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The background image is a vertical photograph of the Tower Bridge in London. The bridge's massive stone towers and intricate Gothic-style architecture are the central focus. A red double-decker bus is captured in motion on the left side of the bridge, its image blurred to convey speed. In the foreground, several people are walking away from the camera along the pedestrian walkway of the bridge. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a clear day. The overall composition is a mix of historical architecture and modern urban life.

Interfaith Beyond the Pandemic: from London Communities to Global Identities

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About the Unit

LSE Religion and Global Society is an interdepartmental research unit which conducts, coordinates and promotes social science research that seeks to understand the many ways in which religion influences, and is influenced by, geopolitical change. The unit is a partnership between the Faith Centre and the Anthropology, International Relations, and Methodology departments.

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With support from Eliana Abdo, Daniel Coyne, Cameron Howes, and Angharad Thain

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who took part in this research, from our interviewees, stakeholders and conference attendees. Your willingness to talk about these issues has been central to this work. This research was generously supported by the LSE's Knowledge Exchange and Impact Fund.



Foreword

London is a city of multiple, overlapping, characteristics and interests. It is possibly the most diversely diverse place on the planet. The word ‘Londoner’ is encouragingly inclusive: anyone arriving in the city today can immediately adopt the word for themselves. Better still, existing Londoners accept such self-identification without question. One of the many threads from which this identity is woven is faith. Immigration in the years since the Windrush generation arrived in 1948 has reinforced and expanded the religious nature of the UK’s capital.

David Dinkins, when mayor of New York described that [wonderful] city as a “gorgeous mosaic of race and religious faith, of national origin and sexual orientation”. Of course, megacities, can be an alien and isolating place. People with different backgrounds and interests can keep to themselves and never fully take advantage of the benefits of being surrounded by so much difference.

Religious leaders in London work together well. They meet in a collegial way and demonstrate clearly that different faiths often have common goals. But on the streets different forces are at play and not all of them good. This report is clearly correct in highlighting the need for central and local government to consider the need to promote effective and collaborative relationships between faiths – and not only during crises. The Covid-19 vaccination programme is a contemporary example of a public policy issue where faith groups can encourage enlightened self-interest among their members.

As the report also argues, religions need to respond to the world of which they are a part. Society and attitudes change. Unless religions encourage wider participation and can reflect contemporary London, they risk irrelevance. Similarly, faith leaders in a global megacity cannot escape the need to address contemporary geo-political issues. Today’s nine million Londoners have family, friends and colleagues living in places where conflict and persecution are the norm. Faith leadership can make things better – or worse.

The authors of this study cite Aristotle’s observation that “man is by nature a political animal”, adding “Interfaith is no different”. This can never have been truer than in London today. The report is timely and important.

Professor Tony Travers

London School of Economics & Political Science
June 2021





Introduction

COVID-19 has touched every facet of society, including the institutions and networks of the London interfaith¹ world. From Whitehall to Whitechapel, the pandemic has reshaped the interfaith sector while revealing its importance. The urgency of reducing infection rates at mass gatherings resulted in the creation of unprecedented interfaith initiatives by the State, and the sudden ubiquity of online platforms has enabled a growth of new civil society interfaith initiatives. All the while, well-established interfaith structures have been drawn upon but not always found able to respond to the unique challenges of the times.

In this report we explore how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted interfaith and set out recommendations for the sector moving forward. Our data indicates that the pandemic has exacerbated an already existing and troubling intergenerational divide in the sector. Yet, at the same time, it has revealed the immense value and dynamism the interfaith sector brings to public life.

Understanding Interfaith



Interfaith, at its core, seeks to bring together members of diverse faith communities to encourage and support dialogue and collaboration across faith traditions. ”

Interfaith, at its core, seeks to bring together members of diverse faith communities to encourage and support dialogue and collaboration across faith traditions.² There is an underlying ethos of, and commitment to, establishing and maintaining a representative body of individuals to take part and bring their experiences into these interfaith initiatives.

Interfaith takes many different forms and is realised through many different structures. The interfaith practiced in the wake of a local hate crime in Whitechapel is very different to the interfaith practiced by a government Taskforce in Whitehall, for example. To help differentiate these ways of structuring interfaith for the purpose of our report, we have identified three forms of interfaith that serve as a conceptual framework:

- State-led interfaith: this represents a diplomatic, top-down form of interfaith dialogue that is focused on outcome-driven representation of various faith communities. As is the case with the COVID-19 task force established by Government, it has a specific purpose and is meant to represent as broad a cross-section of the population as possible.

¹ Often this term is written as Inter Faith, interreligious, or inter-faith, but this report will use “interfaith” throughout. In recognition that interfaith is diverse and takes many different forms, including conversations, meals, or justice projects, the term is frequently used as a noun throughout this report to reflect the broad scope of activities and the sector as a whole.

² Cambridge Dictionary (2021). See also: Fahy and Haynes (2018); Interfaith Youth Core; Moyaert (2013).



- Formal civil society interfaith: the UK has one of the most extensive and well-established collection of interfaith organisations and networks in the world. This the result of structures – both nationwide and citywide – that coordinate and facilitate interfaith gatherings through written articles of association, having earned the trust of local communities over the course of decades and playing a key role in social cohesion (Bickley and Mladin 2020).
- Informal civil society interfaith: this form of interfaith is more fluid and dynamic than formal civil society. Free from institutional structures and bureaucracy, this form of interfaith is more closely aligned to certain causes within local communities, but rarely displays the longevity of formal structures.

These forms are not silos; they are a mixed economy of interfaith with considerable overlap. A leader of a formal civil society initiative can serve at a state-led interfaith gathering, and the Government can establish funding for informal civil society projects. In this Report we convey how the pandemic has impacted all three forms of interfaith.

The Report

The state's emboldened forays into the interfaith world during the pandemic has sparked debates around the **politics of representation** and the relationship between pragmatism and inclusivity, which we discuss in Chapter Two. Chapter Three then moves on to discuss the importance of **social action** to young peoples understanding of faith and the interfaith sector, as they have navigated the online space to create inclusive interfaith forums that highlight social action and justice. Chapter Four discusses how these three forms of interfaith manage, with varying degrees of success, emerging **global identities manifested at the local level**.

The report concludes with recommendations for the sector to address the challenges of interfaith beyond the pandemic: how can state-led interfaith transition from effective pragmatism to better relationships with faith communities without instrumentalising them? How can religious literacy across the sector be improved? How do we renew and reinvigorate formal structures, given their long-standing and vital presence in local communities? And how do we encourage underrepresented communities, particularly young people and women, to get involved?

Intergenerational issues lie at the heart of every chapter, and through our data collection with young people, we can begin to see a vibrant mixed economy of interfaith taking shape that draws on the strengths of each form.



Key findings

- 1** The pandemic has necessitated the creation of unprecedented interfaith forums and initiatives by the state, attempting to mobilise large sections of the population across faith groups for public health priorities. The move online has also enabled a growth of new informal civil society initiatives. Formal civil society interfaith networks have remained important, but their shortcomings have been highlighted by these two other forms.
- 2** There is a tension across the sector between a “pragmatic” representation of (usually older male) leaders and a more “inclusive” representation of female and minority voices. Until leadership within communities themselves diversifies, this is a difficult challenge for the interfaith sector itself to resolve. Informal civil society interfaith is more able to spearhead inclusivity.
- 3** Formal civil society interfaith groups need to take the challenge of including young people, women, and minority faith groups more seriously. Conversely, interfaith activities can sometimes provide leadership opportunities for women and young people that are not available to them in their own communities.
- 4** Young people are more likely to see interfaith collaboration as a vehicle for social action than for dialogue and this contributes to a troubling intergenerational divide in the interfaith sector that builds frustration about the purpose of the interfaith endeavour. This reflects a shift in young people’s understanding of faith itself.
- 5** The intersection of globally-constructed religious identities, often shaped by interreligious conflicts and the local expression of faith is a growing consideration in interfaith activities. The move online during the pandemic has intensified the presence of the global. Interpersonal contact across faith groups is the best means of overcoming the importing of global tensions into the local context.





Chapter 1:

Research Methodology

Research Design

The aim of our data collection was to investigate a range of perceptions and experiences, to explore individual biography, and to create and maintain a diverse sample throughout this work. To achieve this, we employed a mixed method approach in our core research design (Clark and Creswell 2007). Qualitative research is able to “to generate knowledge grounded in human experience” (Sandelowski 2004). Thus, our primary focus was to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews with both young people and those stakeholders we identified as being active in the UK’s interfaith scene.

Research Sensitivities and sampling

Conversations about faith and identity can be challenging. They require sensitivity as well as rapport between the participant and the interviewer: all members of our research team were involved in the data collection and, prior to conducting the interviews, received training in qualitative research methodologies with a focus on the sensitivities of identity-based research.³ Our initial aim was to conduct our interviews face-to-face, but with the COVID-19 restrictions, we moved the data collection online, utilising encrypted calls on Zoom to facilitate interviews. To create a comfortable environment, particularly for our youth interviewees, we ensured that the interviewer was matched with a participant with whom they had had some previous interaction wherever possible, often through participation in the Faith Centre’s interfaith and religious literacy programmes.

Our youth interviewee sample was carefully balanced in terms of gender and faith group. Stakeholders who were not only faith leaders but leaders in the interfaith sector were also recruited. With our aim of engaging young people who have been involved in interfaith initiatives, we utilised our alumni network of young people who had previously taken part in Faith Centre programmes. This allowed us to discuss their experiences and insights into how well this sector is working and how they feel it can be improved. This sample also helped us to snowball into further networks of young people from faith communities across London.

This means that that our participants were mostly young people who are educated, cosmopolitan and are engaged in interfaith. Therefore, their views are understandably a reflection of these values and their largely positive experiences in these areas. We would not want to extrapolate from this an unduly positive view of young people’s attitudes to differing faiths and worldviews or underestimate the challenges of sectarianism and radicalisation. However, the scope of this research was principally to explore the direct perceptions of those young people open to interfaith activity and/or engaged in it.

³ See: Mertens (2010) and Paechter (1998).



Research process

Our methodology was initially three-fold: qualitative interviews with young people from faith communities, qualitative interviews with faith leaders and stakeholders, and our online survey. We conducted a total of 31 qualitative interviews with young people from across all major faith groups, including the Ba’hai, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, and Humanist communities. This breadth allowed us to understand the needs and perspectives of a wide array of backgrounds. Furthermore, we explored the diversity *within* communities by actively engaging with different denominations within faith traditions. Among stakeholders, we conducted eight in-depth interviews with a carefully selected group of individuals actively involved in the interfaith sector.

To reach a wider group of young people we also designed an online survey (n100) comprising of both qualitative and quantitative responses; these mirrored our interview questions, allowing us to synthesise data across samples and look for consistent themes throughout. This combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods allowed us to explore individual biography, but also to have the opportunity to explore our research questions in a wider population. For this research, we employed a Grounded Theory approach, allowing emergent themes from the data to inform theory rather than imposing a strict theoretical framework on the data.⁴ Our interviews were subject to two rounds of inductive thematic coding, as advocated by Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006), until thematic saturation was achieved.

In the process of our data collection, a recurrent theme was the need to have more inter-generational dialogue around interfaith. To respond to this, and to act practically on our inductive methodology, we organised a *Youth Conference on the Future of Interfaith* in January 2021. This Youth Conference brought together stakeholders and young people (with a balanced group of young people and stakeholders who had been interviewed as part of this work, and those new to the discussion, to continue to bring diverse voices into this discussion). This formed a fourth stream of data collection, where key recommendations to take forward were expressed by both groups of attendees and have been incorporated into this report.

The main emergent themes from the data collection form the core chapters of this report – **The Politics of Representation, Social Action, and Navigating the Global and Local.**

⁴ Strauss and Corbin (1994).



Chapter 2:

The Politics of Representation

Aristotle said that “man is by nature a political animal”. Interfaith is no different. The interfaith sector, including all three forms discussed in this report, wrestles with *the politics of representation*. As one interviewee put it, who “gets a seat – and voice – at the table?” In the interfaith sector, there is a real commitment to achieving wide representation and broadening the scope of inclusivity, across traditions, minority subsets, age groups and gender. Yet we found frequent tensions between the pragmatic approach of bringing together those most imbued with authority in their communities (older men in most cases) and the benefits of broader inclusivity. This is linked to the theological and cultural norms that faith communities have inherited and continue to value. But there is an increasing acknowledgement and will to broaden representation to women, young people and minority religious groups, in appropriate forms of interfaith engagement across London.

State-Led Interfaith and the Places of Worship Taskforce

The pandemic necessitated the creation of unprecedented interfaith forums and initiatives by the state, which has in turn highlighted a key debate in the sector around pragmatism versus inclusivity. To respond to the public health emergency, the interfaith task was a pragmatic and, to a degree, instrumental one: to bring together leaders across faiths to shape the government response and ensure their own community’s compliance with those measures. Such an approach would have benefited from more inclusive consultation, but the circumstances and need for agility understandably made this a subordinate concern.

In May 2020, the Government launched a Places of Worship Taskforce to look at how these spaces could reopen and operate safely. Meetings were led by the Secretary of State for Communities Robert Jenrick, or the Minister for Faith, and comprised of “representatives from the country’s major faiths”. The Taskforce worked towards specific issues that places of worship would face as they prepared to reopen safely, “I realise how challenging being separated from their communities has been for people of faith,” Jenrick said. “We will now work together with all faith communities to understand how we can open places of worship as a priority, while continuing to prioritise safety.”⁵

“ The pandemic necessitated the creation of unprecedented interfaith forums and initiatives by the state, which has in turn highlighted a key debate in the sector around pragmatism versus inclusivity. ”

⁵ Greenhalgh and Jenrick 2020



This attempt to actively engage with faith communities was seen as a positive move in many ways by our participants, but the pragmatic aims, and urgent creation created tensions around who was included and who represented each group. By needing to respond to a specific and immediate need, the Government swiftly chose individuals that could serve on this Taskforce, making the selected individuals the most influential voices in shaping the Government's response to, and engagement with, faith communities at this crucial moment. Some of our conversations revealed frustration at the Government appointments without consulting and utilising formal civil society interfaith organisations, which would be seen by many as the natural first point of call given their longstanding work in this field. Some of our stakeholders felt that that Government's decision to create their own Taskforce excluded established networks leaving them feeling "left out" and "ignored". There were also concerns that, subsequently, this had created tensions between and within faith communities. These quotes taken from interfaith stakeholders exemplify this frustration:

"In the pandemic, the Government did not consult with [existing networks], instead, they chose other representatives, which caused issues in their communities. Why does the Government play politics with interfaith? These politics during Covid have exacerbated relationships between groups." (Christian, male)

"What about the Christian representation on the Taskforce? There was Church of England representation, and Catholic, but what about other churches? This has created inter-Christian, inter-denominational, inter-faith tensions." (Christian, male)



"Covid-19 has been a time of politics in the interfaith world [...] The Government has dictated who gets to represent communities. They have decided who gets to speak for the Muslim community." (Muslim, male)





These concerns around representation were also echoed in some of our youth interviews:

“The government Taskforce had issues, the Sikh Council UK were already working with the Government to reopen Gurdwaras separately, then they set this Taskforce up and went with [another individual], which is fine, but they weren’t the most suitable person to that particular issue. That was a challenging moment.” (Sikh, female)

 **In seeking to appoint a representative, the Government, and other external bodies, must acknowledge the structural and organisational differences amongst faith communities. They should consider whether their appointment reflects that community’s established mechanisms of authority, and, if not, the subsequent tensions this may provoke.** 

In seeking to appoint a representative, the Government, and other external bodies, must acknowledge the structural and organisational differences amongst faith communities. They should consider whether their appointment reflects that community’s established mechanisms of authority, and, if not, the subsequent tensions this may provoke. In his analysis of faith community structures, Orton attributes this to default assumptions of a universal Anglican model, stating that “not all religious organisations are organised hierarchically with a universal parish system in the same way as the Church of England. This will have profound implications if those seeking to organise interfaith dialogue do not take this into account” (2016, 254). Thus, the Government’s Taskforce was comprised of representatives *they* deemed suitable to represent different communities, sometimes reflecting the pragmatic considerations of achieving the greatest impact while other appointments seemed to reflect inclusivity or integration concerns.

However, we did interview some stakeholders who believed the Taskforce was an effective forum to collaboratively shape the societal response in line with their community needs:

“At the end of April/Beginning of May I was asked by the Government to be part of their Taskforce for faith communities. I [think] this is a positive move by the Government, I can represent my community, I can give advice about how to safely reopen.” (Hindu, male)



The case study of the Taskforce provides an illustration of the challenges of representation in state-led interfaith, balancing effective pragmatism with concern for inclusivity in communities with divergent structures of authority. We have encountered a degree of alienation in response to the choices made which will have medium to long term implications for the Government’s ongoing civil society engagement with faith communities. A review of the Taskforce’s representation and effectiveness, which considers the concerns of those bodies and actors not present, will highlight the ways in which future faith engagement in crisis situations might balance pragmatism and inclusion more sensitively.

When formal civil society interfaith may lack agility or flexibility, state-led interfaith has shown the ability to engage with faith communities quickly and effectively around a very specific task, whether that concerns the re-opening of places of worship or encouraging vaccine take-up. This is different in both the formal and informal interfaith bodies found in civil society. Here, inclusivity has a stronger role to play, ensuring various voices are included and heard. But even in these forums, removed from the Britain’s political heart in Whitehall, the politics of representation exists, and concern the inclusion of young people, women, and frequently overlooked faith and belief groups.



Young People and Representation

Within religious communities and interfaith more broadly, representation of young people is an issue of concern. Indeed, many feel that they are not eligible to be leaders within, or representatives of, traditional religious structures. Until these communities imagine new leadership possibilities for young people, youth engagement in interfaith will be a challenge.

 Many young people retain strong religious identities and an openness to interfaith engagement, but our research has found that they channel their activity through educational and community-focused organisations and more inclusive interfaith forums. 

Many young people retain strong religious identities and an openness to interfaith engagement, but our research has found that they channel their activity through educational and community-focused organisations⁶ and more inclusive interfaith forums. Here young people can assume positions of leadership more readily than in places of worship while still remaining active as a Jew, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, etc. They also feel uninspired by many existing formal civil society interfaith organisations.

Our intergenerational youth conference highlighted the consensus among stakeholders that young people should be involved in these organisations and that young people want to participate more. Similarly, in an interview, one interfaith stakeholder within an established interfaith organisation recognised the lack of youth participation as a key challenge facing interfaith, largely due to elders and gatekeepers who have long dominated the scene. However, they explained that there is “a move away from dialogue and religious leaders” and that interfaith gatherings will consist more of “ordinary people” in the future.

This stakeholder’s recognition and vision for the sector is reflected among young people. They perceive many existing interfaith forums as a space dominated by clergy and elders which they find difficult to join. One youth interviewee commented, “if you want to get into a space in interfaith, it’s because you know someone else [...] it’s very who you know” (Zoroastrian female). Another interviewee said that interfaith should “not just [get] religious leaders involved” but rather broaden the scope of whose voices are included (Muslim male). Formal civil society interfaith groups need to take the challenge of including young people more seriously, as this demographic is absent or underrepresented from their gatherings and activities (Fahy and Bock 2018).

Although that shift may be in progress, the pandemic and move online has enabled the growth of informal civil society interfaith forums where young people can assume positions of leadership and have the capability to focus more on issues that matter to them, as discussed in Chapter Three. An example we encountered in our research was a new youth network, strategically and practically managed by young people established in April 2020 as the pandemic took hold.

⁶ Limmud, Rumi’s Cave, and City Sikhs were all examples found in our research.



On the surface, youth-led groups that emerged out of the pandemic and the move online expose a troubling intergenerational divide in the interfaith sector. Our data suggests that there can be hostility to younger and new leaders, causing a great deal of tension, but it also recognises the importance of informal networks at spearheading inclusivity for this demographic. During the pandemic, young people have demonstrated their initiative and energy for interfaith engagement. The challenge for the sector going forward is to integrate this contribution without simply assuming that young people can be co-opted into existing formal structures.

Women and Representation

The representation of women in all forms of interfaith was a common thematic concern throughout our data, but there was a particular emphasis on the exclusion of young women. Many are not eligible for leadership within their faith communities and, as a result, are less likely to be nominated for state-led or formal civil society interfaith forums. However, as discussed above, the rise of online informal interfaith gatherings has created a space where they can freely assume responsibilities.

State-led interfaith and its pragmatic aims are not conducive forums for a gender balance. For example, the Taskforce discussed earlier includes six religious communities (Church of England, Roman Catholic, Modern Orthodox Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism) and one provision-based community organisation. Of the religious groups included, only one recognises the formal leadership of women, the Church of England. Mandating the other communities appoint a woman to the Taskforce could undercut the broad representation and authority this form of interfaith requires, ultimately depriving a community of the authoritative representation required in such a forum.

Within formal interfaith, we observed that organisations are working to ensure women are better represented. However, some young women were concerned that they had to work much harder than men to earn their participation. One young woman remarked that, “Sikh women are missing from this male dominated space. There are some female Sikh academics who have become prominent in the public sphere, but they have to earn their seat at the table via their academic achievements in a way that Sikh men don’t.” She continued, “Sikhism in the modern age needs to evolve forward, and women are very important in this process.” This sentiment was echoed by young women from other faith communities.

Even though formal interfaith organisations have challenges, accessibility to these forums have been eased by the pandemic. From a practical perspective, the move online has made it easier for women to access virtual gatherings (both of their own faith and interfaith). Logging onto a Zoom meeting, rather than traveling to a specific location, has allowed women with time constraints to participate, broadening the scope of inclusivity. An interviewee explained the issue of accessibility and the opportunity online gatherings provided:

“A lot of it is the infrastructure problems, it is not the men in the community who don’t want women there – it’s a logistical thing [...] the mosque is always in use, there isn’t always space to have other events. Now women can do two things at once, with this online platform they can access Zoom.” (Muslim female)



This was echoed by one of our Jewish interviewees, who explained that “women were previously prevented from attending *Shurim*⁷ [...] 90 per cent of classes were for men only, now they have sent out Zoom links to everyone [...] That whole idea of access has been generated specifically by COVID.”

This extension of religious spaces to women through online accessibility (including female scholarship) has great potential to bolster the credibility and authority of women’s voices within their own communities and the interfaith sector. This could be one of the significant developments to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Smaller Minority Faiths, No Faith, and Representation

Another finding was the need to amplify the voices of smaller minority faiths and those of no faith, particularly in interfaith structures that value inclusivity over pragmatism. It cannot be possible to give equal weighting to groups of vastly different size, but this should not be an excuse for failing to engage these perspectives in dialogue on matters that affect them. In our data collection, we engaged with young people from the breadth of faith communities in London, including the Humanist tradition and from the Baha’i, Zoroastrian, and Buddhist faith groups, some of whom felt the UK interfaith scene is too dominated by the major faith groups.

We found young people from these communities to be committed to having an active voice in interfaith. One of our interviewees from the Humanist tradition outlined this:

“I am very interested in interfaith [...] There is some resistance to interfaith work within the Humanist community, but this is a small minority, and most members are genuinely interested. I would like to do more informal interfaith work as this is where real bonds and commonality can be established. [...] Humanists want to be part of the interfaith world and we have been trying to support multifaith events such as attending opening of mosques. As a smaller group, we need support.” (Humanist male)

An interviewee from the Zoroastrian community described her experiences and wish for interfaith structures to become more inclusive, “there needs to be more of an open structure where people can get involved in interfaith [...]. Some people from my community tend to stay to themselves and help others within the community, I want to do work that bridges gaps.” They want these young people to have, as quoted throughout this report, a “seat – and voice – at the table.”

Again, the move online has facilitated participation by minority groups. This may, in part, be due to the apparent neutrality of the online platform. As in-person gatherings resume, interfaith organisations must ask how they can avoid reimposing some of the barriers to minorities who wish to participate.

⁷ *Shurim* are lessons on any Torah related topic



Opportunities for Diversification

“ For many young people, interfaith has helped them express their faith in their own way and work with others to create positive change around them. ”

It is also important to emphasise the opportunities for representation that interfaith itself can provide. Many of our interviewees reflected on how being involved in interfaith had provided them a chance to have their voice heard, to hear other voices, to learn, to work together, and to create lasting intergenerational and interfaith friendships and networks. The commitment to inclusion and dialogue provided by certain interfaith forums can, in its ideal, be extremely empowering for young people as they navigate their own identities. As one of our youth interviewees explained:

“Something that has happened with our youth movement recently is, with more and more people taking up the more responsible roles at the top of the movement who are openly queer, for example, that provides a space for young people who aren't confident about their identity or sharing that identity, to find this space as a really empowering space.” (Jewish male)

For many young people, interfaith has helped them express their faith in their own way and work with others to create positive change around them. This is discussed in our next chapter, “Social Action.”





Chapter 3:

Social Action

“ Throughout the pandemic, our research has found that the move online has propelled social action to the forefront of the interfaith agenda through the growth of new informal interfaith organisations, largely due to the initiative and interests of young people. ”

Interfaith social action is not new,⁸ it has been resourced by state-led interfaith initiatives, organised by formal civil society organisations, and driven the creation of informal interfaith groups. In fact, some would argue that the interfaith sector, having previously been defined by conversation and encounter, has gradually evolved to focus more on social action and political issues (Fahy and Bock 2018).

Throughout the pandemic, our research has found that the move online has propelled social action to the forefront of the interfaith agenda through the growth of new informal interfaith organisations, largely due to the initiative and interests of young people. Furthermore, interfaith social action was a recurring theme at our youth conference, and our research has found that young people are more likely to see interfaith collaboration as a vehicle for social action than for dialogue, which is reflective of young people’s understanding of faith as defined more broadly by action rather than dogma. As a result, this has seemingly contributed to a troubling intergenerational divide in the interfaith sector.

This chapter will address interfaith social action, how it exposes this intergenerational divide, and how the pandemic has encouraged the growth of youth-run, social action-centred initiatives.

COVID-19 and Social Action

As a result of the pandemic, young people have utilised the digitisation of everyday life to create and/or join new youth-led interfaith networks. The rise of online platforms as the dominant communication interface, as discussed in Chapter Two, has enabled young people to create informal civil society forums that value inclusivity and reflect the priorities of young people.

⁸ See: Baker and Reader (2016); Cohen (2015); Department for Communities and Local Government (2008); Dinham and Shaw (2012); Fahy and Bock (2019); Greenwood (2017); Stone (2017); Tiffany (2018); and Woolf Institute (2015). At the grassroots level, organisations representing various faith groups are active in interfaith social action, including Near Neighbours, Faith Action, Mitzvah Day, Sadaqa Day and Sewa Day.



It has also allowed young people to focus on areas of paramount concern to them, namely social action, and issues of justice. “Interfaith should not always be about religion,” one interviewee said, “it should be about, every year, what are the top five issues that young people are concerned about” (Muslim male). Although this quote raises further questions about young people’s understanding of “religion,” the focus on contemporary issues and action as a core part of their religious identity is clear. The pandemic offered the opportunity for young people to live out their faith in very practical ways. With many religious leaders busy moving services online, checking in on vulnerable members, and handling an influx of funerals, young people stepped in to provide direct support to those who were vulnerable. For example, one Hindu temple in West London collected food donations for vulnerable members of their community. According to a senior stakeholder within the community, a local group of young people, representing different faiths, approached the temple’s leadership and volunteered to help with the preparation and distribution of food parcels, ultimately feeding 1,600 people during the first wave of the pandemic.

Beyond Discussion: Justice and Interfaith in Everyday Life

For young people in London, especially in the field of interfaith, creating a better society through social action takes precedence over curated encounters and discussions to understand religious difference, largely because they are a generation that has grown up immersed in this difference. One interviewee expressed it simply, “London is a multicultural city” (Humanist male). As reported by Bickley and Mladin (2020), religious Londoners are more likely to be civically engaged, and our research shows that young and religious Londoners are keenly motivated by issues of justice. Many young people root their understanding of faith in social action and use interfaith as a positive force in facilitating that. As one interviewee said, “the way that I practice my Judaism is, a lot of it, social action, and also interfaith” (Jewish female). To them, this is a public display of faith. One interviewee proudly described that his, “wider community [had] a newfound respect for the faith institutions in their area because of the fact they stepped up” during COVID-19 (Hindu/Sikh male).



Faith displayed by action is not a divergence of traditional religiosity. Many of the world’s religions have historically valued acts of kindness and service, ranging from *tikkun olam* in Judaism, the Common Good in Christianity, the Qur’anic term *qist* meaning fairness, or *daya* in Hinduism, meaning compassion. But what we appear to be seeing amongst younger people is a stronger emphasis on action and justice, rather than a weekly attendance at a place of worship. For young people, these ancient traditions of compassion, justice, and repairing the world are a powerful call to action in the present day. As one interviewee said, “faiths are able to bridge that divide between the people and power” to make a difference (Christian female).



Young people have grown up in a world shaped by the 2008 financial crash and a recovery that was vastly unequal, only to enter into the professional world in the middle of a pandemic and economic recession that have disproportionately impacted ethnic minorities and lower-skilled workers,⁹ as well as those at the start of their careers (Dias, Joyce, and Keiller 2020). Additionally, they are inheriting a worsening environmental crisis. Statistically, young people are more concerned with inequality (Reeves and Mager 2018), racial justice (Ipsos MORI 2020), and the environment (Fisher, Fitzgerald, and Poortinga 2018) than older generations, and they want to address these issues through interfaith social action:



“You’re involved in social action, so there’s issues around environmentalism and stuff around the greenhouse gases, issues around social insecurity.” (Muslim male)

Whereas theological conversation and coordinated interaction defined formal civil society interfaith in the 20th century, young people use action-based words like “solidarity” with the marginalised and “justice” to describe interfaith today. Participants at our youth conference provided the following definition for interfaith: “standing with and alongside [other faiths,] standing behind [them] and pushing them forward.” One interviewee compared the difference of his generation’s view of action with his elders. He explained that the elders “think locally [and] act globally,” raising money in London and sending it to communities in South Asia. However, he goes on, his generation wants to “think globally [and] act locally”: recognise global issues and focus on making a difference in his London community (Muslim male).

 **The global march for racial justice, environmental justice, and economic equality are fuelled by youthful imagination and action, and that is particularly reflected in the new informal modes of interfaith.** 

The global march for racial justice, environmental justice, and economic equality are fuelled by youthful imagination and action, and that is particularly reflected in the new informal modes of interfaith. They are the forums where young people, to use the words of Rabbi Abraham Heschel, are praying with their feet to better their local areas. When discussing the Black Lives Matter protests, one interviewee reflected on her interfaith engagement and actions at that time, saying:

“So what can we do as people of faith and just people who want to do better? And a lot of us believe in the idea of equality as well coming from our religions, and saying, you know, the whole idea of caste, colour or creed, separating people is completely the wrong idea. From that we created a whole campaign, an educational campaign on that.” (Sikh female)

 **While issues of justice are never straightforward and contain myriad political complexities, our research shows that issues of justice and interfaith social action motivate young people to get involved in interfaith.** 

⁹ See: Business in the Community (2020) and Institute for Social and Economic Research (2015)



What does this mean for the wider interfaith sector? Despite the growing emphasis on social action among interfaith groups, an intergenerational divide has become apparent. At our youth conference, one participant remarked that young people identify social “awakenings” earlier than their elders, citing the impact of Black Lives Matter. Their perception is that formalised networks, with their slower moving structures, are more reactive than proactive when it comes to social action and justice.

While issues of justice are never straightforward and contain myriad political complexities, our research shows that issues of justice and interfaith social action motivate young people to get involved in interfaith. The inclusion of young people in positions of leadership and proactively incorporating issues of justice in interfaith initiatives could mobilise greater youth involvement within traditional, more established interfaith structures. One interviewee remarked that, “we can all agree that there is no aspect of social affairs into which youth input would not be useful.” Informal civil society interfaith has provided the opportunities for leadership, egalitarian structures, and the emphasis on action that young people are seeking. So, it is no surprise these youth-led forums have flourished from the move online. But what does this mean for the sector as a whole?

Is Dialogue Dead?

Conversation-based dialogue was not generally attractive to our participants, nor was it seen as a solution to the social issues that concern young people. Yet, this shift towards action does not spell the end of youth-involvement in other forms of interfaith. In fact, young people acknowledged that achieving structural change and standing in solidarity with other faith groups relied on the relationships across religious difference that have already been built by their elders in the formal groups. Our research has found that there is no appetite among young people to entirely separate from traditional interfaith structures, but there is a strong desire for those structures to be more inclusive and welcoming, not only of women, young people, and other faiths, but also of their ideas around social action and justice. A particular need is for the experienced members of these organisations to support new initiatives with mentoring and in the navigation of the complex legal compliance involved in safe, effective community work. This includes safeguarding, charity law and public liability. Instead of being seen as a threat, formal civil society interfaith organisations should embrace the dynamism and inclusive nature that these new forums provide, seeking to partner with young people and their informal organisations in social action initiatives.



Ultimately, a form of interfaith that values social action *and* intergenerational involvement marks the way forward. Pope Francis, in his book about rebuilding society after the COVID-19 pandemic, writes that, “the future will be born from the conjunction of the young and the old” (2020, 58). Drawing on a text in the Book of Joel, a prophet in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, this intergenerational conjunction must marry the dreams of the older generation – in our case, a welcoming society built on robust interfaith relationships through intentional encounter, theological discussion, and friendly conversation – with the visions of the young and the dynamism of informal interfaith movements promoting solidarity for the less fortunate and calls for justice.







Chapter 4:

Navigating the Global and the Local

“Although globalization broadens the scope and opens new horizons for an increasing number of people from divergent origins, it has its evident shadow sides. Tragic events such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, DC, and the bombings in Bali, Madrid, and London are fixed forever in our memories. They happened in a globalizing world filled with tensions, oppositions, clashes, prejudices, and misunderstandings between people from different cultural backgrounds who never in history have been so interconnected with each other as in the present era.” (Hermans and DiMaggio 2007, 1)

Globalisation has accelerated the way in which we can access information, knowledge and how we can meet and learn from new people, near and far. This project has sought to examine how interfaith works in London, but this inescapably involved uncovering how religious identities are being shaped by events overseas, and the extent to which this impacts at the local level. We have thus examined the relationship between the “Global” and the “Local” amongst young people of faith. “Local” here refers to the immediate social world of the individual. For most of the young people involved in this work, their ideas of the local centred on close relationships, their local community, and the networks in which they are most embedded. The global is perhaps less easily defined, constructed increasingly through expanding networks of information and the particular events and narratives that these media filter for our consumption. Our examination of how the global impacts the local thus focuses primarily on these aspects of their lives.

 **The high levels of diversity and inter-group social contact that young people experience in London has shaped their social networks and ability to keep global tensions outside of their diverse relationships with members of other communities, even if they are impacted, angered, or worried by them.** 

We have investigated how religion-based tensions that occur globally may impact how local communities and individuals interact and understand one another in the hyper diverse setting of London, and the way this shapes their sense of belonging and identity. Encouragingly, our data indicates that, on the whole, being a Londoner positively impacts the way that global tensions are felt at the local level. The high levels of diversity and inter-group social contact that young people experience in London has shaped their social networks and ability to keep global tensions *outside* of their diverse relationships with members of other communities, even if they are impacted, angered, or worried by them.



This last chapter will employ a broader lens to our research and set the scene for future investigations. We have shown how young people work together, and how interfaith can indeed provide “bridging capital” (Putnam 1995) between and within communities, and how during this pandemic, this has been accelerated in the online space. It is the online space that particularly comes to the fore as we examine: How are global perceptions of other faiths influencing Londoners?

Context

“ We were interested in how global connections within faith communities work: how the speed and magnitude of the information crossing borders and into people’s lives is shaping social identities, and if the more local identification of religious community is being replaced by a more global sense of being a person of faith. ”

As our research has demonstrated, religious identity shapes how people view themselves and wider society. It shapes peoples sense of social responsibility, and increasingly, it influences people to come together, to foster dialogue and to work together to provide help where there is need. However, it can also be a source of division. This has been fuelled by the rise of populist politics and societal divisions where the concept of in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel and Turner 1979) often rely on the conceptualisation of the “other” in terms of their ethnicity, culture and religion.

We were interested in how global connections within faith communities work: how the speed and magnitude of the information crossing borders and into people’s lives is shaping social identities, and if the more local identification of religious community is being replaced by a more global sense of being a person of faith. Alternatively, people may be maintaining multiple identities that are experienced as fluid and ever changing. In this theoretical framework both the local and global manifestations of religious identity would be accommodated, and felt, in the social worlds of young people from faith communities (Bhambra 2015).

These questions reflect what we witness occurring around us: the increasing tensions within and between societies, the intensification of interconnectedness, and the role of the online space within this. This interconnectedness can bring people together in the virtual space, but there is a danger that what is happening around the world can quickly be imported into the local setting, where these tensions can be reproduced. As a result, the work of bringing people together, at all levels of interfaith, may quickly become destabilised and/or threatened in this process.

The escalating tensions between Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims in India under the current Modi administration is something that our British-Indian and British-Pakistani interviewees often reflected on in our discussions. Amongst our interviewees, there was concern about how internal divisions in India were being reproduced here in the United Kingdom. One Sikh participant explained,



“The Punjab is divided between India and Pakistan. The partition caused a lot of trauma that people still live with today. Current events in India are distressing; Sikhs still aren’t recognised as a distinct group in India, marriages are recognised under a Hindu law, despite our own customs. It raises questions of ethnicity and citizenship.”

Her concerns were echoed by a Muslim interviewee who spoke about how information was passed on at home in an intergenerational setting, saying, “we live in a hyper connected society, so everyone knows what is going on globally. I try to remain neutral and educate myself [...] Young people end up talking to their parents and grandparents about these issues at home. Things abroad can lead to ‘bad blood’ here.” Inevitably, these global tensions can create issues between groups, as another Muslim interviewee explained: “Well, there is growing ‘Hinduphobia’ from local Muslims due anti-Muslim policies in India.”

Young people are often more embedded into these virtual spaces, and their exposure to these events may shape their perceptions in a unique way. More generally, in multicultural settings such as London, creating social cohesion is an ongoing process. We saw strong evidence that this process can be impacted by what is happening overseas: 43.2 per cent of our survey respondents (n100) stated that they “strongly agree” (21.6 per cent) or “agree” (21.6 per cent) that they “feel more solidarity with members of their faith overseas than they do of other religions here in the UK”.

As we have discussed throughout this report, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified this drift to the global at a time when in-person meetings have been restricted. In our online survey, 72 per cent of respondents have used online gatherings to practice their faith – the rituals, holidays, and regular interactions with co-religionists – with no need for these to remain constrained to their local or even national context. One Roman Catholic interviewee described how he had begun the lockdown watching the livestream of a mass from his local parish, but then began participating in online worship from the Vatican or St Patrick’s Cathedral in New York owing to their higher production values and better-quality preaching.

As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, the virtual space thus not only empowers young people to work together and find common ground in their interfaith activities, but it also expands and loosens how group identity can be experienced.

The importance of personal contact

Young people, when answering our questions, spoke about how they felt when confronted with religion-related conflict. One of the main themes was how global events can, and do, shape their feelings towards other groups. This, however, often came with a genuine commitment not to let these feelings impact how they relate to those groups in their local settings. They expressed the intention to be mindful of these feelings and to be aware of not letting them interfere with their interactions with others.



Young people described feelings of distress and anger when they witnessed the persecution of their co-religionists in other parts of the world.

“When I see stories of other Muslims being persecuted, I feel pain and there is collective anxiety and worry in my community. [...] Uighurs, Yemen, Kashmir, Rohingya it’s a never-ending list [...] but it doesn’t affect how I see other faiths.” (Muslim female)

“Most recently with the resurgence of ISIS in Iraq [...] The persecution of certain religious groups, it doesn’t affect how you treat people here [...] but you feel it, you identify with it and that is going to affect you in a way.” (Muslim male)

“Sikhs have undergone three genocides and continue to fight for a homeland. The rise of overt Hindu nationalism in India continues to bring all these tensions to the fore.” (Sikh female)

Yet, despite this, they were constantly trying to manage these feelings:

“I put a lot of work into making sure [events overseas] don’t influence my opinions of other faiths.” (Christian female)

“Overseas conflicts and events can influence general assumptions on Muslims [...] you need to be always reminding yourself that extremism does not represent the whole religion and its believers, as a whole, are quite the opposite.” (Jewish female)

“I try to remain neutral and educate myself.” (Muslim male)





Throughout our interviews, the importance of diverse personal contacts, interaction and relationships were emphasised by these young people as they spoke about not wanting to let global events impact how they feel about other groups. Perceptions of the move online are mixed. 43 per cent of our survey participants said that these new modes of online gathering have been “supportive of interfaith relations”, but 48 per cent neither agreed nor disagreed. This shows a hesitancy around the efficacy of online interaction as opposed to face-to-face encounter.

“Personal interactions are the most important, you see them as a person first, rather than a representation of their faith; my friendships are not based around current affairs conversations.” (Sikh female)

“Overseas conflict does influence my identity as a Jew in the UK [...] Positive interactions are really important in countering prejudice and often wrong generalisations, which are in many cases shaped by sensationalist media.” (Jewish female)

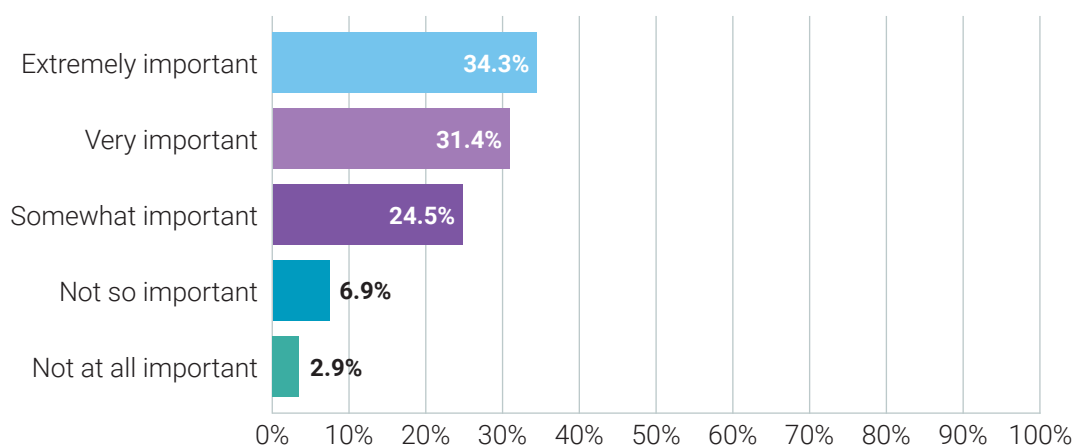
“There is good and bad in all faiths [...] I try and focus on my personal interactions, 9/11 didn’t change my views on Muslims. I think religion related conflict is intrinsic in human nature.” (Humanist male)

“Personal interactions are fundamental when it comes to getting to know people deeply.” (Jewish female)

“One big difference is that in London, I can openly interact with other religions; in India, you don’t interact, you already know your people and assume things about other people.” (Hindu male)

This finding was also evident in our online survey where we mirrored the same questions, asking young people about the importance of personal interaction, print media, social media, and broadcast media in shaping their views of other religious groups in the UK:

How important is personal interaction in shaping your views of other religious groups in the UK



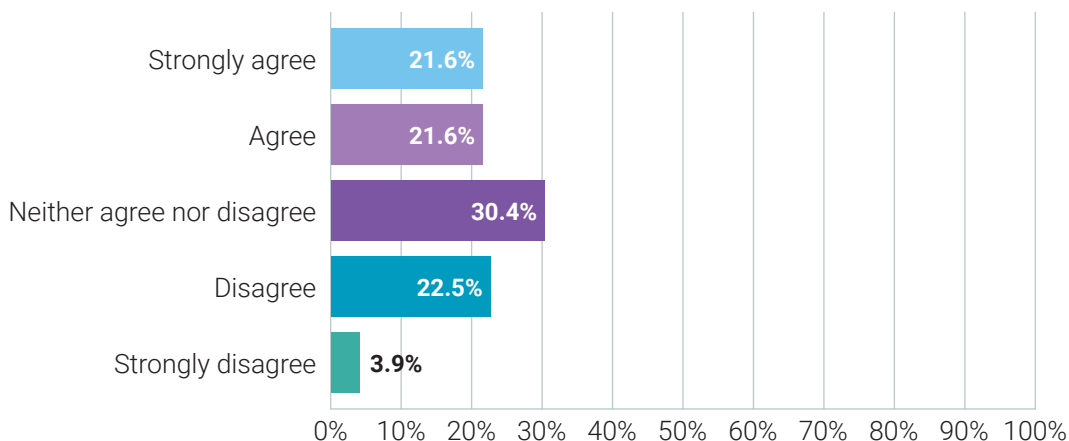
Across both our interview and survey data sets we found this common sentiment of young people focusing on their *personal interactions* as key to shaping their feelings about other groups. When they learnt about global tensions and they were emotionally impacted by these events, they reflected on their positive personal relationships and interactions with people from other faiths and endeavoured to separate these global events from their local relationships. This was also echoed in our analyses of other parts of our online survey. In response to the question, “Are you concerned about religion-related conflict overseas?”, 84 per cent of respondents stated “yes”. However, when asked “Do events overseas influence your views of other religious groups in the UK?”, 67.4 per cent answered “no”.



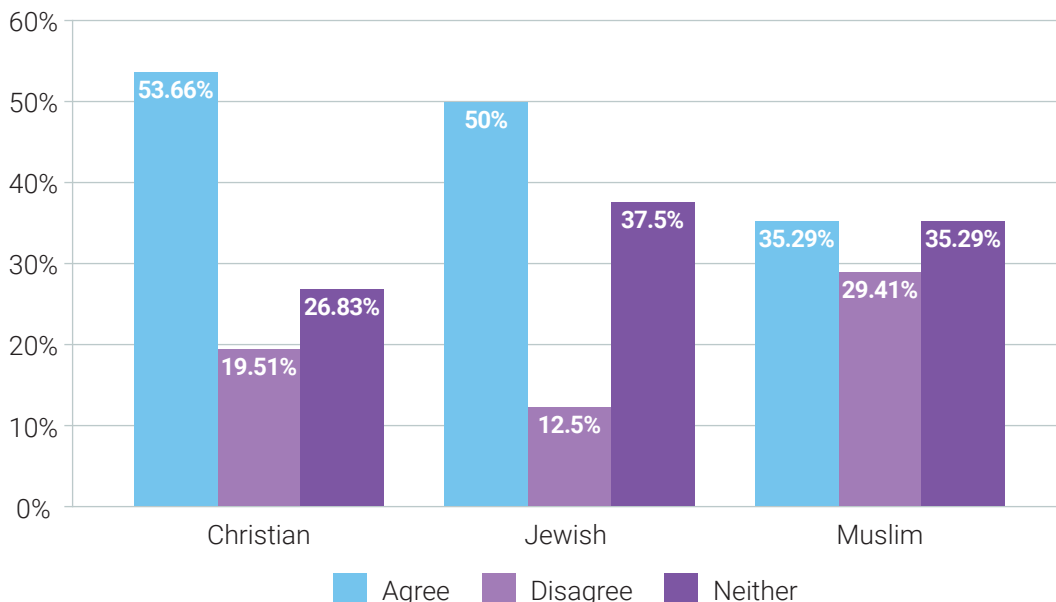
This is not to say that young people do not have a strong sense of a global religious community; we see that in some cases this sense of belonging is stronger than that of local ties. One interviewee explained, “I feel a stronger bond with Zoroastrians abroad, you always have that feeling of belonging, especially as we are a small community.” Another remarked that, “I have more of a connection with Jews anywhere in the world [...] We have that minority-mentality all over the world [...] even if partially.”

This finding was also evident in our survey:

I feel more solidarity with other members of my faith overseas than I do with those of other religions here in the UK



Our analysis of the above data, when broken down further by religious group, showed that Christians and Jews are the two groups who feel a sense of global religious community most strongly. 54 per cent of young Christians and 50 per cent of young Jews surveyed agreed that ‘I feel more solidarity with other members of my faith overseas than I do with those of other religions here in the UK’, compared with 35 per cent of young Muslims:



This is an interesting finding, which perhaps challenges the often essentialising assumptions around the identity orientations and social integration of young British Muslims, as well as conveying the salience of a global religious community across faith groups.



Our data, therefore, leads us to draw two conclusions. First, although classical approaches to the study of social identity acknowledge the multiple identities each individual holds (Berry 1997; Platt & Nandi 2013; Turner et al 1987; Verkuyten & Yildiz 2007), for many young people, religion is not merely one identity alongside others. It is something more foundational that causes believers to feel a connection with coreligionists at the global level. Religion is more formative as an identity category; it shapes how other sources of belonging are understood and lived, rather than simply being held equal amongst others. It is a thicker, more visceral form of identity, that in a hyper-connected, globalised society is felt both locally *and* globally. Forms of interfaith that simply seek to form mutuality around local or national belonging need, therefore, to recognise their limitation. The idea that “Britishness,” for example, can be made to supersede transnational religious identity (across all faith groups) seems increasingly naive.

“ For many young people, religion is not merely one identity alongside others. It is something more foundational that causes believers to feel a connection with coreligionists at the global level. ”

But, on the other hand, the majority of the young people we engaged with had been formed by diverse cultural interactions and an understanding of the need for interfaith that had equipped them to navigate the global and the local through their positive relationships and interactions with others (Allport 1954). Through the acknowledgement of shared values and commitment to helping people in need, these young people have been able to look past differences between groups and find, as one interviewee put it the “common humanity in all of us,” exemplifying the utility of social action in creating bonding *and* bridging capital (Putnam 1995).¹⁰ Thus, we see that religion can be a thicker organising principle of identity, but it need not entirely override other salient identities.

“ Through the acknowledgement of shared values and commitment to helping people in need, these young people have been able to look past differences between groups and find, as one interviewee put it the “common humanity in all of us,” exemplifying the utility of social action in creating bonding and bridging capital. ”

¹⁰ The importance of positive contact and relationships in helping to foster a sense of belonging and withstand isolated tensions between groups has been evidenced in other studies, which have shown that these previous experiences can foster long-term dialogue and friendships, even when intergroup tensions arise (Bhambra 2015).



Looking Forward

As we were writing up this research, events unfolded in the Middle East, with renewed violence between Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories that powerfully and alarmingly exemplify the challenges we have set out throughout this report, and particularly in this last chapter. The role that social media has played in communicating and reinforcing these divisions has been described by one of our stakeholders as threatening to create “a generational fissure in relations between Christians, Muslims and Jews”. There is, therefore, a fresh urgency to better understand the intersection of the global and local in the outworking of interfaith relationships.

We are mindful that future investigations will need to explore these issues outside of London and the unique diversity that this city encompasses. In Birmingham, local organisations have informed us that these global tensions are far more salient in how young people feel about those ‘local’ to them. Sikh, Hindu, and Muslim young people are particularly vulnerable to this. We would like to investigate this further to support local community cohesion initiatives and create space for young people to build bridges across and emerging divides. In a world where global tensions continue to occur and the fight for social cohesion becomes more difficult, the important role of interfaith is only made clearer.

Nonetheless, we believe our research provides cause for hope. Our data shows that the young people we interviewed, who have mostly been involved in some form of interfaith work, are able to form and build on relationships with people from other faiths. They are able to maintain these relationships and their commitment to interfaith dialogue and foster positive relationships despite what happens abroad.





Conclusion and Recommendations

The pandemic has shaken up the interfaith sector in London as it has disrupted our global society in previously unimaginable ways. It has highlighted the importance of the role that faith communities can play in public health and the effectiveness of fostering collaboration between these communities for the common good. London has some of the strongest, and most well-established interfaith networks in the world. But there have been inevitable challenges as the sector has struggled to adjust to the migration online, to the tragic impact of loss and bereavement in many communities, and to the challenges of representation within fluid and dynamic groups. So it is testimony to the skill and hard work of many of the stakeholders and young people we have engaged with in this project that much has been learnt that can strengthen the interfaith sector going forward in London and beyond. It is in this spirit that we make these concluding recommendations:

- 1** The interfaith sector has diversified during the pandemic, seeing the necessity for new state-led initiatives and new informal networks arising out of the move online. Going forward, formal civil society interfaith forums need to learn from both the agility and responsiveness of the state-led interventions and the entrepreneurialism and diverse representation of the informal initiatives. Conversely, both of these need to take seriously the long-term patient work of relationship building and non-instrumentalised engagement with faith communities that characterises the formal structures. Specifically:
 - a** The Government needs to map the authority structures of faith communities and interfaith networks in order to develop effective, collaborative relationships that extend beyond the crisis horizon.
 - b** Formal civil society organisations need to identify the impulses to a “club mentality” that can hamper responsiveness and deter participation.
 - c** Informal society groups need to avoid reinventing the wheel and learn from the mistakes and wisdom of established structures by actively engaging and integrating with them.



- 2** The tension between “pragmatic” representation of (usually older male) leaders and a more “inclusive” representation is difficult to resolve. Where impact and cross-community engagement is required, communities can be disadvantaged by representatives who have been selected for political or politically correct reasons rather than those who carry genuine authority. For national bodies in particular, attention should always be paid to individuals and bodies that carry real legitimacy in the communities they are asked to represent. To facilitate this:

 - a** The Government should review the representation and effectiveness of its COVID-19 response with faith communities, with particular consideration of the concerns of those bodies and actors who felt excluded in order to highlight the ways in which future faith engagement in crisis situations might balance pragmatism and inclusion more sensitively.
 - b** We recommend that each interfaith organisation, particularly at the Government level, should articulate their principles of engagement in order to identify the appropriate participants for their specific objectives and stimulate wider discussion about who is at the table and why.
- 3** Informal civil society initiatives have significantly democratised the interfaith scene giving a voice to women, younger people and smaller minority groups. Formal civil society groups should proactively incorporate the new leaders that emerge and faith communities themselves should recognise and champion leadership in interfaith activities as an important opportunity for those who may be prohibited from traditional leadership roles. Identification of, and targeted investment in, spheres of activity within the interfaith scene where there are fewer theological and cultural barriers to inclusion would foster more diverse community leadership.
- 4** Older interfaith activists and leaders need to recognise the extent to which young people view social action as a more engaging vehicle for interfaith encounter than conventional dialogue. They should do more to champion these collaborations, not least with intergenerational mentoring and infrastructural support for sustained, well-regulated community transformation projects.
- 5** Our research showed how the move online has intensified the way in which global religious discourse is impacting on local interfaith engagement, particularly when it concerns interreligious conflicts. We suggest that interfaith forums and initiatives which shy away from discussing these issues will remain superficial and lack resilience. But these difficult conversations will be possible and constructive once mutuality and relationship have been established. We therefore recommend organisations undertake a reflective audit of their resilience capacity in the aftermath of a challenging global event. This should identify the points at which trust and communication have broken down and consider the measures required to sustain them in the future.



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