

A CRITIQUE OF THE UK GOVERNMENT'S "ANTI-MUSLIM HOSTILITY" DEFINITION:

Disingenuous, Double Standards, and the Normalisation of Islamophobia

CAGE INTERNATIONAL

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CAGE International is an independent advocacy organisation that aspires to a just world. We challenge War on Terror inspired state oppression and empower communities to dismantle the discourses and policies of the global War on Terror.

Premier Business Centre
47-49 Park Royal Road
London NW10 7LQ
United Kingdom

Helpline: 03000302243
Office: 020 7377 6700
General email: contact@cage.ngo
Media enquiries: press@cage.ngo

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INTRODUCTION

On 8 March 2026, after more than seven years of delay and deliberate exclusion of the most representative Muslim voices, the UK government unveiled what it described as a "historic" working definition of anti-Muslim hatred.[1] It called the result "anti-Muslim hostility." The term Islamophobia was not used once and references to race and racialisation were nowhere to be found. The definition explicitly and repeatedly protects the right to "ridicule and insult" Islam whilst at the same time being non-statutory, carrying no legal weight and requiring a proof of intent for each of its three component parts.[2]

This report argues that the definition is not protection, it is a performance. The "anti-Muslim hostility definition" is a document crafted not to shield Muslim communities from the hatred they experience every single day, but to give the government political cover while doing nothing to disrupt the structural, institutional, and ideological machinery that produces Islamophobia in the first place. Worse than mere inaction, the definition actively legitimises the most common and damaging forms of Islamophobia by framing them as protected speech, simultaneously sanitising the UK government's own record of failing and targeting the Muslim community.

This report documents that the definition was:

- Built through a disingenuous process that excluded the UK's largest Muslim organisations and consulted figures with documented records of Islamophobia;
- Linguistically and epistemically rigged, with the word "Islamophobia" itself suppressed and deliberately replaced;
- Structurally and legally weak, with an intent threshold that leading legal experts say most real discrimination cases cannot meet;
- Dismissive of lived Muslim reality, particularly the post-9/11 ideological shift that turned Islam itself into the target;
- A document of double standards, contrasting sharply at every point with how anti-semitism has been defined, resourced, and protected in the UK.

The evidence is overwhelming, the government's definition of 'anti-Muslim hostility' does not fight Islamophobia, it normalises it.

THE HISTORICAL RECORD, A TIMELINE OF DELIBERATE DELAY

1997–2018: The Long Road Before a Definition Even Existed

The term "Islamophobia" entered British political discourse in 1997 with the Runnymede Trust's landmark report, Islamophobia: A Challenge For Us All, launched by then-Home Secretary Jack Straw.[3] While Jack Straw himself was engaged in multiple instances of Islamophobia, the fact that he felt compelled to make this report speaks to the political pressure surrounding the issue of Islamophobia at the time. The report documented the reality of anti-Muslim prejudice, named it, and called for institutional and governmental responses in a way that had not been done before. Yet for the next twenty-one years, successive governments provided no follow up actions to the report, including a refusal to provide an equivalent definition of Islamophobia. Like many such initiatives, the report remained as a symbolic act of recognition for the struggles Muslims faced in the UK by the then government. The report shows that the British government has always had a sound understanding of the issue of Islamophobia and the ways in which it manifests itself. The government's lack of action in tackling Islamophobia has nothing to do with understanding it, but more to do with the fact that it has either chosen to ignore the issue completely or reframed it in a way that serves it's own political interests.

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims published its own limited working definition of Islamophobia in November 2018. It was the product of six months of consultation with academics, legislators, civil society organisations, criminal justice officials, media representatives, and hand-picked British Muslim citizens.[4] The definition read: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."[5] It was adopted by some within the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats, the Scottish Conservatives, and endorsed by more than 850 Muslim organisations and over 100 leading academics.[6] The UK government responded first with silence, and then it rejected the APPG definition entirely.

2019: The First Rejection and the Beginning of the Delay Machine

The APPG definition was not perfect, but it represented a step towards recognising the issue and a real push in dealing with its institutionalised nature. This is why it was significant that the Home Office minister Victoria Atkins stated plainly that the government did "not accept the need for a definitive definition of Islamophobia."[7] The comment was made in the immediate aftermath of the "Punish a Muslim Day" campaign, a nationally coordinated letter campaign inciting violence against Muslims.[8] To make such a public statement at the same time as this campaign shows how successive governments have not simply been indifferent to Muslim suffering, but in refusing to name the issue of Islamophobia, were in fact endorsing it as a fact of life.

In May 2019, Communities Secretary James Brokenshire formally announced that the government would not adopt the APPG definition, citing "practical and legal challenges."[9] Instead, it planned to appoint two independent advisors to produce a new definition, a shallow settlement that was eventually discarded by Boris Johnson when he became Prime Minister.[10] Michael Gove then actively buried the issue, having previously described "political Islam" as a "virus" and publicly opposing the adoption of any Islamophobia definition.[11] This meant that seven

years after the APPG published its definition, the government had still not acted to name the issue that was affecting the safety of Muslims across country. It is in this context that the new anti-Muslim hostility definition must be understood, as it comes after years of refusal to even recognise Islamophobia as an issue. Rather than representing a genuine effort to tackle Islamophobia, the "anti-Muslim hostility" definition is a deliberate mischaracterisation of Islamophobia to legitimise the governments failings in addressing it and the structures that perpetuate Islamophobia in the country.

The Contrast with Anti-semitism: Speed vs. Contempt

The contrast between the ways in which the UK government has treated the definition of anti-semitism compared to that of Islamophobia is so stark that it must be addressed. The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) adopted its working definition of anti-semitism in May 2016, and the UK government formally adopted it in December 2016 within six months.[12] Notably, the IHRA definition was more about equating anti-Zionism with anti-semitism than tackling instances of anti-semitism. Despite this, the swift adoption of the definition shows how the government can implement definitions when there is political will to do so. In the six months following the adoption of the IHRA definition, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government wrote to every local authority leader in the country actively encouraging its adoption.[13] The definition was subsequently adopted by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the judiciary, the devolved administrations, and over 200 local councils.[14]

By 2026, nine years had passed since the UK adopted the IHRA definition. Muslim News, one of the UK's oldest Muslim publications, was blunt in its assessment: "Nine years after the UK Government adopted a working definition of antisemitism in December 2016, efforts to officially adopt a comparable working definition of Islamophobia have been delayed once again."[15] The IHRA definition broadened the understanding of anti-semitism to include anti-Zionism, meaning that the racist political ideology of Zionism was one that the government was keener to protect than its own Muslim citizens. The message this timeline sends to British Muslims is explicit: your community's safety is not a government priority.

Zionism received a government-endorsed, institutionally embedded definition within six months. Muslims waited more than a decade for something weaker, legally unenforceable, and built without them. The adoption of a definition for Islamophobia within a structure that is inherently Islamophobic will always be limited, but the fact that the government has been reluctant to even pretend to engage with Muslim communities is telling.

THE PROCESS WAS RIGGED, WHO BUILT THIS DEFINITION AND FOR WHOM

Exclusion of the Largest Muslim Body in Britain

The most damning indictment of the definition's legitimacy is that it excluded the Muslim communities most affected by Islamophobia from the process of creating it in the first place. Even those hand-picked Muslim organisations who are known for collaborating with the government on such projects were excluded. One such organisation, The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), the UK's largest Muslim umbrella body, representing over 500 mosques, schools, and charities was formally barred from the consultation process.[16] The government maintained a policy of "disengagement" from the MCB dating back to 2009, rooted in anti-Palestinian sentiments within government. When the process to define anti-Muslim hatred was being conducted, the MCB were deliberately excluded.[17]

The MCB condemned its exclusion as "petty cancel culture."[18] Dr Wajid Akhter, the MCB's Secretary-General, stated after the definition was published: "The lack of transparency and meaningful engagement with grassroots community representatives throughout the process... we are unable to endorse such a definition at the present time. It is for the Government to convince and earn the trust of the British Muslim community."[19] The MCB also invoked the Macpherson Principle, the gold standard of UK anti-discrimination policy, established after the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1999 which makes clear that communities must have a central role in defining the hatred they experience.[20] The government violated this principle in producing a definition that the community it was meant to protect did not build, did not endorse, and could not trust.

Instead, the working group consulted several problematic figures. Trevor Phillips a politician who had been suspended from the Labour Party over Islamophobia allegations and was being investigated for comments about Pakistani Muslim men and Muslims' lack of commemoration of Remembrance Sunday.[21] It also consulted John Jenkins, a former diplomat who had endorsed social media posts described as anti-Muslim.[22] The process was overseen by a civil servant, Joel Salmon, who had prior associations with pro-Israel lobbying.[23] The neoconservative Policy Exchange think tank which has published work linking the term "Islamophobia" to threats to counterterrorism was also approached, though it declined to participate.[24] The process of crafting the definition was therefore deeply disingenuous. When considering those who were consulted, it is no surprise that the “anti-Muslim hostility” definition is deeply Islamophobic in its nature and does not serve in the interests of Muslims.

The Call for Evidence Was Deliberately Inadequate

The government's call for evidence ran from 16 June to 20 July 2025 a six-week window that in some cases limited responses to between 600 and 1,000 characters, the length of two to three text messages.[25] Muslims were expected to explain systemic employment discrimination, structural racism within public institutions, and the complex radicalisation of their faith in fewer characters than a social media post. Majid Iqbal, CEO of the Islamophobia Response Unit, put it bluntly: "This wasn't a meaningful consultation."[26] Once again, the performative call for evidence speaks to the intentions behind putting together the anti-Muslim hostility

definition. In limiting the scope of Islamophobia, the government's own inaction was justified. Without adequate evidence it is much easier to reframe the issue in a way that suits the government's own agenda rather than tackle Islamophobia in any meaningful way, further disenfranchising Muslims and their communities.

The Working Group's Own Recommendations Were Then Diluted

The working group that was initially consulted had included Muslim contributors and submitted its report to ministers in October 2025, but the government refused to publish it. A leaked draft confirmed as accurate by two members of the working group was reported by the BBC in December 2025.[27] When the final definition was published in March 2026, it departed significantly from what the working group had initially recommended.[28] The word "racialisation" which had been in the group's draft was removed and the term "Islamophobia" itself had been dropped. Iqbal stated: "I understand that the final definition departs significantly from what the working group proposed. Why weren't expert recommendations fully adopted? What changed, and why?".[29] The MCB's Secretary-General Dr Wajid Akhter described the final product as "a diminished version of that recommended by the Government's own Independent Working Group."[30] A definition that was first produced was then watered down behind closed doors by ministers. With no genuine public consultation, it was then published without endorsement from the communities it was meant to protect.

THE SUPPRESSION OF A WORD, WHY "ISLAMOPHOBIA" WAS

The Deliberate Erasure of the Term

In October 2025, Sky News reported that ministers were deliberately moving away from the word "Islamophobia" and toward “anti-Muslim hostility."[31] By December 2025, the BBC confirmed that the leaked working group definition contained no reference to the word "Islamophobia" at all.[32] This was not a neutral terminological preference but a politically calculated act with profound consequences.

Muslim communities and advocates have been actively discouraged from using the term "Islamophobia" and pushed toward substitute framings such as "anti-Muslim hatred," "xenophobia," or "anti-migrant hate."[33] The goal of this substitution is to prevent Islamophobia from being embedded in public and political discourse the way the term "anti-semitism" is. A specifically recognised, widely feared, institutionally acknowledged category of hate triggers immediate social and political consequences when named. In deliberately failing to mention the term even once, the “anti-Muslim hostility” definition shows that the government is yet again unwilling to deal with the actual threat facing Muslims in the UK.

Majid Iqbal of the Islamophobia Response Unit (IRU) was direct about why this matters: "The internationally recognised term 'Islamophobia', like homophobia or transphobia, better captures the systemic, often unconscious, nature of this form of prejudice."[34] Removing the term does not just alter the vocabulary, it removes the conceptual framework that enables systemic prejudice to be identified, named, and challenged. An instance of "hostility" is something you can witness, "Islamophobia" is something you can diagnose structurally. Dr Salman Al-Azami, senior lecturer in Language, Media and Communication at Liverpool Hope University, stated: "The Labour Party, then in opposition, endorsed [the APPG Islamophobia] definition. It is not clear why the current Labour government refuses to recognise hostilities against Muslims as Islamophobia."[35]

Anti-semitism Retains Its Name; Islamophobia Does Not

The double standard is glaring. The IHRA definition of anti-semitism has been institutionalised under its name "anti-semitism" across the entire apparatus of British public life.[36] No comparable pressure was applied to rename it "anti-Jewish hostility" or "anti-Jewish hatred". The term carries weight precisely because it is specific, named, and feared. When a politician, journalist, or institution is accused of anti-semitism, that charge lands with cultural and institutional gravity. By contrast, through the new government definition, the equivalent charge of Islamophobia cannot officially be made in the same way. Journalists can report ‘anti-Muslim hostility incidents’, politicians can condemn ‘anti-Muslim hate’, but the systemic, racialising phenomenon that academic scholars from Runnymede (1997) to the APPG (2018) have consistently identified and named as Islamophobia is left without a name. James Renton, a historian at Edge Hill University, wrote in Al Jazeera:

> *“This is a mistake; hatred of Islam lies at the very heart of racism towards Muslims. And while the British state fails to even name Islamophobia, Muslims face an unprecedented level of danger. The unwillingness of the British government to name and confront Islamophobia is a scandal.”*[37]

THE LINGUISTICS OF THE DEFINITION, WHAT THE WORDING DOES AND DOES NOT DO

The Definition in Full

The government's definition states:

> *"Anti-Muslim hostility is intentionally engaging in, assisting or encouraging criminal acts – including acts of violence, vandalism, harassment, or intimidation, whether physical, verbal, written or electronically communicated – that are directed at Muslims because of their religion or at those who are perceived to be Muslim, including where that perception is based on assumptions about ethnicity, race or appearance."*
>
> *"It is also the prejudicial stereotyping of Muslims, or people perceived to be Muslim including because of their ethnic or racial backgrounds or their appearance, and treating them as a collective group defined by fixed and negative characteristics, with the intention of encouraging hatred against them, irrespective of their actual opinions, beliefs or actions as individuals."*
>
> *"It is engaging in unlawful 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."*[38]

The Intent Catastrophe

The single most damaging word found throughout this definition: "intentionally" or "intention."[39] Every element of the definition requires demonstrable, provable intent and yet this is not how discrimination, racism or Islamophobia works. Majid Iqbal, whose organisation has handled hundreds of discrimination cases with a 100% employment tribunal success rate, was categorical: "This definition sets an intent threshold that most discrimination cases cannot meet. Our casework shows that Muslims face bias, institutional barriers, and micro-aggressions that aren't intentional, but are no less harmful."[40] He gave a specific example: "Recruitment processes excluding Muslims with Islamic names typically reflect unconscious bias."[41] Such incidents have no provable intent whilst being deeply Islamophobic in effect, and most notably are not covered by the anti-Muslim hostility definition.

As Dr Amina Easat-Daas, senior lecturer in Politics at De Montfort University, argues by focusing on "hostility" rather than racism, the definition "places greater emphasis on individual actors and dismisses systemic discrimination."[42] She warned that this creates "a hierarchy of racism" putting Muslims in a structurally weaker position than other religious minorities protected under British law.[43] The definition restricts forms of discrimination covered by the Equalities Act 2010 when it comes to Muslims, rather than addressing why the Equalities Act has not been able to tackle Islamophobia, the “anti-Muslim hostility” definition restricts what is considered as anti-Muslim hostility in the first place. The Islamophobia Response Unit itself confirmed that it would not adopt or endorse the definition because of these issues.

The Non-Statutory Emptiness

The definition is non-statutory so it is not legally binding. It carries no enforcement mechanism, does not create new crimes nor does it change the law. The government explicitly said so multiple times, framing this as a positive feature which it is not, it is an absence. By framing it as a positive thing, the government admits that this is a deliberate feature of the definition.
The IHRA anti-semitism definition, while also

technically non-statutory, was nevertheless adopted by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, the judiciary, and over 200 local councils.[44] It was actively championed by the government, who wrote to every local authority encouraging adoption. The “anti-Muslim hostility” definition comes with no such institutional push. Three months after its announcement by the promised "anti-Muslim hostility tsar" the definition's primary implementation mechanism remained entirely unfilled, with no clear Terms of Reference, no allocated budget, and no transparent path forward. The MCB described this delay as "three wasted months."[45] The government announced the definition on 8 March 2026 and as of July 2026, the position meant to operationalise it does not exist. This suggests any practical moves to address Islamophobia was never part of the plan for the “anti-Muslim hostility” definition.

No Examples, Unlike IHRA

The IHRA anti-semitism definition is accompanied by eleven detailed contemporary examples of what it considers anti-semitism to look like in practice in media, politics, public life, education, and online spaces.[46] They provide institutions, courts, HR departments, and journalists with specific guidance on what constitutes anti-semitism according to the definition which equates anti-Zionist sentiments and criticisms of Israel to anti-semitism.

The government's “anti-Muslim hostility” definition provides no such examples. Comparatively, the APPG definition, which the government rejected, was accompanied by an extensive list of contemporary examples including making mendacious, dehumanising, or stereotypical allegation about Muslims; applying double standards by requiring of Muslims behaviours not expected of any other group; accusing Muslims collectively of being responsible for the actions of individual Muslims; and using tropes about Muslims as "sex groomers" or inherently violent.[47] All of these detailed illustrations of how Islamophobia is experienced by Muslims across the UK was ignored.

THE IDEOLOGICAL ARCHITECTURE OF HATE PRE- AND POST-9/11 SHIFTS

Pre-9/11: "Islam is Fine, But Muslims Can Be Bad"

To understand what the definition fails to address requires understanding how the architecture of anti-Muslim hatred has evolved. Before 11 September 2001, the dominant mode of anti-Muslim prejudice in the West operated through a particular logic, Islam as a religion could be respected or tolerated in principle, but individual Muslims particularly those seen as "fundamentalist," "extreme," or insufficiently integrated were the problem. The hatred was directed at Muslims as a cultural or ethnic other, while maintaining a nominal deference to the religion itself. This is the framework that Mahmoud Mamdani identified in 2004 in his book Good Muslim, Bad Muslim, when he described the practice of dividing Muslims into "moderate" and "extremist" as fuelling prejudice against all Muslims.[48] The 1997 Runnymede Report has also long documented this at the community level.[49]

Post-9/11: "Some Muslims Are Fine, But Islam Is the Problem"

After 11 September 2001, the architecture of hatred towards Muslims underwent a fundamental ideological shift. The target moved from individual Muslims to Islam itself as an ideological belief system. Now the logic became: some Muslims can be tolerated, but if you genuinely believe in Islam, if you are devout, practising or politically engaged as a Muslim then you are inherently suspect, likely radicalised and potentially dangerous.

As one academic analysis documents, positive representations of Islam in this period actually served to deepen Islamophobia by "framing Islam as a corruptible religion that can be easily perverted, hijacked, and weaponized".[50] This conceptualisation of Islam legitimises the policing of Muslim-presenting people."[51] The shift from targeting "bad Muslims" to targeting Islam itself as an ideology created the foundation for counter-terrorism strategies like Prevent, media framing of Muslims as a fifth column, and political discourse portraying Islamic practice itself as incompatible with "British values."

The post-9/11 shift is precisely what the government's "anti-Muslim hostility" definition refuses to address. Instead, the definition explicitly and deliberately protects the right to "ridicule or insult" Islam and to "portray it in a manner that some of its adherents might find disrespectful."[52] It carves out protection not for Muslims but for those who attack their faith. In the post-9/11 ideological landscape, where the religion itself has been made the threat, a definition that focuses exclusively on hatred of persons while actively protecting hatred of the faith fundamentally disregards the actual mechanism by which Islamophobia operates. You cannot fully separate hatred of the religion from hatred of its adherents in a context where belief in Islam has itself been constructed as a threat.

The Prevent Programme: State-Sanctioned Islamophobia Without a Name

The Prevent counter-terrorism programme is perhaps the most powerful evidence of how the government institutionalises the very Islamophobia it claims to oppose. Prevent was

launched in 2005 and was made a legal duty in 2015, requiring teachers, doctors, and even nursery staff to report children and adults for "signs of radicalisation."[53] Its formal remit covered all forms of extremism but over 65% of Prevent referrals were Muslim in 2017, despite Muslims constituting less than 5% of the UK population.[54] Before the Home Office stopped disaggregating data, 39% of child referrals were Muslim, and 38% were ethnically Asian in a population where these groups represent only 5–6% of the UK population.[55] The UN Special Rapporteur on counter-terrorism, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, stated that Prevent has had "a negative and discriminatory effect on Muslim communities" and that its implementation is "inconsistent" with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.[56] The Committee called for an immediate end to the targeting of specific groups of children by counter-terrorism measures, citing the disproportionate impact on Muslim children. She noted the practical disparity as one where:

> *"Antisemitism is being publicised, being acted on. But Islamophobia is not being acted on, it's not being publicised.*[57]

A definition of "anti-Muslim hostility" that requires proof of intent to harm a specific Muslim person will never, under any circumstances capture the institutional Islamophobia embedded in Prevent. The schools that refer children for questioning by the police for expressing sympathy with Palestinians do not act with "the intention of encouraging hatred" against a Muslim "collective group."[58] They acted through the institutionalised logic of a state apparatus that treats Muslim belief as inherently suspect. That is Islamophobia, the government's definition does not cover it, rather the government's own policies produce it.

ISLAMOPHOBIA V. ANTI-SEMITISM: DOUBLE STANDARD THROUGHOUT THE SYSTEM

Definition Timeline

Event	Anti-semitism	Anti-Muslim Hatred
First major public report demanding definition	Mid-20th century	Runnymede Trust, 1997
Working definition adopted by government	Dec-16	Mar-26
Time from major APPG-equivalent recommendation to adoption	Months	8+ years
Term preserved in definition	"Anti-semitism"	"Islamophobia" (dropped)
Specific examples included	11 examples	None
Statutory or near-statutory status	Institutionally embedded	Non-statutory with no legal force
Government championed adoption to all public bodies	Yes	No institutional push
Definition produced with community leadership	IHRA international body	Largest Muslim body (MCB) excluded
Monitoring organisation funded stably	Community Security Trust (CST)	Tell MAMA (an astroturfed government supported project) was defunded at record-high hate incidents. MEND and IRU not engaged with at all.
Special representative appointed	Anti-semitism envoy, 2017	Anti-Muslim hostility tsar promised March 2026, still vacant July 2026

Tell MAMA Defunded at the Moment of Record Hate

In March 2025, while the government was consulting on its "anti-Muslim hostility" definition, all government funding for Tell MAMA was withdrawn. Tell MAMA was the governments selected partner in documenting anti-Muslim hate incidents and was deeply problematic for Muslim communities. It reduced its work to reporting on incidents of hate crime or unemployment discrimination, doing almost nothing to address the ways in which Islamophobia operated structurally. Despite the political role Tell MAMA played in minimising Islamophobia, it handled nearly 11,000 incidents in the 2023–2024 period alone, documenting a 43% rise in anti-Muslim incidents from the previous year, a 73% surge in physical assaults, and recorded 2024 as the highest number of anti-Muslim hate incidents ever documented.[59] The government also continued to refuse any engagement with community led organisations like MEND and IRU who were themselves recording anti-Muslim hate crimes.

The government defunded the Muslim hate monitoring organisation at the exact moment Muslim hate crime reached its highest recorded level in UK history, during the same period it was supposedly drafting a definition to combat that very hatred. By comparison, the Community Security Trust (CST), which monitors anti-semitism, has received consistent and sustained government support.[60] It has a well-resourced infrastructure, established government relationships, and an institutionally embedded status. CST plays a far more political role within the landscape of UK life, often bringing spurious claims of anti-semitism where there is a genuine and legitimate critique of Israel, these incidents then inflate its statistics of anti-semitism. The contrast with how their data is received as opposed to organisations within the Muslim community, such as the Islamophobia Response Unit is indicative of how a much smaller demographic are protected by the government far more than Muslims. This is all while Muslims make up 6.5% of the UK's population and are the most discriminated community after the traveller community.[61] This treatment by the state is not subtle, it is structural.

The Protecting What Matters Strategy: Protecting Muslims by Policing Them

The Protecting What Matters social cohesion strategy, published alongside the definition, presents the paradox at the heart of the government's approach. In the same document that adopts an "anti-Muslim hostility" definition, the government:

- Embeds the 2024 extremism definition across government, which primarily targets Islamist extremism as the "predominant threat"
- Establishes new surveillance mechanisms for campuses, speaker events, and student activities
- Proposes a "State of Extremism" annual report rooted in counter-extremism infrastructure
- Empowers the Charity Commission to shut down organisations and remove trustees[62]

The pattern is consistent and documented, Muslims are offered narrow symbolic protections while being simultaneously subjected to expanded surveillance. The definition protects the lone Muslim victim of a physical attack whilst the strategy expands the apparatus that treats Muslim political and religious expression as inherently threatening. Jahangir Mohammed of the Ayaan Institute stated: "It is not a strategy to protect British Muslims but to further embed Islamophobia in state policies, creating a system where Muslims are monitored, censored, and penalised."[63]

THE ALTERNATIVE: THE APPG DEFINITION AND ITS FATE

The (All-Party Parliamentary Groups) APPG definition of Islamophobia, published in 2018, captured some of what the government's definition entirely fails to:

- The racial nature of the hatred: "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism" recognising that Muslims are racialised, targeted not just for their individual beliefs but for their collective, perceived, embodied Muslimness;
- Collective responsibility tropes: making mendacious, dehumanising, or stereotypical allegations about Muslims "as a collective group," such as conspiracy theories about Muslim entryism or demographic "takeover";
- Double standards: applying loyalty tests to Muslims not required of any other group;
- Historical tropes: using images such as the claim that "Muhammad was a paedophile" or that Muslims spread Islam "by the sword" to characterise Muslims as inherently violent;
- Collective responsibility for state actions: holding Muslim citizens responsible for the actions of Muslim-majority states.[64]

The APPG definition is problematic in that the experts it brought together from within government are the very people who have perpetuated the very Islamophobia the definition claims to address. But what is worth noting is that despite the fact that the definition was built by Members of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, it was ignored because the government has consistently refused to acknowledge the root cause of Islamophobia. Professor Nasar Meer of the University of Glasgow, one of the UK's leading scholars of anti-Muslim racism, said the “anti-Muslims hostility” definition's "central weakness" lay precisely in what was left out: the systemic, the structural, the racial architecture that makes Islamophobia a form of racism rather than merely a collection of "hostile" individual acts.[65]

Rather than recognise this, the government produced its own misleading definition, excluded the community from making it and then called it "historic."[66]

THE DEEPER PICTURE, NORMALISATION THROUGH DEFINITION

Nowhere is the normalisation of Islamophobia more obvious than in the ways in which Islam and Muslims are represented in the media. The 50% bias rate in UK media coverage of Muslims documented by the Centre for Media Monitoring's State of British Media 2025 report, which analysed 40,000 items of data tells the story of what happens when Islamophobia remains unchallenged.[67] Currently, 70% of UK media reporting associated Muslims with negative behaviour with the worst bias recorded in The Spectator, followed by GB News.[68]

The IRU's 2025 Annual Report documented 906 incidents investigated between 2021 and 2025. There was a 377% surge in reported incidents between 2023 and 2024, a 100% employment tribunal success rate in Islamophobia cases and a 700% surge in hate mail targeting IRU staff.[69] Meanwhile, discrimination now accounted for 37% of all IRU cases, with average employment tribunal settlements reaching £43,234.[70]

These figures, along with the fact that anti-Muslim hate crimes represent 45% of all religious hate crimes, rising by 19% year on year shows a community under sustained, escalating, and structurally embedded attack.[71] The government's response was an "anti-Muslim hostility" definition that covers virtually none of it.

POLICY-LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS

In the wake of the new Burnham administration, there needs to be a concerted effort to repair the damage and resultant obfuscation by seeking action in the areas set out below.

Immediate Government Actions Required

1 **Reinstate the term "Islamophobia" in official government usage.** The deliberate suppression of this term has conceptual, political, and legal consequences. The government must commit to using "Islamophobia" as a category in official statistics, policy documents, and public discourse as it uses "anti-semitism."

2 **Mandate Islamophobia definition adoption across public bodies.** As was done with the IHRA anti-semitism definition, the Secretary of State should write to every local authority, public body, NHS trust, university, and police force encouraging and tracking adoption.

3 **Engage with community-initiated Islamophobia projects.** The defunding of Tell MAMA means little in relation to trust within the community as it was a project that was astroturfed by the government to minimise how Islamophobia is understood, however this does not mean that the government should not be engaging with Muslim community organisations such as the IRU to understand the landscape of Islamophobia. Stable, multi-year, ring-fenced government funding must be restored to an independent, community-trusted organisation.

4 **End role of Anti-Muslim Hostility Special Representative immediately.** One of the ways that the Muslim community has been continually side-lined from speaking effectively on its own issues is through the roles created by the government that act as 'trusted' interlocutors for the community- this form of false consent must end- instead the government should engage with organisations with long track records of serving their communities.

5 **Include worked examples in the definition.** The IHRA anti-semitism definition includes eleven illustrative examples. The government must commission and publish equivalent contemporary examples for Islamophobia, drawn from casework by the IRU and community organisations.

6 **Remove the triple intent requirement.** The requirement for "intentional" conduct in all three pillars of the definition must be rejected. Following existing Equality Act principles, any definition relating to Islamophobia should cover the effects of both direct and indirect discrimination, not just intent.

7 **Conduct a genuine, community-led review.** Muslim civil society organisations must be included in any ongoing review process. The exclusion of community organisations from their own definition-making is a violation of the Macpherson Principle and must be rectified.

Community-Level Recommendations

1 **Do not endorse or adopt the government definition.** Following the MCB's lead, Muslim organisations, mosques, schools, and civil society groups should decline to endorse the government's "anti-Muslim hostility" definition.

2 **Build a definition by the community, for the community.** Muslim communities should be empowered to articulate their experiences on their own terms. A definition built by the community should recognise the British government's domestic and foreign policies as the root cause for the institutionalisation of Islamophobia.

3 **Legal challenges.** The IRU's 100% employment tribunal success rate demonstrates that existing equality law, properly applied, can challenge Islamophobia effectively. Community legal clinics should be developed and resourced so that victims can access this pathway without cost barriers.

4 **Media literacy and accountability.** Given that 50% of UK media coverage of Muslims was found to be biased in 2025, community organisations should actively document, challenge, and file Ofcom and IPSO complaints against bias. Media monitoring should be treated as a community protection function.

5 **Coalition building with other racialised communities.** The structural parallels between anti-Muslim racism and other forms of racialised discrimination particularly as recognised under the Equality Act provide the basis for cross-community alliances that can advocate more effectively for institutional reform.

6 **Political accountability.** Muslim communities should develop explicit, transparent political accountability frameworks: tracking which politicians voted against, delayed, diluted, or championed Islamophobia protections, and building this into electoral engagement and political advocacy.

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