Muslims in the UK comprise a multi-diverse group of communities, and whilst the collective majority are born into the faith with origins or heritage in Muslim countries and regions overseas, the Muslim community in Britain is in fact represented across all ethnicities including indigenous White English and those of Dual/Multiple heritage. Among this diverse community there are long established communities of second, third and even fourth generations as well as recently settled and newer arrival communities. It follows that there are considerable differences between and within these groups. Yet, despite these differences Muslims appear to be an internally cohesive and highly organised community. Indeed Muslims share a bond of belief and core values that shape common perceptions and opinions – epitomised by the Islamic concept of the Ummah i.e. the global Muslim communion – with most Muslims in Britain generally feeling connected with and sympathetic to the plight of fellow Muslims elsewhere in the World. However, as is inevitable in such a diverse group, Muslim communities are subject to many differences ranging from theological to cultural and generational.

The following provides a brief overview of the denominational breakdown of British Muslim communities, looking at religious and ethnic diversity, where these intersect to influence leadership structures and networks and how all these are evolving within the context of British young people.

**Sects – Shia and Sunni**

Muslims are divided into the two main sects of Shia and Sunni. The Sunni make up the vast majority and constitute around 80-85% of Muslims throughout the World and the Shia 15-20% – the proportion in the UK is similar. Both the Sunni and Shia Muslim Sects have many subdivisions, though only a significant few seem to be either represented or established in the UK. Of the two sects, Shia Muslims appear to be the least represented and least diverse.

The majority of Shia Muslims belong to the mainstream Jafari School of Thought which divides into the two main denominations; the Ithna Ashari and Ismaili. The Ithna Ashari are predominant throughout the Shia world and likewise in Britain, constituting the majority amongst Shiites from Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Lebanon, Syria, India, Afghanistan and Bahrain. Ismailis in Britain constitute a minority though represent an eminent section of the Shia community and are mainly of Indian and Pakistani heritage, with a significant proportion being secondary migrants from across East and South Africa. Both the Ithna Ashari and Ismaili subdivide further, but only the Usuli Fiqh of the Ithna Ashari denomination and the Khoja/Nizari and Dawudi Bohra branches of the Ismaili denomination appear as established in the UK, and then only in a select few cities such as Leicester and the London Borough of Waltham Forest.
Most Sunni Muslims belong to one of four major Orthodox Schools of Thought (known singularly as Madhab and collectively as Madhaib) - Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali, named after the Scholars or Imams who founded them circa 8th and 9th Centuries AD. Madhab adoption varies and is generally related to global geographic region(s). The table below shows the range of Madhab adoption across the globe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School of Thought (Madhab)</th>
<th>Range of Global Adoption</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanafi</td>
<td>Indian sub-continent, Turkey, Albania, the Balkans, Iraq and Central Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maliki</td>
<td>North, Central and West Africa.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shafi</td>
<td>South East Asia, Southern Arabia, and East Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanbali</td>
<td>UAE and Saudi Arabia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The major Sunni Madhabs subdivide into further branches, with most interconnected with Sufism. Sufis are organized into orders (Tariqas), grouped around a spiritual leader (Shiekh, Pir or Wali). Although, Sufism is often characterized as the mystical component of Islam, practices vary in terms of degree of emphasis, ranging from passive meditation to direct action.

Despite the variety and complexities, only three Sunni Muslim branches are commonly found established within almost all British Muslim communities; the Barelwi, Deobhandi and Wahabi-Salafi.

Both the Barelwi and Deobhandi are derived from the Hanafi Madhab and originated in India, however, represent two distinctly different types of Islamic practice with varying degrees of adoption related to a large extent on ethno-national and regional heritage. The Barelwi place emphasis on spirituality, whereas the Deobhandi, originating as a reformist movement represents a more doctrinaire approach. The Barelwi are the single largest majority Muslim community in the UK (approximately 40%) and prefer to be described as Ahle Sunnah Wal Jammat i.e. exclusive adherents of the true Sunnah (Traditions of the Prophet). Barelwism is predominant amongst British Muslims of Pakistani Punjabi and Kashmiri heritage and also has a following among Muslims from Bangladesh and India. The Deobhandi strand constitutes majority adoption amongst Muslims from Indian Gujarat, specifically Surut, the Northern Pakistani region of Peshawar, throughout Afghanistan and Bangladesh. There are further variations within and between the branches of Barelwi and Deobhandi, some related to ethno-national culture but also along theological lines.
The Wahabi or Salafi strand, has its origins in Arabia and though confirmed primarily to the Hanbali Madhab, is actually based on teachings that reject the need to be bound by any one of the four Madhabs, and significantly, considers teachings from all four. The Wahabi/Salafi – though most predominant in Saudi Arabia – draw followers from all nationalities and ethnicities including many converts to Islam. Consequentially the Wahabi-Salafi have many sub divisions – lending their theological basis to puritanical factions such as the Jihadist movement and proscribed groups Al Muhajiroon and Al Ghuraba. Whereas, most Salafi follow a less puritanical form of Islam as is espoused by groups such as Pakistani based group Ahle Hadith.

The differences outlined above generally tend to be accepted and tolerated and although sectarianism and factionalism would be quite entrenched in the Muslim world, in the UK – a more cosmopolitan environment – Muslims tend to get along and can often be seen worshipping together in the same Mosque. Nevertheless, most Mosques are established along ethnic and corresponding factional lines and though differences may be subtle and obscure, it is possible to find followers of a particular strand making a principle of boycotting other Mosques. Mosques are typically run by an elders who dominate the management committee and represents the predominant ethnic group and traditional faction for that particular mosque. The committee is also in charge of appointing the imam who tends to be from the same ethnic group and that faction. Control of the Mosque committee is often the subject of ethnic, doctrinal, political and/or other rivalries. Similarly community leadership and representational structures within Muslim communities are typically ethnically and factional based.

Community Leadership Structures
All societies and communities have hierarchical social structures. Most Muslim community leadership structures operate within traditional extended family, tribal/clan networks and allegiance systems, usually transposed from the cultural norms of their respective countries of origin. Common amongst Muslims of Arab, African and Indo-Pakistani origin, these systems are almost always organized with male elders at the helm and developed along nepotistic blood lineage and ancestry. The degree of influence, adherence and power is dependant primarily on the population size and concentration of the respective community.

Probably the most sophisticated and widely utilized in Britain and certainly most influential is termed as the Birardari (brotherhood) or Khandani (ancestral clan) system. Originating in India, this system is formulated on a complex combination of religious, tribal, economic and regional dimensions and is also common in other Indian faith communities including the Sikh and Indian Christian communities. There many variations in terms of influence, representation, adherence and practice specific to Islamic Strand and ethno national heritage.

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Since Barelwi Pakistanis form the majority of Muslims in Britain, the Birardari system is most prevalent in Pakistani Barelwi communities but similar structures can also be identified in most Muslim communities, such as the Somali and Newer arrival communities, due to the tribal roots and politics of developing countries.

The culture of the Birardari system dictates that the leading Birardari or Khandani elders’ word is final. Along with elder control, this system is sometimes criticized by young British born Muslims for being exclusivist, discriminatory, engrossed in denial and fuelled by a defeatist victim mentality - and excluding women and young people. However, there are also voices commending the Elders and local Birardari leaders for providing essential services of representation and also being invaluable in settling disputes. The Birardari/Khandani system is undergoing adaptation in a British context, and the domination by the elders is beginning to change. There is a new generation of British-born, educated leaders, keen to make a change and widen participation to include all ethnicities, the young and women.

Just as all cultures throughout history alter, adapt and are influenced by exposure to new ideas and environments, similarly Muslim culture in Britain has changed. British born Muslims practice and understand their faith in a different context to their parents, increasingly aware of their identities as Muslim as distinct from their ethnicities. There has been a diffusion of ideas and a growth in confidence relative to first generation elders. Moreover, recent events such as 9/11, 7/7, ‘the war on terror’, and the unrelenting media attack and demonising of Islam and Muslims have had a major impact in the current context. Yet a new factionalism is sometimes evident. An illustration of change in a contemporary British context is the array of Muslim Groups and organizations active and originating in Britain, their aims objectives and relative popularity. These organisations number many though it is possible to categorise them into three types; Islamic, Muslim and Ethno National.

Islamic – Aims and objectives are based, governed and restricted by Islamic teachings. Such organisations are often linked to particular denominations and branches of Islam.

Muslim – Membership and representation is concentrated on Muslims, though not governed by Islamic principles. Umbrella groups, forums and Self-help groups typically fit this category.

Ethno National – Organisations that are formed around a particular ethnicity or nationality who also happen to be Muslim.

Some groups and organisations may overlap categories though aims and objectives can often easily be determined through simple semantic analysis. Some of the best known and most popular are listed below:
Islamic

**Tableeghi Jammat (Preaching Group)** – Largest Muslim evangelical group in the world, linked to the Deobandi Strand and thereby large external network Deobandi Mosques and seminaries spanning Newham to Dewsbury. Mostly appeals to Indian Gujarati heritage Muslims, though also have significant following amongst Pakistani Peshwaris, Bangladeshis and Nort African Arabs.

**Hizb Ut Tahrir  (Party of Liberation)** – Political Group whose “Ideology is Islam”. Aim is to re-establish the Caliphate somewhere in the Muslim world. Though not Salafi, operate at and appeal to the Sunni Madhab (Schools of thought) level. Historically, enjoyed wide support amongst young Muslims and some elders, mostly of Barelwi Pakistani heritage, though in recent years support and membership has waned.

**Ahle Hadith (Way of the Traditions of the Prophet)** – Pakistan based Salafi Group.

**Al Muhajiroon (The Immigrants)** – Salafi based group, and although proscribed by government, former members still actively propagate their ideas. Mixed heritage support, typically Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Somali and African Caribbean reverts.

Muslim

**Islamic Society of Britain** – National organization mainly involved in organizing family social activities.

**Muslim Council Of Britain (MCB)** – Umbrella organization.

**British Muslim Forum (BMF)** – Umbrella organization representing mainly Barelwi inclined Mosques and organisations.

Ethno National

**Various** – All/any organisations with specific ethnicity mentioned in title e.g. Indian Welfare Association, Somali Community Centre etc..