

## **UNDERSTANDING THE POLITICISATION OF ISLAM AND BRITISH MUSLIMS IN THE UK: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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### **Abstract**

There are three million Muslims in Britain, with the vast majority of South Asian heritage. In this diaspora, the emergence of political Islam has taken root in urban communities experiencing problems of integration, participation and engagement. In the context of this marginalisation, the politicisation of Islam appeals to groups searching for meaning, belonging and group cohesion in the light of racism, discrimination and exclusion in society, which has exacerbated since the end of the Cold War period, and specifically since the events of 9/11. The nature of this politicisation is generally devoid of radicalisation or violence, and it is at the fringes of Muslim communities in Britain that one finds the reality of violent extremism, which can lead to terrorism. One impact of this is to spur Islamophobia, which then introduces problems of an oppositional and directly conflicting far right extremism, which has gained momentum in the light of the economic downturn since 2008 and the effects of austerity policy that has divided Britain and created politicised communities deeply opposed to each other. What is also interesting about the British Muslim profile is that half the population is under the age of 25, increasingly likely to be educated at university level, especially young women. While, there are a great deal of inequalities facing this group, there is a body of Muslims who are utilising an Islamic worldview as a way in which to generate economic, cultural and social opportunity, as a means of integration and effective participation in society, as well a form of self-realisation. The challenge is to ensure that the process of integration continues in the light of understanding the needs of marginalised communities, while, at the same time there is a celebration of the impact and the outcome of integrated Muslims who see themselves as comfortably British and Muslim at the same time. The important point to note is that this will not be at the behest of the UK government policy, which seeks to securitise Muslims, not to integrate them. This Muslim-led agency will reshape the British Muslim experience, but there will be a spectrum of activity, ranging from fully integrated progressive liberal Muslims to partially integrated conservative non-violent Islamists. In all cases, the awareness of Islam through individual interpretation, the re-intellectualisation of Islamic intellectual history and knowledge, and the fusing together of Western and Eastern modes of being will be the route to success. This paper provides an original argument concerning integration through progressive Islamism as a challenge to racism and discrimination, internally, and to the virulent elements of political Islam, externally.

### **Biography**

Tahir Abbas PhD FRSA is currently Visiting Senior Fellow at the Department of Government at the London School of Economics. Previously, he was a Professor of Sociology at Fatih University in Istanbul and Reader in Sociology at the University of Birmingham. His recent books are *Contemporary Turkey in Conflict* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), *Muslim Diasporas in the West* (Routledge, 2017, 4 vols, ed.) and the forthcoming *Political Muslims* (Syracuse University Press, 2018, co-edited with S Hamid).