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Using Sketch Engine to examine the presentation of Islam and Muslims in the UK press

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Abstract

The presentation reports on the outcomes of the ESRC-funded project, *Presentation of Islam and Muslims in the UK press, 1998-2009*. The project used a corpus-based approach, while also being informed by moral panic theory (Cohen, 1972), and notions central to Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

The project used a corpus of 143 million words, containing over 200,000 articles published in 12 national UK newspapers and their Sunday editions between 1998 and 2009. The corpus articles were derived from the *Nexis UK* online database, via a query containing the terms *Islam**, *Muslim**, and related words (e.g. *Quran*).

The analysis used Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004), an online corpus tool which utilises a grammatically tagged and syntactically parsed corpus to produce “word sketches”, that is, the grammatical constructions that a word is frequently found in, as well as its salient collocates within these constructions.

The analysis focused on the patterns of use of the word forms, *Islam*, *Islamic*, *Islamist(s)* and *Muslim*, *Muslims* (both as nouns and adjectives). The examination of their most salient sketches and strong collocates, as well as the most frequent nouns, adjectives and lexical verbs in the corpus lead to three interrelated observations:

- Islam is treated predominantly as an ideology, rather than a religion.
- The use of *Muslim* as an adjective is associated more frequently with issues of governance (e.g. politics, law) than with issues of religion.
- Irrespective of the stance towards Islam and Muslims that may be projected in particular articles or newspapers, the discussion of Islam and Muslims in the UK press is, overall, carried out within contexts of armed/social conflict and/or terrorism, and the attendant issues of social disruption, violence, destruction and death.

References

- Cohen, S. (1972). *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (3rd edn.) Oxford: Blackwell..
- Kilgarriff, A., Rychly, P., Smrz, P. & Tugwell, D. (2004). The Sketch Engine. In *Proceedings of EURALEX*, Lorient, France.
- Reisigl, M. & Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Anti-Semitism*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.

Project

Title: *The representation of Islam and Muslims in the UK press, 1998-2009*

Funding body: ESRC

Principal investigator: Paul Baker

Co-investigator: Tony McEnery

Researcher: Costas Gabrielatos

Data: source and query

Online database: *Nexis UK*

Query

- *Alah OR Allah OR ayatolah OR burka! OR burqa! OR chador!
OR fatwa! OR hejab! OR imam! OR Islam! OR Koran OR Mecca
OR Medina OR Mohammedan! OR Moslem! OR Muslim! OR
mosque OR mufti! OR mujaheddin! OR mujahedin! OR mullah!
OR muslim! OR Prophet Mohammed OR Q'uran OR rupoush
OR rupush OR sharia OR shari'a OR shia! OR shi-ite! OR Shi'ite!
OR sunni! OR the Prophet OR wahabi OR yashmak! AND NOT
Islamabad AND NOT shiatsu AND NOT sunnily*

Corpus

Articles: 200,000

Words: 143 million

Spelling normalisation

Sub-corpora:

- per newspaper
- per year (1998-2009)
- broadsheets/tabloids
- political orientation

Business

Daily Express + Sunday Express

Daily Mail + Mail on Sunday

Daily Mirror + Sunday Mirror

Guardian + Observer

Independent + Independent on Sunday

People

Daily Star + Daily Star Sunday

Sun

Telegraph + Sunday Telegraph

Times + Sunday Times

Corpus tools and methodology

Tools

- Sketch Engine, WordSmith 5

Methodology

- Detailed wordlist analysis, keyword analysis, word sketches
- Concordance analysis

Word Sketch

- Collocates of a word within a grammatical construction
 - *Muslim_Adj* + Noun collocates

Muslim Islam-UK freq = 89834

Sketch of *Muslim* used as an adjective

and/or	24853 3.0	ADJ+n	84671 6.9	adv+ADJ	2648 2.4	v+ADJ	1858 1.1	N+at-i	6 0.0
British	1660 8.32	community	7676 10.4	predominantly	583 11.99	be	1709 3.82	-a-year	1 6.65
Arab	1113 9.27	world	4928 9.19	mainly	467 10.93	become	23 2.76	beginning	1 1.68
young	1035 8.39	woman	4484 9.07	largely	238 9.14	look	14 2.61	%	1 0.46
Jewish	879 9.11	country	3864 8.74	mostly	153 9.25	bear	12 3.65	N+from-i	2 0.0
Christian	802 9.06	leader	3217 8.8	not	143 3.03	remain	7 2.15	birth	1 1.62
radical	722 9.21	cleric	2279 9.36	overwhelmingly	115 9.86	appear	5 2.26	age	1 0.13
holy	692 9.19	man	2158 7.5	only	80 4.83	turn	5 1.64	N+to-i	2 0.0
first	667 7.18	group	1837 7.74	strictly	40 8.07	win	4 1.51	agnostic	1 6.04
other	645 6.86	population	1799 8.89	even	40 4.39	call	4 0.84	N+in-i	38 0.0
□□□	517 6.05	extremist	1710 8.81	devoutly	38 8.77	compare	3 3.16	origin	3 3.22
many	515 7.06	school	1220 7.67	exclusively	30 7.85	feel	3 1.01	name	3 0.57
traditional	445 8.35	state	997 7.35	especially	30 7.23	bring	3 0.7	field	2 1.73
large	444 7.78	girl	966 7.8	about	28 4.21	lead	3 0.45	court	2 0.15
moderate	376 8.61	family	901 7.05	also	28 2.22	include	3 0.2	makeup	1 5.32
Bosnian	323 8.3	faith	823 7.68	now	24 2.63	mind	2 3.84	squadron	1 5.03
strict	312 8.37	nation	805 7.66	back	22 3.59	mix	2 3.48	census	1 4.47
local	312 6.99	organisation	696 7.45	entirely	20 5.93	recognise	2 2.36	ethic	1 3.62
fundamentalist	277 8.13	youth	630 7.64	n't	20 0.74	stay	2 1.21	th-century	1 2.22
senior	254 7.26	fanatic	612 7.71	just	19 2.45	think	2 0.34	neighbourhood	1 2.16
religious	232 6.51	student	579 7.18	particularly	18 5.5	want	2 0.32	bid	1 1.6
populous	229 8.18	soldier	519 6.53	heavily	17 5.72	mint	1 4.06	design	1 1.55
militant	224 7.56	child	505 6.2	staunchly	16 7.47	disenfranchise	1 3.96	prayer	1 0.9
female	221 7.57	people	489 4.91	nominally	16 7.46	fast	1 3.64	character	1 0.43
devout	212 7.97	terrorist	467 6.71	strongly	16 6.07	modernise	1 3.55	N+for-i	5 0.0
black	205 6.7	pupil	452 7.2	specifically	14 6.63	articulate	1 3.37	chunk	1 3.65
Asian	201 7.16	parent	441 6.87	all	13 3.0	prohibit	1 3.34		
Sikh	185 7.78	prisoner	440 6.95	as	13 2.55	dare	1 3.33		
mainstream	171 7.6	scholar	425 7.21	very	12 2.08	exile	1 3.19		
-year-old	169 6.78	fundamentalist	424 7.21	so	12 1.89	sack	1 2.96		
only	139 6.05	area	413 6.31	too	11 2.76	slaughter	1 2.92		

Sketch of *Muslim* as an adjective -Noun collocates

22 types with freq. > 500

- Less than 2% of sketch types
- More than 50% of sketch tokens

Less frequent types may,
collectively, reveal a different
picture (Baker, 2004)



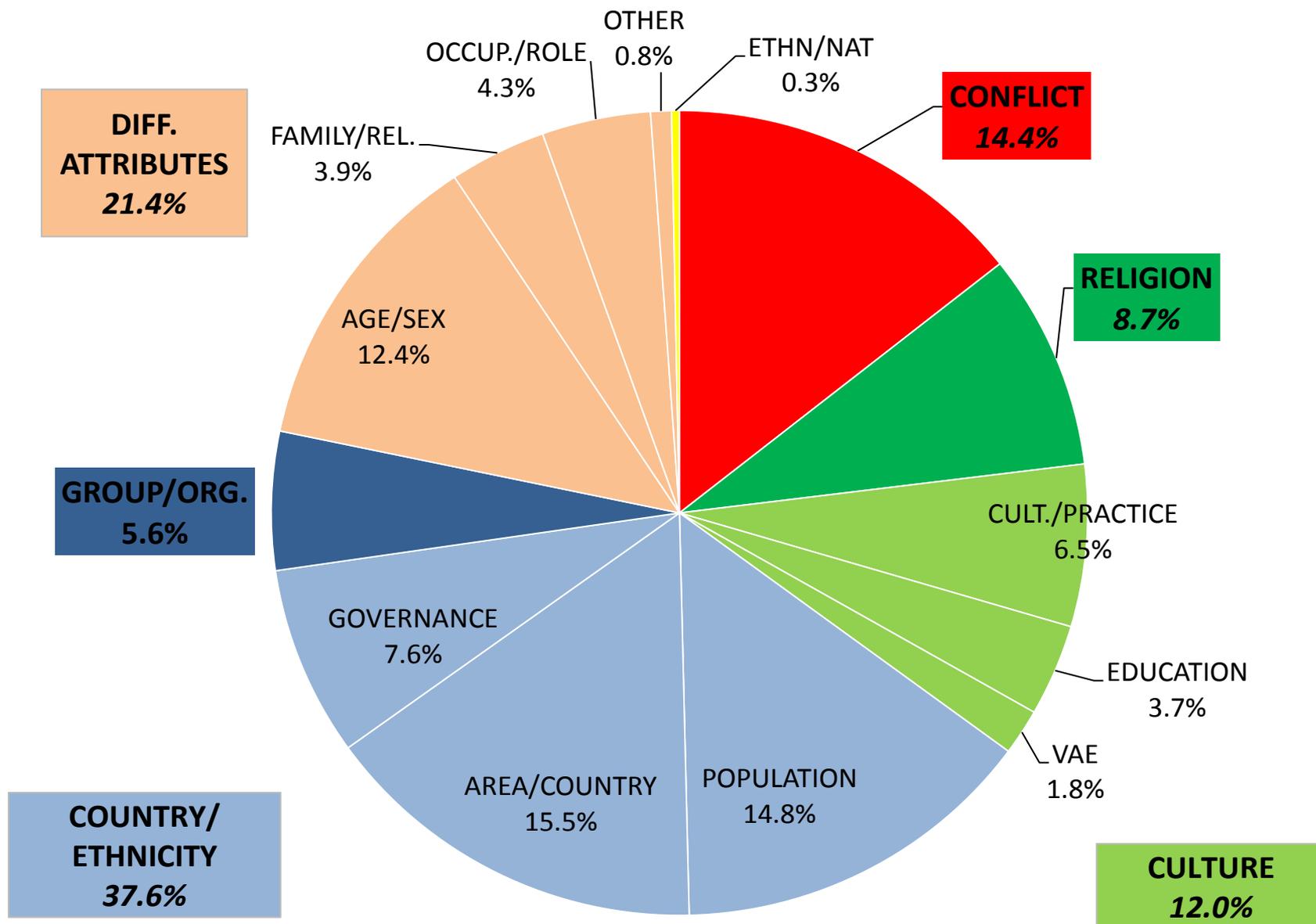
Examination of all sketch types

ADJ+n	Freq.	Saliency (6.9)
community	7676	10.4
world	4928	9.19
woman	4484	9.07
country	3864	8.74
leader	3217	8.8
cleric	2279	9.36
man	2158	7.5
group	1837	7.74
population	1799	8.89
extremist	1710	8.81
school	1220	7.67
state	997	7.35
girl	966	7.8
family	901	7.05
faith	823	7.68
nation	805	7.66
organisation	696	7.45
youth	630	7.64
fanatic	612	7.71
student	579	7.18
soldier	519	6.53
child	505	6.2

Collocate categories

CONFLICT	<i>extremist, fanatic, terrorist, fundamentalist</i>
RELIGION	<i>cleric, faith, month (=Ramadan), preacher</i>
CULTURE/PRACTICE	<i>festival, dress, culture, name, tradition</i>
EDUCATION	<i>school, teaching, education, college</i>
VIEW/ATTITUDE/ EMOTION	<i>opinion, anger, voice, attitude, grievance</i>
POPULATION	<i>community, population, nation, world</i>
AREA/COUNTRY	<i>country, state, area, region, land</i>
GOVERNANCE	<i>leader, voter, MP, government, ruler</i>
GROUP/ORGANISATION	<i>group, organisation, association, charity</i>
AGE/SEX	<i>woman, man, girl, youth, child, teenager</i>
FAMILY/RELATIONSHIP	<i>family, parent, brother, friend, wife</i>
OCCUPATION/ROLE	<i>officer, patient, doctor, worker, assistant</i>
OTHER	<i>house, shop</i>
ETHNICITY/NATIONALITY	<i>Briton, Albanian, Malay, Arab</i>

Muslim-Adj: Noun collocates - tokens

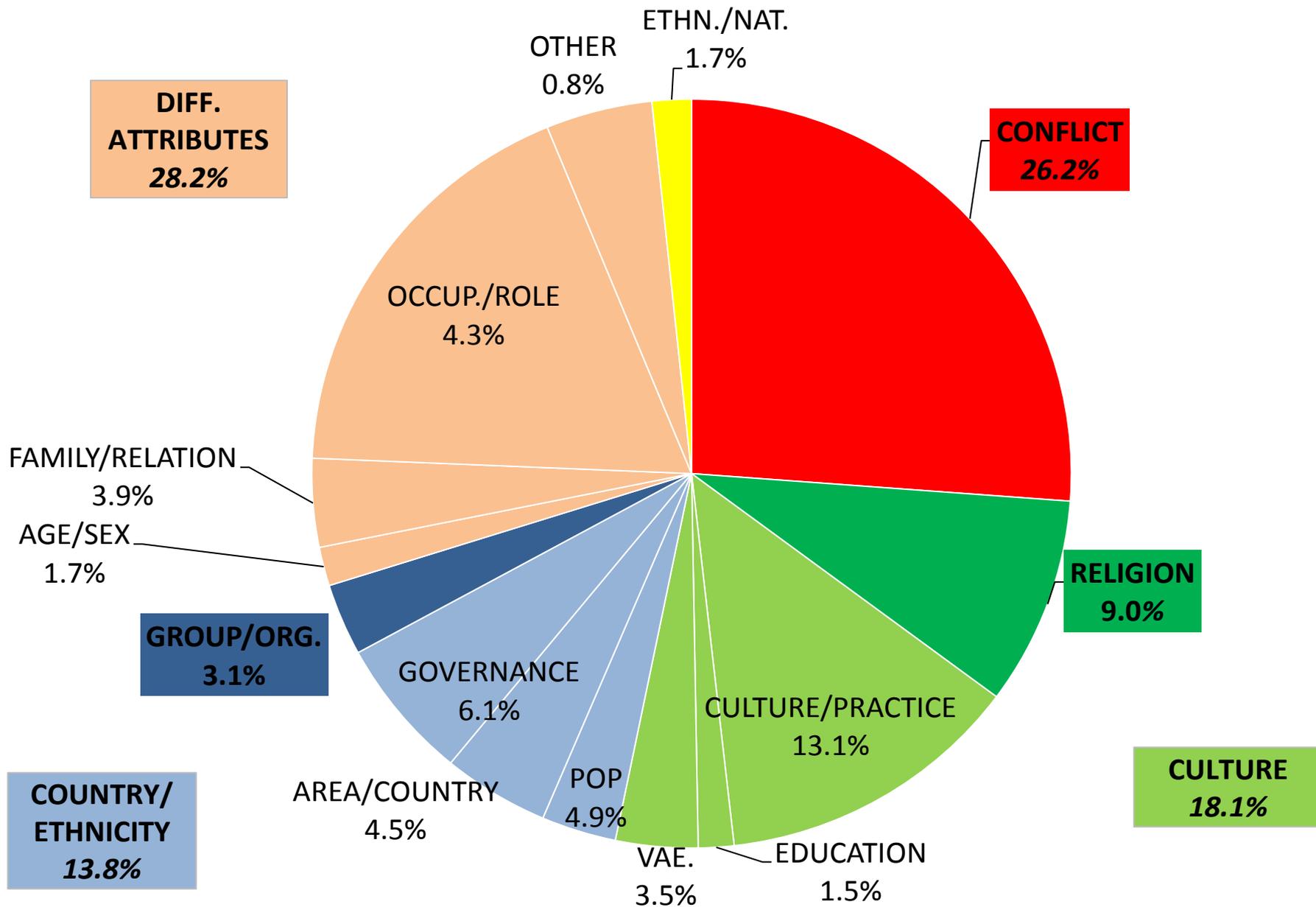


*The distribution in terms of tokens may
be due to some very frequent types*

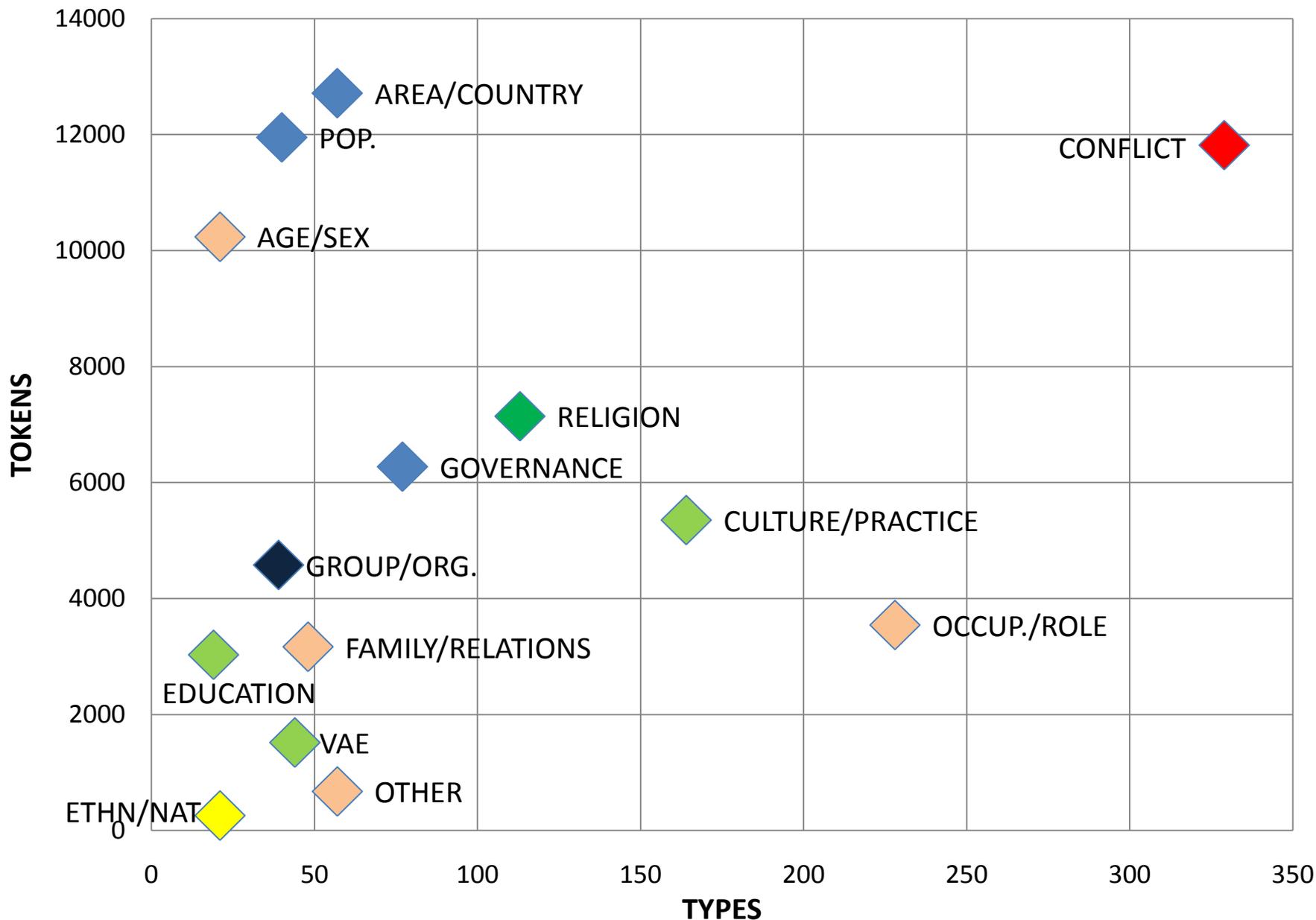


Distribution in terms of types

Muslim_Adj: Noun collocates - types



Muslim_Adj: Noun Collocates – Types + Tokens



Relative frequency (‰) in broadsheets and tabloids

Sketch Collocate	B ‰	T ‰
<i>extremist</i>	13.0	35.9
<i>fanatic</i>	2.3	18.1
<i>terrorist</i>	4.1	8.7
<i>cleric</i>	24.9	31.4
<i>world</i>	69.4	33.7
<i>community</i>	93.6	84.5
<i>country</i>	47.9	40.7
<i>state</i>	12.4	10.4
<i>nation</i>	10.8	6.7
<i>school</i>	14.5	14.3

Conflict

- Daily Star readers have told Union Jack burning Muslims to sod off. On Saturday, we asked you whether the marauding extremists who torched OUR flag on OUR streets should be kicked out of OUR country. And thousands of you phoned to say YES. In a record reply to a Daily Star phone and text poll, a staggering 99.7 % told the fanatics to pack up and leave. Thousands of patriotic Brits deluged our voteline after we published sickening pictures of British **Muslim extremists** burning the Union Jack on the streets of London. The mob tore up an appeal from fellow Muslims for an end to bloodshed and chanted: "You will pay, bin Laden 's on his way". [Star, 05.04.2004]
- In February about 400 people attacked and burned a church in the southern city of Sukkur after accusations that a local Christian had set fire to pages from the Quran. After a similar allegation last November, a **Muslim mob** wielding axes and sticks set fire to three churches, a dozen houses, three schools, a dispensary, a convent and two parsonages. The attacks were the worst on Pakistan's Christian community since 2002, when **Muslim fanatics** led an assault on a church with grenades on Christmas Day. [Telegraph, 28.04.2006]

The category of conflict indicates instances when issues of armed/violent or social conflict are expressed directly.

However, discourses of conflict are pervasive, and are indexed by all other categories.

Religion (cleric)

- WHEN a prominent **Muslim cleric**, Abu Qatada, was arrested in a South London flat last month after nearly a year on the run, security chiefs in Britain recognised that **his supporters might seek their revenge**. [Times, 18.11.2002]
-
- THE Muslim teaching assistant who **insisted on wearing her veil** in the classroom was following fatwa orders. Aishah Azmi, 24, took advice from Mufti Yusuf Sacha, a **Muslim cleric** in West Yorkshire. It's said the Mufti told her **it was obligatory to wear the veil** around men who were not relatives. [Star, 30.10.2006]

Culture/Practice

- A LEADING barrister says Sharia law in Britain is "inevitable", despite 95% of Daily Star readers insisting it is wrong in our phone poll yesterday. Most of our readers believe that Britons should not have to live under the controversial Muslim code in their own country, which includes stoning to death for adultery and cutting off hands for theft. But former Chairman of the Bar Council Stephen Hockman said there was no reason why Sharia law could not be applied here. He said : "Given the world situation and our own substantial Muslim population, it is vital that we now look at ways to integrate **Muslim culture** into our own traditions. [Daily Star, 05.07.2008]

Culture/Practice

- Reedah Nijabat, a young barrister whose family is from Pakistan [...] is convinced that what high-flyers like herself lack is their own watering hole - based on Soho's fabled Groucho Club - and has made it her mission to start one. So far, 30-year-old Nijabat has got a lease on three adjoining shops awaiting conversion and been promised bank loans of pounds 200,000. The site of the ArRum club is in the heart of loft-living, warehouse-clubbing, multi-racial Clerkenwell. So why do Muslims need a separate place to socialise? "Because most of them feel a bit uncomfortable about going to a bar or being offered alcohol, Nijabat says. While it's true that many second and third generation Muslims here feel **more integrated** and outgoing than their parents, Nijabat reckons their specific needs are not being met by the commercial sector. She's tired, too, of negative images of Islam in the media. There's a whole vibrant side of **Muslim culture** - marked by an interest in art, architecture and literature. [Guardian, 06.12.2000]

Education

- Recently, Bradford got its first state-funded **Muslim school**, **sparking a debate** over whether such religious schools - which already exist for Christians and Jews - would promote segregation. [Independent, 17.04.2001]
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- DOZENS of new **Muslim state schools** could be created in a **controversial expansion of faith education** planned by Ministers. Schools Secretary Ed Balls promised funds to take more than 100 private **Muslim schools** into the state sector to meet rising parental demand. But there were immediate **warnings** that setting up new faith schools could backfire by **increasing religious tensions**. Opponents said it could **entrench segregation** and called them 'plain madness'. And a Muslim leader admitted the biggest obstacle to the opening of new Islamic state schools was **public fears that they would 'produce fundamentalists'**. [Mail, 11.09.2007]

Community

- Those who have lived in Muslim districts frequently remark on the warmth and neighbourly atmosphere of streets which are often among the few in Britain where every resident knows the names of his neighbours. They furnish a sense of refuge, and immeasurably buttress the confidence of children and the old, who might otherwise find themselves culturally adrift and isolated. In the longer term, however, the **Muslim community** must ask itself whether the demographic map of the former mill towns of the North is an adequate reflection of its sense of Islam's necessary separateness. [Independent, 15.12. 2001]
- Once the **bombers'** identities had been exposed, the usual platitudes followed thick and fast. They were variously nice, friendly, cricket playing, sports loving, community minded, wonderful with kids. Three lived in the Leeds area where, we are constantly told, the white and **Muslim communities** rub along together just fine. [Mirror, 17.07.2005]

Muslims presented as a nation or homogeneous population

- It also comes just before Mr Obama's visit to Europe and Turkey. It has already drawn warm praise from European leaders, who have been pressing for a new diplomatic push to underpin the international pressure on Tehran over its nuclear ambitions. And when he arrives in Istanbul, on his first presidential visit to a **Muslim country**, he can already show a substantial initiative to improve relations with the **Muslim world**. [Times, 21.03.2009]
- The Palestinian claim to statehood is unanswerable, and with wiser leadership it would have been flourishing for years. It is tragic that the cause is now being so ruthlessly exploited with *Jew* as a codeword for **extremist incitement of hatred** of America and the West. This is **jihad. It is aimed at us all**, at Europeans who "look like" Americans because they believe in liberal democracy and are infected by American culture. But its first victims are the Palestinians and the frustrated masses of the **Muslim world**. Their leaders have led them into ignominy in three wars. They have failed to reform their corrupt and incompetent societies. Habits of mind tending to **approve terror** are becoming ingrained in the **Muslim world**, sanctioned by the lethargy and prejudice in Europe. [Sun, 29.06.2002]

But not all is negative - at least not intentionally ...

- There should be no compromise on supporting universal human rights but there must be flexibility in how we go about achieving them. Navigating that narrow line demands a mixture of humility and solidarity. Take Islam and women in Britain. Since sexism is omnipresent it would be foolish to assume that it has escaped **Muslim communities** or that in some instances the position of some **Muslim women** is not particularly bad. It would also be arrogant to assume that **Muslim women** have not noticed this already or to ignore that some of them are doing something about it. Finally, it would be negligent to forget that Muslims are the most vulnerable to racial attack in Britain, which has seen a steep increase in fascist activity on the streets and at the polls in recent years and is involved in an illegal war against a **Muslim country**. Liberals outside the **Muslim community** have some choices. We can either condemn the entire community as sexist and impose our own priorities on them, thus leaving their communities more embattled and strengthening the conservative forces within them. Or we can talk to **Muslim women's groups** and feminists, of whom there are many, to see what their priorities are and to find some common ground where we can support them and them us, as we struggle against our own demons of racism and Islamophobia. [Guardian, 12.07.2004]

Emerging patterns

- The direct mention of armed/social conflict is both very frequent and lexically rich.
- Other uses of *Muslim_Adj* are usually embedded within discussions of conflict.
- In discussions of cultural aspects or education, there is a pervasive 'Us vs. Them' stance.
- *Muslim_Adj* is used much more often as a national/ethnic/cultural attribute than a religious one.
- Muslims are usually presented as a homogeneous group.