

# The Importance of Narrative in Responding to Hate Incidents Following 'Trigger' Events



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## Foreword

We know from the work of Tell MAMA that major terrorist attacks lead to a corresponding rise in sharp spikes of recorded anti-Muslim hate incidents. We have seen and measured these spikes and troughs and the first major incident that we observed with a large spike was after the murder of drummer Lee Rigby. Most of the spikes have a latency of between 24-72 hours before they show a characteristic sharp upturn and the prevailing wisdom within hate crime agencies like Tell MAMA has been that there is a natural and coupled correlation between the two – terrorist attacks and a sharp measurable rise in anti-Muslim hate or Islamophobic hate incidents.

This report highlights something unique that took place after the appalling Westminster Bridge terrorist attack. It highlights how effective messaging between the Metropolitan police service, civil society groups and a mobilisation by local faith groups meant that any divisive hate incidents after the attack were not as significant as they could have been in terms of their volume. This report underscores the need for quick and early mobilisation and communication interventions, thereby closing down the window for hate groups to promote their divisiveness and in detaching the actions of the terrorist from wider Muslim communities who want to peacefully get on with their lives. This mobilisation also means that wider communities are able to come together and bond at a time when many are in shock and grief when lives are lost and another reason why quick community mobilisation is essential.

More work needs to be done in understanding mechanisms and processes that can reduce societal divisions after major terrorist attacks. This report is the first of its kind looking at a practical example of how tensions and hate incidents were dampened by multiple positive forces at work after the Westminster attack.

**Iman Atta, OBE**

Director, Tell MAMA

## **Executive Summary**

This report is a joint collaboration between the authors, Ms Kim Sadique, Dr James Tangen, Ms Anna Perowne, and Tell MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks). The overall aim of this report is to understand post ‘trigger event’ hate incident patterns with a specific focus on the anomalous data following the Westminster terror attack (22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017). In order to achieve this, the authors undertook a detailed discourse analysis for a period of 2 weeks post Westminster attack between 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017 to 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 (this timescale is linked to the National 14 Day Plan implemented by the Metropolitan Police). Analysis of hate incident reports provided by Tell MAMA was undertaken and semi-structured interviews were conducted with three hate crime and two journalism professionals to illicit the expert opinions of those working in this field as to why there is a difference between some trigger events and others in terms of hate incident patterns. The report concludes with a list of recommendations that have been devised following interviews with key professionals.

### **Key Findings**

- Following a ‘trigger event’ there is a spike in hate incidents which normally occurs between 24-48 hours online and 48-72 hours offline.
- The prevalence and severity of the hate incidents are influenced by government, media and police responses to the ‘trigger event’.
- When the ‘trigger event’ is a terrorist attack the target chosen also appears to play a significant role in the prevalence and severity of hate incidents that follow.
- Muslim communities need to be given a voice/platform to condemn ‘trigger events’ and to use it.
- The National 14-Day Plan (terror incident response plan) that was implemented by the Metropolitan police was a significant factor in preventing the expected spike in recorded hate incidents, following the Westminster terror attack.
- Further contributing factors include: the scale of fatalities, the emotional connection to and feelings of patriotism associated with the ‘trigger event’.

## Recommendations

- 1. Government and political parties should provide clear leadership and a distinctive counter-narrative to anti-Muslim sentiments following a potential trigger event**

There needs to be a clearer counter-narrative from the Government and/or political parties following a 'trigger event' to prevent hate responses. Clear leadership and visibility of Government and/or political parties is crucial from the outset.

- 2. All Police Services should implement the National 14-Day Plan in the immediate aftermath of a potential trigger event**

The National 14-Day Plan implemented by the Metropolitan Police should be utilised by all Police Services across the UK following terrorist attacks.

- 3. Media reporting in the aftermath of a 'trigger event' needs to be more balanced and media outlets should be held to account for reporting that is inflammatory or factually inaccurate**

The media needs to consider the use of language and images used in reporting 'trigger events.'

- 4. Social media companies should enforce a 'zero tolerance' policy towards posts that incite hate**

Social media companies can respond much faster to posts which incite hatred by blocking/removing the posts/user more quickly.

- 5. Muslim communities need to be given a safe platform from which they are able to express their emotions and response to 'trigger events', such as terror attacks**

Muslim communities should be supported to provide a clear and immediate response to potential 'trigger events', particularly terror attacks. Media outlets should ensure a safe platform is provided for legitimate representatives from Muslim communities to be able to speak, without fear of being vilified or collectively blamed for the actions of individuals

- 6. Further research must be undertaken to understand the role of emotions in post 'trigger event' hate responses**

Research should focus particularly on feelings of connection to the event, location and/or victims in addition to patriotic sentiments more generally

## Introduction

Since 2001 there have been a significant number of terror attacks across the world, probably the most well-known being the 9/11 attacks in 2001 on the World Trade Centre in New York using aircraft (vehicle ramming), the 7/7 attacks on the London transport system in 2005 (bombing) and the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby (knife attack). Between March 2016 and June 2017 there were 16 attacks in Europe and the UK (see Appendix 1), four of which have happened in the UK between May and June 2017 (Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge/Borough Market & Finsbury Park). The common modes for these attacks fall into one of four categories. In the period of concern, there were 6 *knife attacks*, 3 *bombings*, 5 *vehicle ramming* incidents and 2 *shootings*.

Of specific concern to this research is the response to 'trigger events' which can lead to a spike in hate crime against those who belong to, or are perceived to belong to, the same racial or religious group as the terrorist<sup>1</sup>. For example, there was a 700 per cent increase in anti-Muslim street incidents in the seven days following the Manchester Arena suicide bombing, with 72 incidents recorded compared to 9 in the previous week<sup>2</sup>. Similar, though not as extreme, increases in anti-Muslim incidents occurred in the wake of the knife attacks in Woolwich, London that resulted in the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby, and more recently on London Bridge and at Borough Market. However, it would be wrong to assume that temporary increases in anti-Muslim hate incidents occur only after identifiable terrorist attacks. Notably, a 475 per cent rise in anti-Muslim street incidents was recorded in the week after the EU Referendum<sup>3</sup> in June 2016<sup>4</sup> emphasises the impact of high-profile 'trigger events'. Events such as the EU referendum and terrorist attacks stimulate public discourse regarding immigration and religious-cultural differences, resulting in a measurable increase in overt prejudice and violence towards minority groups, with a disproportionate focus on Muslims.

Police data from England and Wales demonstrates an immediate increase in racially and religiously-motivated hate incidents following most 'trigger'

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<sup>1</sup> Treadwell, J. and Garland, J. (2011) 'Masculinity, marginalisation and violence: a case study of the English Defence League', *British Journal of Criminology*, 51 (4): 621- 34.

<sup>2</sup> Tell MAMA (2018) *Beyond the Incident: Outcomes for Victims of Anti-Muslim Prejudice*, p6.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*

<sup>4</sup> Tell MAMA (2017) *Tell MAMA Annual Report 2016: A Constructed Threat: Identity, Intolerance and the Impact of Anti-Muslim Hatred*.

events<sup>5</sup>. Hanes and Machin<sup>6</sup> argue such a pattern reflects a relatively short and intense 'shock period' following a 'trigger' event that affects the public's attitudes towards the suspected perpetrators and associated groups or communities. However, differences are evident in several key aspects of how this pattern emerges in relation to specific 'trigger' events. Significant variations can be identified in the time from the 'trigger' event to the increase in hate incidents; the intensity of the spike, measured by the number of incidents occurring per day, and the duration of the spike. These differences were particularly noticeable following the Westminster vehicle and knife attack and the Manchester suicide bomb attack. This research aims to develop our understanding of why the response to some 'trigger events' is different or delayed compared with others.

### **Aims & Objectives**

1. To examine why there are differences in recorded hate crime/incident figures following 'trigger' events (for example terror attacks).
2. To explore hate incident patterns specifically post-terror attack and the reasons for the anomalous data following the Westminster terror attack.
3. To examine media narratives in a range of newspapers, across the political spectrum, directly following a terror attack. Newspapers included: The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Mirror from the 22<sup>nd</sup> March to the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 (post-Westminster terror attack).
4. To explore the views of hate crime and media professionals as to what they believe to be the reasons for hate incident patterns following 'trigger events.'

### **Method**

In order to explore media reporting of 'trigger events' and particularly the Westminster attack, 560 newspaper articles that were published online in the two weeks following the Westminster attack by; The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Mirror have been used to undertake a discourse analysis. This method allowed specific words and themes that were repeatedly used by all five newspapers to be identified and the significance considered. In order to examine these issues we conducted a detailed discourse analysis for a period of 2 weeks post Westminster attack between 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2017 to 5<sup>th</sup> April 2017 (this timescale is linked to the National 14 Day Plan implemented

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<sup>5</sup> See O'Neill, A. (2017) Hate Crime, England and Wales 2016-17, Statistical Bulletin 17/17, Home Office. Figure A3, p17.

<sup>6</sup> Hanes, E. and Machin, S. (2014) 'Hate Crime in the Wake of Terror Attacks: Evidence from 7/7 and 9/11' *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice* 30: 247-267

by the Metropolitan Police). Analysis of hate incident report data provided by Tell MAMA was undertaken and semi-structured interviews were conducted with three hate crime professionals and two journalists to illicit the expert opinions of those working in this field as to why there is a difference between some trigger events and others in terms of hate incident patterns. Participation in this study was voluntary. Participants' names have been omitted and instead they have been referred to by their professional roles/specialisms to ensure their anonymity. These roles were: Interfaith Specialist; Hate Crime Specialist; Hate Crime Officer; and Journalist.

Our report identifies an anti-immigration and, more specifically, an anti-Muslim narrative within the UK that has caused a prolonged spike of both prejudiced and hate-fuelled behaviour towards Muslim communities. Alongside this, negative associations such as, violent extremism and terrorism have been linked to both Muslims and the Islamic faith. Since March 2017, there have been four far-right terror plots that have been thwarted by the Police<sup>7</sup>, as well as the terror attack carried out at Finsbury Park Mosque in June 2017 and yet the perception remains that Muslims and Islam are the sole problem. The Hate Crime Officer interviewed in this study noted,

*“The PREVENT agenda has focused hugely on Muslim communities, rather than people who are vulnerable to extremism and radicalisation...there are people who will be radicalised due to animal rights [or] because of the environment. But, we forget that and we focus, very much on [the] Muslim community being PREVENT...All of a sudden we're quite fixated on Muslim communities.”*

Additionally, other national concerns such as the 'Trojan Horse' inquiry framed as a 'jihadist plot' to take over schools or the child sexual exploitation scandal in Rotherham committed by a group of Pakistani men but reported as a 'Muslim issue', are further examples of the anti-Muslim narratives causing division in the UK. Many of these are also seen as the 'trigger events' that lead to a marked increase (or spike) in anti-Muslim hate incidents.

This report establishes that following a 'trigger event' there is generally a 24-48 hour window in which a spike in online hate incidents and a 48-72 hour window

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<sup>7</sup> Sandford, D. (2018) Far-right terror threat 'growing' in UK as four plots foiled. [Online] BBC News. Available from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43200966> [Accessed 16/10/18]

when offline hate incidents usually occur. In some cases, the time lag between online and offline hate incidents varies depending on the context, location, target and/or reporting of the 'trigger event'. The narratives presented by politicians and the media play a significant role in the public's perceptions of such 'trigger events' and their responses.

Ultimately, we hope that the findings and recommendations from this report are used by a range of Government, the Police, (social) media organisations, and other organisations interested in preventing anti-Muslim hate crime, to look at approaches to reducing the incidence of hate crime through more considered responses, clearer counter-narratives and leadership following 'trigger' event.

## Narratives of Hate

The College of Policing defines a hate crime as “any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice towards someone based on personal characteristics”<sup>8</sup>. The Police also record ‘hate incidents’ which are non-crime incidents motivated by such hostility or prejudice<sup>9</sup>.

Between January and December 2017, Tell MAMA recorded a total of 1,330 reports. Of these reports, 1,201 were verified as being anti-Muslim in nature and as having occurred in the UK between January and December 2017. More than two-thirds of verified incidents occurred offline, or on a street-level (70%, n=839), which represents a 30% rise in offline reports when compared to the previous reporting period (n=643)<sup>10</sup>. The established pattern in anti-Muslim abuse that occurs offline, both in incidents reported to the police and those reported to Tell MAMA, involves Muslim women being targeted because of their visibility (see Littler & Feldman<sup>11</sup> and Awan & Zempi<sup>12</sup>). Of this, the two major incident types were identified as veil pulling and intimidation, particularly on public transport. In addition, there have also been reports of damage to property, including pork products being placed on the doorstep, or wrapped around the door handles, of Muslim households. Anti-Muslim online abuse commonly involves bullying, harassment and threats of offline violence. Furthermore, there is a growing and concerning trend towards the use of anti-Muslim rhetoric and/or anti-Muslim language on social media and in the comment sections of online newspapers, particularly following a ‘trigger event’, which can further fuel hostility towards Muslims.

The extant literature conceptualises hate incidents as micro-manifestations of existing national and international tensions which are then intensified by high-

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<sup>8</sup> College of Policing (2014) National Policing Hate Crime Strategy Available at: <http://www.college.police.uk/What-wedo/Support/Equality/Documents/National-Policing-Hate-Crimestrategy.pdf#search=hate%20crime> [Accessed: 26 May 2017].

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Tell MAMA (2018) Beyond the Incident: Outcomes for Victims of Anti-Muslim Prejudice, p5

<sup>11</sup> Littler, M. and Feldman, M. (2015) Tell MAMA Reporting 2014/2015: Annual Monitoring, Cumulative Extremism and Policy Implications, Teesside: Teesside University Press

<sup>12</sup> Awan, I. and Zempi, I. (2015) We Fear For Our Lives: Offline and Online Experiences of Anti-Muslim Hostility

profile events and associated media coverage<sup>13 14</sup>. Williams and Burnap<sup>15</sup> state that hate crimes are essentially ‘communicative acts’, which are often preceded by events that generate a retributive response from a targeted group, towards a group that [appear to] have similar characteristics to the perpetrators. A significant proportion of hate crime can be categorised as having such ‘defensive’ or ‘retaliatory’ motivations<sup>16</sup>. According to Hanes and Machin<sup>17</sup> following a ‘trigger event’ the public experience ‘attitudinal shocks,’ which reinforce and intensify levels of intolerance and prejudice towards particular groups in society which may be influenced by media framing and coverage of such events. These shifts in underlying bigotry following events such as terrorist attacks or the child sexual exploitation scandal in Rotherham seem to be potentially important determinants of hate crime incidence. Certainly, the evidence shows that anti-Muslim hate incidents have increased considerably following ‘trigger events’ (both terror and non-terror related) carried out by individuals who choose to identify themselves as being Muslim or claim to be acting in the name of Islam<sup>18</sup> as well by as those that are (mis)labelled as Muslim:

*“You’ll have school kids that are being called ‘terrorist’ and that they are actually responsible for what has happened. [...] We’ve seen many cases that come out in schools, we’ve seen discrimination cases as well, at work. [...] A lot of the language that actually takes place on the back of these attacks and these hash tags are being used on social media are being [utilised] on a street level”.*

In terms of the general narrative regarding Islam, Knott et al.<sup>19</sup> found that Islam was reported with links to oppression, radicalisation, terrorism and violence.

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<sup>13</sup> Curtice, J. (2016) ‘Brexit: Behind the Referendum’, Political Insight 7, pp. 4-7.

<sup>14</sup> Mills, C., Freilich, J. and Chermak, S. (2015) ‘Extreme Hatred: Revisiting the Hate Crime and Terrorism Relationships to Determine Whether They Are “Close Cousins” or Distant Relatives’, Crime and Delinquency.

<sup>15</sup> Williams, M.L and Burnap, P. (2015) ‘Cyberhate on social media in the aftermath of Woolwich: A case study of computational criminology and big data’ British Journal of Criminology Vol 56, Issue 2: 211-238

<sup>16</sup> (McDevitt et al, 2002)

<sup>17</sup> Hanes, E. and Machin, S. (2014) ‘Hate Crime in the Wake of Terror Attacks: Evidence from 7/7 and 9/11’ Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice 30: 247-267.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> Knott, K., Poole, E. and Taira, T. (2013) Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred. Representation and Change. Abingdon: Routledge.

Particular attention paid to The Sun newspaper found that terrorism was more likely to be linked to 'Islamic' extremism in this newspaper than in any other media sources<sup>20</sup>. Similarly, in 2008 there were disputes in relation to the reporting of the plotting of the terrorist attack at Glasgow airport and the failed bomb attempt at a restaurant in Exeter. For instance, the plotting of an attack at Glasgow airport was undertaken by Bilal Abdullah and Kafeel Ahmed, who were reported to have shared "the same extreme religious and murderous ideology"<sup>21</sup> however, failed Exeter bomber, Nick Reilly was reported to have been "preyed upon by "radical" Muslims in the area"<sup>22</sup>. Despite all three perpetrators identifying as British Muslims, Reilly was not reported as a Muslim and instead, was reported as a 'criminal', unlike Abdullah and Ahmed who were reported as 'terrorists'<sup>23</sup>.

A number of studies have looked at how the media represent Muslims and/or Islam, with a common focus on the narratives of 'alien other'<sup>24</sup>. While some focus on the amount and type of coverage<sup>25</sup>, others address the views of, or impact on, Muslims. Armeli et al<sup>26</sup> found that 63.4% of British Muslims found the media to be prejudiced towards both Islam and Muslim communities. Similarly, Awan and Zempi<sup>27</sup> found that the participants in their study thought that media reporting had a negative impact on how the general public viewed Muslims and Islam, itself. Importantly, Tell MAMA's 2016 analysis revealed that perpetrators of anti-Muslim incidents often referred to public discourse concerning immigration and terrorism alongside more generalised statements of the 'other' in anti-Muslim abuse<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid*

<sup>21</sup> BBC (2008) Doctors 'sought wholesale murder'. [Online] BBC. Available from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7660750.stm> [Accessed 15/04/18].

<sup>22</sup> Savill, R. and Bloxham, A. (2008) White Muslim convert bomb suspect named. The Guardian. [Online] 22nd May: p. 1 Available from: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/2010241/Exeter-bomb-Nicky-Reilly-white-Muslim-convert-is-named-as-suspect-in-Giraffe-restaurant-explosion.html> [Accessed 15/04/2018].

<sup>23</sup> Knott, K., Poole, E. and Taira, T. (2013) Media Portrayals of Religion and the Secular Sacred. Representation and Change. Abingdon: Routledge.

<sup>24</sup> Saeed, A. (2007) Media, Racism and Islamophobia: The Representation of Islam and Muslims in the Media in Sociology Compass, Vol 1, Issue 2:443-462

<sup>25</sup> Moore, K., Mason, P. and Lewis, J. (2008) Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000-2008. Cardiff: Cardiff University Press

<sup>26</sup> Armeli, S. R., Marandi, S. M., Ahmed, S., Seyfeddin, K., & Merali, A. (2007). The British Media and Muslim Representation: The Ideology of Demonisation: Islamic Human Rights Commission.

<sup>27</sup> Awan, I. and Zempi, I (2015) We Fear For Our Lives. Offline and Online Experiences of Anti-Muslim Hostility. Great Britain: TELL MAMA.

<sup>28</sup> Tell MAMA (2017) Tell MAMA Annual Report 2016: A Constructed Threat: Identity, Intolerance and the Impact of Anti-Muslim Hatred.

These findings are particularly relevant as they highlight the connection between politically charged events, public discourse, and the motivation behind a significant proportion of hate crimes.

In 2016, following the murder of Lee Rigby in 2013 by Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale, Awan and Rahman<sup>29</sup> found that the media were criticised for the excessive coverage of Adebolajo, signifying that the murderer was allowed a 'voice'. Awan and Rahman<sup>30</sup> concluded that they found the media, specifically the BBC, to be guilty of using excessive images of darker skinned, bearded persons as well as reporting links between Muslims and terrorism. Furthermore, they found that words such as 'Islam', 'Muslim' and 'terrorism' were overly reported during the period that followed Lee Rigby's murder. Despite the evidence provided, Perry<sup>31</sup> argues that negative portrayals of Islam and Muslim communities are not a new phenomenon. For example, Awan and Zempi<sup>32</sup> highlight that Islam is represented in the media as a vicious and politically driven religion that perceives Muslim's to be the personification of terrorism. Consequently, the role of the media in reporting 'trigger events' often 'adds fuel to the fire' by establishing an agenda for the narrative of the event that transmits negative images of Islam, while simultaneously making claims that conflate the motivations of the perpetrators with the broader beliefs of Islam<sup>33</sup>. Awan & Zempi<sup>34</sup> suggest that spikes in anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents following trigger events are not confined to offline settings; rather, the offline pattern is replicated online. However, the data gathered for this research demonstrate that online expressions of anti-Muslim hate in response to 'trigger' events occur in the first 24-48 hours, before moving offline:

*“we tend to see a backlash on Muslim communities following terrorist attacks, instantly on the online role i.e.*

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<sup>29</sup> Awan, I. and Rahman, M. (2016) Portrayal of Muslims Following the Murders of Lee Rigby in Woolwich and Mohammed Saleem in Birmingham: A Content Analysis of UK Newspapers. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*. [Online] Vol. 36, (1). Available from: doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2016.1147151 [Accessed 09/04/18].

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> Perry, B. (2016) "Rejected and Dejected": The Impacts and Contexts of Islamophobic Violence. In: Sadique, K. And Stanislas, P. (eds) *Religion, Faith and Crime. Theories, Identities and Issues*. London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, p. 211-238.

<sup>32</sup> Awan, I. and Zempi, I (2015) *We Fear For Our Lives. Offline and Online Experiences of Anti-Muslim Hostility*. Great Britain: TELL MAMA.

<sup>33</sup> Williams, M.L and Burnap, P. (2015) 'Cyberhate on social media in the aftermath of Woolwich: A case study of computational criminology and big data' *British Journal of Criminology* Vol 56, Issue 2: 211-238

<sup>34</sup> Awan, I. and Zempi, I (2015) *We Fear For Our Lives. Offline and Online Experiences of Anti-Muslim Hostility*. Great Britain: TELL MAMA.

*on social media and in 48-72 hours on a street level world. [...] It's a combination on multiple facts and why this takes place; (1) media headlines, (2) far-right extremism and language that is more creating attacks and tension and prompting attacks on Muslim communities”*

(Hate Crime Specialist)

The transmogrification of digital hate into ‘real’ world incidents was identified as occurring between 48 and 72 hours after the ‘trigger event’. Consequently, anti-Muslim hate following a ‘trigger’ event is not simply replicated online; rather, it starts online.

*“That 48 hour window is a crucial assessment point for us as to what is taking place in terms of ‘Is there a significant backlash?’, ‘Is there a rise?’ or is there no impact in relation to a terrorist attack. [...] After 48 hours there will be, to some degree, a 48-72 hour peak, and after that 72 hour period, [...] there is a tailing off”*

(Interfaith Specialist)

While this pattern is initially replicated online, data from Tell MAMA about online anti-Muslim hate incidents shows that the pattern may be more complex than originally envisaged. To begin with, the patterns are the same, with an increase in reported incidents occurring between 24 and 48 hours online following an incident, and a decrease in these reports between 48 and 72 hours. However, following the terrorist attack on Westminster in March 2017, the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2016 and the knife attack on London Bridge and Borough Market in June 2017, there were further increases in reported incidents online in the period between 72 and 96 hours after each incident. Figure 1 shows the number of reported incidents received by Tell MAMA in the five days following each incident, with Day 0 representing the day of the ‘trigger event’ itself.

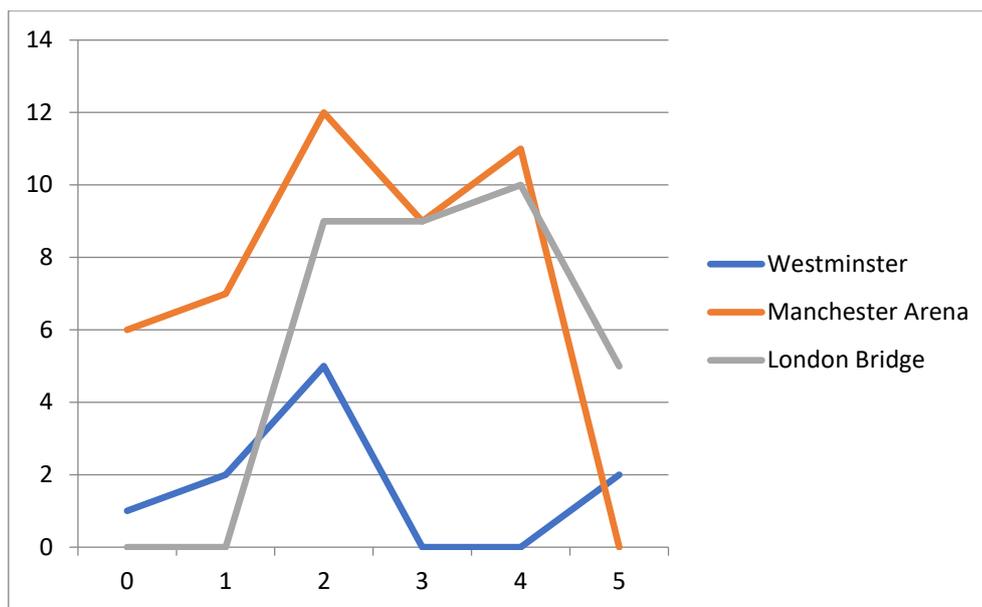


Figure 1: Reports of online anti-Muslim incidents following key 'trigger events'

The Westminster vehicle and knife attack and the Manchester Arena bombing follow the familiar pattern of an initial increase and then an identifiable reduction in reported incidents before a second increase. However, the trend following the London Bridge knife attack indicates a plateau in reported incidents between days 2 and 3, and not a reduction. Day 4 saw a further increase in reported incidents, which, unusually, surpasses the initial rise in reports. In other incidents, the secondary increase is lower than the initial response to the event.

### Culture and symbolic targets

One explanation for the differentiation in the pattern of reports, as well as the re-emergence of online anti-Muslim hate crimes, is the cultural impact of the incident and its influence on the media discourse surrounding the aftermath:

*"I think it depends of the type, if there was a prolonged incident, so after the 7/7 or 9/11 where there was the incident, then the aftermath, then the protracted high-profile policing type events and things like that. [...] I think if we have an incident, we deal with it and then several days later everybody goes back to normal".*

(Hate Crime Officer)

The familiar and familial nature of these attacks appears to have had an impact on the online hate response in the aftermath. The suicide bombing at Manchester Arena, as a venue for culture and entertainment, was an attack on activities that are familiar to much of the population of the UK. Further, the targeting of a pop music concert, attended by many children and young people, is also an attack on

the concept of family; it provokes the parental instincts in all humans. Similarly, the London Bridge and Borough Market attacks targeted an area of London with a particular concentration of the night-time economy. For example, in 2017, 11.1% of business premises in Southwark borough were hotels, restaurants, bars or other establishments intended for cultural and leisure activities; the average for the whole of London was 9.3%, and for the United Kingdom it was 8.8%<sup>35</sup>. Consequently, the nature and volume of victims in these attacks constructs a proximity that facilitates both emotive media discourse and a subsequent desire for emotional reciprocity:

*“[T]he Manchester Arena attack has been a highly emotionally driven attack, an attack that actually impacted children, children were killed. So, it had a different impact on how things are.”*

(Hate Crime Specialist)

The trigger events that form the primary focus of this report can be considered cultural trauma, leaving an indelible mark on the collective memory of the social group(s) targeted by acts of extremism<sup>36</sup>. The shared memory of going out to a bar or restaurant, socialising with friends and the emotional ties to children, siblings and parents enables individuals far removed from events to feel like they too have been targeted, prompting an increase in hate incidents:

*“The Bataclan incident in the nightclub and the increase in lorry, or vehicle type incidents all of a sudden- we’re no longer looking at young Muslim looking men, as people would describe, with a rucksack, and a set of headphones in their ears, as suicide bombers. [...] It’s unfortunate because Muslims get blamed for everything”*

(Hate Crime Officer)

Data from Tell MAMA suggests that the targeting of cultural symbols associated with Islam through rhetoric and legislation may also offer a justification to

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<sup>35</sup> ONS (2018) The Night Time Economy in London and Manchester, 2001 to 2017 [Online] *Office for National Statistics*. Available from:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/business/activitysizeandlocation/adhocs/008001numberofworkplacesinthenighttimeeconomyinlondonboroughsandmiddlelayerssuperoutputareas/msoas2001to2017>

<sup>36</sup> Romania, V., & Tozzo, S. (2017). Terrorism as Ritual Process and Cultural Trauma: a Performative Analysis of ISIS’s Attacks in Europe. *Italian Sociological Review*, 7(2).

perpetrators of online anti-Muslim hate incidents. For example, on 11 August 2016, David Linsard, Mayor of Cannes, approved a ban on “anyone who does not have [bathing apparel] which respects good customs and secularism”<sup>37</sup>

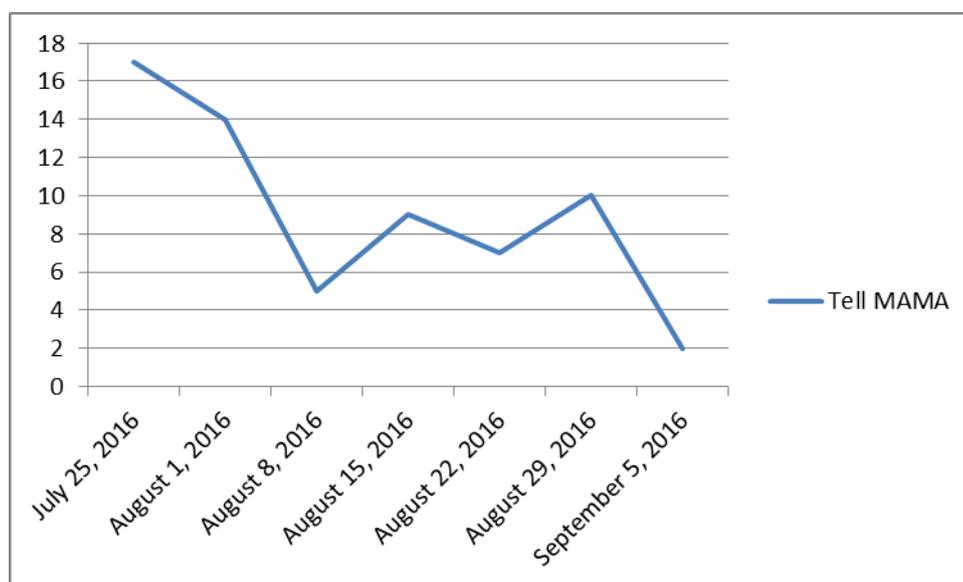


Figure 2: Online anti-Muslim hate incidents (August 2016)

The media coverage of the ‘Burkini’ ban coincides with an increase in online anti-Muslim hate incidents. The increase in incidents, whilst temporarily abated approximately one week after the coverage of the Cannes ban, re-surged following comments by the French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, who indicated his support for local municipalities to make such decrees<sup>38</sup>. This suggests that ‘trigger events’ may include rhetorical acts about Muslim non-conformity with Western European secular cultural norms. This is ironic, given the preference for far-right and nationalist groups to condemn any attempt to ‘desecrate’ the cultural symbols they perceive to be sacrosanct, such as ‘taking a knee’ during the playing of the national anthem<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Agence France Presse (2016) ‘Mayor of Cannes bans burqinis on resort’s beaches’, *The Guardian* [Online] 11 Aug. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/11/cannes-mayor-bans-burqinis-beachwear-must-respect-secularism>

<sup>38</sup> Chrisafis, A (2016) ‘French PM supports local bans on burqinis’, *The Guardian* [Online] 18 Aug. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/17/french-pm-supports-local-bans-burkinis>

<sup>39</sup> Mindock, C (2018) Taking a Knee: Why are NFL players protesting and when did they start to kneel? *Independent* [Online] 4 Sept. Available from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/taking-a-knee-national-anthem-nfl-trump-why-meaning-origins-racism-us-colin-kaepernick-a8521741.html>

## The political narrative

The Hate Crime Specialist argues that there are an increasing number of anti-Muslim hate incidents because “*the language that politicians use [...], the impact drives hatred towards Muslim communities*”. Fiyaz Mughal, the founder of Tell MAMA, has identified ‘anti-Muslim rhetoric is bleeding into the political landscape [and this] emboldens people’<sup>40</sup>. For example, the Muslim Council of Britain have been critical of the Conservative Party, stating that there are “more than weekly occurrences of Islamophobia from candidates and representatives of the party”<sup>41</sup>. An example highlighted by the Muslim Council of Britain was the lack of enquiry following an article shared on Facebook by Bob Blackman, Conservative Member of Parliament for Harrow East and member of the Parliamentary Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the influential *1922 Committee* of backbench Conservative MPs. Blackman has been accused of promoting ‘Islamophobia’ after sharing an article that was headlined “Muslim Somali sex gang spy raping white British children part of their culture”<sup>42</sup>. This incident prompted Baroness Warsi to publicly raise concerns about potential anti-Muslim sentiments within some mainstream parties, including her own. Initially, Baroness Warsi stated that she brought the issue of ‘Islamophobia’ to the Prime Minister’s attention in 2016, with no result<sup>43</sup>. Baroness Warsi went on to claim that the Conservative party are in denial of the abhorrent views held by party members, and have consequently lost support amongst Muslim communities across England and Wales<sup>44</sup>. One prominent example of this is former foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, who has utilised anti-Muslim imagery in his regular newspaper column, describing women who wear the niqab and burqa as looking like “letterboxes” and “bank robbers”<sup>45</sup>. The Sunday Times undertook an examination of Johnson’s

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<sup>40</sup> Dearden, L. (2018) Street attacks on Muslims rocket in UK as perpetrators 'emboldened' by terror attacks and political rhetoric, report finds. *Independent*, 23rd July. Available from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/attacks-muslims-uk-terror-islam-hate-crime-brexite-tell-mama-a8457996.html> [Accessed 11/10/18].

<sup>41</sup>Khan, S. (2018) Conservatives must launch urgent inquiry into Islamophobia in the party, Muslim Council of Britain demands. *Independent*, 30<sup>th</sup> May. Available from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/islamophobia-tory-party-uk-conservatives-muslims-inquiry-a8376516.html> [Accessed 03/07/2018].

<sup>42</sup>*ibid*

<sup>43</sup>*ibid*

<sup>44</sup>BBC (2018) *Baroness Warsi: Conservatives must act on Islamophobia*. [Online] Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44311092> [Accessed 04/07/2018].

<sup>45</sup> Watts, J (2018) Boris Johnson’s Facebook page hosts hundreds of Islamophobic comments after burqa row. *Independent*, 19<sup>th</sup> Aug. Available from:

Facebook page and found several calls to ban Islam<sup>46</sup>. Such comments, written by a former holder of a one of the Great Offices of State in the UK and published by a leading national newspaper, provides a warrant for anti-Muslim hate, both online and in physical public spaces. These are trusted sources, to which the public will turn at times of local and national crisis in order to identify the latest developments and to evaluate what actions they should take to maintain their personal safety.

However, to identify a single political party as the sole cause of such a shift in the public discourse affords too much influence to the Conservative party. It also suggests the origins of anti-Muslim sentiments in public policy and political discourse are relatively recent. Introduced in 2003 by New Labour, the UK Counter-Terrorist Strategy (CONTEST) is structured into four complimentary strands of activity known as the 'Four Ps'<sup>47</sup>:

**Pursue:** To stop terrorist attacks

**Prevent:** To stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting extremism

**Protect:** To strengthen our protection against terror attack

**Prepare:** To mitigate the impact of an attack where it cannot be stopped

The majority of the strategy involves practical steps by first responders, law enforcement and security services: pursuing individuals who perpetrate terrorist attacks; protecting key national infrastructure; and preparing for the impact of chemical and biological and radiological attacks. However, the second strand, PREVENT, poses a moral and ethical dilemma for government. For example, the public duty to co-operate with local PREVENT coordinators<sup>48</sup> has been criticised by academics<sup>49</sup> and civil liberties campaigners<sup>50</sup> for being a mechanism for gathering intelligence, rather than for co-ordinating support for vulnerable

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/boris-johnson-facebook-page-islamophobic-comments-burqa-row-anti-muslim-a8498021.html> [Accessed 04/07/2018].

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

<sup>47</sup> Home Office (2009) Counter-terrorism strategy: The four Ps – Pursue, Prevent, Protect, Prepare [Online] *Home Office*. Available from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20090711105017/http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk/counter-terrorism-strategy/about-the-strategy1/four-ps/>

<sup>48</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/445977/3799\\_Revised\\_Prevent\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_England\\_Wales\\_V2-Interactive.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/445977/3799_Revised_Prevent_Duty_Guidance_England_Wales_V2-Interactive.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Spalek, B. (2010) Community policing, trust, and Muslim communities in relation to "New Terrorism", *Politics & Policy*, 38(4): 789-815.

<sup>50</sup> Dodd, V (2009) 'Anti-terrorism strategy "spies" on innocent', *The Guardian* [Online] 16 Oct. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/oct/16/anti-terrorism-strategy-spies-innocents>

individuals. In particular, the targeting of PREVENT activities towards Muslim communities, has been criticised as too narrow a focus, at the expense of a broader remit that would allow specialist interventions with a range of groups of individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation and extremist views:

*“There are people who will be radicalised due to animal rights; there will be people who will be radicalised because of the environment [...]. But, we forget that and we focus very much on [the] Muslim community being PREVENT”*

(Hate Crime Specialist)

The combination of public rhetoric from prominent politicians, and the translation of this into public policy legitimises anti-Muslim hate in a way that supports a shift in focus from individuals towards the entire Muslim community:

*“anti-Muslim rhetoric and discourse is moving from the visual, looking at a woman down the street, and then saying something and the discourse is moving into that actually the belief and the person whose associated with the belief is evil, which means everything else must be evil.”*

(Interfaith Specialist)

Nevertheless, participants in our research identified a positive role for politicians in mitigating the impact of trigger events and any subsequent anti-Muslim hate incidents:

*“You can send a really, really, strong, clear message that certain things won’t be tolerated and, [...] that can be done whether you agree with something or not. So, I think politicians, both local politicians, national MPs, MEPs, [and] world-wide politicians have a huge role to play.”*

(Hate Crime Officer)

In the same way that Boris Johnson’s use of negative imagery in reference to the niqab and burqa promotes a narrative of hate, the potential for positive images of Muslims can help to construct a positive counter-narrative. In order to be effective, this must involve both a clear factual narrative that highlights positive actions taken

by Muslim community members. For example, the Evening Standard ran a prominent article celebrating the actions of Muslim healthcare professionals in the wake of the Manchester Arena bombing<sup>51</sup>. A significant part of the counter-narrative, which should be explored further, is the avoidance of political rhetoric that identifies the Muslim community as separate to the rest of British society. While politicians and those in public office, such as senior Police officers, may believe they are being factually accurate, this language underpins the divisive narrative of 'them-and-us' in relation to social cohesion and inclusivity for British Muslims. This is an issue of moral leadership for the political classes, who have focused their speeches, electoral campaigns and public policies on identified groups of individuals, rather than on the individuals themselves.

**Recommendation 1**

Government and political parties should provide clear leadership and a distinctive counter-narrative to anti-Muslim sentiments following a potential trigger event

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<sup>51</sup> Urwin, R (2017) The Muslim heroes of Manchester who rushed to help in the wake of the city's terror attack', Manchester Evening Standard [Online] 26 May. Available from: <https://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/london-life/the-muslim-heroes-of-manchester-who-rushed-to-help-in-the-wake-of-the-citys-terror-attack-a3549596.html>

## Managing the narrative: The National 14 Day Plan

The increased level of reporting for high-profile ‘trigger events’, such as the 9/11 or 7/7 attacks, sustains public discourse, and as investigations into the perpetrators re-present themselves in the media narrative, a resurgence in hate incidents follows.

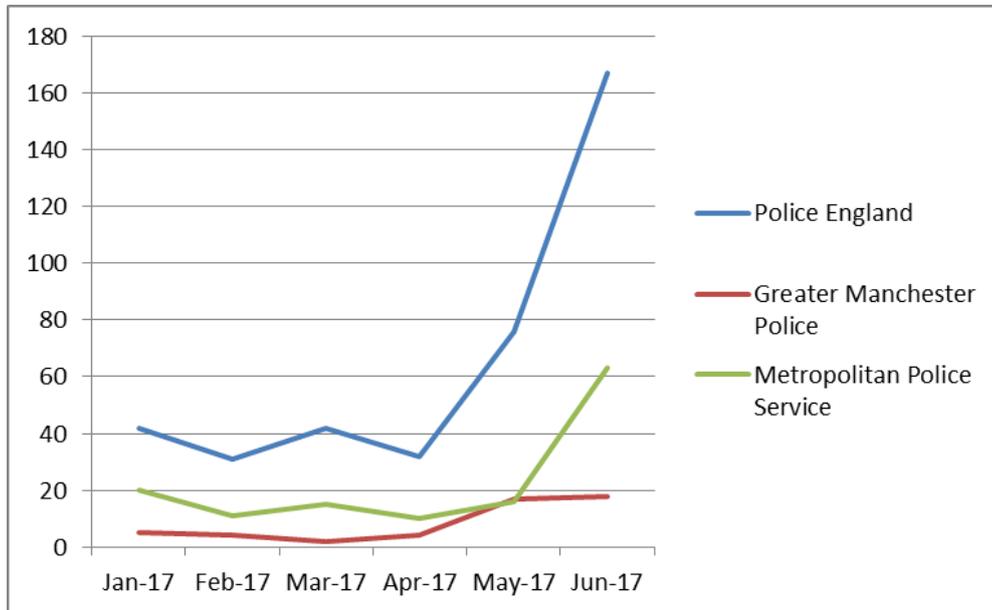


Figure 3: Police reported anti-Muslim hate incidents (Jan-Jun 2017)

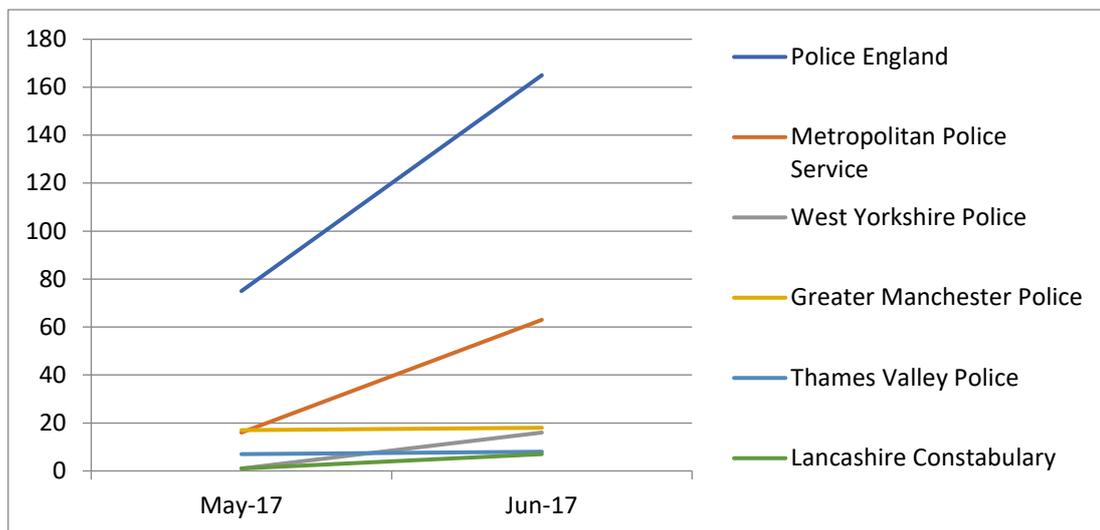
If the pattern of *offline* incidents were consistent for all ‘trigger events’, there should have been a significant rise in hate crime following the Westminster terror attack. However, as seen in Figure 2, this was not the case. The overall number of anti-Muslim hate incidents reported to the police in England and Wales following the attack on the Palace of Westminster, and the death of PC Keith Palmer, was within the normal range of reported incidents for the early months of 2017, though it forms a small peak for the period. Significant increases that were beyond the bounds of established reporting patterns are not evident until the May-June period of 2017, with the attacks at Manchester Arena, London Bridge and Borough Market. Furthermore, when discussing the lack of rise in hate crime following the Westminster attack, it was suggested that

*“we didn’t see a spike, we didn’t see anything like a raised impact. [...] Now, was that because the targets clearly were not children, even though, [...] Westminster is the heart of our democracy. [...] Does Westminster really trigger their emotion is comparison to support for example to the Armed Forces? And is there argument to be said that Westminster is seen as*

*an institution that causes problems for their life? Is it seen as an institution that is detached from them? Is it seen as an institution that's part of the big-brother system?"*

The Westminster terror attack was the first terror incident to occur following the implementation of the National 14-Day Plan. This plan was published in January of 2017 by the Metropolitan Police and is used to predict the public's reactions to a terrorist attack and therefore what actions should be applied by both the police and other key figures and offices, including the Royal family and Mayor's office(s). The National 14-Day Plan is constructed to coincide with 14 days of press releases. These are designed to shape newspaper headlines, and to influence wider reporting throughout the two-week period. As well as this, the police work closely with organisations including the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to implement events such as vigils and wreath-laying.

An examination of reports by the various police services across England in the aftermath of two of the trigger events demonstrates the impact of trigger events beyond the local area that is the primary target. Figure 3, below, demonstrates significant increases in reported anti-Muslim hate incidents for areas other than Manchester and London, including West Yorkshire, the West Midlands and Thames Valley. Further significant increases are evident in South Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cambridgeshire, and Sussex.



**Figure 4: Top 5 Police Services for reported anti-Muslim incidents (June 2017)**

While it may be tempting to ascribe a North-South divide to explain the pattern of sympathetic increases in reported anti-Muslim hate incidents, this is not supported by the data reported by individual police services. Following the Manchester Arena Bombing in May 2017, 20 Police Services recorded a rise in reported anti-Muslim

hate incidents that were 2 Standard Errors<sup>52</sup> greater than the mean number of reported incidents. Following the London Bridge and Borough Market attacks, there were 22 Police Services that recorded an increase of more than 2 Standard Errors greater than the mean number of reported incidents. A comparison of the Police Services reporting these unusually high numbers of reported incidents after the May and June 2017 trigger events demonstrates differences between these areas, though with no immediately discernible pattern. Further research is needed to examine areas experiencing unusually high levels of reported incidents following trigger events, and to develop explanations about why this occurs. Nevertheless, the impact of trigger events beyond primary target areas suggests deploying the National 14 Day Plan across all policing areas may provide counter-narratives to anti-Muslim rhetoric.

### **Recommendation 2**

All Police Services should implement the National 14-Day Plan in the immediate aftermath of a potential trigger event

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<sup>52</sup> Standard Error of the Mean is a measure of the dispersion of a sample. It is calculated as the mean of the sample divided by the square root of the sample size. 95% of the values of sample can be expected to fall between the range of Mean +/- 1.96xStandard Error. Any values falling outside of this range are considered unusual.

# NATIONAL 14 DAY PLAN

#WeStandTogether

## PUBLIC IMPACT

- Fear of public places, using public transport, iconic locations
- Shocked and dazed, inability to comprehend and understand what's happening
- Loss of confidence for visitors and tourist population
- Withdrawal from routine life change in normal behaviour, becoming terrorised
- Concern for loved ones caught up and potentially harmed
- Fear of further attacks, secondary, copycat
- Lack of political confidence in public messaging
- Economic loss - less shoppers in shopping centres

- Harmful media coverage (inadvertent or deliberate)
- Blame targeting certain groups and communities
- Uprising of intolerance and hate crime offending
- Local, regional and national instability and fracturing of cohesion
- Anger and resentment builds as reality begins to sink in
- Suspicion and fear takes hold

- Organised rebellion through physical and on-line protest
- Adversity generated by analysis of communities of concern i.e. Migration, refugees, Islamism
- Far right and extreme right activity
- Celebration of terrorism by extremists - martyrdom
- Stigmatisation of people and/places - UK becoming less a choice of destination
- Economic loss, domestic and international (France & Turkey)
- Knee jerk reaction to public perceptions anger
- Physical attacks on certain groups, certain locations, faith buildings
- Increased fear within certain communities Jewish, Muslim, LGBT, Tourism, Business of reprisals
- Long term damage in community relations

- Medium/long term damage to relationships/cohesion
- Organised protests
- Organised revenge/retribution attacks
- Isolation
- Loss of confidence and credibility in the state
- Loss of control and influence by the state



## RESPONSE

- DAY 1**
- Messaging by Leadership PM/Home Secretary/Mayor/Commissioner/Faith Strategic Leaders - Call for calm, vigilance (Protect), information(Pursue) and support for emergency services.
  - Location - Should be neutral venue (?). If London response - consider City Hall/Steps of St Paul's Cathedral (?) (need to be secured and protected environment)
  - Community Reference Group meeting at New Scotland Yard - activate communities' communications strategy via the on-line community presence/Cross Sector e.g. Businesses/Travelling Public/Tourist etc (Cross Sector Safety and Security Communications) Embassies/High Commissions etc
  - We Stand Together SPOCs (Police and Communities) across the UK to activate the #WeStandTogether campaign plan - communication of consistent key messages.

- DAY 2**
- Commissioner high level Strategic Inter - Faith Forum to meet at Scotland Yard
  - Spreading key messages through diverse communities networks (time periodic messaging)
  - Advertise arrangements and details for local and national Candle lit vigils for Day 3

- DAY 3**
- Candle lit Vigil at or near the attack site
  - Candle lit vigils at other symbolic locations - Local/ Regional and National.
  - Vigils can be thematic as well as symbolic e.g. if an attack on a university then a series of national vigils in educational premises series of vigils at national levels
  - Open a Book of Condolence Iconic locations - Town Halls
  - Formal Wreath Laying by civic leadership - National/Local levels

- DAY 4**
- Strengthening our resolve through a national #WeStandTogether - a community led initiative in partnership with the police. One Nation Principles and shared values. Anti-hate messaging. Zero tolerance to offending.
  - Maintain strong community cohesion between all communities #WeStandTogether (Pre-planning-activating the plan to counter an attack)
  - Protect all communities by expressing anti-hate Intra-faith community protection - helping to guard each other's communities, schools and faith premises
  - Local people showing support through local events and activities
  - Using all existing networks for strong messaging.
    - LGBT, CST, MCB, Christian,
    - Sikh and Hindu Associations,
    - Unions, Local Authorities
  - Generate mass gatherings at locations, shopping malls, sporting events, transport hubs, airports expressing that #WeStandTogether
  - Demonstrating that we will not be terrorised
  - Communities from all faiths, non faiths and backgrounds are coming together and standing against extremism and hatred
  - Civil society and state partnership protection of local places and people

Source: Nova<sup>53</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Nova (2018) National Fourteen Day Plan. [Online] NOVA. Available from: <https://www.nova-wd.org.uk/assets/files/14-Day-Plan-V3.pdf> [Accessed 20/04/18].

# NATIONAL 14 DAY PLAN

#WeStandTogether

## #WESTANDTOGETHER RESPONSE

- Depending on day of Reach out to faith communities
- Sikh Faith
- Jummah Prayers
- Hindu Faith
- Sunday Christian Church Services
- Breaking of Sabbath on A Saturday Night - working with the Jewish community
- Other Faith/Belief Groups
- Working towards a Service of Remembrance and unity on day 7



- Anniversary:**
- Public show of support, strength and cohesion through a peaceful public rally - organised by the community With support from the civic leadership
  - Public display of unity



- Formal review and debrief with Community Hub members
- Identifying Next steps action plan
- Media Strategy
- Thanks giving to the public
- Remembering those injured

DAY 5

DAY 6

DAY 7

DAY 8

DAY 12

DAY 13

DAY 14

- Public Messaging
- Reporting on first five days of events including Hate Crime
- Extensive Media coverage through Local, National and International media including specialist (BME) media
- Community Voices having their say
- Political Support and messaging
- Reassurance
- Advertising 7 day anniversary for remembrance, prayer and reflection



- Enhanced community policing
- Covering special ward panels
- School visits and talks at assemblies
- Visit to every major faith centre
- Increased visibility on school routes at school times
- Increased presence in popular places for reassurance- shopping centres, transport hubs, tourist locations
- Enhanced engagement at airports and international train stations
- Briefings to Ambassadors and High Commissioners
- Briefing to business community
- Update briefing to Key Stakeholders, Chief Execs, leaders, MPs etc
- Public Messaging to be determined at the time but may include Run Hide Tell
- Continued monitoring of Community tensions and sentiment
- Community Advocates to lead local community messages



- Press conference with Community Hub
- Message to all Communities
- Emphasising We Stand Together
- Next Steps
- A multi faith service of Hope at Westminster Abbey (?) [Can be protected and made secure] (and working towards a service of remembrance, reconciliation and peace)

## Narrative accuracy and ethical journalism

In April of 2018, The Daily Express editor, Gary Jones, admitted that the media are “culpable in spreading hate, bigotry and intolerance”<sup>54</sup>. The editor admitted that the media are guilty of promoting prejudiced and hateful ideologies that created “negative sentiments towards Muslims”<sup>55</sup> which in turn, demonises Muslim communities. As well as this, it is argued that the term ‘Islamism’ and terrorism must stop being portrayed in conjunction with one another<sup>56</sup> as again, it promotes the notion of ‘Islamophobia’. In conjunction to this, Richardson argues that it is the term ‘Islamophobia’ that is most inappropriate as it provides a ‘reasonable’ explanation for anti-Muslim sentiment in a way that the term ‘anti-Semitism’ does not<sup>57</sup>. If the perpetrator has a pseudo-medical condition typified by an irrational fear, that pre-supposes and provides a (false) justification for unreasonable actions.

The role of journalists in reporting in a responsible, ethical manner, unsurprisingly emerged as a theme from the research underpinning this report. The first responsibility of journalists, particularly in the era of 24-hour broadcast news, is to provide the public with essential details of emerging incidents so that informed decisions can be made about personal safety:

*“[journalism] should influence public opinion [...] if there are dangers there, then the public needs to know about them. One of the prime focuses [...] is public information; that’s part of a journalist’s job, responsible use of information to inform the public [...]. I mean, one thinks back now to the 7/7 attacks, that was unfolding very, very quickly (in 2005, July 2005).”*

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<sup>54</sup> Abbas, T. (2018) Gary Jones has told the truth about the British media's Islamophobic reporting. [Online] Middle East Eye. Available from: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/undoing-institutionalisation-media-islamophobia-1710806745> [Accessed 27/04/18].

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*

<sup>56</sup> Gabon, A. (2017) The numbers don't lie: Even in the Middle East, most terrorism is not 'Islamic'. [Online] Middle East Eye. Available from: <http://www.middleeasteye.net/essays/numbers-don-t-lie-even-middle-east-most-terrorism-not-islamic-1916251601> [Accessed 27/04/18].

<sup>57</sup> Richardson, H. (2017) 'You're the real monster here' Outrage at sick trolls who blast a Muslim woman for her 'indifference' to London terror attack when she clearly looks horrified. *The Sun*, 23rd Mar. Available from: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/3158465/vile-trolls-muslim-woman-london-terror-attack/> [Accessed 20/04/18].

(Journalist B)

However, not every piece of information can, or should, be put into the public domain. It is essential that journalists consider the moral, ethical and legal implications of the information they have obtained and its likely impact on the public once released:

*“the kind of things that we’re thinking about [in relation to a] terrorist attack, or attempted attack, is what information can we put in the public domain that is responsible [...] from a moral point of view? But also, [we consider] what information can we put into the public domain from a legal point of view?”*

(Journalist B)

Media portrayals following a terrorist attack, which tend to emphasise impacts upon both victims and institutions help to create a spike in hate crime levels within the first 24-48 hours online and 48-72 hours offline:

*“the only way we can get a reaction out of someone is if we escalate the threat, whether it’s real or not. [...] we suddenly start preparing people for the worst [...] because [we] thought a hundred people would die, [...] It’s actually in the media’s best interest to keep that threat level”*

(Journalist A)

This highlights the importance of responsible reporting and how the media must not exaggerate the risks associated with an incident because of the way this shapes the public perception of what happened, what impact it might have for them, and consequently, what constitutes an appropriate response. Arguably, this is how society likes to see the media, as a trusted source that provides factual content to its audience. However, the combination of public and political discourse that demonises particular communities and journalism that is more focused on capturing market-share than providing accurate information may contribute to the creation of a moral panic and provides tacit authorisation for hate incidents.

The tone of how potential trigger events are reported was identified as a key concern in anticipating anti-Muslim hate incidents. The death of PC Keith Palmer during the Westminster attack appeared in 342 of the 560 articles published between 22 March and 5 April 2018, which were examined for this research. The

most common themes in reporting PC Palmer's death were of individual heroism (134 out of 560 articles) and bravery (66 out of 560 articles). In contrast, reports about Khalid Masood, which were found in 339 of 560 articles, frequently linked Masood with 'Islamist/Islamic/Islam/Islamism' (143 out of 560 articles); 'extremist/fanatic/extremism/fundamentalism' (141 out of 560 articles); 'ISIS/IS' (132 out of 560 articles) and 'jihadi/jihadist/jihad' (98 out of 560 articles). The fact that Masood was born in Britain was only mentioned in 95 articles and his British born name, Adrian Elms or Adrian Ajaao appeared in just 92 out of 560 articles. Furthermore, despite Masood acting alone, which was stated in 116 articles, connections to and/or the influence of ISIS were mentioned in 132 articles. Consequently, Masood's connection to ISIS is presented as a more salient feature of his actions than the actual *modus operandi* of his crimes, in spite of the fact that no evidence was provided to demonstrate that Masood was a 'soldier' of ISIS as claimed.

Journalists who participated in this research identified that during the reporting process of a terrorist incident, reporters are acutely aware of the responsibility to get it right and to be proportionate in their reporting and not to scare the public or sensationalise the incident. Other research participants, however, suggested journalists do not always meet their responsibilities. A high-profile example of this, which was identified by several respondents, was the reporting of Fusilier Lee Rigby's murder. Contrasting the reporting of the death of PC Keith Palmer during the attack on the Palace of Westminster with that of Fusilier Lee Rigby, participants observed:

*"the news didn't focus much on that (Westminster), they focused more on the police officer dying, going about their [...] duty"*

(Hate Crime Officer)

*"the reaction [...] did not produce a significant rise as we saw after the murder of Lee Rigby. [...] There weren't the graphic images that we saw in newspaper pages."*

(Interfaith Specialist)

When asked whether they thought that graphic media coverage after a terrorist attack affects the scale of the anti-Muslim hate, both Hate Crime Specialists and the Interfaith Specialist agreed that yes, graphic media coverage does affect the scale of anti-Muslim hate and whilst discussing their answers, all three participants noted the murder of Lee Rigby. They highlighted that there were

*“images that were roaming around within media sources with the blood on the hands of Adebolajo [...] went around and around and around. Rather than the media being responsible in their reporting and seeing that they were fuelling more anger [they] are showing [...] these horrific pictures”*

(Hate Crime Specialist)

The impact of such graphic imagery is concerning; it evokes an immediate emotional response from the public, particularly from right-wing groups who simultaneously demonise Muslim communities and reify military personnel; and it desensitises the wider public to the implications of connecting phrases such as ‘extremist’ or ‘terrorist’ with ‘Islamist’ or ‘Muslim’:

*“we stop being horrified. [...] We start to normalise every terrorist incident having the word ‘Muslim’ in it, or every [...] news reports having an image of somebody who [looks] like a Muslim”*

(Hate Crime Officer)

The use of graphic images in the reporting of the murder of Lee Rigby offers a partial explanation for why this event triggered such a significant increase in reported anti-Muslim hate incidents. However, it must also be noted that Lee Rigby was in a public street as he returned to his barracks and was out of uniform. Consequently, Rigby represents both a symbolic target, as a serving British soldier, but also a familiar target, in that he was dressed in every-day clothes and was in a space where members of the public were present. This intersection is likely to increase concerns amongst members of the public, as they fear ‘that could have been me’.

Nevertheless, the impact of the association between the words ‘Islamist’ and ‘Extremist’ can be seen in the reporting of individuals who might be perceived to be Muslim, who are present at the scene of trigger events. For example, during the two-week period following the Westminster Attack, 3,926 images were published in the sampled news sources. A single image, of an (anonymous) Muslim woman on Westminster Bridge, caused the most controversy. The picture was published by multiple news outlets from across the political spectrum, including The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph. The reporting of the image is significant, as it implicates a nexus of ‘Islamophobia’ specifically, and

xenophobia more generally, which underpinned a backlash against the woman photographed.



Credit: [www.rexfeatures.com](http://www.rexfeatures.com)<sup>58</sup>

However, as social media commentary about the incident began to develop a further theme that was critical of the reporting of the story, The Sun published another photograph of an (anonymous) white male walking along the same spot, shortly after the incident and remaining a by-stander.



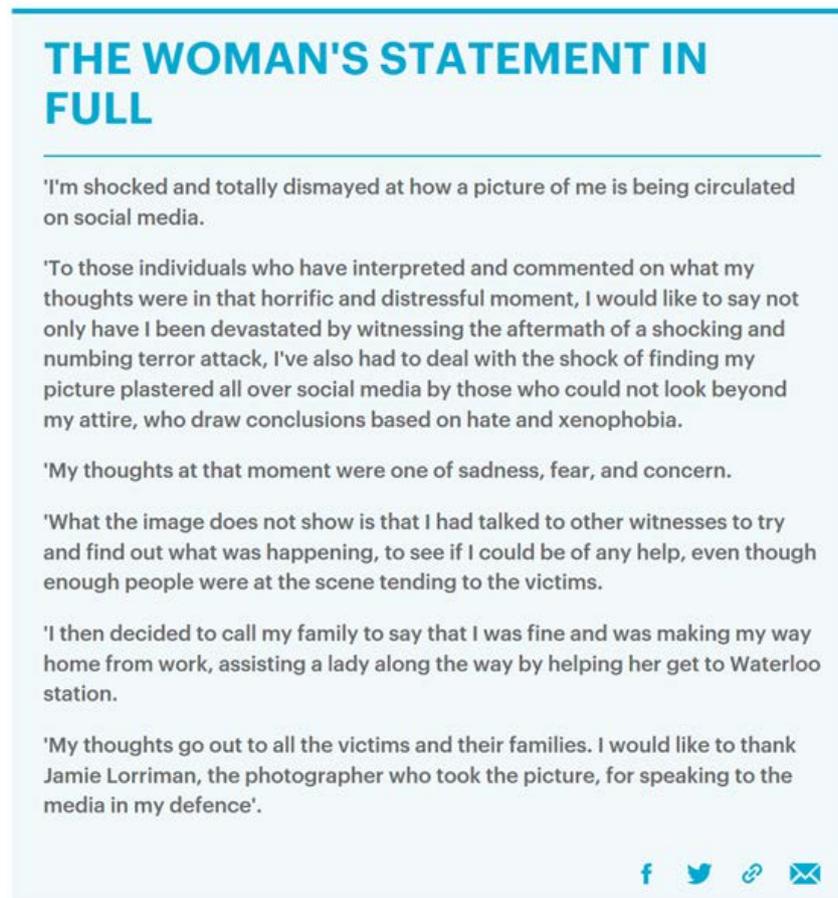
Credit: [www.rexfeatures.com](http://www.rexfeatures.com)<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Richardson, H. and Cambridge, E. (2017) 'Look Beyond My Attire' Muslim woman slams trolls who accused her of 'casually' walking past Westminster terror victims as she reveals she HELPED. *The Sun*, 24th Mar. Available from: <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/3172279/muslim-woman-slams-trolls-who-accused-her-of-casually-walking-past-westminster-terror-victims-as-she-reveals-she-helped/> [Accessed 20/04/18].

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/3172279/muslim-woman-slams-trolls-who-accused-her-of-casually-walking-past-westminster-terror-victims-as-she-reveals-she-helped/>

Alongside the new image, The Sun published a statement released by the woman in question, through Tell MAMA:



**THE WOMAN'S STATEMENT IN FULL**

'I'm shocked and totally dismayed at how a picture of me is being circulated on social media.

'To those individuals who have interpreted and commented on what my thoughts were in that horrific and distressful moment, I would like to say not only have I been devastated by witnessing the aftermath of a shocking and numbing terror attack, I've also had to deal with the shock of finding my picture plastered all over social media by those who could not look beyond my attire, who draw conclusions based on hate and xenophobia.

'My thoughts at that moment were one of sadness, fear, and concern.

'What the image does not show is that I had talked to other witnesses to try and find out what was happening, to see if I could be of any help, even though enough people were at the scene tending to the victims.

'I then decided to call my family to say that I was fine and was making my way home from work, assisting a lady along the way by helping her get to Waterloo station.

'My thoughts go out to all the victims and their families. I would like to thank Jamie Lorrinan, the photographer who took the picture, for speaking to the media in my defence'.

f t e

Source: Tell MAMA<sup>60</sup>.

The change in context and narrative, as well as reports highlighting the visible emotion on the woman's face, prompted a more sympathetic discussion of the picture and its focus. The Guardian and The Daily Telegraph also published articles focusing on the statement from Tell MAMA. Nevertheless, harm had already been done by the deliberate (mis)use of an image containing a visibly Muslim woman, and deploying commentary that draws on stereotypes and prejudices to further an emotional and divisive narrative.

However, in spite of such media representations in the wake of the attack, the events at Westminster did not produce a significant rise in hate crime, particularly when compared to previous terror attacks such as the murder of Lee Rigby or the later Manchester Arena attack. One explanation for this could be the counter-

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<sup>60</sup> Tell MAMA (2017) The truth behind the photo of the Muslim woman on Westminster Bridge [Online] *Tell MAMA*. Available from: <https://tellmamauk.org/the-truth-behind-the-photo-of-the-muslim-woman-on-westminster-bridge/>

narrative created by newspaper headlines such as: “‘Love for all, hatred for none’: hundreds gather for Westminster vigil” in *The Guardian*, 29th March<sup>61</sup>; or “Londoners share images of unity and strength after Westminster attack” on [thebbc.co.uk](http://thebbc.co.uk) on the 23rd March<sup>62</sup>. Following the Manchester Arena attack, BBC News on the 23rd May utilised a headline of “Manchester attack: 22 dead and 59 hurt in suicide bombing”<sup>63</sup> and the *Evening Standard* on the same day included “Manchester attack: Theresa May says suicide bomber chose place to cause ‘maximum carnage’”<sup>64</sup>. The narrative of people coming together as a shared experience of processing the events, and particularly the theme of solidarity, that are so prominent in the headlines following the Westminster attack are absent from the reporting of the Manchester Arena bombing.

### **Recommendation 3**

Media reporting in the aftermath of a ‘trigger event’ needs to be more balanced and media outlets should be held to account for reporting that is inflammatory or factually inaccurate

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<sup>61</sup> Addley, E. (2017) ‘Love for all, hatred for none’: hundreds gather for Westminster vigil. *The Guardian*, 29th Mar Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/29/love-for-all-hatred-for-none-hundreds-gather-for-westminster-attack-vigil> [Accessed 26 May 2017]

<sup>62</sup> Estatie, L. (2017) ‘Londoners share images of unity and strength after Westminster attack’ *BBC Trending*, 23<sup>rd</sup> Mar Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-39364096> [Accessed 26 May 2017]

<sup>63</sup> Casciani, D. (2017) ‘Manchester attack: 22 dead and 59 hurt in suicide bombing’ *BBC News*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-40010124> [Accessed 26 May 2017]

<sup>64</sup> Collier, H. (2017) Manchester attack: Theresa May says suicide bomber chose place to cause ‘maximum carnage’. *Evening Standard*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May Available from: <http://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/manchester-attack-theresa-may-says-suicide-bomber-chose-place-to-cause-maximum-carnage-a3546181.html> [Accessed 26 May 2017]

## User-generated narratives in social media

Although individual journalists may manage their conduct according to professional ethical standards, or personal morality, they also operate within a very competitive market where it is increasingly difficult to be the first to report a news story. The demand for immediate information whilst events are unfolding is a challenge to ethical journalism, particularly with the evolution of social media:

*“All of the tools that people can have in their pocket with a smart phone, they are always going to be at the scene of an incident”*

(Journalist A)

Such material, typified by shaking camera work and poor audio, can be a powerful source that contributes key details to the reporting of events that otherwise would not be available to the public. Similarly, one participant suggested the rawest form of documentary is CCTV footage. Journalist A placed a particular emphasis on the role CCTV played in documenting the Westminster attack including capturing the death of PC Keith Palmer.

The ability of citizen-journalists to utilise a variety of social media platforms to disseminate factual information about incidents mixed with their own opinion about the meaning of the events blurs the lines between ‘fact’ and ‘opinion’ and destabilises public perceptions of what constitutes a reliable source of information. It also places a pressure on news organisations to report details rapidly, without necessarily maintaining their responsibility to due diligence in verifying sources:

*“I think news organisations need to really look at what they do. Even today, I think that you know, there’s a constant need for seeing things unfolding and I suppose Twitter is primarily the thing for that. I know people look at Facebook and stuff but you know, I would still go to Twitter in an incident.”*

(Journalist A)

The value and power of social media is not in utilising it as a primary source in itself, but in pulling at the investigative threads presented in User Generated Content:

*“I think where it’s most powerful... is in giving the journalistic leads that you can then take and go and investigate yourself and check yourself. [...] So if you’re*

*searching for somebody, or searching for an event, you can actually search social media and get a tip of where it might be or the person responsible. But there is no way, that I'll repeat that in a broadcast [...] without checking it out very, very carefully.*

(Journalist B)

The role of the journalist then becomes that of verifier, providing provenance to the stories circulating on social media. In order to achieve this, journalists are required to utilise additional sources to ensure the veracity of the information they place in the public domain. Appropriate due diligence of ethical journalists means that they are subject to a series of checks and balances prior to publishing an article, with editors and senior executives in broadcast media organisations ensuring that journalists meet their duty to accurately inform the public:

*Almost all stories that I do [...] have to be second sourced. If a single source is going to be relied upon then it has to be exceptional circumstances and it has to be referred up to a more senior person in the organisation for careful consideration.*

Similarly, the commentary provided by journalists in presenting their reports must also be subject to ethical consideration, so that their interpretation of the 'facts' are realistic and add value to the public discourse surrounding events. Analysis and commentary that is inflammatory, inaccurate or otherwise seeks to promote a divisive public discourse, is dangerous and may constitute a key element in the development of a terrorist incident into a trigger event. In essence, the event itself, whilst important in prompting anti-Muslim hate incidents, may be only a part of the picture; how the event is reported may have as much influence.

However, it was recognised that ethical journalism is a choice, and not all reports maintain the high standards described by our research participants:

*"you have a lot of the organisations that, they'd rather retweet something, even though they're not meant to, that fills their timeline other than the fact that they don't know what's going on"*

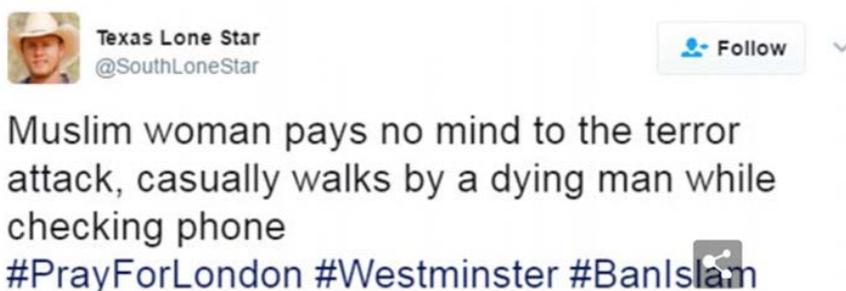
It is the use of short-cuts, such as simply re-presenting User Generated Content as a verified source, which allows divisive messages to permeate public discourse. Otherwise questionable sources assume the veneer of credibility because of the way established, 'reputable' news sources draw on social media to provide details

of incidents and commentary on the public discourse surrounding the events. The problem with not verifying the information presented in User Generated Content is that it may contain inaccuracies, supposition or ideologically driven errors:

*“[Look] at the Twitter feeds of some members of the public who were putting information out about what they thought were terrorist incidents which [...] weren’t terrorist incidents. So that’s a good example of how the media must be very responsible because... it’s very easy if you’ve put stuff out on social media straight away to cause panic*

(Journalist B)

This is further complicated amid current concerns about ‘fake’ news. For example, one of the most widely circulated, and reported, social media responses to the Westminster Attack, and the reporting of the image of the anonymous woman walking through the aftermath of the Westminster attack, was a tweet by @SouthLoneStar:



Source: Twitter

The @SouthLoneStar account has subsequently been linked to debates about Russian interference in public discourse, both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Concerns about the use of such accounts, which utilise divisive rhetoric to increase tensions between far-right groups and minority communities, have been reported since the initial confusion surrounding the details of the events at Westminster were first reported<sup>65</sup>.

The issue with such misinformation is the ability of users to transmit messages across social media platforms, so that the same message circulates repeatedly. The same information may come to the attention of media monitoring

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<sup>65</sup> Hern, A (2017) How a Russian 'troll soldier' stirred anger after the Westminster attack, *The Guardian* [Online] 14 Nov. Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/14/how-a-russian-troll-soldier-stirred-anger-after-the-westminster-attack>

organisations, content generators and journalists across different platforms, or circulated by multiple users. In a profession that is used to managing individual relationships with sources, the multiplicitous presence of a single message may appear to simulate verification of the information to such an extent that its value is overstated:

*“we seem to see what is a clear amplified activity in using websites, social media, Facebook and a whole range of different platforms including things like, increased activity on Gab<sup>66</sup>, increased activity on Instagram, so we’re starting to see the proliferation of activity bleeding out from mainstream Twitter and Facebook in to other platforms.*

(Interfaith Specialist)

A balance between the rights and responsibilities associated with civil liberties and human rights must be understood. Freedom of speech cannot be utilised as a basis for allowing individuals or groups with violent extremist ideologies and divisive political agendas to co-opt the ability of minority groups to speak truth to power. Hate speech, particularly when it is inciting violent action, should not be tolerated on the basis of spurious claims to the very human rights the hate speaker would deny to others. Further, public discourse should not be viewed as the rightful space for any one group to dictate the terms of debates about what constitutes a healthy society. Freedom of speech may be a fundamental, individual right; but this does not mean that speech must necessarily enter public discourse. There is no fundamental right to have access to social media.

**Recommendation 4**

Social media companies should enforce a ‘zero tolerance’ policy towards posts that incite hate

It is unfortunate that social media organisations have not pro-actively managed their environments to create spaces where open discussions of social and political

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<sup>66</sup> Gab is a social media platform that is known to be popular with far-right groups, and has received substantial criticism for hosting content that is overtly racist and misogynistic. In the aftermath of the shooting in a Pittsburgh synagogue in November 2018, many of the service providers that provided the infrastructure for the Gab platform withdrew their co-operation from the site. However, within days a new domain host was identified.

issues can be held. The potential for minorities to be provided with a voice with which they can represent themselves, or develop effective counter-narratives to those promoting violent extremism, is powerful:

*“discussions on forums, on Facebook, people start to have conversations. [...] We start to hear the voice of people who perhaps wouldn’t ordinarily comment but feel as though they want to have a voice and actually the newspaper article online gives them the opportunity to do that.”*

(Hate Crime Officer)

If utilised in this way, social media can become a tool of social harmony, and a key part of the solution to contemporary issues of intolerance. Finding an acceptable balance between supporting minorities to have a voice, the right to freedom of speech and the necessary limitations on intervening in public discourse is one of the fundamental issues of our time. Social media organisations must recognise this and redress the current balance of rights and responsibilities.

**Recommendation 5:** Muslim communities need to be given a safe platform from which they are able to express their emotions and response to ‘trigger events’, such as terror attacks.

## Conclusion

Our aim throughout this report was to determine why there was not a significant rise in hate crime following the Westminster terror attack. This section is used to highlight recommendations that could further influence the reporting of hate crime and how the media report events following a terrorist attack. It is hoped that if further investigations were to be undertaken, it would positively aid victims of both religiously and racially motivated hate crimes, with particular emphasis placed on those which occur after a terrorist incident, both nationally and internationally. We sincerely hope that the police, victim support, communities and other agencies use these recommendations to improve hate crime statistics however, we specifically hope that policy makers, politicians and media reporters and journalists use this research as well as further research to change the regulations in media reporting following a terrorist attack.

This research was produced in order to discuss and examine why there was not a significant rise in hate crime following the Westminster terror attack. The aim of this report was to: (1) examine all articles published (online) by: The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Mirror from the 22nd March to the 5th April 2017; (2) undertake interviews with both hate crime and media professionals in order to gain a thorough understanding in both hate crime, media and journalism; (3) provide a detailed as well as justified answer to the question of why there was not a significant rise in hate crime following the Westminster terror attack.

Several key issues emerged from the research that offer some explanation of why there was not a significant rise in hate crime following the Westminster terror attack. There needs to be an immediate 'zero tolerance to hate crime' response from the Government/political parties following a 'trigger event' to bring the country together. The use of counter-narratives such as #WeStandTogether or #NoPlaceForHate are important in preventing hate responses. A clearer narrative that a terrorist or extremist does not represent a whole community is vital. From the outset, clear leadership from and visibility of, the Government and/or political parties in preventing a hate response are crucial.

The Metropolitan Police's implementation of the National 14-Day Plan predicted the outcome of public behaviour. The response plan created a platform to apply order within society and therefore reduce and deter any expected hateful and/or prejudiced behaviour. The most important factor however, is that the 14-Day Plan was designed to coincide with 14 days of press releases and in turn, control and shape what the media had access to and/or were likely to report during this time.

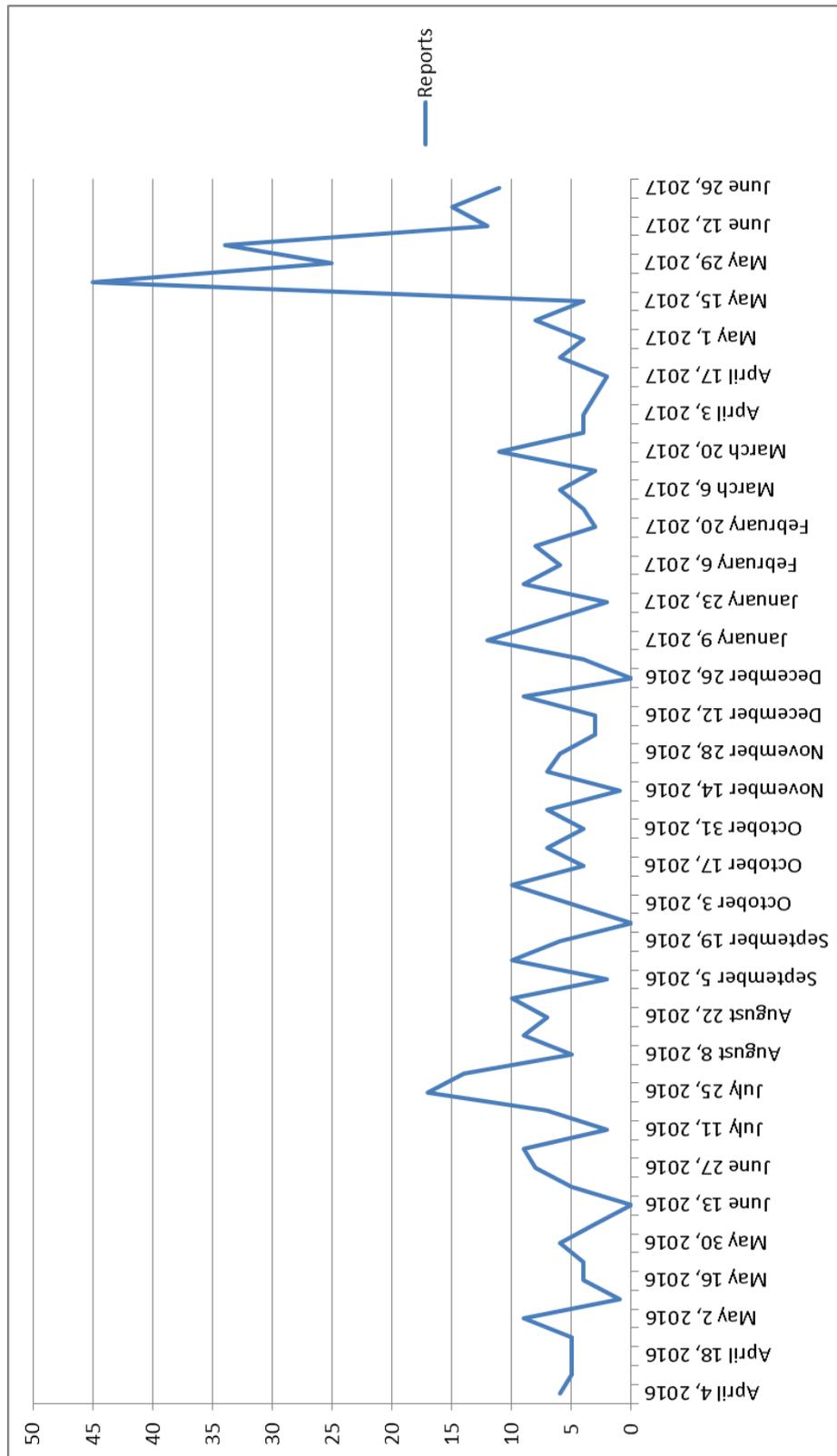
Representations of Khalid Masood focused predominantly on the fact that he was British-born and a self-proclaimed convert. Furthermore, there were limited links to themes of radicalisation and/or Islam and instead, the press focused more upon the fact that the attack was undertaken by a 'lone wolf'. Subsequently, Khalid Masood's actions were not solely linked to negative portrayals of Islam and therefore did not encourage hateful or prejudice behaviour. As well as this, the researchers found there to be minimal use of the word and/or themes of 'Islamophobia' and 'Islamic terrorism'. As a result, the media were not making any perceived risk signals against either Islam or Muslim communities. Retrospectively, it can be argued that the media did not inflict a moral panic following the Westminster terror attack and perhaps "got it right" however, this is not to say that there is not a need for further improvements to be made, specifically within media legislation.

Finally, the location and small scale of fatalities is also thought to have contributed to the lack of a rise in hate crime following the Westminster terror attack. The lack of patriotic emotion shown towards Westminster, despite it representing the heart of British democracy, is interesting. There remain many questions surrounding the reason why the British public do not recognise Westminster as a significant location. Consequently, the target location may, in fact, limit anticipated rises in reports of hate crime incidents. This effect was demonstrated in the aftermath of the Westminster terror attack. Furthermore, the small scale of fatalities and the fact that there were no fatally injured children will have also contributed to this factor.

## Appendix 1: Potential anti-Muslim trigger events in Europe and UK between January 2016 & June 2017

Date	Location	Nature of Incident
22 March 2016	Brussels, Belgium	Bomb attack at Brussels Airport and Maelbeek Metro Station
16 June 2016	Birstall, UK	Knife attack & murder of Jo Cox MP at a constituency surgery
14 July 2016	Nice, France	Vehicle ramming attack on a crowd on Promenade des Anglais
18 July 2016	Würzburg, Germany	Knife attack on a train between Treuchtlingen and Würzburg
22 July 2016	Munich, Germany	Mass shooting at a supermarket North-West of Munich city centre
24 July 2016	Ansbach, Germany	Bomb attack outside a wine bar and music festival
24 July 2016	Reutlingen, Germany	Knife attack outside a Turkish kebab shop. The first victim was the perpetrator's intimate partner.
26 July 2016	Normandy, France	Knife attack and hostage taking at a Catholic church
19 December 2016	Berlin, Germany	Vehicle ramming and shooting at the Christmas Market in Breitscheidplatz
03 February 2017	Paris, France	Knife attack at the Louvre Museum
22 March 2017	London, UK	Vehicle ramming and knife attack at the Palace of Westminster
07 April 2017	Stockholm, Sweden	Vehicle ramming attack on crowd and department store on Drottninggatan
20 April 2017	Paris, France	Mass shooting on the Champs Élysée by a single gunman
22 May 2017	Manchester, UK	Bomb attack of Ariana Grande Concert at Manchester Arena
03 June 2017	London, UK	Knife attacks at London Bridge & Borough Market
19 June 2017	London, UK	Vehicle ramming attack on worshippers leaving Finsbury Park Mosque

## Appendix 2: Tell MAMA Weekly Online incidents Apr 16 – Jun 17





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