



**Can population data anticipate
community tensions?**
Internal briefing by TCC
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Introduction

The unrest in Leicester last month took many by surprise. The city has a reputation as being a success story in terms of diversity – as the BBC subsequently described¹. The scenes of violence and intimidation – mostly involving clashes between young men of Hindu and Muslim backgrounds – caught many unawares. Why did they happen?

Commentator Sunny Hundal (who documents the Leicester events in detail)², is spot on when he argues that “The tensions in Leicester weren’t a failure of diversity and multiculturalism³.” But, as he goes on to point out, “Police forces also need to have better plans of action to understand and defuse such tensions.”

One element here is grasping where issues arise and why, using data to look at patterns and to understand community dynamics. This is clearly just part of the picture. Number-crunching alone will not strengthen social capital, and the initial catalyst is often so incidental that even the most sophisticated analyses would fail to predict subsequent tensions. (Who could have foreseen, a couple of ago, that a cricket match between India and Pakistan, played at a stadium in Dubai, would lead to the scenes witnessed in Leicester?)

Nevertheless, there is a place for science and data in looking at cohesion. It can help to identify places where greater community engagement could mitigate risks, where government interventions would bring the maximum benefit, and where tensions could most easily spill over.

At TCC we specialise in engagement around cohesion. To anticipate issues, we use an ethnocultural name recognition tool called Origins, supplemented by other forms of insight. The rest of this paper looks at what we can learn from recent events in Leicester, based on a data-driven, ‘birds eye view’ picture of this kind⁴.

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¹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-63009571>

² https://twitter.com/sunny_hundal/status/1571927657050415104?s=20&t=QVxmysuFF563MpFTeoT5pw7

³ <https://www.newstatesman.com/quickfire/2022/09/leicester-shows-hindu-nationalism-no-longer-confined-to-india>

⁴ We use 2019 data, which remains fairly up-to-date, but the exact numbers are available for 2022 with some further crunching, and are revised every three months

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/c0m2wr69355t>

⁶ For statistical reasons, we only look at this for places with significant non-WB populations.

'Sites of unrest' in Leicester

We have started off by looking at the exact geographical sites of the unrest in Leicester. These tended to centre upon 2-3 arterial roads in the northeast of the city. To do this, we have analysed the BBC News coverage of the riots⁵, picking out the key streets and neighbourhoods mentioned. This includes the areas where clashes occurred with police, the place where a faith building was vandalised, and the streets where key perpetrators were subsequently found to have come from.

We have looked at this using Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs). These are geographical units with about 1,700 adult residents, developed by the Office of National Statistics. There are 32,844 of them in England, and we have picked out 27 in Leicester which were at or near the sites of violence and unrest. The total population of these 27 LSOAs is just under 49,000 adult residents.

Using some key data points we have set out, in the comparison table below, what we know about these 27 LSOAs taken together – comparing the average profile for these areas to the averages for all English LSOAs.

	Sites of unrest in Leicester (27 LSOAs)	UK as a whole (32,844 LSOAs)
Average % not of Anglo-Saxon or Celtic heritage – i.e. not white British (non-WB)	82.5%	19%
Average diversity score	71.5	91.2*
Average % with Hindu Indian heritage	38.7%	1.6%
Average % with heritage from Pakistan and Muslim countries neighbouring Pakistan	20.0%	3.0%
Average score for income deprivation (higher = more deprived)	0.21	0.13
Average score for educational deprivation (higher = more deprived)	42.35	21.69
Average % aged 44 and under	64.0%	54.6%

*Compared to 6,503 LSOAs where the non-WB population is over 30%

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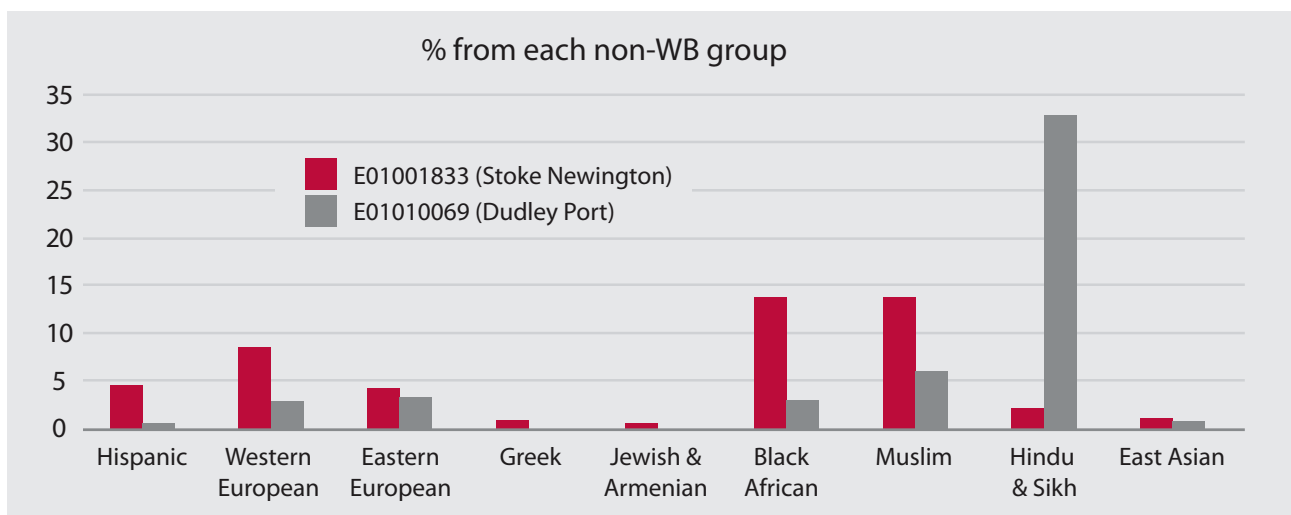
The table shows that the sites of the unrest in Leicester are very specific sorts of places, in demographic terms. Firstly, the populations of these areas are much, much more diverse than the average English neighbourhood. If you measure ‘diversity’ simply on the basis of the size of the non-WB population, then 20 of Leicester’s 27 sites of unrest are among the 1% most diverse places in the country.

However, the nature of diversity is distinct in these parts of Leicester – as the metric for ‘Average diversity score’ shows. This measures diversity among non-WB groups, by deducing the likelihood that two individuals from non-WB backgrounds come from different ethnicities⁶.

‘Multi-diverse’ places (those with higher diversity scores) have a range of different communities within their non-WB populations. In ‘uni-diverse’ areas (places with lower scores), the non-WB population comes from one or two much larger ethnic or national groups. Both ‘multi-diverse’ and ‘uni-diverse’ areas may be ‘diverse’ in the colloquial sense – in that they have large non-WB populations. But the patterns of settlement are quite different.

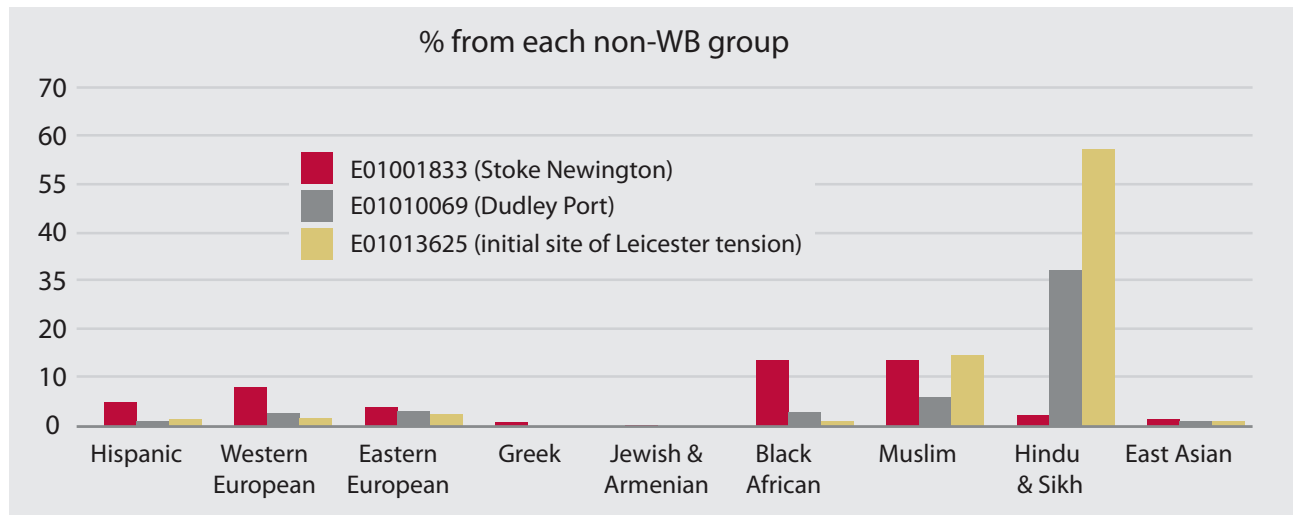
By way of an example, below is a chart showing two fairly randomly chosen LSOAs in other parts of the country. One neighbourhood, in the Stoke Newington area of Hackney, is 51% non-WB, with a diversity score of 94.6 – making it very ‘multi-diverse’. The non-WB population comes from Hispanic, East European, Black African/ Caribbean and Muslim backgrounds, and there are small East European, Hindu, Jewish and Greek populations too.

The other LSOA, in the Dudley Port area of Sandwell, has exactly the same size of non-WB population (51%). But this is derived primarily from one primary Origins category – Hindu and Sikh – which is double the size of all the other non-WB groups put together. Hence this LSOA has a diversity score of 71.5, which we would describe as ‘uni-diverse’.



Leicester's diversity – and particularly that in the areas where the unrest unfolded – is very much at the uni-diverse end of things (in other words, it is more like Dudley Port). The junction where the initial disturbance took place, for example, is the 28th most uni-diverse LSOA of all 32,844 in England, with a score of 68.9.

The chart below is an update of the first chart, but with this initial site of the tension included.



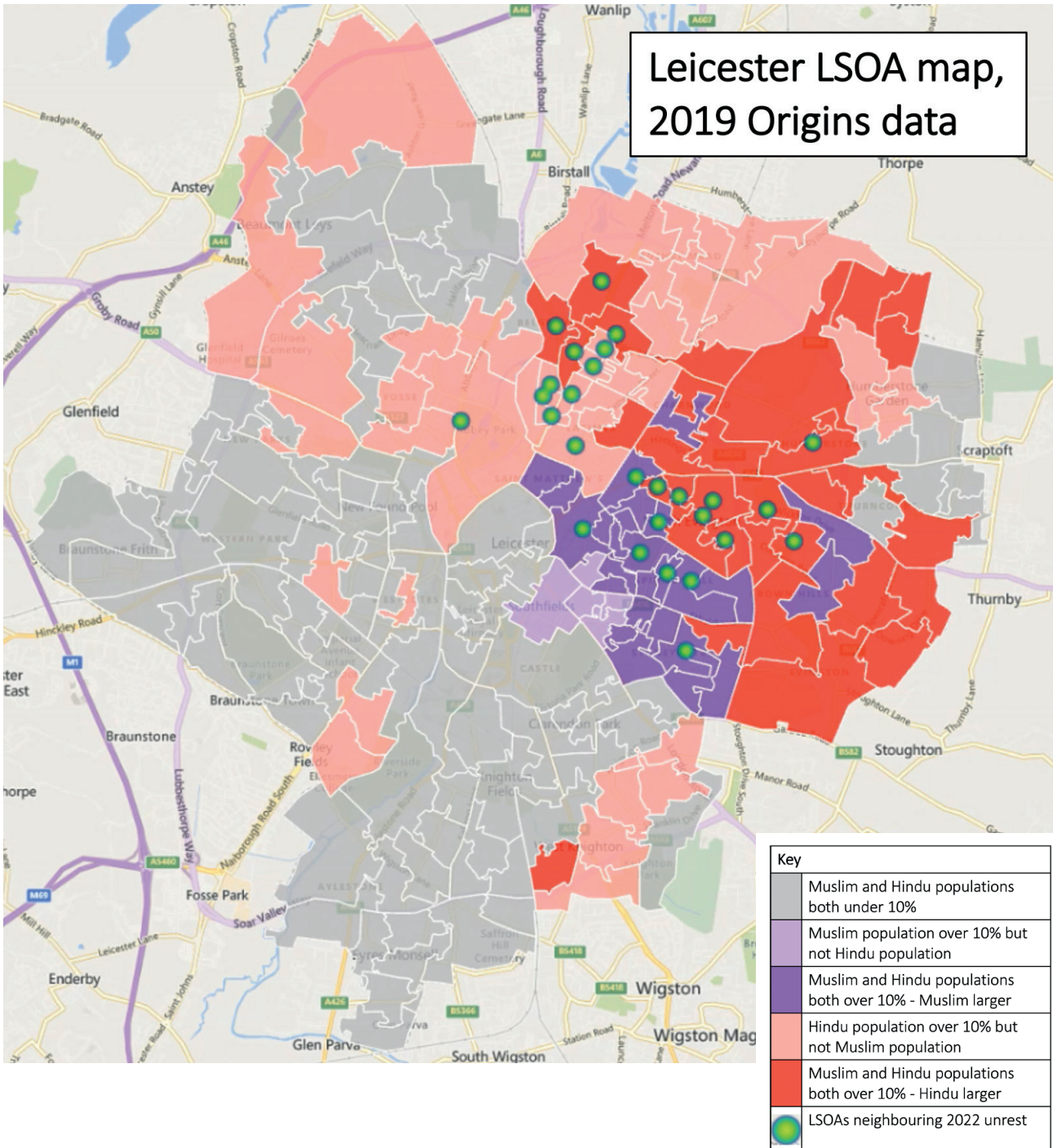
The next two rows on the comparison table shed further light on this. As we can see, amongst the 27 sites of tension the average Hindu Indian population is 39% and the average Muslim population is 20% – well above the English average, in both cases. Less than 2% are of black African or Caribbean heritage and less than 3% are from Eastern European backgrounds.

Indeed, the 27 sites of unrest include the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 8th and 10th largest Hindu populations among all LSOAs in England. In eight of the 27, the Hindu Indian population is bigger than all other groups combined, including WB.

However, the 27 sites of unrest also include some of the country's largest Muslim heritage populations (we have deduced this based on those from Pakistan, Kashmir and other majority Muslim countries bordering India to the west). 24 of the 27 sites of unrest are in the top 10% of all English LSOAs, in terms of the proportions from Pakistani Muslim backgrounds.

Hence, the neighbourhoods we have termed 'sites of unrest' are particular, in that most have both large Hindu Indian minorities and large minorities from Pakistan and other Muslim nations, with very few other minority communities beyond this. Among most of the 27 areas – although not all – the Hindu Indian population is the larger of the two.

The map below illustrates the makeup of Leicester as a whole, looking at the size of these two groups. It shows areas with significant populations (10% or more) of Pakistani Muslim heritage, areas with similarly significant populations of Hindu Indian heritage, and areas with significant populations of both. Among those with both, we have marked in dark purple and dark red respectively which is larger. We have also mapped the LSOAs which witnessed unrest, or which directly neighboured those that did.



*Muslim = Pakistani, Kashmiri, Other Muslim
 **Hindu = Hindu Indian

As we can see, the September 2022 riots took place in parts of Leicester where both populations were large. In particular, many of the 27 sites were situated on a key fault line: between areas where both groups are above 10% with the Hindu Indian population larger, and those that are above 10% but with the Pakistani Muslim population larger.

It may be worth looking in future at places where these fault-lines exist, between a) two uni-diverse areas with different ethno-cultural communities comprising the largest groups, or b) between a uni-diverse area and one which is overwhelmingly WB.

With all of this said, it is worth emphasising that ethnicity is only part of the picture here. As Hundal points out, "Gangs of men looking for trouble and attention is a story that's as old as society itself." The socio-economic and demographic factors in the sites of unrest amplified the likelihood of this happening. Twelve of the 27 LSOAs are in the most deprived quintile in terms of income and poverty. And 20 of the 27 are in the most deprived quintile for lack of educational opportunities⁷.

Added to this, the Leicester sites of unrest are also disproportionately young. All but two have larger than average under-45 populations. In one of the neighbourhoods – around Green Lane Road, where many of the photos of rioting were taken – 72% of the population is 44 or under. This compares to a national LSOA average of 55%⁸.

Demography is not destiny. But our analysis of the 27 sites of unrest suggests it is not a coincidence that these tensions happened where they did. These were super-diverse neighbourhoods, but with that diversity almost entirely comprising two groups. Many of the LSOAs we looked at had large Hindu Indian majorities and significant Pakistani Muslim minorities – although in some cases this was reversed.

Added to this, these were places with a comparative lack of economic opportunities, and with disproportionately young populations – often in low-skilled jobs or looking for work. These conditions accentuate the risk of young men becoming drawn into tensions. Economic opportunities and political engagement are needed, to counter this.

Through an exercise like the above, we can therefore start to understand the predictive power of data, in anticipating issues for cohesion and integration.

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⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019> (File 4)

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/lowersuperoutputareamidyearpopulationestimatesnationalstatistics>

What this means for other areas?

It seems unlikely that the unrest in Leicester will flare up again in exactly the same way elsewhere, now that so much time has passed.

However, an analysis like the above remains useful. By looking at the conditions which facilitated the Leicester riots, decision-makers can forecast other areas where engagement would help to strengthen ties between Muslim and Hindu populations. And, should further unrest occur, national and local government can more quickly anticipate where extra engagement and resources are needed.

Likewise, the on-the-ground management of the events in Leicester will have brought new learnings, for government agencies, local authorities and community groups. The more that Leicester can share best practice with demographically similar places, the better. With this in mind, we have identified a list of 156 LSOAs across England (including those in Leicester) which contain the following characteristics:

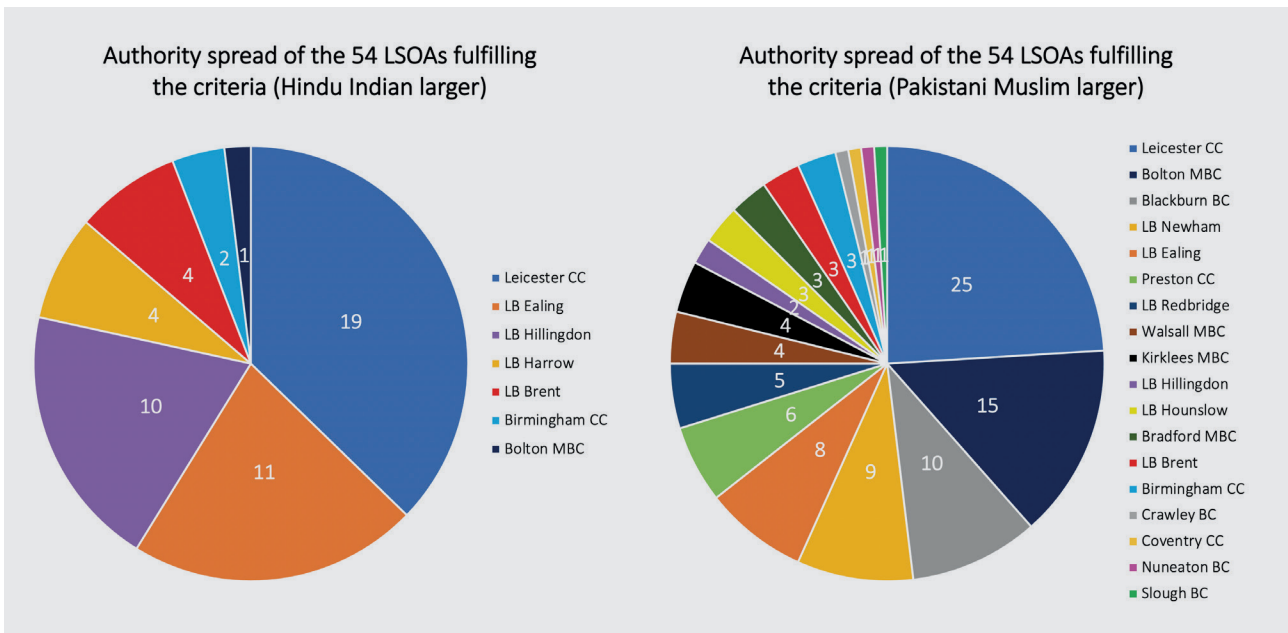
- Pakistani Muslim and Hindu Indian populations both comprise at least 10% of population;
- Below 90 for diversity score (i.e uni-diverse);
- A population which is younger than the average English area;
- In the top half of English areas for income deprivation and skills deprivation.

Among 54 of these 156 LSOAs, the Hindu Indian population is larger, and among 110 the Pakistani Muslim population is larger. The two pie charts on the next page show which local authorities these LSOAs are situated in. The one on the left shows those where the Hindu Indian communities are larger than Pakistani Muslim communities, and the one on the right shows those where the reverse is true.

(There is a question here about whether areas where the Pakistani Muslim population is the larger of the two feature the same types of cohesion risk as those where it is the smaller. Sunny Hundal's assessment of the Leicester unrest – which describes Hindu Nationalism as a catalyst and instigator for the tensions – implies not. But it is difficult, without a better understanding of the dynamics in Leicester, to know for sure).

A key takeaway from this is that north east Leicester is relatively unique, in having the particular set of conditions it does. Of the 156 LSOAs which have these conditions, 44 are in Leicester. If you look only at the majority-Hindu Indian LSOAs (in the left pie chart), then just 35 communities with the same context exist in the whole of the rest of the country – most of them in outer west London.

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Birmingham, for instance, is a huge, super-diverse city, where we might expect similar dynamics. Yet it only has a handful of neighbourhoods which fulfil our criteria. (Hence, perhaps, why young men from Birmingham were reportedly travelling to Leicester last month and participating in the riots as they unfolded).⁹

It is also worth emphasising that the criteria used above are very tight. By relaxing them – or else by removing some of the filters altogether – we get a larger range of areas.

The bar chart on the following page, for example, shows the council distribution of LSOAs which do not have the same ethnocultural characteristics, but which fulfil the social and demographic factors more exactly. They have the following conditions:

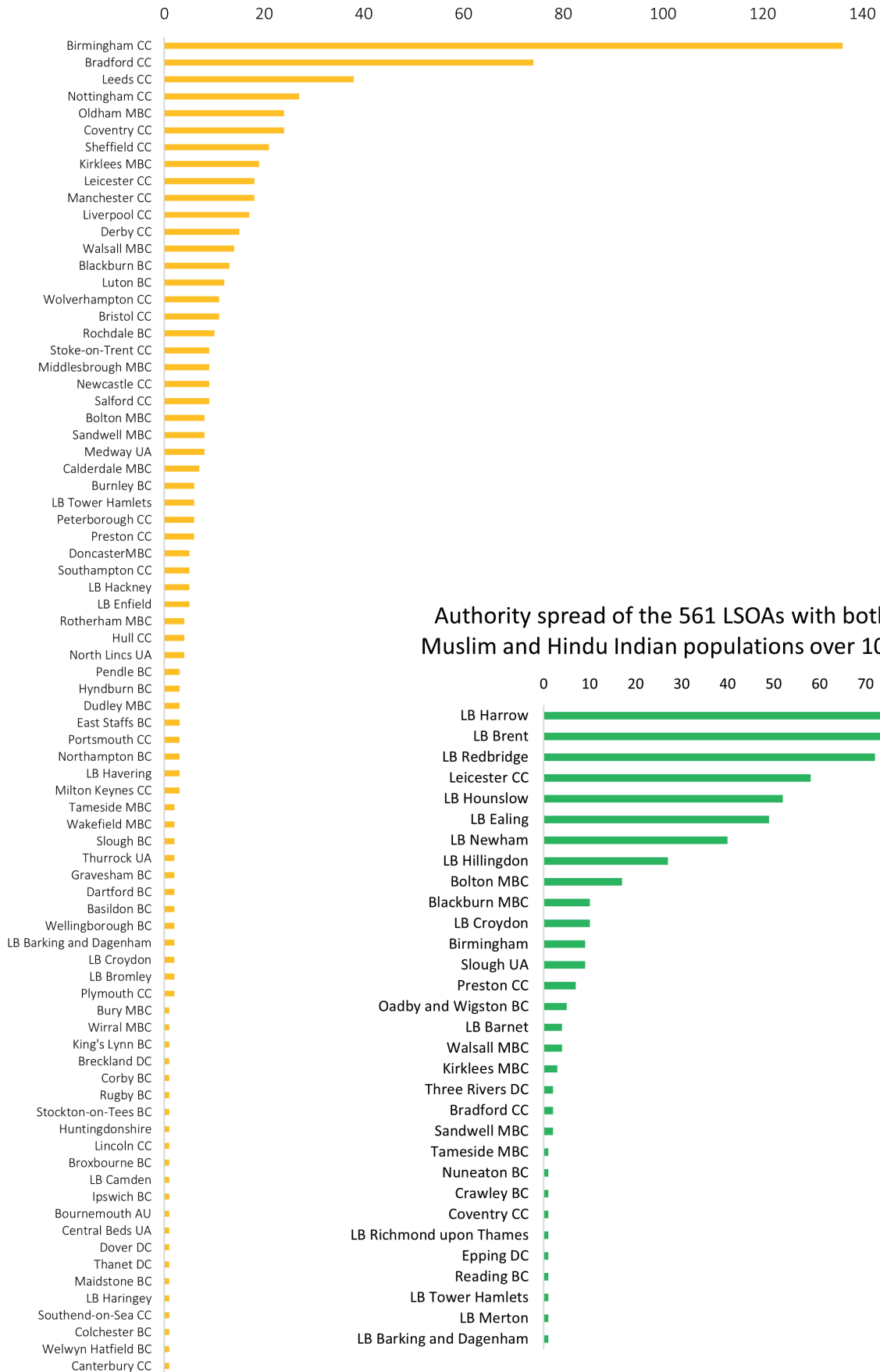
- Top fifth of English areas for income deprivation;
- Top fifth of English areas for educational deprivation;
- Over 70% of the population below the age of 45;
- Above average percentage which is non-WB.

695 neighbourhoods fulfil these criteria. They share with north east Leicester some of the economic and demographic conditions under which, we might surmise, street movements of young men can more easily mobilise around cultural issues.

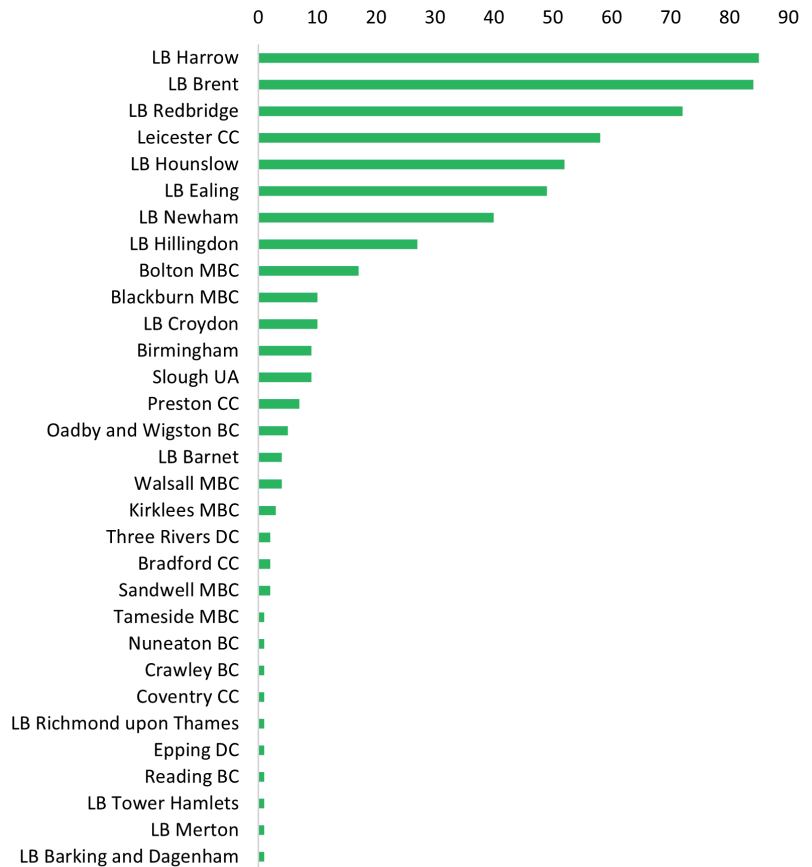
The inset chart, meanwhile, looks in isolation at ethnocultural questions. It shows the local authority spread of places where both Hindu Indian and Pakistani Muslim populations are over 10%, but does not look at the other socio-economic factors.

⁹ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-62946146>

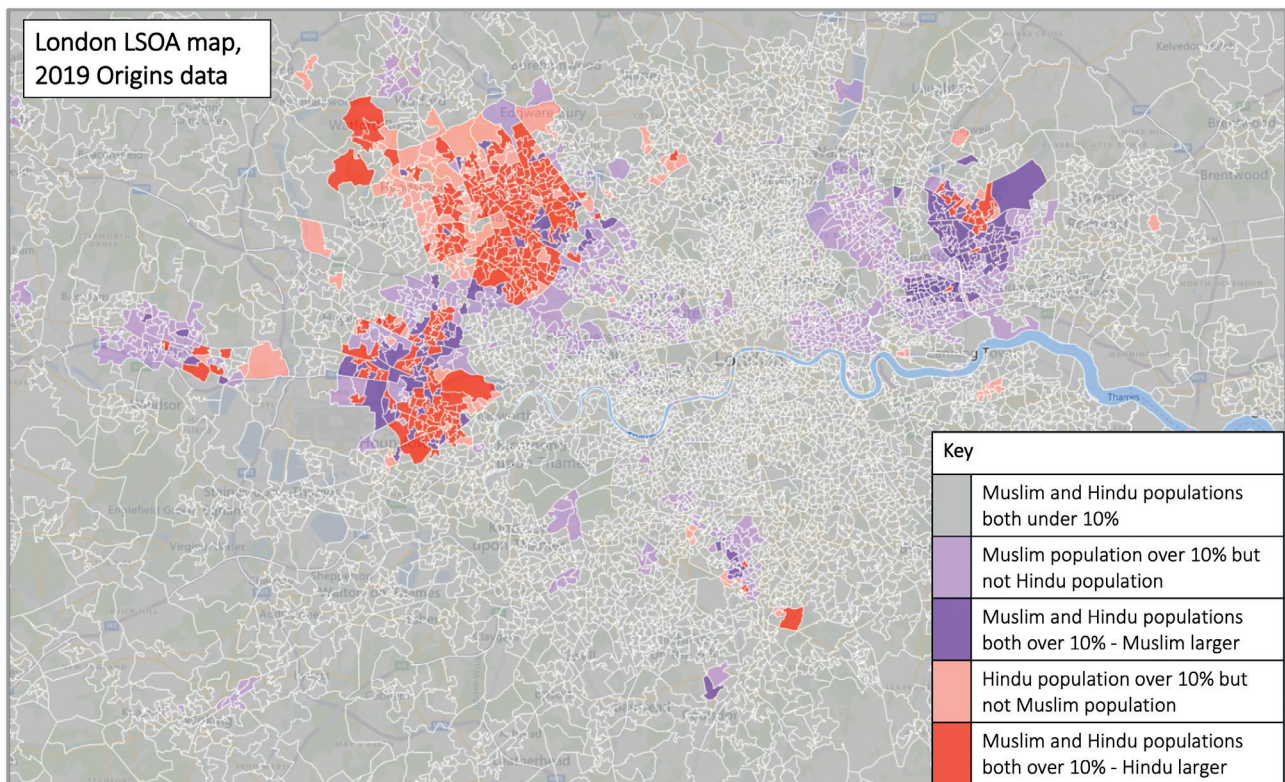
Authority spread of the 695 LSOAs fulfilling the social/demographic criteria



Authority spread of the 561 LSOAs with both Muslim and Hindu Indian populations over 10%



The map below shows how these areas (i.e those with large Pakistani Muslim and Hindu populations) are distributed across London – the main area, after Leicester, to have very high concentrations of both groups. The format is the same as the previous one of Leicester and we can see that the west London boroughs of Ealing, Brent, Harrow, Hounslow and Hillingdon – as well as Slough, just outside London, and Redbridge to the east – figure prominently. The point upon which many of these LSOAs differ from the sites of unrest in Leicester is that they are less deprived and less young, and are not so ‘uni-diverse’.



*Muslim = Pakistani, Kashmiri, Other Muslim
 **Hindu = Hindu Indian

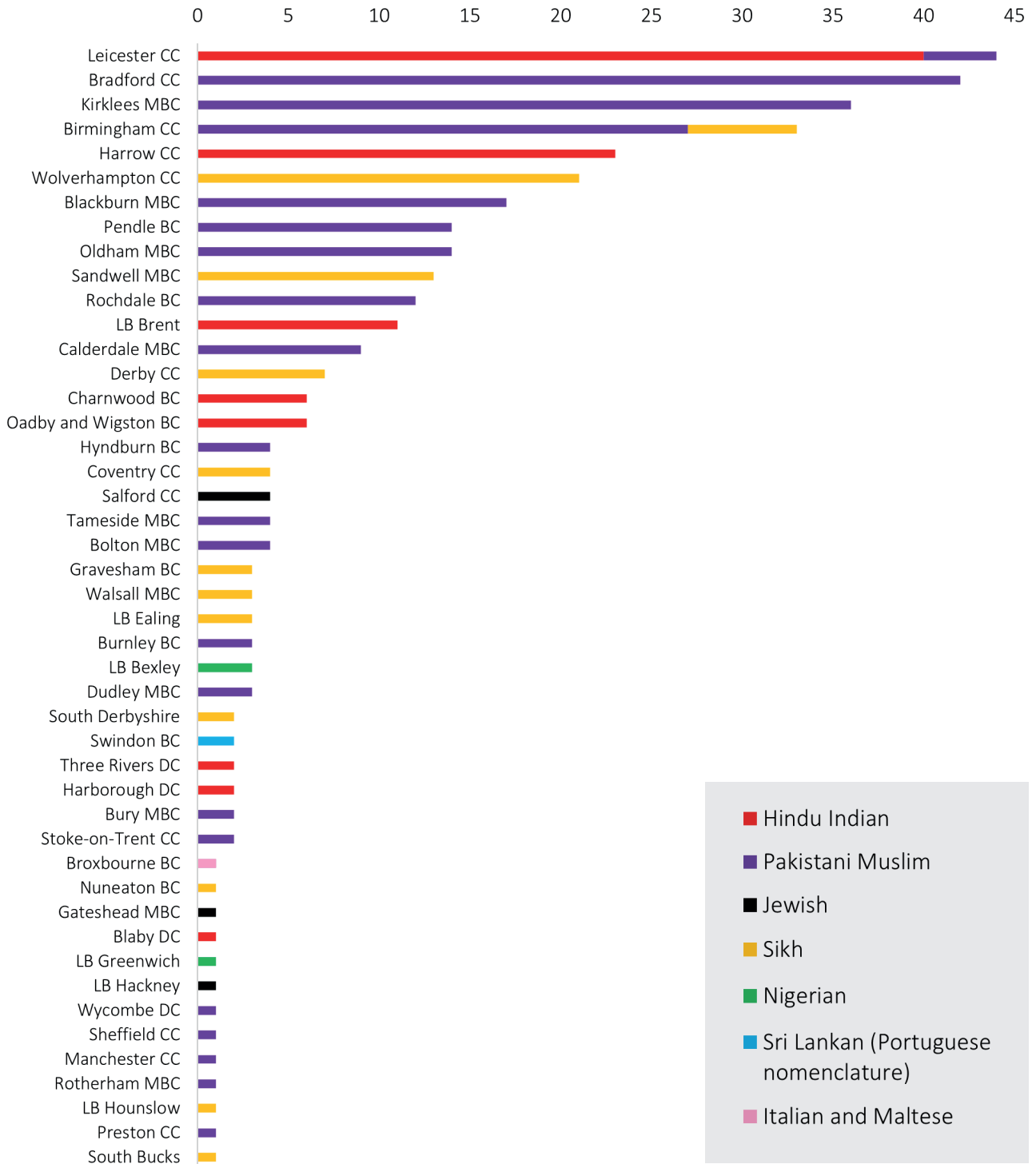
Lastly, it is worth looking in isolation at diversity scores. The question of whether areas are multi-diverse or uni-diverse is under-discussed in debates about cohesion. And there is a risk that faulty ideas underpin any conversation that occurs. For instance, it is sometimes assumed that multi-diverse areas are preferable to uni-diverse ones – rather than simply being different.

The reality is that multi-diverse communities come with one set of challenges and uni-diverse ones come with another. The former can allow smaller minorities to fall through the gaps. But the latter sometimes see less integration between minorities, as groups are larger and more internally self-sufficient.

The following chart again shows local authority makeup, this time for very uni-diverse LSOAs – those with scores below 80. There are 371 of these, and council areas in Lancashire, West Yorkshire, Leicestershire and the West Midlands are very heavily represented.

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Authority spread of the 371 most uni-diverse LSOAs (only those over 30% non-WB, diversity scores under 80)



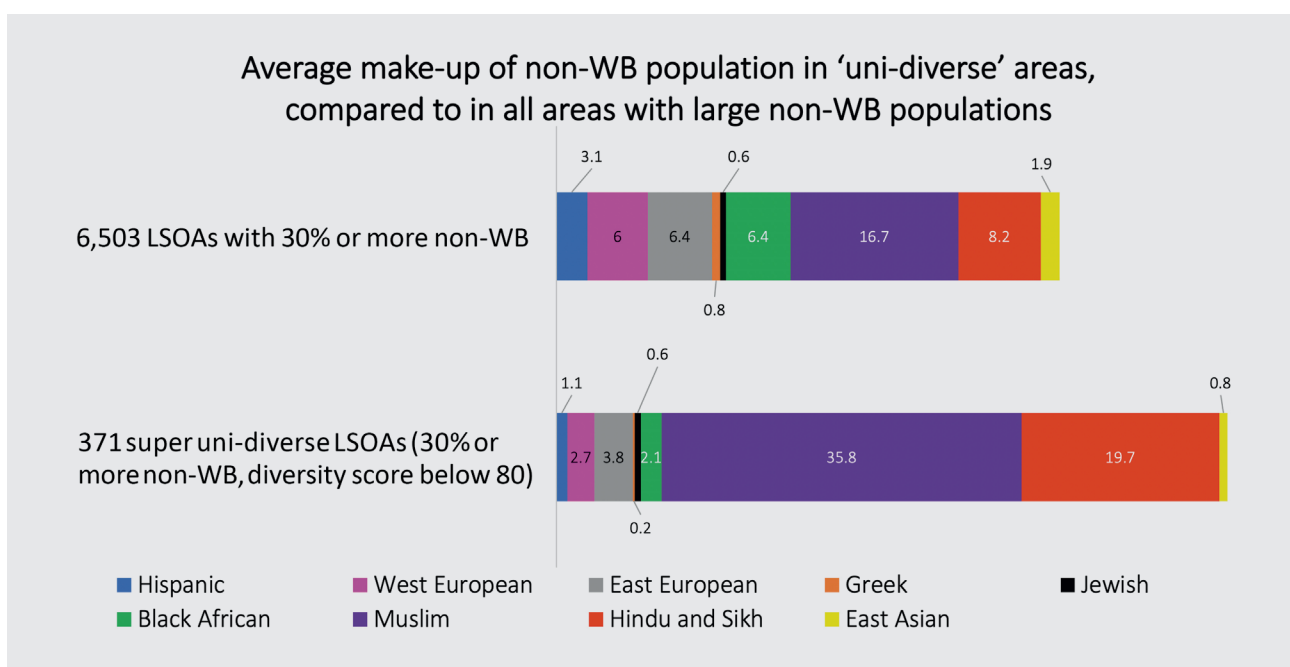
As well as showing the number of these super uni-diverse LSOAs in different council areas, the chart also shows the largest non-WB groups across the 371 areas. As we can see, south Asian groups are by far the largest non-WB group in the majority of these neighbourhoods. See, for example, the large Hindu Indian heritage population in Charnwood, Leicestershire, the large Sikh heritage population in Wolverhampton, and the large Pakistani Muslim heritage population in Pendle, Lancashire.

The stacked chart below reiterates this. The top stack shows the average size of the respective non-WB populations, across all LSOAs which are 'diverse' in a colloquial sense. That is: across the 6,503 English neighbourhoods where at least 30% of residents are non-WB. The latter stack, meanwhile, shows the same thing, but just in the 371 LSOAs which we term super uni-diverse (i.e. places with at least 30% non-WB residents and a diversity score below 80).

This again shows that the most uni-diverse parts of the country are disproportionately likely to have large south Asian populations. And these non-WB populations are likely to be much larger in general. Compared to south Asian groups, Hispanic, East European, Black African and East Asian communities are far less geographically concentrated, and are less likely to settle in places where others from the same background are already living. The reasons for this are geographically specific in many cases. But the role of social infrastructure and faith networks may be a factor.

Given widespread issues like Islamophobia, it is important that channels are open between the council and community leaders, so that large Asian communities in uni-diverse areas are given tailored services and support.

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Conclusions

Using data is highly limited in some ways, in that it can never show the nuances of different community dynamics, nor the unique local context which causes flashpoints to occur.

There are a range of local techniques which we at TCC deploy, for tackling tensions and strengthening cohesion in vulnerable areas, and these are grounded in the principles of community engagement rather than of data analysis. They include the development of place-based narratives and of strong peer-to-peer networks.

Nevertheless, in the light of the events in Leicester, it is worth decision-makers thinking seriously about how data tools like Origins can anticipate risks. This will enable them to provide the right types of support in the right sorts of places, so that communities are less likely to be taken unawares by flashpoints.

Contacts us

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