RESEARCH BRIEFING REPORT

2020

WHAT TO DO IF YOU GET COVID-19

Visit your local mosque!
Muslims have higher sanitary standards than the average person[1] and are far safer to be around during flu season.

No wonder why people have started attacking Muslims. These vermin's have been spreading hatred covered in lies. This will continue unless they're made to rot in jail

09:36 · 09/04/2020 · Twitter for iPhone

1 Like

...w soon before the Muslims take ...er England and call it ...glandistan?

...39 · 08/04/2020 · Twitter for Android

We all need to avoid muzrats who are all still attending mosque. They believe allah will fly down from his rainbow and save them while infecting infidels.

08:35 · 29/03/2020 · Twitter for Android

4 Likes

CORONAVIRUS, FEAR AND HOW ISLAMOPHOBIA SPREADS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

ANTI-MUSLIM HATRED WORKING GROUP

Professor Imran Awan and Roxana Khan-Williams on behalf of the Independent Members of the AMHWG

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"Muslims
are a bigger threat than any
disease like the coronavirus
ever will be...."

INDEPENDENT MEMBERS

ANTI-
MUSLIM
HATRED

WORKING GROUP

INTRODUCTION

Objectives:

The aims and objectives of this report are to try and provide a snapshot of trends of anti-Muslim bigotry and Islamophobic narratives circulating on social media in relation to Covid-19. The objectives are to provide an overview of how these narratives are formed and how they are impacting communities both online and offline.

Online hate speech can come in many different forms from racial harassment, religiously motivated abuse including Islamophobic abuse and directed abuse more generally which targets someone because of their disability, gender, culture, race and beliefs. Online Islamophobia can be categorised as being forms of 'cyber harassment', 'cyber bullying', 'cyber abuse', 'cyber incitement/threats' and 'cyber hate'.

The current Covid-19 crisis has led to local communities coming together to support one another and showing solidarity and unity. Whilst this is extremely positive news, a more chilling effect and consequence of Covid-19 has been the proliferation and manifestation of Islamophobic language and narratives on social media.

For example, Covid-19 has been utilised by the far-right and those who sympathise with this ideology to peddle hate, with such narratives quickly being able to penetrate the mainstream and become normalised. For example, one video shared on the social media site Telegram by the former leader of the English Defence League, Tommy Robinson, alleges to show a group of Muslim men leaving a secret mosque in Birmingham to pray with the video being watched over 10,000 times [1].

A screenshot of the video shared claiming to show people leaving a secret mosque in Birmingham

[1] See: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/05/police-investigate-uk-far-right-groups-over-anti-muslim-coronavirus-claims

This example is based upon the visual representations of Islam which have become synonymous with people who fear the pervading sense of Muslims more generally. For example, the depiction of mosques, headscarves and minarets can help contribute towards the 'othering' of such communities. In the online space, the depiction of Muslims through visual cartoons, memes and posting of fake videos is dangerous and can be used by extremists and fundamentalists to dehumanise Muslims.

As we will highlight this sentiment is used by some users on social media to argue that the police do not work for them and tip-toe around ethnic minorities for fear of being called racist. This is important because in a climate of Covid-19, far-right groups will often use the effects of 'strain' to target minorities because of social and economic issues, thus leaving ethnic minorities more at risk due to the intersections of poverty and class.

We all need to avoid muzrats who are all still attending mosque. They believe allah will fly down from his rainbow and save them while infecting infidels.

08:35 · 29/03/2020 · Twitter for Android

To be honest this being allowed to happen beggars belief NO MATTER who you are do as you are told - Police MUST get a grip they have the legislation in place if they don't then from experience there will be trouble @patel4witham @BBCNews twitter.com/GanglSepp/stat...

This Tweet is unavailable.

💬 1   🔁 15   ♡ 20   ⬆️

28/03/2020

As the internet can act as an echo chamber, the themes presented in this report show that online cyber hubs are being created where this discourse is impacting narratives on the mainstream media. These highlighted forms of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry found on social media reinforce negative views and conflict concerning issues around economics, social cohesion and social mobility. For example, conspiracy theories around Muslims and Ramadan that claim it is a point where the virus is likely to spread have been rife within the popular press and have entrenched perceptions that Muslims are responsible for the coronavirus crisis. Another example of how social media can act as an echo chamber for hate is through unfounded narratives that argue ethnic minorities, and particularly Muslims, are given preferential treatment by the police and the establishment.

That's so they can cover up when the muzzers flout the orders.

23:26 · 23/03/2020 · Twitter for Android

Islamophobic hate crimes increase following 'trigger' events as they operate to galvanise tensions and sentiments against the suspected perpetrators and groups associated with them. At this present time there are no indications that anti-Muslim hate crime is increasing likely due to social distancing measures, however this may become a very real possibility once these are lifted, if this type of hatred is allowed to incubate online. Indeed evidence shows that anti-Muslim hate crimes have increased significantly following 'trigger' events including terror attacks carried out by individuals who choose to identify themselves as being Muslim or acting in the name of Islam. Such spikes in anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents following 'trigger' events are not confided to offline settings; rather, the offline pattern is replicated online.

Key trigger events, such as the New Zealand Christchurch terror attacks, showed an increase in online Islamophobic hate crime. Following the 'trigger event' in the case of Covid-19, this 'new' digital form of anti-Muslim bigotry has become even more striking and prevalent within social media, thus mutually reinforcing the relationship between offline attacks and online hate speech.

There is a continuity of anti-Muslim hostility in both the virtual and the physical globalised world. Whilst Islamophobic hate crimes and incidents often occur in public spaces such as streets and public transport networks, they also occur online. Rather than being single, one-off incidents, Islamophobic hate crimes can sometimes form part of an ongoing process of victimisation that often makes up part of a victim's everyday experiences of hostility.
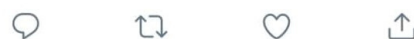
This report does not intend to provide a quantitative analysis of trends or numbers in relation to tweets and posts, however it aims to provide a snapshot of collated and examined posts from Twitter, Facebook, Telegram and content from the traditional far-right and content that is circulating on WhatsApp which contain anti-Muslim prejudice and Islamophobic narratives. The goal of this briefing report is try and better understand how Islamophobic narratives online emerge and the consequences in relation to the Covid-19 crisis. In this report we provide a snapshot of some of the hateful rhetoric on social media and categorise five key themes that highlight the main areas in which anti-Muslim bigotry have arisen in light of the corona virus crisis.

Our report focuses on how quickly fake news can spread; how Mosques are used as a symbol of hate; how Muslims have been falsely accused of flouting the rules; how memes have been used to negatively portray Muslims and how conspiracy theories link Muslims as Muzrats (vermin) to blame them for Covid-19. This is not an exhaustive list, but does provide policy-makers, community groups, the media, social media companies, the police and other key stakeholders an opportunity to work with communities in helping confront Islamophobic abuse online and on social media.

> Its time we start treating muslims as the mental illness it is. Nobody died in the war to have these savages in england.
>
> 03:23 · 06/04/2020 · Twitter for iPhone
>
> 1 Retweet 7 Likes

How Fake News Spreads

'Othering' is when communities or individuals are stereotyped into groups who are portrayed negatively. This can have consequences which can lead to separateness and the formulation of 'in-group/out-group' mentality and the over-policing of minorities.

The political rhetoric and fake news videos posted on social media during Covid-19 illustrates the ways in which Muslim identities can be transformed across time and space. The effect of these transformations has been an increase of hate and fear, resulting in a rise in the level of Islamophobia through the construction of British Muslims as synonymous with 'deviance' and being a 'problem-group'. This discourse has positioned British Muslims as homogeneous and therefore is understood through the binaries of 'them and us'.

> We all need to avoid muzrats who are all still attending mosque. They believe allah will fly down from his rainbow and save them while infecting infidels.
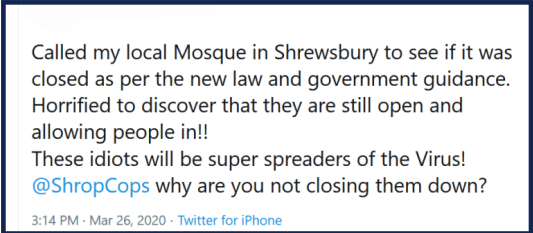>
> 08:35 · 29/03/2020 · Twitter for Android

One of the fake news stories that has particular ramifications for Muslim communities has been the presence of Muslims flouting social distancing measures.
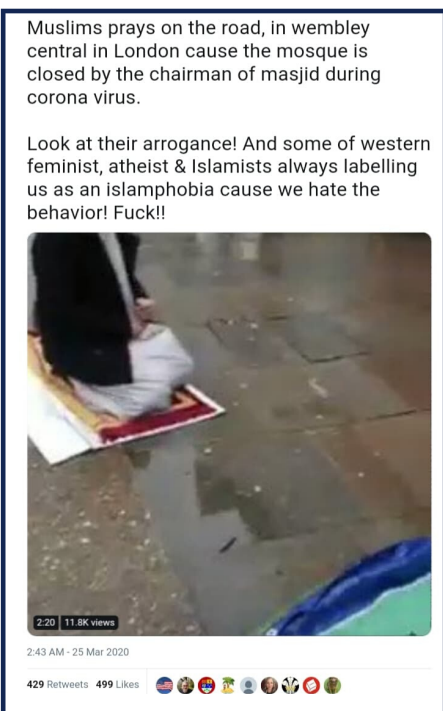
There appears to be many fake news videos surrounding British Muslims and their presence outside during lock down, with one example of a picture being taken outside a Leeds mosque which appeared to show Muslims acting in a self-serving manner by breaking the rules of the official lock down set by the UK Government. Whilst West Yorkshire police were quick to debunk the story, this did not stop the fake news gaining a lot of traction on social media.

> **West Yorkshire Police - Leeds Ci...** ✔
> @WYP_LeedsCity
>
> We've seen numerous comments today questioning why police aren't doing anything about people queuing up to visit a mosque in Leeds. The picture being shared is over a week old (when pubs etc were still open) This is the original article.
>
> Services cancelled but worship continues amid Covid-19 - South Leeds Life
> southleedslife.com
>
> *29/03/2020*

In another related example a tweet posted on the 26th March 2020 from a user claiming to have spoken to his local Mosque in Shrewsbury also reveals how individuals can create fake news stories which spread quickly. The user claimed to be 'horrified' to find that this Mosque was still open, adding that the people inside could be 'super spreaders' of the virus, and urged the police to act. After a fact-finding exercise it was quickly revealed by the police that there was not even a Mosque in Shrewsbury.

> Called my local Mosque in Shrewsbury to see if it was closed as per the new law and government guidance. Horrified to discover that they are still open and allowing people in!!
> These idiots will be super spreaders of the Virus!
> @ShropCops why are you not closing them down?
>
> 3:14 PM · Mar 26, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Similarly, on the 25th March 2020 a picture emerged on Twitter which seemed to show Muslims praying on the streets of central London and not adhering to the social distancing rules. Again, the story was debunked as the picture had been taken weeks ago. [2]

> Muslims prays on the road, in wembley central in London cause the mosque is closed by the chairman of masjid during corona virus.
>
> Look at their arrogance! And some of western feminist, atheist & Islamists always labelling us as an islamphobia cause we hate the behavior! Fuck!!
>
> 2:20 11.8K views
>
> 2:43 AM - 25 Mar 2020
>
> 429 Retweets 499 Likes

[2] See: https://tellmamauk.org/no-the-muslims-praying-in-this-video-arent-ignoring-the-coronavirus-lockdown-its-far-right-fake-news/

In another incident West Midlands Police had debunked a fake video being shared on social media which aimed to demonise Muslims in Birmingham by claiming they were congregating at a mosque in Small Heath during the coronavirus lockdown. However, it was revealed that the video in question was actually shot well before the lockdown had been enforced.

The problem with such information is that it can lead to wider retribution on social media which acts within the echo chamber as the comments on the forum threads can lead to wider vitriolic hate. For example, in relation to the news article shared on Facebook below some messages from users indicated they wanted Muslims "off the streets!!" and that Muslims are "praying in groups then driving taxis afterwards" focusing on regional events such as the grooming events in Rotherham to call out British Muslims as being "deviant". Another user stated that "all over the world these ignorant religious idiots are responsible for spreading this further". This led to wider dehumanizing language around wanting British Muslims to go "back home" and therefore homogenizing and grouping all Muslims together.

> Community leaders fear Muslims in Walsall are still putting themselves in greater danger of catching coronavirus by meeting in groups.
>
> EXPRESSANDSTAR.COM   02/04/2020

Mosques are to Blame for Covid-19

The prevalence and severity of Islamophobic hate crimes are influenced by 'trigger' events of local, national and international significance. The incidents are often provoked by antecedent events that incite a desire for retribution in the targeted group, as they operate to galvanise tensions and sentiments against the suspected perpetrators and groups associated with them.

The markers of Islam are also often the main way in which individuals will target those they perceive as being the problem. For example, whether this is the headscarf, someone's visible identity or a minaret it becomes a key way for individuals to target a whole community. This has been particularly striking following Covid-19 with a number of depictions and stories to how social gatherings within Mosques are part of the problem. Below is a selection of social media posts where users specifically push a narrative that Mosques remain open and therefore are spreading Covid-19.

> Both, most likely. England is having a huge problem with their Muslims . Mosques remain open. And 6% of the population is generating 25% of the Covid deaths
>
> 21:07 · 01/04/2020 · Twitter for Android

> And how about all the Mosques being allowed to be open and used as usual.
> People are reporting this throughout England.
> Surely this will be spreading the virus further, as would any Church if they were open.
>
> Please explain?
>
> 21:28 · 31/03/2020 · Twitter Web App
>
> 2 Retweets 5 Likes

> And still the police are harassing lone motorists for parking before lone exercising, whilst completely ignoring the hundreds of cars bringing multiple occupants to and from mosques. Why does the lockdown not apply to Muslims? This apartheid has to stop.
>
> 15:30 · 01 Apr 20 · Buffer

Called my local Mosque in Shrewsbury to see if it was closed as per the new law and government guidance. Horrified to discover that they are still open and allowing people in!!
These idiots will be super spreaders of the Virus!
@ShropCops why are you not closing them down?

3:14 PM · Mar 26, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Easy. In non Muslim countries, England, shut all the mosques. Demolition is the cure

PUFFIN @puffin1952 · 1d
Pakistan: Muslim clerics say "it isn't possible to close mosques under any circumstances in an Islamic country" wp.me/p4hgqZ-NGh

11:34 · 04/04/2020 · Twitter for Android

08/04/2020
@CMO_England OPEN MOSQUES
All of the18 Mosques in Oldham are open why? all houses of worshipe are in lock down by orders of the Govt, when are the police going to close them. The Midlands are second to London for Conona cases now we know why. SHUT THEM SAVE THE NHS SAVE LIVES.

💬 1   🔁   ♡   ⬆️

They make a plan to come to your house and harrass you....but leave all the mosques and Muslims alone!! Useless wankers

· 1d
5 officers call on man for videoing traffic warden who was ticketing quarantined people. Note.. the taser is ready

11:57 · 01/04/2020 · Twitter for Android

· 28/03/2020 ⌄
To be honest this being allowed to happen beggars belief NO MATTER who you are do as you are told - Police MUST get a grip they have the legislation in place if they don't then from experience there will be trouble @patel4witham @BBCNews twitter.com/GanglSepp/stat...

This Tweet is unavailable.

💬 1   🔁 15   ♡ 20   ⬆️

⌄

others

These muzzers do not give a fuk about the law or about other people. What will the police do FUCK ALL!

19:33 · 28/03/2020 · Twitter for Android

Police struggle to clear Birmingham street as Muslims congregate, ignoring Government advice on #SocialDistancing

#COVID19 #StayHomeSaveLives

59.7K views
💬 573   🔁 970   ♡ 937   ⬆️

⌄

Fuckin muzzers are disgusting.
29/03/2020

Meme culture and the peddling of Islamophobia

Evidence shows that Islamophobia is highly gendered. Muslim women in particular are more likely to be attacked or abused than men in public settings, especially if they are visibly Muslim. In fact, evidence shows that Muslim women are more likely to be abused online too. As with Mosques, the visual identifiers of Islam are the tools for identification upon which Islamophobia is expressed on social media. This approach demonstrates why certain individuals and groups are more likely to become targets for hostility than others.
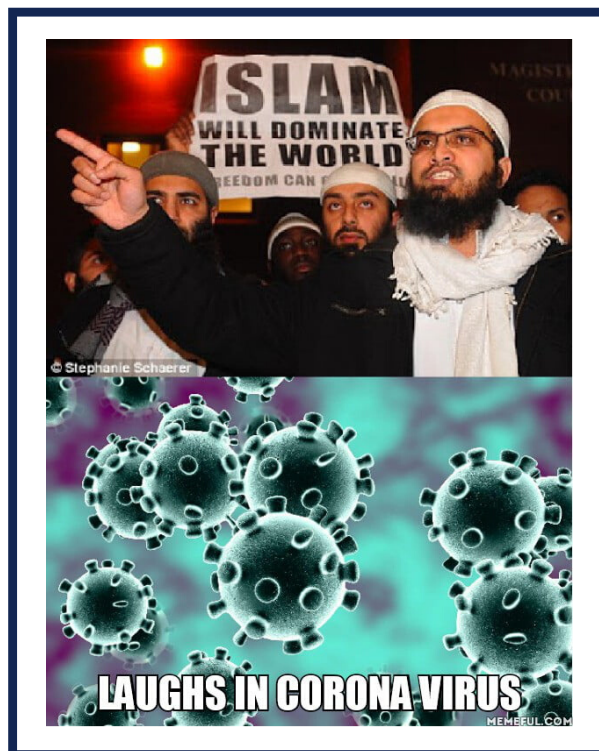
In the sample of tweets and posts collected some examples show how Muslim women are mocked at and abused because of their appearance. For example, a Muslim woman who was wearing a hijab and a protective mask overheard a man in a supermarket say to his partner "look a bomb!" and pointed at her. The woman then confronted the man in the car park and he apologised. In another incident a Muslim woman said she was approached by a man who coughed in her face and claimed he had coronavirus.

The alleged assault in Croydon, south London was on 18th March 2020 and was reported to the Metropolitan police. The woman, who wears a hijab, said she tried to avoid her attacker but the man turned towards her and "got in her face".

The New Arab

UK police investigating 'corona cough attack' on Muslim woman

Police are investigating the incident which took place in 18th March [Getty]

See:
https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2020/4/3/uk-police-investing-corona-cough-attack-on-muslim-woman

Alongside the gendered way in which Islamophobia occurs on social media, there is also a range and selection of memes that have been specifically used to link Covid-19 to historical events such as the Crusades. By using these visual depictions of Covid-19 and Muslims, users are quickly able to whip up fear and anxiety. Some of the images also use visual Muslim identity as a trigger to target Muslims through Islamophobic rhetoric.

covid-19 is a hoax set up by the muslim and lgbt community

Source: https://me.me/i/covid-19-is-a-hoax-set-up-by-the-muslim-and-83d8bff7aec24e09b23bb50092cb5045

Source: https://imgflip.com/m/politics/tag/covid+19

Source: https://knowyourmeme.com/photos/1780041-4chan

As well as social media posts that ridicule and dehumanise British Muslims, a number of social media posts promoting a white British disillusionment narrative, claimed that the police were biased towards ethnic minority groups, thereby reinforcing 'us versus them' narratives which undermine social cohesion and create further social divides, during a time of societal crisis.

> They have their own radio stations for all that so why are the BBC bending over backwards to please these vermin
> This is UK not Pakistan or any other muslim country
> When will people wake up and realise that we are being taken over
>
> 12:26 · 10/04/2020 · Twitter for Android

^ In reference to the BBC broadcasting Islamic prayers over the radio

> 06/04/2020
> There are two forms of policing in the U.K.
>
> One for the white middle classes, one for little Pakistan.
>
> I have been reported to my local police for buying a tomato plant. #outsiders
>
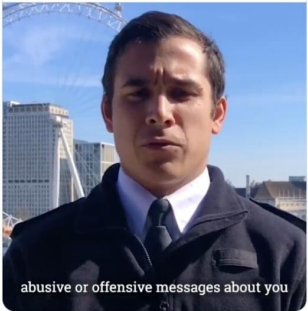> UK RECORDS HIGHEST DAILY DEATH TOLL
>
> 170K views
>
> 371   1,723   4,740

[3] See: https://www.indy100.com/article/coronavirus-uk-lockdown-mosque-shropshire-police-9437521
[4] See: https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-factcheck-leeds-mosque/false-claimbritish-mosque-remains-openduring-coronavirus-lockdown-idUSKBN21I3AX

> If you experience hate crime, please tell us & we will act.
>
> abusive or offensive messages about you
>
> 451   1,907   6,842
>
> 28/03/2020
>
> Replying to @PaulEmbery
> It's because the Met is full of muzzers, poofters and wrong'uns, so they're just looking after their own

In another appaling set of social media posts British Muslims are also described as being Muzrats, another word to describe Muslims as vermin thus linking them to Covid-19 as part of the disease. The examples below use the term Muzrat to politicise the crisis and elude to Muslims taking over the country.

> Katie was referring to how the Muzrats still are allowed to congregate in numbers and how it is policed>
>
> 02:28 · 05/04/2020 · Twitter Web App

> str8 up faxx my brudda fuk da muzrats all my homies h8 da muzrats
>
> 09:30 · 02/04/2020 · Twitter for Android

> No wonder why people have started attacking Muslims. These vermin's have been spreading hatred covered in lies. This will continue unless they're made to rot in jail
>
> 09:36 · 09/04/2020 · Twitter for iPhone
>
> 1 Like

> I'm really hopeful it reduces the muz rat population 😁
>
> 13:06 · 06/04/2020 · Twitter for iPhone

Conspiracy theories: Muslims as super spreaders of Covid-19

The coronavirus crisis has led to a wave of conspiracy theories connecting British Muslims, Islam and the virus in various ways. Amongst far right online communities Mosques are now falsely being portrayed as epicentres of spreading Covid-19, as opposed to extremism, due to their self-serving practices. Conspiracy theories are formed because of latent stereotypes which are often prevalent within public discourses - in the current crisis - these problematising stereotypes surrounding British Muslims have evolved from narratives around the inherent threat of extremism and violent terrorism to now viewing British Muslims as inherently spreading coronavirus, through their culture and beliefs. In a series of highly inflammatory social media posts, British Muslims are viewed as the spreaders of the virus and that Covid-19 is just another attempt to spread Islam in Britain.

05/04/2020 · 2d

The Queen displayed the extraordinary power tonight of one word: EXPERIENCE. No world leader on earth, of any kind, has more than she does.
That's why she always knows exactly what to say.
It's a remarkable gift.

662   1,295   18.4K

Replying to

How can she even speak for England? She's not even Muslim.

How soon before the Muslims take over England and call it Englandistan?

08:39 · 08/04/2020 · Twitter for Android

The Muslims are a bigger threat to the modern world than any disease like corona virus ever will be....

. · 2d

We are learning much about the Invisible Enemy. It is tough and smart, but we are tougher and smarter!

58.3K   62.1K   379K

Replying to @realDonaldTrump

Muslims are responsible for spreading the coronavirus, after China it went straight to the Christian countries United States France England Germany.9th month,19 year is when the virus started in China, I've known for 20 years this was going to happen. Exact year and exact month.   06/04/2020

you cannot go to certain areas in your own country because you are not allowed by muslims. England needs a shakedown. England left down their crusaders. The ones that rescued England from every attack. England and its queen became a sheeple country.
#EnglandWakeTheFuckUp
05/04/2020

A number of the examples above highlight how from a UK perspective Islamophobia is formed on social media. However Covid-19 does have an international perspective and this also reveals how Islamophobia is triggered by events. In India, online and offline hate towards Muslims has proliferated since the outbreak of Covid-19. Shops have been boycotted, people have been attacked on the streets and there has been widespread disinformation shared online. Some have argued that the gathering of an Islamic missionary organisation, Tablighi Jamaat is the reason for the outbreak of Coronavirus and some have even gone as far to say that Muslims have invented the virus to spread jihad. This rhetoric has gained much traction online with digital human rights group Equality Labs claiming that the hashtag #CoronaJihad has appeared nearly 300,000 times [6]. These narratives from India echo and reinforce the discourse here in the UK of Muslims being blamed for the spread of the virus.

WAR FROM TWO FRONTS

Concluding remarks

This report had aimed to provide a snapshot of reports and trends in the evolution of anti-Muslim and Islamophobic narratives circulating on social media in the context of Covid-19, and to explore how these changing narratives are impacting communities and may reinforce negative stereotypes that already have wide prevalence in some sectors of society. The analysis demonstrates that many of the key narratives that can lead to higher rates of Islamophobic hate crime incidence have been reinforced in new ways by the Covid-19 crisis. Rather than simply dissipating, this report has shown how online narratives rooted in anti-Muslim bigotry are evolving and transforming in the new social context created by the pandemic. In this new context, Islam and Muslims have been associated directly with the causes of the pandemic, fitting well within broader well-known far-right themes depicting Muslims as parasitical to society – foreign, alien and 'disease-like'. This report should not be used to extrapolate broad generalisations about precisely how prevalent or representative these online trends are, instead it provides a snapshot of some of the hateful Islamophobic rhetoric espoused online.. It cannot be used to extrapolate

[6] See https://time.com/5815264/coronavirus-india-islamophobia-coronajihad/

broad generalisations about precisely how prevalent or representative these online trends are. This report has undertaken a thematic approach using targeted keyword searches and narrative analysis to examine how specific language and discourse is being adapted to the age of Covid-19. However, the data has identified specific instances of memes and posts achieving virility online across certain social media platforms. The key examples highlighted indicate that the new shift in narrative-focus in a Covid-19 context has significant resonance within online communities which are already sympathetic to far-right ideas, groups, individuals and causes.

Further more comprehensive research is required to determine how prevalent these alarming trends are becoming. The most immediate impact of these narratives is of course to undermine a sense of national social cohesion, to create dangerous suspicions between different faith and ethnic groups, and to dehumanise British Muslim communities in a way that undermines their sense of national belonging. Our concern that this is naturally a vulnerable moment for this country during which the rapid dispersal of such shifting negative narratives can sow distrust that may pose longer term security risks. Our more far-reaching concern is that this shift in narratives indicates a growing risk that online Islamophobic narratives being incubated during the lock down may act as a trigger for unleashing a renewed bout of hate crimes in a post-lockdown context. In particular, we found that the amplification of Islamophobic narratives online is being used by certain groups and far-right members to push an 'us vs them' narrative. This constant threat of anti-Muslim hate can lead some in Muslim communities to adopt a siege mentality, keeping a low profile in order to reduce the potential for future abuse; it can also increase the risks of actual abuse.

About the AMHWG

The cross-government Anti-Muslim Hatred Working Group is made up of representatives from Muslim communities, independent experts, and academics who are known as independent members. The Group is the government's main forum for discussing issues of concern with Muslim stakeholders and the communities whose interests they represent and convey. It also plays a valuable role in both disseminating and providing feedback on key policy messages and approaches.

Stay connected

@AMHWGuk

www.anti-muslim-hatred-working-group.home.blog/