# Researching Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance: A Brief Introduction

*Daniel Nilsson DeHanas*
*Therese O'Toole*
*Tariq Modood*
*Nasar Meer*

Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance
Working Paper, No. 1

Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship
University of Bristol

September 2010

Citation: DeHanas, D. N., O'Toole, T., Modood, T. and Meer, N. (2010) 'Researching Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance: A Brief Introduction', *Muslim Participation in Contemporary Governance Working Paper*, No. 1.

# Introduction

British Muslims today are deepening their engagement with the British state. For most of the period since World War II, Muslims in Britain could have been regarded as on the periphery of national politics. The post-war generation from the Indian subcontinent had largely migrated to Britain for economic reasons, not expecting to remain for the long term (Gilliat-Ray 2010; Gardner 2002). The 1989 Rushdie Affair brought Muslim identities to the fore and ushered in an era of protest-based engagement that would crest in the large-scale Iraq War protests of 2003 (Weller 2009a; Birt 2005). Although *periphery* and *protest* still describe certain aspects of British Muslim approaches to the state, there have been significant developments in Muslim *participation* with (and within) British state institutions. Our principal research concern will be to understand the deepening phenomenon of Muslim participation in contemporary British governance.

There are several ways in which Muslim participation with/within the British state has developed in recent years. Some examples are:

- In the 2010 General Election the number of **Muslim MPs** doubled to eight, including the first three Muslim female MPs (Muslim News 2010). MPs, along with Muslim councillors and bureaucrats, are engaging directly in national/local policymaking and implementation.
- British Muslim lobbying has been an influence on the passage of the **Single Equality Act** (2010) that provides the most robust legal protection against discrimination in Europe.
- Government support of the **faith sector** increased significantly under New Labour, especially as outlined in *Face to Face and Side by Side* (DCLG 2008). The Coalition Government expresses a desire to continue such streams of funding and support, particularly those involving interfaith work (DCLG 2010).
- The Government's controversial **Prevent agenda** has forged partnerships with some Muslim civil society organisations, providing millions of Pounds to groups engaged in dialogue, community-building, and countering 'extremism,' both locally and nationally.

Developments such as the Single Equality Act are the fruit of a long struggle for equality, and are clearly positive. Yet in other cases, like the Prevent agenda, forms of 'participation' are more problematic and ties with the state tend to be held with ambivalence, if accepted at all.

This document provides a brief overview of the existing literature on Muslim participation in governance. It raises several key issues and dilemmas. We begin by explaining the term "governance" and the theoretical underpinnings of our research perspective. We then review three British policy fields in which Muslims have been involved: faith sector governance, equality and diversity, and securitisation. We conclude by raising questions and considering the future, including implications of the Coalition's Big Society agenda for Muslim participation.

## Government to Governance

An emerging trend in British politics has been a transition from conventional government into new forms of governance. Whereas *government* refers to the centralised, bureaucratic state, 'new' or 'participatory' *governance* is a migration of state functions into networks and partnerships that soften the boundaries between the state and civil society (Rhodes 1996; Kjaer 2009). New Labour sometimes referred to this transition as a "double devolution" (Taylor 2007), an idea now embraced by the Coalition Government via Communities Minister Eric Pickles: "I want to see a double devolution, not just transferring power from central government to local authorities, but for power to transfer down to individuals and communities" (DCLG 2010).

Some observers celebrate new forms of governance for their potential to empower democratic participation or as a kind of "new localism" (Fung & Wright 2001; Gaventa 2004). Others are more sceptical, arguing that these styles of governance allow the state entry into new areas of life to cultivate discipline and "governmentality" in citizens (Foucault 1991; Rose & Miller 2008), or that governance is simply an innovation in central state control over civil society (Bang 2004; Marinetto 2003). In austere economic times, the diffusion of state responsibility outwards to civil society may also be understood as "the acceptable face of spending cuts" (Stoker 1998).

*"In our research, we aim neither to demonise the state nor to valorise the grassroots, but rather to provide a better account"*

## Our Theoretical Contribution: A Dual-Vantage Account

Most previous research on governance emphasises either "bottom-up" participation of grassroots citizens or "top-down" influence from the state. Both of these perspectives are limited, however, because civil society is composed of "mediating institutions" (Durkheim 1997) that blur distinctions between top and bottom. Indeed, some researchers recognise that governance produces hybrid categories like the 'expert citizen' (Bang 2005) and that it is important to incorporate top-down and bottom-up perspectives into the same analysis (Lowndes & Thorp 2010; Cornwall & Coelho 2006).

In our research, we aim neither to demonise the state nor to valorise the grassroots, but rather to provide a better account. We seek a ***dual-vantage account*** to explain interrelationships between top-down and bottom-up processes. Our theoretical account will have several components:

- Building from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (2001), we see governance as taking place in **policy fields** in which actors take up particular positions in relation to others. Policy fields are not static, but instead evolve as various **publics** challenge and contribute to their re-formation (Dewey 1927).
- Governance involves the rhetorical practices of **framing** Muslims and relevant issues (Morey & Yaqin 2010) as well as creative attempts at **counterframing** (Brown 2010; Benford & Snow 2000) – practices that can be observed in policy documents, media, and popular accounts.
- A **top-vantage** analysis must take into account authority, institutions, government regimes, and political opportunity structures (Maloney et al. 2000; Lowndes & Wilson 2001).
- A **bottom-vantage** analysis must investigate networks and resources, creative adaptation, and the social skill and political mobility of 'grassroots' actors (Fligstein 2001; Crossley 2002).

In observing both top-down and bottom-up processes in governance, it will be important to recognise that they are often mutually constitutive. Indeed, when Muslim actors and organisations gain influence or when the government relies on Muslim participation, such top/bottom distinctions may become blurred or questionable

# Policy Field I: Faith Sector Governance

One distinctive area of participatory governance has been the increasing involvement of faith-based organisations (FBOs) and representatives in national/local policy creation and implementation – in what is sometimes called the **'faith sector'** (Chapman 2009). Faith groups have been drawn into a range of partnerships and forums including Local Strategic Partnerships, urban regeneration partnerships, social service planning and delivery, consultations, and health, police and neighbourhood forums. A key DCLG report, *Face to Face and Side by Side* (2008), commented: "Public authorities are increasingly recognising the role that faith communities and faith based organisations can play in delivering on their agenda and the opportunities for developing innovative community led solutions through partnership working."

> *"We see abundant evidence of Muslim organisations critically engaged in governance"*

Faith-based organisations are of interest to government for a variety of reasons, as:

- Generators of **civic engagement** that can contribute to government's active citizenship and civil renewal agendas
- Reservoirs of **resources** and **social capital** that can contribute to a mixed-economy of welfare provision and cohesion
- Sources of **representation** and **expertise** regarding communities the government finds difficult to access or understand

Faith groups face a number of challenges when participating in devolved forms of governance, including problems of co-optation (CULF 2006), a mismatch between the religious goals of faith groups and governance agendas (e.g., service delivery or measurable impact), and a lack of religious literacy on the part of government representatives (Baker 2009; CULF 2006). Additionally, particular issues arise for Muslim groups' involvement within governance initiatives in relation to:

- Tensions emerging when Muslims are viewed simultaneously as partners with government and as **communities under suspicion** as a consequence of counter-terrorism policies (McGhee 2008)
- Situations in which Muslim organisations are subject to 'top-down' **interventions** by government (e.g., MINAB)
- The **infrastructure of interaction** between government and faith groups, which (particularly in local inter-faith work) may presume Anglican institutional modes and practices (Weller 2009b)
- Heightened **questioning of legitimacy** in relation to particular historical/theological streams of Islam (e.g., Jamaat-i-Islami)

Whilst Muslim groups face generalised problems of co-optation, instrumentalism, and distortion of goals – alongside specific problems that relate to securitisation – we do not anticipate that these groups are simply passively worked upon by governance agendas. Indeed, we see abundant evidence of Muslim organisations critically engaged in governance, avoiding cooptation, and mobilising for more autonomous goals and agendas (e.g., the MCB; MPACUK; BBOs). The dual-vantage perspective will give us a greater awareness of the embeddedness of Muslim bodies within the broader 'faith sector,' the distinctive aims of government and Muslim groups, and the areas for genuine partnership and participation.

# Policy Field II: Equality, Diversity, and Cohesion

Equality and Diversity is a second policy field in which Muslim participation has been substantial. Issues in this policy field include reducing socio-economic inequality, recognising religious difference, or uniting diverse societal elements; any of which may be accomplished through governance approaches such as **multiculturalism** or **community cohesion**.

## From Race to Religion

British Muslim engagement with the state builds on a precedent of Black Caribbean activism, itself drawing from the wells of the US Civil Rights Movement. A "political blackness" culminated in the 1980s and was embraced by some Asian activists as an inclusive protest identity. However, by the late 1980s Asians were deepening roots in Britain and articulating more specific ethnic identities. Such identities would later make way for the preeminence of Muslim political identity, in part spurred by the Rushdie Affair of 1989 and solidified in shared Muslim experiences following 9/11 (Modood 2009, 2005; McLoughlin 2010).

British equalities legislation was slow to catch up to changes in Muslim identities and to bottom-up demands for recognition. Sikhs (since 1982) and Jews have long been accepted as ethnic groups protected by racial discrimination legislation, but Muslims' religious demands for protection went unfulfilled for many years (Modood 2009).

However, the new Single Equality Act (2010) brings together, and "equalises" the various anti-discrimination laws that the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has been created to implement. The Government has moved from arguing that there was no evidence of religious discrimination (making legislation unnecessary) to religious discrimination legislation that goes beyond EU directives or indeed anything found in Europe.

> *"We contest the idea that British multiculturalism is subject to a wholesale 'retreat' and suggest instead that it has been, and continues to be, subject to... a 'civic re-balancing'"*
>
> *Meer & Modood (2009)*

## From Multiculturalism to Cohesion?

The Parkeh Report (2000), coming in the aftermath of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry, is often considered a high water mark for British institutional recognition of multiculturalism. Joppke (2004) argues that the moment was short-lived and multiculturalism is now in retreat. He cites the rise of a community cohesion approach, following summer 2001 disturbances in Northern English towns and concerns about 'parallel lives' (Cantle 2001). A contemporaneous trend is the increasing invocation of the 'civic' and of active citizenship as a mode of integration.

However, these policy approaches need not be perceived as opposed. As we have stated elsewhere: "We contest the idea that British multiculturalism is subject to a wholesale 'retreat' and suggest instead that it has been, and continues to be, subject to…a 'civic re-balancing'" (Meer & Modood 2009). Britain's approach to equality and diversity is undergoing a civic thickening alongside an explicit recalibration with national identity. On matters such as faith schools, Britain remains an outlier in its willingness to accommodate multicultural needs – and this may be even more striking as we investigate gaps between national securitised rhetoric and local area governance.

# Policy Field III: Security

The UK policy field of securitisation involves the interlinked policy areas of **immigration and border control** and **domestic counter-terrorism**. Although these policy areas both have critical relevance to British Muslims, in this section we will cover the former very briefly before focussing on the latter, because it has become perhaps the paradigmatic example of 'contested governance' in Britain (Newman 2005).

UK securitisation is increasingly conducted through symbolic acts of border control. These have included the refusal of entry to figures deemed controversial (e.g., Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, Geert Wilders) and the threat of deportation (e.g., the case of student Rizawaan Sabir, who printed out an Al-Qaeda training manual for his Ph.D. research) (see Gibney 2008). The government white paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* (2002) demonstrates how security has attained priority over inclusion in the interface with asylum seekers and immigrants (Sales 2005).

Migration and border control policies are often closely linked with surveillance and counter-terrorism. The British counter-terrorism strategy is known as CONTEST (updated to CONTEST 2 in 2009). The strategy's four strands – Pursue, Prevent, Protect, and Prepare – range from 'soft' community engagement to disaster preparedness and the legal prosecution of alleged terrorists.

The Prevent strand is of greatest relevance to our research on participatory governance. In April 2007, the government launched *Preventing Violent Extremism: Winning Hearts and Minds* through the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). It was intended to be a "community-led approach to tackling violent extremism" via engagement with Muslims. Over 90 local authorities have been identified in Britain based on the size of the Muslim population. By April 2011, these authorities will have received about £60 million in Prevent funding, distributed to local organisations and projects.

The PVE agenda is Governments' largest single monetary investment in Muslim civil society organisations and something of an experiment in participatory governance. It is, however, deeply problematic on a number of grounds. Critics have noted that PVE identifies Muslims as a 'suspect community' rather than as citizens (Birt 2009), it embeds intelligence gathering in community work (Kundnani 2009), it has been exploited to fund irrelevant projects (Maher & Frampton 2009), and it merges counter-terrorism with community cohesion in ways that could undermine both (HOC 2010; Thomas 2010).

A key issue with PVE derives from its central aim to "[c]hallenge violent extremist ideology and support mainstream voices." This sets in place binary distinctions of 'Good'/'Bad' Muslims (Birt 2006; McGhee 2008) that can be flexibly applied, limiting inclusion of governance partners to those who delink violent extremism from UK foreign policy. Arun Kundnani (2009) writes that: "The atmosphere promoted by Prevent… undermines the kind of radical discussions that would need to occur if [Muslims] were to be won over and support for illegitimate violence diminished."

We address this issue of **governance inclusion** in a presented paper (DeHanas & O'Toole 2010), providing case examples of state entities or partners with differing views on such inclusion:

- Quilliam Foundation
- Cordoba Foundation
- Radical Middle Way (RMW)
- Muslim Contact Unit (MCU)
- Digital Disruption Project, by Bold Creative

We argue that partners such as Quilliam delimit the set of acceptable 'mainstream voices' and thus discourage debate. MCU and Digital Disruption,* who have more pragmatic and open-ended approaches, will be worthy of further research as potential models for the participatory governance of counter-terrorism.

# Discussion

In our review of the literature, we have established that Muslims are increasingly brought into governance structures for partnership or consultation across multiple policy fields. It is important to recognise that this participatory trend is embedded within broader Faith Sector growth, motivated in part by Third Way (and now Big Society) efforts to devolve power and responsibility outwards to civil society. Yet such participatory developments are also specific to British Muslims, due both to 'bottom-up' demands from Muslim citizens and to 'top-down' state initiatives in community securitisation.

Our research is designed to investigate ongoing developments in participatory governance from the dual vantage points of elites (top) and the grassroots (bottom), while recognising that such distinctions often blur. We will provide analyses of national policy documents and of interviews with national elites, pairing this work with local area case studies of contemporary governance in Birmingham, Leicester, and Tower Hamlets. Because our project start date coincided closely with the entry of the new Coalition Government, we are especially well placed to discern if/how Big Society initiatives spur local participation.

## Research Questions

The following unanswered questions will serve to guide to our data-collection and analysis:

**Values**

1) How are Muslim values and identities framed in policy and on what normative grounds?

2) To what degree are particular conceptions of 'mainstream,' 'extremist,' etc. utilised, and what effect does this have?

3) Does the extent of 'religious literacy' among policymakers vary across institutions or government bodies?

**Governance Structures**

4) What assumptions underpin practices of inclusion of Muslim groups in governance structures? (e.g., of representation? Of faith organisations' infrastructures?)

5) Do any distinctive patterns or issues arise in practice when including Muslim groups in governance structures?

**Policy Implementation**

6) What is the distinction (and possible gap) between governance-related policies and their implementation on the ground? Is it a national/local distinction, a policy dependent one, or one of another kind?

7) In policymaking and in ground-level implementation, do we observe a 'retreat' from British multiculturalism (Joppke)? Or can we instead see a 'civic rebalancing' of multiculturalism (Meer and Modood)?

**Muslim Reactions and Responses**

8) How do Muslims creatively engage with the governance and policy environment?

9) How do civil society organisations and policy makers adapt to changing discourses on religion/Islam/difference?

10) How does inclusion in governance build or undermine the intra-Muslim legitimacy of organisations? (i.e., does it taint, or does it empower?) How does governance involvement reshape the Muslim civil society environment?

# References Cited


Baker, C., 2009. Blurred Encounters?: Religious Literacy, Spiritual Capital and Language. In A. Dinham, R. Furbey, & V. Lowndes, eds. *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Bang, H.P., 2005. Among Everyday Makers and Expert Citizens. In *Remaking Governance: Peoples, Politics and the Public Sphere*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 159-178.

Bang, H.P., 2004. Culture Governance: Governing Self-Reflexive Modernity. *Public Administration*, 82(1), 157-190.

Benford, R.D. & Snow, D.A., 2000. Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26, 611-639.

Birt, J., 2005. Lobbying and Marching: British Muslims and the State. In T. Abbas, ed. *Muslim Britain: Communities Under Pressure*. London: Zed Books, pp. 92-106.

Birt, Y., 2006. Good Imam, Bad Imam: Civic Religion and National Integration in Britain Post-9/11. *Muslim World*, 96(4), 687-705.

Birt, Y., 2009. Promoting Virulent Envy?: Reconsidering the UK's Terrorist Prevention Strategy. *Royal United Services Institute Journal*, 154(4), 52-58.

Bourdieu, P., 2001. The Forms of Capital. In M. Granovetter & R. Swedberg, eds. *The Sociology of Economic Life*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 96–111.

Brown, K.E., 2010. Contesting the Securitisation of British Muslims: Citizenship and Resistance. *Interventions*, 12(2), 171-182.

Cantle, T., 2001. *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*, London: Home Office.

Chapman, R., 2009. Faith and the Voluntary Sector in Urban Governance: Distinctive yet Similar? In A. Dinham, R. Furbey, & V. Lowndes, eds. *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Cornwall, A. & Coelho, V.S., 2006. *Spaces for Change?: The Politics of Citizen Participation in New Democratic Arenas*, London: Zed Books Ltd.

Crossley, N., 2002. *Making Sense of Social Movements* 1st ed., Open University Press.

CULF (Commission on Urban Life and Faith), 2006. *Faithful Cities: A Call for Celebration, Vision and Justice*, London: Church House Publishing/Methodist Publishing House.

DCLG, 2010. Eric Pickles Meets Councillor James Bond and Champions Double Devolution. *Department of Communities and Local Government Website*. Available at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/newsstories/localgovernment/1631157 [Accessed August 20, 2010].

DCLG, 2008. *Face to Face and Side by Side: A Framework for Partnership in Our Multi Faith Society*, London: Department of Communities and Local Government.

DCLG, 2010. Keeping Faith in the Big Society. *Department of Communities and Local Government Website*. Available at: http://www.communities.gov.uk/newsstories/communities/1637515 [Accessed August 19, 2010].

DeHanas, D.N. & O'Toole, T., 2010. Preventing Viable Engagement: The Prevent Agenda and the Construction of a 'Moderate' Muslim Public. Presented at University of Nottingham.

Dewey, J., 1927. *The Public and Its Problems*, New York: Henry Holt & Co.

Durkheim, E., 1997. *The Division of Labor in Society* Reprint., New York: The Free Press.

Fligstein, N., 2001. Social Skill and the Theory of Fields. *Sociological Theory*, 19(2), 105-125.

Foucault, M., 1991. Governmentality. In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller, eds. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Fung, A. & Wright, E.O., 2001. Deepening Democracy: Innovations in Empowered Participatory Governance. *Politics Society*, 29(1), 5-41.

Gardner, K., 2002. *Age, Narrative and Migration: The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London*, Berg Publishers.

Gaventa, J., 2004. *Representation, Community Leadership and Participation: Citizen Involvement in Neighbourhood Renewal and Local Governance*, London: Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Gibney, M., 2008. Asylum and the Expansion of Deportation in the United Kingdom. *Government and Opposition*, Spring.

Gilliat-Ray, S., 2010. *Muslims in Britain: An Introduction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

HOC (House of Commons) Communities and Local Government Committee, 2010. Preventing Violent Extremism: Sixth Report of Session 2009-10.

Joppke, C., 2004. The Retreat of Multiculturalism in the Liberal State: Theory and Policy. *British Journal of Sociology*, 55(2), 237-257.

Kjaer, A.M., 2009. Governance and the Urban Bureaucracy. In J. S. Davies & D. L. Imbroscio, eds. *Theories of Urban Politics*. New York: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Kundnani, A., 2009. *Spooked!: How Not to Prevent Violent Extremism*, Institute of Race Relations.

Lowndes, V. & Thorp, L., 2010. 'Preventing Violent Extremism' - Why Local Context Matters. In R. Eatwell & M. J. Goodwin, eds. *The New Extremism in 21st Century Britain*. London: Routledge.

Lowndes, V. & Wilson, D., 2001. Social Capital and Local Governance: Exploring the Institutional Design Variable. *Political Studies*, 49(4), 629-647.

Maher, S. & Frampton, M., 2009. *Choosing our friends wisely: Criteria for engagement with Muslim groups*, London: Policy Exchange.

Maloney, W., Smith, G. & Stoker, G., 2000. Social Capital and Urban Governance: Adding a More Contextualized 'Top-down' Perspective. *Political Studies*, 48(4), 802-820.

Marinetto, M., 2003. Who Wants to be an Active Citizen?: The Policy and Practice of Community Involvement. *Sociology*, 37(1), 103 -120.

McGhee, D., 2008. In between allegiance and evilization: the Muslim question post-7/7. In *The End of Multiculturalism?* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

McLoughlin, S., 2010. From Race to Faith Relations, the Local to the National Level: The State and Muslim Organisations in Britain. In A. Kreienbrink & M. Bodenstein, eds. *Muslim Organisations and the State: European Perspectives*. Nurnberg, Germany: Bundesamt fur Migration und Fluchtlinge, pp. 123-149.

Meer, N. & Modood, T., 2009. The Multicultural State We're In: Muslims, 'Multiculture' and the 'Civic Re-balancing' of British Multiculturalism. *Political Studies*, 57(3), 473-497.

Modood, T., 2009. Ethnicity and Religion. In M. Flinders et al., eds. *The Oxford Handbook of British Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Modood, T., 2005. *Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Morey, P. & Yaqin, A., 2010. Muslims in the Frame. *Interventions*, 12(2), 145-156.

Muslim News, 2010. Muslim MPs Double. *The Muslim News*. Available at: http://www.muslimnews.co.uk/index/press.php?pr=273 [Accessed August 19, 2010].

Newman, J. ed., 2005. *Remaking Governance: Peoples, Politics And the Public Sphere*, Bristol: Policy Press.

Parekh, B., 2000. *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain*, London: Runnymede Trust.

Rhodes, R.A.W., 1996. The New Governance: Governing without Government. *Political Studies*, 44(3), 652-667.

Rose, N. & Miller, P., 2008. *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Sales, R., 2005. Secure Borders, Safe Haven: A Contradiction in Terms? *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(3), 445-462.

Stoker, G., 1998. Governance as Theory: Five Propositions. *International Social Science Journal*, 50(155), 17–28.

Taylor, M., 2007. Community Participation in the Real World: Opportunities and Pitfalls in New Governance Spaces. *Urban Studies*, 44(2), 297-317.

Thomas, P., 2010. Failed and Friendless: The UK's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' Programme. *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 12, 442-458.

Weller, P., 2009a. *A Mirror For Our Times: 'The Rushdie Affair' and the Future of Multiculturalism*, London: Continuum.

Weller, P., 2009b. How Participation Changes Things: 'Inter-faith', 'Multi-faith' and a New Public Imaginary. In A. Dinham, R. Furbey, & V. Lowndes, eds. *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices*. Bristol: Policy Press.

[*] The Muslim Contact Unit (MCU) is a branch of the London Metropolitan Police founded soon after September 11, 2001 that built on partnerships developed since the early 1990s. The Unit partners with mosques to identify and dissuade potential Al-Qaeda recruits. It is well known for its willingness to work with a wide spectrum of mosques, including Salafi and Islamist ones, rather than invoking a strict eligibility criterion for partnership. The Digital Disruption project is run in Tower Hamlets by Bold Creative, a media organisation. Bangladeshi young men are taught about the power of propaganda, and then create their own propaganda and anti-propaganda videos. The purpose of the project is to equip young men with tools to critically engage with propaganda messages on their own terms – whether these are messages of violent extremism, market consumerism, or Far-Right racism.