#ContestingIslamophobia: Representation and Appropriation in Mediated Activism

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Executive Summary

The project examined the **dynamics, potentials and limitations of counter-narratives[1]** against Islamophobia on Twitter. We examined over **3 million tweets** following three 'trigger' events: **Brexit (2019/20), the Christchurch mosque terror attack (2019)** and **Coronavirus (2020)** as well as interviewing key actors who engaged on Twitter during this time. The research took place in a specific time period that saw stricter moderation standards on Twitter following a purge of far-right accounts **after the Capitol Hill riots** and **before Elon Musk's acquisition of the platform.**

- **Out of our ten datasets**, **four were more supportive towards Muslims, three were evenly balanced** between being supportive and anti-Muslim, **three were more Islamophobic**. At times then, the counter-narrative against Islamophobia became the norm.

- Through its longitudinal and event specific approach, the research demonstrates how platform moderation can reduce the amount of hate speech online. However, automated methods alone are not an adequate solution.

- **There were distinct geo-political patterns** in moderation practices. US content was subject to tighter moderation, with evidence of a greater number of deleted tweets and suspended accounts but this was not the case in other contexts such as South Asia.

- In this context, social media platforms can be useful spaces for meaningful activism against racist and religious prejudice opening up spaces of agency and solidarity (see Recommendations).

- However, we witnessed the demise of hashtag activism as other platform tools/tactics for activism became more popular.

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1. In this case, we are defining counter-narratives as narratives that challenge historically negative media coverage about Muslims as well as those that counter stereotypical tropes online.

- The success or failure of counter-narratives depends on the relationship between specific events, platform affordances, and user interactions (informed by wider social practices and knowledge of the platform).

- Nevertheless, we also witnessed 'a long tail of racism' whereby, after initial support following trigger events fell away, this was replaced by well-rehearsed right-wing debates and tropes about Muslims.

- In this case, activists felt it is important not to leave the counter-narrative space empty, to allow this to be filled by hate. In this way, it is evident that **racist narratives and their counter-narratives are intimately entangled and help sustain each other.**

- Counter-narratives have, therefore, an uneven visibility, according to a range of factors, but our project shows the active mobilisation to counter and reframe mainstream narratives over time.

- This research points to the importance of attending to event specific conditions and contexts in which counter-narratives form. These are not singular or straightforward, but **this report aims to demonstrate some of the patterns and allegiances present at this particular moment in time.**

Acknowledgements

The original motivation for this research was driven by concerns about the negative representations of Muslims and Islam in mainstream media and how social media may offer a place for alternative voices and self-representation. Initially following a negative hashtag in 2016, #stopislam, we noted how this spread due to people sharing *counter-narratives* against its original message – narratives that opposed its negative premise about Islam (see Poole et al, 2019). However, this support proved to be fairly transient and quickly dropped away allowing space for far-right interest groups to continue circulating well-rehearsed tropes about Muslims and Islam. This raised questions for us about the potentials and limitations of social media as a place for counter-narrative work. The current project extended the focus of analysis to three different 'trigger' events (Awan and Zempi, 2015) over different time periods; Brexit (2019/20), the Christchurch terror attack (2019) and the Coronavirus pandemic (2020) on the social media platform Twitter, (see methods section) and combined this with network analysis, interviews with key actors in the online debates, and some mainstream media analysis to develop a better understanding of how hate speech gains visibility, and identify key difficulties and useful strategies for contesting it.

Why this? Why now?

Following the well-documented rise of extreme-right politics in Europe and North America (Kellner, 2016; Emcke, 2019), there has been widespread concern about social media being used in ways that normalises xenophobia (Siapera, 2019) and propagates disinformation about minority groups (Farkas et al, 2017; Horsti, 2016).

However, the same media that have enabled the rapid spread of hate speech also offer opportunities to contest it: with platforms such as Twitter allowing for the formation of counter-narratives that gain circulation in the wider public sphere (Dawes, 2017; Jackson and Foucault Welles, 2015). Much research has suggested that we operate in digital echo chambers (Karlsen et al, 2017) but the construction of counter-narratives offers an instance of more complex interactions between groups with opposing politics. In fact, we argue that through these dynamics, in which the spread of disinformation offers a focal point to debunk it, counter-narratives are often intimately entangled with the narratives they seek to oppose and ultimately work to sustain each other.

#stopIslam, which gained traction on Twitter after the Brussels terror attack, 2016, was a key example of how the US right were using mainstream social media platforms tactically to spread and intensify long-standing discourses about Muslims and Islam through the appropriation of events elsewhere (Poole, 2002; Richardson, 2004; Poole et al, 2020).

Despite the strength of the contestation against this hashtag, at the time, our findings demonstrated the role of tightly-knit groups of self-identified conservative, often Trump-supporting actors in closing down narratives against hate. In the development of this research project, it was evident that an 'insiders' 'outsiders' discourse had become a central component of mainstream political campaigning (Ahmed and Matthes, 2016; Evolvi, 2016) around Brexit, the US presidential race and in various European elections. When we started this research in 2020 therefore, Brexit was still the key focus of political debate but this was quickly replaced once the Covid pandemic took hold.

Not only this, but the shifting political climate had an impact on the platform's moderation standards as the Capitol Hill riots (January 2020) led to a purging of accounts linked to Q-Anon. Our interviews took place just as Elon Musk's acquisition of the platform was finalised, meaning that the research took place in very particular historical moment. However, despite this tighter moderation, the research also responds to concerns that the relationships between mainstream, social, and alternative media in the contemporary political moment has led to extreme right media content migrating from the margins into the public sphere, in ways that enable Islamophobic rhetoric to be reproduced as 'common sense' opinion on social media even if the extreme actors themselves have been blocked (Siapera, 2019). Within a media environment that has enabled xenophobic sentiment to become normalised, this research explores the potential for counter-narratives to gain visibility and contest Islamophobic discourse. Social media platforms like Twitter are significant in this regard; due to routinely being treated as a news source in their own right, these platforms often allow counter-narratives to gain visibility and establish frames that inform mainstream media reports of particular events (Heiss et al, 2019).

1. Introduction

Research aims:

The project aims to address the central question: **What are the dynamics of online counter-narratives against Islamophobia and what political potentials and/or limitations do they offer?**[1]

One of the hypotheses of this research is that the transnational dimension of contemporary counter-narratives against hate is particularly significant in constituting the dynamics of counter-narratives. Adopting a focus on this aspect of counter-narratives, therefore, will enable us to render visible the broader 'media ecologies' that support – or in some instances undermine – counter-narrative formation. On this basis we formulated the following research objectives:

1. To examine the construction and contestation of representations of Islam on Twitter, following three major political incidents (sections 5-7).

2. To identify the actors operating in these discursive events and the interactions between them with particular attention to transnational dynamics and examples of appropriation (sections 5-7).

3. To analyse the symbiotic relationship between Twitter and the mainstream media.[2]

4. To interview significant actors in the debates (activists and journalists) and their strategies and role in disseminating related content (section 8).

5. To develop a conceptual and methodological framework for assessing the political significance of tensions between counter-publics and digital technologies (section 3).

6. To assist anti-racist groups in the development of strategies for both analysing and combating online hate speech (section 10).

In adopting these objectives, we aim to demonstrate not only the complicated processes and practices of communication involved in the circulation and contestation of hate speech but also the shifting geo-temporal patterns of far-right activism. In highlighting the specific tensions but also opportunities that social media create for communities seeking to contest disinformation circulated, we hope this report will assist both activist groups, policy makers and social media companies in tackling digital hate in the contemporary political context.[3]

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1. We are using the widely endorsed APPG (All Party Parliamentary Group) on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia as 'Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness'. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599c3d2febbd1a90cffdd8a9/t/5bfd1ea3352f531a6170ceee/1543315109493/Islamophobia+Defined.pdf

2. As a secondary aim, this will be discussed in our forthcoming book (MUP 2026).

3. We understand disinformation as false information which has the intent to mislead whereas misinformation may be unintentional.

What are counter-narratives?

Narratives are the stories the media tells through their construction (language, form, codes and conventions, Berger, 1997). **Media narratives** not only reflect and reinforce existing social values but have a role in constructing them (Hall, 1997). In doing so, they also construct realities through the language we use to describe others, the way we perceive and interact with others, and the way others are treated, in legislation for example. There is a substantial body of research that shows how narratives in the mainstream media, particularly in the UK press (Poole, 2002; Richardson, 2004; Baker et al, 2013) but also globally (Ahmed and Matthes, 2016; Mertens & de Smaele, 2016) have portrayed Muslims through a simplistic, homogenised and negative framework. Even where media organisations try to present a more balanced approach, the topics they associate with Muslims tends to be restricted around issues of terror, conflict, extremism and cultural difference (Poole, 2019). Early appraisals of social media (and digital media more generally) suggested that it could offer a space for the positive self-representation of minority groups (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2004), a place for **counter-narratives** or **counter-publics** to form (de Jong, Shaw, & Stammers 2005, Downey and Fenton 2003).

Counter-narratives:

The idea of counter-publics has emerged from a Habermasian idea of the public sphere (encouraging democratic public conversations). In online spaces counter-publics can form offering counter or alternative narratives which may not be in line with mainstream ideas or debates (Fraser, 1990). The depth and dynamics of these counter-narratives may differ, from quick counter-messaging that interacts with dominant narratives, to countering, even deconstructing, wider stereotypical ideas, to offering alternative narratives (Ernst et al, 2017). Dominant narratives may be wider conventional tropes, Muslim men as misogynist, for example, or relate to specific content or context as in the case of #stopislam. In 2016, we showed how this hashtag became viral due to the counter-narratives that were being shared against its original intention (Poole et al, 2019). These counter-narratives sought to dis-associate Muslims from terrorism therefore not only countering the message of #stopislam but of wider discourse in mainstream media.

Social media activism:

Early online media was perceived as having the potential for digital activism, particularly for progressive politics, through the spread of counter-narratives and its ability to support counter-public formations (Ruiz, 2014). The characteristics of digital media, its accessibility, the ability to make transnational real-time connections outside traditional and restrictive production and distribution channels, made it a promising tool for social change. Yet this promise has been muted by its infrastructure and ownership which monetises content and rewards controversy. Activists have argued that it cannot sustain the type of interpersonal relations that can be formed offline (Poole and Giraud, 2021).

Solidarities are perceived as being too loose, transient, individualised and weak to lead to the kind of collectivities needed for ongoing activism that might result in social transformation (Nikunen, 2019). Rather than continue a line of thinking that advances an idea of the relationship between digital technologies and activism as either constraining or enabling, we want to argue that as the use of technologies is now unavoidable, we should consider the dynamics of mediated activism with the view that narratives and counter-narratives both amplify and sustain each other. Through this entanglement, we can then examine the tensions that arise in the interactions between the users, specific events and the platforms to gain a better understanding of how technologies can be used in productive ways.

Trigger events:

Siapera et al (2018: 50) define trigger events as 'Topics or themes that tend to elicit reactions including racially-loaded toxic comments'. These might not always be one off incidents (such as the Christchurch terror attack), but have different characteristics, as we have found with our own study, including events and topics that speak to current social issues or tensions, as with the Covid pandemic in this study; or themes around identities such race and nation as with Brexit in this study. Awan and Zempi (2015) in their study of online Islamophobic hate crime note that being a visible Muslim, such as veiling can be a trigger for verbal and physical attacks. Both studies argue that it can be media coverage rather than the event itself that might be a trigger for the circulation of online hate speech. Awan and Zempi (2018) identify specific trigger events/topics and mapped some of the Islamophobic hate speech, threats and attacks on Muslims resulting from this, following, in particular, various terrorist attacks and the rise of populist political movements.

Hate speech:

Although this study does not focus solely on hate speech, it is important to explain how we are defining this given this is a contested concept (Gagliardone et al, 2015; Siapera et al, 2018). The term has only been recently popularised with the growth of both identity politics and the far-right across Western contexts since the 1980s. We are using a broad definition of hate speech in line with the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers' Recommendation 97(20) as comprising of 'all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin'.[1]

Within this, we include all expressions of hate based on identity that might not be considered unlawful, which can often focus on intent, depending on the context. In the UK, religious and racial hatred is defined and outlawed by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008.[2] Both of these specify either 'intent' or making 'threats' to be unlawful. However, the police and Crown Prosecution Service define hate crime as the offender having:

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1. https://rm.coe.int/168071e53e
2. www.opsil.gov.uk, https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/4/pdfs/ukpga_20080004_en.pdf

'demonstrated hostility based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity or been motivated by hostility based on race, religion, disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity'.[3]

They claim to have prosecuted 10,000 cases in 2023 with 86% being successful (ibid). Tell Mama, a charity that monitors anti-Muslim hate crime in the UK has reported year on year increases since its inception, exacerbated recently by the Israel-Gaza conflict (Tell Mama, 2023). They recently reported that anti-Muslim incidents had tripled in the four months following the Hamas attacks on the 7 October 2023.[4]

Online hate speech is defined by The Protocol of the Council of Europe, as:

'Racist and xenophobic material means any written material, any image or any other representation of ideas or theories, which advocates, promotes or incites hatred, discrimination or violence, against any individual or group of individuals based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin, as well as religion if used as a pretext for any of these factors." (Art. 2–1) (cited in Rudnicki and Steiger, 2020).

X does have a policy on 'hateful conduct':

'You may not directly attack other people on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, caste, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, religious affiliation, age, disability, or serious disease.'

It tries to balance this with its policy on free speech by focussing on incitement - incitement to spread fear, harass, economically discriminate, and to violence through its violent speech policy. Given the recent high profile reduction of human moderators on X, this is a mostly reactionary policy that operates through people reporting breaches. Enforcement occurs through downgrading posts to suspending accounts.

https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/hateful-conduct-policy

3. https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/hate-crime
4. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-68374372
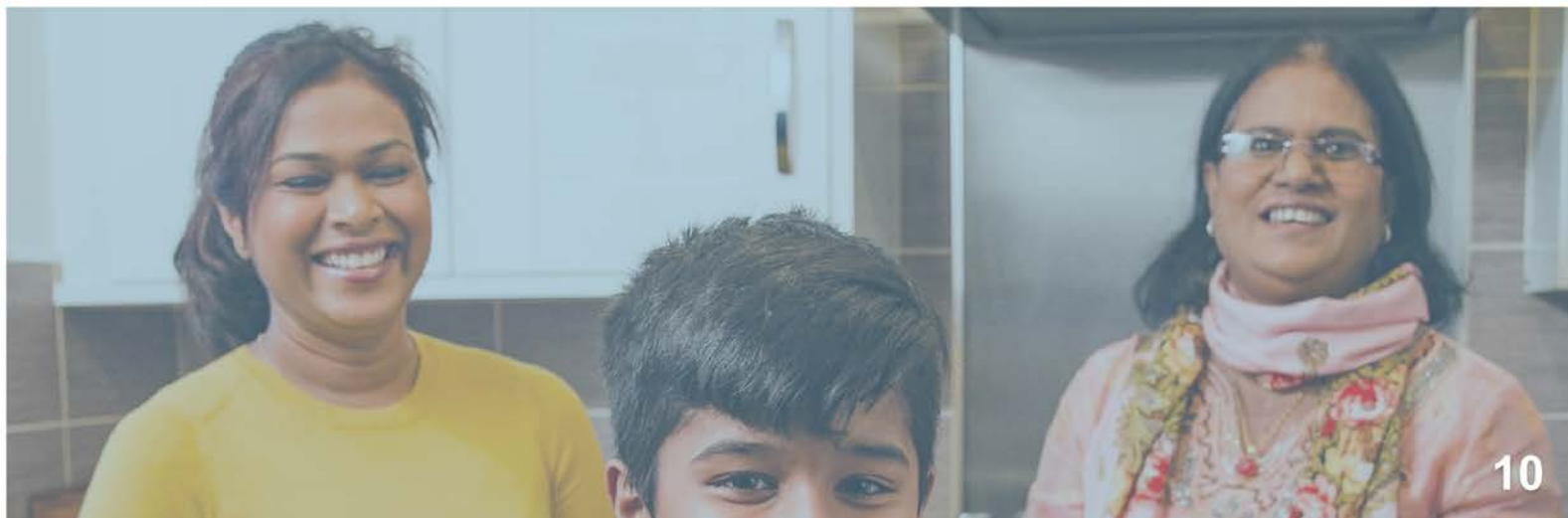
2. Conceptual Approach

The UK has recently introduced the Online Safety Act 2023 with the aim of 'ensuring platforms have systems and processes in place to deal with illegal and harmful content and their associated risk'.[5] However, it has been criticised by civil society organisations for its 'inadequate provisions to safeguard groups with protected characteristics designated under the Equality Act 2010' (Community Policy Forum, 2022). In Scotland, a new Hate Crime and Public Order Act (2024) has introduced the offence of 'stirring up hatred' both on and offline but only applies to Scotland. Regulation continues to be a contested area of debate due to competing tensions between notions of journalistic freedom and free speech, and reducing online harms. The UK has historically lent towards the former (self-regulation), particularly in relation to press freedom, with tighter regulation of broadcasting, but the political economy of the big tech industries, being globalised and having corporate power results in a complex and challenging environment for legislation. This should not, however, be an excuse for a laissez-faire approach and governments are under increasing pressure to hold tech companies to account. Unfortunately, for many, the Online Safety Act does not go far enough in delivering good digital regulation and making people safer online, in particular protecting vulnerable communities.[6] MEND (Muslims Engagement and Development) argue that addressing its shortcomings requires 'Clear definitions, enhanced accountability for tech companies, robust moderation guidelines, proactive content filtering, and community support initiatives are crucial aspects that must be incorporated into the legislation' (ibid).

5. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/enacted
6. https://www.mend.org.uk/the-online-safety-bill-insufficient-measures-against-islamophobia-and-anti-muslim-content/#:~:text=Firstly%2C%20the%20lack%20of%20a,result%20in%20ambiguity%20and%20inconsistency.

We used a **multi-method**, interdisciplinary approach combining computational and methods from the social sciences. It is important to be transparent about the research design and process as this has a direct impact on findings and is more complex than often appears in studies of social media which often assume accuracy and objectivity (boyd and Crawford, 2012).

How we gathered the tweets:

When we started the project in 2020, to ensure a full dataset, it was necessary to buy the tweets from Twitter. This was not a transparent process, and we can still not be sure that we have all the tweets using our search terms but it was the best way to ensure maximum capture at the time. In 2021, Twitter allowed researchers to gather tweets from its API for free (using Academic Research product track which allows the collection of 10m tweets a month). At Twitter's request, subsequent data we collected, using the latter method, was formatted differently which required writing a programme to reformat the data (and constant manual checking for validity as the recoding sometimes led to missing cases).

Sample: Three politically significant trigger events that aimed to provide a more diverse discussion of Islam and Muslims than our previous research following the Brussels terror attack were selected (Brexit, the Christchurch terror attack and Coronavirus), and tweets retrieved using the search terms informed by pilot research and in consultation with our advisory group. These were:

1. Brexit and Islam* or Muslim(s) or Moslem(s)or mosque(s) or 'Religion of Peace" (combining standard spellings with phrases associated with the far right)

2. Christchurch or New Zealand AND Islam* or Muslim(s) or Moslem(s) or 'Religion of Peace' or Terror* or Mosque(s).

3. Coronavirus OR Covid AND (Islam* OR Muslim(s) OR Moslem(s) OR Mosque(s) OR Eid OR 'Religion of Peace')

To allow us to examine the dynamics of the events over time, we selected different date ranges that we thought would generate the most discussion about Muslims and Islam. For Brexit this was 3 weeks around the General Election of 2019 and 3 weeks around the exit date of January 31st 2020; for Christchurch one month of data following the attack then a week at 3 and 6 month intervals; and for Covid, a month at the height of the pandemic and a week around the two subsequent Eid festivals, resulting in 6 weeks of data for each event. The date ranges and number of tweets are shown in Table 1.

Originally, we had intended to select only hashtags for analysis but a pilot study revealed the demise of hashtag activism at this time. However, we also selected two hashtags that were prominent in our datasets for analysis, one that was more supportive towards Muslims (#hellobrother) and a more negative hashtag (#Tablighijamat/#Tablighijamaat - both spellings were included).

Table 1: Date ranges and sample:

Event	Date Ranges	No of Tweets	Total No of Tweets	Quantitative Sample
Brexit	28 Nov 2019 – 19 Dec 2019 17 Jan 2020 – 07 Feb 2020	26,473 16,061	42, 534	1000 1000
Christchurch Terror Attack	15 Mar 2019 – 15 Apr 2019 15 Jun 2019 – 21 Jun 2019 15 Sep 2019 – 21 Sep 2019	3,099,138 8,072 2,870	3,110,080	1000 500 500
#Hellobrother	As above (all dates)	25, 084	25, 084	1000
Coronavirus	19 Mar 2020 – 19 Apr 2020 19 May 2020 – 25 May 2020 29 Jul 2020 – 4 Aug 2020	433,574 119,700 28,097	581, 371	1000 500 500
#Tablighijamat/ #Tablighijamaat	As above (all dates)	13, 742	13, 742	854*
Total			3,772, 811	7854

*The aim was to analyse 1000 but there were only 854 original tweets in English in this dataset.

The following methods were used for analysis:

1. Computational analysis:

We applied a filtering and analytics process that searched for significant characteristics in tweets and bios which included keywords, dates, top retweeted tweets, hashtags, emojis, collocations, top users, top users by followers, top retweeted users, top images and URLs. Retweets were included and counted as distinct tweets in this stage of the analysis.

Inclusion criteria – The inclusion criteria for tweets were more challenging than we thought following changes to Twitter since our previous projects (comments becoming replies, for example). Should we include tweets that have any of our search terms in either the original or quote tweet, for example? Should we include tweets that were originally tweeted outside our date range but are being reshared? We adopted the most inclusive approach to incorporate as much as the content as possible and then checked manually for relevance. This dataset also includes non-English language tweets but the search terms will have excluded some of these.

2. Content analysis:

We used the files generated above to identify the top retweeted original tweets in English for manual quantitative analysis, 1000 from each of the large datasets, 500 from the smaller giving us 7854 in total as shown in Table 1. We measured for 20 variables including time, no of retweets, tweet type, location, affiliation, topic (primary and secondary), use of emojis/URLs and other features, #hashtags (informed by the big data) and whether the account/tweet had subsequently been deleted.

3. Network analysis:

We undertook a network analysis of users who retweeted and quote tweeted others using bespoke code written for this purpose based on the force directed graphs application written by Asturiano (2022).

4. Mainstream media analysis:

We analysed global news media articles that discussed the #hellobrother (21), #tablighijamaat (33) and #tablighijamat (18) hashtags to explore the dynamics between social and other news media. The majority of the latter two hashtags were from Indian media.

5. Machine learning models:

We used the manual quantitative analysis to train computers to recognise our coding of anti and pro-Muslim tweets in the big datasets. An initial pilot study shows this is not a straightforward process due to the nature of the datasets and tweets, with many of them being mixed or imbalanced, so this work is ongoing.

6. Semi-structured qualitative interviews:

We interviewed 15 international journalists and (anti-racist) activists that we identified as tweeting in our datasets about their engagement with Twitter.

We contacted these participants through e-mail, if available, and direct messaging which proved to be difficult at a time when trust was low on Twitter following its acquisition by Elon Musk. We had hoped to include further participants who expressed anti-Muslim sentiment but were unable to attract any for interview. In total there were 7 Muslims, 10 men and 6 women (there were 2 people from an activist group in one interview). The interviewees are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Interviewees:

Affiliation	Number
Individual activist	4
Academic/journalist	2
Journalist	3
Academic activist	2
Activist organisation/group	4
Total	15

Limitations:

1. Focus on the top retweeted tweets. This focus has legitimacy as it includes the most visible tweets about an event but also narrows the focus to mostly high-profile accounts, politicians, celebrities, mainstream media etc. This has the potential to further marginalise the conversations and voices of minority groups as well as miss interesting case studies that may occur at the fringes of Twitter. An event-based focus can also miss everyday banal racism and bias the data towards the sensational and negative.

2. Sole focus on Twitter. Criticisms about the over-representation of Twitter studies in academic research, particularly given the recent changes to X, a platform that is declining in relevance for activists. Twitter's previous accessibility made it a popular research focus but it's also this accessibility that has given it prominence with elite groups in society that often influence public conversations and news agendas. We have included some mainstream media analysis in this project to show how Twitter interacts within wider media ecologies. The project provides an important historical record of how users engaged with Twitter in a period of higher moderation standards between the purge of US far-right accounts associated with Q-Anon after the January Capitol Hill riots and the acquisition by Elon Musk in 2022 (which has made research on X prohibitive).

3. Sharing sensitive data. It is good research practice to share data for credibility, reproducibility and transparency and is now a requirement of UKRI funders. However, this presented an issue to us due to the sensitive nature of the data which may have several implications, particularly around privacy. Although the data is public, assembling it in datasets could lead to its misuse through targeting specific communities or the amplification of individuals which may create significant harms. The fluidity of the platform also presented a challenge in sharing data that may have since been deleted. We sought to address these issues by interviewing researchers who have shared large datasets and have since published some guidelines here https://doi.org/10.21252/4C2M-7M19 . Whilst this a moving target due to changes to platform and legal policies on sharing data, these guidelines provide ethical principles for researchers when designing projects on social media.

Ethics:

We only use the tweets in their full original form from public and verified accounts here. There has obviously been considerable movement in who is verified following the policy changes implemented by Elon Musk but we have interpreted a blue tick before and after these changes as a signal that the account user is happy for their tweets to be public. Where there is any uncertainty in the status of the account holder, we have described tweets rather than transcribed them.

Overview of the data:

The table below and subsequent pie charts show the proportion of tweets that were pro and anti-Muslim from the top 1000 retweeted tweets in the datasets. Statistically, more were positive than negative, with the Brexit date and #Tablighijamaat being negative outliers, but in compiling Table 1, we have also taken account of retweets and subsequent layers of analysis.

Table 1: Position on Muslims:*

This is also determined by the retweet analysis, see event chapters

Datasets more supportive towards Muslims	Anti-Muslim	Mixed
Brexit- General Election data 28 Nov 2019 – 19 Dec 2019	Brexit date 17 Jan 2020 – 07 Feb 2020	Christchurch 2 (3 months after) 15 Jun 2019 – 21 Jun 2019
Christchurch 1 (first month) 15 Mar 2019 – 15 Apr 2019	Covid 1 (first month) 19 Mar 2020 – 19 Apr 2020	Christchurch 3 (6 months after) 15 Sep 2019 – 21 Sep 2019
Covid 2 Eid al Fitr 19 May 2020 – 25 May 2020	#Tablighijamaat - date ranges for Covid	Covid 3 Eid al Adha 29 Jul 2020 – 4 Aug 2020
#hellobrother - date ranges for Christchurch		
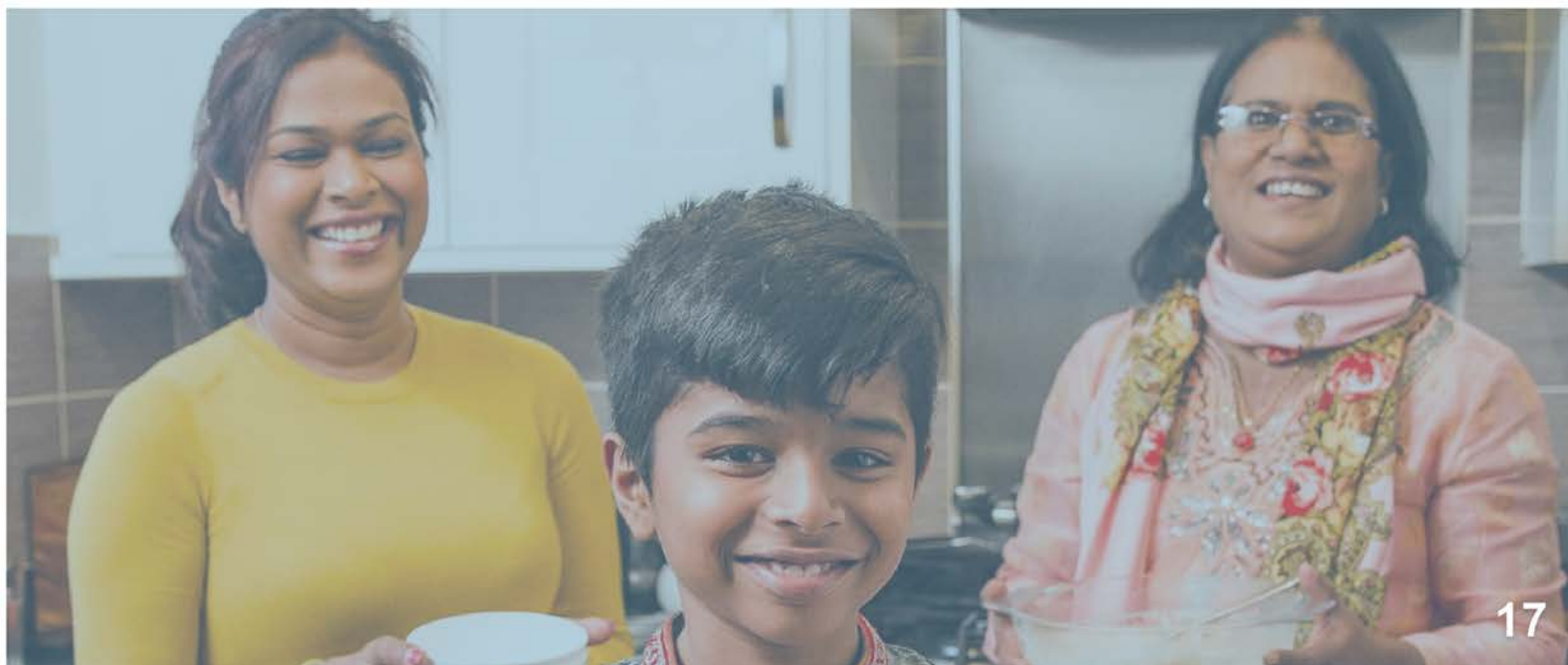
Figure 1: Brexit 1 - General Election:
28/11/19 - 19/12/19

Neutral/No View 12.5%
Anti-Muslim 14.7%
Mixed 25.1%
Supports Muslims 47.7%
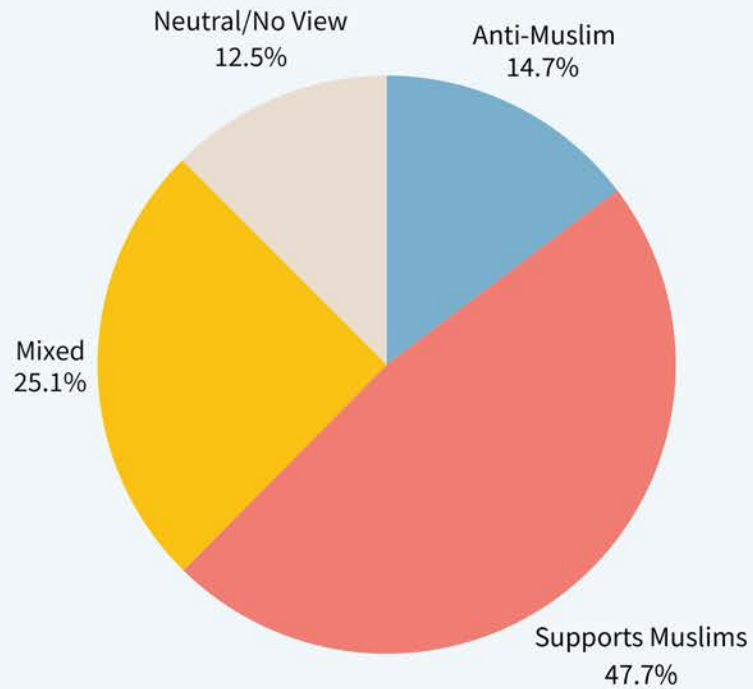
Figure 2: Brexit 2 - Exit date:
17/01/20 - 07/02/2020

Neutral/No View 5.8%
Mixed 20.4%
Anti-Muslim 43%
Supports Muslims 30.8%
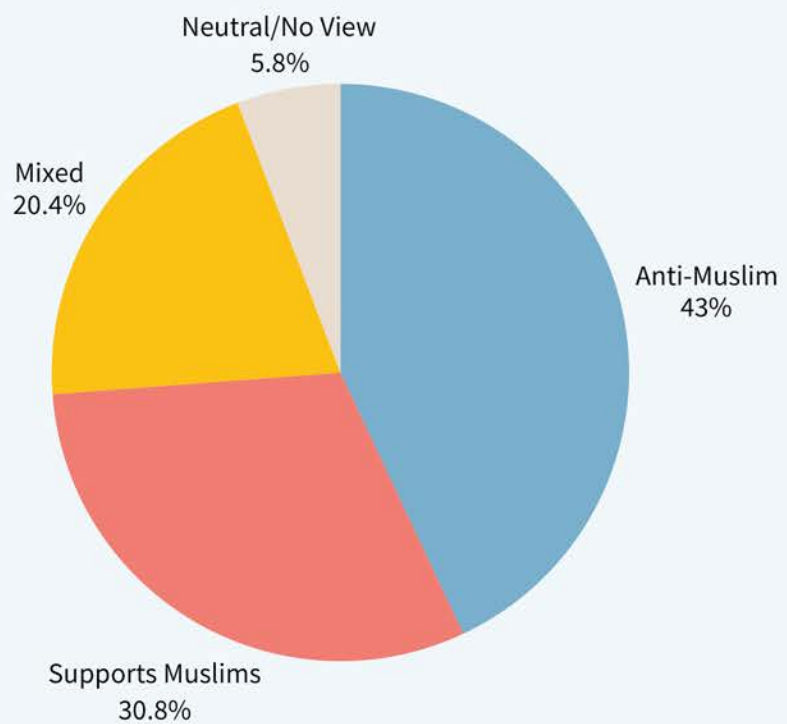
4. Data

Figure 1 data: Brexit 1 - General Election:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	147	14.7	14.7	14.7
Supports Muslims	477	47.7	47.7	62.4
Mixed	251	25.1	25.1	87.5
Neutral/No View	125	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2 data: Brexit 2 - Exit date:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	430	43.0	43.0	43.0
Supports Muslims	308	30.8	30.8	73.8
Mixed	204	20.4	20.4	94.2
Neutral/No View	58	5.8	5.8	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3: **Christchurch 1 (1st month):**
15/03/19-15/04/19

- Neutral/No View 16.8%
- Anti-Muslim 4.7%
- Mixed 5.5%
- Supports Muslims 73%
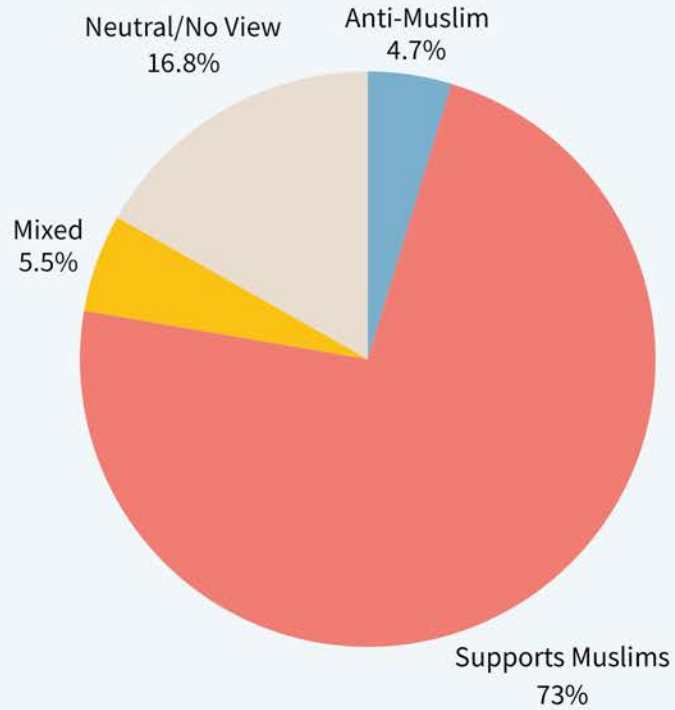
Figure 4: **Christchurch 2 (3 months later):**
15/06/19-21/06/19

- Anti-Muslim 2.4%
- Supports Muslims 41.2%
- Neutral/No View 52.2%
- Mixed 4.2%
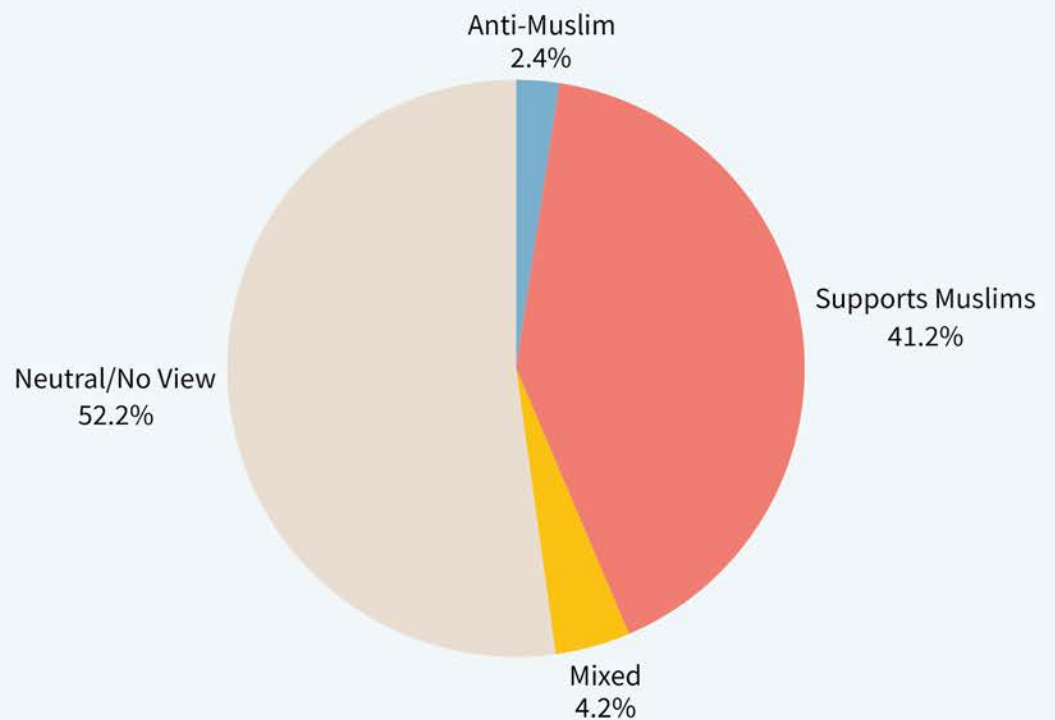
Figure 3 data: Christchurch 1 (1st month):

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	47	4.7	4.7	4.7
Supports Muslims	730	73.0	73.0	77.7
Mixed	55	5.5	5.5	83.2
Neutral/No View	168	16.8	16.8	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Figure 4 data: Christchurch 2 (3 months later):

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	12	2.4	2.4	2.4
Supports Muslims	206	41.2	41.2	43.6
Mixed	21	4.2	4.2	47.8
Neutral/No View	261	52.2	52.2	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5: **Christchurch 3 (6 months later):**
15/09/19-21/09/19

Anti-Muslim
10.8%

Neutral/No View
41.4%

Supports Muslims
42.4%
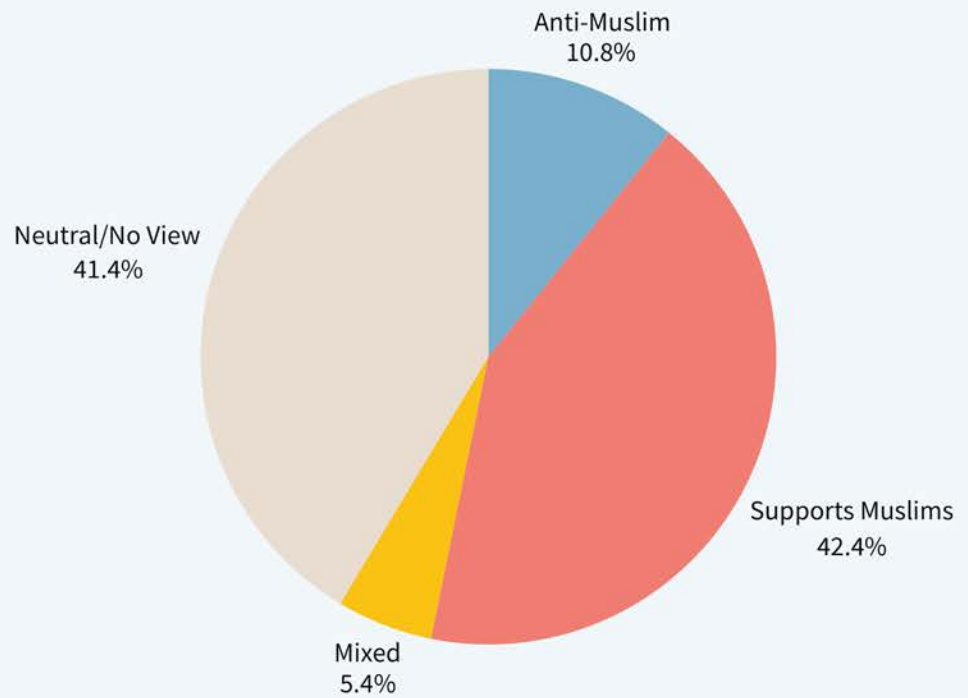
Mixed
5.4%

Figure 6: **#hellobrother:**
15/03/19 - 21/09/19

Neutral/No View
3.6%
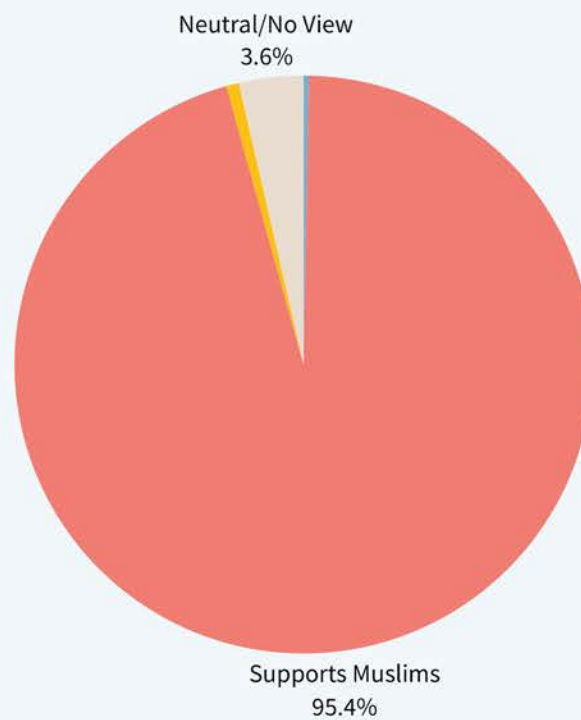
Supports Muslims
95.4%

Figure 5 data: Christchurch 3 (6 months later):

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	54	10.8	10.8	10.8
Supports Muslims	212	42.4	42.4	53.2
Mixed	27	5.4	5.4	58.6
Neutral/No View	207	41.4	41.4	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Figure 6 data: #hellobrother:

	Frequency	Percent
Anti-Muslim	3	0.3
Supports Muslims	954	95.4
Mixed	7	0.7
Neutral/No View	36	3.6
Total	1000	100.0

Figure 7: **Coronavirus (1st month):**
19/03/20-19/04/20

Neutral/No View
5.6%

Mixed
12%

Anti-Muslim
30.7%

Supports Muslims
51.7%
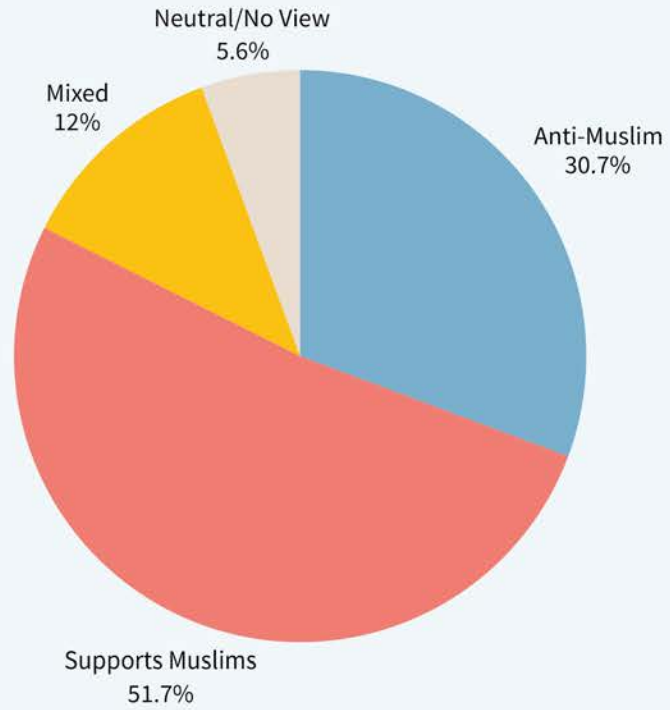
Figure 8: **Coronavirus - Eid al-Fitr:**
19/05/20-25/05/20

Anti-Muslim
5.2%

Neutral/No View
26.6%

Mixed
7.8%
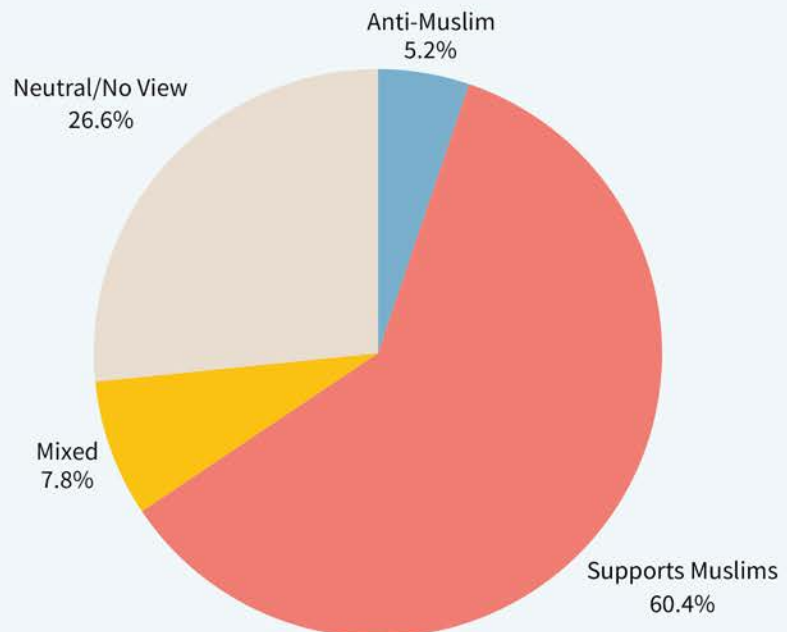
Supports Muslims
60.4%

Figure 7 data: Coronavirus (1st month):

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	307	30.7	30.7	30.7
Supports Muslims	517	51.7	51.7	82.4
Mixed	120	12.0	12.0	94.4
Neutral/No View	56	5.6	5.6	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Figure 8 data: Coronavirus - Eid al-Fitr:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	26	5.2	5.2	5.2
Supports Muslims	302	60.4	60.4	65.6
Mixed	39	7.8	7.8	73.4
Neutral/No View	133	26.6	26.6	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Figure 9: Coronavirus - Eid al-Adha: 29/07/20-04/08/20

Anti-Muslim
10.8%

Neutral/No View
27.4%

Mixed
4.2%

Supports Muslims
57.6%
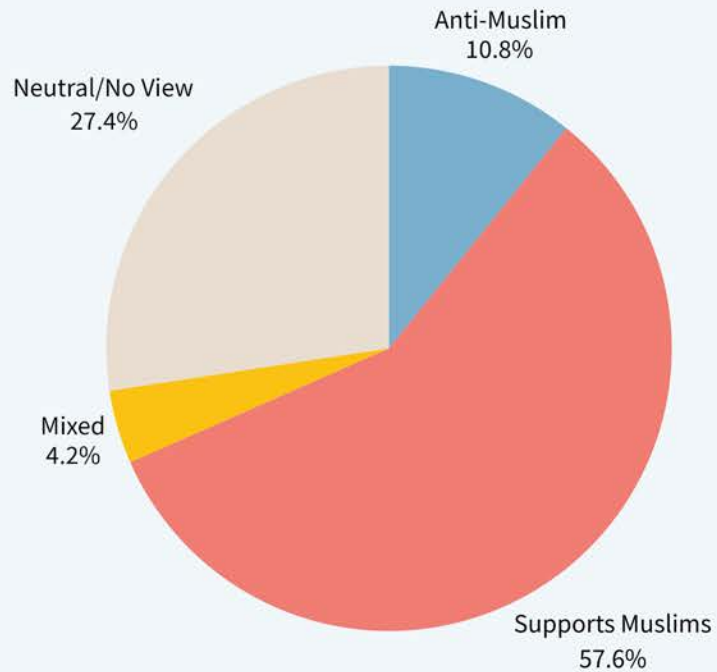
Figure 10: Coronavirus #Tablighijamaat: 19/03/20-04/08/20

Neutral/No View
3.2%

Mixed
27%

Anti-Muslim
48.2%
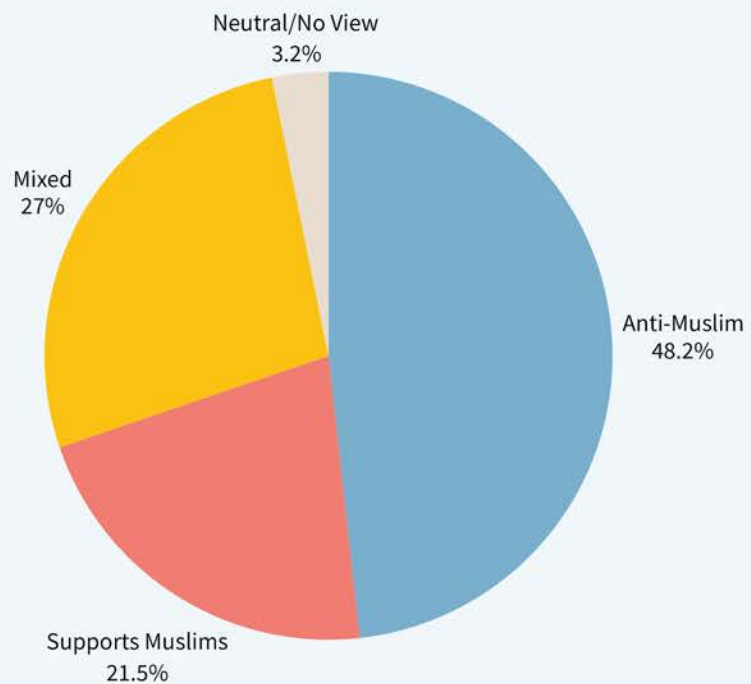
Supports Muslims
21.5%

Figure 9 data: Coronavirus - Eid al-Adha:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	54	10.8	10.8	10.8
Supports Muslims	288	57.6	57.6	68.4
Mixed	21	4.2	4.2	72.6
Neutral/No View	137	27.4	27.4	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Figure 10 data: Coronavirus - #Tablighijamaat:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	412	48.2	48.2	48.2
Supports Muslims	184	21.5	21.5	69.8
Mixed	231	27.0	27.0	96.8
Neutral/No View	27	3.2	3.2	100.0
Total	854	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: **Similarities and differences in the datasets:**

Similarities	Differences
Links to US, Indian politics (main constituents of far right politics at this time) particularly in negative tweets	Geographical composition of users which shifted over time as US users declined and South Asian accounts rose.
Mainstream media tends to be more (explicitly) supportive of Muslims on social media - this has now become the dominant narrative but does not mean reporting is unproblematic	Timelines of events – when tweets are most prominent in each dataset
Quote tweets are more likely to agree than disagree with an original post	Strength of contestation along a counter-narrative spectrum
'Individuals' are always the highest users in terms of affiliation but other more visible actors such as politicians and celebrities are more likely to be circulated	Position on Muslims – more pro/anti/mixed
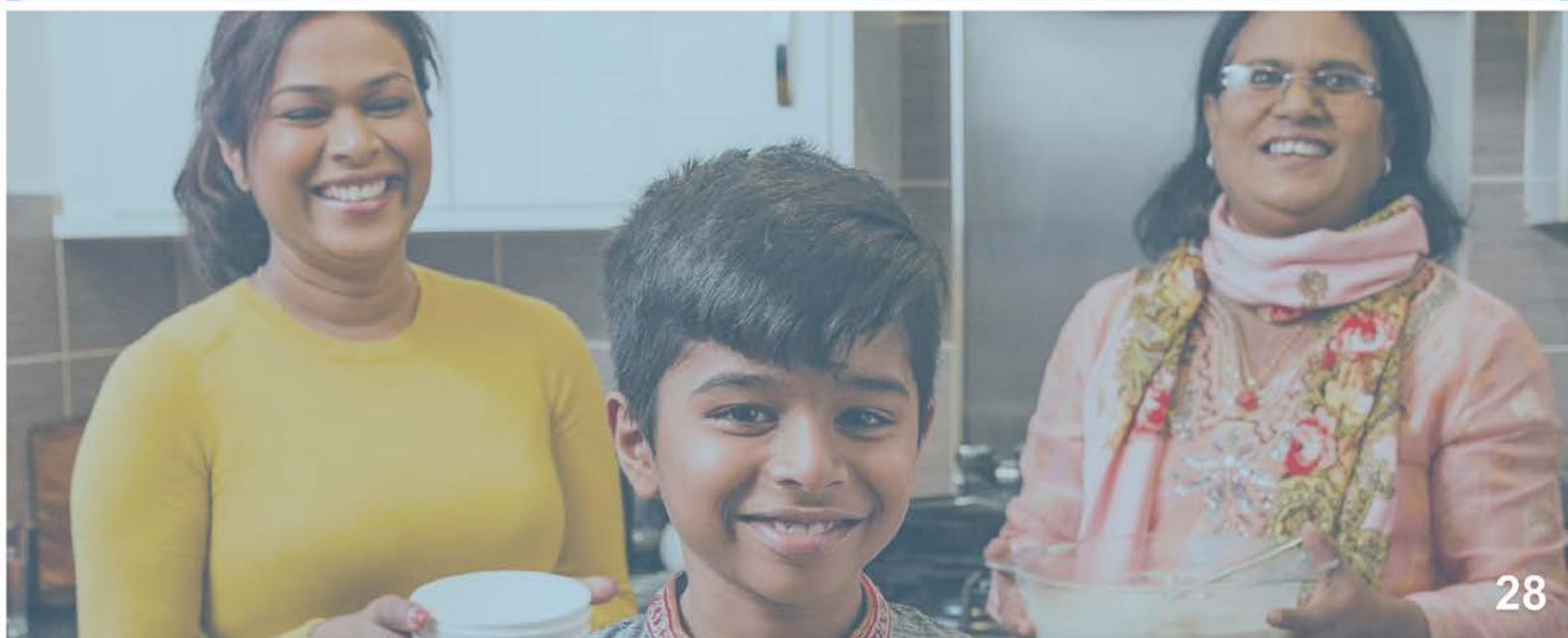
Brexit 1: Dates around the General Election:

28th November 2019 - 19 December 2019

We are reporting on the two Brexit datasets separately as they are quite different in their content. These dates were chosen as it was thought that campaigning around the General Election (Thursday 12th December 2019) might generate discussion about Islam in relation to the upcoming Brexit date (January 2020). The big data findings, quantitative and qualitative analysis all corroborate each other and show a more supportive position towards Muslims.

Table 1: **Summary data on Brexit:**

Brexit 1	26473 tweets which include	%
Original tweets	6653	25.1%
Retweets	19820	47.8%
Tweets in English	24468	92.4%
Quote tweets	2441	9.2%
Tweets with URL	6050	22.8%
Tweets with Media	107	0.4%

The analysis shows a large number of Labour/left and Muslim tweeters criticising the Conservative Party for their Islamophobia. This was particularly apparent following the Leader's debate in the run up to the General Election when Boris Johnson was asked about Islamophobia in the Conservative Party and was accused of deflecting the question with his response - to 'Get Brexit Done'! References to location show this is a very UK based dataset but there are there are also numerous references to India both in the bio and location data. This is partly due to the number of times a comic from India was retweeted (3736 times, the most shared tweet in the dataset), who attacks liberals in both the UK, US Pakistan and India implying an idiocy in those opposing Brexit.

This was a surprising difference to our previous project on #stopislam, where international references were mainly from the US, and also occurs in the Covid data. However, at this point, there are still many references to Trump, albeit more likely to be critical. References to India and the US tend to comment on ill-advised policies that can be compared to Brexit. Other notable storylines are unsurprisingly around party politics including negative commentary on the Brexit Party founder, Catherine Blaiklock, who resigned from the party after posting a series of anti-Islam comments, but was now backing the Conservatives, and an argument between Faiza Shaheen (Labour) and Geoff Seeff (Liberal Democrats) over her position on Brexit where she accuses him of running an Islamophobic campaign.

Table 2: **Keywords in Brexit 1:**

brexit	27678
muslim	7355
uk	6688
trump	6495
islamophobia	6228
johnson	4926
india	4057
boris	4037
usa	3993

In line with disapproval felt for the Conservative Party the most popular emojis in tweets were:

🤦‍♀️ 1156   🤬 464

Popular hashtags reflect this political content (Table 3).

Table 3: Most popular hashtags:

Hashtag	Amount	Hashtag	Amount
Brexit	3005	antisemitism	1303
GE2019	2869	leadersdebate	1232
votelabour	1818	corbyn	454
votefazia	1744	borisjohnson	341
BBCleadersdebate	1616	BBC	265
Islamophobia	1604	Johnson	255
BBCdebate	1511	lies	239

The timeline (Figure 1) shows tweets peak after the leaders debate on the 6th December, smaller peaks around the date of the election (12/13th) and on the 19th when the most shared anti-Muslim tweet was circulated in India.

Figure 1: Timeline in Brexit 1:
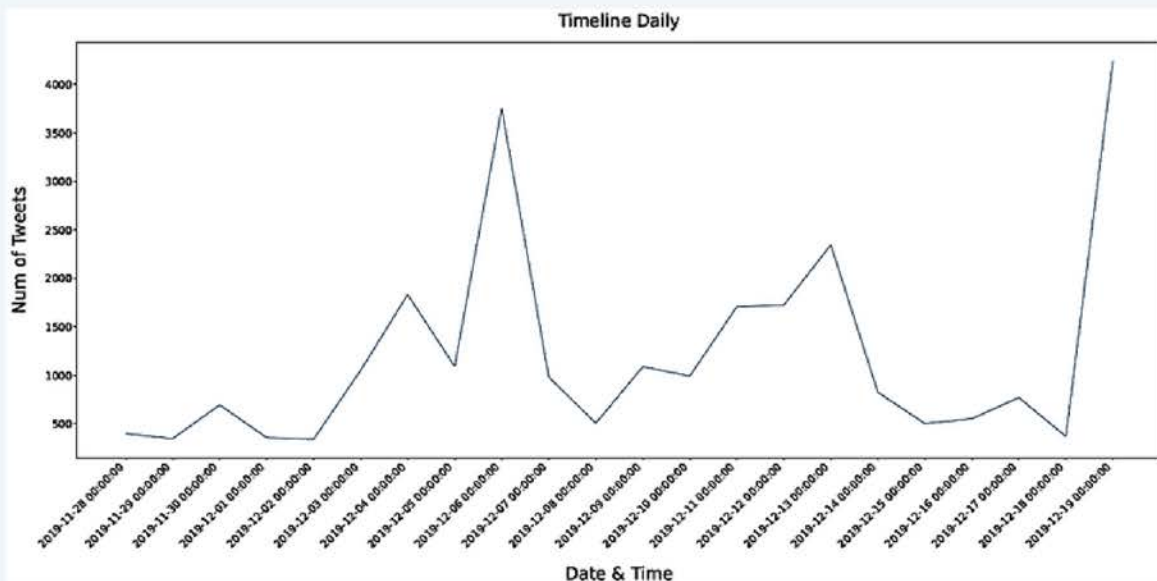
What are the tweets about?

The quantitative analysis, based on a manual analysis of the 1000 most shared tweets, shows the supportive nature of these tweets towards Muslims (Table 4).

Table 4: Position on Muslims/Islam:
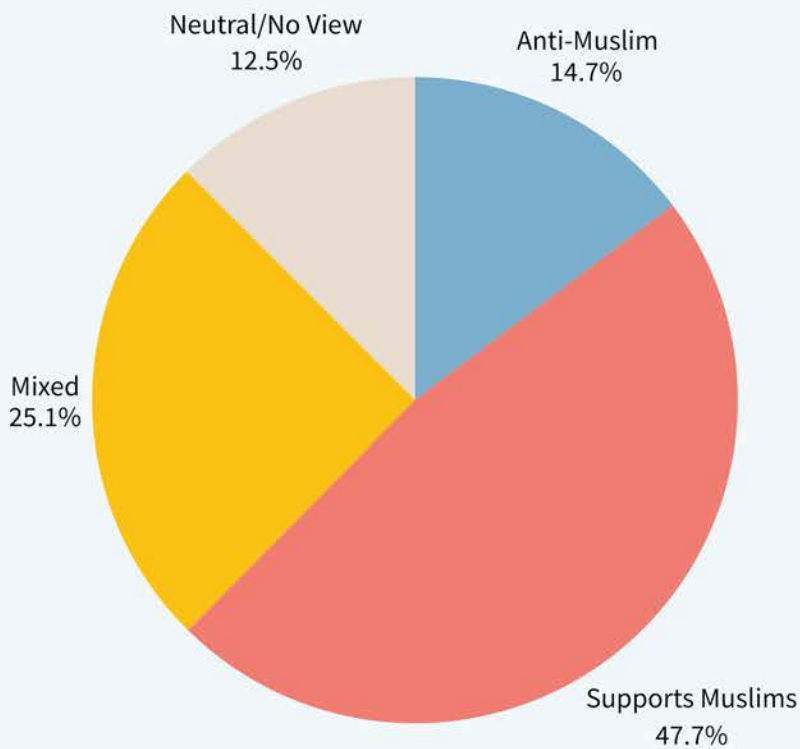
Neutral/No View 12.5%

Anti-Muslim 14.7%

Mixed 25.1%

Supports Muslims 47.7%

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	147	14.7	14.7	14.7
Supports Muslims	477	47.7	47.7	62.4
Mixed	251	25.1	25.1	87.5
Neutral/No View	125	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Positive tweets were also more likely to be retweeted compared to anti-Muslim tweets. The number of accounts deleted (11%) or suspended (8.7%) is notable which demonstrates the efforts of Twitter to clean up the site although deletion may be a form of self-censorship by users who may be more attuned to the political climate post the Capitol Hill riots.

Quote tweets (RT with additional original content added) are more likely to agree with the tweet they quote (23.9% compared to 7.5% that do not).

More people are also anti-Brexit (Table 5)

Table 5: Position on Brexit:
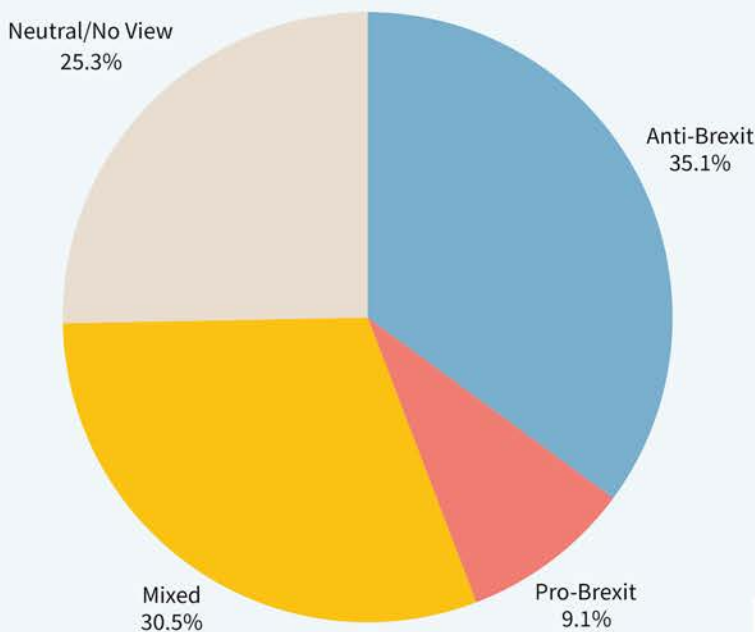
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Brexit	351	35.1	35.1	35.1
Pro-Brexit	91	9.1	9.1	44.2
Mixed	305	30.5	30.5	74.7
Neutral/No View	253	25.3	25.3	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Anti-Brexit tweets were also more likely to be shared (4944 times compared to 764 that were pro-Brexit). There was also a strong correlation between the two positions with a 99.9% significance (Table 6). This is not to argue that this correlation exists even in the wider Twittersphere but only in this data around this event.

Table 6: Position on Islam and Brexit:

Position on Islam/Muslims * Position on Brexit Crosstabulation

		Position on Brexit				
		Anti-Brexit	Pro-Brexit	Mixed	Neutral/no view	Total
Position on Islam/Muslims	Anti-Muslim	4	71	39	33	147
	Supports Muslims	254	5	113	105	477
	Mixed	63	7	137	44	251
	Neutral/No View	30	8	16	71	125
	Total	351	91	305	253	1000

The above political divisions are also reflected in the main topics of tweets (Table 7).

Table 7: Topics of tweets:
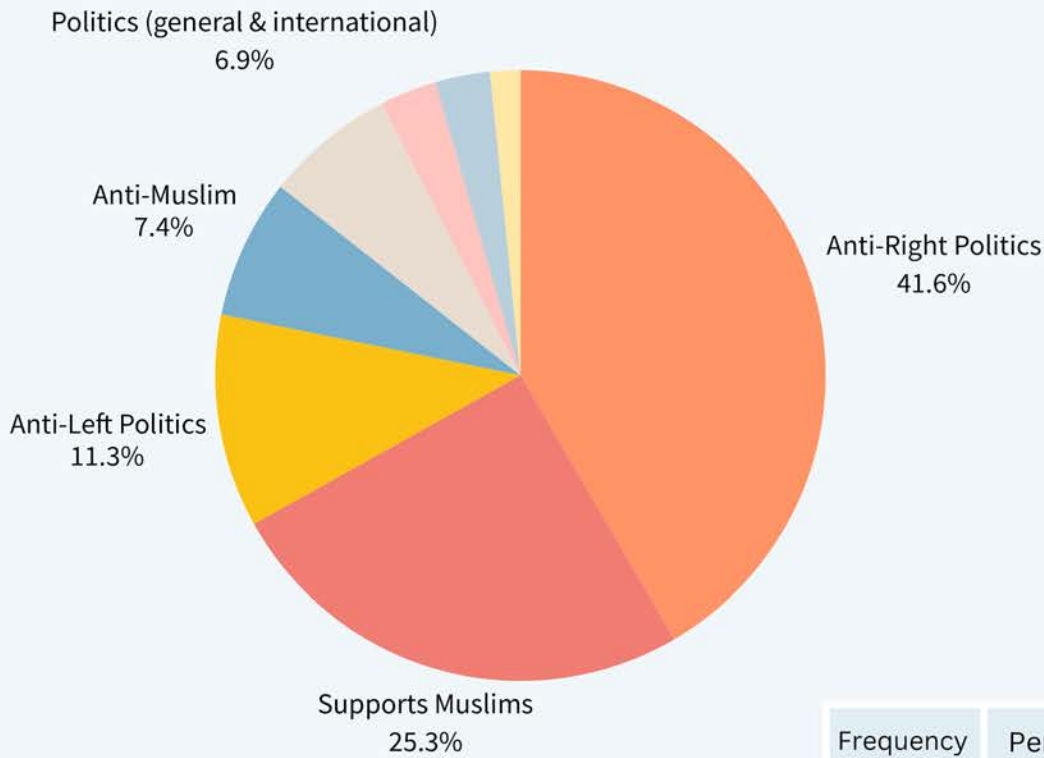
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Right Politics	416	41.6	41.6	41.6
Supports Muslims	253	25.3	25.3	66.9
Anti-Left Politics	113	11.3	11.3	78.2
Anti-Muslim	74	7.4	7.4	85.6
Politics (general & international)	69	6.9	6.9	92.5
Terrorism	30	3.0	3.0	95.5
Other	29	2.9	2.9	98.4
Immigration	16	1.6	1.6	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

We originally coded the topics into more granular categories and then re-coded into the more inclusive themes above. Looking at the more granular topics, the main topic of a tweet was still anti-conservative politics (31.2)% then pointing out Islamophobia (16.1%) racism in British politics (8.3%) then anti far-right politics (6.2%). It's notable that 83.3% of the tweets on terrorism were anti-Muslim and 56.6% of those on immigration.

Who are the users?

Location data (although is not available for all tweets) shows the UK based location of many Twitter users (Table 8).

Table 8: Location data:

1	London	664
2	London, England	619
3	United Kingdom	453
4	India	422
5	UK	411
6	England, UK	361
7	England	113
8	Manchester	104
9	New Delhi	102
10	United States	100

This is corroborated by the quantitative content analysis that shows 50% of most shared tweets are from the UK, with 4.6% from the US and 3.5% from Europe.

Word frequency in bios (in the users' terms) refer to mostly Labour/left affiliations socialist (925) Labour (657) left (308), as well as EU support (404), European (320) but also Indian affiliations Indian (335) Hindu (225) frequently alongside being 'proud'. They are frequent reference to justice (315) and rights (296) and activist (227).

Table 9: Most shared users:

All but two are left wing actors/critics

User	Number of shares
Comic based[1] in India	3736
Fazia Shaheen (Labour candidate)	1581
Medhi Hassan (US commentator)	1493
Sayeeda Warsi (Conservative peer)	1041
Alex Tiffin (Independent journalist)	685
Momentum (left wing arm of the Labour Party)	442
Individual (critical of Boris Johnson)	332
Miqdaad Versi (Muslim Council of Britain)	290
Patrick Edery ('conservative' French blogger)[2]	268
Individual US anti-Trump supporter	228

The users who posted the most original tweets were a mixture of left-wing critics and people with suspended accounts. For example, the top producer of tweets in this dataset, who posted 71 times, has now had their account suspended. This is suggestive of negative content and is a reflection of the stricter moderation at the time. The individuals doing the most tweeting are in contrast to the top users by followers, who are large media organisations, and by the times shared, also mostly news sites.

Due to the political content, there are some high-profile news organisations appearing in the tweets, the users with the most followers tend to be from companies such as Time, BBC, The Independent, Daily Mirror or are journalists such as Laura Kuenssberg and Owen Jones. Similarly, the 10 most popular URLs are from news media albeit more liberal sites like the New European, the Canary, The Independent and The Mirror with the most shared URL being https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/general-election-brexit-party-islamophobic-boris-johnson-conservatives-blaiklock-a9242046.html

The prominence or visibility of high profile tweeters in the dataset is evident if we examine the affiliations of tweeters from the quantitative content analysis. This shows that tweeters were most likely to be individuals (63.4%) and commentators/ journalists whether that be mainstream (4.5%) or independent (3.5%) and politicians only 2.6%. All affiliations apart from alt-right groups are more likely to support Muslims (and alt right group numbers are small and evenly split with only two anti and two supportive tweets). Similarly, all affiliations are more likely to be anti-Brexit except where the affiliation is unidentified, here there is an even balance between anti and pro-Muslim tweets.

Again, although numbers are small when analysing location by position on Muslims, it is worth noting some patterns due to a similarity across datasets. There are still more anti-Muslim narratives coming from US with twice as many anti-Muslim tweets as positive, and slightly more negative tweets from South Asia (38.5% compared to 30.7% pro). All other locations are more supportive. From the UK 36.6% of tweets are anti-Brexit compared to 6.6% that are pro but 30.3% are mixed and 26.5% neutral.

1. We only include names of verified accounts at the time of data gathering and high profile public figures.
2. This tweet was excluded from the manual analysis as it was in French.

Most people in the dataset do not identify with any religion (93%), only 3.5% identified as Muslim. Although this points to more allies in the dataset than Muslims, this could be because we only coded religion if it was a directly claimed identity (to avoid making assumptions). In the big data however, 'Muslim' is still mentioned less than 'atheist' (N=183:175).

The high proportion of tweets from India are likely to be related to the retweeting of the most shared tweet from the Indian comic as previously mentioned. This is reflected by the location data from the quantitative content analysis that shows only 1.3% of the most shared tweets are from South Asia.

The data on Brexit demonstrates that assumptions about hate speech on Twitter and other social media platforms cannot be taken for granted. In this case, Twitter became a space for supporting Muslims. However, much of this is linked to a political agenda and could be seen as opportunistic. This was evident when we examined further through a qualitative analysis.

What are the main narratives/counter-narratives?

The qualitative analysis of 50 most shared original tweets corroborated the findings from the quantitative analysis showing that 38 of these opposed Islamophobia explicitly or implicitly with only 9 Islamophobic tweets. However, the analysis also complicates this finding given the majority of the anti-Islamophobic tweets were predominantly using Islamophobia in an instrumental way, as another means of attacking the Conservative Party. In this way, solidarities with Muslims could be perceived as being fairly weak, even expedient to some extent, compared to strong expressions of solidarity with left wing politics (see Poole et al, 2023). This is particularly evident in replies to these tweets, which do not sustain discussions of Islamophobia. Key high-profile responses to the BBC Leaders debate include politicians and political groups such as Sayeeda Warsi (see below), Liz Clements, Lord Sikka and Momentum as well as left wing mainstream and independent journalists. Very few of the replies to these tweets mention Islamophobia.

'No! The answer to a question on @Conservatives #Islamophobia is not @Labour #Antisemitism and it's certainly not 'Get Brexit Done!' 🙎 *The quality of debate on this issue was shameful'* Sayeeda Warsi, 6 Dec, 2019, 9.36pm, 1089 RTs.

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1203065631840620549

While Warsi's tweet categorises the topic (Islamophobia) and where it took place (BBC Leaders Debate) through hashtags, Tiffin (an independent journalist who identifies as a Muslim in his bio) also places the attitude to Muslims at its centre:

'Boris Johnson decided to talk about Brexit when challenged about Tory Islamophobia..... Says it all really. He doesn't care about Muslims one bit. #BBCLeadersDebate #BBCDebate' Alex Tiffin, 6 Dec 2019, 654 RTs
https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1203063108056604672

In contrast to Warsi's exasperation, the tweet communicates a sense of weariness: when, given the opportunity to demonstrate that he recognised the distress and suffering caused by anti-Muslim discrimination, and perhaps that it had no place in his Party, he ignored the issue and instead spoke about Brexit. The tweeter takes this as symptomatic of his general attitude towards Muslims, showing that 'He doesn't care about Muslims one bit'.

This does generate a couple of responses that mention Islamophobia in the Conservative Party but in general of the 67 replies:

1.   Most discredit Johnson – some orient to his last statement to argue 'he doesn't care about anyone'

2.   Criticise other Conservative voters

3.   Focus more on Corbyn (the Labour leader) praising his performance

4.   Criticise Corbyn and defend Johnson as the best option – with evidence of 'whataboutery', i.e. what about antisemitism in the Labour party?

5.   Criticise the BBC and chair for the way they handled the interview

6.   No Muslim responses

7.   Five Islamophobic replies that include 'Islamophobia is a ridiculous concept' 'fear of Islam is rational' linking to 'evidence' of radicalism and terrorism

8.   3 deleted accounts which indicate more extreme responses

Key themes (and tactics) evident here and throughout tweets are to revert to accusations of media bias (on both sides - such as criticism for platforming extreme voices, references to free speech) and detract attention from the Conservatives by focussing on anti-Semitism in the Labour Party (a couple of tweets suggest that this is due to 'Islamist apologist' Corbyn and 'far-right antisemitic Islamists' voting for the Labour Party).

This level of discussion on Islamophobia, may be a feature of individual tweets and their response (as well as a characteristic of Twitter overall). However, taking the data as a whole, which becomes more evident through a comparative project like this, we can see how Islamophobia has become one of several key issues in a counter hegemonic articulation of left-wing values. This collective approach which emphasises coalitions, rather than detracting from Islamophobia, contributes to sustaining attention to it overall.

Islamophobic themes:

Key Islamophobic tropes relate to Muslims as both a radical and problematic element in society, often justifying Brexit by connecting Muslims with migration. These anti-Muslim tweets are mostly posted by individuals who have English nationalist user names and accompanying symbols such as English flags. One key tactic of the right is to use examples as 'evidence', even if not supported, to advance the argument that Muslims are problematic and Brexit is a solution. As these are mostly posted by individuals, rather than quoting them, we report the key themes with examples here:

Terrorism – evidence such as the 'London Bridge atrocity' used as a reminder to why we need Brexit.

Grooming gangs – anger at the unwillingness of the mass media to report on grooming gangs when a man is asked about why he voted for Brexit but is cut off, and linked to this:

Criminality and sexual deviance – report of a Palestinian Muslim 'migrant' committing necrophilia (the report is a year old), uses the hashtag Brexit and is linked to migration. The report also suggests that other mainstream media outlets have tried to cover the story up.

Islamification – of the UK by Muslims, this is seen to be problematic and Brexit is the solution.

Special treatment of Muslims – argue that there is hypocrisy in the treatment of Jews and Muslims, that Jews are subject to antisemitism and it is accepted, and if this happened to Muslims, there would be outrage.

These only account for limited numbers of original tweets and have limited engagement (mostly agreement). Of the nine tweets, three are suspended or deleted. However, these themes are also evident in the replies to supportive tweets. In the case of this event, the scale of the debate and discourse on Islamophobia, Muslims and Brexit was primarily defending Muslims, and at this time became the dominant narrative on Twitter.

**Figure 2:** **Network of retweets in Brexit:**

White = retweets Red = quote tweets

The network diagram shows the interconnectivity of the British tweeters (the central cluster of nodes) while Medhi Hasan is just on the outer periphery of this. The Indian comic tweeting the most retweeted anti-Muslim tweet is quite disconnected (top left) although there are still links to the larger networks.
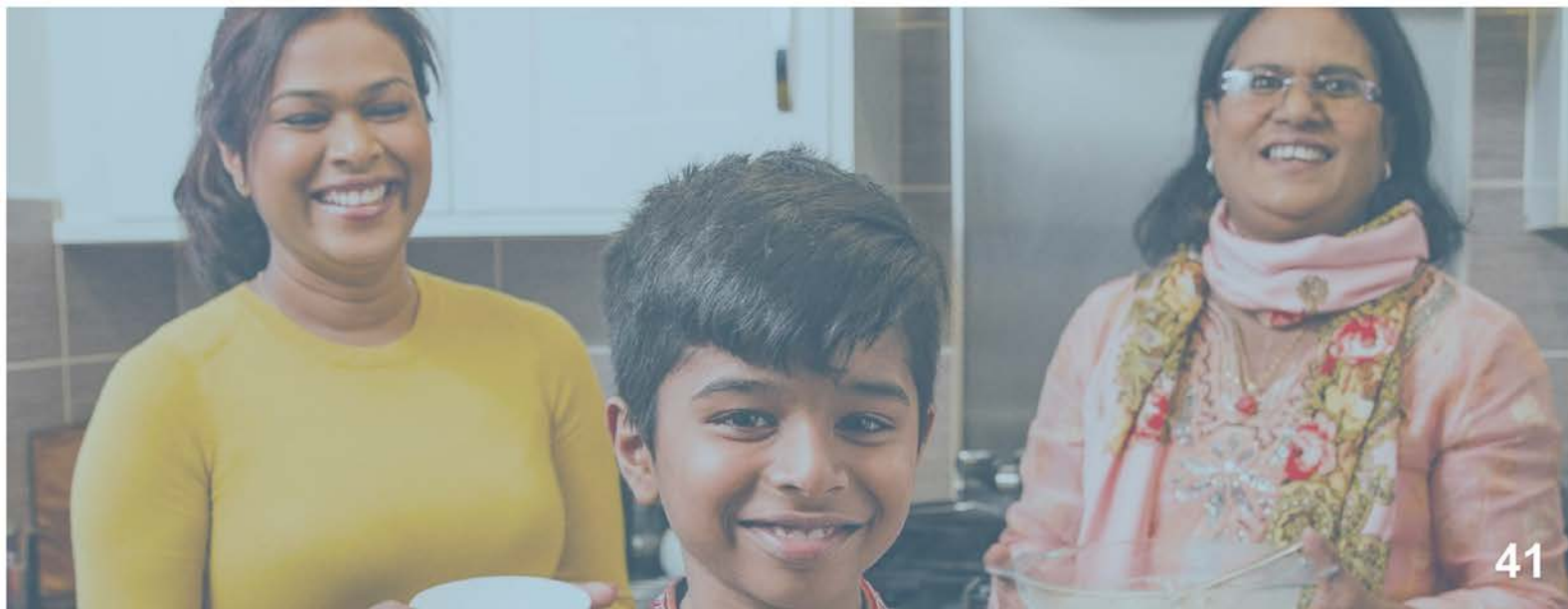
Brexit 2: Dates around the UK's exit from the EU, 31 January 2020:

17 January 2020 – 07 February 2020

Table 1: Tweet data for Brexit exit date:

Brexit 2	16061 tweets which includes:	%
Original Tweets	3554	22.1
Retweets	12507	77.8
Tweets in English	14318	89.1
Quote tweets	1554	9.6
Tweets with URL	2722	16.9
Tweets with media	728	4.5

There are almost 10,000 fewer tweets in this dataset than on the previous Brexit dates which may indicate a sense of fatigue in this debate with less need to provide a convincing argument. This is a more negative dataset (towards Islam and Muslims) but it still highly partisan (and more clearly divided) with party politics dominating and Islam being a secondary topic. The dataset follows a more predictable pattern in repeating discourse around Brexit (see Evolvi, 2019), themes relating to culture wars and identity politics dominate. Islam is used as an argumentative tool to attack political parties and politicians for their position on Brexit both from the left and right. On the right, the BBC is attacked for censorship ('ignoring Muslim grooming gangs') but the biggest single story is that of Tory MP Daniel Kawczynski who is criticised for speaking at a conference that included far-right anti-Muslim politicians (see Figure 1). This is largely due to the retweeting of a tweet by Labour MP David Lammy (shared 2227 times, see page 44). Again, this is a largely UK discussion but there is some linking to (far-right) politics in the US and India.

5b. Brexit 2

Figure 1: Keywords in Brexit 2:

brexit	16364
whip	9892
farright	8121
tory	7710
daniel	6122
kawczynski	6119
muslim	4743
islamophobes	4194
nodeal	4183
antisemites	4180
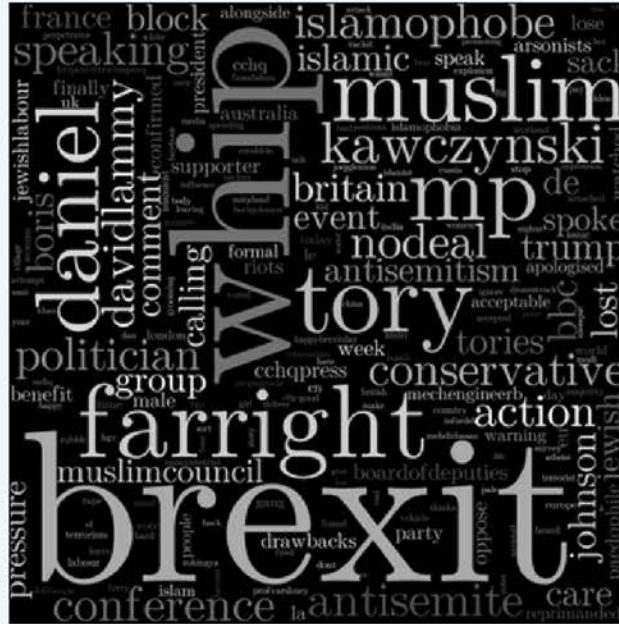
Emojis reflect the account holders position on Brexit but positive emojis appear to outweigh negative in this sample, positive in **celebrating** Britain's exit from the EU:

🚨🤦😂🥹⭐🕋😥😐😀👍👎👏👋↘😁

The police light emoji appears to be an alert/warning signal highlighting negative Conservative Party activity and featured in David Lammy's most shared quote tweet. This purpose of this tweet is to point out that Conservative MPs were removed from the party for opposing a no-deal Brexit, whereas Daniel Kawczynski was still in the party, despite sharing a platform at a political meeting with Islamophobes and antisemites. Lammy argues that this reveals Johnson's values/priorities – that he doesn't care about Islamophobia and antisemitism. The tweet tags the official Twitter account for the Conservatives. The quoted tweet is from the account of a Bloomberg journalist, who reports that the Conservatives were under pressure from both Muslim and Jewish groups to sack Kawczynski, and tags in a range of accounts. It's notable that the majority of responses (over 100) to this tweet were critical of Lammy, in particular pointing to antisemitism in the Labour party, which is a reflection of the trolling aimed at these left-wing public figures. Only a few orient to Islamophobia, either to deny it or to claim it is justified.

Figure 2: **Timeline of tweets:**
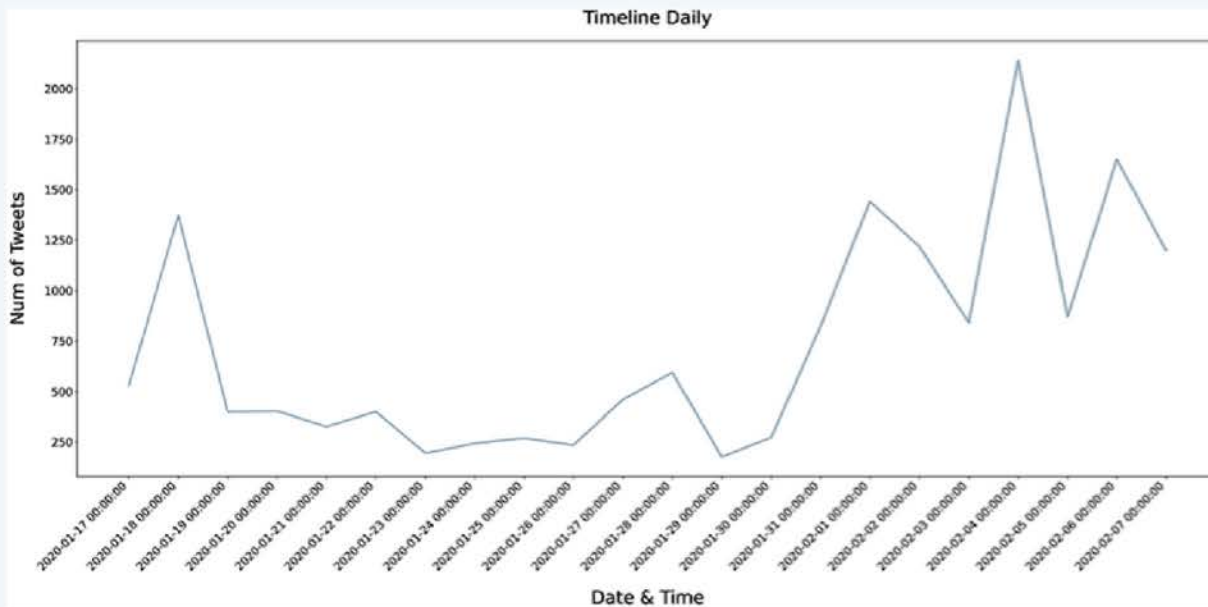
Peaks in the timeline reflect the most shared tweets/stories, the UK's exit date (31st January), David Lammy's tweet was shared on the 4th February and quote-tweeted on the 6th, and the most shared anti-Muslim tweet on the 17th January:

'21 Tory MPs lost the whip for trying to block a no-deal Brexit. Daniel Kawczynski still has the whip despite speaking at a far-right conference with Islamophobes and anti-Semites. At least we now know what the @Conservatives under Boris Johnson care about more.

QT: Alex Wickham

🚨 *NEW: Tories under pressure from Jewish and Muslim groups to sack Daniel Kawczynski after he spoke at an event with far-right politicians*

Calling for action:

-@Board of Deputies
-@Muslims Council
-@Jewish Labour
-@antisemitism

@CCHQPress no comment'

Buzzfeed link
David Lammy, 4 Feb 2020, 5.42pm - https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1224749974879133696

Table 2: Most used hashtags:

Use of hashtags is limited but those against Brexit are used less frequently #notmygovernment 60, #noracismnofascism 59, #notinmyname 58, there are links to European politics (Macron, Nexit – Netherlands exit) (Table 2):

Brexit	2343
islam	434
London	397
HappyBrexitDay	350
islamophobia	190
Macron [1]	179
Scrapthelicencefee	157
EU	145
UK	145
Nexit	143

What are the tweets about?

The manual content analysis shows a higher number of deleted tweets (17.6% of 1000 tweets) and suspended accounts (15%) in this dataset. Of the suspended accounts 69.2% were negative towards Muslims and only 13% supportive; 55% were pro Brexit and 15% anti Brexit. Of the deleted tweets, 66% were anti-Muslim compared to 14% supporting; 53% were pro Brexit and 11% anti so there is a clear correlation between tweets being more negative and being deleted or suspended.

As shown in the big data analysis, more tweets are anti Muslim (43%) but nevertheless 30.8% also support Muslims (Table 3). However, an examination of the retweets show that the latter are more likely to be retweeted (Table 4). The tweets are also slightly more likely to be pro-Brexit (Table 5) and there is a strong correlation between the two, a 99.99% significance (Table 6).

1.Some of these tweets critique the BBC for not covering unrest in France.

Figure 3: Position on Muslims:

Neutral/No View 5.8%

Mixed 20.4%

Anti-Muslim 43%

Supports Muslims 30.8%
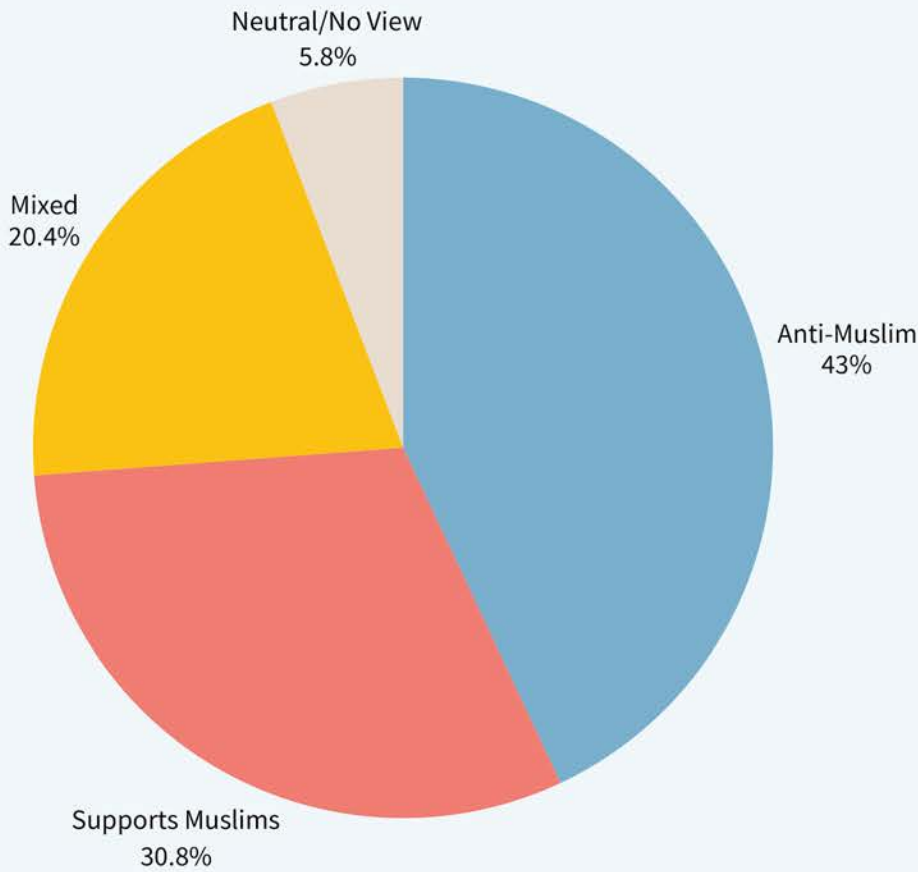
Table 3: Position on Muslims:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	430	43.0	43.0	43.0
Supports Muslims	308	30.8	30.8	73.8
Mixed	204	20.4	20.4	94.2
Neutral/No View	58	5.8	5.8	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: **Retweets:**

*Number of retweets * position on Islam, 2020*

	Mean	Median	Mode	Sum
Anti-Muslim	9	1	1	3733
Supports Muslims	21	1	1	6478
Mixed	4	1	0	859
Neutral/No View	2	1	0	108

Table 5: **Position on Brexit:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Brexit	281	28.1	28.1	28.1
Pro Brexit	336	33.6	33.6	61.7
Mixed	268	26.8	26.8	88.5
Neutral/No View	115	11.5	11.5	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Position on Brexit by position on Muslims:

Position on Islam/Muslims * Position on Brexit Crosstabulation

|		Position on Brexit				
		Anti-Brexit	Pro-Brexit	Mixed	Neutral/no view	Total
Position on Islam/ Muslims	Anti-Muslim	7	284	81	58	430
	Supports Muslims	195	13	75	25	308
	Mixed	60	31	99	14	204
	Neutral/No View	19	8	13	18	58
	Total	281	336	268	115	1000

The main topic in a tweet again demonstrates how partisan politics (which is fairly evenly split between right and left) is a primary focus followed by racial politics (Table 7). Looking into the topics in more detail (the more granular analysis), on the right, people tend to share specific examples that demonstrate negativity towards Muslims (9.9% compared to 2.1% general examples) as well as pro Conservative tweets (8.2%) and are also more likely to criticise mainstream media than the left (7.6% compared to 0.9%). Left-wing tweeters are more likely to support Muslims in general (4.1% compared to 0.3% specific examples of support), point out Islamophobia (8.8%) and show anti-Conservative politics (16.8%). As with General Election data, those tweeting anti-left topics (67.9%), terrorism (76.1%) and immigration (47.6%) are also more likely to be anti-Muslim.
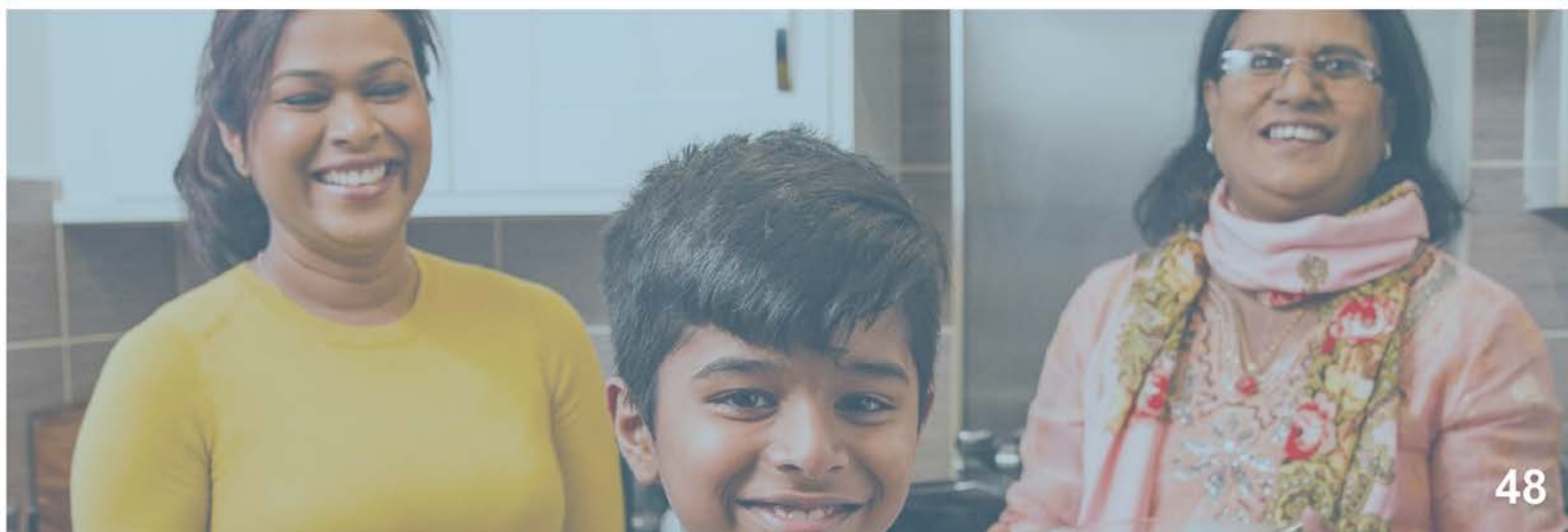
Table 7: **Topics of Tweets:**

Terrorism
4.6%

Anti-Left Politics
23.7%

Politics (general & international)
5.7%

Anti-Muslim
17.2%

Anti-Right Politics
21.6%

Supports Muslims
17.4%
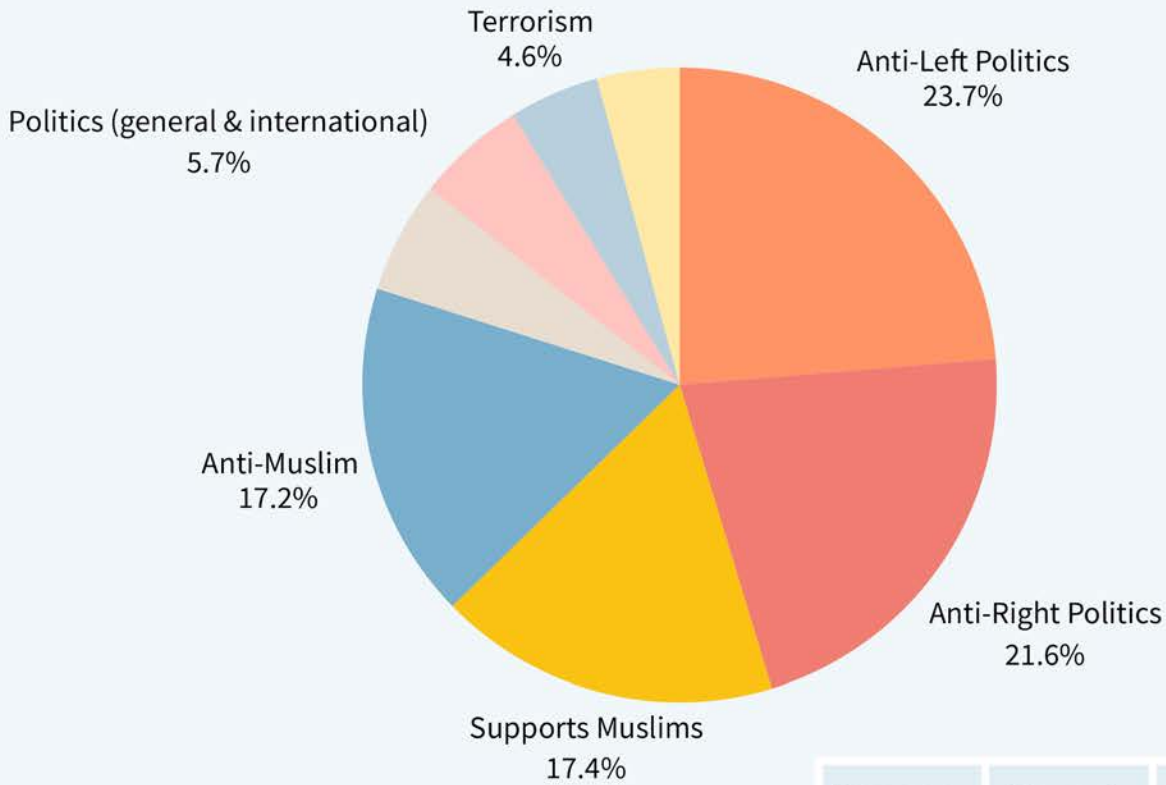
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Left Politics	237	23.7	23.7	23.7
Aniti-Right Politics	216	21.6	21.6	45.3
Supports Muslims	174	17.4	17.4	62.7
Anti-Muslim	172	17.2	17.2	79.9
Politics (general & international)	57	5.7	5.7	85.6
Other	56	5.6	5.6	91.2
Terrorism	46	4.6	4.6	95.8
Immigration	42	4.2	4.2	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

Who are the actors?

Table 8 again demonstrates the 'Britishness' of the dataset, with most people providing variations of UK locations, the only additions to this table outside the UK are France (N=41 and India N=29). In the most shared tweets examined in the quantitative content analysis, 38.7% are from the UK, lower than in the first Brexit sample, while slightly more are from the US (7%) and Europe (4.6%). Most do not give a location, 41.7%.

Table 8: Location of Accounts:

1	London	389
2	United Kingdom	316
3	London, England	311
4	England, UK	259
5	UK	246
6	US	96
7	Scotland, UK	84
8	England	75
9	South East, England	74
10	Scotland	52

In contrast to the first Brexit dataset however, the most reshared tweets are more likely to come from a mixture of individuals who are either pro or anti Brexit, or discussing racial politics, apart from David Lammy MP, Miqdaad Versi (Muslim Council of Britain), Mehdi Hasan (journalist)[2] and an Indian Professor (all more supportive of Muslims). This is also evident in the manual content analysis which shows that while 67.5% were individuals (always the highest category), the second largest category are independent bloggers/journalists (4.9%). Mainstream media were unlikely to link Brexit to Islam and Muslims, they accounted for only 0.8% tweets. The contrast demonstrates the difference in the type of content mainstream organisations/public accounts and individuals share, and what happens when these public accounts are removed from the analysis (the content becomes more negative).

2. He promotes one of his talks on Islamophobia which is also quote-tweeted.

Cross referencing affiliation with position on Muslims, shows that anti-Muslim tweets are only promoted by individual and unidentifiable accounts, with some coming from the few alt-right and parody accounts. Similarly, there are no verified users in the people who share the most original tweets who range from a Tommy Robinson supporter to an Italian user circulating #stopislam, a Trump supporter and various freelance writers who are pro-EU and critical of islamophobia. Not surprisingly then in the bios there are numerous references to being a proud supporter of the UK and Brexit, a patriot, and less so a proud supporter of the EU. However, the percentage of people supporting Muslims compared to being against is slightly higher in most (identifiable) locations except the US which is also more likely to be anti-left, showing that those who engage in these debates, from the US, tend to be using them to reinforce right-wing politics. Similarly, most locations are slightly more anti-Brexit except for the US and South Asia.

The fairly even split between the two divided camps in this dataset is starkly illustrated by the network diagram, (Figure 4). The lower node is Lammy's tweet and the retweets around it, the higher node is the most shared right wing anti Muslim, anti-Brexit tweet.

Figure 4: Retweet network diagram – Brexit date:

White = retweets Red = quote tweets
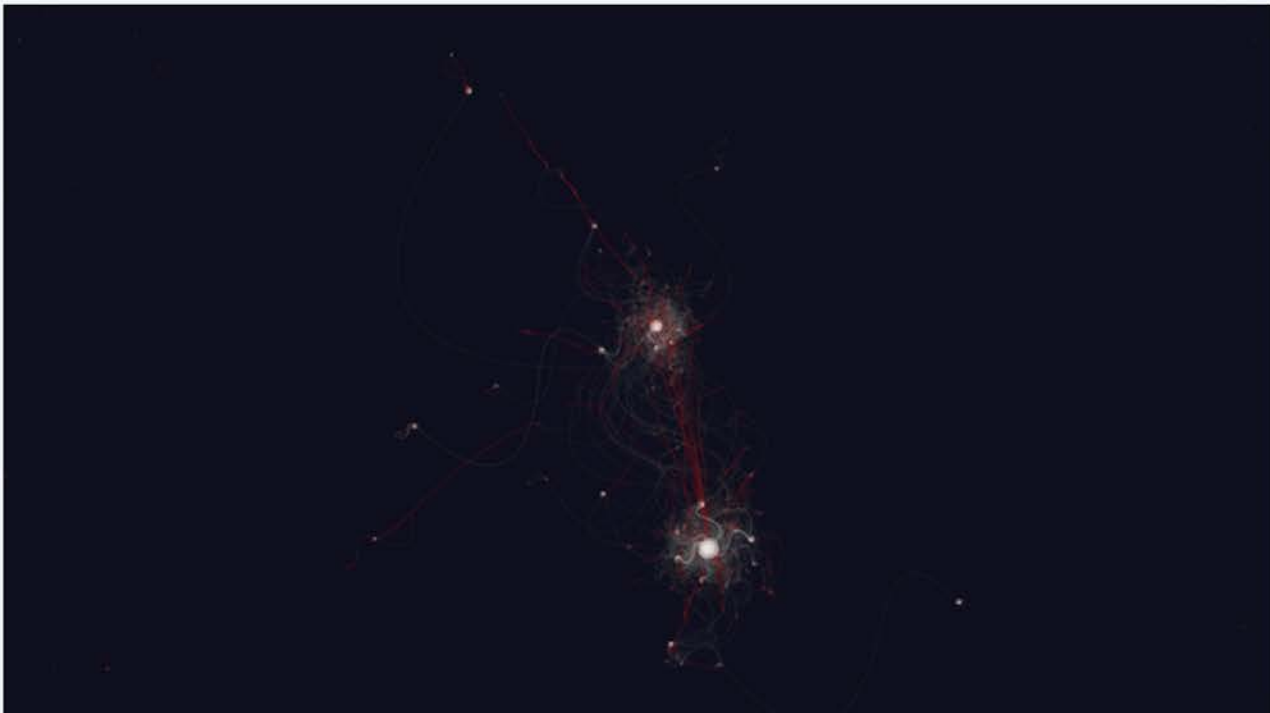
What are the narratives/counter-narratives?

The echo chambers illustrated above are demonstrative of the divisionary character of this dataset, often narrativised as 'culture wars' in public discourse, and further confirmed by the qualitative analysis of the top 50 shared tweets. In this context, political factions appear to interact mostly with those who have similar allegiances except in the case of high-profile, particularly politicians, from an ethnic minority background who are trolled by or a target of abuse by far-right users. In the case of Brexit, this includes Sayeeda Warsi, David Lammy, journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and Naz Shah MP.

Although this dataset demonstrates more hostility to Muslims, 25 of the most shared tweets still oppose Islamophobia while 19 are either explicitly (15) or implicitly (4) anti-Muslim. Most of the tweets are about the meaning of Brexit to the UK, refracted through a party-political lens. There are three main strands of discussion; pro and anti-Muslim discourse, and attacks on the media, particularly the BBC.

On the right, Brexit is perceived as an opportunity to reduce Muslim immigration and 'restore our country'. Typical tropes include anti-semitism, grooming gangs, paedophilia, Shariah law, the treatment of women, terrorism, Islamification and censorship. Brexit is equated to freedom although only two tweets explicitly use these terms – freedom from 'wokism', and from 'authoritarianism'. In many cases, rage is the affective mode, and in the lexical register of culture wars, Brexit a 'fight' that has been won. Only a few are outwardly celebratory then in what is seen as a hard-won battle. In contrast to our findings on white nationalist tweets in relation to #stopislam, we found these tweets used little evidence such as URLs and memes to support their arguments, perhaps due to a perception that the battle is over.

The articulation of reactionary right-wing political causes is also evident in attacks on the media in this dataset. A typical example of how these intersect is the second most retweeted tweet, an anti-Muslim tweet from an individual account (unverified, 3881 followers, RT: 1658); they have flags of the UK, US and Israel in their name and their bio lists their dislikes as "EU/wokery/communism/BBC/SNP".

The tweet is a criticism of the BBC, using irony to suggest that they haven't reported a range of stories. The tweet suggests that the BBC hasn't given any airtime to supporters of two right-wing political projects (Brexit & Trump), or reported on 'Islamic paedophiles in Britain'. It conjures a situation where someone who only ever viewed the BBC wouldn't be aware of these stories or viewpoints ('they know there are no ....(list of absences)). The length of the list works up a sense that these absences are deliberate, and that the BBC has an institutional agenda.

The thread of replies is very long, well over 100 replies, many people have similar flags next to their names. The vast majority support the tweet, criticise the BBC and say that it should lose the licence fee (lots of encouragement to stop paying it); some list other stories that are not being reported and claims that the BBC instead overemphasise racism. There is a sense of rage in the replies with many angry emojis and references to 'it makes you sick/ embarrassed/ fume etc. Some people add to the list of 'absences' in coverage and use sarcasm to emphasise this.

This tactic of listing similar issues to emphasise an argument is evident in another right-wing tweet but also two tweets supporting Muslims who group right-wing 'grievances' together with the implication they are irrational.

Criticism of the media is a central theme of this dataset, the subject of ten of the top 50 shared tweets, with additional responses to media content. This also occurs from the left, an example here is the fourth most shared tweet (358 times), from Miqdaad Versi (25.4k followers), who also has another tweet in the 50 top retweeted tweets. He shared a news story of a bomb planted on a lorry (most likely by the Continuity IRA according to the news article), that would have exploded around the time of Brexit. The tweet suggests that this would have been more widely reported if the perpetrator was Muslim; the subtext of the tweet is therefore a critique of Islamophobia (possibly in the mass media) and the preoccupation with Muslim terrorism. The tweet contains a link to the Belfast Telegraph, a regional newspaper (rather than a national newspaper or national broadcaster) which acts as a kind of confirmation for the claim that this wasn't widely or significantly reported. The image is taken from the report on the website:

'A bomb found attached to a HGV vehicle was a very deliberate attempt to cause an explosion on a ferry to Scotland around the time of Brexit.

You haven't heard about this terrorism?

The perpetrator wasn't Muslim'.

Link to https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/news/belfast-news/brexit-attack-could-caused-death-17702097

Miqdaad Versi 6 Feb 2020, 5.45pm

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1225475529530380288

Versi then tweets three replies, reiterating the claim that this wasn't high up the news agenda: that 'Terrorism in Northern Ireland is largely ignored despite the threat to NI from NI-related terrorism being assessed as "severe" (this tweet contains a link to MI5); a screenshot of the BBC website, showing it doesn't make 'the front page' (which implies it was reported, but not pushed as a main story); and the front page of The Mirror, stating that it did make only 'one front page'.

There are 56 other replies, most of these suggest that the story was actually reported, with several providing links to reports in the Independent, the Guardian and BBC. Other replies give different explanations to why this event wasn't newsworthy, one reply states this is virtue signalling 'nonsense'. These replies therefore do not engage with the subtext of the tweet, that news reporting pushes an Islamophobic agenda. Only a few replies orientate to Islam/Muslims. Both of these are critical of Versi suggesting he is using the Islamophobia card and the focus on Muslim terrorism is justified.

In general, counter-narratives are similarly negative in content to those attacking Muslims. Many are disparaging of those who voted for Brexit as intellectually challenged, racist and immature. Only a couple provide personal experiences of racism. Many question 'what has happened to the UK?' and some suggest minorities will be scapegoated when Brexit goes wrong. However, the tone is generally civil as people seek to distance themselves from the more aggressive tone of anti-Muslim discourse. In this way, the counter-narratives about Muslims reflect the dominant narratives about Brexit by Remainers in wider public discourse.

An example of a more celebratory counter-narrative with a greater focus on Muslims is a Tweet from the founder of the social justice group Documenting Oppression Against Muslims (DOAM) (9785 followers), celebrating that an 80-year-old woman converted to Islam (RT: 265). The tweet includes a 1m44s video of an elderly woman sat down, repeating the shahada, which is being dictated to her by a standing man (perhaps her Imam). At points she mispronounces words, and he smiles and repeats until she says the words correctly.

The tweet uses two hashtags adding #Brexit and #HappyBrexitDay at the end. It is unclear whether the tweet is linking these two matters – implicitly saying that the number of Muslims is growing despite Brexit? That Brexit is an irrelevance? – or whether they have used the hashtags to make the tweet more visible, and so perhaps trolling racist pro-Brexit accounts? It also appears as a quote tweet later in the top 50 shared tweets as a celebration of conversion.

There are 44 replies, the vast majority of which are messages from Muslims and are religious celebration and support (e.g. 'Mashallah', 'Alhamdulillah.. ALLAHU AKBAR'). Some replies use emjois, one posts a gif; there are no links or other materials in the replies. There are three anti-Muslim replies that express a negative emotional response in relation to conversion and invoke '#Londonistan'.

Tweets that link to international issues tend to use Brexit as a political analogy comparing the situation in the US to MAGA and India's CAA (Indian Citizen Amendment Act 2019). There are an equal number of tweets that are supportive of and against right-wing politics.

Suspended accounts tend to be far-right, making more extreme claims such as labelling the London mayor, Sadiq Khan as Muslim Brotherhood, and calls that amount to ethnic cleansing.

The Brexit dataset, although reflecting wider conflicting discourses about Brexit and Muslims, was generally surprising in the number of tweets defending Muslims at this time.

6. The Christchurch Terrorist Attack, 2019

The Christchurch terrorist attack, 2019

For this dataset we sampled three dates: a month of tweets, which started on the day of the attack (15 March 2019 to 15 April 2019); followed by a week of tweets three months later (15 Jun 2019 – 21 Jun 2019); and a final week of tweets six months after the day of the attack (15 Sep 2019 – 21 Sep 2019).

Sample 1:

The terrorist attack on the two Christchurch mosques was the worst in New Zealand's history. The reaction to the attack on Twitter was immediate and vociferous. We sampled over 3 million tweets on or about the terrorist attack and its repercussions in the month following the attack, and the vast majority of those tweets were posted in the first 48 hours. Celebrities, politicians, and sportspeople attracted a large number of likes and retweets for their condolences to the victims and the Muslim community. Only 47 of the top 1000 tweets were posted criticising or attacking Muslims, particularly after Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern wore a hijab to meet and comfort the relatives of the victims. The number of neutral tweets was also quite low, with many news organisations reporting the story in a way that was sympathetic and supportive to the victims.

Sample 2:

In this second sample, the majority of tweets were still supportive of Muslims and critical of Islamophobia. News that the Christchurch terrorist was pleading not-guilty attracted a large number of tweets, from news organisations, activists and individuals critical of him and his ideology. Tweets critical of Muslims clustered around two news stories – first, that a New Zealand man (labelled a neo-Nazi in some tweets, and simply a businessman in others) had been jailed for sharing the terrorist's video, which many accounts complained was a threat to freedom of speech. Second, following New Zealand's a ban on assault rifles, semi-automatic guns, high-capacity magazines, and parts that can be used to build military style-semi automatic weapons, a flurry of tweets from American accounts advocated for the right to bear arms and speculated that a similar ban might be enforced in America.

Sample 3:

By the third sample, the percentage of anti-Muslim tweets in our quantitative content analysis (the top 1000 tweets) had risen to 10.8% and the percentage of supportive tweets reduced to 42.4%. So, the supportive tweets were still very much more frequent, but they had reduced, and the anti-Muslim voices were much more visible. Articles marking the 6-month commemoration of the attack were frequently (re)tweeted, as were articles describing how the Muslim community in Christchurch were responding and rebuilding.

6. The Christchurch Terrorist Attack, 2019

Table 1: **Summary Data:**

	Sample 1 15 Mar 2019 – 15 Apr 2019	Sample 2 15 Jun 2019 – 21 Jun 2019	Sample 3 15 Sep 2019 – 21 Sep 2019	Hashtag #hellobrother
Total tweets	3,099,138	8,072	2,870	25,084
Original tweets	371,225	2,045	547	2,281
Retweets	2,727,913	6,027	2,323	22,803
Quote tweets	176,440 (17.61%)	756 (34.7)	207 (26.27)	1,435 (14.81)
Tweets in English	2,926,844	7,772	2,757	24,003

Table 1 shows the scale of the initial response to the attack, and the drop in tweet frequency after 3 and 6 months has elapsed. Comparing the ratios of retweet to original/quote retweets reveals some interesting insights into the engagement of users, during these three sample periods. In the first month after the attack, 82.39% of the sampled tweets were retweets (17.61% were original tweets or quote tweets); this percentage was even higher in the #hellobrother sub-corpus, where 85.19% of the sampled tweets were retweets (14.81% were original tweets or quote tweets). These percentages indicate an event where users were simply sharing information without feeling the need (or the ability) to add material of their own preparation. By period 2, retweets still represented the largest portion of the sample, but the percentage had dropped to 65.3%, the original and quote retweets had risen to 34.7%; the combined original and quote retweets represented 26.27% of the third sample. So, though much lower in number, tweets posted in the second and (to a lesser extent) the third sample periods may reflect a broader range of users' views and opinions.

Figure 1: **Keywords in the datasets:**

Keywords - Sample 1:
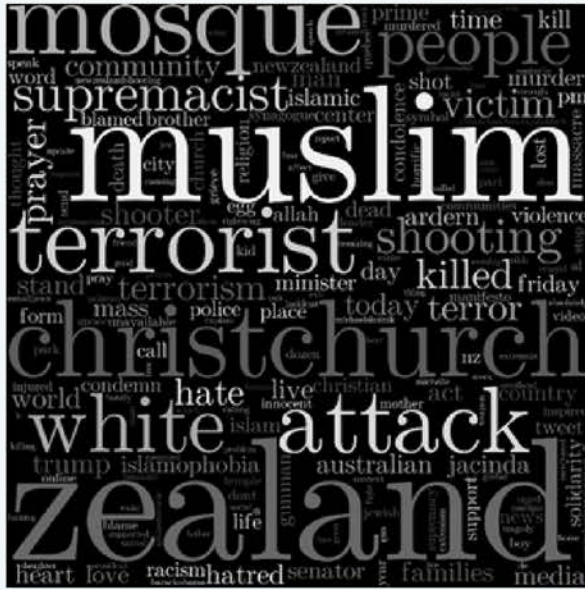
Keywords - Sample 3:
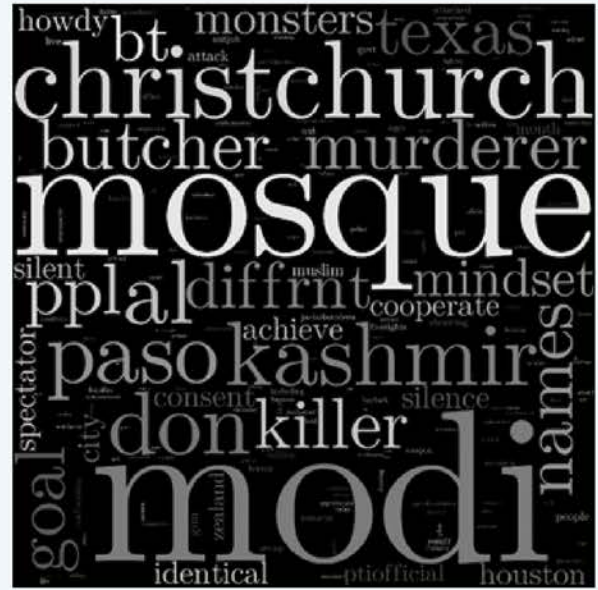
The Keywords of Sample 1 provide an accurate summary of the main dimensions of the attack, in terms of the location (Zealand = 2,054,987; Christchurch = 1,683,963), the victims (Mosque = 1,166,857; Muslims = 994,881; community = 289,917) the perpetrator (terrorist = 1,239,968; white = 1,011,862) and that this was a hate attack, driven by white supremacist ideological motivations (supremacist = 606,695; hate = 278,357). By Sample 3, we can see that key terms relating to the attack were still very frequent (mosque = 2482; Christchurch = 2,399; killer = 1,521), but Twitter users were now linking the attack to broader political events and processes, principally in India, and specifically regarding the treatment of Muslims in Kashmir (N=1,563) under the government of PM Modi (N=3,150).
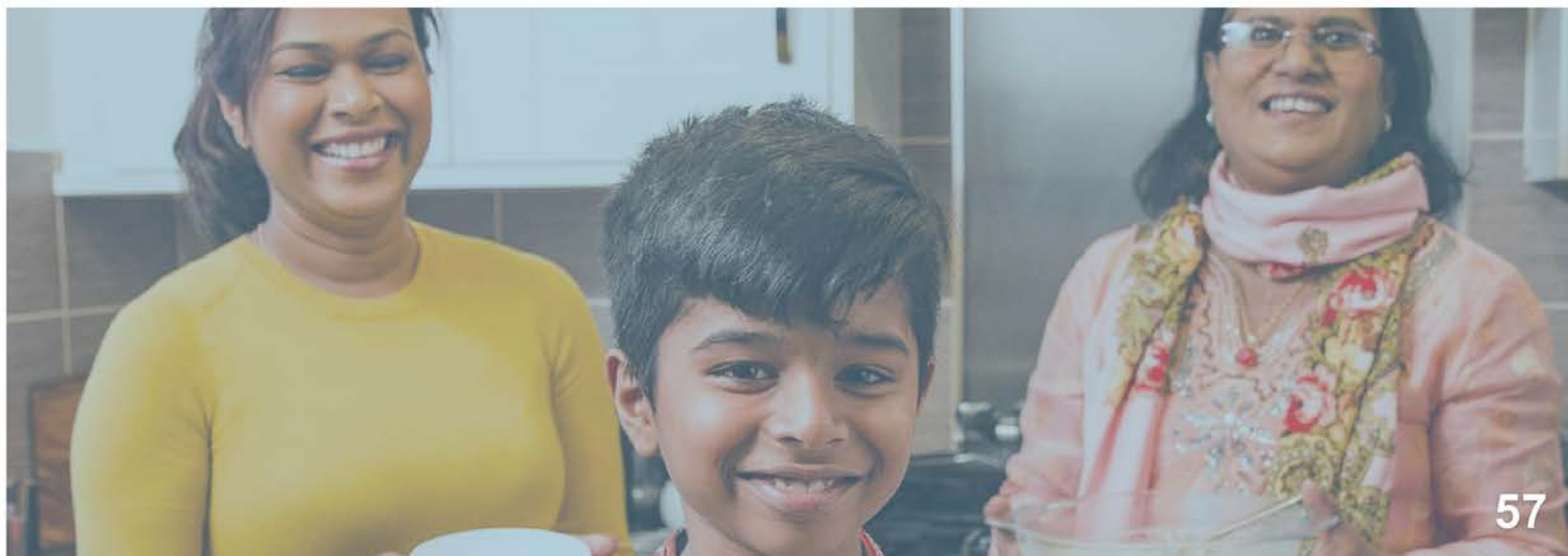
Figure 2: Keywords in the #hellobrother dataset:

The Keywords of the #HelloBrother dataset represent a more focused account of the attack centred on the experience of the victims (door = 15,420; killed = 14,798), and specifically on the first victim, Haji Daoud Nabi (hellobrother = 25,288; Nabi = 14,738).

Table 2: Most collocated words with Islam and Muslims:

Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	#HelloBrother
Christchurch (772,913)	Christchurch (3,287)	Christchurch (2,012)	door (15,352)
Zealand (703,706)	Zealand (2,373)	killer (1,517)	killed (14,633)
attack (618,532)	shooting (1,537)	Zealand (279)	brother (14,581)
community (236,627)	shooter (1,376)	attacks (252)	mosque (14,518)
shooting (197,919)	attack (1,138)	nut (187)	terrorist (14,435)
attacks (188,685)	nonmuslim (690)	attack (120)	received (14,358)
shootings (167,285)	sold (689)	shootings (91)	religion (7,103)
killed (163,559)	attacks (662)	hold (84)	Christchurch (939)
terrorist (160,707)	shootings (653)	elected (72)	victim (886)
mosque (148,083)	amp (391)	event (71)	attack (877)

There isn't a great deal of variation in the collocates through the three samples, with tweets emphasising geographical location, that this was a terrorist shooting and an attack on the community. The collocated words in the #hellobrother sample were skewed significantly by the content of the most retweeted tweet, discussed below.

Table 3: Emojis across each dataset:

Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	#HelloBrother
😭 88,530	❤️ 201	😂 22	😭 9671
😢 77,896	🤎 191	👇 19	❤️ 6698
❤️ 67,873	👏 69	👏 8	🙏 6670
💔 53,351	🤍 60	⬇️ 7	💔 577
[red heart] 46,340	🖤 48	🙏 7	[red heart] 221
😞 26,588	⬇️ 48	😔 6	😢 157
💜 21,493	🐸 27	Ⓖ 5	👇 92
🙏 12,586	⛪ 25	🖤 3	😞 89
😂 12,349	😊 21	🕌 3	🙏 49
🙏 12,027	😭 12	🧕 2	🧡 34

All three sample periods show the affective response to the terrorist attack, with crying, broken hearts and praying emojis all very frequent. The ninth most popular emoji in sample 1 – 'face with tears of joy' 😂 – indicates a sizable constituency of Twitter users who seemingly, not only take enjoyment from the mass murder of Muslims, but also feel sufficiently emboldened to share that response to their followers.

Summary of the quantitative data:

The first thing to note is the scale of the sample – over 3 million tweets were sent in the month following the attack, the largest sample of tweets in our study by a significant margin. The vast majority tweeted in the first 48 hours, as Figure 3 below illustrates:

Figure 3: Timeline of Tweets - Christchurch sample 1:
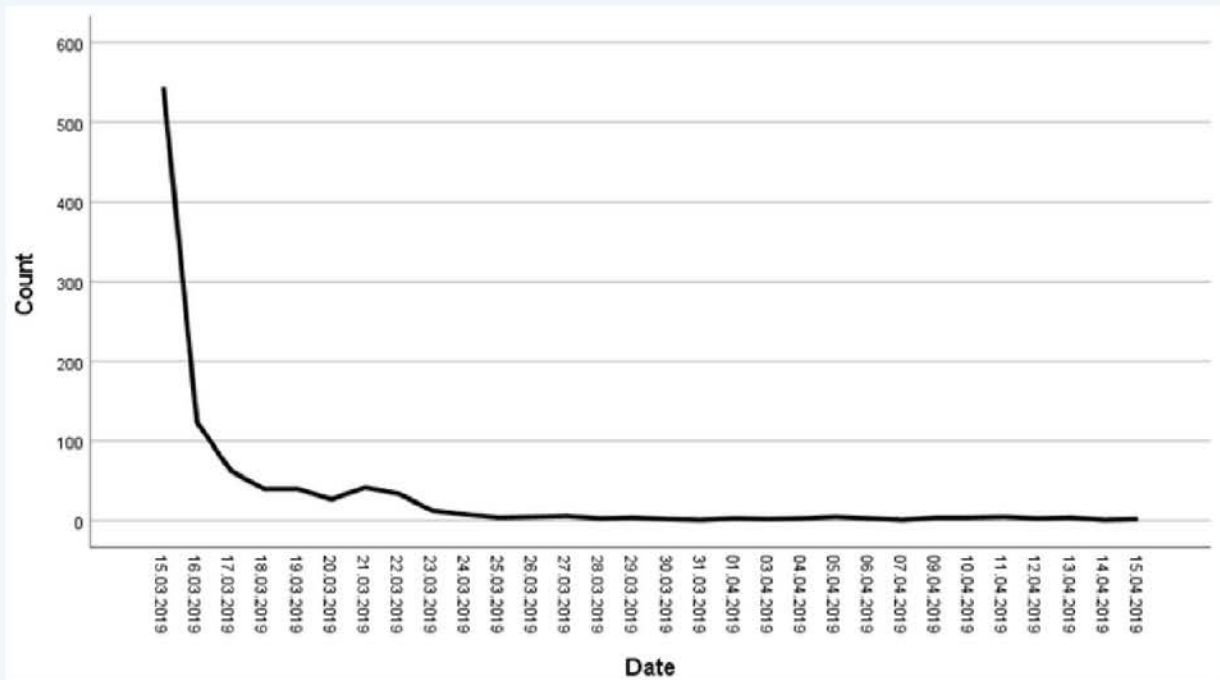
The second and third date ranges show progressively less public engagement with the story, with a little over 8000 tweets in the second sample and only 2800 in the third.

What are the tweets about?

Initially there was outpouring of support for Muslims, both the victims and the wider Muslim community in New Zealand. Table 4 shows 73% of tweets were supportive, but 4.7% still managed to respond to the event by criticising or attacking Muslims. The number of neutral tweets was also quite low, with many news organisations reporting the story in a way that was sympathetic and supportive to the victims. This neutral tone returned by the second sample period:

Table 4: **Position on Islam/Muslims:**

	Sample 1: N	%	Sample 2: N	%	Sample 3: N	%	#hello brother N	%
Anti-Muslim	47	4.7	12	2.4	54	10.8	3	0.3
Supports Muslims	730	73.0	206	41.2	212	42.4	954	95.4
Mixed	55	5.5	21	4.2	27	5.4	7	0.7
Neutral	168	16.8	261	52.2	207	41.4	36	3.6
Total	1000	100.0	500	100.0	500	100.0	1000	100.0

Between Sample 1 and Sample 3, the percentage of tweets criticising Muslims, or sharing anti-Muslim views, increased. Table 4 shows that the percentage of anti-Muslim tweets had risen from 4.7% (N=47) to 10.8% (N= 54) whilst the percentage of supportive tweets reduced from 73.0% (N=730) to 42.4% (N=212). So, six months after the attack, tweets supporting Muslims were still around four times more frequent, but the percentage had reduced, and the anti-Muslim voices were much more visible than during the immediate response to the attack.

The #hellobrother sub-corpus was almost entirely supportive of Muslims, and the victims of the attack specifically. Only 3 of the top 1000 tweets that included this hashtag were coded as anti-Muslim, 7 were mixed and only 36 (3.6%) were neutral.

Table 5: **Number of retweets by position on Muslims:**

	Sample 1		Sample 2		Sample 3		#hellobrother	
	Mean	Sum	Mean	Sum	Mean	Sum	Mean	Sum
Anti-Muslim	1,397	65,646	13	156	1	55	2	7
Supports Muslims	2,002	1,461,285	7	1,535	9	1,821	23	22,394
Mixed	1,633	89,842	11	221	0	6	15	104
Neutral	1,415	237,676	13	3,394	2	407	2	65

Table 5 reiterates the scale of the initial response to the attack, with the top 1000 tweets attracting thousands of retweets: the 730 tweets that were supportive of Muslims were retweeted a total of 1,461,285 times, significantly higher than the 65,646 retweets for the 47 anti-Muslim tweets. This disparity continues in the second and third sample periods, with pro-Muslim tweets significantly outweighing those that targeted or vilified Muslims. The only slight qualifier to this positive finding is that, during sample two, the average number of retweets for anti-Muslim tweets (N=13) was almost twice as much as pro-Muslim retweets (N=7), but the total number of pro-Muslim tweets was still much higher.

The topics that Twitter accounts invoked in relation to the attack, and its repercussions, also shifted across the different sample periods.

Table 6: Topics, sample 1:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Left wing politics	320	32.0	32.0	32.0
Condolences/support/ tributes to Muslims	308	30.8	30.8	62.8
Global Politics/ Politics of RW terrorism	211	21.1	21.1	83.9
Defending Muslims	78	7.8	7.8	91.7
Right wing politics	68	6.8	6.8	98.5
Other	12	1.2	1.2	99.7
Accusation of antisemitism	3	0.3	0.3	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

The first sample was dominated by tweets supporting left-wing politics, offering condolences to the victims and discussion of the politics of right-wing terrorism (the cumulative percentage of these three topics was 83.9% of the sample). The tweets on left wing politics were mainly praise for Jacinda Ardern and the Labour Party, but also included left wing criticism of the news media for the way the attack was initially reported, and tweets opposing the far right and white supremacy. The tweets on global politics/ right wing terrorism were mainly about and criticising the terrorist, but also related the story to other countries (that is: Christchurch and US politics, Christchurch and Indian politics, and so on).

In the second sample, both condolences and left-wing politics were significantly reduced, and tweets on global politics/ right wing terrorism dominated, but there was also an increase in right wing tweets. These tweets often advanced pro-Conservative or pro-far right agendas but this topic also included tweets on white victimhood, Christian victimhood and anti-Muslim tropes.

In the third sample, we see this pattern develop further:

Table 7: Topics, Christchurch - sample 3:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Global Politics/ Politics of RW terrorism	219	43.8	43.8	43.8
Condolences/support/ tributes to Muslims	94	18.8	18.8	62.6
Left wing politics	78	15.6	15.6	78.2
Right wing politics	69	13.8	13.8	92.0
Defending Muslims	34	6.8	6.8	98.8
Other	5	1.0	1.0	99.8
Accusation of antisemitism	1	0.2	0.2	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 shows that the percentage of tweets discussing global politics and the politics of right-wing terrorism have doubled – up from 21.2% in the immediate month after the attack, to 43.8%, six months later. The majority of these tweets discuss the parallels between the political agenda of the terrorist and anti-Muslim politics in other countries – particularly in India – or linked gun control in New Zealand to that issue in the US, sometimes in a conspiratorial way. Condolences and support for the Muslim victims of the attack were still high and were frequently connected to the 6-month anniversary of the attack; and support for left wing politics and parties also remained high. However, support for right-wing politics and causes doubled from 6.8% of Sample 1 to 13.8% of Sample 3. These tweets advanced pro-Conservative, or occasionally pro-far right agendas, emphasised Christian victimhood (claiming that Christian victims of Muslim violence were being ignored in the mainstream media) and other anti-Muslim tropes.

Drawing these findings together, it appears that the increase in anti-Muslim tweets across the three sample periods is linked to, and a reflection of, an increase in tweets advocating a right wing political agenda.

Who were the users?

The most retweeted **tweet** in sample 1 was posted by Barack Obama (61153 retweets), sending his condolences to the people of New Zealand. Table 8, below, shows that the most retweeted **accounts** in sample 1 were also progressive and liberal individuals and organisations: the most retweeted user was the founding partner of 'a worker-owned creative agency for social impact' (66,845 retweets); the second most popular was a US Muslim human rights activist (64,768 retweets).

Table 8: Most shared accounts:

Accounts, Sample 1	Number of retweets	Accounts, Sample 2	Number of retweets	Accounts, Sample 3	Number of retweets
Michael Skolnik	66845	Shannon Watts [anti gun lobby activist]	1085	PTI Official [Pakistan political party]	1390
StanceGrounded	64768	Uk account [former Army engineer]	580	Philip Schuyler [US individual, Republican]	159
Barack Obama	61153	Menaka Doshi [journalist]	278	NBC News	83
Private account [entrepreneur]	60239	Qasim Rashid	243	Pillars Fund [Muslim advocacy group]	64
CJ Werleman [journalist]	44575	Bloomberg Quicktake	211	Bloomberg Quicktake	63
Qasim Rashid [American author & politician]	41867	CNN Breaking News	189	MuslimMatters [non-profit Muslim magazine]	52
Wajahat Ali [journalist]	37449	Simran Jeet Singh [Sikh community activist]	180	Imtiaz Mahmood [UK individual 'Outspoken atheist']	42
CNN	32700	Kyle Orton [freelance writer]	165	APP [Pakistan's National News Agency]	27
Imran Khan	28287	[Indian BJP activist]	131	NZ Human Rights Commission	26
NowThis [news website]	26610	Reuters	123	'ally #BLM' [individual]	24

The most retweeted users in sample 2 diversified to include a US anti gun lobby activist (tweeted about how the legislative response in New Zealand differed to US inaction), an ex-army engineer (tweeting his opposition to halal meat) and a BJP/Hinditva activist (tweeting about the combined threat of Christian and Muslim terrorism). The retweets in sample 3 were dominated by the official account of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, the centrist Pakistani political party founded by Imran Khan, tweeting their opposition to Indian PM Modi.

It is notable that the number of declared or identifiable Muslim accounts decreased from Sample 1 to Sample 3. (Again, here we include only the Tables for Samples 1 and 3, since the percentage in Sample 2 represented a mid-point.)

Table 9: **Religion of account, Christchurch - sample 1:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Unidentified	816	81.6	81.6	81.6
Muslim	139	13.9	13.9	95.5
Christian	17	1.7	1.7	97.2
Jewish	10	1.0	1.0	98.2
Sikh	9	0.9	0.9	99.1
Hindu	6	0.6	0.6	99.7
Atheist/Agnostic	2	0.2	0.2	99.9
Buddhist	1	0.1	0.1	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

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Table 10: **Religion of account, Christchurch - sample 3:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Unidentified	431	86.2	86.2	86.2
Muslim	39	7.8	7.8	94.0
Christian	12	2.4	2.4	96.4
Atheist/Agnostic	10	2.0	2.0	98.4
Jewish	4	0.8	0.8	99.2
Hindu	3	0.6	0.6	99.8
Sikh	1	0.2	0.2	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Table 9 shows that, during the first month after the attack, 13.9% of the sampled tweets were written by declared or identifiable Muslim accounts, which reduced to 7.8% by the third (and it was 9% in the second sample). For context, in the General Election Brexit sample, 3.5% of tweets were from declared or identifiable Muslim accounts, so 13.9% is significantly higher. Whilst in Sample 3 the number of tweets from identifiably Muslim accounts was over 3 times greater than the number of tweets from identifiably Christian accounts (N=12), during Sample 1 there had been over 8 times more Muslim than Christian tweets. This suggests that a lot of the initial reaction to the attack was driven by Muslims responding to the atrocity as Muslims.

The type of accounts also changed between Samples 1 and 3. Table 11 shows that there was a high degree of diversity between individual and institutional accounts in the first month following the attack: 30.0% from mainstream or alternative media sources, 28.6% from individual members of the public, 10.5% from politicians and political parties and 6.1% from celebrities sharing condolences.

Table 11: Identity/affiliation of account, Christchurch - sample 1:

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Individual	286	28.6	28.6	28.6
Mainstream media org/journalist	174	17.4	17.4	46.0
Alternative media org/journalist/blogger	126	12.6	12.6	58.6
State institution/politician/Party	105	10.5	10.5	69.1
Celebrity	61	6.1	6.1	75.2
Unidentified	42	4.2	4.2	79.4
Leftist or social justice advocacy group	35	3.5	3.5	82.9
Mixed	33	3.3	3.3	86.2
Independent political analyst/commentator	32	3.2	3.2	89.4
Academic	32	3.2	3.2	92.6
Artist/musician	29	2.9	2.9	95.5
Alt/far right group	23	2.3	2.3	97.8
Pressure group	8	0.8	0.8	98.6
Religious Representative	7	0.7	0.7	99.3
Other	4	0.4	0.4	99.7
Charity	2	0.2	0.2	99.9
Parody account	1	0.1	0.1	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

By the third sample, there was a significant concentration of tweets from individuals (N=296, 59.2%), with blogger and alternative media significantly lower (N=56, 11.2%), and the mainstream media at less than 10%. Six months after the attack, all other institutional sources, whether politicians, NGOs, advocacy or pressure groups, now showed very little interest in the continued repercussions of the event:

Table 12: **Identity/affiliation of account, Christchurch sample 3:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Individual	296	59.2	59.2	59.2
Alternative media org/journalist/blogger	56	11.2	11.2	70.4
Mainstream media org/journalist	47	9.4	9.4	79.8
Unidentified	22	4.4	4.4	84.2
Academic	18	3.6	3.6	87.8
Mixed	13	2.6	2.6	90.4
Other	12	2.4	2.4	92.8
State institution/politician/Party	8	1.6	1.6	94.4
Leftist or social justice advocacy group	6	1.2	1.2	95.6
NGO	5	1.0	1.0	96.6
Pressure group	5	1.0	1.0	97.6
Charity	5	1.0	1.0	98.6
Alt/far right group	2	0.4	0.4	99.0
Independent political analyst/commentator	2	0.4	0.4	99.4
Parody account	2	0.4	0.4	99.8
Celebrity	1	0.2	0.2	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Looking to the national location of the account, we found that the event elicited a very international response. Cross-tabulating the country of the tweeter with their position on Muslims/Islam, shows not only the diversity of tweets during the month following the attack, but also where clusters of anti-Muslim accounts were located:

Table 13: **Anti- and pro-Muslim sentiment according to country, Christchurch - sample 1:**

	Anti-Muslim		Supports Muslims		Mixed		Neutral/No View		Total	
UK	6	4.7%	98	77.2%	6	4.7%	17	13.4%	127	100%
US/North America	21	6.5%	221	68.0%	19	5.8%	64	19.7%	325	100%
Europe	0	0.0%	13	81.3%	0	0.0%	3	18.8%	16	100%
South Asia	8	8.0%	78	78.0%	10	10.0%	4	4.0%	100	100%
Other Asian Country	0	0.0%	25	96.2%	0	0.0%	2	7.4%	27	100%
MENA Region	0	0.0%	26	89.7%	1	3.4%	2	6.9%	29	100%
Other African Country	0	0.0%	11	91.7%	1	8.3%	0	0.0%	12	100%
Australasia/ Oceania	1	0.0%	36	81.8%	0	0.0%	7	15.9%	44	100%
Russia	0	0.0%	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100%
Mixed	2	10.5%	14	73.3%	0	0.0%	3	15.8%	19	100%
Other	0	0.0%	4	33.3%	0	0.0%	8	66.7%	12	100%
None Mentioned	9	3.1%	203	70.5%	18	6.3%	58	20.1%	288	100%
Total	47	4.7%	730	73.6%	55	5.5%	168	16.8%	1000	100%

32.5% of accounts with an identifiable location were tweeting from North America, 12.7% from the UK and 10% from South Asia (a combination of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka). As well as being the most frequent, these locations were also proportionally the most anti-Muslim. 47 tweets in the sampled top 1000 tweets expressed anti-Muslim sentiments (see Table 13, above) and 35 of these anti-Muslim tweets came from accounts identifiably located in the UK, the US/North America or South Asia. 6.7% of tweets from US/North America and 8% of the tweets from the Indian subcontinent were anti-Muslim, higher than the percentage for the sample as a whole (4.7%).

The cluster of anti-Muslim sentiment from the Indian subcontinent had subsided by the third sample period, but the percentage of anti-Muslim tweets had increased in the UK, in North America and also in Australasia:

Table 14: Anti- and pro-Muslim sentiment according to country, Christchurch - sample 3:

	Anti-Muslim		Supports Muslims		Mixed		Neutral/No View		Total	
UK	5	16.7%	18	60.0%	1	3.3%	6	20.0%	30	100%
US/North America	15	10.0%	52	34.7%	6	4.0%	77	51.3%	150	100%
Europe	1	16.7%	3	50.0%	0	0.0%	2	33.3%	6	100%
South Asia	1	1.9%	29	54.7%	2	3.8%	21	39.6%	53	100%
Other Asian Country	0	0.0%	4	66.7%	0	0.0%	2	33.3%	6	100%
MENA Region	0	0.0%	4	44.4%	0	0.0%	5	55.6%	9	100%
Other African Country	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	25.0%	3	75.0%	4	100%
Australasia/Oceania	10	11.4%	47	53.4%	8	9.1%	23	26.1%	88	100%
South/Central America	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	2	100%
Mixed	0	0.0%	3	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	100%
Other	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	50.0%	2	100%
None Mentioned	22	15.0%	50	34.0%	9	6.1%	66	44.9%	147	100%
Total	54	10.8%	212	42.4%	27	5.4%	207	41.4%	500	100%

Six months after the attack, 11.4% of tweets about Christchurch, from identifiably Australasian accounts, were anti-Muslim, which was higher than the percentage in the sample as a whole (10.8%). This proportion was even higher for tweets from UK accounts, where 16.7% of tweets on Christchurch from this period were Islamophobic.

Network diagrams:

The network of retweets for the Christchurch corpus shows how many people were connected in retweeting the condolences of high-profile accounts with only a few outliers in sample 1 (Figure 4). Figure 5 shows how these connections dissipate as time passes (and the fewer number of tweets).

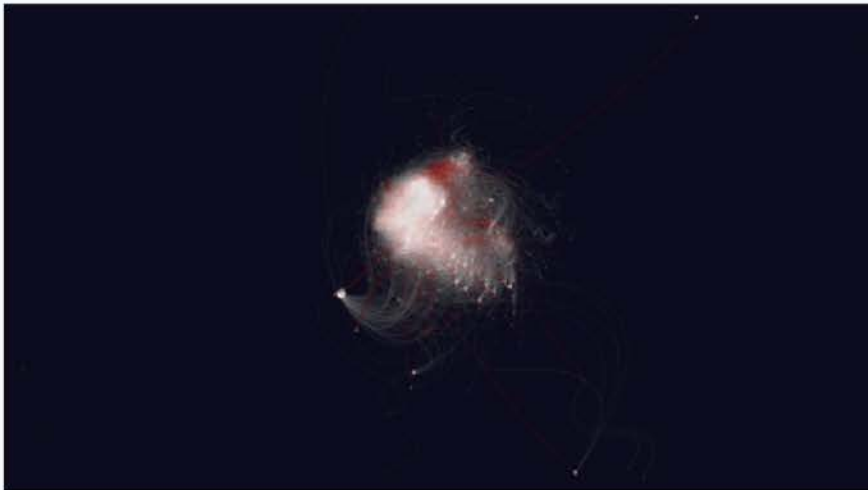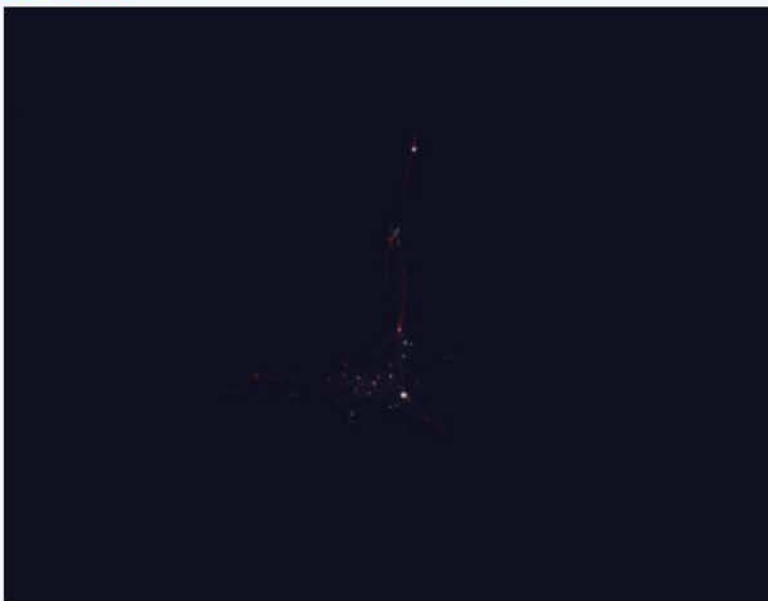**Figure 4: Retweet network in sample 1:**

White = retweets Red = quote tweets

Figure 5: Retweet network in sample 2:

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What are the narratives?

The vast majority of the tweets in the month following the attack supported Muslims, with most of these implicitly opposed to Islamophobia. A large portion of sample 1 were condolences and victim tributes (both those who died and others who survived) – tweets with photos of victims and descriptions of their backgrounds, their personal characteristics or the manner in which they were killed. One example is that of Naeem Rashid and his son Talha who were killed while 'trying to disarm the terrorist'. Images are shared with the statement 'HE IS A HERO. KNOW HIM' and request to retweet.

There were also some examples of the more popular condolence and tribute tweets from the #hellobrother sub-corpus.

The most retweeted tweet was the condolences posted by Barack Obama:

'*Michelle and I send our condolences to the people of New Zealand. We grieve with you and the Muslim community. All of us must stand against hatred in all forms*'.
Barack Obama, 15 March 2019, 1.15pm, RTs 61153

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1106544510555824128

The tweet above referred to "hatred", as a motivation for the attack, and other tweets positioned this more centrally, contextualising the attack with reference to Islamophobia and white supremacism. Some of these tweets specifically mentioned President Trump and the encouragement he is perceived to give to anti-Muslim extremism. Other tweets, such as the example below (48,484 retweets), contextualised the Christchurch attack by listing other white supremacist attacks:
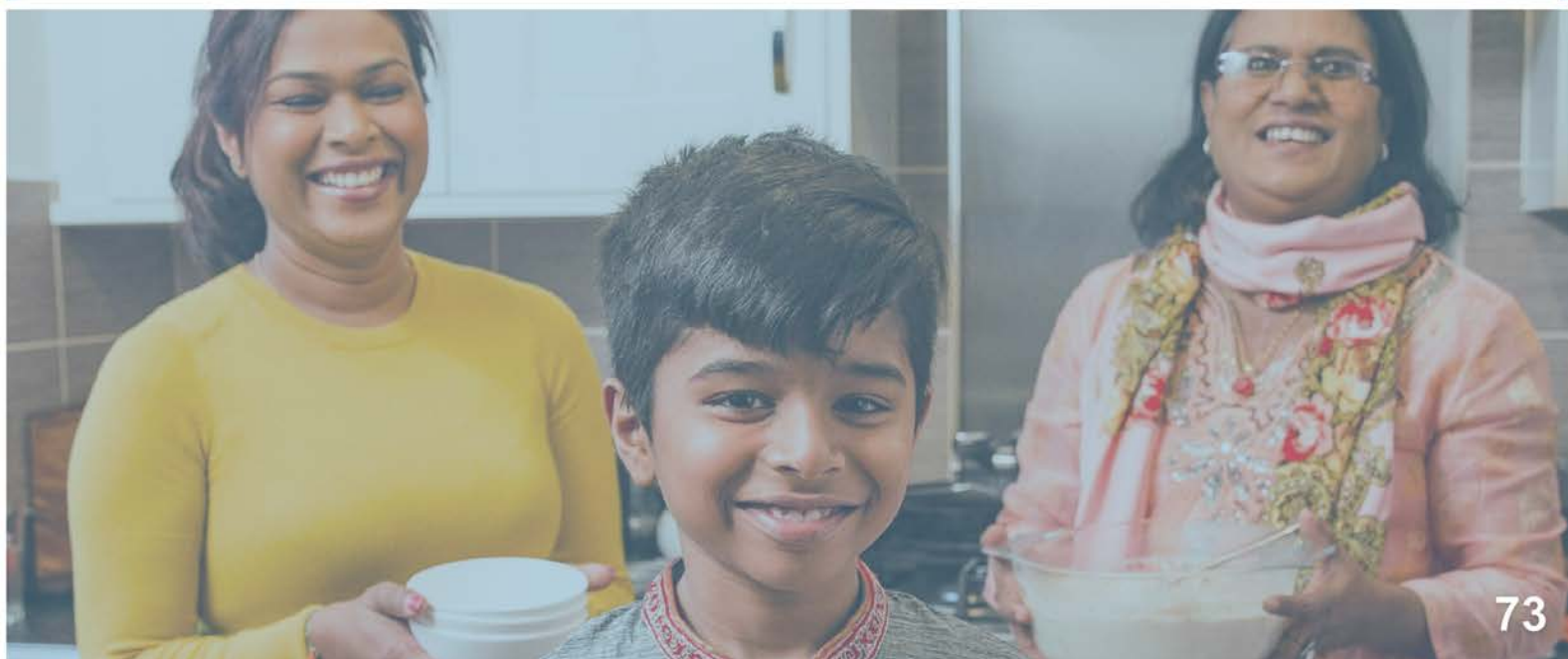
'Christchurch Mosque:
White supremacist.

Tree of Life Synagogue:
White supremacist.

Mother Emanuel AME Church:
White supremacist.

Oak Creek Sikh Temple:
White supremacist.

Overland Park Jewish Center:
White supremacist.

Islamic Center of Quebec City:
White supremacist'.   Michael Sklonik, 15 March 2019, 12.36pm

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1106534709302042624

Tweets praising Jacinda Ardern and the Labour Party were frequently posted, particularly after Ardern was photographed wearing a hijab, whilst comforting the relatives of the victims. The most retweeted tweet that paid tribute to her response to the attack was posted by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (8,341 retweets), the ruler of Dubai and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates:

'New Zealand today fell silent in honour of the mosque attacks' martyrs. Thank you PM @jacindaarden and New Zealand for your sincere empathy and support that has won the respect of 1.5 billion Muslims after the terrorist attack that shook the Muslim community' , 22 March, 4.08pm

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1109124817888915461

The above tweet, praising Ardern, also included the image, below (Figure 6). The image shows the photograph of Ardern, wearing a hijab and hugging a family member of a victim, being projected onto the Burj Khalifa building in Dubai. The image includes the particularly resonant word 'salaam/peace', which may be directed at the mourners or more generally in the world but overall demonstrates solidarity/support.

Figure 6: **Image shared with tweet praising Jacinda Ardern:**

Credit: account of HH Sheikh Mohammed -https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1109124817888915461

Only 4.7% of tweets were coded as anti-Muslim in this first sample. The attack did prompt some right-wing activists and commentators to provide their interpretations of what took place in Christchurch and its political significance, and these often provoked further anti-Muslim comment in reply threads. For example, Dinesh D'Sousa's first response was to claim that the attack was only being reported by US Networks because it fitted with a political agenda to denigrate white men:

'Any act of terror is evil. But if a Muslim guy shot up a church in New Zealand it would not be news here. The media is going crazy over this #MosqueAttack for one reason: it fits their narrative. Muslims good, white man bad! So part of the story here is how #Fake News is made'.

15 March 2019, 12.08pm 4083 RTs

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1106527483246071808

There were also tweets from the political commentator Ann Coutler, the right-wing activist Amy Mek and the right-wing journalist Andy Ngo.

A negative tweet (towards Muslims) that received the most engagement in sample 1 (6,838 retweets) was posted by a Toronto-based columnist. The tweet included an image of schoolchildren wearing niqab. The tweet lists four Muslim-majority countries and says that this is not a scene filmed in any of them; instead, he reveals that the video was filmed in India. The construction of the tweet therefore presents this as an apparent surprise – that we/someone is unlikely to have guessed 'India' when asked the location, and is more likely to have replied with a country like 'Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan or Turkey':

'This is not a scene from Saudi Arabia, Iran or Pakistan or Turkey. No sir, this is a video of the morning assembly at an Islamic school in India. Don't feel jealous PM @JacindaArderm (original spelling)*, it's coming soon to Christchurch #NewZealand'* Tarek Fatah, 3 April 2019, 3.33pm.
https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1113449536385626113

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1113449536385626113

This journalist was a regular feature of our samples, often posting Islamophobic content in the guise of criticising 'Islamism' or 'Islamification'. In the above tweet, he presents a narrative of comparative Islamification: that India has become 'more Islamic', and that the Islamification of NZ is "coming soon". The specific tagging of Ardern (though he spells her name/Twitter handle incorrectly) may also be in response to her wearing the hijab when meeting with, and comforting, the survivors and family members of victims, following the attack. From the narrative world he creates, '[this is] coming soon to Christchurch' because it follows naturally on from politicians, like Ardern, wearing the hijab. The tweet attracted further anti-Muslim replies, suggesting for example that 'Islam should be eradicated'. That such commentary was posted in response to the Christchurch attack is particularly disturbing.

The two most significant stories included in the second sample period were news that the terrorist had pleaded not guilty to the charges against him and that a man in New Zealand, called Philip Arps, had been sentenced to 21 months in prison for sharing the video of the livestreamed massacre, with 30 of his associates. Perhaps surprisingly, it was the second of these two developments which received the most attention on Twitter. Most users commenting on the sentencing were very critical of the prosecution. Half of the ten most shared tweets focus on this story, usually retweeting a news report with a comment (Figure 7). A British account (shared 168 times) refers to it as insane and suggests it is an indication of move towards totalitarianism in the West.

Figure 7: Frequently shared news story:

Credit: The Globe and Mail:

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-man-gets-21-months-for-sharing-video-of-new-zealand-mosque-shooting/?cmpid=rss&utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter

The Globe and Mail ✓ @globeandmail · Jun 18, 2019
Man gets 21 months for sharing video of New Zealand mosque shooting
dlvr.it/R6ntBc

Another tweet minimised the crime he committed, suggesting that it was 'crazy' that he had been sentenced to nearly two years for simply "sharing a video on the internet". Other users claimed that the prosecution was motivated by a specific political agenda (Figure 8):

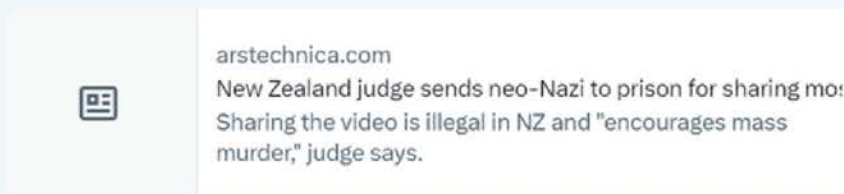**Figure 8: News story shared with a tweet suggesting a political agenda:**

Credit: https://www.arabnews.com/node/1512346/world

Arab News ✔ @arabnews · Jun 18, 2019
New Zealand man was jailed for 21 months on Tuesday for distributing gruesome livestream video of the Christchurch mosque attacks that killed 51 Muslim worshippers, local media reported bit.ly/2RncTEt

In the above retweet (19 retweets), the user (a pro-gun Australian account) shares a news story accompanied by text (not shown here) which suggests that the sentencing of Arps for "sharing video" amounted to thought crime – using the term "doubleplusbadthink", a reference to Orwell's dystopian novel 1984 – which, they argue, was to be expected from a "socialist government". However, other tweets provided some contextualisation for Arps' actions, suggesting that, far from a victim of an overzealous legal system or an innocent who had unwitting shared "a video on the internet", he had been motivated by an extremist political ideology (Figure 9):

Figure 9: News article shared in a tweet criticising Arps:

Credit: https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2019/06/neo-nazi-who-shared-mosque-shooting-video-gets-21-months-in-n-z-prison/

arstechnica.com
New Zealand judge sends neo-Nazi to prison for sharing mo:
Sharing the video is illegal in NZ and "encourages mass murder," judge says.

Sharing the news article above (Figure 9), works to substantiate the user's decision to describe Arps as a "neo-Nazi". The article revealed his history of anti-Muslim hate crimes, delivering a box of pigs' heads to the Al Noor mosque (incidentally, one of the mosques attacked on March 15th 2019) accompanied by two men who gave Nazi salutes, as well as his attitude to the video he shared, calling it "awesome". Further, he didn't simply share the video; the article revealed that he has also asked one of his associates "to insert crosshairs and include a kill count in order to create an Internet meme". Vans owned by Arps' insulation company were decorated with Nazi symbols, and white supremacist symbols were used in promotional materials for the company. During his trial, the judge stated that Arps had "strong and unrepentant views about the Muslim community and had compared himself to Rudolf Hess", the Deputy Führer of the Nazi Party. His act of sharing the video was therefore intended to glorify the terrorist and encourage hatred of Muslims.

By the third sample, tweets on global politics/ right wing terrorism were most frequent – these were mainly about and criticising the terrorist, but a significant portion linked the ban on assault weapons in New Zealand to gun control in the US, sometimes in a conspiratorial way. For example, one tweet, from a US account, misrepresents the gun controls recently introduced in New Zealand by claiming that the government have confiscated the guns of 5 million people, implying that these 5 million people no longer own any guns. In fact, the government introduced a far more specific control, banning assault rifles, semi-automatic weapons, parts that can be used to build these semi-automatic weapons and high-capacity magazines. So, people in New Zealand are still able to own guns, just not the ones proscribed. This tweet is then quote tweeted by another US account, who offers a conspiratorial explanation: the government had a plan to disarm its citizens and achieved this goal through a staged mass shooting and "propaganda media". The lesson they take from this is clear: the US government also desires to disarm its citizens and so, it too, will stage mass shootings in order to remove their right to 'bear arms' (as stated in the 2nd Amendment of the US Constitution). The tweets are therefore more concerned with American political debates than anything that actually took place in New Zealand, during the attack or in its wake.

There was also an increase in right wing tweets to 13.8% of the third sample, which included tweets advancing pro-Conservative or pro-far right agendas, tweets on Christian victimhood and anti-Muslim tropes. One tweet, shared by a UK based atheist, (46 retweets) evokes the conventional tropes of Muslim violence and fanaticism in suggesting that a Muslim convert ramming a police car with their own car (includes image) is the 'Muslim response' to the sympathy shown to Muslims in New Zealand since the terrorist attack. The user therefore locates this violent incident within an implicit narrative of 'liberal sleepwalking', wherein 'the West' (and, here, New Zealand specifically) is exposing itself to danger because of its accommodating stance towards Muslims.

Other tweets provided narrative accounts of the political response taken in New Zealand following the attack, suggesting that it is an example of a recognisable pattern of blaming white supremacists and using this to tighten gun laws to 'punish law abiding citizens'. Such a tweet was posted three times by an anti-immigrant account, in reply to posts tweeting about gun control in Canada and criticising PM Justin Trudeau. The tweets also included an image of Jacinda Ardern, in hijab, with the caption claiming Islam is "responsible for 99% of the world's terrorism". Their opposition to Islam is such that they even object to laws being changed "to protect innocent Muslims". By inserting two key phrases in scare quotes – "WHITE SUPREMACISTS and "BUY BACK" – the user implies that these are questionable or suspect aspects of the narrative. They are, presumably, suggesting that the terrorist wasn't a white supremacist, though it is unclear what term they thought would be more accurate; similarly, it is unclear why they believe that there wasn't a 'buy back' of assault weapons in New Zealand. However, they are clear that this is a familiar response – and is indicative of a "globalist game plan".

Although both condolences and tweets supporting left-wing politics were significantly reduced, they were still prominent in the third sample, and frequently tied to the 6-month anniversary of the attack. Such tweets, often summarising the shocking events of that day with additional directives that you/we should "Never Forget", function to oppose the way that far-right users on Twitter, and their fellow travellers, were attempting to rewrite the narrative and euphemise the motivation of the terrorist.
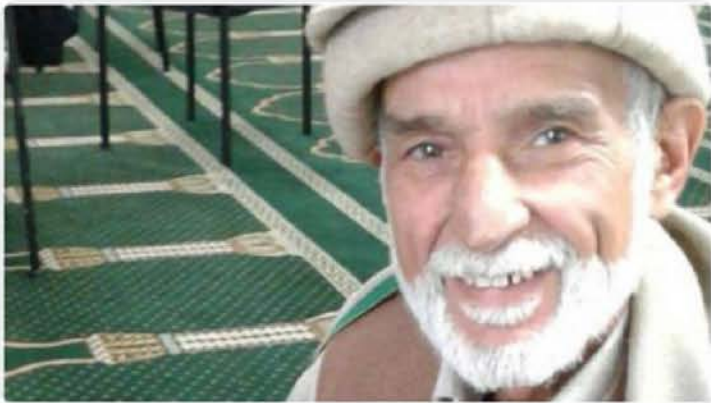
#HelloBrother:

The most retweeted tweet (8540 RTs) in the #hellobrother sample was a tribute to Daoud Nabi, the man killed after saying 'hello brother' to the terrorist. The tweet included an image of him, which has been cropped to emphasise his smiling face (widely used, uncredited, Figure 10). (Other tweets in the samples include an uncropped version of this image, which showed a young girl stood beside him.)

'"Daoud Nabi", a 71-year old Afghan refugee who escaped death in his country to cite in New Zealand where he received the terrorist at the mosque door with the words 'welcome brother' but the terrorist killed him directly' #HelloBrother #NewZealandTerroristAttack

(we have used the original wording as so many people retweeted it in this form, making it harder to identify the initial user, we are also not publishing the source of the tweet for the sake of anonymity.)

Figure 10: Image shared in the most circulated tweet in #hellobrother:

The account is Saudi Arabian (the bio is in Arabic), unverified and with 9740 followers. No accounts were tagged into the tweet, which uses no emojis; the tweet uses two hashtags, #HelloBrother and #NewZealandTerroristAttack which serve partly as archive markers and partly to present the account's understanding of the event – that this was a terrorist attack, rather than a more generic 'killing'.

The first 14 replies to the tweet were also posted by this same account, with similar tributes to other victims. Each tweet contains a photo and a description of the victim, where they are also given a short descriptive name (The Heroine, Little Angel, The Dreamer, etc). Several of these tweets describe children who had been murdered, which makes for very difficult reading. There are more than 100 other replies in the thread, almost all expressing horror and grief. Some of these contain very short replies containing just a few words or an emoji (broken hearts and praying hands were especially common).

A few replies express doubt that this happened – one reply asks why would someone welcome a gunman, to which another account replies 'Because we are Muslims'. There are three other replies where someone expressed doubts more strongly (i.e. that this didn't happen), to which a particular account replies to them with a subtitled gif indicating that he did say "hello brother".

The second most retweeted #hellobrother tweet was posted by the Turkish football player Mesut Özil (verified account, 26.1m followers, Figure 11). This was also a tribute to Daoud Nabi and states *'Terrorism has no religion'*, then calls on people to *'unite and stand together against violence against any race or belief'*. The tweet contains three emojis – praying hands, a red heart (love) and the New Zealand flag – the hashtags #hellobrother and #Christchurch and a 1m47s video. The video is a very high-quality production, stamped with the logo for TRT World – a Turkish public broadcaster and international news channel. The video opens with "Hello, Brother" in the centre of the screen, before showing a series of men and women, shot in medium close up against a black background so that their heads and shoulders fill the frame; a slow, melancholy piano melody plays underneath a voice over; all the words spoken are subtitled.

'His final words shed light on a day shrouded in hate.'
'Hello, brother'
'In this world of hysteria, fear-mongering and anger'
'He addressed ugliness with beauty'
'Hello, brother'

Figure 11: Video shared in a tweet by footballer Mesut Özil:

Credit: TRTWorld, https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1110170205748187136

The video ends with a tribute on screen, that names Nabi and mentions the atrocity for the first time: "In memory of Haji-Daoud Nabi. The first victim of the Christchurch massacre. He inspired a legacy that will live on. #HelloBrother".

The #hellobrother dataset, as a whole, functions as a tribute to the victims. It is therefore surprising that it was our only sample with tweets that included video footage recorded by the terrorist. Four #hellobrother tweets included clips from the terrorist's livestream recording: one clip, included in a single tweet, was only three seconds long and stopped immediately after Nabi can be heard saying "hello brother"; another clip, included in two tweets, was five seconds long and showed his greeting and then him immediately being killed; a final clip, included in a single tweet, was 45 seconds long and showed not only Nabi being killed, but also the terrorist moving past his dead body, entering the mosque, and killing countless others.

At time of writing, only one of these tweets has been removed. Tweets including the 3 second, the 5 second and 45 second clips of the murders still haven't been taken down, despite being reported to Twitter (by us) several times. Based on what they wrote, and their bios, the people who tweeted these clips seem to be motivated by revulsion at the actions of the terrorist and anger that the full horror of what he did wasn't being shown. One of these tweets identified the video as "One of the tweets that Twitter deleted", so reposting it suggests that they objected to its removal. Perhaps the reason the tweets remain online is that the tenor of their words makes it clear that they are disaffiliated from the aims of the terrorist and the violence in the videos. However, writing in the Guardian at the time, the columnist Jason Burke observed that the central point of the attack was not just to kill Muslims, "but to make a video of someone killing Muslims".[1] Users who (re)tweeted clips of the video did so for identical reasons: they wanted to share a video of Muslims being killed by a white man because of what they think it reveals – the tweet on the left, above, also included the hashtags #Muslims_Under_Attack and #ChristianTerrorism.

Analysis of the Christchurch terror attack on Twitter shows how, following a crisis, Twitter can be mobilised to show transnational solidarity with a victimised minority. This led to highly visible support for Muslims and highlighted the problem of white supremacism. However, it also illustrates how these solidarity movements can be fairly transient, and once celebrity support has dropped away, can leave a space open for more negative voices to emerge and appropriate the conversation, what could be termed, a long tail of racism. Civil Society Organisations could learn from the practices of right-wing groups to continue to fill the space and control the narrative to highlight contextual issues relating to discrimination and hate crime.

1. Jason Burke, "Technology is terrorism's most effective ally. It delivers a global audience," Guardian, March 17, 2019, https://rm.coe.int/168071e53e (accessed 16 March 2023)

The Covid pandemic 2020

For this dataset we sampled three dates, a month at the height of the pandemic 19 March 2020 – 19 April 2020 (sample 1) and a week around the two Eid festivals, Eid al Fitr 19 – 25 May 2020 (sample 2) and Eid al Adha 29 July – 4 August 2020 (sample 3) (Table 1).

Sample 1:

The first sample adopts a significant focus on the festival of the Tablighijamaat's (a transnational Sunni Islamic movement) annual gathering in Nizamuddin, (Delhi, India), which received international delegates, many of whom became stranded when lockdown rules were imposed, was accused of being a superspreader event (Aschwanden, 2020; Ghasiya & Sasahara, 2022) and led to a nationwide search for people who had attended. The event gained significant attention despite the fact there were many other religious gatherings in India at that time (Tierie & Ranjan, 2022). This sample is dominated by Indian tweets, bloggers, youtubers etc, and some alt-right accounts. Indian propaganda about Muslims spreading Covid is the dominant topic with regular updates on events and activities where Muslims are testing positive although there is also significant countering by drawing attention to the positive activities of Muslims and calling out discrimination.

Sample 2:

This is an unusually positive, even benign, dataset as many of the tweets consist of Eid greetings including two of the most retweeted tweets from Narendra Modi to the UAE and Pakistan, and in that sense tweets are mostly supportive. Alternatively, tweets were about Eid during Covid, information about how to celebrate safely such as #EidatHome in the UK. As the least disputatious dataset in the project, there was also less need for countering although there is some discussion around social distancing. Tweets from and about Nigeria feature highly in this dataset, from news sources, individuals and government sources, as well as other Muslim countries. There was some debate around easing up restrictions in the country (the closest thing to a dispute in this sample), with some government agencies arguing in favour and mosques arguing against. This was also echoed in the US, with Trump attempting to force places of worship to reopen.

Sample 3:

The third dataset, around the festival of Eid al Adha, is smaller again, and also more positive or information driven. It contains a mixture of the above – discussions of Hajj during Covid, Eid greetings, with a small rise proportionally in discussions about Muslims spreading Covid, particularly in the UK due to a Conservative MP accusing BAME communities of spreading Covid and being called out for this. Otherwise, although India continues to be a dominant location, it is more mixed geographically with Pakistan and Nigeria featuring as with sample 2 and therefore more Muslim users.
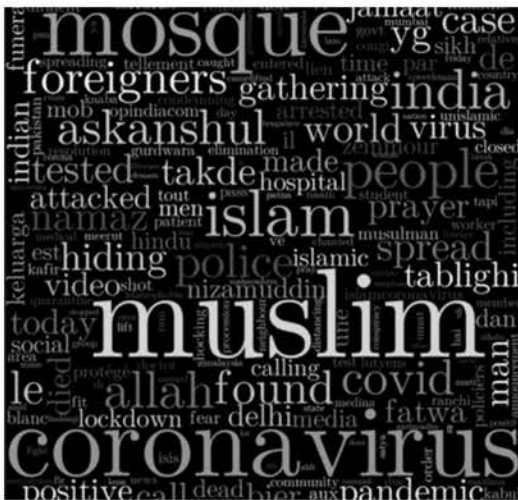
Table 1: Summary data:

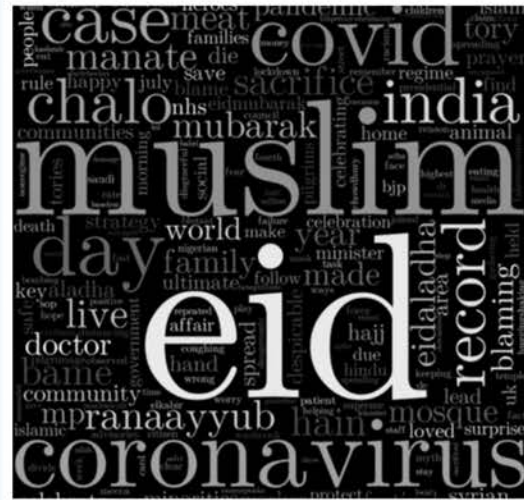|	Sample 1 19/3/20 19/4/20	Eid al Fitr 19-25/5/20	Eid al Adha 29/7-4/20	#Tablighijamaat
Total Tweets	433574	119700	28097	13742
Original Tweets	43249	29301	2253	931
Retweets	391225	90399	25844	12811
Tweets in English	356562	100772	26388	13310
Quote Tweets	2190	951	208	177

Figure 1: Keywords in the datasets:

Sample 1

Sample 3

The word clouds illustrate the different foci of the two datasets – with sample 1 pointing to Muslims and 'foreigners' (N=42120) 'found' (N=40867), 'hiding' (N=28241) and 'gathering' (N=19707) in the mosque while in sample 3 there are references to 'doctor' (N=2256), 'MP' (N=2380) and the 'Bame community' (N=3703) reflected social distancing discussions in the UK. Sample 2 (Table 2) shows a more genial focus on greetings for Eid.

The word cloud for the #Tablighijamaat is even more obvious in this respect (Figure 2):

Figure 2: Frequently used words in the #Tablighijamaat:

The Indian presence is visible in all outputs from the data, both topic and location is further illustrated by the most collocated words with Muslim and Islam, and Eid in the case of sample 2 and 3 (Table 2).

Table 2: Most collocated words with Islam and Muslims:

Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	#Tablighijamat
Coronavirus 25198	Mubarak 11151	Mubarak 3122	Hiding 7050
India 24873	AlFitr 8175	BAME 2506	Lucknow 6838**
Elimination 15621	Prayers 6308	AlAdha 1771	Community 1035
Hiding 16062	Celebrate 5302	Celebrating 969	Delhi 769
Caught 11771	World 4628	Blame 951	Accused 666
Namaz 11570	Hindu 4589	Happy 885	Fishing 661***
Neighbours 11343	LockdownIndia 4445	Community 862	Karnataka 659****
Bier 11160	Choudhury 2996*	Council 845	Event 648
Community 9747	Dabirul 2993*	Spread 816	Nizamuddin 238
Indian 9664	Spent 2931	Hands 794	Vilify 236

*Dabirul Choudhury was a 100 year old British Muslim who raised money for Coronavirus victims by walking during Ramdan. Labour leader opposition MP, Keir Starmer, draws attention to this in his tweet.

**Area where people were 'found hiding' in a mosque

***Some Muslims are attacked while fishing – used as an example of discrimination

****Location of fishing incident

Emojis (Table 3) in sample 1 are predominantly negative given the topic of coverage but also point to positive and negative examples of Muslims activity (pointing hands) and suggest an element of ridiculing this behaviour (laughing faces, rolling eyes) (Table 3). Sample 2 reflects the more positive focus of this dataset while sample 3 illustrates the need to follow guidelines during celebrations. The only significant emoji from the #Tablighijamaat is clapping hands (N=1237) which appears to be congratulatory in catching people for transgressing rules or sarcastic 'well done on playing the victim card'.

Table 3: **Emojis across each dataset:**

Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3
😷 102315	💔 2229	🚫 336
👇 3405	🙏 1398	🤼 193
🍞 3136	🙌 1144	✅ 190
🙏 2415	👏 808	👆 162
😠 1611	👇 704	😮 130
💔 1025	👇 635	👝 129
🤣 939	😁 616	🙋 119
👈 896	😂 516	⬛ 98
😂 881	🌹 481	✨ 97
😁 831	👏 458	👉 95

Use of hashtags is again fairly descriptive with the significant recurrence of the tablighijamaat hashtag which features 13742 times across the time frame as well as other hashtags that relate to the event such as nizmuddin and derivatives (N=3669). However, there is also evidence of counter-narratives in calling out #fakenews (N=2228), #fakenews also appears with #tablighijamaat 2123 times often to counter vilification (it can, also be however, used to attack Muslims). #altfactnewscheck, (N=5317, 4969) is also significant in sample 1. Altfactnewscheck or Alt news is the product of Mohammed Zubair, a small outfit which aims to analyse misinformation and disinformation across India. He has been arrested and imprisoned several times for tweeting 'inflammatory tweets' which has raised concerns over free speech in India. The second (and third) sample show more evidence of Eid related hashtags such as Eid N=6148 and EidMubarak N=6217 and Covid related information such as coronaupdatesinIndia N=4442, and lockdown4guidelines N=4437. Sample 3 also refers to the hajj (N=520), hajj2020 (N=340).
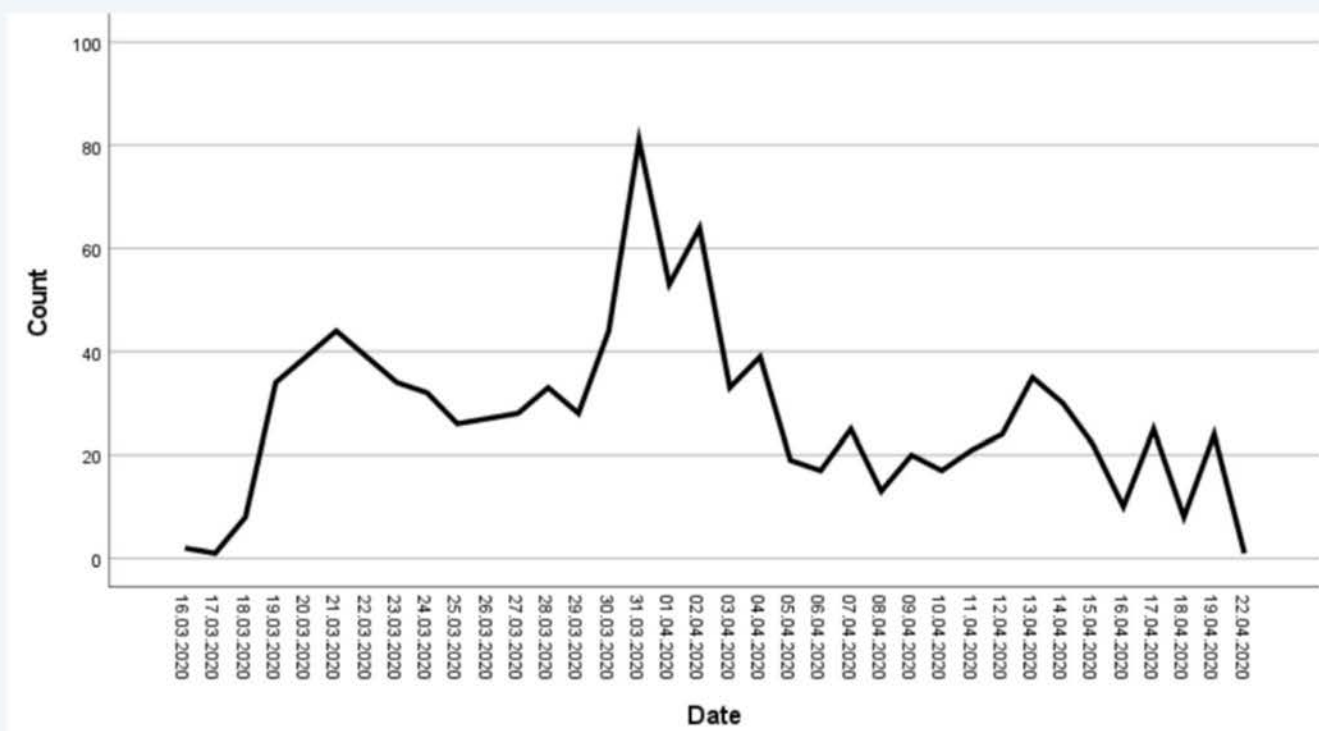
Timeline:

The timeline for the first sample date is much more uneven than event specific datasets and reflects the ebb and flow of activities related to Coronavirus (Figure 3). The peak at the end of March and beginning of April relates to developments in the Tablighijamaat event (updates, finding new cases, people 'hiding').
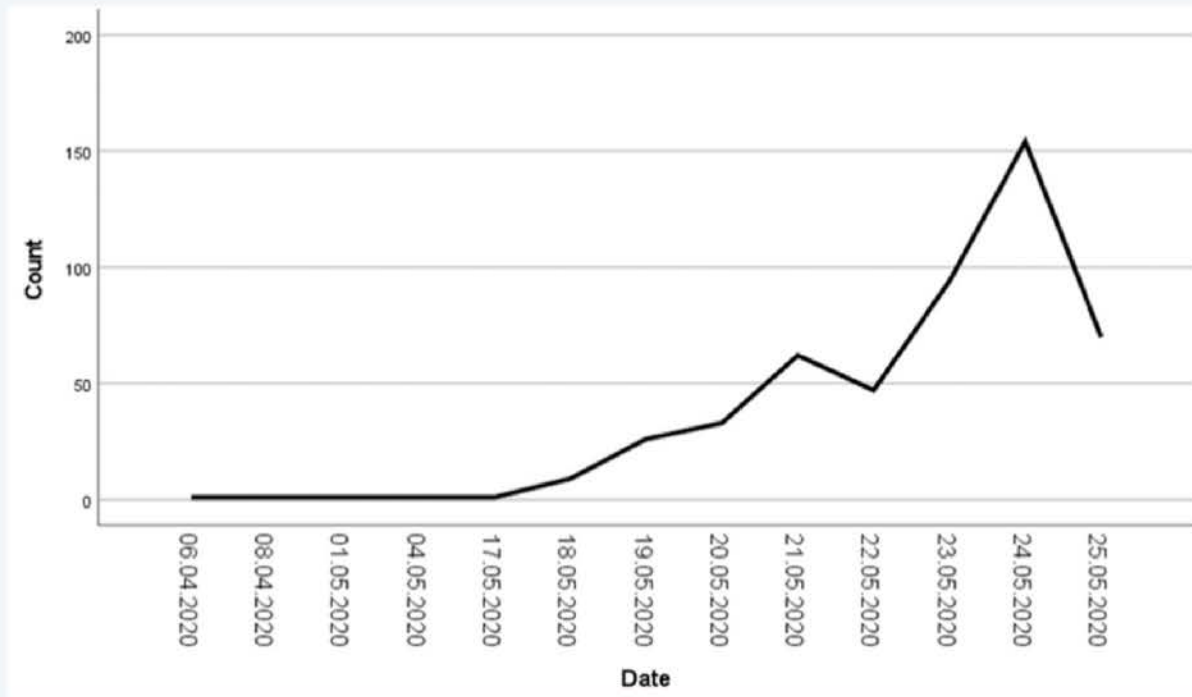
Figure 3: Sample 1:

In samples 2 (Figure 4) and 3 the timelines peak around the Eid dates on the 24th May and the weekend of Friday 31st July and Saturday 1st August 2020.

Figure 4 - Sample 2: Eid al Fitr:

What are the tweets about?

Deleted and suspended tweets are highest in #tablighijamaat, illustrating its negativity (8.7% were deleted and 6.6% suspended, followed by sample 1 (at 3.8%, 3.1% respectively) and the last sample (3.4%, 3.2%), then dropping to 2.2% and 1.4% in sample 2 which is less conflicting.

The quantitative content analysis shows that sample 1 and #tablighijamaat are significantly more negative than the later samples. Whilst tweets supporting Muslims (in sample 1) still outnumber those against, Table 5 shows that the tweets that were more likely to be shared were negative, amplifying those tweets. In the 2nd sample, the anti-Muslim content drops significantly due to the greater focus on Eid greetings. There is a small rise in negative tweets in sample 3 as concerns about social distancing start to arise once more. Engagement with supportive tweets was higher during the Eid celebrations (Table 5). Disagreement with original tweets is higher in #tablighijamaat (15.9%), and there is a higher circulation of positive tweets, showing some contestation here (Table 5).

Table 4 - Position on Muslims

	Sample 1: Number	%	Sample 2: No	%	Sample 3: No	%	#tablighi jamaat	%
Anti-Muslim	307	30.7	26	5.2	54	10.8	412	48.2
Supports	517	51.7	302	60.4	288	57.6	184	21.5
Mixed	120	12	39	7.8	21	4.2	231	27
Neutral	56	5.6	133	26.6	137	27.4	27	3.2
Total	1000	100%	500	100	500	100	854	100

Table 5: Position on Muslims - Retweets:

|	Sample 1: No	Sample 2: No	Sample 3: No	Tablighijamaat
Anti-Muslim	129179	1132	2446	1180
Supports	97758	18572	13833	3023
Mixed	40822	10350	184	1477
Neutral	11413	4335	2442	6754

Topics:

In sample 1, as seen above, there was a fairly even balance between those tweets defending Muslims and attacking (Table 6) yet again, more users were retweeting negative tweets (Table 9) while in samples 2 and 3 more people were defending Muslims.

Table 6: **Frequently occurring topics in sample 1:**
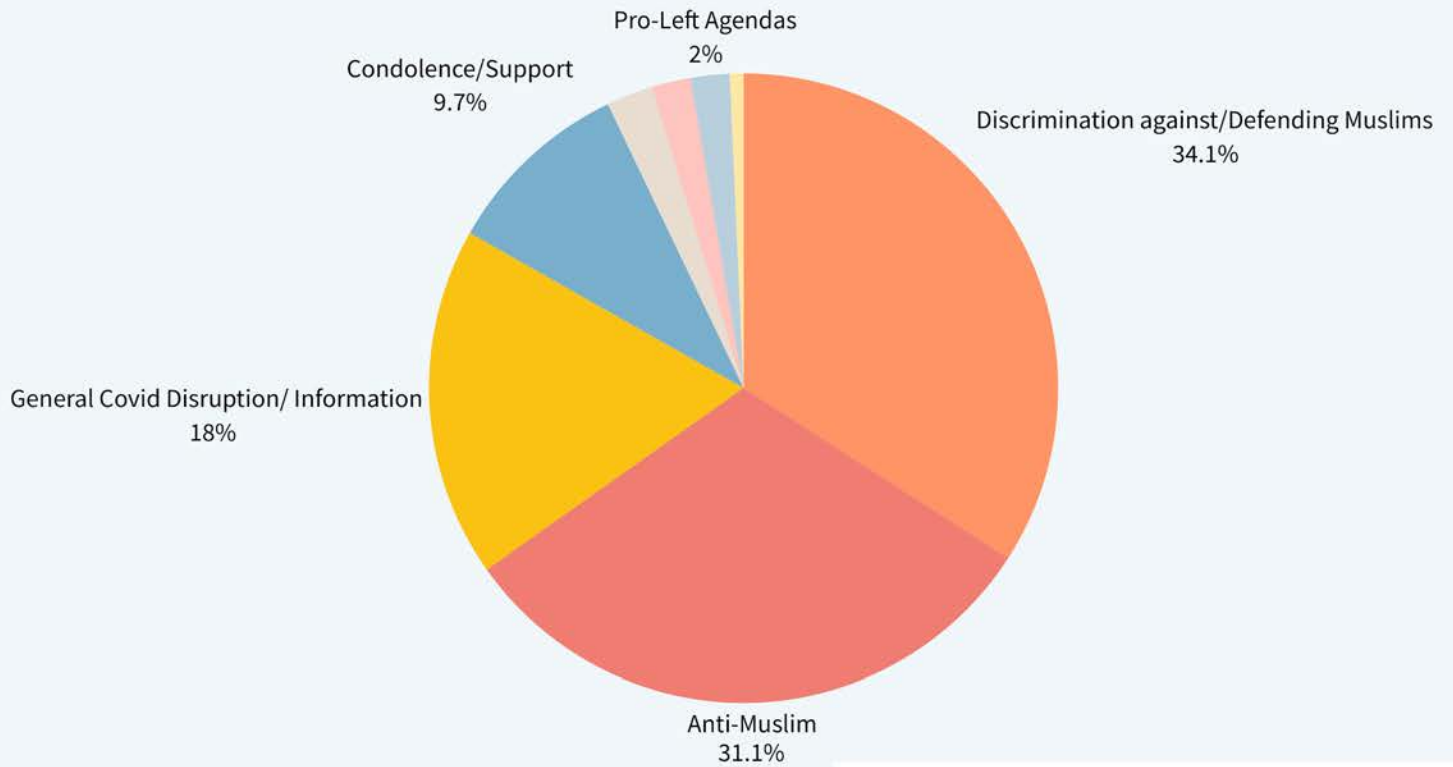
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Discrimination against/Defending Muslims	341	34.1	34.1	34.1
Anti-Muslim	311	31.1	31.1	65.2
General Covid Disruption/ Information	180	18.0	18.0	83.2
Condolence/Support	97	9.7	9.7	92.9
Covid & Politics	24	2.4	2.4	95.3
Pro-Right Agendas	20	2.0	2.0	97.3
Pro-Left Agendas	20	2.0	2.0	99.3
Other forms of discrimination	7	0.7	0.7	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	100.0	

A more granular analysis shows that scapegoating Muslims for Covid is the highest single topic in this sample (N=159, 15.9%) but pointing out discrimination (10.5%) and anti-Muslim propaganda (8.2%) is quite common. Also, negative topics are more likely to be retweeted (see Table 9), scapegoating tweets are retweeted 53389 times and specific anti-Muslim tweets 55188 compared to discrimination towards Muslims which are shared 20048 times and specific pro-Muslim tweets, 35515. Tweets on Islamist terrorism, despite having a low incidence (3 tweets) are also shared many times (N=15583). Similarly tweets disseminating conspiracy theories are shared 2096 times while tweets pointing out conspiracy theories are only shared 299 times. **This demonstrates the high circulation of negative tweets and how this tool is significant in the amplification of anti-Muslim agendas.**
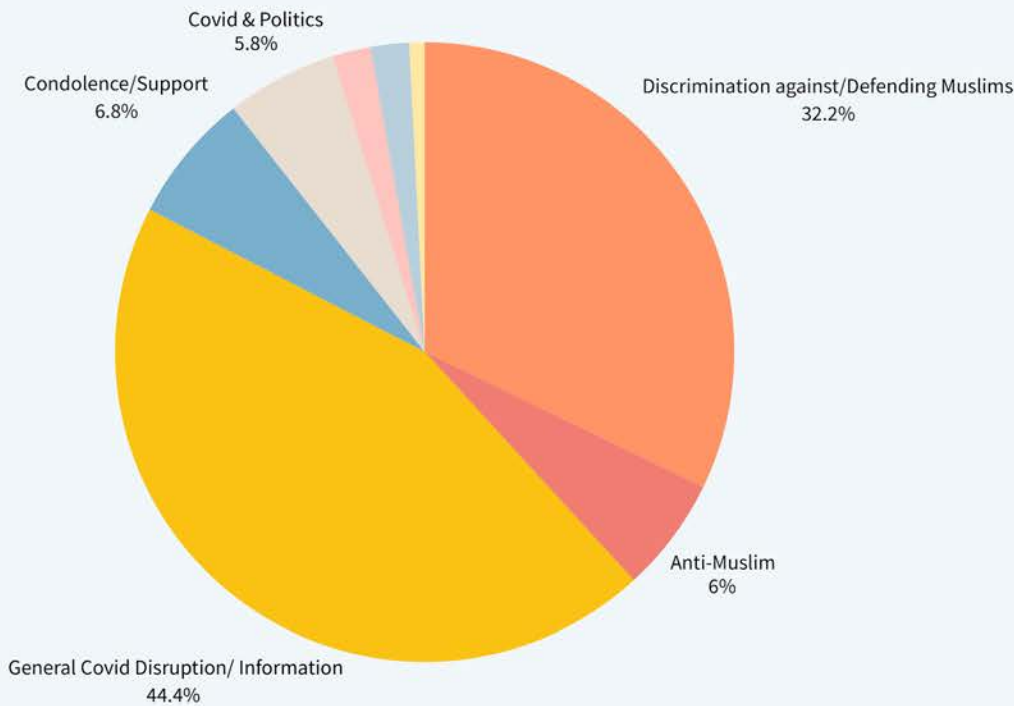
Sample 2:

Table 7: Frequently occurring topics in sample 2:

The more granular analysis (breaking the topics above down further) shows changes/disruption to Covid is the single topic most likely to be tweeted about N=174, 38.4%; followed by Muslims celebrations, N=63, 12.6%; specific pro-Muslim topics N=44, 8.8%; pointing out discrimination N=33, 6.6%; only then does scapegoating appear as the 5th frequently occurring topic 19 times, 3.8%. Tweets about disruption were either supportive (52.3%) or neutral (37.6%) as were celebrations (92.1% positive).
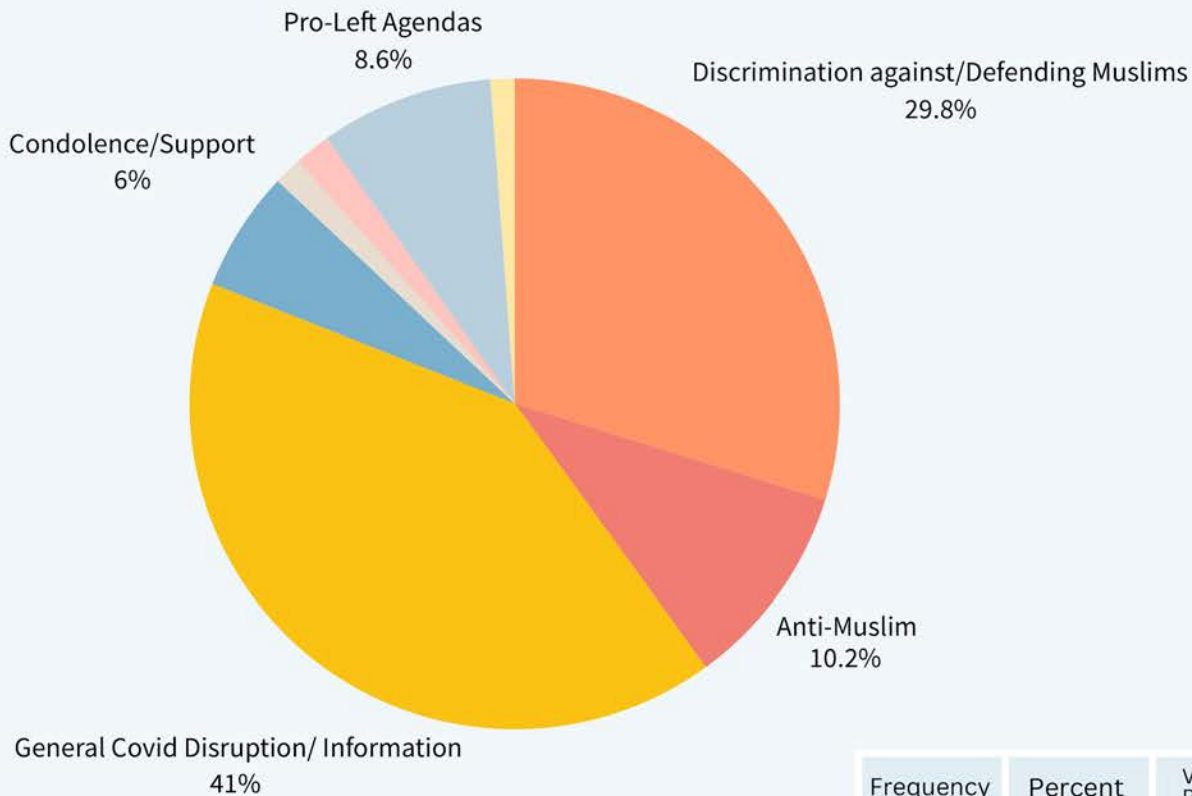
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
General Covid Disruption/ Information	222	44.4	44.4	44.4
Discrimination against/Defending Muslims	161	32.2	32.2	76.6
Condolence/Support	34	6.8	6.8	83.4
Anti-Muslim	30	6.0	6.0	89.4
Covid & Politics	29	5.8	5.8	95.2
Pro-Right Agendas	10	2.0	2.0	97.2
Pro-Left Agendas	10	2.0	2.0	99.2
Other forms of discrimination	4	0.8	0.8	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Sample 3:

Table 8: **Frequently occurring topics in sample 3:**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
General Covid Disruption/ Information	205	41.0	41.0	41.0
Discrimination against/Defending Muslims	149	29.8	29.8	70.8
Anti-Muslim	51	10.2	10.2	81.0
Pro-Left Agendas	43	8.6	8.6	89.6
Condolence/Support	30	6.0	6.0	95.6
Pro-Right Agendas	9	1.8	1.8	97.4
Covid & Politics	7	1.4	1.4	98.8
Other forms of discrimination	6	1.2	1.2	100.0
Total	500	100.0	100.0	

Sample 3 demonstrates a similar pattern to sample 2 with Covid disruption being the most frequently discussed topic (N=130, 26%) then Muslims celebrations, (N=69, 13.8%); specific pro-Muslim topics (N=49, 9.8%); public information/scientific breakthroughs (N=48, 9.6%); anti-Conservative politics (N=39, 7.8%). Scapegoating Muslims is the 6th frequently occurring topic, 31 times, 6.2% which is higher than in sample 2 and shows the slight rise in conflict in this sample. Tweets about scapegoating are mostly anti Muslim (90%) while Covid disruption and public information tends to be positive (40%/35%) or neutral (58%/46%). Discussions about the impact of Covid are mostly positive towards Muslims, (67%). The mainstream media tend to tweet about disruption due to Covid (73%). Discussion about scapegoating (42%) and anti-Conservative politics are largely based in the UK in this sample due to the debate about the Conservative MP (56%). All affiliations are more likely to be pro Muslim except alt-right groups (who occur infrequently) and the mainstream media which tends to be neutral (70%).

In the case of the second and third Covid dataset, the trend is reversed with more positive tweets being circulated (Table 9). However, there is a slight upturn in the anti-Muslim tweets being circulated in sample 3.

Table 9: **Retweets:**

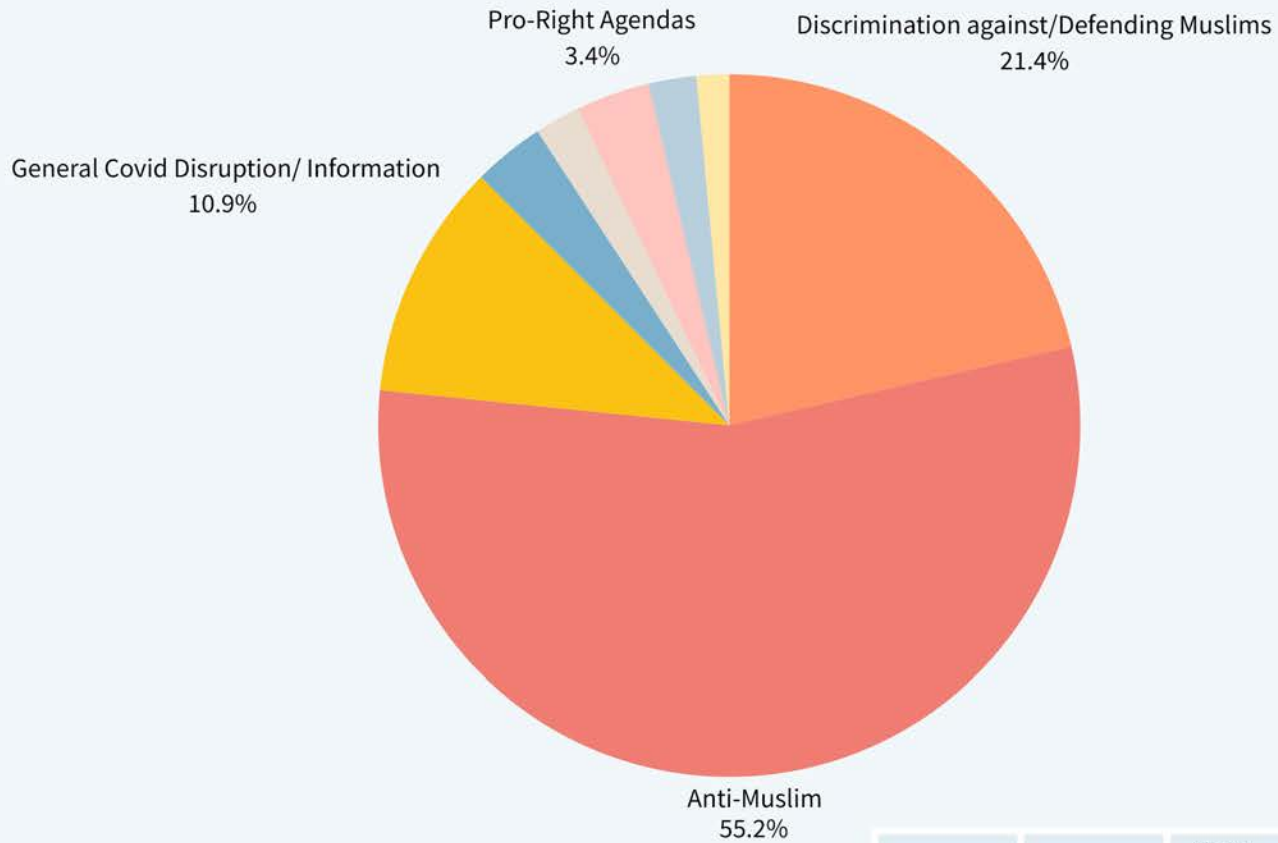|	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3	#tablighijamaat
General Covid Disruption/ Information	40453	9224	6070	56
Discrimination against/Defending Muslims	78991	12740	6545	3025
Anti-Muslim	129807	1444	2330	8741
Pro-Left Agendas	2756	270	1738	8
Condolence/Support	11273	1840	1116	262
Pro-Right Agendas	4377	483	203	216
Covid & Politics	10280	8243	844	110
Other forms of discrimination	1235	145	88	16

#Tablighijamaat/Tablighijamat*:

The Tablighijamaat dataset is significantly more negative than other datasets on Covid (Table 10) and indicative of how this event/hashtag was used to circulate negative propaganda about Muslims. (*Both versions were analysed but I use just the first spelling in this text).

Table 10: Frequently occurring topics in tweets using the #Tablighijamaat:

Pro-Right Agendas
3.4%

Discrimination against/Defending Muslims
21.4%

General Covid Disruption/ Information
10.9%

Anti-Muslim
55.2%

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Anti-Muslim	471	55.2	55.2	55.2
Discrimination against/Defending Muslims	183	21.4	21.4	76.6
General Covid Disruption/ Information	93	10.9	10.9	87.5
Pro-Right Agendas	29	3.4	3.4	90.9
Condolence/Support	28	3.3	3.3	94.2
Pro-Left Agendas	19	2.2	2.2	96.4
Covid & Politics	18	2.1	2.1	98.5
Other forms of discrimination	13	1.5	1.5	100.0
Total	854	100.0	100.0	

Scapegoating Muslims is the highest occurring single topic (24.5% and is also more likely to be recirculated N=7794 times) then specific anti-Muslim tweets (15.1%) but also some commentary of anti-Muslim media/propaganda, (9.5%), the impact and spread of Covid (9.1%) then general anti Muslim tweets (8.9%). Tweets about discrimination towards Muslims account for 7.1%. General Covid disruption was also more likely to be negative (92%).

Who are the users?

As we have seen so far, India dominates this sample (Table 11).

Table 11: Location data (from top 1000 tweets – quantitative content analysis):

Sample 1	No	%	Sample 2	No	%	Sample 3	No	%
India	370	37%	India	85	17%	UK	119	23.8%
None given	163	16.3%	Other African Countries	73	14.6%	None given	80	16%
UK	133	13.3%	Pakistan	68	13.6%	India	68	13.6%
US/North America	123	12.3%	None given	67	13.4%	Pakistan	56	11.2%
Pakistan	47	4.7%	MENA region	63	12.6%	Other African countries	49	9.8%
Other African countries	44	4.4%	USA/North America	54	10.8%	US/North America	48	9.6%
Mixed	39	3.9%	UK	46	9.2%	MENA region	28	5.6%
Other Asian countries	34	3.4%	Mixed	14	2.8%	Europe	19	3.8%
MENA region	27	2.7%	Europe	13	2.6%	Mixed	16	3.2%
Europe	17	1.7%	Other Asian Countries	11	2.2%	Australasia/Oceania	8	1.6%
Australasia/ Oceania	2	0.2%	Australasia/ Oceania	5	1%	Other Asian countries	7	1.4%
Russia	1	0.1%	Bangladesh	1	0.2%	South/Central America	1	0.2%
				500	100%	Other	1	0.2%
Total	1000	100%				500		100%

Keywords in the bios also point to India with the top word being 'proud N=21004' then 'Indian' (N=18276), 'hindu' N=11191, 'Muslim' 9777, 'India' 8855, and 'nationalists' 7815 while the collocated words show that 'proud Hindu' appears more often (over 4000 times) than 'proud Muslim' (just over a 1000). In sample 2 there is more evidence of a wider use of languages reflecting the international exchange of Eid greetings and 'proud Pakistani' (N=303) also features more often than 'proud Hindu' (N=115) while Indian is still the highest affiliation N=554, (Muslim is 232). Sample 3 reverts back to 'proud Indian' as the most frequent collocation (N=157) then 'proud Hindu' (N=59) while 'proud Pakistani' occurs 51 times and Muslim 34. #Tablighijamaat tends to mirror sample 1 due to its high occurrence in this database, for example, 64.1% of the accounts are based in India and 64% of the tweets from India are anti-Muslim. 'Proud Indian' appears 236 times, Hindu 126 and Muslim only 19.

In sample 1 and 2, all the top users by followers are news organisations mostly from India and the US (New York Times, BBC World, Reuters, TIME, The Washington Post, ABC News, NDTV, The Times of India). The quantitative content analysis from sample 1 also shows the high number of media accounts (both mainstream, 16% and alternative, 16.7%) along with state actors/politicians, 8.6%, although individuals are always the highest affiliation of users (28.7%). Celebrities have a low occurrence in this dataset with only 0.8%. of all the affiliation categories. However, state affiliated accounts (N=27109), celebrities (N=3434) and media, particularly the negative alternative media (Mainstream N=40400, alternative N=88339) have high retweet rates. Given there are fewer alt-right groups (N=39) and religious representatives (37) in this sample, they also have a fairly high retweet rate (N=9628 and N=4398 respectively). Only alt-right actors and alternative media are more likely to be anti-Muslim than pro, 46.8% (N=89) of alternative media/bloggers were anti Muslim compared to 38.4% (N=73) that were pro. Almost half the tweets contain weblinks (43.8%) and 59.6% contain images which is also indicative of the news-driven agenda. **This shows how negative tweets promoted by alternative media sources, alt right groups and some state actors are being retweeted at a high rate and increasing their visibility**.

Sample 2 had a similarly high number of mainstream media accounts, 24% followed by state actors 17.6%. State actors mostly offered international greetings (accounting for 73.7% of tweets on this topic) while media reported updates/disruption (62.5% of its tweets), and some guidelines on celebrating during Covid (accounting for 43.1% of tweets on this topic). Alternative media sources were lower (11%, and mostly reported on guidelines during Covid, 40% of its tweets) which indicates this is the source of more negative narratives. This pattern is replicated in Sample 3, state actors also have the highest circulation rate in this sample (90 tweets are circulated 6293 times compared to individuals where 144 tweets are circulated 4076 times).

The most shared users in Sample 1 are also mostly based in India with a few US accounts (Table 12). Without wanting to label people pro or anti-Muslim, unless they say so, there is an even number of people who share pro and anti-Muslim tweets in sample 1 (Table 12) noting the number of times the Indian blogger 'AskAnshul' is retweeted. Sample 2 and 3 are slightly more diverse but with a few more Muslims and pro-Muslims perspectives occurring. Sample 3 shows the shift in location of accounts to the UK.

Table 12: Most shared users:

User Sample 1	Number of shares	Sample 2	No	Sample 3	
Anshul Saxena (blogger)	43910	Narendra Modi	7039	Indian individual/ comic	3700
French Muslim	16668	Indian columnist	4408	Rushanara Ali, Labour MP, UK	1511
OpIndia.com	16379	DG ISPR*	2871	US Muslim MD	789
Subramanian Swamy (Indian MP)	15504	Keir Starmer MP	2553	Justin Trudeau, Canadian PM	681
Indian political analyst (Pro-Muslim tweet)	11866	Malaysian individual account	2443	Muhammadu Bahari, President of Nigeria	672
Columnist/ Activist against Islamophobia (USA)	9452	Opindia.com	2422	Zarah Sultana, Labour MP, UK	648
Malaysian private account	9384	Guardian Correspondent	1591	Syrian opposition columnist based in Doha	596
Asian News International	7116	Al Jazeera English	1582	Pakistani ex general, government official	505
Robert Spencer (Director of Jihadwatch)	6392	Dr Arif Alvi, President of Pakistan	1388	Uk Muslim media commentator	503
Doam Documenting Oppression Against Muslims	5498	Turkish Presidency	966	Columnist/ Activist against Islamophobia (USA)	472

*Spokesperson for Pakistan Armed Forces
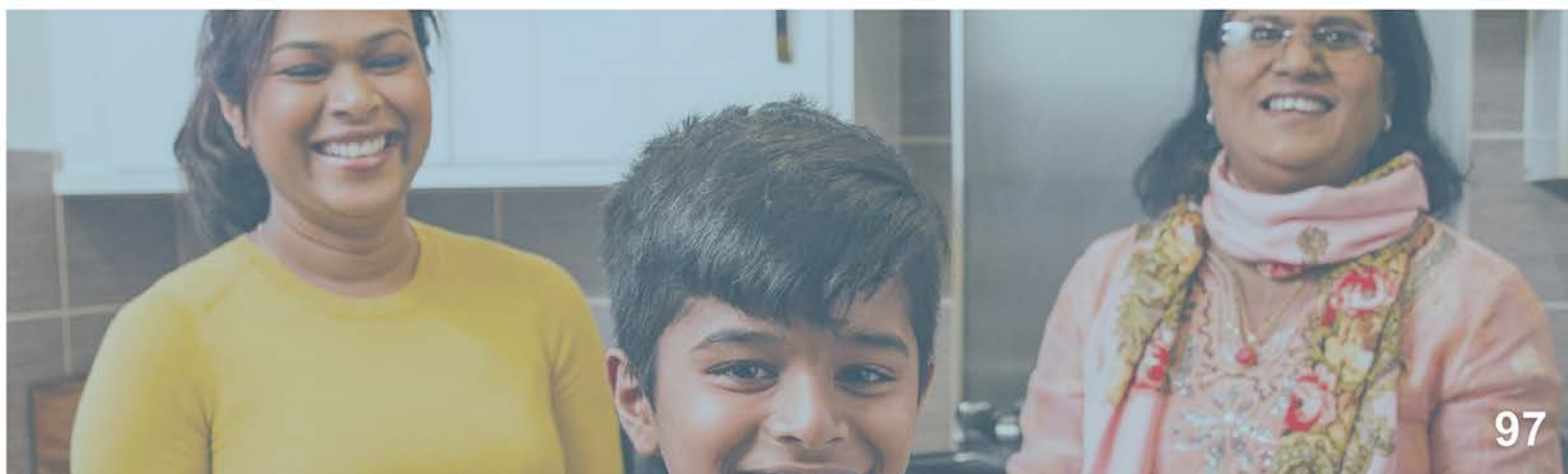
In sample 2 Narendra Modi is the top tweeter by followers N=68760994, The President of India N=13846353 and a Chinese broadcaster also features (CTGN N=13554688). Modi also has the most shared tweets N=7039. Again, the mixture of people being retweeted here is a reflection of the international exchange of Eid greetings. In sample 3, users by followers become more diverse, as well as a few world news agencies and news organisations from Pakistan and Indonesia, the World Health Organisation features, some officials from Pakistan and the activist group, Anonymous. (Note all regions are more positive towards Muslims, Europe is neutral, for Oceania, 6 out of its 8 tweets are negative).

The most prolific tweeters of original posts were, however, Muslims. In sample 1, of the top 10 tweeters, most were based in India with one (non-Muslim, anti-Muslim) in the US. The top tweeter was a UK based Muslim (N of posts = 344). In sample 2 there a greater mixture of sources - all unverified except The New Arab (news from the Middle East). The top posters were information services; 3 accounts were from Nigeria, one from Pakistan. Sample 3 is similar, mostly Muslim, 3 from Pakistan, two verified sources both from Gulf states. One US campaigner appears in both samples as a prolific tweeter.

The high proportion of accounts from declared or identifiable Muslims in the most shared tweets compared to other datasets was also revealed in the manual quantitative analysis where Muslims clearly outnumbered other religions posting on this topic (Table 13). #tablighijamaat is the exception here with more Hindus posting N=118 compared to 53 Muslims. In this # 88% of content shared by Hindus is negative to Muslims while 83% of Muslims content is positive (the rest is mostly mixed).

Table 13: Religion of the account holders:

| Religion of the account holder	Sample 1: No	%	Sample 2: No	%	Sample 3: No	%	#Tabligh ijamat	%
Unidentified	699	69.9	355	71	361	72.2	677	79.3
Muslim	230	23	133	26.6	129	25.8	53	6.2
Hindu	32	3.2	1	0.2	7	1.4	118	13.8
Atheist/Agnostic	23	2.3	2	0.4	0	0	3	0.4
Jewish	7	0.7	0	0	1	0.2	0	0
Christian	6	0.6	2	0.4	2	0.4	1	0.1
Sikh	3	0.3	7	1.4	0	0	2	0.2
Total	1000	100	500	100	500	100	854	100

The quantitative analysis shows that most of the negative posts come from Indian accounts as well as some from the UK and US, although posts from these regions are also more likely to be supportive (see Table 14). By sample 3, however (Table 15), most of the negative posts are located in the UK.
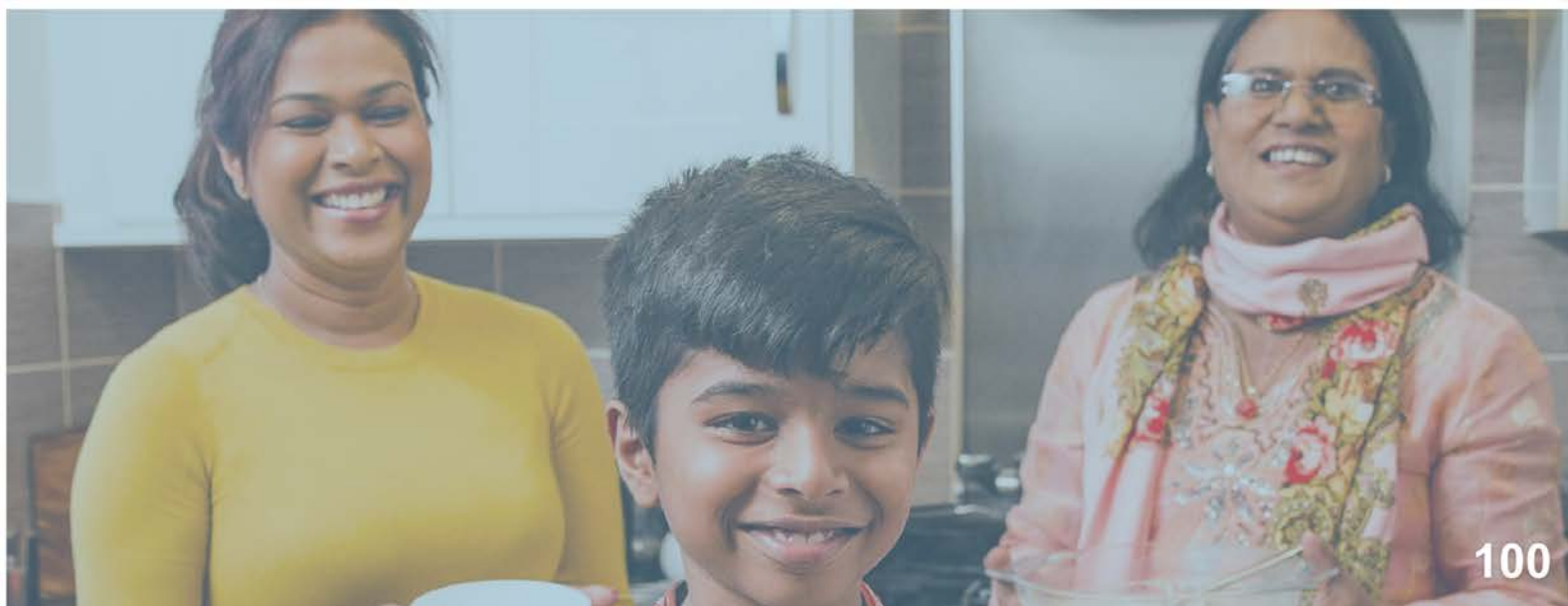
Table 14: **Cross tabulation of account holder's location with position on Muslims - sample 1:**

Location	Anti-Muslim	Supportive	Mixed	Neutral	Total
UK	28	94	8	3	133
USA	34	72	11	6	123
Europe	3	9	2	3	17
India	153	161	46	10	370
Pakistan	8	26	10	3	47
Other Asian countries	5	15	7	7	34
MENA region	0	22	1	4	27
Other African countries	11	18	10	5	44
Mixed	10	17	7	5	39
None	54	83	18	8	163
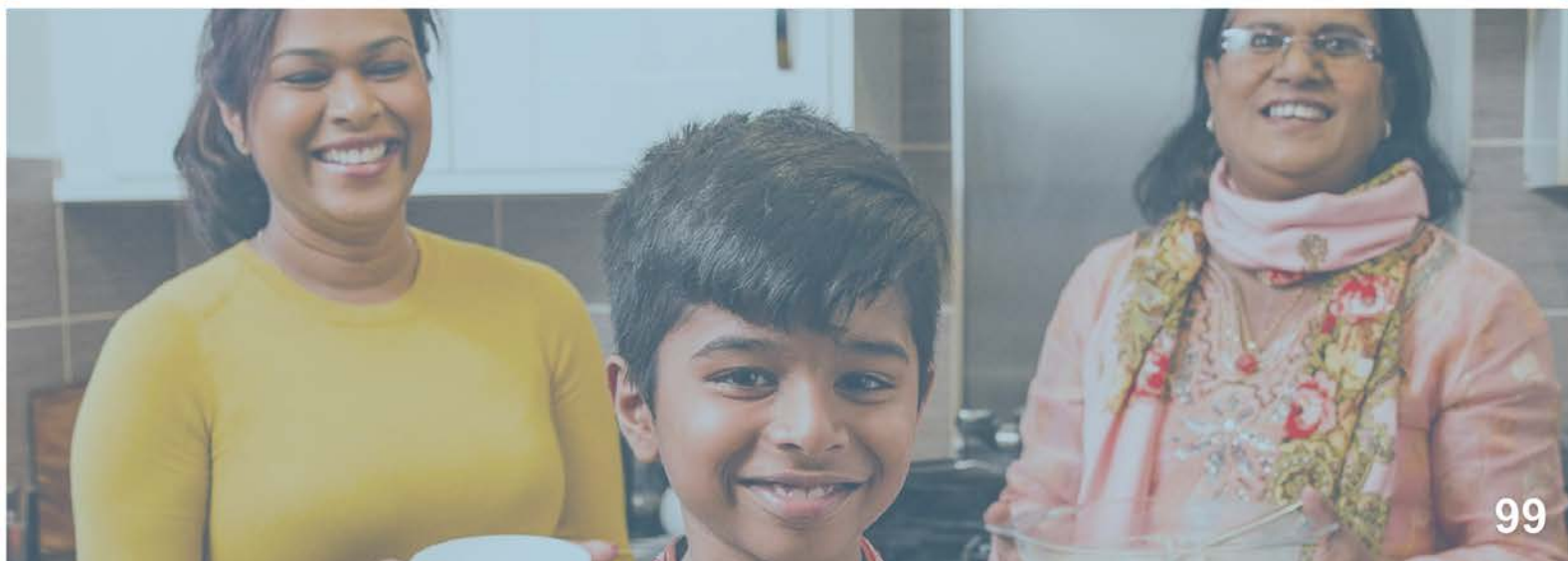
Table 15: Cross tabulation of account holder's location with position on Muslims - sample 3:

Location	Anti-Muslim	Supportive	Mixed	Neutral	Total
UK	23	76	5	15	119
USA	2	31	3	12	48
Europe	1	6	0	12	19
India	9	37	3	19	68
Pakistan	0	44	3	9	56
Other Asian countries	0	2	0	5	7
MENA region	0	14	0	14	28
Other African countries	0	32	1	16	49
Mixed	1	7	0	8	16
None	12	36	6	26	80

Network diagrams:

The network diagrams for Coronavirus show the activity around key Indian actors:

Figure 5: Covid 1st sample:

White = retweets Red = quote tweets
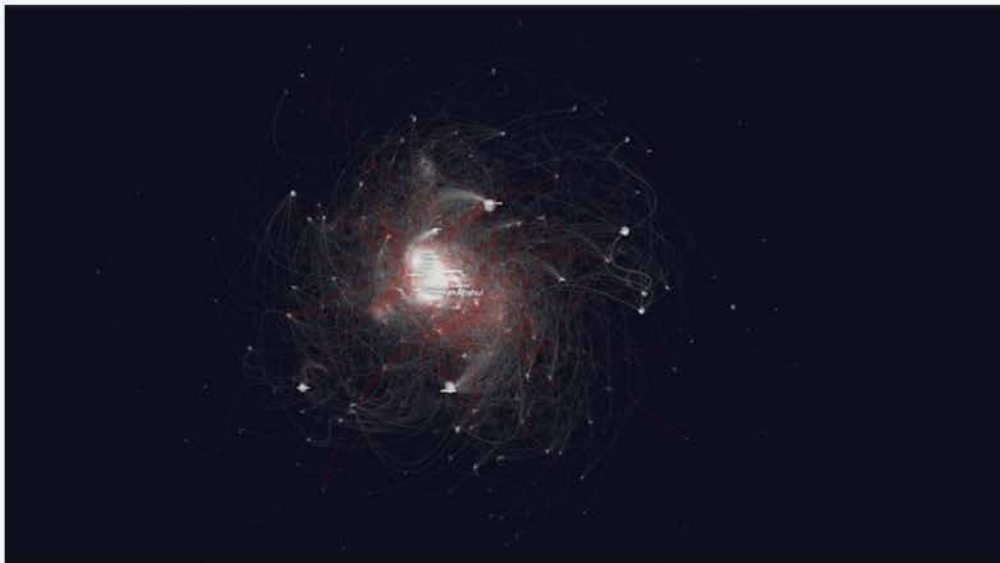
Figure 6: Covid 2nd sample:
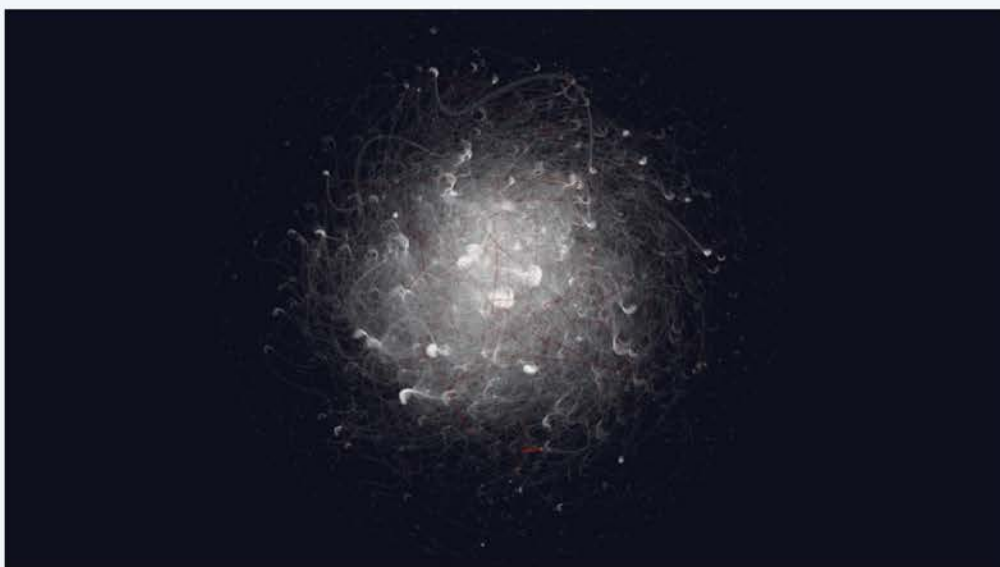
Narendra Modi is the largest node here. This diagram also shows the number of retweets of these key actors.

Figure 7: **Covid 3rd sample:**
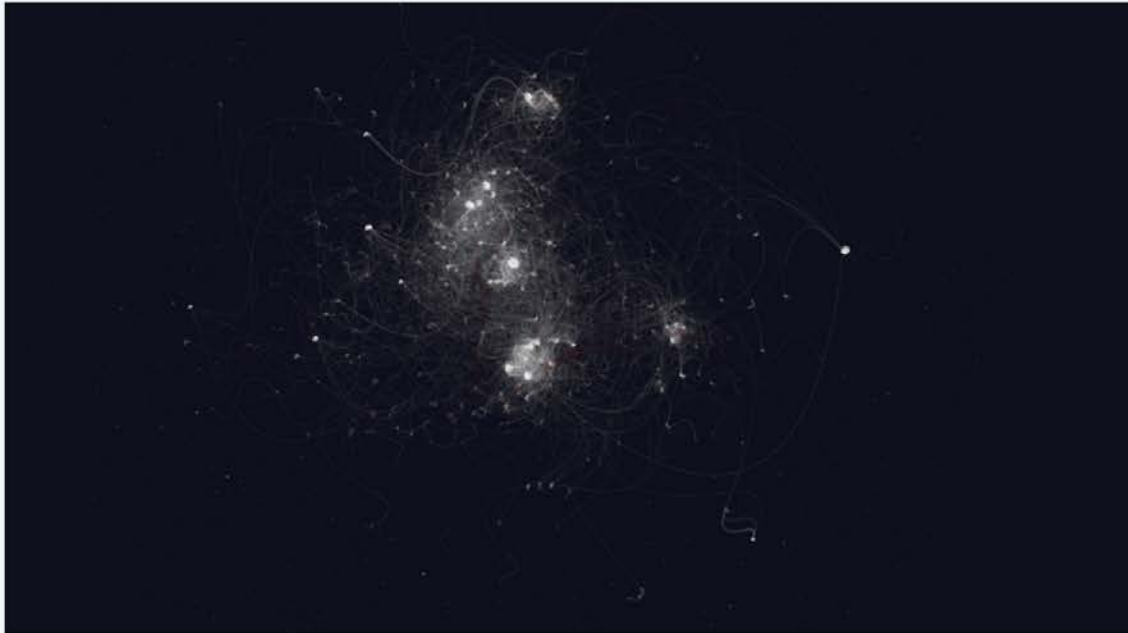
The third sample becomes more dispersed with activity going on outside Indian networks.

What are the narratives?

Spreading Covid:

As we have seen, from the quantitative analysis, one of the main narratives is blaming Muslims for the spread of Covid. Some of this could be categorised as *reiterative racism*, the repetitive reporting of Covid cases found in the Muslim community. These tweets were not explicitly anti-Muslim but the lack of contextualisation and the selective focus on Muslims builds an association between Muslims and the spread of the virus. This occurs from both mainstream media sources (see Figure 8) but also frequently from Indian bloggers which may be more intentional. One very prominent account 'Ask Ansul' tweeted frequent updates of cases found among Muslims (he has 7 similar tweets in the 10 most shared tweets and is the most shared account overall):

'Coronavirus:

4 students of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) who were put in quarantine, escaped from the facility under mysterious circumstances.

3 students found in Kashmir, 1 still untraceable.

All 4 are PhD scholars.

In many cases, educated ones are more irresponsible.'

Anshul Saxena, 21 March 2020, 11.08am, 6533 RTs https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1241320828798529537

Figure 8: Mainstream media reporting of Covid cases:

Credit: Reuters, 21 March 2020, 12.25pm, RTs 1881, https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1241340177655660544

Outside of the mainstream media, tweets tended to be more opinionated and anti-Muslim and sometimes linked Muslims testing positive with forms of criminality, conflating a public health discourse with a criminal discourse, suggesting that people who caught the virus were not unlucky patients that needed medical treatment but were criminals that needed punishing (Figure 9).

Credit: OpIndia.com, https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1243052562086948864 26 March 2020, 5.50am, 1218 RTs

Some accounts went further, explicitly arguing Muslims were intentionally spreading Covid, some suggesting Muslims were doing this out of hatred for non-Muslims, some that Muslims were weaponising the virus as a new form of terrorism. These tweets generated a lot of hatred against Muslims in the replies – threats including that of physical violence, and the crafting and sharing of anti-Muslim graphics and memes such as that in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Meme implicating Muslims in the spread of Covid:

Credit: Know the Nation,

https://twitter.com/knowthenation/status/1245351822178414593
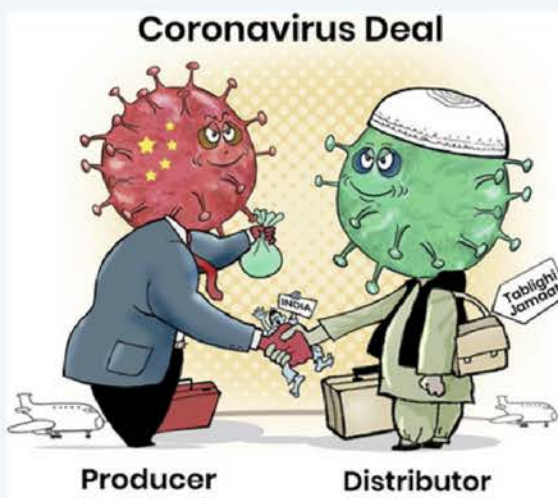
Also circulated by DOAM to highlight prejudice against Muslims,

https://twitter.com/doamuslims/status/1250372386756669440?lang=zh-Hant.

What are the counter-narratives?

Narratives opposing Islamophobia took one of three forms:

1. Criticising the Islamophobia as motivated by hatred or criticising the media in India for its anti-Muslim bias. For example, the All India Muslim Personal Law Board tweeted:

'*Amidst the ongoing #Covid_19 crisis, Media is shifting #pandemic to a Hindu-Muslim issue. An organized media conspiracy against the #Tablighijamaat is unacceptable. During a medical emergency, people deserve love and care, not hatred and fear-mongering. #FakeNews'.* 1 April, 10.41am, 2029 RTs,

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1245285080513167361

In the UK people pointed out how things were being misrepresented on social media, images of social distancing taken at misleading angles, for example.

2. Reporting on the positive activities of Muslims in abiding lockdown rules and helping others through self-sacrifice. In sample 3, 50% of tweets were positive showing how Muslims were adapting to Covid rules. In the UK, this took the form of pro-NHS discourses, pointing out that many of the first health workers who died were Muslim and through the hashtag #EidatHome (see cover image).

3. The third counternarrative strategy was to point out other people who were not abiding by rules, both in India and the UK (mostly in sample 3). This included sharing images (accompanied by negative commentary) of packed beaches and people celebrating sports events such as Liverpool fans celebrating LFC winning the league. These did provoke anti-Muslim tweeters to respond quoting further examples and 'numbers' to support their arguments. This overlooks the fact that more Muslims were being tested in India at this time due to the perceived association between Muslims and the virus (Tierie and Ranjan, 2022).

These debates about social distancing also take place in Nigeria with various actors putting pressure on others to do so with some pointing fingers at different religious groups.

Also worth mentioning were the international Eid greetings circulating in sample 2 and 3:

'*Spoke to PM Sheikh Hasina to wish her and the friendly people of Bangladesh, a happy and prosperous Eid-ul-Fitr. We discussed the impact of cyclone Amphan and the present Covid-19 situation. Reiterated India's continued support to Bangladesh in this challenging time*'
Narendra Modi, 25 May 2020, 2.40pm, 4123 RTs,

https://twitter.com/i/web/status/1264914357063831552.

The analysis of the representation of Muslims/Islam of Twitter during Covid shows the levels of hostility towards Muslims, particularly, in this case, of Indian Twitter. However, this resulted in more active, consistent and sustainable counter-narrative work. Organisations such as Indian American Muslim Council engaged in impactful counter-narrative campaigns to highlight these issues to policymakers in the US. This included multiple video campaigns such as the one shown in Figure 11 which was accompanied by the text:

'As India's poor reel under the 21 day lockdown, the country's 200 million Muslims have been subjected to anti-Muslim hate and scapegoating over coronavirus by the Hindutva goons leading to a rise in hate crimes across the nation #Covid2019 Watch and share.' 12 April 2020, 4.33pm

We will explore these strategies further in the next section which analyses the interviews with participants in these discursive debates.
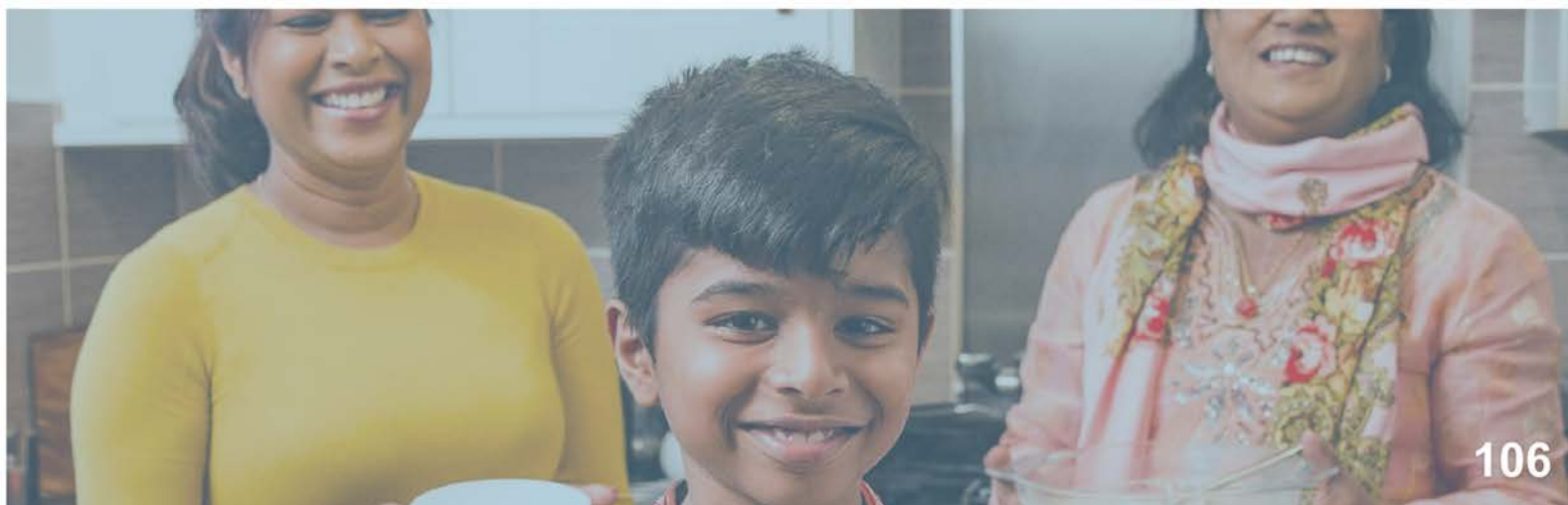
Figure 11: **Video campaign by the Indian American Muslim Council:**

Credit: Indian American Muslim Council

Interviews: Activist strategies

Sample:

The aim of this stage of the project was to speak to those people who had engaged in the debates on our events/ Twitter samples to discuss their objectives, and tactics for engaging with online narratives. We send out 150 invites to people who had engaged frequently in the debates we examined on Twitter. We aimed to engage with a range of people including activists, journalists, academics and non-affiliated users from a range of political positions. As we had to use direct messaging through Twitter to contact most people, the response rate was low (15 interviews were secured). This could be partly due to the impact of Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter which was taking place at the same time (September 2022) and many people were leaving the platform or were more wary of unsolicited contacts. Not surprisingly, most people who agreed identified as being supportive of Muslims or anti-racist. Seven of the 15 participants were Muslim, only 1 of whom was a woman; the other participants were 10 men and 6 women who identified as non-Muslims (two people represented one group which we counted as one interview). Their locations varied from the UK, Europe, North America, South Asian countries and Australia.

The interviews lasted from 45 to 160 mins and took place on Microsoft Teams.

Table 1: Affiliations:

Affiliation	No
Individual activist	4
Academic/journalist	2
Journalist	3
Academic activists	2
Activist organisation (Civil Society Organisation/CSO)	4
Total	15

The first point to note is that, at the time, these users had a high Twitter usage, *'my phone is Twitter',* although cited recent reductions due to fatigue, toxicity and Musk's acquisition of the platform. In the context of these interviews, Twitter was mainly used in a professional capacity, meaning that they used it predominantly in line with their professional norms, whether that be a journalist, academic, or CSO. Only 3 people mentioned it had an entertainment use. However, very few made use of automated tools or were particularly strategic in their use, except groups (see section three for further discussion on strategies). Most people cited following like-minded people with journalists and groups following more influential and diverse accounts. These could be transnational or nationally specific depending on the event under discussion.

1.   Objectives:

Cited objectives for the participants included:

- **Information gathering/finding sources**
- **Observational**

'It's a way for me to actually just sort of understand how people are seeing the world'.

- **Anti-racism campaigning/educating** – highlight issues around discrimination and abuse; highlighting abuses, providing positivity but also complexities; encouraging critical thinking about the issues

'part of what 'organisation name' does is educating people about the tropes, the common tropes, both in antisemitism, Islamophobia'.

- **Networking/ community** - building/ showing support and allyship
- **Publicity** (a necessity for freelancers)
- **Providing an alternative voice/taking space**
- **Challenging misinformation, debunking narratives and providing counter or alternative narratives**

'*But also it's about not necessarily changing their mind, but to showing anybody else who's looking at their argument that there is a counter argument. And that, yeah, what they're saying isn't necessarily, you know there..... There is an opposing argument to it'.*

- **A way to do this is by intervening in political debates around specific events**
- **But also encouraging civility in debate** – creating a public square
- **Groups have a campaigning/advocacy objective** – targeting specific politicians etc

'We have a proactive strategy. …..we have messaging. We have issues that we want to push and talk about. We just do our work and that's it.'

2. Opportunities: 'a tool for social change'?

Opportunities reflect the objectives cited above as well as the platform affordances (capabilities) and include:

- **Utility**

'extraordinary as first sources of information' 'instantaneous' for 'breaking news', 'alternative news', and 'information sharing'

This was partly related to the speed of the platform which allows for a 'timely response' and for 'momentum' linked to virality.

'you can gain a lot of, a lot of very immediate and very instant political sentiment on Twitter, that doesn't necessarily fade with the long term trends'

The pace of the platform was also seen as a potential advantage in restricting hate speech due to the speed in which topics move on as well as the number of characters people could use.

- **Accessibility** – this allows for challenging mis/disinformation; providing context with reliable sources/evidence, resolving antagonisms, and highlighting issues

'more democratised space than the old media, for all its shortcomings. So there's a broader range of voices which are represented. And having seen pre, Twitter and post Twitter public discourse, I would say that the unbalanced, the Twitter public discourse or the public discourse under the influence of Twitter has been probably better balanced'

- **Influence**

'But it sort of punches above its weight because of the people, the types of people that are using Twitter, so politicians, media professionals, people that have influence and power are using Twitter and that's why it's important'

- **Networking** – showing solidarity/ support whether at a basic level such as offering advice or more complex organising linked to offline activities – mobilisation (across borders)

'so somebody might have a problem, they might need advice. It might be a journalist who wants something, it might be a fellow academic who wants something, it might be a student who wants something. So that's quite nice'

'I think meaningful activism has occurred on Twitter and across social media platforms, I mean..I'm routinely asked by various campaigns to engage in Twitter storms or retweet campaigns at certain times in order to get visibility...... But I do think that there is a really there is a prominent sort of organising potential within both Twitter and social media generally'

- **Advocacy** - Twitter is perceived as a 'very powerful tool of social change' BUT also depends on further action:

'They were called corona bombs. They were called a lot of names.....And I think that is when the Arab world also got a little involved into what is happening in India. ......Twitter activism is helping governments talk about the persecution that's happening in India right now.'

- **Campaigning**

'converting the middle ground', 'galvanises support' particularly around specific events - Brexit was a *'major event'* – *'my tweets went viral'*

- **Humour** – several participants mentioned the humour on Twitter as a positive aspect in terms of its entertainment value but it has been widely reported that this is an aspect that is successfully exploited by the far-right for campaigning (Ringrose 2018).
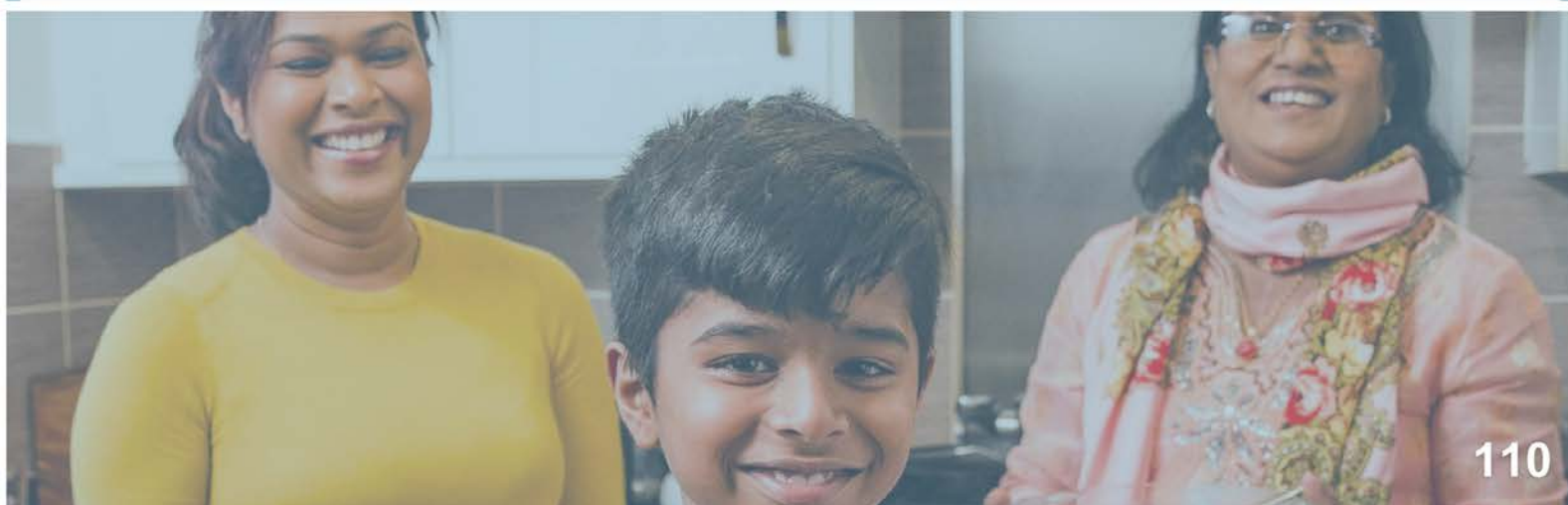
3.   Concerns/challenges:

- **Toxicity**, the emotional toll was a key barrier to activism with many personal experiences related. This was of slightly less concern to those representing groups who were shielded by their anonymity. Extremities of opinion, including inciting violence (and political leaders' discourse enabling this), that results in greater division, reinforcing culture wars and cancel culture was also a key concern. The normalisation of trolling online was also a concern, that it has become accepted there. Hence, participants were keen to contribute to a professional civil discursive environment, emphasising 'reasonable'/ responsible behaviour

- **Disinformation**, and the diminishment of expertise

- **Type of content was therefore raised as an issue** – Islamophobia, racism and antisemitism, and its potential dangerous 'real-life' effects, as well as over- simplistic content

- **Escalation**, following divisive events such as Brexit and the contexts driving this such as integration agendas in the UK, political context in the US and India

'people who possibly were holding back, but had it in their heads and saw that as an opportunity. Right, now I'm allowed to say it'.

- **Limitations for solidarity/allyship -** participants mentioned the fragility of connections and the potential for clicktivism, performance politics, and how for some, non-minority groups could avoid exposure and abuse while visibility online for others means being in the firing line

'I have the luxury of shutting off'

- Hence most participants mentioned the need for offline alliances and how online interactions may undermine this

'disadvantage of Twitter…. trick people or convince people that they are doing more than they're actually doing, you know, because tweeting only does so much, right?

- **Limitations of counter-narratives** – not effective in changing people's minds and even being counterproductive, amplifying hate

'So you're just, you're actually adding more grist to the kind of the narrative mill' 'like a pantomime, you know? It's like, oh no you didn't, oh yes you did. And where do we go with that? You know. Where, where? Where do we go with this for? How do we do anything with that?'

- This raises a question of how to engage, do you engage with trollers, and what type of content is appropriate given that cynical content is more likely to gain traction? Trolling can lead to self-censorship.

- **Defining hate speech** – where do you draw the line?

'I would say we should police against open expressions of hatred or calls for violence. Endorsements of violence. But I would, you know, give pretty wide latitude to views expressed that fall short of that standard, only be, not because I like all those views, just because if you go beyond that, you get into very, very difficult territory of the slippery slope, I would say.

- Free speech was only mentioned explicitly by one person and this was in relation to concerns about censorship online (favouring the powerful). Digital surveillance and privacy were also only mentioned by one person.

'I think that there is something useful about having that room, even if it gets ugly'

- **Moderation** – the different standards of moderation on different platforms and across countries, all but one supported moderation.

- The limitations of the digital political economy/issues of digital labour were also only mentioned by 3 participants. The corporate nature of platforms that provide no incentive to stem hate, and the labour required to engage when you are subject to hate were raised as concerns.

- **Affordances** - participants discussed the technical characteristics of Twitter that reinforced the tendencies listed here and the way engagement unfolds including its anonymity, disaffiliation, algorithms, limited characters for addressing a complex subject which can be easily undermined, ephemeral character, the lack of control – people digging up old tweets and retweeting out of context, the limitations of the type of people on Twitter (elites, older demographic), and limitations of influence unless you have many followers.

Strategies:

Strategies were mostly proactively adopted by groups that had the resources to do this and operated as traditional news organisations and/or campaign groups, even providing support services for people who have been targeted by online abuse, whereas the strategies of individuals developed more intuitively or in the context of their specific profession. Groups emphasised the importance of developing user engagement but also being flexibile in order to be responsive. The response should be thought about carefully in order to adopt the right strategy and not inflame situations or be counterproductive 'feeding trolls'.

'I try to be strategic about it, but at the same time, at the same time you can get caught up or you can, you know, do something in an offhand moment or, you know, people are susceptible to emotion, or just reaction'.

- **Monitoring** – active monitoring, tracking patterns of activity and impact through analytics, *'know your enemy'*

- **Quality content creation including videos/cartoons, press releases, pre-paid adverts**

- **'Set messaging' with a CONSISTENT approach** – amplified with tactics (see below) and targeting specific audiences. This required being an effective communicator to maximise impact

- **Reporting abusive tweets** – passing tweets to research teams to investigate, keeping records of offensive tweets (screenshots etc)

- **Online safety training for staff**

- **Providing support services**

- **Counter-narrative work** – specific counter-narrative campaigns such as video campaigns during Covid to counter negative mainstream media coverage in India

'the story needs to be told again and again and again until people understand how'

- **Providing alternative narratives/voice/space to alternative voices** – some people deliberate avoiding counter-narratives so as not to amplify hate, and providing positive alternatives

'You have to have positive narratives in order to motivate people to change and to get involved'.

'maybe it is a valid argument that we're reproducing hate speech, but I think sometimes it's necessary in order to educate'

- **Offline activities** – co-ordinating civil rights organisations meetings/coalitions – look for/follow mentors as a matter of trust. Offline capacity building. Engaging with creative activities

'You need to be at the protest you, you have to be present, right? You have to be engaged.'

- **Targeting politicians to affect policy** (see tips)

Tips and tactics:

- **Manipulating the platform** – the activists demonstrated advanced knowledge of ways of using the platform's tools and algorithms for activism and gaining traction. The approach applied depended on what was appropriate in a given situation.

- **Blocking and muting** was rarely used, only in extreme cases, people were more likely to modify their privacy settings to adjust who could reply to posts or hide location data

- **Retweeting** was mainly used if participants had nothing to add, were unsure of the full facts and for speed

- **Quote tweeting** was used to generate debate, highlight disinformation, provide context, share with their own followers, credit the author, to highlight certain aspects of an article and to explain nuances in a story reported in the mainstream media

- **Replies** were used if users wanted the original poster's followers to see it so had a different purpose – replies were more likely to be used as confirmation of opinion, with people who are known, avoiding this on far-right accounts. Replies help develop a relationship with followers and amplify their (our interviewees) own content.

- **Using evidence to demonstrate authority and credibility**, enhance engagement and quality – this included screenshots 'authentic sources', polling data, research work to close discussion down, and visualisations – to aid understanding

- **Tagging** - celebrities/politicians – to attract journalists' attention to amplify/ fact check (again with consideration in using this technique)

- **Using networks to maximise exposure** – create coalition campaigns and 'Twitter storms'

- Having **multiple accounts** – to target specific audiences (groups only)

Interactions/engagement:

- There were different approaches to this, with most groups and some independent activists more likely to engage directly with people circulating Islamophobic content, and academics and journalists less so. Knowing when it is appropriate to engage was key here. Being aware of triggers, etiquette and audience can inform how to respond. For groups, engaging was considered as being part of the job whereas some individuals felt it 'may be that one drop' to make a change. This tended to be directed at people with differing opinions rather than trolls spreading hate, the 'vulnerable observer'.

'they posted intensely anti Jewish tweets and I engaged with them and I said to one of them, we are human, you know, not monsters. And then he, to my surprise, he replied, something like, of course you're human. We're all human. And somehow it was a a tipping point on which the hostile conversation turned and became much more friendly, much more friendly. When that happens, there's a sort of great gratitude between the antagonists. That it could be resolved'.

'And then you just have to know whatever you put out there, is what you can get back. So if you want to engage in debate on Twitter, you have to know, you're gonna get stuff thrown back at you'

- **Interventions** – to ask for calm

- **Self-preservation** - taking breaks to keep a sense of perspective so as not to be consumed by activism/Twitter

- **Resilience: Knowing your tolerance levels** – 'start tentatively', 'engage gently'

- **Having a support group**

- **Solidarity tactics** - even those who didn't engage directly with negative discourse would adopt solidarity tactics such as anti-trolling techniques or supporting people who were being abused.

- **Tagging others** to support someone after an attack - this was a *'call to action'* and a *'highly powerful bystander technique'*

'And what you do is you basically get, you get that person that's being attacked a huge show of support and a huge following, and you amplify their voice.'

'And the other thing I would probably do, particularly if it was targeting a specific person, but in general, would reach out to Muslim friends and contacts and say, you know, to sort of, say I'd seen it and say how sorry I was about it, or, you know, hopefully checking in with them, check they're OK'

- **Content techniques**

- **Avoid being pigeon-holed** – not always discussing Islamophobia but demonstrating Islamophobia by resisting the framing

- **Speaking to the middle ground** – to maximise inclusivity

- **Engaging with trending topics**

- **Exploiting media ecologies** (promoting blogs, writing for news media, sharing into closed groups)

- **'Phrasing and re-phrasing!'**

- **Using humour to disarm**

- **Timing**

- **Simple approach/language**

- **Manipulative tactics of the far right:** activists mentioned the tactics they had witnessed or experienced from far right groups but were not always able to replicate for ethical reasons including altering the participants and other activists' memes, co-ordinating and engaging in personal attacks, initiating pile-ons, setting up fake, bot accounts, using automation/ reporting rules to get civil rights groups de-platformed, blocked/ threatened/arrested for disinformation, evolving to avoid detection, misinformation, escalating things offline and planting viruses.

8. Interviews: Activist Strategies

The interviews demonstrate the value of the platform for activists despite its recognised limitations. Offering space for counter-narrative work, agency and alternative voices, for networking, support, observing and monitoring trends allow for activism that would otherwise be very difficult. However, even in 2022 before many of the changes on Twitter, following its acquisition by Elon Musk, people found the environment emotionally demanding. It would be interesting to do a similar study in this new challenging context. The new context raises questions about where this important activism is occurring in the current environment and how corporate and private ownership, and a lack of regulation and moderation can limit its potential for social good. Participants recognised these contradictions in the platform, the opportunities and demands but felt it was worthwhile to participate on a number of levels. Approaches to usage depended and drew on professional roles, engagement and codes of practice, with groups being very proactive and strategic, and journalists and academics using it foremost in a professional capacity. Through an analysis of shifting trends and usage, it is possible to identify the specific conditions; the relationship between particular engagements, events, and contexts, as well as the timeliness of interventions that work for challenging online hate.
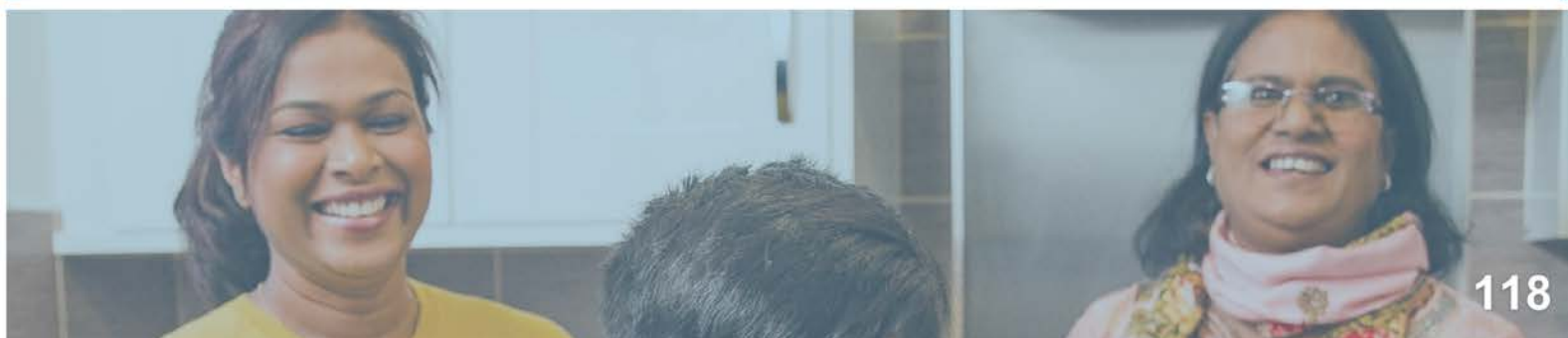
Conclusion:

Social media is routinely accused of spreading hate speech, but it also provides the tools to contest it. This project shows how Twitter has been used to spread and counter anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia in response to three very different 'trigger events', Brexit, the Christchurch terror attack and the Covid-19 pandemic. Twitter has been an interesting platform to study due to its disproportionate influence in the public sphere given its widespread use by academics, politicians and journalists. However, rather than try and position the platform as productive or destructive, we would suggest that it is the relationship between the different narratives that sustains them. Not only that but it is the relationship between specific events, the platforms and the users that generate particular (fluid) outcomes. It is important to study the context of engagement which takes into account the users, the use of platform tools, the timeline, and events to understand the dynamics of activism online and therefore identify the opportunities and constraints to countering hate speech.

Our study provides a unique longitudinal insight into shifting patterns of hate speech on one of the most prominent and debated social media platforms, at a distinct and significant political moment. The research shows that in the context of Brexit and the General election, the event (in the main triggered by a televised political debate) attracted a wider audience to criticise political approaches to Islamophobia, aligned with other anti-right politics. However, this remained at the level of counter speech, quick fire messaging rather than in-depth countering and potentially crowded Muslims out of the discussion. Nevertheless, it also generated significant support and allyship for Muslims around the topic of Brexit which was less evident when Brexit was the sole focus of discussion, as demonstrated by the second Brexit dataset which was more stereotypical and negative in repeating anti-Muslim tropes. In this case Islamophobia was perpetuated in relation to narratives reproducing 'culture wars'. It is notable, however, at this time that the collective activity of far-right groups was less evident than in our previous work after the Brussels terror attack, particularly from the US, leaving individual, often British actors, spreading hate which undermined the strength and persistence of their narratives. However, evidence of white nationalist discourse was still apparent, and present across all datasets. Similarly, the Christchurch massacre attracted the attention of high-profile users which gave traction to a spike in visible support for Muslims which quickly dropped off after the initial event allowing right-wing groups to appropriate it to further their agendas on gun laws and online censorship. This raises a question about the sustainability of counter-narratives and solidarity networks online. Clearly, the involvement of high-profile accounts is useful but how do activists ensure the momentum is maintained beyond the initial response? The Covid dataset, however, shows how specific events can be manipulated for spreading propaganda against Muslims, in this case aligned to Hindu nationalism. Yet this hostility can in turn produce more meaningful and sustainable counter-narrative work and alliances. The latter datasets show how counter-narratives can become the norm at particular moments, around specific events and festivals. The value in the discursive struggle then is in legitimising these discourses which then become normalised in the mainstream, as was evident by the predominance of counter-narratives shared by the mainstream media in this data.

What becomes apparent by adopting a longitudinal approach is that even where there is significant hostility and divergent narratives across distinct events, over time there is also evidence of persistent counter-narratives about Muslims. As one interviewee stated 'you've got short term ephemeral trends and then I think you got long term consistent topics that are recurring'.

One of *the risks* highlighted by the study is the possibility of escalating or amplifying hate speech by engaging with it. Constructing alternative narratives may be effective, rather than replying, to minimise this risk. in In our reporting, we have tried to mitigate harm by not showing images of the most extreme content. Yet the interviews demonstrate *the value* of social media platforms for meaningful activism despite the limitations due to their features and political economy which benefits from Islamophobia and other negative and sensationalised content. However, there is no doubt that engaging in activism online is a struggle that takes an emotional toll, an environment that has become more hostile to activists in recent years and therefore invites further study. Will Twitter/X maintain its influence in this context?

The moderation of Islamophobia is particularly difficult given that racism is often presented as legitimate debate about cultural difference and religious belief. This is further complicated by the complexities of the socio-technical relationships between the platform, events and users that cannot be moderated by automation alone. Likewise, the evolving nature of platforms and specificity of events means that it is not possible for users to identify a universally 'successful' series of tactics (although some tactics have a more consistent track record in crafting sustainable resistance than others). Although there are no easy answers to the management of online debate, particularly given the shifting socio-technical landscape, drawing on the evidence of this project and the work of interviewees, we offer the following recommendations below.

For users/activists:

- **Using counter-narratives to counter hate and disinformation – timing is key** to debunk 'evidence' but consistency and persistence is also important. Maintaining civility is also necessary to defuse tensions. Using counter-evidence can enhance an argument.

- **Construction of alternative narratives** – varied depending on purpose and audience. These may be more critical or constructive reflection to provide a nuanced approach or presented concisely such as visual content to be effective. Using this method rather than the replying tool is less likely to amplify hate.

- **Collective articulations of critique** – hashtag campaigns can still achieve virality and raise visibility.

- **Solidarity across difference** – using solidarity tactics as suggested above, forming networks and organising offline. The #iamhere campaign which encouraged people to use the #tag when engaging with hate, offered people support when making interventions (Facebook, 2021).

- **Monitoring (cross platform) and reporting** – providing evidence to Twitter, to police and to media to add pressure. Holding platforms accountable – using pressure tactics like coalition letters.

- **Identifying key nodes of hate** with a view to pressurising for their removal to reduce spread of hate and influence (de-platforming).

- **Sharing and co-operating with other organisations**, including cross media work and analysis, to provide a strong response – producing and sharing content, joint campaigns etc.

- **Targeted content at specific groups,** particularly young people who may be more open to educational narratives, using appropriate and varied media forms. The Army of Good Trolls was an effective campaign in this regard (see Textgain and Media Diversity Institute, Facebook 2021) They argue that it is important to 'set the right tone', to take people with them rather than preach or lecture.

- **Media literacy/ educational initiatives** to encourage collective responsibility – what motivates people to engage? Campaign around human rights and democratic values to encourage an ethical outlook with clear guidelines on how people can help.

- **Training and use of existing resources provided by groups** such as the Media Diversity Institute, Countering Digital Hate and Demos.

For organisations/government:

- **Duty of care** approach.

- **Tighter regulation and enforcement** to ensure stricter moderation procedures which should include manual techniques to identify abuse or 'hidden hate' that evades automated methods (Center for Countering Digital Hate, 2022).

- **More transparent policy when it comes to censorship and other rules**. **Consistent enforcement** of these rules - this requires **investment** from social media companies including investment in multi-lingual and region specific moderation teams.

- **Data sharing policies** – open and transparent data sharing policies to allow for research on hate speech.

- **More rapid/ efficient response by tech companies.** Shouldn't leave to individuals to manage 'victim-blaming'.

- **C**onsult with external experts/civil groups on their policies/ practices.

- **Co-operate with activist groups in online campaigns** including financial support.

- **Distinguish between opinion, hate speech**, where people are attacked/ threatened, and disinformation where people can be manipulated on mass.

- **Investing in technology** to monitor and delete speech that violates community standards.

- **Putting pressure on advertisers** to pull out of platforms.

Resources:

Additional resources include videos from an event on countering hate held with advocacy groups, and guidelines for sharing data. Datasets will also be available here in due course. All resources will be held here:

https://www.keele.ac.uk/humanities/study/mcc/research/contestingislamophobia/

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