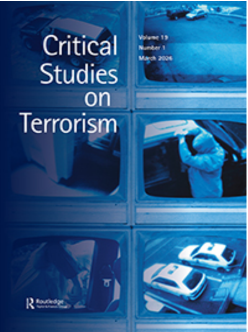

Critical Studies on Terrorism

ISSN: 1753-9153 (Print) 1753-9161 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rter20

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To cite this article: Richard McNeil-Willson, Lianne Vostermans & Tahir Abbas (2026) Acute to Chronic Islamophobia: the impact and mitigation of counter-extremism on young Muslims in Northern Europe, Critical Studies on Terrorism, 19:1, 134-155, DOI: 10.1080/17539153.2025.2609366

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2025.2609366

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CRITICAL STUDIES ON TERRORISM
2026, VOL. 19, NO. 1, 134–155
https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2025.2609366

Acute to Chronic Islamophobia: the impact and mitigation of counter-extremism on young Muslims in Northern Europe

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the evolving role of the counterterrorism state in Islamophobia across Northern Europe, exploring how new preventative counterextremism measures have reshaped Islamophobia from acute articulations of violence to chronic social exclusion and how young Muslims have sought to respond. Drawing on 114 interviews with young Muslims aged 18–25 in the UK, Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway, along with eight subsequent focus groups, the research highlights how counterterrorism policies are normalising anti-Muslim attitudes and constructing young Muslims as latent security threats in novel ways. These findings reveal significant shifts: while acute articulations of Islamophobia, marked by reports of physical acts of anti-Muslim violence, have notably declined, structural and institutional forms – understood here as chronic forms of Islamophobia have become more dominant. This shift is intricately tied to the evolution of state-led counterextremism and pre-crime programmes that perpetuate radicalisation narratives, alienating young Muslims and fostering disengagement from political and media spheres. The paper furthermore seeks to understand the agency of young Muslims, finding that they have developed new strategies for managing and mitigating chronic articulations of Islamophobia. By bringing together theories on securitisation, Islamophobia and racialisation, the authors underscore the need for critical revaluation of new and ongoing counterextremism approaches, their societal implications, and how young Muslims seek to manage and mitigate novel patterns of racialisation and social exclusion.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 30 April 2025
Accepted 21 December 2025

KEYWORDS
Islamophobia; securitisation; counterextremism; Muslim; youth

Introduction

This paper explores the relationship between securitisation, Islamophobia and racialisation, finding that the creation and embedding of new counterextremism programmes across Northern Europe has created novel articulations of structural and covert Islamophobia. In the context of growing counter-extremism, the paper finds that the landscape of Islamophobia in Northern Europe has changed, away from reports of "Acute

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Islamophobia", characterised by short-term articulations and enactments of irregular violence and prejudice against visibly Muslim individuals, towards "Chronic Islamophobia", understood as long-term, embedded articulations of exclusion and marginalisation, which are often harder to identify.

We define Acute Islamophobia as episodic, overt hostility, including verbal abuse, physical assault, and public vilification, typically triggered by geopolitical events such as terrorist attacks. Chronic Islamophobia, by contrast, denotes systemic, institutionalised forms of exclusion embedded in policy, discourse, and everyday practice. This medical metaphor is not intended to pathologise victims but to capture the temporal and structural transformation of anti-Muslim racism, from visible eruptions to persistent, low-intensity infrastructures of marginalisation (cf. Nixon 2011 on "slow violence"). The framework builds inductively from interview data but resonates with victimisation studies that document how structural harms accumulate over time, affecting health, education, and civic participation (Rehman and Hanley 2023; Samari, Alcalá, and Sharif 2018).

Through interviews with young Muslims from Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the authors explore changes in Acute and Chronic Islamophobia across generations, as well as how young people engage in new processes of managing, mitigating and challenging securitisation. Findings highlight a continuing and evolving relationship between shifting formations of Islamophobia, racialisation and the counter-terror state. The authors advocate for a more disaggregated understanding of Islamophobia that accounts for the link between changing experiences of counter-extremism, racialisation and Muslim response.

Since the start of the War on Terror in 2001, counterterrorism and constructions of radicalisation have undergone significant shifts, from conceptualisations that intrinsically linked the concept to violence, as evident in the post-9/11 landscape, to contemporary practices and structures seeking to infer and identify "vulnerabilities" and "risks" (Toros, Jarvis, and Jackson 2024). Whilst the military occupations of the early years of the War on Terror have largely ended, the logic of counterterrorism continues to permeate the European political landscape (Jackson 2015) through flourishing national and supranational preventative counterextremism approaches which seek to tackle terrorism through "pre-criminal" or "upstream" initiatives (Heath-Kelly 2020; Schneider 2019).

We follow McCulloch and Wilson (2016) in defining pre-crime as state interventions that target perceived risks of future criminality before any illegal act occurs, shifting security from reaction to prediction. These are seen in the creation of legal obligations for the reporting of perceived instances of extremism by public sector workers in education, healthcare and the judiciary in the UK (Prevent Duty, HM Government 2015); the similar adoption of Prevent structures and mechanisms by the European Union (Flonk and McNeil-Willson 2023); as well as other pre-crime variations: the Netherlands' "Interventions on Radicalisation" (Vliek and de Koning 2023), Denmark's "Ghetto Package" and "Imam Law" (Hassani 2023), and Norway's Action Plan against Radicalisation (Ellefsen and Sjøen 2023).

The term counterterrorism state, drawn from Jackson (2015), refers to the institutional expansion of security logics into civil domains, where counterterrorism becomes a governing rationale across education, welfare, and urban planning. This framework aligns with pioneering work on the securitisation of Islam (Croft 2012) and its gendered

and racialised dimensions (Eroukhmanoff 2019; Kaleem 2023), though our study extends this by tracing how securitisation has evolved from overt surveillance to chronic, everyday suspicion.

The continuation of the logic of counterterrorism and the subsequent spread of pre-crime structures have been observed as enabling significant Islamophobia in various civil sites (Faure Walker 2021; Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2018; Maslaha 2020; Younis 2020), through practices that have singled out Muslims as particularly prone to violence (Pantanzis and Pemberton 2009), created a hyper-visibilisation of Islamic religious practice (Ali 2020), and contributed towards the same causes of violence and societal polarisation they ostensibly seek to combat (Abbas 2019; McNeil-Willson et al. 2019). Over two decades since the start of the Long War on Terror, a first generation of young people have grown up entirely in the shadow of counterterror legislation and practice (Jackson, Toros, and Jarvis 2021). Whilst Islamophobia is recognised as deeply entwined within counterterrorism policy and practice, this paper considers the link between how counterterrorism is being conducted and radicalisation conceptualised, with how young Muslims are experiencing Islamophobia.

Partly, this discussion has come out of a grounded approach of interpreting the experiences of young Muslims in Northern Europe. Data was collected through interviews and focus groups with 114 young Muslims between the ages of 18 and 25 in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway as part of the European Commission-funded DRIVE project, which sought to understand contemporary experiences in Northern Europe linked to radicalisation, counterextremism and social exclusion. As part of this process, interviewees detailed consistent trends of Islamophobia which suggested changes across the case study countries, interlinking patterns of securitisation with articulations of Islamophobia and the responses that follow. Whilst research has demonstrated a link between counterterrorism and Islamophobia, few have considered how typologies of Islamophobias, racialisation and securitisation have altered over time. This paper, centred on the experiences of young Muslims who have grown up entirely within the War on Terror, therefore seeks to advance discussions on the link between Islamophobia and securitisation (Welten and Abbas 2022), how these are occurring across different contexts and relate to different types of Islamophobia, and how new and innovative responses are deployed by young Muslims to manage and mitigate their impacts.

This paper seeks to answer the following question: How are young Muslims' experiences of Islamophobia being reconfigured by the rise of preventative, pre-crime approaches to counterterrorism? It does this through the examination of three relevant sub-questions:

1. Trends of Islamophobia: Have young Muslims across Northern Europe observed changes in Islamophobia throughout their lives?
2. Experiences of Securitisation: How have young Muslims experienced contemporary security and securitisation in relation to counter-extremism legislation and practice?

3. Youth Responses: What has been the response of young Muslims to these trends, and how does this help us conceptualise the link and interaction between Islamophobia and security?

These questions allow us to draw out the following hypotheses:

1. Trends of Islamophobia: Islamophobia has not declined overall but rather shifted from overt, acute acts of hostility to more subtle, persistent, and systemic manifestations, reflecting a transition from "acute" to "chronic" Islamophobia.

2. Experiences of Securitisation: The growth in chronic experiences of Islamophobia can be linked to new articulations of security and securitisation, demonstrating a dual shift in both patterns of Islamophobia and securitisation.

3. Youth Responses: Young Muslims are actively devising and adopting novel coping strategies, such as masking or minimising visible religious identity, disengaging from mainstream political spaces, and employing hypervigilance, to navigate and mitigate newly entrenched forms of Islamophobia, racialisation, and securitisation.

Theoretical approach

This paper builds on theories of securitisation, Islamophobia and racialisation to illuminate the links between the construction of counterextremism by the European state and novel patterns of Islamophobia experienced by Muslim youth. It provides evidence for the need to conceptualise and distinguish between multiple securitisations and Islamophobias, operating in interlinked and mutually reinforcing manners. It suggests that the ways in which radicalisation is being constructed and embedded in counter-extremism are, in turn, altering the types of Islamophobias experienced by young Muslims, from those more associated with Acute Islamophobia, to those more associated with chronic formations. Such changes are also eliciting different responses from young Muslims, who are creating novel means of interpreting, managing and resisting contemporary formations of Islamophobia and racialisation. To achieve this, the study relies on existing work utilising theories of securitisation, Islamophobia and racialisation.

Theories of securitisation are particularly relevant because they consider how state security and power expand from traditional sites of militarism into civil spheres as the result of discursive articulations and framings. The rise of the War on Terror extended the security lens into broader civil society, as military and security discourses increasingly shaped and reinforced policies on labour, migration, education, and political and democratic engagement. As wide areas of social life and civil liberties have been traded for security across Europe, civil liberties have narrowed in a manner that has disproportionately impacted Muslim and minority communities. These processes have generated a deeply racialised inequality that intensifies existing structural barriers to education, employment, and visibility in mainstream media and politics.

Processes of securitisation have also been linked to the construction of radicalisation, which developed significantly post-2005 (Sedgwick 2010). These constructions have disproportionately targeted Muslim communities, casting conservative or visible Islamic religious practice as inherently linked to violence (Kundnani 2012). Recently, counter-terrorism measures have integrated concepts of extremism, with the requirement for public sector workers and wider society to identify and report signs of extremism and potential risks (HM Government 2015, 2024a, 2024b). These have been coupled with

constructions of radicalisation as linked to identifiable "risk factors" or "vulnerabilities", entrenching racialised processes against Muslims (Heath-Kelly 2020; Heath-Kelly and Gruber 2023).

By framing Islam and European Muslim communities as inherently linked to security threats, counterterrorism measures have exacerbated and institutionalised patterns of Islamophobia across European societies. Islamophobia in its modern incantation is attributed to the Runnymede Trust, in which it was conceptualised as four distinct but interlinked sets of experiences: Exclusion, Violence, Prejudice and Discrimination (Trust 1997). The Long War on Terror has led to various articulations of these four processes, including long-term patterns of social exclusion and marginalisation against Muslim communities (Abbas 2024), irregular violence against individuals and Muslim groups (Levin 2022), prejudice against visible representations of "Muslimness" (Allen 2015), and structural discrimination embedded in state and civil practices (Weichselbaumer 2020). Such Islamophobias have contributed towards the racialisation of Muslims in Europe (Ali 2020), in what is understood as the rise of a construction of racisms that differ from past practices (Garner and Selod 2015).

How, when, where, why, and under what conditions processes of racialisation occur has been explored in recent research, which has shown that theories of racialisation can provide researchers with the means and manoeuvres to understand race and power across various social contexts and social times (Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss 2019). Racialisation is born out of an experience of social dominance, and it is this intersection of power and race within theories of racialisation that lends itself to an exploration of a European counterextremism that has framed radicalisation as a distinctly Muslim problem (Kundnani 2012), linked to issues of migration, criminality, gender and other articulations of inequality (Garner and Selod 2015). Processes of racialisation and their articulations have created in Europe a powerful infrastructure of subordination, which Muslims in these societies must navigate on a day-to-day basis (Hassani 2023, 46).

The impact of such processes of racialisation and Islamophobia on the wellbeing of Muslims and Muslim communities has been documented in recent studies (Rehman and Hanley 2023), with notable links found between Islamophobia, health, and socioecological determinants of health, suggesting patterns of long-term decline in contexts of Islamophobia (Samari, Alcalá, and Sharif 2018). This process has also been shown to lead to the development of various coping mechanisms for experiences of securitisation and Islamophobia, as well as the internalisation of anti-Muslim biases amongst Muslims themselves (Abdel-Fattah 2017; McLaughlin, Ahmad, and Weisman de Mamani 2022). This rejection of the Muslim self has been shown to occur as a result of rejection by social institutions, which operate to steer, structure and limit Muslim life in Europe (Van Raemdonck 2024).

Whilst existing theories of securitisation, Islamophobia and racialisation help to illuminate the flow of power from authorities and majorities towards the Muslim minority in Northern Europe, how the subject of these processes manages, mitigates or responds to their effects is relatively underexplored. In prioritising examination of the flow of power from authorities to the racialised other, the agency of Muslims in developing responses and coping mechanisms may be overlooked. Research has, for instance, found a link between experiences of counterextremism and a willingness to engage in political activism as a means of fighting back against stigmatisation through political participation and engagement (Balazard and Peace 2023). Other studies, meanwhile, have shown the

impact of Islamophobia on encouraging demobilisation and retreat from political engagement, particularly in response to a sense of threat from counterterrorism (Peucker 2021).

As a result of the creation and evolution of counterextremism measures and the increasing construction of radicalisation as a non-violent act, this paper argues that experiences of Islamophobia have also undergone changes. Acute and overt acts of violence against Muslims that characterised the first decade of the Long War on Terror have, to a significant extent, been replaced by more covert, chronic experiences of structural inequality and social exclusion. These forms of Islamophobia are no less damaging; indeed, in creating far-reaching structural barriers for Muslims determining their life course, they are arguably more dangerous. Over recent years, young Muslim experiences of pre-criminal counterextremism approaches have increasingly contributed to a sense of alienation felt by Muslims (Abbas 2019), shaping young Muslims' perceptions of society, Islam and themselves. As both the security structures of the state and the types of Islamophobias experienced have changed, so too has the response developed by many young Muslims seeking to exercise agency through actions that include the masking of their identity, disengagement from politics, and psychosocial adaptations. In this way, this paper builds on the when and where of Islamophobia (Najib and Hopkins 2020) by considering the "what" of Islamophobia, in what ways it is crafted, experienced and responded to, its link to the securitised and racialised context, and the agency of young Muslims themselves in responding to increasingly chronic forms of Islamophobia.

Methods

This project draws on research conducted as part of the European Commission-funded H2020 DRIVE project, which explored discussions around radicalisation with young people, activists and practitioners, with a focus on engaging with Muslim and nationalist communities, as part of a comparative study of Northern Europe. Research practice included interviews and focus groups, as well as ethnographic study of activism and a large-n survey. For this analysis, 114 interviews were conducted with young Muslims, aged between 18 and 25 years, from across the UK, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway, focused on their experiences of security and securitisation, along with eight follow-up focus groups. This study offered a comparative means of examining national and regional experiences of counterextremism and respective trends of Islamophobia. Interviews and focus groups took place across an 18-month period, from July 2022 to January 2024.

Steps were taken to engage with young Muslims from various different backgrounds, accounting for a wide set of viewpoints. The gender balance was relatively equal between male and female interviewees, with a slight majority of male participants (53%) over female participants (47%). Geographically, the interviews were conducted in various locations within case study countries, with a focus on major cities including London, Manchester, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Oslo, as well as other significant urban and regional areas, with 25 interviews taking place in Denmark, 35 in Norway, 21 in the Netherlands, and 33 in the United Kingdom. In addition to one-on-one interviews, a total of 32 young Muslims were taken forward to eight focus groups held by the Public Mental Health Team of the DRIVE project, and aspects of these conversations are also reported in this paper and informed the discussion.

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling, with efforts made to ensure representation from a cross-section of Muslims from different ethnic, cultural and class backgrounds, including South Asian (Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Indian), Arab (Syrian, Iraqi, Moroccan), Somali, Turkish, and converts of European descent. While we acknowledge limitations in fully capturing the diversity of Europe's Muslim populations, our sample reflects the dominant ethno-religious configurations in each national context (e.g. Somali-Danish, Pakistani-British, Moroccan-Dutch). Interviews were conducted in the native language of each country and later translated into English for analysis. Interview questions focused on experiences of Islamophobia and racism, perceptions of radicalisation, experiences with counter-extremism policies, and perspectives on community-state relations. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and strictly and completely pseudonymised to protect participant confidentiality. All data was stored securely using the University of Leiden internal servers. Once pseudonymised, interviews were then analysed using Atlas.ti to identify and explore key themes noted by the interviewees and developed by DRIVE researchers. This coding process was replicated by researchers at various DRIVE project institutions, who conducted checks on data coding and interpretation to ensure the greatest possible accuracy.

There are some notable limitations to this study and approach. The research seeks to draw broader trends from detailed interviews with small numbers of young Muslims across differing national case studies, and whilst these findings represent their experiences, they may not be representative of others within Northern Europe. As such, we should be careful in applying these findings without proper caution to trends in both the case study countries and beyond. Whilst the study found broadly similar patterns of concern and experiences across the four countries, there may also be a need to further disaggregate the different experiences between the case studies to provide a more comparative discussion. Whilst this paper furthermore looks to develop a study of responses deployed by Muslim youth to these experiences, further research is needed on precisely the kinds of responses deployed by young people against novel forms of Islamophobia and securitisation, as well as the impact this has on health and wellbeing, with several interviewees implying a widespread decline in resilience and mental health. However, this paper does provide a means of potentially fine-tuning our understanding of patterns of Islamophobia over recent decades, conceptualising the interactive relationship of securitisation and racialisation within a framework of acute and chronic Islamophobia, as well as exploring how we might account for the agency of Muslims within this process. This study aims to add valuable insights to enduring critical terrorism discussions on the construction of counterextremism and its wider societal impacts.

Results

Youth experiences of Islamophobia since the start of the Long War on Terror

The first finding from the interviews with young Muslims is that young people across the four case study countries reported both direct experiences of Islamophobia but also, with relative consistency, that societal articulations of Islamophobia and racialisation had changed throughout their lifetime. As part of the interviews, young Muslims reflected on whether it was more difficult to be a Muslim within their country now or in the recent

past and the implications this has for both their generation and that of their parents. Several participants spoke of a distinctive difference between their generation and that of their parents' generation in how Islamophobia had been experienced, stating that their current generation has experienced lower levels of overt violence and prejudice but greater levels of structural discrimination and exclusion.

Within all four case study countries, the majority of young Muslim interviewees suggested that their parents' generation experienced greater levels of overt forms of Islamophobic violence than the current generation of young Muslims. Young people spoke of instances of verbal abuse, physical acts of violence, and overt and visible prejudice as a response to their perceived "Muslimness". Such Acute Islamophobia seems to have been particularly evident during the early years of the War on Terror, following the 2001 9/11 attacks in the US, as well as the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh, the Madrid bombings, and the 2005 London bombings in Europe. Many detailed experiences they had either heard from their parents or had experienced firsthand throughout their childhood.

One young British Muslim shared their experiences growing up Muslim in a major city in the UK:

> . . . growing up, I've always seen my mum face racism. And I was young, and I didn't even know what racism meant. But, even when my mum would take us to the park, there would be racial comments. I was very young, and my mum was wearing a head scarf, and she'd get called a lot of things, like she was called Paki or the like . . . Growing up, I felt like my mum and dad definitely had it harder. (Young British Muslim woman)

Acute Islamophobia and racialised attacks were stated as having been worse for the previous generation of Muslims, often told through experiences related to their parents and families. One British interviewee discussed how their father had faced prejudice and violence during his employment, underscoring the levels of harassment experienced by their parents' generation:

> I hear stories about my dad saying he came here and there was a lot of Islamophobia. They had to mark their territory because everyone wanted them out, and it was just so difficult. Like, he'd work, he'd do mini cabbing, and they'd come and smash up the entire cab station because there were Muslims. And there was a divide between the White people in [the community] and the Muslim people. So yeah, so when I hear their stories, I'm like, "Wow, you guys definitely had it much, much, much harder." (Young British Muslim woman).

The main factor suggested as driving these instances of verbal and physical violence against their parents' generation was the start of the Long War on Terror, as well as individual acts of "terrorist"-style violence in Europe, a point that aligns with existing research (Garner and Selod 2015). One young Dutch Muslim reflected on this period, noting the attacks in Europe in the early 2000s, stating that it created an increase in Islamophobic aggression:

> 9/11 happened when I was young; I don't remember exactly, and I didn't see the impact it had straight away. But I remember that the language started to change; the way I was seen was more – hostile, more threatening. And then 2004 and the Theo van Gogh murder, and it was getting worse. I definitely felt it; we all did in my family. Islamophobia got more overt and open in the streets and in the school. (Young Dutch Muslim man)

Another British interviewee noted the impact that the early years of the Long War on Terror and the language used around the 2005 London bombings had on their family, stating:

> ... during the height of the War on Terror, shortly after the sort of London bombings and stuff, there was a lot of racism. There were times when my dad and my uncles had to sort of shave their beards to hide their Muslim identities. My mum was reluctant to wear the hijab. This sort of persisted up until, I'd say, around 2012. (Young British Muslim man)

According to several interviewees, the start of the Long War on Terror represented a moment of sudden increase in hostile attitudes towards Muslims, at least in the way their parents recalled this time. Another British interviewee noted the impact of 9/11 on Islamophobia in Britain:

> I believe [my parents] had it a bit easier before 9/11. This was before the whole War on Terror era and the 7/7 bombings in London and things. They even told me themselves that when they first arrived here during the late '80s and early '90s, it was a lot easier for them, as in there wasn't so much racism, there wasn't so much Islamophobia. Of course, it's different, but for my parents at least, they said people used to be a lot more friendly with them. But shortly after I was born, and obviously throughout my childhood, they started to experience this Islamophobia (Young British Muslim man).

Several young people corroborated the sense that violence against Muslims peaked in the years that immediately followed the 2001 attacks in New York and the 2004 and 2005 bombings in Madrid and London, based on their parents' experiences. As one young British Muslim stated:

> ... my mum grew up in Kent, and in that time, I feel like it was very Islamophobic because it was around the 9/11 time when she grew up there. She has told me stories of when she used to get hit by rocks from other people ... She would get discriminated against at work, stuff like that ... There was a lot of, like, Islamophobic stuff back then. (Young British Muslim man)

Some interviewees reflected on the wider causes and processes that led to this uptick in anti-Muslim violence. One young British Muslim noted the general mainstreaming of anti-Muslim language which had infiltrated media narratives and political debates and its links to the specific international articulations of the War on Terror and the reporting of terror attacks (Politzer and Alcaraz 2023), recalling that:

> It was sort of shortly after 9/11. That's when I sort of grew up and the whole sort of War on Terror sort of era. And the reason why I mentioned that is quite crucial to my upbringing is that up until today, it's a very sort of majority white area. It's a white conservative area. At the time, we were probably the only Muslim family in the area ... But, at the time, a lot of people in primary school were even sort of politically aware. I used to be asked questions such as, "Oh, is this war against your people?" and things like this. (Young British Muslim man)

There was a sense amongst many young Muslims who were interviewed that the earlier years of the Long War on Terror marked a particularly significant peak in Acute Islamophobia and racist violence against Muslims. Since then, however, many reported that overt acts of violence had notably declined and that such violence was not as much a concern to their generation as it was to their parents' generation. However, this observation did not equal the belief that countries and societies in Northern Europe had become less Islamophobic during this period, despite a decline in violence.

Many interviewees underlined that, whilst they believed the majority of the older generation of Muslims in their country had experienced acute forms of Islamophobia such as overt violence and prejudice, younger Muslims were experiencing similar, if not greater, levels of Islamophobia, yet in different forms. These contemporary forms of Islamophobia are rooted in more covert forms of discrimination, with one young Danish Muslim suggesting a sea change in experiences of Islamophobia.

> ... those who are 50+ today, I think they have experienced, in Copenhagen and Aarhus, I would think, something very concrete in one way or another. People have called them perker [racial slur] or shouted at them or spat at them or something. That feeling, or what they have experienced, has been very clear to them. I think for the new generation, it's a more subtle form of racism; I usually call it a feeling of resentment, where you're sort of invisibly singled out in some way, right?" (Young Danish Muslim man)

These findings align with research that has suggested a link between terrorist attacks, the legitimisation of anti-Muslim rhetoric in mainstream politics, and instances of racialised hate crime (Awan and Zempi 2018), and with broader trends of the mainstreaming of Islamophobia (Mondon and Winter 2020). Whilst there was a sense that Acute Islamophobia had been declining, levels of overall Islamophobia were not. What was reported amongst many interviewees was that the form of Islamophobia had changed. It had become more embedded, more long-term and more insidious, with one British interviewee stating:

> I've seen a lot of the Islamophobia that [my parents] experienced, direct and indirect, overt and covert. I don't know if you want to use that language. It's all over. But witnessing a lot of what they experienced, you know, raising us as a working-class family, I very quickly understood what Islamophobia was, and I very quickly understood how it manifests in so many different ways. (Young British Muslim man)

Interviewees noted that Islamophobia had become more ingrained in society and normalised within mainstream discourse. Partially as a result of the advancement of the Long War on Terror and the growth of counterterrorism and counterextremism, young people stated they had also experienced the mainstreaming of anti-immigration and racist attitudes. One Danish interviewee stated:

> ... [Our generation] have become citizens in society while there's a whole rage about Muslims and immigrants, "They shouldn't be here," and so on and so forth. And I think some of the shock also comes from myself, for that matter, but also probably from so many others; you suddenly see that it's somehow come out of the closet, that there are actually a lot of Danes who think it's okay [to be racist] in reality (Young Danish Muslim man).

These statements illuminate how young Muslims have experienced a shift in Islamophobia throughout their lives in Britain, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands, under the shadow of the development of structures of counterterrorism.

Many young Muslims suggested changes in how they experienced Islamophobia, which moved from overt acts of violence and articulations of prejudice against Muslims in the early years of the Long War on Terror, here understood as Acute Islamophobia. Despite a sense that Acute Islamophobia has been in decline throughout the past generation, there was a general sense that this was not accompanied by a general decline in experiencing Islamophobia. Acute Islamophobia had given way to other articulations of

Islamophobia, which were more covert, more embedded, and more structural, understood as Chronic Islamophobia. This ties into existing research which has suggested the widespread embedding of processes of racialisation (Garner and Selod 2015; Hassani 2023) but is novel in suggesting that there has been a broader overarching shift in the types of Islamophobia being experienced in Northern Europe.

Such findings encourage us to consider the various possible articulations of Islamophobia and how potential patterns of exclusion, violence, prejudice and discrimination, highlighted by the Runnymede Report as constructing Islamophobia (Trust 1997), may shift over time, with certain formations becoming more or less prevalent, dependent on the political context. Whilst acts associated with Acute Islamophobia, such as violence and prejudice, have declined, those associated with Chronic Islamophobia, such as discrimination and social exclusion, have increased. This helps in detailing a noticeable shift throughout the past 20 years, as well as a theoretical structure for understanding novel patterns of discrimination and exclusion. The following section investigates the political context within which this occurred, examining how young Muslims have experienced contemporary security and how this has shaped their understanding of the Northern Europe counterterror state.

Youth experiences of counterextremism and counterterrorism

Young people reported high levels of negative experiences due to contemporary articulations of counterextremism across the four case study countries. Particular focus was centred on the preventative aspect of counterextremism, which has sought to identify vulnerability to terrorism well before violence or illegal acts occurred and become increasingly prevalent in sites of civil society such as education, healthcare and employment (Abbas, Awan, and Marsden 2023; Faure Walker 2021; Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2018; Younis 2020). Within a British context, many concerns concentrated on the Prevent programme (Kaleem 2023), which was reported by several interviewees as impinging on their freedoms of speech, assembly and religion.

As one British interviewee stated:

> During sixth form, I think it was in 2015 when the Prevent Duty was first enforced in schools and in public buildings and stuff. One of my teachers actually pulled me aside and said that "I don't know if you're aware, but we're getting some new form of training where we're going to have to monitor Muslim students, and you being the only Muslim student, you have to sort of watch what you say and how you talk about your Muslim identity." (Young British Muslim man)

Education was often cited as a key area of concern for young people experiencing securitisation, with many detailing the negative impact that the embedding of security measures within their schools had on their wider educational experience. One young Norwegian Muslim discussed how securitised discussions had impacted them and those fellow students who wore the hijab:

> I have; I can say that very many others, also Muslims, who also have a hijab, also developed anxiety from having to go to school with a hijab. I have met others who also started with a hijab like that before, and they think it was the worst because they were bullied often, even

> in places where there were a lot of people with a foreign background or a Muslim background. (Young Norwegian Muslim woman)

Interviewees spoke of the impact that discussions over terrorism and counterterrorism had amongst peers. One Dutch interviewee discussed the securitisation of Islamic and Arabic phrases, stating that:

> . . . after the [2016] attacks in Paris, there was a lot of that circulating in the news. And we were young children at the time, so no one fully understood. No one really understood it at the time, but a lot of people were shouting Arabic phrases or like Allahu Akbar on the playground, which was like, I didn't understand why they were doing it, but it did feel demeaning and insulting. (Young Dutch Muslim man)

Several interviewees highlighted that the introduction of the Prevent Duty in 2015 had significantly curtailed their freedom of speech at school. They described becoming wary of classroom discussions about politics or religion, fearing that open debate might trigger a Prevent referral. One young British Muslim interviewee, for example, recalled multiple instances where teachers explicitly tied his Muslim identity to concerns around extremism:

> I remember I sat with my deputy head. I was quite friendly with him in Year Seven and Year Eight; even things like Prevent, I said to him, look like I like to debate . . . "Look, to what extent can I actually have these discussions without me getting, like, a prevent referral? Am I not allowed to have this discussion? Am I not allowed to engage with you academically without fear of me being, you know, not allowed into university?" And he said, "Look, you're one of the good ones. We know that you're having an academic discussion, so that's fine." (Young British Muslim man)

This correlates with research that has raised concerns about the effect of precrime counterextremism and prevention in educational environments (Faure Walker 2021). A number of students reported instances in their schools where they were reassured by teachers that, despite the introduction of counterextremism measures, they were not to be worried as they were "one of the good ones". Such framing acts to create a highly problematic good-bad dichotomy of Muslims within European countries, which has been implicated in reinforcing the securitisation and hypervisibility of Islam (Hafez 2018, 216), a dynamic that exemplifies what Croft (2012) identified as the securitisation of Muslim identity, now intensified through pre-crime logics (Eroukhmanoff 2019).

Another young British Muslim interviewee described this dichotomy and how it led them to feel they needed to demonstrate their "moderate" stance, in relation to politics and Islam, for fear of being labelled "extremist":

> I really find it frustrating, the characterisation between, like, this idea that there are moderate Muslims, then there are the radical ones, and then everyone else in between is just thinking . . . And even this idea of a moderate Muslim, it plays into this idea that we as Muslims, you have to feed into . . . you have to work towards a characterisation of Muslims that they have outlined for you. So, we have to be within their framework. And if we don't fit the framework of a moderate Muslim, then we are automatically a radical Muslim, because that's the only dichotomous vision that they have: you're either radical or you're moderate, and there is no in-between. (Young British Muslim man)

The concept of radicalisation, as experienced by young Muslims, was seen as specifically focused on Islamic identity markers (Kundnani 2012) and as targeting European Muslims.

This was creating processes in which Muslim minorities were being treated differently, specifically as intrinsically linked to security concerns. As one British interviewee stated:

> I feel that there are certain stereotypes that are given to Muslims, and you know, if you can identify those, then, boom, you've ticked it. And that's very, very detrimental. And that's why I worry a lot. If the religiosity of somebody increases, then there's a red flag on them. If somebody's travelled to their hometown in Syria, then there's a red flag. If somebody came from an Arab country or is wearing a hijab – and this happened to my sister, actually, you know – there's a red flag that pops up. (Young British Muslim man)

Interviewees underscored that how the concept of radicalisation was being constructed within recent counterextremism created conditions for experiences of Islamophobia and the racialisation of Muslims. As one young British interviewee stated:

> The Home Office has a lot to do with it, and it's very obvious to everyone I think I speak to and to myself. That term [radicalisation] is geared towards Muslims. You never hear about the radicalisation of the right wing in the UK, so things like EDL and whatnot. But everyone tends to associate that term with Muslims because they're more likely to be sort of radicalised in their opinion . . . I don't think Islamophobia is justified by security. I think the Home Office does a terrible job of balancing those two terms on two issues. And that's what leads to a lot of Islamophobia . . . (Young British Muslim woman)

This imbalance in the way in which radicalisation was conceptualised in policy and practice as focused on Muslims was contrasted with how White-majority violence was seen to be underplayed and not associated with radicalisation and terrorism. This was understood as politicising and securitising Muslims whilst pathologising majority communities and majority violence, a view echoed in relevant studies (James 2022). The casting of violence conducted by Muslims as different from violence conducted by majority communities was placed within wider trends of mainstreaming far-right, anti-minority and anti-migrant discourse by politicians and media in Northern Europe (Mondon and Winter 2020). As one British interviewee stated:

> . . . those kinds of ideas are now becoming more acceptable. So, people think it's acceptable to say racist things or Islamophobic things or something about migrants because they've heard, you know, people in power discussing it and saying the same things. (Young British Muslim woman)

Across the case studies, young Muslims shared the negative experiences they had with state policy and authorities and how they had experienced Islamophobia from security-based policy and counterextremism. As one Danish interviewee stated on various counter-extremism and related legislation:

> . . . there is discrimination in society. government policy – whether it's the ghetto legislation, the imam package, or this new recommendation for a headscarf ban in primary schools – all of these initiatives are targeting Muslims and Islam. It helps to stigmatise and marginalise Muslims. (Young Danish Muslim man)

It was understood by many interviewees that counterterrorism and counterextremism continued to be overwhelmingly and disproportionately focused on Muslim communities. This led to significant concern over the impact it was having on their own Islamic faith and identity:

> I think that the discussion on things like the war on terror is just fearmongering and propaganda, kind of just a way to sort of make us feel like we have to project the experiences of what's happening in the Middle East onto our own identities. And I don't think it's fair. I think you find, like, a majority of Muslim populations have no links or affiliations with things like terrorism and war and, you know, extremism. But we're sort of under the whole same paintbrush. And I just don't think that's fair. (Young British Muslim woman)

As counterextremism discourses increasingly frame national, European, or Western values as the antidote to extremism, Muslims become more vulnerable to accusations of "radicalisation" for not appearing to conform to these imposed standards (Ali 2020). Many felt they were denied a risk because of their Muslim beliefs and were being "othered" as the result of the promotion of national values. One British interviewee surmised that British Muslims were:

> . . . portrayed as people who are alien to Britain, people who are violent, and people who want a different sort of way of life in the UK. We're just portrayed as the other – we're otherised. (Young British Muslim man)

A significant impact of this process noted by young interviewees was the mainstreaming of anti-Muslim racism and racialisation. As one young Danish Muslim stated:

> Politically, Denmark is very hostile to foreigners – or hostile to Muslims. Even though I am Danish, I feel that I don't fit into the country. (Young Danish Muslim man)

Ultimately, security policy around countering extremism was seen as interacting with and mutually reinforcing Islamophobia (Abbas 2019), one Dutch interviewee stating:

> Islamophobic parts in society and Islamophobic parts in politics are making each other strong. And because of this politics dealing with these Islamophobic parts in society, they give it a voice in the political arena and all societies stick this up. And also, the people that think for themselves that they are not picking it up, they are picking it up because of all the subtle language that is used, such as "moderate Muslims", for example. (Young Dutch Muslim man)

These interviews demonstrated concerns around the construction of radicalisation through the counter-extremism process. They included worries about the impact that preventative approaches were having on their freedom of speech in the classroom, the stereotyping of Muslims as being inherently linked or more vulnerable to extremism, differences in the way in which minority and majority violence is treated, as well as the mainstreaming of racist and racialised views linked to securitised language (Mondon and Winter 2020). Interviewees therefore not only experienced a change in how Islamophobia was being articulated throughout their lifetimes and across generations from Acute Islamophobia to Chronic Islamophobia but also suggested that Chronic Islamophobia was linked to changes within and around the development of constructions of deradicalisation and counterextremism policies. This ties in to research that has linked securitisation, Islamophobia and racialisation (Welten and Abbas 2022) but advances the discussion by suggesting that specific changes in securitisation can influence and are linked to changes in patterns of Islamophobia.

The increasingly preventative nature of counter-extremism structures and programmes was seen by many young Muslims as "othering" European Muslim communities,

negatively impacting their lives and education (Abbas 2024). Having explored the development of novel formations of Islamophobia and the creeping securitisation experienced by young Muslims, the final discussion section will investigate the impact of Chronic Islamophobia and securitisation on their lives, as well as how they have reported their response. Ultimately, this analysis clarifies the complex interplay between Chronic Islamophobia, securitisation, and counterextremism, illuminating how evolving security measures both shape and are shaped by the everyday experiences and responses of young Muslims.

Impacts and responses by Young Muslims

Experiences with counterextremism and Chronic Islamophobia have had a variety of impacts on young Muslims. Young Muslims reported impacts including disengagement from politics and other mainstream parts of society, the internalisation of Islamophobia, attempts to mask or remove elements of their Islamic identity, as well as hypervigilance within their day-to-day lives. These responses function as coping strategies aimed at navigating and mitigating the pervasive pressures of Chronic Islamophobia, strategies that resonate with victimisation studies documenting how marginalised groups develop protective behaviours in response to systemic threat (Samari, Alcalá, and Sharif 2018).

One young British interviewee explained the rise of chronic forms of Islamophobia as "insidious", noting how it subtly and covertly entered the daily experience of young Muslims, how difficult it was to recognise and identify, and the impact it has had on their lives:

> That's why so many Muslims are struggling because they're not aware of what's happening to them, and they don't realise what, you know, the source of it is. They just probably have this, you know, this sense, this instinct. Something's not right, like I did. You just don't know where you know where to pinpoint it because it's so subtle. It's insidious. (Young British Muslim woman)

This subtle "sense, this instinct" that "something's not right" emerged across interviews in all four case study countries, reflected in varying levels of political disengagement. On a formal level, interviewees described withdrawing from core political acts such as voting, campaigning, or joining a political party, citing an erosion of trust in politicians and the political system:

> I can't find security in belonging to a political party. Politicians say one thing, and then they get voted in, and it's just a lie. (Young Danish Muslim woman)

On an informal level, several interviewees spoke of deliberately avoiding everyday political discussions with friends, classmates, and colleagues, motivated by a fear of being labelled radical or extreme. For many, this anxiety outweighed their desire to openly share or debate viewpoints, leading them to adopt a protective silence:

> I think a lot of young [Muslims] feel like they shouldn't get involved in [politics] because you meet so much resistance, and you can get the feeling that if you just let out one word, you'll get a slap on the wrist. I think most young people have a huge reticence about politics and just have it as something they keep to themselves. (Young Danish Muslim man)

Such formal and informal disengagement functioned as a protective measure against the perceived risks of a securitised political climate, aligning with research that links racialised securitisation experiences to changes in political participation (Balazard and Peace 2023; Peucker 2021).

Another means of mitigating the risk of securitisation was an attempt to mask overt articulations of "Muslimness", particularly more visible or conservative aspects of faith. This included the deliberate hiding or removal of Islamic identity markers linked to faith, belief or cultural practices in their day-to-day lives. Where this was deemed not possible, some interviewees strove to frame themselves as "good Muslims", thereby distancing themselves from any suspicion of radicalism. As one young Norwegian interviewee noted:

> Muslims in today's society must hide their identity, and if they don't, they must constantly explain themselves and distance themselves from things in order not to be ostracised and made responsible for the actions of others. (Young Norwegian Muslim man)

One interviewee recounted how an experience with counterextremism prompted them to stop disclosing their Muslim identity altogether, effectively concealing this aspect of their life entirely:

> I became quiet; I didn't say anything for quite a long time. I didn't say it to anyone, and then I stopped telling people that I was Muslim. (Young Norwegian Muslim woman)

In existing research, masking or concealing Islamic identity is often seen as a way to mitigate both external hostility and internalised Islamophobia (McLaughlin, Ahmad, and Weisman de Mamani 2022; Van Raemdonck 2024). However, the interviewees in this study emphasised that masking operates not only as a response to discrimination but also as a means to cope with securitisation pressures. One young Muslim, for instance, changed their name as soon as they reached legal adulthood, as a means of avoiding being seen as Muslim:

> I decided to change my last name as soon as I turn 18, to avoid [being seen as Muslim] . . . It's something I feel I have to do so that I'm not seen as . . . well, it's . . . it's a bit silly to say, but I don't want to be seen as a Muslim or something. Not because I have much against it, but I feel that many others do, in a way. I've gotten comments; there was one or two times . . . . (Young Norwegian Muslim woman)

While masking was a recurring theme in interviews, other coping strategies included hypervigilance and carefully altering one's behaviour or self-presentation, particularly when interacting with majority ethnic groups:

> I become very aware of my surroundings. I am very aware of how people talk. I am very aware of whether I fit into their way of being. There is a big difference between talking to an ethnic Danish friend and a childhood friend who is Arab or Muslim. I spend so much energy on it . . . (Young Danish Muslim woman)

This hypervigilance also involved consciously adjusting one's outward demeanour to appear less threatening or more "approachable" to non-Muslim or majority communities. As one young British Muslim woman explained:

> I felt like I needed to be a bit more extroverted and bubbly towards customers, even though it is a bit tiring also because it's like, Okay, I don't have to always be like, 'Hey, how are you

> doing?" But I needed to do that in order for them to think, Okay, I am approachable. (Young British Muslim woman)

These coping strategies suggest that, amongst those young Muslims interviewed, Islamophobia as linked to securitisation had been, at least to some extent, internalised and formed a part of their calculation in navigating day-to-day experiences. This ties in with research conducted in the realm of public mental health, which has noted the links between Islamophobia and declining psychosocial health of European Muslims (Abdel-Fattah 2017; Rehman and Hanley 2023).

As one Danish interviewee surmised:

> I guess it's this feeling of discrimination and racism, as you say, that can affect young people …. That was just to go back to the question of the cover-up ban. If a young girl wants to cover up, that's her own freedom. And if the politicians then say you can't do that at all. Then it becomes internalised in your brain – this thing about society saying, "You're not part of society." (Young Danish Muslim man)

A small number of interviewees sought to respond to instances of Islamophobia by attempting to educate those who expressed such views, though often only in circumstances where it seemed safe to do so and where it would not have long-term negative impacts on their future:

> At my school, we had a chemistry teacher. He was passive-aggressive against Muslims … I sort of took it upon myself [to challenge it]. And I'm not saying everybody needs to do that – but, for me, I felt that I was able to do it. It was something that I wanted to work on, something that I want to speak to him about, to educate him, etcetera. And I feel for me, it worked. I think in the way he, you know, the classes … [in comparison to] the start of our academic year, later on, it improved. (Young British Muslim man)

These interviews illustrate how young Muslims deploy a variety of strategies, ranging from masking religious identity to educating antagonistic peers, to navigate the chronic forms of Islamophobia arising from securitisation and radicalisation discourses. Many seemed to navigate rather than openly resist Chronic Islamophobia (Hassani 2023). While earlier sections highlight more overt hostility experienced by older generations, these accounts point to an increasingly pervasive and subtle form of exclusion that constrains day-to-day opportunities, social interaction, political engagement, and mental well-being. The following section will explore how these interconnected processes, Chronic Islamophobia, securitisation, and shifting constructions of radicalisation, further shape the lived experiences of young Muslims across different national settings.

Discussion

The data presented here, based on research conducted in Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, highlight a clear shift in Islamophobia's predominant forms over the course of the Long War on Terror. In earlier phases, Acute Islamophobia, shaped by overt violence and verbal abuse, was widely reported by older generations or during the immediate aftermath of high-profile attacks such as 9/11, the Madrid bombings, and the 2005 London bombings. By contrast, the experiences of younger Muslims indicate an overall reduction in these blatant hostilities, yet

a simultaneous rise in Chronic Islamophobia, marked by subtle and deeply embedded forms of exclusion, discrimination, and racialised suspicion.

This transition from acute to chronic forms aligns with the broader embedding of securitisation in civil institutions. As counterterrorism discourses increasingly focus on pre-emptive measures, seeking to identify "risks" or "vulnerabilities" before any violence occurs, they naturally shift scrutiny into everyday spaces such as schools, workplaces, and health services (Heath-Kelly 2020; Schneider 2019). From the perspective of young Muslim interviewees, this preventative approach has cast them as perpetual security concerns (Winter et al. 2022), reinforcing covert forms of bias and solidifying structural barriers to full social and political participation. Official hate crime statistics partially corroborate this trend: in the UK, anti-Muslim hate crimes peaked post-7/7 (2005) and again after Brexit (2016), but have since stabilised or declined in reported physical assaults (Home Office 2023), even as Prevent referrals and policy-driven discrimination have increased (Abbas, Awan, and Marsden 2023). Similar patterns are observable in Denmark and the Netherlands, where far-right political gains have coincided with legislative targeting of Muslim practices (e.g. hijab bans, mosque closures), reflecting what Mondon and Winter (2020) describe as the "mainstreaming of Islamophobia."

Securitisation, Islamophobia, and racialisation thus appear intertwined, continuously shaping each other. As legal and policy tools like Prevent attempt to define "normal" identities in national contexts (Heath-Kelly 2020), they inevitably reinforce the notion that Muslim identities require monitoring or correction. Across the case study countries, young people experienced the promotion of racially coded national values and a good/bad dichotomy overlaid onto Muslim communities. This situation is compounded by public and political discourses that frame extremism primarily in Islamic terms, downplaying comparable threats from majority communities (Ali 2020; Crawford 2017; James 2022). The result is a self-reinforcing cycle: heightened fear of extremism legitimates restrictive measures, which then reinforce Islamophobic stereotypes, ultimately justifying further surveillance.

The agency of young Muslims, often overshadowed in securitisation and racialisation literature, emerges strongly in this study. Interviewees describe a spectrum of responses to Chronic Islamophobia, from tactical withdrawal from mainstream politics and self-censorship in classroom debates to more subtle forms of masking to avoid stigmatisation. These strategies confirm existing research pointing to the "internalisation" of Islamophobia (McLaughlin, Ahmad, and Weisman de Mamani 2022) but also reveal an acute awareness of how to manoeuvre around these structural pressures. Rather than purely resisting, many opt to navigate Islamophobia (Hassani 2023), balancing the need to protect themselves from surveillance with the desire to sustain their religious identity and broader social ambitions.

Importantly, our framework of Acute and Chronic Islamophobia does not medicalise victimhood but draws attention to the temporality and institutionalisation of harm, a distinction vital for policy intervention. Acute Islamophobia demands reactive protection (e.g. hate crime policing), whereas Chronic Islamophobia requires structural dismantling (e.g. de-securitising education, repealing discriminatory laws). This aligns with victimisation studies that differentiate between episodic and systemic trauma (Samari, Alcalá, and Sharif 2018), urging scholars to move beyond event-based analyses towards understanding cumulative, everyday exclusion.

This nuanced interplay underscores a need for further refinement in conceptual tools. Disaggregating Islamophobia into acute and chronic strands not only captures the diversity of

experiences but also situates them within evolving counterterror and pre-crime regimes. Additionally, acknowledging the different modes of agency highlights that Muslims are not passive recipients but actively adapt, cope, or contest in ways that also change with time. Recognising these patterns and their underlying logics is vital if policymakers and scholars hope to mitigate harms, ensure equitable public services, and fully grasp how securitisation recalibrates the social position of Muslim communities in Northern Europe.

Conclusion

These findings significantly shape how we understand, nuance and deploy concepts of Islamophobia, securitisation and racialisation within the context of expanding European counterextremism. They underscore that Islamophobia is neither static nor monolithic; rather, it evolves in relation to shifting security paradigms.

Across two decades of the Long War on Terror, a shift has taken place from Acute to Chronic Islamophobia, in which overt acts of violence and verbal abuse have given way to greater structural and embedded practices of discrimination and exclusion. This insight demands a more nuanced understanding of Islamophobia's multiple forms, highlighting how certain manifestations, violence, prejudice, discrimination, or exclusion (Trust 1997), can dominate or recede over time, depending on political climates and policy agendas. All four factors, as seen in the Runnymede Trust's early conceptualisation of Islamophobia, were reported to be present in young Muslims' experiences. However, some seemed more prevalent than others at different points in time, suggesting value in disaggregating Islamophobia into acute and chronic trends. It also suggests merit in potentially repositioning Islamophobia not as one singular concept but as separate "Islamophobias" that mutate over time, dependent on how they are being experienced within societies.

These transformations are closely tied to the rise of pre-crime counterextremism models, which broaden the security lens beyond traditional policing and intelligence operations to encompass new social and political sites (Jackson 2015). The construction of counterextremism has been linked to the production of Islamophobia(s) in a Northern European context (Abbas 2019; Hassani 2023; Vliek and de Koning 2023). By employing a temporal lens over several decades, informed by the first-hand accounts of young people growing up entirely within the Long War on Terror, this study illuminates how shifting securitisation strategies have enabled and shaped different forms of Islamophobia. As more covert and embedded forms of security have come to dominate counterterrorism through pre-crime models that delegate the role of identifying "risks" and "vulnerabilities" of extremism to a far wider body of structures and individuals, so too have the more covert and embedded Chronic Islamophobia come to dominate the experiences of young Muslims.

Whilst the interlinked trends of Chronic Islamophobia, counterextremism, and securitisation were detailed by young Muslims across Northern Europe, so too were various practices of interpreting and managing this threat. The use of disengagement, masking and hypervigilance, amongst other tactics, all demonstrate that this nexus neither goes unnoticed nor unchallenged by those who receive it. Whether it is through addressing or seeking to shield themselves from it, these actions underline an agency in attempting to manage developing patterns of discrimination and exclusion. It suggests the need for tempering our conceptualisations of Islamophobia, securitisation and racialisation as processes that are not one-directional but are reinterpreted and resisted in a variety of

ways by those experiencing them. We must therefore seek to consider the agency of young Muslim actors, not to understate the danger that such processes pose to the wellbeing of young Muslims, but to complexify their impact and implications.

The theoretical framework of Acute and Chronic Islamophobia, rooted in established research on Islamophobia, securitisation, and racialisation, offers a valuable lens for examining how Islamophobia evolves alongside shifting counterextremism measures. It highlights not only the deepening structural constraints faced by young Muslims but also their agency in challenging and navigating those constraints. By recognising both the persistence of racially charged policies and the varied strategies that young Muslims employ to manage and mitigate Chronic Islamophobia, researchers and policymakers can move beyond static views. Ultimately, this approach underscores the need to address the structural underpinnings of Chronic Islamophobia while centring the adaptive resilience of Muslim communities across Northern Europe.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This research was supported by the European Union's H2020 programme under grant agreement No. [959200].

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