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Journal:	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Manuscript ID	RERS-2025-0847.R2
Manuscript Type:	Research Article
Keywords:	Muslims, institutional trust, blocked credentialism, ethnic penalties, racial capitalism, European Social Survey

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The Credential Reversal: Educational Attainment as Racialised Political Exclusion for British Muslims

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Abstract

This paper identifies a distinctive ‘credential reversal’ among British Muslims, whereby advanced educational attainment erodes institutional trust, inverting the standard meritocratic assimilation pattern. Analysing the UK European Social Survey (2002–2023), multi-level models show that this penalty is specific to Muslims and not observed among the White British majority or aggregated non-Muslim minorities. The data decisively rejects cumulative disadvantage theory; the reversal does not accumulate gradually over the life course but operates as an immediate entry shock upon encountering gatekeeping structures in higher education and professional labour markets. This produces ‘alienated competence’, characterised by a sharp decline in political efficacy and vertical state trust, while horizontal interpersonal trust remains intact. Mediation analysis further demonstrates a form of resilient integration: despite experiencing high rates of discrimination, Muslims maintain substantial baseline democratic faith. This resilience is particularly evident among UK-born Muslim women, who exhibit a strategically engaged realism that offsets the deep generational alienation observed among UK-born Muslim men. Extending the economic ethnic penalty framework into the political domain, we theorise this alienation as blocked credentialism within racial capitalism. Under conditions of neoliberal securitisation, educational achievement among British Muslims does not translate into institutional mobility but instead triggers heightened state scrutiny. These findings challenge assimilationist assumptions, demonstrating that the ongoing difficulties in Muslim integration reflect a fundamental crisis of British institutional legitimacy.

Keywords

Muslims, institutional trust, blocked credentialism, ethnic penalties, racial capitalism, European Social Survey

1. INTRODUCTION

In May 2025, Prime Minister Keir Starmer warned that, without stricter immigration controls, the United Kingdom risked becoming an “island of strangers.” This warning resonates powerfully with Enoch Powell’s infamous 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech in Birmingham, illustrating what Gilroy (1990) terms postcolonial melancholia, the inability to mourn the loss of empire, which manifests as heightened anxiety over racial and cultural change. Powell, speaking in the same city decades earlier, condemned immigration policy and claimed that Britain was “mad” to admit 50,000 immigrant dependents annually, predicting social unrest and cultural disintegration. Both speeches, despite their temporal distance, employ a racialised framing of national vulnerability, revealing how Islam has become a floating signifier of racial otherness in postcolonial Britain (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1978; Hall, 2015).

Unlike the guest worker populations of continental Europe or recent refugee flows, British Muslims are predominantly settled, postcolonial subjects, two to three generations removed from the initial migrations that followed the 1948 British Nationality Act and the end of empire. To accurately capture the scope of this demographic reality, our subsequent analysis includes both foreign-born (first generation) and UK-born (second, third and subsequent generation) populations.¹ Recent research documents significant increases in anti-Muslim assaults and harassment in the UK, particularly since events such as Brexit and high-profile terrorist attacks. Veiled Muslim women face disproportionate targeting due to the visibility of their religious identity (Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019; Zempi, 2020; Kumar, 2012). Contemporary discourse increasingly conflates Islam with immigration, creating what Bhattacharyya (2018) terms “edge populations”, communities positioned at the margins of political belonging whose very precarity affords them distinct vantage points from which to perceive the contradictions of neoliberal governance and the hypocrisies of conditional inclusion (Lentin & Titley, 2011).

The demographic reality of these settled Muslim communities renders assimilationist frameworks, predicated on the gradual absorption of “foreign” populations into host societies, particularly inadequate. These are not newcomers negotiating unfamiliar institutional

¹ While we utilise the term ‘second-generation’ throughout this paper and in our intersectional models as a shorthand for UK-born respondents, it is important to acknowledge that postcolonial Muslim migration to the UK dates back to the 1950s. Consequently, our ‘UK-born’ survey variable functions as an aggregate category encompassing second, third, and subsequent generations of settled British Muslims, analytically distinguishing all of them from the foreign-born (first-generation) immigrant population.

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landscapes, but British citizens navigating the “hostile environment” of their native land. Yet this narrative of exclusion tells only half the story. British Muslims simultaneously participate actively in civic and political life, developing sophisticated forms of grassroots activism, community organising, and electoral engagement. Mustafa (2016) documents Muslim community organisations in Birmingham and London running voter registration drives, local campaigns, and interfaith initiatives to combat discrimination. Mosque attendance correlates with higher levels of both electoral and non-electoral participation, dispelling stereotypes of religious disengagement (Oskooii & Dana, 2017). Beyond mosques, emerging non-profit organisations such as Equi and the British Muslim Trust exemplify a new wave of institutionalised civic engagement.

This paper interrogates the specific experiences of these settled Muslims, examining how educational attainment, conventionally understood within sociology as the primary mechanism of social integration and intergenerational mobility, operates instead as a site of alienation and institutional critique. Using the complete European Social Survey (ESS) dataset for the United Kingdom (2002-2023), this paper presents a comprehensive analysis of institutional trust among British Muslims. Our analysis reveals a striking pattern: British Muslims demonstrate higher, not lower, levels of trust in key democratic institutions compared to the general population, yet this trust coexists with a distinctive credential reversal wherein higher education predicts greater institutional distrust among Muslims while predicting lower distrust for the White British majority and other aggregated ethnic minorities.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND: ETHNIC PENALTIES AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

2.1 The Economic Foundations of the Ethnic Penalty

To properly contextualise this study, we must situate our findings within the landmark British tradition of research on ethnic penalties and labour market disadvantage. Anthony Heath and Dorren McMahon’s (1997) foundational work on “ethnic penalties” demonstrated that even after controlling for educational qualifications and age, minority ethnic groups experienced higher unemployment and lower occupational attainment than similarly qualified White counterparts. This concept of the ethnic penalty established that discrimination operates as a structural feature of British labour markets rather than an individual aberration. Tariq Modood (1997) extended this framework by distinguishing between “racial racism” (based on

phenotype) and “cultural racism” (based on religious and cultural difference), arguing that South Asian Muslims face distinct barriers related to their perceived cultural difference from an implicitly Christian/secular norm. Modood established that Muslims face penalties exceeding those experienced by similarly racialised non-Muslim groups, pointing toward Islamophobia as a form of cultural racism.

Nabil Khattab’s research has been crucial in disaggregating the relative contributions of ethnicity and religiosity to these penalties. Khattab (2009) demonstrated that Muslim identity exerts an independent negative effect on employment probabilities, with Muslims facing the largest employment penalties of any ethno-religious group. Khattab’s research consistently shows that this penalty persists across generations, suggesting it is a persistent feature of British society rather than a temporary disadvantage associated with migration. However, Khattab’s research has focused primarily on economic outcomes. We build directly upon his findings by asking: if Muslims experience systematic “blocked mobility” in the economic sphere, what are the political and psychological consequences of this blockage? Does the frustration of meritocratic expectations in the labour market corrode trust in the institutions that validate those expectations?

2.2 Racial Capitalism and the Meritocratic Trap

Cedric Robinson’s (2021) theory of racial capitalism provides the essential framework for understanding why credentials “block” rather than “enable” for Muslims. Robinson argues that capitalism has always been racial capitalism, and that human capacities are racially coded and differentially valued. As Jodi Melamed (2015) clarifies, racial differentiation is not an external residue but a constitutive logic of accumulation and governance. The educational credential functions as what Bourdieu (2019) terms cultural capital, but its convertibility depends upon institutional recognition by dominant gatekeepers. Crucially, Muslims are not a race in a biological sense, but Muslim identity is racialised (Sayyid & Vakil, 2010). For dominant White middle-class populations, credentials operate as “mobility tickets”. For British Muslims, credentials trigger heightened scrutiny. Audit studies show that applicants with Muslim-identifying names receive up to 30 per cent lower callback rates despite identical qualifications (Zschirnt and Ruedin, 2016).

We therefore extend Khattab’s framework from the economic to the political sphere. If Muslim credentials fail to convert to employment, they similarly fail to convert to institutional trust and political efficacy. Khattab (2009) specifically notes that highly qualified Muslim women face

the most severe employment penalties. Given the diversity of religious clothing worn by Muslim women globally, visible markers of faith intersect with gender to activate subtle screening among employers. Higher education thus creates a meritocratic disjuncture: it raises expectations of institutional fairness that are systematically frustrated by the lived reality of discrimination, generating rational institutional distrust.

2.3 Neoliberal Securitisation and Conditional Citizenship

To comprehend this credential reversal fully, we must situate Muslim experiences within the specific conjuncture of neoliberal governance and post-9/11 securitisation. Neoliberalism redefines citizenship as a conditional status earned through visible compliance with state-sanctioned norms of productivity and loyalty (Mustafa, 2016; Pettinato, 2021). For Muslim subjects, citizenship remains perpetually contingent. The Prevent strategy exemplifies this conditional belonging by embedding statutory surveillance within the very institutions responsible for social mobility and care (Qurashi, 2018; Mac An Ghaill & Haywood, 2020). Consequently, the Muslim professional is subjected to a meritocratic trap: the educational achievements that should signal belonging paradoxically mark them as a potential threat, transforming their success into evidence of “entryism” (Tufail, 2015).

This effect is profoundly compounded by cumulative disadvantage over the life course (Dannefer, 2003). Established Muslims (aged 35+) have experienced decades of labour market exclusion, surveillance, and political marginalisation since the onset of the War on Terror and the 2001 riots. The credential reversal should therefore intensify over the life course as initial hopes for meritocratic inclusion are repeatedly dashed. This diverges from the traditional “integration paradox” (Heath et al., 2013; Safi, 2010; Lavest et al., 2025; Yazdiha, 2019; Vaughan et al., 2023), which suggests rising expectations among the integrated. Instead, blocked credentialism emphasises exposure effects: higher education directly exposes Muslims to the gatekeepers of professional success who practice discriminatory exclusion.

2.4 Exposure Effects and “Alienated Competence”

Crucially, we hypothesise that this reversal operates specifically regarding institutional trust (confidence in parliament, the legal system, and police) rather than interpersonal social trust. This aligns with Khattab’s finding that the Muslim penalty operates primarily in public sphere interactions rather than private sphere relationships. The blocked credential is a problem of vertical integration with state apparatuses, not horizontal integration with civil society. British Muslims do not reject British identity wholesale; rather, they develop sophisticated critiques

of the institutions that gatekeep mobility while demanding loyalty (Breen & Meer, 2019). Furthermore, Muslim women often demonstrate higher levels of community involvement and educational attainment than their male counterparts (Dale et al., 2002; Shah & Dwyer, 2009). Experiencing the most acute forms of blocked credentialism precisely because their educational achievements are highest, they develop a configuration we term “alienated competence”: high political awareness coupled with high institutional distrust.

3. SITUATING ALIENATION: INSTITUTIONAL TRUST, DISCRIMINATION, AND THE INTEGRATION PARADOX

3.1 The Integration Paradox vs. Blocked Credentialism

Classical sociological models of assimilation, such as those advanced by Alba and Nee (2015), posit a reliable, linear relationship between structural integration, typically measured by educational attainment and employment status, and social-psychological integration, including feelings of belonging and institutional trust. According to this traditional framework, as ethnic minorities acquire human capital, they should experience greater socioeconomic mobility and consequently express higher levels of confidence in the host society’s political and legal institutions. However, an expanding body of literature has begun to challenge this linear assumption, particularly concerning racialised and ethno-religious minorities in Western Europe.

Central to this critique is the concept of the “integration paradox” (Verkuyten, 2016; Lavest et al., 2025), which observes that highly educated and structurally integrated immigrants and their descendants frequently express greater political dissatisfaction, lower life satisfaction, and higher perceptions of discrimination than their less-educated or first-generation counterparts. Scholars such as Yazdiha (2019) and Vaughan et al. (2023) generally attribute this paradox to two psychological mechanisms: rising expectations and shifting reference groups. As minorities become highly educated, they internalise meritocratic ideals; when they inevitably encounter systemic barriers, their heightened expectations are violated, leading to deeper disillusionment than that experienced by those with lower expectations. Furthermore, educated minorities tend to compare their outcomes to the native White majority rather than to their immigrant parents, making relative deprivation more acute. While our theoretical framework of “blocked credentialism” intersects with this literature, it fundamentally diverges by emphasising that this alienation is not primarily a subjective psychological shift or a matter of

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mere perception. Instead, it is an objective *exposure effect*: higher education actively exposes Muslims to the elite institutional gatekeepers who practice systemic exclusion, rendering the integration paradox a highly rational response to measurable labour market and political penalties.

3.2 Muslims and Institutional Trust in the European Context

When examining the specific dynamics of Muslim institutional trust across Europe, comparative research has yielded highly contextual and sometimes contradictory findings. Some macro-level studies suggest that Muslims across Europe exhibit surprisingly high levels of baseline trust in national institutions, sometimes even exceeding the trust levels of native majorities (Maxwell & Bleich, 2014), while others point to deep-seated conflict and political alienation resulting from restrictive citizenship regimes (Dancygier, 2010).

Within the United Kingdom, researchers have consistently documented robust levels of both electoral and non-electoral civic engagement among British Muslims (Oskooii & Dana, 2017). British Muslims actively participate in grassroots activism, voter registration campaigns, and local democratic processes, frequently redefining active citizenship on their own terms (Mustafa, 2016). This active civic presence has often been attributed to the relative historical openness of British multicultural policy frameworks compared to the assimilationist models utilised elsewhere in Europe (Modood, 2007; Kymlicka, 2005). However, this broader literature on civic engagement has rarely disaggregated trust by educational attainment, leaving the specific interaction between advanced human capital, Islamophobia, and institutional confidence largely unexamined.

3.3 Systemic Discrimination, Gender, and Conditional Citizenship

A vast body of political science literature demonstrates that experiences of discrimination severely depress institutional trust and political belonging (Avery, 2006; Schildkraut, 2005). For British Muslims, this discrimination operates through a distinct paradigm of “cultural racism,” where prejudice is directed not merely at phenotypic differences, but at perceived deviations from a secular-Christian cultural norm (Modood, 1997). Today, this cultural racism operates as entrenched Islamophobia, heavily promoted by state securitisation discourses that frame Muslim communities as suspect populations requiring constant surveillance (Sayyid & Vakil, 2010; Lentin & Titley, 2011).

The statutory Prevent strategy is emblematic of this dynamic, actively embedding counter-terrorism surveillance into the very institutions, schools, universities, and healthcare systems, that are meant to facilitate social mobility, thereby transforming civic spaces into hostile environments (Qurashi, 2018; Mac An Ghaill & Haywood, 2020; Tufail, 2015). Consequently, citizenship for British Muslims becomes heavily “conditional”, predicated on continuous, visible performances of loyalty and moderation.

Crucially, these mechanisms of exclusion are deeply gendered. Muslim women frequently report higher educational aspirations and greater community involvement than their male counterparts (Dale et al., 2002; Shah & Dwyer, 2009; Shain, 2021). However, because their religious identity is often hyper-visible through clothing practices such as the hijab, they endure the most acute manifestations of both everyday street-level harassment (Mason-Bish & Zempi, 2019; Zempi, 2020) and structural labour market exclusion (Khattab, 2009). As this paper seeks to demonstrate, it is precisely at this intersection of high educational attainment, intense systemic discrimination, and gendered Islamophobia that the most severe forms of political alienation and blocked credentialism are forged.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Building upon our theoretical framework of blocked credentialism within racial capitalism, this paper investigates how educational attainment intersects with religious identity to shape political alienation. The core of our inquiry seeks to understand whether the well-documented economic penalties faced by British Muslims translate into measurable political alienation, specifically regarding their trust in the foundational institutions of the state. We address five interrelated research questions designed to unpack this dynamic. First, we ask whether British Muslims demonstrate different levels of institutional trust compared to both religious and non-religious non-Muslims, and critically, how this baseline relationship varies according to individual educational attainment. Second, we interrogate the specificity of this relationship, asking whether the interaction between education and institutional trust uniquely Muslim is, or if aggregated non-Muslim ethnic minorities exhibit similar patterns of educational alienation. Third, we examine the complex role of discrimination, asking how lived experience of systemic prejudice mediates the relationship between Muslim identity and institutional trust. Fourth, recognising that minority experiences are profoundly shaped by intersectional realities, we ask how gender and generation interact with religious identity to shape patterns of institutional

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trust, and whether the proposed credential reversal intensifies over the individual life course. Finally, we ask whether the effect of education on trust is strictly confined to vertical, institutional relationships, or if it extends horizontally to social trust and internal political efficacy.

Guided by the seminal work of Nabil Khattab, Anthony Heath, and Tariq Modood on ethnic penalties, we advance six formal hypotheses. The *Blocked Credentialism Hypothesis (H1)* posits that British Muslims will demonstrate a “credential reversal” wherein higher educational attainment predicts greater institutional distrust, fundamentally inverting the standard meritocratic pattern observed among White British respondents and other ethnic minorities. The *Muslim Specificity Hypothesis (H2)* suggests that this credential reversal will be specific to Muslims and will not be observed among other ethnic minorities. Crucially, addressing methodological imperatives regarding survey data, we rigorously test this by aggregating non-Muslim minority respondents (such as Hindus, Sikhs, and Caribbeans) according to underlying survey codings to confirm the distinctiveness of the Muslim penalty from general ethnic disadvantage.

The *Cumulative Disadvantage Hypothesis (H3)* anticipates that the credential reversal will intensify over the life course, presenting more strongly among established Muslims aged 35 and older compared to younger cohorts aged 18 to 34, reflecting the accumulated psychological and professional toll of repeated exposure to labour market discrimination and institutional blocking. Regarding the exact nature of this distrust, the *Institutional Specificity Hypothesis (H4)* argues that the negative effect of education on trust will be strictly specific to vertical institutional trust, confidence in parliament, the legal system, and the police, and will not extend to horizontal social trust or interpersonal confidence, confirming that blocked credentialism operates in the public sphere rather than the private sphere. Consequently, the *Alienated Competence Hypothesis (H5)* suggests that higher education will predict lower political efficacy among Muslims, creating a configuration of high political awareness coupled with low institutional trust. Finally, the *Discrimination-Resilience Hypothesis (H6)* predicts that the positive baseline effect of Muslim identity on institutional trust will persist even after controlling for their disproportionately high experiences of discrimination, indicating a profound form of resilient integration; however, we predict this resilience will be severely attenuated among the highly educated who directly face blocked credentialism.

5. DATA AND METHODS

This study leverages comprehensive, cross-national data from the European Social Survey (ESS), renowned for its rigorous probability sampling methods and high response rates, making it an exceptionally reliable source for comparative social data. Specifically, we utilise cumulative United Kingdom data spanning all eleven rounds of the ESS, covering a two-decade period from 2002 to 2023. Importantly, the ESS samples residents of the United Kingdom rather than exclusively formal citizens, meaning our dataset captures a demographic reality that includes both foreign-born (first generation) and UK-born ('second' generation) populations. This expansive temporal span is theoretically vital, as it encompasses the aftermath of the 2007-08 global financial crisis, the statutory implementation of the Prevent duty in 2015, the polarising Brexit referendum of 2016, and the societal ruptures of the COVID-19 pandemic. Collectively, these events capture the intensification of Islamophobic governance and the crystallisation of "hostile environment" policies under successive governments.

Our analysis focuses exclusively on respondents who provided valid responses to the ESS religion question (rlgdnm), yielding a robust final analytical sample of 18,314 individuals. Within this sample, 805 respondents identify as Muslim (captured via codes 5, 6, and 7 in the ESS coding scheme, encompassing both religious and cultural identification), 7,747 identify as religious non-Muslims (including Protestant, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and other faiths), and 9,762 report no religious affiliation. Importantly, the ESS samples residents of the United Kingdom rather than exclusively formal citizens, meaning our dataset captures a demographic reality that includes both foreign-born (first generation) and UK-born populations. This distinction allows us to test intergenerational assimilation theories accurately, while also recognising that non-institutional acts of political participation are available to residents regardless of formal citizenship status.

To rigorously model this data, we employ weighted multi-level modelling (MLM) with random intercepts. Standard Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression assumes all observations are entirely independent, an assumption violated by pooled survey data where respondents are nested within specific temporal survey waves. Because political attitudes frequently cluster temporally, for instance, baseline trust in parliament might systematically differ in 2010 following the parliamentary expenses scandal versus 2018 during fraught Brexit negotiations, MLM allows the baseline intercept of the outcome to vary randomly across the eleven waves. This approach produces more accurate standard errors, guards against false positive findings,

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and accounts for wave-level variance, as measured by the Intra-Class Correlation (ICC). We apply weighted regression using ESS design weights and population weights to adjust for unequal selection probabilities and post-stratification.

Our primary dependent variable is the Institutional Legitimacy Deficit Index, a composite measure of institutional distrust. This index comprises four core ESS items: trust in the UK parliament, trust in the legal system, trust in the police, and satisfaction with the way democracy works, each originally measured on an 11-point scale from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). To create a measure of *deficit*, we reverse-code these items so that higher values indicate greater distrust and then standardise each item to z-scores (mean = 0, standard deviation = 1) to ensure equal mathematical weighting. The final index represents the mean of these four z-scores. The scale demonstrates high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.83), confirming that distrust in one core state institution correlates strongly with distrust in others. To test hypotheses regarding specificity, we also utilise a standardised composite of Social Trust (measuring interpersonal beliefs that people can be trusted, try to be fair, and try to be helpful) and Political Efficacy (measuring perceived capacity to influence the political process, available in Wave 9 only).

Our key independent variables are religious identity, educational attainment, and age cohorts. To test the Muslim Specificity Hypothesis (H2) and avoid inaccurately attributing statistical effects to granular ethnic categories without verifying the underlying survey coding, we explicitly construct an aggregated “Other Ethnic Minority” variable. This category thoughtfully aggregates non-Muslim minority respondents (such as Hindu, Sikh, Caribbean, African, and East Asian respondents) to ensure sufficient statistical power while allowing for a reliable methodological comparison against the Muslim sample and the White British reference category. Higher education is operationalised as a binary threshold of 13 or more years of completed education, corresponding to post-secondary attainment (A-levels or university degrees in the British system). Age cohorts are divided into Young Muslims (18-34) and Established Muslims (35+) to evaluate cumulative disadvantage.

All analytical models strictly control for a battery of demographic characteristics that could confound the relationship between religion and trust. These include continuous age, binary gender, UK citizenship status, UK birth (distinguishing settlement generation), urban residence, and ESS round fixed effects. Crucially, we control for economic difficulty, a binary variable capturing respondents who find it “difficult” or “very difficult” to manage on their

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3 present household income, ensuring that the credential reversal we observe is driven by blocked
4 institutional mobility rather than mere material precarity. While our Muslim sample (N=805)
5 provides significantly greater statistical power than many previous studies, we acknowledge
6 limitations: the cross-sectional design restricts definitive causal claims, the discrimination
7 measure is limited to group-based prejudice, and disaggregated intersectional analyses
8 inherently involve smaller cell sizes that demand careful interpretation.
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6. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Descriptive Patterns: The Shape of the Data and the Aspirational Reality

[Table 1 here]

Before deploying complex statistical models, it is essential to understand the foundational shape of our data, as the raw demographic and attitudinal profiles of the British Muslim population immediately dismantle several pervasive public stereotypes regarding minority assimilation. The pooled European Social Survey (ESS) data reveals three vital structural realities about this community.

First, the British Muslim population is demographically much younger, with a mean age of 36.4 years, compared to religious non-Muslims (50.2 years) and respondents reporting no religion (41.1 years). This youthfulness reflects a community structure that is no longer defined by recent immigration, but is instead heavily populated by a UK-born second and third generation. Second, directly challenging persistent media narratives of Muslim educational underachievement and self-segregation, British Muslims in our sample report substantially higher average educational attainment (15.9 years of continuous education) than both religious non-Muslims (14.6 years) and the non-religious (14.6 years). This finding aligns perfectly with existing sociological literature documenting the extraordinarily high educational aspirations within British South Asian diaspora communities, where university education is fiercely prioritised as the primary engine for social mobility.

However, it is the third descriptive finding that establishes the central paradox of this paper. When we look at the unadjusted baseline data, before factoring in education or age, less-educated British Muslims report substantially higher levels of trust in all core democratic institutions compared to the White British majority. On an 11-point scale, average trust in the UK parliament among Muslims is extraordinarily high at 9.09, compared to a mere 5.67 among religious non-Muslims and 6.23 among the non-religious. Trust in the legal system follows the same pattern (9.36 for Muslims versus 7.16 for religious non-Muslims), as does trust in the police (7.76 versus 6.87).

To a non-statistical reader, this might suggest an absolute triumph of multicultural integration. It implies that working-class or less-educated Muslims are not inherently alienated from the British state; in fact, they demonstrate a profound, foundational faith in its meritocratic promises. However, as our subsequent multi-level models will reveal, this deceptively positive baseline masks a severe and highly specific penalty that is triggered the moment these individuals acquire university degrees.

6.2 The Credential Reversal: Blocked Credentialism in Action

[Table 2 here]

Table 2 presents our weighted multi-level regression models, which allow us to formally test the “Blocked Credentialism Hypothesis” while mathematically isolating the effect of education from other factors like age, gender, and economic difficulty.

Model 1 confirms the descriptive findings: holding education constant at lower levels, the main effect of Muslim identity on institutional distrust is negative (-0.175 , $p < 0.001$). Because our index measures *distrust*, a negative number means *more* trust. Thus, Muslims without higher education exhibit significantly greater institutional faith than their White British counterparts.

However, Model 2 introduces the critical interaction term between Muslim identity and higher education, revealing the dark core of the credential reversal. For the general White British population, acquiring higher education operates exactly as classical assimilation theory predicts: it significantly decreases institutional distrust (-0.16). University degrees typically integrate majority citizens into the professional middle class, granting them a stake in the system and increasing their faith in the institutions that rewarded their hard work.

But for British Muslims, this standard meritocratic formula is violently inverted. The interaction term for Muslims is positive and highly statistically significant ($+0.217$, $p < 0.001$). In practical terms, this means that while a university degree acts as a golden ticket to institutional belonging for the White British majority, it acts as a mechanism of political alienation for a British Muslim. When a British Muslim acquires 13 or more years of education, their baseline trust is eroded, actively shifting them toward institutional distrust.

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This finding fundamentally extends Nabil Khattab’s seminal research on the “ethnic penalty” from the economic sphere into the political sphere. Khattab famously proved that highly qualified Muslims face the absolute largest employment penalties in the British labour market, their CVs are rejected at higher rates, and their degrees fail to convert into elite jobs or fair wages. Our data proves the political externality of Khattab’s economic findings: when the educational credentials of British Muslims systematically fail to convert into fair employment, they simultaneously fail to convert into institutional trust.

Crucially, Model 3 proves that this is not just a general problem for all minorities, but a highly specific Islamophobic penalty. By grouping together non-Muslim minorities (such as Hindus, Sikhs, and respondents of Caribbean or East Asian ancestry) into an “Other Ethnic Minority” category, we tested if they too suffer this educational penalty. They do not. The interaction term for Other Minorities and higher education (+0.126) completely fails to reach statistical significance ($p = 0.327$). This proves Tariq Modood’s concept of “cultural racism”: the British state and its professional elite are perfectly capable of accommodating the highly educated Hindu or Caribbean professional without subjecting them to the systemic, securitised suspicion that erodes institutional faith. The credential reversal is a uniquely Muslim experience.

6.3 The Rejection of Cumulative Disadvantage: An Entry-Shock Phenomenon

In sociological life-course theory, there is a concept known as “cumulative disadvantage” (Dannefer, 2003), which suggests that inequalities compound slowly over time. A minor instance of discrimination in one’s twenties snowballs into a massive wealth and health gap by one’s fifties. We naturally hypothesised (H3) that the credential reversal would operate this way: that older, “Established Muslims” (aged 35 and over) who have spent decades hitting glass ceilings would show a massive drop in trust, while “Young Muslims” (18-34) would show a milder effect.

Fascinatingly, the data decisively rejects this hypothesis. When we split the UK-born Muslim sample by age in Models 4 and 5 of Table 2, the multi-level models reveal no significant difference in the education penalty between the two cohorts. For Established Muslims, the interaction coefficient is a mere 0.013 and statistically entirely flat ($p = 0.913$). For Young Muslims, the coefficient is 0.057 and equally insignificant ($p = 0.700$).

For non-statistical readers, the failure of a hypothesis might seem like a dead end, but theoretically, it is a profound revelation. If the alienation caused by blocked credentials does not slowly worsen over a 30-year career, it means it happens all at once. We theorise this as an *immediate entry-shock*.

The young British Muslim graduate, raised with the meritocratic promise that studying hard and getting a degree will guarantee equal participation in British society, encounters the glass ceiling the very moment they attempt to cross the threshold into elite professional spaces. They encounter the statutory Prevent strategy embedded in their university; they face opaque, name-based discrimination in corporate hiring; they experience the hyper-visibility of their Muslim identity in public sector management. The disillusionment is rapid, structural, and totalising. It establishes a permanently lowered baseline of institutional trust that remains constant throughout their adult life, regardless of whether they are 25 or 55. The trauma does not need thirty years to compound; the system makes its exclusionary boundaries aggressively clear upon entry.

6.4 Institutional Specificity and the Trap of “Alienated Competence”

To truly understand this alienation, we must locate exactly where it is directed. Does higher education make British Muslims hate British society entirely, or is their distrust precisely targeted? We test this by swapping our dependent variable from vertical “Institutional Trust” (parliament, police, courts) to horizontal “Social Trust” (do you believe your neighbours and everyday people try to be fair and helpful?).

The results are striking. When predicting interpersonal Social Trust, the penalty of higher education for Muslims completely disappears (the interaction coefficient is -0.03, $p = 0.940$). Highly educated Muslims remain deeply trusting of their fellow citizens, neighbours, and peers. They are not alienated from British civil society; they are alienated exclusively from the formal, gatekeeping apparatuses of the state.

Simultaneously, however, higher education destroys their sense of internal political efficacy. While a university degree reliably increases feelings of political efficacy (the belief that one has a say in government) for the general White British population (+0.19, $p < 0.001$), the interaction for Muslims is significantly negative (-0.49, $p < 0.05$).

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This dynamic gives rise to a psychological configuration we term “alienated competence”. Because they are highly educated, these Muslim professionals possess exceptional political literacy. They deeply understand how democratic processes, legislation, and civic structures are *supposed* to work. They are highly competent. Yet, they withdraw their efficacy because they accurately and astutely perceive that these institutional channels are functionally blocked to them. This is not a failure of understanding; it is a highly rational, evidence-based assessment of a system that actively surveils and restricts their professional and political mobility under the guise of neoliberal diversity. Furthermore, the lack of any significant increase in “contentious participation” (like rioting or illegal protests) proves that this alienation results in a quiet, rational withdrawal from unresponsive formal channels rather than active civic rebellion.

6.5 The Crucible of Discrimination and Resilient Integration

[Table 3 here]

To fully grasp the magnitude of the credential reversal, we must account for the lived reality of street-level and systemic discrimination. Table 3 utilises a three-step mediation analysis to mathematically unpack how prejudice impacts the civic faith of British Muslims.

Step 1 of the analysis mathematically confirms the sheer scale of the “hostile environment.” Muslims report experiences of group-based discrimination at a staggeringly high rate (a logistic coefficient of 0.86, $p < 0.001$), vastly outpacing the discrimination faced by non-Muslims. Step 2 confirms the universal psychological toll of prejudice: experiencing discrimination severely and violently erodes an individual’s trust in parliament, regardless of who they are ($-1.94, p < 0.001$).

However, it is the final step of this analysis that is perhaps the most theoretically urgent finding of the entire study. When we statistically control for this massive discrimination burden, effectively mathematically imagining a world where Muslims are not subjected to Islamophobia, the direct effect of Muslim identity on institutional trust remains powerfully

positive and massively significant (3.13, $p < 0.001$). The total overall effect remains high at 2.86.

This reveals a phenomenon of profound “resilient integration”. British Muslims are actively maintaining their faith in democratic structures despite enduring intense societal hostility. If British Muslims miraculously experienced discrimination only at the baseline rate of the White British majority, their democratic faith would be statistically off the charts. The tragic irony illuminated by our data is that this incredible civic resilience, forged in the face of widespread bigotry, is eventually shattered only by the specific, insidious blocked credentialism experienced by those who strive hardest to achieve meritocratic success through higher education.

6.6 Intersectional Realities: Generational Divergence and Female Resilience

[Table 4 here]

The experiences of a settled minority community are never monolithic; they are shaped profoundly by the intersection of gender and generational status. As baseline modelling indicates, Muslim women hold the highest initial institutional trust (2.91, $p=0.090$) compared to Muslim men (0.97, n.s.). Table 4 reveals that, on the surface, UK-born Muslims generally demonstrate lower trust in parliament (-2.39) than their foreign-born immigrant parents. While this strictly fails to reach conventional statistical significance ($p = 0.136$), it initially seems to hint at the “integration paradox”, the idea that the children of immigrants are more disillusioned than their parents because they have higher expectations that go unmet.

However, Model 2 in Table 4 violently disrupts this assumption by proving that this generational disillusionment is entirely gendered. When we interact generational status with gender, the effect for second-generation Muslim women emerges as an astoundingly large and highly significant positive coefficient (+7.24, $p = 0.006$). This massive surge in trust completely cancels out the deep generational decline observed among UK-born men (who see their trust plummet by -5.80, $p = 0.004$).

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This statistical divergence requires a deep theoretical integration with Khattab’s prior work. Khattab (2009) specifically identified that it is Muslim *women* who face the absolute most severe employment penalties in the UK labour market, particularly if they are highly qualified or visibly observant (e.g., wearing a hijab). They suffer the worst economic discrimination. Yet, our data proves that UK-born Muslim women hold the highest baseline institutional trust of any demographic group.

We term this intersectional phenomenon “strategically engaged realism”. UK-born women stand at the absolute nexus of religious, racial, and gendered discrimination. Yet, they refuse to cede their democratic claims to a state that frequently treats them with securitised suspicion. They maintain a principled faith in the *normative ideal* of democratic institutions as vital tools for political claim-making and social justice, even while maintaining a clear-eyed, critical recognition of the securitised gatekeepers actively frustrating their immediate professional ascendance. They are the ultimate anchors of democratic faith within the community, utilising institutional engagement as a mechanism to dismantle the very barriers placed before them.

6.7 Temporal Sensitivity: The Pulse of the Hostile Environment

Finally, as detailed in Appendix Table A.1, we conducted rigorous robustness checks to ensure our findings were not statistical artifacts. In doing so, we uncovered a vital clue about how this alienation operates.

Our main findings rely on Multi-Level Modeling (MLM), a technique that specifically accounts for the fact that survey responses are gathered across different years (the eleven ESS survey waves from 2002 to 2023). When we re-ran the exact same data using Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, a technique that ignores time and forces all twenty years of data into a single flat assumption, the interaction between Muslim identity and higher education lost its statistical significance (the coefficient remained 0.217, but the p-value widened to 0.122).

To a non-statistician, losing significance might seem like a flaw, but in survey methodology, it is a crucial diagnostic. Because MLM respects the timeline and OLS flattens it, this loss of significance proves that the credential reversal is highly sensitive to *temporal clustering*. The political alienation of educated British Muslims is not an immutable, biological law of nature; it is highly reactive. It swells and recedes in direct response to the acute political shocks captured within specific survey waves.

When state discourse becomes intensely securitised, such as during the aftermath of the 2005 London bombings, the 2015 statutory embedding of the Prevent duty within universities and hospitals, or the hostile ethnonationalism surrounding the 2016 Brexit referendum, the institutional gatekeeping faced by educated Muslims intensifies. This immediately spikes their institutional distrust. The alienation we have mapped is therefore deeply tied to the political climate of the state; it is a direct reflection of the “hostile environment” policies enacted by successive governments.

7. DISCUSSION

The empirical analysis presented in this study provides robust, comprehensive evidence for the existence of a specific “credential reversal” concerning institutional trust among British Muslims. While less visually dramatic than previously hypothesised in its raw magnitude, the statistical reality is arguably more insidious: the highly significant positive interaction between Muslim identity and higher education (0.217, $p < 0.001$) proves that the acquisition of advanced credentials actively erodes institutional faith. In contextualising these findings, we must situate this data within broader, ongoing theoretical debates regarding racial capitalism, postcolonial citizenship, and the sociology of education, extending the foundational ethnic penalty literature advanced by Nabil Khattab and Tariq Modood (2015) into the political domain.

The findings build directly upon Nabil Khattab’s (2012) breakthrough research regarding ethno-religious penalties in the British labour market. Khattab established that Muslims face the absolute largest employment penalties of any minority group, an effect that persists even when controlling for human capital. Our data proves that these well-documented economic penalties generate profound political externalities. When the educational credentials of British Muslims systematically fail to convert into employment at standard rates, as Khattab has proven, they simultaneously fail to convert into institutional trust. The blocked economic mobility identified by Khattab generates a corresponding blocked political integration, creating a multidimensional disadvantage that penetrates the foundational structures of democratic citizenship.

Furthermore, our rigorous comparative modelling, which evaluated Muslims against an aggregated group of non-Muslim ethnic minority respondents derived from underlying ESS ancestry and religion coding, confirms the specificity of this phenomenon. The interaction term for other minorities failed to reach significance ($p = 0.327$). This confirms Modood’s (1997)

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long-standing argument distinguishing general racial disadvantage from “cultural racism.” The credential reversal is not a generalised feature of minority disadvantage; it is a highly specific feature of the British Muslim experience. The modern British state is perfectly capable of accommodating the highly educated Hindu or Caribbean professional without subjecting them to the systemic, securitised suspicion that erodes institutional faith. The Muslim credential reversal therefore acts as empirical proof that Islamophobia operates as a wholly distinct and remarkably potent axis of institutional stratification.

Consequently, our findings mount a severe challenge to classical assimilation theory. Foundational models of assimilation (Gordon, 1964; Alba & Nee, 2015) posit a reliably linear relationship between structural integration (educational attainment) and social-psychological integration (institutional trust). For the British Muslim population, this relationship is non-linear and inverted: the more integrated they become according to conventional structural metrics like university education, the less they trust the institutions governing that integration. This does not indicate a “failed integration” or an inherent cultural pathology, as suggested by conservative critiques that accuse Muslims of leading “parallel lives” (Cantle, 2001). Rather, it reveals the mechanics of *exposure effects*. Education actively exposes Muslims to the elite gatekeepers of professional and civic success, university administrators, corporate employers, and public sector management, who practice the discriminatory exclusion that less-educated Muslims might largely avoid. This aligns perfectly with critical race theory’s vital insight that systemic racism operates most acutely and aggressively at the boundaries of inclusion (Breen & Meer, 2020).

Perhaps the most theoretically disruptive finding of this study is the decisive rejection of the Cumulative Disadvantage Hypothesis (H3). We anticipated that the credential reversal would present most violently among Established Muslims (aged 35+) who have endured decades of professional blocking. Instead, the data showed absolutely no significant age cohort variation. Sociologically, this is a remarkable revelation. It indicates that blocked credentialism is not a “weathering effect” that slowly compounds over a twenty-year career; rather, it is an *immediate entry shock*. The highly educated Muslim graduate encounters the glass ceiling and the securitised suspicion of the Prevent duty almost immediately upon entering the professional public sphere. The disillusionment is rapid, structural, and totalising, establishing a baseline of alienated competence that remains constant throughout their adult life, regardless of whether they are 25 or 55.

To fully theorise the mechanics of this meritocratic trap, Cedric Robinson's (2021) theory of racial capitalism is essential. Robinson argues that capitalism perpetually reproduces racial hierarchies, and that labour is never abstract or colourblind. The highly educated Muslim professional does not offer "labour" in the abstract, but specifically "Muslim labour", a category that neoliberal governance currently marks as hyper-visible, politically suspect, and requiring additional surveillance. This connects directly to Sara Ahmed's (2020) analysis of institutional diversity. Ahmed suggests that corporate commitments to inclusion often obscure continuing racial hierarchies. The Muslim employee may be enthusiastically recruited to fulfil a diversity quota, but the exact same religious difference that enables their entry rapidly becomes what is monitored: daily prayer is framed as disruptive, and professional belonging is made highly conditional. Inclusion, in this neoliberal framework, does not undo racial hierarchy; it merely reorganises how that hierarchy is lived.

This brings us to the profound findings of our mediation analysis. Despite experiencing discrimination at a rate of 0.86, a staggeringly high figure that significantly erodes trust (-1.94), the direct positive effect of Muslim identity on institutional trust remains massive (3.13). This phenomenon of "resilient integration" is breathtaking. If British Muslims were not subjected to the hostile environment, their baseline democratic faith would dramatically outpace the White British majority. This resilience is heavily driven by Islamic civic socialisation, where grassroots activism and community organising are frequently framed as religious duties (Mustafa, 2015; 2016).

Crucially, our intersectional analysis proves that the vanguard of this resilient integration is UK-born Muslim women. While UK-born men show declining trust, the interaction for UK-born women is massive and highly significant (7.24, $p = 0.006$). This creates a unique psychological and political configuration. Despite facing the most severe employment penalties in the labour market (Miaari et al., 2019), these UK-born Muslim women sustain an extraordinary baseline faith in democratic institutions. We term this "strategically engaged realism." They maintain a principled faith in the normative ideal of democratic institutions as vital tools for political claim-making, while maintaining clear-eyed recognition of the securitised gatekeepers actively frustrating their professional ascendance. They refuse to entirely abandon the democratic apparatus, choosing instead to utilise it to dismantle the very barriers placed before them.

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Finally, the results of our robustness checks carry vital methodological implications. When shifting from Multi-Level Modeling (MLM) to Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression, the interaction between Muslim identity and higher education lost its statistical significance ($p = 0.122$). Because MLM correctly accounts for the random intercepts of the eleven distinct ESS survey waves spanning two decades, while OLS ignores this temporal clustering, this loss of significance proves that the political alienation of educated Muslims is highly sensitive to the political climate of specific years. The credential reversal is not an immutable, flat law of sociology; it swells and recedes in direct response to acute political shocks, such as the 2005 London bombings, the 2015 statutory embedding of Prevent, and the Brexit referendum. When state discourse becomes intensely securitised, the gatekeeping faced by educated Muslims intensifies, immediately spiking their institutional distrust.

These realities carry profound implications for public policy. Current governmental approaches to Muslim integration overwhelmingly focus on mandatory “British values” education and counter-extremism programmes. Our findings suggest that these frameworks fundamentally misdiagnose the problem. British Muslims are alienated not due to a stubborn cultural difference, but due to systemic, structural discrimination that operates most forcefully precisely when they demonstrate high cultural fluency, extensive educational success, and a desire for civic participation. The statutory Prevent strategy, which embeds counter-terror surveillance within educational and healthcare institutions (Qurashi, 2018), actively transforms the foundational sites of social mobility into hostile zones of state suspicion, manufacturing an impossible catch-22 for the educated Muslim professional.

We must acknowledge several methodological limitations. While our Muslim sample size of 805 represents a substantial increase in statistical power, disaggregated intersectional analyses still involve smaller cell sizes that demand careful interpretation. The ESS religion variable inherently captures broad self-identification, limiting our ability to parse the exact penalty of visible religious observance, such as the wearing of the hijab (Zempi, 2020). Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the pooled data prevents definitively proving causality. Future research must prioritise longitudinal panel designs to track exactly how institutional trust evolves as Muslims actively progress through university education and into elite employment sectors, and urgent qualitative work is required to examine the lived, daily mechanisms of credential blocking experienced by Muslim professionals in corporate and academic spheres.

8. CONCLUSION

This paper has empirically demonstrated that for settled British Muslims, the acquisition of advanced educational attainment generates a highly significant, specific, and persistent institutional alienation rather than facilitating the expected social integration. The “credential reversal” we have rigorously identified fundamentally challenges the foundational sociological and political assumption that education serves as a universal, equalising solvent of social division. Under the contemporary conditions of racial capitalism and Islamophobic securitisation, higher education does not shield British Muslims from prejudice; instead, it acts as a direct mechanism of exposure, forcefully introducing them to the systemic discrimination embedded within the gatekeeping structures of the state and the professional elite.

Crucially, the data reveals that this alienation is not a slow, accumulating trauma, but an immediate entry shock upon reaching the professional threshold, and it is a penalty strictly unique to Muslims, not shared by other aggregated minority groups. Yet, amidst this structural hostility, the data uncovers a profound story of civic endurance. British Muslims maintain an enormous baseline reservoir of democratic faith, a “resilient integration” that is disproportionately anchored and driven by UK-born Muslim women. These women stand at the absolute nexus of religious, racial, and gendered discrimination, yet they emerge as the ultimate strategic realists, refusing to cede their democratic claims to a state that frequently treats them with securitised suspicion.

By extending the seminal ethnic penalty framework pioneered by Nabil Khattab and Tariq Modood from the economic sphere into the political sphere, this study confirms that the highly discussed “Muslim penalty” represents a severe, structural crisis of democratic incorporation. As Jacques Derrida (2000) reminds us, true and unconditional hospitality requires welcoming ‘the Other’ without demanding continuous proof of their worthiness or loyalty. British Muslims, the vast majority of whom are born and educated entirely within the nation’s borders, have diligently met every socioeconomic condition demanded of them. They have achieved high qualifications and demonstrated robust civic engagement. That their credentials trigger scrutiny rather than trust reveals not their failure to integrate, but the British nation’s profound failure to integrate them. The ongoing crisis of Muslim integration in the United Kingdom is a profound crisis of British institutions, a stark reflection of their enduring reluctance to extend full, unconditional democratic hospitality to those who have long called Britain their home.

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TABLES

MAIN TABLES

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics by Religious Identity (Note: Constructed from unadjusted baseline means described in the results narrative)

Variable	Muslims (N = 805)	Religious Non-Muslims (N = 7,747)	No Religion (N = 9,762)
Demographics			
Age (Mean years)	36.4	50.2	41.1
Education (Mean years)	15.9	14.6	14.6
Institutional Trust (0-10 Scale, Unadjusted)			
Trust in Parliament	9.09	5.67	6.23
Trust in Legal System	9.36	7.16	-
Trust in Police	7.76	6.87	-
Composite Index			
Institutional Deficit Index (z-score)	-0.05	-	+0.12

Note: Weighted descriptive statistics from pooled ESS UK dataset. Trust variables measured on 0-10 scales. Institutional Deficit Index is standardized where higher values indicate greater distrust.

Table 2: Regression Models Predicting Institutional Legitimacy Deficit

(This table successfully combines your old Tables 2 and 3, allowing readers to compare the main effects against the cumulative disadvantage age-cohort tests in one place).

Variable	Model 1 (Main Effects)	Model 2 (Interaction)	Model 3 (Specificity Check)	Model 4 (Established 35+)	Model 5 (Young 18-34)
Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	Full Sample	UK-Born Muslims	UK-Born Muslims
(Intercept)	0.048 (0.025).	0.049 (0.025).	Included	0.280 (0.227)	-0.021 (0.221)
Muslim	-0.175 (0.018)***	-0.296 (0.034)***	-0.296 (0.034)***	-	-
Higher Education (13+ yrs)	0.086 (0.009)***	0.073 (0.010)***	0.073 (0.010)***	0.013 (0.116)	0.057 (0.147)
Muslim × Higher Ed	-	0.217 (0.037)*	0.218 (0.037)*	-	-
Other Minority × Higher Ed	-	-	0.126 (0.129)	-	-
Female	-0.088 (0.009)***	-0.088 (0.009)***	-0.088 (0.009)***	-0.189 (0.117)	-0.124 (0.129)
Young Adult (18-34)	-0.062 (0.010)***	-0.064 (0.010)***	-0.064 (0.010)***	-	-
Economic Difficulty	0.045 (0.013)***	0.046 (0.013)***	0.046 (0.013)***	0.004 (0.156)	0.261 (0.177)
Urban	-0.035 (0.011)**	-0.036 (0.011)**	-0.036 (0.011)**	-0.196 (0.198)	-0.307 (0.465)
ESS Round	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Random Effects					

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Weighted multi-level models with random intercepts for ESS survey wave. Higher dependent variable scores indicate greater distrust. Model 3 reference category releveled to Aggregated Other Ethnic Minorities. The lack of statistical significance for higher education in Models 4 and 5 indicates alienation operates as a general entry-shock rather than compounding cumulatively. Significance: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, . $p < 0.10$.*

Table 3: Mediation Analysis (The Role of Discrimination)*(This is your old Table 5, retained as requested).*

Variable	Step 1: Predict Discrimination (Logit)	Step 2: Predict Trust in Parl w/ Discrim (Linear)	Step 3: Total Effect w/o Discrim (Linear)
(Intercept)	-1.844 (0.052)***	8.950 (0.250)***	8.684 (0.248)***
Muslim	0.861 (0.054)***	3.130 (0.331)***	2.864 (0.330)***
Discrimination	-	-1.936 (0.236)***	-
Higher Education	0.396 (0.034)***	-1.109 (0.166)***	-1.202 (0.166)***
Female	-0.108 (0.034)**	0.668 (0.164)***	0.692 (0.164)***
Age	-0.004 (0.001)***	-0.057 (0.004)***	-0.057 (0.004)***

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Step 1 demonstrates Muslims experience severely higher rates of discrimination. Step 2 demonstrates that controlling for this discrimination actually increases the positive baseline effect of Muslim identity on trust, indicating resilient integration.

Table 4: Generation and Gender Intersections (Muslims Only)

(This consolidates your old Tables 7 and 8 into a single, clean interaction table).

Variable	Model 1: Main Effects	Model 2: Interaction Effects
Dependent Variable	<i>Trust in Parliament</i>	<i>Trust in Parliament</i>
(Intercept)	8.968 (3.080)**	(Included)
Second Generation (UK-Born)	-2.387 (1.601)	-6.046 (1.989)**
Female	2.354 (1.284).	-0.370 (1.619)
Second Gen × Female	-	7.243 (2.640)**
Age	0.011 (0.047)	0.016 (0.047)
Education (Years)	-0.083 (0.055)	-0.065 (0.055)
UK Citizen	-2.428 (1.996)	-2.561 (1.988)
ESS Round Fixed Effects	Included	Included
R-squared	0.036	0.046

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. The significant positive interaction effect for second-generation women (Model 2, p=0.006) reveals that the overall generational decline in trust is driven entirely by second-generation men.

APPENDIX A: ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

Appendix Table A.1: Main Results and Robustness Specifications

Variable	(1) Main MLM	(2) OLS Robust	(3) Ed $\geq$ 12 yrs	(4) No Outliers	(5) 3-Way Int	(6) Pooled OLS
Muslim	-0.175*** (0.018)	-0.296*** (0.034)	-0.363*** (0.034)	-0.82*** (0.19)	-1.01*** (0.31)	-0.94*** (0.27)
Higher Education	0.086*** (0.009)	0.073*** (0.010)	0.053*** (0.010)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)
Muslim $\times$ HigherEd	0.217* (0.037)**	0.217 (0.140) (ns)	0.275* (0.040)**	1.62*** (0.24)	1.60*** (0.37)	1.45*** (0.34)
Muslim $\times$ HigherEd $\times$ EconDiff	-	-	-	-	0.17 (0.45)	-
Female	-0.088*** (0.009)	-0.088*** (0.009)	-0.083*** (0.009)	-	-	-
Young Adult	-0.062*** (0.010)	-0.064*** (0.010)	-0.064*** (0.010)	-	-	-
Econ Diff	0.045*** (0.013)	0.046*** (0.013)	0.044*** (0.013)	-	-	-
Urban	-0.035** (0.011)	-0.036** (0.011)	-0.035** (0.011)	-	-	-
Wave Effects	Random	None	Random	None	None	Fixed

Note: Dependent Variable: Institutional Legitimacy Deficit (standardised). Standard errors in parentheses. Model (1): Linear mixed model with random intercepts for ESS wave. Model (2): OLS with heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors; loss of significance here ($p=0.122$) proves the credential reversal is highly sensitive to temporal/wave clustering. Model (3): Alternative education threshold (≥ 12 years). Model (4): Excludes influential observations (Cooks $D > 4/n$). Model (5): Tests three-way interaction with economic difficulty (n.s., $p = 0.71$). Model (6): Pooled OLS with ESS wave fixed effects..

Appendix Table A.2: Missing Data Patterns

Variable	Complete Cases	Missing	% Missing
Religion	18,314	0	0.0%
Trust in Parliament	17,892	422	2.3%
Trust in Legal System	17,901	413	2.3%
Trust in Police	17,923	391	2.1%
Age	18,098	216	1.2%
Education	18,314	0	0.0%
Discrimination	18,314	0	0.0%

Note: Missing data rates are low across all dependent and independent variables, considerably reducing concerns regarding sample selection bias.