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A FALSE COMPROMISE

WHY A DEFINITION OF “ANTI-MUSLIM
HOSTILITY” IS AS BAD AS A DEFINITION
OF “ISLAMOPHOBIA,” POSSIBLY WORSE

Sir John Jenkins KCMG LVO and Andrew Gilligan

Endorsements

"I welcome this valuable report and agree with it that the proposed definition is even worse than anticipated. It is dangerous and divisive. That it will become a free speech and thought control problem is immediately evident. If there is one policy that cries out for another government U-turn, it is this."

Baroness Kishwer Falkner, chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission
2020-2025

"Sikhs teachings stress that that we are all equal members of one human family with equal rights and responsibilities; and repudiate false and conflict producing differential treatment of people on the basis of religion, gender, colour or so-called race. As such, we believe that the government's exclusive focussing against prejudice against Muslims is wrong. All faiths and beliefs should be equally protected."

Lord Singh of Wimbledon CBE DL, Director Network of Sikh Organisations UK

"I welcome this report which shows that the proposed definition is deeply pernicious. It will give extremists a veto over what can and cannot be discussed and suppress entirely legitimate debate. None of this will help Muslims- particularly those many Muslims who wish to resist Islamist extremism. It will merely stoke division and resentment."

Richard Scorer, Manchester lawyer who has represented victims of terrorism and grooming gangs

Short Summary

According to leaks, a government-appointed working group to devise an official definition of “Islamophobia” has proposed a draft which avoids the word “Islamophobia,” substituting instead the term “anti-Muslim hostility.”¹ Members of the working group have sought to present this as a compromise which will “resolve” opponents’ concerns.²

A definition of “anti-Muslim hostility” is, in fact, at least as broad and dangerous as one of “Islamophobia,” possibly more so. And because the term lacks (for now) the same negative political connotations, it is also more deployable by activist groups.

The dictionary definition of “hostility” includes “not liking”³ something, “not agreeing”⁴ with it or being “opposed” to it.⁵ It is perfectly accurate, for instance, to describe the National Secular Society as hostile to the growth of Muslim (and other religious) schools. No hatred is present here, merely opposition.

This note details multiple other examples where the term “hostility” has been used, including by members of the working group, to attack legitimate criticism or scrutiny of Muslims, Islam or religion.

We show that even as the police now propose to scrap “non-crime hate incidents,”⁶ an official definition of “anti-Muslim hostility” risks giving this enormously controversial practice a new lease of life – if only for “non-crimes” against Muslims.

We have also learned that the leak was incomplete. Not disclosed was that the proposed definition includes examples of speech which would not be deemed “hostile” to Muslims. These examples of permitted speech are narrow – for instance, they include theological criticism of Islam, but they do not include saying that disproportionate numbers of British Pakistanis are involved in group-

¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjrjzp42v4zo>

² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/10/18/labour-party-rows-back-islamophobia-definition-muslimness/>

³ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hostile>

⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hostile>

⁵ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hostile>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62dv1l0jelo>

based sexual offending (one key instance where speaking the truth has been attacked as “Islamophobic.”)

Also not disclosed, the definition states that public bodies and companies will be free to adopt their own definitions of “anti-Muslim hostility,” even broader than the one proposed – effectively *carte blanche*.

We show how the term “hostility” has been used to further the second goal of many of those involved in campaigning for a definition – to bring about political change by the back door, including weakening counter-terrorism and immigration laws.

We raise concerns that one of those who devised this expansive definition has already been given a government-funded role which, in effect, makes her into an arbiter of what constitutes “anti-Muslim hostility.”

We argue that giving Muslims special protections not available to others will be disastrous for them, and for everyone else. It will fuel, not diminish, hostility towards Muslims. It will empower divisive extremes – both in Muslim communities, by creating new opportunities for challenge, grievance and attack in every institution and workplace; and on the nativist right. It will increase, not reduce, social tensions.

A FALSE COMPROMISE

On 15 December, the text of a proposed official definition of “anti-Muslim hostility” was given to the BBC.⁷ Within an hour of the receiving journalist’s first tweet, a member of the Government working group which devised the definition, Baroness Shaista Gohir, issued a 500-word statement saying: “I can confirm that the definition published by the BBC is the same as the advice the working group submitted to the government in October. The group is, however, still awaiting a formal response from the government... I urge the government to adopt the working group’s advice without delay.”⁸

This attempt to pressurise ministers, if that’s what it was, was poorly timed: only the day before, 15 people had been murdered in an Islamist terror attack in Australia. But as Policy Exchange had predicted,⁹ the proposed definition avoided the word “Islamophobia” and sought to present itself as a compromise. Gohir earlier stated that opponents of a definition would be “pleasantly surprised” by the form of words chosen, which would “resolve” their concerns.¹⁰

The immediate reaction to the BBC story suggested the leakers had achieved some success in their marketing campaign. The director of the Free Speech Union, Lord Toby Young, still strongly opposed the new definition, but said it had been “watered down” and “isn’t as bad as the old one,”¹¹ devised in 2018 by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims, which did use the term Islamophobia. Newspapers reported that the Islamophobia definition had been “axed.”¹² From the other side of the fence, the Islamist group Muslim Engagement and Development (Mend) expressed its “alarm” at a definition which risked being “incomplete, half-baked and lacking credibility.”¹³

⁷<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjrjzp42v4zo>

⁸ <https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/mediaStatmentDetail.php?id=355>

⁹ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Islamophobia-Definition-Observatory.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/10/18/labour-party-rows-back-islamophobia-definition-muslimness/>

¹¹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/12/15/labour-watered-down-islamophobia-definition-still-bad/>

¹² <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-15387619/Labour-braced-free-speech-row-ministers-finalise-details-axe-Islamophobia-definition-favour-anti-Muslim-hostility.html>

¹³ <https://www.mend.org.uk/government-must-not-water-down-definition-of-islamophobia/>

Draft definition as given to the BBC¹⁴

"Anti-Muslim hostility is engaging in or encouraging criminal acts, including acts of violence, vandalism of property, and harassment and intimidation whether physical, verbal, written or electronically communicated, which is directed at Muslims or those perceived to be Muslims because of their religion, ethnicity or appearance.

"It is also the prejudicial stereotyping and racialisation of Muslims, as part of a collective group with set characteristics, to stir up hatred against them, irrespective of their actual opinions, beliefs or actions as individuals.

"It is engaging in prohibited discrimination where the relevant conduct – including the creation or use of practices and biases within institutions – is intended to disadvantage Muslims in public and economic life."

"The Islamophobia definition which is not called Islamophobia"

The working group's replacement of "Islamophobia" with "anti-Muslim hostility" is astute. It recognises that the former term has now acquired so much political baggage that it has become less useful for achieving its advocates' objectives.

But though the working group seeks to present the new definition as different, the truth is that for those campaigning for it, the terms "anti-Muslim hostility" and "Islamophobia" have long been closely intertwined, even synonymous. Indeed, on 15 December, Gohir herself described the new form of words as "the Islamophobia definition which is not called Islamophobia."¹⁵

In the very first significant entry of the term "Islamophobia" into the public debate – a 1997 report by the Runnymede Trust – "Islamophobia" was defined as "unfounded hostility towards Islam."¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjrjzp42v4zo>

¹⁵ <https://x.com/ShaistaGohir/status/2000619492616151353>

¹⁶ <https://mcislamofobia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Islamophobia-a-challenge-for-us-all-without-cartoons-1.pdf> - page 10 of PDF

An incomplete leak

Policy Exchange has learned that the leak was incomplete. Not disclosed to the receiving journalists was that the proposed definition also includes a series of examples of speech which would not be deemed “hostile” to Muslims. These examples of permitted speech are narrow – for instance, they include theological criticism of Islam, but they do not include saying that disproportionate numbers of British Pakistanis are involved in group-based sexual offending (one key instance in the past where speaking the truth was attacked as “Islamophobic.”)

Also not disclosed, the definition states that public bodies and companies will be free to adopt their own definitions of “anti-Muslim hostility,” even broader than the one proposed – effectively *carte blanche*.

At least as broad, at least as dangerous to free speech

In this research note, Policy Exchange argues that a definition of “anti-Muslim hostility” is, in fact, at least as broad and dangerous to free speech as one of “Islamophobia,” possibly more so. And because the term lacks (for now) the same negative political connotations, it is more deployable by activist groups.

The dictionary definition of “hostility” includes “not liking”¹⁷ something, “not agreeing”¹⁸ with it or being “opposed” to it.¹⁹ It is perfectly accurate, for instance, to describe the National Secular Society, or the Guardian columnist Polly Toynbee, as hostile to the growth of Muslim-only (and other religious) schools. No hatred is present in either case, merely opposition. But if the idea that “hostility” is prohibited and actionable takes hold these, and many other, legitimate points of view risk being caught by it.

And even as it is now reported that the police will stop recording “non-crime hate incidents,”²⁰ an official definition of “anti-Muslim hostility” risks, in effect, giving this enormously controversial practice a new lease of life – if only for “non-crimes” against Muslims. As we explain, it is easy to see how a definition

¹⁷ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hostile>

¹⁸ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/hostile>

¹⁹ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/hostile>

²⁰ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62dv110jelo>

could be used to pressure police forces, local authorities, employers or other bodies to record or sanction incidents of “anti-Muslim hostility.”

As the Law Commission has pointed out, “hostility” is also broader than the other term sometimes used in the debate on a definition, “anti-Muslim hatred.” As the Commission put it in its report on hate crime, in reference to the criminal offence of stirring up hatred, “‘hatred’ is more than mere hostility, or ridicule, or offence.”²¹

Just like “Islamophobia,” the term “hostility” has often been used by activists – including repeatedly by Gohir herself – to attack fair and legitimate criticism or scrutiny of Muslims and Islam. In October 2025, the Muslim Women’s Network, of which Gohir is chief executive, attacked media coverage of a fun-run organised by the East London Mosque from which women and older girls were banned. It said the “disproportionate media attention given to the event... reflects a broader hostility towards Muslims rather than genuine concern for women’s equality.”²² (In fact, however, even the East London Mosque said it would review its policies and the format of the event after the backlash.)²³

In 2021, Gohir signed a letter attacking the BBC presenter Emma Barnett for her “strikingly hostile” (in truth entirely normal) interview on *Woman’s Hour* of the then Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) secretary-general, Zara Mohammed.²⁴ Gohir and her co-signatories criticised Barnett for, in effect, treating Mohammed like any other public figure “rather than authentically recognising and engaging in what [she] represented for British Muslim women.” They attacked the presenter for “interrupting” her, as most BBC interviewees are interrupted, saying this betrayed “an instinctive urge not to listen to the voice of a Muslim woman.”²⁵ This was a prima facie demand for special treatment, of the kind Gohir and her allies insist forms no part of their “anti-hostility” push.

In August 2025, Gohir attacked newspapers for “hostility” towards all Muslims after they exposed her own record of inflammatory posting on social media. In

²¹ <https://cdn.websitebuilder.service.justice.gov.uk/uploads/sites/54/2025/12/Hate-crime-final-report.pdf>

²² https://www.mwnuk.co.uk//go_files/resources/118324-Mosque%20charity%20run.pdf

²³ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cpwvg72ddj0o>

²⁴ <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/open-letter-to-the-bbc-about-womans-hour-and-islamophobia/>

²⁵ <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/open-letter-to-the-bbc-about-womans-hour-and-islamophobia/>

2019, she had reportedly falsely accused Humberside police of “racism,” “Islamophobia” and “unnecessary use of excessive violence” in detaining a Muslim man and in 2024 she had attacked Greater Manchester police over a similar incident at Manchester Airport, falsely describing it as “police brutality.” Gohir said the criticism of her statements was part of a “sustained wave of hostile media coverage” against supporters of an Islamophobia definition which “reveals far more about their attitude towards Muslims than it does about me.”²⁶

In January 2025, Policy Exchange exposed the deeply troubling views of Wajid Akhter, the man who succeeded Mohammed as secretary-general of the MCB.²⁷ He said that being Muslim was “an act of revolutionary defiance – standing at odds with the prevailing culture;”²⁸ that British Muslims should raise their children to identify primarily as Muslim, rather than as British;²⁹ and that celebrating the “pagan” event of New Year was “the first step on a slippery slope... to disappearing within the dominant culture.”³⁰ The MCB’s official response was to attack our supposed “long history of hostility towards British Muslims.”³¹

In 2015, a Muslim boycott of police in Rotherham was launched for their “hostility” to Muslims after the town’s grooming scandal. A group called British Muslim Youth claimed that officers of South Yorkshire Police “piggybacked on this hostile environment towards the Muslim community by deflecting the attention of their own failures by scapegoating us. They have peddled a pernicious lie that historically they failed to act on allegations of [child sexual exploitation], because they were afraid of being branded ‘racist’.”³² The boycott’s ringleader, Muhbeen Hussain, the nephew of a Rotherham councillor who was

²⁶ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/08/10/peer-manchester-airport-row-islamophobia/>

²⁷ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Muslim-Council-of-Britains-New-Leadership-V.1.pdf>

²⁸ <https://muslimmatters.org/2022/02/03/did-the-prophet-wear-glasses-raising-children-resilient-muslims/>

²⁹ <https://muslimmatters.org/2022/02/03/did-the-prophet-wear-glasses-raising-children-resilient-muslims/>

³⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20150707104521/http://muslimmatters.org/2012/12/28/4-reasons-why-muslims-should-not-celebrate-new-years/>

³¹ <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/society/article/muslim-council-candidates-iran-islamic-views-wn65w0qkj>

³² <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/mbe-muslim-police-boycott-grooming-scandal-xl8l0lmgm>

forced to resign for his role in “suppressing discussion” of the scandal, later played a key role in the creation of the APPG Islamophobia definition.³³

The working group’s words define hostility more narrowly than the dictionary, though the definition could easily be widened later. Clearly, too, when public and private sector bodies seek advice from Muslim groups on how to use the definition in practice, an expansive interpretation is likely to be used. But even the definition’s starting conception of “hostility” includes broad-brush ideas such as “the prejudicial stereotyping and racialisation of Muslims” or the “creation or use of practices and biases within institutions intended to disadvantage Muslims.”

It is clear that these wide formulations would, particularly if adopted by institutions, give activists more options to raise grievances or urge action against “hostile” journalists, *Woman’s Hour* presenters or think-tanks than simply issuing an angry quote. From past experience, many institutions, public and private, are already less than robust under activist pressure; a definition makes it more likely that they would yield.

Social and political change

As Policy Exchange warned in October 2025, the main intention behind the definition is not to tackle discrimination or hate crime against Muslims, both of which are already illegal, but to restrict criticism of Islam and Muslims (see above) and to bring about social and political change by the back door.³⁴ As Mend has put it, a definition should be a “sociological lens through which to carry out structural analyses of discriminatory policies embedded within, for example, immigration [and] counter-terrorism legislation”³⁵ and must be used to challenge “policy failures,” including “how Muslims are unfairly targeted in counter-terrorism laws.”³⁶ (For context, Islamist terrorism is responsible for 94

³³ https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Rotherham-Grooming-Scandal-and-The-Creators-of-the-Islamophobia-Definition_.pdf

³⁴ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-Islamophobia-Definition-Observatory.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/Islamophobia-Submission-MEND.pdf>

³⁶ https://www.mend.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/MEND_Islamophobia_AntiMuslim.pdf?fbclid=IwY2xjawNWFR1leHR

per cent of all terrorist deaths in Great Britain in the last quarter-century. The proportion in the last ten years is higher.³⁷⁾

The proposed definition's third paragraph is where this ambition is clearest, saying that anti-Muslim hostility includes "the creation or use of practices and biases within institutions... intended to disadvantage Muslims in public and economic life."

The concept of "hostility," just like "Islamophobia," has often been used to demand the weakening or removal of terrorism and immigration laws. In 2021, Amnesty International complained that "a person who is perceived as a suspected terrorist, extremist or vulnerable to 'radicalization' faces interference from law enforcement (e.g., visits, surveillance, approaches to employers and family members) which creates a hostile and degrading environment for them."³⁸

Evidence was given to the working group drawing up the proposed definition by, among others, Amira Elghawaby, the Canadian government's Special Representative on Combating Islamophobia. Her presentation to them, seen by Policy Exchange, states that Islamophobia includes "viewing and treating Muslims as a greater security threat [than others] on an institutional, systemic and societal level." Perhaps Elghawaby was just objecting, perfectly reasonably, to any claim that all or most Muslims are terrorists or extremists. Perhaps, however, she, like Mend, was falsely complaining that counter-terrorism laws unfairly or disproportionately target Muslims.

The Migrants' Rights Network has rebranded the Home Office as the "Hostile Office," saying that "for people of colour and other marginalised groups, this [immigration] system simply wasn't designed for us. That is why we are calling for the Hostile Office and immigration system to be dismantled."³⁹ The group

[uA2FibQlxMABicmlkETFvQXVvamV1U280MVFGV0FrAR5hH_gX9G-LTU4cBvbLK_iX3KCClgYDGrllxe4H6pxvQ_pZ8lkQeApczaFDCQ_aem_1UIM9Rv20LzQvj-7mij-EQ](https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Extremely-Confused-The-Governments-new-counter-extremism-review-revealed.pdf)

³⁷ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Extremely-Confused-The-Governments-new-counter-extremism-review-revealed.pdf> - pp26-7. The table does not include the October 2025 attack in Manchester, but this does not change the proportions.

³⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur01/3606/2021/en/>

³⁹ <https://migrantsrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Hostile-Office-report-accessible-inverted.pdf>

Bristol Defend the Asylum Seekers has demanded “an end to hostile [immigration] policies” so there can be “a fair plan for refugees.”⁴⁰

In April 2025, Mary-Ann Stephenson, who is now chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, called on the Government to relax its “hostile politics” towards illegal migrants, saying these “play into the hands of those seeking to build them-and-us division between local communities and refugees. It is the time to move away from the hostile politics, racist rhetoric and demonising language of the past and unite our communities for a different way forward.”⁴¹

The concept of “hostility” was used to justify the highly controversial ban on Israeli football fans attending a game at Aston Villa with their team, Maccabi Tel Aviv. The independent MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, Ayoub Khan, who campaigned vigorously for the ban, said that “with so much hostility and uncertainty around the match, it was only right to take drastic measures.”⁴²

A 2025 report by Leicester University’s “Centre for Hate Studies” on “unpacking experiences of hostility” in the countryside listed a number of incidents which it said demonstrated hostility, including “monocultural customs for example in pub culture,” “hostile body language” and other “microaggressions.” Some of the “experiences of hostility” do appear extremely micro; one participant objected to a remark about how her wellies were muddy even though she was only at the beginning of her walk.⁴³

What sorts of “practices... within institutions” could be covered by the new definition of hostility? In employment, for instance, the Muslim Council of Britain has described workplaces where Muslim staff cannot stop for prayer breaks as “a hostile work environment.”⁴⁴ (Lack of time for prayer was also made an issue in the activist campaign against Michaela School – unsuccessfully, but maybe more successfully in future if agencies such as councils, inspectorates or grantmaking bodies adopt the proposed definition.)

⁴⁰ <https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/far-right-response-aug-2025/>

⁴¹ <https://togetherwithrefugees.org.uk/press-release-border-security-summit/>

⁴² <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/oct/16/maccabi-tel-aviv-fans-banned-from-game-at-aston-villa-in-europa-league>

⁴³ <https://le.ac.uk/-/media/uol/docs/research-centres/hate-studies/the-rural-racism-project-files/unpacking-experiences-of-hostility-full-report-1.pdf>

⁴⁴ <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Islamophobia-in-the-Workplace-1.3.pdf>

Also condemned for creating a “hostile work environment” are “microaggressions” that “communicate negative assumptions or stereotypes about Islam,” even when these are “unintentional.” Solutions, according to the MCB, include compulsory training for all employees in how to treat Muslims and ending work-related social events which are “deliberately held at bars with alcohol.”⁴⁵

“Encouraging” criminal acts

The first paragraph of the proposed definition has been treated even by some opponents as uncontroversial, referring as it does to “criminal acts” such as “violence, vandalism of property, and harassment and intimidation whether physical, verbal, written or electronically communicated.” The main objection to this part has been that it is unnecessary, since criminal acts are already by definition illegal.⁴⁶

But the sting is that this paragraph defines anti-Muslim hostility as either “engaging in” criminal acts or “encouraging” them. It is an activist article of faith that by, for instance, opposing mass immigration, politicians and newspapers encourage crimes such as racial harassment. In the words of the Runnymede Trust, “the racist and Islamophobic discourse used by the media and parliament to justify increasingly hostile immigration legislation has created a culture where sections of the UK population feel increasingly emboldened to engage in racial discrimination and violence.”⁴⁷

Gohir has said that “some MPs intentionally use coded language to normalise hostility towards Muslims... [this] was particularly intensified by certain Conservative MPs during the previous Conservative government...Barely a week goes by without statements that... fuel fear and hatred.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Islamophobia-in-the-Workplace-1.3.pdf>

⁴⁶ <https://christianconcern.com/comment/proposed-definition-of-anti-muslim-hatred-released/>

⁴⁷ [https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/688b6baccbe036f9e0f022_A%20hostile%20environment_Phase%20Two_v6%20\(1\).pdf](https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/688b6baccbe036f9e0f022_A%20hostile%20environment_Phase%20Two_v6%20(1).pdf)

⁴⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/06/reform-uk-inflaming-hostility-towards-muslims-leading-british-muslims-warn>

It is easy to imagine this element of the definition becoming another limb of the fight for speech restriction or social change, used to try to prevent policies or political statements on the grounds that they are “encouraging” crime against Muslims and Muslim migrants.

“Racialisation”

Another red flag for those watching carefully was the mild and nuanced reaction to the leak from several problematic Islamist-linked organisations, including the MCB and the East London Mosque. Tellingly, they did not oppose the replacement of Islamophobia with “anti-Muslim hostility.” Instead, they emphasised that the proposed definition’s reference to the “racialisation of Muslims” must be retained by the Government. (The briefing which accompanied the leak said that “racialisation” remained an “area of debate” for ministers.⁴⁹ Gohir’s statement on the leak said that “including the element of racialisation” was necessary.⁵⁰)

The East London Mosque’s response to the leak said: “We recognise that the Government’s current approach seeks to protect individuals while safeguarding freedom of expression... Any definition intended to address anti-Muslim racism must reflect the reality that Muslims are routinely targeted as a racialised minority, not simply as adherents of a faith. Whether the language used is ‘Islamophobia’ or ‘anti-Muslim hostility,’ a framework that fails to acknowledge this lived experience will be inadequate.”⁵¹

The MCB made a similar point, claiming that “the Government is considering watering down the suggested definition recommended by its own working group... Stripping out or diluting the concept of racialisation does not protect free speech.”⁵²

Islam is of course multi-racial and Muslims are not a race. This false construct is another clear echo of the original All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG)

⁴⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cjrjzp42v4zo>

⁵⁰ <https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/mediaStatmentDetail.php?id=355>

⁵¹ <https://www.eastlondonmosque.org.uk/news/elm-responds-to-the-governments-proposed-definition-of-anti-muslim-racism>

⁵² <https://mcb.org.uk/mcb-statement-mcb-warns-against-lack-of-transparency-and-watering-down-the-definition-of-islamophobia/>

Islamophobia definition - "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness." The decision to conflate religion and race, in the MCB's words, was because it "facilitates [a definition's] operationalisation, given that many large organisations already have in place mechanisms and protocols for dealing with racism; therefore, by articulating Islamophobia as a type of racism, there is no need to invent new procedures to deal with complaints and concerns that arise."⁵³

The working group definition has again, however, been more wily than the APPG's in choosing to speak of the "racialisation" of Muslims. On a close reading, this effectively amounts to the same as the APPG definition, which speaks of "racism that targets expressions of Muslimness." But it sounds a little more nuanced. It also reflects academic attempts to argue that "'race' can be better understood as a social process by which groups of people are placed into a hierarchy rather than a natural biological reality... racism is not dependent on the existence of 'races', but rather generates classifications by which to organise people and place a value on them."⁵⁴

Alas, whatever the appeal of this concept to the activist-academic mind, the law – which demands practicable and clear parameters – defines race differently, as involving "colour, nationality or ethnic or national origins."⁵⁵ Thus, as the Equality and Human Rights Commission has said, anti-Muslim hatred is not a form of racism.⁵⁶ The current Government, too, has explicitly stated that the APPG definition's references to race are "not in line with the Equality Act."⁵⁷ Given the close similarity between the APPG and the working group definition on this point, it is hard to see how that is not also true of the working group definition.

The risk, however (and no doubt the intention) is that the official adoption of a definition featuring, for the first time, the concept of "racialisation of Muslims" pulls policy, public authorities, jurisprudence and eventually the law itself in the direction the activists seek.

⁵³ https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/FULL-SPREAD-IslamophobiaReport_020321_compressed.pdf

⁵⁴ <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/documents/college-artslaw/ptr/90172-univ73-islamophobia-in-the-uk-report-final.pdf>

⁵⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/9>

⁵⁶ <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/2025/Working%20Group%20on%20Anti-Muslim%20Hatred%20Islamophobia%20-%20our%20response.pdf>

⁵⁷ https://nsouk.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MC2024_20608-Reply.pdf

Hostility as an existing legal term

One objection to seeing the term “hostility” as new and dangerous is that it has for many years formed part of hate crime law. The main legislation, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, defines a racially or religiously aggravated offence as one “motivated wholly or partly by hostility towards members of a racial or religious group.”⁵⁸ The Sentencing Act 2020 uses similar wording about hostility as an aggravating factor in sentencing.⁵⁹

The term “hostility” is not itself defined in either of these laws, or anywhere else. Crown Prosecution Service guidance states that “consideration should be given to ordinary dictionary definitions, which include ill-will, ill-feeling, spite, prejudice, unfriendliness, antagonism, resentment, and dislike.”⁶⁰ That sounds even wider than the working group’s proposed definition.

The key principle, however, is that under these laws hostility *alone* is not an offence. It is not illegal to be unfriendly towards someone on the grounds of their religion. Hostility is an aggravating factor for an actual offence such as assault, or causing harassment, alarm or distress through threatening or abusive words or behaviour. The lack of a legal definition of “hostility” also means that the courts can consider factors such as the public interest in freedom of expression, as they did with the recent acquittal on appeal of a man who publicly burned the Quran.⁶¹

“Set in stone”

The new “anti-Muslim hostility” definition risks moving things the other way. It will not (at least initially) be statutory. But a clear risk is that it either becomes so, or that it reduces the safeguards introduced after Miller, and gives the courts less discretion.

⁵⁸ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/section/28>

⁵⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2020/17/section/66>

⁶⁰ <https://www.cps.gov.uk/prosecution-guidance/racist-and-religious-hate-crime-prosecution-guidance>

⁶¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c9v7wlj3pr2o>

There is also a risk that if asked to rule on “anti-Muslim hostility” for the purposes of the new definition, a court will default to the CPS guidance which includes broad terms such as “unfriendliness.”

As the Law Commission has stated in its report on hate crime, in reference to the criminal offence of stirring up hatred, “‘hatred’ is more than mere hostility, or ridicule, or offence.”⁶² This would imply that a change from hatred to hostility expands the net.

Strictly speaking, of course, a non-statutory definition should not be able to have any legal effect. But there is a risk that the definition will wrongly be taken to have such effect, or may bleed into argument before courts, or into prosecutorial practice. And if it ever were to become statutory, that would further change the calculus.

Finally, whether or not a definition is statutory, it is highly likely to be adopted, and to be used to police behaviour, by many public bodies, funding organisations, and companies.

Whatever they may say now, these are the clear objectives of those behind the definition. In January 2025, Gohir attacked the “subjective” nature of the existing legal test of hostility, which allowed “different” interpretations from different police officers. By contrast, she said, an official definition would make matters “really clear” and “set in stone.”⁶³

A return to non-crime hate incidents – for Muslims only?

It has recently been reported that the intensely controversial practice of police recording “non-crime hate incidents” (NCHIs) against people will be scrapped.⁶⁴ The Metropolitan Police and other forces have already stated that they will stop recording NCHIs.

⁶² <https://cdn.websitebuilder.service.justice.gov.uk/uploads/sites/54/2025/12/Hate-crime-final-report.pdf>

⁶³ <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/15235/pdf/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c62dv110jelo>

However, an official definition of “anti-Muslim hostility,” covering a much wider range of behaviours than the criminal law, risks in effect reinstating NCHIs in even fuller force than now – albeit only for non-crimes against Muslims.

It is easy to foresee how an official definition would be used to pressure police forces, local authorities or other bodies to record or to sanction incidents of “anti-Muslim hostility.” For the police, it is likely that the charge would be led by their official Muslim “community liaison” bodies and their official Muslim police staff networks, both of whose concerning activities have previously been exposed by Policy Exchange.⁶⁵ The National Association of Muslim Police has published its own definition of “anti-Muslim hatred”⁶⁶ which bears a close resemblance to the broad terms proposed in the Grieve/ Gohir working group’s definition of “anti-Muslim hostility.”

NCHIs are criticised as a waste of police time, an avenue for malicious complaints and harmful to free speech. An NCHI can be recorded by police against any individual on the basis of a single complaint where the complainant believes (but does not have to provide any evidence) that the supposed offender is motivated by hostility. About 13,000 were recorded in 2024.

An NCHI involves no sanction and is not a criminal record but may show up on an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check, potentially affecting employment prospects. NCHIs have been recorded against children after playground disputes, against the then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, for a speech at her party conference and against journalists who have used “outdated” language.

One event in the practice coming to greater public attention was the Appeal Court case brought by Harry Miller, against whom police recorded a NCHI after he posted gender-critical tweets. The court expressed concern that the “threshold for hostility is low,” that “the net for non-crime hate speech is an exceptionally wide one” and that there was a “chilling effect” on free speech. Ordering the removal of the supposed “incident” from police files, the court

⁶⁵ <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Blurred-Lines.pdf>
<https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Might-is-Right-Final.pdf>

⁶⁶ <https://muslim.police.uk/documents/Confronting%20anti-Muslim%20hatred%20and%20Promoting%20Human%20Rights.pdf>

demanded “additional safeguards” so that “the incursion into freedom of expression is no more than is strictly necessary.”⁶⁷

Finally, there may also be less to the claim that NCHIs are being abolished than meets the eye. It appears some “serious” NCHIs will still be recorded on police databases and others may now be treated as “intelligence” reports.⁶⁸ What will constitute a “serious” NCHI is unclear. Also unclear is the difference between a record on a police database and a police intelligence report (also, of course, stored on a police database). At the discretion of a chief police officer these records, too, can be disclosed in vetting checks, potentially impacting employment.

An official definition of “anti-Muslim hostility” may mean that these practices are also more deployed against people who are accused of hostility towards Muslims below the criminal threshold.

Advocates become arbiters

One of the working group’s members, Akeela Ahmed, did not just co-devise the new proposed definition. She has also been appointed chief executive of a new organisation called the British Muslim Trust (BMT), awarded up to £2.6m of public money⁶⁹ to act as the Government’s official “partner to monitor and tackle anti-Muslim hatred” and provide “direct support to victims.”⁷⁰

The BMT is a startup with no experience in the highly sensitive work of supporting victims. It replaces a much more experienced group, Tell Mama, which did the job for 13 years but whose founder, Fiyaz Mughal, opposes a definition,⁷¹ and which withdrew after what it called a “smear campaign” against

⁶⁷ [https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2021/1926.html&query=\(harry\)+AND+\(miller\)](https://www.bailii.org/cgi-bin/format.cgi?doc=/ew/cases/EWCA/Civ/2021/1926.html&query=(harry)+AND+(miller))

⁶⁸ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/12/22/non-crime-hate-incidents-to-be-scrapped/>

⁶⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/combating-hate-against-muslims-fund-prospectus/combating-hate-against-muslims-fund-prospectus>

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/british-muslim-trust-appointed-as-new-partner-to-monitor-and-tackle-anti-muslim-hatred>

⁷¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/689c52215555fb89cf3f5ee4/CE01_Steven_Gr eer.pdf

it by supporters of the BMT.⁷² (Shaista Gohir said in the same article that “that’s probably me” Tell Mama was referring to, though denied any smear.)

The BMT now literally has the ground-level job of defining anti-Muslim hostility. It is not hard to anticipate the vast array of incidents, microaggressions and media reports about grooming and terrorism which it could now count as “hostile,” helpfully also creating a new tide of “hostility” which must be fixed through a new official definition. Indeed, Shabir Randeree, the BMT chair, has said one of the reasons for needing a new body is “a growing sense that anti-Muslim hate in this country was not being recorded correctly.”⁷³

The BMT is also likely to be asked by institutions and companies to advise on the interpretation of any new official “anti-Muslim hostility” definition. It may well be accepted by the courts as an “interested party” or an intervener in any legal case arising from the definition. These, too, will be obvious opportunities to operationalise the definition and pursue the broader aims of those who promote it.

The BMT is co-controlled by the Aziz Foundation, created and funded by a controversial billionaire property developer, Asif Aziz. The Foundation is deeply hostile to Prevent, the government’s counter-extremism policy, saying it “actively harms Muslims.”⁷⁴ It funds groups which attack and undermine it, such as Mend⁷⁵ and its offshoots, the Islamophobia Response Unit⁷⁶ and Islamophobia Awareness Month.⁷⁷ The Foundation’s social media feeds have promoted divisive misinformation, for instance over the attack on police officers at Manchester Airport for which a Muslim man was recently convicted.⁷⁸

The Aziz Foundation funds and works closely with the Muslim Council of Britain, boycotted for many years by governments of all parties for its hardline views. Its

⁷² <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2025/may/03/its-been-traumatic-the-inside-story-of-tell-mamas-break-with-labour-government>

⁷³ <https://muslimnews.co.uk/news/how-the-british-muslim-trust-aims-to-lead-anti-muslim-hate-crime-monitoring/>

⁷⁴ <https://unherd.com/newsroom/islamophobia-watchdog-role-given-to-prevent-critic-2/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Social-Impact-Report-2019-23.pdf> - page 20

⁷⁶ <https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Social-Impact-Report-2019-23.pdf> - page 23

⁷⁷ <https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/aziz-foundation-launches-university-roadshow-during-islamophobia-awareness-month/>

⁷⁸ <https://x.com/AzizFndn/status/1816500219682623877>

trustee, Rahima Aziz, states that the Aziz Foundation's "goals and vision for the Muslim community [are] aligned with MCB."⁷⁹

The Foundation has close links with two more members of the "anti-Muslim hostility" definition working group, Gohir and Rt Hon Dominic Grieve KC. The Foundation has funded Gohir's Muslim Women's Network, paying for a staff member there.⁸⁰ One of the Aziz Foundation's own staff, Lina Charki, its internships, events and public engagements manager,⁸¹ sits on the advisory group of the Muslim Women's Network.⁸² Grieve, the working group's chair, chaired another project funded by the Aziz Foundation, the Citizens' Commission on Islam, Participation and Public Life – which also called on the government to "adopt a definition of anti-Muslim prejudice."⁸³

Special treatment certain to be counterproductive

In her response to the leak of the definition, Gohir claimed that "Muslims are not seeking special treatment" and that "the definition does not create new rights or protections." In the same statement, however, she contradicted herself, saying that opposition to a definition had been "dominated by those who do not want strengthened protections for Muslims."⁸⁴

It is clear that the latter of Gohir's statements is the operable one. A definition will create stronger protection and special status for members of one faith. It is an obvious and explicit act of two-tier policy, which in other areas – such as sentencing – the Government itself recognises as a highly damaging charge and is at pains to refute.

The "two-tier" charge is what the pollster Focaldata terms "cultureconomics," an issue that joins up voters' cultural *and* economic concerns, to deadly effect. Focaldata says that "of all statements that could predict whether someone

⁷⁹ <https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/the-muslim-council-of-britains-25th-year-anniversary-gala-dinner/>

⁸⁰ <https://x.com/AzizFndn/status/1653686786126651392>

⁸¹ <https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/lina-charki/>

⁸² <https://web.archive.org/web/20251109134921/https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/muslim-womens-advisory-group>

⁸³ https://www.azizfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Missing_Muslims_Report_execsummary.pdf

⁸⁴ <https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/mediaStatmentDetail.php?id=355>

would consider voting for a right-wing nationalist/populist party, the notion that minorities have better access to job opportunities than white people is the single best predictor of all.”⁸⁵

But it is not just a gift to the populist right - it will also empower the growing Muslim populist challenge to Labour. It will not alleviate Muslim discontent – it will stoke it, creating new opportunities for grievance politics, challenge and attack in every institution and workplace. Strengthening divisive extremes on both sides will be harmful to community cohesion, and to Muslims. Special treatment for Muslims will increase hostility towards them, not reduce it.

⁸⁵ <https://www.focldata.com/blog/bi-focal-15-where-will-the-culture-wars-go-next>