

Islamophobia Working Group: Call for Evidence

6. When referring to discrimination, prejudice, bigotry, hatred or violence directed at Muslims, which term do you think should be used? For instance, 'Islamophobia', 'anti-Muslim hatred', 'anti-Muslim racism', 'anti-Muslim prejudice', 'Muslimophobia' etc.

No specific term needed – general categories of discrimination suffice

7. Please tell us your reason for suggesting this term. (600 characters)

Laws already protect people of all faiths and none from discrimination, hatred and violence. A new term risks confusing criticism of Islam as a religion – a democratic right – with hostility to Muslims as people. This confusion is most explicit with the term Islamophobia. But a letter in 2019 from over 40 diverse experts also raised concerns with the concept of Muslimness, saying it “can effectively be transferred to Muslim practices and beliefs, allowing the [APPG] report to claim that criticism of Islam is instrumentalised to hurt Muslims”.¹ It also begs the question: who defines Muslimness?

8. Do you think the UK Government should adopt a definition of Anti-Muslim Hatred/Islamophobia? (any definition would be non-statutory)

No

9. Please could you tell us more about why you think that? (600 characters)

We agree with the National Secular Society the term ‘Islamophobia’ would be “divisive” and feed ‘two-tier’ justice narratives, fuelling calls for other ‘religion-phobia’ definitions, which could stifle debate between beliefs.² The previous Government’s analysis has also found that a term that seeks to protect the religion of Islam, rather than Muslim people, would be incompatible with the Equality Act 2010.³ Public safety could also be at risk. The Casey Review warned too many public institutions “have ignored... harmful cultural and religious practices, for fear of being branded... Islamophobic”.⁴

10. Do you think Anti-Muslim Hatred/Islamophobia is also a form of racism?

No

11. Please could you say more about why you think that? (1000 characters)

Islam is not a race, but a religion with adherents drawn from a range of ethnicities. Concerningly, the APPG ‘Islamophobia Defined’ report sought to sidestep this issue by defining the “concept of racialisation” as not just “informed by biological race, but by a culture – broadly defined – that is perceived to be inferior to and by the dominant one”.⁵ Formally embracing a concept of ‘cultural racism’

¹ Christian Concern, Press Release, *Open letter to home secretary rejects Islamophobia definition*, 17 May 2019

² ‘NSS raises free speech concerns with Islamophobia working group’, *National Secular Society online*, 23 January 2025, see <https://shorturl.at/Z8P6U> as at 7 July 2025

³ House of Commons, Hansard, 9 January 2024, cols 5P-6P

⁴ *The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration*, Department for Communities and Local Government, December 2016, para. 1.67

⁵ *Islamophobia Defined: the inquiry into a working definition of Islamophobia*, APPG on British Muslims, page 39

risks threatening the freedom to criticise aspects of Islamic culture. A member of an organisation that has signed up to this kind of definition could be disciplined for Islamophobia if they criticise mandatory female head coverings or suggest that UK law is preferable to sharia law.

Free speech protections are afforded for discussion and criticism of religion under section 29J of the Public Order Act, which do not apply to race. If defined as a race, Islam could therefore receive special protection from criticism, thereby undermining healthy debate and democratic discussion.

12. Should any of the aspects below feature in a definition of Anti-Muslim Hatred/Islamophobia? Please tick all that apply.

Optional question – we will leave blank.

13. If you wish to, please can you give an example(s) of anti-Muslim hatred/Islamophobia that you have witnessed, experienced or read about over the last two years? (1000 characters)

It is important that the working group consider examples of people illegitimately accused of 'Islamophobia' and later exonerated. These help show the stifling climate a definition could create.

For example, Sir Trevor Phillips, former head of the EHRC, was suspended from the Labour Party in March 2020 over allegations of Islamophobia in March 2020. The evidence presented included his comment in a Policy Exchange meeting that Muslims "see the world differently", and also his highlighting the "longstanding abuse by men, mostly of Pakistani Muslim origin in the North of England".⁶ He was readmitted to the party in July 2021.

Academics have also come under attack for making perhaps uncomfortable but historically attestable assertions about Islam. In her 2016 book, *The Battle for British Islam*, Dame Sara Khan has documented how accusations of 'Islamophobia' have even been exploited by Islamists to silence more moderate Muslim voices.

⁶ *The Times*, 9 March 2020; Dieppe, T, *The Challenge of Islam*, Wilberforce Publications, 2025, pages 84-85