

# A Pocket Guide to Media & Politics



# ENGAGE

Media Awareness • Political Participation



[www.iengage.org.uk](http://www.iengage.org.uk)

## ➔ Introduction

Britain is now home to around 2 million Muslims; some 3% of the total British population.

Post 9/11 and 7/7, Muslims have become the focal point of much media comment and analysis. A study of content and visual analysis of Muslims in the British media conducted by the Cardiff School of Journalism in 2008, on the third anniversary of the 7 July bombings, found that:

- In 2008 the incidence of stories stressing the incompatibility of Islam with British values exceeded the coverage of terrorism related stories for the first time
- While around a quarter of stories refer negatively to Islam (as dangerous, archaic or irrational) only 2% of them positively appraise Muslims' acceptance of dominant moral values
- Around two thirds of the coverage of Islam and Muslims in Britain focuses on them as a threat, a problem or both

The need for British Muslims to counter this sort of coverage which demonises their religion, contributes to their alienation and hinders their integration has never been more urgent.

*'We should be positioning ourselves to take advantage for our own political ends of the growing wave of public hostility to Islam currently being whipped up by the mass media.'*  
(Nick Griffin, BNP leader)

ENGAGE is a new initiative designed to encourage British Muslims to interact more effectively and productively in politics and the media in the UK.

ENGAGE aims to work closely with local Muslim communities providing support, training and advice on how to challenge the prevalence of negative media coverage.

ENGAGE encourages British Muslims to better appreciate the importance and virtues of political engagement through voter registration campaigns and working with local councillors and MPs.

We hope that through positive and enduring engagement, increased numbers of British Muslims will develop the confidence and skills necessary to counteract negative perceptions about their religion and their place in Britain. It is our belief that through this vital capacity building we will support the creation of a fairer media and a more robust democracy in Britain.

“**HELP ONE ANOTHER TO VIRTUE AND GOD-CONSCIOUSNESS AND DO NOT HELP ONE ANOTHER TO SIN AND TRANSGRESSION.**” (QUR’AN 5:2)

The **ENGAGE** Team

## ➔ **Islamophobia & Discrimination**

All of us have the right to go about our lives free from discrimination regardless of our religion, race or gender. Islamophobia, the fear and hatred of Muslims and Islam, is a growing phenomenon across Europe. It manifests itself in both hate speech and in physical assaults on Muslims and their property.

Tackling hatred of other communities is a long term process that involves eradicating the fears on which animosity is based; educating others on respecting difference; and on protecting all citizens against crimes that are religiously and racially motivated.

If you, a fellow Muslim, or any other citizen is attacked, threatened, harassed or intimidated, report the matter to the police immediately. If this happens in the work place, report it at once to your manager and union representative.

Remain calm and never respond in a violent or aggressive manner.

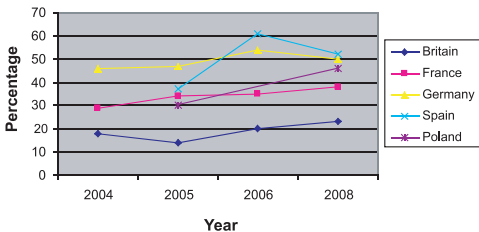
**“THE GOOD DEED AND THE EVIL DEED ARE NOT ALIKE. REPEL THE EVIL DEED WITH ONE WHICH IS BETTER AND YOUR ENEMY WILL BECOME AS CLOSE AS AN OLD AND VALUED FRIEND.” (QUR’AN 41:34)**

## ➤ Anti-Muslim Attitudes on the Increase Throughout Europe

The Pew Global Attitudes Survey 2008 has found that anti Muslim opinion throughout Europe is on the increase with attitudes towards Muslims in Great Britain, France, Spain, Germany and Poland being more negative in 2008 than in 2005.

The survey found 14% of the British public expressed a negative view of Muslims in 2005 compared with 23% in 2008. The research also found that opinions about Muslims in almost all of the countries surveyed are considerably more negative than are views of Jews.

**Rise in Anti Muslim Attitudes 2004 - 2008**



## ➔ Muslims in the UK

City/ Town	Total Muslim population	Muslims as % of total population
England and Wales	1,546,626	2.97
London	607,083	8.5
Birmingham	140,033	14
Bradford	75,188	16
Kirklees*	39,312	10
Manchester	35,806	9
Leicester	30,885	11
Luton	26,963	15
Blackburn	26,674	19
Oldham	24,039	11
Sheffield	23,819	4.6
Leeds	21,394	3
Rochdale	19,248	9.4
Bolton	18,444	7
Glasgow	17,337	3.1
Cardiff	11,261	3.7
Preston	10,678	8.2
Edinburgh	6,729	1.5
Dundee	2,913	2

\*Kirklees is a metropolitan borough comprising Huddersfield, Batley and Dewsbury.

## ➔ Political Engagement

Muslims are the second largest faith community in Britain. There are more British Muslims than the numbers of British Jews, Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists combined. Official government data shows that they are also the most disadvantaged in terms of educational attainment and employment status.

- 35% of Muslim children live in households with no adults in employment compared to 18% in the general population
- 70% of Bangladeshi pupils and almost 60% of Pakistani and Black African pupils live in the 20% most deprived postcode areas compared to less than 20% of White British pupils
- 18% of London's Muslim population are currently not registered to vote

Engagement is necessary in order to promote policies that will help Muslims and others on the margins of society to move out of their economic and political exclusion zones and into the mainstream.

*'Britain is basically English speaking, Christian and white, and if one starts to think that it might become basically Urdu speaking and Muslim and brown, one gets frightened and angry.'* (Charles Moore, The Spectator, 19 Oct 1991)

## ➔ Engaging with the Media

As British Muslims, each of us has a responsibility to ensure that our media carries a true and fair portrayal of Islam. We must utilise the media to help stimulate debate and improve the public image of Islam in Britain by engaging with it constructively.

In addition to letter-writing, most newspapers allow readers to post comments to online pages. News and features that are inaccurate or inflammatory can be responded to immediately by posting a comment via the internet. Make use of the internet to respond in a timely fashion to news stories and features that you feel denigrate Islam and Muslims, or those that you feel negatively affect tolerance and social cohesion.

You should of course also write to compliment and express your appreciation when newspapers publish news or stories that you think are praiseworthy for their objectivity and content. Credit should be given where credit is due. Don't restrict your letter writing to criticisms, offer thanks where it is due.

If you have a contribution, or a complaint, get in touch with the relevant newspaper or broadcaster, by letter, phone or email.

*'It is the core ideology of Islam that is the problem, not a handful of incendiary preachers.'*

(Rod Liddle, former editor of the Radio 4 Today programme, writing in The Spectator, 16 Sept 2005)



## ➔ Media Contact Information

**Daily Express** – 0871 434 1010  
expressletters@express.co.uk

**Daily Mail** - 020 7938 6000  
letters@dailymail.co.uk

**Daily Mirror** - 020 7293 3000  
mailbox@mirror.co.uk

**Daily Telegraph** - 020 7931 2000  
dtletters@telegraph.co.uk

**The Metro** - 020 7651 5242  
mail@ukmetro.co.uk

**The Guardian** - 020 7278 2332  
letters@guardian.co.uk

**The Independent** - 020 7005 2000  
letters@independent.co.uk

**The Observer** – 020 7278 2332  
letters@observer.co.uk

**The Times** - 020 7782 5000  
letters@thetimes.co.uk

**Financial Times** – 020 7873 3000  
letters.editor@ft.com

**The Sunday Times** – 020 7782 5000  
letters@sunday-times.co.uk

**The Sun** - 020 7782 4000  
letters@the-sun.co.uk

**The Scotsman** - 0131 620 8620  
letters@scotsman.com

**The Herald** - 0141 302 7000  
letters@theherald.co.uk

**BBC** - 03700 100 222  
www.bbc.co.uk/complaints

**ITV** - 0844 881 4150  
dutyoffice@itv.com

**Sky News** – 0870 240 3000  
news@sky.com

**Channel 4** - 0845 076 0191  
Fill out the web form at:

<http://help.channel4.com>

**ITV Teletext** - 020 8323 5000  
webmaster@teletext.co.uk

If you have made a complaint and were not satisfied with the response you received you can take the matter further and write to:

### **Press Complaints Commission**

020 7831 0022  
complaints@pcc.org.uk

### **OfCOM** (Office of Communications)

020 7981 3040  
www.ofcom.org.uk

Please send ENGAGE a copy of all correspondence for our records at [info@iengage.org.uk](mailto:info@iengage.org.uk).

## ➔ Active Citizenship

Islam exhorts Muslims to lead active public lives, contributing to society through protecting and promoting values that ensure the cultivation of healthy, robust and respectful discourses.

The concept of citizenship covers knowledge, understanding and the acquisition of the necessary skills to learn how our own and others' attitudes can either undermine or enhance the quality of life of all individuals and communities in a society. Equipping all members of society with the knowledge, skill and confidence to participate in society's debates about its future is an important measure of equality in a democratic society. And the communities themselves bear some responsibility in teaching their members these skills sets.

Islam calls upon us to seek knowledge and to display a willing attitude towards learning from others whilst also laying down clear parameters that allow for a robust - but always civilised - debate.

**“CALL TO THE WAY OF YOUR LORD WITH WISDOM AND FAIR EXHORTATION, AND REASON WITH THEM IN THE BETTER WAY.” (QUR’AN 16:125)**

## ➔ Political Engagement

The first step to exercising our democratic right is to ensure that we are eligible to vote. According to the Department for Constitutional Affairs, 18% of London's Muslims in February 2006 were not on the electoral roll, and thus unable to exercise a vote, despite being eligible to do so. You can read details of how to register to vote at [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk).

Our democratic participation should not be limited to the exercise of a vote every four or five years in national and local elections. To improve our quality of life, and that of our local community, we should take an interest in and follow closely developments in our local area.

We should keep in regular touch with our local councillors and MPs and raise issues of concern to us, our families and our neighbourhood. We should encourage our local masjid and Islamic organisations to hold regular public meetings with our MPs and councillors so that they are kept informed of our community's views on local as well as major national and international issues.

### **Make sure you have your say.**

*'Forced marriages are common. Honour killings and beatings are far from rare. Women are refused education or a chance to learn English.... The accusation that the media — with a few badly researched or unchecked stories — is fomenting race hatred is in itself a trivialisation.'*

(Trevor Kavanagh, The Sun, 13 July 2008)

## ➔ **New Media, New Opportunities**

Blogging has fast become a useful and inexpensive way of disseminating views to a much wider audience. There are many blogs available on the internet that add Muslim perspectives to local, regional, national and international debates.

The Guardian's Comment is Free (CiF) website at [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree) hosts hundreds of bloggers with a number of Muslims also regularly contributing articles to the site. CiF is a hugely popular forum and is a great place to read and take part in commenting on a multitude of issues that affect all of us.

Blogging allows writers the freedom to publish their views on the internet either in response to news seen and read elsewhere, or simply to generate news and views of their own. A blog is a useful tool enabling active engagement in public debates.

The blog culture contributes positively to the democratisation of public debates as individuals make more use of the internet to add their voices to the mix and challenge more established opinion formers. Get involved today!

*'The problem lies in a refusal to acknowledge that Islamist extremism is rooted in religion. Instead, ministers and security officials prefer to think of it as a protest movement against grievances such as Iraq or Palestine, or "Islamophobia".'*  
(Melanie Phillips, The Times, 6 June 2006)

## ➔ Terrorism

Terrorist attacks like the 7/7 atrocities have no religion and kill innocent people of all races and creeds. Community vigilance is essential to help ensure security for all.

Averting a terrorist attack is an Islamic imperative.

“DO NOT SPREAD DISORDER ON THE EARTH, AFTER IT HAS BEEN SET IN ORDER, AND CALL ON GOD WITH FEAR AND HOPE.” (QUR’AN 7:56)

For information on the current terrorist threat and government responses to it visit the Home Office website at: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/security/>

If you become aware of suspected terror-related activity then bring this to the attention of the police immediately. Call the **Anti-Terrorism Hotline** in confidence on **0800 789321**.

If you are uncertain then discuss your concerns with a trusted community elder or neighbourhood police officer.

Terrorist propaganda seeks to justify 7/7 on the basis that it is responding to indiscriminate violence by UK and US troops against Muslim civilians abroad. Challenge it amongst your friends by explaining that grievances against foreign policy are best pursued through increased political and media engagement.

## ➔ Conclusion

We hope you have found this Pocket Guide useful, insha' Allah. It can only encapsulate a brief summary of our rights, responsibilities and the importance of engagement.

If you would like members of the ENGAGE team to deliver a FREE seminar to your mosque/Islamic organisation about politics and the media in the UK and how you can get involved, then please email [info@iengage.org.uk](mailto:info@iengage.org.uk) with your details.

Do also regularly visit the ENGAGE website to keep up-to-date with the latest developments and useful resources concerning British Muslims in politics and the media.

[www.iengage.org.uk](http://www.iengage.org.uk)

Special thanks to the Muslim Council of Britain for allowing us to adapt some material from their 2004 booklet 'Know Your Rights and Responsibilities'.

*'His [the Archbishop of Canterbury] call for sharia law amounts to nothing more than a craven surrender to bullying from fundamentalist Muslims, whose demands are usually accompanied by the hint of menace from the clenched fist or suicide bomb.'*

(Leo McKinstry, Daily Express, 11 Feb 2008)