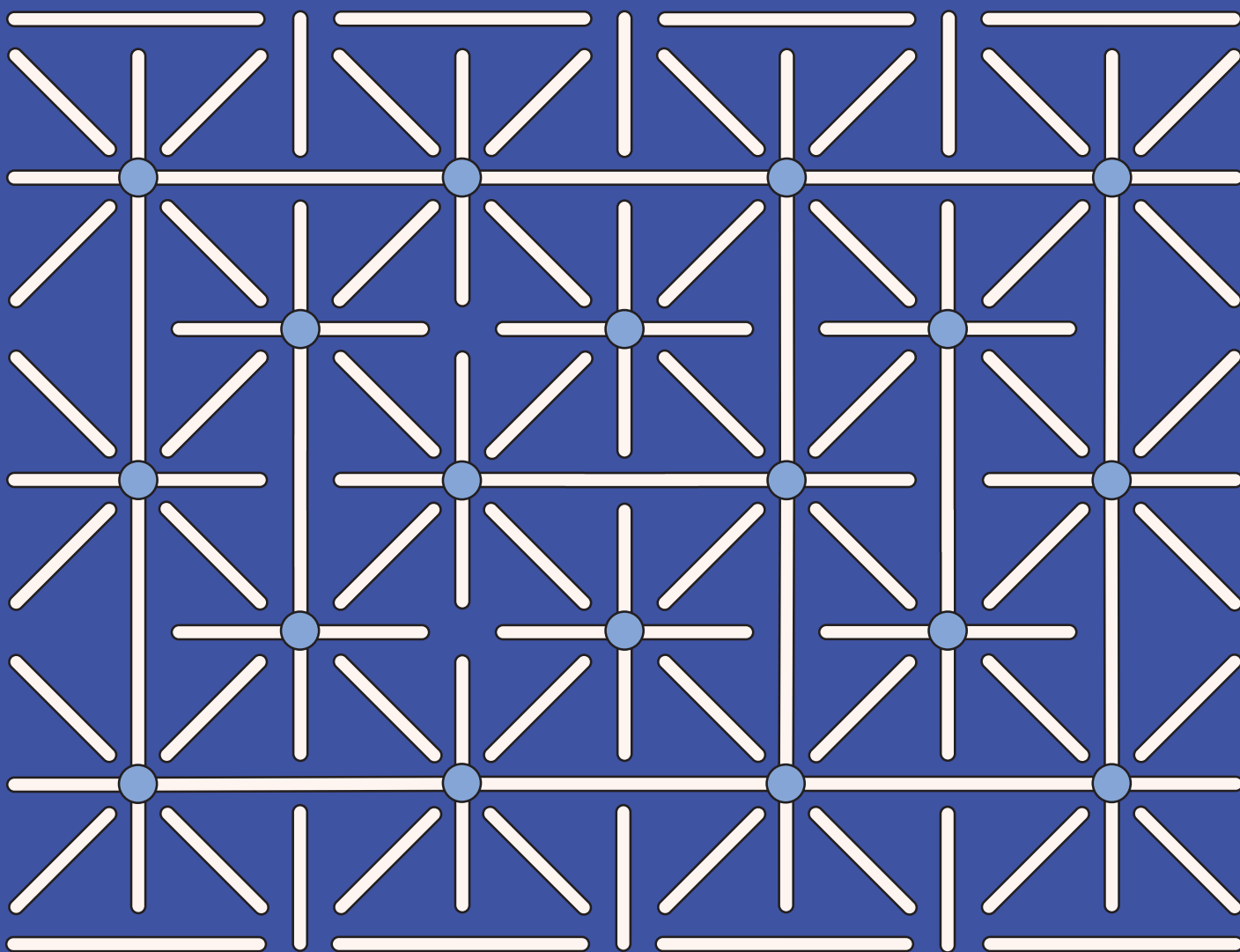


# Better Together

# 2026

## Understanding the 2022 Violence in Leicester



A report by the Independent Commission  
of Inquiry into the 2022 Leicester violence

**SOAS**  
University of London

**LSE**  
THE LONDON SCHOOL  
OF ECONOMICS AND  
POLITICAL SCIENCE

the  
**Monitoring  
Group**

CHAIR OF INQUIRY · Professor Juan E Méndez

PANEL · Neelim Sultan, Dr Subir Sinha, Lisa Magarrell,  
Suresh Grover, Professor Chetan Bhatt

LEICESTER ADVISORY GROUP AND ADVISERS ·  
Leesa Naidu, Naim Razak, Umesh Patel, Kirk Master

REPORT AUTHORS · Chetan Bhatt, Vedika Puri,  
Syed Fahad Kamal, S. Patel, Subir Sinha,  
Sagar Abraham-Gonsalves, Suresh Grover,  
Lisa Magarrell, Juan E Méndez, Neelim Sultan

DESIGN · Andy King

The Inquiry panel members are solely responsible for  
the content and recommendations of this report.

Publication date: 23 February 2026

Published by: School of Oriental and African Studies,  
London.

ISBN: 978-1-916762-03-9

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25501/soas.00822763>

## Understanding the 2022 Violence in Leicester

A report by the Independent Commission  
of Inquiry into the 2022 Leicester violence

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	6	Political and community figures and the police	64
<b>Recommendations</b>	7	Conclusion	65
The Context	7	Motivations for the march and counter-mobilisation	65
National Government	7	Organisation and planning?	67
Political Parties	8	Hindu nationalism and the 17 September march	68
The City Council	9	Chants during the march	69
Education	10	<b>Chapter 5: Aftermath</b>	72
Misinformation and disinformation	10	Community fears and tensions	73
Religious groups and NGOs	11	Community Responses	75
Social media and related activism	13	The City Council	79
Leicestershire Police	13	Political responses: national and international	81
Transparency and Accountability	13	<b>Part 2 – The Wider Context</b>	84
Community Concerns and Police Response	14	<b>Chapter 6: Background Factors</b>	86
Intelligence and Early Warning Systems	14	Demographic changes and social integration	87
Training and Community Engagement	14	Socioeconomic Disadvantage	88
Crisis Management and Communication	14	Housing and Overcrowding	89
Operational Response	14	Antisocial behaviour and community tensions	90
Police and Crime Commissioner	14	Local Confusion about Hindutva and Hinduism	92
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b>	16	Territorialism	94
Purpose of the Inquiry	17	Racial and Religious Hatred	96
Origins of this Inquiry	18	Communal Separation	97
Guiding frameworks	18	Ideologies and prejudices	98
Communalism	20	External Influences and International Conflicts	100
Ethical Issues	20	Conclusion	101
The Report	22	<b>Chapter 7: The City Council and Local</b>	102
Terms used	22	Multicultural Leicester	103
<b>Part 1 – What Happened in 2022?</b>	24	Social cohesion	104
<b>Chapter 2: Attack and Cricket Match, May to August 2022</b>	27	Tensions in Leicester’s approaches	104
Attack on 22 May 2022	27	The City Council and National Austerity	107
Escalation in August	29	Young people	108
India – Pakistan Cricket Match, 28 August	30	Newer communities and integration	111
Allegations of religious slurs	33	Political Parties and Communalism	112
Impact on Residents	36	Councillors and allegations of bias	115
Conclusion	37	Perceptions of differential resources and services	116
<b>Chapter 3: Communal Violence in early September</b>	38	Conclusion	117
4–5 September	39	<b>Chapter 8: Policing</b>	118
Meetings outside Jame’ Masjid	40	Hate crime	119
Attack in Cottesmore Road on 5 September	42	Freedom of Expression	120
Impact on residents	44	Freedom of Assembly	120
Conclusion	47	Self-defence	120
<b>Chapter 4: The Events of 17–18 September</b>	48	Car convoys, flags and slogans	121
17 September	49	Operational Models for Public Disorder	121
Route and events	51	The post-cricket match violence	121
Returning to Belgrave	54	Police responses to the May and early September attacks	121
Incidents in the afternoon and evening	55		
Shiv Sagar restaurant incident	57		
Belgrave Road, evening and night	58		
The Shivalaya Mandir incident	61		
Night and dispersal	64		

Policing during the 5–7 September events	123	<b>References</b>	187
Policing on 17 September	124	<b>List of Figures and Tables</b>	199
Arrests and Convictions	126	Figures	200
Conclusion	127	Tables	201
<b>Chapter 9: Social Media and the Leicester</b>	128	<b>Appendices</b>	202
Communal misinformation	129	<i>Appendix 1: Methods of Research and Working</i>	203
False stories and rumour cascades	129	This Inquiry's Work	203
The Hindutva narrative: 'Hindus Under Attack'	132	Other reviews and opposition	203
Political Islamist Disinformation	137	Research Design	204
Themes in social media polarisation	138	Primary Research	205
Internationalisation	138	Interviews	205
Communal polarisation	139	Interview participants	205
Disinformation and misinformation	140	Focus Groups	207
Ambitious influencers	140	Online survey	207
Conclusion	141	Public Hearing	207
<b>Chapter 10: Hindutva and the Leicester Events</b>	142	Secondary Research	207
Hindutva then and now	143	Documentary Analysis	207
'Hindus under siege'	144	Site Visits and Observation Research	207
Slogans and iconography	145	Data Analysis	208
Hindutva supporters in Leicester	146	Research Ethics	208
Hindutva polarisation and division: the role of Insight UK	148	Naming individuals and groups	209
Insight UK and the Leicester Events	151	Obstacles and limitations	210
Insight UK and this Inquiry	156	Conclusion	211
The amplification of Hindutva communalism	158	<i>Appendix 2: The Commission of Inquiry Panel and Team</i>	212
Wider Hindutva influences in Leicester	159	Inquiry Panel	212
Radical and militant preachers	159	Project and Research Team	212
Ayodhya temple inauguration events	161	Leicester Advisory Group	213
Grassroots youth Hindutva	163	<i>Appendix 3: Terms of Reference</i>	214
Conclusion	165	<i>Appendix 4: Religious Peace Statement</i>	216
<b>Chapter 11: Leicester and its People</b>	166	<i>Appendix 5: Women's Peace Statement</i>	216
Leicester's people	168	<i>Appendix 6: Communications with the City Mayor</i>	217
Ethnicity and Superdiversity	172		
Religion in Leicester	172		
Looking Deeper at Religion	175		
Ethnicity, Religion and Residential Segregation	177		
Leicester's Daman and Diu community	182		
Conclusion	183		
<b>Chapter 12: Conclusion</b>	184		

## Acknowledgements

We want to thank the many people of Leicester for kindly and generously sharing their insights, knowledge and experiences with us.

For their considerable assistance, advice and support, we would like to thank Vedika Puri, Syed Fahad Kamal, S. Patel, Sagar Abraham-Gonsalves, Leesa Naidu, Kirk Master, Naim Razak, Umesh Patel and Jagdish Patel.

We want to thank Open Society Foundations for supporting this project, colleagues at The Monitoring Group, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the London School of Economics and Political Science.

## Recommendations

One of the key objectives of the Inquiry was to make recommendations on local, national and community-based strategies to prevent the kind of hostility and violence seen in 2022. We derived our recommendations from our findings and analysis, and by asking all respondents, whether in interviews, meetings and focus groups or through the survey, what changes they would like to see that they think will help prevent violence and aid positive and strong relations between communities. During the violence and since, many residents and professionals worked tirelessly to prevent the escalation of violence and foster peace. We see our recommendations as helping to support their aims towards community reconciliation and conviviality.

### The Context

The recommendations are made in a challenging and volatile political context. There is currently a hostile political and policy environment for migrants and for Muslim communities. Far-right political viewpoints and parties are resurgent today with a scale and reach not seen in the UK since the 1970s. Many views previously considered to be far-right and even neo-Nazi are now common in the political mainstream. The targeting of and violent attacks on migrant and refugee hostels is now a regular feature of far-right mobilisation in the UK. The local impact of international events, including events in South Asia, constitutes another context.

Furthermore, the recommendations are made in an environment dominated by the impact of a decade or more of austerity, as well as subsequent crises in public sector finance affecting Leicester City Council. The combined effects of these areas mean that any recommendations for better approaches to community relations, antiracism, and integration are emerging in an unfriendly environment with limited resources.

Despite this, the violence in Leicester demonstrates the need for new, innovative, nationally-resourced and locally-accountable approaches to the question of how people in towns and cities in the UK can live together in congenial relations in strong, resilient, united communities during a period where multiple actors, both national and international, are seeking to divide and fragment communities, deliberately generate antagonisms, and spread inflammatory and polarising disinformation that will have consequences for many years, if not decades. From this perspective, the issue isn't of 'Hindu-Muslim conflict among South Asians' but how residents of British towns and cities can live peacefully and build convivial relations amidst many polarising forces.

## National Government

Years of austerity and further cuts to local authorities, schools, and welfare are tearing at the fabric of public life and deepening poverty, inequality and mistrust. The UK Government must reverse this course and invest in rebuilding communities, not in facilitating their dismantling. We urge the Government to invest in public services and alleviate poverty among affected people, communities and regions across the UK. We recommend:

- *Targeted funding for Leicester's cohesion and renewal.* Ring-fenced investment in community regeneration, public housing, education, youth services, and voluntary groups, including funding for community cohesion, integration and conflict prevention work.
- *Accountable, innovative policing.* Fund Leicestershire police services and the Police and Crime Commissioner to create non-coercive, community-led policing schemes focused on mediation, conflict resolution, anti-discrimination and anti-communalism<sup>1</sup>. Fund the development of new training programmes for the police services on communalism, religious conflict and new forms of anti-immigrant far-right mobilisation. Support the monitoring of and rapid responses to fast online mobilisation and incitement to violence in the event of vigilante-style actions in communities.
- *Digital literacy.* National investment in programmes to improve digital literacy and build capacity among people and communities, especially young people, to assess communications for disinformation, misinformation, polarisation, fear speech and incitement to violence. Support partnerships between government, civil society, and social media and communications platforms to improve local responses to disinformation.
- *Political will to confront Hindutva extremism.* Determined attention to recognising radical and militant Hindutva (Hindu nationalism, Hindu supremacism) as a form of 'extremism', like militant political Islamism and far-right white nationalism, that is an important threat to community unity and positive community relations. Hindutva ideology meets the criteria in the UK Government's 2024 definition of extremism, including Hindutva activities in the UK to 'radicalise, indoctrinate and recruit others to an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance', and in Hindutva attempts to glorify or excuse violence and terror in India against minorities and minority institutions.<sup>2</sup>
- *Independent public inquiry into extremism.* Hold a public inquiry into ethnonationalist, religious and racist violence to better inform the public and public authorities about effectively countering threats and acts of violence, while avoiding the stigmatisation of lawful religious and political thought and ideas. Such an inquiry should include Hindutva-related incidents, as well as those by other groups.

- *Invest in education for convivial coexistence.* Support resources for local education authorities and schools to initiate programmes, within an antiracist framework, that explore personal and educational development in the context of diverse communities. This includes programmes about communicating across ‘differences’, disagreeing, agreeing and listening well, identifying common experiences, developing skills in mediating disputes, analysing arguments, and identifying disinformation, factual lies and fear speech. It can include secular supplementary and youth education that brings young people together, outside of any identity-framing, as individuals with common purposes.
- *Prioritise jobs, homes and hope for young people.* Prioritise investment in employment programmes for young people, affordable housing, and community regeneration schemes that target areas of high socio-economic deprivation in Leicester.
- *Focused interfaith funding.* In religious and interfaith support, differentiate – in a fine-grained, informed way – between religious activities that encourage common civic participation and those that distance and separate people based on identity or perceived supremacy.

## Political Parties

National and local political parties have a fundamental role in promoting responsible, trustworthy political engagement that reduces communal antagonism and tension. However, they have often done the opposite and instead exacerbated communal and religious divisions, including religious hostility. We recommend that all political parties, at national and local levels, should:

- *Work ethically.* Agree on a code of ethical conduct that rejects religious, sectarian and inflammatory rhetoric, fear speech, and appeals that target or stereotype any groups protected by the 2010 Equality Act, even if implicitly.
- *Champion Leicester’s shared identity.* Promote common and shared experiences and identities and foster respectful communications and dialogue across communities.
- *Condemn divisive campaigning.* Publicly condemn divisive religious and communal appeals, materials, and electioneering, including appeals based on communalising international issues to gain support from religious groups and communities.
- *Reject sectarian alliances.* Refuse to work with political outfits that are based on communal identities and refuse divisive appeals to specific groups. Encourage appeals to all constituents as members of a civic community, identify commonalities and work to bring people together.
- *Disown communalism wherever it comes from.* Quickly reject any speeches, statements or campaigns, from whichever party, that exploit communal, religious, ethnic or racial tensions, hatred, distrust and division.
- *Reflect real diversity.* Promote candidates who reflect Leicester’s diversity, not only in ethnic and religious terms, but also in terms of sex, socioeconomic status, and diverse viewpoints and political positions.
- *Focus on shared challenges.* Promote policies that address common challenges, including inequality and socioeconomic disadvantage, rather than identity-based divisions.
- *Invest in political learning.* Through non-ideological, academically informed training, gain an understanding of the nature of communalism and religious, ethnic and caste-based supremacist and sectarian political tendencies, their history in South Asia, and their representatives in the UK.
- *Respect the dignity of every voter.* Treat all voters democratically and with the dignity that democracy confers on them as individuals with their own views. Avoid treating them as units in a religious or communal voting bloc to be exploited for electoral reasons. Actively work to increase voter participation by appealing to communities, individuals and households.
- *Confront divisive politics.* Engage regularly with constituents, community groups and party members about the dangers of communal and sectarian politics and work actively to counter inflammatory and divisive politics and fear speech that targets any ethnic or religious group.

### The City Council

The City Council, as the primary civic authority, had key roles to play during the 2022 violence, including taking leadership, reassuring frightened residents, sending clear messages during the violence about unity, community peace, and disinformation, and working in the aftermath, in an integrated way and with a long-term perspective, with residents and community groups to heal the city after an extended period of terrible violence. As a body, the City Council failed in all these respects. Leadership during the 2022 violence was primarily demonstrated by the police services, together with individual councillors and community figures.

Despite its current financial crisis, the City Council is uniquely placed to offer novel, cross-sector approaches to addressing communal and other forms of division and hostility, and to help rebuild trust. The violence in Leicester affected not just South Asian communities but all residents – white, black and South Asian. Many of the issues we cover in the report are significant to residents of Leicester as a whole, not just one or two groups. We recommend that the City Council initiate a bold Social Unity and Community Resilience Strategy that integrates its work with recommendations we provide for other agencies.

- *Create a permanent community unity forum.* As part of its public sector equality duty, the City Council should establish a permanent forum on community unity and resilience, comprising the executive, community figures (religious, non-religious, women's, youth), the police service, and education, youth, and social services. The forum should develop joint initiatives to improve relations across all communities, backed by a dedicated fund. The forum should identify early signs of tensions and take relevant action.
- *Fund secular, cross-community projects.* Implement targeted funding for secular projects across Leicester focused on purposive cross-community interaction, education, and relation building, and working against communalism. Projects should involve women and young people from across communities in an integral way. They should include place-based projects in areas of ongoing tensions. They should consist of projects in partnership with the Police and Crime Commissioner, the police services, and community groups.
- *Rebuild universal youth and community services.* Implement dedicated funding to re-establish non-faith-based universal youth and community services, and to provide resources for education and schools, including supplementary education, youth skills, and sports clubs. As part of this, develop a city-wide youth mentorship and leadership programme.
- *Expand integration programmes,* including English language skills, employment and other rights, employment-related skills, and civic participation for newer communities.
- *Refocus interfaith work from dialogue to collaboration.* Establish new projects that refocus interfaith work towards cross-community participation, engagement, learning and purposive collaboration, in addition to interreligious dialogue.
- *Tackle deprivation head-on* and make socio-economic inequality and housing regeneration city-wide priorities. As a priority, address socio-economic deprivation, unemployment, public sector housing, and community regeneration in Leicester's deprived areas.
- *Involve residents.* In wards with tensions, involve residents in decisions about public safety, crime, and youth services, and about where and for what purpose funding is allocated.
- *Challenge segregation.* Identify and work against policies, processes and physical infrastructure in the city that facilitate segregation and separation.
- *Train for peace and leadership.* Develop certified training programmes on leadership, peer mediation, de-escalation, peacebuilding, communicating and disagreeing well, and related skills for community and religious figures, youth, women and the NGO sector.
- *Establish a multiagency de-escalation team* that includes councillors, diverse religious and secular community figures, women's and youth groups, and police community liaison officers to be deployed during any communal unrest.
- *Build a long-term conflict infrastructure.* Work towards a longer-term multiagency infrastructure to counter serious community conflicts, whether communal, racist or far right. Prioritise project funding that brings people (women, men and families) together across communities.
- *Celebrate the whole city and all its citizens.* Develop city-wide, cross-community cultural, sports, music, and other festivals, alongside those focused on religious events. Encourage spaces for intergroup dialogue.
- *Communicate clearly.* Develop accessible materials that clearly explain procedures for civic engagement, public and religious processions and celebrations, antisocial behaviour, car convoys, traffic and parking regulations, and major festivals. Be transparent about funding allocations and other decisions that affect communities.
- *Study and respond to this report.* The City Council and Mayor should assess the events of 2022, and their roles within the events in light of this report, and provide opportunities for the public to comment on the findings and recommendations.

## Education

- *Civic leadership and peace education.* Develop training resources for schools for civic participation, leadership, peer mediation, peacebuilding, disinformation, and communalism. Develop cross-community leadership and mentoring programmes with youth and sports clubs.
- *Connect schools.* Facilitate cross-school projects and exchanges, especially where they involve largely segregated schools or exchanges between mainstream and faith-based schools. Encourage the use of digital and other narrative methods to explore the complexities, diversity and commonalities in students' lives. Facilitate student-led anti-hate and peace campaigns, including on TikTok and other media. Consider city-wide peace-based projects across schools. Consider using models already existing in Leicester<sup>3</sup>.
- *Train teachers for hard conversations.* Provide training and support for teachers and those working with young people, within a safeguarding approach, to develop further their skills and knowledge in opening discussions and having difficult conversations, managing peaceful dissent and disagreement, mediating conflicts between students, distinguishing criticism and incitement, facilitating cross-community communication, teaching digital literacy, and identifying disinformation. Provide support for teachers to develop knowledge and skills in addressing religious, racial and political tension, the impacts of international conflicts, and supremacist ideologies. Integrate awareness of communal and religious factors within existing bullying and safeguarding policies.

## Misinformation and disinformation

- We looked at general principles regarding misinformation and disinformation that preserve freedom of expression, while seeking ways to create trusted, reliable, credible, objective, non-sectarian, and fast-acting sources to counter disinformation, incitement, and fear speech. We also considered where such schemes could be sited, given the changing political landscape of local authorities, criticisms of police services, and the many interests of NGOs and religious and community groups.
- *Build a trusted rapid-response counter-disinformation unit as a city-wide effort.* An ideal would be a well-resourced and trusted rapid-response counter-disinformation unit with substantial expertise, including in identifying symbols, images, memes, hashtags, and phrases (in English or otherwise) that show sectarian, communal, or far-right incitement on social media, WhatsApp, Telegram, the web, and elsewhere. These are areas for further discussion and collaboration between academic bodies, community groups, objective citizen journalists and social media experts. The discussions should involve the major social media platforms, as well as officers responsible for content moderation policies and disinformation.
- *Develop a democratic multi-sector misinformation framework.* Relevant agencies, statutory and otherwise, may benefit from exploring models for multi-stakeholder misinformation communication frameworks that address misinformation while avoiding censorship by distributing responsibility across several sectors. For example, such sectors could include the city council, religious and community figures, BBC Leicester and community radio stations, youth and women's groups and universities. The aim is to create trusted channels that can prepare for misinformation, detect and classify rumours, verify and cross check (including against police intelligence and open sources), designate risk, respond rapidly, and review outcomes. No agency has the power to take down lawful communication in this approach.

### Religious groups and NGOs

Religious and community figures play many strong and positive roles in Leicester's communities. They are a highly valuable resource and are uniquely placed to address community tensions and conflict and work towards peace and reconciliation. In our work, we came across powerful examples of religious figures and groups working towards community unity during and after the violence, often despite considerable opposition from some within their communities. Respondents to our survey and many interviewees also often foregrounded the role of religious figures and emphasised their role in long-term reconciliation strategies, including inter-faith dialogue, youth engagement programmes, and educational initiatives to rebuild trust.

Yet, since the 2022 violence, we are not aware of even one meeting across the main religious groups dedicated to working together towards community peace and harmony. At the same time, many actors, local, national and international, are actively seeking to polarise communities and prevent such meetings from taking place. Inter-religious peace within Leicester is the shared responsibility of all its religious groups, all of whom express the values of unity, peace, compassion and justice.

Many of the recommendations below are challenging ones. They require serious, dedicated and long-term attention towards issues that are often ignored or evaded, including facing the denialism among religious and community figures about militant and authoritarian political religion among some groups and organisations in their communities. They involve a change in paradigm about the meaning and purpose of religious institutions in communities and neighbourhoods. They include encouraging many spiritual leaders to step out of providing services solely to worshippers, to engage the communities and neighbourhoods they are in, and to develop an inclusive and open presence within those communities. We recognise that even meeting together as co-religionists to address many of these areas is difficult work, and even harder to work together with those of different religions. We are also aware of reported issues of knowledge and capacity to enable this work. But we think the work is vital for building strong relations among Leicester's communities. It is also critical work during a period of far-right resurgence: divisions between and within South Asian, black and white communities weaken united responses to far-right and authoritarian hatred and violence.

Our recommendations are:

- *Hold a historic meeting in Leicester between local Hindu and Muslim leaders* and set a unique and powerful example, a landmark of what could be achieved if community leaders worked together. With the support of neutral mediators, there should be a series of dedicated meetings with all the prominent Hindu, Daman and Diu, and Muslim religious and community organisations in Leicester, based on a commitment to 'make an enemy of the absence of a common ground'.

The meetings should encourage relevant organisations to participate and include every organisation that wants to, including those that may otherwise be opposed or even hostile to one another. The outcome of the meetings should be nothing more than working towards an agreement on the common ground held by those attending. We contend that there are always common grounds, good-faith actors, and goodwill.

- *Listen to Daman and Diu communities, especially the youth.* There should be dedicated meetings with appropriate mediation and support for the Daman and Diu communities and Daman and Diu youth to articulate their grievances and concerns with the police services, the city council and established Hindu and Muslim religious and community organisations.
- *Publicly reject divisive rhetoric.* Religious and community figures in Leicester should reject divisive statements and appeals, and work, as many already do, to promote unity among the people of Leicester, regardless of their religious or non-religious affiliations, to foster trust and peace and counter communalism and polarisation.
- *Condemn all violence without exception.* We recommend that religious figures regularly publicly reject, as many already do, the use of religion to legitimise the denigration of or hostility or violence towards other groups and instead harness the resources of religion to build peaceful relations and trust across communities, including through public statements, sermons to congregations, interfaith initiatives, and regular joint statements by religious figures. It is vital that the condemnation of violence, hatred, or injustice is not selective or communal, but applies principled criteria across all groups.
- *Create a training and support forum to challenge communalism and isolate extremists.* We recommend a dedicated forum and city-council-supported training to empower and support religious figures and organisations to develop skills and capacity to challenge divisive, inflammatory, supremacist and related tendencies within Leicester's religious communities.
- *Isolate Hindutva extremism and make it unwelcome.* While Muslim communities have had to address political Islamist and salafi-jihadi militancy in their communities over several decades – a community-led process we encourage being continued – a similar process hasn't begun in Hindu communities. We recommend that Hindu religious and community organisations work steadfastly and patiently to distance their religious, spiritual, devotional and *sampraday* traditions from political Hindutva supremacist ideas and organisations. We recommend that Hindu religious and community figures identify and isolate Hindutva organisations and consistently challenge them, including by using the many spiritual and religious resources of Hinduism, and develop strong and credible national Hindu networks that are opposed to extremism – whether Hindutva, political Islamist or far-right.

## Religious and community figures play many strong and positive roles in Leicester's communities. They are a highly valuable resource and are uniquely placed to address community tensions and conflict and work towards peace and reconciliation.

- *Lead reconciliation.* We encourage religious figures and organisations to set the tone and take leadership in cross-community mediation and reconciliation initiatives, and to emphasise the importance of moral responsibility for the city's wellbeing. This responsibility goes beyond the boundaries of any one religion or community and affects all communities. Religious figures are also well placed to take the lead in jointly advocating against injustice and inequality.
- *Create an active cross-community peace network.* Community and religious organisations are encouraged to develop an identifiable, trusted cross-community peace network that can be mobilised when tensions emerge, can correct misinformation and rumour in the community, and can identify places and issues of tension and concern. This could be extended to an inclusive, cross-community rapid-response group of religious and secular figures and laypersons that would meet whenever tensions are apparent to discuss the situation, correct misinformation, and de-escalate. Existing models in Birmingham and other cities could be applied where relevant.
- *Make interfaith work real, not ritualised.* Faith-based NGOs and charities, whether publicly funded or not, should develop dedicated projects that reach and work across religious communities and aim to develop positive relations across them. They should include regular services, without religious conditions, for any members of the local community in which they are sited. These should be substantive efforts rather than occasional token events (such as occasional welcome events or open days) and should be a regular feature of their work.
- *Empower NGOs to mediate and build peace.* The NGO sector and its existing networks (such as Leicester Council of Faiths, Leicester Race Equality Centre, Voluntary Action Leicester and St Philip's Centre) are well-placed, with support, to develop and coordinate training on cross-community communication, disinformation, communalism and conflict mediation. They are also ideally placed to create community-based first responder activities in situations of community tension or conflict. Voluntary sector organisations are encouraged to create spaces and events for dialogue, truth-telling and listening, in which affected communities can come together to develop solutions.
- *Rebuild everyday togetherness.* We strongly encourage religious and community groups and NGOs to use their creativity and power to rebuild spaces and practices of conviviality across communities, independent of government or local authority initiatives. This could include organic, 'bottom-up' multi-community events, projects, sports teams and related activities. The voluntary and community sector also has a critical role to play in addressing or mitigating problems with the integration of newer communities into established and settled minority communities.

### Social media and related activism

- *Stop spreading unverified and untruthful claims.* We urge local social media ‘influencers’ and activists to avoid posting communal, inflammatory, untrue, or unverified posts about local events and incidents, either carelessly or wilfully, that could cause community tensions, hostility, and violence. Where misinformation is circulated, activists who have spread it should publicly retract it with the same prominence, speed, effort and breadth of circulation as the misinformation they spread.
- *Challenge misinformation, isolate deceivers and extremists.* We recommend ‘influencers’ and activists challenge and call out those who spread disinformation and misinformation, and work to isolate them from influence within the local community.
- *Work with anti-hate campaigns.* We urge social media influencers, especially within the South Asian community, to actively work against communalism and community polarisation in their social media output, ideally in coordination with other influencers or as part of wider strategic antiracist campaigns.
- *Promote anti-communal narratives.* Social media influencers should partner with and amplify initiatives against communalism in Leicester and collaborate with local campaigns against religious hatred, casteism, racism and the far right.
- *Mainstream anti-communalism.* We call on antiracist and antifascist activists in the UK to integrate anti-communalism in their campaigns and activities and make opposition to communalism a key part of their work against the far right.

### Leicestershire Police

The key areas of concern regarding policing that emerged in our report related to the perceived lack of action regarding the May and early September 2022 attacks on individuals, the early September communal violence, the 17 September march and serious disorder in East Leicester, and the aftermath of arrests and subsequent actions, including police actions during religious events in subsequent years. The events of 17 September appeared to catch the police off guard, despite indicators of rising tension in the previous weeks. These events have led to a significant lack of trust towards the police among sections of Daman and Diu, East African Asian Hindu, and South Asian Muslim communities, and especially younger people from those communities. The failure of the police to control the violence when it broke out, and what was perceived as the heavy-handed way in which they responded to the Muslim counter-protestors, as well as Hindu youths, has caused a reported lack of faith in the police. A concern seemed to be that the police were sometimes not present when they needed to be (17 September, and 5-6 September for some residents) but were heavy-handed when they were present. Members of both Hindu and Muslim communities also view the actions of the police as favouring the other community. Our recommendations to Leicestershire police:

#### Transparency and Accountability

- *Disclose investigation outcomes.* Because substantial concern continues to exist around these events, the police need to assure the community around its investigations, and the reasons for its decisions regarding the 22 May and 5 September 2022 attacks on Muslim men, the 5 September attack on a Hindu man and family, the 5-7 September events in which many Hindus and their property were attacked, and the disinformation-based incitement that led to a group surrounding a Hindu family’s home in mid-September. We consider public disclosure of information about the investigations into these incidents a priority. Where progress in investigations may be feasible, the police and prosecuting authorities should follow up on these cases more proactively.

**We urge local social media ‘influencers’ and activists to avoid posting communal, inflammatory, untrue, or unverified posts about local events and incidents, either carelessly or wilfully, that could cause community tensions, hostility, and violence.**

- *Publish detailed hate crime data.* Following serious events, present data on hate crime, hate incidents, arrests, charges, cautions or community resolutions, including by ethnicity and religion where known, as a measure of transparency and accountability.
- *Explain 'no further action' decisions.* 'No further action' decisions by victim and suspect ethnicity and religion, where known, as well as CPS data on sentencing, should also be part of the transparency process. In particular, it will be essential to have available data by ethnicity and religion (where known) in cases, including hate crimes, where the suspect is known and the victim supports further action, but where the police say there is insufficient evidence to prosecute.
- *Strengthen partnerships with affected communities* and NGOs to improve coordination in response to emerging situations. Adapt known models from the College of Policing to areas such as community tensions.
- As part of a sustained strategy of community engagement, *hold regular community safety events* and open dialogue sessions with religious figures and young people from across communities, with those meetings also acting as a focus for discussing shared responsibility to ensure peaceful community relations.
- *Appoint well-trained, proactive community liaison officers* as key points of community contact as part of a long-term community engagement approach.

#### Community Concerns and Police Response

- *Address perceptions of unequal treatment.* There are continuing concerns that require a police response: alleged unfairness in the policing methods deployed against Muslims during the 5-7 September 2022 events; the number of arrests of Muslims on 17 September in comparison with Hindus; perceptions of differential treatment of Muslim gatherings on 5-7 September in contrast with the Hindu march on 17 September; concerns about the alleged unfair treatment of Daman and Diu youths on 17 September; concerns about the lack of police action regarding attacks on Hindu (including Daman and Diu) people and property in early September.

#### Intelligence and Early Warning Systems

- *Establish early warning systems* for rising tensions involving not only established religious and community figures but also younger influencers, youth workers, youth groups, schools, alongside relevant city council officers and community liaison officers.
- *Improve intelligence,* or the way intelligence informs strategic intent, regarding potential public disorder, including the way intelligence is gathered and shared.
- *Improve the tracking of inflammatory content,* disinformation, coordination and gathering in real time. Track online mobilisation in real time. Improvements in intelligence-led policing can help anticipate potential flashpoints and enable more effective, proportionate responses to emerging situations.

#### Training and Community Engagement

- *Train officers on communalism and sectarian dynamics.* Police officers' knowledge and understanding of religious, ethnic and communal conflicts in the South Asian diaspora is low to non-existent in our experience. We think this factor also affects the quality of intelligence, as well as what is or is not considered actionable intelligence. We recommend development and deployment throughout the service of informed, objective, secular and skilled training on communalism, religious hatred and ethnic-nationalist conflicts, alongside training on the far right.

#### Crisis Management and Communication

- *Real-time emergency messaging.* Rapidly counter misinformation and disinformation linked to potential public order issues using real-time community alerting and 'emergency messaging' by trained officers (perhaps working with credible and trained community fact-checkers) on WhatsApp and Telegram channels and relevant local Facebook, X and Instagram accounts. If police services work to develop a channel of information that is consistently up to date and reliable, it may become a go-to source for people following events.
- *Two-way crisis communication strategy.* Develop a two-way communications strategy for 'crisis' situations, including clear and timely messaging and social media management, and coordination with community figures and the City Council.

#### Operational Response

- In situations of likely conflict or tension, ensure a *highly visible but 'low-key' police presence and deploy de-escalation approaches,* moving to more assertive approaches only if the latter fail.
- *Review major operations independently and swiftly.* Initiate rapid and independent reviews of strategic intent and operational priority, other key decisions, police conduct, actionable intelligence and intelligence quality following serious events.

#### Police and Crime Commissioner

The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) currently provides small grants focused on community safety. The PCC already funds small projects working with young people based on diversion activities, sports, knife crime, antisocial behaviour, personal development, healthy relationships and civic engagement, most ultimately aimed at community safety.

We think there is scope to expand this work through a larger fund and longer-term projects focused on positive relations within and across communities, especially among youth from all backgrounds, and coordinated with the City Council, the voluntary sector, and police services. We recommend that the PCC:

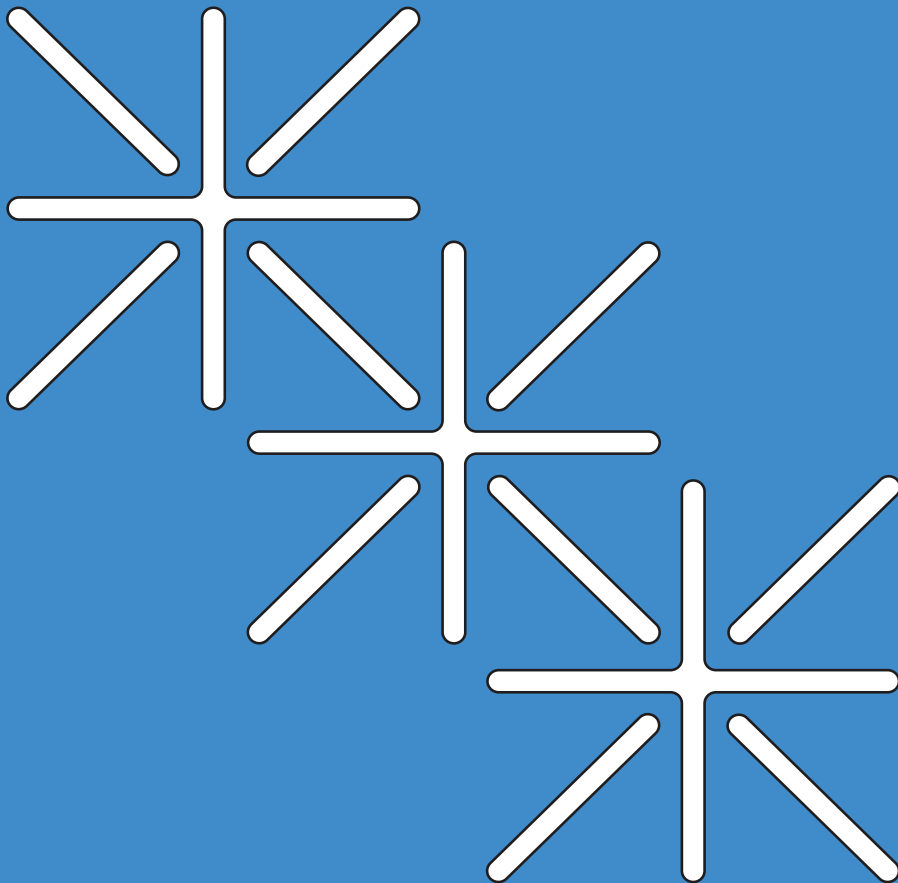
- *Create a Youth and Community Safety Fund* to build community resilience and safety, with funding targeted at larger, longer-term projects

that bring young people together from across communities and areas of Leicester through purposive developmental activities.

- *Establish a Community Cohesion Advisory Board* focused on community cohesion and resilience to advise the PCC.
- *Invest in counter-disinformation initiatives.* Consider developing and funding a strategy to counter disinformation and misinformation.
- *Fund mediation and conflict-management training.* Consider funding mediation training for youth and community workers, religious figures and community activists.

To enhance accountability and transparency, we recommend that the Police and Crime Commissioner establish robust mechanisms through existing police and community meetings to scrutinise police performance in the following areas:

- *Transparency and Accountability.* Ensure that police actions and decisions are transparent, with clear explanations provided for their reasoning and outcomes.
- *Community Concerns and Police Response.* Regularly review community concerns and assess the effectiveness of police responses to concerns.
- *Intelligence and Early Warning Systems.* Evaluate the police's ability to gather and utilise intelligence to anticipate and respond to emerging issues.
- *Training and Community Engagement.* Assess the adequacy of police training and community engagement initiatives, ensuring they align with community needs and expectations.
- *Crisis Management and Communication.* Examine police crisis management procedures, including communication strategies, to ensure an effective response and minimal disruption to communities.
- *Operational Response.* Review the police's operational response to incidents and assess their adherence to policies, procedures, and best practices.



In August and September 2022, Leicester, a city in the East Midlands, UK – a place often seen as a model of good community relations and multicultural harmony – experienced serious, large-scale violence between Hindus and Muslims. The scale and nature of the violence between South Asians were unprecedented in the UK, with the violence threatening to spread to other major cities in Britain. The unrest was initially reported to have been sparked by tensions following an India-Pakistan cricket match in late August 2022. The violence was fuelled by misinformation and polarising content spread on social media. Serious disturbances followed in early September and culminated in a day of violent disorder in east Leicester on 17 September. Major street confrontations between hundreds of youths, serious public disorder, and physical attacks on individuals and property led to significant police presence and many arrests. The violence caused considerable fear and shock among city residents, and that fear has persisted for some people to this day. The international media widely reported the violence, and the disorder had significant international repercussions, including interventions from the governments of India and Pakistan.

Throughout this difficult period, many residents, community and religious figures, women’s networks, voluntary sector services, councillors, youth workers, and others worked hard to bring communities together, both during the confrontations and in the years since the violence. They constitute a reservoir of common sense and commitment to fairness and equality that can be counted upon in the future. They are a valuable, experienced human and moral resource that the city already possesses in its moves towards reconciliation. We see our task, and this report, as helping to enhance their work.

### **Purpose of the Inquiry**

Community-led investigations of key events or periods of violence are often called ‘fact-finding missions’, ‘people’s’ or ‘citizens tribunals’, ‘commissions of inquiry’, or ‘truth commissions’. They have been carried out in varying contexts in Britain and around the world. Such independent commissions are common in human rights and related work.<sup>4</sup> While often based on legislative criteria (such as human rights frameworks), they do not have to be ‘official’ or ‘statutory’ to reach their objectives effectively. Many commissions have operated by choice outside of government bodies and are often initiated and led by NGOs and academics rather than by legislatures. Regardless of their origins, most such commissions have similar purposes: to establish the facts around events or violations that are denied or disputed; to protect, acknowledge, and empower victims and survivors; and to inform policy and promote change in groups, institutions and societies.<sup>5</sup>

This Independent Commission of Inquiry was established in early 2023 to investigate the causes of the violence and disharmony in Leicester in 2022, understand why the events occurred, and consider

what might be done to improve relations in the community and prevent similar violence in Leicester and elsewhere in the UK. The Terms of Reference of this Inquiry emphasised our independence, and they are available in Appendix 2.

As members of this Inquiry, we sought to examine objectively the circumstances surrounding the disturbances of August and September 2022 and their aftermath. Our work aimed to understand the:

- Timeline of the events before, during and after the August-September 2022 disturbances
- Background and context of the events
- Key drivers of violence and disharmony
- Response of the city council, the police and other statutory agencies before, during and after the events
- Role of communities, community groups, individuals, social media and other agents in these events, including their role in inciting polarisation and violence in the city, and their role in preventing violence and working towards community peace

Through our research, we wanted to hear from people affected by the violence and gather information from statutory, voluntary, and other agencies. We sought to make recommendations about

appropriate mechanisms for future prevention for statutory authorities, community groups and residents of Leicester.

### Origins of this Inquiry

The patterns of violence and mistrust in Leicester included incidents that had occurred before August and September 2022, including a serious group attack on a Muslim individual in May 2022. The national anti-racist and civil rights organisation, The Monitoring Group (TMG) had been contacted regarding that incident and had been meeting with some community groups since May 2022. Following the violence on 17 September, TMG met with a variety of community groups over an extended period. On 30 September 2022, at a meeting of groups and individuals held at the Highfields Centre, groups proposed to the TMG that an independent inquiry take place into the violence that had occurred. Local groups strongly expressed, in the spirit of community reconciliation, the need to understand why the violence occurred and what steps could be taken to prevent it in the future. The idea was to initiate an independent and objective investigation of the events and their root causes, and to develop approaches that might help prevent a recurrence of violence.

Subsequent meetings with academics at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) solidified the idea. The international human rights philanthropy The Open Society Foundations (OSF) along with other funders were approached for funding support. The Independent Commission of Inquiry ('the Inquiry') was established through this process, and the panel of Inquiry subsequently developed its Terms of Reference.

- *Work and panel:* the Inquiry panel, chaired by Professor Juan Méndez, was selected to reflect the following areas of legal and other expertise and experience that we thought were important: international and domestic human rights, including in situations of conflict, division, peace-building, truth and reconciliation; communities in conflict and strategies for community development; South Asia and the South Asian diaspora in the UK; anti-racism; political religion; religious hatred; anti-discrimination; equality; and policing, public order and hate crimes. The chair and other panel members provided additional international human rights perspectives, forged from experiences across various parts of the world related to conflicts, inequality, and deep divisions among groups. Details of the panel, its mandate and its work are available in Appendices 1-3.
- *Beyond the panel:* we relied on the extensive local knowledge of individuals with a long history in Leicester who could advise the panel and help build trust in the process and within the community more generally. We recruited a Leicester-based Advisory Group to aid our outreach and contextualise our research within the realities of Leicester's communities. We ap-

pointed a community development worker in Leicester to undertake outreach and community engagement across Leicester's communities. An academic team comprised of a project coordinator and three researchers was appointed and based at SOAS, and the research was jointly managed by two academic principal investigators at SOAS and LSE, both of whom were also panel members. The purpose of the academic team was to undertake qualitative and quantitative research on the violence and its broader social and historical context. The Inquiry panel members are solely responsible for the content and recommendations of this report.

### Guiding frameworks

*Legal frameworks.* Several legal frameworks informed our Inquiry. Most relevant to our investigation are:

- Human rights (1998 Human Rights Act, the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights and subsequent protocols), and in particular:
  - The right to liberty and security
  - The right to a fair trial
  - Freedom of thought, conscience and religion
  - Freedom of expression
  - Freedom of assembly and association
  - The right to an effective national remedy for breach of these rights
  - The prohibition of discrimination in the protection of these rights
- Equality and anti-discrimination (2010 Equality Act)
- Hate crime (1988 Crime and Disorder Act and 2020 Sentencing Act)
- We also considered legislation and procedures relevant to policing, including aspects of the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act, the 1986 Public Order Act, the 2014 Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, the 2014 Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, the 1998 Malicious Communications Act 1988, and procedures typically used for large scale disorder, including the College of Policing Public Order Public Safety guidance for the management of disorder.<sup>6</sup>

Human rights and equality standards not only serve to limit the power of public authorities so that they may not act in violation of people's human rights; they also impose a positive duty on public authorities to act to prevent rights violations, even when those involve the actions of private citizens and organisations. Public authorities are also required to promote accountability and justice in the event of human rights abuses and violations. It is in this context of limitations and duties that the Inquiry raised essential questions about official actions and inactions in Leicester and their impact on social unity, violence and fear.

Some of the rights above can be limited by public authorities to protect public order and safety, as well as the rights of other individuals. For example, under Article 9 of the Human Rights Act, while beliefs of faith are protected almost without limit, actions

**Our findings clearly show that no single community or group is ‘to blame’ for the violence, distrust, and tensions that erupted in 2022. However, small groups of people and organisations from across several communities in Leicester were often key actors in the violence and communal polarisation, and various national and international actors fueled the latter.**

can be subject to some limitation ‘in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others’.<sup>7</sup> Public authorities have some leeway to restrict rights to protest or publicly act out one’s religious beliefs. Similar limitations on rights are also applicable to the freedom of expression (Art. 10), as well as the freedom of assembly and association (Art. 11). Where there is a restriction on (qualified) rights, the public authority must show that the restriction is lawful, has a legitimate aim, and is proportionate. Even when authorities have this power to regulate some freedoms, the prohibition of discrimination (Art. 14) states that the enjoyment of rights and freedoms should be ‘secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth or other status’.<sup>8</sup>

The 2010 Equality Act is intended to protect people against discrimination, harassment or victimisation based on protected characteristics, whether in their employment or their use of public and private services. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Act also outlines the public sector equality duty. The duty is a legal requirement for public authorities and any organisations carrying out public functions. Public authorities have a duty to ‘put an end to unlawful behaviour banned by the Equality Act 2010, including discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equal opportunities between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who have a protected characteristic and those who do not’.<sup>9</sup> The public sector equality duty would apply, for example, in local authority or police service policies, local authority grant-making, and many other public roles and functions.<sup>10</sup> All of these considerations informed our findings and recommendations.

**Facts, opinions and objectivity.** Ours was not a government-initiated inquiry and had no privileged access to official sources and confidential infor-

mation. We were not able to compel testimony from any witnesses or public officials. Instead, we sought to obtain information voluntarily from as many diverse sources with firsthand knowledge as possible. We also relied on interviews, a survey, and many secondary sources to gather detailed information and confirm firsthand reports. We have aimed to apply rigorous academic and fact-finding standards appropriate to a serious and independent investigation.

We have made judgments about facts, events, and people throughout this report using academic and legally informed standards. Generally, when we say something occurred, we mean we have convincing evidence that it did, either from credible witness statements, reliable secondary sources, or corroboration from other sources. This standard is not the same as, say, a criminal justice standard of ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’. We also made judgments based on what we thought a reasonable person would believe, or judgments that, on the balance of probabilities, something was ‘more likely true than not’.

**Academic frameworks.** In addition to legal frameworks, we also used several academic approaches to the areas we considered. In addition to the qualitative, quantitative and social media methods detailed in Appendix 1: Methods of Research and Working, we used historical, sociological and interdisciplinary academic approaches to guide our understanding and analysis of the background of the ideas and ideologies we investigated. We used common academic standards to make claims about political, ideological or religious phenomena. Our views were based on our academic assessment, drawing on our collective knowledge and the consensus from the academic literature and experts in the relevant areas. For example, we considered large volumes of social media posts. While we make empirical claims of the kind that a message is disinformation, we also draw on theoretical frameworks about misinformation and disinformation to make broader claims about patterns and styles of disinformation. We also analysed political ideologies, including Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) and political Islamism, based

on sociological and political science literature in these areas.

### Communalism

A key idea that informs this report is the concept of 'communalism'. While an unfamiliar term in the UK, in South Asia, it carries the same kind of weight as racism might in the UK and is of similar importance. The low level of understanding of communalism in the UK has had consequences for how the Leicester events were viewed, addressed and reported. Below, we distinguish between group identity and communalism.

**Identity.** Organising on the grounds of identity is not contrary to democratic values, human rights and equality standards. It can even be seen as a positive outcome of multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. In the Leicester context, identity can mean several things:

- Allegiance and loyalty to one's religious or ethnic group, whether alongside or in contrast to the broader civil society in which all groups live
- Creating organisations or organising based on religious, ethnic or caste identity
- Engaging in political activities that are based on religious, ethnic or caste group identity, including lobbying and advocating for what are seen as the interests of a religious, ethnic or caste group

#### Communalism

- While group identity is not the same as communalism, it can sometimes lead to it. By 'communalism', we mean the following:

#### Communal superiority or supremacy

- Belief in the intrinsic superiority, including moral or social superiority, of one's religious, ethnic or caste group, in comparison with other groups that are considered intrinsically inferior and incompatible. Sometimes, these beliefs take the form of a systematic political ideology.

#### Communal hatred

- Prejudice, hatred (including inciting religious hatred), discrimination or violence towards mem-

bers, or imputed members, of other religious, ethnic or caste groups *because* they are members or believed to be members of those groups.

#### Communal fallacy

- The belief that if an individual belongs to a particular religious, ethnic or national group, they will possess antagonistic or hostile views towards others from another group, or they will have specific political beliefs because of their membership of that group.

#### International diaspora communalism

- Organising politically based on religion, ethnicity or caste in one nation, typically as members of a diaspora, by affiliation with a group, movement, state or government in another country that may also be organised based on religion (including religious nationalism) or ethnicity (including ethnonationalism).

Communalism can have negative effects on rights, equality, civic respect, and democratic participation. All the dimensions of identity and of communalism outlined above were relevant to the 2022 violence in Leicester.

### Ethical Issues

Because communalism was a central feature of the 2022 violence, including how the violence was later perceived and narrated by different groups, even using the terms 'Hindu' and 'Muslim', phrases like 'Hindu-Muslim violence', or referring to 'Hindu communities' or 'Muslim communities' is to fall into the logic of communal division that was central to the violence in the first place. Communal thinking can also paint all members of a community with one brush, whereas all communities are diverse in beliefs, views, values and people. Where possible in the report, we decided to avoid references to individuals' religious backgrounds or identities unless they were relevant to the issue being discussed.

A central ethical issue we faced in preparing this report was whether to name individuals, organisations and communities in respect to several areas, and this is discussed fully in Research Ethics.

**A key idea that informs this report is the concept of 'communalism'. While an unfamiliar term in the UK, in South Asia, it carries the same kind of weight as racism might in the UK and is of similar importance. The low level of understanding of communalism in the UK has had consequences for how the Leicester events were viewed, addressed and reported.**

Our concern was about the safety of individuals and organisations, and potential repercussions for them, given the sometimes volatile environment in Leicester.

We discuss the Daman and Diu communities at various points in the report. This is because some of its members were important actors in the events. We, however, want to emphasise in the strongest terms that this is not an issue of apportioning blame to any single group or community – members of Muslim and Hindu communities were involved in the violence that occurred. No single group or community should be seen as responsible. We were concerned about reinforcing unfair assumptions about the Daman and Diu communities, which were already suffering from various socio-economic disadvantages and discrimination (see Leicester's Daman and Diu community).

We are highly attuned to the difficulties faced by the Daman and Diu communities as recent migrants encountering hostility, racist violence, economic deprivation, and caste prejudices. Members of the Daman and Diu communities have faced significant hyper-exploitation and racist and caste-based prejudice and discrimination. They are especially vulnerable across a range of socio-economic areas and face considerable marginalisation, including from existing South Asian communities, both Hindu and Muslim. At the same time, we promised the communities in Leicester that we would provide the most accurate description and analysis we could of the events that occurred. Balancing issues of truth and accuracy with potential ethical and political consequences has not been easy.

- We decided to anonymise every interview and meeting, including testimonies from our public hearing. We endeavoured to avoid using quotations that could potentially identify individuals or organisations. We were especially concerned about naming individuals living in Leicester, even if they were significant actors in the events, because of potential repercussions upon them, their families or friends. We were similarly concerned about drawing attention to individuals already facing scrutiny. We have the full interviews and testimonies, as well as all images, videos and social media used in the report, on file and stored securely.
- Where people are quoted, they are usually referenced with an anonymous code that has no meaning and does not refer to the initials of the person's name (for example, 'Interview XAB'). In several cases, we do not reference quotations with an interview code because the person might be identified either by their quotation or by comparing all their quotations across the report.
- We anonymised many references to social media accounts where we believed there could be a risk of local repercussions. This included individuals and accounts responsible for spreading disinformation, inciting hatred, or inciting violence, even if those individuals and accounts had been named publicly elsewhere.

## The Report

The 2022 events and their background are complex and multifaceted. Our findings clearly show that no single community or group is 'to blame' for the violence, distrust, and tensions that erupted in 2022. However, small groups of people and organisations from across several communities in Leicester were often key actors in the violence and communal polarisation, and various national and international actors fueled the latter.

The report is also published in a context where there are serious concerns about polarisation within towns and communities across the UK, especially because of the influence of the far right and its campaigns against migrants and asylum seekers. Many of the themes discussed in this report – tensions and violence within communities, disinformation and the power of social media, the influence of external actors, the creation of divisive and hostile narratives against other groups, and the impact of austerity, funding cuts and poverty – also apply more widely. Additionally, disinformation about our Inquiry has been highly motivated and sustained. Further disinformation will inevitably accompany this report, including about its findings, content, methodology and authors.

Because of the complex political context in which this report emerges and the considerable disinformation surrounding the topics it covers, we urge readers of this (or any report on the Leicester violence) to read the material critically and to consult primary sources when in doubt. We worked diligently to examine our own thinking. We hope readers find in this report the objectivity to help them sort out facts, disinformation, and self-interested narratives. We encourage readers to read the entire report, including the background to the violence and the analyses in Part 2 – The Wider Context.

We hope that, through our findings, community and religious groups can reflect on their work and ideas about peaceful religion and politics within Leicester's communities. The report will serve the community if it helps inform positive action to build strong relations across communities, and we hope community groups use it for that purpose. We welcome informed criticism and commentary about the report, its findings, methods, and any gaps or errors.

Though this is a long report, the volume of research undertaken greatly exceeded what could be contained in a report like this, so further supplementary information in the form of academic publications will be produced in due course.

The report is divided into three parts, each with its own chapters.

**Part 1** covers what we believe occurred in 2022. It also discusses the immediate aftermath of the events.

**Part 2** contains our analysis of several themes we believe are important for understanding the 2022 violence, its context and background, and the underlying dynamics that made the violence more likely. We discuss and analyse:

- Background factors that contributed to community tensions, including territorialism and new migration

- The role and response of the city council, including its models of multiculturalism and community cohesion
- The response of the police
- The significance of social media in the events
- Hindu nationalism and the 2022 events
- Leicester's people, including detailed analyses of ethnicity and religion

Our recommendations are based on findings from the above parts of the report. At the end of Part 2, we also provide some general conclusions.

Appendices discuss in detail our research methods and working practices during the Inquiry, provide additional detail about the Inquiry panel and mandate, and include supplementary information that may be of interest to some readers.

## Terms used

- The terms **Asian** and **South Asian** are used interchangeably to refer to people originating from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and a few other countries in the Indian subcontinent. Because the report is mainly concerned with South Asian Hindu and Muslim communities that are of Indian origin, we also use the terms **Indian** and **Indian diaspora**.
- **Political Islamism** is used to refer to states, groups and movements that wish to create a non-democratic state, government and society based on what they believe to be religious law, the latter seen to be superior to secular law; or groups who wish to organise and order civil society for believers and non-believers based on what they believe to be religious law. Political Islamism is different from and should not be confused with the traditions that comprise the religion of Islam. The dominant political Islamist influences in the UK relate to groups run or influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and the Bangladeshi or Pakistani Jamaati-i Islami. Though they sometimes overlap in terms of individuals, political Islamism is different from salafi-jihadism, the main ideological current that informs violent armed groups like Al Qaeda or Islamic State. Though they often overlap, political Islamism is not the same as what we call 'Muslim politics' or 'Muslim identity politics', by which groups organise within a democratic system to pursue their interests, including defending against stereotypes and prejudices attached to their religion.
- **Hindutva** and **Hindu nationalism** are used interchangeably to refer to a political ideology that emerged in the 1920s in colonial India based on Hindu supremacy. Its goal was to create an exclusive Hindu nation-state (*Hindu rashtra*) in India based on racial and religious ideas. The main, but not the only Hindutva influences relevant to our Inquiry relate to the UK branch of the Indian Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), called the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), and its numerous nationwide branches and affiliated organisations. Hindutva is a militant nationalist ideology and should not be con-

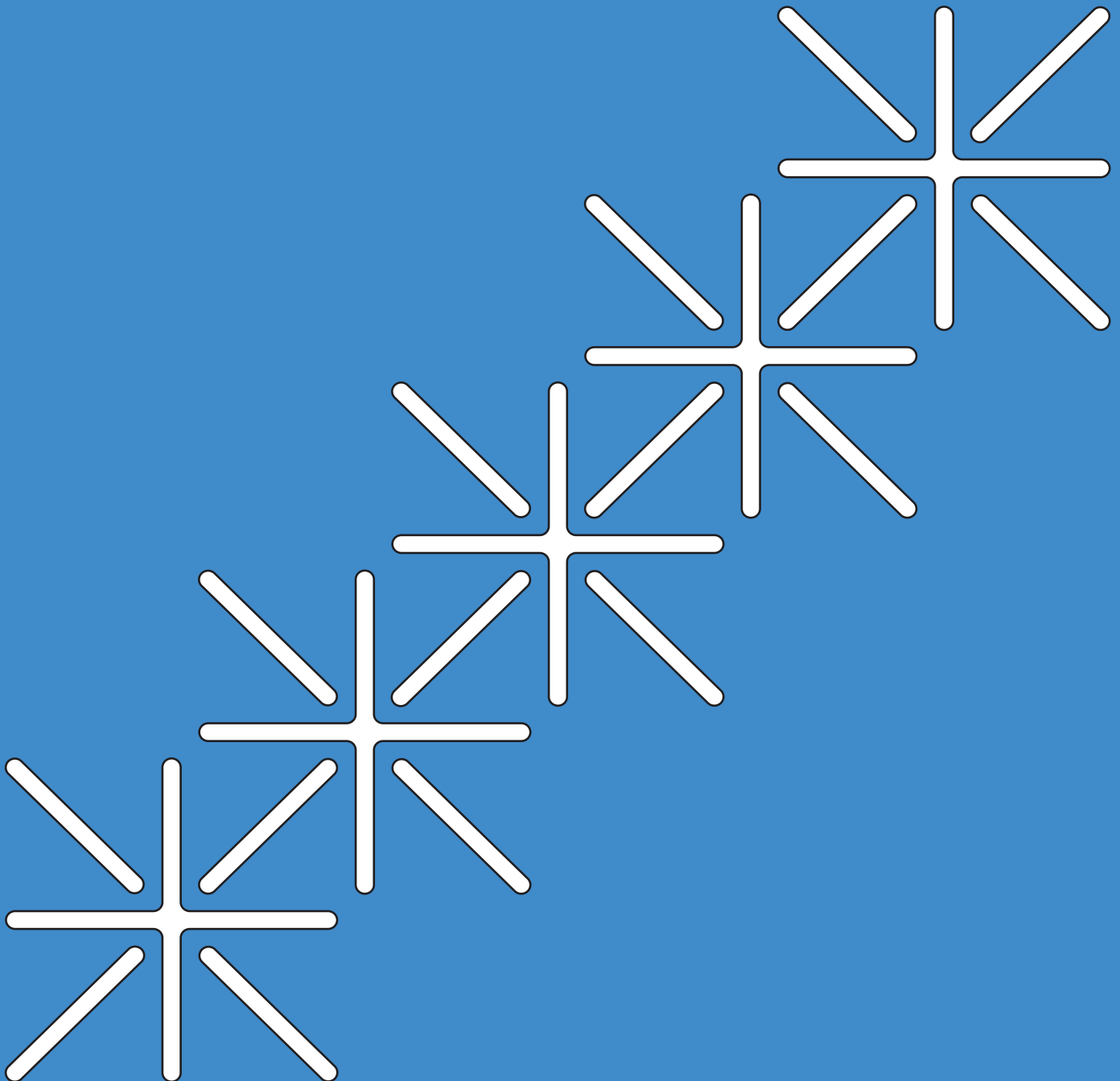
fused with the diverse traditions that make up the religion of Hinduism. While they often overlap, Hindutva is also different from groups organising as Hindus ('Hindu identity politics') to defend against anti-Hindu prejudices or bias.

- By **secular** and **secularism**, we mean an approach, including by the state and public institutions, that is neutral with respect to any religion. It is a framework in which people of all religions or no religion can co-exist peacefully as equals. It does not mean 'anti-religion'.
- **Sampraday** refers to religious sects within Hindu traditions, often those who follow a founder, their lineage, and their scriptural interpretations, creed and rules.
- By **misinformation**, we mean false or misleading information that is spread by someone without that person necessarily intending to deceive, lie or manipulate other people.
- By **disinformation**, we mean the deliberate creation or spreading of false or misleading information by someone who wants to deceive or manipulate people's views and lead them away from the truth. We also refer to **rumour cascades**: on social media, false information is known to spread 'further, faster, and more broadly' (cascade) than corrections of the false information.<sup>11</sup>
- **Fear speech** is speech (such as social media posts) in which a group is framed as threatening and dangerous, and one that will cause great violence and harm to 'our' group.<sup>12</sup> The conclusion is that 'our' group must start preparing to meet this major threat. Fear speech can bring a group closer to violence against a group they claim will be violent towards them. Online fear speech is related to offline violence.<sup>13</sup> Unlike hate speech, which can demean or dehumanise others, fear speech instils fear (rather than open hatred) by claiming that other groups are monumental threats to 'us' and 'our' security, culture, community, religion or nation. In this way, fear speech can be used to 'justify' acts of 'pre-emptive' violence against other groups.
- The words **participant** and **interviewee** are used interchangeably and refer to individuals we interviewed, met or who gave us a written statement. **Respondent** refers to those who completed our survey.
- While the term **community leader** has many meanings in official multiculturalism and within much internal community politics, we have generally avoided the term since it portrays South Asian communities in undemocratic ways as communities that require 'leaders'. Instead, we refer to **community or religious figures**. These individuals have significant influence among community groups (NGOs, religious or sub-caste organisations or community networks) or have acted as 'mediators' or 'powerbrokers' between community groups and other authorities, including the city council, the police services or political parties.



Part 1

What happened in 2022



The violence in Leicester during 2022 was widely reported to have arisen following two cricket matches between India and Pakistan on 28 August and 4 September 2022, soon followed by a march of several hundred predominantly Hindu men on 17 September, from Belgrave to Green Lane Road, an area which has a significant Muslim population. The march resulted in considerable violence during the afternoon and evening.

However, events leading up to the violence began earlier in the year. An attack on 22 May 2022 provides essential context and was often referred to as a contributory cause in subsequent events. It was also the first significant event that appeared to have religious connotations. A community figure said that, before the May attack, some people were ‘expressing discontent about a smattering of individual incidents from one community to another’ (Interview XAR). These included allegations of antisocial behaviour in parks and streets, including alleged harassment of women and the elderly using parks, unplanned and spontaneous religious processions, including in residential areas at night, and regular drinking outside mosques by groups of youths or men primarily from the Daman and Diu community. These allegations led to reported feelings of resentment and rising tensions.

This and the following chapters aim to provide the fullest account possible of the sequence of events from 22 May until September 17-18, including how the events unfolded and led to subsequent events. We also discuss how events were interpreted, because contesting interpretations about past events informed and even caused further events. Establishing a timeline of events is challenging because disputes about the sequence of events or the ‘original’ event (‘who started it’) can fuel subsequent violence. There have also been several timelines produced by groups about the Leicester violence that provide partial, often politicised accounts, portraying one religious group as a wholly innocent victim and casting a negative light on another as the sole aggressor.

The events described in this and subsequent chapters are complex. Individuals and groups looking for a single, simple cause or a single community or group to hold responsible will be disappointed with our findings. We would ask readers to consider all chapters of this part of the report together, rather than singling out a few incidents. They give a holistic picture of the violence that erupted in 2022.

---

#### **Attack on 22 May 2022**

On the night of Sunday 22 May 2022, an 18-year-old man was driving home from work. His mother, who was not a witness to the attack, described what happened:

My son was driving back from work actually. He was on his way to his friend’s house. And on the way back from work, he noticed a young lad getting mugged and decided to go around and check in on the guy, which he did... And just out of nowhere there’s loads of guys just come out, came straight up to him, and first asked him, ‘Are you Muslim?’. And he’s like,

‘Yeah’. But before he could even say anything more, they just started beating him. They smashed alcohol bottles at him, metal poles over his head, and they just kept going for his face and his head. He got up, they got him back down again and battered him again – again, face and head. He managed to get back up again and they got him back down again until he managed to get up and run... But by the time he got to his friend’s house, lucky his friend opened the door. And just as a friend opened the door, these guys punched... his friend, punched him in the face and then they smashed a glass bottle over his head. About this point, I think the parents of his friends come out of the

house and that's when it [sic] all hell broke loose, because it was commotion.<sup>14</sup>

Through discussions with TMG and by asking the man questions through a mediator, we understand that he saw someone being assaulted while driving home. He parked his car near his home and walked a short distance back to see what was happening. A large group of (Hindu) youths was assaulting someone, and he confronted them, after which they set upon him. He was asked what his religion was and then attacked. A bystander who witnessed the attack was later interviewed by TMG. They also said that the man was asked his religion. The man was hit by a cricket bat on a road next to Sparrow Park, and then he was chased into Harewood Street by around 20-30 attackers, where he was assaulted again, knocked to the ground and hit on the head with a weapon. He got up again and ran to the door of a friend's house, where he was hit on the head with a cricket bat.

The attack happened near Sparrow Park at the junction of Uppingham Road and Cottesmore Road. This area is important as several relevant incidents of violence also occurred there later in September. CCTV footage from Harewood Street shows around 20 youths involved in the attack.<sup>15</sup> The man was taken to hospital for his injuries, which included facial fractures, and released after a couple of days in hospital.

Police were called and took a statement and a description of one of the attackers. Subsequently, a 28-year-old man was voluntarily interviewed, but no charges were brought. The family of the injured man contacted the police many times, but there were no further developments in the case, and they heard nothing more from the police. It was only after the events of 17 September that the police services took further action, and the (then temporary) Chief Constable, Rob Nixon, visited the family. We understand that the police have told the family they were badly let down. However, no one has been charged for the attack. A councillor, having spoken to the police, said to us that 'the police felt at the time that they had managed to root out the ringleaders ... they've gone, giving them warnings and things, visited them and that they thought that things had settled down' (Interview XAR).

The 22 May attack is significant for several key reasons. It is an incident in which an individual claimed to have been attacked because of their religion. It should, therefore, have been investigated by the police as a racially or religiously aggravated assault with injury or grievous bodily harm. It is also important because, at the time that it occurred, the incident was discussed among some community members and activists as a hate incident (Interview XDE). Some community members were also discussing retaliation (Interview XDK). It is additionally important because, during the events of August and early September, the incident was fitted into a holistic narrative conveyed by some Muslim community groups of alleged 'Hindu extremist' attacks on Muslims, a narrative that was reinforced by a

Figure 1: Sparrow Park and vicinity, including Harewood Street and Cottesmore Road



similar incident in early September (see 4-5 September), including a similar perception of lack of police action.

Several incidents were reported to us that were claimed to have followed the May attack. We heard claims that groups of South Asian youths, largely in cars, were shouting racial comments at shop owners assumed to be Muslim and at women wearing hijab (Witness, Public Hearing). We were also told about altercations and verbal disagreements on the streets, particularly around Green Lane Road, Uppingham Road and nearby streets, between Hindu youths and Muslim families (Interview XAC). The most consistent claim in the period leading to August and reported by several eyewitnesses was that convoys of cars with young men, sometimes with Indian or religious flags, were deliberately driving past mosques, stopping or slowing down their cars outside the mosque, and often chanting or shouting slogans.

They just drove down the streets and like, literally, like 30-40 cars, and put in I don't know what kind of music but also chanting, like, I remember very clearly, 'Jai Shri Ram'... Not once, I think it happened twice... like 2-3 people in each car and about 40 cars, yeah. It did go on for like a good 5-10 minutes. (Interview XDT)

This behaviour was said to have occurred repeatedly and focused on two mosques. We heard reports of similar incidents outside the East Park Road gurdwara (Interview XAC). 'Jai Shree Ram' is an ordinary Hindu devotional chant, but also one now used widely by Hindu nationalists, especially in protests against Muslims. In this context, it cannot be considered an act of devotion.

### Escalation in August

In August, such car-related incidents reportedly increased, especially outside the Jame' Masjid on Asfordby Street, on Pakistan and India Independence Days (14 and 15 August), and after India's cricket team beat Pakistan in the Asia Cup (28 August).

Obviously, they do... the same thing for the Pakistan Independence Day as well. They have a convoy of cars just going around with flags and stuff. What makes it a problem is when you have a convoy of cars, which will drive past the mosque and then stopping and then waving their flags, right? And it is just seen as a provocation... I saw that during the Indian Independence Day... When you look at the people... they've got their torsos out of the car, right? So, you've got one person who's driving, you've got three people who got their torsos out of the car, and they've parked literally on Asfordby Street outside of the [Jame'] mosque, waving their flags... I saw it happen there. It happened [at Masjid Umar on Evington Road] as well. I wasn't there for that one personally, but there were videos [and messages] going around, saying: 'You guys be careful. These guys are making patrols

Figure 2: Screenshot from CCTV footage, distributed online, showing around 20 youths chasing and then surrounding one, and possibly two, other youths<sup>16</sup>



around all the major mosques at the time of prayer'... The flags were Indian flags. They were chanting mostly 'Jai Shree Ram'.

It was also claimed that the India Independence Day celebrations in Leicester, which are usually large, spontaneous, public events that include car convoys, were different in 2022.

In the evening of Indian Independence Day [in 2022], I was walking down Saint Peter's Rd [and as I was] approaching Melbourne Hall and the petrol station, I saw a cavalcade forming up which looked very different to any cavalcade I had seen before. It was very organised... There was someone on the motorcycle carrying an Indian flag. There were about seven cars, all of them were full, four or five people. And all the people in there looked like they were aged between about 18 and about 40. There were no little brothers or sisters or grandparents.

The witness claimed that the convoy was provocative and intimidating, something they had not seen before during India Independence Day celebrations. It was claimed that this or a similar convoy drove down St Peter's Road, turned left and drove to the Jame' Masjid where it stopped and played provocative music (Interview XDJ). Several other witnesses described similar incidents outside the Jame' Masjid, Masjid Umar and Baytul 'Ilm. These incidents occurred on India Independence Day and on 28 August, following the Indian cricket team's win (see below). The individuals involved in these incidents were reported to be youths and men from the Daman and Diu communities, in cars numbering three to six or more. In mid-August, some individuals said they were concerned enough that they had to think about protecting people visiting some mosques and getting home safely:

So, if someone wants to be escorted to the mosque or something, we'll just hang around or after the prayer. We will just hang around for a bit longer just so that people just disperse and nobody does anything. So, it was very informal.

It wasn't any particular group or mosque or anything actually doing that.

Around India Independence Day, groups were also organising to protect the Mahatma Gandhi statue on Belgrave Road amid rumours that it would be attacked (Interview XDU). It was unclear who was rumoured to be planning to attack the statue, though the implication was that it was Muslims. There had been gatherings around the statue of Gandhi in Leicester in June 2020, following attacks on his statues in the UK and elsewhere during the global Black Lives Matter and related protests that year.<sup>17</sup> We were also told of two other incidents that we were unable to verify, in which two men, purported to be Muslim, were chased on two separate occasions by a group of men, purported to be Hindu. Both incidents occurred on Hill Street near the centre of the city in June and July (Interview XAO).

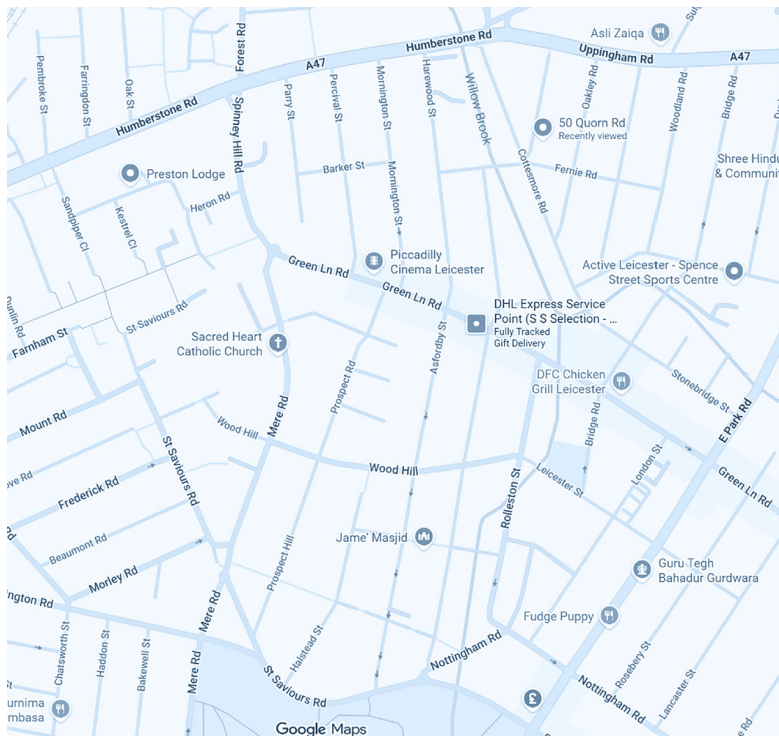
Based on our interviews, in the period between May 2022 and the violence that followed the India / Pakistan cricket matches in late August, it would be reasonable to assume that, for some groups in South Asian communities, there was unease, especially among some residents living around Uppingham Road, Green Lane Road and nearby streets, including Harewood and Cottesmore Streets.

### India – Pakistan Cricket Match, 28 August

As part of the Asia Cup, India and Pakistan played two cricket matches on 28 August and 4 September 2022 in Dubai. Violence between fans followed the 28 August match. Some respondents said the post-match violence was unprecedented for Leicester. However, in June 2017, following Pakistan's win against India in the ICC Champions Trophy match, there had been clashes in Belgrave Road between Pakistan and India fans, and several police officers were injured.<sup>18</sup> We were also told about an unreported aspect of the violence in 2017: as Pakistan fans drove up and down Belgrave Road waving Pakistan flags, other young South Asian men allegedly threw bricks at the cars. The 2017 incident

**Individuals and groups looking for a single, simple cause or a single community or group to hold responsible will be disappointed with our findings. We would ask readers to consider all chapters of this part of the report together, rather than singling out a few incidents.**

Figure 3: Leicester area of significance in events prior to end of August 2022



was described to us as unusual and troubling, as it had never happened before (Interview XBE).

In UK South Asian communities, spontaneous street celebrations celebrating the victory of the winning side in cricket matches are common and typically involve unorganised gatherings of large numbers of people, often including families and children, in the neighbourhood's main street, with car convoys blowing their horns. Some people carry flags of the winning national team. In August 2022, following India's cricket match win, such celebrations took place in the afternoon and evening on Belgrave Road, Melton Road, and surrounding streets. Video footage shows large, noisy crowds and car convoys on Belgrave Road in the afternoon, and many waving Indian flags.<sup>19</sup> In these videos, the slogans are primarily about India winning with shouts of 'India! India!' In some videos we have seen, there is the chant 'Bharatmata ke Jai!' ('Victory to the holy Motherland'). This slogan could mean 'Victory to India' for some, but it also has long associations with Hindu nationalist sentiment (see Chapter 10: Hindutva and the Leicester Events).

The celebration resulted in heavy and often blocked traffic around Belgrave and Melton Roads. It was also concerning for some people because of the sheer number of people and cars:

[It's] quite intimidating when there's lots of people all surrounding you and your car... I managed to navigate it by speaking [through] my window and speaking to a few of the elders that were there who sort of helped me get away... There were individuals there that were celebrating the win and visibly drunk and probably a bit aggressive as a result.

Just as we heard from some witnesses that the India Independence Day celebrations were different in tone in 2022 compared to previous years, other witnesses had similar views about the post-cricket match celebrations in 2022.

You know, I've lived in Leicester my whole life. If India's won, we've seen celebrations, cars hooting, whatever. If Pakistan wins, we've seen celebrations in the Highfields area, people driving around with the flags. And there's never been any tensions. [We're] used to it. There's never been any tensions between the Hindu community or the Muslim community or the Pakistani community. This time it was different. We started seeing racial slurs. We started seeing groups of protests happening in the Belgrave area, Green Lane area, Highfields area. And then things started escalating.

Similarly, a then local councillor said: '[We've] had lots of cricket matches in Leicester and there's never been an aftermath that created so much animosity and so much ill will between two communities'. (Witness, Public Hearing)

The Muslim population (86,442) of Leicester is somewhat larger than the Hindu population (65,819). But, among just South Asian people, there

are approximately equal numbers of Hindus (64,391) and Muslims (63,871). Among just South Asian Muslims in Leicester, 63 per cent (40,119) are of Indian rather than Pakistani origin, and the great majority of them would be Gujaratis. Around 18 per cent (11,717) of all South Asian Muslims in Leicester are of Pakistani origin, and 10 per cent (6,660) of Bangladesh origin (see Religion). There would be no reason for most South Asian Muslims in Leicester to support Pakistan in a cricket match against India.

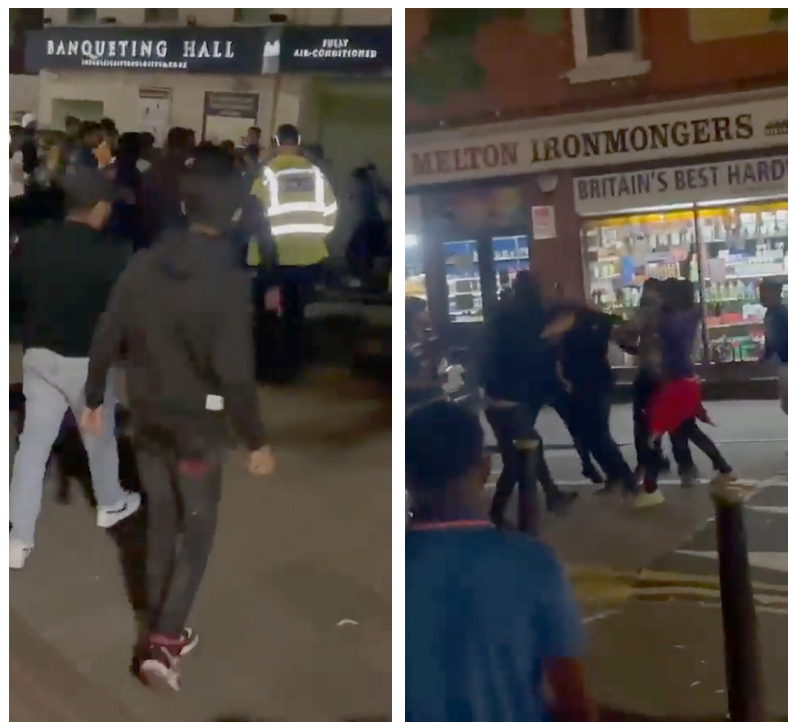
However, several interviewees said that the match celebrations took on a communal dimension because some groups supporting India equated Hindus with India and all Muslims with Pakistan, even though most South Asian Muslims in the city are Indian. Similarly, the reported focus on mosques was also communal because the mosques were seen to represent Pakistan, even though most people using them would likely be Indian (Interview XAV).

[If] Pakistan lost and India won, then you get these youngsters coming in, cars driving past, honking their horns, waving Indian flags and saying things. And they drive past when they know that we are going to be finishing prayers or going to prayers, taunting us. But we have nothing to do with that cricket match... And it's ironic that the vast majority of the congregation at my local mosque... Baytul 'Ilm are Gujarati Indians. And yet these Gujarati Hindus are waving their flag and taunting us as though we are supporting Pakistan in the cricket. We have nothing to do with it.

Convoys of cars stopping outside mosques on both India Independence Day and after the cricket match, often chanting and shouting slogans, were described to us by several witnesses. Several witnesses said they saw small convoys deliberately stopping outside mosques from around 6.00 pm on 28 August. One witness, attending Masjid Umar on Evington Drive, said:

And obviously when we're in the mosque, as I was putting my shoes on to leave there, just noise and commotion outside and car hooting and stuff like that. We go outside [thinking] there must be like a traffic jam, but then we see people with half their torsos out of the windows, waving flags. They are literally just stopped like a convoy of cars. So, I just kind of just walked off. Some people were recording. I didn't record anything. But then I thought, 'Okay, this is gonna be a problem. This is gonna cause problems'... I saw there was a shock because it's never happened before. This is the first time I've seen it happen... But when I was there, there were just the elders coming out so, luckily, I didn't see any youths coming up at that time... These elders come on their own as well. They walk to the mosque, or they come in pairs. I mean, they wouldn't want to say anything, most of them just fearing for their own safety.

Figure 4: India cricket team supporters attacking others on Melton and Shaftesbury Roads, Leicester



## Groups of India supporters marched down Belgrave and Melton Roads chanting ‘Pakistan Murdabad!’, with several carrying the Indian flag. Videos show large groups of youths and men walking down Melton Road and chanting anti-Pakistan slogans.

Another witness described a similar incident outside the Jame’ Masjid on Asfordby Street around the time of evening prayers, the procession of cars having previously passed by his house (Interview XBA). These incidents were discussed on WhatsApp. Consequently, we were told that the first message of significance about religion that was being disseminated on WhatsApp groups was that ‘Hindus had gathered’ outside the Jame’ Masjid.

Later in the evening, what had been a joyous, if sometimes raucous, celebration changed in some areas. Groups of India supporters marched down Belgrave and Melton Roads chanting ‘Pakistan Murdabad!’, with several carrying the Indian flag. Videos show large groups of youths and men walking down Melton Road and chanting anti-Pakistan slogans. ‘Murdabad’ was originally a Persian word that is part of modern Urdu and Hindi. The literal translation of ‘Pakistan Murdabad!’ is ‘death to Pakistan’. However, ‘murdabad’ is regularly used in protests to mean ‘down with’, rather than referring to literal death. It is widely used in South Asia with this meaning – for example, ‘Sarkar Murdabad!’ (‘down with the government!’) or ‘Bhrashtachar Murdabad!’ (‘down with corruption!’). The meaning of ‘down with’ would be its most common one.

During the march by India supporters, a group of around 20-30 men and youths attacked a man on Melton Road, with another group of around 12 attacking another man on Melton Road and Shaftesbury Avenue. In the latter case, a South Asian man grabbed the Indian flag from a member of a large group that was marching down Melton Road. The man happened to be Sikh but his religion wasn’t visibly identifiable. He was set upon and attacked by a group of the marchers. Because the man wasn’t identifiable as Sikh, we were told that ‘wasn’t the identity that was attacked’ (Interview XDR). It was reported to us that there was anti-Muslim abuse towards him (Interview XAC), though we have not been able to ascertain what words were used.

Information and videos about this attack were widely disseminated on social media and WhatsApp groups that night and over the coming days. The second important message about religion being circulated on WhatsApp was that a group of Hindus had attacked a Muslim, though ‘after a few days it did start to materialise that it wasn’t a Muslim male, it was a Sikh male that was attacked’ (Interview XAC).

During the evening, there were violent altercations and scuffles in Belgrave and around Green Lane Road between groups of youths, some resulting in significant injuries. It was reported to us by an eyewitness that he saw some groups had ‘smashed Muslim shops’, and people were seen running into a Muslim family’s house (Interview XDY). A medical professional described a steady stream of people entering his workplace, many of whom he treated for injuries.

I was working in [name of place] during that weekend at night in particular... People were quite badly injured and then brought to [name], so I physically saw the impact of it first hand, and it’s not nice and it’s the first time I’ve ever seen something like this, [especially] knowing that this happened in the community that I’ve grown up in... I looked after individuals from both the Muslim and the Hindu community. And these were young people that developed, sustained some pretty nasty injuries. And no, there was no animosity from them or no sort of mistrust [or] distrust [toward me]. Which is sort of ironic, because that was the sort of thing [that caused] the violence in the first place. And so, it makes you scratch your head and say, why are you guys all doing this?

On the day of the violence, eight people, most in their 20s, were arrested, including for assault and violent disorder.<sup>21</sup> We were told that there was a succession of minor violent incidents that followed in the week after the cricket match. On 30 August, Leicester police stated they would use powers under Section 34 of the Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to disperse groups. On 7 September, these were applied in Belgrave, Rushey Mead and Spinney Hill.

### Allegations of religious slurs

Social media messages about the cricket match events often contained a religion-based narrative of Hindu-Muslim violence, including during the day of the violence. We did not see any videos of the 28 August events that contained explicitly anti-Muslim (as opposed to anti-Pakistan) slogans. Some interviewees, however, mentioned hearing religion-based slurs and political-religious chants:

But we did hear slurs, we heard Hindu nationalist kind of chants, and we also heard Islamic chants as well. And we thought that, yeah, this is going to erupt into something, and we left at that point... We've seen lots of it just this weekend past, kind of aggressive, body languages, fist bumping. You know this kind of behaviour? Yeah. Just the same as what it could be a mob of any denomination, right? But it was in this instance, it was one that kind of had that Hindu or Indian nationalist fervour... Equally, there were the Islamic chants of 'Takbir' something [and] 'Allahu Akbar' – along those lines. So, it was on both sides.

The interviewee mentioned 'Jai Shree Ram' being shouted during the violence (Interview XDR). This is a traditional saying expressing Hindu devotion for many believers. But, in recent decades in India, it has been transformed into a political slogan that has regularly accompanied anti-Muslim and anti-Christian violence in the country (see Chapter 10: Hindutva and the Leicester Events). Similarly, 'Allahu Akbar' is an expression of conscientious religious faith and devotion for believers, but it is also used assertively by political or militant groups as a rallying slogan that can be directed against others.

A *Leicester Mercury* report two days after the cricket match describes 'offensive anti-Pakistani chants'. The Federation of Muslim Organisations referred to 'hateful' and 'racist' chants. On 30 August, East Leicester Police referred to 'racist remarks'<sup>22</sup> and said they were 'aware of the videos circulating on social media of racist and hateful chanting filmed in the Belgrave area of Leicester after the conclusion of the India v Pakistan cricket match on Sunday evening'.<sup>23</sup> 'Death to Pakistan' was usually the slogan referred to in news reports, and its meaning was taken in the literal sense rather than as an expression of disapproval, as in 'down with'.

In Leicester, videos and messages, including false ones, around the cricket match events and the attack on the man in Melton Road 'started to circulate around the community like wildfire', largely focusing on the claim that a Muslim man had been attacked and there was anti-Muslim chanting (Interview XAC). The next day, 29 August, a local activist with a Twitter account of 60,000 followers framed the 28 August events in terms of anti-Muslim hatred and Hindu nationalism.

Someone in Leicester must know who these Hindutva cowards are. They attacked a few people and were chanting against Pakistan on Melton Road. We all know they were really chanting against Muslims. These scum need to be caught and justice needs to be served! #Leicester #Hindutva<sup>24</sup>

No evidence was given for why the groups were Hindu nationalists. In addition to this tweet, they posted another the same day, saying that a Quran had been ripped up near Melton Road.<sup>25</sup>

It wasn't too long ago ripped up Quran pages were found on the streets not far from this same

road. I hope the people responsible are caught asap before things really escalate. #Leicester (Posted on Twitter, 29 August)<sup>26</sup>

We have seen a video in which a woman shows pages from a Quran and, in a distressed voice, pleads in Gujarati to stop doing this. Two men approach her, seemingly having picked up pages from the Quran on the other side of the main road, which they then hand to her. She says the location is Melton Road, but we were unable to confirm the exact location or the date and time the video was taken.<sup>27</sup>

In the few days after 28 August, other Twitter accounts were posting similar narratives of anti-Muslim Hindutva violence. On 3 September, a comedian and broadcaster posted a tweet claiming that 'Modi weirdos' had attacked Muslims and Sikhs and that 'mandem [men] are on a madness to sort them out'.<sup>28</sup> In other social media posts, there was substantial anti-Hindu abuse, including the use of the word 'pajeets',<sup>29</sup> the phrase 'piss drinkers',<sup>30</sup> and repeated reference to Hindus as 'mushrikeen'.<sup>31</sup> The word 'mushrikeen' describes people who are accused of *shirk* (associating with deities or entities other than Allah or ascribing partners to Allah). It is also used pejoratively to refer to polytheists – in the South Asian context, typically Hindus.

Melton Road, Leicester Translation: 'Death to Pakistan' As if it wasn't enough in India, now we've got these Nazi lovers in the UK disrupting the harmony between different communities. #UnitedKingdom #Hindutva (Posted on Twitter, 29 August)<sup>32</sup>

My message to these coward piss drinkers is come down to the Eastend or meet somewhere neutral and then we shall see. (Posted on Twitter, 30 August)<sup>33</sup>

On 30 August, Leicestershire Police Superintendent for Neighbourhoods Policing and City, Paul Allen, said in an email to the Leicester Council of Faiths that the 28 August events included the chant 'death to Muslims'.

Unfortunately, a small minority of people began chanting in a racially offensive way, calling for (we believe) 'death to Pakistan' and 'death to Muslims' in Hindi. There was also an assault which took place on a Pakistan supporter and both of these incidents were captured on video and have now been shared widely on social media. This has understandably caused significant community concern in both the Belgrave and Spinney Hills areas of Leicester and we have received information suggesting that there may be revenge being sought.<sup>34</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the word 'murdabad' is typically used to mean 'down with' rather than literal death. This message was retracted the next day as there was no evidence for the 'death to Muslims' chant. But a community figure explained its consequences:

I had an email that was sent to me by the police sergeant that we deal with on community relations issues to say that there have been reports that the chants of 'death to Pakistan' and 'death to Muslims' have been made. Obviously, 'death to Muslims' is much more about a faith perspective. So, I circulated that message to our board group and the WhatsApp group. Somehow, somebody leaked that message out on a wider platform, and basically, then that went public, right? [At a later council meeting] the police then reiterated and confirmed that there was no message around 'death to Muslims', just 'death to Pakistan'. There was no Muslim issue there, so they clarified that.

A Hindu community figure sympathetic to Hindutva ideology told us that Allen's email greatly worsened the situation in late August as it introduced, without evidence, the theme of religious hatred, leading to a polarisation between community groups. Pro-Hindutva individuals have made similar claims to us about this email.<sup>35</sup> Another Hindu community figure told us that many Hindu organisations were surprised that the cricket match events were being seen in religious terms and that the violence had religious undertones. Some Hindu figures were also said to be upset about the Indian flag being trodden on or snatched.

Following the 28 August violence, actors from different communities were creating narratives about what happened that differed greatly according to the religious-communal affiliation of the narrator. In late August, a handful of Leicester Muslim activists strongly propagated the narrative of Hindutva-influenced attacks on Muslims in Leicester. More widely, some Muslims made links between these events and earlier incidents, such as the 22 May attack (Interview XAC). Conversely, for some Hindu community figures, religion only became a clear factor when a religiously motivated violent attack on a Hindu home occurred during the Ganesha Chaturthi festival period (see 4-5 September). The difference in narratives was a significant factor in the explicitly religiously motivated communal violence which followed in the week after 28 August.

In addition to links being made with the 22 May attack, another key link created at this time related to complaints around antisocial behaviour alleged to be caused by a few members of the Daman and Diu community.

Some of the messages [were] along the lines of 'Our women are being attacked, Muslim women are being attacked, Muslim youngsters are being attacked, they don't feel safe coming in or out of their houses because they're being intimidated on the streets, there's a lot of street drinking going on which is affecting young people being able to move around the area' et cetera. And all of this information started to correlate now in the social media space. And I think the thing that actually brought it all together was the cricket match incident.

This perspective was brought out differently by an interviewee who described their experience at a 'Gold' meeting, held by the police after 17 September:

It's not the cricket match. This has been going on for years now where they've been loitering outside our mosques, playing loud music, getting drunk. And we've told you many, many times. When it's Independence Day, they on purpose come and drive through our areas outside our mosques, wave their flags, play their music and [are] instigating it. The police were not very responsive to that. They're trying to separate the two incidents: 'No, it's a cricket game. It's a cricket game', they're saying. No... it's not the cricket game, we've been having cricket games for years.

The reference here is to longstanding issues discussed later (Chapter 6: Background Factors). As happened many times during our research, we heard from individuals who attempted to resolve issues between communities, work towards community peace, and try and involve the police services and the City Council.

I had contact with one or two of the police officers at that time, and I spoke to them and said 'look, if there's a problem between the Indian fans and the Pakistani fans of cricket then we can get them together. I can get some of the players together and sit down and have tea or samosas and whatnot and sit down and say that we are the best of friends so what's going on?' Cricket is a gentlemen's, a peaceful sport. Why is somebody getting so excited about this? There is no need. We are the best of friends. These things happen. Somebody wins, somebody loses. But at that time, the police were of the opinion that it would all die down, there was no issue, and they did not want to make it into a bigger issue than it already was.

Similarly, because of the attack on a Sikh man, several community figures within and outside the Sikh community worked to prevent any retaliation and de-escalate the situation quickly (Interview XAC).

### Impact on Residents

We heard from South Asian and other residents of great fear among their families, neighbourhoods, and communities after the cricket match violence. This included fear of going to the shops, mandir, mosque or the houses of relatives, and significant reported changes in personal behaviour. Several interviewees mentioned fear and suspicion of immediate neighbours.

[When] there were any Gujarati events in the temple... they were scared to attend the event. I've got my older mother-in-law who lives with me, [and] she was scared to go to any temple or anything because it affected her as well...

They were thinking that some violence might happen in the temples as well. [This fear was generated by] the videos that were circulating online... I live in Evington, so that's part of all a mixed community living [together]. We've got mosque and everything around this area, so we could see because all our neighbours are [Muslim]... I was feeling a bit uncomfortable even going out and talking to them.

I was like quite nervous to come back to this area. I had a religious... praying bead hanging from my car. I ended up like removing that because I didn't want to be a target. I thought around that time, sometimes I like to wear my hijab out, but I wasn't fully wearing my hijab. But I do remember, around that time, I was sort of avoiding it because I didn't want to be a target. I didn't want that community to know that I was living in the area and that this was a Muslim house because obviously I didn't want to be a target.

Among many such accounts, we heard about a (Hindu) man who was worried about his sister's safety on Melton Road (Interview XBK), a (Muslim) garment worker whose family was so frightened that he took two weeks off work to stay at home to protect his wife and children, even though he couldn't afford to do so (Interview XBK), and an elderly (Hindu) woman living alone who was too scared to go to the shops or her mandir.

Fear and anxiety also affected local services. A voluntary sector professional described the impact on staff and South Asian service users of their organisation:

[The] staff worked really hard to try and make sure that the service users continued to do joint activities together. We did events, whether it was a Diwali event or an Eid event or a Christmas event, they all came and participated in it together. So, we had to say to them: 'Yes, this has happened. Yes, it probably has impacted on [you]... made you a little bit anxious, a little bit scared to go out'... Obviously, this was more pronounced in the clients that experienced vandalism to their houses, their windows smashed... [Among service users] we had to work really hard not to make it like big deal... We just tried our best to calm everything down... When they started making groups, Hindu people sitting in one group, it's like that because they were talking [about the events]. But then we said: 'OK, we just need to like sit together and do activities [together]. It took us a week just to not let anybody talk or distract any other client with all these issues going on. So then everything was calmed down for a week.

Some clients of this service had been frightened of leaving their home because (Hindu) religious symbols on the outside of their homes had been ripped off in the days following the cricket match. Much of the fear resulted from messages and

## The Leicester post-cricket-match violence on 28 August contained strong religious-communal dimensions that were evident from many witness accounts.

videos on WhatsApp and social media that family members and friends shared, and which often contained safety advice (Interview XAI). This concern across communities was exacerbated by frequent rumours of groups looking for others to attack. We heard, for example, of a group of youths (Hindu) ‘patrolling’ on the Tuesday after the cricket match (Interview XDE) and another group (Muslim) ‘looking for people’ in the days after the game.

In Highfields... I saw groups of what I can presume were Muslim lads, they were [trying to] ‘find somebody’, you know, I observed that. Yeah, I observed what I can presume again would be Hindus... from India, again in groups, ‘looking for someone’ or just there to intimidate someone. So, this happened after, and it carried on for a couple of weeks after.

### Conclusion

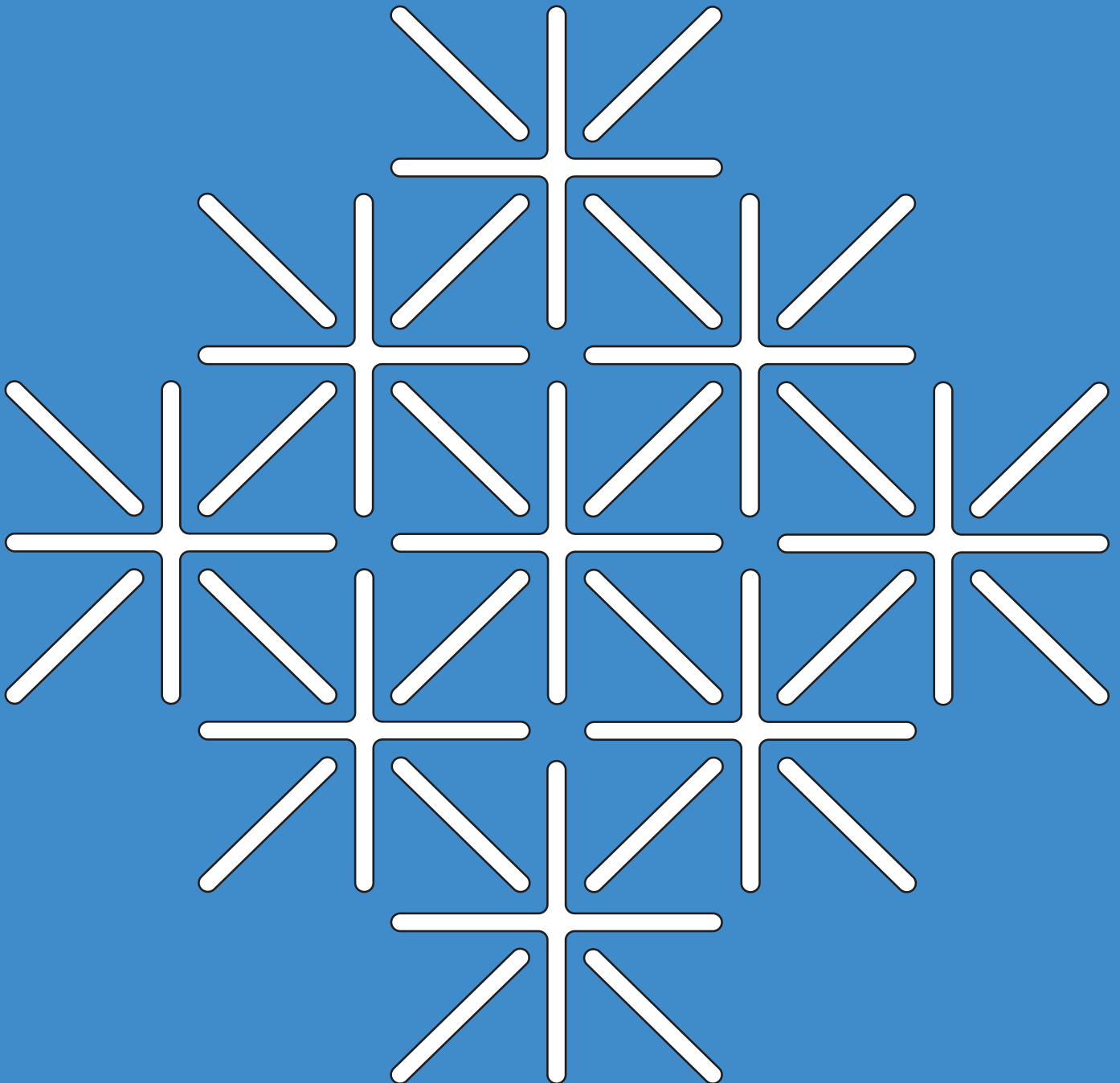
The events from May to late August 2022 illustrated the coming together of several incidents, sometimes linked to background factors. This included the violent attack on a Muslim man in May 2022, seen at the time by several local activists as a religiously-motivated hate crime. This incident affected how some residents perceived events in August and early September. Additionally, there were some longstanding issues related to alleged antisocial behaviour, neighbour disputes, noise complaints, and public drinking and behaviour around mosques and in parks that have affected interactions between some members of Muslim communities living in Evington and Highfields, and some members of more recently arrived Daman and Diu communities (see Chapter 6: Background Factors). Another factor has been a reported pattern of provocative behaviour by car convoys outside mosques. Many of these various issues were reportedly raised by representatives and residents with the police and City Council prior to the cricket match, but their complaints were apparently ignored.

After 28 August, these separate issues were merged into a narrative generated by a handful of local activists, who sought to characterise some groups as Hindutva-driven and anti-Muslim. This became the dominant narrative among some Muslim groups about the cricket match. Social media messages of the violence, including messages during the violence itself, often contained a religion-based narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict. A handful of actors used the term ‘Hindutva’ to de-

scribe its alleged cause. Other residents saw these events as constituting tensions between two primarily Gujarati communities: East African Asian Muslim and Indian Daman and Diu.

An important feature of the tensions was symbolic territorialism (see Territorialism). This is the view that some areas of Leicester ‘belong’ to one community or another, or a residential area or public space is the communal property of members of one community. Alongside this was a second theme: nationality was imputed on the basis of perceived religion. Thus, mosques were seen as Pakistani, ‘as though the [Jame’] mosque was from Pakistan’ (Interview XAV), even though most of the worshippers would be Indian. In this context, a common anti-Muslim slur in India is to refer to Muslims as ‘Pakistani’ or tell them to ‘go to Pakistan’. This reflects communalism in which all Muslims are Pakistanis, all Indians are Hindus, and the relations between them are seen as inherently antagonistic.

In our view, the Leicester post-cricket-match violence on 28 August contained strong religious-communal dimensions that were evident from many witness accounts. Communalism does not have to rely on explicit invectives against other religious groups, but it is evident in the kinds of slogans and gestures used and in the groups targeted. The cricket match violence was the point at which religious communalism informed the violence for some actors. Religion was also evident in other local actors, who quickly realised they needed to de-escalate tensions between *religious* communities. After a subsequent cricket match won by Pakistan on 4 September, the violence in Leicester was to escalate and was based on explicit religious motives.



This chapter of the report examines the events of 4-7 September as signal moments during which communalism and religious hatred came to the fore as driving factors in the violent way groups mobilised against others, and in the creation of communal narratives about the events that fuelled further incidents later in September.

#### 4-5 September

Ganesh Chaturthi is an important annual, 10-day religious festival. In 2022, it commenced on 30 August, culminating in the public procession of the deity Ganesh's idol and its submersion in water (*visarjan*) on 9 September, symbolising the deity's return to the heavenly realm. For devotees, the festival carries considerable religious and symbolic significance. Depending on the belief community under consideration, *visarjan* can also act as a request to the deity to carry away one's sins over the past year. The devotional chant 'Ganesh Bappa Morya', a reference to a 14th-century saint, Gosavi Morya, is common (though more so in some UK Hindu communities than others). While the meaning of the festival and the extent of its private and public celebration vary across specific Hindu belief groups, it is a major festival for Hindus from the Daman and Diu community and is often celebrated publicly and with vigour.

The Daman community appear to be very vocal, boisterous, energetic and enthusiastic in the public celebration of the various Hindu celebrations, Ganesh Chaturthi being, you know, a favourite amongst that community. You know, the *visarjan* and all of that stuff being like 'Oh! It's a community event'. All the neighbours get together, we're all part of the same community and it's for them [and] for me a very innocent and cultural presentation. You live in a neighbourhood together, you come out in the neighbourhood, and you're sharing food, you do *garba*, and you're going to sing the *bhajans* and the songs and you're going to share the worship.

On Sunday 4 September, a family and their friends in Cottesmore Road were celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi. An individual from outside ran towards the house and threw eggs into it, allegedly at an idol of Ganesh. For many believers, the throwing of eggs at an idol of a Hindu deity would be considered a desecration, equivalent to spitting in a font of holy water or throwing pork into a mosque or synagogue. This intentional act was followed by a violent altercation outside the home between members of the family and individuals responsible for throwing the eggs. This act of throwing eggs during a religious celebration was of great significance in initiating an escalating series of events. For several Hindu community figures, it was this attack that led to the recognition that religion and religious hatred were central factors in the unrest developing in Leicester: 'The first time faith was involved was

this Ganesh Chaturthi [event], and that was Hindu faith and celebration being attacked'.

Before this incident, a (Hindu) resident characterised the mood in nearby streets a few days before, linking it to the incident on 4 September.

I believe on Friday 02/09/22 about 3pm, I was walking up Barker Street. I noticed a couple of cars, maybe three. The [car] boots were open with the Lord Ganesh statues [inside]. They were celebrating by dancing but causing traffic chaos. It's the school run and there is a school nearby. Also, the Friday prayers take place that added to more congestion. People came across to me as frustrated. (Respondent 30)

In the early hours of Monday, 5 September, around 1.30am, a man had gone out from his house to smoke a cigarette in Memorial Gardens on Bridge Road, a short distance from his home. The man told TMG, who met him soon after the attack, that he was sitting on a wall by the park at around 1am, having a cigarette, as he regularly did. He heard a commotion and saw a gathering of around 50 young (Hindu) men in the street. He described them as meeting to 'organise'. He said he was staggered by the number of people who had gathered and how angry they were. He was confronted and asked if he was a Muslim, and he initially said, 'you can't ask me that', but subsequently said he was Muslim. He said they suspected him of throwing eggs into the house earlier and asked him if he knew about the incident. He said he didn't know about the incident and was adamant he was not involved. He said he was surprised at being asked if he was a Muslim. His attackers also initially said to him that, because he was smoking, he couldn't have been Muslim. In any event, he was very violently attacked and seriously injured. He went to a nearby (Hindu) family friend for support, and they looked after him and called the police. The attack has left the man seriously affected and fearful, including of further attacks on him. He suffered serious injuries amounting, in our view, to grievous bodily harm, for which he required hospitalisation and extended treatment. He believes the attack on him was racially motivated and based on his religion. He is adamant that he was uninvolved in any prior incident related to the Ganesh Chaturthi celebration. Despite several other witness interviews, we were unable to determine who threw the eggs into the Hindu household.

Extensive CCTV footage of the attack was available and was recorded from a neighbouring house. It shows a car arriving, allegedly picking up some of the attackers, and leaving. Footage

of the attack shows a large group of youths chasing and attacking the man. The family have said they felt let down by the police and had to point the police to evidence, such as the footage and forensic investigation related to the car. The police stated at the time that 'the victim is considering the options to engage with police, but we have continued to work with him and talk to him about what happened. There is now a team of dedicated detectives investigating, and this is progressing quickly'.<sup>36</sup> Following the events of 17 September, the (then temporary) Chief Constable of Leicestershire Police visited the family. We understand that the police have said they have not been able to identify the perpetrators.

News of the attack on Bridge Road spread quickly on social media and WhatsApp groups. A Muslim 'influencer' posted the following at 9.30am on 5 September:

Woke up to find out about ANOTHER attack that took place last night in #Leicester. Similar location to where a mob of 20+ racist #Hindus randomly attacked & hospitalised another Muslim lad a few months ago. Why wasn't no action taken by @LeicsPCC? Take action before it escalates.<sup>37</sup> (Posted on Twitter, 9.30am on 5 September)

The reference was not to Hindu nationalism or Hindutva, but 'racist Hindus'. Another post at 7.47am to a Highfields, Spinney Hill and Evington Facebook group, now deleted, purported to be from the brother of the person attacked, stated:

Assalamualaikum can you please post this. Yesterday night at around 1am on bridge road just outside bridge park, off green lane road. my brother was beat by 30 Indian guys with cricket bats knives and weapons. They broke his arm, fingers and smashed up his head, back all over his body he has bruises and cuts. It's time we stand up to them and do something about it. They think they are in India and can jump people because they are in numbers. Has anyone got a practical solution as how we can stand up to them because it is getting ridiculous he could have lost his life. He is currently in hospital and in a bad state.<sup>38</sup>

Several Twitter accounts, including @xavierjp\_ and @HPakistanis, posted highly inflammatory messages on 5 September, calling on people to act. Several messages contained anti-Hindu abuse.

### Meetings outside Jame' Masjid

During the day on 5 September, numerous messages circulated on WhatsApp in Leicester, some urging action and others calling for a meeting. Information about the 5 September attack was reportedly also being discussed among some Muslim activists outside Leicester. That evening, in the car park area near the Jame' Masjid on Asfordby St, and for two nights thereafter (5-7 September), a

gathering and collective discussion was held after prayers around 7pm, with some discussions continuing to 8 or 9pm. Estimates ranged from 50 to 100, possibly up to 200 people attending. The numbers reflected concern about the attacks in May and early that morning, as well as about the perceived lack of police action. Numbers diminished from the second night onwards, mainly due to increased police presence, but several smaller groups also gathered away from the car park in nearby streets. We interviewed several individuals who attended the meetings, including some who were present on all three evenings.

The meetings had no relationship to Jame' Masjid, its management and leadership, nor its trustees. They were not called by the mosque or any official associated with it. The meetings were organised independently through a newly created WhatsApp group, the Muslim Brothers' Group. (This group was seen as a successor to a similarly named group created to oppose the far-right English Defence League (EDL) a few years before, when the EDL had been scheduled to hold an event in Leicester.)

The initial meeting was called to engage people in discussion about recent events and prevent 'youths doing anything stupid' (Interview XDY, Interview XDK, Interview XDD). It was attended by older people, businesspeople, several community and religious figures, a few elected councillors, and many youths. The common theme of discussion was that 'Hindutva boys' had attacked Muslims, and the police hadn't taken appropriate action, even though the perpetrators had been identified (Interview XDP).

We were told that the meeting on 5 September began as a calm, productive discussion, but then the police arrived suddenly and acted in a heavy-handed manner (Witness, Public Hearing). We were also told by witnesses that the police 'were taken by surprise' by the numbers gathering (Interview XAC) and, by the second evening, police numbers had increased substantially and included the use of police dogs. The relationship between the people at the gathering and the police was described to us as 'tense'. It included an attempted arrest, an assault with a truncheon, and an incident involving a police dog that later resulted in the charging and sentencing of an individual for threatening a police officer under section 4A of the 1986 Public Order Act. There was concern that police officers were treating elders aggressively and roughly, whereas the elders themselves were trying to engage in peaceful discussion and attempting to calm the situation. Some interviewees said that the police presence made the situation worse by increasing tension and resulting aggression.

During discussions, links were made to the 22 May attack, the cricket match violence, incidents of antisocial behaviour, and provocative events outside mosques. (The victim of the 5 September attack also linked the attack on himself to the one in May.) Both the May and early September attacks were spoken of in similar terms: a lone Muslim man was approached by a group of Hindus who asked

the man his religion; when he said he was a Muslim, the group attacked him. Some local activists claimed both attacks illustrated the importation of Hindu nationalist politics from Narendra Modi's India, but without providing direct evidence of Hindutva involvement.

Between the 'elders' and youth, as well as among youth groups, there was divergence of views on the actions to be taken regarding the Bridge Road attack and previous events. We can corroborate from several interviews that there were many attempts to discuss the events and ways forward, and to prevent some youths from retaliating against the Bridge Road attack. Three separate viewpoints were evident about the actions to be taken:

- Undertake peaceful discussions and advocacy with Hindu community leaders, engage the police and local authority, including about their alleged inaction, and urge people to go home and avoid any confrontations
- Organise peaceful patrols around streets where there had been trouble and chaperone people (for example, those visiting mosques) to ensure they get home safely
- Retaliate immediately and physically by finding those alleged to be responsible for the Bridge Road and other attacks and take physical action against them.

Those calling for a peaceful approach were heckled and shouted down by a few individuals, some of whom wanted immediate retaliatory action. Others attempted to calm the situation but failed.

[Individuals] stepped in and said: 'We cannot have all that, we need to fight'. Then took 300 youth. They did stupidness, taking stuff off Hindu houses, smashing car windows, troubling Hindu passersby, chanting stuff. This set the flame off. [I] blame [individuals]... who egged everyone on... who instigated the people... [They said:] 'You are washed up now' ... to the old man who tried [to] calm [things] down. [These individuals] took 100 kids away to fight with Hindus, kicking the doors at Green Lane Road. This is what started the violence.

A group of up to a hundred youths left the gathering and walked towards Sparrow Park (Interview XDD, Interview XDY). They went in the direction of the park because they 'had an assumption' that the group who had attacked the man on Bridge Road congregated there with friends (Interview XAC). The park is at the end of Cottesmore Road at the junction with Uppingham Road. The incident in which eggs were thrown into a house celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi occurred the previous day in Cottesmore Road. The encouragement by a few individuals to physically retaliate reportedly caused great upset among other attendees, who were described to us as 'very annoyed' that a group had taken 'things into their own hands' because they did not have the information to make such an assessment (Interview XAC).

On the second night, Tuesday 6 September, a similar meeting took place near Jame' Masjid, but

it was met with a 'huge' police presence that had been in place before the meeting began. Witnesses said there were relatively fewer people outside the mosque, but there were groups of people gathering and roaming in the surrounding streets: 'Groups met, groups congregated, headed out, particularly going into the areas where they thought this [Hindu] group was' (Interview XAC). We were told that little discussion took place, and instead, there were tensions between the youths and the police. A councillor spoke to the meeting and tried to calm the crowd, but was 'heckled and pushed aside' (Interview XAC).

Several people, including a group of imams, made efforts to calm the situation. However, large groups of youths, many wearing black clothing and masks or balaclavas, were roaming around or purposefully marching through the streets off Uppingham Road and around Sparrow Park on the nights of 5 and 6 September. They were often met by police cordons blocking some streets to prevent them from entering. This caused some confrontations between the youths and the police until they eventually dispersed. On the third night, there was virtually no mobilisation, seemingly because of the heightened police presence the previous night, including on Asfordby Street, Green Lane Road and Uppingham Road.

We heard from several community and religious figures who worked throughout the week to try to de-escalate the situation among some youths.

My first activity to de-escalate the situation was on Tuesday when there were rumours that there's Hindu mobs patrolling the streets and looking to cause violence and approximately 2-300 Muslims had gathered outside our [mosque] was because that was the scene where the Hindus, after the day of the cricket match, had come and started horning [their cars] etcetera... You could say that that was one of the focal points and the flash points. Myself and few other imams went to de-escalate and tell the Muslim community to... let the police handle the matter.

We heard of sustained efforts by several community and religious figures to persuade youths to disperse and go home. We were told that youths didn't 'come out' on Wednesday or the rest of that week because of these efforts, though it may also have been the case that the large police presence deterred them.

### Attack in Cottesmore Road on 5 September

On the evening of 5 September, groups of youths left the meeting in the car park outside Jame' Masjid and headed towards Sparrow Park. Some of these (Muslim) youths attacked (Hindu) individuals and homes in Cottesmore Road. Some of the youths were armed, including with knives. One of the houses targeted on Cottesmore Road was the same as the one into which, the previous night, a

Figure 5: Attack on young man by large group, Cottesmore Road<sup>42</sup>



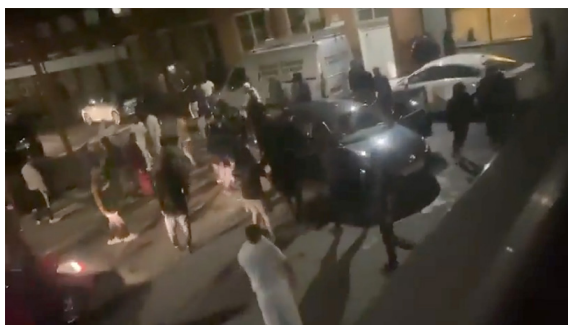
Figure 6: Flag snatched from home in Cottesmore Road<sup>43</sup>



Figure 7: Large groups of men and youths walking through Spence Street and down Woodland Road in the direction of Fernie and Cottesmore Roads<sup>46</sup>



Figure 8: Youths surrounding and attacking a car on Woodland Road<sup>47</sup>



man had thrown eggs during Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations.

The attack resulted in a stabbing and injury to the hand for which a (Hindu) man required hospital treatment. Several other people were also injured during the attack. A video shows a group of around 20 youths, many with faces masked, some with knives, walking down Cottesmore Road from the junction with Fernie Road.<sup>39</sup> One youth is shown removing a Hindu religious flag and flagpole from a house and walking towards the people being attacked.

In a Channel 4 News report, the victim of the stabbing described coming to the house to celebrate a religious festival with a friend and being attacked by a large group: 'I was scared. Like I thought, I'm dead'. They ran to a neighbour's house. He said:

I was just banging on the door. Like, 'We're Hindu just open the door'. Then afterwards if we stay outside for more than five minutes, they are going to kill us. The guy who took the flag, I know him, then he just tried to with a stick he tried to hit my brother as well.<sup>40</sup>

Subsequently, a photo of the victim was widely distributed across social media, claiming that he was an 'RSS member'. He said he neither knew about the RSS nor was he a member. His mother described the fear the family lived under: 'We are still scared. When we stayed in Daman, Hindus and Muslims lived together very well. On coming here to Leicester, what happened? These problems fell upon us.'<sup>41</sup>

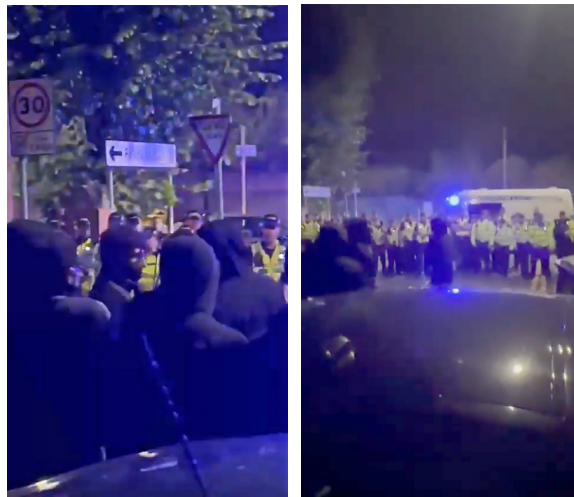
In a video of the attack, a man pulls or breaks off a saffron flag from outside a house on Cottesmore Road, presumably to use as a weapon against the youths he was following.<sup>44</sup> Families inside the home from which the flag is taken are clearly terrified, shouting at the attackers to stop and calling for police help. Another video shows a large group of youths and men, numbering up to 100, walking through the junction of Woodland Road and Spence Street, many masked and behaving in an intimidating way. Some of them attacked a car stopped in the middle of the road.<sup>45</sup>

In this video, frightened families are urging the police to be called. In other videos from the first and the second night, groups of youths are roaming the streets around this area of Leicester. In these videos, chants of 'Long live Pakistan!', 'Modi is a dog!' and 'Allahu Akbar!' are being shouted. In one video, the word 'mushriks' is heard, a derogatory reference to Hindus. This phrase is used in the context of an individual talking about putting 'pressure' on Hindu residents in the area.<sup>48</sup> We also heard reports of random physical attacks on those perceived to be Hindus, Hindu symbols being removed from houses by youths, and several cars being attacked and having their windows smashed. A (Hindu) family described their experiences across two nights:

We were having dinner as a family and, all of a sudden, heard a very loud noise. We opened the door to see what was happening outside. There was 4-5 Muslim boys being chased by

Hindu boys. Thereafter came more family members of the same Hindu family running after them. After asking one of them, they told us that they were celebrating Lord Ganesh at home and few Muslim boys threw eggs in the house. Therefore, the Muslims boys were chased. The next day again around dinner time we all sat down and hear a loud noise but this time it was a Hindu lad while in the car got attacked by the Muslim men. We shut the door not knowing what was happening outside our house. As we shut the door, there were men trying to break our door, knocking on our windows shouting and yelling for us to open the door, while we were scared as our baby was crying because of the noise. It all happened outside our house. More than 50 people, some carrying knives, hockey sticks, hammer, attacking Hindus, houses and cars. They were shouting and running across the streets with most of them wearing black hoodies and masks covering their faces. (Respondent 93)

Figure 9: Groups of youths and police, many masked, during 5-6 September events<sup>49</sup>



### Impact on residents

The immediate impact of these events was attacks on people and damage to houses and cars. These were acts that often deliberately targeted homes and cars that had (perceived) Hindu religious symbols. Some people have told us that the purpose of the mobilisation was to show those who had attacked Muslims that 'we are here' and to demonstrate a 'presence'. However, this was used to 'justify' acts of intimidation of ordinary residents that generated considerable fear.

We met several witnesses, including elderly residents living alone, who spoke of the sheer terror of seeing around 100 young men, many of them masked, outside their houses across the two nights, sometimes passing by their homes several times and shouting, including chanting against Narendra Modi, and often banging on doors and windows. Some individuals described turning off all their lights and TV and hiding silently during the events. We heard of individuals and families too scared to leave their homes for days or more, terrified older people, and families too frightened to send their

**We met several witnesses, including elderly residents living alone, who spoke of the sheer terror of seeing around 100 young men, many of them masked, outside their houses across the two nights, sometimes passing by their homes several times and shouting.**

We heard of individuals and families too scared to leave their homes for days or more, terrified older people, and families too frightened to send their children to school in the days and sometimes weeks following the events. Some families were reported to have removed religious symbols from around their doors to avoid being identified as Hindu. We heard that the fear extended across all communities, South Asian or otherwise.

---

children to school in the days and sometimes weeks following the events. Some families were reported to have removed religious symbols from around their doors to avoid being identified as Hindu. We heard that the fear extended across all communities, South Asian or otherwise. Some Muslim individuals were highly critical of the attitude of some Muslim youths in the events on 5 and 6 September and encouraged them to apologise to the affected families (Interview XAK).

In addition to de-escalation attempts by some community figures in early September, several organisations issued statements calling for peace, including the Leicester Council of Faiths on 5 September. It said that images of the cricket match violence were being disseminated internationally and were being used by a minority of people to divide communities and cause disruption.<sup>50</sup> Among some Hindu community organisations, there was a serious acknowledgement that – following the egg-throwing incident during Ganesh Chaturthi and the later spread of a series of false allegations – religious identity had become a central factor in the tensions that had built up during and since the cricket match (Interview XAM). A range of organisations also made a short joint video statement at the Shree Damania Machhi Mahajan on 5 September:

We, the undersigned communities have come together in a show of solidarity and unity at the Daman community centre with one clear message. We are citizens of this beautiful city, and we have a responsibility to uphold peace and unity and to not destroy the hard work of our elders and forefathers who worked hard to establish us in the city. Our aim is to safeguard all our communities and, most importantly, our young people now and into the future. The violence and oppression must stop now, and this is what we agree, all the communities here.<sup>51</sup>

The Leicester organisations agreeing to this statement included the Shree Damania Machhi Mahajan, the Federation of Muslim Organisations, the Leicester Council of Faiths, Masjid Bilal, the Jain Samaj, the Pancholi Samaj, ISKCON, the Jay Bhavani Association Diu, the Maher Community organisation, the Shree Hindu Temple, and the Textile Association of Leicestershire. On the Thursday after the violence, a range of Hindu organisations and community figures also met to discuss the violence and how to respond to restore peace:

I remember the first meeting we held after the violence in Leicester. There was an overwhelming sense that something had to be done immediately to restore peace. The issues had escalated too far, and as a community, we needed a unified approach. That Thursday meeting came right after tensions flared in areas like Green Lane Road, where people's cars were being vandalised, and religious symbols were broken. It was unsettling, and I felt we couldn't sit back any longer without addressing the hurt that had affected so many families. There was a mix of leaders from temples, community organisers, and local residents, all determined to find a solution. It was the first time some of us had come together with such urgency, and the atmosphere was tense yet hopeful. We spoke openly about our frustrations, particularly the lack of police action when it was most needed.

In its statement on 6 September, the Federation of Muslim Organisations asked for those with influence within communities to work towards stopping the violence: 'We understand many people, particularly our youth are very angry about recent events and the perceived lack of action, but please do not take matters into your own hands or take out your anger on innocent people or the police'.<sup>52</sup> A meeting was also held between a few Muslim and Hindu community organisations (Interview XDE).

In addition, there were meetings between some Muslim community organisations and the police, including with Rob Nixon at Spinney Hill police station. The aim of this meeting was to try and 'nip this in the bud and let's try and bring the communities together. And we were very hopeful' (Interview XDE). A person who was at the meeting said:

We had a conversation with him, and I believe it was a good conversation where I said that we have five to six concerns which the Muslim community has. One is that they are being very provocative. Two, [there are] concerns that in Spinney Park there's a drinking culture and Muslim women and Muslim young children are being harassed [and intimidated]. Three, the attack on the Muslim lad in May some time, again that wasn't responded to properly [and] the police are not dealing with this appropriately. Four, the concerns within the Muslim community that some mosques are being subject to or being targeted [Asfordby Street] mosque... the [car] horning etcetera. So these were four or five concerns we presented to the police. [We said] 'Look, let's try and get a grip to this.' We even in that meeting said to the police: 'I'm happy to meet with the Hindu community and leaders. Let's try and calm things down... What's happened? You know, we've been living together peacefully for all these years. What's happened that it's [taken us] to this point, and what can we do to build the communities?' And that was also discussed with the Chief Constable.

The policing of the August and September events is discussed more fully in Chapter 8: Policing.

The violence died down after Wednesday. Some individuals reported that in the week that followed, things began to calm down and return to normal, and that the violent events that followed the cricket match had passed (Interview XAK). However, what followed on social media intensified the polarisation

**In addition to de-escalation attempts by some community figures in early September, several organisations issued statements calling for peace, including the Leicester Council of Faiths on 5 September. It said that images of the cricket match violence were being disseminated internationally and were being used by a minority of people to divide communities and cause disruption.**

and led to considerably more violence later in September. Then MP, Claudia Webbe wrote to Rob Nixon on 14 September, explaining that constituents had told her about incidents of serious physical assault, intimidation, and property damage.<sup>53</sup> She referred explicitly to these incidents as racially or religiously motivated and linked to incitement to hatred towards both Muslims and Hindus. In addition to warning about the likelihood of further violence, she also referred to posts on WhatsApp calling for a ‘peace march’ against ‘hate crimes’ against Hindus.

### Conclusion

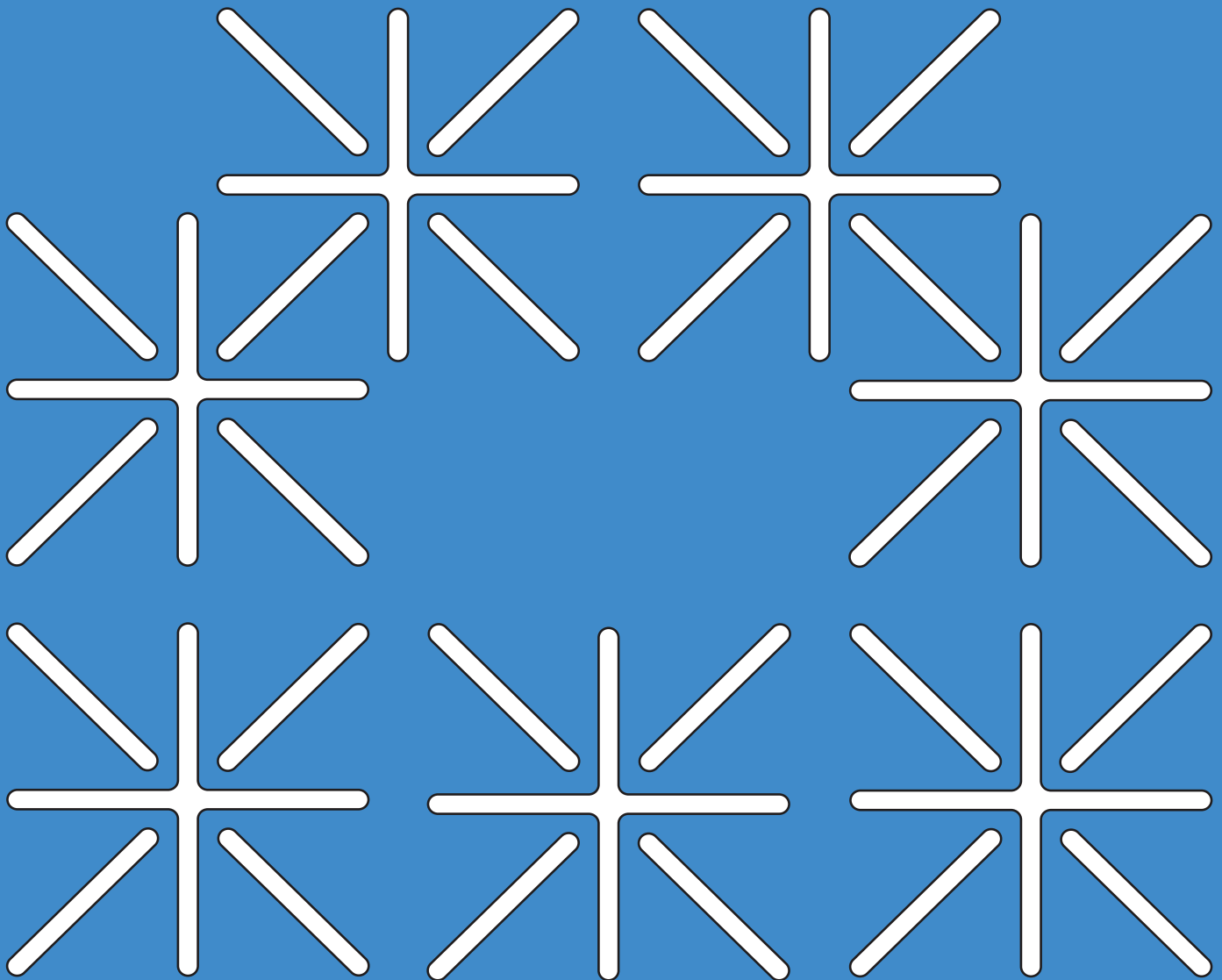
The events of 4-7 September followed a sequence of escalation: the throwing of eggs into a Hindu house celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi, a retaliatory violent attack on a Muslim man by a large group of Hindu youths, the subsequent incitement of groups of Muslim youths over two main nights to take retaliatory action against the alleged perpetrators of the attack, which resulted in indiscriminate violence against people – mostly Hindus – and their property over those nights. Each of these actions was intentional and targeted. They are unacceptable acts that have no justification. They were clear examples of violent, religiously motivated communalism on the streets of Leicester, and they resulted in great fear and anxiety across South Asian and other communities in Leicester.

The perpetrators of the violent attack on the Muslim man should have been found and charged with grievous bodily harm, with or without racially- or religiously-motivated aggravation, depending on the evidence found. Similarly, police should have investigated who threw eggs at the house and taken action against the instigators. In a second clear case of violence in early September, a large group of Muslim youths, many arriving from meetings held in a car park area and joined by others from nearby streets, aimed to find the alleged perpetrators of the 5 September attack. Some members of the groups engaged in unlawful actions over the nights of 5-7 September, many of which indiscriminately targeted those of a different religion. Their actions caused much fear and distress among residents. They resulted in serious injury to a Hindu man and property damage, for which the police should have taken appropriate action against the perpetrators, including considering the evidence for racially or religiously motivated aggravation.

The events of early September, following quickly after the cricket match violence, illustrated several important factors:

- Significant polarisation on the grounds of religion regarding interpretations of the incidents that had occurred, with radically different views of the events and their causes
- The entrenchment of communal narratives among several activists and community figures about people from other religions or regions of India
- Incidents of both targeted and indiscriminate religiously motivated violence in Leicester

- As with the 28 August events, widespread fear and suspicion in Hindu and Muslim communities linked to perceptions of religious difference
- A disconnect between community figures and youth, and the inability of community figures to appeal effectively to youth and prevent violence
- Sustained efforts by several community figures to try and calm the situation, prevent youths from engaging in violence, and promote dialogue with Hindu community figures and the police. Nevertheless, there was little effective communication between community and religious figures from Hindu (including Daman and Diu) and Muslim communities.



The events of Saturday, 17 September 2022, focused considerable national and international attention on Leicester. That attention included interventions from the governments of the UK, India, and Pakistan; massive, coordinated social media attention and disinformation; a proposed Mayor's inquiry; a UK Government review; and this independent review. Those events were triggered by a march of at least 300 young men, predominantly Hindu and from the Daman and Diu communities, from the Belgrave area of Leicester to Green Lane Road. Considerable violence and disorder followed in the wake of the march and the counter-mobilisations against it by large groups of mostly young Muslim men. This chapter of the report examines the events of that weekend.

Between the 4-7 September and 17 September violence, there was considerable social media and community-based misinformation, disinformation and the cascading of various rumours in communities. This area is discussed in Chapter 9: Social Media and the Leicester Events.

### 17 September

Following the violence and disorder of 28 August and 5-7 September, a community figure reported that the situation seemed calmer, with things returning to normal and tensions dying down (Interview XAK). We were told about small groups of Hindu and Muslim youths allegedly engaging in intimidating behaviour and scuffles in certain streets. A reported factor for both Hindu and Muslim youths was that the police had not taken their concerns or complaints about the previous violence seriously. A (Muslim) community figure said, '[There were] a lot of disgruntled youth in the area and they wanted to get the more senior people like myself involved to take it further and deal with the police and speak to the police. So, we were planning on how to do that.' (Interview XDX).

Meanwhile, some Hindu youths were discussing a protest or march on WhatsApp. We were unable to speak with the individuals who called for the march, but we did speak with several people who knew or had met some of those who attended. We were told that the 'organising' group was mainly from the Daman and Diu community. We were informed that about 3-4 days before 17 September, groups of Daman youths had met to discuss events, the meetings initiated via WhatsApp groups. The reason for the meetings was to express unhappiness about how the Daman and Diu communities were being treated, and the lack of police response to the recent violence that had particularly affected Daman and Diu residents.

At the discussion, there was no initial intention to hold a march. But 'there were two or three guys who then worked up the group of them to say: "We can show them, we're not gonna allow them (the Muslim community) to do these things"'. (Interview XAR)

By that time, because the men were really worked up... nobody was listening to anything

else. It was too late to try and stop people. From what they said, I got the feeling that maybe they didn't want to go on the march, because you could tell that they felt really uneasy about the fact that people were on the thrust of this emotional wave and just joining in.

The claim was also that young Hindu men from the Daman and Diu communities were being 'stirred up' around situations about which they did not have a complete understanding. As with the rumours circulating among young Muslims, the Daman and Diu youth could not distinguish between what was true and what was false, and emotion took over (Interview XAR).

Some Hindu victims of the violent attack on 5 September were also part of the march.<sup>54</sup> In a report on *Channel 4 News* on 14 October, one organiser said that the aim was to have a peaceful march: 'Because of all these tensions, we all tried to do a protest, a normal protest. We were suddenly a hundred people'.<sup>55</sup> This number was to increase substantially. It was also being referred to as a peace event by several individuals on WhatsApp messages. As one (Hindu) community figure said: 'There was talk of some people coming together to do a peace march'.

Another (Hindu) community figure described the reasons for the march as a direct response to the 5-7 September events and the disinformation and false claims spread by a few local Muslim activists.

The situation reminded many of us of our experiences elsewhere, where similar displays have been used to send a message. Members of the Hindu community, especially the Daman and Diu community wanted to stand their ground and convey that they weren't intimidated, in contrast to the previous generation. The Daman and Diu community isn't like the earlier British Asians. They won't take a slap and offer the other cheek.

But for others in the Leicester community, including many local Muslims, this approach seemed to fuel more fear rather than fostering mutual respect.

In particular, he described the frustration within the community with both the police and local authority, following the 5-7 September violence. In this context, the idea of a ‘peace march’ was envisaged by some (Hindu) community figures as a way to convey unity and resilience within one community, rather than aggression against others.

The ‘peace march’ was organised to show unity but interpreted within the Muslim community as an aggressive display rather than a gesture of reconciliation. From my viewpoint, several Hindu community members wanted to convey resilience, to show that they weren’t intimidated by the events unfolding. However, for some Muslim residents, this added to a prevailing atmosphere of fear. Social media didn’t help either; it spread these misunderstandings quickly, fueling division rather than bridging it.

While there were many calls for a march in WhatsApp groups, a few days before 17 September, there were also messages calling it off or saying it wasn’t happening. The march was being ‘promoted and then cancelled and promoted and then cancelled’:

Then there was messages being shared on WhatsApp: ‘There’s going to be a gathering, there’s going to be a march’. ‘No there isn’t.’ Then follow up [with]: ‘No, this is fake news’ with a red line through it. ‘No, don’t believe this’.

One of the WhatsApp messages said:

HINDU NEIGHBOURHOODS SAFETY MARCH  
17/09/2022 HI, I REQUEST EVERY HINDU TO  
JOIN THIS GATHERING AT ROSSWALK AT  
12:00 pm MAIN MOTIVE OF THIS MARCH IS  
TO PROTECT OUR FAMILY AND WORSHIP  
PLACES. TOGETHER WE CAN BRING PEACE  
ADDRESS- ROSS WALK, LEICESTER LE45HH  
ITS VERY IMPORTANT FOR EVERY HINDU TO  
ATTAIN THIS MEETING. OTHERWISE IN FU-  
TURE WE WILL HAVE TO LIVE IN FEAR, WHICH  
I THINK NO ONE WANTS THAT. A JAI SHREE  
RAM HAR HAR MAHADEV [Hail Lord Ram! Glory  
to Lord Shiva!]

Not all messages promoting the march used the word ‘peace’. Another witness who saw the WhatsApp messages being distributed to ‘two, three, four hundred people’ said that many of the messages were voice notes in Gujarati or Hindi that contained information about causing disruption over the coming few days, including ‘planning’ for violence:

They would say, ‘Okay, they’ve hit us here, so we’ll hit them there’. It is that kind of stuff that you don’t want to hear. It’s like you’re planning attacks openly and you’re saying stuff like, ‘Oh

yeah, don’t worry, the police are on our side’. There were literally people saying stuff like that.

We have not been able to verify claims that violence was being discussed, planned or incited on the WhatsApp groups. It was also reported to us that some of these WhatsApp discussions were being circulated among some individuals in the Muslim community who were aware that something was being planned, the messages causing fear (Interview XAO).

Community figures told us that the police were also asking them several days beforehand whether they knew anything about a proposed march. In this vein, it was suggested to us that the police were ‘caught off guard’ on 17 September because the messages about whether the march would take place were ambiguous or mixed, though we were also told that the police had said they would be vigilant. On 16 September, Leicestershire Police issued an updated statement: ‘East Leicester remains calm. We are maintaining extra proactive patrols in the area throughout the bank holiday weekend.’ It went on to say that senior police officers had met with community members, and dialogue was taking place.<sup>56</sup>

On 17 September at around 4pm, there was a meeting between some Muslim community figures at Spinney Hill police station to discuss rumours about a ‘Hindu march’. People present at the meeting told us that the police were aware of the proposed march and ‘not to worry about it’ (Witness, Public Hearing). We also heard from those present at a subsequent meeting with the police, including with (temporary Chief Constable) Rob Nixon, that the march was supposed to congregate in the morning, but police officers sent to patrol the area in the morning didn’t see people gathering, and so assumed the march wasn’t going to transpire (Interview XDK). We haven’t been able to account for what seems to be inadequate communication within the police services about the march – on the one hand, reported knowledge that the march may be taking place but without seemingly much concern about it, and on the other, the deployment of a small group of police officers to accompany a large number of youths who had gathered.

From around midday to 1pm, as reported to us, young men started to congregate in Belgrave. The group became larger, numbering in the few hundreds. The marchers were all male and typically young. They were virtually all Hindu, but individuals with Christian names on the march were also arrested (Interview XDE).

The great majority of people in the march had their faces covered, and many wore surgical (COVID-19) blue masks. In a Channel 4 News interview, one of the march organisers said that they masked up because they did not want to be identified for retaliatory violence: ‘Ok, so I will tell you what’s the reason for wearing mask and all. If any of them saw us, then they will come to our house. Because we are scared, that’s why we were wearing masks’.<sup>57</sup>

Several witnesses told us that they saw some of the men carrying weapons, including knives: ‘[They

## The orientation of the march was described to us as determined, purposeful and intended to cause fear and intimidation.

were] carrying, I would say knives that I've seen with my own eyes, bats, other items that would probably be used to hurt other communities' (Witness, Public Hearing). We heard from several witnesses that some of the marchers carried knives and bats (Interview XAK).

In the videos and photographs of the 17 September events, no weapons are visible. In one video, a community figure is pointing out to a police officer an alleged weapon (a knife) being carried by one of the marchers.<sup>58</sup> We also heard of knives allegedly being disposed of later that evening in Belgrave. We know that several individuals were arrested, charged and convicted for possession of knives and other weapons on 17 September.

It was also reported to us by a witness who spoke to several of the youths that, because they came from a fishing community in Daman and Diu where the carrying of knives was allegedly 'normal', they did not see anything wrong with having knives on them. However, it would not be considered 'normal' to carry a knife in public in India, where it would be illegal and the knife would be construed as an offensive weapon in similar ways to the UK. While we do not know the extent to which marchers carried knives, it is not credible to believe that people didn't know that carrying knives in public for use as potential weapons was illegal.

The orientation of the march was described to us as determined, purposeful and intended to cause fear and intimidation: 'They looked threatening and dangerous. And you know, if I was a female of any age for that matter or even older as a man or even as a young child, I would have been quite fearful, quite fearful' (Interview XDF). Several witnesses described how the march was not simply a protest but was intended to cause 'trouble' and 'hell-bent on injuring people' and 'causing damage' (Witness, Public Hearing). Other (Hindu) witnesses to the march shared this view:

...they were again groups of these same people chanting, but also clearly trying to aggravate as well... Just general antisocial kind of behaviour which again gave to me a different angle of this is not just 'we're going to march the streets', this is 'we are gonna march... and we're also trying to disrupt and be a nuisance in that way', which again becomes more threatening. (Witness, Public Hearing)

Some witnesses described how, at different times of the day, groups (both Hindu and Muslim) were either arriving in cars or being dropped off. During

the night, an ex-councillor said: 'I can't speculate where they came from, but the way in which I saw people being driven up in cars and cars, unloaded and then speeding off again and stuff. It just didn't strike me as people who lived locally' (Interview XAR). Similarly, others claimed that they had seen two individuals 'loading their car full of stuff' (Interview XDK). In addition, there was also social media disinformation about marchers being brought by coach or bus into Leicester from London (Interview XDO), a claim that was disproved on several occasions (see Chapter 9: Social Media and the Leicester Events).

### Route and events

We outline below the route of the march from Belgrave to Green Lane Road and back to Belgrave, highlighting key incidents that occurred. We discuss some illustrative incidents in greater detail later. The march, which measured 3km (1.86 miles) on Google Maps, was initially accompanied by six to eight officers (Interview XDF). News media also confirmed there were only eight officers on duty at first despite the police's awareness of the march and the context of the violence over the previous two or three weeks.<sup>59</sup>

From eyewitness accounts and other reports, at around 1pm groups gathered near Loughborough Road and Ross Walk, though others mentioned groups congregating at the corner of Loughborough Road and Roughton Street. They then walked towards Belgrave Road, accompanied by a few police officers (Interview XDC). They crossed Melton Road and went through Cossington Park and the streets adjacent to it into Martin Street. They then turned into Forest Road, which some witnesses say occurred around 3pm (Interview XDF), crossed Humberstone Road, and went down Spinney Hill Road and into Green Lane Road, by which time the march numbered several hundred people, mostly youths. We also heard reports of youths coming from Overton Road (rather than Forest Road), crossing Humberstone Road, and entering Spinney Hill Road.

So basically they're walking on Hastings Road and I'm just here, [on] Hastings Road on [which] they came out... There's a ball court on Hastings Road [on the corner] of Overton Road. Yeah. So, Overton Rd. So, what happened, there's a side street and everyone came out from there, so we followed them here, and then there's loads of people.

Others said marchers, shouting 'Jai Shree Ram!', turned left into St Barnabas Road from Humberstone Road and walked towards Green Lane Road through Spinney Hills (Interview XBA).

The march went down Green Lane Road. There were frequent shouts of 'Jai Shree Ram!' and 'Vande Mataram!' Some witnesses said that they saw saffron flags on the march or later in the evening on Belgrave Road: 'Their flags, their orange sort of flags, that triangle one' (Interview XBC). However, videos of the day and evening that we have seen do not show saffron flags being carried by marchers.

We were told that the march also attempted to head down Asfordby Street towards Jame' Masjid, but the police prevented it, and the marchers had to turn back (Interview XAC). There is video footage showing a group of around 100 youths walking down Green Lane Road, seemingly trying to head down Asfordby Street, where the Jame' Masjid is located, but several police officers are blocking that street.

It was also claimed that the march was planned to go past several mosques (Interview XDE). However, the route down Spinney Hill Road into Green Lane Road is also the most direct route to the latter, and marchers couldn't have avoided going past Baytul 'Ilm and the Faiz-e-Raza Academy, which both happen to be at or near road junctions. Conversely, alternative routes the march did not take would have also passed several mosques. No incidents were reported to us in connection with the march passing the Baytul 'Ilm Madrassah on Spinney Hill Road.

On Green Lane Road, several individuals perceived to be Muslim, including passersby, shopkeepers, and women with children, were physically assaulted in unprovoked attacks by individuals or groups. Videos show an attack on an individual outside a grocery store on the corner of Green Lane Road and Bridge Road during the afternoon.

The march passed beyond the junction between Green Lane Road and Bridge Road around 4pm (Interview XAC). From around 3pm, messages were circulating widely on WhatsApp groups asking Muslims to mobilise against the march. A common claim in the messages was that a mosque (often, the Jame' mosque) was being attacked:

It was around 3-4 o'clock on the Saturday, I started to get some traffic on my phone relating to this group of individuals that were marching on Green Lane Road. And following the messaging [were] videos that were being circulated on social media [about] a large group walking on Green Lane Road...there were messages starting to be [circulated that] everybody needs to get to Green Lane Road, these guys are trying to attack the mosque.

Prior to 6pm, rumours that Muslims had been attacked were circulating. Also, that Hindu youths were marching towards the mosque on Asfordby Street (Witness, Public Hearing).

In the afternoon, across social media, especially WhatsApp, a range of narratives was disseminated.

Figure 10: Approximate route of march from Belgrave to North Evington on 17 September 2022

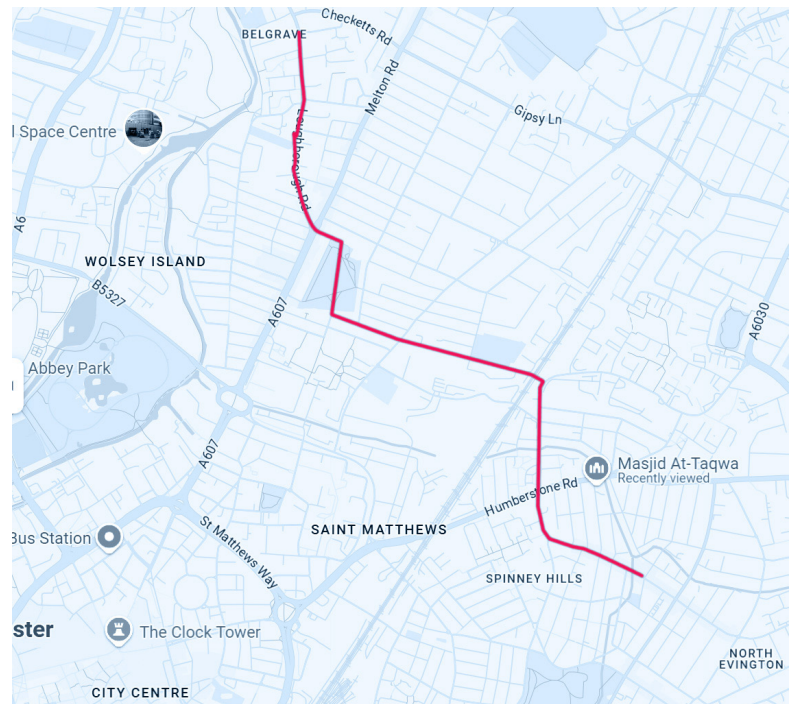
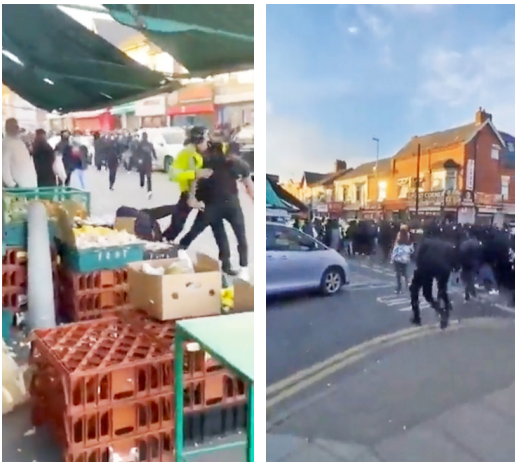


Figure 11: About a hundred youths walking down Green Lane Road having apparently tried to turn into Asfordby Street



Figure 12: Attack on an individual by group of youths on corner of Green Lane Road and Bridge Road, followed by a large group running towards the attack



Some accounts on Twitter and Instagram, including @doamuslims and @ukapnacentral, were spreading false information that a mosque or mosques were under attack by Hindus, and urging Muslims to come to Leicester or Green Lane Road. Just after 8pm, Leicestershire Police issued a message saying: ‘We’ve seen reports on social media that a mosque is being attacked. Officers on the ground have confirmed this is not true. Please only share information on social media you know to be true.’<sup>60</sup> There was anti-Hindu and anti-Muslim abuse on social media during the afternoon, including widespread use of anti-Hindu slurs, such as ‘mushri-keen’, ‘cow worshippers’ and ‘Hindu dogs’.<sup>61</sup>

There was also a call on social media urging Muslim and Sikh people in Birmingham to meet at 3pm at the PowerLeague sports complex on the M6 motorway, one of the routes to Leicester. These messages were clearly intended to encourage physical action against others. Witnesses also described some (Muslim) counter-protestors being from outside Leicester, especially in the evening’s events: ‘We’d try to calm things down a bit and tell a few groups, because I know a lot of the groups, but there was a lot of out of towners that [had] come by now. So, you had a lot of out of towners there’ (Interview XDK). A few Birmingham residents were arrested later that day. We understand that police officers also stopped some cars on the outskirts of Leicester. Over the weekend, which included a mobilisation by Muslim groups on Sunday, over half of the 18 people arrested came from outside Leicester, including Birmingham, Solihull, Luton and London.<sup>62</sup>

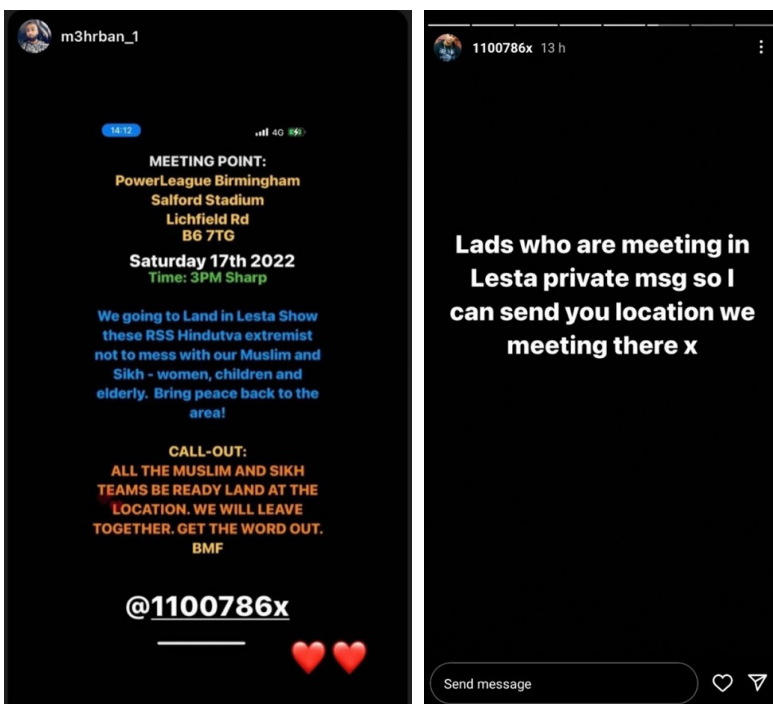
Approximately half an hour after the march entered Green Lane Road, young Muslims began arriving at the bottom end of Green Lane Road, with numbers increasing as the evening went on. A witness reported that ‘the groups weren’t really interacting with anybody’ but just ‘milling around’ (Interview XAC).

The Muslim counter-mobilisation included some youths and men with face masks, including balaclavas, though videos show the majority of counter-protestors on 17 September were not masked. However, one witness, who wanted a peaceful counter-demonstration, said that the Muslim response made the situation worse since many ‘came dressed in jet black and in balaclavas’ (Interview XBE).

Between 4–5pm, there was a confrontation at the junction of Green Lane Road and Bridge Road between the marchers and those who had come to oppose them, the first large confrontation. Several violent altercations with counter-protestors on Green Lane Road and in side streets followed this. There was a series of flashpoints along Green Lane Road.

Asr prayers were at 4.19pm on that date, so some Muslims who gathered in and around Green Lane Road performed prayers in the street (Witness, Public Hearing). At 7.10pm, Maghrib prayers were also performed in the street at Uppingham Road near the junction with St Barnabas Road by around 20-30 people. Videos of the latter street prayer were subsequently used by Hindutva groups for communally divisive purposes (see Insight UK and the Leicester Events).

Figure 13: Social media messages calling people in or near Birmingham to meet and go to Leicester



## Returning to Belgrave

Following these confrontations, the marchers headed back to Belgrave, walking up Green Lane Road and through several of its side streets, or going down St Barnabas Road and its adjacent streets. By this time, many more police officers were accompanying the marchers. Officers were blocking certain streets to prevent confrontations between marchers and an increasing group of counter-protestors.

In a video taken by a witness, around 50-60 youths are crossing Uppingham Road just after 6pm and congregating at the top of Layton Road. Another group of Hindus are on the other side. Some members from the first group beckon the others to join them, but then cross Uppingham Road only to cross back. A police officer shouts at them to keep moving down Layton Road. The group is clearly undecided about where to go, with some youths signalling to go down Layton Road toward Belgrave, whereas others appear to want to go back toward Green Lane Road.

In the video, a (Muslim) community figure is pointing out alleged weapons, including knives, to a police officer and asking why they are not being arrested. He also says the youths are engaging in hate speech. A police officer responds that he cannot understand what is being said, and they are following public disorder management approaches.<sup>63</sup> Another witness described how, during the afternoon around Bridge Road, a police constable had implied that the Hindu march could take place because Muslims 'had theirs' last week, a reference to the 5-7 September events. The PC's statement was subsequently retracted (Interview XDC).

Police lines prevented other Hindu groups from heading down certain streets, including streets where counter-protestors had assembled. A witness described Hindu marchers walking along Bridge Road around 6–6.30pm and Muslim counter-protestors following on the parallel Duxbury Road, described as wanting to 'get to' the Hindus, but unable to as the police had blocked their path (Interview XDC). We were also told of a large group of (Muslim) youths walking towards Gypsy Lane around 6.30pm (Interview XDC).

As the counter-protestors followed the marchers back to Belgrave, there were several incidents of violence, scuffles and attacks on the side streets. This included incidents on streets off Catherine Street and Melton Road, off Ross Walk and Marjorie Street, on Gypsy Lane, and on Melton and Belgrave roads.

Some of the counter-protestors tried to talk to the marchers about their concerns, including individuals they recognised as neighbours: 'I was walking one behind him, trying to get to talk: 'Come on, let's talk. Forget fighting. You wanna fight? We will do that another day, yeah? What's the concern? What is it?' Similarly, a witness recognised a neighbour on Forest / Hastings Road and tried to speak to him: 'I go: 'Bro, what are you doing?', and then he just put his mask on (Interview XAK).

Groups were stopped at various points by the police, including a Hindu group being held at

Figure 14: Some 'flashpoints' reported on Green Lane Road and Martin Street, 17 September 2022

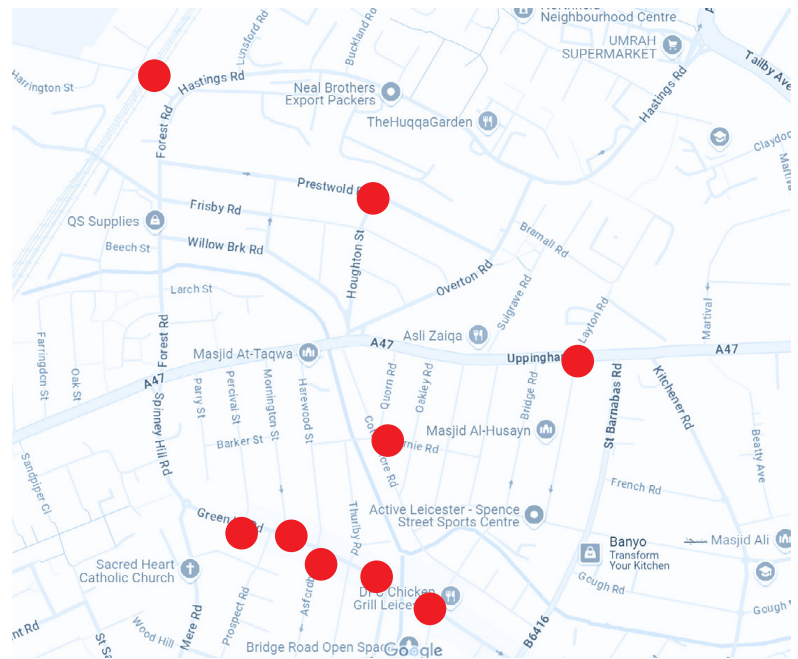


Figure 15: Large group of Hindu youths on Layton Road at junction with Uppingham Road



Figure 16: Marchers contained by police at the corner of Spence Street and Duxbury Road

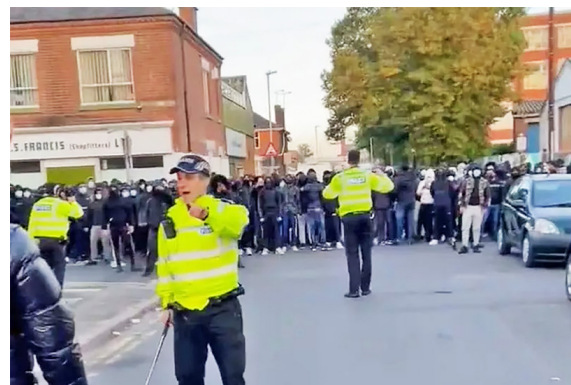


Figure 17: Hindus on Layton Road blocked from confrontations with Muslims on Duxbury Road



Martin Street near the overhead bridge (Interview XAC, Interview XAK).

All I see the police are there on Forest Road where Martin Street is. And police have barricaded it right and this is how it was. And then these guys, the police were pushing them back under the bridge to Martin Street.

It was reported that many marchers disposed of their masks at an industrial estate on Hastings Road (which becomes Forest Road). CCTV footage from business owners, seen by witnesses, but not by us, shows them disposing of the masks (Interview XBA) in an area that was also shown to a then-Leicester MP. The group then dispersed through the back streets around Catherine Street and the back of Melton Road (Interview XAC).

**Incidents in the afternoon and evening**

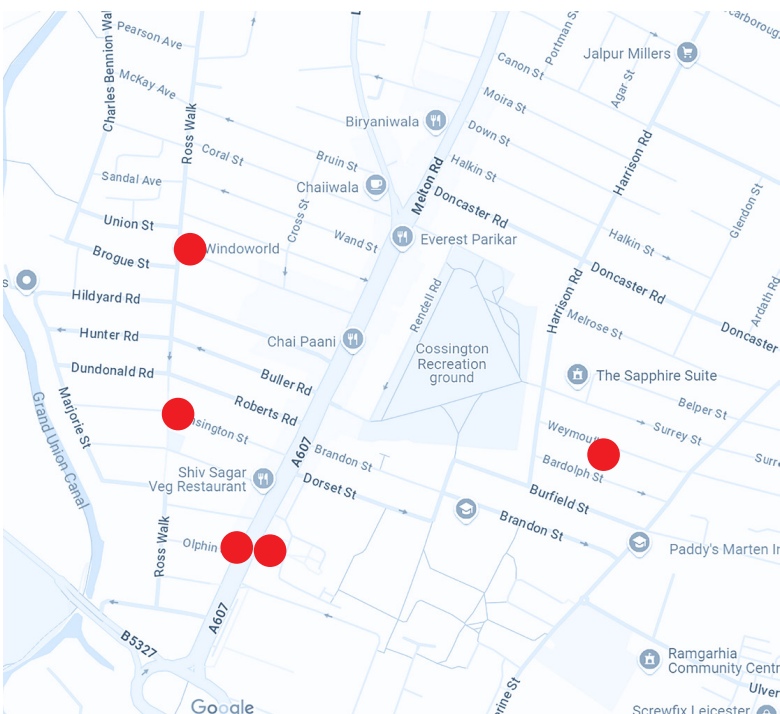
The march, the counter-protest, and the violence in and around Green Lane, Belgrave and Melton Roads caused considerable fear among residents irrespective of religious or ethnic affiliation, as reported by many interviewees. Families were phoning each other or their members outside to ensure they were safe. Many older people were reported to be very concerned and frightened by the messages they were seeing on their phones (Interview XDF).

Several incidents of violent assault by the marchers on Green Lane Road, and again when the marchers were returning to Belgrave, were reported to us by witnesses, both Hindu and Muslim. We were told (by Hindus) of youths from the march damaging cars, pushing a mother with a buggy, and attacking people on Green Lane Road. Several witnesses, Hindu and Muslim, described having to shelter in grocery and takeaway shops because of the violence outside, with some shopkeepers calling people into their premises and pulling down their shutters. A worker in a shop described an incident involving a woman who was attacked. They supported her and allowed her to stay until the situation seemed safer: ‘And then there was, I remember there was a woman and a daughter coming to the shop, just panicked. [I asked her] ‘What’s happened?’ And she said, ‘Oh, there’s a group of Hindus marching, chanting. They’re throwing coffee, they’re throwing something at me.’ (Interview XBC).

A (then) city councillor described the fear felt by her colleague, also a councillor, who was driving in Leicester: ‘[She was] driving their grandchild through the area here. And she said the way that this mob were marching, she was so scared for her life, and she was just really worried about what had happened in Leicester. She couldn’t believe that this was happening in Leicester.’ (Interview XAX). Other witnesses described being told by their managers to leave work early because of the large groups. A woman working in Belgrave said:

So, my team leader advised if I could leave to go home early because I wear a scarf... ‘You could be a target and all that’. Yeah, because

Figure 18: Some flashpoints reported in Belgrave area



it's predominantly a Hindu area and out of fear and all that, so she told me: 'Just for your safety, if you could leave early'.

A Muslim man driving towards Melton Road was harassed while in his car:

I immediately took my phone out and started filming them. They seen how I was dressed, and immediately ran towards my car, started shaking my car, banging on my windows. There was one policewoman who came running to my car. She's tried to stop them. And then one person from those protesters stopped everybody and said: ['Let's] get away from here'... and then they all walked away. And that incident really shook me up.

Another Muslim man was approached by a taxi, and the driver said: "Brother get in my car please, you don't know what's going on, you don't know what [weapons] they got. Get in my car, please. You know, this is just safety" So, I got in his car.' (Interviews XAK). An off-duty Hindu police officer, who was with his Muslim friend, narrowly escaped being attacked: 'My colleague... nearly got beat up because they saw maybe he's a Hindu guy. Luckily, I went back to the car, and I said what are you lot doing. Because he was with me... luckily nothing happened to him.' (Interview XDC).

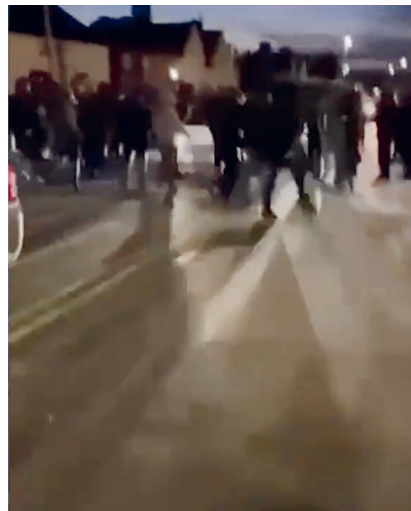
Later that evening, a Hindu man driving down Gypsy Lane was stopped not far from the junction with Catherine Street and surrounded by a Muslim group who were following the marchers back to Belgrave. Some of the group attacked the man and attempted to drag him from the car. His face was slashed with a weapon, and he suffered other injuries. A local activist, who was part of the group surrounding the car, was reported to have prevented the attack from continuing and was seen by the victim as the person who 'saved his life'.<sup>64</sup> In another description of this same incident, a witness described how a car was coming down Gypsy Lane, and the (Hindu) driver saw many (Muslim) youths coming down the street.

[He] was driving, and he got a call from someone [saying] 'you don't need to be in the area, you need to get out from there' [for his safety]. So, when he saw 100 people walking down there toward Gypsy Lane, he got scared and he tried to get out.

This witness told the crowd that he knew the driver (though he didn't), after which the attacks on him stopped. Similarly, we had reports of two Hindus beaten up with 'just fists' (Interview XBC). We heard of a (Muslim) youth and an elderly (Muslim) man who were beaten up later that night. The elderly man was attacked 'really badly', 'he was on one of the corners. He got caught up in it, so they hurt him as well' (Interview XAV).

Some witnesses described stones and glass bottles being thrown, either on Belgrave Road in the evening (Interview XBJ), or at other times – for

Figure 19: Attack on man in a car by large group, Gypsy Lane near Catherine Street, 17 September 2022



example, one witness described missiles being thrown at him near Bridge Road (Interview XAK). We were also told of some Hindus who attempted to seek refuge in the afternoon from the violence at the Shree Hindu Temple on St Barnabas Road (Interview XDP). Some survey respondents similarly described an atmosphere of fear during the day, and the need to get away quickly: 'took my elderly mum to safety ASAP' (Respondent 97), 'I run [a]way' (Respondent 77), 'I straight went home' (Respondent 4).

### Shiv Sagar restaurant incident

The impact of the events on individuals and families who were out in the evening is illustrated well by what happened at the Shiv Sagar restaurant, located opposite the Gandhi statue and a short distance from it. The statue is next to the Shivalaya mandir and on the opposite side of the road from a carwash. We spoke to several witnesses who were inside and around the restaurant.

Since it was a Saturday evening, the restaurant was busy, serving primarily South Asian families with children and older people, around 50-60 people. Around 5.30pm, customers heard some commotion outside and initially dismissed it.

'Oh, it's just some young kids running around', whatever, you couldn't really tell. But the volume started to increase, then [became] crazy. In a matter of seconds, there was from a trickle to hordes of people running down. And of course, the same way that people tend to behave in these things, they were banging on the doors, banging on the windows.

It quickly became clear to customers that a serious incident was occurring (Interview XAB). Outside, there was a lot of shouting, including some people banging on the restaurant doors and windows. Around 6pm, a young (Hindu) man bleeding from injuries and without his shoes, came running into the restaurant, seeking help. He was walking in Cossington Park when he was asked whether he was Hindu or Muslim. He said 'Hindu' and was chased and beaten, losing his shoes as he tried to run away from the group (Interview XAQ). He said he wasn't far from home but wanted to escape a group attacking him, so he ran to the restaurant as he knew it. Witnesses said he was injured, bleeding and looked like he had been beaten up. Restaurant staff and customers assisted him (Interview XAB). Witnesses also described a second man coming into the restaurant with blood on his hands from injuries (Interview XAR, Interview XDM).

The restaurant staff pulled down the blinds, dimmed the lights and locked the restaurant entrance.

And what happened was there was a lot of shouting outside, people banging on the doors and what had happened was [they] closed all the blinds, locked the door. There was still a lot

of noise, a lot of shouting, a lot of people in that were scared. They're wondering what's gonna happen. But yeah, basically shut everything off. There was, loads of people running outside towards there's, I think, a temple opposite. And we were basically stuck there for a few hours because it was too dangerous for us to go out, especially what was happening there... [Customers] were worried, nervous because they could hear and see everything that's happening outside.

Another witness said that a 'mob outside' were asking people if they were Muslims or Hindus and shouting 'Allahu Akbar' and threatening anyone who didn't also say this phrase that they would be beaten up (*maara jaayega*). The witness was asked if he was Muslim or Hindu, and he said he was a Muslim 'to save his life' (Interview XAB). According to the witness, Muslim families were let out periodically by the group if they said they were Muslim. Some customers left, whereas other Muslim families stayed inside out of fear.

A witness said the groups outside were heading towards the Shivalaya Mandir and carwash area, increasing in number as it got darker, and occasionally banging on the restaurant windows or door. More police officers were also seen outside. We were told that people were thinking:

How do we leave and how do we get out of here? Well, forget the food, we have to go. And they were scared because they go well, we don't know who's out there really, we don't know what they're after. I can't just go outside, especially while I've got kids and buggies and stuff.

Witnesses described a (white) woman, thought to be a youth or community worker, who came to the restaurant with a South Asian man and asked to be let in. She said the 'kids' outside were 'really angry' and advised people to leave in case they tried to smash the restaurant windows (Interview XAQ). Most families decided to stay inside as it didn't feel safe to go out.

Coincidentally, a then-councillor (Hindu) was at the restaurant. She phoned (then temporary) Chief Constable Rob Nixon to say, 'You need to get some men up here'. She explained how frightening the situation was, and that she had only seen one police van and a few police officers. She said that police officers on the ground had told her that 'they were so short of police officers' because some were on leave and others were deployed in London for the Queen's funeral, but that officers were coming from Loughborough and other places. She also texted the Mayor, Peter Soulsby, about the situation.

Around 8pm, a Muslim community figure knocked on the restaurant door. Because he was bearded, people inside were wary, but he spoke in Gujarati and told the customers he had come to help them get home safely. He returned with a Hindu friend and, together with the councillor, reassured the customers.

I gave them reassurance that: 'Look, I will ensure that every single one of you gets out of this and you don't have to worry.' There were old people in there and I was like, 'Why are these people stuck in all this?' I gave them the reassurances, you know. I told them that's my car outside. Their cars were parked in different places. I said: 'I will ensure that somebody walks you to your car and nothing happens to you'... We got everybody out of that restaurant. I do know different people [and asked them:] 'I need you to take this family to the car'. If one of the families said that 'We don't have a car', I said to the guy, 'Take my car, drive them to wherever they need to go to'. We got them all to their destination, everyone to their cars. And I think they were at peace after that. It took a little while, but it all happened.

The Muslim community figure, together with several others, escorted families to their cars or drove them home (Interview XAR, Interview XDC, Interview XAQ, Interview XAB, Interview XDM). One witness described the ordered way this was done, with one person leaving with a family while others remained with the next. On his return, the next family left, similarly accompanied, the whole process taking several hours. The staff at the restaurant were offered the same assistance.

In addition to the events at the Shiv Sagar restaurant, we heard other examples of cooperation among people considered to be on 'opposing sides'. We heard several stories of people – including those who were protesting during the day – coming to help people in the midst of the violence, regardless of their assumed religion. This included Hindus collecting strangers from venues and driving them to safety. We were told that many Hindu temple leaders had become aware of the march during the day. They were communicating, 'trying to stay on top' of the news coming their way, and sharing their concerns. From interviews, we understand that the march surprised Hindu community figures. A Hindu religious figure drafted a message that 'the country is in mourning, the Queen has died, we should be respecting this, get off the street, stop this. The Hindu community certainly is appalled by this'. The same figure also distributed a message to a network of imams in Leicester during the day and communicated with the Jame' Masjid to discuss the march and previous incidents. The mosque also apologised to him for the pulling down and burning of the flag that had occurred outside the Shivalaya Mandir (see The Shivalaya Mandir incident). We believe that these examples are of great significance in illustrating the everyday anti-communal sentiment and mutual assistance that, according to many people we spoke to, typified community relations in Leicester before these recent events.

### Belgrave Road, evening and night

In Belgrave Road, the disturbances escalated and continued until the early hours. A witness who was part of a group that included a Hindu person and

Figure 20: Hundreds of (Muslim) youths running into Belgrave Road in the evening<sup>65</sup>



Figure 21: Belgrave Road Shivalaya Mandir and carwash



The Muslim community figure, together with several others, escorted families to their cars or drove them home. One witness described the ordered way this was done, with one person leaving with a family while others remained with the next.

Figure 22: Police line cordoning off Muslim counter-protestors on Belgrave Road outside Shivalaya Mandir and its car park<sup>68</sup>



Figure 23: Other mainly Muslim counter-protestors on Belgrave Road near the junction with Olphin St<sup>69</sup>



a few Muslims described the marchers turning off Catherine Street and walking down Doncaster Road towards Melton Road. Some individuals broke away from the larger group and dispersed into side streets, including to their own or their friends' homes, whereas around 50-60 youths went on to Melton and Belgrave Roads and held a march there (Interview XAK).

Witnesses described how Muslim youths then started arriving in the Belgrave area in very large numbers. A witness described his thoughts as: 'Oh, God! This is going to turn nasty':

Then, all of a sudden... we had messages come from our phone that 'We're coming, we're coming on our way', and someone said, 'What? Coming where? Who's coming?' And then I just seen a group of Muslim guys actually turned up from Cossington Park and I've tried calming everyone down. Let's not do anything. We don't know, there [are families there], kids there. [But] no one's going to listen to me, everyone's crazy that day.

There were subsequently large numbers of Muslim and Hindu youths 'running around' the Belgrave Road area: 'There were lots of groups and people running in different directions across the road down the back streets into Saint Mark's estate, down the back of Marjorie St' (Interview XAC).

In the evening, there was a much larger police presence in Belgrave. We were also told that by around 8pm, the Commander of the East Leicester Neighbourhood Policing Area, Yakub Ismail, had arrived in Belgrave Road (Witness, Public Hearing). A witness told us that, around 8pm, Yakub Ismail had said to them that the Uppingham Road area was 'calm' (Interview XDC). He had been contacted in the afternoon about the march and, seemingly, wasn't aware of the disturbances in the city at the time (Interview XAK). During the evening, Rob Nixon also came to Belgrave.

By the evening, a large Hindu group was positioned across and at the bottom of Belgrave Road, around the junction with Olphin Street, though there were Hindu groups at other places on Belgrave Road, roughly from the junctions between Dorset and Olphin Streets, and in the side streets leading

to Marjorie Street. The police were positioned in a line, separating the large group of Hindus near Olphin Street and the large group of Muslim counter-protestors that was forming. The distance between these groups was initially around 15-20 feet. The police line between them ‘then started to increase and get bigger and bigger, as the crowd started to get bigger and bigger’ (Interview XAC).

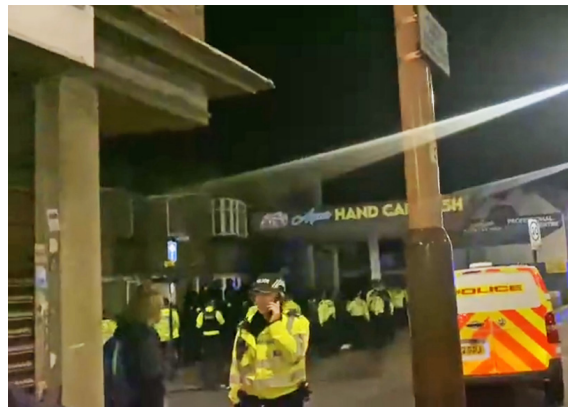
It just kept escalating as the evening went on... there were scuffles going on before the police had segregated the two groups. There was lots of scuffles going on in the back streets and people trying to get round the back and get to the car wash, petrol station area and the police were trying to contain everyone in one space... On Belgrave Road, the two groups never actually got to each other between the police cordon. But there was missiles being thrown, bottles being thrown, bricks being thrown from both sides across the police line. That group [in the car wash] was trying to get out, and the police were just holding them in, and the group that wasn't locked into the car wash area were trying to break the police line to get to the Hindu [group]. And that went on all evening, the hustle, the scurrying, the kind of toing and froing, the missiles being thrown.

We were told of an attempt, facilitated by Rob Nixon, to bring representatives from both groups together to agree on a dispersal strategy (Interview XAK). After about half an hour of deliberation, a few individuals from the Muslim and Hindu groups were chosen. They were taken to a separate location. Some of the discussion between the representatives was in Gujarati and Rob Nixon was present.

During the meeting, one of the representatives from the Hindu group was reported to have said that the reason for their march was because they believed Muslims were assembling from Birmingham and elsewhere and coming to Leicester to attack Hindus (Interview XAK). It was agreed that the Hindu group would disperse up Belgrave Road, and the Muslim group would disperse in the other direction. A witness at the meeting described this decision as a ‘very bad idea’ because its outcome was that the Hindus got ‘barricaded’ in the car wash and were scared because, by then, they were facing a much larger Muslim group. Several witnesses described the Hindu group as being ‘trapped’ in the car wash for many hours. Part of the Muslim crowd broke away and was cordoned off outside the Shivalaya Mandir of the Leicestershire Brahma Samaj, virtually opposite the car wash (Interview XAK).

Witnesses said that by the early evening, there were roughly 200 Hindus and 200-300 Muslims positioned against each other (Interview XDC), with the number of Hindus declining as the evening progressed. Most interviewees said that missiles, mainly glass bottles, were being thrown by the Hindu group towards the Muslim group and towards the police who were containing the latter. However, other witnesses said both groups were

Figure 24: A small group of Hindu youths contained in the carwash, Olphin St and Belgrave Road<sup>70</sup>



## We heard several stories of people – including those who were protesting during the day – coming to help people in the midst of the violence, regardless of their assumed religion.

throwing missiles (Interview XAC). Several bottles allegedly hit police officers. Videos we have seen show bottles hitting the ground near the Muslim group or the police.<sup>66</sup> We didn't see videos of missiles being thrown by the counter-protestors towards the Hindu group or the police.

Witnesses said there were occasional shouts of 'Jai Shree Ram' or 'Allahu Akbar', but otherwise little 'religious sloganeering' (Interview XAC). A video from earlier in the evening shows a group chanting 'Allahu Akbar' around the junction of Garfield Street and Belgrave Road. Respondents to our survey also described the following types of shouting on 17 September: 'Jai Shri Ram constantly', 'Allahu Akbar', 'Various Islamic and Hindu terms', 'Lots of swearing and dirty comments made to aggravate the Hindu community', 'swearing against (Muslims and Pakistani) passer-by', 'Anti Islam chants', 'The shouting of "fascists" to groups of Hindus who were attending temples or walking around', 'Threats of being killed for being a Hindu', 'Kill them all... don't leave anyone', 'Fuck Hindu', 'To beat Muslims up and get together in certain areas'. Witnesses described the mood as 'angry', with a lot of shouting by both groups and other abusive threats and 'non-sense' (Interview XDF, Interview XAV).

Just before 8pm on 17 September, Leicestershire Police put dispersal orders in place in East Leicester under sections 34 and 35 of the 2014 Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act, the orders remaining in place until 8am the following morning.<sup>67</sup> Several community figures described their cooperation with the police in calming the situation in Belgrave Road during the evening and night, and asking counter-protestors to calm down and disperse. This included some senior imams from the East Midlands (Interview XAV, Interview XDX), as well as other community figures.

One of the police officers recognised me, so they took me along to where they had set up a little bit of a command base where the Chief Constable was. He looked at me and he said to me, 'Can you get them all to go home? We're going to deal with it. We'll deal with everything tomorrow. Just get everybody away.' I looked at him and I said: 'You've got about 300-odd, angry youth here and you're asking me to get them away.' And my response to him was that, you know, I can help you, but I can't do it, it's not my job. I can support you and help you to do it. But don't make it out like it's my responsibility.

Because I don't mind helping, but I can't... I don't even know all of them, and all of them don't even know me because they're from different parts of the city, different areas. Some may not even be from the city, and the emotions were running very high.

### The Shivalaya Mandir incident

The pulling down and attempted burning of the flag from outside the Shivalaya Mandir on Belgrave Road on the evening of 17 September was a signal event in the 2022 Leicester violence. Together with the protest a few days later on 20 September in Birmingham outside the Durga Bhawan temple, it created considerable anxiety among many Hindu groups about targeted attacks on Hindus (for more on the Durga Bhawan temple incident, see Radical and militant preachers).

Videos of the Shivalaya Mandir incident went viral on international social media, and it was reported extensively in the Indian media. For many Hindus, the taking down of the flag (and smashing of windows) was seen as an unambiguous attack on their religion and places of worship, and on them as Hindus. For Hindutva groups, it energised their political narrative of 'Hindus under attack' (see Insight UK and the Leicester Events). Many commentators, both in the UK and internationally, and especially in India, saw this event as the most significant one of the day, the coverage typically implying falsely that the violence that day was primarily the targeting of a Hindu temple by Muslims. Often, the initial Indian coverage did not mention the march, instead making more generic references to communal clashes and the cricket match events in August. Because of its importance, we discuss the event in some detail below.

During the evening, as the Muslim counter-protestors were cordoned outside the Shivalaya Mandir, a young Muslim man climbed up onto the wall of the mandir and pulled down a saffron flag. Attempts were also made to burn the flag. Missiles were also thrown at the mandir, and some of its windows were smashed. The Leicestershire Brahma Samaj responded the next day:

Yesterday there were scenes of protest, violence and disorderly behaviour carried out by a gathering of large groups of people on Belgrave Road. Members of the gathering were seen trespassing the Shivalaya building, sitting

on our walls, vandalising the Shivalaya's flags and lighting them on fire soon after. We are shocked and saddened to see such behaviour in Leicester. We do not condone such behaviour and ask everyone to keep safe. We hope for order, oneness, unity, peace and calmness in our community.<sup>71</sup>

The flags outside the temple were ordinary saffron flags with no political connotations. The use of saffron colour, including in flags, robes, and religious decorations, is traditional in Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The colour saffron symbolises many things within Hinduism, including purity. The saffron flag has also been used – its detractors say appropriated – by the RSS and its affiliates to symbolise a Hindu nation-state (*Hindurashtra*). However, the saffron flag in Hinduism doesn't have the meaning the RSS seeks to assign to it. It simply connotes Hinduism and the purity of faith: 'orange is a sign of purity. [When] we use the colour saffron, it means it's pure, it's goodness'.

Based on eyewitness accounts of the event, we outline what happened. Initially, when the Muslim counter-protestors had been cordoned outside the Shivalaya Mandir, this location wasn't considered significant by them. A witness said that, as a possible precaution, they would position people to guard the temple.

A Muslim councillor and a few other Muslim community leaders who were there and mosque representatives... we had stationed them around the mandir [saying], 'Look, you stay there and make sure no one does anything to the mandir.' [There were about] 400 people, and 99.9% of them weren't doing anything to the mandir, wasn't interested in the mandir or were just interested in ensuring that the Hindus [positioned opposite] don't escalate... And when we realised that no one's doing anything, there wasn't a need for [concern] so, we just asked the representatives to stay there as a precaution, although no one was doing anything there anyway.

A young man tried to climb up the wall towards the flag, and several witnesses pulled him back twice. A couple of witnesses described that, on the one hand, they were trying to keep an eye on the man and prevent him from climbing the wall; on the other hand, they were watching to ensure bottles thrown from across the road didn't hit them.

Figure 25: Republic World in India reporting that a Hindu temple was targeted in Leicester<sup>72</sup>



**Videos of the Shivalaya Mandir incident went viral on international social media, and it was reported extensively in the Indian media.**

While councillors had gone to the scene and worked for many hours under challenging circumstances to calm the situation and work with police officers to ensure safe dispersal, and while the Chief Constable was also present, there was no reported presence of the City Mayor, nor any direct representation from his office on the ground during the events of the night.

Then two to three young men who had come, they started approaching the mandir and I noticed that one of them climbed up and he was trying to pull [the flag] down... I went there with one of my friends and another mosque, community leader and we told him to get down, and he got down. So that was the first thing, so he got down now, and everyone, all the Muslims there were taunting him, were telling him after: 'Why did you do that for?'... The Muslims there were rebuking him. 'Why did he do this for?' And then he went back with his group. There was only two or three of them. Then they realised that the Muslims there are not going to give them any support. So discreetly, he went, and he started to light it. And again, we went, and I stopped him, physically stopped him. We took the lighter away, my friend took the lighter away, my Muslim friend and then there was another Hindu friend of mine who had come. We all went together and then he stumped the flames out... So, we stopped the burning of the flag and then we told them: 'Look, you guys are not welcome here' and we moved them away. But I think what's important to point out is that 99 per cent of the Muslims there were supportive of what we were doing, no one supported them, they all rebuked them, and we basically removed them and then they weren't allowed to stay within our midst, so we ejected them, and then they went away. Where did they go? I don't know. But they weren't welcome. And we made it clear to them that you are not welcome... And we said to them that, 'Look, we are not against the Hindu community, we're not against Hindus, it is a place of worship'. I even said to them that, 'Look, [Islam] says that we have to protect all places of worship, and this is a place of worship'.

The overriding theme from the counter-protesters was strong opposition to the flag incident and many attempts to prevent it. Significant in the opposition was the use of religion to oppose the act: 'And I'm like, 'Listen, mate, that's not what we're about. That's

not what we're here for. This is *haram*. You're Muslim, and we cannot desecrate a place of worship.' (Interview XDO, Interview XDE). Another witness described how an imam 'went to tell that guy that: "what you are doing is completely unlawful. You're burning a flag of [the mandir], and it says in the Quran that you shouldn't be doing this."' (Interview XAK). These interventions also highlight the possibility of using religious teaching and religious scripts as resources for tolerance, mutual respect, and even potential opposition to communalism. After the group remonstrated with him, the man who took down the flag and his associates reportedly ran away. It's unclear whether the individual and his associates were responsible for smashing the mandir's windows, or whether others were. Several witnesses also claimed the individual was not from Leicester, but we have no information on whether he was or wasn't.

Following the incident, a delegation of three individuals from the crowd went to the mandir with a police officer to apologise, check that everyone inside was 'okay', and say they would fix any damage.

[Someone had] not just pulled the flag down, but somebody had thrown something and smashed a window. So, we thought, let's go in and see if everybody's okay. So, then we knocked. It took a while for them to answer, quite understandably. They were afraid that, you know, they may be attacked or something. So, we stood there and then... I just shouted out who I am and who I represent, and they felt a bit safer. And apparently there was only two [people] in the mandir at the time... I explained to [them] who we were and why we're there and to reassure [them] that they're safe, there isn't anything to fear because nobody's up to attack the temple. It was one individual who's an isolated individual, an isolated incident, and there was nobody supporting him. If the intention was to attack the mandir, there was no police presence between the group of Muslims and the mandir... their backs [were] to the mandir as opposed to

facing the mandir... So, there was no intention to attack any place of worship at all... I gave them my telephone number. I gave my contact details... I did mention without taking any responsibility, as a community, we are prepared as a gesture of goodwill, to show you that we are not of the opinion that any place of worship should be desecrated or anything at all. We offered to pay for the damage to the window... I did reassure [them], I gave [them] my number and I said to [them], 'Look, anytime even if in the middle of the night you feel that there is something that is bothering you and you feel unsafe, I am more than happy to take a call and to support you'. So, that's how we left it with them.

This witness described a call on Sunday morning to the temple during which he reiterated the offer to fix and pay for any damage to the temple, explaining that it was an individual action not supported by the counter-protestors. He also said to temple staff: 'I'd love for you to contact me. I'd love the opportunity to come and meet you and let's see how we can work together to build relationships'.

Just before 2am that morning, Leicestershire police stated that they were 'aware of video circulating showing a man pulling down a flag outside a religious building on Melton Road. This appears to have taken place while officers were dealing with nearby public disorder. We do not tolerate violence or disorder and are investigating the incident.'<sup>73</sup> Aside from the Shivalaya Mandir, there was also fear and concern at other Hindu mandirs about possible violence.

There was nervousness in the [BAPS Swaminarayan] temple. We were at the BAPS Temple. That day, even when we closed the gates for the safety of the gathering, there were young Muslim men present. But, contrary to rumours, they didn't damage the temple or engage in violence. They circled the area, which made us anxious, but their presence didn't lead to any direct confrontation. Inside, people of all ages were praying peacefully, and our focus remained on keeping the atmosphere respectful and safe.

### Night and dispersal

Following the Shivalaya Mandir events, videos show a large police cordon around the counter-protestors outside the temple, with others milling about on Belgrave Road. The Hindu group, by now small, had been herded into the carwash area and surrounded by police officers.<sup>74</sup> The Muslim group reportedly numbered at least a hundred people after 1am, whereas the Hindu group was much smaller, around 10-20 individuals: 'The reason why the Hindu guys were in that corner was actually for their own safety' (Interview XAR). Another video, seemingly taken at 1.50am shows Belgrave Road blocked off around the junction of Garfield Street by two police vans, two police cars, and a line of police officers, with around 50 (presumed Muslim) people standing near them.<sup>75</sup>

But the crowd kept growing. Through seven, eight o'clock, nine, ten o'clock, eleven... It was getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and that [Hindu] group were physically trapped now. And there was a real sense of how are we going to get this group out from the car wash and safely away? And how are we going to disperse this [Muslim] group [who are] saying they're not moving until 'we get hold of them'.

A view among several Muslim counter-protestors was that they believed many of the Hindus were armed or carried knives, and they wanted the police to search them, remove their masks, identify them, and get other details before letting them disperse. Some witnesses told us the group had been kept in the carwash for many hours, giving individuals enough time to drop or discard any weapons. This resulted in a negotiation with the police to allow a 'monitor' from the Muslim group (to whom we spoke) to observe, from the opposite side of the road, the police searching people in the Hindu group (Interview XAC). The police have powers under the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act to remove face coverings or items used to conceal one's identity. The police were reported to have agreed to the search and identification, and asked community figures to give this information to the crowd and to ask them to disperse and go home. A witness told us that it took 'a lot of convincing' to persuade the Muslim crowd to go home (Interview XDX).

### Political and community figures and the police

Witnesses also described actions by councillors on the ground during the evening, including negotiating with the police and working with the two respective groups to stay calm, disperse and go home. They included councillors Rita Patel, Kirk Master, Mohanbhai Valand, Mohammed Dawood, Nita Solanki and Ruma Ali. A councillor said to us that they did not see themselves as either Hindu or Muslim. Nevertheless, it was significant that councillors mainly worked with the group that were their co-religionists, rather than across both groups. Additionally, while councillors had gone to the scene and worked for many hours under challenging circumstances to calm the situation and work with police officers to ensure safe dispersal, and while the Chief Constable was also present, there was no reported presence of the City Mayor, nor any direct representation from his office on the ground during the events of the night.

It was reported to us by an ex-councillor present (corroborated by other witnesses, including other ex-councillors) that the police dispersal strategy was based on letting people go in small groups to prevent skirmishes. This process reportedly included the use of drones to monitor dispersal.

Yakub Ismail and Rob Nixon came over to us and spoke to us and said the only way they could handle the situation properly was if they had a cordon around the Hindu youths so that

they didn't get into skirmishes again. They were going to escort all the Muslim youths out of the area. They had drones, and they had vehicles in the area. Once that was done, they would then escort all of the Hindu youngsters back to where they lived, and most of them lived locally, so back to where they lived. That was the only way they could ensure people's safety.

People were largely dispersed by the police by around 3am, with those remaining leaving by 4am (Interview XAC). The day's events lasted over 14 hours, from around 1pm until around 3am. During the evening and night, in side streets off Belgrave Road, it was reported that several individuals who were dispersing or uninvolved, mostly Muslims, were attacked by small groups, mostly Hindus, some seriously, including an elderly man.

Most of the people searched that night were from the Hindu and not the Muslim group. This led to concerns about fairness, with allegedly different rules for the two groups, with only the Hindu group cordoned off, searched and having their names taken. A Hindu councillor we met received a call from another Hindu councillor who had received a phone call around 10pm from men in the carwash 'who were saying that they needed help' (Interview XAR). Reportedly, the Hindu group: 'were really frightened. They didn't know what was happening, and they didn't understand because the police were taking photographs of them, and they were taking their personal details, and they didn't see the same thing happening with the Muslim cohort' (Witness, Public Hearing). There were additional concerns about the Muslim group not being searched, because of a belief that some of the group had come from outside Leicester, and others may have had weapons. Senior police officers that night were reported to have said there weren't different rules, 'but they needed to make sure that they got the details of as many people as possible' (Interview XAR). This view of alleged unfair treatment of Hindus was to spread widely and led to claims about different patterns of arrests: 'Some people have said that Hindus were arrested, Damans were arrested. But how come there weren't any arrests on the other side?'. In publicly available information, many more Muslims were arrested than Hindus, but the view of unfairness towards Hindus had become common.

Among the Muslim counter-protestors, there was also the view that the police were heavy-handed towards them and used baton charges, dogs and aggressive language. This included claims of aggression towards individuals who were trying to calm the crowd, including elderly community figures (Interview XBC): 'He was trying to push them, calm them down, because if they see a face they recognise, obviously they'll calm down. They'll give a bit more respect. And the police pepper-sprayed him' (Interview XAV). Another Muslim community figure was struck on the thighs with a police baton and left with a bruise for several weeks (Witness, Public Hearing). The key grievance concerned the

perception that the Hindu group, which had been allowed to march and was now throwing projectiles at counter-protestors, was treated lightly, whereas the Muslim group were treated harshly and 'scape-goated' for the violence, even though they were cooperating with the police (Interview XDF). Others said that, aside from verbal altercations, there was little tension between police and Muslim counter-protestors (Interview XAC).

## Conclusion

The 17 September march was an unprecedented communal event whose novelty related to the expression of street-level Hindu nationalist ideas during violent actions. Similar incidents have occurred in the past few years in the US, Canada and Australia. The march was the mobilisation of a group defined by its religion to intimidate, threaten and attack another group defined by its religion.

Likewise, the events of 5-7 September were also communal as they involved the mobilisation of a group defined by religion to attack individuals and property believed to belong to another religious group. Social media and WhatsApp groups were central factors during the events in September and facilitated the mobilisation of groups for collective and vigilante violence on the streets of Leicester through communal polarisation and incitement, misinformation and disinformation, and the merging of international and local issues. The disturbances of 17 September were also the culmination of events that had occurred earlier – whether from 22 May, as some local Muslims said, or 4-5 September onwards, as some local Hindus said.

## Motivations for the march and counter-mobilisation

A Hindu man who participated in the march described it as a protest against weeks of intimidation of Hindu families and fear within the community. Protestors said they were aiming to protect their families, with many in the Daman and Diu communities feeling threatened and frightened of leaving their homes, especially after the events of 5-7 September.<sup>76</sup> Reported motivations for organising the march included:

- The need to protest because organisers had heard that Muslims were being mobilised from Birmingham and elsewhere to come to Leicester and attack Hindus. During negotiations for dispersal between representatives later that night that were facilitated by the police, a Hindu representative's views were reported in the following way by a witness: 'In Gujarati, the guy goes to me that, "there was reports online where loads of people are coming from Birmingham and surrounding areas and attacking any Hindus, so that's why we retaliated to that"'.
- To protest recent attacks by Muslims, including the Ganesh Chaturthi egg-throwing incident, the subsequent stabbing of a Hindu man, and the events of 5-7 September. 'They were upset because they felt like they were being attacked

## The 17 September march was an unprecedented communal event whose novelty related to the expression of street-level Hindu nationalist ideas during violent actions. Similar incidents have occurred in the past few years in the US, Canada and Australia.

and targeted, and they wanted to make a point of it' (Interview XAQ).

- To protest the lack of police and local authority action regarding these attacks and the failure of the police to protect Daman and Diu people and provide necessary measures for victims.
- To demonstrate Hindu 'unity' and 'resilience' and a strong 'presence' to the community, perhaps to intimidate others by showing 'strength'.
- To march for 'peace' and 'reconciliation'.
- To take 'revenge' for the attacks on 4 and 5 September, or otherwise engage in physical confrontation.

Some involved in UK RSS-affiliated organisations were reported as saying that Hindus, and especially a first-generation migrant community, had been targeted, and the march reflected a right by the Hindu community to protect itself.

We understand that, following the violence of 5-7 September and the frustrations resulting from a perceived lack of police and local authority action to support affected residents, there was a view among some Hindu community figures that Hindus needed to demonstrate 'resilience' in a peaceful way. However, the outcome was not one that some community figures intended, and it illustrated the distance between Hindu community figures and youth. For some Hindu community figures, the march failed because of its aggression and targeting:

I was thinking why were there face masks on, with balaclavas, face masks, 'Jai Shree Ram' slogans, black attire. So, for me, it was an aggressive march. They didn't think what could have happened. They were so naïve to walk into a Muslim area. What were they trying to show, what were they trying to do?

Witnesses reported several reasons for why Muslims came to Green Lane Road and then Belgrave to oppose the march:

- To 'see what was happening', given the messages on social media (Interview XDE).
- To 'defend the Muslim community', because the marchers, in large numbers with many apparently armed, were seen as coming to physically attack Muslims or the Jame' Masjid and other mosques.

- To oppose what they perceived as an extreme right-wing Hindutva anti-Muslim march. Some interviewees saw the march as similar to an attempted march in Leicester organised by the EDL (Interview XDO). One interviewee said it reminded them of previously far-right marches by the EDL or the National Front, and that's why they had to mobilise (Interview XBA). For others, it was seen as a pre-planned and well-organised Hindutva demonstration that had to be opposed.
- To protect Muslim families, women, and children from being attacked. 'I got calls from concerned family members because of their young children were there, their families that were shopping there. And I thought to myself, you know, I've gotta go there. You know, you can't just see injustice like this and not do something about it, so I made my way there' (Witness, Public Hearing).
- To organise a peaceful counter-protest without physical confrontation (Interview XBC).
- To 'get revenge' for the attack of 5 September (Interview XDP) or engage in physical confrontation: 'One of the two objectives were to show [that] the Muslim community are not going to be passive with regards to the incidents that are occurring. And also, to be honest with yourself, [it] was for physical confrontation with the individuals as well, [if we're] being honest with ourselves.' (Interview XBC).

We understand that some Hindus involved in the march were not motivated by violence or aggression towards another community. However, as an event, the Hindu march on 17 September was not a 'peace' march, but rather a demonstration of 'presence' or aggression by one group against another community. The march was communal in its intention, since it assembled several hundred youths to march around 3km from a 'Hindu area' to a 'Muslim area' and engage in violent acts. Some demonstrators also appeared to be heading towards a prominent Leicester mosque, but were stopped by police. For these reasons, the march intended to intimidate and threaten people of a particular faith living in a local area. It resulted in unprovoked and targeted assaults on individuals because they were Muslim. There is robust evidence that the march was comprised overwhelmingly of young people whose families originated in Daman and Diu. Con-

versely, the numerically-dominant East African Asian Hindu community seemed to have virtually no presence in the march. Most Hindu organisations were reported as being surprised or caught unaware by the march and its impact.

The counter-protest was organised quickly and spontaneously to oppose the march. While this may not have been the intention or reflect the views of many who protested, the counter-protest also demonstrated strong evidence of communalism, illustrated by the unprovoked and targeted attacks on individuals because they were Hindu, the pulling down of a flag signifying Hinduism, and damage to the property of a Hindu temple. There is also robust evidence of individuals from outside Leicester mobilising to oppose the march physically.

On the day and evening, many ordinary residents, community figures, and councillors made a strong commitment to maintain calm and act in a non-sectarian way, despite a difficult, violent, and often dangerous situation. We especially noted the efforts of community figures to work with and safeguard those of a different religion from their own.

### Organisation and planning?

There was a consistent view among several witnesses that the march was ‘well prepared’ and would have required significant organisation. One witness described what they called the ‘military’ formation of the march, with rows comprising four or five youths, dressed in black, gloved and masked, walking in a determined, organised way (Witness, Public Hearing). Others said, ‘you cannot get 350 people to march in unison with masks’, so it was ‘very coordinated’ and planned well in advance (Interview XDE).

Video footage, however, shows youths wearing fairly ordinary clothing, maybe with a preponderance of black or darker coats, puffas or parkas. We did not see gloves worn in any videos. Most people had their faces covered or half-covered with either 3-ply disposable light-blue face masks (as used during the COVID-19 pandemic) or black or dark balaclava-type masks, or with clothing pulled up from the neck to their eyes. Others had scarves, hoodies, or their coat or parka hoods covering much of their faces. Of the videos we have seen, none show any youths wearing three-hole balaclavas (that fully cover the face except for the eyes and mouth) or dressed in a militaristic style, other than perhaps one or two youths wearing ordinary clothing with camo-style prints. In videos we have seen, youths are walking in single file, pairs, or groups in a determined and purposeful way, but not in a way that could be described as ‘militaristic’ or even especially orderly.

An interviewee who met many youths involved in the march told us it was spontaneous.

I do believe, from what I heard from young people, that, overall, it was spontaneous. That doesn’t mean that there weren’t elements there who had always planned that they would do something like that.

Figure 26: Around 50-60 Hindu youths on the corner of Humberstone and Layton Roads, 17 September



It is reasonable to assume that there would have been at least minimal advice and instructions on the place and time of assembly, route of the march, including communication during the march to enable others to join, and instructions about masking, such as guidance to bring face masks or assigning individuals to supply them. However, this level of organisation can be communicated easily through WhatsApp messages and word of mouth. Daman youth to whom we spoke also said that social media allowed the spread of rumours that incited the violence; they confirmed that groups mobilised through social media to go to Green Lane Road on 17 September.

By comparison, on 5-6 September, large groups of youths roaming the streets in one area were often dressed in black and wearing balaclavas or other face coverings. We know this activity depended on coordination in WhatsApp groups and spontaneous incitement by a few individuals. That same combination of coordination and spontaneous incitement also seems relevant in the march. Such self-organised activity by young people does not necessarily require any 'behind the scenes' orchestration by an organisation, though this does not imply that organisations weren't involved.

#### **Hindu nationalism and the 17 September march**

The strong perception of a 'behind the scenes' presence of Hindutva individuals came up often during interviews. In 2023, UK security sources said that Indian BJP activists were working with supporters of the BJP in the UK to mobilise Hindus in Leicester:

...elements close to Indian prime minister Mr Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are suspected of having incited British Hindus to confront Muslim youths in last summer's explosive riots in Leicester. A UK security source said there was evidence of BJP-linked activists using closed WhatsApp groups to encourage Hindu protesters to take to the streets.<sup>77</sup>

As if to confirm its strategy of communal polarisation, the UK Overseas Friends of the BJP said in response:

Violent ethnic clashes in Leicester has no connection to Modi or BJP. The truth is blatant, the key instigators were Islamic Extremist in Leices-

---

**It is significant that the main chants used by the Leicester demonstrators on 17 September are ones used by Hindu nationalists during their political demonstrations in India.**

ter. Let us reiterate what @SuellaBraverman said regarding Islamic extremism & risk related the same in UK.<sup>78</sup>

The blanket denials by Hindutva groups of any Hindutva influence and their reiteration of the cause as 'Islamic extremism' is unhelpful since it would be in the interests of all groups in Leicester to examine the influences and motivations that led to such serious disorder and hostility in a British city.

We came across claims that an older figure, linked to local Hindutva politics but not from the Daman and Diu communities, was alleged to have been instructing youths in Belgrave at the start of the march. We heard that a video was recorded that appears to corroborate this claim, but we were unable to obtain it. The same individual was also alleged to have been present with the marchers during the 'standoff' on Belgrave Road during the evening, according to two witnesses who recognised him from having seen him earlier in the day with the marchers. He was seen talking to the police and community figures who were trying to disperse the Hindu group. We understand that police subsequently questioned him. We also know another older figure accompanied the march as it moved through residential streets and headed towards the Green Lane Road area. However, in both cases, we do not know their role, if any, in the march or its organisation, and we have no evidence that they were involved in its organisation. We also heard that the march was instigated by a very small number of individuals who had previously been involved in Hindutva-based politics in India. It was also reported to us that some UK Hindutva-associated figures were part of several WhatsApp chat groups about the march, but we weren't able to verify their involvement.

### Chants during the march

During the march, there was frequent chanting of two phrases, 'Jai Shree Ram!' and 'Vande Mata-ram!', as evidenced by videos. Newspaper reports also said that 'Jai Bharatmata!' was chanted. No religious flags are visible in the videos we have seen. An organiser of the march said: 'We were not chanting any racist or hate to any Muslims. We were just chanting our God's name. That was it. We were chanting our God's name because we all were scared.'<sup>79</sup> Others interpreted the chant as a 'call to arms' against Muslims (Witness, Public Hearing). A community religious figure described the traditional meaning of the chant and its transformation for political purposes.

[The] thing that I was struck by the most was to hear that this group was chanting 'Jai Shree Ram' and that that was being used to torment or even threaten. So, that was hard to hear. And obviously at that time, I was actually quite naïve [in] appreciating the background of... how the chant of 'Jai Shree Ram' had become political... My personal feeling is I'd like to see a campaign of reclaiming sacred and pure names of the

incarnations of God from the Hindu tradition that have been misused. And I think it was a complete misuse of that chant.

The most common religiously inflected greeting in UK East African Hindu Gujarati communities is 'Jai Shree Krishna', invoking the God Krishna, who, like Ram, is an avatar of the God Vishnu. It would not typically be 'Jai Shree Ram', unless Ram is a primary devotional deity for the person. The phrase 'Jai Shree Ram' is traditionally used during home prayers (*pūja*), on relevant religious occasions, or in temples. There is nothing unusual about hearing the phrase in these contexts. The word 'Ram' is also used to refer to 'God' in a generic sense – there are common Gujarati phrases invoking Ram that are equivalent to 'Oh Lord!' and similar phrases.

Context is important for understanding the meaning of the phrase 'Jai Shree Ram' for those who use it. For the devotee, it expresses the glory of God. But for the Hindu nationalist, the phrase 'Jai Shree Ram' has become a direct expression of Hindutva ideology. The public chanting of 'Jai Shree Ram' is ubiquitous among Hindu nationalist groups in India and routine in Hindutva public demonstrations. It is a typical chant in Hindu nationalist marches, demonstrations and protests, including those against Muslim and Christian religious sites and people. It is often used as a rallying cry and 'a call to arms', and it has been used frequently to threaten and discipline Muslims or Christians in India. There have been countless incidents in India over recent years of Muslims being forced to say those words while under threat of serious violence or death.<sup>80</sup> From the perspective of minorities in India, the chant today invokes fear or terror. It is often chanted by Hindu nationalists in India with the intention to terrify Muslims.

The political significance of the chant for the Hindutva movement relates to the campaigns from the late 1980s and early 1990s by the BJP, the RSS, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council or VHP) to destroy the medieval Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, because of a belief that it was built on the site of the alleged birthplace of the god Ram. The mosque was destroyed in 1992 by Hindu nationalists. In January 2024, a new, massive Ram temple was inaugurated by Narendra Modi in Ayodhya. The chant has transformed from its devotional meaning that acknowledges the (victorious) glory of God, to a chant that, for Hindu nationalists, is intended to demonstrate an affiliation to political Hindutva and, simultaneously, aggression towards others, primarily Muslims but also Christians. That transformation is the outcome of sustained Hindutva attempts over many decades to displace devotional Hinduism with the ethno-religious nationalist political ideology of the RSS and its demand that India become an exclusive Hindu nation-state.

There is, therefore, considerable significance in hearing the chant 'Jai Shree Ram!' on the streets of Leicester, shouted by a group purposefully marching into an area that is perceived as Muslim. In that context, it cannot be seen as an innocent devotional chant, and it represents an aggressive

gesture. There are a number of (assertive, peaceful) chants and slogans that could have been used. Instead, this particular slogan was repeatedly chanted throughout the day. This is not to say that it had the singular meaning of ‘a call to arms’ for all participants in the march; some may have seen it as a simple rallying cry or as something else. However, the significance of the chant in public and in the context described is clear.

The view of a Hindu nationalist orientation of the march is reinforced by the second chant chosen by the marchers, ‘Vande Mataram!’, again clearly audible in a video of the marchers in Green Lane Road during the afternoon.<sup>81</sup> ‘Vande Mataram’ comes from a late nineteenth-century Indian poem, later transformed into a song. It expresses devotion to a Motherland conceived in Hindu religious terms. It has often been contrasted with secular nationalist songs expressing patriotism in India (such as ‘*Jana Gana Mana*’), and it is frequently interpreted to express *religious* devotion to a nation in a form that would go against Muslim or Christian religious beliefs. The song has a strong historical association with Hindu nationalist sentiment.

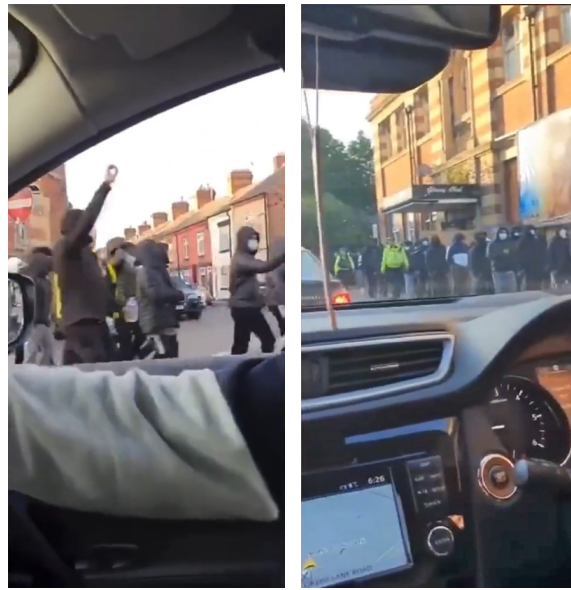
Over the last decade, the RSS has called for ‘Vande Mataram’ to become India’s national anthem, in opposition to its current secular one. In recent decades, the song has been frequently used as a slogan by Hindu nationalists during marches and demonstrations in India, often as a call by one individual (‘Vande!’) and a response by the crowd (‘Mataram!’). In India, in this form, it is often used by Hindu nationalists. Chanting ‘Vande Mataram’, which traditionally means ‘I bow to thee, (Oh) Mother(land)’, also seems out of place and anomalous on Leicester streets. Hearing it on the streets of Leicester or in the UK, outside of Hindu nationalist circles, is highly unusual.

An Indian newspaper also reported that ‘Jai Bharatmata!’ was chanted during the march,<sup>82</sup> though we did not hear it in the videos we saw. While not exclusive to Hindu nationalists and sometimes used to demonstrate a non-religious patriotism, the chant ‘Bharatmata ke Jai!’ has also become associated with Hindu nationalist sentiment in India. It equates ‘Indian’ nationalism exclusively with the Hindu religion and represents ‘India’ as a Hindu goddess. Additionally, it associates Indian nationalism exclusively with the Hindu religion by using the Sanskrit word ‘Bharat’ for the nation.

The three chants *taken together* – ‘Jai Shree Ram’, ‘Vande Mataram’ and ‘Bharatmata ke Jai’ – characteristically express Hindu nationalist sentiment and are typically used together in Hindu nationalist circles in the UK. For example, an Overseas Friends of the BJP car rally in London in March 2024 to support Narendra Modi and the BJP began with exactly those three chants.<sup>83</sup> Outside of Hindutva circles, it would be highly unusual to hear these chants among ordinary Gujarati Hindu communities. We are unaware of previous marches or demonstrations in the UK where ‘Vande Mataram’ or ‘Jai Shree Ram’ have been used in these ways.

It is also significant that the main chants used by the Leicester demonstrators on 17 September are

Figure 27: ‘Jai Shree Ram’ and ‘Vande Mataram!’ being chanted on Green Lane Road by protestors, 17 September 2022



The events of 5-6 September and 17 September are unprecedented in the UK. In the former case, large groups of Muslim youths and men roamed aggressively in areas they perceived to be Hindu, with some looking for a particular group they perceived as responsible for a previous attack on a Muslim, and others attacking those simply believed to be Hindu and their property. In the latter case, a large number of Hindu youths purposefully and aggressively marched into an area some distance from their starting point and engaged in attacks on those they perceived to be Muslim and their property.

---

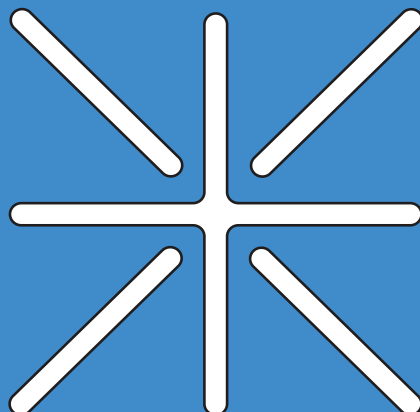
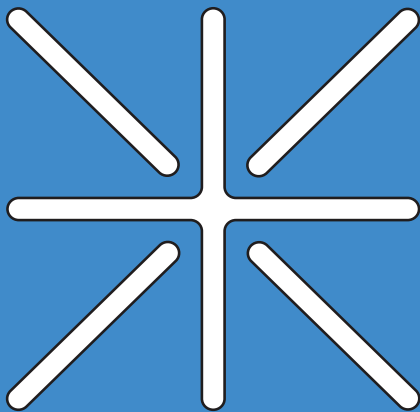
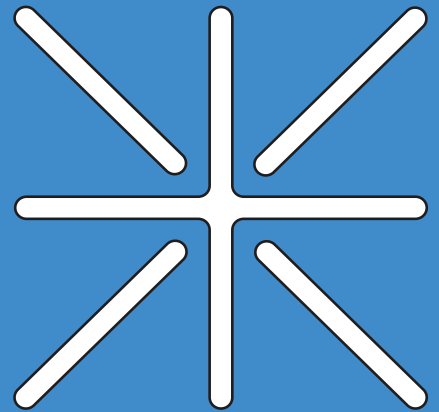
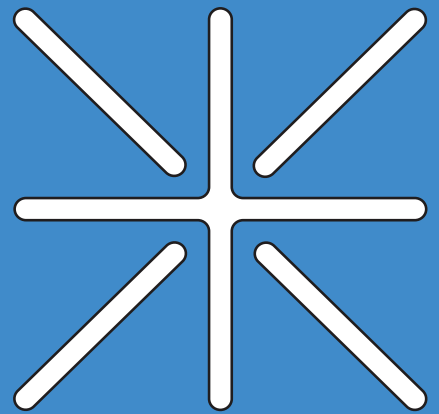
ones used by Hindu nationalists during their political demonstrations in India. These chants are endorsed and promoted by the RSS, BJP, VHP, and their affiliates and have long associations with Hindu nationalist politics and violence in India. In public and political demonstrations, these slogans, when used together, are not expressive of Hindu religion and devotion but of Hindu nationalist ideology. Conversely, no other chants – such as those calling for South Asian or Hindi-Muslim unity or peace, of which there are many – were heard in videos we saw or reported by witnesses.

Furthermore, the march was planned to go to an area with a significant Muslim population. While we know of small groups of South Asians that have organised to attack individuals or other small groups from another (perceived) South Asian religious community, we do not know of any previous event taking place in the UK, other than the events of 5-6 September and 17 September, in which members of one South Asian religious group have organised in numbers to go into a geographical area perceived to be made up of members of another South Asian religious group in order to intimidate or attack them.

The events of 5-6 September and 17 September are unprecedented in the UK. In the former case, large groups of Muslim youths and men roamed aggressively in areas they perceived to be Hindu, with some looking for a particular group they perceived as responsible for a previous attack on a Muslim, and others attacking those simply believed to be Hindu and their property. In the latter case, a large number of Hindu youths purposefully and aggressively marched into an area some distance from their starting point and engaged in attacks on those they perceived to be Muslim and their property.

In the earlier violence (5-7 September), as expressed in witness statements, the initial motivation

was to find a particular group perceived to be responsible for an attack on a Muslim man, but this became a general attempt to intimidate Hindu residents or attack Hindu individuals, religious symbols and property. The 17 September march was aimed at the Muslim community in general. Because of these factors, as well as the chants, we believe a Hindu nationalist orientation was a significant driving factor in the march, even if commitment to Hindu nationalist ideology may not have been shared by all or even many marchers.



The events of 17 September 2022 drew major reactions at local, national and international levels, including from the British, Indian and Pakistani governments.

The events added great momentum to those in the UK and abroad who were interested in fostering further communal division and animosity as part of their political and ideological commitment to religious or nationalist supremacy. These dynamics had already been present from late August and early September, but after 17 September, they expanded across several dimensions. Several contending narratives emerged about what occurred on 17 September. From this point, Hindutva narratives and disinformation dominated discourse about the Leicester events and strongly influenced local actors. This also led to a false ‘confirmation’ among many Muslim activists that Hindutva ideology had been behind all the significant events in Leicester since May.

This chapter examines the aftermath of the events. A key theme is the involvement of external political actors and social media ‘influencers’, both pro-Hindutva and pro-political Islamist, who generated communal narratives about the 17 September events, spread misinformation and disinformation, and aided polarisation in the city without accountability and with seemingly little concern for the impact of their activities on the ground and on relations between people in the city. Their views continue to impact community relations in Leicester. We also highlight examples of non-sectarian, anti-communal joint work by women, religious figures, and individuals who rejected division and communal hatred.

Towards the end of September, and again towards the end of October, there were two important Hindu religious festivals, Navratri (26 September to 4 October, with the last two dates of particular significance) and the major festival of Diwali (22 October until 25 October, with Diwali falling on 24 October). The occurrence of major religious festivals within a month or two of the violence was significant since there was the potential for further disturbances that required significant institutional responses.

---

### Community fears and tensions

In the aftermath of the violence, residents from across Leicester’s communities expressed fears about their everyday safety. Some reached out to their MPs and councillors. An MP at the time reported to us the fear among constituents who contacted her, as well as anger that the community relationships they had built over many years had been damaged:

‘Something has to be done’... was the plea of that person. So just showing genuine fear there... This person... said that they were very angry, basically regarding what had happened to multicultural Leicester. They were very proud of multicultural Leicester, and they’ve been in Leicester since the age of 10. And for the past

40-45 years, they said they’ve never come across anything like what they saw with their eyes. [It] has been affecting them so much, affecting them and their family so much, that just to walk to Green Lane Road, Highfields, [Evington], Belgrave, puts them in daily fear. They asked themselves what could happen next. They don’t feel safe in Leicester. And they wanted to get to know if there were going to be any local meetings to hear about the fear that they were experiencing and any sort of reassurances.

Significant also was the fear and grievance felt by many in the Daman and Diu communities, not simply about potential further violence against them, but because they were often being blamed for the events of 17 September, including by some Hindus who did not want to be associated with creating division.

This was one of the communities that felt aggrieved and unhappy at this time. They still do, to be honest... The reason that they did it was because they were genuinely needing help, assistance. Yet because of what happened, some of the other Hindu communities didn't really want to associate with [them] because of the fear that they would be tarnished with the narrative of creating animosity as well.

Indeed, among Daman youth we spoke to, there was a deep sense that the Daman and Diu community were being blamed unfairly for the violence. They instead had concerns about what they called 'Islamic extremism' in Leicester and said they just wanted to get on with their lives and be successful in Leicester.

We heard of many incidents of threats and abuse. In October, for example, a woman affiliated with a Hindu temple said she was threatened while in the city centre by a woman who said: 'Hindus are killing Muslims, Hindus are making life difficult for Muslims in India' (Interview XAJ). A football club moved its training from Cossington Park to Rushey Fields as there were allegations of groups of young Muslims attacking Hindus. Players went home in groups due to fears about personal safety (Interview XBE). We heard about Hindu families in the Green Lane Road area who were too frightened to leave their homes. In early October, two Sikh women were confronted in the Green Lane Road / East Park Road area by three boys shouting at them that this was 'not their area', the incident being defused after an older woman stepped in (Interview XDW). This illustrated how communal territorialisation had become significant in Leicester, with some groups believing a geographical area belonged to one or another religious community. We also heard about a violent, unprovoked racist attack on a Sikh man in the city centre in early 2023, though it is unclear who the perpetrators were (Interview XDR).

We heard from individuals working in service-providing organisations who noticed tensions among client groups and even some staff. On the Monday following the violence, a witness noticed that Hindu and Muslim individuals within a client group began to segregate into smaller, separate groups (Interview XBE). The unrest also had serious economic consequences: Leicester businesses and restaurants reported significant revenue losses due to reduced footfall, as many residents stayed indoors amid widespread fear. It was reported that some members of the Daman community were planning further protests on Green Lane Road several times in late September, and local community figures had informed the police about these, as they could lead to further tensions (Interview XAO).

The sense of tension continued into October, with reports that many individuals felt unsafe attending Navratri and Diwali celebrations (Interview XAI). We heard that many in the Hindu community remained cautious following rumours of incidents at temples and because of increased police presence around Navratri and Diwali (Interview XDG).

We were then told by police to not go to our events. Navratri was around the corner, and Diwali was around the corner. We had all that coming up, so obviously, it was an important time for the Hindus for our festival celebrations, prayers and meeting with families. We were told [by temples and community representatives] to be restricted and be very, very careful to avoid Melton Road.

Many respondents to our survey similarly described tensions in their local neighbourhoods following the violence: 'Everyone in my street looked at each other with uncertainty for some time afterwards. Myself and my husband didn't go to large gatherings in the area for a year after, just in case' (Respondent 84); 'There is more uncertainty and fear of the communities that live in Belgrave and has made it even less likely for people to venture from the city centre to this area' (Respondent 45). Several respondents mentioned the distrust created within communities 'which have previously been very close' (Respondent 11). One respondent said that after the violence, 'We would never trust Muslim community [after this] or have the respect we had for each other' (Respondent 93). One respondent said:

It seems like relations are not the same as they were before all this occurred. Because people possibly distrust each other's communities because they feel that if something like this happens again, they would take the side of their community, so I should stick with my community'. (Respondent 30)

These views indicate a significant breakdown of civic trust and civic solidarity, essential elements for convivial community relations.

We were told that, following the violence, tensions manifested in primary and secondary schools, and reports emerged of Hindu and Muslim children clashing (Interview XAQ). We heard about various incidents: a Sikh girl, during a fight, having her turban pulled off by a Muslim boy; a Muslim boy at school targeted for abuse by Hindu boys who had allegedly heard anti-Muslim prejudices at a community event (Interview XDB); a Hindu boy beaten up by a Muslim boy, allegedly because he was a Hindu (Interview XDR, Interview XDW). In another school with predominantly Hindu pupils, there was hostility towards the few Muslim pupils, and pupils were sharing hateful posts. By contrast, in other schools, the discussions among pupils around the violence were more 'relaxed' and didn't involve targeting any group (Interview XDM). Across several interviews related to schools, there was a reported reluctance to discuss the events with pupils, with many schools reported to be doing 'nothing' (Interview XAF). By not addressing the tensions, some schools were seen to have missed an important opportunity to provide support, explore religious differences and commonalities, and encourage critical dialogue during a significant period.

The events of 17 September 2022 drew major reactions at local, national and international levels, including from the British, Indian and Pakistani governments. The events added great momentum to those in the UK and abroad who were interested in fostering further communal division and animosity as part of their political and ideological commitment to religious or nationalist supremacy.

### Community Responses

After the cricket match violence in late August, it was reported to us that many Hindu community groups did not see – or did not want to see – the violence in religious terms and instead saw it as fights between rival fans. Apparently, they did not feel it necessary to discuss the events with Muslim groups (Interview XAY). It was after the 4 September egg-throwing incident and subsequent violence that some Hindu community groups began to see the significance of religion in the previous events.

Soon after the 17 September violence, Hindu and Muslim figures and groups held ‘emergency’ meetings to discuss its causes and consequences. Muslim religious figures met in the days following 17 September and expressed a need to understand what had occurred (Interview XAK). Hindu religious figures held a small meeting on Sunday morning (18 September) attended by representatives from the Jalaram, Swaminarayan, Sanatan, Ram and ISKCON mandirs. At that meeting, concern was expressed regarding the image created of the Leicester Hindu community, especially during a period of national mourning following the death of Queen Elizabeth II. Reactions at this meeting included surprise at the march and disappointment over the violence the previous day. Hindu community figures discussed contacting Daman and Diu organisations to address cultural integration and misunderstandings regarding public conduct in the UK, such as spontaneous public processions. Significantly, none of the established Hindu community figures had strong connections with the Daman and Diu communities. Just as significantly, both Muslim and Hindu community figures reported to us the distance between South Asian youth and the established Leicester ‘community leaderships’, with the latter viewed as having little connection with or influence among the youth.

There were very few discussions *between* Muslim and Hindu community figures in the following days and weeks. A community figure reported a helpful telephone conversation with the Shivalaya Mandir. Indian national media had circulated widely videos of the incident outside the Shivalaya Mandir, including footage of an individual pulling down the flag

Figure 28: Pradip Gajjar, ISKCON, reads out the joint peace statement outside the Jame' Mosque with religious and community figures present, 20 September 2022<sup>87</sup>



and another video of the flag being set alight. The fact that much of the Indian media tended to reduce the day's events to the one incident at the Shivalaya Mandir reportedly had a significant impact among Leicester's Hindu groups. It helped fuel a political narrative of 'Hindus under attack' from Muslims (see Insight UK and the Leicester Events).

Muslim community figures offered to pay for any damage to the temple, a meaningful gesture that was reported as appreciated. However, while some Muslim community figures expressed willingness to meet regularly and strengthen relationships, the narrative of the attack on the mandir dominated views among Hindu groups, and the payment was refused. Similarly, while a meeting had been arranged between some mosques and temples about a week later, this was cancelled shortly afterwards by Hindu groups, and Muslim community figures ceased further outreach. We were told that this was 'a lost opportunity' to rebuild relationships (Interview XAM, Interview XCS).

Yet, amid such difficulties, important efforts toward peace were underway, though cross-community work was sometimes thwarted. For example, some Muslim groups approached Hindu temples ahead of Navratri (and later Diwali) and offered to provide security to ensure the festivities remained undisturbed. While some welcomed this gesture as a significant step toward community reconciliation, temple managements did not implement it. A reported reason was that if Hindus arrived at temples for Navratri or Diwali celebrations and saw 'visible' Muslims standing outside, this would have caused more fear, this perhaps being an indicator of the extent of community suspicion. Another cross-religious initiative involving young Muslim women going to a mandir to celebrate Diwali with a Hindu women's group was also met with scepticism (Interview XAC).

Other peace activities did take place. For example, over 200 people gathered at Shree Hanuman Temple at the start of Navratri to pray for peace, joined by local councillors, police, and community members.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, on 11 October, an interfaith prayer vigil was held at Shree Sanatan Mandir, and people of all faiths were invited to pay their respects to the Queen.<sup>85</sup> Mosques and some schools worked together on community cohesion workshops to prevent further violence (Interview XAK, Interview XCD). On 26 October, the Leicester Council of Faiths undertook activities to reassure communities, including messages recorded in Gujarati and English that emphasised unity between Hindus and Muslims (Interview XDP). At the start of November, Leicester Stories of Hope was established as a Facebook group and subsequently met at St Philip's Centre. It aimed to counter divisive social media narratives by sharing positive stories of Hindu-Muslim unity in Leicester.

We just put a message out that show how Hindus and Muslims have lived together, do live together, do support each other. And within that came... lots of different people from the community, especially women, [who] were sharing

Figure 29: Women's peace statement, Leicester city centre, 24 September 2022



The statement and the work of ISKCON and Jame' Masjid in producing it represented an important, courageous public intervention. It illustrated the possibility of non-sectarian cooperation and joint work across communities and religious organisations. The statement invoked Leicester's anti-racist history and its history of community diversity and peace.

stories of how they will celebrate as Muslims. They would share sweets at Diwali. There was Hindus that were saying they would give *iftar* to their friends for Ramadan. There were stories of a Muslim gentleman whose neighbour, a Hindu, would take him to mosque every single day for his lunchtime prayers.

Many such activities largely emerged from initiatives taken by individuals rather than by established community figures and groups.

On 17 September during the violence, and again on the evening of 18 September, there were communications between a few Hindu and Muslim community figures that led to collaboration on a joint public peace statement (Interview XAM). Individuals from the ISKCON temple and the Jame' Masjid worked on a statement to be read out outside the mosque on the morning of 20 September (there were also plans to read the same statement outside a Hindu temple, but that did not occur, Interview XDX). The draft was initiated by the Jame' Masjid and revised and finalised by the ISKCON temple.

However, on the morning of 20 September, when the statement was due to be read out at a large public gathering outside the mosque, with reporters and cameras from the BBC, Channel 4, Sky News, and other media present, there was disagreement over a new version of the statement. Shockat Adam, chair of Muslim Engagement and Development (MEND) and now an MP for Leicester South, had arrived with a different version of the statement that included direct references to the RSS, Hindutva ideology and Indian politics. This led to disagreement over the statement's content and what it should convey (Interview XAC). Of significance was the attempt by some individuals to make direct reference to RSS involvement without providing evidence of this involvement. They also wanted to make comparisons between the Leicester events and the situation of Muslims under the current Indian government.

Some Hindu figures wanted to remove references to RSS and Hindutva and preferred a broader condemnation of extremism. They argued that evidence of RSS or Hindutva involvement in the march or other incidents had not been established. They

also wanted the focus to be on unity between Leicester's Hindu and Muslim communities rather than international political issues. A community figure was also reported as saying that using the term RSS would have to be discussed 'locally, nationally and maybe internationally' first, a view with which some Muslim figures disagreed (Interview XDX).

They said, 'No, we can't use the word Hindutva, because it's not proven'. They were hesitant in using the word 'Hindutva' because it obviously has a connotation in Hinduism, and also, it's a more kind of controversial issue when it comes to promptly mentioning this. So, there was a hesitancy to use that word. And then one of the Muslim persons [said] 'This has to be mentioned, that is the cause of all this'... So, we have a stand-off. Then we tried to calm things down, and we agreed for that Hindutva [word] to be taken out from that statement just leave the extremist ideologies in there.

Another source of division was the presence of individuals who were seen as responsible for spreading misinformation during the violence in August and September, as well as organisations such as MEND, which had been reported in the mainstream media as having a political Islamist orientation or being 'extremist'.<sup>87</sup>

After some private discussion, the peace statement was read out to the press by Pradip Gajjar of the Leicester ISKCON temple, but without reference to Hindutva or the RSS, though a sentence was included about avoiding foreign influence.<sup>88 89</sup>

Whatever the difficulties involved, the statement and the work of ISKCON and Jame' Masjid in producing it represented an important, courageous public intervention. It illustrated the possibility of non-sectarian cooperation and joint work across communities and religious organisations. The statement invoked Leicester's anti-racist history and its history of community diversity and peace. The complete statement is included in Appendix 5: Religious Peace Statement.

Following this event, the intention was for religious figures from Hindu and Muslim communities to meet soon after and continue regular cross-community dialogue. However, attempts to hold joint

discussions failed, and no meetings took place (Interview XDP). While several small or individual meetings between Hindu and Muslim community figures were reported to us, there was no sustained effort to continue those meetings. We know of no significant meeting since the events of 2022 between Hindu and Muslim community figures, nor any plan for sustained activities to rebuild relations by relevant religious community groups: 'There's not been one attempt to have a conversation between Muslim leaders and Hindu leaders. Not one.' (Interview XAM). Similarly, on the first anniversary of the violence, attempts by a few religious figures to work across communities foundered because of a lack of interest or cooperation from either Hindu or Muslim religious figures. A meeting was held in Belgrave in March 2024 by the United Religions Initiative, but it had relatively little engagement from the range of religious and community groups in Leicester and was an externally driven initiative by a US-based organisation.<sup>90</sup>

The peace statement was appreciated by many Leicester residents (Interview XAJ, Interview XAM). However, it received substantial backlash online from some Hindus aligned with Hindutva ideology, often using accounts based in India. They pointed to individuals associated with controversial organisations such as MEND and Cage. They often also objected to any joint work between Hindus and Muslims. Hindus associated with the peace statement received sustained criticism and were accused of 'betraying' the Hindu community, 'siding' with Muslims, or misinterpreting Hindu scriptural texts. These pressures illustrated the extent of the influence that Hindutva organisations exerted in the wake of the 17 September events.

[The]language was that Hindus were weak... that we are siding with the enemy, that [Hindus are] being forced to make these statements by the Muslims... [But the] actual statement wasn't as a Hindu but... more as a resident of Leicester to say: 'This is our community and we will deal with whatever issues here as people, not just Hindus or Muslims.'

Following this peace statement, a group of South Asian women coordinated by Rita Patel, then a city

**In the immediate aftermath of the violence, there was, to our knowledge, only one meeting held by the Mayor that attempted to bring city councillors, Muslim and Hindu organisations and the police together to discuss the events, institutional failures and ways forward.**

councillor, issued a public statement of unity in Leicester city centre on 24 September.<sup>91</sup> The organisers of this statement were also attacked, primarily by Hindutva-aligned individuals on social media. This statement was developed collectively by around 20 women from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds and aimed to give women a voice and to call for peace. Their statement highlighted the specific impact of the violence on South Asian women of all faiths, including the fear it generated among women, elderly people, and children. The full statement is provided in Appendix 6: Women's Peace Statement.

### **The City Council**

We met several councillors, ex-councillors, council workers and community figures who had interacted with the city council and with the Mayor, Peter Soulsby, after the violence. In the immediate aftermath of the 17 September events, Soulsby was reported to be 'baffled' by the violence.<sup>92</sup> Subsequently, in a council meeting on 29 September, Soulsby condemned the disturbances and emphasised Leicester's history of tolerance and the need for community cohesion. He announced the need for a review to understand the causes and contributory factors of the violence and to learn lessons that promote tolerance and unity in the city.<sup>93</sup>

In October, Soulsby announced an independent review into the violence to be led by academic Chris Allen from the University of Leicester. The inquiry was to focus on six key areas, with Allen working with research teams from the University of London and De Montfort University.<sup>94</sup> On 14 October, Soulsby also said that the September unrest had its roots in right-wing Hindutva ideology.<sup>95</sup> Some Hindu councillors opposed Allen's appointment, claiming that his past research on anti-Muslim hatred made him biased (Interview XAZ). On 31 October, Hindu groups boycotted the inquiry, and Allen faced considerable backlash, including online campaigns and death threats originating from India (Interview XDP). Due to this opposition, he withdrew from the process, and the idea of the inquiry was abandoned.<sup>96</sup>

Later, in May 2023, Secretary of State for Communities Michael Gove announced an independent review into the civil unrest headed by Lord Ian Austin. In June, many Labour councillors in Leicester said they would not participate in the government review due to concerns about the chair's stated political views.<sup>97</sup> Several Muslim organisations also called for a boycott of the government review.

In the immediate aftermath of the violence, there was, to our knowledge, only one meeting held by the Mayor that attempted to bring city councillors, Muslim and Hindu organisations and the police together to discuss the events, institutional failures and ways forward. There were other reported meetings held separately with either Muslim groups or Hindu ones, but no meeting, other than the one described below, attempted to bring community groups together in the aftermath of the violence.

The Federation of Muslim Organisations had been pushing for a meeting with the city council and the

police. In parallel, the Leicester Council of Faiths was also trying to organise a meeting of community groups. The city council subsequently organised a meeting. However,

It then transpired that it was the Mayor who was actually setting the invitation list [and] chairing the meeting. [It wasn't] a community meeting... The Belgrave (Hindu) councillors were all invited, as well as the councillors from the Muslim side. The police and [other practitioners] were there. But nobody from the Hindu community attended, no organisation. We tried to encourage organisations to attend. There was a message sent to me... that some of the Indian groups felt that they can't send anybody because no one Hindu person can represent the Hindu community, but [also said] the invitation is not open, they prefer that the invitation should be open before they can attend. At the meeting, there was no presence from the Belgrave Community councillors [or] the Hindu community.

This meeting was dominated by the police, who gave updates and answered questions, with the Mayor reportedly contributing very little to the discussion. Others told us that, despite this major incident in the city, there was no statement from the Mayor, even months later, nor was there space created for councillors to discuss these areas.

You had around ten Muslim councillors, and you had 15 Hindu councillors, and there was no political platform to bring those groups together to say, 'What do we need to do? How do we deal with this?' [The Mayor] just wouldn't allow it.

A further complaint was that the Mayor did not engage with communities. An ex-councillor described having to 'push and push' the Mayor to engage directly with the city:

Where are you? What are you doing? The community want answers. They want to know what you're doing. And I arranged a community meeting and invited him to a community meeting which was held at Evington Community Centre... But even with that, I literally had to drag him to come to the meeting.

While this is the view of one former councillor, we also heard from various other participants who said that the Mayor 'hid', 'went underground', that he didn't try and bring together Hindu and Muslim groups, refused to allow political discussion among councillors about the events, didn't take leadership regarding such discussions, and didn't facilitate necessary dialogue in the city among different groups and worried residents.

During this period, a network organised through social media, Active Muslims Leicester, was established ostensibly to address tensions in Leicester, negotiate with the authorities, and focus on Hin-

Figure 30: VHP demonstration in Delhi related to the Leicester violence<sup>66</sup>



Much of the political response to the 17 September violence followed the same paths of communal and religious division that led to the violence in the first place. It is disappointing that many political figures in the UK and abroad sought to amplify narratives of one innocent religious community being the victim of another hate-driven aggressor.

dhutva.<sup>98</sup> Its members met with the Mayor (Interview XAK). However, the key need, as articulated to us, was cross-religious, cross-community discussion and dialogue that the Mayor should have organised. It was reported to us several times that the Mayor historically did not facilitate meetings and conversations across communities, but instead met Hindu and Muslim groups separately. This reduced intercommunity cooperation, leaving councillors to start any cross-community initiatives themselves (Public Hearing). We would have appreciated discussing these areas with the Mayor and sought meetings with him many times to explain our work, but he repeatedly refused to meet us.

#### Political responses: national and international

The Leicester violence drew numerous national and international political reactions. A few days after the 17 September events, India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar raised concerns about violence in Leicester against Indians with UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly, and sought action against the perpetrators.<sup>99</sup> On 19 September, the Indian High Commission in London stated in a press release:

We strongly condemn the violence perpetrated against the Indian Community in Leicester and vandalism of premises and symbols of Hindu religion. We have strongly taken up this matter with the UK authorities and have sought immediate action against those involved in these attacks. We call on the authorities to provide protection to the affected people.<sup>100</sup>

This statement did not mention the attacks on Muslims that were precursors to the events. The next day, the Muslim Council of Britain said that the Indian High Commission 'must represent all Indians and also condemn the deliberate targeting, intimidation and instances of assault of Muslims and Sikhs by large groups of thugs chanting far-right Hindutva slogans'.<sup>101</sup> On the same day (19 September), the Pakistan High Commission issued a

statement condemning 'the systematic campaign of violence and intimidation that has been unleashed against the Muslims of the area. This is not the first time such Islamophobic incidents have been reported in Leicester'.<sup>102</sup> It did not mention attacks on Hindus in Leicester.

On 22 September, Bob Blackman, MP for Harrow East, London, chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus, and a politician with an extensive history of support for the UK RSS and its associated groups, raised concerns in parliament about the safety of Hindus in Leicester during the festivals of Navratri and Diwali. He also wrote to Home Secretary Suella Braverman, saying that the attacks on Hindus in Leicester and Birmingham were by 'Islamist extremists', also urging action by MPs against what he called 'Hinduphobia'.<sup>103</sup> He did not mention the Hindu march or attacks on Muslims in Leicester. In October 2022, UK Home Secretary Suella Braverman visited Leicester. She blamed the Leicester violence on 'uncontrolled' migration into the UK and the failure of new migrants to integrate into British society, the latter leading to social tensions.<sup>104</sup> Some residents said her presence worsened the situation because of her political views (Interview XAO).

In October 2022, some 180 Hindu organisations wrote to UK Prime Minister Liz Truss stating that Hindus in the UK felt under siege due to rising hostility and extremism. The letter highlighted incidents of violence, harassment and intimidation against the community in Leicester, Birmingham, Nottingham and London. Six areas were outlined in which the British Government's intervention and protection was sought, including police investigations, financial support for riot victims, an independent inquiry into anti-Hindu hatred, recognition of radicalisation threats, teacher training on anti-Hindu discrimination and increased security. Organisations signing this letter included the National Council of Hindu Temples, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Sanstha UK, Indian National Students Association UK, ISKCON Manchester, Overseas Friends of BJP (UK), the Hindu Lawyers Association (UK) and Insight UK.<sup>105</sup>

In India, the RSS's newspaper, in an article on 29 September titled 'Hindus Under Attack', reiterated the narrative of organisations like Insight UK (see *Hindutva polarisation and division: the role of Insight UK*). It also claimed that Muslims had been intimidating Hindus after the Asia Cup cricket match in late August:

After India and Pakistan's Asia Cup Cricket match on August 28, 2022, Muslim men, who had come to watch the cricket match from several UK towns, deliberately intimidated the local Indian/Hindu community. They made hate speeches and used racial slurs in addition to publicly attacking and damaging private Hindu property. The widespread Islamist hate towards Hindus fuelled violence against Hindus in the city for the next few days. These highly motivated and radicalised groups targeted local Hindu homes, damaging over fifty Hindu properties and vehicles during the series of targeted attacks.<sup>106</sup>

The RSS's religious front, the VHP, held a demonstration near the British Embassy in Delhi that included posters that stated 'Arrest the Jihadi extremists', 'Stop the atrocities against Hindus', and 'Hindustan shall not tolerate any insult towards revered Hindu saints'.<sup>107</sup>

The Indian VHP's central working president, Alok Kumar, wrote to the then UK Prime Minister Liz Truss, saying that Hindus were being falsely accused of violence and Hindu homes, temples and symbols were being attacked.<sup>108</sup> The pro-Narendra Modi media in India framed the events as an attack on Hindus by Pakistani and Muslim groups using highly inflammatory language that compared the Leicester events to atrocities against Hindu minorities in South Asia. *Times Now*, for example, claimed that 'India was collectively assaulted' and that Hindus in the UK, 'the new Jews', were in 'grave danger'.<sup>109</sup> A silent protest was also held in Daman, and posters carried the message 'UK Save Hindus'.<sup>110</sup>

Much of the political response to the 17 September violence followed the same paths of communal and religious division that led to the violence in the first place. It is disappointing that many political figures in the UK and abroad sought to amplify narratives of one innocent religious community being the victim of another hate-driven aggressor. This included Indian and Pakistani gov-

ernment representatives, UK MPs, local and national Hindutva and political Islamist organisations, including Insight UK, 5Pillarz and Cage, and social media 'influencers' such as Ali Dawah and Mohammed Hijab (see *Ambitious influencers*). While these are very different institutions and figures, their common ideological thread reflected a deeply partisan orientation.

We saw no evidence of leadership from the city council during the violence. Indeed, several respondents told us that police spokespeople demonstrated leadership and community engagement during meetings, but this only highlighted further the city council's failures. While some councillors took individual initiatives, there was a striking lack of political leadership, community engagement, and facilitation of community dialogue from the Mayor that could have helped establish a cooperative political framework across political parties and supported frightened communities during a critical time. Instead, the vacuum was filled with further communal polarisation by politicians, as illustrated during the 2024 General Elections. Moreover, and notwithstanding its severe financial crisis, the city council's reliance on older models of multiculturalism and community power-brokering fostered institutional engagements with religiously separated communities, thereby creating a competitively communal environment for political power and resources (see *Tensions in Leicester's approaches*).

Communal ideas and activities have a long history in Leicester's politics. They have been deployed locally by the major political parties and reinforced by the city council in ways that magnified symbolic religious and territorial divisions within the city rather than challenge them. Initiatives such as the Unity Declaration by the Leicester Council of Faiths in March 2020, which sought to prevent communal division and hostility, especially during political campaigning, were positive signs and attracted many signatories from Leicester's religious groups.<sup>111</sup> However, these had limited power in the larger landscape of institutional and political forces, including international ones that strongly affected local relations.

We find it revealing that, to date, no significant meetings of Hindu and Muslim organisations have taken place to discuss the 2022 events or ways to move forward together. This would seem to be a major priority. We recognise the forces that worked

**We find it revealing that, to date, no significant meetings of Hindu and Muslim organisations have taken place to discuss the 2022 events or ways to move forward together.**

## The women's and religious leaders' peace statements illustrated critical non-sectarian, anti-communal forces in Leicester's South Asian communities that are determined, often in the face of considerable opposition, to work towards community unity and peace.

against such meetings and the pressures faced by organisers in their communities against undertaking joint work. The events surrounding the first peace statement illustrated how efforts to foster joint work among different religious groups were being subverted and attacked by some political groups whose interests were communal and fostered divisiveness rather than unity and cooperation.

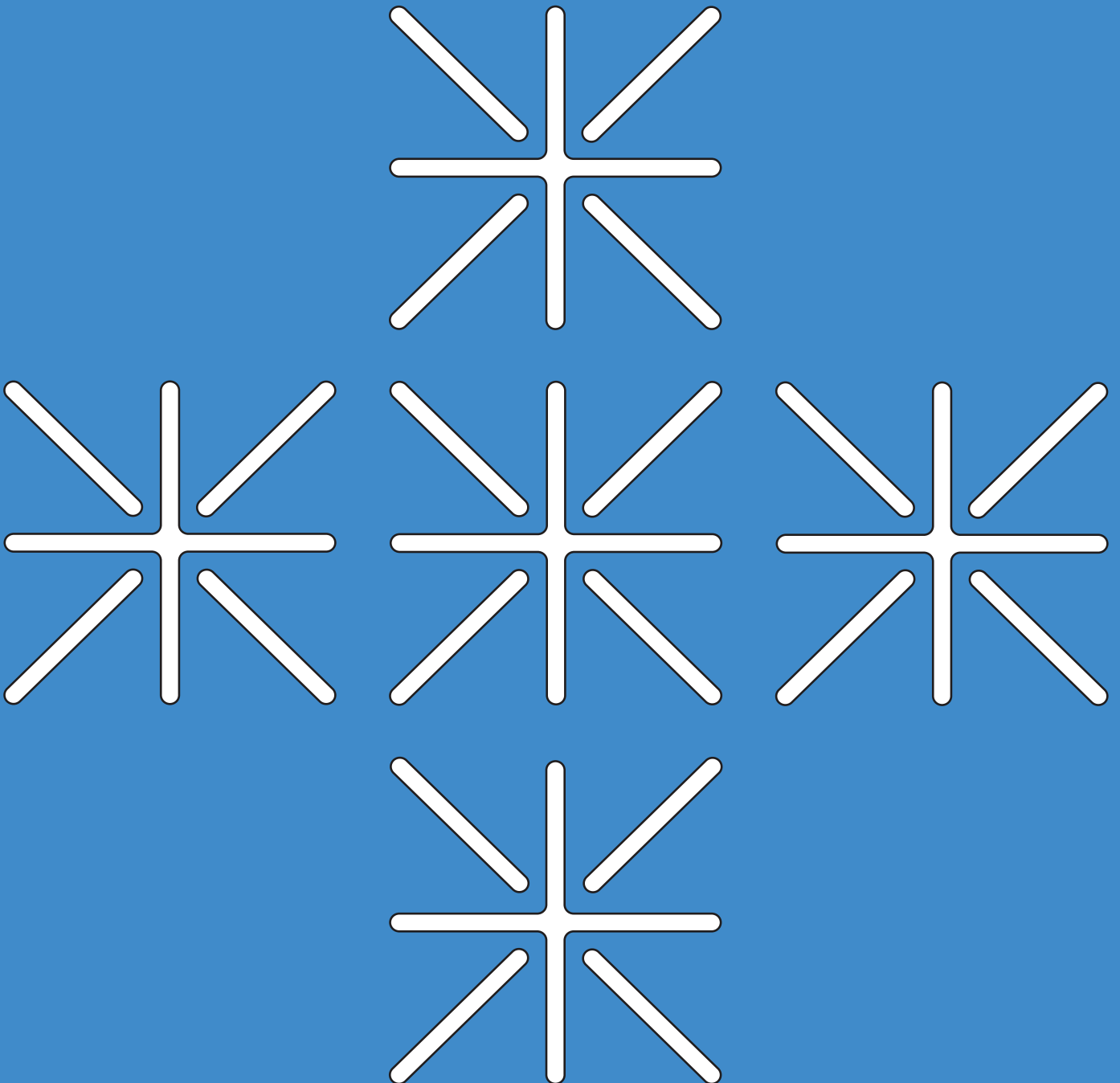
However, the women's and religious leaders' peace statements illustrated critical non-sectarian, anti-communal forces in Leicester's South Asian communities that are determined, often in the face of considerable opposition, to work towards community unity and peace. These views were echoed in both our focus groups, where participants emphasised the need for long-term reconciliation strategies, including interfaith dialogue, youth engagement programmes, and educational initiatives to rebuild trust. They also expressed a desire for better community representation in decision-making processes at the city council level. We believe it is this non-sectarian, anti-communal spirit, which was also illustrated vividly in many incidents of cooperation and mutual aid during the violence on 17 September, that should be the basis for future institutional support and recognition. We also believe that such institutional recognition will help marginalise and isolate political currents that seek to foster communal division and polarisation.

There were (and are) numerous actors, local, national, and international, who actively sought to polarise communities or enforce a deeply communal understanding of the events of 2022. They placed either Muslims or Hindus as perpetrators or victims. They promoted a binary, communal picture in which the Leicester events were manifestations of a broader, often international conflict in which either Hindus or Muslims were being systematically persecuted, with the Leicester events claimed to be part of this persecution. After 17 September, their activities dominated representations of the events on social media and within Leicester. While we know of local efforts to challenge disinformation, investigate incidents, and oppose communal thinking, and while we recognise the risks individuals took in challenging untruths and disinformation in their communities, these were essentially initiatives undertaken by individuals with little collective or organisational support. Conversely, individuals with highly active social media accounts received little sustained or

public challenge from co-religionists (Hindu or Muslim), a relative silence that others interpreted as a wider endorsement of their views, leading to further misunderstanding and polarisation.







We frequently came across the view that the August-September 2022 violence seemed to emerge out of nowhere and took the city and its police services by surprise. But the violence was the culmination of multiple factors that led to increased tensions between different communities in recent years, most notably between Daman and Diu and Muslim communities.

In this chapter, we consider several background factors that we believe are either contributory to the violence in 2022 or relate to the broader social environment in which the violence occurred and may have made it more likely. These include socioeconomic factors, including work and housing conditions, antisocial behaviour, territorialism, and communal views across communities. Some themes in this chapter are also discussed in more detail in other chapters of the report.

Several interviewees mentioned several of these areas as ‘explanations’ for the violence. Our interviews and the survey occurred long after the August and September violence. Some people may have created narratives after the violence that ‘explained’ to them what happened, but they might not have thought about these factors before the violence. However, several of the factors below were mentioned consistently across different data collection methods and groups.

While we discuss some factors relevant to the Daman and Diu communities in this chapter, our aim is not to ‘blame’ any group, but to understand the perceptions and misunderstandings that ultimately led to serious tensions in the city. This includes understanding and challenging the negative narratives and stereotypes about Daman and Diu communities that have developed in the city among other South Asians, whether Hindu or Muslim. We are especially concerned about the extent to which some local actors have represented misunderstandings, neighbour disputes, and antisocial behaviour as political issues linked to religious difference, and about how some actors have tried to communalise ordinary disputes and events involving the Daman and Diu communities.

#### Demographic changes and social integration

A theme prevalent across interviews and survey respondents was that recent migration from Daman and Diu had disrupted what were seen as relatively settled relations among Asians. Survey respondents said that ‘Asians used to help each other’, but because of ‘the influx of people from Indian subcontinent with no idea how to integrate’ and ‘large scale immigration of the Indian (Daman) community’, there were ‘tensions between the people from Daman and people who are [East African Asians]’. One survey respondent said, ‘there has always been a clear divide between Belgrave and Highfields, but each side has mixed with Hindus and Muslims’, whereas this has now been affected. Some participants explained the differences between the East African Asian and Daman and Diu communities in this way:

A lot of the community now here are second, third, fourth generation. But this group of

people are technically still first in their own journey. So, there’s a bit of disconnect there, because they’ve come at a time where times have moved on compared to when my grandparents came [in the] 60s. They’ve come as a first generation with a different mindset, and that mindset clashes quite a lot with the second, third, fourth generation of people here... Their identity of being Indian or British is very different, their community is different, their mindset is different, their education is different, everything is different. Whereas me and my friend [of a different religion] from school, we’re probably more alike in all those things because we’re in the same generation, we’ve come at the same time, have the same school and it’s all the same.

Some of the views we heard about Daman and Diu communities are similar to the negative views among some white residents of Leicester that met East African Asians who arrived in Leicester in the 1970s. The consistent complaints – about antisocial

behaviour, public drinking, public celebrations and parties associated with Daman and Diu communities – sound little different to the complaints made against Asian and Caribbean people when they arrived in the UK from the 1960s and 1970s. The stereotyping of the Daman and Diu community was reported to fuel its further marginalisation.

They're stereotyped not only by the Muslim community but also by the established South Asian community living in Britain. They're called 'freshies' – 'They don't know how to cross the road, they don't know how to drive a car'. When it comes to issues like litter or antisocial behaviour, it's often blamed on them.

The difference from previous periods of migrant settlement is that the stereotypes and complaints are from former migrants themselves and point to an under-acknowledged factor: integration is no longer within one dominant majority society and its laws, rules and obligations, but within a culturally plural society comprised of earlier migrant communities that may have varied and even mutually contesting values. Because of language barriers, differing levels of educational attainment, different cultural and religious practices, and limited knowledge of the infrastructure of rules, procedures, and norms, there is scope for considerable misunderstanding between long-settled and recent communities.

### Socioeconomic Disadvantage

The violence in 2022 was largely related to communities that faced significant levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. For many residents, especially migrants, employment is shaped by economic necessity and low incomes. The structure of Leicester's economy has historically revolved around manufacturing, garment factories, retail, logistics, and care work. However, the opportunities in these sectors are often insecure, low-paid and physically demanding. The impact of these conditions can be deeply felt, particularly among those with limited social mobility. An interviewee highlighted the situation for many recent migrants:

There's a struggle now and that becomes more difficult as [getting] work gets harder and harder and more and more difficult. There's an employment agency that does all the packing jobs. You go past their offices now in Leicester and there's people waiting outside... The waiting room is full. There's a desperation and that is a fundamental issue... They can't get those jobs that are highly paid because they don't have the language skills or the education to do that. They are relying on those lower paid jobs but... there aren't enough of them now because those lower paid jobs have disappeared after COVID and that backlash.

Individuals from low-income households and migrant communities do not have the relevant quali-

fications or skills to get into the skilled labour market and are forced to do low-paid, menial jobs. Economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic led to job losses, particularly in garment and textile manufacturing, where many migrant community members were employed. The lack of jobs has created intense competition for limited employment opportunities. A Daman man we met described how he knew people travelling as far as Cornwall in search of any available work.

The nature of employment options available to working-class residents reflects structural inequalities that have persisted in Leicester for many decades. Many who enter the garment, food packing and similar industries find little job security, minimal career progression, and often poor working conditions. The lack of benefits for new arrivals forces them into immediate employment, depriving them of the opportunity to train or pursue education that could improve their prospects. It also means that the overwhelming bulk of wages is used to cover rent, with utilities and food coming next. Furthermore, it was reported to us that many Daman and Diu people cannot claim benefits because they work enough hours through agency jobs such that they are ineligible. But, at the same time, they cannot get enough work to sustain adequate standards of living.

Reports published in 2020 revealed severe working conditions in several of Leicester's garment factories, including during lockdown, when many workers were forced to come to work and were not provided with face masks or other protection.<sup>112</sup> A study of over a hundred garment workers found that more than half said they were paid below the minimum wage and received no holiday pay: 'Almost half (49%) of those involved in the study received no sick pay, 56% had been paid below the minimum wage, 55% did not receive holiday pay and a third had no contract and did not receive a payslip'.<sup>113</sup>

As elsewhere, COVID-19 also played a significant role in contributing to community stresses by intensifying social isolation, economic hardship, and mental health challenges. As the first city to enter lockdown and the last to emerge from it, Leicester experienced prolonged isolation. Women garment workers in Leicester also reportedly had the highest rate of COVID-19 fatality in the UK. Participants said fear of the virus heightened social anxiety and distrust, while the lack of social support networks worsened mental health issues, especially for individuals living alone and young people facing developmental challenges. Women, particularly in extended and joint families, struggled to balance caregiving responsibilities under added stress.

National reports over several years alleged poor working conditions and treatment of workers in Leicester's garment factories, and even allegations of 'modern day slavery'.<sup>114</sup> Following these reports, the Government's Gangmaster and Labour Abuse Authority, the National Crime Agency and the Health and Safety Executive, together with customs officers and the city council, launched an investigation, Operation Tacit. While the investigation concluded that there was no 'modern day slavery', it

## We are especially concerned about the extent to which some local actors have represented misunderstandings, neighbour disputes, and antisocial behaviour as political issues linked to religious difference, and how some actors have tried to communalise ordinary disputes and events involving the Daman and Diu communities.

found many abuses, including health and safety breaches and payment below the national minimum wage.<sup>115</sup> It identified 315 premises of 'interest' in Leicester and conducted 'engagement and enforcement' visits to 215 factories.<sup>116</sup>

In October 2023, over 500 South Asian textile workers, many from the Daman and Diu community, attended a protest demanding better pay and conditions. A factory owner, speaking bleakly about the future of his industry, told us that the combined impact of the pandemic and what he considered adverse reporting in the national press about Leicester's textile factories meant that some 500 factories had closed and only around 30-40 remained. This, he said, also meant that 12-15,000 people, including many from the Daman and Diu communities, suddenly became unemployed from 2020.

A further structural problem in Leicester's job market for many low-income workers is reliance on employment agencies. While agencies are meant to provide flexibility, in practice, they can create significant insecurity. Many workers have no guarantee of employment on any given day, leaving them to regularly compete for work, arriving daily and waiting outside an agency in the hope of getting a shift, illustrating the precarious, unpredictable nature of agency-based work. Without stable contracts, workers cannot plan, access credit, or feel secure in their employment. It was also reported to us that many Daman and Diu people are employed without written contracts on a cash-in-hand basis. This type of economic uncertainty increases vulnerability to exploitation and deepens the divide between those with stable employment and those stuck in precarious jobs.

Access to work in Leicester is not determined solely by availability, and discrimination and nepotism were reported to us to play a role in restricting opportunities. Linguistic barriers further constrain access to employment, particularly for those who arrive in Leicester without strong English language skills. Economic pressures also mean that many do not have the time or financial stability to engage in language or skills learning. An interviewee noted: 'If they're of working age, they're not necessarily going to college, they're just working, they're working to send money back' (Interview

XAD). A Daman interviewee similarly told us that, for many younger people in the community, the pressure to earn is so high that they forgo college, further education, or skills training. The remittance of funds to families in India, reflecting financial obligations that extend beyond the UK, creates additional strain.

### Housing and Overcrowding

The long-term decline of social housing has played a significant role in the prospects for many of Leicester's low-income communities, irrespective of ethnic background or migrant status. Many council homes sold under the historic Right to Buy scheme have ended up in the hands of private landlords who rent them out at rates unaffordable for those who previously relied on social housing. The failure to replace lost stock with new public housing has left thousands of families either waiting indefinitely on housing lists or being pushed into the private rental sector. Housing in Leicester has become one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges, with rising rents, overcrowding, and a shortage of affordable accommodation that has reportedly created a crisis for low-income residents.

Many households, particularly those with migrant backgrounds, struggle to find suitable, affordable housing, and this can lead to overcrowding. Further, the affordability crisis has been worsening, with rent increases outpacing wage growth. A resident highlighted the rapid rise in rental costs: '18 months ago, a two-bedroom terraced house in Belgrave would be rented for about £700. It's about £1100 now. So, any new person coming in to rent a property would find it extremely difficult.' (Interview XBH).

Many low-paid migrant workers are forced into shared housing arrangements to reduce costs, with living spaces operating on a shift system to accommodate multiple occupants. A participant described living conditions for a significant number of people from Daman and Diu:

So, at one end of Belgrave Road is the [name of store]. If you go there at 7am in the morning, you'll see a load of men sitting around drinking

beer... These guys have just finished a night shift... They're sharing a house with a day shift worker, the bed as well. So, they are waiting for their housemates to leave. They've just finished the shift, they're coming here in the morning and they're just winding down. They're waiting for the rooms to become vacant so they can go sleep, rest. [For them,] this is their evening.

What for some is a rest with a beer after a long night shift while waiting for their beds to be vacated is seen by others as antisocial behaviour, inappropriate drinking and social disruption. Overcrowding does not just affect those inside the home but has a broader impact on social behaviour and the use of public spaces. Limited private space often forces young people to seek alternative places to socialise, sometimes leading to tensions in the community. An interviewee noted how this played out in their local area:

Usually, two families staying in one house, two-up, two-down or three bedrooms upstairs, overcrowded. And perhaps that was the reason why the young men didn't sit at home, watch TV at home. They went outside and sat outside the mosque and played the music loudly because they couldn't do that at home.

This is one of many examples we came across about how housing issues negatively affect broader social dynamics. Overcrowding, linked to poor socio-economic conditions and shift work, led to the use of public places (streets, parks, parking lots, alleyways) in ways that significantly contributed to tensions within several communities in Leicester. The lack of indoor communal space pushes people into public areas where their presence can be perceived as disruptive. This often leads to complaints and friction between different groups that can become communal, even when the root cause is socioeconomic rather than behavioural. These tensions can then escalate, with the Daman and Diu communities being unfairly blamed for issues that are ultimately linked to broader housing and economic policies. 'The [Daman] community feels quite isolated, feels quite blamed by Hindus who are not Damans and blamed by Muslims' (Interview XDW).

### Antisocial behaviour and community tensions

In this way, recent demographic changes and factors related to the adjustment of new migrants have created an environment ripe for misunderstandings and tensions. Several separate issues, listed here and discussed below and elsewhere in the report, have been the source of tensions between Daman and Diu communities and others, primarily South Asian Muslims, the latter predominantly Indians from East Africa.

- Spontaneous, often noisy, religious celebrations, public processions or domestic parties, the latter sometimes spilling into the street or continuing late into the night
- Perceived antisocial behaviour, including drinking in streets and parks, and alleged harassment of individuals
- Allegedly intentional drinking and antisocial behaviour outside mosques
- Intentionally driving convoys of cars towards mosques and stopping outside them, sounding car horns and shouting provocative slogans (see also Chapter 2: Attack and Cricket Match, May to August 2022.)

A persistent source of tensions between East African Asians and some members of the Daman and Diu communities concerns public celebrations and parties in streets and public places, including footpaths and roads, and often occurring around religious occasions. This has been compared with East African Asian Hindu events, which typically take place indoors in halls or private homes or, if in public, have received the relevant permissions from the city council or police. We also heard from several white residents who expressed great frustration and annoyance with the noise and traffic related to religious festivals celebrated outside of organised events, especially ones that continue for several consecutive nights. Some reported having to leave their homes and go away during these periods (Interview XEE).

Alongside is an alleged drinking culture and related allegations of women and children being harassed in parks, including Spinney Hill. Gujarat is known for being a 'dry state' (where the sale and consumption of alcohol is prohibited). Being union territories, Daman and Diu have no such prohibition and are places where many Gujaratis and tourists go to drink alcohol. It has been put to us that

**The violence in 2022 was largely related to communities that faced significant levels of socioeconomic disadvantage. For many residents, especially migrants, employment is shaped by economic necessity and low incomes.**

a ‘heavy drinking culture’ has accompanied some migrants from Daman and Diu, and this has caused problems with some Muslims (Interview XDE).

The claims are that this alleged drinking culture and antisocial behaviour have led to persistent problems and conflicts in some areas. We have seen video evidence of fights involving around 15-20 Daman youths, as well as videos of tomfoolery in Spinney Hill Park. While these may be annoying or intimidating for families witnessing such events, they were fights between groups of Daman youths. We did not see evidence of communalism in these videos. We also heard allegations of harassment and intimidation of families, especially Muslim women and children using Spinney Hill Park. However, we did not see evidence that families had been targeted because they were Muslim.

We also saw several video and audio files distributed online of loud, obviously Hindu celebrations in Belgrave and elsewhere, allegedly accompanied by drinking alcohol. In the audio recording from Belgrave, there is loud music and raucous behaviour, but we did not hear any anti-Muslim sentiments. In one video, there is a Hindu party at night spilling outside a home onto a residential street. This was claimed to be problematic because a mosque is nearby. However, while the behaviour might reasonably elicit complaints from neighbours about noise or antisocial behaviour, nothing is happening in the video other than a celebration. In another video, we saw a loud Hindu religious celebration in the street at night in which some Hindus attempted to negotiate with complainers, while a few became verbally aggressive. In none of these recordings did we see evidence of intentional communal provocation or the targeting of Muslims. Yet, these have each been distributed online to claim Hindus are deliberately causing problems for Muslims. We deplore the online promotion of such material, as it portrays ordinary (albeit annoying) events – which could have been complained about through relevant channels – in ways that can only heighten communal tensions.

A consistent theme across several interviews and the survey was the lack of city council (or police service) enforcement action, including a lack of attention to complaints about antisocial behaviour, loud music and late-night drinking, especially outside mosques and in parks. It was put to us that, despite repeated reporting of antisocial behaviour to the city council and police services, ‘nothing was done’, leading to mounting frustration and tension (Interview XDZ). Several interviews also mentioned that the city council did not communicate acceptable behaviours and guidelines for public events and celebrations, which allegedly led to disruptive behaviour that increased tensions.

It is not unlawful to drink alcohol in public in Leicester, including outside religious or cultural buildings or events or in parks. However, drinking must not cause a nuisance and, if deemed a nuisance by officials, individuals may be requested to stop drinking or surrender their drink.<sup>117</sup> There are various other measures to tackle antisocial behaviour and public nuisance. The city council and

police can also issue a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) if drinking or antisocial behaviour is persistently causing harm or nuisance in public places – for example, at weekends in some city centre areas. Regarding religious celebrations, if they are public processions, the police should be notified 6 days in advance.<sup>118</sup>

A small group of men gathering after a factory night shift may be seen by others as engaging in unacceptable public drinking and antisocial behaviour early in the day in a park where mothers with children are out enjoying the day. What, for one community, may be an enthusiastic house party celebrating a religious event with loud music and dancing may be construed by others as deliberately provocative behaviour near a mosque. Similarly, the ordinary (if enthusiastic) way that some groups celebrate religious occasions is seen by others as an aggressive display of religious militancy. A few local activists have tried to portray ordinary disagreements and disputes in religious terms for their own reasons. In particular, there was a persistent attempt to blame the Daman and Diu communities in Leicester for what is claimed to be ‘the rising tide of Hindutva in the UK’ by linking an apparent increase in anti-social behaviour or public religious celebration to issues of religious politics.

Separately from the above examples, we heard claims from several interviewees about behaviour outside some mosques in Leicester relating either to drinking or to car convoys. We heard about regular drinking by groups of men gathering outside mosques in ways that have been described as provocative (because of the religious prohibition against drinking alcohol). The men were reported to sometimes abuse and intimidate worshippers. These claims have been made to us across several interviews.

At the top of Green Lane Rd, there’s a mosque called Baytul ‘Ilm... The elderly people were saying that at night you get these Hindu youngsters from Daman and Diu sitting in the vicinity drinking till the late hours and playing the music loud. Not thinking ‘[It’s] the prayer time so let’s turn down the music’, not thinking like that. They couldn’t care less and some of them were drunk, making lewd comments, rude comments to people who are passing by, the young, the women and children. So, this caused resentment. And when they were approached and said, ‘Look... you shouldn’t sit here, go and sit somewhere else’, that caused some tension, some distress. So, that’s the background leading up to the events of the summer.

However, we did not see direct evidence that the gathering or drinking occurred because it was a mosque, rather than the opportunistic use of a car park or wall that happened to be near a mosque.

We frequently heard about the driving of small and large convoys of cars by men and youths towards a mosque, slowing down or stopping outside the mosque, seemingly during prayer times, sometimes with the men carrying flags and loudly

sounding their car horns, sometimes accompanied by loud chanting, and sometimes taunting or abusing people. They were said to be common during Hindu religious festivals, independence days, and cricket matches. (In India, Hindu nationalist car convoys, usually called 'road shows', are now common and often used to assert presence in certain areas, including areas where Hindus are in the minority. They typically include the use of flags and other symbolism and the chanting of slogans, including 'Jai Shree Ram'.)

They had a line of cars all the way down Asfordby Street. There's a prominent mosque there known as Jame' mosque. And they were blowing their horn, playing loud music [and] recording outside the mosque, recording themselves. You know [it's] being posted [on social media to say:] 'Look what we're doing outside the mosque. Look what we're doing in a prominent Muslim area.' The whole street lined with cars honking, beeping. That's totally unacceptable to do that outside the mosque where you know it's prominent and it's intimidating behaviour.

Another type of car-related incident was driving into an area perceived to be 'Muslim', and behaving in an intentionally provocative manner. A witness described to us an incident in August 2023 on Pakistan Independence Day during which around five cars drove down Evington Road with India flags out of their windows, throwing eggs at passers-by and frightening elderly people who were out shopping (Interview XBC).

An alternative view from a community figure was that, given the number of mosques in some parts of Leicester, it would be impossible for a religious procession or convoy of cars not to stop outside or near a mosque, and that the claim of deliberate provocation is incorrect. Nevertheless, this type of incident has been consistently reported to us by interviewees across different time periods, locations, and events. Because of the details that have been described to us by unrelated witnesses, we believe at least some of these incidents were intended to be provocative and either directly targeted at Muslims or indirectly targeting them by assuming Indian Muslims were 'Pakistani'.

Alongside these incidents were others related to traffic, cars and religious events, that both Hindus and Muslims complained about:

At the end of the day, and you've got Muslims doing Eid and they go to the mosque. If you're in Leicester between 1.00 and 3.00 o'clock on Friday, you can't get anywhere. The traffic is amazingly bad. But we don't moan about it, we accept it. It's the time that they go, it's the time they close their businesses.

These are unplanned blocking of roads during Navratri. They've blocked major roads. The police are powerless – when you're confronted with hundreds of young Hindu boys or men against a few of them, what can they do? They're

blocking the road because there's an overspill. There's too many people [and] the temple can't accommodate. Yes, it's your festival. Yes, celebrate. But surely blocking the road is not the way, unless there's a prior application put in and the Council has approved it.

Similar concerns have previously been raised about other religious celebrations, such as those at the East Park Road gurdwara, which drew complaints about noise, traffic, parking issues and disturbances. This suggests that some of the reported tensions are less about specific communities and religions and more about broader disputes over (unapproved) public celebrations in densely populated urban spaces, including situations where recent migrants may not be aware that they need formal permission to hold such events.

### Local Confusion about Hindutva and Hinduism

We also want to point out here another factor that has been a source of confusion between ordinary Hindu religious practice and Hindutva religious symbols. The Daman and Diu community in Leicester is noted for its enthusiastic, often spontaneous celebration of religious festivals, particularly those associated with Ganesh, but also with Ram, Hanuman, and the goddess Bhavani, a representation of the Mother Goddess (Durga) familiar in Maharashtra and parts of Gujarat. There are also followers of regional *sampradays* (sectarian traditions, often linked to a religious figure or saint). The configuration of Hindu religious beliefs among the Daman and Diu communities overlaps significantly with that of the East African Gujarati Hindu communities, but the emphases are not necessarily the same (nor should they be, since Hindu religious belief and practice vary enormously).

In some groups within the Daman and Diu community, figures are foregrounded who are not often considered prominent among most East African Gujarati Hindus, unless they happen to originate from Maharashtra. Of importance here is Shivaji, the medieval warrior and head of the Maratha Confederacy. Despite having a complex history, Shivaji is seen today by Hindutva ideologues as the creator and defender of a Hindu state and warrior against the Muslim Mughals. Large flags of Shivaji are used in some Daman and Diu community religious processions (and among other groups originating from Maharashtra), though only a few people carry them. Some worshippers also integrate Shivaji into other festivals, such as Ganesh Mahotsav.

Within Daman and Diu community religious processions, it would not be unusual to find a small youth group carrying large flags of Ram and the Ayodhya temple, the 'angry Hanuman' flag, and flags of Shivaji. This change in the iconography of public processions is new for Leicester and the UK. It differs from, for example, the flags and chants in existing East African Asian Gujarati Hindu processions and festivals (see Slogans and iconography). Thus, several interviewees reported seeing changes

We frequently heard about the driving of small and large convoys of cars by men and youths towards a mosque, slowing down or stopping outside the mosque, seemingly during prayer times, sometimes with the men carrying flags and loudly sounding their car horns, sometimes accompanied by loud chanting, and sometimes taunting or abusing people.

in flags, slogans and iconography in recent years, and they linked these changes to the Daman and Diu communities.

Some Muslim individuals have sometimes overinterpreted the flags and symbolism as representing political Hindutva or being directed against Muslims. Many individuals from Daman and Diu are undertaking religious practices common in their original regions. It is important for community relations in Leicester to avoid falsely interpreting ordinary religious practices in newly arrived communities and seeing them as threatening or Hindutva-oriented when they are not.

Disinformation has also caused significant confusion, misunderstanding and tension in Leicester about ordinary Hindu symbols as opposed to Hindutva ones. The local confusion between Hinduism and Hindutva is partly caused by Hindutva activists (who want to replace Hinduism with the political ideology of Hindutva) and partly by some Muslim activists (who have blurred the distinctions for their own reasons). This has led ordinary Hindu religious events to be characterised by a few local activists as problematic for communal reasons, rather than because of the noise they might create or other annoyances. This view is assisted by Hindutva organisations like Insight UK who falsely claim that Hinduism is Hindutva. This narrow ideological claim may be taken at face value by others who will then see all of Hinduism as racist, militant extremism and consequently disparage all Hindus.

This confusion has played out in Leicester in several consequential ways. The following example illustrates the complexity of the issues involved. In early September 2023, a Hindu religious figure received a call from a Muslim religious figure asking about the use of saffron flags during a Janmashtami celebration at Spinney Hill Park. The call had been sparked by an X/Twitter post by a local Muslim activist about the event, claiming that there was a 'Bajrang Dal' flag at the event, which he had reported to the police.<sup>119</sup>

Janmashtami is the celebration of Krishna's birthday. It is an important, regular and ordinary Hindu religious event: 'young families, elderly ladies,

young children, they had just gathered were chanting the names of Krishna on Janmashtami Day, and there were some orange flags'. However, because of the post, some Muslim community groups became concerned about saffron flags, as they had on other occasions. The Hindu religious figure explained that it was an ordinary religious occasion and that saffron flags are normal in Hinduism, the colour signifying goodness and purity. This is certainly true.

But a further complication in this case is that the particular 'angry Hanuman' flag referred to in the Twitter post, while not designed as a Hindu nationalist flag, has often been used by Hindu nationalists in India, including the violent Hindu nationalist Bajrang Dal movement, though many other people also use it, and it is commonplace in India. Daman youth that we met told us that the 'angry Hanuman' flag is often used in Daman and Diu community processions, and was frequently used in India, but some Muslims in Leicester wrongly considered it a 'terrorist' flag. They said they were deeply unhappy about being stereotyped as 'extremists' for simply following their religion. For some Daman and Diu people, using the 'angry Hanuman' flag may be normal and may not intend any offence, but it is seen as exceptional by others. It is certainly not a traditional image. Furthermore, the meanings attached to flags and symbols are not static and vary by time and place. The 'angry Hanuman' image is recent and is used by Hindu nationalist groups in India, and for others, this use has become normalised.

In another incident in September 2023, an activist posted about an ordinary Hindu religious event in Leicester. The post was close to the anniversary of the march, and related to a street where tensions were serious in 2022:

[Name of street], #Leicester Wow! So this is what's going on right now. Hindus playing music loud on the streets as part of their festival with no consideration for neighbours. Senior @leicspolice have said to let it continue. 15 secs from Masjid Taqwa. @CCRobNixon<sup>120</sup>

Inflammatory posts from others followed, characterising an ordinary, if loud, event as Hindutva-related, though it was not. We cannot see the purpose of posts like this other than to escalate communal tensions and create antagonism between communities based on falsehoods. A (Muslim) community figure said:

The independent view [about the above celebration] is, they can do whatever they want as long as they have the permission to do it and as long as it's not too late, because people do celebrate. But then, some people started to use that as means...[of] coming on the bandwagon: 'Look, these people are getting away with it. The police have allowed them to do it.' [Activists] are using these [events] to promote that kind of [view], whereas the mainstream Muslim and the mainstream Indian communities have just moved on (Interview XDP).

### Territorialism

I'm very proud to be from Leicester, but it's also very segregated. Very, very segregated. You have your areas where you have your Sikhs, your Hindus, Muslims and your white middle class and whatnot. [We] kind of all coexisted, and it was like, yes. But still very separate, right?

Many interviewees said that communities which had previously been more mixed had become more segregated, as people tended to cluster in areas with others from similar religious, ethnic, and class backgrounds. This reduced opportunities for intercultural interaction because people had 'enough' of their own community structure around them – schools, shops, places of worship, restaurants. While they are not 'ghettos' (in the sense of being an area with high poverty and multiple levels of deprivation inhabited mainly by one ethnic minority group), several interviewees described some Hindu and Muslim communities in these terms.

Where Hindus and Muslims predominantly resided in separate areas, this created a sense of 'ownership' over those neighbourhoods (Interview XDR, Interview XAP). Statements such as 'this is our area' frequently arose in our research and, for some residents, suggested territorial exclusivity and resentment towards outsiders (Interview XDC). An Asian project that provides services to anyone in the community described the impact of territorialism: 'It was about four or five Muslim guys, outside the project [who] said that we shouldn't be here because we're not a Muslim project. This is their area' (Interview XDW). Similarly, an organisation described to us a situation where, because the National Lottery partly funded the organisation, they were told that as gambling was contrary to the beliefs of Muslims, the organisation should 'not be in that area'. Similarly, we were told by a mixed (white and Asian) group that they couldn't book meetings at Belgrave Neighbourhood Community Centre because 'it was only for Hindus'.

Communal territorialism was at the core of an important dispute in 2018, one of several we documented regarding the siting of religious buildings. In that year, a consulting firm submitted an application to convert an industrial warehouse in Belper Street, Belgrave, into a nursery and a Muslim prayer room.

The application sparked major uproar among many Hindus following a campaign led by Hindu Voice and other groups. The city council received over 1,400 objections, and two petitions with over 3,500 signatories also opposed the application. Former Leicester East MP Keith Vaz also campaigned against the application by allegedly lobbying the City Mayor. The City Council rejected the application. Significantly, many objected in territorial terms by opposing a Muslim institution in a 'Hindu area'. Comments about the application on the city council website contained a significant amount of anti-Muslim abuse. In turn, some Muslim organisations created a counter-petition to highlight the abuse. We also heard that attempts by the Daman and Diu community to acquire property and build a temple

**Disinformation has also caused significant confusion, misunderstanding and tension in Leicester about ordinary Hindu symbols as opposed to Hindutva ones. The local confusion between Hinduism and Hindutva is partly caused by Hindutva activists (who want to replace Hinduism with the political ideology of Hindutva) and partly by some Muslim activists (who have blurred the distinctions for their own reasons).**

Where Hindus and Muslims predominantly resided in separate areas, this created a sense of ‘ownership’ over those neighbourhoods. Statements such as ‘this is our area’ frequently arose in our research and, for some residents, suggested territorial exclusivity and resentment towards outsiders.

in Highfields were met with strong resistance by some Muslims, again for territorial reasons. Such conflicts over planning applications for religious sites demonstrate an entrenched sense of religious territory and animosity towards other religious groups who may settle there.

Religion-based territorialism in Leicester manifests in other symbolic ways. We heard from community figures how the installation of the Gandhi statue on Belgrave Road, sponsored by the Samanvaya Parivar, amplified the divide between ‘Hindu Belgrave’ and ‘Muslim Highfields’, even though Gandhi was a universal figure, surely relevant to all Indians, and with particular significance for Indian Muslims who chose to live in India after partition. The statue became the site of potential tension several times, including during the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, during which a petition was signed by 6,000 people to remove it, claiming that Gandhi was a ‘fascist, racist and sexual predator’ who brought ‘inconsolable suffering to millions of people during the partition of India’.<sup>121</sup> Members of the Indian community, joined by former MP, Keith Vaz and some city councillors, formed a human chain around the statue to shield it (Interview XBK, Interview XDU). On Indian Independence Day, 15 August 2022, rumours were circulating that a few people, implied to be Muslim, were going to damage the statue, and several Hindu groups organised to protect it.

There were people from Mandhata Samaj and there were people from the Hindu community in the Council. There were some other people from some of the charity organisations on Loughborough Road. And they all formed a human chain to protect the Gandhi statue... This was on Independence Day in 2022 because they would have damaged that statue otherwise... There were rumours going around... so they were being protected essentially. We may not have been told directly, we just took a precaution.

New arrivals can also disrupt existing, entrenched territorialism. Belgrave is often considered ‘Hindu’, and Highfields ‘Muslim’. The relatively new Daman and Diu community has settled across both these areas. Some of its members live in or near Bel-

grave, and others live in Highfields and the Green Lane Road area. Their sense of their community crosses both areas. We can envisage, among existing groups, that ‘their’ territory is being disrupted. This can create potential tensions, especially if the new community is perceived or spoken of as a threat. Moreover, if recent migrants did not feel the need to engage with or learn about other communities and preferred to mix with those from their hometowns in India, and if the existing Indian communities (Muslim or Hindu) saw them as newcomers with whom there was little cross-community interaction – unless it was to do with negative matters (such as complaints about street parking, refuse, littering, drinking and noise) – then the negative impact on community tensions is evident.

Suspicion of others within what is assumed to be ‘our’ territory can lead to many misunderstandings. Street plays and theatre are often performed by members of the Daman and Diu community, often in the tradition of *nukkad nattak*. These are common in parts of India (including Daman) and are an important form of community education and leisure, typically performed in public. We were told about a street play outside a mosque.

Last year sometime, a group came in, and they were doing some rituals on that square. So, I went along and just stood there. I didn’t disturb them. I waited till they had a pause in what they were doing. And then I just asked them: ‘Who’s in charge here? Can I just ask what’s going?’ because I didn’t want [it] to escalate into something different, because the Muslim community came and they just felt that there’s something going on here [and] things can just get out of hand. They said to me: ‘Look, we’re just having what we call a silent drama. It’s a play that we have and we have permission from the Council.’ So, I said: ‘Okay, that’s fine. It’s just that we have prayer time here. Are you going to be playing any loud music or anything?’ [He said:] ‘No, we will be silent, and we’ll be finishing in 10 minutes.’ It was clarified and we moved on.

The significance of this interchange lies in the perception of civic spaces – in this case, Sheikh Adam Square, a public space – as belonging to a

religious group and in the suspicion of others who might enter it.

### Racial and Religious Hatred

The number of hate crimes recorded by Leicestershire Police has been increasing since 2016, and the most significant increase by far relates to racist hate crimes, which rose from less than 900 in 2016-17 to over 2,300 in 2021-2022. This reduced somewhat to about 2,000 in 2023-2024.

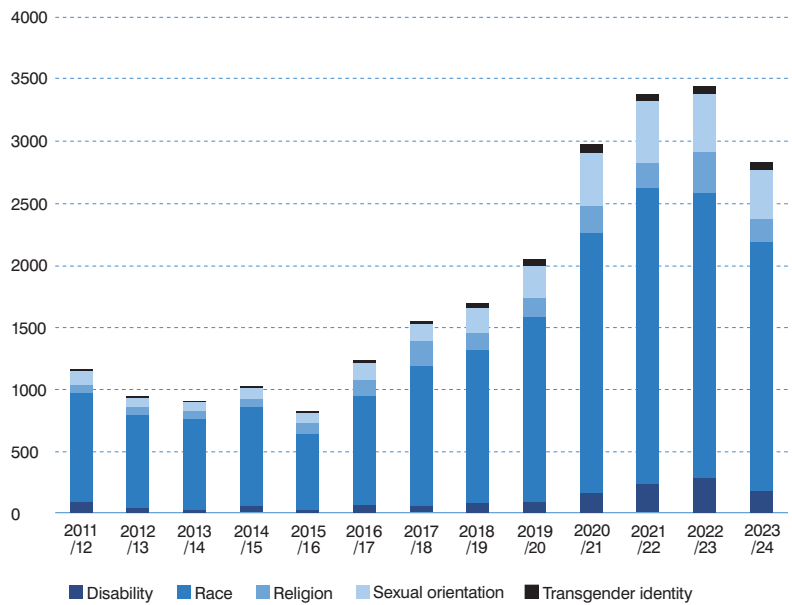
The peak number of racial crimes in Leicestershire was in the year before the 2022 violence. The rise to a peak in 2021-2022, followed by a slight decline across 2018 – 2024, is not unique to Leicester, and national hate crime data shows a similar pattern. Significantly, hate crimes in Leicester motivated by religion are considerably lower than racist hate crimes, accounting for about 80 crimes in 2011-12 and around 200 in the years 2020-2022, rising to a peak of around 330 in the period March 2022 to April 2023, which would have included many related to the August and September violence in 2022. Hate crimes related to sexual orientation have been higher in Leicestershire than those related to religion, and those related to disability are comparable in magnitude. This data suggests that religious hatred and communalism among Leicester's population are low or have not systematically translated into reported hate crimes. While it is possible that some, or even many, hate crimes where religion was a motivating factor were recorded as racial instead, the disparity in numbers between racial and religious hate crimes is noteworthy.

Incidents reported to us where religion was a factor and caused widespread anxiety in the communities included the following:

- In January 2013, seven Sikh men were convicted for attacking two Muslim customers at the Mogul Darbar restaurant on East Park Road. Four people, including three staff members, were stabbed. This followed allegations that a Sikh girl had been 'groomed'. Reports suggest 40-50 men, wearing scarves and balaclavas and brandishing knives, poles, bricks and metal bars, were involved in the incident. The police also treated it as an incident in which religion was involved.<sup>124</sup>
- In March 2022, two Sikh boys were followed and attacked by three non-Sikh schoolboys in Marydene Drive near Judgemeanow Community College. One of the Sikh boys was punched while the other's turban was taken off. The incident was investigated as a hate crime with three boys being arrested.<sup>125</sup> The two Sikh boys were subsequently moved to a different school. It was claimed to us that intolerance in the area was worsening (Interview XDR, Interview XBB, Interview XBD). In November 2016, 15-year-old Brandon Singh Rayat took his own life as a result of bullying at the same school.<sup>126</sup>

Though few of the hundred or so respondents to our survey reported being victims of racial or religious hatred, several also reported incidents like the following:

Figure 31: Hate crimes recorded by Leicestershire police, 2011-2024<sup>120</sup>



- Melton Road. Shouting ‘paki terrorist’ at me and mum (headscarf) whilst we walked to Cossington Park... This is nothing new, there’s a lot of drunk Indian men around Belgrave area who get drunk and shout racist slurs. It’s been going on for the three to six years, a lot more. No job, share beds at friend’s house, and drink all day (Respondent 32).
- ‘We are aged and disabled (Indian origin) couple minding our own business and were abused threatened by gangs of Hindu youth yelling anti-Muslim Islamophobic slogans used by the BJP in India. ‘Muslims go to Pakistan’, I cannot remember the exact words. And banging on our door and threatening us. What beggars belief is the youths exhibit foreign accents, not English, clearly from Daman, India, and have the audacity to tell a British person born in England to go back to Pakistan’ (Respondent 8).

### Communal Separation

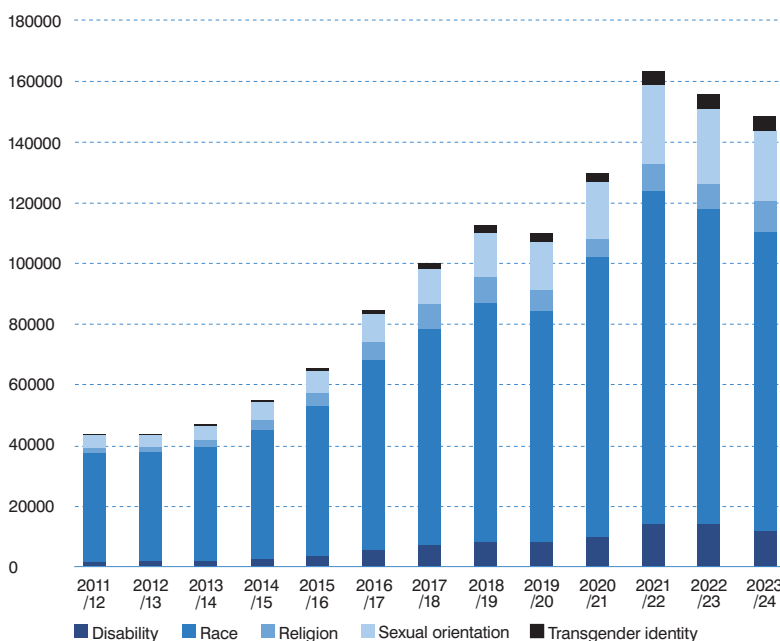
These examples reflect a perception, evident from our interviews, focus groups and survey, that Leicester has become more divided along ethnic and religious lines in recent years (Interview XDW). Similarly, in our two focus groups, participants acknowledged a long history of coexistence in Leicester but expressed concern over the erosion of trust following the disturbances. Some attributed this fragmentation to external influences, political agendas, and social media misinformation, while others pointed to local tensions that predated the events. Also significant is that, in some radical or supremacist ideologies, there is pride or honour in not mixing with those of another religion or community.

While the city has historically been praised for its diversity, increasing economic pressures and newer political dynamics have led to divisions that are now obvious. These tensions are not necessarily about religion but about competition for resources, the lack of integration opportunities, and the perception that communities are being treated unequally. These factors are translated into communal directions, sometimes by local activists.

A participant involved in community work explained how socio-economic conditions make young people more vulnerable to communal ideas: ‘When you’ve got an environment where young people, and Leicester’s [has] one of the... highest rates of poverty amongst young people and children... You combine that with this extremism narrative, they’re primed to be susceptible to that’ (Interview XAX).

In the absence of strong community support structures, communal narratives can offer an alternative sense of belonging and purpose. The reduction in funding for integration programmes, language education, and youth services has left a vacuum that communal groups often fill. As reported to us in several interviews, communal ideas can be promoted among the disenfranchised, marginalised, or poor by those who may seek to use them as political fodder to gain power, status, and influence (Interview XAX).

Figure 32: Hate crimes recorded by police forces in England and Wales, 2011-2024<sup>121</sup>



People told us of considerable distrust, fear and anxiety across both Hindu and Muslim communities after the 2022 events. But we wanted to understand how, before those events, ordinary relations had changed in more recent years, from the often idyllic ways in which they were spoken about in previous decades:

I remember lots of Hindu families on my street. We used to exchange sweets and gifts on occasions like Eid and Diwali. It was very positive experiences and good positive memories. There was never any hatred.

It was significant that, during many interviews, including those with individuals opposed to prejudice, there was regular use of communal language ('they', 'them' versus 'us', 'our', for example).

A common theme reported to us was that younger generations are separating along religious lines, with Hindu and Muslim youths increasingly isolating themselves from others. Interactions in schools and colleges reflected this segregation, with students from some backgrounds reportedly keeping to themselves and not interacting with others. The formation of social groups in schools is often influenced by differences in class, religion, ethnicity and sex. Friendship networks within educational institutions frequently mirror broader social patterns. A teacher from a Muslim-majority comprehensive school in Leicester observed that, as students progress through their education, their friendship groups tend to become more homogenous:

Friendship groups might be mixed to the extent that you might have Pakistani Muslims, Indian Muslims, Bengali Muslims. Then you get Somali Muslims, and they might congregate more with the North African Muslims, for example... By year 11, you start to see some of these friendship circles splintering a little bit.

This suggests that while younger students may form more diverse friendships, peer groups tend to become more insular over time. The teacher further highlighted distinctions between established South Asian communities and recent arrivals from Daman and Diu. This differentiation is evident in extracurricular activities:

Most visibly, you see it in the cricket teams. So, we're at a school that's renowned for our cricketer talent, and I would say most of the composition of the cricket teams do tend to be those from the Daman communities.

A factor relevant to many members of the Daman and Diu communities concerns caste prejudice and caste hierarchy. In Leicester, both class and caste divisions have reportedly manifested through the assertion of difference between many in the East African Gujarati Hindu community and groups in the Daman and Diu communities. The differences are further compounded by relatively limited non-transactional interactions between the Daman

and Diu community and other residents, often mediated through statutory services linked to social work or neighbour disputes, with few holistic engagements with broader Leicester communities. Additionally, although the Daman and Diu community shares a common religion with settled Hindu communities, we were told that there had been reluctance to include them in existing places of worship, though this has changed in recent years (Interview XAY). Additionally, many people from Daman and Diu are not vegetarians but eat fish and meat, and this is seen negatively by some East African Asian Hindus.

Because of the influence of UK Hindutva campaigns, many Hindu organisations reject the discussion of caste-based discrimination as, somehow, 'anti-Hindu' (though caste is an explicit structure of Hinduism and described copiously in its primary sacred texts; we are also fully aware of how caste and subcaste prejudices operate in many ordinary Hindu communities and families<sup>127</sup>). There has been considerable resistance to efforts to legislate against caste-based discrimination, with campaigns by the Hindu Council UK and Hindus for Democracy opposing legislation barring discrimination by caste.<sup>128</sup>

Yet, during interviews and meetings, participants often mentioned how Daman and Diu people were often seen as 'low class', 'low caste' or 'fishermen'. The operation of caste and subcaste in Hindu communities, together with their interaction with migration status and poverty, highlights an important dynamic in Leicester's South Asian communities through which social hierarchies are reinforced. It was reported to us that, in some of the garment industry, caste hierarchies in hiring processes were apparent and linked to the exploitation of Daman and Diu workers, often hired under precarious contracts, frequently on cash-in-hand terms, and often unaware of their fundamental employment rights. The implicit assumption was that intensive, manual, low-paid work for long hours in often poor working conditions was all that most Daman and Diu people were 'fit' for because of their 'lower' caste status.

### **Ideologies and prejudices**

Communal and religious separation also operates through ideologically informed views of other communities rather than simply 'everyday prejudice'. The views illustrated below are not representative of participants and were articulated by relatively few people across different data collection sites. *We want to emphasise that these are perceptions of a small minority of individuals.* It is essential to understand these ideologically informed prejudices if they are to be addressed – even if they do not represent the views of most people.

We found views among some Muslim and Hindu individuals that were ideological, sometimes conspiratorial, and often based on communalising international conflicts and disputes. Where specific allegations were made about incidents, we asked for tangible, verifiable evidence that we could follow up.

New arrivals can also disrupt existing, entrenched territorialism. Belgrave is often considered ‘Hindu’, and Highfields ‘Muslim’. The relatively new Daman and Diu community has settled across both these areas. Some of its members live in or near Belgrave, and others live in Highfields and the Green Lane Road area. Their sense of their community crosses both areas.

---

Among some Muslims, the primary view was that Hindus were supporters of Narendra Modi, strongly influenced by Hindutva ideology, and harboured anti-Muslim sentiments fuelled by the BJP and RSS in India. A related and common view was that recently arrived migrants from India to Leicester carried with them Hindu nationalist views as a result of living under Modi and BJP governance since 2014 (Interview XDE).

The new migrants, primarily from Daman and Diu, were seen by some as having introduced anti-Muslim ideas and contributed to the spillover of issues from India to Leicester. In this context, it is noteworthy that Daman and Diu has among the *lowest* levels of officially recorded communal violence of all state or union territories in India, recording no incidents in 2016 or 2017 and with no persons arrested or charged for communal violence between 2018 and 2020.<sup>129</sup> There was also the view, articulated implicitly or openly, that the situation between Muslims and Hindus in Leicester reflected the situation of Muslim communities in India. We also came across several instances of anti-Hindu prejudice on social media, including several examples in the UK of incitement to hatred, threats and religious abuse following the September violence.

Among Hindus, even though a shared Gujarati identity with Muslims was often spoken about, there was a reported growing religious divide within it. Some respondents mentioned what they said was a ‘betrayal’ by Gujarati Muslims during the violence in September and the consequent creation of distrust. While Gujarati Muslims were said to have become untrustworthy only in recent years, it was said that Bangladeshi and Pakistani Muslims could ‘never’ be trusted. Some Hindus told us that they felt Muslims had ‘never forgiven us’ for the fact that Narendra Modi was elected in India and that the violence in September was revenge for Modi’s electoral wins. Some Daman youth also said that the Muslim community in Leicester ‘took advantage’ of Hindus because the latter were perceived as peaceful.

Other views included the claim that Muslims, once mainly confined to the LE4 area, were now trying

to take over Leicester and make it 'Islamic', including by expanding the number of mosques and madrassahs across east Leicester and taking over the city council. The movement of Muslims into other areas of Leicester had allegedly created negative community dynamics. The latter was sometimes spoken of in transnational, conspiratorial terms and associated with what was seen to be wider 'Islamisation'. Certain madrassas were also claimed to be instilling anti-Hindu views among Muslim children and young people. We heard several times that there needed to be more unity among Hindus to resist what was claimed to be discrimination and intimidation from Muslims. There was an additional view that Muslims were united, whereas Hindus were divided, including by caste and *sampraday*. It was also said to us that these divisions meant Hindus were not able to engage in violence when 'sometimes' they felt like they wanted to.

A key part of Hindu nationalist ideology in India is 'love jihad', an idea that crosses into the UK white supremacist far-right – the 'love jihad' campaigns in India have indeed dovetailed with far-right 'grooming gangs' narratives, often facilitated by Hindu nationalist supporting Indian media. The campaigns are based on the claim that Muslim men are marrying, grooming or converting Hindu and Sikh women and girls to Islam as part of a strategy of ultimate conquest and domination. The idea of 'love jihad' came up surprisingly often among Hindus we met, and it arose in both subtle and explicit forms. We heard conspiratorial claims that Muslim organisations in Leicester provided financial support to teenage Muslim boys to initiate 'love jihad'. Several interviewees also confirmed to us how widespread the 'love jihad' ideology has become among Hindu and Sikh groups. We also heard – but were not able to corroborate – the claim that leaflets were posted in Evington that advised Muslims on 'converting Hindu girls into Islam' (Interview XDI, Interview XDU, Respondent 47). These ideas have been actively promoted in the UK by several Hindutva organisations and linked to the British far-right's 'Pakistani grooming gangs' narrative (see Hindutva polarisation and division: the role of Insight UK).

### External Influences and International Conflicts

There is little question that international events and conflicts have strongly impacted relations between some groups and communities in Leicester and

will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. However, in the past, inflammatory events in the Indian subcontinent have been reported to us as having had relatively little influence on community relations in the city. Those events have included:

- Destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 and the nationwide violence that followed
- Religiously motivated attacks on Hindu and Buddhist minorities in Bangladesh and Pakistan
- Violence against Muslim communities in Gujarat in 2002
- Armed religious militia committing atrocities against civilians, such as the Lashkar-e Tayyiba attack in Mumbai in 2008
- Continuing conflict between India and Pakistan regarding Kashmir, including the 1999 Kargil war

It was reported that, during these previous crises, groups in Leicester met and worked to avoid escalations in the city. For example, the former Hindu-Muslim group of the Leicester Council of Faiths was reported to have 'played a very important role in developing mutual understanding between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The members of the group met when there had been tension between these large communities, for example, at the time of the clash in Gujarat in 2003 and after the Mumbai attacks on 26-29 November 2008.'<sup>130</sup>

However, this situation has changed significantly, not only in Leicester but across several towns and cities in the UK. The impact of invasions, occupations and conflicts in the Middle East from 2003, salafi-jihadi-influenced violence in the UK and Europe from 7/7 onwards, the election of Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi as prime minister of India from 2014, continued acts of violence against Muslim, Dalit and Christian populations in India, and Israel's attacks on and war crimes in Gaza have all contributed to *differential* politicisation of groups within UK South Asian communities. Within this politicisation, communal approaches have often seized the upper hand, fuelled by groups aligned with Hindu nationalist and political Islamist politics. External conflicts, which are not essentially religious, are converted locally into communal, Hindu-Muslim antagonisms. Combined with the speed of social media dissemination, disinformation, and incitement, this creates a challenge that seems out of proportion to the issues that local community cohesion strategies are intended to address.

**A common theme reported to us was that younger generations are separating along religious lines, with Hindu and Muslim youths increasingly isolating themselves from others.**

## Because of the influence of UK Hindutva campaigns, many Hindu organisations reject the discussion of caste-based discrimination as, somehow, ‘anti-Hindu’, though caste is an explicit structure of Hinduism and described copiously in its primary sacred texts.

In Leicester, politics in the subcontinent have played out in various ways. In 2019, over 100 people gathered at a Hindu Temple to celebrate Narendra Modi and the BJP’s landslide win in the Indian general elections.<sup>131</sup> While of course, they have every right to do this, it also means that an important local religious institution is associated with Hindu nationalist politics and a specific political party. It also sends a message of perceived separation to many Indian Muslims in Leicester. Both Hindu and Muslim interviewees shared the view that Narendra Modi and the BJP’s governance in India has had a negative impact on community relations in the diaspora between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. Conversely, no information or examples were given to us that illustrated how it positively impacted community relations. The negative impact has emerged in multiple public antagonisms between groups of Hindus and Muslims, and groups of Hindus and Sikhs, in the UK, Canada, the US, Australia and elsewhere.<sup>132</sup> Many interviewees said that Indian politics after Modi’s election and the rise of Hindu nationalism had an impact on the deteriorating Hindu-Muslim relations in Leicester. This deterioration was evident because the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat had little to no impact on community relations in Leicester.

Interviewees also mentioned to us the invitation of radical or militant preachers, Muslim and Hindu, to Leicester. This included Pakistani preacher Syed Muzaffar Shah Qadri, who spoke at several mosques in the UK in December 2016, including in Leicester. He had praised the killer of Salman Taseer, the Governor of Punjab, who had opposed blasphemy laws in Pakistan, and influenced Tanveer Ahmad, who stabbed to death Asad Shah, an Ahmadi man, in Glasgow. Similarly, Bangladeshi preacher Enayat Ullah Abbasi, who praised the 9/11 attackers and called for beheadings of those who insulted Islam or were Ahmadi, was invited to speak in central Leicester in June 2023. Some Leicester Muslim organisations have invited various other extremist clerics from Egypt, Pakistan, Bangladesh and elsewhere. The Islamic Centre in Leicester was accused of extremism in 2019<sup>133</sup> after posting website content which said that ‘an apostate does not have the right to life’.

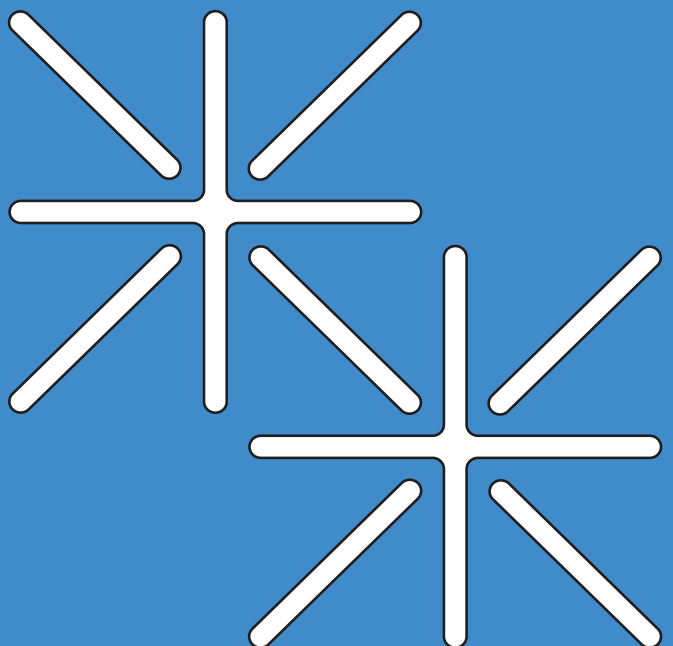
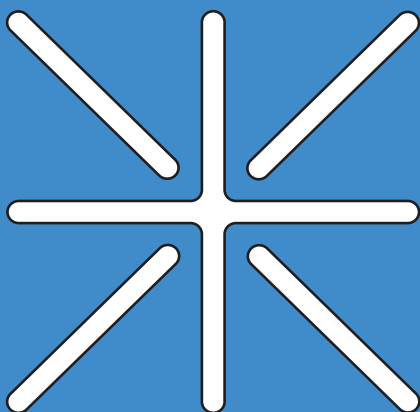
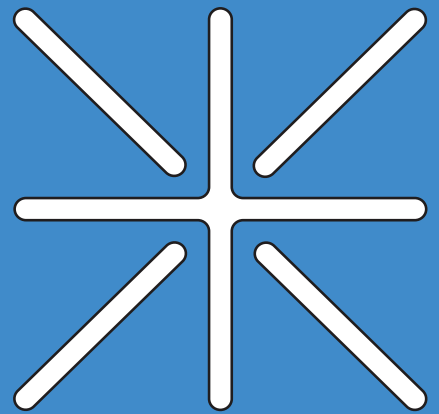
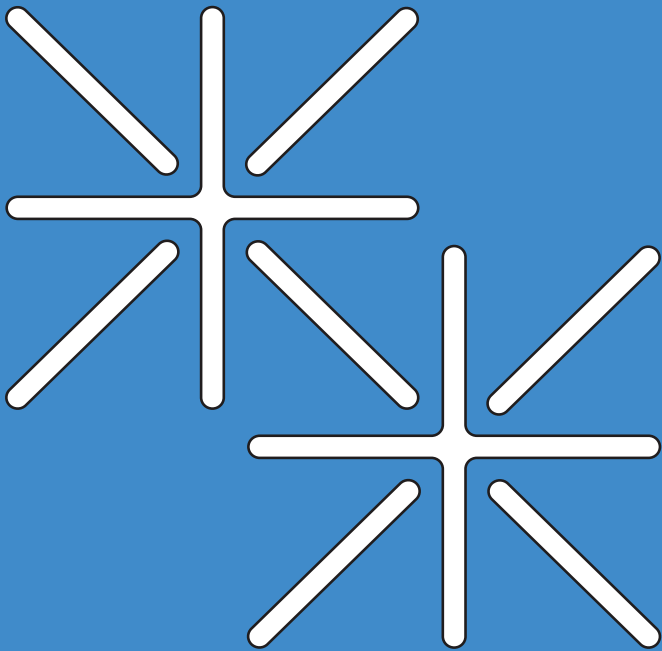
Similarly, Hindu organisations invited Sadhvi Ritambara, probably the most important inciter of anti-Muslim violence and hatred in India during the

1980s and 1990s, and Dharendra Shastri, a preacher who advocated for the bulldozing of Muslim homes and campaigned for India to become a Hindu nation-state.

A final area of external influence, evidenced through arrests during the violence in September, concerns the activities of political Islamists from outside the city, especially activists and social media influencers from Birmingham who had links with some activists in Leicester. It was put to us during several interviews that, both during the September events and before, outside actors from Birmingham – whose families primarily originated from Pakistan and who did not understand the often close relations and shared histories between Gujarati Hindus and Muslims in Leicester – had attempted to communalise relations in Leicester or spurred local activists to do so (Interview XBL, Interview XAA).

### Conclusion

The 2022 Leicester violence occurred against a background of many social, political, and economic factors, and these cannot be seen as unrelated. Demographic change, minority adjustment, territorialism, the communalisation of minor disputes and antisocial behaviour, the influence of international politics, and socio-economic and housing challenges all played significant roles in establishing an environment of division and resentment among some groups. Failures by statutory authorities, particularly the police and local government, left grievances unaddressed and allowed tensions to fester. With some communities already facing tensions and local disputes over territory linked to new migration patterns, the effects of inflammatory disinformation, the unpredictable, explosive power of social media, and local and external actors contributed to a volatile environment that eventually culminated in broader unrest.



In this chapter, we focus on the role of the city council, the forms of official multiculturalism in Leicester, and local party politics as broader factors that constituted further background to the 2022 events.

### Multicultural Leicester

Leicester City Council is a unitary authority with a directly elected City Mayor, Sir Peter Soulsby, who was elected mayor in 2011 and who had previously been leader of the council for almost every year between 1981 and 1999. As leader or Mayor, he has led the city council for around 29 of the last 44 years, including when it became recognised as a model multicultural city, when policies related to community cohesion were developed, and through the decade or more of austerity measures imposed by central government.

From the 1990s, diversity was recognised as a positive asset for Leicester and became a defining characteristic of the city. Leicester was often branded as a model for multiculturalism, integration and harmonious community relations.<sup>134</sup> Today's population reflects diverse national, ethnic and religious backgrounds (see Chapter 11: Leicester and its People). The 'Leicester model' of multiculturalism has informed national policy and the approach of other local authorities. It had several dimensions:<sup>135</sup>

- The promotion and management of policies aimed at ethnic and religious diversity by a city council controlled by the Labour Party since 1979 (except for 2003-2007), with a left-wing within that party that oriented it towards multiculturalism from the mid-1980s onwards, transforming Leicester from 'an avowedly racist city'<sup>136</sup> to what was seen as a model of diversity.
- The dynamic and entrepreneurial orientation of East African Asians that changed the city's economic fortunes from post-industrial decline and recession in the late 1970s to the economic rejuvenation of manufacturing industries (clothing and textiles) and the dramatic expansion of migrant businesses, such as in the 'Golden Mile' – often through the social capital and transnational business links of migrants.
- Additionally, whether because of discrimination in public housing or for other reasons, East African Asians arriving in the 1970s chose to live in cheap, privately rented, and later privately owned accommodation. In not causing excessive competitive strain on public housing, this factor eased the pathway to integration, though it also led to residential segregation.
- A great deal of goodwill from community organisations, community figures, the city council and (especially) the Labour Party resulted in civic harmony over many decades.
- The branding and promotion of the city – seen previously as an 'industrial relic', a 'lost place' – to a globally-oriented, diverse, open, inclusive, business- and tourism-friendly model of racial harmony and cooperation, with its ethnic

diversity strategically central to its brand and self-image.

- The development of an extensive programme of cultural, ethnic and religious festivals and celebrations supported by the city council, including Diwali, Navratri, Eid, Vaisakhi, Caribbean Carnival and Christmas. Additionally, the city council supported applications for planning and development of religious sites and buildings in Leicester, funded various ethnic minority centres, community groups, and NGOs, and recognised and accommodated particular needs relevant to ethnic minority groups (such as funerary sites).
- Increased political representation of ethnic minority councillors and MPs, especially from the growing South Asian middle classes. Historically, this was through the Labour Party, but has changed in more recent years.
- Dealing with potential community conflicts through meetings between and public statements of calm from the religious community establishment (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Christian), the city council and the police, indicating also a degree of trust between these agencies. It is argued, for example, that this approach prevented clashes between Hindus and Muslims in the 1990s around the Ayodhya temple issue.

Whatever its successes, Leicester's multiculturalism faced several challenges and strains, some of which highlighted broader issues with multiculturalism in the UK. The city's approach was claimed to co-opt, contain and commodify South Asian peoples and cultures.<sup>137</sup> This approach reduced diversity to cultural and religious festivals, minority representation, and cultural recognition, while avoiding questions of economic redistribution, social segregation, or the differential impact across the city of nationally driven policies or austerity measures. Furthermore, religious and cultural festivals, an aspect of Leicester's branding and tourism,<sup>138</sup> are widely attended and enjoyed by many residents. But while multiculturalism and diversity are showcased, this is through religion and does not necessarily encourage deeper inter-community interactions. One participant told us:

I don't really think there's any overlap or sharing of festivities, which again is another thing that leads to division between communities. So, for example, with celebration of Diwali and Holi things locally, I don't know of anything where people of non-Hindu faith, Muslim faith [do things together], because this is where the issues are. It's Muslim [communities] and Hindu communities really. I have not seen any... local sharing of festivities.

If Leicester's multicultural model was primarily based on addressing discrimination and celebrating diversity through religious and cultural festivals, these were seen as 'narrow boundaries' that reflected both the 'strength and weakness of the multicultural experiment in Leicester'.<sup>139</sup>

### Social cohesion

After the 2001 urban disturbances across the UK, national debates about multiculturalism were supplemented – and often displaced – by a different series of issues about social and community cohesion.<sup>140</sup> The 2001 Cattle report<sup>141</sup> was primarily focused on disturbances in northern towns and cities and relations between white and South Asian communities. It highlighted 'parallel lives' lived by whites and South Asians in those cities that were an outcome of 'a laissez-faire approach to multiculturalism'.<sup>142</sup> Shared civic associations, clear conceptions of common citizenship and its obligations, and shared ideas of nationhood had become detached from ideas about multiculturalism, leading to communities segregated by religion or ethnicity and without a common purpose under a larger civic nationalism. The segregation, it was argued, was linked to the effects of local authority policies that encouraged 'separate development' and disassociated community relations.<sup>143</sup>

We know of various pieces of work on community cohesion in Leicester since the early 2000s, including work developed after 2007 on 'taking community cohesion forward' in Leicester; an assessment framework; a community cohesion framework in 2012 and a community cohesion fund, among other activities.<sup>144</sup> In the early 2000s, Leicester also attempted projects to foster 'interculturalism' – an approach whereby groups are encouraged to interact and influence one another, this intended to lead to greater mutual understanding and a shared civic engagement. This approach was also described as thinking 'outside the box' of existing identities. These projects were linked to developing a 'cultural quarter' to bring different groups together. However, the focus was often on artistic and cultural expression related to city branding, which would have little impact outside small groups.<sup>145</sup> The development of intercultural con-

sensus was often left to interfaith forums that were often dissociated from younger people.

The city council's earlier community-cohesion work included awareness of tensions within and between communities. At that time, it identified recently arrived Somali migrants, primarily from within the UK and the Netherlands as 'the most urgent challenge facing the City', including because of clashes between some Somalis and some African Caribbean and white groups.<sup>146</sup> The residential concentration of ethnic minority groups, as well as segregation in schools and cultural, sporting and leisure activities, were identified as areas where some residents of Leicester were leading 'parallel lives'. It was also found that 'the lack of contact between Leicester's different communities is a factor in competition over scarce mainstream and regeneration resources' related to disadvantage, and this primarily affected predominantly white communities living on housing estates on the outskirts of the city, as well as African Caribbean, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups.<sup>147</sup>

Community cohesion proposals from 2005 aimed to increase social interaction and inclusion. They included removing barriers, especially to health, education and employment opportunities, building 'inter-cultural and inter-faith contacts between geographic communities', ensuring common values and integration in schools, and activities for 'younger and older people to break down intergenerational barriers'.<sup>148</sup> They also included attention to asylum seekers and other recent arrivals. A community cohesion fund was also available for groups to apply for project monies. In recent years, community cohesion has been based in the city's Community Safety Partnership, which includes the police services and whose priority areas in 2024 included stronger communities, hate crime, crime and anti-social behaviour, and violence in public places.<sup>149</sup> The city council also has an Equality Action Plan, as required under the 2010 Equality Act.<sup>150</sup>

### Tensions in Leicester's approaches

Integration, multiculturalism, social cohesion and anti-discrimination have often suffered from being seen as equivalent. For example, the existence of multicultural and equality policies and a culturally

**Integration, multiculturalism, social cohesion and anti-discrimination have often suffered from being seen as equivalent. For example, the existence of multicultural and equality policies and a culturally plural social environment 'took care' of other issues, such as cohesion.**

Figure 33: Distribution of Hindu Temples in Leicester (Source: Google Maps)

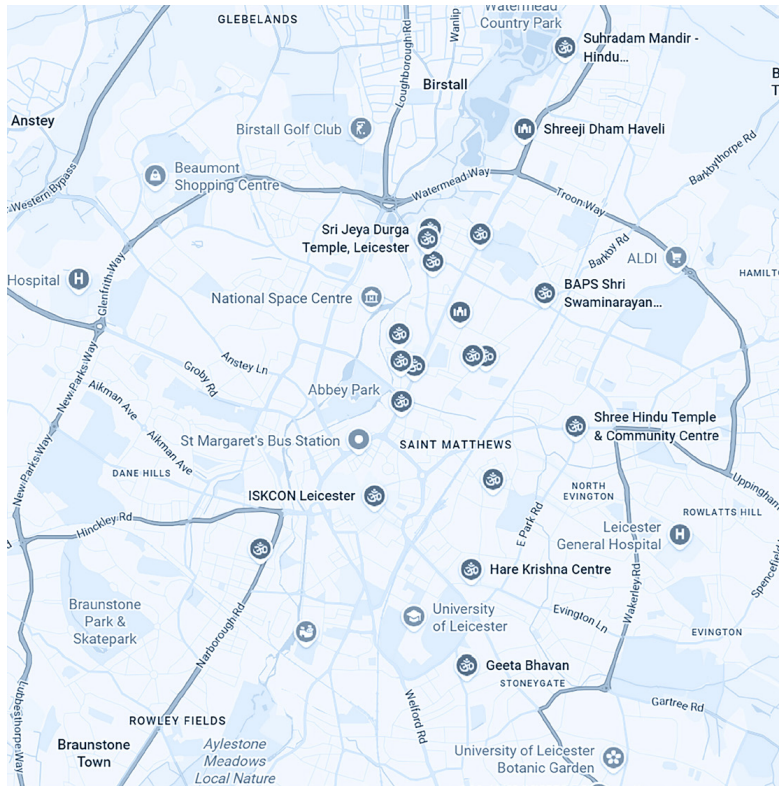
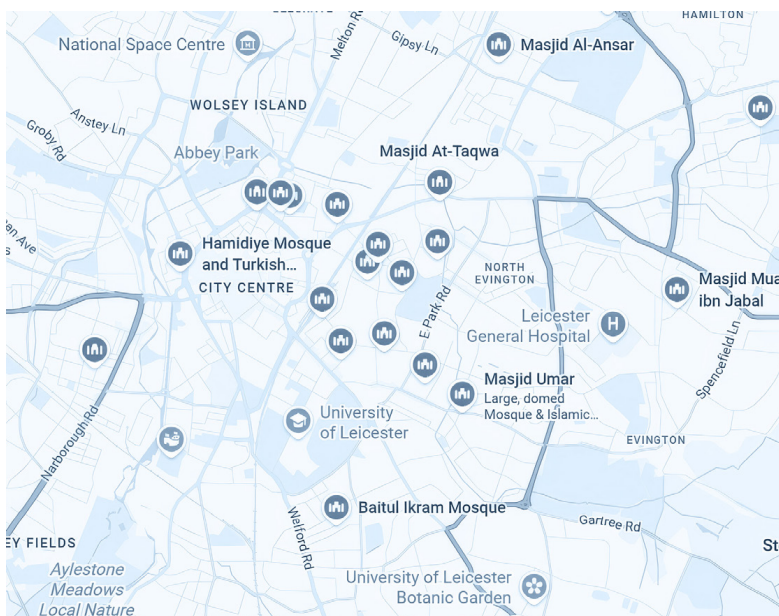


Figure 34: Distribution of Mosques in Leicester (Source: Google Maps)



plural social environment ‘took care’ of other issues, such as cohesion. This view can arguably be applied to Leicester, where the successful settlement and integration of East African Asian and Caribbean communities and targeted efforts to integrate Somali and Sri Lankan communities overlooked other issues and populations, especially the more recent Daman and Diu communities.

We often came across the view that, because of the city council’s history of multicultural success and its support for Diwali, Caribbean Carnival, and other festivals, this was assumed to resolve integration and community cohesion issues that required separate efforts. Even if supporting festivals is a rudimentary approach to community cohesion, it is a temporary association of people and cannot replace more sustained community-cohesion work for adults and young people.

While Leicester and Southall, west London, were often held up as examples of where strong intercultural relations prevented riots from occurring in 2001, ‘parallel lives’ could also be said to exist within some South Asian communities between religiously-defined groups who may have co-existed in the same town or city but whose levels of interaction were often superficial or indifferent rather than deep, sustained or congenial. Additionally, existing relations were often replaced by separation and even communal distance among some members of the second and third generations, for whom religious identity was felt more strongly than it was among their parents and grandparents. With the rise of religiosity globally since the 1990s, *religious identity*, though not necessarily religious devotion or spiritual practice, has become prominent.

The Leicester Labour Party’s orientation towards multiculturalism has been described as ‘consociational’,<sup>151</sup> an approach to power-sharing in a democracy that maintains peace or stability by managing social or cultural divisions and tensions through power-sharing by elites across recognised identity groups. However, this can lead to the institutionalisation of division and political fragmentation.<sup>152</sup> In this sense, the city council acts essentially as a broker, working with elites and representatives of different religious and ethnic communities to organise the distribution of power and influence in the city. This mode of operation can lead to the institutionalisation of differences rather than cohesion.

For example, the Mayor was said to meet with representatives of one religious community and then separately with another community – but did not aim to work together with both nor to create tangible, effective methods of intercultural and inter-religious cooperation that went beyond hosting an interfaith forum. We heard from several people that this approach was divisive. It led to a competitive environment among faith groups seeking city council attention and resources, resulting in broader communalisation across the community and voluntary sector. We saw some evidence supporting this view when, following the 17 September events, even getting Hindu and Muslim community groups to attend a joint meeting hosted by the city council proved very difficult, with many groups instead

wanting to meet separately with the Mayor, claiming this to be established practice.

At the same time, the city's over-reliance on community groups as a mechanism for social cohesion allowed systemic issues of inequality to persist. The assumption that community organisations will bridge gaps left by state institutions was said to lead to complacency in addressing structural inequalities and resource allocation across the city.

In the last 10-15 years there's been a level of complacency that's crept in... Money is spent on festivals which are assumed to bring people together... But that seems to have been the only positive aspect of the work that has been undertaken.

This approach also overlooks the complexities of the communities themselves, particularly along the lines of religion, socio-economic class, subcaste, and different periods of migration and settlement, which may each shape hierarchies that influence access to resources, representation, and a sense of belonging (see Religion).

Religious organisations tend not to be generic (for example, 'just' Hindu or Muslim), but typically represent particular sectarian traditions within those religions. In this context, multiculturalism, especially multifaithism as policy (after the Tony Blair period of the Labour government), gave an advantage to groups interested in competitively expanding their religious influence and the teachings relevant to their sect. In Leicester, which in the 1970s had often refused planning applications for religious sites, there later emerged a proliferation of religious sites across the city, evidenced by increased planning applications to the city council for temples, mosques, madrassahs, and a few gurdwaras.

Multiculturalism also advantages political-religious and ethnonationalist groups that have a political interest in representing communities in particular ways, controlling those communities and their representation in political and policy spaces, and managing those communities from within in accordance with their ideology.<sup>153</sup> The paradox of multiculturalism is that, in reducing culture and ethnicity to religion, and in giving attention to the most demanding religious voices, it can empower conservative political groups, particularly religious fundamentalist and patriarchal groups, across all faiths. Because they are resourced by statutory authorities, over time, those conservative groups have tended to displace secular South Asian groups that had previously emerged from earlier anti-racist traditions.

Multicultural models in the UK, including Leicester, also contain a series of potentially negative logics. Once the local authority (and often the ruling political party, typically Labour) establishes mechanisms of representation, recognition, consultation and funding, it creates an elite of representatives and community gatekeepers ('community leaders') who may compete with each other, but who collectively have a stake in maintaining their position as power brokers between the city council, the police services

and community organisations. Over time, this structure can embed specific individuals and views within local-authority thinking in a narrow, undemocratic way that might not properly represent the views of members of the respective communities. The official community ‘leadership’ can also become distant from the communities whose interests it is intended to convey. (In this vein, it was striking how few survey respondents could name ‘community leaders’ or describe their presence or relevance in their lives.) The ‘leadership’ can also become distant from the younger generations whose interests and values may differ.

Current British models of multiculturalism were also not designed to address communalism, religious fundamentalism or militant ethno-nationalism among some members of diaspora communities. Similarly, they were not developed to address the impact of international politics, faraway conflicts, and global uncertainties on relations between communities in the UK. Furthermore, they were created during a time when current levels of political polarisation, disinformation and the impact of social media on questions of culture, religion and conflict could not have been predicted.

### The City Council and National Austerity

Under the Conservative governments led by David Cameron, Theresa May, and subsequently Boris Johnson, Rishi Sunak and Liz Truss, major austerity programmes were introduced over 2010-2019 and 2021-2024. The last round of austerity overlapped with the removal of government support measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This induced a cost-of-living crisis in the UK, with severe impacts, especially in areas already suffering from socio-economic deprivation. In 2023, the City Council said that because of the ‘decade of austerity’ (2010–2020), council services other than social care were reduced by 50 per cent, and city council funding in 2021 and 2022 was supported with reserves.<sup>154</sup> In early 2025, it reported that:

the medium-term financial outlook is the most severe we have ever known. Like many authorities, we face increasing difficulties in being able to balance our budget... In previous years, we have used a ‘managed reserves policy’, by which specific reserves have been set aside to support budgets and buy us time to make cuts. The available resources for this are rapidly running out.<sup>155</sup>

Leicester has areas among the most severely deprived in the UK. In 2022-23, over 40 per cent of the city’s children were classed as poor, the city being the fourth worst area for child poverty in the UK.<sup>156</sup> Leicester’s public services have long been a lifeline for low-income communities. Austerity measures and national funding cuts have significantly weakened their ability to support many residents.

The consequences of austerity have been very severe, including in basic areas related to poverty, food, housing, and childcare, as well as in areas

directly related to integration and community cohesion. Post-2010 austerity measures led to major funding cuts, reductions, or closures across Leicester for many youth, community, social and children’s services. Cuts affected youth and children’s programmes, language learning, and many initiatives linked to community cohesion and integration. Austerity also led to major reductions in funding for the NGO and charity sectors: various voluntary organisations, charities, and community groups attended by women, children, and youth have been shut down. Former settlement projects assisting new migrants were also closed due to austerity and the city council’s fiscal crisis. Cuts have disproportionately affected white and migrant working-class communities, many of whom relied on publicly funded services and spaces for education, social support and community engagement.

The significance of these cuts for integration, community cohesion and multiculturalism is multiple and compounded. Several interviewees told us that austerity and other funding cuts led to the dismantling of much of Leicester’s progressive multicultural infrastructure and its community cohesion strategies. Many public services essential to social cohesion have disappeared or been substantially reduced. Because of the lack of resources, work by organisations such as the Leicester Council of Faiths, the faith-based community cohesion organisation St Philip’s Centre, and many other voluntary and community groups has been curtailed or is insufficient to address deeper integration and cohesion issues. In parallel, the withdrawal of state support, especially for youth and community initiatives and the third sector, has had significant reported negative consequences for social cohesion and inter-community engagement.

Furthermore, cycles of investment followed by withdrawal have reportedly created instability, with some community programmes launched only to be scrapped after a few years. Each time a programme is dismantled, trust in public services erodes. One participant, who had worked within the local council, described this pattern:

[In terms of] community regeneration, about 15-20 years ago, there were neighbourhood coordinators that were employed... Within two years, they were disbanded because it changed from one council leader to another council leader. Then maybe eight years ago, they wanted to restart it up again’.

One of the most significant impacts has been the closure of most youth centres in Leicester, as well as reductions or closures in some children’s services. A major area affected by funding cuts is early years support (Interview XDQ, Interview XDL).

It was also reported to us that there are major inequalities in how local authority resources are allocated across the city, with the centre of Leicester and more affluent areas being prioritised, whereas areas of higher deprivation were said to receive less investment relative to need. An ex-councillor told us:

This is a predominant view that there is a lot of money spent on the city centre, what are sometimes described as vanity projects, with the area around the cathedral having benefited from a lot of expenditure, whereas the neighbourhoods have been neglected in terms of infrastructure, spending on making the environment for people who live there better. There's some truth in that.

Leicester City Council also relies heavily on the voluntary sector and community organisations to serve different groups, even though it no longer provides many grants to support them. Older communities, such as the South Asian and African Caribbean groups, have established organisations with the help of past local authority grants and remain active. However, newer communities have not had the same opportunities to develop strong organisations due to a lack of resources, which is said to be hindering their integration and progress. Interviewees described to us how the 'mixture of components' – early learning, Sure Start, English language classes and youth community resources, among others – was necessary for integration and how, in the absence of such a mix, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, local social structures and systems 'break down' (Interview XAP).

### Young people

The 1980s and 1990s were important for Leicester's social and educational landscape, particularly concerning the development of youth services and multicultural education. During this period, there was increased investment in multicultural education, with funding directed towards initiatives to address racial inequalities in schools and youth work (Interview XBK). This period saw the rise of secular projects that provided young people, especially those from minority communities, with opportunities to engage in education and politics. Leicester became an important hub for youth work, with statutory agencies and local authorities supporting professional training in the field. Institutions such as De Montfort University played a significant role in developing youth work as a recognised profession. Support extended beyond formal education, as community-based initiatives created spaces for

---

**Leicester has areas among the most severely deprived in the UK. In 2022-23, over 40 per cent of the city's children were classed as poor, the city being the fourth worst area for child poverty in the UK.**

## Several interviewees told us that austerity and other funding cuts led to the dismantling of much of Leicester's progressive multicultural infrastructure and its community cohesion strategies. Many public services essential to social cohesion have disappeared or been substantially reduced.

young people to apply the skills they had learned across communities. This period included significant grassroots initiatives, such as the Red Star Football Club and youth project<sup>157</sup>, which also served as an important community hub. The initiative exemplified how youth-led, community-based projects could foster empowerment and political engagement, and create alternatives that counter social exclusion and discrimination.

However, as an ex-MP told us, as a result of austerity, youth and community facilities 'have been decimated in Leicester, completely decimated. Nothing exists that provides an integrated youth and community provision'. Drastic funding cuts led to the closure of youth clubs, the elimination of statutory provisions for young people, and the scaling back of extracurricular education. Another participant described how previous initiatives for children and youth were engines for integration:

For instance, we have... Highfields Playground. It's called an adventure playground, right? We all grew up there. Hindu Sikhs, Muslims, black people, everyone, and that's why none of us got into shit with each other because we all knew each other. Now they're closing it down. They've already closed down the other ones. If you close these things down now, there's nowhere but the streets.

Whereas previously dedicated programmes within schools and youth services played a critical role in encouraging interfaith and intercultural interactions, the decline in state-funded initiatives has shifted the burden onto schools and faith and community groups themselves. Without the infrastructure to support meaningful cross-community engagement, interviewees reported that young people have been left to navigate life in Leicester within narrower, often more segregated, networks. Many interviewees, particularly those working in local government, emphasised how the systematic closure of local youth facilities was eroding the social fabric that once enabled young people to build skills and relationships across territorial, religious, and cultural boundaries.

Youth, community, and children's services are secular spaces that allow children and young people to mix, learn, develop skills together, and

engage in purposeful activities with those from other communities. For earlier generations of migrants:

In terms of our social, cultural, political and personal development, we integrated with each other. We had programmes that got us to examine our values and viewpoints, our understanding, our identity and so on. That's what made Leicester a beacon, as well as having a National Youth agency, a model for good practice. The decimation of the youth and community service couldn't have come at a worse time for Leicester. And it was the wrong move. The Council should have made a greater effort to try and save the youth service.

Once such statutory provision ceases to exist, the facilities for young people that remain are either the few secular civic associations that rely on the goodwill of a few individuals (such as football and other sporting clubs) or they are the range of faith-based youth, cultural and educational services that virtually all large faith groups offer. Similarly, religious organisations and faith-based groups took over some community spaces and began offering support through food distribution and educational programmes. Although these organisations provided valuable and necessary services, they often lacked intercultural and interfaith programmes. Following funding cuts, religious groups took over social and community support spaces, which led to segregated rather than integrated community spaces. Conversely, there was an absence of a 'third space' – a neutral ground for young people to engage across cultural and religious lines.

The closure of council-funded spaces that fostered cross-cultural engagement has left youth reliant on faith and community-led initiatives, which, while valuable for many reasons, often reinforce insular identities rather than promote broader social engagement. For instance, the Tamil community centre and the gurdwaras provide excellent educational opportunities, such as A-level Tamil and religious instruction. However, these centres typically do not encourage collaboration or engagement across diverse cultural backgrounds, limiting opportunities for creative and critical exchanges. It was said to us that this weakened community integration and increased social separation, particularly in Leicester

East. Regardless of the quality and intentions of faith-based programmes, they end up segregating people by religious and cultural background.

Similarly, the closure of council-funded language courses means that second-language education now primarily occurs in religious institutions. With few secular institutions offering second-language education in Gujarati, Hindi or Arabic, religious spaces have become the primary sites for language learning. One interviewee said that young people learning Gujarati, Hindi or Arabic often do so in the context of religious instruction, rather than in neutral educational spaces (Interview XDM). Some young people from Hindu backgrounds often attend religious and language classes at temples, including those organised by ordinary Hindu *sam-pradays*, but also ones organised by the Hindu nationalist HSS. As a result, although young people may have the same heritage language (Gujarati) that they would like to learn, language education is often tied to religious institutions, which could communalise identities rather than emphasise shared cultural backgrounds. This was contrasted with former multicultural working groups, supported by the city council, that provided secular community-led services including language education (Interview XAZ).

Additionally, there is an even more fundamental difference between statutory and faith-based services that concerns independent personal development:

When you participate in statutory [youth] provision, you are... also engaged in notions of challenge, of ideas and values of self, of identity... It is an after-school programme that you choose, you vote [for] in your own time. [With] some of the uniform [religious] provisions, you go there because your parents want you to be there, right? With the statutory provisions, you're choosing to use your own spare time in a way that is going to be beneficial to you, and along the way you may meet others that you would not have met before. You've learned things about values, about challenge, and about thought processes that you may not have [done]. None of that exists now. What exists is this uniform provision and the faith organisations that are trying to provide that safety net. But there's nobody challenging stereotypes and the underlying seeds of hate.

According to this argument, the shift to faith-based provision contributed to an increasingly separated and communalised environment where young people's interactions were confined primarily within specific identity groups. The effect of austerity cuts by the same governments that were vigorously promoting community cohesion was the displacement of secular services by religious ones that are not typically intercultural, interfaith or integrated, and may contribute to establishing the 'parallel lives' pattern that was intended to be avoided.

One further consequence of the absence of shared spaces relates to youth political participation.

## The closure of council-funded spaces that fostered cross-cultural engagement has left youth reliant on faith and community-led initiatives, which, while valuable for many reasons, often reinforce insular identities rather than promote broader social engagement.

Interview participants mentioned the former importance of youth councils as spaces for young people to voice concerns and engage in democratic political discourse:

Some people [engage] because they're genuinely interested in politics, and they want to move into [it] in the future. Some people want to have their voice heard. Some people want to represent their community and highlight some of the issues that's going on.

The defunding of youth services was said to have directly impacted youth political engagement (Interview XDM). The closure of the British Youth Council and the reduction in funding for youth-led initiatives indicated a shift away from prioritising young people in local governance and political participation. The removal of resources and institutional support was said to create a self-perpetuating cycle in which fewer young people engage in common civic matters, leading to further neglect of youth-specific concerns in policymaking. At the same time, we are living through a period of multiple international and global crises that are of major concern to young people. If initiatives such as youth councils, clubs, parliaments and other secular initiatives played a multifaceted role in encouraging local democratic, civic engagement and advocacy, the absence of those initiatives leaves open a space for other centres of political gravity. Some of these may be communal and territorial. Others may be based on social media influencers and WhatsApp groups, including those that promote disinformation and community polarisation.

The effect of the segmentation of community spaces by culture and ethnicity in comparison with the period of the 1980s and 1990s is that for many people (especially younger people), relations across communities were reported to us as defined less by friendships, harmony, affinity and empathy, and more by transactional associations that may be interdependent, but are essentially superficial. For example, many sites in East Leicester give the impression of an integrated community space used by diverse South Asians. However, interactions between families and those employed by the sites tend to be transactional: families in the same spaces do not necessarily interact with one another

beyond superficial exchanges, after which they go their separate ways. Conversely, families might express strong associations with other families on social occasions such as weddings, parties and other community and religious events, but these would inevitably be dominated by one religious or even caste group. To be sure, the same observations might apply for any community, white, black or Asian, but the significance here is that religious divisions are pertinent to community relations.

### Newer communities and integration

Leicester has a diverse voluntary and community sector, comprising secular and faith groups, on which the city council has often relied to provide essential services and support, especially during austerity and fiscal crises. With drastic cuts in voluntary sector support, the latter has had to rely much more on philanthropies, business partnerships and sponsorships. While many voluntary sector organisations possess the expertise, social capital, and capacity to navigate grant application and monitoring processes, newer communities may not have these capabilities. Similarly, established religious organisations often rely on social networks, connections, and various resources, including overseas ones, for funding.

Several interview participants expressed concerns about the city council and the voluntary sector's lack of engagement with newer communities due to historical preferences given to established groups. The perception reported to us was that funding processes favoured the established, especially East African Asian and Caribbean communities, but largely left others out: 'The majority of those are from established communities... Some of these new communities haven't had those sorts of opportunities to get grants... or to have a place to meet' (Interview XAZ). This was said to contribute to exclusion and made it difficult for newer migrants to integrate effectively. Some newer communities struggled to access resources to establish their own centres, while longstanding organisations continued to receive support.

This disparity was reported to create barriers to integration and limit opportunities for interaction between different groups, making it harder for newer groups to establish a foothold in the city's

social and economic landscape. This filtered down to communities and the difficulties that newer arrivals experienced in navigating local services: 'Some of the people that we've spoken to, even just accessing basic resources [is an issue]: where are doctors' surgeries, where are educational institutions that we can use to be able to help better ourselves and better our lives.' (Interview XAP).

These areas highlight the need for robust integration measures to support recently arrived communities. They also illustrate another important factor: integration is not simply about integrating within a majority (white) community, but also about integration with existing ethnic minority communities, including communities where some members may want to exclude or discriminate against new arrivals on caste, religious or class grounds. The existing voluntary and community sector can therefore play an important role in addressing or mitigating some of these factors.

**Political Parties and Communalism**

Like other parts of the UK, Leicester has seen a significant change in what used to be a strong association between being Asian (Hindu, Muslim or Sikh) and voting Labour. In Leicester, there has been a significant shift in two directions. A significant number of Leicester Hindus now support the Conservative Party, and this factor ousted a Labour MP for a Conservative Hindu MP in 2024 – the only seat the Conservatives won nationally from Labour in the 2024 General Election. A significant number of Leicester Muslims abandoned Labour in 2024 because of anger at the Labour Party's stance on Israel's attacks on Gaza. They instead supported an independent candidate, who successfully displaced the incumbent Labour MP. There were allegations that communal interests partly drove both campaigns against the Labour candidates.

Some of these recent changes also reflect the Labour Party's deselection of 19 of its Leicester councillors as candidates from April 2023, which primarily affected black and South Asian councillors, including all six of its Hindu councillors.<sup>158</sup> Whilst many non-white councillors were affected, this act was articulated by some groups as specifically 'anti-Hindu', alongside the claim that the Labour Party 'does not care about Hindus'. This narrative 'spread like wildfire in the Hindu community' and reportedly had a 'massive impact' electorally, including causing the city Mayor to lose half his share of the vote (Interview XAX).

So, it's not been a historic thing where there's been a political division between the communities on religious lines because both communities would affiliate to a political party because of their life experience, where they feel most comfortable. What's happened in the past couple of years is there's been a political division between the communities that's been reinforced by the political parties. Both parties have played to the community.

Figure 35: Flyers by Operation Dharmic Vote used during the 2019 General Election in Leicester<sup>161</sup>

The top part of the image is a flyer titled "ODV Asks These Policy Questions". It compares Labour, Liberal Democrats, and Conservatives on various issues. The bottom part is a campaign flyer for "Operation Dharmic Vote" with a hand making a peace sign and a ballot box.

	Labour	Liberal Democrats	Conservatives
<b>Policies towards India</b>			
Kashmir & a positive attitude to India?	✗	✗	✓
<b>Caste Legislation (Anti-Dharmic)</b>			
Will Caste Legislation be removed?	✗	✗	✓
Will Case Law on Caste be removed?	✗	✗	✗
<b>Wealth &amp; Taxes</b>			
Impact of tax policies on voters.	✗	✗	✓
Impact of Inheritance taxes, including homes.	✗	✗	✓
Impact of Corporation Taxes.	✗	✗	✓
Impact on capital gains tax.	✗	✗	✓
Support retaining the Marriage Allowance.	✗	✗	✓
Impact of policies on local Rates householders pay.	✗	?	✓
Policy Impact for Education, Student loans / finances and what voters will end up paying in the long term.	✗	✗	✓
<b>Economy</b>			
Are the Business and Enterprise policies friendly?	✗	✗	✓
<b>Rental Properties</b>			
Impact of tax and regulatory policies on landlords.	✗	✗	✓

**The political Manthan of GE2019**  
Will the Dharmic Community end up with Amrut or poison?

Make Leicester East electorate the most famous across the world, by voting Bhupen Dave in the biggest electoral upset in modern British political history.  
Don't want Leicester East being run from Islington by Corbyn's fan club!  
**Vote to make your Vote count.**

**Operation Dharmic Vote**

Thus, voting behaviour was, for many, determined by religious identity, despite both Hindus and Muslims sharing similar levels of reported concern about the cost of living, the economy, the NHS and housing.<sup>159</sup> The significance of communal electoral politics in Leicester is that it is claimed to fuel division along religious lines, leading to the kinds of polarisation that culminated in the 2022 events. The communalisation of electoral politics at national and local levels is promoted by groups like Hindus for Democracy and The Muslim Vote. In Leicester, the political polarisation was reported to us as often deliberate: political parties were leveraging religious identities for electoral gains, further exacerbating divisions.

At the time of the local elections [in a particular ward], it was played out as a Hindu thing. You could see that on some of the posters, some of the leafleting that was carried out that was posted in certain areas, [candidate] as making references to make sure you vote for these people because of who they are. We as a Hindu community [are] with this. They're putting Narendra Modi's pictures on leaflets, right?

Communalism was reported to us as a strong feature of party politics in Leicester and affected several elections for city councillors and MPs. Many allegations were made to us about the impact of communalism in local party politics, and we collected significant documentation confirming attempts to mobilise communities, both Hindu and Muslim, through appeals, some of which were of a religious nature and would appear to be contrary to electoral law in the UK. While exploring this area in detail is beyond the scope of this report, some aspects are relevant because they illustrate the background of recent communal activism that has contributed to the polarisation of communities along communal lines. During the Inquiry, several claims were made to us:

- A statement was read out to us verbatim that had been sent to an important, credible political figure by an individual from the Daman and Diu community which alleged that local figures in the Conservative Party were deliberately inciting Hindus, and the Daman and Diu community in particular, along communal directions, the purpose being to polarise the electorate and gain votes for favoured candidates.
- Allegations were made to us that some local Conservative politicians and associated activists, some associated with Hindutva politics, were deliberately spreading communalism in Leicester for electoral reasons, and part of their strategy involved spreading divisive communalist ideas among Hindus in Leicester, including the Daman and Diu community, especially in wards important for winning seats in elections.
- We were also told about local businesspeople, some linked to party politics in Leicester, who employed significant numbers of Daman and Diu people in their businesses and were alleged

to be instigating them along communal and divisive lines for reasons of political influence or votes.

There were further claims from the British security services that BJP supporters in the UK, acting in concert with BJP activists in India, had incited Hindus around the 17 September march (see Chapter 4: The Events of 17-18 September).<sup>160</sup> A related claim from the British security services was that BJP and Modi-supporting activists in the UK and India were involved in interfering in elections in Leicester and elsewhere. A similar claim of interference in UK elections by BJP supporters was also made in a confidential report by the National Community Tension Team to the National Police Chiefs' Council, this latter report also warning of links between Hindutva extremists and the far right in the UK.<sup>161</sup> In India, a key BJP electoral strategy has been to deliberately inflame and polarise the electorate along religious lines, typically by invoking the RSS's ideology of Hindus being under siege from Muslims.<sup>162</sup> In India, this approach frequently leads to communal violence and insecurity, after which many Hindus vote for the BJP. The security services' view seems to be that, in the UK, communal polarisation methods were being used in Leicester by UK supporters of the BJP.

We were also provided with emails and other documentation that were claimed to illustrate the use of 'spiritual influence' during the 2019 General Election, contrary to section 114 of the 1983 Representation of the People Act. Appeals were also made to specific religious communities by supporters of candidates during the 2019 and the 2024 General Election.

During the 2019 UK general election, the campaign 'Operation Dharmic Vote' targeted six parliamentary seats, including Leicester East, Luton, and Slough. Operation Dharmic Vote was associated with the Leicester-based Dharma Sewa Purvapaksha outfit and (British) Hindu Voice. It was also linked to figures involved in the Overseas Friends of the BJP and the HSS. Individuals

engaged in Operation Dharmic Vote also spoke at HSS meetings.

The campaign sought to prevent Labour candidates from winning and used anonymous, religiously charged leaflets distributed mainly in the Rushey Mead and Belgrave areas. The flyers, printed without printer and promoter details or a postal address, made explicit appeals to what was called the 'Dharmic community' in Leicester (Hindus, Sikhs and Jains), specifying certain issues as 'anti-Dharmic'. The favoured candidate was represented as *amrut* (nectar) and their opponent as 'poison'. For many devotees, something 'anti-Dharmic' would be seen as equivalent to 'sinful' or going against religious law. Similarly, used in this context, *amrut* can be read as having strongly positive religious connotations (the divine nectar of immortality), especially when paired with religious imagery of the churning (manthan) of the primordial ocean and contrasted with the opposing candidate, portrayed as literally toxic. The campaign aimed to mobilise Hindu voters using religious appeals and opposition to caste anti-discrimination legislation:

That's a systematic way of influencing a community in a particular way by putting – what can I say? – a guilt trip on them saying: 'Hold on you're Hindu, you have to vote where the faith tells you to vote.'

This material can be seen to have used undue influence linked to undue spiritual pressure upon Hindu voters, contrary to section 114A (3)(e) of the 1983 Representation of the People Act. Significantly, it did not attempt to appeal to Muslim or other voters.

During the 2024 General Election, we were told about leaflets that encouraged voters not to vote for a particular MP as she was not a Muslim: 'I saw materials like that. I saw materials that said vote for Shockat Adam in Leicester South and Zaffar Haq in Leicester East. These people will honour sharia law' (Interview XBK). The police 'also investigated

**Integration is not simply about integrating within a majority (white) community, but also about integration with existing ethnic minority communities, including communities where some members may want to exclude or discriminate against new arrivals on caste, religious or class grounds. The existing voluntary and community sector can therefore play an important role in addressing or mitigating some of these factors.**

## Communal tensions were also reportedly claimed to be heightened during periods when international issues were debated among political parties, councillors, and the city council.

undue spiritual influence' in Leicester in relation to the 2024 General Election, during which messages from imams and mosques were circulated on WhatsApp groups urging Muslims to vote for a Liberal Democrat candidate, Zaffar Haq, in Leicester East.<sup>164</sup> The communalisation of electoral politics also included alleged intimidation of a Muslim person who signed the nomination papers for another Labour candidate and now ex-MP: 'That's not about party politics. That's about identity as a Muslim, or what does it mean to be a Muslim, what you should or shouldn't do' (Interview XEQ). In the 2024 General Election, religious appeals were also implicit in attempts to mobilise Muslim voters through The Muslim Vote website, as well as locally in opposition to Israel's attacks on Gaza.<sup>165</sup>

Several allegations about the use of communalism were reported during the 2023 city council election. In North Evington, an area with a significant Daman and Diu community and with almost equal numbers of Hindu and Muslim populations in the ward, it was claimed that images of Narendra Modi were used in campaigning. It was also allegedly promised that Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations would be held 'on all the streets' if a particular candidate was elected (Interview XAV). A (Hindu) community figure described how communal politics during elections reinforced religious divisions in the city:

In Leicester East, where there are... more Hindus than any other kind of religious faith, a Hindu MP ran on a campaign that was focused on [that] religion. In Leicester South, where there are more Muslims... you have a Muslim MP who didn't necessarily run on that kind of campaign, but that's what you have. And that hadn't ever been the case before. It's an interesting development... about how identity and politics, and the way people want to have their voice heard has perhaps changed, and what that means moving forward. Because the last thing this city needs is to be divided further on these lines.

A further dimension to the communalisation of Leicester politics relates to the alleged relations between some businesses, their workers, and mobilisation for political parties on the grounds of religion. Workers in garment factories, primarily from the most impoverished communities, have faced poor wages, alleged wage theft, and alleged bullying from owners and managers. Workers feared job loss if they challenged poor wages and

working conditions, making them vulnerable to exploitation. We heard about long-standing systems of worker suppression in some factories where complaints are discouraged and dissent is controlled. The workers are threatened with job loss and feel powerless due to their economic dependence on factory owners. Related to this were claims that workers in some sectors were mobilised for political purposes, with some factory managers allegedly pressuring workers to vote a certain way during local elections.

This is real and this is true. In certain factories where they are experiencing poverty pay and wages far below the minimum wage, far below what is legal, they have bosses who basically tell them how they should vote. And they don't believe that they have the power to complain about their wage, their poor condition, let alone fight their boss over the way they should vote. Now, of course, the way they end up voting is personal to them. But somehow, they believe that somebody will find out.

### Councillors and allegations of bias

Some political figures were said to have allegiances based primarily on religion and worked in a biased manner to support the perceived interests of co-religionists. Several Hindu and Muslim councillors were claimed to be 'siding' with and favouring their religious community rather than acting in the interests of all constituents or the city. This alleged selective support was said to have created a sense of injustice and reinforced perceptions of unequal treatment among community groups. It was reported to us that this led to alienation from the city council and political institutions among sections of the population. After the September 2022 events, it was claimed that 'the Hindu councillors sided with the Hindus' and failed to apportion any blame for the events on the Hindus who organised a march to Green Lane Road (Interview XDF). Conversely, it was also claimed that many constituents had a widespread perception that their councillor's religion could determine their councillor's orientation to them – the belief that a Hindu councillor was assumed to support Hindus and not support Muslims, and vice versa.

Communal tensions were also reportedly claimed to be heightened during periods when international issues were debated among political parties,

councillors, and the city council. For example, during the internet lockdown in Kashmir in 2019-2021, some Leicester constituents wanted local councillors to raise the issue in council meetings and pass a motion opposing the lockdown. The motion's wording was said to have been broad and neutral, but discussion was shut down, allegedly to avoid upsetting some Hindu groups (Interview XAX).

Some politicians were also alleged to be interfering on communal grounds in council decisions, such as decision-making regarding public spaces and funding allocations, including influencing which organisations should or should not receive public resources. There was a planning application in 2017 for a council-owned building in Beaumont Leys to be acquired by a Muslim group for a religious space and food bank. Initially, the building was awarded by the city council to the Muslim group. However, Hindu councillors 'had marched into the city hall and demanded that this building be given to another organisation'. They had also allegedly attempted to persuade the second organisation to petition the city council because if Muslims acquired the building, this would cause conflict in the community. In another planning application for a nursery and prayer space in Belper Street, Belgrave, councillors were also alleged to have acted out of communal interests.

In September 2017, there was a brutal, racist and religiously motivated attack in Beaumont Leys. The attack was on a Somali woman, Zaynab Hussein, who was taking her children to school. She was deliberately driven into by a car, causing nine months of hospitalisation and severe, permanent injuries. During the same incident, the driver, Paul Moore, also attempted to run over a 12-year-old schoolgirl who was wearing a headscarf. The incident generated significant fear within the local Muslim community, particularly among women who felt vulnerable to further attacks. In the aftermath of this incident, attempts by some councillors to address anti-Muslim hate crime through a council resolution and a proposed change to its hate crime policy were met with political resistance, with some Hindu councillors said to be actively opposing the resolution.

### Perceptions of differential resources and services

A factor that can be seen to contribute to community tensions in Leicester relates to the *perceived* (though not necessarily evidenced) reasons for economic inequality and inequality in resource allocation. Where claims of discrimination were made, we asked for tangible examples and evidence, but none were given to us to investigate further. Several participants in the research reported perceptions about differential treatment by religion across city council resource allocation, access to services, treatment of service users, and reasons for inequalities in the city. Both Hindu and Muslim participants reported these perceptions during the survey, interviews, meetings and focus groups.

In several interviews with residents and professionals, there was the view that there has been a communalisation of professional relationships among some people, with favourable treatment for their co-religionists and indifferent or discriminatory treatment for those of another religion. Users of various services were also reported to believe that resources and opportunities were unfairly distributed, as professionals favoured members of their religious group.

You get one service user where she is Muslim and she has a Muslim [social care professional] and she gets absolutely everything she wants, right? And yet [they are] also the [professional] for one of our Hindu clients and twice [they have] reduced her [entitlements].

The [professional team] is predominantly Muslim... We had a woman who had to speak to them, and he basically said to her, 'Well, yeah, I expected you to be Hindu. That's why you're divorced.' He was a Muslim worker.

Several participants also reported how interactions between colleagues at work included religious tensions (Interview XDI).

Muslims get a day off for Eid. We never used to get a day off for Diwali. It's only since last year that people have mentioned that. Where's the fairness?... If you're gonna have Christmas and then you have Eid, why not have Diwali?"

Further views put to us were that some community members felt other groups were prospering while they struggled, leading to resentment and a sense of injustice. Members of some communities said they were overlooked in favour of others, with allegations that some cultural and religious groups received disproportionate funding for events and projects, leading to perceptions of favouritism and exclusion. This also included claims about more recent (2024) grants related to the Daman and Diu communities:

They're giving all the money, all the grants we get, it's Diwali party this, Ganesha party this, this party, that party, the Hindus have taken [resources] and these guys have just come off the boat... So, then I said to the councillors: 'Why don't you give it to the person who brings the different communities together?'

Conversely, some Hindu community members said that Muslims were being favoured in terms of financial resources and institutional support: 'And our young people are feeling a sense of frustration and feeling a sense of the Muslims have taken over, the Muslims have got all of the resources' (Interview XAP).

There was a persistently held view among several Hindu interviewees that Muslims 'are appeased' and 'pandered to' by the city council, Labour politicians and central government, this being driven

We have outlined how communalism has become a key factor in much local politics. We consider this to be a damaging outcome and deplore the opportunistic, divisive use of religion by some local politicians to gather support, influence, power and votes. International issues and conflicts now routinely affect significant constituencies in unrelated countries and have the potential to polarise and divide communities in powerful ways.

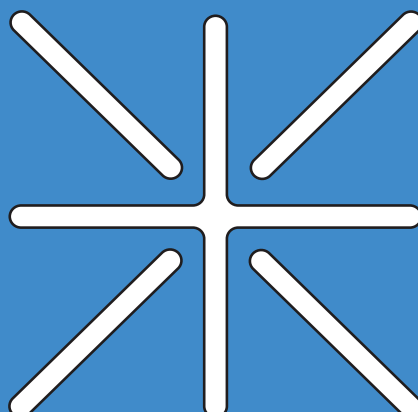
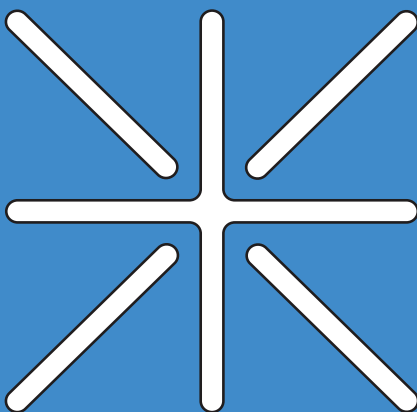
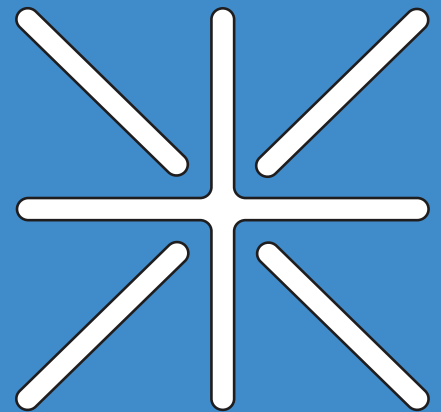
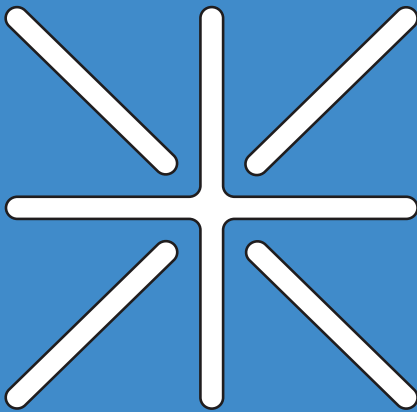
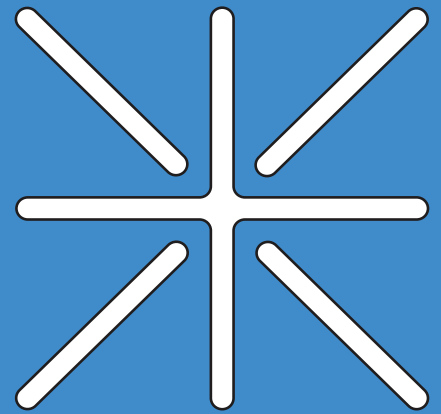
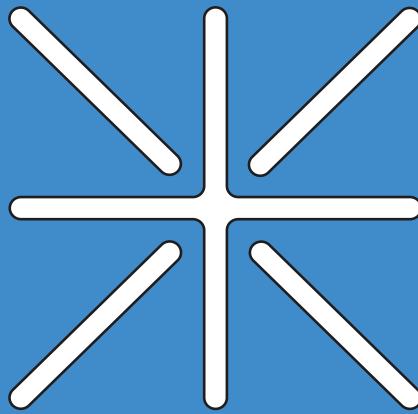
by the fear of losing Muslim votes. Conversely, we heard views that the city council and the Labour Party were discriminating against Hindus. Statements such as '*raja ka ladka kuch bhi kare*' ('the King's son can do anything, can do no wrong') indicated perceived privilege or leniency towards Muslims. Several times, we heard reference to monies awarded to Muslim groups through the Prevent and Channel programmes. Relatedly, there was a perception of discrimination against Hindus and their alleged 'disenfranchisement', the latter being given as the reason why a Hindu Conservative MP was elected in 2024 in a safe Labour seat. Such views foster a sense of competition and resentment across communities. Politicians were also said to deepen this competition by alleging that resources were unfairly distributed or by promising resources for their co-religionists (Interview XBH).

### Conclusion

The chapter has explored the political and institutional factors that form a backdrop to the 2022 violence. We highlighted the strengths and limitations of Leicester's multicultural model, including its shortcomings in fostering convivial, cohesive communities. These areas are urgent to explore further, as the impact of austerity, followed by the financial crisis faced by the city council, has devastated many services typically seen as essential to integration and community cohesion. We note that the city council has failed to facilitate genuine, sustained and deep work across religious communities and that its approaches have tended to enhance the logic of religious separation rather than a common purpose.

We have outlined how communalism has become a key factor in much local politics. We consider this to be a damaging outcome and deplore the opportunistic, divisive use of religion by some local politicians to gather support, influence, power and votes. International issues and conflicts now routinely affect significant constituencies in unrelated countries and have the potential to polarise and divide communities in powerful ways. Yet, existing approaches to multiculturalism, integration, and

community cohesion are ill-equipped to address these dynamics. We would urge serious, inclusive discussions within and outside Leicester to consider novel approaches to community life, relations and well-being in a new, unpredictable national and international environment.



Many witnesses raised concerns with us about police responses to the events of May to September 2022 as well as police actions around other events since then. We interviewed individuals who were arrested during some of these events, some of whom were charged and sentenced. In this chapter, we first discuss some important areas of law and regulation that are relevant to the 2022 events and their background. We then consider police responses to the events.

Our approach to policing during the 2022 events was informed by human rights, equality, public order and hate crime legislation. Of relevance for this chapter are: freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, hate crime and non-crime hate incidents, self-defence, public order, and the police's handling of protests and serious disorder. The police have the duty to ensure rights are protected and that justice, fairly applied, achieves accountability. In situations of community conflict:

- Where there is evidence of hatred or violence, or incitement to hatred or violence, or serious public disorder, or crimes against people and property, these should be subject to appropriate intervention by the police and criminal justice system.
- Other community tensions and conflicts should be resolved through longer-term prevention (which may include the police), community engagement, education, and other community-led solutions, ideally working across affected communities in ways that avoid the criminalisation of people and groups who may be facing multiple dimensions of socioeconomic disadvantage.
- Regarding hateful or offensive views, statements and slogans, we would emphasise the importance of context, intention, the history of perpetrators, and broader feelings across communities. Approaches should be guided by maximising the freedoms of expression and assembly, while protecting the lawful rights of others and avoiding public disorder.
- While everyone must enjoy human rights protections, we would distinguish between individuals or groups that are inciters (for example, ideologically committed activists, motivated local 'ringleaders' and their committed 'foot soldiers'), and ordinary local people who get swept up in events because of community emotions and tensions, misinformation, disinformation, and misunderstandings.
- We would separate:
  - respecting the right of individuals and groups to express ideas and beliefs, and lawful practices arising from these beliefs, including proselytising for their beliefs
  - protecting people who come under attack because they are lawfully expressing and practising their beliefs
  - the beliefs themselves, which can be subjected to respect, agreement and support, as well as critique, ridicule, disrespect and opposition

- Peaceful demonstrations, even if provocative or offensive, are legitimate in a democracy and should be encouraged as a method of democratic participation and freedom of expression by citizens. Peaceful counter-demonstrations are similarly legitimate in a democracy.

### Hate crime

There is no standalone offence of a 'hate crime' in the UK. Instead, hate crime refers to an existing criminal offence – for example, common assault – that was 'aggravated by hostility' related to one or more of five protected characteristics: race or perceived race, and religion or perceived religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity.<sup>166</sup> Hate crimes are covered by the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and section 66 of the 2020 Sentencing Act. The 1986 Public Order Act recognises incitement to racial hatred – the use of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour or the publication of material that is intended to or likely to stir up racial hatred. The same act recognises religious hatred as an offence when the use of words or behaviour is threatening or intended to stir up hatred. Unlike racial hatred, using abusive or insulting speech related to religion is not an offence; to qualify as an offence, such speech needs to be threatening.

Prosecutors can ask for an increased sentence for a crime motivated by hostility regarding race or religion (a hate crime). In addition to hate crimes, the police are also required to record non-crime hate incidents (NCHIs) to collect information on 'hate incidents' that do not constitute a criminal offence but could indicate, for example, community tensions. If no criminal offence has been committed but there is evidence of hostility, the incident can be recorded as an NCHI.

The Crown Prosecution Service and the police use the definition of hate crime as 'any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice' that is related to one of five protected characteristics. Under section 28 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act 1998, an offence is racially or religiously aggravated if 'the offender demonstrates towards the victim hostility based on the victim's membership (or presumed membership) of a racial or religious group', or 'the offence is motivated, wholly or partly, by hostility towards members of a racial or religious group based on their membership of that group'.<sup>167</sup>

'Hate' is not defined in UK law, and courts do not require proof of hatred. Instead, the concept of 'hostility' is used. Hostility constitutes a legal threshold that must be proved beyond a reasonable doubt at the time the offence was committed. Hostility is partly defined in law and partly interpreted by the courts. Hostility is not equivalent to hate, and it is used in its 'everyday' meaning. It can include 'ill-will, spite, contempt, prejudice, unfriendliness, antagonism, resentment and dislike'<sup>168</sup> and it can manifest as abuse or derogatory language. Hostility need not be based on deep-seated hatred, but neither can it be equivalent to dislike, ignorance or bad attitude (unless the latter constitutes demonstrable hostility). Hostility does not need to be the only demonstrated factor or motive, and there may be other motives for the crime, but it does need to be a factor or motive.

Hostility must be evidenced clearly through words or actions at the time the incident took place ('demonstrated hostility'), or it must be evidenced through motivations at the time of the incident ('motivated by hostility'). For example, shouting racist abuse while assaulting someone would fall under demonstrated hostility. In this case, the attacker's motive would not be relevant, and there is no need to establish a racist motive – just the words or actions are sufficient. Alternatively, the hostility can be evidenced by motive, either wholly or partially. For example, a stranger who proceeds to pull off a hijab from a woman in the street would be motivated by hostility, irrespective of whether they said anything during the action. Motive could be demonstrated by the context of the action, the person or people targeted, the views held by the perpetrator, or whether they planned to undertake the action.

### Freedom of Expression

Under the 1988 Human Rights Act, freedom of expression and assembly are protected rights, but they are qualified rights that can be restricted in some circumstances. Speech is lawful, unless it incites violence, is hate speech, glorifies terrorism, or causes serious public disorder, among other factors. Speech that is offensive, shocking, disturbing, or results in a hostile reaction is still protected if it is undertaken peacefully – unless it incites racial or religious hatred or is used to harass or cause alarm or distress.

Speech can be restricted on grounds such as public safety, public order, crime prevention, defamation, and national security. Under the 1986 Public Order Act, speech or behaviour that is threatening, abusive or likely to cause alarm or distress to someone, even when unintended or reckless (section 5), or speech and behaviour that was intentionally threatening, abusive or caused alarm or distress (section 4) can be restricted and prosecuted. However, such speech or behaviour can also be defended – for example, as a public protest on free speech grounds. Under the 1988 Malicious Communications Act, sending communications, including electronically, that are threatening, indecent or grossly offensive can also be prosecuted.

### Freedom of Assembly

Peaceful protests, including provocative and offensive ones, are lawful under the 1988 Human Rights Act. Advance notice, usually six days, is required for processions and assemblies. Freedom of assembly can be restricted on grounds that include public order and public safety, and preventing crime or disorder. Restrictions on freedom of assembly in the 1986 Public Order Act allow the police to place conditions on protests if they might result in serious public disorder, serious damage to property, serious disruption to community life, or the intimidation of others. Under the Act and other laws, the police can impose conditions on route and timing or preventing the blocking of roads, among others.

A march whose purpose or effect is to stir up hatred against another religious group or intimidate or harass another religious group could be restricted – for example, by not allowing it to enter a particular area or changing its route, or by policing it heavily or, very rarely, by banning it from taking place. Furthermore, if a demonstration involves threatening or abusive behaviour (whether in speeches, chants or distributed material) that is intended to stir up racist or religious hatred, this would be unlawful under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and other laws. Under section 13 of the Act, the police and local authority can ban a procession if they believe there is a serious risk to public order or serious disruption in community life or if the purpose of the procession is to intimidate people. It is very rare for a march or demonstration to be banned.

### Self-defence

A person can use reasonable force to defend themselves, another person, property, to prevent a crime from taking place, or to assist in the lawful arrest of perpetrators. If someone is attacked, people are not required by law to stand by, not intervene, and simply witness the attack. More than one person can act together in self-defence. This is lawful if there is an imminent threat of violence and they use reasonable force proportionate to the threat. The purpose of actions in self-defence is to prevent harm, not to attack or punish others. In England and Wales, a person cannot rely on a self-defence argument if they provoked a confrontation or were the aggressor, unless the threat escalated beyond the provocation and the person clearly tried to withdraw from the fight.

Group self-defence may be lawful only if there is an imminent threat of violence and reasonable force is used in self-defence. It is not lawful to organise a group in advance nor pre-emptively go onto the streets claiming that you are 'defending' the community. It is unlawful to organise a 'patrol', to be 'patrolling' the streets, or confront or intimidate others, even while claiming to 'protect a community' or acting in self-defence. Planning to use force in advance before any actual threat exists is not considered self-defence. Retaliatory actions, including searching for a group to confront or attack them, are also unlawful. Forming groups to patrol streets

and areas when a threat is not immediate is not legal. Claiming that such actions are ‘self-defence’ or intended to ‘protect a community’ does not make the actions lawful, and they would likely be seen as aggressive actions rather than defence.

### **Car convoys, flags and slogans**

In the UK, car convoys are legal unless they cause danger, block traffic or involve dangerous or reckless driving. If the convoy is related to a political or religious demonstration, it could fall under the 1986 Public Order Act. Under this, police have powers to impose restrictions on processions if there is a risk of public disorder or serious disruption. Events on public roads also typically require police approval.

Under the Highway Code, a horn can be used only when the car is moving and the driver needs to warn others of their presence. The only permitted use of a car horn is as a warning of danger. A car horn cannot be used when the car is stationary. Similarly, a car horn cannot be used in a built-up area between 11:30pm and 7am unless it is used as a danger warning. It is unlawful to use car horns to express annoyance or during celebrations; this would be unnecessary or inappropriate use. While the police ignore short bursts of honking during sports, wedding or religious celebrations, they have the discretion to impose fines or issue warnings for repeated use of horns, including at night or if it causes disturbance in residential areas.

The law regarding deliberately or implicitly provoking a community through flags, symbols, or slogans is complex and is mainly covered by the 1986 Public Order Act. Flying a flag (irrespective of whether it is national, religious or political) is protected as free speech under the European Convention on Human Rights. People can lawfully display the Union Jack, the St George’s Cross, the Palestine, India or Pakistan flag, and Hindu or Muslim religious flags (unless the flags are those of a proscribed organisation). The police do not usually interfere in flag displays unless they cross into public order offences or are intended to provoke hateful behaviour or violence. Driving in a convoy with flags isn’t illegal, but flags must not compromise safety, and convoys must not cause obstruction, intimidation, or disorder. Small flags are allowed as long as they don’t obscure the vision of the driver or create a hazard. Where large flags might obscure vision or distract other drivers, they can be considered unlawful.

Under several sections of the 1986 Public Order Act, offences include using ‘threatening, abusive, or insulting words or behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm, or distress’ (sections 4A, 5) and words, behaviour, or material that is intended to ‘stir up’ racial or religious hatred (sections 17-29). Under section 5, it is an offence to use threatening or abusive behaviour likely to cause harassment, alarm, or distress. A convoy of cars that deliberately drives to and stops outside a mosque, flying religious flags and chanting slogans that intentionally target Muslims, or are intended to provoke them, could be seen as harassment or as stirring up religious

hatred. Similarly, if flags are deliberately used to mark territory or intimidate communities, they may be seen by the police as community intimidation but are very rarely prosecuted. ‘Implicit provocation’ – for example, driving through a ‘Muslim area’ with Hindu flags or vice versa – is also difficult to establish since the law would require demonstration of intent or likelihood of causing harm.

### **Operational Models for Public Disorder**

During large-scale protests or community tensions, police procedures are typically informed by the College of Policing’s Authorised Professional Practice (APP) guidance.<sup>169</sup> This outlines standards for the police’s management of public order and public safety-related incidents. APP also outlines protocols for planning and preparation, threat assessment, community engagement, and practical areas, including operational tactics (dispersals, cordons) and specialist resources (such as police support units, drones). APP advocates de-escalation through dialogue, a review of operations to assess the impact on the community and learning from operations conducted.

The APP is based on a command framework of Gold (strategic objectives), Silver (tactical planning and resource management), and Bronze (operations on the ground) for managing major incidents. This structure is intended to ensure clear decision-making and lines of command and communication, especially during rapidly changing or volatile situations. Decisions are guided by the National Decision Model through which the police gather information and intelligence, assess threats and risks, consider their legal powers (including proportionality), identify options, assess possible consequences, take relevant actions, and then review the operation.

### **The post-cricket match violence**

During the post-cricket match violence on 28 August 2022, Leicestershire police acted quickly, deploying riot squads and mounted police, and obtaining support from nearby forces to control the disorder in Melton and Belgrave Roads and in North Evington.<sup>170</sup> Stop and search powers (section 60) and dispersal orders (sections 34 and 35) were used in Belgrave, Melton Road, Green Lane, and North Evington, and their use continued into early September.

Leicestershire police data for stop and searches in 2022 shows a peak in September of 651 stop and searches (but also another peak in November of 637). The September data will include the 17 September events. Of these, over 11 per cent resulted in arrests.<sup>171</sup> On 28 August, two people were arrested during the disorder itself, one for violent disorder and another for possession of a bladed weapon,<sup>172</sup> with a total of eight arrests that night for offences that included assaults, including on an emergency worker, affray,<sup>173</sup> violent disorder and possession of an offensive weapon. Further arrests of at least 47 individuals<sup>174</sup> were made in

the subsequent week and included those suspected of involvement in the post-cricket match violence as well as other violent events in early September (see below).

A significant factor reported to us in escalating tensions, at least among some community groups, was the statement by Leicestershire Police, subsequently retracted, that during the post-cricket match violence, there was chanting of ‘death to Muslims’, a claim for which there was no evidence. Several community groups (often expressing opposing views on other matters) told us the statement exacerbated tensions among some groups, which then spread through the community. It is unknown who, if anyone, made the claim to the police that this slogan was being chanted. Additionally, in situations of potential, sensitive communal tensions or conflict, particularly when emotions may be running high, accurate institutional understanding of slogans and phrases that may be used, and taking care with stating even seemingly neutral phrases (such as ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ or ‘Hindu-Muslim conflict’) is critical because official statements can promote and entrench communal logics that generated the violence in the first place.

### Police responses to the May and early September attacks

The 22 May attack by a group of Hindus left a Muslim man seriously injured and with facial fractures. The injured man and a bystander believed the attack was primarily motivated by religious hatred. This was a significant event whose interpretation among Muslim activists and the wider community framed events later in August and September. The event remains a continuing concern in the community and is believed by the family to have been a hate crime motivated by religion. The family also persistently called the police about developments but ‘got nowhere’. Initially, the police took a statement and a description of the main attacker, but did not visit the family afterwards. We were told that the police did not check the CCTV video of the attack.

After the 17 September events, the police reinvestigated the May incident, and in early October 2022, a man in his late 20s was voluntarily interviewed in relation to the attack.<sup>175</sup> In early December, a 30-year-old was arrested on suspicion of violent disorder, and a 22-year-old was interviewed on suspicion of affray, both in relation to the 22 May incident, but both were released pending investigation.<sup>176</sup> In early November, the police released CCTV footage of the attack to the public and were making links between the May attack and the subsequent disorder in August and September.<sup>177</sup> We understand that perpetrators could not be identified, and in the absence of any leads, the police did not pursue the case further.

On 5 September, there was another serious attack on a Muslim man by a large group of Hindus, and there was again a perceived lack of police action around this attack. The attackers claimed that their victim was involved in an earlier incident concerning the throwing of eggs into a home celebrating a

Hindu religious festival. They also asked the man if he was a Muslim and proceeded to attack him when he said he was. In this case, the family again persisted with asking the police for developments and had to point the police to video evidence of the attack taken from a neighbouring house. The police took a statement from the victim and descriptions of the attackers, one of whom was apparently identified by the victim. The police claimed they could not identify the perpetrators or their cars and did not pursue the case at the time.

Soon after the 17 September events, the Chief Constable visited the family to discuss the attack and offer support. Subsequently, in late September, a 32-year-old man was arrested for the assault and released on bail.<sup>178</sup> However, no one has been actively prosecuted for the attack. The family also felt they were asked unrelated questions about the 17 September violence, in which they had no involvement.

On the 20th of September, the Chief Constable Rob Nixon came to our house. He said that they were taking the case seriously. But what sticks in my mind about the visit is that he asked whether my son and I knew why the riots started. Other CID officers also asked which people had visited my son and our house. We had no role in these riots but, somehow, we feel we were being blamed.

In early September, a large group – mainly youths, many arriving from meetings held in a car park area near the Jame’ Masjid and joined by others from nearby streets – aimed to find the alleged perpetrators of the 5 September attack. They engaged in unlawful actions over two main nights, many of which indiscriminately targeted those of a different religion, irrespective of whether they were assumed to be involved in the attack. The disorder caused widespread alarm and distress among residents, especially among Daman and Diu families.

During these events, a Hindu man was seriously attacked by a group of Muslims, as apparent retaliation. He was stabbed in the hand and required hospital treatment. There is video evidence of groups of attackers shown to be assaulting individuals, including with what seems to be a knife and wielding other weapons. In this case, no one has been charged.

After the May and early September attacks on the two Muslim men and on the Hindu man and family, investigations should have been conducted promptly and perpetrators charged with grievous bodily harm with or without racially- or religiously motivated aggravation, depending on the evidence found. The police should have recognised the significance and meaning of the egg-throwing incident (that, for believers, was a serious desecration). They should have investigated promptly who threw eggs into the house and taken action against them and any associates, since this appears to be a hate crime motivated by religion.

In mid-September, a Hindu home was surrounded by a large group of Muslim youths acting on dis-

**After the May and early September attacks on the two Muslim men and on the Hindu man and family, investigations should have been conducted promptly and perpetrators charged with grievous bodily harm with or without racially- or religiously motivated aggravation, depending on the evidence found.**

information that was circulated widely on social media that gave details of a Hindu man and his car. A false claim was made against the man alleging the kidnapping of a Muslim girl. The Hindu family had to leave the home for their safety, and the man was abroad at the time. We do not know if any perpetrators were arrested and charged for incitement or for threatening the Hindu man and the Hindu family. We also do not know whether any individuals were charged with spreading disinformation, malicious communications, or inciting hatred and physical confrontations during the early September and the 17 September disorder.

#### **Policing during the 5-7 September events**

After the events of 4-5 September, Leicester police had initiated, as part of a proactive policing plan, dispersal powers under the 2014 Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act (sections 34 and 35). Further stop and search powers were also initiated. The orders applied from 8pm on 6 September until 6am the following morning in Rushey Mead, Belgrave, Highfields, Evington, Spinney Hills, and St Matthew's.<sup>179</sup> In addition, 'highly visible' patrols were initiated in several areas. It was reported that 131 people were stopped and searched, and 18 were dispersed under these powers. Several people were arrested, mostly on suspicion of carrying weapons, violent disorder or other public order offences. Many of these arrests were related to the events of 5 and 6 September, and the arrested included Muslim and Hindus.

Perceptions of policing strategy during the 5-7 September events differ significantly across communities. Several interviewees who were present at the meetings in the car park area outside the Jame' Masjid described the police presence as heavy and aggressive, and they compared this with the police's response to the Hindu march on 17 September, which began accompanied by only eight police officers. The police presence during the outdoor meetings of Muslims included scuffles and altercations, attempted arrests (including of community figures) and stop and searches of uninvolved passersby. Some interviewees said that the perceived aggressive response of the police (which included the use of dogs) intensified tensions, ultimately

leading to the breakaway of some groups who wanted to engage in retaliatory violence against Hindus, partly because of their belief that the police had not taken appropriate actions around the 5 September attack on a Muslim man.

Conversely, other (mainly Hindu) respondents described large groups of youths and men roaming residential areas in North Evington and engaging in violence, intimidating behaviour and damage to property, with little police presence to prevent this. Some interviewees said that several victims did not report incidents to the police as they felt there was no point. They also mentioned the inability of Hindu victims to obtain incident numbers for insurance claims for property damage.

Car windows were smashed, and religious symbols were desecrated, leaving families distraught and questioning their safety. I remember discussing with local leaders the frustration within the community over the lack of immediate support from authorities. Reporting these incidents often felt futile. Families couldn't even file insurance claims because police wouldn't issue the necessary incident numbers.

In our view, soon after 4-5 September, police officers should have established communication channels – not solely with known and established community figures, but with Muslim and Daman and Diu youth directly involved in the events. They should have taken note of and investigated the crimes, including hate crimes, that affected both Muslims and Hindus, and made it a priority to support the families affected. As importantly, we think, the police should have issued a strong statement of reassurance to the residents in the areas affected by the 5-7 September events, including specific communications to the Daman and Diu community who felt they were under attack, to reassure residents that actions were being taken to prevent the violence.

It was evident in May that there were local tensions in North Evington. Knowledge of the tensions, combined with the communal disorder during the cricket match in late August, followed by the early September violence, indicated the need to establish a dedicated or special team focused on hate

crimes. This could have investigated the incidents across a small number of common streets in North Evington, including the May and September attacks against Muslims, the incident of the eggs being thrown into a Hindu household, the attacks on and stabbing of a Hindu man and his associates, the violence targeting the Daman and Diu and other Hindu residents, and the inflammatory social media posts related to the latter. We believe such actions, together with a public statement and visits to affected families by community liaison and investigating officers, would have done much to ease tensions and fears and prevent further escalation later in September.

Significant also seems to be a failure of police intelligence, and the quality of that intelligence. We also do not know whether and to what extent national police intelligence regarding the events of 28 August and 5-7 September was gathered, or whether it informed local policing approaches. The first meeting outside Jame' Masjid on 5 September was met with a large and reportedly aggressive police presence, so the police already knew a meeting was going to take place. If community liaison officers or senior police officers had taken the opportunity to speak to those meeting outside the Jame' Masjid (who had assembled to discuss concerns about the attacks and the apparent lack of police action), this may also have helped mitigate retaliatory actions that night. Furthermore, both the August and early September events and the 17 September march and its aftermath illustrated a lack of knowledge about communalism and the history of Hindu-Muslim conflict, an important factor in actionable intelligence.

### Policing on 17 September

It would seem that the police were aware that a Hindu march was being discussed and planned for 17 September, since some officers had asked various community figures we interviewed about this potential event before it occurred. A somewhat different view was given by Chief Constable Rob Nixon, who said that tensions had been declining after early September, but then an unanticipated march occurred, and the police seemingly had no information about it.<sup>180</sup>

We were told that a patrol car went to Belgrave in the morning of 17 September but left after seeing no assembled marchers. Several witnesses said that had more police been present from the start

of the day, including being available to prevent the march, the situation in Leicester would not have escalated: 'If you're a police officer and you see two or three hundred people – they've got face coverings on, they're masked up, they're carrying sticks and flags – surely that should set some alarm bells ringing?' (Interview XDX). Other witnesses said that if police had been present in greater numbers during the early afternoon on Green Lane Road or later during the marchers' return to Belgrave, the events would also not have escalated, including during the evening in Belgrave.

This led to a strong perception among Muslim groups and activists that the police did not take the march seriously, even though it was a march from one part of Leicester to another and was an intentionally provocative and intimidating demonstration, with several marchers carrying weapons. Instead, the marchers were perceived to have been given 'free rein' to intimidate and cause trouble. Moreover, the police response to the Hindu march was contrasted with the perceived 'heavy' response to the Muslim community meetings outside the Jame' Masjid on 5-7 September. We also need to consider the possibility that, because the march was a Hindu event rather than a Muslim one, it was perceived by officers as unlikely to cause trouble.

It also appeared to many witnesses that police officers were 'escorting' the march into what is seen as a 'Muslim area'. That a small number of police officers accompanied – rather than stopped or limited – the demonstration led to the perception of an implicit endorsement of the aims of the marchers (Interview XAR). On Wednesday, 21 September, Rob Nixon published an open letter to 'the communities of east Leicester' that said the police did not 'support' the march, and had no direct intelligence about the mobilisation and numbers likely to be involved:

On Saturday 17 September, I am making clear that police did not support an unplanned protest in East Leicester. There was no direct intelligence relating to the volume of people who were going to mobilise early on Saturday. My officers were dispatched in order to try to engage and seek co-operation. They were confronted by in excess of 300 people and there were eight officers at the time. They did the best they could in the circumstances by staying with them until more officers could arrive. That is what videos on social media show. Two arrests were

**A demonstration in which individuals are chanting 'Jai Shree Ram', 'Vande Mataram' or 'Allahu Akbar' is not in itself unlawful, even if considered offensive or provocative by others.**

made later. Separately, earlier in the day, officers had dealt with a small group who had posted on social media that they planned to come to Leicester from Birmingham. Protests need advance notification and none was given.<sup>181</sup>

The initially low police presence was reportedly due to several factors. The police did not receive advance notification of the march, as is required by law. Some witnesses said that, based on available intelligence, the police did not think the march would occur (Interview XAR). Many Leicestershire police officers had been deployed to London to assist with the Queen's funeral. This took place on Monday, 19 September, and included the laying in-state ceremony at Westminster Hall, where tens of thousands of people were expected each day over that weekend. It was also reported that many police officers had taken annual leave that weekend (Interview XAR, Interview XBK). Because of reduced officer levels and an inability to prevent the march, the reported aim was to accompany the marchers and try to prevent escalation on Green Lane Road (Interview XAR).

It was also said to us that there was a belief among senior police officers that a strategy that had been deployed previously, in August and early September, had essentially been successful, so a more substantial police presence wasn't required (Interview XBK). This strategy was one of increased police presence and proactive patrols, combined with meetings with community figures. It was based on defusing and containment and comprised engagement with community leaders, placing an unmarked vehicle in an area where protests or trouble might be expected, and proactive policing patrols in some areas (Interview XBK).

It was clear to me that the tensions were there. But they said that they got it all under control. It was all calm that they'd managed to talk communities down... they've managed to stop people going to the protest... After [the cricket match], there was a direct discussion with the Chief Constable that I had... The police had become... comfortable at that time... with the way that they were policing the issue after the cricket disorder. They became so comfortable that they decided that they would fully go and contribute to the policing of the Queen's funeral... They believed that they had the lid on everything, everything was under control. Certainly, that's what they told me.

Similarly, we were told by a then councillor who had spoken to the police that there was a genuine belief that the situation was 'under control' based on the intelligence they had:

They felt that they had done everything they could to manage the situation, and if they hadn't felt comfortable that they had got a handle on it then they wouldn't have allowed officers to go on annual leave and things. So, I think that's for real. I think they did act according to the intelligence they had before the incident.

We are persuaded by the argument that the police response was determined by a belief that previous approaches were sufficient. This included police patrols combined with community engagement to address community conflict, including in August and early September. Routine community engagement with well-known figures, however, missed sections of the community, including youth, who are not necessarily influenced by 'community leaders'. There was a belief that things had calmed down since early September. It also appears that the police failed to read the social media traffic correctly or take it seriously in the days before 17 September, pointing to a failure of intelligence gathering. The police services were therefore caught unawares when the march occurred.

A demonstration in which individuals are chanting 'Jai Shree Ram', 'Vande Mataram' or 'Allahu Akbar' is not in itself unlawful, even if considered offensive or provocative by others. The march also contained individuals who had weapons, and the intention of many of the marchers was physical confrontation, as shown by the attacks on Green Lane Road. It was evident from the way marchers were assembled and dressed, and because of their intention in marching into an area seen as Muslim, that public disorder was highly likely. For reasons of serious public disorder, the police should have negotiated with the march organisers to allow the march to proceed peacefully, and should have accompanied it in larger numbers, but the police should have prevented it from proceeding into certain areas, especially Green Lane Road where it could have been predicted to have led to public disorder and would have been seen as provocative or intimidating. Those seen with offensive weapons from any group should have been apprehended. The police can also use special powers to ask protestors to remove clothing that makes them unidentifiable.

The policing of events later in the day was also criticised by witnesses. We were told that the disturbances in Belgrave that night could have been avoided if the police had dispersed the marchers more effectively in the afternoon. An ex-councillor said about the evening that, 'There is no doubt about it, if there had been more police officers available on the night, I don't think it would have escalated in the way in which it did, because officers there straight away would have really stopped people [and] discouraged people from getting there'.

Another community figure said the police could have acted before the disturbances in Belgrave that night, which he believed could have been avoided (Interview XAK). A related argument we heard was that the police were more interested in surrounding and containing the Muslim counter-protestors and the Hindu marchers in an area for an extended period ('kettling'), rather than dispersing the Hindu marchers in Belgrave (Interview XDE). According to this view, if the police had dispersed the Hindu marchers coming back into Belgrave earlier, the situation would not have escalated that night.

I said to the police [that evening] that I will ensure that the Muslims will not move forward. I

gave the police my word... that I will make sure that the Muslim community stay here, as long as the Hindus don't come this way, and the Hindus are dispersed. That would be much easier... By the minute, more and more Muslims were coming – from 25, it was 40, 50, 80, 100 and 200 by the minute. [If] the police at that time dispersed the Hindus and dealt with them, there would have been no reason for the Muslims to come. Because they didn't, and they [focused] on kettling the Muslim community. It resulted in an escalation.

Another (Hindu) community figure described how forcing the marchers back to Belgrave worked to generate a Hindu-Muslim divide: 'We didn't know why they were pushed into Belgrave Road. I didn't like them being pushed into Belgrave. It was like Hindu vs Muslim.' It was also reported to us that Hindus on the march were not happy with the police because of the way they felt they were treated during the march and later in the evening on Belgrave Road. Members from both communities also felt strongly that there was a lack of police action around the May, August or early September incidents.

However, while these views express critical opinions about police tactics on 17 September, in a situation of violent confrontation, it would be expected that the police would first and foremost separate conflicting factions. Additionally, given the background of the events of 5-7 September, the extent of social media mobilisation of counter-protestors during the afternoon, the number of youths that arrived in Belgrave, and other incidents unconnected with the marchers that were reported to us, it isn't clear that dispersing the marchers alone would have prevented further violence that evening in Belgrave.

Some witnesses described the difficult situation the police faced in trying to 'bring control' and 'calm the situation' while trying to 'remain fair', separating the adversarial groups using restraint and proportionate means. The strategy also involved community figures:

They were trying to bring control to it, and they were trying to speak to community leaders on both sides. They wanted to be fair... I think the police were trying to bring that peace and get community leaders involved. So, I think they were trying their best. I was very disappointed to see the police being pushed, and aggression towards them as well. Because I feel like it was the first time it felt like there wasn't any sort of fear of the authorities, like people weren't bothered about that.

While the police negotiated dispersal with representatives of both adversarial groups during the evening in Belgrave, one outcome was the cordoning of a large number of Muslim counter-protestors outside the Shivalaya Mandir. We know the overwhelming majority of counter-protestors had no intention of troubling the temple, nor did they even pay it much attention. They faced the opposite side

of the road with their backs to the temple the entire evening, faced by a line of police officers. If they had wanted to attack the temple, they could have easily done so. Nevertheless, a few did, leading to the flag incident that caused much animosity and subsequent disinformation. The key policing issue here was that, in a communally inflamed situation like that evening in Belgrave, it was not wise to cordon any group outside any religious building. The subsequent approach of the police towards dispersal was patient, engaged with both groups, was geared to the safety of individuals (especially the Hindu group), and aimed to prevent further violence and skirmishes in side streets.

The police issued dispersal orders, including stop and search, from the night of 17 September until the following morning. Fifteen arrests were made that day,<sup>182</sup> and many more followed under the framework of Operation Energy, the codename for the police's serious disorder response to the events of 17 September and those that led up to it. Leicestershire Police said that detectives had been 'meticulously scouring' through 'many hours' of CCTV and body-worn video,<sup>183</sup> and reported that around 25 officers and a police dog had been injured in the August and September events. On 18 September, dispersal and a temporary cordon were used following gatherings of young men in North Evington. The police stated their commitment to preventing violence, disorder and intimidation, and called for calm and dialogue.<sup>184</sup> Several times afterwards, the police released images of individuals from the day and evening and appealed to the public to identify them.<sup>185</sup>

### Arrests and Convictions

Despite our many requests to meet, there has been a lack of police cooperation to meet with us. Consequently, we do not have detailed information on the numbers of people arrested, charged, and later acquitted or sentenced, as well as their religious or ethnic background, age, and gender. We relied therefore on a combination of public sources and meetings with lawyers and defendants.

While there had been 47 arrests by 20 September 2022, a year later, in September 2023, the Chief Constable reported that there had been about 100 arrests related to the August and September disorder. Fifty-eight individuals were charged and 32 were found guilty of various offences, including public order offences and affray, including offences aggravated by racial or religious factors, possession of weapons, including a firearm (taser), assault on an emergency worker, threats to kill, and several driving offences. Several people were arrested in Birmingham for inciting religious hatred through social media videos that contained threats and derogatory language.<sup>186</sup> Sentences included fines, community orders, electronic tag curfews, community resolutions and some prison sentences (up to ten months). Of the 32 individuals found guilty, 17 had pleaded not guilty.<sup>187</sup>

From interviewees we spoke to, including some who had been arrested and convicted, several themes emerged:

- A concern among some Muslim groups that, in the public appeals, virtually all the photographs released were of Muslim individuals, with barely a few of Hindus. This led to a perception of disproportionate prosecution of Muslims based on images released by police.
- A related concern was that many of the individuals had not had any prior trouble with the police and criminal justice system, and this was causing shame and embarrassment among families and the community. Activist group Active Muslims Leicester also met with the Chief Constable to raise these concerns and work towards 'closer collaboration', better relations between Muslim communities and the police services, and the possibility of distributing images of people through community groups.
- Some people who voluntarily went to the police to give them information about the events ended up being arrested themselves. 'Many individuals initially believed they were assisting the police when they went in for a voluntary interview but were instead interrogated under caution and were later charged. This led to a prolonged legal process and an unexpectedly high fine. Many Muslims faced false allegations, which led to costly legal battles, despite the police having no evidence supporting their claims' (Interview XDF, Interview XAV).
- Reports that fear of harsher or prison sentences led to guilty pleas, even for very minor offences.
- Claims that many of the offences, including public order offences, were reserved for district judges rather than lay magistrates, as would be usual practice, the belief being that this must have been intentional and linked to public interest in the events (Interview XBI).
- Claims that the first judge set the tone by sentencing the first person (a Hindu), caught with a knife, to prison immediately. A subsequent judge was said to be more 'relaxed' and open to giving suspended sentences (Interview XBI).
- Claims that eight people prosecuted (for section 4 and 5 offences, 'very low level stuff') 'were exercising their right to protest and should not have been prosecuted', and that this was due to a policy decision, the majority of them being charity workers and the like and often involved in trying to calm the situation and prevent violence (Interview XBI).

### Conclusion

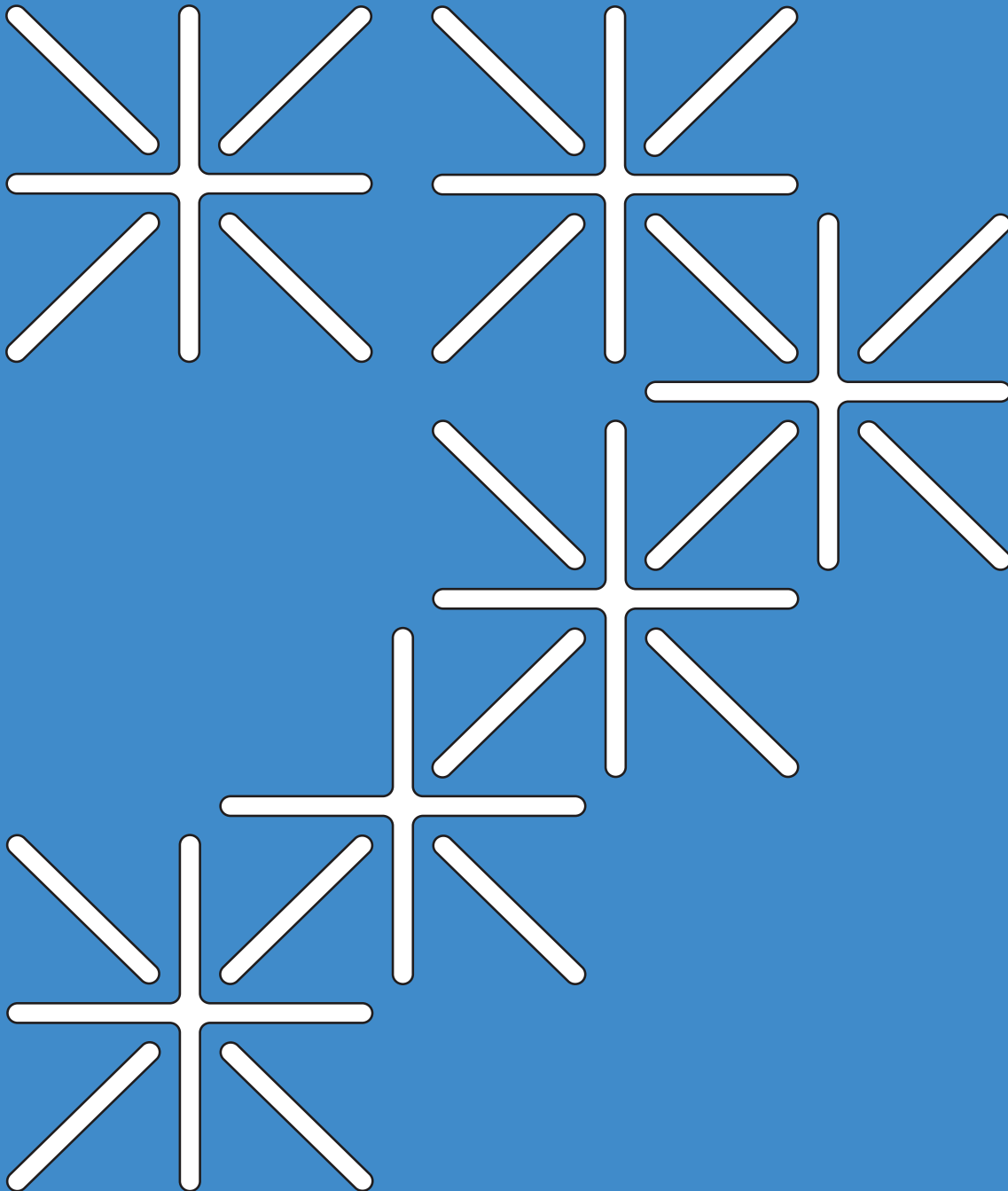
In a situation of substantially reduced police numbers, the police took important actions during 17 September that worked to prevent further violence, including separating the adversarial groups in Belgrave during the evening, negotiating and conducting the dispersal, identifying some of the protagonists, preventing the march from entering Asfordby Street, and making some relevant arrests of those involved in violent acts. After receiving reinforcements, the police's orientation on the streets seemed restrained and effective, trying to separate the factions physically and maintaining

presence until the more violence-prone elements dispersed. The overall approach was: an initial police escort of the marchers until reinforcements arrived; preventing violence in the meantime; preventing access to the main mosque (and perhaps other sensitive sites); separating factions where possible, including in the evening; and negotiating dispersal. We do not know the operational order for the event, nor who signed it off.

However, there were significant failures in actionable intelligence and operational matters that led the police to underestimate public order risks and initially deploy only a handful of officers. Some interviewees also attributed the limited early response to overconfidence resulting from previous community engagement strategies. The consequence was widespread disturbances in parts of the city. It should have been clear from the post-cricket match violence and the events of 5-7 September that significant, persistent and volatile community tensions were present. In that context, even if unconfirmed, police awareness that a march was being planned should have elicited a stronger and proactive response. The events in August and early September, and the warnings about the 17 September march, should also have altered national police intelligence processes. There were also persistent tensions which had been raised with the police and which concerned antisocial behaviour and related issues.

Notwithstanding the absence of many officers from Leicestershire Police on the day (mainly because of the funeral of the Queen), the march, which was undertaken without permission, should have been allowed to proceed – but with significant police protection. It should have been prevented from entering areas like Green Lane Road where it would have inevitably caused serious public disorder and intimidation, just as the police had earlier prevented the marchers from entering Asfordby Street (where an important mosque is located). Allowing marchers to enter Green Lane Road escalated the violence.

Strong perceptions of bias remain, including beliefs across both communities of unfair treatment and the view that a more proactive and engaged approach might have mitigated the violence. There has been limited engagement with community members, especially youth, outside of established 'community leader' networks. This area also links to combined failures of engagement and intelligence.



Social media was not merely an observer in the Leicester violence but an active agent. It became a force that shaped perceptions, reactions and the course of events. Social media amplified tensions, mobilised groups, and blurred the lines between reality and fiction. The spread of misinformation through social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Twitter (now X), played a central role in shaping many perceptions and fuelling tensions.

This chapter examines the impact and consequences of social media on the events in Leicester. In the first part, broadly following the timeline of events from late August until the 17 September events, the chapter considers the role of disinformation and rumours in those events. It considers how Hindutva and political Islamist groups used social media to shape polarising and divisive narratives about the Leicester violence, and influence people on the ground. This chapter also illustrates how false claims and narratives on social media led to ‘rumour cascades’ that had a significant impact on families and communities. In the latter part, we outline themes related to the impact of social media misinformation and disinformation.

#### Communal misinformation

After the 4-7 September violence, it appeared that calm had slowly returned to Leicester. However, in the week or so after 7 September, several communal narratives took on increasingly international dimensions and involved international actors, especially from India. The period from around 7–17 September was also important for illustrating the power of communally driven misinformation, disinformation, and rumour, which had direct consequences on the streets of Leicester.

Some community figures expressed to us the view that some Muslim and Hindu activists were aiming to promote a particular agenda through social media about the cricket match events and the early September violence (Interview XBB). Some Leicester Muslim activists promoted the view that Hindutva ideology and the RSS were behind the 28 August cricket match violence and the 22 May and 5 September attacks on the two Muslim men. However, they did not produce any evidence to support their claims of Hindutva involvement. Also, by early September, comparisons were being made on social media between the violations of the human rights of Muslim minorities in India under the Narendra Modi government and local incidents in Leicester, as if the two were related phenomena. Social media here was critical in weaving together incidents across diverse sites into a large narrative of communities or people under attack by the ‘other side’.

Thus, a local Muslim activist posted the following on X/Twitter on the night of 6 September, after two nights of violence directed against Hindus that had followed a serious attack on a Muslim:

Gangs of drunken racist Hindu youths have been attacking Muslims in #Leicester. The #Hindutva

mobs of 30+ attack lone Muslims late at night with weapons. 2 Muslim teenagers have been hospitalised in recent months. This isn't India. We wont allow this.<sup>188</sup>

Similarly, another local Muslim activist posted on Facebook on 7 September:

3 months ago a young lad was battered by 30 odd far right extremists Hindutva RSS thugs to near death using baseball bats. The parents got the police involved but because of police inaction nothing was done. The parents obtained CCTV footage of the attack and handed it over to the police (that should have been their job). There was a line up and the boy identified 3/4 of the thugs and yet nothing has been done. The past 3 months around the Green Lane Road area these thugs have been terrorising families, harassing and abusing them and yet police have not done anything... 3 nights ago a 19 year old boy was battered again by the same group blaming him for throwing an egg?? An egg! Wow.<sup>189</sup>

No evidence is given for why youths involved in the May attack were characterised as ‘Hindutva RSS thugs’. This polarising language casually dismissed what many Hindus saw as a serious desecration of their deity and religious event.

#### False stories and rumour cascades

Several alleged incidents, widely reported on social media and subject to intense community rumours in early September, concerned events that had not taken place. In one example, a young Muslim man reportedly ran home to his father and claimed that a group of Hindu youths had tried to

stab him in Spinney Hill Park. The message was spread widely by members of the family: 'someone sent a message out and the message went flying' (Interview XAK). However, a witness who challenged the family's claims reported to us that the incident had not occurred, though we did not investigate it independently. The potential effect of such rumours on youths was described to us:

Now, innocent Hindu kids, it doesn't matter where they from, if they are hanging around and they've got nothing to do with this and they are being chased by Muslim boys, that's wrong. And similarly, if Muslim innocent boys are hanging around somewhere and getting chased by Hindu lads, that's wrong, when they got nothing to do with it. (Interview XAK)

A second false story, which emerged on Facebook, concerned an alleged incident on 9 September in which a Muslim traffic warden reported being attacked by Hindus. The warden claimed he was working on Belgrave Road near the Chaiiwala café and saw a red Corsa pull up on a double yellow line. He told the driver that he would be issued a parking violation ticket if he didn't move. He then said he'd be kind, and they could go. The warden claimed one of the men pulled out a knife and asked him, 'Are you a Muslim?' He replied, 'Yes', and said they punched him. He said he recorded the incident on his body cam and reported it to the police. In the Facebook video, his relative, an imam, said, 'This is what the extremist Hindutva community are doing now.' The incident was widely reported on social media, and the interview with the warden was posted on Facebook and other platforms. On 13 September, Leicestershire Police issued a message saying they were conducting enquiries and that the warden was 'safe and well'.<sup>190</sup> However, as later reported by the police,<sup>191</sup> the claim about the attack was false. The narrative, though false in this case but true in others, is the same as that reported in the two attacks on 22 May and 5 September – a

man is asked if he is a Muslim by a group of Hindus and attacked when he says he is, and the claim is that this was the result of Hindutva extremism.

On the same day as the alleged incident involving the traffic warden, an activist tweeted:

#LEICESTER UPDATE A 17 yr old Muslim lad was on his way to work yday at 11:30AM. He was on Cottesmore Road when 2 Hindu guys stopped him & asked him his name & if he's Hindu or Muslim. They then grabbed him by his neck but he managed to beat them both up & escape. STAY ALERT<sup>192</sup>

This tweet locates this incident in Cottesmore Road, the scene of violence only a few days before, and its narrative, like that of the 22 May and 5 September attacks, is of a Muslim being stopped by Hindus and asked their religion and then attacked. (While we were not able to investigate this incident, no interviewee reported it to us. We had asked virtually all interviewees about all the possible incidents related to religious hatred they knew about.)

The most damaging false story, first appearing on a Facebook post, generated violence against a Hindu family and considerable fear and anger across communities. It concerned the claim that, on the morning of 12 September, a Muslim teenage girl was approached by three Hindu men who were driving a black Audi on Richmond Way near the Beauchamp College, and they tried to kidnap her. The allegation was that she was asked if she was Muslim, and when she said she was, a man tried to 'grab her'.<sup>193</sup> The claim, now deleted, was posted on Facebook by the girl's father on the day of the alleged kidnapping attempt:

Salam. Today my 15 year old daughter who goes to secondary school was nearly kidnapped this morning A black audi reg number [XXX XXX] 3 indian boys got out and asked her if she is muslim she said yes and one guy tried to grip here and put her in the car she managed to

**Social media was not merely an observer in the Leicester violence but an active agent. It became a force that shaped perceptions, reactions and the course of events. Social media amplified tensions, mobilised groups, and blurred the lines between reality and fiction. The spread of misinformation through social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Twitter (now X), played a central role in shaping many perceptions and fuelling tensions.**

**We were told on many occasions that disinformation spread on social media by a bare handful of two or three Muslim activists in Leicester was causing major problems across communities and leading to fear, distrust and polarisation. The fear generated by their disinformation crossed communities.**

push him and run away they jumped in car and drove off.<sup>194</sup>

The allegation was circulated on Twitter on 13 September by a local activist who claimed police had confirmed the story. However, on 14 September, the police said:

Yesterday we issued an appeal following a report that a teenage girl had been approached by three men in the area of Richmond Way, Leicester, on Monday morning (12 September). We can confirm that a full investigation has been carried out involving a significant number of officers and detectives. Following extensive enquiries, we have been able to establish that the incident did not take place and no offence was committed. We are aware that information about this report was circulated on social media by others before it was investigated by police. This included an image and details of a person's car. The tone of the social media was critical and encouraged others to act. Making a false allegation or posting misinformation on social media can cause significant distress and will have implications for other people. We urge people not to get drawn into things circulating on social media but to work with us to ensure proper checks are carried out.<sup>195</sup>

The statement's reference to the details about a car concerns social media posts in which a photograph of a man posing by his car on Melton Road was widely circulated with the claim that the car belonged to him. Information about the man, his car registration details, and the alleged address of his home were widely circulated on Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media, with responses implicitly encouraging retaliation (including after the police statement was published.) For example, a singer from Blackburn with many TikTok followers posted details about the man, along with the false allegations. The consequence of these posts was that a large group of Muslim youths surrounded a house on a residential street where a Hindu family lived, terrifying the family, who then had to move. The person identified in the post was out of the country and was not involved in any kidnapping incident.

The false allegation of kidnapping and the threats to the individual and his family were described to us as having a major impact on the thinking of Hindu community figures and in the Hindu community more broadly.

And a very big concern that we heard was of the Hindu man trying to kidnap a Muslim girl outside of Beauchamp College... And this was now circulating, you know, screenshots of Twitter were circulating on WhatsApp. And a picture of the boy who was trying to you know abduct this... girl was being shared. Then we heard, then I heard, heard that a group of Muslims were outside the home of this so-called boy who was abducting this girl in Belgrave. And to the point that the family had to leave the home, all that kind of stuff. It then transpired that the boy whose picture was used and the car was used to say this is the guy who's doing this [but he] wasn't even in town, wasn't there. Again, this is everything that we were hearing. And other community people who were sharing this were verifying the fact that this wasn't there, verifying that the family were tormented by a gathering of Muslim boys outside of the house, and they had to move home.

These false allegations also affected some Muslim community figures.

I really tried to connect with that family... They lived on [street], apparently, and they had to move out from there... And I really wanted to connect with them to say: 'Sorry. Please, you know we are not all like that'... Yeah, well, you should apologise because they had nothing to do with it, they were completely innocent people. [It] was really bad, when that came out as fake news. Now, that was bad. That was very, very bad.

We were told on many occasions that disinformation spread on social media by a bare handful of two or three Muslim activists in Leicester was causing major problems across communities and leading to fear, distrust and polarisation. The fear generated by their disinformation crossed communities. For example, we heard about Muslim parents frightened

of sending their daughters to school following the false kidnapping allegation (Interview XCA). While some accounts withdrew their claims when proven false, they had spread several false claims in the first place without due consideration of their impact on individuals and relations between communities.

Partly because of these false stories, there was substantial anti-Hindu abuse from some Twitter accounts.<sup>196</sup> We have seen a video posted on social media of girls and young women doing *garba* outside a temple in Leicester, an ordinary cultural practice, the person videoing engaging in anti-Hindu abuse.<sup>197</sup> Similarly, on social media, there was considerable anti-Muslim abuse, often coming from accounts in India.

### The Hindutva narrative: 'Hindus Under Attack'

Hindutva narratives on social media about the Leicester events started to consolidate following the events of 5-7 September and expanded rapidly after 17 September. After 5 September, Hindutva organisations and their supporters in the UK and India became significant in shaping narratives about Leicester on social media, often under a broader RSS framing of 'Hindus Under Attack'. These narratives had an impact on many Hindu community groups in the city and fed the polarisation that was occurring.

The phrase 'Hindus Under Attack' is widely used as a hashtag on social media by the RSS and its affiliated organisations and supporters in India. The phrase virtually exclusively refers to claims about Muslims attacking Hindus and is part of the RSS's ideology of Hindus living in a state of permanent siege from Muslims. Hindutva organisations often use the phrase to refer to the situation of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Kashmir.

The first tweet about Leicester we found that used variants of that slogan (#HindusUnderAttackInUK or #HindusUnderAttackUK) was on 6 September. We didn't find these hashtags used on Twitter, Facebook or Instagram before that date. We found about 680 tweets using that hashtag on Twitter up to 17 September – a small number but one which increased dramatically after 17 September.

Many tweets in early September reflected the narrative of 'Hindus under attack' by 'Pakistani Muslims':

A mob of Pakistanis attacked & vandalised Hindu homes & property in Leicester, UK on Sunday. Slogans like 'Long live Pakistan', 'Modi is a dog', 'Allahu Akbar', 'Hindustan Murdabad' were chanted. No International media has picked this news up. #HindusUnderAttackInUK<sup>198</sup>

#HindusUnderAttack #HinduLivesMatters #Leicester #HindusUnderAttackInUK Muslims are on road and damaging the Innocents Hindus In Leicester and Propaganda started by so called peaceful community.<sup>199</sup>

#Pakistani gangs running riot & escalating attacks on innocent #Hindus who have been

Figure 36: Number of tweets (678) using the hashtags #HindusUnderAttackInUK and #HindusUnderAttackUK from 6-16 September 2022

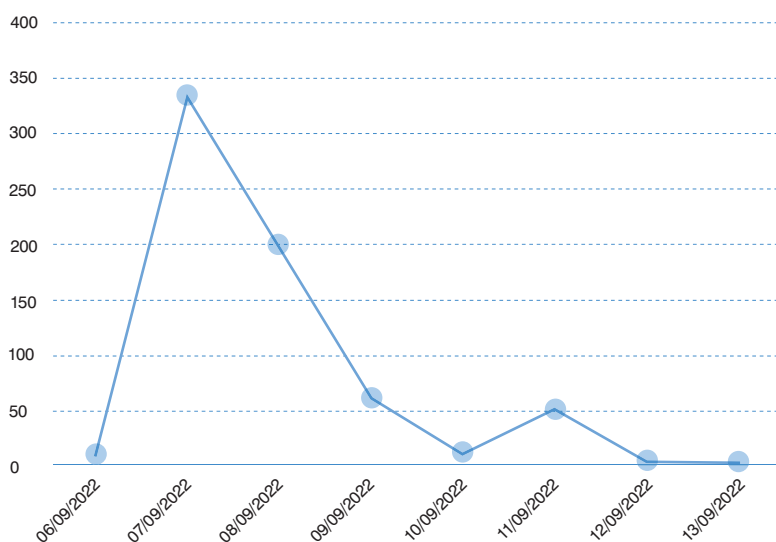
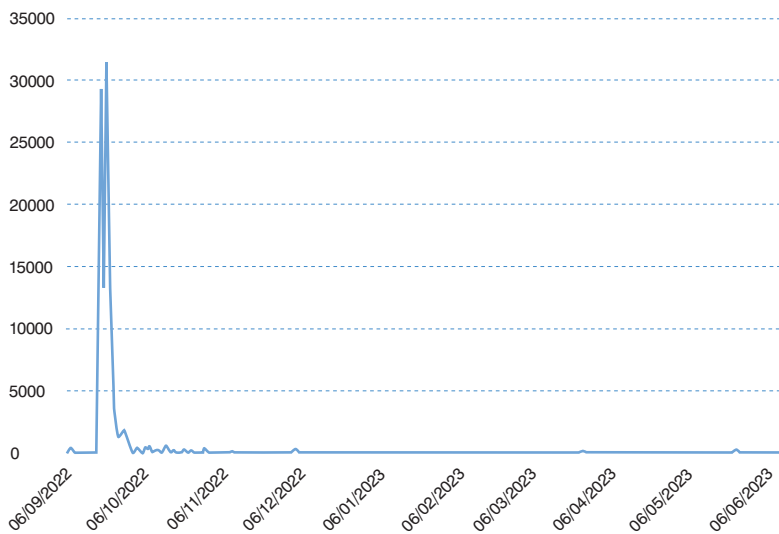


Figure 37: Number of tweets using the hashtag #HindusUnderAttackInUK (and #HindusUnderAttackUK) from 6 September 2022 – 6 June 2023



terrorised in their own properties, there have been attempts to stab & there has been rampant vandalism of Hindu properties in #LeicesterCity. #HindusUnderAttackInUK & they must unite against it<sup>200</sup>

Other examples of tweets related to the early September events included significant amplification of a tweet by Sanatan Prabhat, the media wing of the Sanatan Sanstha, an organisation that has been accused of several murders and acts of terrorism in India.<sup>201</sup>

Hindu Tej Jago ! [Awaken Hindu Brilliance/Power!] #Pakistani Muslims attacked Hindus in Leicester, UK. Who will protect Hindus ?<sup>202</sup>

Citti Media, a Hindutva media outlet that has had a longstanding focus on the anti-Muslim 'love jihad' ideology, also promoted the #HindusUnderAttack hashtag on its Facebook and Instagram posts. Similarly, Rashmi Samant, a prominent Hindutva anti-Muslim activist based in India who was previously involved in a significant controversy in the UK regarding her ideological beliefs, tweeted extensively about the Leicester events,<sup>203</sup> again based on the theme of Hindus under attack by Muslim gangs. By early September, the narrative of Hindus under attack from (Pakistani) Muslims in Leicester had become established on social media.

After the 17 September events, the hashtag #HindusUnderAttackInUK became a dominant one in Hindutva posts about Leicester. The rise of the hashtag bears the hallmarks of a coordinated campaign involving substantial numbers of accounts from India posting on X/Twitter and Facebook.<sup>204</sup>

BBC Monitoring (the BBC service tracking and analysing global media) identified around half a million English-language tweets referencing the

**Hindutva narratives on social media about the Leicester events started to consolidate following the events of 5-7 September and expanded rapidly after 17 September. After 5 September, Hindutva organisations and their supporters in the UK and India became significant in shaping narratives about Leicester on social media, often under a broader RSS framing of 'Hindus Under Attack'. These narratives had an impact on many Hindu community groups in the city and fed the polarisation that was occurring.**

Leicester tensions. It found that over half of the tweets from a 200,000 tweet sample originated in India, with the top hashtags being #HindusUnderAttack and #HindusUnderAttackinUK. The BBC found strong indications of manipulation, with many accounts using such hashtags appearing inauthentic, newly created, lacking profile pictures, and geo-located in India. Of the top 30 shared URLs in tweets, 11 were from *OpIndia*, a media outlet that strongly supports Narendra Modi, the BJP and Hindutva politics. While inauthentic accounts spread some posts, many were also shared by genuine, high-profile users with large followings.<sup>205</sup>

Many Hindutva narratives about Leicester were almost mirror images of the claims made by some Muslim activists. For example, some Hindutva-influenced narratives claimed Hindus were being targeted for violence in Leicester by 'Islamists', including 'Pakistani-origin' or Muslim gangs, over a long period. The Hindutva organisation Insight UK spread disinformation claiming that Hindus in Leicester had been victims of targeted violence by Muslims for 20 days.<sup>206</sup> Examples from 8 and 10 September include:

'Gangs running riot and escalating attacks on Hindus. Innocent Hindus have been terrorised in their own properties, there have been attempts to stab and there has been rampant vandalism of Hindu properties,' Rashami Samant, a human rights activist tweeted. 'Trouble in Leicester, UK. Paki Muslims targeting hindu households, desecrating religious symbols, using racist slurs (mushirks),' tweeted another user.<sup>207</sup>

100s of Muslim youth on the rampage. 50 homes & cars damaged. Hindu homes identifiable by symbols like Om, Shubh Labh & Ganesh pics targeted. House gates/doors broken. Mob tried to enter house where a newly married Hindu woman was alone.<sup>208</sup>

A key theme in such narratives was that large numbers of Hindus were leaving Leicester because of the violence. The Henry Jackson Society, whose document about the Leicester violence largely reflects the perspective of Hindutva organisations, claimed that nine Hindu families had left Leicester<sup>209</sup>. Leicestershire Police stated they were unaware of the situation of the nine families.<sup>210</sup> Nevertheless, similar views were disseminated by other social media accounts.

According to this video, nine Hindu families left #Leicester due to the fear of Islamist violence. Some of them returned to remove visible symbols of Hinduism from their houses and cars. As a Kashmiri-American, this sounds eerily like #Kashmir all over again.<sup>211</sup>

Building on Henry Jackson Society researcher Charlotte Littlewood's interview with *GB News*, reports from *OpIndia* alleged that 'Islamists' were calling for the removal of Hindus from Leicester as they had done in Kashmir. *OpIndia*'s editor, Nupur

Figure 38: Call on Muslims to protest on 18 September in Belgrave<sup>217</sup>

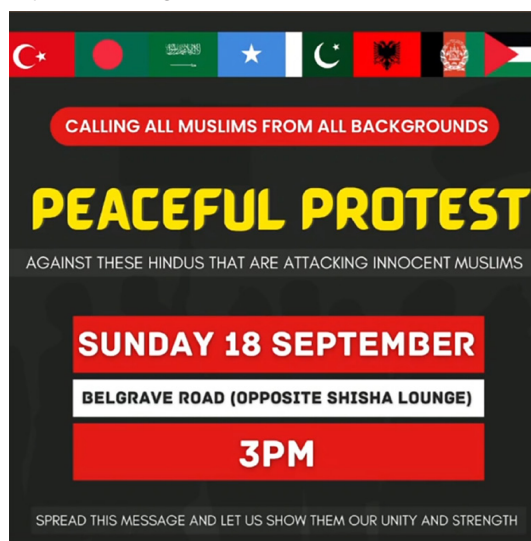


Figure 39: Mohammed Hijab and a 'Muslim patrol', Belgrave, 18 September<sup>224</sup>



Sharma, falsely claimed that 200 Hindu families had been displaced from Leicester.

I've been told by Hindu orgs in Leicester that several families (some say 200) have been displaced from Leicester and are unwilling to go back because they are scared of the violence by Islamists. Even if its 1 family displaced, it is a scathing indictment of @leicspolice<sup>212</sup>

Just as some Muslim activists drew comparisons between the situation in Leicester and the conditions faced by Muslims in Modi's India, some Hindu activists on social media, particularly on Indian accounts, claimed that what was occurring to Hindus in Leicester reflected the violations of the human rights of Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, Pakistan or Kashmir. Such divisive communal language drew on international conflicts to polarise and inflame animosity within a local community. International events were being falsely mapped onto local tensions.

Numerous Twitter accounts, including @desi\_diva1, @AKanuv108, @JIX5A, @HinduHate and @Muncha108, produced inflammatory content and false information about Muslims. For example, on 18 September, the claim was posted on social media that the Leicestershire police did not intervene effectively in the violence because the police's city centre inspector, Nadia Rana, was from Pakistan.

Sorry mam, they don't want to control the situation. You know who is new Leicester police in charge it's a Pakistani origin female named as Nadia Rana.<sup>213</sup>

On 10 October 2022, Leicestershire Police launched an investigation after their new hate crime officer, Sumaya Bihi, faced what the BBC described as 'a torrent of online abuse' and racist, misogynistic, and anti-Muslim comments following the announcement of her appointment.<sup>214</sup>

It was claimed on 18 September that the large BAPS Swaminarayan Temple in Leicester had been 'attacked by Pakistani Muslims' on 17 September,<sup>215</sup> a claim that was false, as reported to us by witnesses who were inside the temple at the time. Around 21 September, several accounts falsely claimed that Muslims had set fire to a shop in Birmingham, resulting in Hindu-Muslim brawls in which the police had to intervene.

UK Update : Shop/Houses set on fire by #Islamic extremists – Street Brawl ensues in #Birmingham between Hindus and Muslims. British Police use non-lethal force in an attempt to break up conflict.<sup>216</sup>

The West Midlands Fire Service investigated the shop fire and concluded that it was caused by an accident when rubbish burning outdoors spread to the building.<sup>217</sup>



Social media and WhatsApp groups proved very powerful in mobilising people to gather in the streets of Leicester during the 5-7 September violence, and on 17 September for both the march and the counter-mobilisation. Social media facilitated the rapid mobilisation of individuals, often based on incomplete or misleading information.

### Political Islamist Disinformation

After the 17 September march, Muslim activists and ‘influencers’ on WhatsApp and social media called for a mobilisation in Belgrave Road on the afternoon of 18 September. Some messages called for a ‘peaceful protest’ to show unity and strength ‘against these Hindus that are attacking innocent Muslims’.<sup>218</sup>

Around 50-60 youths, primarily South Asian, virtually all masked, many wearing hoods and some wearing balaclavas, are shown in a video taken in Garfield Street near the junction with Belgrave Road, many shouting ‘Allahu Akbar’<sup>220</sup>. Other videos posted on social media show an attempted march down Belgrave Road.<sup>221</sup> There is a significant police presence and interaction with the protestors on Belgrave Road, which eventually leads the group to disperse. Community figures were also there, encouraging people to go home. ‘I was there on the day, just talking to people: ‘Why are you here? What’s happened? You know, you don’t need to be involved in this’ (Interview XAC).

Several social media ‘influencers’, including political Islamists like Mohammed Hijab and Ali Dawah, came to Leicester on that Sunday to engage in what they called ‘Muslim patrols’, additionally posting highly inflammatory anti-Hindu messages on their social media accounts.<sup>222</sup> Hijab posted a video on his YouTube channel in which he is telling the ‘patrol’: ‘Hindus believe in reincarnation, what a humiliation and pathetic thing for them to be reincarnated into some pathetic, weak, cowardly people like that. I’d rather be reincarnated as a grasshopper, bruv.’<sup>223</sup> Hijab encourages resistance against ‘Hindutva gangs’, and the crowd repeatedly chants ‘Allahu Akbar’.<sup>224</sup> (Some Muslim men attempted to stop Hijab from addressing the crowd, telling him: ‘Show some restraint! You’ve said your piece.’<sup>225</sup>)

The Muslim Public Affairs Committee UK published inflammatory videos and pictures of a group of Hindu youths on their Facebook page, claiming ‘Hindutva terrorists were running riot in Leicester’.

While figures like Ali Dawah and Mohammed Hijab later made clarifications, these didn’t contain contrition or good-faith apologies for the damage

they had caused to community relations or for spreading false claims to thousands of their followers.<sup>228</sup>

Alongside Hijab and Dawah, Moazzem Begg of the Cage organisation visited Leicester. While Begg said that the Muslim community needed to engage with Hindus, he also said ‘if they are going to fight you, fight back’ – since this, he claimed, was proportionate (physical) self-defence.<sup>229</sup> On 24 September, salafi-jihadi activist Anjem Choudhary released an inflammatory video blaming Hindus for the violence and calling for ‘Muslim patrols’ to fight Hindus in Leicester.<sup>230</sup>

Numerous false claims, including doctored images, were also circulated on social media in the aftermath of the 17 September violence. Husnain Yacoob, an imam from Nottingham, released a (now deleted) YouTube video in which he falsely implied that RSS supporters may have deliberately taken down the flag on the Shivalaya temple to blame Muslims.<sup>231</sup> Activist Zahid Akhtar, on his DOAM Instagram account, posted a timeline of ‘anti-Muslim attacks by Hindutva goons’ that contained misinformation about an attack on a mosque.<sup>232</sup> Other (now deleted) tweets claimed multiple stabbings of Muslims by Hindus during the march. Another claim was that Hindu nationalists had entered a mosque and abused worshippers, a claim that mosque officials said was false.<sup>233</sup>

Accounts and influencers, including Ali Dawah, @aart1231 and @atiqmalikawan, falsely claimed after 18 September that a coach owned by Angel Tours (often said to be linked to BJP supporters at a temple in Ealing Road, Wembley, as well as RSS supporters in India<sup>234</sup>) carried Hindu ‘mobs’ from London to Leicester. Another tweet falsely claimed that Manoj Mishra, a Conservative candidate in the 2022 May council elections in Brent North, was involved with Angel Tours in bringing people from London to Leicester. These claims were repeatedly disproved.<sup>235</sup>

On 25 September 2022, a now-deleted Instagram account, @apnamuslims, shared an inflammatory post promoting a demonstration outside Shree Sanatan Mandir in Wembley, London, falsely referring to the temple as a hornet’s nest of ‘Nazi Hindutva’. The significance of this post, as well as events in

Birmingham and Coventry, was that violence between Hindus and Muslims had the potential to spread to other cities.

Themes in some Muslim and some political Islamist narratives about Leicester included the following:

- Hindutva ideology, and RSS involvement, was the primary factor behind the events of 2022, starting from May and expressed openly in the 17 September march
- Muslims have faced months of threats, intimidation and attack from Hindus
- Those incidents are motivated by Hindutva ideology and prejudice towards or hatred of Muslims (Islamophobia)
- The sole reason for the attacks is because the victims were Muslim
- The attacks on Muslims in Leicester represent what is happening to Muslims in India, under the Modi government
- The Leicester police have acted with anti-Muslim or pro-Hindu sentiments, treated Muslims unfairly, and failed to take action against anti-Muslim violence and harassment
- Expression of anti-Hindu prejudice
- Spreading misinformation, disinformation, inflammatory claims and sometimes outright fabrications

### Themes in social media polarisation

#### *Internationalisation*

One of the most significant aspects of the Leicester unrest was how, through social media, motivated activists mapped global political narratives onto local events, shaping local disputes with external political agendas.

Several interviewees (Hindu and Muslim) noted that much of the online discussion drew on broader geopolitical conflicts rather than on Leicester's history of inter-community relations. Some (Hindu) interviewees expressed frustration at the introduction of discourses from India that had little resonance in Leicester before the unrest. Narratives that had previously been confined to political discourse in India were suddenly appearing in local

**Misinformation, such as an attempted kidnapping of a Muslim girl by a Hindu man or coach-loads of people arriving in Leicester from London, was successful in creating fear and prompting mobilisation and retaliation. WhatsApp groups were central to the transmission of unverified alerts that reportedly created considerable fear.**

**Social media platforms operate through a monetised attention economy that thrives on intense, wide engagement. Polarisation and disinformation on social media increase engagement. It is therefore in the interests of many influencers to generate attention by posting divisive, inflammatory, untruthful, and ideologically polarising messages.**

online discussions; conversely, the events in Leicester were becoming part of Hindutva discourse in India, especially feeding into its 'Hindus under siege' narrative. Some Muslim interviewees pointed to how right-wing Hindu nationalist discourse was being imported into Leicester's digital spaces. The convergence of these global narratives meant that Leicester's unrest became a battleground for ideological struggles that had little to do with the city's history. The influence of international narratives also manifested in how some community members responded to events. Rather than interpreting the unrest through Leicester's own history, some activists – both Hindutva and political Islamist – began to see it as part of a broader global struggle.

#### *Communal polarisation*

Social media and WhatsApp groups proved very powerful in mobilising people to gather in the streets of Leicester during the 5-7 September violence, and on 17 September for both the march and the counter-mobilisation. Social media facilitated the rapid mobilisation of individuals, often based on incomplete or misleading information. Interviewees repeatedly told us how digital platforms were used to organise and coordinate action, sometimes escalating the situation further. Some recalled how WhatsApp messages encouraged individuals to gather in key locations, often under the pretext of defending their communities from attack.

We're not all Hindus against all Muslims kind of thing, but it can start to feel like that in a bubble, right? Especially in social media, where you can really start to feel like that. And I think that's really what captured the mood of people: 'We are under attack, and we have to go and defend ourselves'.

By 5-6 September, communally polarised narratives had become established among some actors and those they influenced. Two opposing narratives were that Hindutva-influenced groups were deliberately targeting and attacking Muslims, and Pakistani Islamist groups were deliberately target-

ing and attacking Hindus. These polarising narratives reinforced fear across Hindu and Muslim communities in Leicester and heightened suspicion and anxiety about neighbours.

The way in which digital spaces encouraged communal polarisation along religious and ethnic lines was repeatedly mentioned in interviews. Many interviewees recalled being inundated with WhatsApp messages that exaggerated the scale of events, misrepresented incidents, or fabricated threats. The nature of these messages was often alarmist, warning of imminent violence and urging individuals to stay inside or take precautionary measures. In this way, social media, particularly WhatsApp messages, generated considerable fear and anxiety among communities. An interviewee who had access to local WhatsApp networks reflected on how narratives of blame were reinforced within closed online environments:

There were some [messages] that were a little bit hateful and were a little bit disingenuous and blamed a certain group for a certain thing, and I think that spread really quickly because you can forward a message on WhatsApp. It's really fast and that idea can get shared very quickly.

Many interviewees noted that social media enabled selective exposure and reinforced pre-existing biases. Many WhatsApp groups, Facebook pages, and Twitter threads fostered narratives that aligned with communal anxieties during the events. Several interviewees described how people predominantly engaged with content reinforcing their viewpoints, with misinformation becoming self-sustaining (Interview XAP). This process resulted in opposing or alternative perspectives being seen not simply as disagreeable but as illegitimate. A cumulative effect of these dynamics was that social media discourse became a space for competition over victimhood rather than reconciliation. Instead of engaging in collective reflection on the causes of unrest, much online discussion became preoccupied with establishing which 'side' had started the unrest or suffered more: 'There were Hindus saying Muslims started it... and some

Muslim accounts saying that the Hindus started it. That was on social media, a lot of blame being put on one group' (Interview XDM). The consequence of communal polarisation is that the possibility of dialogue becomes sabotaged.

For some interviewees, social media discussions led to a mischaracterisation of Leicester, and a re-framing of community relations within it as driven by conflict rather than coexistence: 'I've lived here all my life, and I've not heard a word of this... None of this makes sense. It doesn't sound like anything that [I know]. Have I been in a coma? It did not resonate.' (Interview XAH). This aspect was particularly evident in the way Leicester's Hindu and Muslim communities were framed in international discourse. Several interviewees and survey respondents also described how distorting narratives were imposed onto the Leicester context:

Social media went into overdrive from India even. There were also other accounts, mostly Muslim communities were fine, but then everyone was trying to pin down the Hindus to say, 'Please blame this on Hindutva', which again we had to distance ourselves from because that's not what it was about. Our life in Leicester is not about Hindutva and ISIS. It's not about that. It's about various communities... living together in peace and harmony.

#### *Disinformation and misinformation*

Misinformation was not just a by-product of the Leicester events but was actively used to shape public perception. Some interviewees described how specific social media accounts sought to control the narrative about the events by disseminating false information aligned with their agendas. Some external actors, both within the UK and abroad, used social media to stoke further discord and incite tensions.

Misinformation, such as an attempted kidnapping of a Muslim girl by a Hindu man or coachloads of people arriving in Leicester from London, was successful in creating fear and prompting mobilisation and retaliation. WhatsApp groups were central to the transmission of unverified alerts that reportedly created considerable fear. Concerns about misinformation were particularly acute among older generations, who may not have had the digital literacy needed to assess the credibility of forwarded messages (Interview XDF). Misinformation also created competing and mutually

exclusive versions of events. In particular, interviewees described how social media reduced complex events to simple, emotionally-charged narratives that pitted one community against another.

The spread of misinformation did not simply contribute to heightened tension but was reported to have had a lasting impact on community trust. Interviewees noted that narratives which took hold on social media began to seep into everyday interactions, shaping perceptions even after the unrest had subsided. The scale and speed at which misinformation circulated meant that it did not just create short-term panic but reportedly planted seeds of doubt and suspicion about the integrity of local relationships (Interview XDM). In this way, social media misinformation created an atmosphere of generalised fear and insecurity. People who had previously moved through Leicester with ease began to feel unsafe, uncertain of how their presence might be perceived by others (Interview XBD). The transformation of everyday spaces into sites of potential hostility demonstrated the impact of digital narratives on many residents.

Some interviewees expressed concern that the role of social media in the unrest had set a precedent for future disputes. Some interviewees worried that any future tensions, whether local or in South Asia, could be inflamed by the same mechanisms of local mobilisation, communal polarisation, disinformation, and the merging of local and international narratives. The potential for rapid escalation means that community organisations, the city council, and police services face a substantial challenge in countering social media polarisation and misinformation before it takes hold locally.

#### *Ambitious influencers*

It is known that social media platforms operate through a monetised attention economy that thrives on intense, wide engagement, and that polarisation and disinformation on social media increase engagement. It is therefore in the interests of many influencers to generate attention by posting divisive, inflammatory, untruthful, and ideologically polarising messages.

Social media provided platforms for ambitious individuals ('influencers') to shape narratives about Leicester in line with their ideological or instrumental interests. Several interviewees mentioned individuals who became prominent voices during the unrest, some often using their platforms to spread unverified and false claims without considering the

**Social media provided platforms for ambitious individuals ('influencers') to shape narratives about Leicester in line with their ideological or instrumental interests.**

**During and after the violence in August and September, a few motivated political actors spread significant disinformation on social media that caused violent incidents and fear and anxiety across communities in Leicester. The disinformation included the reporting of incidents and events that had not occurred, as well as the distortion of events to present a particular community as innocent victims of violence by members of another community.**

consequences within Leicester. A related factor was the involvement of individuals who were not connected to Leicester but exploited the events for online influence (Interview XBG). This 'digital opportunism' meant that the agendas of external actors often eclipsed the truth about what was occurring in Leicester.

The most damaging aspect of influencer-driven misinformation was its ability to mobilise physical action against others. Several interviewees noted how online messaging translated into real-world confrontations as individuals mobilised to take part in demonstrations and counter-protests. A recurring theme during interviews was the role of private groups in amplifying unverified claims. The tangible effects of misinformation in escalating tensions underscore the extent to which digital narratives often shape offline behaviour.

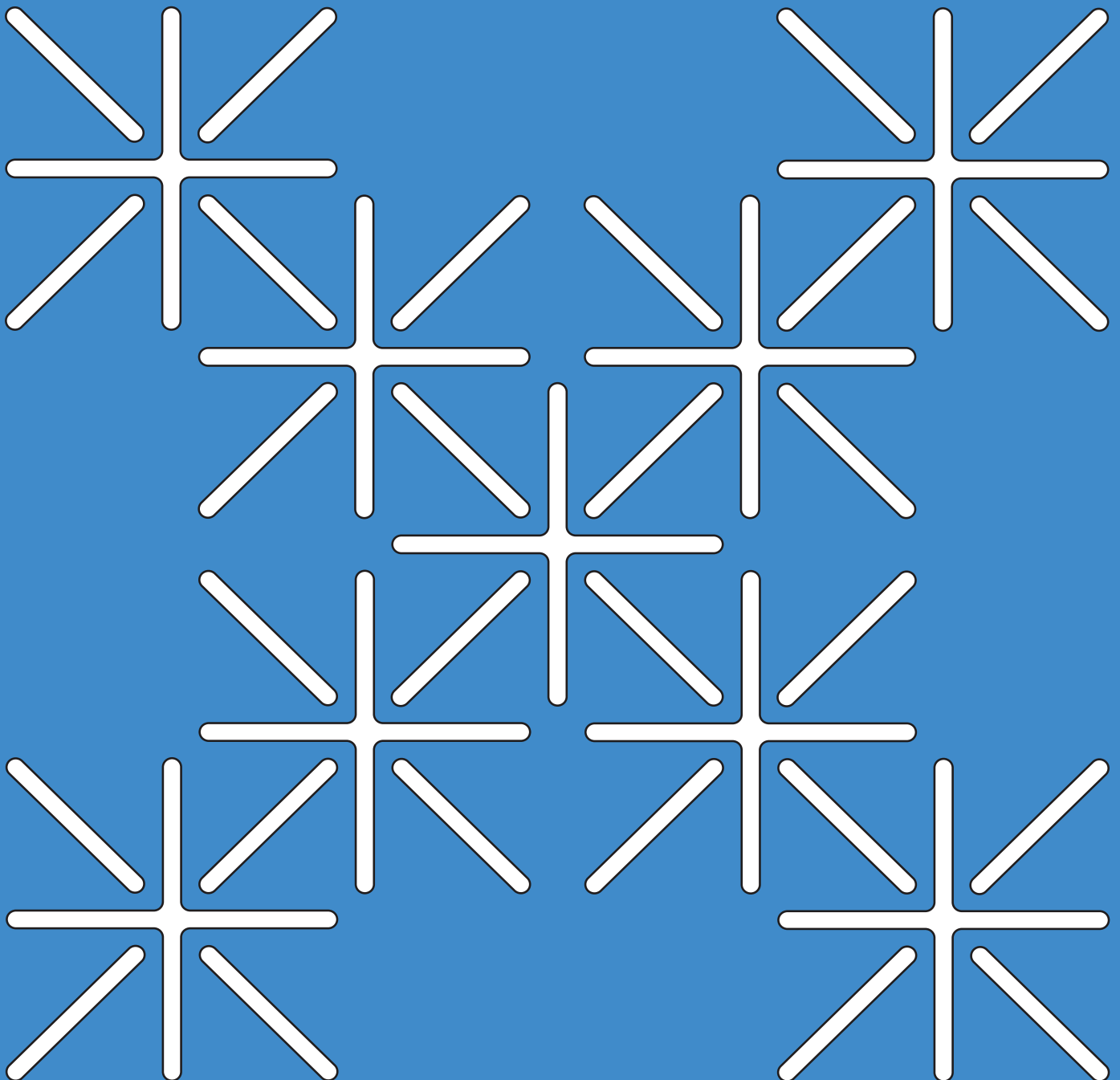
### **Conclusion**

Social media played a significant role as both a catalyst and an amplifier, escalating emotions and polarising communities. Incendiary content circulated rapidly and was widely consumed across platforms like WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. During and after the violence in August and September, a few motivated political actors spread significant disinformation on social media that caused violent incidents and fear and anxiety across communities in Leicester. The disinformation included the reporting of incidents and events that had not occurred, as well as the distortion of events to present a particular community as innocent victims of violence by members of another community.

We especially want to draw attention to the power of narratives that are about threats to or abductions of women or girls. This narrative emerged in the false 'girl abduction' story above, and it exactly mirrors the Hindutva 'love jihad' narrative. Virtually identical ideas are also used in far-right mobilisations in the UK. These ideas about women or girls

from one community under threat from or sexually assaulted by members of another community signal the deepest fears of communities in relation to each other. They point to a high, substantial risk of breakdown in inter-community relations.

Across our interviews, survey and focus groups, many participants highlighted the role of social media in escalating tensions, citing the rapid spread of inflammatory content, misinformation, and false narratives that heightened hostilities. They also expressed concerns about external actors amplifying divisions online and called for greater digital literacy and community-led fact-checking initiatives (Interview XDL).



Given the considerable interest in this area, including from the national media, this chapter examines the extent of Hindutva involvement and influence in the Leicester events. We consider the significance of Hindutva activism in shaping and interpreting communal narratives of events in Leicester from late August onwards. We also consider the broader influence of Hindutva groups and ideas in Leicester. The chapter begins with background information on Hindutva.

### Hindutva then and now

Hindutva is a political ideology developed in the 1920s in the English language by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha organisation. It is an ideology of aggressive Hindu supremacism based on racial-religious, ethnonationalist and territorial criteria. For Savarkar, these criteria defined who was or was not a Hindu: a Hindu was someone who considered India as their fatherland and their holy land. His fatherland idea was based on descent by 'blood' – specifically, Aryan blood. His holy land idea was intended to exclude Islam and Christianity since he considered South Asian Islam and Christianity to be 'foreign' to India. While the word 'Hindutva' was first recorded in the late nineteenth century, it did not come into broader use until Savarkar's twentieth-century definition.<sup>237</sup>

Hindutva or Hindu nationalism is fundamentally distinct from Hinduism. Hinduism is a world religion encompassing numerous and diverse religious traditions and practices. Savarkar did not use Hindu religious criteria to define his Hindutva. The RSS in India is an organisation whose founding ideology and methods were inspired by a combination of Savarkar's ideology, Italian Fascism, and German National Socialism (Nazism). Since its formation, the RSS has attempted to displace the religion of Hinduism with Hindutva, a *racial political ideology of Hindu supremacy and anti-Muslim, anti-Christian hatred*. The goal of Hindutva movements in India is to create what they call 'Hindu Rashtra', a Hindu nation-state based on Hindu supremacy.

The literal translation of Hindutva as 'Hinduness' allows the RSS and its followers to deliberately confuse it with Hinduism, claiming that the 'essence' of Hindu religion is Hindutva. For those unfamiliar with its history and ideological meaning, Hindutva may seem simply to be a word that means 'being a Hindu' rather than a recent far-right political ideology of racial-religious supremacy and anti-minority hatred. In UK Gujarati communities, there has been no history of using the word 'Hindutva' as a self-representation until the RSS and its affiliates tried to popularise it from the 1990s onwards, especially in recent years following Narendra Modi's electoral successes from 2014.

The Indian RSS's central method is to organise and unite Hindus into one political entity under its ideology to create a Hindu nation-state. This state would be radically different to India's constitutionally secular democracy. The RSS typically uses the word 'Bharat', a Hinduised rendering of the republic, to

refer to India. The RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) has created a large number of formally associated organisations (*sangh parivar*, the RSS family), including the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) currently in power in India under Narendra Modi, who has been an RSS member since his youth, the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad or World Hindu Council), Sewa Bharati (its welfare wing), and the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (All-India Students Council) among many others. The RSS and all its major affiliates have been involved in instigating large-scale communal violence and hatred in India since Independence, especially from the 1980s onwards.

In the diaspora, many RSS organisations mirror the Indian ones but crucially reflect other priorities. The RSS branch in the UK is the HSS (Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh). The key aims of HSS are to organise Hindu communities in line with its goals and ideology, generate support for RSS or other Hindutva projects in India, mobilise support for Narendra Modi, raise funds for RSS projects in India, and separate Hindus as a 'model minority' from Muslims (UK Hindutva organisations have therefore campaigned against the use of the term 'Asian'). It seeks to enshrine its ideology (such as 'Hinduphobia' and Hindu communities being under siege from hate crime) through protection in law or policy and oppose law or policy that contests its ideology (such as legislation to protect against caste discrimination).<sup>238</sup>

The HSS UK has several close affiliates: the Hindu Sevika Samiti (women's wing); the VHP; Sewa International, Sewa UK and Sewa Day (RSS charity fronts); the National Hindu Students Forum; Friends of India Society International; Vichar Manthan (an ideas and intellectual forum); the Hindu Lawyers Association; Hindu Sahitya Kendra (bookshop and distributor); the Overseas Friends of the BJP (which organises UK support for the BJP and Narendra Modi); the International Centre for Cultural Studies, the former National Hindu Welfare Support (NHWS) and the current Hindu Support Network (which focuses on alleged grooming of Hindu girls); Samskrit Bharati (for teaching Sanskrit language); the Kalyan Ashram Trust, which supports RSS projects among Adivasi ('tribal') groups in India; the now defunct Bhaarat Welfare Trust; and the VHP UK's Hindu Mandir Network.<sup>239</sup>

Organisations working closely with the HSS include Insight UK, which styles itself as a social movement of British Hindus and Indians, and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus,

which was partly initiated by Conservative MP Bob Blackman, a supporter of the RSS and a guest at UK HSS events. The HSS has several offices in the country, including its central office and bookshop in Leicester, which are used by various affiliates.<sup>240</sup> Its Leicester premises are named after the founder of the Indian RSS and were inaugurated in 1995 by the then-head of the RSS in India. The links in ideology and practices between the UK HSS and the Indian RSS are historic, extensive and copiously documented. They include several Indian RSS workers sent to work full-time on organising the UK HSS and its affiliates, as well as UK HSS workers sent to work on RSS projects in India. Similarly, OFBJP volunteers from the UK have been sent to work on BJP election campaigns in India.

The RSS and its large family of affiliates have dominated Hindutva politics and organisation in India. However, since the 1920s, other Hindutva organisations have functioned independently of the RSS, including Savarkar's original Hindu Mahasabha and its offshoots. Hindutva ideology also drives many different organisations and religious-political figures that are independent of the RSS. Some are competitors to the RSS, and several are to the political right of the RSS and BJP.

Since Narendra Modi's rise to power in 2014, Hindutva organisations and ideology have received considerable Indian state support internationally. Under the Modi governments since his election to the present period, Hindutva organisations have expanded considerably in India and in the Indian diaspora. In India, both RSS-linked and independent Hindutva groups have proliferated massively. The growth of non-RSS forms of Hindutva is an important factor, and both RSS and non-RSS forms of Hindutva organisation are present in Leicester. Furthermore, partly through the activities of the VHP's youth wing, the violent Bajrang Dal, and partly through the massive expansion of violent vigilante groups, distinctions between RSS and non-RSS supporters of Hindutva have also blurred.<sup>241</sup>

### 'Hindus under siege'

The central element of Hindutva ideology is that Hindus in India are living in a state of permanent danger and under siege from Muslim minorities. The key Hindu nationalist idea is '*Hindu khatre me*' ('Hindus are in danger'), widely used by Hindutva politicians and activists in India, especially during elections, to instil fear or to justify anti-minority measures. The presence of Muslims (and Christians) in India is considered a threat and is articulated as the persecution of Hindus by minorities, who constitute about 80 per cent of India's population. The idea of Hindus under permanent siege, persecution and attack by (primarily) Muslims is a dominating theme in Hindutva ideology. The combination of severe Hindu victimhood and aggressive, militant or violent Hindu mobilisation is central to Hindutva communalism.

In this view, Hindus are eternal victims of aggression from Muslims. Hindus cannot be violent since Hinduism is a religion of peace – Narendra Modi,

Figure 42: Traditional depictions of Ram as a moral, ethical figure governing in a period of peace, plenty and wise rule



Figure 43: Newer depictions of Ram, as a lone warrior and silhouetted in flag stating 'Jai Shree Ram'



## Hindutva or Hindu nationalism is fundamentally distinct from Hinduism. Hinduism is a world religion encompassing numerous and diverse religious traditions and practices.

the Indian RSS head and many supporters often make claims of the kind that ‘No Hindu can ever be a terrorist’ (*‘Hindu aatnakwaadi ho hi nahin sakta’*). When Hindus are violent, this is excused or seen as justified because of their historical suffering at the hands of Muslims. It is a central part of Hindutva ideology that Hindus are intrinsically innocent, incapable of wrongdoing, and peaceful. If accused of violence or aggression, it is because Hindus are being victimised by nefarious anti-Hindu, anti-national, ‘Islamist’ interests. For example, legal opposition to caste-based discrimination, instead of being welcomed as a move towards greater equality, is characterised as the persecution of Hindus.

The same ideology of ‘Hindus under siege’ is also applied in UK Hindutva politics to claim that Hindu communities are besieged by Muslims. Key ideological campaigns undertaken in India – for example, around ‘love jihad’ and ‘Hindu persecution’ – are mirrored in Hindutva campaigns in the UK. The ‘love jihad’ and anti-Muslim ‘Hindu persecution’ narrative have enabled affiliations and alliances between diaspora Hindutva groups, white far-right anti-Muslim groups, and right-wing pro-Israel groups.<sup>242</sup>

### Slogans and iconography

In Hindutva demonstrations in India, a set of political slogans, some of which appropriate Hindu religious idioms, is common. They include ‘Bharatmata ke Jai!’ (Victory to the holy Motherland), ‘Vande Mataram!’ (I bow to / praise thee, Mother[land]), ‘Jai Shree Ram!’ (Victory to [the God] Ram!) and ‘Hindu Rashtra ke Jai!’ (Victory to the Hindu nation!). It is also significant that the Hindutva map of ‘Bharatmata’ includes the borders of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, Myanmar, South East Asia, and territories belonging to Australia and New Zealand. Other Hindu devotional slogans are also used, including ‘Har Har Mahadev’, which announces the glory of the deity Shiva and calls for the removal of suffering or obstacles for everyone. The combination of the first three slogans is distinctive to Hindutva organisations and supporters.

Hindutva demonstrations often contain specific symbols and iconography. These are mostly notably new representations of Hindu deities, such as large flags portraying an angry Hanuman or Ram as a lone warrior in front of a massive temple at Ayodhya, and historical figures, such as Shivaji, the medieval ruler of the Maratha confederacy. (Because he engaged in wars with Mughal rulers,

Shivaji is seen as a heroic Hindu warrior against Muslims, although he also worked and formed alliances with Mughal rulers.)

Many of these slogans and symbols are not typically used in ordinary Hindu religious practice (on ‘Jai Shree Ram’ as a chant, see Chants during the march) but have arisen in the context of Hindutva militancy and are associated with Hindu nationalist politics. The slogans and symbolism, especially when used systematically or combined, would indicate Hindutva influence or affiliation. Similarly, while the use of Hindu religious iconography and saffron flags is a traditional practice, including in public processions, it has been supplemented with newer iconography, including substantially larger flags and symbols.

Analysing changes in religious iconography, including representations of deities, is standard academic practice across religious studies, South Asian studies and art history. By showing the changes in the representation of some Hindu deities below, we aim to illustrate for readers the significance of changes resulting from Hindutva influence. For example, a traditional representation of the God Ram typically shows him in with Sita, Lakshman and a devoted Hanuman, often in a gentle and familial setting. The representations typically depict great wisdom and moral, ethical and peaceful reign.

From the early 1990s, newer depictions of Ram emerged and tended to show him alone and often on his way to battle. It isn’t unusual to depict Ram alone or even as a warrior figure. What is significant is that it is these depictions that dominated Hindu nationalist representations, rather than those of Ram as a peaceful, moral and ethical figure.

Representations of the God Hanuman have also changed. Traditional depictions of Hanuman typically show his devotion to Ram, his deep wisdom and knowledge, and his physical strength (carrying a mountain, for example). Of importance, including in Leicester, has been the recent proliferation of the ‘angry Hanuman’ flags and stickers. This image of Hanuman was designed in 2015 by Karan Acharya, a graphic artist from Kerala, for a flag of a youth club celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi. His intention was not to create an angry or Hindu nationalist symbol but to represent Hanuman with ‘attitude’. The symbol became widely used across India and is not exclusive to Hindu nationalists. However, it is also used regularly by Hindu nationalist groups, including the violent Bajrang Dal, the youth wing of the RSS’s religious affiliate.<sup>243</sup> The

symbol has come to have several connotations, including militant Hindu nationalism.

Flags depicting 'Jai Shree Ram' have also changed in recent years. Typically, they would have shown Ram, Sita, Laxman and Hanuman together, or depicted Hanuman carrying a mountain. Today, they tend to show Ram alone in front of his grand temple at Ayodhya.

The newer iconography is also typically larger, more abstract, and contains figures such as Shivaji who are of importance for Hindu nationalists.

Of relevance also is the depiction of Bharatmata, the deity representing the motherland. For Hindu nationalists, the motherland is not given by the current borders of India but is a much vaster territory, 'Akhand Bharat', meaning 'whole' or 'undivided India'. The RSS' ideal of 'Akhand Bharat', which is also used by some Leicester activists, covers the territories of multiple countries in South and Southeast Asia, extending all the way to lands possessed by Australia and New Zealand. Typically, 'Akhand Bharat' is seen as 'the dream of every Hindu patriot' and an ideal to which they must pledge their resolve.

In addition to changes in iconography, a further dimension of Hindutva politics in India since 2016 is the proliferation of Hindu nationalism in popular culture, including Indian cinema and popular music. The latter includes the phenomenon of 'Hindutva pop' or 'H-pop'<sup>244</sup> – songs that contain strong Hindu nationalist themes. Some pop songs directly incite anti-Muslim hatred and are played outside mosques or during acts of communal violence in India. A recent example is the popular 2021 dance song 'Bharat Ka Baccha Baccha Jai Shree Ram Bolega' ('Children of the Nation Say the Name of Ram'), written by Sachin Upadhyay and sung by Pooja Golhani. The song links to the movement to inaugurate the Ram temple in Ayodhya over the ruins of the Babri Masjid.

### Hindutva supporters in Leicester

Both RSS-affiliated and non-RSS varieties of Hindutva are important for understanding the 17 September march and subsequent narratives about the Leicester events. In addition to the HSS family listed earlier, Hindutva influences include:

- Insight UK (London, Leicester and elsewhere), the Hindu Community Organisations Group (HCOG)

Figure 44: The God Hanuman, a traditional depiction of divine wisdom, and a recent 'angry Hanuman' representation



Since its formation, the RSS has attempted to displace the religion of Hinduism with Hindutva, a racial political ideology of Hindu supremacy and anti-Muslim, anti-Christian hatred.

Figure 45: 'Jai Shree Ram' flags, older and more recent, the first depicting Hanuman carrying a mountain, the second of Ram against the Ayodhya temple



- The earlier Dharmic Vote campaign in Leicester, and the Dharma Sewa Purvapaksha that worked to support Conservative Party candidates during elections in Leicester and elsewhere, both linked to support from the Overseas Friends of the BJP
- The newer Leicester-based Ramdoot Seva Sangh – a youth organisation emerging in 2024, but reflecting earlier tendencies, and focused on the Daman and Diu communities
- Advocacy for British Hindus and Indians (ABHI), which is currently the Secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Hindus
- Official institutions under BJP governance, including the Indian Government and the Indian High Commission in the UK
- British MPs who have been supporters of the RSS, such as Bob Blackman (Conservative)
- Hindutva-aligned ideological outfits, such as Citti Media and the Global Hindu Federation
- Hindutva activists such as Rashmi Samant and Hindutva supporters such as the researcher Chris Blackburn
- A wide range of social media 'influencers' in India and the UK who are BJP or RSS supporters

In the UK, Hindutva organisations operate in parliament, within political parties, the charity sector, across community and religious groups, and within social media. The extent of organised Hindutva influence in the UK is the outcome of decades of work by the UK branch of the RSS and its affiliates. They have often made use of liberal or left-wing progressive spaces of multiculturalism to promote a far-right, deeply supremacist ideology within British institutions, using the shield of religion as well as claims to represent British Hindus and claims about discrimination.

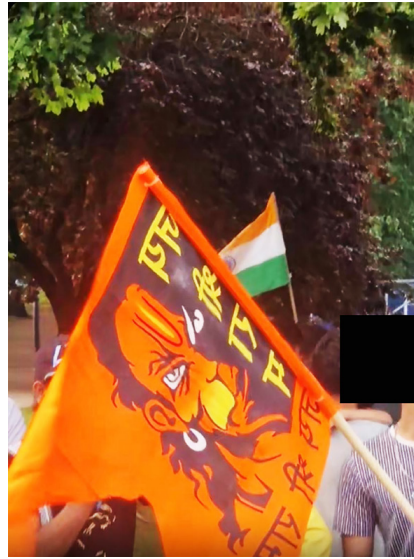
Hindutva-aligned tendencies have received consistent support from ideologically-driven political lobbying organisations, such as the Henry Jackson Society, often seen as close to (Conservative) government activities, and a cluster of media outlets and journalists that included Naomi Canton of the *Times of India*, Nupur Sharma of *Opindia*, much Indian media, such as *Times Now*, *Kreately.com*, *Times Algebra*, *New Arena*, *The Analyser*, and several news anchors on Republic TV, Times Now, Zee News and India TV that circulated an essentially Hindutva-driven version of the Leicester events.<sup>245</sup>

While the above are each different, independent entities, most reproduced a largely uniform understanding of the Leicester events: 'Hindus under attack' from (often 'Pakistani origin') extremist Muslims. This Hindutva narrative around the Leicester events was disseminated with effort and coordination by Insight UK, the Indian RSS, and their supporters, and was frequently amplified by Hindutva-supporting Indian media. Their narrative comprised many of the following claims and ideas:

- Hindus in Leicester are collectively victims of unprovoked attacks and threats from Muslims – an extension of the 'Hindus in danger' idea
- They are under attack from Muslims because they practise Hindu religion

- Muslims are attacking Hindus either because of extremist, political Islamist ideology or because of 'Islam' itself
- Attacks on Hindus in Leicester are sometimes categorised or alluded to as 'terrorism', the aim being to associate Muslims with terrorism
- Attacks on Hindus in Leicester reflect violent attacks on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh, Pakistan or elsewhere by political Islamist groups and movements
- Attacks on Muslims in Leicester or their claims of harassment and intimidation are ignored, minimised or dismissed as fabrications
- If Daman and Diu communities are acknowledged, they are presented as vulnerable, marginalised, blameless, or victims of Muslim aggression
- If the Hindu march of 17 September is acknowledged, it is presented as a 'peace march' or a march resulting from desperation following an extensive period (sometimes claimed to be months) of attacks and intimidation of Hindus by Muslims in Leicester
- Considerable effort is placed on negating, dismissing or minimising the significance of Hindutva ideology or Hindu nationalist politics in Leicester, whether or not it is associated with the RSS
- Objective or critical reporting of the Leicester events is typically characterised as anti-Hindu bias or prejudice ('Hinduphobia'), as is mention of Hindu involvement or Hindutva influence
- Criticism of Hindutva is typically called 'blaming Hindus', deliberately confusing a religion with a narrow, supremacist political ideology
- Opposition to Hindutva narratives or organisations is, similarly, classed as 'Hinduphobia', as is criticism of India or Narendra Modi
- 'India' is used instrumentally such that criticism of Hindutva is seen as anti-Indian (echoing the pejorative 'anti-national' claim often used in India against critics of the RSS, BJP or Narendra Modi)
- While groups claim to represent British 'Hindus and Indians', Indian Muslims and their interests are ignored and 'Indian' is typically equated with 'Hindu'
- The Leicester police are claimed to have acted with anti-Hindu or pro-Muslim sentiments, maltreated Hindus, or consistently failed to protect them from attacks (sometimes this echoes the white supremacist far-right claim about 'two-tier' policing)
- Implicitly or explicitly, anti-Muslim prejudice or hatred emerges in various ways (see below)
- Narratives were often based on disinformation, misinformation, highly selective information, inflammatory claims, and sometimes outright fabrications and defamation of individuals

Figure 46: Changes in iconography



### Hindutva polarisation and division: the role of Insight UK

Insight UK calls itself a 'social movement dedicated to raising awareness, advocating and campaigning

## The central element of Hindutva ideology is that Hindus in India are living in a state of permanent danger and under siege from Muslim minorities.

Figure 47: 'Undivided India', as imagined by contemporary Hindutva



for the causes that concern and impact the British Hindu and Indian communities in the United Kingdom', though it has shown no evidence of working for the interests of Indian Muslims. It says that it conducts 'research studies, surveys, campaigns, seminars, and advocacy initiatives... against anti-Hindu and anti-India hate and propaganda'. It claims to deliver accurate information on issues affecting British Hindus.<sup>246</sup> It is an anonymous organisation that does not list its key figures or provide a postal address, though individuals within it are well-known in Leicester and elsewhere. Insight UK is an unelected Hindutva organisation of which few ordinary Hindus would have heard, yet it claims to represent and speak for British Hindus and Indians. Because of its role during the Leicester events, it is important to understand its political ideology, which is unmistakably Hindutva-based and often indistinguishable from that of the RSS, the VHP and their affiliates.

Insight UK's first significant project (January 2021) claimed that teaching about Hinduism in British schools as part of religious education was inaccurate and was causing bullying and racial hate crime against Hindus. This project had the strong involvement of the UK branch of the RSS and its religious front, the VHP. It similarly criticised the teaching of caste within Hinduism as part of religious education, despite the reality that caste is a central element within most Hindu Vedic and epic period religious texts and, in several ways, in the lives of most Hindus in the UK. This is part of its political agenda to portray Hinduism as a blameless religion of peace. Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism are viewed as 'dharmic' religions indigenous to India, whereas Indian Islam is ignored or seen as an aggressor. Similarly, Insight UK recommends using the HSS's religious wing's texts in British schools and collaborating with the HSS's student organisation.

Insight UK's promotion of Hindutva political ideology is well illustrated by its social media output. In a Twitter/X post sent in March 2025 to the Home Office, the Metropolitan Police Service, Keir Starmer, the major political parties, and the major news outlets in the UK, Insight UK claimed that Hindutva was the expression of Hinduism.

'Hinduism' derives [from] the universal principles, also known as 'Dharma'. Hindutva is its expression in daily life. It is that which is Hindu or 'Hindu-ness' and is the essence of Hindu Dharma.<sup>247</sup>

An accompanying video shows children and adults engaged in ordinary religious practices, while

overlaid text reads 'Hindutva'. Therefore, Insight UK attempts to normalise in the UK a supremacist, racist political ideology by equating it with ordinary Hindus and their religious devotion. In this way, opposition to Hindutva and its supremacism can be called 'anti-Hindu'. These are ideological sleights of hand with which many people in the UK would be unfamiliar, including many Hindus who may be unaware of the history of Hindutva and the RSS.

In defending Hindutva ideology, Insight UK has complained about 'Hindutvaphobia' and 'Hindutvamisia' and the labelling of Hindutva as far-right. It urges British Hindus to replace Hinduism with Hindutva:

Changing the terminology of Hinduism to Hindutva is not only a useful working reminder to question and call out the daily rhetoric, and for Hindus to reclaim the power over their own rhetoric and terminology – but is also the first step in a very important journey towards social, cultural, religious, spiritual and civilisational justice.<sup>248</sup>

A good analogy here would be to urge the changing of 'Britishness' to mean exclusively Christian or white nationalism.

These examples are part of Insight UK's disinformation and dissimulation strategies. Its approaches rely on well-documented forms of far-right disinformation. They include intense victimhood, polarisation, 'asking questions' to make ideological statements, repetition of untruths, mixing facts with ideological claims and untruths, using conspiracy narratives, deflection and whataboutery, and the blending of Hindutva ideology into its narratives.<sup>249</sup> Underlying its approach is a consistent anti-Muslim orientation. Like other far-right outfits, it rapidly applies the label 'hate' to views which contest its ideology.

In 2020, Insight UK focused on what it called 'Muslim grooming gangs', disseminating a video, 'Easy Meat: Britain's Muslim Rape Gangs', that featured the far-right activist Tommy Robinson, and which claimed that 'up to 1 million British children' were victims of 'Muslim rape gangs'. It has organised events with the former NHWS organisation, an RSS-affiliated group focused on the alleged 'grooming' and 'entrapment' of Hindu youth and young children, claiming some to have been sold abroad into sexual slavery.<sup>250</sup> Similarly, Insight UK, the VHP's Hindu Mandir Network and the HSS's National Hindu Students Forum are the three partners of the Hindu Support Network that superseded NHWS. This organisation focuses on what it calls the grooming and religious conversion of Hindu girls and women.<sup>251</sup>

Insight UK promotes the Indian VHP and RSS's 'love jihad' conspiracy theory, which claims that Muslims entice Hindu girls and women into relationships, after which they are converted to Islam and produce Muslim children, the latter seen by Hindutva groups as part of Muslim 'demographic aggression' against Hindus. It campaigned to urge UK cinemas to show or extend their showing of the inflammatory 'love jihad'-based fictional film, *The*

In 2020, Insight UK focused on what it called ‘Muslim grooming gangs’, disseminating a video, ‘Easy Meat: Britain’s Muslim Rape Gangs’, that featured the far-right activist Tommy Robinson, and which claimed that ‘up to 1 million British children’ were victims of ‘Muslim rape gangs’.

*Kerala Story* (2023), claiming that it was a ‘true story’, and linking the film to Muslim ‘grooming gangs and radicalisation’ in the UK.<sup>252</sup> The film, styling itself as factual, claimed 32,000 mostly Hindu women from the state of Kerala had converted to Islam and joined Islamic State (ISIS). However, Kerala police said ‘there are not more than 10-15 women who have got converted and left to join the IS from Kerala since 2016’.<sup>253</sup> Insight UK’s activities are a bridge between the RSS’s ‘love jihad’ ideology and the ‘Muslim rape gangs’ ideas of the white supremacist far-right. In a similar vein, activists associated with Citti Media, who were also involved in parallel disinformation about the Leicester events, have written about what is claimed to be the ‘wholesale grooming of Hindu, Sikh and White young girls’ for over 30 years in the UK.<sup>254</sup>

These examples illustrate how Insight UK’s activities are aligned with the campaigns and priorities of the Indian RSS, VHP and their affiliates, and their key idea that Hindus are besieged, persecuted, in danger, and being converted by Muslims, whether in India or the UK. Insight UK’s political style is shrill, alarmist, and divisive, and its activities are focused on stirring up animosity towards Muslims in the UK using themes that are often indistinguishable from those used by the white supremacist far-right.

### Insight UK and the Leicester Events

Insight UK’s interventions in the Leicester events must be seen in the context of the RSS’s ideology of Hindus living in a state of siege and danger. The key theme of Insight UK and other Hindutva interventions from early September was to promote the view that Hindus in Leicester were being violently besieged by ‘Pakistani Islamist gangs’ and to expunge the view that Hindus could be anything other than innocent victims. Its ‘fact-based’ video about these events is discussed below because it highlights the misinformation and disinformation techniques Insight UK used regarding the Leicester events, which were widely reproduced in the UK and India.

The video imagery and text are accompanied by dramatic music to establish a particular emotional tone. As the video material from the 28 August attack on the Sikh man and the 5 September attack on the Hindu home rolls on, the text states:

On 28th August, Leicester, India cricket fans of all backgrounds celebrated a win over Pakistan. A drunk fan (black t-shirt) needlessly walked over and provoked the Indi fans. One India fan hugged him to de-escalate and calm him down. He then further provoked them by snatching and disrespecting an India flag. This provoked the crowd to react and dress him down. Nothing was said against Islam or Muslims. India fans then came forward to help the drunk man, protecting and helping him. Without evidence, Sunny Hundal and Guz Khan recklessly shared a *cropped* video with baseless claims. Many Pakistanis witnessed the event and blamed the drunk man. Pakistani Islamists then attacked innocent Hindus in September, making it a religious issue. They used slurs like ‘mushriks’ meaning polytheists or idolators. With premeditated knife attacks, a Hindu boy was stabbed and a Hindu flag removed. Misinformation was purposefully being shared to stoke religious tensions. We hope the police hold the right people accountable.<sup>255</sup>

The narrative seeks to establish Hindus as innocent, helpful and blameless. In its discussion of the Sikh man attacked on 28 August, Insight UK depicts him as drunk. However, many India fans were drinking on the streets that night, as reported to us. The mild phrase ‘dress him down’ is a reference to a violent attack. Similarly, the claim that India fans helped the man deliberately misleads the viewer. The man had to go to a café to prevent people from attacking him, several of whom remained waiting for him outside. While Indians or Hindus are portrayed as innocent victims (despite being shown to attack a man violently), this is contrasted with what the video terms masked ‘Pakistani Islamists’. This despite the fact that Insight UK could not have known the national origins of the attackers on the Hindu home on 5 September, nor of those who were roaming the streets those nights. The large majority would likely have been Indian-origin Gujaratis. Similarly, the video does not mention the May or early September attacks on Muslim men or other related incidents, since these would distract from its overriding ideology that ‘Islamists’ are solely motivated by their religion to attack Hindus solely *because* they are Hindus. Insight UK aims to remove from consideration the possibility that Hindu nationalist ideology

or animosity towards Muslims had any part to play in the events in Leicester, something it would be keen to do as it adheres to this ideology.

Along similar lines, in late September 2022, a few Hindu groups supported by Insight UK held a protest outside *The Guardian's* London office, with placards stating 'Hindu Lives Matter', 'Stop Spreading Fake News' and 'Stop demonising Hindus'. Insight UK said

British Hindu & Indian communities protest outside @guardian offices in London for its continued anti-hindu & anti-india bias. The Guardian has been pedaling its #Hinduphobia narrative for many years now. #EnoughIsEnough<sup>256</sup>

A press release about the protest stated that it was taking place because of 'Hindu hate-filled' articles in the newspaper. *The Guardian* had published articles that had discussed the possible role of Hindutva extremism in the Leicester violence, but none of which, to our knowledge, demonised or blamed Hindus.<sup>257</sup>

One of the first tweets by Insight UK related to the Leicester events was posted on 8 September, a day after the period of violence on 5-7 September:

FACT CHECK: Leicester Violence. Targeted attacks on #Hindus in Leicester. Let's look at the facts and how religious tensions were incited. @LPCityCentre, the safety of #BritishHindus must be ensured & hope you hold those who incited religious hate accountable. #HindusUnderAttack<sup>258</sup>

The ideological aim of the hashtag #HindusUnderAttack is to link the situation of Hindu minorities

elsewhere with the UK and promote the idea of Muslims globally attacking and persecuting Hindus.

One aim of this narrative in the UK is to get 'Hinduphobia' recognised in hate crime law and policy. An important reason that Insight UK wishes to have 'Hinduphobia' recognised officially is that its ideas of anti-Hindu hate are very broad. They include criticism of Hindutva, the RSS, the Modi government, caste, and representations of Hinduism or India that do not align with supremacist Hindutva ideology. Inherent to Insight UK's disinformation strategy is to castigate critics as 'anti-Hindu', 'Hinduphobic' and motivated by 'hate' against Hindus. Practising and devout Hindus who are critical of Hindutva are claimed to be 'anti-Hindu' or 'anti-India', the latter paralleling the RSS's characterisation of its critics, or Modi critics, as 'anti-national'.

Recorded hate crimes against Hindus in the UK thankfully remain low, constituting about 193 recorded (2 per cent) of religious hate crimes in 2023/24 in comparison with over 3,000 for Jewish people and over 3,800 for Muslims.<sup>259</sup>

Insight UK characterised the Leicester events in conspiratorial, communal tones:

A dangerous plot. This is not a Hindu-Muslim clash, this is an outright attack on Hindus by #Islamists. And then they play the victim! Their hate is clear to see. This has always been the case of Islamist hate and not being able to accept non-Muslims, particularly #Hindus<sup>260</sup>

Insight UK claimed that the Hindu community had been 'a target of organised violence in Leicester' and 'had suffered at the hands of extremist Muslims' who had planned to 'terrorise the Hindu community'.<sup>261</sup> By comparison, it characterised the

Table 1: Religious hate crimes in England and Wales recorded by the police, by perceived religion<sup>258</sup>

Perceived religion of the victim	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	% change 2022/23 to 2023/24	Proportion of religious hate crimes 2023/24 (%)	Religious hate crimes rate per 10,000 population 2023/24
Buddhist	36	19	20	—	0	1
Christian	701	628	702	12	7	0
Hindu	161	288	193	-33	2	2
Jewish	1,919	1,543	3,282	113	33	121
Muslim	3,459	3,432	3,866	13	38	10
Sikh	301	302	216	-28	2	4
Other	403	459	503	10	5	14
No religion	209	178	196	10	2	0
Unknown	1,426	1,509	1,382	-8	14	[u]
Other	423	499	428	—	—	—
Total	8,730	8,370	10,484	25	—	—

**Insight UK's activities are aligned with the campaigns and priorities of the Indian RSS, VHP and their affiliates, and their key idea that Hindus are besieged, persecuted, in danger, and being converted by Muslims, whether in India or the UK.**

Hindu march as a 'peaceful protest' against attacks on Hindus by (Pakistani) Muslims.

This peaceful protest march in Leicester was attacked by violent Islamists. Hindus are not even allowed to protest against the violence inflicted on them. Welcome to Pakistan. Is this the new UK @UKHomeSecretary? Find the culprits and deport them. #HindusUnderAttackInUK<sup>262</sup>

The accompanying video to the tweet shows many hooded and masked Hindus marching down Green Lane Road as an illustration of 'peace'. It similarly claimed that:

A peace march was organised by Hindus to show solidarity and support for the Hindu victims. Leicester Police were informed and were present at the march. No chants were raised against Islam or Muslims during the march.<sup>263</sup>

While referring to several hundred Hindus 'marching' into Green Lane Road while chanting 'Jai Shree Ram' as 'peaceful', some Muslims praying during their counter-mobilisation are referred to as 'Muslim extremists block a road and start praying on the road as a sign of territorial right'.<sup>264</sup> Muslims praying in the street is seen by Insight UK as a provocation in a 'Hindu-dominant' area, but Hindus shouting 'Jai Shree Ram' and marching into an area with a significant Muslim population is claimed to be peaceful. Some Hindutva-aligned community figures in Leicester claimed to us that the strategic aim of (especially Pakistani) Muslims was to take over the city, the goal being to turn Leicester into something like an 'Islamic state', by moving residentially into 'other' areas, turning buildings into mosques and madrassahs, and dominating local politics. Insight UK echoes this conspiracy narrative.

Though Insight UK frequently complains about fake news and lies, its communications illustrate its use of inflammatory, misleading and divisive statements. For example, it associates the Shivalaya Mandir incident in the evening of 17 September with Pakistan and the narrative of Hindu persecution:

Hindu flag pulled down and desecrated in front of @leicspolice and then burnt. Hindu hatred is the start of Hindu persecution. Is this UK or Pakistan? #HindusUnderAttackInUK<sup>265</sup>

Similarly, a key target for Insight UK is the BBC, *The Guardian*, and liberal or independent news sources.

BBC caught in its own web of lies The BBC, which has maliciously targeted India and Hindus by building a false narrative that Muslims, the second majority of people in India are 'unsafe'. But the very same BBC sent a Muslim reporter, Samira Hussain, to cover the Maha Kumbh Mela festival in India amidst millions of Hindus! Dear BBC, care to explain? Will the BBC respond?<sup>266</sup>

These are unmistakable disinformation strategies, and their aim is communal polarisation. Therefore, Hindus in the UK are characterised as a model minority that is well educated, earns comparatively high incomes, tends to be in highly-skilled professions, with a low presence in British prisons.

British Hindus contribute, co-exist and cooperate.

1. Hindus hold the most degrees
2. Hindus earn well
3. Hindus have the least number of people in prisons
4. Over 41% of Hindus work in a high-skilled occupation

#Hindus are an asset to #Britain<sup>267</sup>

Hindus make up the lowest number of prisoners in England and Wales. Facts don't lie. Ministry of Justice: Prison numbers. Hindus co-operate, co-exist and contribute. #EnoughIsEnough #HindusUnderAttackInUK<sup>268</sup>

Leaving aside how Insight UK characterises 'Hindu success', the aim of such narratives is not simply to show Hindus in a good light, but to portray Muslims negatively.

The polarisation strategy also applies to characterising Hindus and their activities as peaceful or well-meaning, whereas similar activities undertaken by Muslims or their supporters are portrayed as malicious and malign. For example, politicians in constituencies with significant Muslim populations are claimed by Insight UK to be cultivating 'vote banks',<sup>269</sup> whereas its launching of a 'Hindu

Manifesto' for the 2024 UK General Elections that reflects 'the key aspirations of the UK Hindu community', or its support for Bob Blackman MP, is not.<sup>270</sup> India fans violently attacking a man are rendered as conciliatory and friendly; snatching an India flag is claimed to be a 'desecration' (as if a national flag is a sacred religious object). Muslims, named as Islamists, are claimed to be spreading fake news, false narratives and lies, whereas its smears (see below) are construed as 'facts'.

Following the 5 September attack on a Hindu family and their home, several tweets appeared of the following kind:

Commander for the East #Leicester Police is Inspector Yakub Ismail, Do I need to say More #LeicesterHinduProgram #HindusUnderAttackInUK<sup>271</sup>

The reference to 'Inspector Yakub Ismail' is significant in illustrating a deeply communal anti-Muslim theme in many Hindutva-aligned interventions regarding the Leicester events. In providing names associated with Muslim traditions, as if this is explanatory, a divisive communalism is propagated. Similarly, some tweets would show images of bearded or hijab-wearing Muslim figures.

Insight UK used the same communal strategy: blaming Muslims or Islam, by giving names that come from Muslim traditions. Thus, a police officer involved in incidents related to Hindus has his name repeatedly mentioned across many tweets, as if his religion (indicated by his name) is explanatory of alleged 'anti-Hindu' sentiments.

Disruption of Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations in Leicester with the use of excessive force by officer Adam Ahmed of Leicestershire Police. We condemn the actions of the officer and believe that the actions by Mr Ahmed were uncalled for. Interestingly, Officer Ahmed was the same Policeman that created controversy outside the Prajapati hall on 23rd July 2023. @leicslive @leicspolice @BBCLeicester #Leicester #HindusUnderAttack #Hindus #GaneshChaturthi (posted 19 September 2023)<sup>272</sup>

It said that 'the Policeman with a history of using excessive, unreasonable force at previous Hindu events was seen again doing the same at this

**The polarisation strategy also applies to characterising Hindus and their activities as peaceful or well-meaning, whereas similar activities undertaken by Muslims or their supporters are portrayed as malicious and malign.**

event'.<sup>273</sup> The accusation in the tweets, disguised as a question and manifest in the hashtags used, was that the police officer, because he was a Muslim, was deliberately targeting Hindus and preventing them from practising their religion.

During the small procession leaving the Shivlaya mandir on the evening of 18 September 2023, a community figure taking part was pushed to the ground and suffered a serious injury to his eye. He told us:

I remember vividly the atmosphere surrounding the Ganesh Chaturthi procession in 2023 and the wider community's concerns. There was a lot of nervousness, especially at the temple. Many of us felt confused and the inspector escalated everything. What I went through, I made sure the Somali officer was never around Hindu events. I still suffer damage to my eye due to the incident. He tackled me to the ground unprovoked; I could not breathe.

This episode resulted in injury from the alleged use of excessive force by a police officer. It also involved the shoving and pushing of the priest of the Shivlaya temple. A then local MP described the police intervention as 'chaotic and insensitive' and 'heavy-handed'.<sup>274</sup> Some of those directly involved in the incident did not see it in communal terms. The Independent Office of Police Conduct later said that the police officer was trying to ascertain whether necessary permission had been obtained for the procession in which he intervened. It found no reason for disciplinary action in response to the officer's behaviour and said, 'there was no evidence to indicate the officer's actions were due to any religious differences'.<sup>275</sup> But the incident was deliberately communalised by the RSS and BJP-supporting Indian media, such as *OpIndia*,<sup>276</sup> amplifying Insight UK's divisiveness. A petition calling for the officer's suspension was signed by over 8,000 people (most with Hindu names), with many messages decrying 'Hinduphobia' and pointing to the officer being a Muslim.<sup>277</sup>

The reference by Insight UK to July 2023 concerns an altercation between some attendees and the same police officer at an overcrowded event at the Prajapati Hall in Leicester. A figure from India, Dharendra Shastri, was speaking at the event. The overcrowding and crushing of people were causing a significant hazard<sup>278</sup> and this danger was the reason police were called. Using language that is allusive rather than explicit, but whose meaning is clear, Insight UK attempted to communalise that incident. Indeed, the altercation was widely communalised on social media by Hindutva supporters in the UK:

Crowds of Devotees in leicester coming for Dharshan and to listen to Ram Katha by Pandit Dharendra Krishna Shastri of @bageshwardham at Prajapati hall this morning. First they had to brave the heavy rains, then manhandled and beaten by an M police officer There was poor management and not enough police. Was this

deliberately done ? That Hinduphobic police officer needs to be suspended and criminal charges brought against him! Leicestershire police have shown over and over again, how Hindu phobic they are! What was the need for such aggression?! We all know the reason!<sup>279</sup>

Insight UK’s selective, communal and divisive characterisation of the Leicester events was mentioned to us several times by individuals in Leicester, including Hindu and Muslim religious and community figures who disputed Insight UK’s interpretations and opposed its interventions. Some figures considered Insight UK to be a marginal organisation in the city with little grassroots influence. Other Hindu religious figures asked us to ignore Insight UK as ‘irrelevant’ and not reflective of diverse Hindu opinion in the city. Many respondents reflected on its divisive role in the community.

**Insight UK and this Inquiry**

Insight UK’s activism around our Inquiry is worth elaborating on since it further demonstrates its ideological agenda. Adam Habib is the Vice Chancellor of SOAS, the university where this Inquiry was housed, though Habib is not involved in the Inquiry himself. Insight UK referred to the Vice Chancellor as ‘Adam Mahomed Habib’ to ensure an anti-Muslim message was clear to its supporters. Insight UK further claimed that Habib was banned from entering the US for ‘associations with terrorism and racism’. Like many academics at the time, Habib was, for a while, denied entry to the US for his criticism of the US invasion of Iraq. (Narendra Modi, who Insight UK seems to venerate, was denied entry to the US and many European countries for his complicity in the 2002 anti-minority pogroms in Gujarat when he was Chief Minister of that state.) Insight UK also regularly smeared SOAS, a world-renowned university and part of the University of London. Hindutva-supporting media in India amplified these attacks.<sup>280</sup>



In September 2023, Insight UK claimed that our Inquiry panel members, several of whom are Hindu, were ‘anti-Hindu’ and ‘anti-India’.<sup>281</sup> Hindus constitute the largest group in our combined team of panel, researchers and advisors. Insight UK offered no evidence of anyone making an anti-Hindu statement on the Inquiry panel, though it demonstrated that some panel members had criticised the RSS, the ideology of Hindutva, and human rights violations during Narendra Modi’s period as Chief Minister of Gujarat or as Prime Minister of India. Insight UK also pointed to associations with Muslim organisations as evidence of being ‘anti-Hindu’. In an article on its website, Insight UK went to unusual lengths to claim that we had made false statements against the RSS:

False statements against the RSS: <https://youtu.be/hz20NnzRANs?t=619>

Attempting to link an RSS gathering with Italy or Germany in the 1930s.

Figure 48: Examples of disinformation and defamation by Insight UK regarding the Independent Inquiry, 2023-2024




**Panellist: Juan E Méndez**

Juan E Méndez has previously conducted substantial research on apparent violence against Muslims but never against Hindus. Méndez has called for the UN to demand India to protect its religious minorities but never to neighbouring nations like Pakistan and Bangladesh.



Both countries have a long history of persecuting their minorities. Pakistani and Bangladeshi Hindus have all but been annihilated after being systematically killed, raped, kidnapped or forcefully converted for decades.



**Panellist: Chetan Bhatt**

Chetan Bhatt is a Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics (LSE) and came under scrutiny for an article published in The Guardian in which he blamed Hindus for the Leicester violence.



Chetan Bhatt has already compromised the inquiry by making various false statements against the RSS in India and Hindus in general.

**Panellist: Subir Sinha**

Subir Sinha, a Reader in Development Studies at SOAS, has been known to draw comparisons between Hindu-ness and Nazis. Also, he is a motivated critic of Hindus, Hinduism and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and is therefore already compromised.

Malicious Tweets by Subir Sinha on drawing comparisons between Hindu-ness and Nazis Subir Sinha.





**Panellist: Suresh Grover**

Suresh Grover was interviewed alongside one of the Leicester violence instigators, Majid Freeman and attributed blame to Hindus and the RSS for the violence.


Suresh Grover appeared on a platform with the UK Indian Muslim Council (UKIMC) and has clearly shown his anti-Hindu and anti-India bias. He may try to smear Leicester Hindus with the same paint to try and malign them.

Suresh Grover had already blamed Hindus without any evidence.



**Funding**

The SOAS inquiry is being funded with a £620K grant from the Open Society Foundations. The Open Society Foundations is a grant-making network founded by none other than George Soros, an openly anti-India and anti-Hindu business magnate.



Falsely claiming that a member of the RSS shot Gandhi, he was not a member and had left the RSS due to disagreements.

Falsely claiming that the RSS conducts large-scale mass violence against minorities.

Falsely claiming that the RSS think they are the original Aryan race. RSS does not claim anywhere that they are the original Aryan race, in fact, they do not believe in the Aryan invasion theory.

Conflating the RSS with Salafi Jihadis who are armed and conduct terrorist activities worldwide, whilst the RSS have members of all religions.<sup>282</sup>

Why would an organisation claiming to represent UK Hindu opinion defend the Indian RSS in such detail? The RSS is an organisation whose founders did indeed form associations with groups in Fascist Italy, celebrate the virtues of Nazi Germany and Adolph Hitler, derive inspiration from Fascism and National Socialism, and claimed Hindus were indigenous to India (Aryans).<sup>283</sup> One of its members did kill Mohandas K Gandhi,<sup>284</sup> and the RSS or its affiliates have been involved in most large-scale acts of anti-minority violence in India since Independence<sup>285</sup> – among much else that is true about the RSS and its affiliates that Insight UK wants to deny.

Insight UK also engaged in serious defamation acts against panel members of this Inquiry by claiming they were associated with terrorism or motivated by ‘hate’ of Hindus. These accusations are subject to legal investigation at the time of writing. The Open Society Foundations funded the Inquiry, though it did not influence its research, findings, recommendations or methods of working. But, like the far-right globally, Insight UK used the figure of George Soros, claiming he is ‘anti-Hindu’ or ‘anti-India’, to smear the Inquiry.<sup>286</sup> This view was amplified by journalists like Naomi Canton, who said that Soros was funding NGOs to bring down the government of India.<sup>287</sup> Authoritarian populist and far-right movements often portray Soros as a malign mastermind working against various governments, an idea often based on antisemitic thinking.

Insight UK’s campaign to boycott this Inquiry was supported by the Leicester Hindu Community Organisations Group UK (HCOG), which said that ‘serious doubts have been cast on the credibility and impartiality of the SOAS inquiry due to the funding and people involved in the inquiry’, and so it ‘strongly urges Hindus not to participate’.<sup>288</sup> Insight UK’s campaign was sustained, continuing during most of the work period of this Inquiry during 2023-2024.

Any organisation has the right to boycott this Inquiry and to persuade others to do the same. Some Muslim organisations in Leicester called for the boycott of the UK Government’s review of the Leicester events. However, we have not previously experienced such a sustained disinformation campaign by any ideological group aimed at preventing and disrupting academic research by UK universities.

For example, in addition to the call to boycott this Inquiry, Insight UK tried to prevent local Hindus from engaging with it. It regularly put out false social media messages, based on spurious information it could not have had, that attempted to cast doubt on or smear Inquiry members or researchers in Leicester (almost all of whom happened to be Hindu). Naming – and therefore targeting – young (Hindu) researchers also puts them at potential risk of harm in the field, which is, in our view, an irresponsible act.

Because of the disinformation generated about this Inquiry, various other incidents occurred. Our successful open meetings held at Belgrave Neighbourhood Centre in May 2024 were followed by anonymous complaints, leading the centre to refuse to honour bookings for similar events in June. Our door-to-door leafletting campaigns in the Belgrave area received anonymous complaints and social media messages urging Hindus not to participate, as did our English- and Gujarati-language survey. Public events we had organised were subject to complaints made to venues – for example, a venue was told that a press conference we organised in September 2023 was being held a day before the start of Ganesh Chaturthi. This was claimed, absurdly, to be ‘offensive’ to Hindus and therefore the event shouldn’t be allowed to proceed.

The excessive lengths to which Insight UK and its supporters went to try and prevent Hindus in Leicester from engaging with this Inquiry made us consider why Insight UK went to such great lengths to try to prevent Hindus in Leicester from talking to us. We also considered carefully what Hindus might have said to us about the events in Leicester, including those on 17 September, which might have been significant for Insight UK and its Leicester associates.

### The amplification of Hindutva communalism

Following the 17 September violence, a meeting was held with the Indian Consulate from Birmingham, Baroness Verma, a few youths from the Daman and Diu community, Leicester community leaders, and Insight UK representatives. We were told that some participants were concerned that Insight UK was defending the march, using the event to promote its ‘Hinduphobia’ narrative, in which Hindus were simply victims, and pushing further disinformation. In September, the Secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus (APPG Hindus) produced a policy brief titled ‘Alarming Rise in Hinduphobia: Hindu Community Lives at Serious Risk in Leicester’. The Secretariat for APPG Hindus is held by Advocacy for British Hindus and Indians UK (ABHI UK). Like Insight UK, this group claims to represent the interests of ‘Hindus and Indians’ in Britain. The policy brief claimed that:

On the evening of 17 September, a peaceful protest march by Hindu youths was attacked by radical Islamists with stones and glass bottles. It is obvious from the video footage that

this attack was carefully planned to terrorise the Hindu community. Included within the attacks are the Diu-Daman Hindus, a small and marginalised group who are based in the Belgrave and Latimer areas and face various socioeconomic challenges. This growing hate crime against the Hindu community is not an isolated issue in Leicester and is unfortunately happening across the UK. Unfortunately, the Hindu community is not being adequately protected from radical hate crime.<sup>289</sup>

The highly provocative 17 September march by 300 or so young masked Hindus to an area seen as Muslim is here distorted into its opposite: a well-planned hate crime against Hindus by ‘radical Islamists’. The narrative is the same as that of Insight UK, based on a wilful distortion of the events of 17 September. It illustrates how narratives created by Hindutva organisations like Insight UK, supported by MPs like Bob Blackman, and legitimised by organisations like the Henry Jackson Society (HJS is a right-wing UK think tank), allow supremacist ideologies to enter parliamentary and policy spaces in the UK. HJS was a motivated political actor regarding interpretations of the Leicester violence, and its narrative paralleled that of Insight UK.

Both Insight UK and the HJS have an interest in generating a narrative that presents what they call ‘Islamists’ as aggressors against other communities they want to portray as blameless and peaceful. The HJS’s Charlotte Littlewood’s report in early November 2022 claimed that Hindu families were leaving Leicester due to fear of being attacked. Littlewood stated that ‘an organised gang of Islamists’, supported by Islamist influencers, were responsible for the tensions in Leicester and Birmingham and had also ‘targeted’ the Indian High Commission in London.<sup>290</sup> The HJS dismissed claims of Hindutva involvement in the Leicester violence. It said that a minor community-cohesion issue had been falsely used to promote a narrative of Hindutva extremism that had put the Hindu community at risk of hate, vandalism and assault, with some Hindus imposing self-curfews, relocating, or avoiding work due to safety concerns.<sup>291</sup> Littlewood was also a guest on many of the pro-BJP, pro-Hindutva media outlets mentioned earlier. Among local community figures who spoke to us, Insight UK was seen as collaborating with HJS, and both were criticised for worsening Hindu-Muslim relations in Leicester. Because some Hindu community figures accepted HJS’s narrative, dialogue across communities became more difficult and undermined community reconciliation efforts).

Hindutva-led communal divisiveness manifested in various ways. Around 23 September, many MPs received emails titled ‘Hate Crimes Against the Hindu Community’ that presented a narrative very similar to that developed by Insight UK, often using the same claims and form of wording as used by the APPG Hindus and Insight UK.

So this [email I received] is titled Hate Crimes Against the Hindu community. Alarming rise in

Hinduphobia... It says: ‘I’m appalled and deeply angered by the recent violent and aggressive attacks on the Hindu community, which has continued to... threaten the security of our community and deeply alarmed by the rise in Hinduphobia in the UK and the increase in hate crimes against the Hindu community... The Hindu community has been a target of organised violence in Leicester over the past 20 days. It has suffered at the hands of extremist Muslims who sought to cause deliberate harm, disruption and fear’... So I can only think that the coordination of the letter was by the Secretariat of the All Party Parliamentary Group for British Hindus.

Emails by UK RSS figures and others were also sent to a then MP, accusing them of being ‘anti-Hindu’ and ‘anti-Indian’. The polarising interventions of Insight UK, Citti Media, the Hindu Community Organisations Group and the HJS illustrated well the significance of divisiveness. Communalism itself led to the violence in the first place. Their selective contributions do not help the residents of Leicester work towards securing future peaceful relations between groups and communities; yet they do fuel division, polarisation and hatred.

### **Wider Hindutva influences in Leicester**

Aside from the influences already mentioned, we want to outline some further Hindutva nationalist influences at grassroots level in Leicester. They are illustrated through groups or events, including small groups of Daman and Diu youth. Most of the events discussed below occurred after the 17 September march, but they are important indicators of Hindutva beliefs among some groups in Leicester. During the Inquiry, we spoke to a few Hindus who expressly articulated Hindutva ideology. Only a few community figures expressed these views, and explicit reference to Hindutva ideology was rare outside a few meetings.

Most Hindus with whom we engaged, including from the Daman and Diu communities, tended to be unaware of Hindutva or its representative organisations in the UK, and didn’t express animosity towards other religious groups. On the contrary, as our survey also illustrated, many Hindus blamed the breakdown in community relations on misunderstandings, lack of education about different religions, and the impact of international or South Asian politics, while some blamed extremists in Muslim communities. Some said recent migration from India had created tensions because of allegedly more militant views among recent arrivals from Daman and Diu. Nevertheless, there is clear evidence of Hindutva ideologies and influences at various community levels in Leicester, including among community activists and grassroots members.

### **Radical and militant preachers**

Above, we mentioned the organised targeting of a Muslim police officer that included allegations about

his behaviour during Ganesh Chaturthi in September 2023 and his alleged role in an altercation outside an event held at Prajapati Hall in Leicester in July 2023. While unrelated to the altercation, it is important to consider further the preacher who was hosted to speak in Leicester from 22-28 July 2023.

Dhirendra Shastri is the head priest (*mahant*) of the Bageshwar Dham temple, dedicated to the deity Hanuman and located in the Chhatarpur area of Madhya Pradesh, India. He is often called 'Bageshwar Dham Sarkar' or 'Bageshwar Dham Baba'. Shastri, in his late 20s, is popular in India and the Indian diaspora. It is claimed about him 'that he has divine powers and that he can heal the sick, cure people possessed by ghosts and help people tide over business and financial problems'<sup>292</sup>, claims that are fraudulent and deceptive, as stated by Indian anti-superstition and rationalist groups.

Shastri is known for his *Ram kathas*, extended narrations, interpretations, and moral lessons derived from the story of the deity Ram, based on Valmiki's *Ramayana* or Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*. *Ram kathas* can last for many hours or even days. In the UK, the pattern of popular preachers from India conducting *Ram kathas* goes back many decades and is common.

Dhirendra Shastri has incited hatred and violence against Muslims in India, including calling for homes to be bulldozed in reference to Muslims. He has called on Hindus to 'wake up' and arm themselves. He has conducted 'Hindu Rashtra' tours across India, calling for a 'Hindu nation' that will unite Hindus 'into one'.<sup>293</sup> He has called on Hindus to procreate more for the 'Hindu nation'.<sup>294</sup> He has recently initiated a 'Hindu village' in Madhya Pradesh for a thousand Hindu families. The village is intended to be the nucleus of a Hindu nation and forbids entry to non-Hindus.<sup>295</sup> Outside the Leicester event, he proclaimed, 'Hindu Rastra ke Jai!' (Victory to the Hindu nation!), and called on his hundreds of supporters gathered outside to 'stay awake'.<sup>296</sup> These statements were greeted with cheers from many supporters. It is essential to recognise the significance of this event: an extremist preacher from India was calling for a Hindu nation-state, the core of Hindutva ideology, in public in Leicester to hundreds of his followers.

Despite this background of extremism and allegations of fraud, Leicestershire Police awarded Shastri an 'NPA [Neighbourhood Policing Area] Commanders Award for Recognition of Service' on 27 July 2023, an action that was widely publicised in the UK and India and seen by some as an endorsement of his extremism.<sup>297</sup> No Hindutva organisations in the UK, including Insight UK, mentioned his extremism – their focus remained on the actions of a Muslim police officer outside the overcrowded event.

On September 20, a few days after the Leicester violence, a protest occurred outside the Durga Bhawan Temple in Birmingham. The demonstration was organised because Sadhvi Ritambara, the founder of the VHP's women's wing, was invited to speak there. She was a central figure in the Hindutva movement during the 1980s and 1990s to

Figure 49: Protest outside Durga Bhawan temple in Smethwick, 20 September 2022<sup>297</sup>



## As about 200 Muslim protestors gathered outside, Muslim, Sikh and Christian religious figures stood in solidarity with Hindu temple officials inside the temple during the protest as part of an interfaith network calling for peace and continuing dialogue.

destroy the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya, and she frequently exhorted her supporters to destroy the mosque. That period of heightened communal violence across much of India led to over 2,000 deaths. Ritambara was the most important figure in that period in inciting extreme levels of violence and hatred against Muslims and Christians. Her speeches calling for violence were militant, visceral and frequently led to anti-minority riots. She was arrested and charged at various times for her role in inciting communal violence and in the destruction of the mosque. While in recent years she has withdrawn from direct political activity, her legacy is one of leading and inciting extreme levels of hatred and violence in India.

Importantly, the Durga Bhawan temple said it was unaware of this legacy and withdrew the invitation after its history was reported to them. Significantly, as about 200 Muslim protestors gathered outside, Muslim, Sikh and Christian religious figures stood 'in solidarity' with Hindu temple officials inside the temple during the protest, the latter as part of an interfaith network in Sandwell, Birmingham, calling for peace and continuing dialogue.<sup>298 299</sup>

However, some protestors outside the temple engaged in explicit anti-Hindu abuse, verbal threats, and derogatory gestures.<sup>300</sup> Police intervened when protestors tried to breach the temple's gates, with some individuals wearing balaclavas and chanting 'Allahu Akbar'.<sup>301</sup> Fireworks and missiles were also thrown at police officers. This event, together with the Shivalaya temple flag incident on 17 September, created great insecurity among many Hindu groups and fed the narrative of a broader anti-Hindu sentiment that Hindutva groups quickly magnified (Interview XDP). Furthermore, the protestors falsely called the temple the 'Durga BJP/RSS Centre', confusing a Hindu temple with Hindutva ideology. Similar protests were also planned in Nottingham and Coventry.<sup>302</sup>

### Ayodhya temple inauguration events

On 22 January 2024, Narendra Modi inaugurated a massive new Ram temple on the site of the destroyed Babri mosque in Ayodhya. The temple's consecration (*pran pratishtha*) and inauguration were widely celebrated across India and the

diaspora. For Hindu nationalists, the event was the victorious culmination of a campaign they had started in the 1980s to destroy the Babri Masjid and build a temple at what they claimed to be the birthplace of Ram.

In Leicester, there were celebrations of the inauguration at various temples. About a week before these events, another ceremony, an *akshata kalash puja*, was held at various temples in the UK, including Leicester. '*Akshata kalash*' is a sacred consecrated symbol representing the deity, typically a metal pot containing whole rice or water. The pot, its shape, and the rice each have important religious significance and meaning for devotees. The travelling of the *akshata kalash* to various temples in the UK, together with the associated prayer ceremonies, were seen as part of the broader festival linked to the temple consecration (Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Mandir Pranpratishthapana Mahotsav). The ceremonies included the travelling of the *kalash* (pot) from Ayodhya to several temples and sites in the UK, symbolising the deity's journey to those temples that allowed devotees to view the *kalash*, offer prayers, and receive divine blessings.

In a ceremony held at a temple in Leicester on 13 January 2024, at which around a hundred or so devotees were present, representatives who had arrived with the *kalash* said during a speech:

The welcome you gave to us and to the Kalash was very good. You did a very good job. Jai Shree Ram Jai Shree Ram. First of all, I will start with a bhajan for Shree Ram. A small... I will only speak four lines [of the bhajan, Ragupati Raghava Raja Ram]: 'Praise King Ram, Lord of the Raghu dynasty. Praise Sita Ram, who purifies even the sinners. Beautiful in form, dark like a rain filled cloud. Radiant and loving, he is worshipped with Ganga water and tulsi plant. The beloved son of Janak. Victory to you of the Raghu dynasty. Praise King Ram, Lord of the Raghu dynasty. Praise Sita Ram, who purify even the sinners.' *Many people don't know the correct version of this bhajan. Some people have sung a very wrong version. It is very important that you learn the correct version and also teach that to your children too... 22 January is a very big festival for us. We have waited for this temple*

for 500 years. When will the temple be constructed? Will it ever even be made? We used to have such questions. But to make so many karsevaks, swayamsevaks, Rashtriya Swayamsevaks, Hindus, who have given sacrifice of their lives, we are so fortunate that we can see the temple being constructed. So you must go and... Jai Shree Ram. (emphases added) <sup>303</sup>

The significance of this statement is its political nature, including the explicit reference to the VHP and RSS's campaign to destroy the mosque, but also a critical reference to Mohandas K Gandhi, who had slightly altered the words of a devotional hymn to include a reference to Allah and thus to Hindu-Muslim unity. At the same event, another speaker used the words: 'We have won this round. Yeh [referring to Ayodhya] *toh bas jhanki hai, Kashi, Mathura baaki hai!*'.<sup>304</sup> The slogan was also shouted in public during the arrival of the *kalash* at the temple.<sup>305</sup> This is an inflammatory Hindutva slogan which states that Ayodhya now has a completed temple and that Kashi and Mathura are next. In India, this slogan has often been used in Hindutva processions and demonstrations, including ones with sword- and gun-wielding groups gathered outside mosques. Human rights organisations have cited this among other slogans in the Hindutva targeting of Muslim groups and sites in India.

The Kashi Viswanath temple – Gyanvapi Mosque dispute in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, concerns Hindu nationalist demands that the mosque be destroyed and the Kashi Viswanath temple complex be extended with a new temple. The Krishna Janmabhoomi – Shahi Idgah dispute in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh, concerns the Hindu nationalist demand that the Shahi Idgah was built on the site of the God Krishna's birthplace and must therefore be destroyed and replaced with a temple. Alongside the Ram temple at Ayodhya, the Kashi and Mathura disputes have been the focus of much Hindutva agitation. They are part of a view promoted by the RSS, VHP and their affiliates that there are thousands of medieval Muslim sites in India, including the Taj Mahal, that were formerly Hindu temples or monuments, and those Muslim sites must now be destroyed and replaced.

In addition to the Akshata Kalash puja events in Leicester, several Leicester temples also organised celebration events for the inauguration of the Ram temple on 22 January 2024 by Narendra Modi. We are not suggesting that temples should not have organised the *akshata kalash puja* and the Ram temple inauguration celebrations, just as they might have done for the opening of other temples in India that would be important for diaspora populations. However, we want to highlight their significance for community relations in Leicester and the UK. For many devotees, the *akshata kalash puja* and Ram temple events represented an apolitical religious celebration and the expression of devotion to their God. For others, including many Muslims in Leicester, exactly the same events would have represented celebrating the destruction of a mosque following a long and violent anti-Muslim

campaign in India, that led to the deaths of thousands. Some respondents mentioned resulting underlying tensions in everyday life:

It was in a restaurant and it was the same week as the Ayodhya temple opening... So we were all sitting there and [the Ayodhya temple] was the elephant in the room because the Hindus and Muslims had very different ideas about that. The Hindus on one level were feeling, 'Finally, there's a temple in Ayodhya', which there should rightly be. [But] then there's also so much bloodshed in that area, against the Hindus as well as against the Muslims. So that was really the elephant in the room.

Like other events that we consider below, the temple inauguration had dual, deep, and directly conflicting meanings for different people living within the same community. Such events, which reflect sharp, ongoing conflicts and tensions in South Asia, represent a significant challenge to maintaining and developing good relationships within and between UK South Asian communities. Similarly, the sharply contested meanings of the Ram events illustrate how communal events in India can directly affect relations between people in the UK.

Hindutva slogans were present in public in Leicester, not only during *akshata kalash puja* events but also during public processions linked to the temple inauguration, Ram's birthday (Ram Navami), and other Ram-associated *shoba yatras* (celebratory processions aimed at building community unity and wellbeing). Ram's birthday is an important occasion for Hindus and is celebrated in many ways by different temples and communities, including through public processions. But in a few such processions, Hindutva slogans about Ayodhya, Kashi, and Mathura were repeatedly shouted. For example, during a procession in Leicester on 17 April 2024, celebrating Ram's birthday, a small but very visible group was shouting the following:

Ayodhya toh bas jhanki hai! Kashi, Mathura baaki hai! (Ayodhya was a just a glimpse ['trailer'], Kashi and Mathura are next)

Jai Shivaji! (Victory to [the Maratha warrior] Shivaji!)

Krishna Lalla, hum ayenge! Mandir wahi banayenge! (Lord Krishna we are coming, we will build a temple there [in Mathura])

Mahadev, hum ayenge! Mandir wahi banayenge! (Lord Shiva, we are coming, we will build a temple there [at Gyanvapi mosque in Varanasi]) <sup>306</sup>

These are not Hindu religious slogans but inflammatory, militant, political Hindutva slogans from India that are anti-Muslim in their essence. They contain demands, made in public in the UK, that several medieval mosques and monuments in India be destroyed or replaced. Such speech can

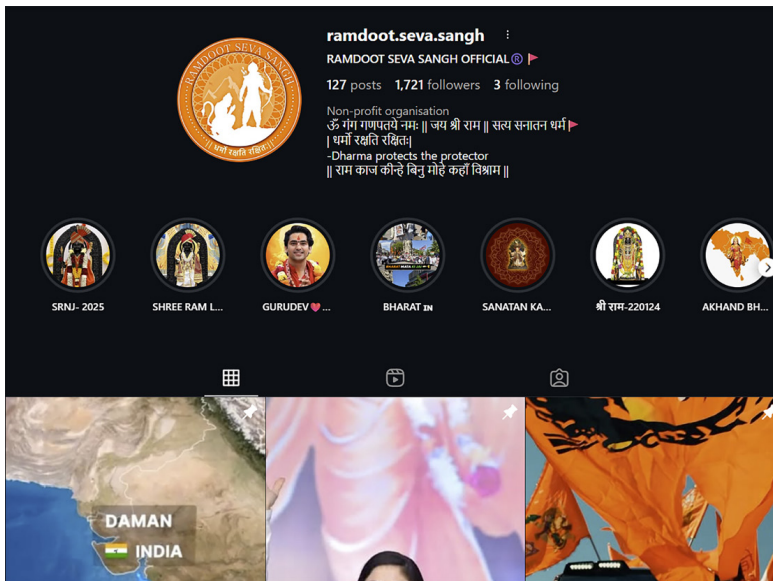
Figure 50: RDSS Instagram profile page<sup>309a</sup>

Figure 51: Members of RDSS in procession in Leicester



reasonably be construed as sectarian speech that glorifies anti-minority violence in another country. Perhaps the closest comparison is to chants expressing religious or sectarian hostility in Northern Ireland or Scotland, acts which are covered by laws on public order, criminal justice, and public processions.

In interviews, Hindu and Muslim figures said these slogans should not be present on the streets of Leicester. Additionally, an interviewee noted that some people who do not understand their political significance start chanting them and, in this way, 'right wing ideology, this ideology that Hindus have to reclaim what is "theirs", is becoming entrenched' (Interview XAJ) without people necessarily knowing what that means or what the consequence of that might be. This is the spreading of Hindutva ideology in ordinary communities by stealth.

### Grassroots youth Hindutva

There are also small, organised Hindutva groups within the Daman and Diu community that predate the 17 September events but have become more visible since. What was distinctive about the Ram processions in Leicester, during which slogans about Ayodhya, Mathura and Kashi were shouted, was the presence of a small group of youths organised as the Ramdoot Seva Sangh (RDSS). 'Ramdoot' translates as 'messenger of Ram' and is a reference to the God Hanuman, Ram's most devoted disciple and the exemplary *ramdoot*. 'Seva Sangh' translates as 'service society'.

The RDSS in Leicester is a Daman and Diu youth group of 15-20 young men and some women, who developed an online presence in early 2024. The RDSS is significant because it uses mottos that are distinctive to the RSS and VHP. The RDSS states that '*dharmo rakshati rakshitah*' (religion protects those who protect it), a historic slogan of the Indian VHP. Similarly, it speaks of 'selfless service', a phrase characteristic of the RSS that refers to the alleged ethos of its volunteers. It also uses unusual wording to describe itself as the '1st Sanatan Hindu Social & Ground Unity Group In UK'. We have only come across this phrase used by several militant and often violent outfits in India that are associated with the idea of 'Ram's Army' (*Ram sena*). For example, the militant Hindutva group Jai Shri Ram Sena Sangathan in India refers to itself as the 'World's First Social and Ground Sanatan Network'.<sup>307</sup>

The Hindutva orientation of the RDSS in Leicester is illustrated in multiple ways. Its social media posts about religious events such as Ganesh Chaturthi or Ram's birthday often include Hindutva-themed hashtags. The RDSS organised the construction and transport from India to Leicester in May 2024 of a *vighraha* (representation) of the child Ram, similar to the one installed at the Ayodhya temple. The hashtags announcing this included #akhandbharat ('undivided India'), #hindurashtra ('Hindu nation'), #bharatmatakiyai, and support for Narendra Modi. 'Akhand Bharat' and 'Hindu Rashtra' represent the core of Hindutva ideology.

Hindutva slogans were present in public in Leicester, not only during *akshata kalash puja* events but also during public processions linked to the temple inauguration, Ram's birthday (Ram Navami), and other Ram-associated *shoba yatras* (celebratory processions aimed at building community unity and wellbeing).

Shree Ram Lalla vighraha-From Bharat(Ayodhya) to UK(leicester). #jaishreeram #ramrajya #youtubeshorts Hamare pyare Ram LallaFrom Bharat (Ayodhya) to UK (leicester) Organised by: Ramdoot Seva Sangh -RDSS Made By : @deziniindia Murti Travel from Varanasi-Daman-South-hall-Leicester. Hamare leicester mein Shree Lalla Ram ayein hai. #jaishreeram #shreeram #bharat #ayodhya #ayodhyarammandir #uk #leicester #akhandbharat #hindu #hindurashtra #bharatmatakijai #bhageshwardham #explorepage #foryou #foryoupage #me #instareels #bhagwa #trendingreels #like #instagood #trendingaudio #merabharatmahan #jaibajrangbali #sita #modi #yogi #daman #diu<sup>308</sup>

Similarly, in a post celebrating Ganesh Mahotsav in September 2024, the RDSS used the #akhandbharat and #hindurashtra hashtags, linking an important Hindu festival to Hindutva ideology.

AAGMAN OF SANATAN KA RAJA SHREE GANESH MOHATSAV – 2024 PART 1 Ramdoot Seva Sangh – RDSS leicester UK#jaishreeram #bharat #leicester #uk #akhandbharat #hindurashtra #shreeram #ganpati #lalbagcharaja #modi #bhageshwardham #ganpatibappamorya #aagman #sanatandharma #dharma #shivajimaharaj #jaibhavanijaishivaji #love #insta<sup>309</sup>

RDSS's Instagram profile<sup>310</sup> highlights the Hindu nationalist preacher Dharendra Shastri and the RSS's map of undivided 'Bharatmata'. The foregrounding of certain historical figures (Shivaji), the promotion of Dharendra Shastri, and the use of Hindutva ideas (Akhand Bharat, Hindu Rashtra) are distinctive and are promoted within the Daman and Diu and wider Hindu communities in Leicester.<sup>311</sup>

The RDSS has also organised joint events with four temples or religious organisations in Leicester. The RDSS presence at public events and processions includes distinctive clothing worn by its members, large flags of 'angry Hanuman', Shivaji, and Ram depicting the Ayodhya temple, and enthusiastic, energetic celebration.

Grassroots Hindutva influence among young people also manifests through the popularity of some forms of 'Hindutva pop', especially during *garbas* (a traditional Gujarati collective, circular and

energetic dance form). *Garba* events often take place during Navratri, nine nights of celebration that honour the Mother Goddess (Durga). During Navratri celebrations in Leicester at The Platinum Suite in 2023, the song, *Mere Bharat Ka Bacha Bacha*,<sup>312</sup> was interspersed among traditional *garba* songs and was greeted enthusiastically by attendees, though it is unclear whether the political connotations of the song were known to them.<sup>313</sup> The song was also played during Ram processions in January 2024.<sup>314</sup> The song is about the primary significance of the deity Ram and celebrates the temple's construction, including slogans such as '*mandir wahi banayenge*' ('we will build the temple there'), which were formerly the preserve of the VHP and RSS. The song contains the lines:

In every house only one name, one slogan will ring: Jai Jai Shree Ram. Every child of my Bharat will say 'Jai Jai Shree Ram'. We Hindus are courageous lions. If we become obstinate, we will lay everyone to waste. Where Ram has taken birth, we will construct the temple there. We will fly the saffron flag everywhere in India... Wake up Hindus wake up now, this is no time to sleep. This opportunity to bring Ram Rajya [the rule of Ram] should not be lost just like that

We also heard about other examples of grassroots communal politics in Leicester. For example, in June 2023, Tariq Jamil, a *maulana* from Pakistan, was scheduled to speak at the (Hindu) Maher Centre, which was booked as the venue. Tariq Jamil originates from the Tablighi Jamaat, a worldwide conservative Deobandi movement. However, Jamil is a liberal figure who has made strong speeches against Deobandi-Barelwi sectarianism and violence in Pakistan and made gestures of amity towards Shia communities in the country. He is typically considered to be a liberal reformer within South Asian Islam and has faced hostility from conservative Deobandi and Tablighi figures. He has also made statements suggesting that COVID-19

is a consequence of women's immodesty,<sup>315</sup> though he also tweeted in April 2021:

My prayers for a speedy recovery go to all those suffering from the dangerous wave of COVID-19 in India and the world. May Allah have mercy on the humanity and rid us from this pandemic. #PrayForIndia #pakistanstandwithindia<sup>316</sup>

He has criticised Hinduism for its alleged worship of (stone) idols, but so have Hindu reform movements such as the Arya Samaj. In the appalling killing of a Sri Lankan worker, Priyantha Kumar, for 'blasphemy' in Pakistan, he visited the Sri Lankan embassy in Islamabad to condemn the killing as an act of cruelty for which 'we are ashamed'.<sup>317</sup>

It would be difficult to characterise Tariq Jamil as an 'extremist hate preacher' or 'jihadi' in the way that the online disinformation of Hindutva supporters sought to do.<sup>318</sup> Insight UK called for his ban from the UK in October 2024.<sup>319</sup> Similarly, those opposing what they called his 'jihadi sermon' at the Maher Centre in June 2023 didn't provide evidence for their claims (his talk was on the legacy of Abraham). A group calling itself the Maher Yuva Sena (Maher youth army) called for a protest at the centre. In the absence of any other evidence, it seems reasonable to assume that the protestors' objection was to a Muslim speaking at a Hindu centre.

The spread of Hindutva communal politics at various grassroots levels is significant for future relations between communities in Leicester. While we found clear evidence of Hindutva influences, both organised and sporadic, among grassroots communities, we want to emphasise that they do not represent the views of Hindu or Daman and Diu communities. Even in community processions celebrating the Ram temple or Ram's birthday, the vast majority of attendees were not carrying flags or chanting slogans associated with Hindu nationalism. This was the activity of only a small group. As a Hindu religious figure said to us, most Hindus attending those processions or events would see a flag of their deities but would not know the political connotations of the newer representations; they would likely not even recognise Shivaji and may not even know who he was.

I don't think your regular *masi* [auntie] who picks that flag up is going to think, 'I'm now picking up the flag of right-wing Hinduism' and [think]: 'We're gonna get after them, and we're gonna undo history'. She's just picking up a flag of Hanuman.

## Conclusion

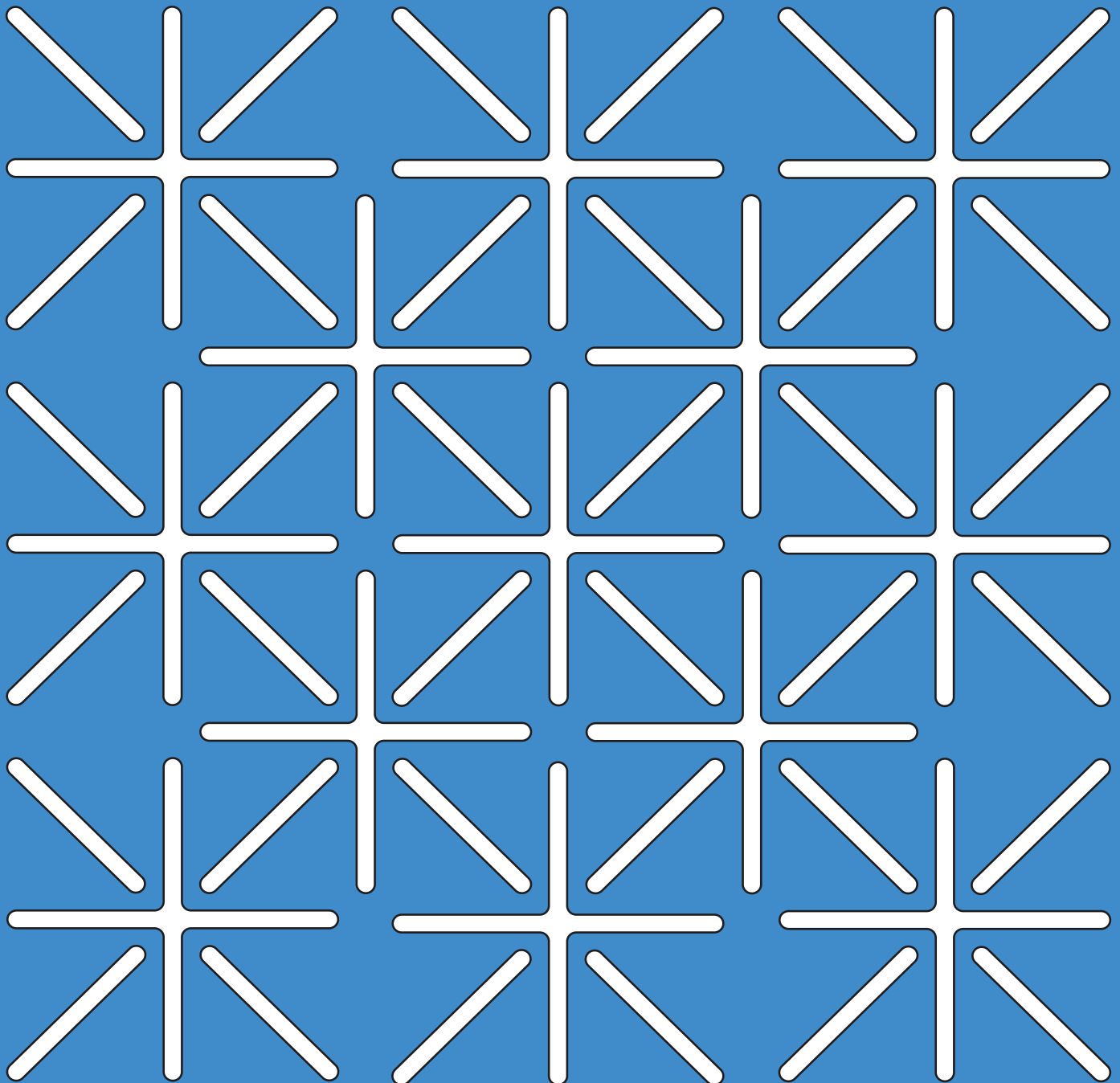
Previously, we considered the significance of Hindu nationalism for the 17 September march. This chapter has provided further context for the march and events since 2022, and for how the violence was portrayed in communal ways by national and international Hindutva groups and their supporters. The chapter also explored several levels at which Hindutva ideology and organisations are present

in Leicester, and considered various dimensions at which Hindutva influences work locally, including by influencing Hindu religious and community organisations, affecting local relations between communities, inviting extremist preachers, working among some youth groups, and manifesting in cultural forms, especially among the younger generations.

Because of the violence associated with political Islamist and salafi-jihadi groups after 9/11 and subsequent attacks, Muslim families, homes, mosques and organisations have had to face, discuss, debate and challenge the presence of a minority of supporters of militant or violent religion within their communities. That process is ongoing and difficult, but it has occurred.

Hindu communities, on the other hand, have not faced this challenge. Hindu organisations, including many temples, *sampradays* and caste-based organisations, are often in denial about Hindutva supremacy and extremism; they either wish to remain silent about it or, in some cases, actively support it. However, it is our view that this process of facing and challenging Hindutva supremacism in the UK diaspora, including its attempts to control the spaces of Hindu religious beliefs and practices and turn them into support for extremist and violent ideologies, must take place.

If the expression of radical, militant or violent ideologies related to political Islamism, salafi-jihadism or far-right white nationalism is considered grounds for intervention, we cannot see any reason why Hindutva supremacism should be an exception to this principle. While many British institutions have policies about equality and anti-discrimination, there is a serious lack of knowledge and understanding related to communalism, Hindutva supremacism, and its damaging effects on South Asian communities in the UK.



Leicester is one of England's oldest cities. It is a medium-sized, formerly industrial city, famous in the early 20th century for large-scale industrial manufacturing, especially clothing. It is now a post-industrial city and, before the 2022 violence, was often said to be a model of harmonious multicultural diversity. Leicester became known for its diversity in the later 20th century following migration from ex-colonial Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean, South Asia and East Africa, especially Kenya, Uganda, Malawi and Tanzania.

This chapter explores Leicester's people, their socioeconomic profile, religion, ethnicity and related factors, including changes in migration patterns.

---

Settlement in East and South Africa from colonial India began through the British system of indenture (a contracted labour system that replaced slavery). This included the need for labourers to build railways from the late 19th century, particularly the Kenya-Uganda line in East Africa. Subsequent settlement in East Africa by Indians included merchants who provided goods for workers. In East Africa, migration was primarily from what is now Gujarat state in north-west India, and the migrants were Hindu, Muslim and Sikh in religious orientation, with Hindus being the largest group. Most Gujaratis in East Africa were from the Kathiawar peninsula (often from Rajkot, Jamnagar, Bhavnagar, Porbandar, and Junagadh), the Kutch region (Bhuj, Mandvi, and Anjar), and from north and central Gujarat (Surat and Ahmedabad). They included significant Lohana, Vania, Bhatia and Patidar (Patel) subcastes, Bohra, Khoja (Ismaili) and (Sunni) Memon Muslims, Jains and Sikhs. Many East African Asians lived in poverty, whereas some became wealthy – a few spectacularly so, especially in Uganda.

Following Independence, 'Africanisation' policies in Kenya led to the migration of Kenyan Asians to the UK, especially during the 1970s. After Ugandan Asians were expelled by Idi Amin in the early 1970s, about 30,000, most of whom were citizens of the UK and colonies, came to Britain. Most East African Asians settled in Brent and Newham in London, but a significant proportion made Leicester their home. There was considerable hostility from the city council and many residents towards the Ugandan refugees. The city council placed notices in Ugandan newspapers warning Asians not to come to Leicester because of pressures on local authority, housing, education and health services. 'The advertisement, however, backfired. Most people by then had heard of England and of London. But now they knew there was some place called Leicester, where there were numerous Asians. All those who had been undecided as to where to go... started making arrangements to go to Leicester.'<sup>320</sup>

The refugee experience included battles that East African Asians had in Leicester against official hostility, racial discrimination and racist violence, facing off organised fascist movements, and challenging discriminatory exploitation in light engineering, textile and other industries. During the 1970s and 1980s, South Asians in Leicester organised resistance against the neo-Nazi National Front party and

related groups. Many Leicester South Asians identified with the common movement of South Asian, African-Caribbean and African people against racism. In 1974, South Asian workers, many of them women, initiated a historic strike of several thousand employees against racial discrimination at the Imperial Typewriters factory on East Park Road.

This history is important in understanding the orientation of East African Asians towards Leicester as 'their' city, one 'they' rescued from its post-manufacturing decline. South Asians:

played a major role in re-boosting Leicester's post-industrial economy, in particular the clothing trade between Leicester and the Asian sub-continent in the 1990s. This migration flow contributed to bringing new commercial and entrepreneurial skills to Leicester, thus offsetting the gloom of deindustrialisation.<sup>321</sup>

This past has been said to lead to complex orientations towards the later migration of other populations, including from India. South Asians also arrived with one or several generations of experience living in East Africa, meaning there was a distance created over several decades from social changes and political events in India.

In Leicester, there was a strong sense of unity among South Asians because they were largely Gujarati, shared a history of migration and settlement in East Africa, and had fought together against racism and fascism. From the 1970s until the 1990s, religion was not a significant source of division.<sup>322</sup> East African Asians in Leicester, while Hindu, Muslim or Sikh, tended to come from particular traditions within these broad religious categories (see below). Many people we spoke to recalled their early and school years as times when religious and cultural differences may have been present, but were neither defining nor especially important. Many participants emphasised their interfaith friendship groups with no issues of religious conflict (Interview XDB, Interview XAD).

That wasn't really what we would fight about. It was about what football team you support, something [like that]. It wasn't about the fact you were Hindu and Muslim or anything like that... That was a great way of grow[ing] up.

### Leicester's people

Leicester has a relatively young population with a median age of 33 years compared with England's 40.5. The large population of 20-24-year-olds (9.8 per cent) is partly related to students attending the University of Leicester and De Montfort University.<sup>324</sup> Leicester's population by sex is almost evenly split between males and females.<sup>325</sup> Despite the impact of austerity and the downturn in local industries (especially textile manufacturing), Leicester remains a popular city in which to live, work and study, and its population has increased by 11.8 per cent since 2011.<sup>326</sup> The city, the 10th-largest in the UK, is one of the fastest-growing in England.<sup>327</sup>

Figure 52: Leicester and Leicestershire in the UK (Source: Google Maps)



Figure 53: Leicester city ward map<sup>321</sup>

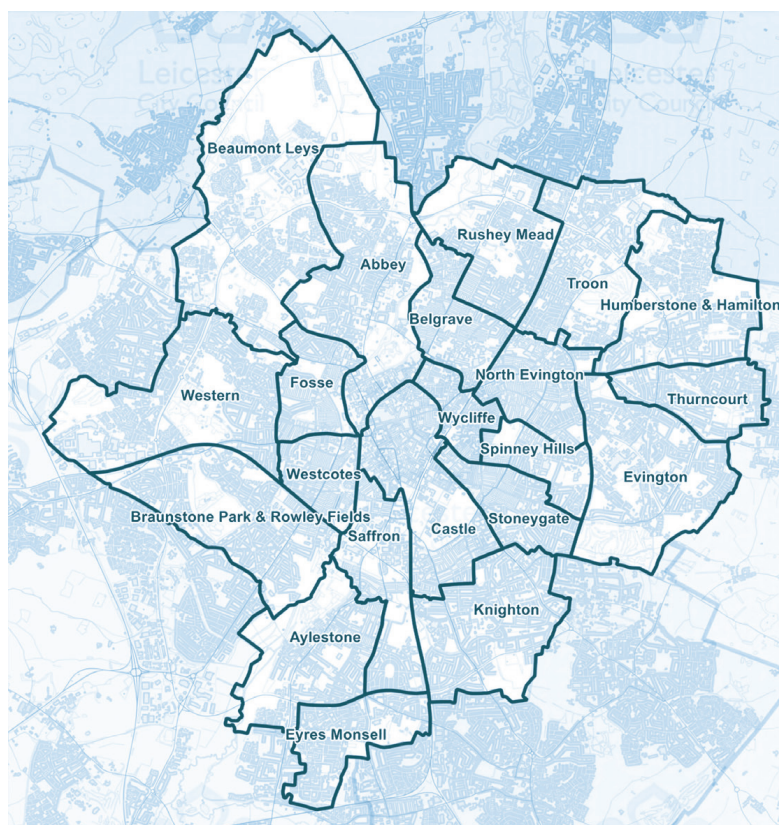
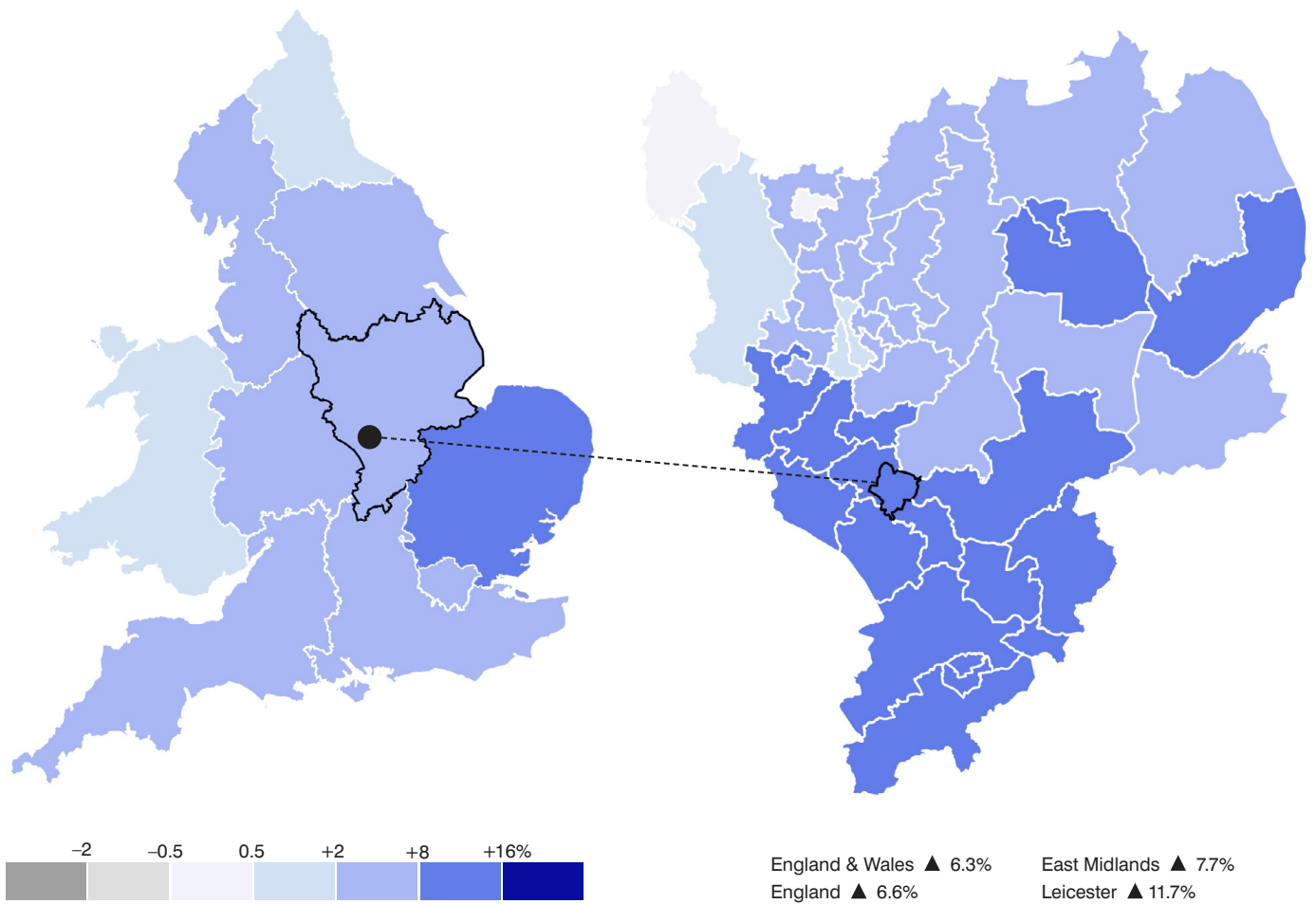


Figure 54: Population growth in Leicester compared to East Midlands and England<sup>326</sup>

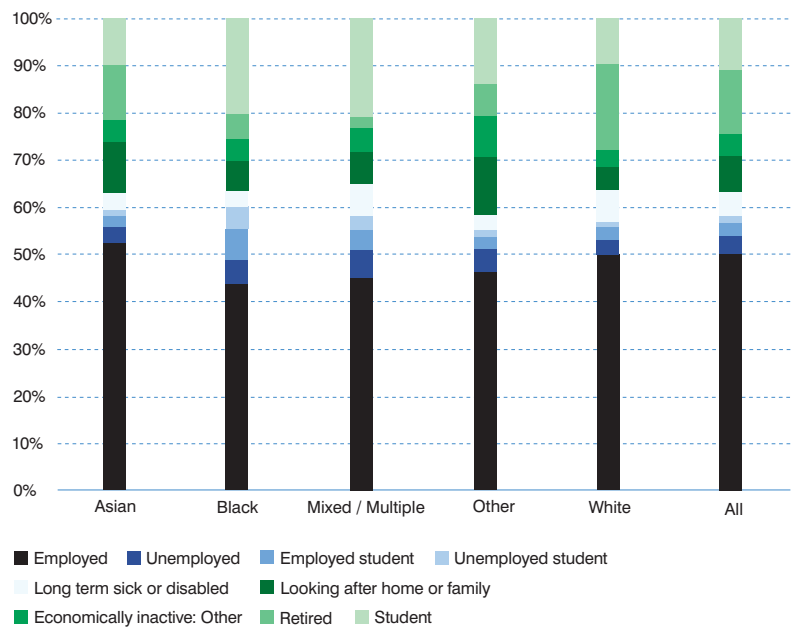


The city's economy is supported by industries such as manufacturing, retail, and healthcare, as well as by Leicester's two universities. Leicester has a lower labour force participation rate and higher unemployment rate (4.7 per cent) than England (3.9 per cent). Nonetheless, the employment rate rose from 49.4 per cent in 2011 to 50.4 per cent in 2021, and the employment rate among people aged 16 or over increased.<sup>329</sup> A large proportion of employed people work in routine occupations such as factory work, cleaning, driving, serving, and care. A higher proportion of Asians are employed full-time than in the Leicester population, and a significant proportion of the Hindu and Sikh population works in manufacturing. Unemployment rates are relatively low among Hindus, and higher among Sikhs and Muslims in comparison with the population of Leicester, this being broadly consistent with the national picture.

There were 127,389 households in Leicester according to the 2021 Census. 47 per cent of their homes are owned, and 29 per cent are privately rented. 23 per cent of the city's population rent from the social sector, of which 18,748 rent from the council. The city includes affluent areas and some severely economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Around 13 per cent of Leicester's residents have never worked or are long-term unemployed. In 2019, the city ranked 32nd out of 317 local authority districts in Indices of Multiple Deprivation, and is significantly more deprived than surrounding areas, with some areas of the city among the most deprived nationally.<sup>333</sup>

In 2021, there was higher unemployment in central Leicester, Highfields, Spinney Hills, Westcotes, Aylestone, and other parts of west and north Leicester, including 'affluent' Oadby, though the latter may also reflect the impact of the pandemic. Some areas of Leicester are affected by multiple deprivation related to unemployment, education, health and disability, and overcrowding, especially Beaumont Leys and Braunstone. This indicates high levels of deprivation affecting white working-class populations, but which also affect other populations living in Central Leicester, Highfields, St Matthews, Spinney Hills and Rushey Mead, the latter areas having high Asian (Muslim and Hindu) and other populations. In particular, the housing estates

Figure 55: Economic Activity and Ethnicity, 2021 Census ('does not apply' categories excluded)<sup>328</sup>



**During the 1970s and 1980s, South Asians in Leicester organised resistance against the neo-Nazi National Front party and related groups. Many Leicester South Asians identified with the common movement of South Asian, African-Caribbean and African people against racism.**

Figure 56: Economic Activity and Religion, 2021 Census<sup>329</sup>

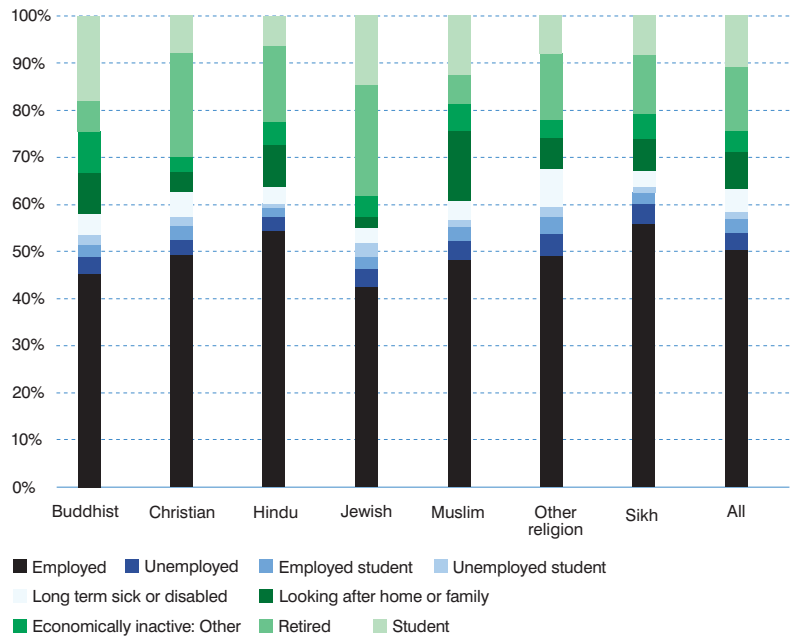
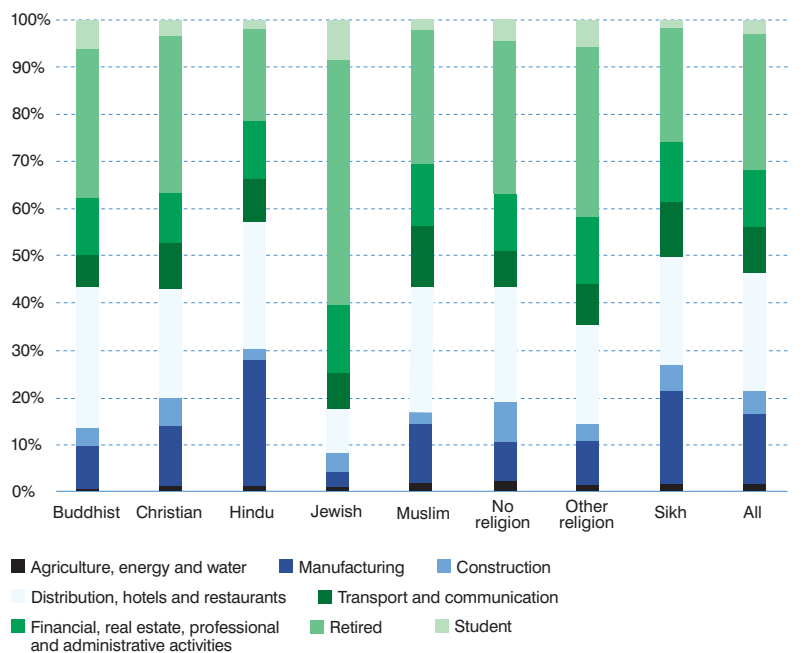


Figure 57: Occupation by Religion, 2021 Census<sup>330</sup>



in St Matthews (with multiple ethnic minority groups) and Saffron Lane (with predominantly white ethnic groups) are areas of concentrated poverty and multiple deprivation.

### Ethnicity and Superdiversity

Leicester is considered a 'super-diverse' city and one of the cities in the UK where the ethnic minority population is larger than the white population. Similarly, the city's *Asian* population (43.4 per cent) is larger than the *white* population (40.9 per cent), and its *Indian* population is larger than the *white British* population. Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups make up almost 40 per cent of the city's population. Furthermore, nearly 17 per cent of the white population is not white British or Irish, reflecting significant diversity among white residents. The Asian population in Leicester also increased between 2011 and 2021 from around 37 per cent to around 43 per cent of the city's population.

Forty-one per cent of Leicester's residents were born outside of the UK, a figure increasing from 34 per cent in the 2011 census.<sup>335</sup> About 16 per cent (59,800) of Leicester residents reported India as their country of birth, up from 11.3 per cent in 2011. Around 24 per cent of the population identified with a non-UK national identity. Thirty per cent of Leicester residents do not speak English as their primary language. South Asian languages, such as Gujarati and Punjabi and Eastern European languages, such as Polish and Romanian, are the most spoken non-English languages. Around 32,000 (9 per cent) of Leicester residents say they do not speak English well or at all.

From the 1990s, what had been relatively predictable patterns of primary and dependent migration from Commonwealth countries to the UK changed significantly. In Leicester, this included the arrival of refugees from Somalia, Polish people from the EU, Ukrainians, Serbs, and people from the Baltic states, as well as asylum seekers from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Kosovo.

### Religion in Leicester

Leicester's population by religion reflects its history of migration within a context where the existing population is either Christian or atheist. Christians, who include Christians from South Asia, the Caribbean and the African continent, make up almost a quarter (24.7 per cent) of the city's population, followed by Muslims (23.5 per cent), atheists (22.9 per cent, which includes a few thousand Asians) and Hindus (almost 18 per cent). Christians, Muslims, atheists and Hindus are the four main belief groups in Leicester by size, and they comprise over 70 per cent of the city's population, with Hindus and Muslims together comprising 41 per cent, a significant minority. Smaller communities practice Sikhism (4.5 per cent), Judaism (0.1 per cent), Buddhism (0.3 per cent), and other faiths.

The Muslim and Hindu populations have increased in the period from 2011 to 2021, with the Muslim increase being from 18.6 to 23.5 per cent of the city's

Figure 58: Economically inactive (top) and deprivation (bottom) across four dimensions (education, employment, health and housing), distribution in Leicester, 2021 Census<sup>332</sup>

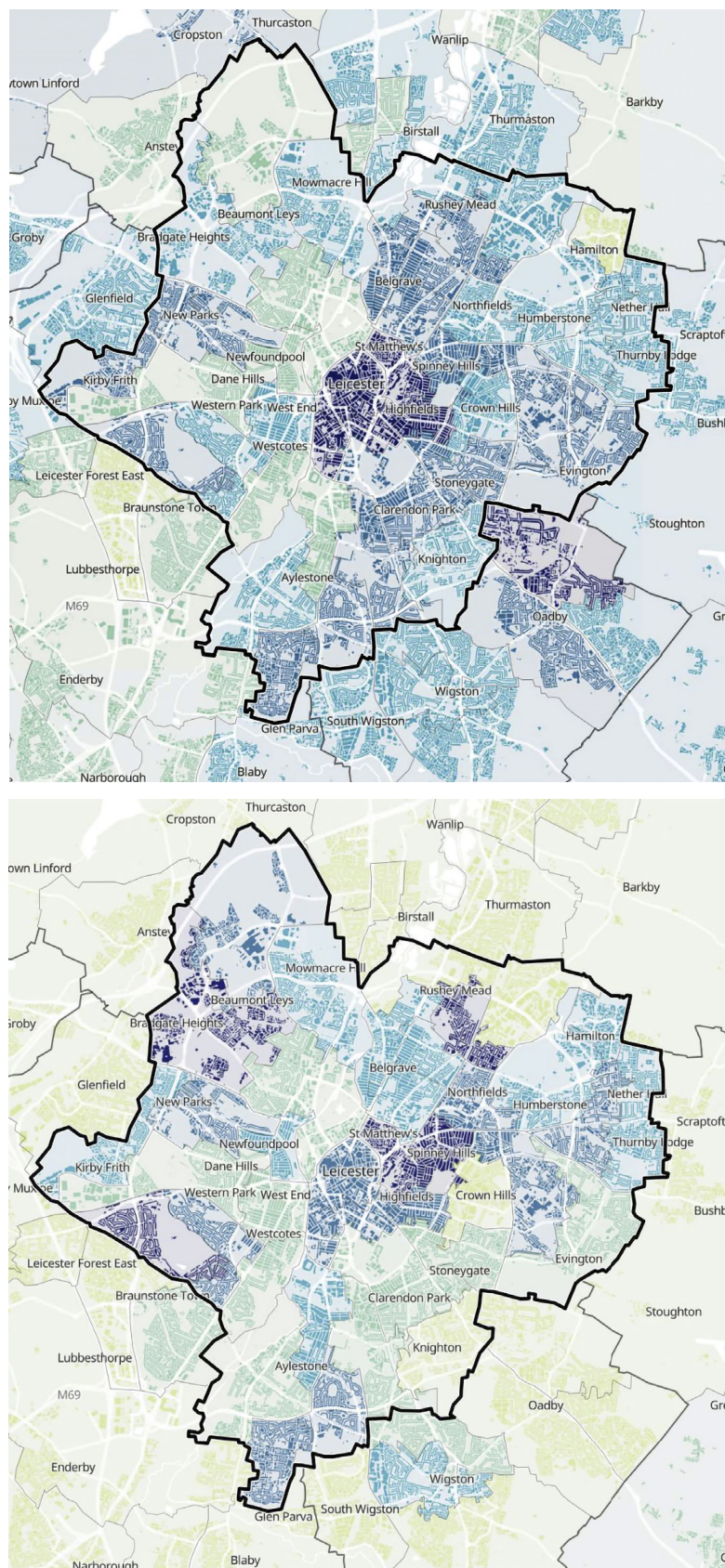


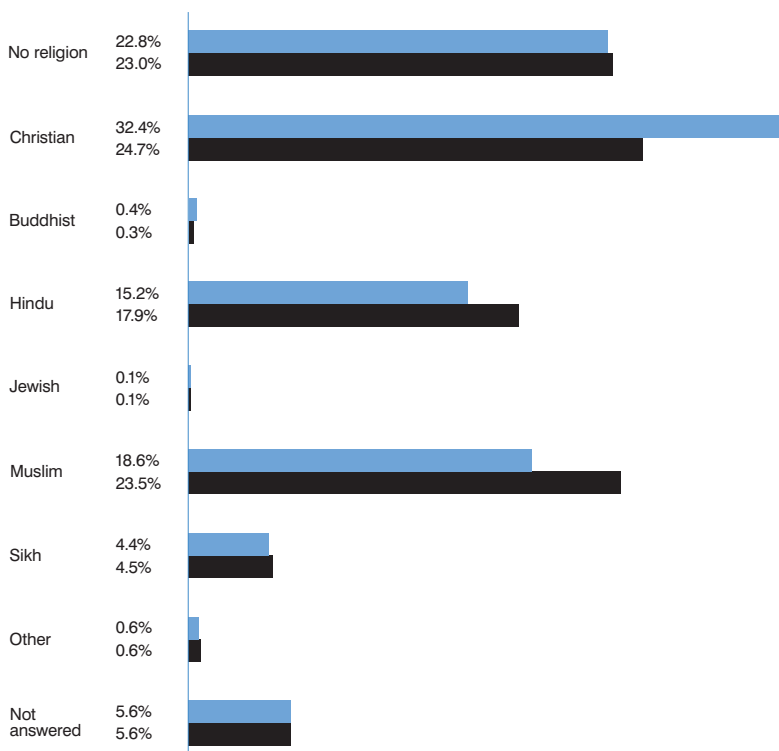
Table 2: Leicester's population by ethnicity in 2021<sup>334</sup>

Ethnicity	Ethnic Population	% of population
<b>Leicester's population</b>	368,571	100
<b>White</b>	<b>150,657</b>	<b>40.9</b>
White British	122,395	33.2
White Irish	1,789	0.5
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	457	0.1
Roma	839	0.2
Any Other White Background	25,177	6.8
<b>Black</b>	<b>28,766</b>	<b>7.8</b>
Black Caribbean	4,466	1.2
Black African	21,536	5.8
Any Other Black Background	2,764	0.7
<b>Asian</b>	<b>159,977</b>	<b>43.4</b>
Indian	126,421	34.3
Pakistani	12,673	3.4
Bangladeshi	7,055	1.9
Chinese	2,481	0.7
Any Other Asian Background	11,347	3.1
<b>Mixed</b>	<b>13,899</b>	<b>3.8</b>
Mixed White and Asian	3,659	1
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	5,025	1.4
Mixed White and Black African	1,776	0.5
Arab	3,402	0.9
Any Other Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Background	3,439	0.9
Any Other Ethnic Background	11,870	3.2
Other	15,272	4.1

Leicester is considered a 'super-diverse' city and one of the cities in the UK where the ethnic minority population is larger than the white population.

Table 3: Leicester's population by reported religion and ethnicity<sup>335</sup>

Ethnicity	Religion								
	Hindu	Muslim	Sikh	Buddhist	Christian	Jewish	No religion	Other religion	Total
Indian	63,026	40,119	11,629	41	4,882	7	1,688	754	<b>126,421</b>
Pakistani	15	11,717	5	6	148	1	117	5	<b>12,672</b>
Bangladeshi	59	6,660	6	2	18	1	40	2	<b>7,054</b>
Other Asian	1,391	5,375	1,289	591	1,631	1	500	51	<b>11,344</b>
Chinese	4	23	0	177	381	1	1,603	8	<b>2,482</b>
Black British, African, Caribbean, Other	28	10,173	4	6	15,193	9	1,472	132	<b>28,765</b>
Mixed White and Asian	185	1,008	93	21	586	5	1,354	42	<b>3,659</b>
Mixed White and Black African or Black Caribbean	12	535	7	9	2,279	5	3,393	43	<b>6,802</b>
Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	55	1,190	17	10	817	11	914	33	<b>3,437</b>
Arab	5	3,049	0	1	39	0	69	7	<b>3,402</b>
Any other ethnic group	917	4,505	3,335	50	1,705	95	661	114	<b>11,869</b>
White (All White groups)	122	2,088	66	268	63,479	190	72,798	882	<b>150,655</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,819</b>	<b>86,442</b>	<b>16,451</b>	<b>1,182</b>	<b>91,158</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>84,609</b>	<b>2,073</b>	<b>368,562</b>

Figure 59: Religions in Leicester in 2021 and 2011<sup>336</sup>

population, the fastest growth of any religion, and the Hindu increase being from 15.2 to 17.9 per cent from 2011 to 2021.

### Looking Deeper at Religion

Among all South Asians in Leicester (reflecting the census categories of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Other Asian who reported their religion), around 42.5 per cent (64,491) are Hindu, 42 per cent (63,871) are Muslim, and 8.5 per cent (12,929) are Sikh. Almost all Hindus (around 98 per cent) and Sikhs (around 90 per cent) are of Indian origin. The majority of Muslims in Leicester (63 per cent) are also of Indian origin; around 18 per cent are of Pakistani origin, and around 10 per cent are of Bangladeshi origin.

The broad categories of religion – Hinduism and Islam – do not provide a fine-grained understanding of the lived practices within communities. Hindus, for example, may include those following the three main traditions with which Hinduism is often classified – the Vaishnava, Shaiva and Shakti traditions. But many Hindus follow *smarta* traditions that are inclusive, non-sectarian and include deities from the three main traditions as well as others. Similarly, some *sampradays* (sects, often those with a founder, their religious/scriptural interpretation, and their lineage within a tradition or *parampara*) are highly significant for some Hindus. They include several sects that are followers of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century ascetic Sahajanand Swami, known as Swaminarayan. Two Swaminarayan sects, the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) and the International Swaminarayan Satsang Organisation (ISSO), are strongly represented in Leicester. For many Hindus, the worship of regional saints, such as the nineteenth-century Jalaram, is significant.

In addition to the more common South Asian Barlwi and Deobandi traditions, many East African Asian Muslims may come from Khoja (Nizari Ismaili), Sunni Vohra, Dawoodi Bohra (Mustali Ismaili), other Khoja Ismaili, and Memon traditions. It is also not uncommon among East African Asians to find a Hindu family with Muslim relatives or vice versa; similarly, very close relations can exist across religions within an extended family and its friendship circle. The latter includes – or perhaps used to include – common celebrations of religious festivals, including Diwali, Eid and Raksha Bandhan. Partly, this reflects the histories of close migration and settlement in East Africa, but it is also known among several religiously mixed communities in Gujarat.

To identify deeper religious traditions among South Asians in Leicester, we analysed 305 South Asian community organisations in the city, to consider sectarian, regional, subcaste and other forms of diversity. The organisations were found from Charity Commission information, directories of mosques, and other Hindu and Muslim organisations and networks that we found online or identified during our visits. The information below is not comprehensive – we excluded several patrilineal

Table 4: Leicester's South Asian population by reported religion and ethnicity<sup>337</sup>

	Religion							
	Hindu	Muslim	Sikh	Buddhist	Christian	Jewish	No religion	Other religion
Ethnicity								
Indian	63,026	40,119	11,629	41	4,882	7	1,688	754
Pakistani	15	11,717	5	6	148	1	117	5
Bangladeshi	59	6,660	6	2	18	1	40	2
Other Asian	1,391	5,375	1,289	591	1,631	1	500	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,491</b>	<b>63,871</b>	<b>12,929</b>	<b>640</b>	<b>6679</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2,345</b>	<b>812</b>

Table 5: Leicester community groups classified by religious traditions

Hindu			Muslim			
		42			47	
Religious tradition	ISKCON	3	Religious tradition	Deobandi	32	
	Jalaram	3		Sunni Muslim	23	
	Sai Baba	3		Barelwi	13	
	Swaminarayan	3		Salafi	5	
	Other	2		Ahmadiyya	3	
	Arya Samaj	1		Shia	3	
	Brahma Samaj	1		Bohra	2	
	Brahma Kumari	1		Ismaili	2	
	Gayatri parivar	1		Sufi	2	
Subcaste (jati)	Prajapati	5		Surti Muslim	2	
	Rohit Kshatriya	5		Ahl-e Hadith/Salafi	1	
	Mandhata/Koli	4		Bharuchi Vohra	1	
	Arya	3		Dawoodi Bohra	1	
	Rajput	3		Fultoli	1	
	Bhatia	2		Khoja	1	
	Limbachia	2		Kutchi Muslim	1	
	Lohana	2		Memon	1	
	Maher	2		Momin	1	
	Patidar	2		National/ethnic	Arab	1
	Soni	2	Arab and African		1	
	Brahmin	1	Sri Lankan		1	
	Darji	1	Political Islamism		4	
	Leva Patel	1	All related to Islam			<b>149</b>
	Pancholi	1	<b>Sikh</b>		10	
	Rana	1	<b>Jain</b>		1	
	Surti	1	<b>Other</b>	Ravidassia	1	
Wanza	1	<b>Interfaith</b>		2		
National/ethnic	Daman and Diu	3	<b>Secular organisations</b>	Secular	28	
	Political religion	Hindutva		2	Afgan	1
All related to Hinduism		<b>106</b>			Bangladeshi	1
					Indian	2
					Konkani	1
					Nepali	1
				Pakistani	2	
				<b>All secular</b>	<b>36</b>	

clan (*gotra*) and village networks that we had come across, for example.

Where we didn't find more detailed information for many Hindu and Muslim groups, these are classified as just Hindu (42) or Muslim (47). Some categories are not exclusive – for example, all Deobandi and Barelwi groups would be Sunni Muslim. Similarly, Bohra, Khoja, and other Ismaili groups would consider themselves to be arising from Shia traditions. The number of organisations listed does not necessarily indicate their degree of following or influence in Leicester.

Around half of all groups are Muslim, and about 40 per cent are Hindu. Secular organisations comprise a small number, only about 12 per cent of all South Asian groups in Leicester. While Deobandi and Barelwi groups and generally Sunni Muslim groups predominate, there is nevertheless great diversity in South Asian, primarily Indian-origin Islam in Leicester, including a variety of groups owing to non-Sunni lineages. Among Hindus, it is striking how many subcaste organisations (40) together with sampradays (18) represent the primary mode by which the Hindu communities are organised into groups. The subcaste numbers are certainly an underestimate, as we could not trace all subcaste organisations in Leicester due to time constraints. The presence of political religion is significant, expressed as a small number of Hindutva and political Islamist organisations, though often very influential.

The overall diversity has significance for thinking about multiculturalism and cultural pluralism. British multiculturalism has focused on the 'world religions', often in a superficial way, rather than the more detailed modes by which devotees may live and practise these religions. The latter may not be uniform or expressible in homogeneous ways and may be internally disputed. In this sense, this diversity also represents sites of potential (and sometimes actual) division and contestation.

### **Ethnicity, Religion and Residential Segregation**

Perhaps an ideally 'cohesive' city comprises communities, including well-integrated minorities, that regularly interact with one another across different spheres of life: residential, employment, education, consumption, recreation, leisure, and friendship. Leicester's residential segregation by ethnicity was registered in the 1970s, with South Asians living in east Leicester and white working classes in the west – a 'partition city'.<sup>340</sup> This segregation was partly linked to public sector housing in the west of and just outside the city<sup>341</sup> and the availability, during the 1970s and 1980s, of affordable private-sector housing in the east, which many East African Asians took up.

Today's Asian population is concentrated in Belgrave, Rushey Mead, Humberstone, Northfields, Spinney Hill, Highfields, Evington, St Matthews and Stonegate, with wealthier Asians living in Oadby and other surrounding areas. However, Asians also make up around a quarter to a third of the population in central Leicester, parts of Knighton and Wigston in the south, and areas like Abbey Park in

Figure 60: White (top) and Asian (bottom) population distribution in Leicester, 2021<sup>340</sup>

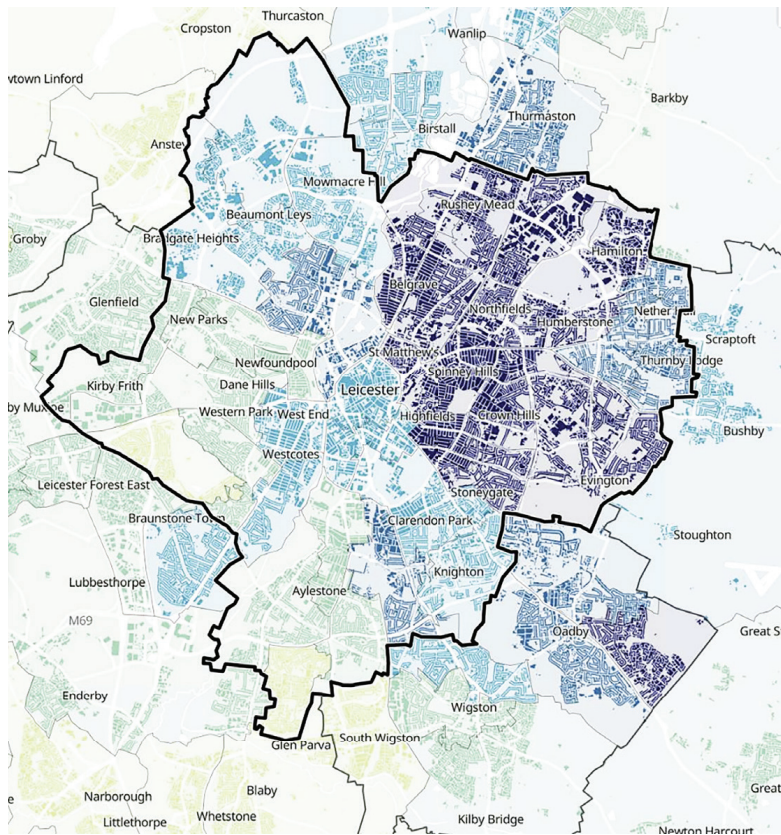
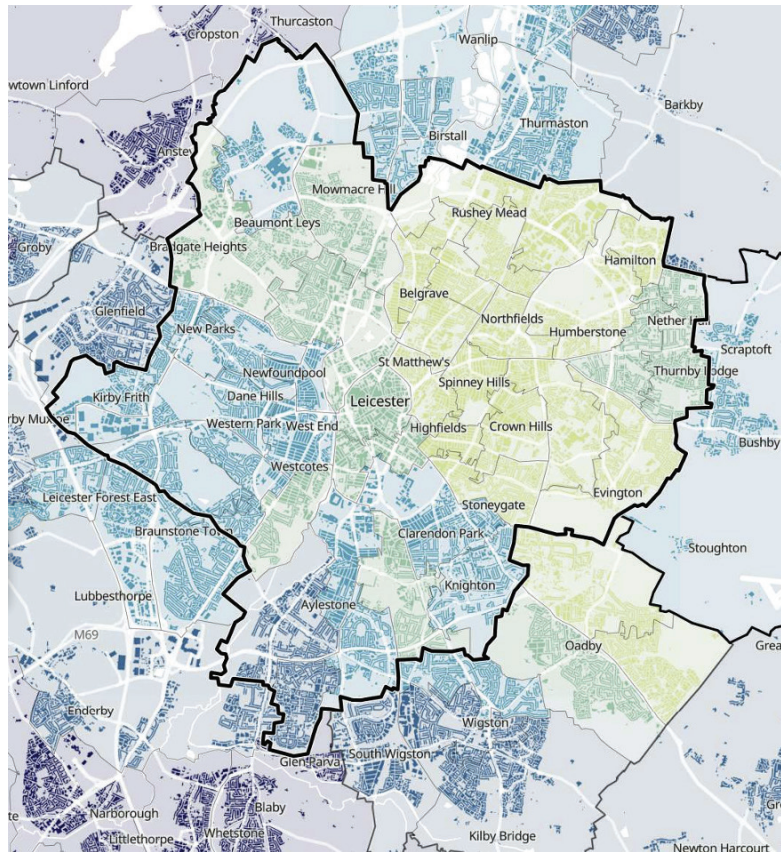
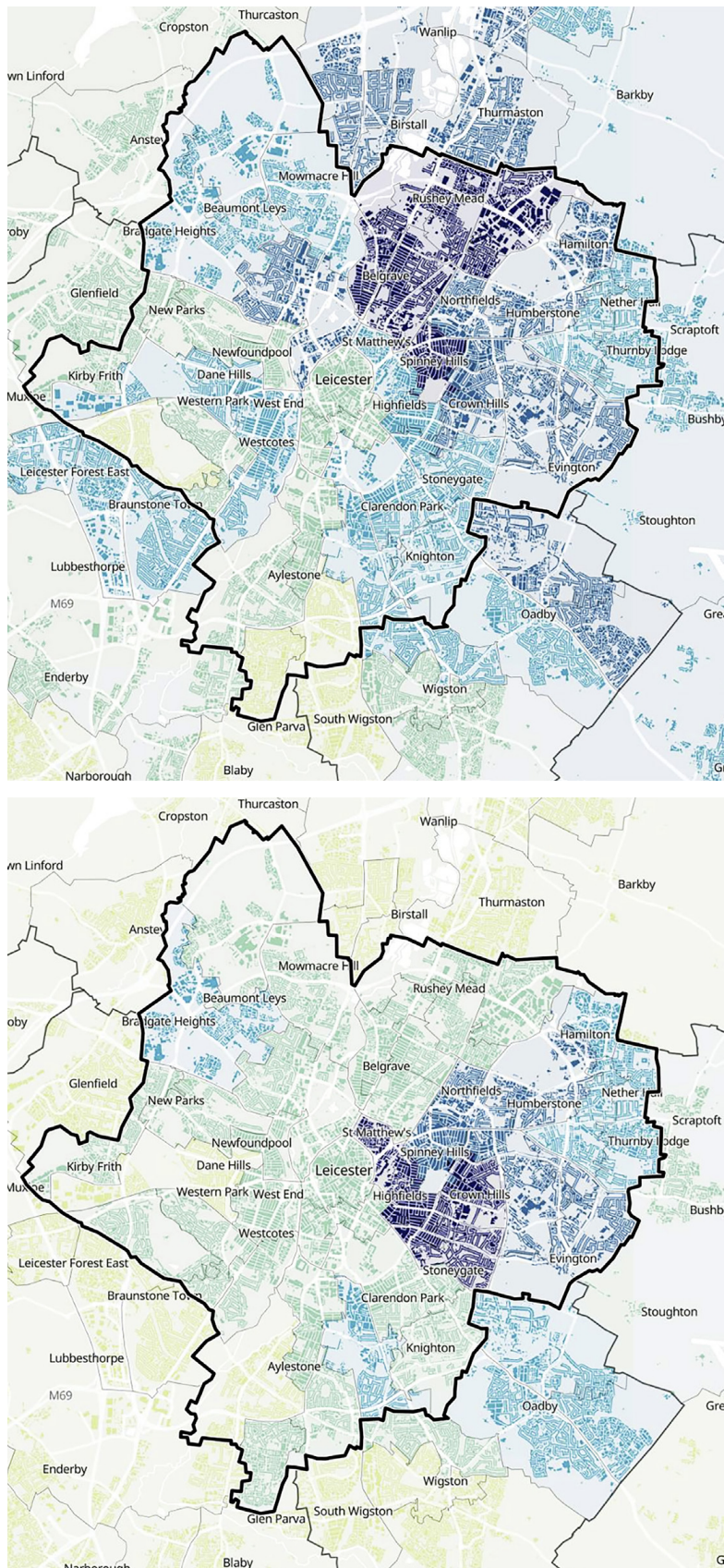


Figure 61: Hindu (top) and Muslim (bottom) population distribution in Leicester, 2021<sup>342</sup>



the west of the city. Nevertheless, the concentration of Asians in the east and south reaches almost 90 per cent in some areas (Belgrave South, 87.6 per cent; Spinney Hill Road, 87.7 per cent; Crown Hills, 84.5 per cent; Highfields South, 77.8 per cent). Conversely, the white population is concentrated in areas to the west, north and south: Beaumont Leys, Braunstone, Stoneygate, Knighton, Aylestone, Eyres Monsell, and areas outside the city, including Glenfield and Wigston.

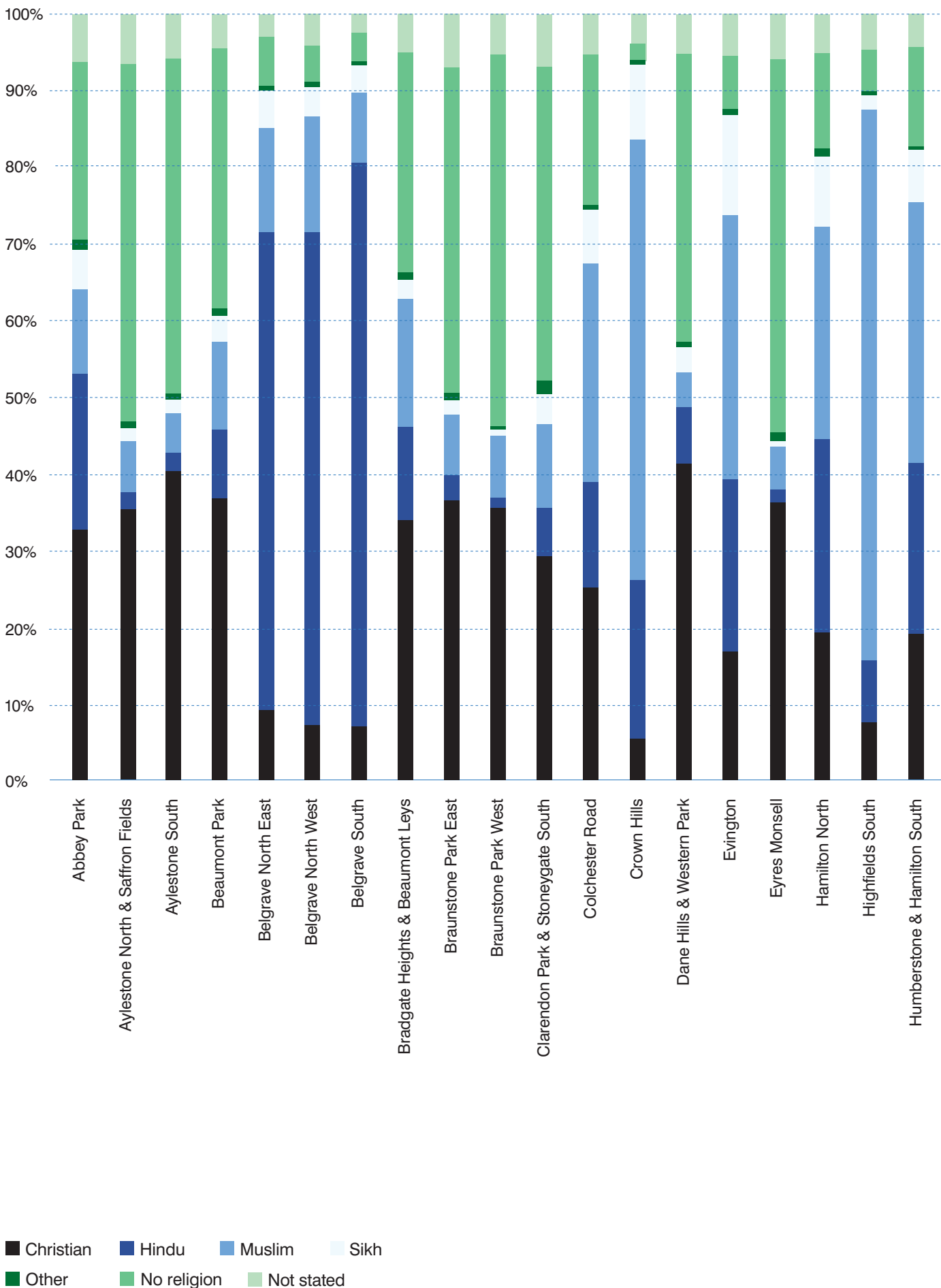
If ethnicity was the first dimension of segregation, the second – religion – was also apparent in the 1970s: Leicester's Asian population quickly became marked by 'spatial polarisation' between Hindus and Muslims<sup>343</sup> that became more established over the decades: Hindus tended to live in the Belgrave, Rushey Mead and Abbey wards, whereas Muslims tended to live in the Spinney Hill, Stoneygate and Wycliffe wards, with Sikh people distributed in various parts of the city.<sup>344</sup>

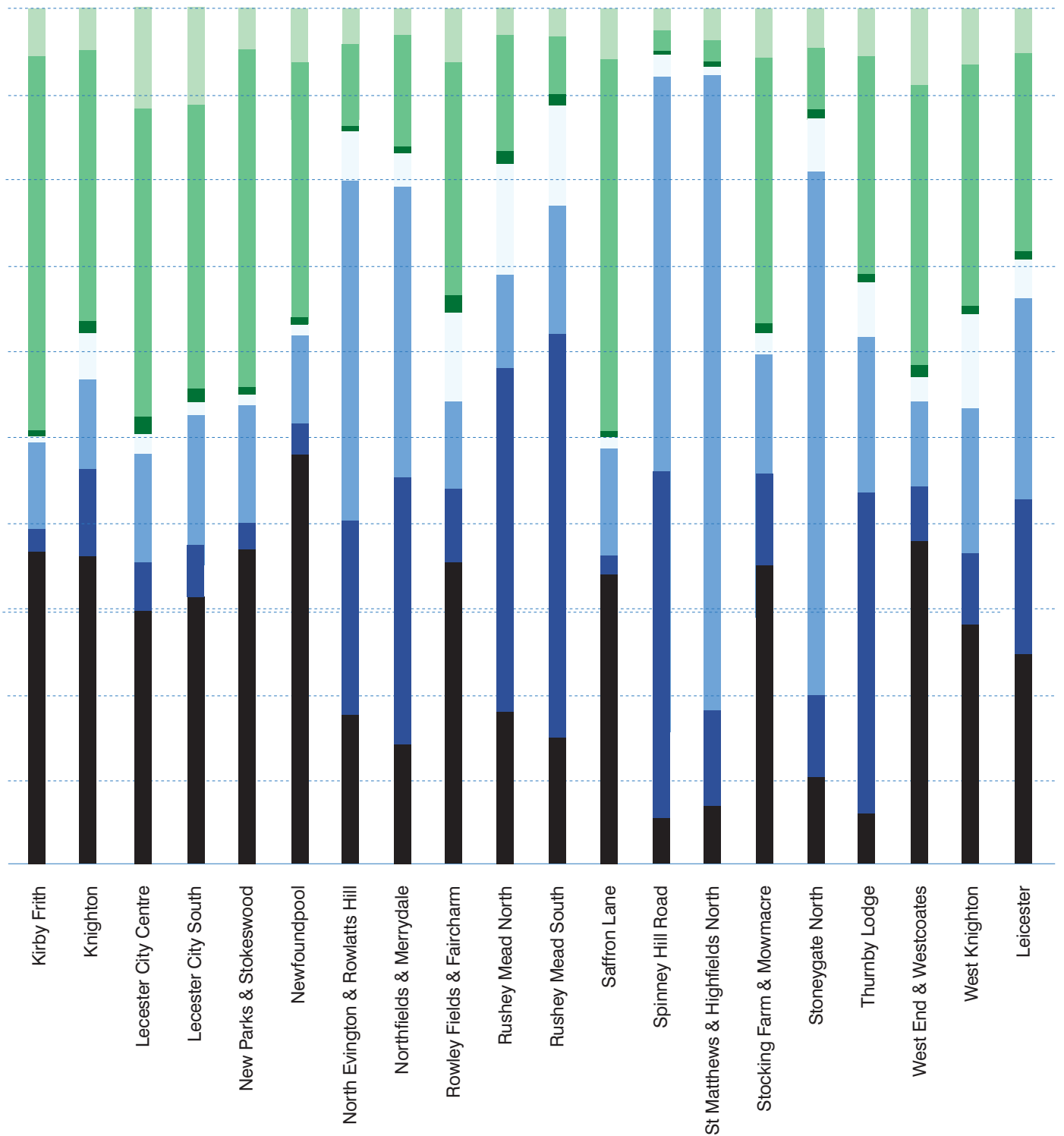
It has been argued that what appears as *religious* segregation masks what is essentially segregation by *socio-economic class*, therefore reflecting class segregation in the Indian community.<sup>345</sup> As educated, urban middle-class people with a pre-existing knowledge of English and no 'myth of return',<sup>346</sup> some East African Asian refugees settled in Leicester and aspired to physically distance themselves from other Asians living in Highfields, considering them to be mainly uneducated and coming from rural backgrounds.<sup>347</sup> However, it can also be argued that religion was intertwined with class in complex ways. More affluent East African Asians, especially Kenyan Hindus, began to cluster in Belgrave, a formerly working-class white neighbourhood that was facing economic decline.<sup>348</sup> Belgrave was rapidly transformed into a prosperous area that contrasted with the perceived bleakness of Highfields. It was also reported that some Muslims refused public housing because of its proximity to Hindu residents.<sup>349</sup>

New migrants also tend to move to the same areas of the city as their ethno-religious peers for reasons of cultural affinity and feelings of security – it is when they become better established and more affluent that this pattern changes.<sup>350</sup> For example, Oadby, seen as an area of greater affluence, has Muslim and Hindu populations that is comparable in size (Oadby East's population is almost 23 per cent Hindu and 21.5 per cent Muslim; Oadby North's population is 17 per cent Hindu and 23 per cent Muslim.)

Furthermore, many areas of east and south Leicester are highly mixed, with substantial Hindu and Muslim populations. For example, the Spinney Hill Road region, often seen as a 'Muslim area', has a Hindu population of over 40 per cent. Similarly, over one in five residents is Hindu in Evington and north Evington, also places seen as 'Muslim areas'. The Hindu population declines to around 8 and 11 per cent in Highfields South and St Matthews / Highfields North, respectively, whereas the Muslim population is 72 and 74 per cent there. Other areas, such as Humberstone and Hamilton, contain significant numbers of both Muslim and Hindu

Figure 62: Populations by religion in Leicester wards, 2021<sup>349</sup>





residents. This pattern of ‘mixed’ populations is common across Leicester. Rushey Meade, often seen as a ‘Hindu area’, has a Hindu population of 40 per cent (Rushey Meade North) to 49 per cent (Rushey Meade South). The two areas with an overwhelming population of one religious group are Belgrave (Belgrave South, over 73 per cent Hindu) and Highfields (St Matthews / Highfields North and Highfields South, 74 and 72 per cent Muslim).

### Leicester’s Daman and Diu community

Leicester’s Daman and Diu community is discussed in several places in this report and is described here. The Daman and Diu community is a relatively new but growing migrant group in Leicester, though we have come across individuals from Daman and Diu who have been in Leicester for many decades. Daman is on the southern coast of Gujarat, and Diu is a small island off the Kathiawar Peninsula. Due to their former history of Portuguese colonisation, many people from Daman and Diu became eligible for Portuguese citizenship. Some settled in Britain as European citizens before Brexit, with some dependents following later. Many individuals from this community chose Leicester due to the city’s established Indian population. The Daman and Diu community in Leicester is largely composed of those who have moved to the UK for better economic opportunities, education, and family reunification. Leicester has the largest proportion of residents with Portuguese passports in England, accounting for 5.1 per cent (18,862) of its population.<sup>352</sup> The second highest is the Borough of Brent in London (14,218), followed by Hounslow (10,537). The first two areas have among the largest concentrations of South Asian Hindu populations in the UK, suggesting that the majority of those indicated by these figures are from Daman and Diu rather than Portugal.

Daman and Diu community members in Leicester have a strong connection to Gujarati culture and heritage, but this can differ from that of the existing East African Gujaratis. While the community is predominantly Hindu, there is also a minority of Catholics and a small number of Muslims. A significant proportion of those from Daman and Diu have come from families that were typically fisherfolk working along the coast of Gujarat. There are several fisherfolk castes in Daman and Diu, including the Macchi subcaste.

We were also told of caste prejudices from other Indians because many Daman and Diu people come from subcastes that are perceived as ‘low’. As reported to us in several interviews, some East African Gujaratis in Leicester, both Hindu and Muslim, looked down upon Daman people as being of ‘low’ caste or as uncultured rural ‘freshies’. Some of these prejudices also came across during a few interviews. There have been alarming instances of racist violence, as well as exploitation reportedly related to caste prejudices that have affected members of the Daman and Diu communities. Among some East African Asians, there is reported resentment that Daman and Diu people received Portuguese

Figure 63: Location of Daman and Diu in India (Source: Google Maps)



**For many in the Daman and Diu communities, the reported areas of vital importance are housing and overcrowding, unemployment and underemployment, and factory pay and working conditions.**

passports without any effort in comparison with the long years of struggle East African Asians faced as refugees in naturalisation and obtaining British citizenship. Additionally, among East African Hindus who are vegetarian, there are reportedly negative orientations to those from Daman and Diu who eat fish and meat.

In the early 2020s, children in the Daman and Diu communities attending Orchard Mead Academy in Leicester East faced regular verbal and physical abuse from white adults, youths and children, this harassment continuing for several years. The Daman children were targeted as their appearance and clothing marked them as a newer migrant group. Despite awareness of these incidents, parents were reluctant to report them to the school or other authorities due to economic hardship, a lack of integration support, and fear of authorities. As a former MP told us:

The children of the Daman and Diu community received a lot of hate... I was called to a school, because there was a significant problem with the treatment of Daman and Diu children going to and from school... [They] were receiving hate, racist hate, physical and verbal, so much so that the school had to enrol or enlist a dedicated school bus... I spoke to the children and I asked them why would they pick on you? What was so distinguishable about you? And apparently, it's because if you're newer community, your hair might be longer, slightly longer, your clothes will be of a different type. And when I say different type, I mean not as streetwise as established Asian young people or children. They could clearly distinguish who were the new children or who were the new communities.

Significantly, out of all the South Asian children, only the Daman and Diu children were being singled out and targeted for abuse and attack. Some teachers witnessed the attacks and began escorting the children towards their homes. Subsequently, other arrangements were made for their safety – a striking example of racism in Leicester in the 2020s.

For many in the Daman and Diu communities, the reported areas of vital importance are housing and overcrowding, unemployment and underemployment, and factory pay and working conditions. Many members of the Daman and Diu communities work in Leicester's garment sector, food packing, light engineering, or warehouse jobs. Many depend on several agencies in Leicester that recruit factory workers. As recent arrivals, and like many East African Gujaratis before them, they often live in homes with multiple families. The situation of the Daman and Diu communities is often inextricably linked to worsening socio-economic conditions that have affected many working people in Leicester, especially recently arrived migrants from India and elsewhere.

The Daman and Diu people are also seen as culturally self-assured, proudly and vigorously celebrating Hindu cultural and religious events, including Ganesh Chaturthi, Navratri, and Diwali, and

families often displaying religious iconography outside their homes. It has been put to us several times that the public, enthusiastic celebration of religion by members of the Daman and Diu communities is a way of asserting belonging to the existing (East African Asian) Hindu community and staking a claim to belong to the city. But it is also argued to be a simultaneous assertion against the existing Hindu community, partly to contest real or perceived caste prejudices or social inequality faced by many in the Daman and Diu communities.

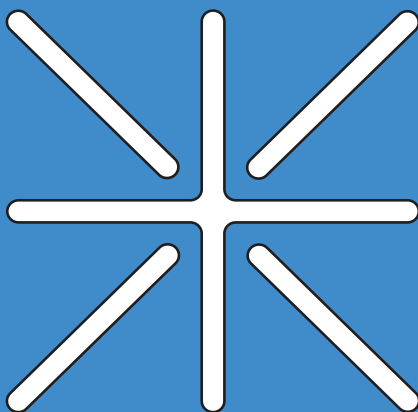
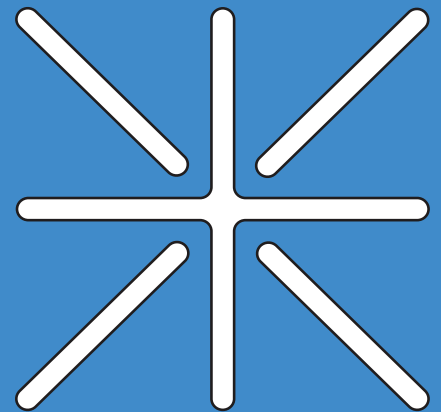
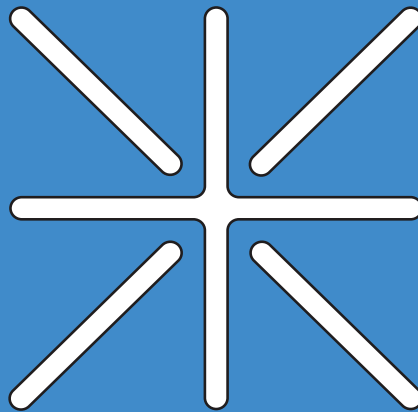
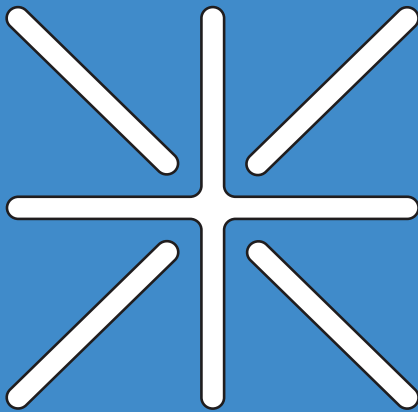
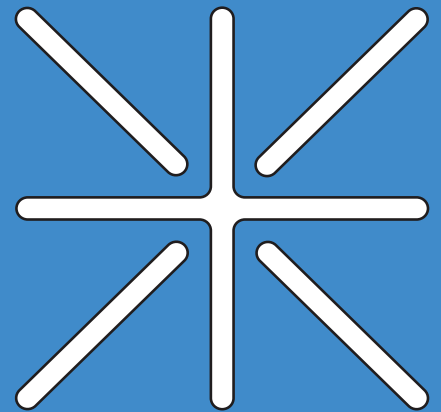
Many members of the community have settled in the Green Lane Road area and around Highfields and north Evington, partly because of the proximity to factories and partly because housing rents can be unaffordable in other areas. Because many families live in overcrowded conditions and typically have no or only one car, employment nearby is important. Because the Daman and Diu communities are primarily EU citizens, there has been little or no process of integration for them in Leicester, as might have been provided to other identified groups in the past. In an important way, they have 'fallen through the gap' regarding integration measures.

## Conclusion

Leicester's social landscape cannot be understood without considering its complex history of migration, work and settlement. The city's transformation from a post-industrial centre into one of the UK's most diverse urban spaces has been shaped by East African Asian migration and experiences of displacement, discrimination and collective resistance. That history has fostered strong attachments to Leicester as a home. It includes memories of the revitalisation of the city after deindustrialisation, as well as building Leicester's reputation for multicultural coexistence.

But diversity in Leicester has not been simple or static. Ethnicity, religion, class and different patterns of migration have interacted in complex ways. They have produced patterns of residential and commercial concentration, economic inequality and internal differentiation within communities defined broadly. While early narratives of Leicester typically emphasised diversity and harmony, those narratives coexisted with segregation, deprivation and now conflict. Religious labels such as Hindu, Muslim or Sikh also mask significant internal diversity, including differences of sect, caste, region and political orientation. These can be sources of both solidarity and distance.

The experiences of newer groups, including the Daman and Diu communities, also illustrate how Leicester's multiculturalism has been uneven in its reach. Though settling in a city shaped by earlier migrant struggles, these communities have faced racism, exploitation and limited institutional support, revealing important gaps in integration. Leicester's history points to the need for more nuanced approaches that engage seriously with inequality, internal diversity, socioeconomic conditions and lived experience for all of its residents.



The trigger for the sequence of escalating events that led to the 2022 Leicester violence was the violent attack in May 2022 of a young Muslim man by a group of Hindu youths. While there were previous incidents of communal violence in Leicester, it was this incident that initiated the events of 2022 that followed.

Other provocative events included the intentional demonstrations by car convoys outside important mosques during the India Independence Day celebrations in mid-August. This was followed by similar convoys and incidents of post-cricket match violence in late August that included small-scale disorder.

Alongside these were a series of minor altercations over the summer in a small area of Leicester between some Hindus and Muslims. In early September, a Hindu house celebrating a religious event had eggs thrown into it. In retaliation, a large group of Hindus violently attacked a Muslim man. In retaliation for this event, groups of Muslim men and youths broke away from meetings held outside a mosque to discuss recent events and attacked and terrified mainly Hindu residents over two main nights; a Hindu man was stabbed during these events. Other incidents of altercation and tension continued. Numerous false stories were disseminated on social media during this time that led to increased tensions in the community.

Mainly in response to the 5-6 September events, some Hindus organised a provocative march into an area seen as Muslim in mid-September. This led to much violence and public disorder. Further false stories were disseminated, leading to false accusations against a Hindu man and the surrounding of a Hindu family home. In each of these incidents, religious animosity and communalism were key factors for many of the actors involved.

Hindu nationalism was a clear factor in many of the incidents, including the 17 September march. Hindutva narratives about the events took on international dimensions from the August cricket match events and intensified following the 5-6 September violence. There were also political Islamist narratives about these events that presented highly selective, distorted or false versions of the events. Self-styled Muslim influencers from outside Leicester tried to exploit the events to further their interests. However, Hindutva narratives were international in scale and coordinated in their approach, reflecting the fact that Hindutva is a state-backed, international project. These interventions, which were selective, distorted, or false, had a destructive impact on community polarisation in Leicester.

Both Muslim and Hindu communities in Leicester were deeply affected by the violence and restricted in the enjoyment of their rights to freedom of belief, expression, association, and their physical safety. The proximate cause was not the public authorities but lay mainly with their own neighbours and fellow residents. The authorities charged with safeguarding their rights – the police and city officials – share responsibility for their failures to adequately understand the situation early on and to respond in ways that might have helped prevent the harms.

Better knowledge and understanding of local and international trends in militant religious authoritarian ideologies and groups would have helped them to see what was happening more clearly.

There were instances of apparent police failures to investigate fully serious cases of violence against individuals. A swift resolution of the May 2022 attack might have made a real difference in the following episodes of violence, for example. Public authorities are obliged to ensure accountability for such crimes, and when this fails (as it did here), one consequence can be that residents start to take 'justice' into their own hands. That venture into 'vigilantism' is a dangerous outcome and was clearly demonstrated in Leicester.

The rights to free expression and acts of religious belief are not boundless. Authorities are obliged to safeguard these rights, with due regard for the safety of others. What is protected by law is the peaceful expression of religion, including symbols, rituals, and peaceful proselytising. Where symbols and rituals include coded expressions of threat, intimidation and violence, as in the case of some of the Hindutva symbolism and chanting used in Leicester, we believe the police would have been within proper bounds if they had used reasonable constraints to restrict the 17 September demonstration.

We have attempted to document how the police reacted to the incidents of street violence in September 2022, to test whether decisions to arrest and charge individuals had been motivated by discrimination against some individuals because of 'race' or religion. Our researchers interviewed people who were arrested, some of whom were convicted, as well as their defence lawyers. We also reviewed video footage and some court documents. We tried, without success, to interview police chiefs and prosecuting authorities to clarify several issues. Despite this, we have grounds for believing that there were disproportionate numbers of Muslims arrested, convicted and sentenced, in comparison with other groups also involved in violent actions during the same events. We believe that, in some cases, the arrests and sentences were for minor issues triggered by police presence rather than by negative intentions on the part of those arrested.

The police also failed to apprehend individuals on 17 September who were pointed out to them as possessing knives or other offensive weapons. There were also significant failures in police intelligence that could have helped prevent the violence on 17 September. We also found some heavy-handedness and unnecessary aggression in police actions towards Muslims who had gathered to discuss events on 5-6 September. While police responded to the violence during 5-7 September, many Hindu families were left without support or further investigation, leading to a belief that the police were failing to protect them from concerted violence targeting them, especially members of Daman and Diu communities. Individuals reported to us that the police did not provide documentation that could enable follow-up with insurance claims for damage to cars and homes. There remains concern that incidents of misinformation and incitement

that led to a Hindu family being surrounded by an aggressive group were not followed up by the police. In other incidents, such as police actions towards some Hindus who had taken part in an informal Ganesh Chaturthi celebration in 2023, police behaved in an unnecessarily aggressive way.

At the same time, the police did take positive actions in containing and decelerating the violence during the 17 September events, along with citizens who courageously intervened in favour of peace and non-violence. We found that, during the 17 September violence, city councillors, community figures, and ordinary citizens took important actions to de-escalate the situation, sometimes in coordination with the police or under the leadership of police officers.

There was, however, a major absence of leadership, direction, reassurance and support from the city council. The police often demonstrated leadership and direction in community settings that the city council should have shown.

Members of both Hindu and Muslim communities in Leicester perceived favour toward the other by the police and city council, which should be a red flag for public authorities to be more transparent about the decisions taken in distributing funds and political resources, and to be more inclusive across communities in all communications.

Some politicians in Leicester – Conservative, Labour and independent – contributed in multiple ways to increasing divisions based on religious identity, especially during election periods. In some cases, this took on explicitly communal and divisive rhetoric. In other political arenas, social media and traditional media, within and outside the UK, deliberately misstated or emphasised communal narratives of the events. This fed into subsequent violent outbreaks in Leicester and served militant agendas that sought, at least implicitly, to justify violent acts. This was most commonly the case in Hindutva-oriented interventions.

Contributing factors to the violence included the lack of support for new migrants from the Daman and Diu community and for building relationships across communities. The newer Daman and Diu communities settled across Belgrave, Highfields and North Evington, and this settlement was seen to disrupt existing, settled territorialism between East African Asian Hindus and Muslims. Incidents related to new migrant adjustment, overcrowding, uses of public space, perceived antisocial behaviour, unplanned public celebrations of religious events and neighbourhood disputes contributed to a background of negative perceptions and tensions. Differing practices of Hindu devotion, together with new religious iconography, regular public celebrations, and the use of new flags and chants, led to suspicion and misunderstanding. These factors allowed communalism and the seeds of polarisation to magnify. Leicester's authorities need to reconsider the effects of austerity decisions, the disappearance of social programmes and youth opportunities, and the politicisation of communal identity, as part of the mixture of causal factors requiring their attention.

# References

## References

- 1 'Communalism' is defined fully in the report, but here it means creating division or conflict between religious or ethnic communities, including by mobilising religious or ethnic group identities.
- 2 UK Government, New definition of extremism, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. March 14, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/new-definition-of-extremism-2024/new-definition-of-extremism-2024>.
- 3 Project Free, 'Linking projects', <https://www.projectfree.co.uk/linking-projects>, Project FREE- Connecting Communities, not dated.
- 4 A recent example is the Woolf Institute's Commission on the Integration of Refugees, <https://www.woolf.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/commission-on-the-integration-of-refugees>
- 5 Eduardo Gonzalez Cueva, Jill Williams, and Felix Reategui Carrillo (2022). Civil Society-Led Truth-Seeking Initiatives: Expanding Opportunities for Acknowledgment and Redress. International Center for Transitional Justice, April 21, <https://www.ictj.org/node/35101>.
- 6 College of Policing. "Authorised Professional Practice (APP): Public Order Public Safety." <https://www.college.police.uk/app/public-order-public-safety>.
- 7 United Kingdom. Human Rights Act 1998, c.42, Sch. 1. London: The Stationery Office, 1998. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1>.
- 8 United Kingdom. Human Rights Act 1998, c.42. London: The Stationery Office, 1998. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/contents>.
- 9 Equality and Human Rights Commission. "Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED): Guidance." Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2020. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/guidance/public-sector-equality-duty-psed>.
- 10 United Kingdom. Equality Act 2010, c.15. London: The Stationery Office, 2010. [https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpgaen\\_20100015\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/pdfs/ukpgaen_20100015_en.pdf).
- 11 Adrien Friggeri, Lada Adamic, Dean Eckles and Justin Cheng. 'Rumour Cascades', Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media, Vol. 8 No. 1, 2014.
- 12 Antoine Buysse, 'Words of Violence: 'Fear Speech,' or How Violent Conflict Escalation Relates to the Freedom of Expression,' Human Rights Quarterly 36, no. 4 (November 2014): 779–797;
- 13 Punyajoy Saha et al., 'On the Rise of Fear Speech in Online Social Media,' Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 120, no. 11 (2023): e2212270120.
- 14 5Pillarz. 'Hindutva gangs' and anti-Muslim violence in Leicester. 9 September 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M2tugqpl0zE>; BBC. Leicester: Behind the Divide. BBC File on Four. October 4, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001cpc9>.
- 15 Leicester Mercury. "Teenager Punched, Kicked and Bottle Thrown in Leicester." Leicester Mercury, October 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/teenager-punched-kicked-bottle-thrown-7660218>.
- 16 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 17 BBC. "Gathering to 'symbolically protect' Leicester Gandhi statue". BBC News. June 13, 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-53036785>
- 18 Dave Owen. "Six Police Officers Injured as Cricket Fans Clash in Leicester." Leicester Mercury. June 19, 2017. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/six-police-officers-injured-cricket-201056>.
- 19 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 20 Leicester Mercury. "Violence Flares During India v Pakistan Cricket Match in Leicester." Leicester Mercury, August 29, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/violence-flares-during-india-v-7524312/>. Inquiry archive: Altercation after cricket match.mp4
- 21 BBC News. "Leicester Disorder: Police Say Tensions Triggered by 'Aggravating Factors.'" BBC News, September 18, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-62934815>.
- 22 Leicestershire Police (East Leicester) [@LPEastLeics]. "Post." X (Twitter), August 31, 2022. <https://x.com/LPEastLeics/status/1564663241095127041>.
- 23 Leicestershire Police (East Leicester) [@LPEastLeics]. "Post." X (Twitter), August 31, 2022. <https://x.com/LPEastLeics/status/1564663241095127041>.
- 24 X/Twitter post August 30, 2022, Inquiry archive..
- 25 Network Contagion Research Institute, Cyber Social Swarming Precedes Real World Riots in Leicester: How Social Media Became a Weapon for Violence (New Brunswick, NJ: Network Contagion Research Institute, November 10, 2022), [https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-Report\\_11.10.22.pdf](https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-Report_11.10.22.pdf); X/Twitter post, August 29, 2022, Inquiry archive.
- 26 X/Twitter post, August 29, 2022, Inquiry archive.
- 27 Inquiry archive.
- 28 Tweet deleted, Inquiry archive. Network Contagion Research Institute, Cyber Social Swarming Precedes Real World Riots in Leicester: How Social Media Became a Weapon for Violence (New Brunswick, NJ: Network Contagion Research Institute, November 10, 2022), page 21. [https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-Report\\_11.10.22.pdf](https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-Report_11.10.22.pdf).
- 29 The term 'pajeet' and its associated visual memes originated among far-right white supremacist users of 4chan to refer to South Asians and Indians in particular, but is also used, including by other South Asians, to refer pejoratively to Hindus or Indians.
- 30 For example, MoShaik5 (@MoShaik5). "Post." X (Twitter), September 2022. <https://x.com/MoShaik5/status/1564585137425289223>.
- 31 For example, mansoor484 (@mansoor484). "Post." X (Twitter), August 30, 2022. <https://x.com/mansoor484/status/1564494711762690053>.
- 32 tragicBud (Twitter). "Melton Road, Leicester Translation: "Death to Pakistan" As if it wasn't enough in India, now we've got these Nazi lovers in the UK." August 30, 2022. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220901104749/https://twitter.com/tragicBud/status/1564213097904185345>.
- 33 KAY150747133 (@KAY150747133). "Post." X (Twitter), August 31, 2022. <https://x.com/KAY150747133/status/1564671977465470981>.
- 34 Paul Allen. Email to Leicester Council of Faiths, August 31, 2022. Unpublished correspondence. Inquiry archive.
- 35 Rashmi Samant and Chris Blackburn, The Rise of Territorial Majoritarianism and Hinduphobia: Fact Finding Report on Leicester Violence 2022 (London: Centre for Democracy, Pluralism and Human Rights, 2022).
- 36 Statement in Inquiry archive. See also: ITV News. "Violent Unrest in Leicester Forces Local Authorities and Community Leaders into Emergency Meeting," ITV News, September 7, 2022. <https://www.itv.com/news/central/2022-09-07/violent-unrest-in-leicester-sparks-an-emergency-police-controls>.
- 37 X/Twitter post, September 6, 2022, Inquiry archive.
- 38 Screenshot of post in Inquiry archive.
- 39 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 40 38. Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 41 38. Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 42 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 43 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 44 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 45 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 46 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 47 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 48 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 49 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 50 Asha Patel. "Appeals for Calm after Violence in Leicester." Leicester Mercury, September 19, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/appeals-calm-end-violence-after-7553966>.

- 51 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 52 Asha Patel. "Appeals for Calm after Violence in Leicester." *Leicester Mercury*, September 19, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/appeals-calm-end-violence-after-7553966>
- 53 Claudia Webbe. "Incitement to hate and ongoing disturbances in Leicester East". Letter to Rob Nixon, September 14, 2022. See also: Richard Vernalls. "Leicester tensions have been simmering for 'months' says city MP". *The Independent*, September 20, 2022. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/claudia-webbe-leicester-hindu-muslim-muslim-council-of-britain-b2171162.html>.
- 54 Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 55 Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 56 Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice). "Post." X (Twitter), September 17, 2022. <https://x.com/leicspolice/status/1571065204745637888>.
- 57 Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 58 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 59 Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 60 Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice). "We've seen reports on social media that a mosque is being attacked. Officers on the ground have confirmed this is not true." X (Twitter), September 18, 2022. <https://x.com/leicspolice/status/1571214687659761667>.
- 61 Network Contagion Research Institute, *Cyber Social Swarming Precedes Real World Riots in Leicester: How Social Media Became a Weapon for Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Network Contagion Research Institute, November 10, 2022), page 27. [https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-Report\\_11.10.22.pdf](https://networkcontagion.us/wp-content/uploads/NCRI-Report_11.10.22.pdf).
- 62 Mark Townsend. "Half of Those Arrested over Clashes in Leicester from Outside County." *The Guardian*, September 19, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/19/half-those-arrested-over-clashes-in-leicester-from-outside-county>.
- 63 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 64 Yahoo News. "Hindu Man Thanks Muslim Activist Who Stepped in to Save Him During Violence in Leicester." *Yahoo News*, September 27, 2022. <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/hindu-man-thanks-muslim-activist-200100102.html>.
- 65 BBC News. "Leicester Disorder: Hindu Man Saved by Muslim Friend." *BBC News*, September 20, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-62965416>.
- 66 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 67 Leicester Media, "Policing Patrols Continue Following Further Reports of Disturbance in East Leicester," *Leicester Media Online*, September 7, 2022. <https://www.leicestermedia.online/post/policing-patrols-continue-following-further-reports-of-disturbance-in-east-leicester>.
- 68 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 69 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 70 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 71 Shivalaya Temple Leicester. "Yesterday there were scenes of protest, violence and disorderly behaviour". Facebook, September 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/shivalayatlbs/posts/yesterday-there-were-scenes-of-protest-violence-and-disorderly-behaviour-carried/868313797878793/>.
- 72 Republic World. "Violence Flares Up In UK Between Hindu-Muslim Groups In Leicester; Temple Targeted Amid Tensions". *Republic World*, September 19, 2022. <https://youtu.be/o8tu1yPga9A>
- 73 <https://x.com/leicspolice/status/1571304661990182915>
- 74 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 75 Video in Inquiry archive.
- 76 BBC Radio 4. "Leicester: Behind the Divide" BBC File on 4. October 4, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001cpc9>.
- 77 Abul Taher and Nicholas Pyke. "Violent Ethnic Clashes in Leicester Were Stoked by Modi's Hindu Nationalist Party." *Daily Mail*, May 14, 2023. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12081129/Violent-ethnic-clashes-Leicester-year-stoked-Modis-Hindu-nationalist-party.html>.
- 78 OFBJPUK (@OFBJPUK). "Violent ethnic clashes in Leicester has no connection to Modi or BJP." X (Twitter), May 2023. <https://x.com/OFBJPUK/status/1657779450765770752>.
- 79 Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 80 BBC News. "Jai Shri Ram: The Hindu chant that became a murder cry". *BBC News*. July 10, 2019. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-48882053>. Video examples include: CNN-News18. "Forced To Say Jai Shree Ram, Viral Video Of An Ujjain Vendor Who Got Caught In Communal Drift", *CNN-News 18*, August 29, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbsHdPo1fDw>; *The Wire*. "UP Muslim Man Tied To Tree, Hit, Forced To Say 'Jai Shree Ram' On Suspicion Of Theft", *The Wire*, June 20, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLT6qRnrqJQ>; *DNA India*. "Western UP: Men force Muslim man to chant Jai Shree Ram", *DNA India*, April 20, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10158618498020441>; *HW News English*. "Muslim Woman Denied Food For Refusing To Chant 'Jai Shri Ram' Outside Mumbai Hospital". October 30, 2024. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wI8Cb8\\_Ryk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7wI8Cb8_Ryk).
- 81 Inquiry archive.
- 82 Wadood Mushtaq, "What Went Wrong?" *The News International*, October 2, 2022. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/995946-what-went-wrong>.
- 83 Overseas Friends of BJP (UK), "London Car Rally to Support Modi Ji and BJP for Upcoming Elections," Facebook Live video, March 16, 2024. <https://www.facebook.com/OverseasBJP.uk/videos/london-car-rally-to-support-modi-ji-and-bjp-for-upcoming-elections/1371276583371492/>.
- 84 Mohnish Singh. "Prayers for Peace at Leicester Hindu Temple." *Eastern Eye*, September 26, 2022. <https://www.eastereye.biz/prayers-for-peace-at-leicester-hindu-temple/>.
- 85 Sali Shobowale. "Prayer Vigil in Honour of Queen Elizabeth." *Leicester Mercury*, September 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/prayer-vigil-honour-queen-elizabeth-7577338>.
- 86 Sreya Chatterjee, 'VHP to hold protest near British Embassy over communal clashes in Leicester', *India Today*, September 24, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/vhp-to-hold-protest-near-british-embassy-over-communal-clashes-in-leicester-cops-block-road-2004220-2022-09-24>.
- 87 Iram Ramzan and Andrew Gilligan. "MPs Ditch Meeting with Muslim Group MEND over Islamist Claims." *The Sunday Times*, October 29, 2017. <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/politics/article/mps-ditch-meeting-with-muslim-group-mend-over-islamist-claims-rgxqn0s05>; Dominic Kennedy. 'Muslim Lobby Group Promotes Extremism.' *The Times*, October 31, 2017. <https://www.thetimes.com/article/muslim-lobby-group-promotes-extremism-muslim-engagement-and-development-mend-hkm87fx35>.
- 88 ISKCON Leicester (@IskconLeicester). "Muslim-Hindu Unity Statement by Temple President, Pradyumna Das, outside Asfordby St Mosque." X (Twitter), September 20, 2022. <https://x.com/IskconLeicester/status/1572201509051584513>.
- 89 Shannen Headley, 'It is now time for solutions', *Leicestershire Live*, September 24, 2022. <https://www>.

- leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/it-now-time-solutions-women-7623176.
- 90 United Religions Initiative. "URI Visit to UK: Final Report, March 2024." URI, 2024. <https://uriuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/URI-VISIT-TO-UK-FINAL-REPORT-March-2024.pdf>.
- 91 Shannen Headley. "It's Now Time for Solutions." Leicester Mercury, September 24, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/it-now-time-solutions-women-7623176>.
- 92 Asha Patel. "City Mayor Baffled by Violence." Leicester Mercury, September 19, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/city-mayor-baffled-violence-peaceful-7601506>.
- 93 Leicester City Council. "Agenda and minutes, Council meeting, Thursday, 29 September 2022", <https://cabinet.leicester.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?MIId=11949>.
- 94 Asha Patel. "Investigation into violence in east Leicester will focus on six key questions". Leicester Mercury, October, 26 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/east-leicester-disorder-independent-inquiry-7748233>.
- 95 Channel 4 News. "Leicester Mayor Orders Inquiry into Violent Unrest." Channel 4 News, October 14, 2022. <https://www.channel4.com/news/leicester-mayor-orders-inquiry-into-violent-unrest>.
- 96 BBC News. "Leicester disorder: Expert Dr Chris Allen steps down from review." BBC News, November 1, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-63477841>.
- 97 Asha Patel. "Councillors refuse to participate in Government review into Leicester unrest under Lord Ian Austin's lead." Leicester Mercury, June 2, 2023. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/councillors-refuse-participate-government-review-8484347>.
- 98 AMLeicester (@AMLeicester). X (Twitter), 2022. [https://x.com/AMLeicester\\_](https://x.com/AMLeicester_).
- 99 Rezaul H Laskar. "India Has Raised Issue of Violence in Leicester with UK, Says Centre." Hindustan Times, September 23, 2022. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/delhi-news/india-has-raised-issue-of-violence-in-leicester-with-uk-says-centre-101663869374742.html>.
- 100 High Commission of India, London. "High Commission Condemns Violence in Leicester." HCILondon.gov.in, September 19, 2022. [https://www.hcilondon.gov.in/news\\_letter\\_detail/?id=62](https://www.hcilondon.gov.in/news_letter_detail/?id=62).
- 101 Muslim Council of Britain (@MuslimCouncil). "The MCB has written to the Indian High Commissioner". X (Twitter), September 20, 2022. <https://x.com/MuslimCouncil/status/1572220849763254273>.
- 102 Pakistani High Commission London. "On Situation in Leicester." Press Release. phclondon.org, September 19, 2022. <https://www.phclondon.org/pressrelease/on-situation-in-leicester>.
- 103 Bob Blackman MP (@BobBlackman). "Yesterday I wrote to the Home Secretary, @SuellaBraverman." X (Twitter), September 23, 2022. <https://x.com/BobBlackman/status/1573234180472950784>.
- 104 PTI. "UK Minister Suella Braverman Blames Leicester Riots on New Migrants." The Hindu, October 5, 2022. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/uk-minister-suella-braverman-blames-leicester-riots-on-new-migrants/article65971878.ece>.
- 105 LiveMint. "UK Hindu Groups Write to Truss Seeking Protection Post Incidences of Violence." LiveMint, October 15, 2022. <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/uk-hindu-groups-write-to-truss-seeking-protection-post-incidences-of-violence-11665848814006.html>.
- 106 Organiser Bureau. "Hindus under Attack." Organiser, September 29, 2022. <https://organiser.org/2022/09/29/95286/analysis/hindus-under-attack/>.
- 107 Sreya Chatterjee. "VHP to Hold Protest near British Embassy over Communal Clashes in Leicester." India Today, September 24, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/vhp-to-hold-protest-near-british-embassy-over-communal-clashes-in-leicester-cops-block-road-2004220-2022-09-24>.
- 108 Poulomi Saha. "Right-Wing Group VHP Writes to UK PM Liz Truss on Leicester Riots." India Today, September 21, 2022. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/right-wing-group-vishwa-hindu-parishad-writes-to-uk-pm-liz-truss-on-leicester-riots-2003134-2022-09-21>.
- 109 Times Now Digital. "Why Did the UK Government Turn a Blind Eye to the Hindu Hate Incidents?" Times Now News, Updated February 14, 2025. <https://www.timesnownews.com/videos/times-now/shows/why-did-the-uk-government-turn-a-blind-eye-to-the-hindu-hate-incidents-news-hour-video-94425011>.
- 110 Jet News Daman. "News Broadcast." Jet News Daman, September 22, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhWFBomKLT0>.
- 111 LCOFE. "One United Leicestershire". Leicester Council of Faiths, March 4, 2020. <https://www.lcof.org.uk/one-united-leicestershire/>; MEND. "MEND Welcomes the Leicester Council of Faiths Unity Declaration." Muslim Engagement and Development, March 18, 2020. <https://www.mend.org.uk/mend-welcomes-the-leicester-council-of-faiths-unity-declaration/>.
- 112 Archie Bland and Denis Campbell. "Some Leicester Factories Stayed Open and Forced Staff to Come In." The Guardian, June 30, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/30/some-leicester-factories-stayed-open-and-forced-staff-to-come-in>.
- 113 Butler, Sarah. "Poor Working Conditions Persist in Leicester Garment Factories, Finds Survey." The Guardian, June 13, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jun/13/poor-working-conditions-persist-in-leicester-garment-factories-finds-survey>.
- 114 Dan Martin. "Investigators find 'No modern slavery' in Leicester textile factories – but uncover low wages and safety issues." Leicester Mercury, April 16, 2021. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/investigators-find-no-modern-slavery-5302899>.
- 115 Emma Guy. "We Can't Eat, We Can't Feed Ourselves: Leicester's Garment Workers Have Had Enough." Tribune, October 2023. <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2023/10/we-cant-eat-we-cant-feed-ourselves-leicesters-garment-workers-have-had-enough-2023>.
- 116 Dan Martin. "Investigators find 'No modern slavery' in Leicester textile factories – but uncover low wages and safety issues." Leicester Mercury, April 16, 2021. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/investigators-find-no-modern-slavery-5302899>.
- 117 Leicester City Council. "Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs)." Leicester.gov.uk, not dated. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-community/emergencies-safety-and-crime/public-spaces-protection-orders/>.
- 118 Leicestershire Police. "Processions and Events: Guidance for Communities." Leicestershire Police Campaigns, 2024. <https://www.leics.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/leicestershire/campaigns/2024/english-processions-and-events-guidance-for-communities-digital-and-accessible.pdf>.
- 119 X/Twitter post, September 7, 2023. Video in Inquiry archive.
- 120 X /Twitter, September 19, 2023, Inquiry archive.
- 121 Dan Martin. "Gandhi statue campaign 'a distraction' from Black Lives Matters – Leicester East MP Claudia Webbe." Leicester Mercury, June 15, 2020. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/gandhi-statue-campaign-a-distraction-4229833>.
- 122 UK Government. "Hate crime, England and Wales, year ending March 2024 – Open Data tables." Home Office, 2024. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68079ed74dd7e0f8897a6194/prc-hate-crime-open-data.ods>.
- 123 UK Government. "Police Recorded Crime and Outcomes: Open Data Tables." Gov.uk, 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/police-recorded-crime-and-outcomes-open-data-tables>.
- 124 BBC News. "Moghul Durbar restaurant 'revenge attack': Seven men jailed" BBC News, April 26, 2013. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-22315118>.
- 125 BBC News. "Leicester: Boys arrested after 'hate crime' on Sikh boys." BBC News, March 23, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-60852750>.

- 126 PTI. "Indian-Origin Teen In UK Commits Suicide Allegedly After Bullying In School". NDTV, November 15, 2016. <https://www.ndtv.com/indians-abroad/indian-origin-boy-commits-suicide-after-being-bullied-in-british-school-1625542>.
- 127 Meena Dhanda et al. Caste in Britain: Socio-legal Review. Equality and Human Rights Commission Research Report, 2014. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-91-caste-in-britain-socio-legal-review.pdf>.
- 128 National Secular Society. "Hindu Group Threatens Secularists with Police over 'Offensive' Talk." Secularism.org.uk, January 19, 2024. <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2024/01/hindu-group-threatens-secularists-with-police-over-offensive-talk>.
- 129 Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. "Rajya Sabha – Unstarred Question No. 50." Parliamentary Document. February 2, 2022. <https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2022-pdfs/RS02022022/50.pdf>.
- 130 Ajay Aggarwal. Interfaith Dialogue and Community Cohesion in Leicester. Unpublished, not dated. Inquiry archive.
- 131 Asha Patel. "Leicester reacts to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Indian election win." Leicester Mercury, May 31, 2019. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/leicester-reacts-prime-minister-narendra-2924886>.
- 132 Shivam Patel and Anna Mehler Paperny. "India's Modi, Canada's Trudeau Condemn Violence at Hindu Temple near Toronto," Reuters, November 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/canadas-trudeau-indias-modi-condemn-violence-hindu-temple-near-toronto-2024-11-05/>; Reuters. "Demonstration outside Canadian Hindu Temple Broken Up after Police Spotted Weapons," AP News, November 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/86cc58e12e0f13bad0c4c1753e3e64d3>; Phil Tsekouras. "Police Release Bodycam Video of Officer-Involved Incident at Hindu Temple Protest in Brampton, Ont.," CTV News Toronto, November 14, 2024, <https://www.ctvnews.ca/toronto/article/police-release-bodycam-video-of-officer-involved-incident-at-hindu-temple-protest-in-brampton-ont/>; Meredith Bond. "Weapons Seen at Protest at Brampton Hindu Temple One Day after Violent Clashes: Police," CityNews Toronto, November 4, 2024, <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2024/11/04/hundreds-of-people-attend-march-at-brampton-hindu-temple-a-day-after-violent-clashes/>; Olivia Bowden, "'What's Happening in Canada?': Clashes between Hindus and Sikhs Spark Fears of Growing Divisions," The Guardian, November 17, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/nov/17/canada-hindus-sikhs-growing-tensions>; Stephen Dziedzic. "Australian Authorities on Alert as Sikh-Hindu Tensions over Khalistan Separatist Movement Boil over in Sydney," ABC News (Australia), June 9, 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-06-10/tensions-over-khalistan-separatist-movement-boil-over-in-sydney/102463024>; Rosanne Maloney. "Religious Figures Call for Calm after Violence and Vandalism among Victoria's Indian Communities," ABC News (Australia), January 31, 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-02-01/sikh-hindu-khalistan-tensions-religious-leaders-call-for-unity/101910030>; Allannah Sciberras. "Two Arrested after Violent Clash over Khalistan Referendum in Melbourne," 9News, January 30, 2023, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/khalistan-referendum-two-arrested-after-violent-clash-in-federation-square/5c831b08-93f7-4c90-aa57-81e12cd97938> (accessed August 23, 2025); "Voting in 'Khalistan Referendum' Unfolds amid Clashes in Melbourne," SBS Punjabi, January 30, 2023, <https://www.sbs.com.au/language/punjabi/en/podcast-episode/sikhs-in-australia-vote-for-khalistan-referendum-in-melbourne/awkh8uc6s> (accessed August 23, 2025); Atul Dev. "A Bulldozer among the Floats at Indian Parade Divides New Jersey Town," Reuters, September 22, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/bulldozer-among-floats-indian-parade-divides-new-jersey-town-2022-09-22/> (accessed August 23, 2025); EmgageUSA. "Statement on the 18th Annual India Independence Day Parade," EmgageUSA, August 15, 2022, <https://emgageusa.org/press-release/statement-on-the-18th-annual-india-independence-day-parade/>.
- 133 Humanists UK. "Humanists UK calls for Leicester Assistant City Mayor to be investigated after revealing links to extremist and anti-apostate Islamic Centre." Humanists UK, June 28, 2019. <https://humanists.uk/2019/06/28/humanists-uk-calls-for-leicester-assistant-mayors-suspension-after-revealing-links-to-extremist-and-anti-apostate-islamic-centre/>.
- 134 It has been argued that a 'multicultural city' has several defining features: an ethnically diverse population; a statutory framework of human rights, equality and anti-discrimination that includes cultural and religious rights (typically as group rights); official recognition through city policies of ethnic and religious groups; and reasonable accommodation of cultural differences in public institutions to make them plural and inclusive. At the same time, a multicultural city has 'an overarching common ground of public institutions and universal values and norms, an ethics of shared spaces and services relevant across all cultures, and the incremental evolution of a common ground through mutual influences'. Significant in this description is the 'balance' between the common shared civic space and services of the city, the recognition and accommodation of diverse needs and demands in policymaking, and the distribution of statutory services and resources across diverse communities. It is also argued that institutionally strengthening a multicultural and multi-faith city requires promoting healthy community relations that include developing strong degrees of trust and mutual understanding and working to resolve potential sources of conflicts creatively. See: 141. Mohammed A. Qadeer. "Viewpoint: The Multicultural City." Canadian Journal of Urban Research 23, no. 1 (2014): 116–126.
- 135 Gurharpal Singh. "Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: reflections on the 'Leicester Model'", International Journal on Multicultural Societies, 5(1) (2003), pp. 40–54; Gurharpal Singh, "A City of Surprises: Urban Multiculturalism and the 'Leicester Model,'" in A Postcolonial People: South Asians in Britain, ed. Nasreen Ali, Virinder S. Kalra, and S. Sayyid (London: Hurst & Company, 2006), 291–304. See also Paul Winstone, "Managing a Multi-ethnic and Multicultural City in Europe: Leicester," International Social Science Journal, no. 147 (March 1996): 33–41, page 39.
- 136 Valerie Maret, Immigrants Settling in the City (London: Leicester University Press, 1989): 54.
- 137 Seán McLoughlin, "Discrepant Representations of Multi-Asian Leicester: Institutional Discourse and Everyday Life in the 'Model' Multicultural City," in Writing the City in British Asian Diasporas, ed. Seán McLoughlin, William Gould, Ananya Jahanara Kabir, and Emma Tomalin (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 115–140.
- 138 Inès Hassen-Dakhli and Massimo Giovanardi, "The Difference of 'Being Diverse': City Branding and Multiculturalism in the 'Leicester Model'," Cities 80 (2018): 45–52.
- 139 Gurharpal Singh. "Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: reflections on the 'Leicester Model'", International Journal on Multicultural Societies, 5(1) (2003), pp. 40–54.
- 140 Social and community cohesion are often poorly defined, but social cohesion has been characterised as 'a state of affairs concerning both the vertical and horizontal interactions among members of society as characterised by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging, and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioural manifestations'. Social cohesion typically refers to the degree of social solidarity and mutual interdependence among people, and between people and the society's institutions. The level of social cohesion is measured by trust, values, volunteering, and local contentment, among other factors. Community cohesion, while often used interchangeably with social cohesion, has more recently been defined in terms of relations between communities within a society, while social cohesion is a broader concept. Aside from increasing contentment and positive relationships, a high degree of social cohesion is assumed to make the society and relations within it resilient to the impact of internal and external shocks and crises. It is typically argued that there is a causal relationship between institutional infrastructure and enhanced trust and social cohesion, with the former referring to the degree of investment in reliable and

- stable public infrastructure and services, and measures for achieving equality, mobility, interaction, safety and opportunity. Conversely, there is a causal relationship between inadequate institutional infrastructure, poor integration, social fragmentation, and increased levels of conflict in the community. An extensive recent review of the evidence regarding diversity and social cohesion found that diverse neighbourhoods tend to be less cohesive, have lower levels of general trust and have more negative views about neighbours and the neighbourhood. However, if deprivation in Britain is taken into account, diverse areas seem less cohesive 'because they tend to be more deprived. It is material deprivation, not diversity, that threatens to stretch and tear the social fabric'. After the Cattle report, local authorities were charged with promoting community cohesion, including through regeneration programmes and strategies of cross-cultural association. Despite numerous discussions, reports and policies about community cohesion, projects and outcomes over the past 20 years have been patchy or poor across the UK. Also, following the Cattle report, the debate in the UK between proponents of multiculturalism and those of social cohesion often became sharply polarised. Some academics pointed to substantial areas of Leicester with mixed populations and some changing residence and social mobility patterns that contested the idea that the city was segregated. Nevertheless, residential and social segregation patterns are significant in Leicester. See: Joseph Chan, Ho-Pong To, and Elaine Chan. "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research." *Social Indicators Research* 75 (2006): 273–302; Tak Wing Chan and Juta Kawalerowicz. "Social Diversity and Social Cohesion in Britain." *British Journal of Sociology* 75 (2024): 452–470; Edward Scott, "Community Cohesion: The Role of Integration", House of Lords Library In Focus, March 6, 2025; Sara Khan. "Threats to Social Cohesion and Democratic Resilience: A New Strategic Approach". Independent Adviser to the UK Government for Social Cohesion and Resilience, March 2024.
- 141 Ted Cattle. *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*. London: Home Office, 2001.
- 142 Gurharpal Singh. "Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: reflections on the 'Leicester Model'", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 5(1) (2003), pp. 40–54.
- 143 Gurharpal Singh. "Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: reflections on the 'Leicester Model'", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 5(1) (2003), pp. 40–54.
- 144 Thilo Boeck, Carine Cardoza, Jim McCullum, Martin Bell and Michelle Skinner. *Assessing Community Cohesion in Leicester*. Leicester City Council, September 2008; Leicester City Council. *Asylum Seeker Support available in Leicester: Delivering on our commitment to Still Human Still Here*. Leicester City Council, March 2016; Ahtsham Ali, Chris Dallison, Daljit Kaur, Harris Joshua, and Steve White, *Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester* (London: Improvement and Development Agency [IDeA] for Local Government, February 2003); Leicestershire County Council, *Cohesive Communities in Leicestershire* (Leicester: Leicestershire County Council, not dated); Leicestershire County Council, *Leicestershire's Community Cohesion Framework 2012/13*, Leicestershire County Council not dated. <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s69990/K%20equalities%20community%20cohesion%20appx%202022.pdf>; Thilo Boeck, Monica Glover, Mark Johnson, Lee Harrison. *Leicester Community Cohesion – Evaluation and Assessment Framework*. Centre for Social Action, De Montfort University, January 2007.
- 145 Gurharpal Singh. "Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: reflections on the 'Leicester Model'", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 5(1) (2003), pp. 40–54, page 49.
- 146 *Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester*, page 41
- 147 *Taking Forward Community Cohesion in Leicester*, page 7
- 148 Leicester Partnership (2005) "Strategy for Leicester – Aims and Objectives" in *Taking forward community cohesion*
- 149 Leicester City Council. "Leicester Community Safety Partnership Plan 2024-2027." Leicester.gov.uk, 2024. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council/policies-plans-and-strategies/public-safety/leicester-community-safety-partnership/leicester-community-safety-partnership-plan/#:~:text=Summary,make%20a%20difference%20to%20them>.
- 150 Leicester City Council. "Equality Action Plan 2024–25." Leicester.gov.uk, 2024. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council/how-we-work/equality-and-diversity/our-commitment-to-equality/equality-action-plan-2024-25/>.
- 151 Gurharpal Singh. "Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: reflections on the 'Leicester Model'", *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 5(1) (2003), pp. 40–54.
- 152 Arend Lijphart. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).
- 153 Anne Phillips. *Multiculturalism Without Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).
- 154 Leicester City Council. *Revenue Budget 2023–2024*. Leicester.gov.uk, February 22, 2023. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/buhbdloa/general-fund-revenue-budget-2023-2024.pdf>.
- 155 Leicester City Council. *General Fund Revenue Budget 2025–2026*. Leicester.gov.uk, February 19, 2025. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/b4hhlvjs/revenue-budget-202526.pdf>.
- 156 Hannah Richardson. "More than One in Three Children in Leicester Live in Poverty." *Leicester Mercury*, March 23, 2024. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/more-one-three-children-leicester-9183902>.
- 157 Sallie Westwood. "Red Star over Leicester: racism, the politics of identity, and black youth in Britain" in Pnina Werbner and Muhammad Anwar eds. *Black and Ethnic Leaderships in Britain: The Cultural Dimensions of Political Action* (London: Routledge, 1991), 101-16.
- 158 Jessica Murray "Labour Tells 19 Leicester Councillors They Cannot Stand in May Election." *The Guardian*, March 23, 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/mar/23/labour-tells-19-leicester-councillors-they-cannot-stand-in-may-election>.
- 159 Tanya Abraham and Matthew Smith. "Ethnic Minority Britons at the 2024 General Election." *YouGov*, June 28, 2024. <https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/49877-ethnic-minority-britons-at-the-2024-general-election>.
- 160 Abul Taher and Nicholas Pyke. "Violent ethnic clashes in Leicester last year 'were stoked by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist party', sources claim." *Daily Mail*, May 14, 2023. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12081129/Violent-ethnic-clashes-Leicester-year-stoked-Modis-Hindu-nationalist-party.html>.
- 161 Abul Taher. "British Hindu extremists are forming alliances with far-right groups over their 'common hatred' of Muslims *Daily Mail*, March 30, 2025. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14550845/british-hindu-far-right-muslims-common-hatred.html>.
- 162 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021).
- 163 Inquiry archive.
- 164 Camilla Turner. "Police investigate fears 'undue' spiritual influence was used in general election." *The Telegraph*, July 18, 2024. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/07/18/police-investigate-spiritual-influence-election-leicester/>; Camilla Turner. "Fears of 'undue spiritual influence' on voters as community leaders 'highlight Islamic values'." *The Telegraph*, June 29, 2024. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2024/06/29/fears-of-undue-spiritual-influence-on-voters-islamic-values/>.
- 165 The Muslim Vote. "Wondering who should you vote for?" *TheMuslimVote.co.uk*, not dated. <https://themuslimvote.co.uk/who-should-i-vote-for/>.
- 166 Crown Prosecution Service. "Hate Crime." *CPS.gov.uk*, not dated. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/hate-crime>.
- 167 United Kingdom. *Crime and Disorder Act 1998, c.37, s.28*. London: The Stationery Office, 1998. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/37/section/28>.

- 168 Crown Prosecution Service. "Hate Crime." CPS.gov.uk, not dated. <https://www.cps.gov.uk/crime-info/hate-crime>.
- 169 College of Policing. "Authorised Professional Practice." [College.police.uk](https://www.college.police.uk/app), not dated. <https://www.college.police.uk/app>.
- 170 Martin Evans. "Fifteen People Arrested in Leicester Clash between Hindu and Muslim Gangs." *The Telegraph*, September 19, 2022. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/09/19/fifteen-people-arrested-leicester-clash-hindu-muslim-gangs/>.
- 171 Leicestershire Police. Stop and Search Annual Report 2022–23, page 12. <https://www.leics.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/leicestershire/stats-and-data/stop-and-search/annual-stop-search-report-2022-23.pdf>.
- 172 Aina J Khan and Mark Brown. "Police call for calm after 'serious disorder' breaks out in Leicester." *The Guardian*, September 18, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/18/police-community-leaders-crowds-leicester>.
- 173 'Affray' refers to the threatening or use of unlawful violence towards a person such that the person has a reasonable fear for their safety. For 'violent disorder' to occur, three or more people must be present together and use or threaten unlawful violence that would make another person reasonably fear for their safety.
- 174 PTI. "UK Police Make 47 Arrests to Deter Further Disorder in Leicester." *National Herald India*, September 20, 2022. <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/international/uk-police-make-47-arrests-to-deter-further-disorder-in-leicester>.
- 175 Shannen Headley. "Teenager punched and kicked and bottle thrown at head." *Leicester Mercury*, October 5, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/teenager-punched-kicked-bottle-thrown-7660218>.
- 176 Leicester Media. "East Leicester disorder – an update on arrests." *LeicesterMedia.online*, December 24, 2022. <https://www.leicestermedia.online/post/east-leicester-disorder-an-update-on-arrests>.
- 177 Asha Patel. "Police release footage of men after assault linked to violence and disorder in east Leicester." *Leicester Mercury*, November 8, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/police-release-footage-men-after-7794447>.
- 178 Shannen Headley. "The latest arrests which bring total connected to violence and disorder in east Leicester to 55." *Leicester Mercury*, September 30, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/full-latest-arrests-bring-total-7650794>.
- 179 Leicester Media. "Policing patrols continue following further reports of disturbance in East Leicester." *LeicesterMedia.online*, September 7, 2022. <https://www.leicestermedia.online/post/policing-patrols-continue-following-further-reports-of-disturbance-in-east-leicester>.
- 180 BBC. "Leicester: Behind the Divide" BBC File on 4. October 4, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001cpc9>.
- 181 Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice). "Open Letter to East Leicester." X (Twitter), September 21, 2022. <https://x.com/leicspolice/status/1572593850522165254/photo/1>.
- 182 PA Media. "Fifteen arrested to 'deter further disorder' in Leicester, say police." *The Guardian*, September 19, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/19/fifteen-arrested-to-deter-further-disorder-in-leicester-say-police>.
- 183 Dave Owen. "Police release gallery of images of men wanted in connection with violence in East Leicester." *Leicester Mercury*, January 10, 2023. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/gallery/police-bodycam-images-released-men-8011377>.
- 184 Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice). "East Leicester Disorder Update" X (Twitter), September 19, 2022. <https://x.com/leicspolice/status/1571642866081976320>.
- 185 Corey Bedford. "Police issue 16 new images of men wanted in connection with East Leicester disorder." *Leicester Mercury*, January 19, 2023. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/gallery/police-issue-16-new-images-8041761>.
- 186 Coventry Police (@CoventryPolice). "This morning, we arrested a 37-year-old man from #Birmingham." X (Twitter), September 23, 2022. <https://x.com/CoventryPolice/status/1573228269943635968>.
- 187 Leicestershire Police. "Chief Constable Rob Nixon Reflects One Year on from East Leicester Disorder." <https://www.leics.police.uk/news/leicestershire/news/2021/sepember/chief-constable-rob-nixon-reflects-one-year-on-from-east-leicester-disorder/>.
- 188 X/Twitter post, September 6, 2022, Inquiry archive.
- 189 Facebook Story post, now deleted, 2022, Inquiry archive.
- 190 Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice). "Post." X (Twitter), September 12, 2022. <https://x.com/leicspolice/status/1569631673721188353>.
- 191 Shannen Headley. "The latest arrests which bring total connected to violence and disorder in east Leicester to 55". *Leicester Mercury*, September 30, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/full-latest-arrests-bring-total-7650794>.
- 192 X/Twitter post, September 9, 2022, Inquiry archive.
- 193 Reha Kansara and Abdirahim Saeed. "Did misinformation fan the flames in Leicester?." *BBC News Blogs*, September 25, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-63009009>.
- 194 Screenshot of Facebook post, 13/9/2022, Inquiry archive.
- 195 Rina Chandran. "How Tweets, Lies from India Fuelled Hindu-Muslim Unrest in UK." *Reuters*, October 4, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/how-tweets-lies-from-india-fuelled-hindu-muslim-unrest-in-uk-idUSL8N30R28Z/>. Original tweet in Inquiry archive.
- 196 Network Contagion Research Institute, *Cyber Social Swarming Precedes Real World Riots in Leicester: How Social Media Became a Weapon for Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Network Contagion Research Institute, November 10, 2022), page 22.
- 197 Video, man in car filming young women doing garba, Inquiry archive.
- 198 Deleted X (Twitter) post. <https://x.com/i/web/status/1567425881320325127>.
- 199 Deleted X (Twitter) post. <https://x.com/i/web/status/1567427018471645184>.
- 200 RashmiDVS (@RashmiDVS). "Gangs running riot and escalating attacks on Hindus." X (Twitter), September 7, 2022. <https://x.com/RashmiDVS/status/1567357000664875008>.
- 201 Abhiram Ghadyalpatil. "Inside the 'hypnotic' world of Sanatan Sanstha." *LiveMint*, September 12, 2018. <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/s9kuMJdW2dwqANclIMQe1J/Inside-the-secret-world-of-Sanatan-Sanstha.html>.
- 202 Sanatan Prabhat (@SanatanPrabhat). "Hindu Tej Jago! #Pakistani Muslims attacked Hindus in Leicester, UK." X (Twitter), September 8, 2022. <https://x.com/SanatanPrabhat/status/1567821169750937603>.
- 203 For example, RashmiDVS (@RashmiDVS). "Gangs running riot and escalating attacks on Hindus." X (Twitter), September 7, 2022. <https://x.com/RashmiDVS/status/1567357000664875008>.
- 204 Network Contagion Research Institute, *Cyber Social Swarming Precedes Real World Riots in Leicester: How Social Media Became a Weapon for Violence* (New Brunswick, NJ: Network Contagion Research Institute, November 10, 2022).
- 205 Reha Kansara and Abdirahim Saeed. "Did misinformation fan the flames in Leicester?." *BBC News Blogs*, September 25, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/blogs-trending-63009009>.
- 206 Insight UK. "Civil Disorder in Leicester." *Insight UK*, September 18, 2022. <https://insightuk.org/civil-disorder-in-leicester>.
- 207 Rediff. "Pak Gangs Target Hindus in UK after Cricket Match." *Rediff.com*, September 8, 2022. <https://m.rediff.com/news/commentary/2022/sep/08/pak-gangs-target-hindus-in-uk-after-cricket-match/b7f54910fd034993a8cdeb7977a17c1bf>.
- 208 Insight UK (@INSIGHTUK2). "6th Sep: 3rd consecutive night of attacks." X (Twitter), September 10, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1568608724914212864>.

- 209 Henry Jackson Society (YouTube). "Charlotte Littlewood details on-the-ground information regarding the Leicester disorder on GBNews". YouTube, September 21, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMxk69PrTzg>
- 210 Leicestershire Police (@leicspolice). "We are not aware of this." X (Twitter), September 22, 2022. <https://x.com/leicspolice/status/1572856715372294144>.
- 211 DrAmbardar (@DrAmbardar). "According to this video, nine Hindu families left #Leicester." X (Twitter), September 22, 2022. <https://x.com/DrAmbardar/status/1572738357503078401>.
- 212 OpIndia. "'Let's clean them from Leicester as we did from Kashmir': Hindu families leaving amid threat messages from Islamists." OpIndia, September 22, 2022. <https://www.opindia.com/2022/09/hindu-families-leave-leicester-amid-threats-from-islamists/>.
- 213 Ssmit\_93 (@Ssmit\_93). "Post." X (Twitter), September 2022. [https://x.com/Ssmit\\_93/status/1571577955247337472](https://x.com/Ssmit_93/status/1571577955247337472).
- 214 Dan Martin. "'Unacceptable' online abuse aimed at Leicestershire hate crime officer." BBC News, October 13, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-63232931>.
- 215 SarahLGates1 (@SarahLGates1). "Video Post." X (Twitter), September 2022. <https://x.com/SarahLGates1/status/1571493760311373824/video/1>; World Hindu Council (@WldHinduCouncil). "Just in: BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Temple attacked by Pakistani Muslims." X (Twitter), September 18, 2022. <https://x.com/WldHinduCouncil/status/1571538124223946753>.
- 216 g4g4n\_d33p (@g4g4n\_d33p). "UK Update : Shop/Houses set on fire by #Islamic extremists." X (Twitter), September 21, 2022. [https://x.com/g4g4n\\_d33p/status/1572564550729478144](https://x.com/g4g4n_d33p/status/1572564550729478144).
- 217 West Midlands Fire Service. "Large Fire in Supermarket, Alum Rock Road, Saltley." WMFS Incidents, September 19, 2022. <https://www.wmfs.net/incidents/large-fire-in-supermarket-alum-rock-road-saltley/>.
- 218 notts2Brum (Mohsin Ahmed). "Peaceful Protest", TikTok, September 18, 2022. <https://www.tiktok.com/@notts2brum/video/7144681737677917446>
- 219 notts2Brum (Mohsin Ahmed). "Peaceful Protest", TikTok, September 18, 2022. <https://www.tiktok.com/@notts2brum/video/7144681737677917446>
- 220 notts2Brum (Mohsin Ahmed).. "Leicester clash with police – Belgrave Road," TikTok, September 18, 2022. <https://www.tiktok.com/@notts2brum/video/7144854718408314118>.
- 221 notts2Brum (Mohsin Ahmed). "Police will not allow Muslim group to clash with Hindu mobs". TikTok, September 18, 2022. <https://www.tiktok.com/@notts2brum/video/7144764022141897989>
- 222 Mohammed Hijab. "Muslim patrol in Leicester." Instagram, September 18, 2022. [https://www.instagram.com/mohammedhijabofficial/p/CiqHJJuwl\\_-P/](https://www.instagram.com/mohammedhijabofficial/p/CiqHJJuwl_-P/).
- 223 Mohammed Hijab. "Muslim Response to Fascist Hindutva Thugs in Leicester." YouTube, September 19, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4CetXTNmVU>.
- 224 notts2brum1 (TikTok). "Sun. 18th Sep 2022 Belgrave Road, Leicester @ 18:15 West Gang Linkup". TikTok, September 18, 2022. <https://www.tiktok.com/@notts2brum/video/7144854718408314118>.
- 225 Catherine Lough. "Islamist Preacher Accused of 'Stirring Up Hatred' in Leicester." The Telegraph, September 24, 2022. [www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/09/24/islamist-preacher-accused-stirring-hatred-leicester/](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/09/24/islamist-preacher-accused-stirring-hatred-leicester/).
- 226 Mohammed Hijab. "Muslim patrol in Leicester." Instagram, September 18, 2022. [https://www.instagram.com/mohammedhijabofficial/p/CiqHJJuwl\\_-P/](https://www.instagram.com/mohammedhijabofficial/p/CiqHJJuwl_-P/).
- 227 MPACUK. "We are praying for our brothers & sisters in #leicester." Facebook, September 19, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/MPACUK1/videos/629739165416347/>.
- 228 Ali Dawah (YouTube). "Did your coaches carry BJP Hindutva?" YouTube, September 22, 2022. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBCr1\\_VnW6g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UBCr1_VnW6g); Channel 4 News (YouTube). "Leicester riots: YouTuber Mohammed Hijab interview after claims of 'stirring up hatred'". YouTube, October 6, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNRfx74C4Oo>.
- 229 Moazzam Begg (TikTok). "Recently visited the brothers in #Leicester". TikTok, September 22, 2022. <https://www.tiktok.com/@moazzam.begg/video/7146237783374417158>.
- 230 Nick Parker and Dominik Lemanski. "Hate preacher Anjem Choudary returns to spout hate over Leicester chaos months after his public speaking ban is lifted." The Sun, September 24, 2022. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/19907823/anjem-choudary-leicester-fights-muslim-hindu-hindutva/>.
- 231 Network Contagion Research Institute, Cyber Social Swarming Precedes Real World Riots in Leicester: How Social Media Became a Weapon for Violence (New Brunswick, NJ: Network Contagion Research Institute, November 10, 2022), page 31.
- 232 DOAM (@doamuslims). "Anti-Muslim Attacks by Hindutva Goons – a timeline of events", Instagram, September 21, 2022. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CixcAH1q6tl/>.
- 233 Fiona Hamilton, Kaya Burgess, Venetia Menzies, David Woode and John Hall. "Leicester Violence Caused by False Claims of Kidnap and Mosque Attacks," The Times, September 21, 2022. <https://www.thetimes.com/uk/crime/article/leicester-violence-caused-by-false-claims-of-kidnap-and-mosque-attacks-p9nhs80z>.
- 234 Deleted X (Twitter) post. <https://x.com/i/web/status/1571629201781841925>.
- 235 Jessica Murray, Aina J. Khan and Rajeev Syal. "'It feels like people want to fight': how communal unrest flared in Leicester." The Guardian, September 23, 2022. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/sep/23/how-communal-unrest-flared-leicester-muslim-hindu-tensions>.
- 236 AskAnshul (@AskAnshul). "Dear @MPSBrent." X (Twitter), September 25, 2022. <https://x.com/AskAnshul/status/1573951219827380225>.
- 237 Chetan Bhatt, "Hindutva in the West: Mapping the Antinomies of Diaspora Nationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 3 (2000): 615–641; Parita Mukta, "The Public Face of Hindu Nationalism," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23, no. 3 (2000): 442–466; Edward T. G. Anderson, *Hindu Nationalism in the Indian Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024); Nishant Thapliyal, "Resisting Hindutva in the Digital Indian Diaspora," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 46, no. 3 (2023): 500–519.
- 238 Edward T. G. Anderson, *Hindu Nationalism in the Indian Diaspora: Transnational Politics and British Multiculturalism* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd, 2023).
- 239 See, for example: Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh UK. *Sangh Sandesh Special Edition: celebrating fifty years of sangh in UK*. HSS, 2016. Inquiry Archive. Sanjay Kadia. "Hindu Mandir Network Launches in UK." VHP UK, January 14, 2021. <https://vhp.org.uk/>; Awaaz – South Asia Watch. "In Bad Faith: British Charity and Hindu Extremism". London: Awaaz, 2004).
- 240 Hindu Swyamsevak Sangh UK. *Sangh Sandesh Special Edition: celebrating fifty years of sangh in UK*. HSS, 2016, page 140.
- 241 Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021).
- 242 Vinod K. Jose. "The Unholy Alliance between India and the New Global Wave of White Supremacy." The Caravan, December 31, 2017. <https://caravanmagazine.in/khaled-diab/why-white-supremacists-and-hindu-nationalists-are-so-alike>; Al Jazeera, December 13, 2018. <https://aljazeera.com>; Political Research Associates. *Hindu Supremacy and the Multiracial U.S. Far Right*. Somerville, MA: PRA, October 30, 2024. <https://politicalresearch.org>; Political Research Associates and Savera Coalition. *HAF Way to Supremacy*. Somerville, MA: PRA, October 2024. <https://politicalresearch.org>; Alex de Jong. "The Hindutva-MAGA Alliance." Jacobin, March 11, 2025. <https://jacobin.com>; Hindus for Human Rights UK. "Statement on Growing Alliance between Hindu Supremacists and White Supremacists." July 31, 2024. <https://hindusforhumanrights.org.uk>; Moya Lothian-

- McLean. "White and Hindu Supremacists Are a Match Made in Heaven." Novara Media, February 23, 2023. <https://novaramedia.com>.
- 243 Deepa Bhashti. "The mystery behind why Bengaluru is covered in stickers of 'angry Hanuman'." Scroll, February 4, 2017. <https://scroll.in/magazine/825967/the-mystery-behind-why-bengaluru-is-covered-in-stickers-of-angry-hanuman>.
- 244 Kunal Purohit, H-Pop: The Secretive World of Hindutva Pop Stars, Gurugram, Haryana: Harper Collins India, 2023.
- 245 See, for example: Naomi Canton, "No Hindutva or RSS Extremism Involved in Leicester Violence: Report," Times of India, November 6, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>; Naomi Canton, "Pakistan-Origin Youths' Target Hindu Areas in Leicester," Times of India, September 8, 2022, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>; Nupur J. Sharma, "Let's Clean Hindus from Leicester as We Did from Kashmir: Islamists Messages to Organise Violence...", OpIndia, September 22, 2022, <https://www.opindia.com>; Nupur J. Sharma, "Another Report from OpIndia Where We Track the Trajectory and Main Misinformation Campaigns That Triggered Violence against Hindus. #Leicester," OpIndia, September 21, 2022, <https://www.opindia.com>; OpIndia Staff, "Leicester: How Religious Symbols Were Used by Islamists to Identify and Target Hindus," OpIndia, September 19, 2022, <https://www.opindia.com>; Aban Usmani, "What Happened in Leicester, and Did Indian Media Play a Role?," NewsLaundry, September 20, 2022, <https://www.newslaundry.com>; Republic World, "Hinduphobia in UK Draws Ire, Indians Call Out 'False Narrative' against Hindus – Arnab Debates," Republic World, 2022, <https://www.republicworld.com>; Republic TV, "Leicester Strife Due to Local Majoritarianism against Hindus?," YouTube video, 2022, <https://youtube.com>; Zee News, "DNA: Soft Terror Attack on Hindu Temples in Britain," broadcast, September 21, 2022, <https://zeenews.india.com>; Zee News, "Hindus Are under Constant Attack in England," broadcast, September 21, 2022, <https://zeenews.india.com>; India TV, "Ruckus between Hindu Muslim Heats Up in England; Police Struggled Controlling Conflict," broadcast, September 19, 2022, <https://www.indiatvnews.com>; Kreately, "Britain: Hindu Temple Vandalized, India Lodged a Protest," Kreately.in, September 20, 2022, <https://kreately.in>; Times Algebra (@TimesAlgebraIND), "Leicester City Saw Communal Tensions between the Hindus & Pakistani Muslims...", X (formerly Twitter), July 14, 2024, <https://x.com/TimesAlgebraIND>.
- 246 Insight UK. "About Us." Insightuk.org, not dated. <https://insightuk.org/about-us>.
- 247 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "What is Hindutva?." X (Twitter), March 1, 2025. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1895855746690269684>.
- 248 Insight UK. "Hindutvaphobia and Hindutvamisia." Insightuk.org, December 14, 2023. <https://insightuk.org/hindutvaphobia-and-hindutvamisia>.
- 249 Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis, Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online (New York: Data & Society Research Institute, 2017); Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017); Kate Starbird et al., eds., The Handbook of Disinformation Research (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2024).
- 250 Alessandra Barrow. Beyond India: Sangh International and Vernacular Hindutva Politics in the UK. Master's Thesis, University of Leiden, January 7, 202, page 41.
- 251 Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (UK). "About Us." hsnuk.org, not dated. <https://www.hsnuk.org/aboutus>.
- 252 Insight UK. "The Kerala Story: Write to Cineworld." Insight UK Campaign, not dated. <https://campaign.insightuk.org/the-kerala-story-write-to-cinemas/>.
- 253 Meryl Sebastian. "The Kerala Story: Why an Indian film on Islamic State is so controversial." BBC News, May 10, 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-65481927>.
- 254 Satish K. Sharma. Caste Conversion: a colonial conspiracy. Self-published, 2020, page 15.
- 255 INSIGHT UK (@INSIGHTUK2), "FACT CHECK: Leicester Violence – Targeted attacks on #Hindus in Leicester." Twitter/X, September 8, 2022, <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1567970288339668999>.
- 256 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "British Hindu & Indian communities protest outside @guardian offices in London for its continued anti-hindu & anti-india bias." X (Twitter), September 28, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1575174449112162304>.
- 257 Shubham Ghosh. "British Hindu community protests outside Guardian office over 'anti-Hindu & anti-India bias'." Eastern Eye, September 29, 2022. <https://www.easterneye.biz/british-hindu-community-protests-outside-guardian-office-over-anti-hindu-anti-india-bias/>.
- 258 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "FACT CHECK: Leicester Violence." X (Twitter), September 8, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1567970288339668999>.
- 259 UK Government. "Hate Crime, England and Wales, Year Ending March 2024." Gov.uk, October 10, 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024>.
- 260 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "A dangerous plot. This is not a Hindu-Muslim clash, this is an outright attack on Hindus by #Islamists." X (Twitter), September 28, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1575078273389760512>.
- 261 Insight UK. "Civil Disorder in Leicester." Insight UK, September 18, 2022. <https://insightuk.org/civil-disorder-in-leicester>.
- 262 INSIGHT Leicester (@INSIGHTLeicester). "This peaceful protest march in Leicester was attacked by violent Islamists." X (Twitter), September 18, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTLeicester/status/1571307539479814144>.
- 263 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "A peace march was organised by Hindus to show solidarity and support for the Hindu victims." X (Twitter), September 21, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1572627771523829762>.
- 264 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "Muslim extremists block a road and start praying on the road as a sign of territorial right." X (Twitter), September 21, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1572627835407187974>.
- 265 INSIGHT Leicester (@INSIGHTLeicester). "Hindu flag pulled down and desecrated in front of @leicspolice and then burn." X (Twitter), September 18, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTLeicester/status/1571461622908203009>.
- 266 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "BBC caught in its own web of lies." X (Twitter), January 22, 2025. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1882151083512132080>.
- 267 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "British Hindus contribute, co-exist and cooperate." X (Twitter), October 31, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1586991368483864576>.
- 268 Insight UK (Facebook). "Hindus make up the lowest number of prisoners in England and Wales." InsightUK Facebook, September 23, 2022. <https://www.facebook.com/InsightUKTeam/posts/hindus-make-up-the-lowest-number-of-prisoners-in-england-and-wales-facts-dont-li/638118687748739/>.
- 269 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "A correct response to @kimleadbeater from the British Hindu Council." X (Twitter), December 1, 2022. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1598285788243894276>.
- 270 Insight UK. "The Hindu Manifesto UK 2024." Insightuk.org, June 26, 2024. <https://insightuk.org/the-hindu-manifesto-uk-2024>.
- 271 NathaliPutrRexx (@NathaliPutrRexx). "Commander for the East #Leicester Police is Inspector Yakub Ismail, Do I need to say More !!!." X (Twitter), September 6, 2022. <https://x.com/NathaliPutrRexx/status/1567267483349811200>.
- 272 INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "Disruption of Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations in Leicester with the use of excessive force by officer Adam Ahmed of Leicestershire Police." X (Twitter), September 19, 2023. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1704172664602914936>; INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "Hindu priest manhandled by Officer Adam Ahmed of @leicspolice during Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations in Leicester." X (Twitter), September 19, 2023. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1704172538530545805>; INSIGHT UK – Leicester (@INSIGHTLeicester). "Last night Officer Adam Ahmed

- of Leicestershire Police used what we believe is excessive force against peaceful Hindu devotees celebrating #GaneshChaturthi. Last year's attacks and now this." X (Twitter), September 19, 2023. <https://x.com/INSIGHTLeicestr/status/1704167366664364183>; INSIGHTUK2 (@INSIGHTUK2). "Hindu priest pushed around by Sgt Adam Ahmed of Leicestershire police." X (Twitter), September 20, 2023. <https://x.com/INSIGHTUK2/status/1704475316347912481>.
- 273 Insight UK. "Leicester Ganesh festival interrupted: A timeline of events." Insightuk.org, September 21, 2023. <https://insightuk.org/leicester-ganesh-utsav-interrupted>.
- 274 Claudia Webbe (@claudiawebbe). "Ganesh Chaturthi is a major event in the Hindu calendar." X (Twitter), September 21, 2023. <https://x.com/claudiawebbe/status/1704876050579104057>.
- 275 Jeremy Ball. "Sergeant cleared of misconduct at Hindu procession." BBC News, December 12, 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cwyxjzwjvknk>.
- 276 OpIndia. "UK: Ganesh Chaturthi celebration disrupted in Leicester after police officer Adam Ahmed manhandles Hindu priest and devotees." OpIndia, September 20, 2023. <https://www.opindia.com/2023/09/cop-adam-ahmed-manhandles-hindu-priest-and-devotees-at-ganesh-chaturthi-in-leicester/>.
- 277 Change.org. "Petition: Immediate Suspension of Police Officer Adam Ahmed." Change.org, September 22, 2023. <https://www.change.org/p/immediate-suspension-of-police-officer-adam-ahmed-involved-in-the-shocking-incident-outsid/c>.
- 278 See for example, rjalkaheenaartist (TikTok). "bhageshwar Baba Leicester #2023". TikTok, July 26, 2023. <https://www.tiktok.com/@rjalkaheenaartist/video/7260255587311553819>.
- 279 JIX5A (@JIX5A). "Crowds of Devotees in Leicester coming for Dharshan." X (Twitter), July 23, 2023. <https://x.com/JIX5A/status/1683084717438955526>.
- 280 Rati Agnihotri. "Is the SOAS inquiry into Leicester violence biased and rigged against Hindus?" HinduPost, December 29, 2023. <https://hindupost.in/world/is-the-soas-inquiry-into-leicester-violence-biased-and-rigged-against-hindus/>.
- 281 Insight UK. "The not-so-independent SOAS inquiry into the Leicester violence." Insightuk.org, September 24, 2023. <https://insightuk.org/the-not-so-independent-soas-inquiry-into-the-leicester-violence>.
- 282 Insight UK. "The not-so-independent SOAS inquiry into the Leicester violence." Insightuk.org, September 24, 2023. <https://insightuk.org/the-not-so-independent-soas-inquiry-into-the-leicester-violence>.
- 283 Insight UK. "The not-so-independent SOAS inquiry into the Leicester violence." Insightuk.org, September 24, 2023. <https://insightuk.org/the-not-so-independent-soas-inquiry-into-the-leicester-violence>.
- 284 Dharendra K. Jha, "The Apostle of Hate: Historical records expose the lie that Nathuram Godse left the RSS," *The Caravan*, January 1, 2020. <https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/historical-record-expose-lie-godse-left-rss>.
- 285 Christophe Jaffrelot, "India's Democracy at 70: Toward a Hindu State?," *Journal of Democracy* 28, no. 3 (2017): 52–63; Ward Berenschot, *Riot Politics: Hindu–Muslim Violence and the Indian State* (London: Hurst; New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Thomas Blom Hansen, *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s* (London: Hurst, 1996); Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu–Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003); Ornit Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Thomas Blom Hansen, "Recuperating Masculinity: Hindu Nationalism, Violence and the Exorcism of the Muslim 'Other,'" *Critique of Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (1996): 137–172.
- 286 Insight UK. "The not-so-independent SOAS inquiry into the Leicester violence." Insightuk.org, September 24, 2023. <https://insightuk.org/the-not-so-independent-soas-inquiry-into-the-leicester-violence>.
- 287 Naomi (@naomi2009). "There is more about George Soros that the people of India need to know." X (Twitter), February 18, 2023. <https://x.com/naomi2009/status/1626941447621558275>.
- 288 HCOG UK (@HCOG\_UK). "Statement from #HCOG about the SOAS led inquiry into #Leicester unrest." X (Twitter), April 8, 2024. [https://x.com/HCOG\\_UK/status/1777447281844728192](https://x.com/HCOG_UK/status/1777447281844728192).
- 289 Advocacy for British Hindus & Indians (ABHI). "Alarming Rise in Hinduphobia: Hindu Community Lives at Serious Risk In Leicester". Policy Brief by the Secretariat to the APPG For British Hindus, September 21, 2022. Inquiry archive.
- 290 Henry Jackson Society (YouTube). "Charlotte Littlewood details on-the-ground information regarding the Leicester disorder on GBNews". YouTube, September 21, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMxk69PrTzg>
- 291 Charlotte Littlewood. "Hindu-Muslim Civil Unrest in Leicester: Hindutva and the Creation of a False Narrative." (London: Henry Jackson Society, November 3, 2022.) <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/hindu-muslim-civil-unrest-in-leicester-hindutva-and-the-creation-of-a-false-narrative/>.
- 292 Asha Patel. "Police called after crowds gather outside venue to see controversial Indian priest." *Leicester Mercury*, August 1, 2023. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/police-called-after-crowds-gather-8645068>; Geeta Pandey. "Bageshwar Dham Sarkar: The Indian guru making headlines over 'miracle' cures." BBC News, February 3, 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-64480726>; Himanshu Shekhar Dwivedi. "How Dharendra Shastri Got His Powers And What Makes Him a Divine Soul." *Shribageshwardham.com*, July 22, 2023. <https://shribageshwardham.com/how-dhirendra-shastri-got-his-powers/>.
- 293 NH Web Desk. "Bageshwar Dham Chief Saying 'India a Hindu Rashtra' Has No Value: Nitish Kumar." *National Herald India*, May 17, 2023. <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/national/bageshwar-dham-chief-saying-india-a-hindu-rashtra-has-no-value-nitish-kumar>.
- 294 ABP News Bureau. "Dhirendra Shastri Backs 'Batoge Toh Katoge' Slogan, Urges More Childbirths For 'Hindu Rashtra'." *ABP Live*, November 3, 2024. <https://news.abplive.com/cities/dhirendra-shastri-supports-batoge-toh-katoge-slogan-pushes-for-more-childbirths-for-hindu-rashtra-yogi-adityanath-bageshwar-dham-1728803>.
- 295 ABP Live News. "Dhirendra Shastri Lays Foundation Stone For First Hindu Village In MP, Says 'Dream Of Hindu Rashtra Starts From Here'" *ABP Live News*, April 3, 2025. <https://news.abplive.com/states/madhya-pradesh/dhirendra-shastri-lays-foundation-stone-for-first-hindu-village-in-mp-says-dream-of-hindu-rashtra-starts-from-here-1762676>.
- 296 FoejMedia (@FoejMedia). "Controversial self-proclaimed Godman, #Dhirendrashastri aka #BageshwarDhamSarkar Dham Sarkar, raises chants for #HinduRashtra from Leicester, London." X (Twitter), July 27, 2023. <https://x.com/FoejMedia/status/1684606684180910080>.
- 297 Areeb Ullah. "UK: Leicestershire police face backlash for presenting award to Hindu preacher." *Middle East Eye*, August 2, 2023. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-leicestershire-police-backlash-award-hindu-preacher>.
- 298 Jane Haynes. "Plea for peace after protest at Durga Bhawan Hindu temple in Smethwick." *Birmingham Mail*, September 21, 2022. <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/black-country/plea-peace-after-protest-durga-25069593>.
- 299 The New Indian Express. "After Leicester city, communal violence erupts in UK's Smethwick." YouTube, September 21, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAQDaJy9s8w>.
- 300 The New Indian Express. "After Leicester city, communal violence erupts in UK's Smethwick." YouTube, September 21, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAQDaJy9s8w>.
- 301 Jane Haynes. "Plea for peace after protest at Durga Bhawan Hindu temple in Smethwick." *Birmingham Mail*, September 21, 2022. <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/black-country/plea-peace-after-protest-durga-25069593>.

- 302 Enda Mullen. "Police dispersed crowd of dozens after protest outside Coventry Hindu temple." Coventry Telegraph, September 23, 2022. <https://www.coventrytelegraph.net/news/coventry-news/police-dispersed-crowd-dozens-after-25093670>.
- 303 YouTube video of Akshata Kalash Pooja in a Leicester Hindu Mandir, Inquiry archive.
- 304 YouTube video of Akshata Kalash Pooja in a Leicester Hindu Mandir, Inquiry archive.
- 305 YouTube video of Akshata Kalash Pooja in a Leicester Hindu Mandir, Inquiry archive.
- 306 UKIM Council (@UKIMCouncil). "Hindutva provocation resurfaces in Leicester." X (Twitter), April 19, 2024. <https://x.com/UKIMCouncil/status/1781111712806064265>.
- 307 Jai Shri Ram Sena Sangthan. "About Us." JSRS, not dated. <https://shriramsetu.org/>.
- 308 Ramdoot Seva Sangh (Instagram). "Hamare pyare Ram Lalla From Bharat(Ayodhya) to UK (leicester)." Instagram, May 1, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/ramdoot.seva.sangh/reel/C6cN0y5t993/>.
- 309 Ramdoot Seva Sangh (Instagram). "AAGMAN OF SANATAN KA RAJA." Instagram, September 24, 2024. <https://www.instagram.com/ramdoot.seva.sangh/reel/DATxZBtW-U/>.
- 310 Ramdoot Seva Sangh Official (Instagram). "Related Profiles". Instagram, not dated. [https://www.instagram.com/ramdoot.seva.sangh/related\\_profiles/](https://www.instagram.com/ramdoot.seva.sangh/related_profiles/).
- 311 Ramdoot Seva Sangh Official (Instagram). "Related Profiles". Instagram, not dated. [https://www.instagram.com/ramdoot.seva.sangh/related\\_profiles/](https://www.instagram.com/ramdoot.seva.sangh/related_profiles/).
- 312 Bhakti Mala (YouTube). "Mere Bharat Ka Baccha Baccha by Pooja Golhani". YouTube, November 13, 2023. <https://youtu.be/vOpkyoLnj2w>. Video in Leicester, October 28, 2023, in Inquiry archive
- 313 Video from Leicester, October 25, 2023, in Inquiry archive.
- 314 Video from Leicester, January 22, 2024, in Inquiry archive.
- 315 Indian Express, "Covid-19 Pandemic God's Wrath for Obscenity, Nudity: Pakistan Cleric," Indian Express, April 27, 2020.
- 316 Tariq Jamil (@TariqJamilOFCL). "My prayers for a speedy recovery." X (Twitter), April 25, 2021. <https://x.com/TariqJamilOFCL/status/1386338087710732294>.
- 317 Daen (Pakistan). "'We are ashamed'": Maulana Tariq Jamil condemns act of 'cruelty' against lynched Sri Lankan national". Dawn.com, December 22, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1665216>
- 318 JIX5A (@JIX5A). "This is absolutely shocking! Why is the Maher Centre leicester, UK managing committee, allowing this?." X (Twitter), June 14, 2023. <https://x.com/JIX5A/status/1668968130213756929>.
- 319 Insight UK. "Concerns over the Global Peace and Unity Festival: A Platform for Extremist Voices?" Insightuk.org, October 13, 2024. <https://insightuk.org/concerns-over-the-global-peace-and-unity-festival-a-platform-for-extremist-voices>.
- 320 Mahmood Mamdani. From citizen to refugee: Uganda Asians come to Britain. (Oxford: Pambazuka, 2011), page 55.
- 321 Hassen, I., and Massimo Giovanardi. "The Difference of 'Being Diverse': City Branding and Multiculturalism in the 'Leicester Model.'" *Cities* 63 (2017): 8–17.
- 322 Koshy, Yohann. "What the Unrest in Leicester Revealed About Britain – and Modi's India." *The Guardian*, February 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/08/unrest-leicester-muslim-hindu-revealed-britain-modi-india-2022>.
- 323 Leicester City Council. "Online Mapping System." Leicester.gov.uk, 2024. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/planning-and-building/planning-applications/online-mapping-system/>.
- 324 Leicester City Council. Leicester – Local Authority profile 2023. Leicester.gov.uk, not dated. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/inmh1feq/living-in-leicester-infographic-summary-2023.pdf>.
- 325 Office for National Statistics. How life has changed in Leicester: Census 2021. O (January 19 2023).
- 326 University of Leicester. "What's the wider story behind Leicester's migration history?". Blog post. University of Leicester, December 16, 2022. <https://le.ac.uk/news/2022/december/migration>.
- 327 Leicester City Council. Leicester – Local Authority profile 2023. Leicester.gov.uk, not dated. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/inmh1feq/living-in-leicester-infographic-summary-2023.pdf>
- 328 Office for National Statistics. "How Life Has Changed in Leicester: Census 2021." ONS Visualisation, January 19, 2023. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E06000016/>.
- 329 Office for National Statistics. "How Life Has Changed in Leicester: Census 2021." ONS Visualisation, January 19, 2023.
- 330 Office for National Statistics. "Economic activity status by ethnic group." ONS, January 15, 2024. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/RM018/editions/2021/versions/3/>.
- 331 Office for National Statistics. "Economic activity status by ethnic group." ONS, January 15, 2024. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/RM018/editions/2021/versions/3/>.
- 332 Office for National Statistics. "Economic activity status by ethnic group." ONS, January 15, 2024. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/RM018/editions/2021/versions/3/>.
- 333 Leicester City Council. Leicester – Local Authority profile 2023. Leicester.gov.uk, not dated. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/inmh1feq/living-in-leicester-infographic-summary-2023.pdf>.
- 334 Office for National Statistics. "Census Maps: Leicester." ONS, not dated. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/identity?lad=E06000016>.
- 335 Leicester City Council. Leicester – Local Authority profile 2023. Leicester.gov.uk, not dated. <https://www.leicester.gov.uk/media/inmh1feq/living-in-leicester-infographic-summary-2023.pdf>
- 336 UK Government. "Regional Ethnic Diversity." Gov.uk, December 22, 2022. <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest/>.
- 337 Office for National Statistics. "ONS Dataset Filter Outputs: Ethnic group and religion." ONS, March 23, 2023. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/create/filter-outputs/2faa1375-031c-4974-9953-b97da4ec5cbb#get-data>.
- 338 Office for National Statistics. "How Life Has Changed in Leicester: Census 2021." ONS Visualisation, January 19, 2023. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E06000016/>.
- 339 Office for National Statistics. "ONS Dataset Filter Outputs: Ethnic group and religion." ONS, March 23, 2023. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/datasets/create/filter-outputs/2faa1375-031c-4974-9953-b97da4ec5cbb#get-data>.
- 340 Koshy, Yohann. "What the Unrest in Leicester Revealed About Britain – and Modi's India." *The Guardian*, February 8, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/feb/08/unrest-leicester-muslim-hindu-revealed-britain-modi-india-2022>.
- 341 Gurharpal Singh, "Multiculturalism in Contemporary Britain: Reflections on the 'Leicester Model,'" *International Journal on Multicultural Societies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 40–54.
- 342 Office for National Statistics. "Census Maps: Leicester." ONS, not dated. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/identity?lad=E06000016>.
- 343 Valerie Karn and Deborah Phillips, "Race and Ethnicity in Housing: A Diversity of Experience," in *Race Relations in Britain: A Developing Agenda*, ed. Tessa Blackstone, Bhikhu Parekh, and Peter Sanders (London: Routledge, 1998), 128–157; Deborah Phillips and Valerie Karn, "Racial Segregation in Britain: Patterns, Processes, and Policy Approaches," in *Urban Housing Segregation of Minorities in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Elizabeth D. Huttman, Wim Blauw, and Juliet Saltman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 63–91, page 72.
- 344 Office for National Statistics. "Census Maps: Leicester." ONS, not dated. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/maps/choropleth/identity?lad=E06000016>.
- 345 David Byrne, "Class and Ethnicity in Complex Cities—The Cases of Leicester and Bradford," *Environment and Planning A* 30, no. 4 (1998): 703–720, page 712;

- 346 Cf. Parminder Bhachu, *Twice Migrants: East African Sikh Settlers in Britain* (London: Tavistock, 1985).
- 347 Steven Vertovec, *Multicultural, multi-Asian, multi-Muslim Leicester: dimensions of social complexity, ethnic organisation and local government interface* (*Innovation: European Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1994, pp. 259–276), page 263.
- 348 Deborah Phillips, “The Social and Spatial Segregation of Asians in Leicester,” in *Social Interaction and Ethnic Segregation*, ed. Peter Jackson and Susan Smith (London: Academic Press, 1981), 101–121, page 108.
- 349 Valerie Karn and Deborah Phillips, “Race and Ethnicity in Housing: A Diversity of Experience,” in *Race Relations in Britain: A Developing Agenda*, ed. Tessa Blackstone, Bhikhu Parekh, and Peter Sanders (London: Routledge, 1998), 128–157; Deborah Phillips, “Black Minority Ethnic Concentration, Segregation and Dispersal in Britain,” *Urban Studies* 35, no. 10 (October 1998): 1681–1702; Phillips, Deborah, and Valerie Karn. 1992. “Race and Housing in a Property-Owning Democracy.” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 18 (3): 355–69.
- 350 Richard Bonney and William Le Goff, “Leicester’s Cultural Diversity in the Context of the British Debate on Multiculturalism,” *The International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations*, vol. 6 (2006): 45–58.
- 351 Leicester City Council. “Census 21 – Religion Ward Level,” Leicester Open Data Portal, published June 27, 2023. <https://data.leicester.gov.uk/explore/dataset/census-21-religion-ward-level/information/>.
- 352 Office for National Statistics. “Portuguese Nationals in the UK.” ONS, January 27, 2025. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/freedomofinformationfoi/portuguesenationalsintheuk>.
- 353 For example, see: GTCRP. “The Mandate and Guiding Principles.” Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission. <https://greensborotrc.org/mandate.php>; GTCRP. *Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report – City response* (Chapter 9), page 252. [https://greensborotrc.org/post1979\\_cityresponse.pdf](https://greensborotrc.org/post1979_cityresponse.pdf); Eduardo Gonzalez Cueva, Jill Williams and Felix Reategui Carrillo. *Civil Society-Led Truth-Seeking Initiatives: Expanding Opportunities for Acknowledgment and Redress*, International Center for Transitional Justice, April 21, 2022, page 18. <https://www.ictj.org/node/35101>.
- 354 Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners* (London: SAGE Publications, 2013); Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Thousand Oaks, CA; London; New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2011).
- 355 Sali Shobowale and Ciaran Fagan. “‘We will not let you succeed’ Leicester’s Muslim and Hindu leaders issue joint message to ‘inciters of hatred’.” *Leicester Mercury*, September 20, 2022. <https://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/we-not-you-succeed-leicesters-7605808>.
- 356 Gareth Davies. “Asian women in Leicester ‘living in fear’ as they condemn ‘senseless’ sectarian violence.” *The Telegraph*, September 25, 2022. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/09/25/asian-women-leicester-living-fear-condemn-senseless-sectarian/>.

# List of Figures and Tables

## Figures

**Figure 1:** Sparrow Park and vicinity, including Harewood Street and Cottesmore Road [28](#)

**Figure 2:** Screenshot from CCTV footage, distributed online, showing around 20 youths chasing and then surrounding one, and possibly two, other youths [29](#)

**Figure 3:** Leicester area of significance in events prior to end of August 2022 [31](#)

**Figure 4:** India cricket team supporters attacking others on Melton and Shaftesbury Roads, Leicester [32](#)

**Figure 5:** Attack on young man by large group, Cottesmore Road [42](#)

**Figure 6:** Flag snatched from home in Cottesmore Road [42](#)

**Figure 7:** Large groups of men and youths walking through Spence Street and down Woodland Road in the direction of Fernie and Cottesmore Roads [43](#)

**Figure 8:** Youths surrounding and attacking a car on Woodland Road [43](#)

**Figure 9:** Groups of youths and police, many masked, during 5-6 September events [44](#)

**Figure 10:** Approximate route of march from Belgrave to North Evington on 17 September 2022 [52](#)

**Figure 11:** About a hundred youths walking down Green Lane Road having apparently tried to turn into Asfordby Street [52](#)

**Figure 12:** Attack on an individual by group of youths on corner of Green Lane Road and Bridge Road, followed by a large group running towards the attack [53](#)

**Figure 13:** Social media messages calling people in or near Birmingham to meet and go to Leicester [53](#)

**Figure 14:** Some 'flashpoints' reported on Green Lane Road and Martin Street, 17 September 2022 [54](#)

**Figure 15:** Large group of Hindu youths on Layton Road at junction with Uppingham Road [54](#)

**Figure 16:** Marchers contained by police at the corner of Spence Street and Duxbury Road [54](#)

**Figure 17:** Hindus on Layton Road blocked from confrontations with Muslims on Duxbury Road [55](#)

**Figure 18:** Some flashpoints reported in Belgrave area [55](#)

**Figure 19:** Attack on man in a car by large group, Gypsy Lane near Catherine Street, 17 September 2022 [56](#)

**Figure 20:** Hundreds of (Muslim) youths running into Belgrave Road in the evening [58](#)

**Figure 21:** Belgrave Road Shivalaya Mandir and carwash [58](#)

**Figure 22:** Police line cordoning off Muslim counter-protestors on Belgrave Road outside Shivalaya Mandir and its car park [59](#)

**Figure 23:** Other mainly Muslim counter-protestors on Belgrave Road near the junction with Olphin St [59](#)

**Figure 24:** A small group of Hindu youths contained in the carwash, Olphin St and Belgrave Road [60](#)

**Figure 25:** Republic World in India reporting that a Hindu temple was targeted in Leicester [62](#)

**Figure 26:** Around 50-60 Hindu youths on the corner of Humberstone and Layton Roads, 17 September [67](#)

**Figure 27:** 'Jai Shree Ram' and 'Vande Mataram!' being chanted on Green Lane Road by protesters, 17 September 2022 [70](#)

**Figure 28:** Pradip Gajjar, ISKCON, reads out the joint peace statement outside the Jame' Mosque with religious and community figures present, 20 September 2022 [75](#)

**Figure 29:** Women's peace statement, Leicester city centre, 24 September 2022 [76](#)

**Figure 30:** VHP demonstration in Delhi related to the Leicester violence [80](#)

**Figure 31:** Hate crimes recorded by Leicestershire police, 2011-2024 [96](#)

**Figure 32:** Hate crimes recorded by police forces in England and Wales, 2011-2024 [97](#)

**Figure 33:** Distribution of Hindu Temples in Leicester [105](#)

**Figure 34:** Distribution of Mosques in Leicester [105](#)

**Figure 35:** Flyers by Operation Dharmic Vote used during the 2019 General Election in Leicester [112](#)

**Figure 36:** Number of tweets (678) using the hashtags #HindusUnderAttackInUK and #HindusUnderAttackUK from 6–16 September 2022 [132](#)

**Figure 37:** Number of tweets using the hashtag #HindusUnderAttackInUK (or #HindusUnderAttackUK) from 6 September 2022 – 6 June 2023 [133](#)

**Figure 38:** Call on Muslims to protest on 18 September in Belgrave [134](#)

**Figure 39:** Mohammed Hijab and a ‘Muslim patrol’, Belgrave, 18 September [135](#)

**Figure 40:** Inflammatory MPAC UK video, Facebook, 18 September [136](#)

**Figure 41:** Post from @apnamuslims calling for a protest outside Shree Sanatan Mandir in Wembley [136](#)

**Figure 42:** Traditional depictions of Ram as a moral, ethical figure governing in a period of peace, plenty and wise rule [144](#)

**Figure 43:** Newer depictions of Ram, as a lone warrior and silhouetted in flag stating ‘Jai Shree Ram’ [144](#)

**Figure 44:** The God Hanuman, a traditional depiction of divine wisdom, and a recent ‘angry Hanuman’ representation [146](#)

**Figure 45:** ‘Jai Shree Ram’ flags, older and more recent, the first depicting Hanuman carrying a mountain, the second of Ram against the Ayodhya temple [147](#)

**Figure 46:** Changes in iconography [148](#)

**Figure 47:** ‘Undivided India’, as imagined by contemporary Hindutva [149](#)

**Figure 48:** Examples of disinformation and defamation by Insight UK regarding the Independent Inquiry, 2023-2024 [156](#)

**Figure 49:** Protest outside Durga Bhawan temple in Smethwick, 20 September 2022 [160](#)

**Figure 50:** RDSS Instagram profile page [163](#)

**Figure 51:** Members of RDSS in procession in Leicester [163](#)

**Figure 52:** Leicester and Leicestershire in the UK [168](#)

**Figure 53:** Leicester city ward map [168](#)

**Figure 54:** Population growth in Leicester compared to East Midlands and England [169](#)

**Figure 55:** Economic Activity and Ethnicity, 2021 Census (‘does not apply’ categories excluded) [170](#)

**Figure 56:** Economic Activity and Religion, 2021 Census [171](#)

**Figure 57:** Occupation by Religion, 2021 Census [171](#)

**Figure 58:** Economically inactive (left) and deprivation across four dimensions (education, employment, health and housing), distribution in Leicester, 2021 Census [172](#)

**Figure 59:** Religions in Leicester in 2021 and 2011 [174](#)

**Figure 60:** White (top) and Asian (bottom) population distribution in Leicester, 2021 [178](#)

**Figure 61:** Hindu (top) and Muslim (bottom) population distribution in Leicester, 2021 [179](#)

**Figure 62:** Populations by religion in Leicester wards, 2021 [180](#)

**Figure 63:** Location of Daman and Diu in India [182](#)

## Tables

Table 1: Religious hate crimes in England and Wales recorded by the police, by perceived religion [152](#)

Table 2: Leicester’s population by ethnicity in 2021 [173](#)

Table 3: Leicester’s population by reported religion and ethnicity [174](#)

Table 4: Leicester’s South Asian population by reported religion and ethnicity [176](#)

Table 5: Leicester community groups classified by religious traditions [176](#)

Table 6: General profile of all participants: gender and religion [205](#)

Table 7: Interview participants’ profile [205](#)

Table 8: Profile of survey respondents [206](#)

Table 9: Hashtags for which X / Twitter data was collected [209](#)

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 Methods of Research and Working

### This Inquiry's Work

Normally, inquiries like ours are mainly fact-finding and reporting, and are typically guided by legal and policy frameworks, often grounded in human rights. Our approach was different and integrated legal areas, social research, academic analysis and community engagement. The Inquiry comprised four main dimensions of work: the Commission Panel, the research team, the Leicester Advisory Group, and community development and engagement.

The Inquiry formally began its work with a letter sent on 24 May 2023 to the Mayor, the Chief Constable for Leicestershire Police, and the Police and Crime Commissioner for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland, the Leicester MPs, 54 elected councillors and a wide range of community groups in Leicester to inform them about the Inquiry and requesting their engagement. The Government announced its review on 26 May 2023, two days after our letter. We subsequently sent a wider press release on 1 June about our Inquiry and its scope.

We held a press conference on 18 September 2023 at the Peepul Enterprises Centre, attended by representatives of the national and local media and local organisations. We wrote to the Mayor, the Chief Constable, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Leicester MPs and councillors several times during our work, informing them of our Inquiry and requesting meetings.

In May and June 2023, we emailed 146 community groups and voluntary organisations to inform them about our Inquiry. As our work progressed, we identified many more organisations, including community networks and regional or subcaste (*jati*) groups, resulting in an eventual list of 337 community groups, voluntary organisations, and named community networks in Leicester. Of these, 305 were South Asian. Where we had email addresses for groups (153 groups), they were emailed about the following elements of the Inquiry: in September 2023, about our press conference, in December 2023, asking for witnesses to the events, in March 2024, asking if they would like to be interviewed, and in July 2024, informing them about our public hearing. Around 150 residents attended our community events in Leicester East and Leicester South, our public hearing, and the press conference. We emailed 75 of these residents in December 2023 and contacted 47 other individuals during 2024 by mobile phone to request information, witnesses, or other engagement with the Inquiry.

Pathways to community engagement included:

- A Leicester-based Advisory Group that provided considerable assistance and advice regarding engagement with groups and residents
- Employment of a community development worker based in Leicester to work with community groups and contacts
- Visits by the Inquiry panel to Leicester on 20–21 November 2023, including meetings with com-

munities in Leicester East (Peepul Enterprises Centre) and Leicester South (Evington Community Centre) that encouraged residents to engage with the Inquiry. Around 35 and 75 residents attended these respective meetings.

- Weekly or fortnightly visits to Leicester during much of 2024, whereby the research team, project coordinator and community development worker were present on the ground and available to meet individuals and groups
- Direct contact by email or phone with almost 180 individuals to request an interview or meeting. 81 individuals were interviewed, some more than once.
- Dedicated community drop-in sessions during which members of the public could come and talk to us. Two were held at Belgrave Neighbourhood Community Centre in early May 2024, and three at the Peepul Centre in June and July that year.
- A day-long public hearing held on Saturday, 13 July 2024, at the YMCA Leicestershire that heard testimony from eight witnesses about the events of 17 September.
- Dedicated meetings with many community groups, including with the public congregation at the Shree Swaminarayan Temple (International Swaminarayan Satsang Organisation, ISSO), meetings with representatives of several Leicester mosques, and meetings with the Federation of Muslim Organisations, the Adhar Project, the Leicester Council of Faiths, St Philip's Centre, the UK Indian Muslim Council, Shama Women's Centre, Highfields Community Centre, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Leicester Council of Faiths, Leicester Stories of Hope, the Integration Foundation, the offices of the Bishop of Leicester, and several other community groups and representatives (Hindu and Muslim).
- Door-to-door leafletting in June 2024 of households in the Belgrave ward (7,000 flyers), and then again in October of all households in Belgrave, Rushey Meade and North Evington wards, as well as the Northfields area of Troon ward (15,000 flyers). The leaflets informed residents about the Inquiry, our open sessions, and the survey.
- Making available facilities to provide anonymous information by email or in person to us. This included meeting individuals in designated private spaces where they would not be seen or recognised.

### Other reviews and opposition

Within days after our first letter to Leicester officials, politicians and community groups, the Government's Independent Review Panel of the 2022 Leicester unrest, chaired by Lord Ian Austin, was announced by Secretary of State for Communities, Michael Gove on 26 May 2023 (hereafter, 'government review'). An earlier official inquiry, announced in 2022 by Sir Peter Soulsby, Leicester City Mayor, had foundered following complaints from some

organisations about alleged bias. Our Inquiry panel met with the Government's Independent Review Panel in December 2023 to discuss our respective areas of work, but without sharing findings – the aim being to cooperate where necessary but without affecting our respective academic, ethical or institutional independence.

It is not unusual to find multiple inquiries into serious events, some simultaneous and others in serial order, to reach conclusions about what happened and formulate recommendations. Some inquiries can span many years. During the early stages of our work, the existence of two projects caused confusion among a few community groups, though we clarified these issues at various public and community engagement meetings in Leicester.

Both the government's review and our Inquiry faced accusations of bias, and groups in Leicester organised campaigns to boycott either one or the other. In a concerted and dogged campaign, Hindus in Leicester were asked to boycott our Inquiry by the anonymous organisation Insight UK and by the Leicester-based Hindu Community Organisations Group. Several organisations and mosques called on Muslims to boycott the government's review. Strikingly, the two calls for boycotts reflected the communal divisions that were the cause of the unrest itself. The two boycotts also illustrate the strength of communal division among community groups and figures who purport to represent South Asian residents in Leicester.

Inquiries can succeed when dealing with other projects seeking public attention, and they can be meaningful even when there is vocal opposition to their existence, mandate or composition.<sup>353</sup> All inquiries into places where tensions or conflict between groups have led to serious violence or threats of violence will have their critics, and ours is no exception. In our case, Leicester Mayor Peter Soulsby's opposition has been consistently vehement. His stated argument was that he would not meet with us as we had used the words 'independent', 'commission' and 'inquiry' in our name, rather than calling ourselves an academic research project. We explained, to no avail, that such words were common in non-governmental human rights work. Despite numerous requests to meet him, Soulsby responded with acute hostility, something uncommon for a public figure (see Appendix 7: Communications with the City Mayor).

Additionally, the Chief Constable of Leicestershire Police cited the government's review as the reason for not engaging with our Inquiry. The methodological impact on our Inquiry of the boycott campaign aimed at Hindus in Leicester, the Mayor's opposition, and the police's lack of engagement is discussed below.

## Research Design

The research design adopted a mixed-methods approach to ensure a comprehensive collection of evidence and to provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the events, their causes, and their impact. A multi-method research design was

adopted to ensure a holistic understanding of the events. The study combined qualitative and quantitative data collection methods that included:

- Depth interviews with residents and witnesses
- Key informant interviews with local experts
- Meetings with community figures and organisations
- Focus group with women and a focus group with Hindu devotees
- Observation research of sites and events
- An online bilingual (Gujarati and English) survey of Belgrave and neighbouring residential areas
- Collection and analysis of X/Twitter, Facebook and Instagram data
- Collection and analysis of images and videos from X/Twitter, Instagram and YouTube
- Documentary analysis, including of selected websites
- Visual methods for the analysis of images

The adoption of a multi-method approach was essential to capture both the depth and breadth of the Leicester disturbances, as well as their background and impact. This approach was justified on several grounds:

*Triangulation of Data Sources.* By combining qualitative narratives with quantitative survey findings and documentary analysis, the Inquiry aimed to ensure that conclusions were drawn from multiple corroborating sources, reducing bias and subjectivity.

*Capturing Diverse Perspectives.* The disturbances affected different communities in distinct ways, necessitating a methodology that included multiple viewpoints. While interviews and focus groups provided deep, individual and group insights, surveys and the public hearing enabled the collection of wider public opinions, ensuring that the Inquiry was not limited to a narrow segment of the affected population.

*Balancing Depth and Scope.* Qualitative methods allowed for an exploratory, detailed, and context-sensitive analysis of personal and collective experiences. Quantitative methods provided a macro-level perspective, identifying trends, correlations, and demographic patterns related to the disturbances.

*Understanding Institutional Responses.* The documentary analysis of policy reports, law enforcement, and government statements enabled the Inquiry to assess the effectiveness of official responses. This approach allowed the Inquiry to examine discrepancies between public perceptions and institutional accounts.

*Ensuring Inclusivity and Accessibility.* Recognising that not all individuals may have felt comfortable participating in interviews or a public hearing, the survey provided an anonymous alternative for those who preferred to share their perspectives privately. Similarly, focus groups enabled open and candid discussions within trusted community settings.

The research design was structured to enable progressive data collection and iterative analysis. The findings from early interviews and focus groups were used to refine survey questions and guide the focus of the public hearing. Similarly, documentary

analysis was conducted throughout the study to contextualise emerging themes and verify claims made in interviews and testimonies.

Ethical considerations were embedded in every stage of the research process. Informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity were prioritised to ensure that participants felt safe and protected when sharing their experiences. Where necessary, measures were taken to protect individuals from potential risks associated with discussing sensitive issues.

*A note on quotations*

Interview, focus group, and survey information in anonymised form has been used throughout the report, often in the form of quotations to illustrate claims about events and to inform our understanding when making claims. Interviews were transcribed verbatim. To improve readability and clarity, we have removed repetitions (for example, ‘actually, actually’) and some phrases (for example, ‘you know’, ‘actually’, ‘like’, ‘I think’, ‘so’, ‘sort/kind of’) and, in some cases, slightly altered tense and grammar for readability. In every case, the meaning of the quotation we recorded has been preserved.

**Primary Research**

Demographic profile of participants

*Interviews*

A series of 81 in-depth, semi-structured interviews was conducted to gather detailed, personal accounts of the Leicester disturbances, their causes and their impact. Individual interviews were the most suitable method of data collection to explore the understanding of a topic in which residents of Leicester have a personal stake. The inclusion criteria required participants to be over the age of 16. A combination of convenience and snowball sampling was employed to identify and recruit participants. This strategy allowed the study to engage individuals with direct experiences of the disturbances and those with expert knowledge or leadership roles within the affected communities. The snowball sampling approach was instrumental in reaching participants who might not have come forward on their own, thereby including diverse voices that might otherwise have been underrepresented.

*Interview participants*

All interview participants were asked for basic details about themselves. Because of the sensitivity of the topics and the concerns many participants had about confidentiality and anonymity, participants were informed that they were free to describe themselves however they wanted with regard to ethnicity, religion, gender, family background, and so forth. Where they gave demographically relevant information about themselves, this is summarised below. Where the count was below five, some of the numbers below have been aggregated into ‘Other’ categories.

The majority of participants who gave this information reported Indian family backgrounds (around 57 per cent), most arriving from East Africa (around 60 per cent), and most speaking Gujarati (around 50 per cent reported, but certainly higher). This

Table 6: General profile of all participants: gender and religion

	Survey	Interviews	Meetings	Focus groups
<b>Gender</b>				
Women	29	31	5	1
Men	49	48	16	10
Prefer not to say / Not stated	20	2	—	—
<b>Religion</b>				
Christianity	4	12	6	—
Hinduism	47	21	9	7
Islam	11	43	5	4
Judaism	1	—	—	—
Sikhism	4	3	1	—
Atheism	4	—	—	—
Prefer not to say	11	—	—	—
Other/unknown	16	2	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>11</b>

Table 7: Interview participants’ profile

<b>Gender</b>	
Women	31
Men	48
Not stated	2
<b>Age range</b>	
Under 20s and 20–29	6
30–39	6
40–49	11
50–59	10
60 and above	7
Not stated	40
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi	49 (Indian 45)
White British/Irish	8
Other	7
Not stated	4
<b>Religion</b>	
Hindu	21
Muslim	43
Christian	12
Other	5
<b>Family background</b>	
Indian	45 (Language: Gujarati 38)
Other	4
Not stated	31

Table 8: Profile of survey respondents

<b>Age range</b>	
15–20	3
21–30	19
31–40	14
41–50	13
51–60	16
61+	14
Prefer not to say/Not stated	19
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
Indian	57
Pakistani	5
Mixed	5
White British or Irish	4
Other	3
Prefer not to say/Not stated	24
<b>Country/region of birth</b>	
United Kingdom	33
India	28
East Africa (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania)	10
Other African country	4
Other	4
Prefer not to say/Not stated	19
<b>Country/region of family's settlement prior to the UK</b>	
East Africa	25
Daman and Diu	9
Elsewhere in India	22
Pakistan or Bangladesh	5
Other	17
Prefer not to say	8
<b>Languages normally spoken at home</b>	
English	27
Gujarati	26
English and Gujarati	6
Other Indian languages	9
Other	1
Not stated	29
<b>Usual place of worship</b>	
Mandir	34
Mosque	9
Gurdwara	4
Church	2
None	2
Not stated	47
<b>Gujarati dialect spoken</b>	
Kathiawadi	15
Surti	11
Damaniya	4
Amdavadi	4
Another Gujarati dialect	10
Unknown	11
Not stated/not spoken	43

was the case for both Hindu and Muslim participants, with the family backgrounds of both most likely being Indian and Gujarati. Only a small handful of participants had family origins from Pakistan or Bangladesh. The number of Muslim interview participants is higher than that of Hindu participants, whereas this is reversed in the survey. The reasons for the former is that: we interviewed several Muslims who had been arrested or were defendants in legal cases; some Muslim organisations had strongly encouraged their members to participate in our Inquiry; some Hindu organisations had actively discouraged Hindus from engaging with our Inquiry; and a few (mostly Hindu) participants withdrew their interviews later in the process (any participant could withdraw their interview or withdraw from the research process at any stage of the research).

The semi-structured format of the interviews provided a flexible yet focused approach to data collection. While a core set of questions guided the discussions, participants were encouraged to expand on their experiences and insights freely, allowing for a deeper exploration of key themes. The interview protocol was designed to cover multiple dimensions of the disturbances, including:

- Personal experiences during and after the disturbances – how individuals were affected, their interactions with different community groups, and any challenges they faced.
- Perceptions of community relations – perspectives on historical tensions, evolving social dynamics, and intergroup relations before, during, and after the unrest.
- Influence of external actors – views on the role of media, social media, law enforcement, and community organisations in escalating or mitigating tensions.
- Pathways to reconciliation – suggestions on conflict resolution strategies, community engagement initiatives, and measures to rebuild trust.

All interviewees were provided with clear written information about the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any time, and confidentiality measures. These areas were also explained verbally to participants. Informed consent was obtained in writing or verbally. All data was anonymised and stored securely to protect participant identities and personal information. Anonymity was considered at different levels of participant information: request for anonymity; name; location; profession; organisational affiliation; job title; residential location; and work location. In descriptions of events or groups, or in naming individuals and organisations during interviews, the participant's anonymity could be compromised, so we made judgements on a case-by-case basis. This sometimes led us to provide general descriptions from the interviews, quote from interviews in a way that did not compromise anonymity, or, in a few cases, not reference the quote or interview.

The age range of interview participants spanned 16 to 80 years, and that of survey participants spanned 16 to 87 years. This range aimed to ensure that insights were obtained from younger and

older generations with differing perspectives on community relations and conflict dynamics.

#### *Focus Groups*

Two focus groups were conducted at the Highfields Community Centre and Shree Swaminarayan Mandir (ISSO) in Leicester. The first group comprised four Muslim participants (one woman and three men), while the second consisted of seven Hindu men. These sessions facilitated discussions on community relations, social tensions, and reconciliation efforts. The 2022 violence is a sensitive topic that could generate strong, conflicting perspectives in collective discussions.<sup>354</sup> Separately from the focus groups, we met individually with Daman and Diu youth representatives on two occasions to discuss their perspectives on the events of 2022, the second meeting being a representative conveying the views of a group of Daman youth to the Inquiry.

#### *Online survey*

An English- and Gujarati-language survey was used, partly to hear from ordinary residents in affected areas and partly to mitigate the spread of disinformation about our Inquiry. As part of distributing information about the Inquiry to households in Belgrave and surrounding areas, the survey information was circulated in English and Gujarati. The survey could also be accessed via a QR code. Leaflets for the survey were distributed to encourage broad participation from diverse communities and backgrounds.

As with the interviews, statements, and focus groups, survey participants were invited to share their observations, experiences, and recommendations regarding the events of 2022 and community relations in Leicester. A total of 131 survey forms were entered, of which we considered 33 to be incomplete regarding the required information. We included only 98 of the surveys in our results. The survey response rate was very low, perhaps not surprising given the sensitivity of the topics. However, the survey included significant and credible eyewitness accounts (because of their detail) of events in late August and September 2022. It also included significant information about the views of residents as to the causes of the violence and what could be done to improve community relations.

Importantly, among the 98 surveys we considered complete, 36 respondents reported directly witnessing the events in August or September 2022. Forty-five respondents (almost half) said the violence affected relations between communities in the city. The most significant impact respondents mentioned was the considerable distrust and suspicion that had developed between communities and neighbourhoods. Fifteen respondents (Hindu, Muslim and Christian) also said they had been threatened in Leicester because of their religious or ethnic background. Survey information is used in various places during this report.

#### *Public Hearing*

An all-day public hearing was held on 13 July 2024 at the YMCA Leicestershire as a key component of the Inquiry, providing an open, accessible, and

transparent platform for members of the public to hear from direct witnesses and other affected individuals. The hearing played an important role in ensuring that the voices of affected individuals were heard and documented during the investigation. The open format also encouraged direct engagement with the Inquiry, allowing participants to elaborate on their testimonies and respond to follow-up questions where necessary. Through public testimonies, the Inquiry documented first-hand accounts of the violence, explored perceived successes and failures of statutory agencies, and identified long-standing issues in local governance, policing, and community relations. We are immensely grateful to those who were willing to testify in public. Given the sensitivity of the information, we decided not to make the testimonies available online.

### **Secondary Research**

#### **Documentary Analysis**

The research process involved the systematic collection and review of a wide range of written, visual, and digital sources, allowing the Inquiry to build an evidence base that complemented the findings from primary research. The Inquiry engaged in an extensive review of publicly available documents and media sources. This included:

- *Policy reports.* Official reports from government agencies, local councils, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were examined to assess existing strategies for community cohesion, conflict prevention, and law enforcement responses. These documents provided essential context regarding institutional frameworks and past initiatives aimed at fostering positive community relations.
- *Social media content.* Given the significant role of social media in disseminating information, mobilising individuals, and escalating tensions, an analysis of digital content was undertaken. This included reviewing viral posts, comment threads, hashtag use, and video content across X/ Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The Inquiry sought to identify narratives that influenced public perceptions, and misinformation and hate speech.
- *Census data.* Demographic data from the 2021 census was used to provide insights into ethnic, religious, and socio-economic compositions of affected neighbourhoods. By integrating this data, the Inquiry was able to examine underlying structural factors, such as economic disparities and patterns of residential segregation, that may have shaped community dynamics.
- *News articles.* A comprehensive review of local, national, and international media coverage was conducted. This involved assessing newspaper articles, television reports, online publications, and opinion pieces to understand how the events were framed by different media outlets.
- *Photographic and video evidence.* Visual documentation, including photographs and video footage from news sources, social media users, and independent observers, was examined to

corroborate timelines, verify claims, and contextualise the events. This evidence helped the Inquiry assess the nature and scale of disturbances, police responses, and violence to people or property. Video and social media sources and claims were evaluated for credibility, reliability, bias, and authenticity.

#### *Site Visits and Observation Research*

Site visits were an important component of the Inquiry, providing first-hand contextual insights into the areas directly affected by the disturbances. By visiting these locations, the Inquiry sought to develop a deeper understanding of the spatial, social, and environmental factors that may have played a role in the events. Observational data were collected to complement other research findings. These visits enabled researchers to assess the physical aftermath of the disturbances, including any visible signs of damage, changes in local infrastructure, or alterations in the use of public spaces. Additionally, site visits provided an opportunity to observe community interactions and social dynamics, helping identify whether tensions persisted or whether there had been visible efforts toward reconciliation and rebuilding. During the visits, researchers took detailed field notes, capturing information on the layout of affected areas, the presence of community spaces, and any notable features that may have influenced the events. Photographs and video recordings were taken where appropriate, ensuring that observations were documented for further analysis.

During site visits, informal conversations with residents, business owners, and community leaders took place. These interactions provided valuable spontaneous insights into how different parts of Leicester had experienced the disturbances and how communities had responded in the aftermath. While not structured as formal interviews, these discussions often revealed additional perspectives that helped contextualise findings from other research methods.

By grounding the research in direct, place-based observation, the Inquiry was able to corroborate key narratives, identify discrepancies, and provide a nuanced account of how the events unfolded across different neighbourhoods. These visits were particularly important in understanding the geographic dimensions of the disturbances, including the proximity of affected areas to key landmarks, places of worship, and community centres. This helped to clarify whether spatial factors, such as the concentration of particular communities in specific neighbourhoods or the location of key gathering points, had any bearing on the events.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Qualitative Analysis*

Most interviews and focus group discussions were audio-recorded, with the person or group's consent. Each recorded session was transcribed verbatim, preserving participants' exact words, pauses, and speech patterns. Verbatim transcription was chosen to maintain linguistic accuracy, capture nuances in expression, and allow for a

deeper interpretative data analysis. This process ensured that implicit meanings, emotional tones, and discursive structures were available for closer examination. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the qualitative data as it provides a systematic approach to identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns within the dataset. This method is well-suited to studies exploring complex social phenomena, particularly those involving subjective experiences, cultural perceptions, and community dynamics. The thematic analysis allowed for an iterative process and the refinement of themes as data were examined in greater depth. NVivo 12 software was used to enable efficient data management, categorisation, and retrieval.

### *Survey Analysis*

Survey demographic data were examined to determine representation across different communities, age groups, and genders. This allowed the Inquiry to assess the diversity of perspectives captured in the survey and identify any potential limitations in the sample.

### *Social Media Analysis*

Given the significant role of social media in shaping public discourse and escalating tensions during and after the disturbances, an analysis of large datasets from X/Twitter and Facebook was conducted. Twitter data was collected using Twitter's historic search function for the relevant hashtag searches (and their small variants).

'Time period' refers to dates of the first and last tweets. 'Collection period' refers to the period during which searches were done. The 'number of tweets' supplied in the table is after cleaning of tweets and conservative removal of possible duplicates.

In addition to X/Twitter data, Facebook data was downloaded and analysed to identify general patterns and trends using the same hashtags. X/Twitter was processed and analysed to identify key patterns related to misinformation, digital mobilisation, and divisive narratives. The objective was to examine how online discourse evolved, the spread of false narratives, and the influence of key actors in amplifying tensions. Analysis was undertaken to identify: time-series trends in the use of hashtags; prominent accounts; geolocation data, where available; media and other URLs referenced in tweets; prominent words and concepts; and prominent two- and three-word N-grams. Much of the social media analysis we undertook extended the scope of the Inquiry and will be published as supplementary papers or academic articles by panel members and researchers in due course.

## **Research Ethics**

The work of the Inquiry and all its research activities were conducted following approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, as well as the equivalent committee at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), the aim being to ensure compliance with institutional policy, including university research ethics policies, and the protection of participants and

Table 9: Hashtags for which X / Twitter data was collected

Hashtag	Time period of tweets (first and last dates)	Collection period	Number of tweets
#antihinduhate	28/09/2022–11/12/2022	21/10/2022–14/01/2023	1,558
#hinduhate	05/04/2023–16/06/2023	17/06/2023	1,815
#hinduphobia	05/04/2023–16/06/2023	17/06/2023	34,375
#hindustargetedinuk	24/09/2022–03/06/2023	01/11/2022–17/06/2023	24,485
#hindusunderattackinuk #hindusunderattackuk	06/09/2022–13/06/2023	25/09/2022–17/06/2023	131,160
#leicester	01/01/2021–16/06/2023	01/11/2022–17/06/2023	714,466
#leicesterburning	18/09/2022–29/01/2023	28/09/2022–24/03/2023	17,792
#leicesterhindusattacked	19/09/2022–03/06/2023	28/09/2022–17/06/2023	34,692
#leicesterviolence	06/09/2022–12/06/2023	28/09/2022–17/06/2023	25,449

their information. The Inquiry handled personal data in accordance with SOAS’s Data Protection and Privacy Policy. All data, whether electronic or paper, was kept and stored securely. Specific ethical approval was also granted for interviewing young people between the ages of 16-18.

Participants who engaged with the Inquiry have been guaranteed strict confidentiality. Participants were fully informed about the research objectives and assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Written or verbal consent was obtained before participation. The Inquiry also established secure, anonymous submission routes, enabling individuals to share their experiences without fear of exposure or repercussions. These measures have addressed many safety concerns and ensured that participants could contribute openly. During the investigation, individuals with concerns about privacy, safety, confidentiality, or data protection have been able to contact us to discuss them.

*Naming individuals and groups*

A key ethical issue, which was subjected to extensive discussion and ethical evaluation, related to whether or to what extent we should name individuals and groups in this report. This includes individuals or groups who were linked to issues including the following:

- Alleged involvement in inciting or participating in violent events or in generating disinformation that led to violence or disorder in 2022
- Affiliation with political ideologies linked to religion that would be considered radical, supremacist or militant
- Even where publicly named elsewhere regarding the same allegations, we considered whether we should name individuals or their social media accounts again in this report
- Even when known to exist in Leicester, whether to identify radical, supremacist or militant organisations or individuals by name
- Whether to name individuals and associates involved in anonymous organisations that have been engaged in considerable disinformation and community polarisation
- Whether to identify social media accounts, and therefore potentially individuals, who have been involved in inciting hatred and violence in Leicester
- Whether to identify – or risk possible identification by quotation – individuals who would likely face criticism or even harassment from co-religionists for having participated in this Inquiry or because of what they have said about events, individuals and groups

We also faced specific ethical issues regarding the Daman and Diu community in Leicester:

- Whether to mention the Daman and Diu community in this report, given it is comprised mainly of relatively recently arrived, often poor, often discriminated against and frequently economically hyper-exploited groups
- Whether to mention particular organisations and activists within the Daman and Diu communities that are linked to supremacist or militant political ideologies

Our approach was to aim to minimise harm or negative repercussions for individuals, groups and communities in Leicester. We anonymised all interviews and statements made in the public hearings. Each interview reference is to an arbitrary code, such as 'XAC', which has no relation to an individual's name. We otherwise avoided naming individuals, even if named in other public reports. We sometimes named social media accounts, but in some cases we did not because of potential repercussions for local individuals. In some instances, we do not reference an interview with an anonymous code because of the risk of identification if all their quotations are collated in the report. We could not avoid discussing the Daman and Diu community since some of its members were key actors in many of the events we describe. We avoided naming individuals involved in radical or supremacist organisations in Leicester.

#### *Obstacles and limitations*

There are several limitations to this Inquiry that influenced the scope, depth, and interpretability of the findings, highlighting areas where further research may be needed.

#### *Constraints in data collection*

Although the study employed a diverse range of research methods, certain constraints affected data collection:

- *Time and resource limitations.* Given the scale of the Inquiry, interviews and focus groups could not be conducted indefinitely, potentially leaving some valuable perspectives unrecorded.
- *Dependence on retrospective accounts.* Much of the qualitative data relied on participants' recall of past events, which may have introduced recall bias or memory distortions.
- *Variation in digital literacy and access.* While the survey provided an anonymous avenue for participation, individuals with limited digital access or literacy may have been unable to contribute effectively.
- While interviews captured perspectives from both men and women, focus group discussions had an *uneven gender representation*, with the Hindu group consisting entirely of men.

#### *The impact of boycotts*

The research aimed to incorporate diverse voices from across Leicester's affected communities. However, the boycott instigated within the Hindu communities by Insight UK and the Hindu Community Organisations Group would have affected the participation of some Hindus and many Hindu community and religious organisations. This impact was mitigated to some extent through several private and informal meetings that individuals requested with us, as well as Hindus coming to us during our community engagement, drop-in and other events. Insight UK's campaign against us also provided valuable data on Hindutva social media disinformation and revealed essential links between UK- and India-based Hindutva organisations and media outfits.

#### *Sensitivity and participant bias*

Given the highly sensitive nature of the disturbances, the potential for biased or emotionally

charged responses was a significant factor. Potential participants also had concerns about anonymity and safety. Some expressed reluctance to speak openly, particularly due to fears of repercussions or further community tensions. Participants may have:

- Self-censored their views, particularly in hearings or group settings, due to fear of judgment, social pressure, or community backlash
- Presented subjective or one-sided narratives, either consciously or unconsciously, based on personal experiences, community affiliations, or prior beliefs; this may have been especially relevant in situations of real or perceived polarisation between communities
- Overemphasised certain factors while downplaying others, leading to potential gaps or imbalances in the accounts provided

There may also have been consequences on recall and memory resulting from local activist interventions and media coverage. Interviews were conducted after the events and after highly polarised, often communal accounts had emerged on social media and within communities. Some participants may have been affected by this coverage and inadvertently presented their views in line with them. We know that some activists from across different communities met with individuals who we subsequently interviewed. They may have given the individual confidence to participate but avoided influencing their narrative. However, we also know that a few activists aimed to influence participants' narratives so that participants presented one community or another in the best possible light, or their members as uninvolved in any negative actions. While triangulation with documentary evidence, surveys, and social media analysis can help counteract some of these issues, the subjectivity inherent in qualitative research remains unavoidable.

#### *Non-participation by the Mayor and Chief of Police*

For reasons unknown to us, Leicester City Mayor Sir Peter Soulsby's orientation to this Inquiry was uniformly and consistently hostile, as evidenced by the tone and content of his communications. However, we did meet with or interview a good number of city councillors and ex-councillors, Labour, Conservative and other, who provided valuable perspectives on: the Mayor's and city council's approach to the 2022 events; other information relating to the Labour Group in the city council; and dynamics within the Labour, Conservative and other parties. Nevertheless, the Mayor's lack of cooperation leaves a potential gap in this research, which we regret, not least because it denies residents of Leicester a perspective that is surely crucial.

The Chief Constable of Leicestershire, Rob Nixon, was initially happy to meet with us, but, as the Inquiry progressed, his office provided various reasons for his inability to meet, including a busy diary and the reason that, since the government review was taking place, that would be his focus. We repeatedly contacted him for a meeting, but to no avail.

Again, this reflects a gap in our research, which we attempted to mitigate by using several other

sources, including data from the Home Office and the Office of National Statistics. It would have been helpful to discuss with him the strategic intent and operational orders regarding events in August and September, allegations of bias (from two communities), arrest, charging and sentencing data, the alleged failure to investigate incidents of serious violence, the service's thinking regarding the policing of diverse communities in situations of polarisation, and recommendations for changes and improvements.

### **Conclusion**

The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods enabled the research to examine the underlying causes, community experiences, and institutional responses with, we believe, an appropriate degree of depth and accuracy. By incorporating first-hand testimonies, survey data, documentary analysis, and observation research, the study aimed to ensure its findings were rooted in diverse perspectives and accounts. This approach provided a detailed account of individual and collective experiences and helped identify broader social, political, and economic factors that formed the background to the disturbances.

The research design allowed for both exploratory and confirmatory analysis, ensuring that insights were derived from personal narratives and objective data sources, policy documents, and statistical trends. This balance between subjective accounts and empirical evidence aimed to strengthen the credibility and reliability of our findings. The methods also aimed to ensure that previously under-represented voices were heard and offered a platform for those directly affected by the violence to share their perspectives in a safe and accessible manner. The inclusion of public hearings, community consultations, and site visits provided additional layers of understanding that would not have been captured through a single-method approach.

## Appendix 2

### The Commission of Inquiry Panel and Team

#### Inquiry Panel

**Juan Méndez**, Professor of Human Rights Law at Washington College of Law, American University. Juan Méndez was United Nations Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment. He was also Special Advisor to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

**Lisa Magarrell**, Human rights and transitional justice expert based in New York who was an advisor to the community-based Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission in North Carolina (US).

**Neelim Sultan** is a human rights practitioner in criminal and public law children's cases and advocates for community-based legal services. She was involved for many years as an officer of the International Bar Association's (IBA) Human Rights Law Committee and as a member of the IBA's Presidential Task Force on Trafficking.

**Subir Sinha**, Reader, Department of Development Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies.

**Chetan Bhatt**, Anthony Giddens Professor of Social Theory, Department of Sociology, London School of Economics and Political Science.

**Suresh Grover**, Founder and national coordinator of The Monitoring Group (TMG), a pre-eminent organisation working against racism and discrimination since the late 1970s, and which played a leading role in several public inquiries, including the Stephen Lawrence, Zahid Mubarek and Victoria Climbié inquiries, and numerous other campaigns.

#### Project and Research Team

**Sagar Abraham-Gonsalves** (Project Coordinator) is a doctoral researcher in the Department of Law at SOAS University of London where his research focuses on anti-terror laws and how they inhibit collective action by targeting civil society organisations. His PhD is part of a broader academic research project that aims to study the social life of authoritarian legality.

**S. Patel** (Researcher) is a researcher, artist and filmmaker with a specialism in historical and contemporary South Asia. She is an ESRC-funded Doctoral Researcher in Anthropology. Her research focuses on the sensory and affective dimensions of nationalism and communal difference. She has worked on documentaries, research, community and cultural projects across India and London.

**Syed Fahad Kamal** (Researcher) is a policy analyst, researcher, and writer whose work examines misinformation, migration, coercion and trafficking, and the politics of risk and security. He has worked with grassroots organisations in the UK and India on issues of displacement, modern slavery, and unequal access to resources. His research combines ethnography, political economy, and data science in a mixed-methods approach, allowing him to trace how marginalisation takes shape in everyday life,

how conflicts over land and water are mediated, and how questions of cybersecurity, AI, and bias affect trust in governance and surveillance.

**Vedika Puri** (Researcher) is an early-career researcher with academic training in psychology (LSE, Ashoka University) and over four years of experience contributing to quantitative and qualitative research projects on intergroup relations and social cohesion. She is currently an Evaluation Manager at the National Literacy Trust, where she is committed to using evidence to inform programmes and policies that drive social impact.

### Leicester Advisory Group

**Naim Razak** (Community Advisor) has worked at grassroots level with diverse communities across Leicester city for over 40 years. He started his career as a youth worker in Belgrave and moved into community development, working in the voluntary sector, the NHS and with the local authorities. As a community health development co-ordinator, a primary aspect of his role involved engaging with black and minority ethnic communities, including liaising with community leaders, religious leaders and key stakeholders, to promote positive health & wellbeing and address health inequalities to help improve their quality of life.

**Leesa Naidu** (Community Outreach Worker) was born in Leicester. She is a qualified Social Worker and Mental Health Professional (AMHP). Leesa has over 10 years of statutory sector experience. She has worked for various local authorities and NHS trusts. Leesa is passionate about tackling the structures of racism. She wants to see how it intersects with people's lives. She is committed to fighting discrimination and oppression in her daily work. Her Master's thesis in Social Work explored the high numbers of black African-Caribbean males detained under the Mental Health Act (1983) compared to their white counterparts. Her undergraduate thesis focused on the experiences of people living with HIV and AIDS in Leicester.

**Kirk Master** (Advisor to The Monitoring Group) is a senior leader with over 30 years of experience across the voluntary and community sector, the UK Civil Service, and political leadership. He has held key roles with the Home Office, Youth Justice Board, and served as Assistant City Mayor and Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner. Kirk has led national policy initiatives, managed multi-million-pound budgets, and delivered programmes focused on criminal justice, youth advocacy, and community engagement, including projects previously deemed unachievable. His work is driven by a deep commitment to equity, justice, and amplifying the voices of underrepresented communities. With a dual heritage background and numerous lived experiences, Kirk brings authenticity and insight to leadership. His career reflects a dedication to systemic change, informed policy-making, and inclusive public service.

**Umesh Patel** (Community Advisor), originally from East Africa, arrived in the UK in the early 1970s through political unrest in Uganda. He holds aca-

ademic qualifications in Sports Management and Sports Science and began his professional career as a youth worker in the Belgrave area of Leicester during the late 1980s. He subsequently served for 15 years with Her Majesty's Probation Service in Leicester, where he contributed to the rehabilitation and support of individuals within the criminal justice system. Following this, he joined the NHS Leicester Partnership Trust as a Community Well-being Practitioner, focusing on promoting health, wellbeing, and social inclusion within local communities. Throughout his career, he has had sustained commitment to the Leicester community, particularly the Belgrave area, where he has lived and worked for the majority of his professional life. He has extensive experience in youth engagement, community development, and programme management, and has led and delivered numerous health and sports-related initiatives across the city.

## Appendix 3

### Terms of Reference

During August-September 2022, serious violence between South Asians from Hindu and Muslim backgrounds shocked the city of Leicester, East Midlands, a city often viewed as a model for community harmony and conviviality. The violence threatened to spread to other major cities in Britain, and it also had international repercussions.

The Independent Commission of Inquiry will investigate the reasons for the violence and community disharmony in Leicester in 2022. It will investigate the roles of civil society organisations, independent actors, and social media both in the fostering of and mitigating against such disharmony. The Commission will evaluate the response of the relevant statutory agencies to the violence and consider the impacts of the events. The Commission will make recommendations about local, national, and community-based strategies aimed at preventing such hostility and violence in the future. The Commission is committed to fully exploring the events, including their consequences and impact on people's lives and on Leicester's civil society. It is committed to exploring what needs to be done in the face of such violence and disharmony, including addressing injustice, potential abuses of human rights, and discrimination.

The initial idea for a Commission of Inquiry into the events and their causes arose through work and engagement with community groups in Leicester. Local groups expressed strongly, and in the spirit of community reconciliation, the need to understand why the violence occurred and what steps could be undertaken to prevent such violence in the future.

The Commission will:

Examine the circumstances surrounding the public disturbances of August and September 2022 and their aftermath, including:

- The factual context of these events, including an evidence-based chronology of key events before, during and after the disturbances
- The causes and key drivers of violence and disharmony
- The response of local statutory agencies prior to, during, and after the events
- The role of civil society, local associations, independent actors, and social media in these events, including in mitigating the violence and working towards community peace

Hold public hearings in which it will:

- Consider carefully individual experiences from members of the public. Although the Commission will not make detailed findings on individual cases, those cases will inform its conclusions and recommendations
- Gather evidence from statutory and voluntary agencies
- Make legal and policy recommendations about appropriate mechanisms for future prevention, including by identifying:
  - Relevant principles of equality and non-discrimination

- Material principles of transitional justice and reconciliation relevant to its work
- Factors relevant to ensuring justice
- Examples of good practice
- Relevant lessons learned

- Provide regular information about the work it has undertaken
- Produce a final report of its findings and recommendations in a timely manner and as soon as reasonably practicable

#### Values

The Inquiry will strive to work in accordance with the following core values:

- Commitment to high-quality, independent, evidence-based, impartial, and objective investigation
- Commitment to principles of equality and non-discrimination
- The highest standards of professional conduct, including in designing the study, collecting data and other evidence, and in ensuring appropriate data security
- Commitment to participation of local communities
- Strengthening dialogue between groups and within civil society
- Transparency in communications before, during and after investigation, relating to the process and the findings
- Aiming for the widest participation of affected local organisations and people, including in making submissions to the Commission, and in the dissemination of its findings
- Sensitivity to any safety concerns for those engaging with the Commission, including protection of information and making available routes for submission and discussion that guarantee confidentiality and anonymity where necessary
- Working to avoid wherever possible the exacerbation of disharmony in its approach and methods of working

Without prejudging any factors, the Commission's scope of investigation is flexible and will consider relevant local, national, and international dimensions. The Commission is attuned to the complex, multi-layered dynamics that are relevant in situations of conflict, including in Leicester. The Commission's approach is multi-disciplinary, reflected in its composition, structure, and methods of working. The Commission will comprise several dimensions of activity, including:

- Legal and policy analysis and recommendations informed by the panel's expertise in domestic and international human rights, anti-discrimination and equality law, as well as expertise in the conduct of public inquiries following situations of community conflict
- An independent stream of academic research that will inform the Commission and which is sensitive to several institutional and geographical scales of analysis. The research will be conducted by two reputable universities and a team of researchers

- A Leicester-based Advisory Group that will advise the commission on local issues of community concern, including recent and historic issues of discrimination and disadvantage, as well as relations within communities
- Community and youth engagement and development work with Leicester organisations, including religious and community groups, youth clubs and organisations, and the education sector

The Commission is supported by the Open Society Foundations through a grant made to the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (SOAS). The Open Society Foundations has no influence over the methods of working, conduct, or findings of the Commission.

## Appendix 4

### Religious Peace Statement

The following was the peace and unity statement read out in front of Jame' Masjid on 20 September 2022 and endorsed by several Hindu and Muslim religious figures.

We, the family of Leicester, stand in front of you not only as Hindus and Muslims but as brothers and sisters. Our two faiths have lived harmoniously in this wonderful city for over half a century.

We arrived in this city together. We faced the same challenges together; we fought off racist haters together and collectively made this city a beacon of diversity and community cohesion. That is why we are saddened and heartbroken to see the eruption of tension and violence. Physical attacks on innocent individuals and unwarranted damage to property are not part of a decent society and, indeed, not part of our faiths. What we have seen is not what we're about. We together call upon the immediate cessation of provocation and violence – both in thought and behaviour. We together call upon the inciters of hatred to leave our city alone.

We are a strong family, we will work together to resolve whatever concern may arise – we do not need to call up any assistance from outside our city. Leicester has no place for any foreign extremist ideology that causes division.

Our message to anyone that sows disharmony between us is clear 'we will not let you succeed'. We ask all to respect the sanctity of religious places, both mosques and mandirs alike – whether provocation with loud music, flag bearing, derogatory chants or physical attacks against the fabric of worship. This is not acceptable nor upheld by our faiths.

As with all families, we will be having honest and uncomfortable conversations in addressing the issues, but we are confident that with our faith in God and, indeed, faith in each other, we will come out of this even stronger. We're One Family.<sup>355</sup>

## Appendix 5

### Women's Peace Statement

The following was the statement from South Asian women in Leicester read out in the city centre on 24 September 2022.

We as Asian women from Leicester, call upon the people of this city to rally together and oppose the senseless violence that has torn apart our community over the last week. We condemn those perpetrating hate and violence in our city – you will not succeed in dividing us.

As your grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunts, daughters and friends we have come together in collective solidarity to say no to the senseless violence that has plagued our great city in recent weeks and left many people injured. As a result, whole neighbourhoods and entire families, particularly women, children and elders and now living in fear.

Our thoughts go out to all those injured as a result of this violence, including community workers and police officers. Leicester is a great place to live and work – and such hate-filled violence threatens to tarnish our city that has been and remains a model of peace and tolerance.

This has been built on the extraordinary hard work of many including countless community organisations, faith groups and other agencies on the ground. We now call upon the people of Leicester to reject and challenge all that is intent on dividing and polarising our communities.

It is now time for solutions. We therefore, ask the women of Leicester to join us in taking action and bringing our communities together once again. As strong proud Asian women, we know that when Leicester is united, it can never be defeated. Leicester, united as one.<sup>356</sup>

## Appendix 6

### Communications with the City Mayor

Sir Peter Soulsby consistently rejected our attempts to meet, claiming that the title ‘Independent Commission of Inquiry’ was a misrepresentation or was biased in some way, though without saying how it might be biased. The Inquiry team repeatedly tried to arrange a meeting, emphasising research, transparency, and community engagement.

**5 June 2023:** Subir Sinha (SOAS) asks to meet Sir Peter Soulsby about the project.

**6 June 2023:** Sinha confirms the Inquiry is funded by the Open Society Foundations, emphasises transparency.

**9 June 2023:** Soulsby raises concerns about Soros as funder, asking for full details of the proposal, sums and conditions.

**14 June 2023:** Soulsby criticises the use of the title ‘Independent Commission of Inquiry’, saying that it should be described as ‘research’, not an ‘inquiry’ or ‘commission’ or ‘independent’.

**11 November 2023:** Chetan Bhatt (LSE) formally requests a meeting on November 20–21 with Professor Juan Méndez and others to discuss the Commission’s work.

**14 November 2023:** Soulsby again rejects the use of ‘commission’ and ‘inquiry’, calling the wording misleading.

**14 November 2023:** Bhatt suggests a meeting to discuss concerns and attaches terms of reference.

**21 November 2023:** Soulsby objects to the ‘preference’ of calling it a Commission or Inquiry.

**27 November 2023:** Bhatt reaffirms willingness to meet and discuss research and community relations.

**27 November 2023:** Soulsby again objects to the title of the Inquiry, claims he will meet researchers.

**30 November 2023:** The Chair, Juan Méndez writes attaching a letter that gives examples of many independent commissions and inquiries, and how common they are in human rights work. He reiterates the request for a meeting.

**15 January 2024:** Soulsby responds aggressively, accusing the project of making ‘bogus’ claims of legitimacy, rejects the title again and claims he meets genuine researchers if they don’t use misleading labels.

