



BRIEFING

'Madrassas' in the British media

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Introduction

The debate around faith schools in the UK has always been polarised. While supporters of faith schools point to their strong academic results and their potential to promote diversity and tolerance, there remains considerable public and media suspicion about the social impacts that these schools may be having, with critics focusing on the ways in which they may be segregating young people along religious and ethnic lines. This concern is even more pronounced in relation to supplementary faith schools, since most of these operate in the independent sector and are therefore not subject to the same oversight as state-funded educational institutions. Moreover, since the events of 9/11 in the United States and 7/7 in London, Muslim supplementary schools or 'madrassas' have come under additional scrutiny for the role that they may be suspected to play in facilitating the radicalisation of young Muslims towards violent extremism.

Generally, these fears are not based on rigorous research but rather on intermittent reporting and speculation in the media. This leads to a poor understanding amongst policymakers and the wider public about how many madrassas exist, how they are funded and governed, and what their impact on the children who attend them may be. There is also an unhelpful lack of clarity about the important distinctions between mainstream Muslim faith schools, religious seminaries (known as *darul uloom*) and Muslim supplementary schools or madrassas.

Having identified these gaps, ippr's project aims to provide a more accurate and extensive evidence base on madrassas, seeking to identify where they are performing well, where they could improve and how they can be supported to deliver positive outcomes for the children and communities they serve. This briefing is concerned with madrassas specifically rather than mainstream faith schools or seminaries.

While the final report of this research will not be available until September 2011, we present here preliminary findings based on a review of the available literature and an extensive analysis of the way that madrassas have been portrayed by national and local media over the past decade.

What do we mean by 'madrassas'?

There is no single definition of a madrassa. In Arabic, the term refers to all kinds of schools and does not differentiate between those that are secular and those that are religious. In the UK context, however, the word is most often used to refer to schools that have an Islamic frame of reference and that operate outside of the mainstream educational system. Various sources have described them as 'unofficial Islamic schools' (Hayer 2009), 'mosque schools' (MPGB 2006) and 'evening and weekend classes intended to provide Muslim children with additional teaching in the Qur'an ... and related Islamic topics, including some instruction in Arabic' (MacEoin 2009).

A more comprehensive definition from Rashid, Latif and Begum (2006) characterises madrassas as: 'supplementary schools for the Muslim community ... set up to deliver Islamic education in order to preserve religious, cultural and linguistic identities. They particularly deal with learning of the Quran. Muslim supplementary schools operate either from local mosques or are set up independently for the sole purpose of teaching the Quran and Islam... Financial income for the schools is mainly generated through fees, funding and, mostly, donations from the local community.'

In general, Muslim youths who attend madrassas are aged from about four or five to 13 or 14 (attendance tends to drop off after this due to the increased pressures created by schoolwork and exams). Most of these students will go to community or church primary and secondary schools during the daytime and then attend madrassas for up to two hours every night in order to learn more about their religion (OSI 2005). This includes instruction in Arabic for the purpose of being able to recite the Qur'an, as well as teaching about the principles and practices of Islam. However, the types of classes offered in madrassas vary widely, from information on the Islamic faith to mother-tongue language instruction (in Urdu or Bengali for example) to assistance with homework or other basic skills. Some organisations act more like youth clubs and provide structured opportunities for Muslim children to socialise together (BMCS 2010).

The literature is vague on the question of how madrassas are funded. While media reports often raise concerns about the prospect of madrassas being paid for from public funds (see for example Toynbee 2010), it is very unlikely that these schools (and particularly those that do not engage

with elements of the national curriculum) receive official funding of this kind. Instead – much like independent Muslim schools – most receive funding from a combination of sources, including from mosques, other private funders and fees or voluntary contributions from parents (OSI 2005).

How many madrassas exist in the UK?

The Muslim Council of Britain has suggested that three main types of madrassa currently exist in the UK (Hayer 2009).

- The first and largest group comprises madrassas attached to mosques – one survey suggests that as many as 94 per cent of mosques in England and Wales are currently providing some kind of education for young people (Charity Commission 2009).
- The second kind of madrassa is run by volunteers who teach Islamic classes in hired out community centres or school halls.
- The third is informal classes held in people's homes.

While there is no firm data on either the number of madrassas in the UK or the number of young Muslims that attends them, various reports have tried to estimate these figures. A 2006 report by the Muslim Parliament of Great Britain stated that there were around 700 madrassas in Britain teaching lessons about basic Islam to pupils of school-going age in after-school hours, and that some of these were attended by more than 500 pupils (MPGB 2006). A more recent estimate suggested that there were approximately 2,000 madrassas in the UK that were known to local councils and where staff had undergone the proper checks and procedures to allow them to work with children in a safe environment (Eason 2009). The *Sunday Times* suggests that 200,000 children in Britain attend madrassas (Siddiqui 2008).

Some councils have also tried to quantify the number of students in their area likely to be attending madrassas: for example, a briefing by Leicester City Council indicates that as many as 80–90 per cent of Muslim students attend local madrassas (Leicester City Council 2008). However, none of these estimates of the number of madrassas or number of attending students is based on any rigorous research that would reliably indicate it is close to the actual number.

How has the government engaged with madrassas?

Since so many madrassas in the UK operate privately and are not subject to public oversight, the government has a fairly limited ability to regulate the way in which they are run. However, the issue has still received some limited domestic policy attention in light of concern about how these schools are managed and what is being taught in them. For example, a number of reports have been commissioned to improve understanding of supplementary education in general, and Muslim schooling in particular (Maylor et al 2010, DCLG 2010). The government has also funded various initiatives that seek to raise the attainment of Muslim pupils in both mainstream and supplementary schools, to build bridges between madrassas and other local schools and organisations, and to promote better practice within madrassas. This latter goal has been a particular focus for councils in areas with large Muslim populations – Kirklees Council, for example, works with local mosques and madrassas to train staff, volunteers and trustees in a range of key skills and competencies.

In 2007, the Department for Education and Skills gave funding to the Madrassa Children's Literacy Project run by QED-UK, a programme designed to create a more sustained dialogue between madrassas and mainstream schools, governors, staff, parents and children in order to foster understanding between different communities and to improve levels of literacy and overall educational attainment for 2,250 ethnic minority pupils (QED 2008). In 2009, an 'Open Madrasah Network' was developed by Bradford Council and funded for three years by the Yorkshire Forward regional development agency. This pilot programme, which may be rolled out in other parts of the country if it proves successful, pays local qualified teachers to provide booster classes for 'borderline' primary and GCSE students in four madrassas in the Bradford area. It also gives pupils the opportunity to study for GCSEs in Arabic, Urdu and Religious Education (Stewart 2009).

The government has also funded projects to improve the way in which citizenship is taught by teachers in Muslim schools and madrassas. One such programme is the Islam and Citizenship Education Project (ICE), which was created in 2009 by the Bradford Council of Mosques and developed in partnership with the Schools and Development Support Agency, the Department

for Communities and Local Government and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. It was trialled in around 30 madrassas in London, Bristol, Bradford, Kirklees, Leicester, Oldham and Rochdale, and has recently been rolled out to another 300 Muslim schools and madrassas across the country. ICE aims to challenge the idea that there is any tension between being a good citizen and a good Muslim, and uses class discussions, roleplay and written exercises to teach children about tolerance and respect, and about how to play a constructive role in their schools and broader communities (ICE 2009).

In general, government initiatives to engage with or support madrassas remain fragmented and often reactive to either child protection or security concerns. This reinforces the need for a more systematic and sustainable approach to engaging with these institutions, one which is based on robust evidence rather than reaction to media coverage.

Filling the knowledge gap: the role of the media

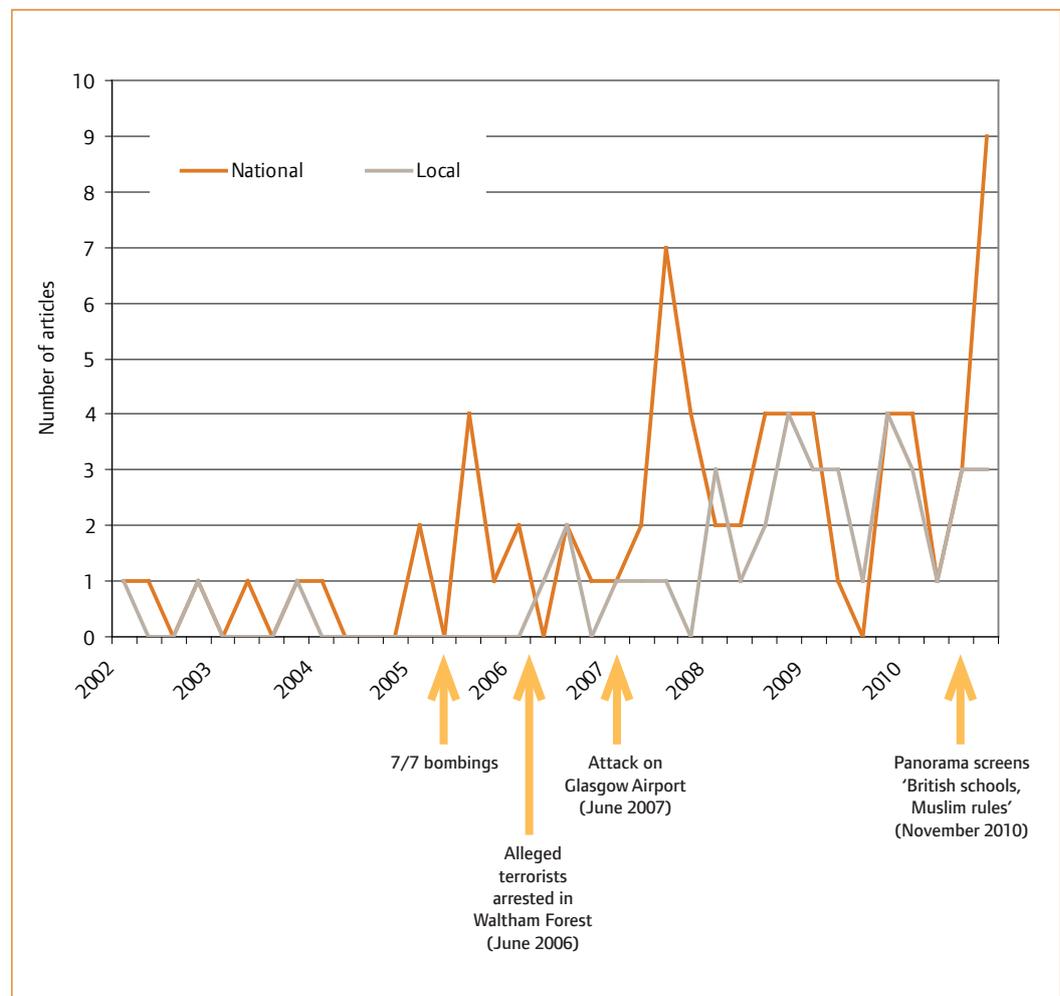
The strongly negative headlines generated by events such as 9/11 and 7/7 have changed the way that Muslims and Islam are discussed in the press. Madrassas (particularly those in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan) are now frequently mentioned in the context of debates about radicalisation and extremism, and it is likely that this has had an important impact on the way that they are perceived by policymakers and in communities in Britain.

The following section offers a preliminary analysis of the way madrassas have been represented publicly in the UK, at both the national and local levels. The newspaper articles for analysis were sourced online,¹ covering the period 2001–10. Articles captured by this analysis were those that referred directly to madrassas in the UK, although this was not necessarily the main focus of the article. This process generated a pool of 111 articles (70 national and 41 local).

Our analysis reveals that some newspapers have been particularly active in covering news around madrassas. Nationally, *The Times*, *Guardian*, *Daily Mail* and *Telegraph* have included more articles referring to madrassas in the UK than other news sources. Locally, there have been greater levels of coverage in the *Yorkshire Post*, the Bradford-based *Telegraph and Argus* and the London-based *Evening Standard*.

The following chart shows the frequency of articles found relating to madrassas in each quarter from the end of 2001 to the present date.

Figure 1
Articles published nationally and locally, by quarter



¹ The following search terms were used to locate the relevant articles for analysis: madrassas, madrassa, madrasa, madrassah, madrasah; in the UK, in Leicester, in Bradford and in London; Muslim supplementary schools, Ofsted Muslim Schools, Muslim faith schools, Panorama.

At the national level, there is a peak in the third quarter of 2005, a significant peak in the third quarter of 2007, and then a consistently moderate level for the remaining period, with a small dip in 2009. In the local analysis the growth in the frequency of articles mentioning madrassas is more marked over time, although this may signal that these newspapers have introduced online articles more recently. Peaks can be identified in 2008, at the end of 2009 and at the end of 2010.

Some of the events noted in the graph may explain the peaks in articles covering madrassas. Around the time of the 7/7 bombings in 2005 there was a clear peak in national media coverage and again in the case of the attacks on Glasgow Airport in 2007. Towards the end of 2010, the *Panorama* show 'British Schools, Islamic Rules' corresponded with another peak in coverage. Although it is not clear that these events led directly to the articles in question, it could at least be argued that they raised the media profile of madrassas.

There were some common storylines that ran through many of the articles.

- **Child abuse and child protection:** Twenty of the articles concerned events occurring around the abuse and protection of children. The first such story surfaced in 2002, when an MP claimed she had evidence of abuse occurring in madrassas within the Keighley area. The majority of such stories then occur after 2007 and they appear consistently from this point on.
- **Introducing citizenship classes in madrassas:** Thirteen articles covered the introduction of citizenship classes in madrassas, which was one of a number of measures introduced by the previous government in 2006 aimed at tackling extremism. The stories around this were framed in different ways, with some emphasising the positive aspects of the proposals and others focusing on the more negative conditions that led to the proposals being made in the first place.
- **Educational impact of attending a madrassa:** Fifteen articles highlighted the pressure put on children as a result of attending both a mainstream school and a supplementary school. Others mentioned the risk of getting the balance wrong between activities based on faith and other educational activities. While some articles took a more positive view of madrassas and documented cases where they improved the grades of pupils or helped with their development, most of these articles ran in local rather than national newspapers.
- **Community relations, cohesion and conflict:** Seventeen articles commented on the impact of madrassas on community relations, in both positive and negative ways. Some emphasised the isolating effect they can have on pupils who attend them, while others described them as having the potential to build greater cohesion within British communities, for example by building partnerships with mainstream schools.
- **Links to extremism and communicating anti-western messages:** Thirty-four of the articles related to the broader theme of extremism and the risk that Muslim children may be radicalised towards violent extremism through attending madrassas. These included one article about convicted terrorist Richard Reid, linking 'rogue' Islamic weekend schools to the indoctrination of young Muslims. Fewer emphasised the use of madrassas to prevent extremism.

Assessing the news story

As shown in Figure 1, the number of articles on madrassas has increased since 2002, with 11 times more articles being found in 2010 than in 2002. Although this increase could be partly attributed to the increase in newspapers publishing online, the events of 7/7 have also drawn more attention to Muslim communities and institutions in general.

Each article has been analysed to assess whether it portrays madrassas in a positive, negative, or objective way. This categorisation, which bears a degree of subjectivity, considers each article by reference to:

- Choice of headline, its wording and how it frames the story: Headlines that used more emotive language or apparently sought to provoke anger or another negative reaction were deemed to be more negative. Those that ran with more factual headlines were seen as being objective, and those that used language reflecting more constructive aspects of madrassas were deemed to be more positive.
- Topic and narrative of the story: Where there was a narrative that presented only negative aspects of madrassas, the article was deemed to be negative.

The following pie charts show the results of this analysis for both national and local articles.

Figure 2
Categorisation
of headlines,
national articles

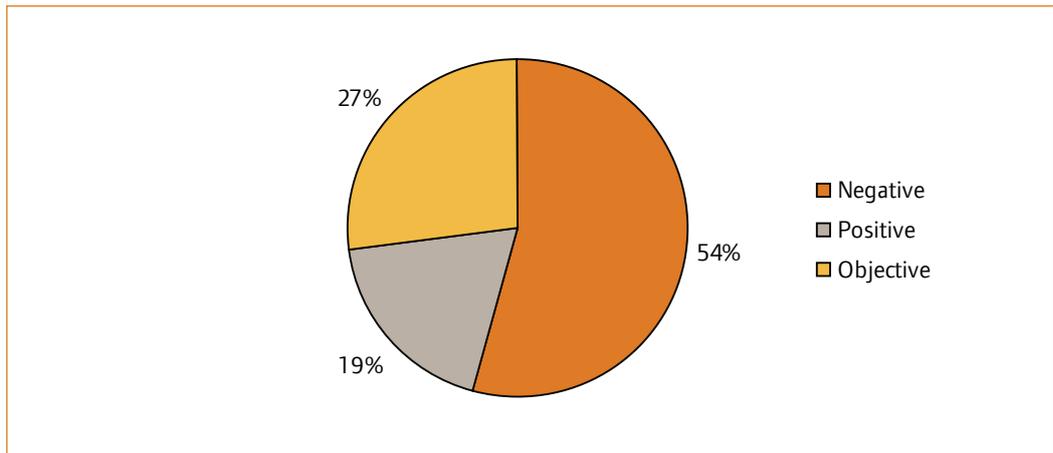
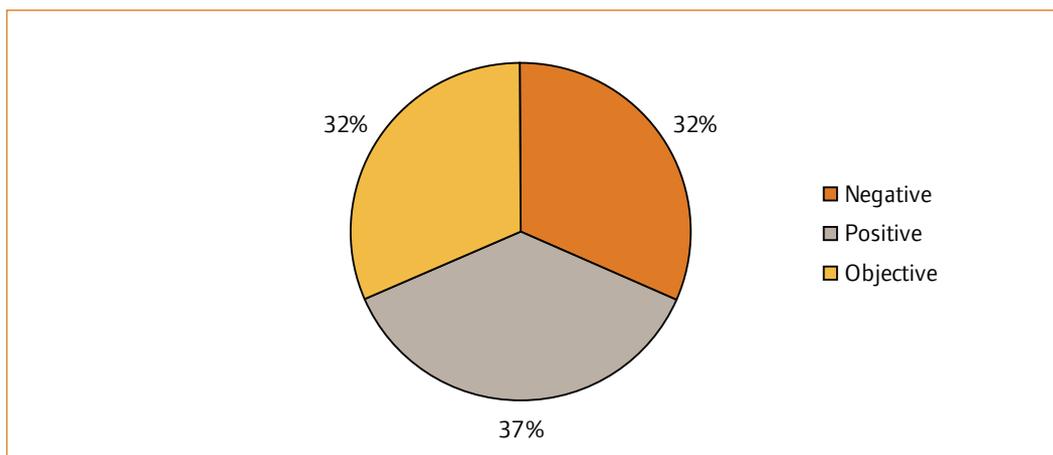


Table 1
Categorisation
of headlines:
national articles²

	Published articles				Proportion of published articles		
	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.	Total	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.
BBC News	3	3	2	8	38%	38%	25%
Daily Express	4	0	0	4	100%	0%	0%
Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday	7	1	0	8	88%	13%	0%
Guardian	4	1	4	9	44%	11%	44%
Independent	1	1	0	2	50%	50%	0%
Telegraph	6	0	4	10	60%	0%	40%
The Times and Sunday Times	8	5	5	18	44%	28%	28%

Figure 3
Categorisation
of headlines:
local articles



² Data presented in these tables includes only those newspapers which published two or more captured articles. For this reason, the totals given do not add up to 111 (the sample used for the study).

Table 2
Categorisation of headlines: local articles

	Published articles				Proportion of published articles		
	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.	Total	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.
Evening Standard	3	0	2	5	60%	0%	40%
Keighley News	0	1	1	2	0%	50%	50%
Metro	1	0	1	2	50%	0%	50%
Oldham Evening Chronicle	0	1	1	2	0%	50%	50%
Rochdale Online	1	1	1	3	33%	33%	33%
Telegraph and Argus	3	2	1	6	50%	33%	17%
Yorkshire Post	0	5	2	7	0%	71%	29%

An initial comparison of headlines immediately reveals a national versus local divide. Local newspapers have equal proportions of negative and objective headlines (32 per cent), and a slightly higher proportion of positive headlines (37 per cent). However, national headlines are significantly more likely to be negative (54 per cent) than objective (27 per cent) or positive (19 per cent). This divergence might be explained by the fact that headlines are associated with sales and so national newspapers (with their higher daily circulation levels) are more likely to seek to make a profit with an attention-grabbing headline than with an objective one.

The second indicator used in this analysis is the topic and narrative adopted by newspapers in covering stories about madrassas.

Figure 4
Categorisation of topic and narrative: national articles

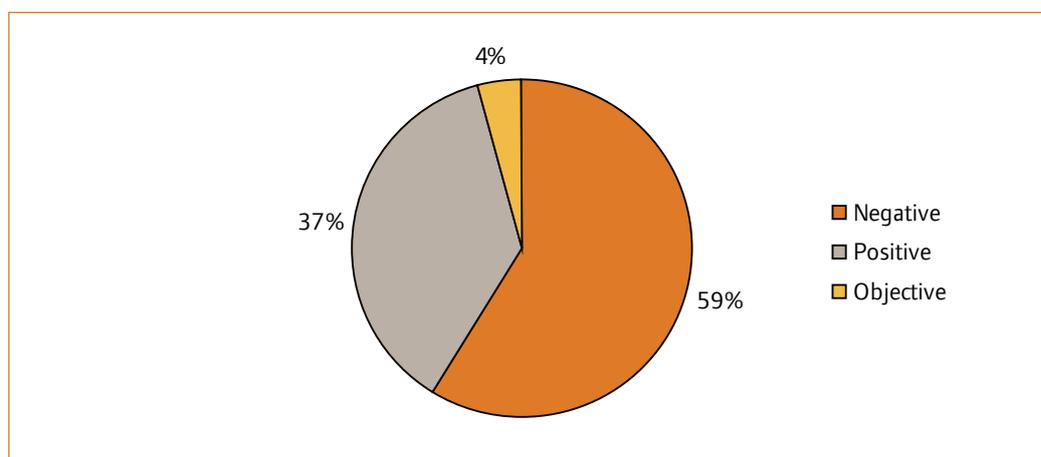


Table 3
Categorisation of topic and narrative: national articles

	Published articles				Proportion of published articles		
	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.	Total	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.
BBC News	3	4	1	8	37.5%	50%	12.5%
Daily Express	4	0	0	4	100%	0%	0%
Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday	7	1	0	8	87.5%	12.5%	0%
Guardian	6	3	0	9	67%	33%	0%
Independent	1	1	0	2	50%	50%	0%
Telegraph	6	2	2	10	60%	20%	20%
The Times and Sunday Times	10	8	0	18	56%	44%	0%

Figure 5
Categorisation of topic and narrative: local articles

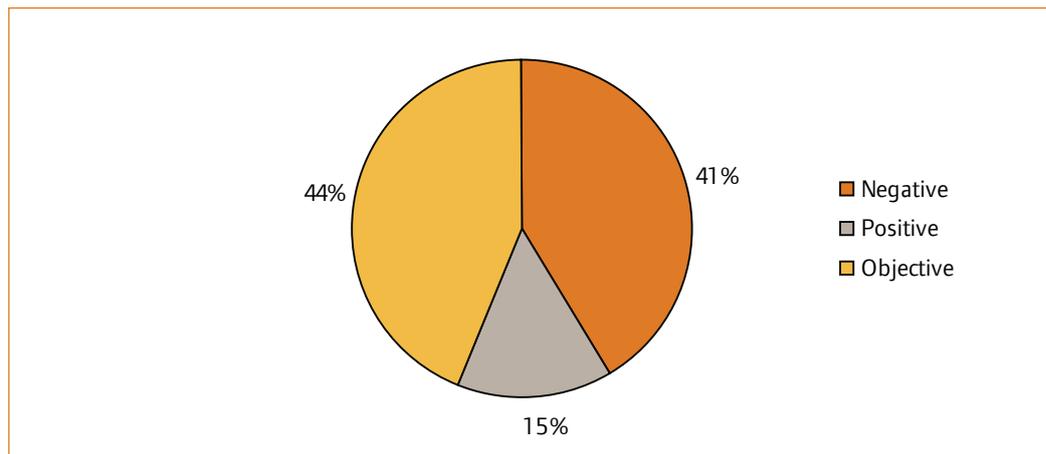


Table 4
Categorisation of topic and narrative: local articles

	Published articles				Proportion of published articles		
	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.	Total	Neg.	Pos.	Obj.
Evening Standard	5	0	0	5	100%	0%	0%
Keighley News	1	1	0	2	50%	50%	0%
Metro	1	0	1	2	50%	0%	50%
Oldham Evening Chronicle	0	1	1	2	0%	50%	50%
Rochdale Online	1	2	0	3	33%	67%	0%
Telegraph and Argus	3	2	1	6	50%	33%	17%
Yorkshire Post	1	5	1	7	14%	71%	14%

The data indicates that the majority of stories about madrassas in national newspapers have been negative (and are more likely to use inflammatory language and biased representations), while local papers have been more objective. Of the national articles we analysed, 59 per cent were found to be negative, 37 per cent were positive and just 4 per cent were objective. In comparison, 44 per cent of local articles were objective, 41 per cent were negative and 15 per cent were positive. This tendency towards negative coverage is arguably a result of what newspapers consider to be newsworthy. With thousands of active madrassas in the UK, newspapers are more likely to pick up on examples of bad practice and report them in a way that generates greater interest in the story.

Analysis of national news sources

The most consistently negative national newspaper is seen to be the *Daily Mail*, with 88 per cent of its coverage of madrassas being framed in a negative way. Particularly negative articles include the following examples.

'Britons who HATE Britain: The Muslim extremists hell-bent on segregation rather than integration' – *Daily Mail*, 14 March 2009 (Bracchi 2009). This story focuses on the Luton area and 'poisonous fanatics' protesting as soldiers returned from service abroad. It claims that in the Bury Park area of Luton the 'original indigenous white population has all but disappeared' and that Muslims in the area are completely segregated, with their own madrassa, school and other services to maintain this segregation. Its one more positive point is immediately counteracted when it states that while 'the majority of Muslims are peace-loving, industrious people, it would be wrong to deny that there are deeply disturbing tensions in the area' and goes on to document specific acts of crime against white people in the area by Muslims and the high number of benefit claimants among the Muslim protesters.

'To our eternal shame, Britain is STILL a hub for Islamic terror' – *Daily Mail*, 28 December 2009 (Phillips 2009). This comment piece revolves around the accusation that Britain is a place where

extremists are able to thrive comfortably, not least because there has been 'no action taken against extremist mosques and madrassas' and that the UK's obsession with human rights is preventing it from dealing appropriately with this problem. It also presents a statistic that 'almost one in every three Muslim students in the UK said that killing in the name of religion was justified' which the journalist describes as 'horrifying'. No evidence is given as to where this data comes from. The article also claims that the extremist element does not represent a 'perversion of Islam' but is actually reflective of authentic Islam which 'promotes holy war to conquer "infidels" and insufficiently pious Muslims'.

The newspaper with the second-highest number of articles that were negative about madrassas is the *Guardian*: based on topic and narrative, 67 per cent of *Guardian* articles captured by this analysis presented negative stories about British Muslims in connection to madrassas. In most cases the articles that were assessed to be negative were pointing out some of the failings of madrassas, and these were presented in a more nuanced way than in the *Daily Mail*. It is also worth noting, however, that unlike the *Daily Mail*, the *Guardian* achieved an equal split in its use of negative and objective headlines (44 per cent each). The following negatively categorised article arguably exemplifies this more moderate approach.

'This medieval Saudi education system must be reformed' – *Guardian*, 26 November 2010 (Al-Ahmed 2010). This article was triggered by the *Panorama* show broadcast on 22 November 2010 which revealed that some Saudi-influenced madrassas were teaching homophobic and anti-Semitic material. This article claims that the Saudi education system has a divisive effect, representing the most extreme aspects of the Muslim faith. It claims that the aim of the system is to 'maintain the rule of absolute monarchy by casting it as the ordained protector of the faith, and that Islam is at war with other faiths and cultures.'

Despite a lack of positive articles in national newspapers, 50 per cent of the BBC news articles online mentioning madrassas were positive; 38 per cent were negative, while 13 per cent were objective. The following is one example of a BBC article that was categorised as positive.

'Imams to give citizenship lessons' – BBC, 15 May 2007. This is a story about the emergence of a citizenship course in Bradford that is seen as a way 'to promote community cohesion and help small communities be resilient to the small minority of extremists who promote violence and hate in the name of Islam.' It talks about the important role madrassas have as places where many children spend their time and frames this as a positive step towards improving the experiences of Muslim children attending madrassas.

The Times and *Sunday Times* were the most active newspapers in producing articles related to madrassas, with 18 stories in total. These papers had equal levels of positive and negative articles.

Analysis of local news sources

There are some significant differences in the choice of topic and narrative between the local newspaper articles analysed. Although there are fewer positive stories, local newspapers publish a larger proportion of objective stories, which may indicate their greater reliance on factual information compared to national media. However, local media are often less nuanced in the way that they frame debates on madrassas. For example, outlets such as the *Nottingham Post*, *Leicester Mercury*, *Rochdale Online* and *Yorkshire Post* were all identified as having extremely high levels of positive media coverage of madrassas, while articles in the *Evening Standard*, *Metro* and the *Telegraph and Argus* were entirely negative.

Articles which were considered to be more positive included those that focused on improving the educational attainment of Muslim children, improving links with local madrassas and also around community cohesion.

'Madrassas to pilot citizenship courses to combat extremism' – *Yorkshire Post*, 12 September 2006 (Roberts 2006). This article documents a new citizenship course that has been introduced by the Bradford Council of Mosques. The purpose of the course is not only seen as being to reinforce the 'British values' that are included as part of courses run within secondary schools but also to develop a sense of identity among Muslim children.

Categorisation by storyline

The following tables give a breakdown of articles according to their dominant storyline.

Table 5
Categorisation of storylines: national/local

	National	Local	Total
Child protection	10	10	20
Education	11	11	22
Education and extremism	7	0	7
Extremism	13	2	15
Extremism prevention	11	4	15
Community cohesion	7	3	10
Community conflict	2	1	3
Segregation	3	1	4
Integration	1	0	1
Local planning	0	6	6
Saudi weekend schools	6	2	8

Table 6
Categorisation of storylines: negative/positive/objective³

	Negative	Positive	Objective
Child protection	16	1	3
Education	7	15	0
Education and extremism	5	2	0
Extremism	12	3	0
Extremism prevention	0	14	1
Community cohesion	3	7	0
Community conflict	1	1	1
Segregation	4	0	0
Integration	1	0	0
Local planning	1	1	4
Saudi weekend schools	8	0	0

These results show that national articles are dominant in coverage of 'education and extremism', 'extremism prevention' and 'extremism', which may reflect the greater concerns about the role and influence of madrasahs in relation to extremist activities. Local coverage on the other hand is more focused on the positive role that these institutions might play in preventing extremism by, for instance, teaching pupils about the real values of Islam instead of leaving that role to more radical groups capable of exploiting young people's ignorance.

The tables also reflect the polarised public debate regarding madrasahs, with the two most negative storylines being child protection and extremism and the positive ones linked to education and extremism prevention. Whereas national news dominated the coverage around extremism, the child protection issue was covered equally by both types of newspaper. Child protection issues were reported negatively in the vast majority of cases. All of the articles focusing on segregation and integration were written in a negative way and the majority of these were found in national sources.

Articles focusing on education, community cohesion and environment represented madrasahs positively to a greater degree than the other storylines identified. In a similar way to the extremism prevention articles, these often reported efforts to exploit madrasahs to improve the lives of attendees and society as a whole.

³ Assessed in terms of topic/narrative.

Word analysis

The specific wording of a newspaper article may communicate information in a way that reflects a particular discourse. Using computer software,⁴ the frequency of words occurring in the captured articles was studied. National and local items were analysed separately, and the same exercise was conducted for the headlines of the articles included.

The table below shows the 10 most frequently used words in national and local articles, including both headlines and body text.

Table 7
Word analysis,
national and local
media

Rank	National		Local	
	Word	Frequency	Word	Frequency
1	Muslim	658	School	221
2	School	618	Muslim	163
3	Children	274	Children	137
4	Britain	222	Education	73
5	British	210	People	71
6	Islamic	188	Madrassas	62
7	Education	143	Mosque	61
8	Faith	138	Bradford	60
9	Islam	135	Community	60
10	Government	121	Islamic	54

The highest-ranking words include many that one would expect to see, considering the subject matter. Terms which are arguably neutral and relate directly to the area of interest could include 'school', 'Muslim', 'religious', 'mosque', 'people', 'report', 'teacher' and 'parent', and these types of words make up the majority of those used most frequently. Other words, such as 'terror' or 'extremist' may be considered more emotive or could indicate a particular discourse that is used when writing about British Muslims or madrassas. Despite the fact that some words are seen as neutral, interesting differences can be observed between their rankings in local and national news sources which may reveal differing priorities. Analysis of these rankings is provided below on some of the words that stand out as highlighting either particular forms of discourse on madrassas or interesting differences between local and national newspapers.

- **Education:** The frequent use of this word in both the local and national articles reveals a particular discourse around the impact and role of madrassas in improving educational outcomes for their pupils. This word can be used in either a negative or positive light and should rightly be a central point of debate for institutions that are primarily concerned with teaching. This word ranks fourth in the local analysis compared to seventh in the national analysis, which may reflect a greater concern within local newspapers around the educational impact of madrassas.
- **Law:** This word could highlight the discourse around madrassas in relation to their rules and regulations, for example in relation to the stories around the need for child protection and health and safety policies within madrassas and accusations that there have been some failings in this area. This only appears in the top 30 words in national articles, which may reflect a greater tendency to frame madrassas as institutions that are under-regulated or risk breaking the law.
- **Extremist:** One of the more emotive words, it appears at 20th in the national analysis but 94th in the local analysis. This perhaps highlights one of the stronger negative discourses that is revealed by this media analysis, in which madrassas are perceived as incubators for extremism. 'Extremism' is also found to rank highly among the national articles – 44th nationally but 142nd locally – supporting the view that national articles are more likely to reinforce a simplistic (as yet unfounded) causal link between madrassas and 'extremism'. Other related words such as 'terror' and 'bomber' also appear within the national analysis but are completely absent from the local articles.

⁴ Hermetic Word Frequency Counter: see <http://www.hermetic.ch/wfc/wfc.htm>

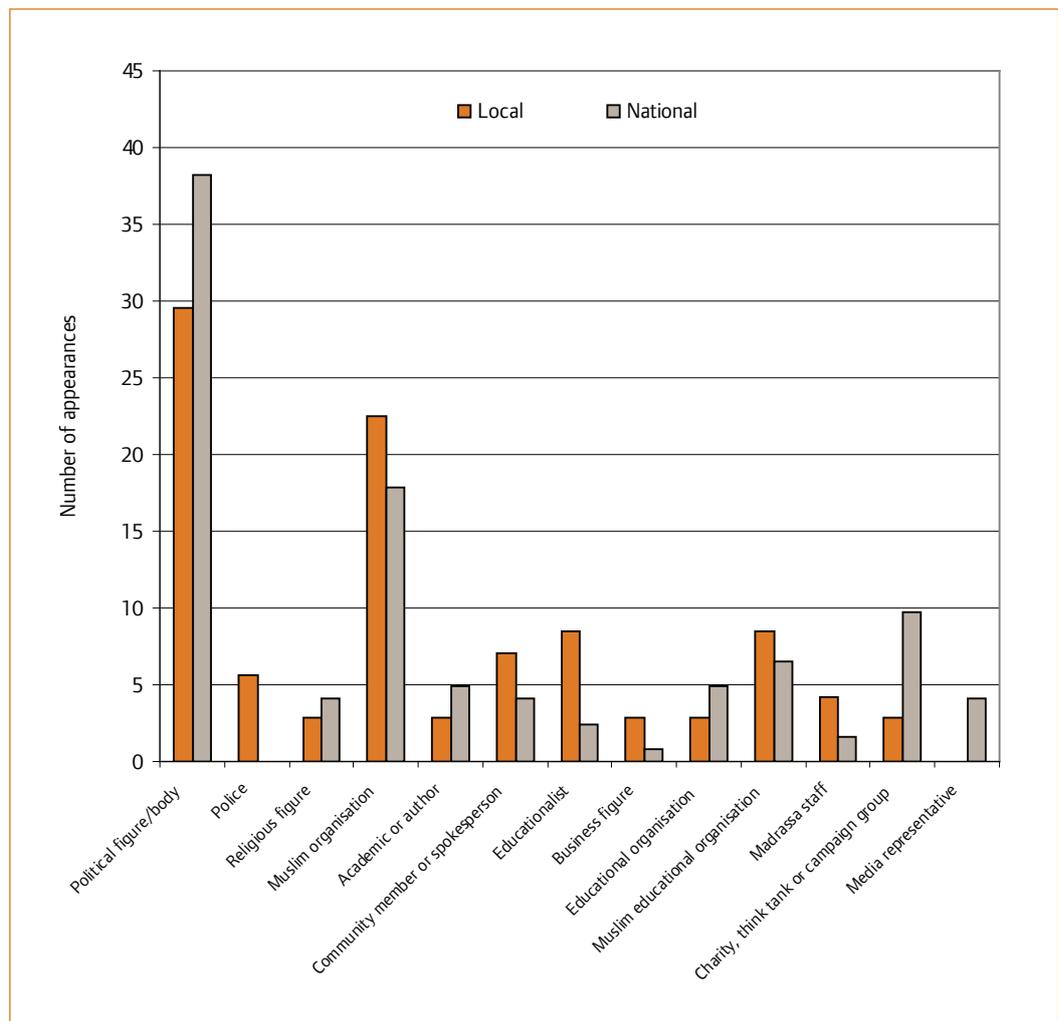
- Government:** The word comes up 10th in the national analysis but 72nd in local articles, indicating the different context for these sources. The national articles are likely to focus more often on national policy and potentially to politicise the subject, rather than focusing on more child-centred aspects of the debate.

Interesting contrasts pop up further down the rankings. For example, 'segregation' ranks 521 in local articles, compared with 184 in national articles. 'Integration' ranks 178 in national articles but doesn't appear at all in local coverage. By comparison, 'citizenship' ranks 52 in local media and 145 in national media.

Spokesperson analysis

The commentators quoted in articles often have an important role in influencing the way a story is framed, and reflect the choices made by media outlets as to whose views should be solicited on particular issues. The following graph shows the different categories of spokespeople represented in the captured articles.

Figure 6
Spokespeople found within local and national articles



This shows that the vast majority of spokespeople included in the analysis can be categorised as either political figures or representatives from Muslim organisations. In the case of political figures, and at the national level, individuals that held the role of Secretary of State for Education at the time of the article were quoted frequently, while councillors were more likely to be included in local papers. Members of Parliament involved in debates about the prevention of extremism were also quoted.

This prominent role for government representatives would appear somewhat at odds with the government's lack of policy regarding madrassas. Despite madrassas being firmly on the government's radar, they are institutions with very little national guidance or policy.⁵

What also stands out in this analysis is the absence of members of the community and madrasa representatives themselves, particularly in national articles, potentially perpetuating a view of madrassas that may not be the reality for those engaging directly with them or working within them.

There are also some interesting differences between the results for national and local articles. National articles cited reports and spokespeople from think-tanks or charities far more frequently than local articles. In contrast, local articles were the only ones that published comments from police representatives and more commonly represented the views of madrasa staff. Local articles also used Muslim representatives to a greater degree than national articles, perhaps revealing a more balanced approach to the selection of commentators. This can be contrasted with the more-frequent use of political figures or bodies in national articles. This contrast might also reflect the tendency of local news sources to use local spokespeople and cover 'on the ground' issues more often, where political figures may be viewed as slightly detached from the realities within local communities.

⁵ Although, following the recent *Panorama* programme the government has said it is going to review this area (Siddique 2010).

Conclusion

While media reports on madrassas in the UK often focus on their potentially negative impacts on community cohesion and child welfare, this briefing suggests that the picture is less black and white. There are legitimate concerns about how some of these schools are run and the nature and quality of the curriculum taught within some of them, but there are also good examples of innovative schemes that have been developed to build bridges between madrassas and their local communities and to promote a positive vision of British Muslim citizenship.

This briefing also highlights the divide that exists between national and local news coverage of madrassas, with national coverage tending to be much more negative and less nuanced in its coverage of madrassas than local media outlets. National newspapers may be trying to convey a more specific narrative in these articles, one which does not allow for the subtleties of local coverage and leads them to overlook or ignore some more-positive stories.

A major problem arising from this imbalance is the substitution of media coverage about madrassas, which may or may not reflect reality across the country, for a strong evidence base on these institutions. It is clear that substantial holes remain in our understanding of Muslim supplementary education in the UK.

- There is a lack of basic statistical information about the number and types of madrassas that currently exist, as well as how many children attend them.
- Insufficient research has been carried out on whether the methods and content of curricula used in madrassas are creating social and educational difficulties for those Muslim children who also attend mainstream primary schools, or if they have the potential to boost achievement and self-confidence.
- There is an absence of strong evidence linking madrassas to the radicalisation of young people in the UK.

ippr's ongoing project on madrassas⁶ aims to address some of these knowledge gaps by generating a more accurate and extensive evidence base on madrassas, identifying where they are performing well, where they could improve and how they can be supported to deliver positive outcomes for the children and communities they serve. The research is adopting both quantitative (using an extensive survey of madrassas) and qualitative approaches (using in-depth interviews and deliberative workshops), and the final report of this study will be published in September 2011.

6 See <http://www.ippr.org/research/themes/project.asp?id=4198>

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