | *Commit to recognising that Palestinian activism is a legitimate form of political dialogue and commit to protecting the rights of British Muslims to advocate and support Palestinians’ right to self-determination.*

**Reality check** | UK law as it stands already protects people’s freedom of expression and agency to carry out lawful protest and demonstration. It also protects the rights of others who oppose BDS to challenge activism, as necessary in an Open Society. The BDS movement, for example, has had decent traction and success in the UK<sup>15</sup> even though there is considerable difference of opinion as to whether economic boycotts are legal or not from a *Shari’* perspective. Overall, the UK has little influence on the issue of Palestinian self-determination, and little will happen unless the regional geo-political conditions among Arab countries changes, a more peace-interested Israeli leadership comes to power and the US Government’s intent improves. Whether BDS hardens people in both camps or cultivates conditions for, for example, a two-state solution remains to be seen.

### **Minority Rights and Integration**

**MEND’s Muslim pledge** | *Commit to preserving human rights and the protection of minority rights, including, but not limited to, the rights to religious slaughter, male circumcision and the wearing of religious dress or symbols as currently enshrined within UK legislation.*

**Reality check** | The Conservative Government have not stated that any of these would be repealed or watered down. In fact it is only the Liberal Democrats who have publically stated that they will ban religious slaughter (halal meat), yet they score higher than the Conservatives.

**MEND’s Muslim pledge** | *Commit to supporting the protections afforded by the EU Equal Treatment Directive to advance protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion to education, healthcare, housing, access to goods and services and social protection, within UK law post-Brexit.*

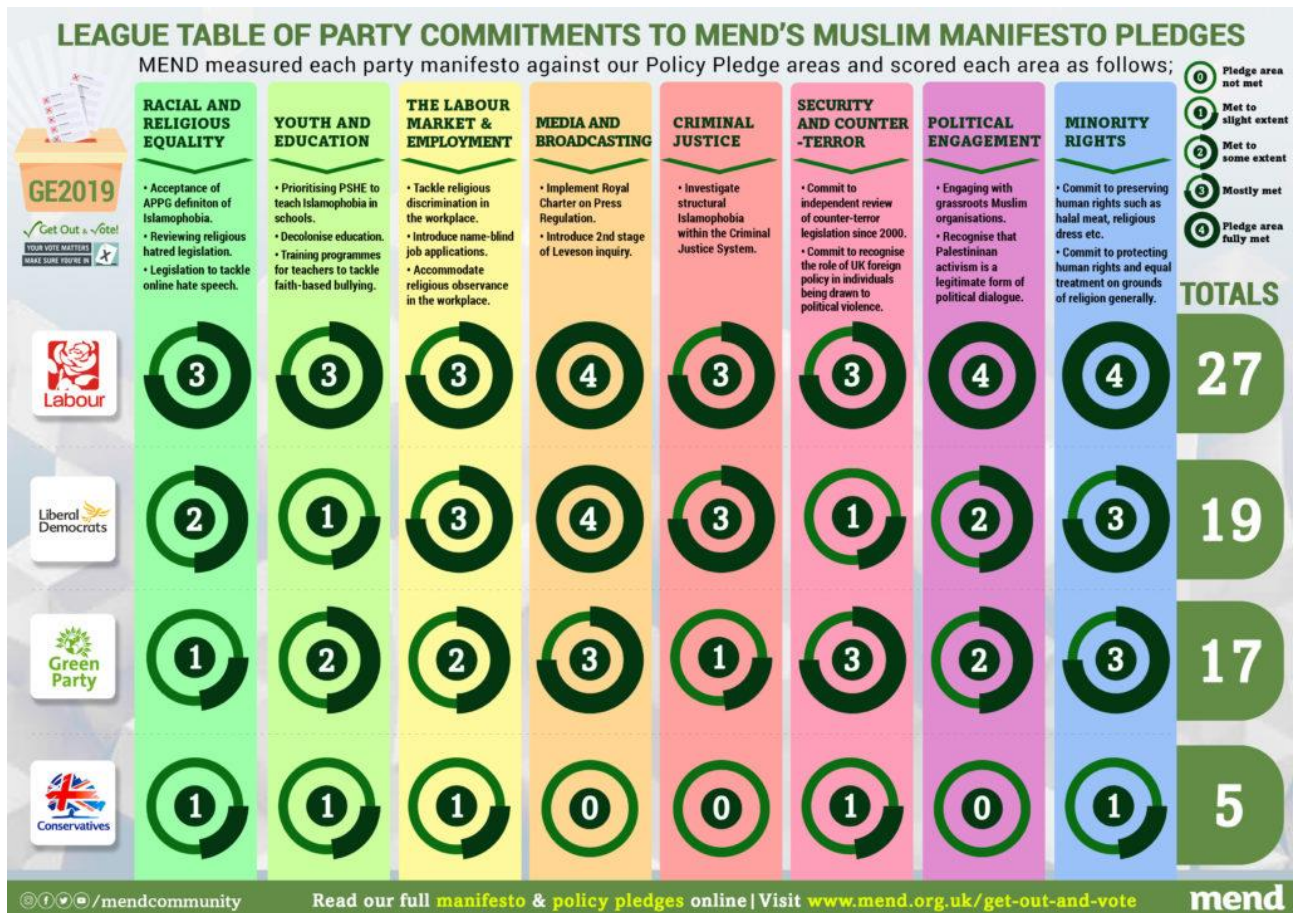
**Reality check** | There has been no suggestion that post-Brexit any existing anti-discrimination laws be changed, including the Race Relations Act (1965), Equality Act (2010) or the Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006).

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.palestinecampaign.org/category/bds/>. Retrieved 7 December 2019.



**Appendix 1: MEND’s league table of party commitments to Muslim manifesto pledges**



# Appendix 2: The MCB's comparison of manifesto commitments affecting British Muslims

## General Election 2019 and Muslims

### COMPARING MANIFESTO COMMITMENTS

Here are the policies in the Conservative Party, Labour Party and Liberal Democrat 2019 General Election manifestos on key issues affecting British Muslims. The parties' policies are compared with the Muslim Council of Britain's Ten Key Pledges to Support Muslim Communities. To view these pledges, and to read the Muslim Council of Britain's election policy platform, visit [mcb.org.uk/muslimsvote](http://mcb.org.uk/muslimsvote)



#### Tackle Racism and Islamophobia

**Adopt the APPG on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia across the UK, defining Islamophobia as being rooted in racism and as a type of racism that targets Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.**

Tackle prejudice, racism and discrimination, and protect people from physical attack or harassment for their ethnicity or religion.

The Conservative Party has not internally adopted the APPG definition of Islamophobia.



Build a society free from all forms of racism including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and commission an independent review into the threat of far-right extremism and how to tackle it. Using social media platforms to combat the rise of racism, including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and extremism expressed on social media. Work with partners across Europe to challenge all three issues.

The Labour Party has internally adopted the definition of Islamophobia.



Tackle the rise in hate crimes by making them aggravated offences and condemn Islamophobic and anti-Semitic rhetoric by those with public platforms. Educate all generations in tackling the impact of fake news, and proceed with Part Two of the Leveson Inquiry.

The Liberal Democrats have internally adopted the definition of Islamophobia.



#### Religious Liberty

**Defend the right of Muslims – and people of all faiths – to express their faith, be that in religious clothing, food and reasonable accommodation of religious observance.**

Champion freedom of expression and tolerance, both in the UK and abroad. Update the Human Rights Act to create a balance between the rights of individuals, national security and effective government.



Strengthen communities' rights to practice their religion free from persecution. Defend the right to wear religious and other dress and symbols, and protect the practices which are crucial for many, such as the production of kosher and halal meat.



Stand up for human rights by championing the Human Rights act.



#### Engagement with Muslim Communities

**Commit to proactively engage with a broad and representative spectrum of British Muslim communities to ensure a plurality of views are being considered.**

The Conservative Party does not currently engage with the MCB.



Ensure the views of communities with or without faith are respected and protected across society.

The Labour Party currently engages with the MCB.



The Liberal Democrats currently engage with the MCB.



#### Safety at Places of Worship

**Safeguard visitors at places of worship, by providing support and funding for any Muslim institution to implement safety measures, in line with other faith groups.**

Expand funding for and protect places of worship.



Review current levels of funding for and access to the Places of Worship Protective Security Funding Scheme to ensure it is proportionate to risk and consult on giving it statutory protection to ensure that religious communities have the support they need. Amend the law to include attacks on places of worship as a specific aggravated offence.



Provide funding for protective security measures to places of worship, schools and community centres that are vulnerable to hate crime and other terrorist attacks.



#### Effective Health and Elderly Care Services

**Focus policymaking on ensuring equity for all sections of society, recognising the gap in health and wellbeing standards, particularly between older and elderly Muslims and the general population.**

No information.



Work across government to end the race disparities in our health care system and develop a strategy to address race inequalities in mental health services.



Require that a fair proportion of funding for health research focuses on research into the mental health needs of different health communities, including BAME communities.



#### Refugees

**Encourage the resettlement of refugees across the UK, working with communities to address and tackle issues faced by refugees resettling in Britain.**

Continue to grant asylum and support to refugees fleeing persecution, with the ultimate aim of helping them to return home if it is safe to do so.



Continue to grant asylum and support to refugees fleeing persecution, with the ultimate aim of helping them to return home if it is safe to do so. Uphold international legal commitments to refugees and allow people to exercise their rights to seek asylum.



Provide safe and legal routes to sanctuary in the UK by resettling 10,000 vulnerable refugees each year, and fund community-sponsorship projects for refugees.



#### Full Economic, Social and Public Participation in British Life

**Enhance democracy by enabling increased participation of minorities and women in politics and public life, addressing the underlying socio-economic challenges in place.**

Ensure no one is put off from engaging in politics or standing in an election by threats, harassment or abuse.



End the under-representation of BAME communities in all aspects of public life and review the implementation of all BAME shortlists. Consider how to ensure increased diversity at all levels, including the judiciary and elected Mayors.



Improve diversity in public appointments so women and ethnic minority groups, among others, are properly represented. Allow all BAME shortlists.



#### Criminal Justice

**Address the disparity of treatment and outcomes for BAME people within the criminal justice system. Rebuild trust with Muslim communities by ensuring all counter-terrorism legislation is evidence-led, non-discriminatory, and open to evaluation.**

A review of the Prevent strategy, as committed to by the 2017-19 Conservative Government, is currently underway.



Conduct a wholesale review of Prevent. Tackle racial discrimination in the criminal justice system and review the recommendations in the Lammy review along with investigating the disproportionate number of young Muslim men in the prison population.



Replace Prevent with a scheme that prioritises community engagement and supports communities in developing their own approach to tackling the dangers of violent extremism. Reduce the overrepresentation of people from BAME backgrounds throughout the criminal justice system. <sup>As per 2017 manifesto</sup>



#### Equality in Education

**Ensure a fair approach to educational provision for all children, with a syllabus that reflects the diversity of communities, with appropriate parent involvement.**

Include mandatory Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in schools.



Support religious education about all faiths in all schools. Review the curriculum to ensure that it enriches students and covers subjects such as racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia and black history and continues to teach issues like the Holocaust. Fund schools to deliver mandatory RSE.



Introduce a 'curriculum for life' in all state-funded schools, which will include Personal, Social and Health Education, citizenship, and age-appropriate RSE.



#### Ethical Foreign Policy

**Support a binding recognition of Palestine as an independent and sovereign state, and address human rights abuses abroad, including in Kashmir, Xinjiang and Myanmar.**

Maintain support for a two-state solution in Israel and Palestine. Ban public bodies from imposing their own direct or indirect boycotts, disinvestment or sanctions campaigns against foreign countries.



Recognise the state of Palestine and call for an immediate return to meaningful negotiations. Press for reform internationally to secure justice and accountability for breaches of human rights, including in Syria, the Gaza Strip, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Yemen.



Recognise the state of Palestine, condemn violence on all sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and support Israel's right to security. Remain committed to a negotiated peace settlement, which includes a two-state solution.



Conservative Party manifesto:  
[vote.conservatives.com/our-plan](http://vote.conservatives.com/our-plan)

Labour Party manifesto:  
[labour.org.uk/manifesto](http://labour.org.uk/manifesto)  
Labour has also produced a standalone Race and Faith manifesto.

Liberal Democrat manifesto:  
[libdems.org.uk/plan](http://libdems.org.uk/plan)