

Has Multiculturalism Failed? – links to the debate, February/May 2011

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Introduction

This paper was compiled following [David Cameron's speech at the Munich Security Conference](#) on Saturday 5 February 2011.

The speech and media discussions of it dealt with three principal themes:

- **The concept of multiculturalism**, and whether multiculturalism in Britain, and in Europe more generally, has failed.
- **The nature and causes of violent extremism**, and approaches to preventing it.
- **'The Muslim question'** – the place of Islam and of Muslim communities in modern Europe, and the nature and causes of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism.

In addition there was consideration in the media of:

- **disagreement and controversy within the UK government** relating to the three themes mentioned above, for example differences of opinion within the Cabinet, between the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), and between Conservatives and Liberal Democrats
- **the response of the Labour Party leadership** to the prime minister's speech
- **the actions and policies of the English Defence League (EDL)**, which happened to organise a large demonstration on the same day as the speech.

The concept of multiculturalism

Criticisms of the prime minister's remarks about multiculturalism were made by, amongst others, [Rob Berkeley](#), [Ruth Grove-White](#), [Meral Hussein-Ece](#), [Sunder Katwala](#), [Cecile Laborde](#), [Tariq Modood](#), [Varun Oberoi](#), [Kanishk Tharoor](#), [Paul Vallely](#) and [Humza Yousaf](#). There was critical discussion of it by a range of academic authors in a special issue of [British Politics Review](#) (Norway).

Support for the speech was expressed by, amongst others, [Martin Bright](#), [the English Defence League](#), [Frank Furedi](#), [Nick Griffin](#), [Charles Moore](#), [Melanie Phillips](#) and [Norman Tebbit](#).

Incidentally, the prime minister's views on state multiculturalism had previously been outlined in [a speech he gave some three years earlier](#), when he was still leader of the opposition.

The [BBC Wales Politics Show](#) canvassed opinion about the prime minister's speech amongst young people in Butetown, Cardiff. A range of views was expressed.

A report from the [Searchlight Educational Trust](#) referred to the speech and proposed an interesting typology for considering multiculturalism and related issues. The report was summarised in relation to Mr Cameron's speech by [David Miliband](#). It was subsequently strongly criticised by [Sivanandan](#) and [Jon Burnett](#), both based at the [Institute of Race Relations](#).

On 7 March there was [a lively exchange of views between Mehdi Hasan and Douglas Murray](#) about multiculturalism and related issues on the BBC Politics Show.

It was preceded by [a short film featuring Douglas Murray's views](#).

[Professor Bob Jackson](#) discussed the prime minister's speech in connection with the positive role that can be played in schools by religious education (RE).

An alternative view of multiculturalism was reflected in a research report from [Manchester University](#).

Later (21 April), [Liz Fekete](#) wrote a lengthy paper situating Mr Cameron's speech within a Europe-wide attack on multiculturalism by right-wing and centre-right politicians. In due course (11 May), [a summary](#) of this was published.

Preventing violent extremism

Criticisms of the prime minister's approach to preventing violent extremism (PVE) were made by, amongst others, [Madeleine Bunting](#), [Liz Fekete](#), [Jonathan Githens-Mazer](#), [The Guardian](#), [Mehdi Hasan](#), [Robert Lambert](#) and [Andy Mycock](#). There were implied criticisms in a speech by [Nick Clegg](#).

Later (6 May), an article by [Vikram Dodd](#) reported that the report of the government's current review of PVE is likely to contain or be accompanied by a re-statement of the prime minister's views on multiculturalism.

Support for the prime minister's views on preventing violent extremism were expressed by, amongst others, [Douglas Murray](#), [Maajid Nawaz](#) and the [Quilliam Foundation](#), and by [Charles Moore](#) and [Melanie Phillips](#).

Later, the [Muslim Council of Britain](#) published a set of academic articles critiquing the government's revised Prevent strategy.

Muslims and Islam in modern Britain

Criticisms of the prime minister's views of Muslims and Islam in modern Britain were made by, amongst others, [Yasmin Alibhai-Brown](#), [Mahmud Al-Rashid](#), [Chris Allen](#), [Madeleine Bunting](#), [Engage](#), [Karima Hamdan](#) and [Salma Yaqoob](#).

The article by [Mahmud Al-Rashid](#) was accompanied by three additional brief statements by British Muslims.

Those who supported the prime minister on this subject included [Charles Moore](#) and [Melanie Phillips](#), and also [James Delingpole](#), [Niles Gardiner](#) and [Haras Rafiq](#)

Debate and controversy within the government

Shortly before the prime minister's speech, [Peter Osborne](#) described major disagreements within the Cabinet about preventing violent extremism, and amongst senior civil

servants. His perceptions were cited and reinforced by, amongst others, [Mehdi Hasan](#), [Jonathan Githens-Mazer](#), and [Seumas Milne](#).

Differences of opinion within the Conservative Party were alluded to by, amongst others, [Norman Tebbit](#).

The English Defence League

On BBC Newsnight, a few days before the prime minister's speech on 5 February, there was [a short documentary film](#) about the English Defence League (EDL) and there was [an interview with the EDL's leader](#).

Comments on the interview were published by the [Muslim Council of Britain](#) and by [Suzanne Moore](#).

Dan Hodges published [an account of how the prime minister's speech was perceived by the EDL](#), and also [an account of the EDL demonstration](#) in Luton on 5 February.

For background information and analysis, it is relevant to recall that [Faith Matters](#) published a substantial report on the English Defence League in November 2010.

The Labour Party

Shortly before the prime minister's speech on 5 February [Bob Pitt](#) published a critical review of the Labour Party's record over the last decade in relation to British Muslims.

[Mehdi Hasan](#) noted that the Labour Party leadership failed to make a high-profile response to the speech. There was, however, a response in due course from [David Miliband](#).

[Dan Hodges](#), who in common with David Miliband referred to the [Searchlight Educational Trust](#) report, wrote an extremely critical review of Labour's record in relation to immigration and multiculturalism.
