Community Policy Forum

FROM HATE SPEECH TO POLITICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENCE:

FAR-RIGHT ISLAMOPHOBIA IN THE UK

AUGUST 2024

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Community Policy Forum

The Community Policy Forum is an independent think-tank seeking to promote evidence-based and community-centred approaches to the structural inequalities facing British Muslim communities. We attempt this through connecting policymakers with academic research and experts and through providing platforms for engagement with diverse Muslim voices on areas of contemporary importance.

We are grateful to Luc Steinberg, Aurelien Mondon, and Katy Brown for generously contributing their analysis to this report. Their contributions are highlighted in the relevant chapters. Observations and recommendations outside of these contributions are solely those of Community Policy Forum.

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Introduction

In recent weeks, the UK has seen the worst rioting it has witnessed since **2011**, with over 1,000 arrests and almost 600 charges at the time of **writing**. However, this violence has not erupted in a vacuum. In reality, it is the product of racism and Islamophobia being increasingly normalised by politicians and the mainstream media over recent years. For too long, the blame for high levels of unemployment, economic deprivation, the cost-of-living crisis, and the austerity-driven decimation of social and public services has been directed at migrants, Muslims, and other minority communities. This has only served to embolden racist ideologies and legitimise hatred through painting such misinformation as 'legitimate grievances'.

It was disappointing that, until Tuesday 6th August, neither Keir Starmer nor his government directly acknowledged the Islamophobia and racism that has been underlying and driving such violence. Initially, Starmer instead merely called out far-right "**thuggery**" – a framing which does not recognise the structural and institutional Islamophobia and racism that is at the core of such politically motivated violence. Likewise, there was a corresponding pattern of journalists and broadcasters going to great lengths to avoid reference to Islamophobia as a factor, with Muslim MP **Zarah Sultana** being met by **sniggers** from *Good Morning Britain*'s otherwise all-white panel when she suggested the riots should be called "Islamophobic".

At the same time, the media has framed those engaging in violence as 'protestors'. This is an erroneous and dangerous framing as it equates violence with legitimate non-violent democratic activism and minimises the heinous acts that are terrorising minority communities. Even the ***BBC*** presented violence in Bolton as between "the pro-British march on one side of the town hall here, and the counter-protest on the other side". Minimising the driving ideology behind the violence as 'pro-British' acts to justify the hostility directed at Muslims and minority communities as a principled and legitimate patriotic stance.

The current violence must act as a critical warning for the UK to recognise and address the danger posed by the far-right, as well as the political, media, and online landscape that has propagated and maintained hateful ideologies across society.

As such, the following report seeks to explore the history, narratives, and strategies of the far-right in the UK. This allows us to offer recommendations that encompass legislative change, industry initiatives, and educational efforts to confront the dangers of the far-right that underpin the recent riots.

Understanding the Far-Right

In the UK context, the far-right can be understood as a loose collection of political groups, individuals, and ideological outlooks that are characterised by extreme nationalist, anti-immigrant, and often racist views. These groups typically advocate for the preservation of a perceived 'pure' or 'authentic' 'indigenous' British identity, which they see as threatened by a loss of 'traditional' social values, immigration, multiculturalism, and specified scapegoated communities – with Jewish and Muslim communities being the primary (but not exclusive)

targets. Thus, the contemporary far-right in the UK is often associated with Islamophobia, antisemitism, misogyny, anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric, anti-vaccine positions, and climate change denial, as well as a rejection of liberal democratic principles, diversity and inclusion practices, human rights, and equality frameworks.

However, the far-right is in no way a unified homogeneous movement. Rather, adherents as groups and individuals support the different key themes and grievances to varying degrees. Consequently, in understanding the violence of recent weeks, it is essential to first understand the ways in which far-right movements have operated and evolved within the UK context. To that end, the following discussion seeks to explore the origins and evolution of the far-right, its key political themes, operational strategies, and the influential figures that have shaped its trajectory.

The following chapters are not intended to be an exhaustive exploration, but instead provide context to the current violence. For greater insight into the perpetuation and mainstreaming of far-right ideologies, we recommend reading *Reactionary Democracy: How Racism and the Populist Far-Right Became Mainstream,* by Aurelien Mondon and Aaron Winter.

It is important to note that many of the organisations, groups, and individuals discussed throughout this report may not self-identify as far-right, and may even object to the characterisation. However, we have included them in this analysis as they are actors around which the far-right coalesce and mobilise due to their perceived tacit or explicit support of far-right ideologies. As such, we do not believe that their role in furthering the objectives and worldview of the far-right should be excluded from the analysis.

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Part I: The History of the Far-Right in the UK

- From its origins in early 20th-century movements to its contemporary manifestation, the far-right in the UK has consistently adapted its political focus and strategies in response to changing socio-economic and political circumstances, effectively exploiting moments of national crisis in order to drive a worldview founded in nationalism, xenophobia, and racial superiority.

- Emerging in the early 20th century with groups like the British Union of Fascists with their virulent antisemitism, the far-right has evolved through various incarnations, driving anti-immigration and racist rhetoric through organisations such as the National Front in the 1970s, before undergoing a transition to Islamophobia throughout the 1990s and 2000s with the rise of the British National Party, the English Defence League, and Britain First.

- One of the defining features of these movements is their consistent scapegoating of minoritised communities as the cause of Britain's economic and socio-political troubles. In recent years, UKIP and Reform UK (formerly the Brexit Party) have successfully adopted far-right themes and conspiracies to achieve mainstream political success. Under the leadership of Nigel Farage, these parties have capitalised on public concerns over immigration, particularly from Muslim-majority countries, and national sovereignty, using Islamophobia as a central narrative. With five Reform UK MPs currently sitting in Parliament, the infiltration of far-right ideologies into the political mainstream is of vital concern.

Part II: Key Narratives of the Far-Right

- **Scapegoats:** The use of scapegoats is a central tactic in far-right rhetoric that is employed to direct public anger towards a specified community. In times of perceived economic decline, heightened crime, or cultural erosion, far-right agitators attempt to rally public support by portraying themselves as defenders of the 'in-group' against the supposed threats posed by the scapegoated 'out-group.' This reductionist view is an effective tool for removing the nuance of complicated socio-economic and political challenges. This provides the public with a simple explanation for the challenges that they face, while providing the political establishment with a convenient vehicle through which to distract from its own political and economic shortcomings.

- **Islamophobia and the 'Clash of Civilisations':** Inciting hostility towards Muslim communities and Islamophobia is central to the contemporary far-right's narrative in the UK, often using distorted or demonstrably false narratives to inflame public fears and justify calls for sanctions against Muslim communities. The key mechanism for mobilising public sympathy within this narrative is the rhetoric of perceived threat to white 'indigenous' Britons. These perceived threats are primarily existential (fears that Muslims

are culturally incompatible with the West and erode Western culture, values, and identity), physical (fears of terrorism, violence against women and girls, and criminality), and economic (fears that Muslims don't possess a sufficient work ethic and are causing financial strain on the UK's welfare system and public services, to the detriment of 'deserving' white British communities).

- **The Great Replacement Theory:** One of the most pervasive and dangerous narratives of the far-right is the 'Great Replacement' theory, a white nationalist conspiracy that falsely claims there is a deliberate effort to replace white, Christian populations in Western countries with non-white (particularly Muslim) populations through high immigration levels and birth rates. This is also known as 'white genocide' and has been tacitly or actively bolstered in the mainstream by commentators such as Douglas Murray, who has **claimed** that Europe is "committing suicide".

- **The Inversion of Victimhood:** A common theme in far-right rhetoric is the portrayal of white, native Britons as victims of a concerted effort to marginalise and oppress them. This narrative inverts traditional understandings of racism and discrimination, arguing that it is white people who are now the primary targets of prejudice and exclusion. Far-right groups claim that policies promoting diversity and multiculturalism are actually forms of 'reverse racism' that disadvantage the white majority. By perpetuating the impression that white, working-class boys in particular are being ignored by the state, far-right groups position themselves as the only representatives of disenfranchised white communities.

- **Nationalism and Sovereignty:** Nationalism is a core feature of far-right rhetoric, where it is often used to promote an exclusionary and aggressive form of patriotism. This type of nationalism is characterised by the belief that the UK is under threat from immigrants and ethnic or religious minorities, who are portrayed as diluting or undermining the national identity, as well as undeservedly occupying its resources. This type of nationalism typically involves the glorification of a mythic past, where Britain is idealised as homogenous, pure, and untainted by foreign influences. This **romanticised** vision of the past is used to justify efforts to 'restore' the nation to its former glory by resisting multiculturalism and reversing the perceived erosion of traditional values. Moreover, in creating a narrative of 'us vs them' the far-right often demonises anti-racists and those that oppose far-right ideologies as '**race traitors**' and 'bleeding hearts' as a way to delegitimise opposition and legitimise discriminatory practices against those deemed 'un-British' or 'unpatriotic'.

- **Populism and Distrust of Political Elites:** Populism is another key characteristic of far-right rhetoric, emphasising a distrust of political elites and institutions perceived to be part of the 'establishment'. Far-right populists present themselves as the voice of the 'ordinary people' against a corrupt and out-of-touch elite that is accused of betraying national interests, particularly in relation to immigration and multiculturalism. However, the idea of an organic grassroots swelling is largely a myth. In reality, those with the most to gain from far-right rhetoric are the socio-political privileged, including mainstream politicians, who are able to manipulate the concept of 'the people' to push reactionary ideas and maintain their political and economic interests through the well-established practice of 'divide and rule'.

- **Capitalising on Economic Crises:** Economic crises have long been exploited by the far-right to capitalise upon public discontent and redirect frustrations toward scapegoated communities. After a decade and a half of economic deprivation, the UK is **considered** one of the least socially mobile societies in the Western world, with 22% of people living in **poverty**. Meanwhile, poverty and socio-political disempowerment alienate people from mainstream politics and can result in them becoming more susceptible to right-wing ideologies as an outlet for their grievances. At the same time, political commentators have tacitly endorsed far-right reductionist logic, preferring to overlook the political decision-making that has led to these hardships, and providing space for far-right agitators to deflect blame onto migrants, Muslims, and other minority communities, thus heightening perceptions of injustice.

Part III: Operation and Strategies of Far-Right Movements

- **Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns:** Political parties have been a key vehicle for the far-right in the UK, providing a platform for promoting their ideology and gaining electoral support. Over the years, far-right parties like the British National Party and UKIP, and now Reform UK and smaller parties such as Laurence Fox's **Reclaim Party** have participated in local, national, and European elections, with varying degrees of success. These parties often tap into public grievances and present themselves as the only political force willing to address them. These campaigns often use provocative and inflammatory language to stir up public emotions and gain media attention – a tactic that was particularly **visible** in Reform UK's campaign strategy for the 2024 **general election**. By securing five parliamentary seats, the party has not only gained a platform to influence national policy but has also moved the once-fringe ideologies of the far-right closer to the centre of UK politics. This electoral success has the potential to embolden other far-right groups, further normalising extreme viewpoints by making them a legitimate part of political discourse.

- **Street Protests and Politically Motivated Violence:** Street protests, demonstrations, and even riots in areas predominantly populated by scapegoated minorities have been a significant tactic for the far-right in the UK. Protests are typically framed as a defence of British values and identity, but they often involve confrontational and aggressive tactics, including mob violence and clashes with counter-protesters, the police, and local residents. These demonstrations aim to assert the presence of the far-right in public spaces and provoke reactions that can be used to further the far-right's narrative of victimisation – especially when curated videos and images are circulated across social media platforms. However, there is a vast difference between legitimate peaceful protest, and the recent riots that the UK has witnessed. Many media outlets and political commentators have irresponsibly **described** this politically motivated violence as "pro-British marches" and "protests", thereby minimising the dangers of both the actions and the ideologies that are driving them. In reality, if one observes the definition of 'terrorism' outlined in the **Terrorism Act 2000**, the politically motivated violence embodied by these riots fall into this category and the government must respond accordingly. At the same time, the outbreak of the violence further exposes deep failures within the PREVENT strategy – a strategy that we firmly believe should be scrapped. Moreover, it would be a mistake for this new government to respond to the riots by adopting its predecessor's legislative agenda of clamping down on the right to legitimate peaceful protest.

- **Grassroots Activism and Community Engagement:** The far-right in the UK also engages in grassroots activism and community outreach. This can take the form of **leafleting**, door-to-door canvassing, and organising local events, such as community meetings, and charity drives. These activities are designed to build a local support base and present the far-right as a legitimate and caring community actor.

- **Online Propaganda and Social Media:** The rise of the internet and social media platforms has dramatically changed the way the far-right operates, with online platforms becoming a crucial tool for spreading propaganda and conspiracy theories, leveraging right-wing news stories and political analysis, recruiting new members, and coordinating activities. This has been assisted by a lack of effective content moderation, **biases** in algorithms, the potential for anonymity and a legislative landscape that has failed to keep pace with the rapid expansion of social media platforms and communications technologies, which has allowed far-right groups to operate more freely and avoid legal repercussions. The recent riots are a poignant reminder of how social media is being used as a tool to popularise support for far-right ideologies, ultimately serving as a **catalyst** for real-life violence and the incitement of hatred. This raises serious questions about the effectiveness of the Online Safety Act and calls for scrutiny of the UK's current ability to tackle hate speech online.

- **Leveraging the Mainstream Media:** The mainstream press and broadcast news plays a central role in platforming and normalising far-right ideologies, with figures such as Nigel Farage perfecting the art of media engagement and the practice of incendiary comments to create headlines, thereby leveraging the press to spread their messages. At the same time, many mainstream publications themselves actively contribute to the spread of far-right rhetoric through selective framing of narratives, as well as sensationalist and distorted reporting – a situation that the current regulatory system is unable to tackle due to the reliance on the incapability of IPSO. This raises an urgent need to address these failings and confront the media's role in spreading hatred.

- **Co-opting Mainstream Politicians:** Recent years have seen numerous examples of mainstream politicians strategically adopting or echoing the themes and language of the far-right, often in an attempt to capitalise on public anxieties for the sake of electoral advantage. This not only legitimises fringe views but also contributes to a political climate that emboldens far-right actors, exacerbates social tensions, and as the riots attest, even incites violence. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in concluding a four-year **investigation**, recently argued that the UK must urgently **implement** comprehensive measures to address the use of racist hate speech by British politicians and high-profile public figures.

- **Charismatic Figureheads:** A prominent feature of far-right movements is the role of charismatic figureheads in mobilising and maintaining support. Far-right organisations often lose momentum in the absence of a powerful authority figure (as was the case with the decline of the EDL following Tommy Robinson's departure in 2013). However, the rise of social media has led to a transition within the broader far-right movement from a collection of centralised, formal groups to a decentralised, '**post-organisational**' structure that relies increasingly on the role of influencers, including journalists, political

commentators, social media personalities, and politicians. These figures are key in popularising and normalising far-right ideologies and conspiracies across society.

- **Connections with International Far-Right Movements:** The far-right in the UK does not operate in isolation but is part of a broader international network of far-right movements. British far-right groups have longstanding connections with far-right organisations in Europe, the United States, and beyond, sharing strategies, resources, and ideological inspiration. These international connections have been facilitated by the rise of the internet, which has made it easier for far-right groups to communicate and collaborate across borders. The global nature of the far-right movement also means that events and developments in one country can have a significant impact on the far-right in other countries. For example, the rise of far-right populism in the United States, exemplified by Donald Trump's presidency, has emboldened far-right activists in the UK and given them a sense of legitimacy.

Part IV: Creating a Roadmap to Tackle the Dangers of the Far-Right

Politically Motivated Violence

- The government must frame its response to the riots through the lens of terrorism and urgently recalibrate its approach to and understanding of the domestic security threats currently facing the UK.

- The PREVENT strategy must be urgently scrapped. Instead, the government must develop a new approach to radicalisation that includes addressing the systematic disempowerment, economic deprivation, and slashing of social services that allows grievances to fester within communities – grievances that can then be taken advantage of by nefarious actors and agitators of all different ideologies.

Prosecutions

- The government should consider a review into the prosecution of far-right cases, including the role of CPS and the courts in the application of legislation and sentencing guidelines, as well as the ability to prosecute charismatic figureheads of the far-right that fan the flames of violence. This review should seek to provide recommendations for strengthening existing legislation and sentencing guidelines to ensure that far-right violence is appropriately addressed.

Protest

- It is paramount that the government does not conflate the politically motivated violence of the riots with legitimate protests and does not seek to respond to the riots through legislation designed to increase the restrictions on non-violent protests.

Accountability for Economic Grievances

- We call on the government to show true leadership by openly and honestly recognising

the roots of economic deprivation and the collapse of local services across the UK and directly engaging with local communities to constructively address them.

Social Media and the Online Safety Act

- We call on the government to either strengthen the Online Safety Act or introduce new legislation to:
    - Strengthen protections against the spread of disinformation in online spaces.
    - Address the lack of regulation governing comments sections on news websites.

The Role of Mainstream Media

- We call on the government to:
    - Amend the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' contained within the Online Safety Act to ensure that it encompasses only those regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System.
    - Either reinstate and commence Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 with immediate effect or put in place an equivalent to safeguard an independent system of self-regulation.
- We call on the press industry to develop and adopt strategies addressing the responsibility of journalists and broadcasters to avoid the use of hate speech and stereotypes in describing minority communities. This must include initiatives to increase cultural and religious awareness amongst journalists and increasing diversity within newsrooms.

Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006

- We strongly urge the government to review and address the threshold disparity contained within the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and explore ways to ensure that the legislation properly captures Islamophobic abuse. In addressing this disparity, we further recommend that the government protects the freedom of expression by adopting the APPG on British Muslims' **definition** of Islamophobia alongside the **guidelines** laid out by CAI.

The Accountability of Mainstream Politicians

- We call on the government to launch an independent investigation into the role of parliamentarians in fuelling far-right hate, with a view to adopting a comprehensive strategy to:
    - discourage and combat racist, Islamophobic, and xenophobic discourse by political and public figures,

- ensure that such cases are effectively investigated and sanctioned,
- ensure also that public authorities and officials distance themselves from and condemn such speech when it occurs.

Educational Initiatives

- We call on the government to:
  - Actively acknowledge past wrongs and raise awareness of the legacies and impacts of colonialism and slavery, as well as their impact on the present-day manifestation of systemic racism.
  - Create strategies to accurately reflect the history and legacy of colonialism and slavery within school curricula.

Part I:

THE HISTORY OF THE FAR-RIGHT IN THE UK

The far-right is a multifaceted and enduring element of the UK's political landscape. From its origins in early 20th-century reactionary movements to its modern manifestations and contemporary form, the far-right has consistently adapted to changing social, economic, and political circumstances, frequently exploiting moments of national crisis and societal change to gain influence and political traction. Understanding this history is key to understanding its appeal to certain segments of society.

Again, the following discussion is by no means exhaustive and there are a number of smaller groups that we have not included in this analysis. Instead, our aim is to touch upon key moments in the evolution of the far-right in the UK in order to demonstrate the logics and socio-economic forces underpinning its development.

Early Manifestations

The far-right's origins in the UK can be traced back to the early 20th century, with significant political, social, and economic upheaval in Europe during the interwar period providing fertile ground for far-right ideologies to gain traction as a reaction to the rise of socialism, liberalism, and internationalism — forces that were perceived by its adherents as threats to the traditional social order and national sovereignty.

Arising largely out of the fascist movement and inspired by the success of Mussolini's Fascists in Italy and later Hitler's Nazis in Germany. These movements were characterised by their ultra-nationalism, authoritarianism, and vehement opposition to communism and socialism, which they saw as existential threats to their vision of society. These early movements were avid **supporters** of the British Empire and imperial interests, perhaps largely differing in their identification of the primary threats to British hegemony: communists or Jewish populations.

The British Fascisti (later the British Fascists), founded in 1923 by Rotha Lintorn-Orman, was modelled after Mussolini's Blackshirts and had little ideological unity beyond anti-communism for much of its existence. Although it attracted some support from ex-military officers and members of the upper classes, the British Fascisti never gained significant traction and its primary legacy was that it set the stage for more influential far-right movements that would follow.

In 1929 **Arnold Leese** split from the British Fascists and founded the Imperial Fascist League (IFL), which was explicitly antisemitic and espoused commitment to an Aryan race, adopting many of the racist ideologies that would later become central to the Nazi movement in Germany. The IFL's overt racism alienated much of the British public, and like the British Fascists, it remained a marginal force.

The far-right gained more serious momentum with

the formation of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) in 1932, led by **Sir Oswald Mosley**. Mosley was a charismatic and ambitious politician who had previously been a Labour MP and a minister in Ramsay MacDonald's government. Heavily espousing antisemitism and disillusioned with the traditional political parties' inability to address the economic turmoil of the time, Mosley argued that fascism was the only possible way to save Britain from socio-economic ruin and the inherent dangers of communism. The BUF also called for the abolition of parliamentary democracy in favour of a strong, centralised state led by a single leader (a role for which Mosley naturally envisioned himself to be best suited). Initially, the BUF attracted a diverse range of supporters, including disaffected working-class individuals, sections of the aristocracy, and intellectuals who were drawn to Mosley's vision of a regenerated Britain.

The virulent strain of antisemitism that was central to the BUF's ideological perspective increased over the years, quickly becoming the central focus of the BUF's agenda, with its provocation, intimidation, and harassment of British Jewish communities intensifying over time. In October 1936, Mosley scheduled a march through the East End of London, which had a large Jewish population. An estimated 3,000 BUF supporters were met by up to 300,000 anti-fascist demonstrators who had mobilised to stop the march, resulting in violent street clashes in what became known as the **Battle of Cable Street**. This was a marked significant defeat for the BUF and highlighted the strong opposition the far-right faced from both the political left and local communities. The BUF's increasing alignment with Nazi Germany and its violent tactics further alienated potential supporters, leading to its decline. By the outbreak of World War II, public opinion had turned decisively against fascism, and the BUF became increasingly marginalised. The party was ultimately **banned** in 1940, with Mosley and 750 members of the BUF eventually being incarcerated under wartime defence regulation that allowed for the arrest and detention of enemy sympathisers.

Post-WWII and the Collapse of Empire

The horrors of WWII and revelations of the atrocities of the Holocaust largely discredited fascist ideologies amongst the British public due to their connection with the Nazi regime. This forced the far-right to adapt; however, the driving themes of nationalism, xenophobia, and opposition to socialism persisted.

The League of Empire Loyalists (LEL) was formed as a pressure group in 1954 by **Arthur K. Chesterton**, a former leading figure in the British Union of Fascists who believed that Bolshevism and American-style capitalism were part of a Jewish-led conspiracy to dismantle the British Empire – a mindset that informed the antisemitic and white supremacist ideologies of the LEL from its inception. In its early years, the driving concern of the LEL was to support the British Empire and its continuing existence, following the logic of its assertion that Britons are the world's natural leaders.

Over the years, and as the progressive collapse of the British Empire became increasingly inevitable, the LEL redirected its efforts to opposing non-white immigration into Britain, coinciding with increased immigration from South East Asia and the Caribbean as part of the government-backed efforts to recruit for the NHS and rebuild the UK's infrastructure and public services following the war. Eventually, more extreme elements of the movement pushed to make the group more political, leading to the formation of several splinter groups including the White Defence League and the National Labour Party.

The National Front and Opposition to Immigration

In 1967, the far-right saw a resurgence with the replacement of the LEL by the National Front (NF), which gained popularity after Enoch Powell's '**Rivers of Blood**' speech in 1968. The NF quickly became the most prominent far-right organisation in Britain during the late 1960s and 1970s as it absorbed former members of other smaller far-right groups in decline, such as the **Greater Britain Movement**, who had "campaigned for laws to stop 'marriage between Britons and non-Aryans,' and for forced sterilisation of those with racial, mental or physical 'defects'."

The NF's platform was built around opposition to immigration, a return to 'traditional' British values, and a rejection of multiculturalism, capitalising on growing public discontent over immigration, economic decline, and the perceived failure of the mainstream political parties to address these issues. The party promoted racial nationalism, advocating for the repatriation of immigrants and the preservation of what they saw as the "indigenous" British population, as well as declaring **support** for South African apartheid.

Election results for the NF remained strong throughout the 70s in a few working-class urban areas, with a number of local council seats won, but the party struggled to gain significant electoral success in Parliamentary elections. The party was frequently involved in street violence (including the 1974 **Red Lion Square** disorders and the 1977 **Battle of Lewisham**), which was met by strong opposition from anti-fascist organisations and community groups, which actively worked to undermine its influence.

By the 1980s the party had gone into decline as the popularity of the British National Party (BNP) grew. They last fielded parliamentary candidates in **2015**, when seven candidates ran on behalf of the party, and contested the **by-election** in Batley and Spen in 2016. However, despite the relative silence of official activity in recent years, caution should still be taken considering the extreme ideologies that the NF represents. It remains a white supremacist party that promotes biological racism, antisemitism, Holocaust denial, the white genocide conspiracy theory (see below), Euroscepticism, and global racial separatism while condemning interracial relationships and miscegenation, feminism, and LGBTQI+ rights.

The BNP and a Transition towards Islamophobia

The decline of the NF in the late 1970s and early 1980s led to the rise of the BNP, founded in 1982 by John Tyndall, a former NF leader. Despite a continuing fascist or neofascist worldview, the BNP sought to present a more respectable image than the NF, although it retained many of the same ideological positions. The BNP's platform centres on opposition to immigration, the preservation of British culture and 'indigenous' population, and a rejection of multiculturalism. This is supposedly to be achieved through an end to non-white migration into the UK (initially through the compulsory expulsion of non-whites, however, it has advocated for voluntary removals with financial incentives since 1999). Like its predecessor, it also promoted biological racism and the white genocide conspiracy theory, called for global racial separatism and condemned interracial relationships.

In the early years under Tyndall, the BNP heavily promoted Holocaust denial and antisemitic conspiracy theories that Jewish populations seek to dominate the world. However, after Nick Griffin became leader in 1999, the party increasingly **transitioned** from antisemitism towards Islamophobia, withdrawing from its traditional biological racism and instead adopting a stance grounded in cultural racism and the claim that Muslims are culturally incompatible with the UK. Following the attacks of 9/11 in 2001, their campaign against British Muslim communities grew in **intensity**. This Islamophobic worldview was combined with an expanded focus on local issues, such as local services, crime, and governance – issues that particularly resonated with voters in economically deprived areas. These rebranding efforts resulted in short-lived successes and the party gained several local council seats and two seats in the European Parliament in 2009. However, by the early 2010s internal divisions, financial difficulties, growing public opposition, and competition from other growing far-right groups (such as UKIP and the English Defence League), led to its decline and it has been essentially defunct since 2019 when it fielded only one candidate at the 2019 general election (the candidate came last in their constituency).

The English Defence League and Britain First: Embedding Popular Islamophobia

The English Defence League (EDL) is a social movement/ pressure group that has been at the forefront of propagating anti-Muslim hostilities since its inception and leadership by Tommy Robinson (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon – another former BNP member with **convictions** for violent assault) in 2009. Ostensibly emerging in response to a perceived threat of Islamic extremism, the group claims to stand for the **white working-class** and defend British values and culture against what they see as the growing Muslim threat that is supposedly hell-bent on undermining British society and imposing Shariah Law.

Initially, the EDL gained notoriety for rallies and street demonstrations, usually fuelled by alcohol and resulting in violence against local Muslim communities and clashes with police and counter-protesters. The group gained popularity through capitalising on social media to spread its messaging, thereby bypassing traditional media channels and directly engaging with a broad audience. On platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, the EDL became adept at disseminating inflammatory content designed to provoke anger and mobilise supporters. This online presence not only helped the EDL grow **rapidly** but also contributed to the spread of Islamophobia across the UK. In 2011, two EDL supporters were **convicted** of plotting to bomb a mosque in Stoke-on-Trent.

By 2013, the group had begun its decline and membership fell sharply after Robinson left the group in 2013 and launched the short-lived **Pegida UK** alongside **Liberty GB's** Paul Weston and Anne Marie Waters from **Sharia Watch**. Since then, the group has lost any centralised leadership and has become essentially defunct but it maintains sympathisers in online spaces, with Merseyside police **reporting** that supporters of the EDL were prominent in the recent Southport violence.

Around the same time as the EDL's decline, Britain First emerged as a far-right fascist/ neo-fascist political party. Founded in 2011 by former members of the BNP, notably **Jim Dowson** and **Paul Golding**, the group emerged as a reactionary force against what it

perceives as the 'Islamisation' of Britain, making Islamophobia a central tenet of its ideology. Britain First promotes a virulent form of nationalism, blending anti-Muslim sentiment with broader anti-immigrant and anti-leftist positions. The group is virulently against multiculturalism and claims to want to protect 'traditional' Christian British culture.

The organisation's tactics include provocative '**Christian patrols**' in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods, where members would hand out leaflets, aiming to intimidate and antagonise local Muslim communities. They have also staged '**mosque invasions**', where members would enter mosques uninvited and engage in confrontational behaviour, which they would then film and share on social media to rally support and spread their message. According to **HOPE not Hate**, "Britain First's brand of far-right Christianity explains in part its obsessive Islamophobia, seeing Muslims as a fundamental threat to British traditions and identity… [but it] has a wider and more traditional far-right platform than some of their rivals within the so-called 'counter-jihad' scene. In many ways, the group has more in common with fascist political parties like the BNP than it does with primarily anti-Muslim street organisations like the EDL."

Key figures in Britain First include Paul Golding, the group's leader, and **Jayda Fransen**, the former deputy leader. Both have been **convicted** multiple times for hate speech and incitement related to their anti-Muslim activities. The group's rhetoric is heavily focused on race, especially the Great Replacement theory (which is explored further below). In a 2021 article, they claimed that "white Westerners" are being targeted by a "pernicious and evil campaign" that they equate to "genocide."

The group has been linked to violent incidents inspired by its ideas, including the 2016 murder of Labour MP Jo Cox by Thomas Mair, who **shouted** "Britain First" during the attack, while the 2017 Finsbury Park Mosque attack by Darren Osborne, who drove a van into Muslim worshippers, killing one and injuring twelve others, and was known to be heavily **influenced** by material from both Britain First and Tommy Robinson. Meanwhile, several of the group's members and supporters have been convicted of terrorism offences, violent assault, and domestic abuse.

Like the EDL, much of Britain First's public visibility was gained through harnessing social media. Social media platforms took a variety of steps to curb both groups' influence over the years by removing content and banning accounts, including removing Tommy Robinson's, Britain First's, and Paul Golding's Twitter accounts – all have which have since been **reinstated** following Elon Musk's takeover of the platform and remain **active** at the time of writing.

National Action and the Continuing Threat of Fascism

National Action was a neo-Nazi organisation founded in the UK in 2013, characterised by its violent ideology and activities. Influenced by Hitler's National Socialism, the group sought to revive fascist principles in the UK, openly promoting racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, and homophobia. National Action adopted a militaristic style, organising marches, demonstrations, and propaganda campaigns to spread its message. The group used **slogans** like “Refugees not welcome. Hitler was right”, aiming to provoke and incite violence, while also vilifying Jews, Muslims, and non-white populations as a threat to Western civilisation. The group often depicted Muslims as invaders and used Islamophobic rhetoric to galvanise support for an explicitly white supremacist agenda. Benjamin Raymond, a co-founder and primary ideologue, **declared** that “there are non-whites and Jews in my country who all need to be exterminated” and advocated for the violent overthrow of the government to establish a white ethnostate.

The group gained notoriety following the murder of MP Jo Cox in 2016. Shortly after, National Action became the first far-right group to be **proscribed** as a terrorist organisation under the UK's Terrorism Act in December 2016. Despite the ban, there were **reports** of members continuing to meet **clandestinely** with some members attempting to reconstitute the group under different names, leading to arrests and convictions.

UKIP and Brexit

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) is a Eurosceptic, right-wing populist political party, initially founded in 1993 primarily to oppose the UK's membership in the European Union, advocating for British sovereignty and independence from what it perceived as an overreaching EU bureaucracy. Over the years, UKIP evolved from a fringe movement into a significant political force that played a pivotal role in the UK's withdrawal from the EU, particularly under the leadership of Nigel Farage, who served as party leader in various stints between 2006 and 2016.

UKIP's ideology was characterised by strong opposition to the EU, immigration, and what it perceived to be the erosion of British sovereignty and identity. While the party initially avoided overtly far-right positions, under Farage's leadership, it increasingly adopted anti-immigrant and **Islamophobic** rhetoric. UKIP positioned itself as the defender of British values against what it portrayed as the twin threats of uncontrolled immigration and the rise of Islam in the UK, thus contributing to a toxic discourse around immigration and multiculturalism.

In the run-up to the referendum in 2016, Farage and UKIP carefully calibrated their messaging to present the EU as the source of uncontrolled migration and vehicle for Islamisation of the UK, thus centring public debate around anti-Muslim narratives. Community Policy Forum recently published a **report** based on research by Keele University that explored anti-Muslim content on social media platforms surrounding key socio-political events, including the 2016 referendum. One of the observations was the key Islamophobic tropes that were found within Twitter interactions at the time. These tropes are central to far-right messaging (as will be explored below in the discussion about far-right themes). It was these tropes that were mobilised by UKIP and Farage as a political tool to achieve popular support for Brexit.

***Poster** used by UKIP during its Brexit campaign*

UKIP also had a notable strain of opposition to the political establishment and socio-political elites through the heavy use of populist rhetoric. For example, in 2014, Farage **called** on voters to "join the people's army" to "topple the establishment who've led us to this mess", thereby positioning the party as one of the working class and 'ordinary' people.

Following the Brexit referendum and the UK's decision to leave the EU, UKIP's influence began to wane. Farage stepped down as leader and subsequent leaders struggled to maintain the party's relevance. The party's focus on Islamophobia persisted, but its electoral success diminished as the Conservative Party, under leaders like Boris Johnson, adopted much of UKIP's "**toxic**" hardline stance on Brexit and immigration. More recently, in the run-up to the 2024 general election, four Tory candidates **signed** up to the pledges or "commitments to culture" of **Laurence Fox's** right-wing populist Reclaim Party, including advocating for the withdrawal of the UK from the European Convention on Human Rights, the repeal of the Human Rights Act and the reform of the Equality Act – all of which resonate with the messaging persistently platformed by Nigel Farage during his time in UKIP, and the subsequent Reform UK (which will be discussed further below).

As such, since the Brexit referendum in 2016, there has been a notable shift of the entire political spectrum to the right across the UK political landscape. Thus, despite declining in relevance, the role of UKIP in **normalising** far-right positions, as well as Islamophobic and racist rhetoric under the banner of 'legitimate grievances' cannot be underestimated.

Patriotic Alternative

Founded in 2019 by the **neo-Nazi** and antisemitic conspiracy theorist **Mark Collett** (another former member of the BNP), Patriotic Alternative (PA) is a fascist, Islamophobic, white supremacist, hate group that promotes **white genocide** conspiracy theories. PA has been **described** as “the biggest fascist group in the UK”.

PA's tactics include organising demonstrations, distributing leaflets, and holding events to promote their **white supremacist** agenda. They are also active on social media, where they spread their Islamophobic and racist messages to a broader audience. The group has been involved in various provocative activities, such as organising "White Lives Matter" rallies and counter-protesting Black Lives Matter demonstrations, as well as reportedly being **involved** in targeting hotels accommodating asylum seekers.

The group has a long list of **connections** to individuals with criminal records related to terrorism and incitement to racial hatred, as well as links to the previously mentioned NA. As **noted** in 2023 by Hope not Hate, “PA has publicly disavowed NA, and explicitly condemns violence and terrorism. However, the underlying ideologies of the two groups have much in common, and PA has proved willing to accommodate and even to promote former NA activists to official positions within the organisation.”

Reform UK

Following his departure from UKIP, Nigel Farage founded the Brexit Party in 2018 to pressure the government into delivering Brexit on the terms laid out by the party. It was rebranded as Reform UK in 2020, building on the strategies Farage had perfected during his years at UKIP by cementing immigration, Islamophobia, and multiculturalism as the primary causes around which it rallied supporters.

Like UKIP, it similarly positioned itself as the working person's alternative to the mainstream Conservative Party, portraying itself as the voice of ordinary Britons against a corrupt and out-of-touch political establishment. Thus, ultimately rooting its ideology in a populist and nationalist worldview, Reform UK emphasises British sovereignty, strict immigration controls, and opposition to political correctness, **human rights** legislation, and **diversity** measures, as well as demonstrating wider far-right positions, such as **climate change denial**.

Reform UK's tactics, particularly in the run-up to the recent general election, include aggressive campaigning on **social media**, where it targets disaffected voters with messages about government failure, the dangers of immigration, and the need for strong leadership to protect British values from the perils of multiculturalism and Muslim communities. The party also organises public **events** and **rallies** to build grassroots support and maintain its visibility. Farage and other leaders frequently appear in the media using **provocative** language **demonising** Muslims to generate headlines and attract attention.

With five currently sitting Reform UK MPs, a close examination of their appeal to voters and political influence is necessary. Like UKIP before it, the party does not explicitly frame itself as a far-right party, however, much of its rhetoric and policies, particularly around immigration, Islam, perceptions of the political establishment, and opposition to human rights and equality frameworks clearly align with far-right positions and themes (as will be explored below). As such, regardless of whether or not they wish to define themselves as 'far-right' they play a vital role in normalising far-right ideologies in both political and public life.

Part II:
KEY NARRATIVES OF THE FAR-RIGHT

As can be gleaned from the above (albeit brief) exploration of the history of the far-right in the UK, there are a variety of key narratives that have defined far-right ideologies, each rising and falling in prominence in response to the socio-political landscape.

The narratives and rhetoric of the far-right in the current times represent a significant challenge to the UK's social cohesion, democratic values, and multicultural identity, having gained renewed visibility and influence in recent years by capitalising on economic, social, and political crises. Hostility and division are core characteristics of this resurgence and the recent violence attests to the dangers that are posed by these ideologies.

The following discussion explores some of the key narratives that drive far-right rhetoric in the UK, with a particular focus on conspiracy theories and positions that underpinned the violence and Islamophobia that we have seen in recent weeks. As such, not every ideological position that can be identified within far-right rhetoric is covered in this chapter. There are topics not included in this exploration that are outside of Community Policy Forum's expertise, but which remain in urgent need of address. Hostile views towards climate change, sexuality, gender identity, feminism, abortion, and vaccinations – to name but a few areas that dominate far-right discourse – all have the potential to lead to more violence, particularly if (as will be discussed in a later chapter) mainstream media and politicians continue to adopt far-right rhetoric and language. The horrific death of **Brianna Ghey** in 2023 and the incel-inspired mass **shooting** in Plymouth in 2021 are but two stark reminders of these dangers.

It should also be noted that there is no blanket conformity of ideologies across far-right groups and actors. As the previous chapter demonstrated, many of the positions adopted by the far-right lie on a spectrum, with these positions frequently evolving as a pragmatic response to changing socio-political pressures and opportunities. Consequently, many of the organisations, groups, and individual actors discussed throughout this report may not subscribe to all of the narratives that we identify below, while others may only tacitly endorse them. That being said, in a holistic sense, it is these narratives that are the foundations of far-right ideologies and the driving force behind the current violence. As a consequence, it is imperative that we dismantle these narratives if we are to address this violence.

Scapegoats

The use of scapegoats is a central tactic in far-right rhetoric that is employed to simplify complex societal problems and direct public anger towards a specific community or demographic — often minorities, immigrants, or other marginalised groups. In times of perceived economic decline, heightened crime, or cultural erosion, far-right leaders and movements attempt to rally public support by portraying themselves as defenders of the 'in-group' (usually defined along ethnic, national, or religious lines) against the supposed threats posed by the scapegoated 'out-group.'

Under early movements such as the BUF and LEL, antisemitism and conspiracies about Jewish communities, as well as communists, were the focal points around which the far-right mobilised. In the years since, organisations such as NF turned their attention to migrants and racially minoritised communities before the BNP and EDL would eventually popularise Islamophobia.

This reductionist view is an effective tool as it removes the need for nuance when discussing complicated socio-economic and political challenges. This provides the public with a simple explanation for the challenges that they face, combined with an identifiable and tangible cause for their grievances to which their discontent can be directed.

Moreover, the platforming of scapegoats also provides the political establishment with a convenient vehicle through which to distract from its own political and economic shortcomings. Consequently, even if political elites do not actively participate in this rhetoric, they frequently lack the appetite to sufficiently condemn it and to publicly clarify the wider root causes of public dissatisfaction. At the same time, as later chapters of this report attest, this ability to distract from complicated issues with difficult solutions is a tempting lure for politicians to gradually shift their positions increasingly towards the right in pursuit of public popularity.

Scapegoating also serves to unify far-right supporters and sympathisers by creating a common enemy and sense of solidarity in protecting 'us' from 'them', thereby bolstering support for far-right ideologies and policies. By positioning themselves as the protectors of the nation or culture, far-right leaders can consolidate their power and justify exclusionary, oppressive, or even violent measures against the scapegoated group.

Islamophobia and the 'Clash of Civilisations'

The scapegoating of Muslim communities and Islamophobia is central to the contemporary far-right's narrative in the UK, often using distorted or demonstrably false narratives to inflame public fears and justify calls for sanctions against Muslim communities. The key mechanism for mobilising public sympathy within this narrative is the rhetoric of perceived threat to white 'indigenous' Britons.

Muslims as an existential threat

The far-right often frame Islamophobia within the broader context of a supposed 'clash of civilisations' narrative that draws on long-standing Orientalist tropes that depict Islam and Muslims as barbaric, uncivilised, and hostile to Western modernity, essentially concluding that Islam is inherently incompatible with Western values and poses a fundamental threat to British society. This rhetoric often emphasises cultural differences, such as the wearing of the hijab and praying, to argue that Muslims are unwilling or unable to integrate into British society, thereby leveraging social anxieties surrounding a perceived loss of 'British' identity and 'traditional' values.

A key point to be made is that many of the ideologues who wax lyrical about the perceived failure of Muslim communities to 'integrate' are usually not in fact concerned about integration – their offence is caused by Muslim refusals to assimilate. Integration refers to the mutual process by which society accommodates minority groups in retaining their original cultural identities while simultaneously incorporating aspects of the dominant culture. Integration promotes a multicultural society where diversity is respected and celebrated. Assimilation, on the other hand, involves the minority group adopting the customs, values, and norms of the dominant culture, at the expense of their own cultural identity. In assimilation, the goal is for the minority group to become indistinguishable from the majority, leading to a more homogenous society. This process can be voluntary or imposed, and it often involves pressure to conform to the dominant culture.

In other words, integration encourages cultural diversity within a society, while assimilation demands conformity to a single cultural standard. It is the end of multiculturalism and the homogeneity of one dominant culture to which far-right agitators ultimately aspire.

There is also an observable tendency to **overestimate** the size of Muslim communities in UK and Europe. In 2018, **research** demonstrated that "on average, the public think that around one in six Britons are Muslim, rather than the correct figure of fewer than one in twenty." This makes the perceived threat to identity appear more urgent and **promotes** "a widespread sentiment that Europe is being invaded by a growing Muslim population that cannot or will not be assimilated and that dreams, as blogger Agnon de Albatros argues, of 'implementing Shari'a law in Europe and making this infidel continent part of the domain of Islam'".

Beyond accusations that Muslim communities have no interest or intention of 'integrating' (or else, are so culturally incompatible that they are unable to do so), this narrative often centres on the idea that Muslim communities are actively working as a 'fifth column' in their attempts to impose their beliefs and customs on the broader society, leading to the erosion of British traditions and the imposition of Shariah law – the 'Islamisation' of Britain. For this reason, Muslims in the UK frequently face accusations of 'entryism' and 'manipulation' when they are seen to be politically active and participating in democratic processes. At the same time, if Muslim communities do not participate in political and public life they are accused of being 'isolationists' that refuse to integrate.

Muslims as a physical threat

The far-right often portrays Muslims as inherently violent and physically dangerous, framing them as a direct threat to public safety, national security, and women in particular. This narrative is typically fuelled by the selective highlighting of crime and terrorist attacks and accented by phrases such as 'Islamic invasion' to suggest that Muslims and immigrants are not only prone to violence but are also intent on undermining Western societies through acts of violence. This portrayal of immigrants, and Muslims in particular, as being responsible for a disproportionate amount of crime, further feeds into far-right calls for harsher policing, tougher sentencing, and increased surveillance of minority communities, as well as their argument that political correctness and concerns about being accused of racism have led to a situation where the police and judiciary are unable or unwilling to take effective action against crime, particularly when it involves minority groups.

This portrayal is further amplified by the provably false **conspiracy** theories of '**no-go zones**' in UK towns where Shariah law allegedly overrides national laws and non-Muslims cannot go, painting a picture of lawlessness and danger associated with Muslim-majority areas. Such rhetoric exploits fears of violence, crime, separatism, and intolerance, thereby reinforcing the idea that Muslims are a menacing presence in society.

This theme played a potent role in the riots that the UK witnessed in recent weeks. Within hours of the horrific **stabbing** and death of three young girls in Southport, social media platforms were flooded with speculation and incendiary posts relating to the identity of the attacker and accusing Muslims of being an inherently predatory, violent, and sexual danger to white British girls and young women. These claims are part of a well-established

Islamophobic trope that has been repeatedly debunked but remains potent within far-right messaging.

The stabbing was thus used as a catalyst to revive the 'grooming gang' conspiracy as a vehicle to direct hostility and violence towards Muslim communities, with the mosque in Southport becoming a **target** of a terrifying attack the following day. As such, it is surprising that there has been so much political **hesitancy** or direct reluctance to acknowledge Islamophobia as a factor in the violence.

As reported by the *Guardian*, participants of the attack **stated**, "We've just come because we want our country back. This hotel was supposed to be for women and children but it's full of men and there are loads of reports of them attacking women and stuff."

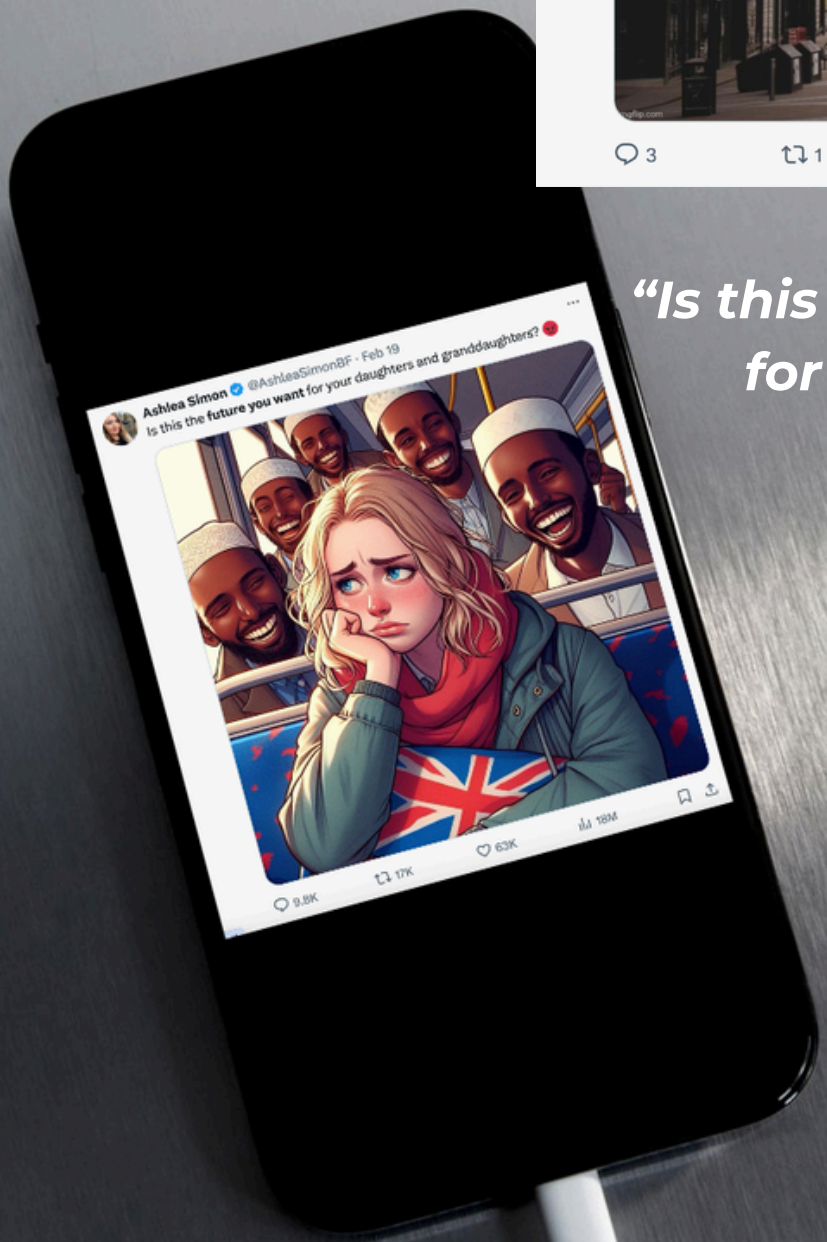
Earlier this year, Community Policy Forum published a **report** based on research by Keele University into Islamophobic discourse following socio-political 'trigger' events. Across the dataset examining social media posts surrounding Brexit, there were multiple examples of anger at the mainstream media for apparently being supposedly unwilling to properly report on grooming gangs. This follows a broader pattern within national public discourse (a pattern echoed in social media discussions surrounding the Southport stabbing and subsequent riots), with stories of grooming gangs involving Muslims and people of colour being capitalised upon by far-right voices as evidence of a unique proclivity amongst Muslims to sexual deviance and violence. Indeed, these portrayals of violence against women and girls invisibilise abuse perpetuated by white men, disingenuously reducing a society-wide and multifaceted problem to one of a single supposedly problematic group.

Consequently, such tropes continue to gain prominence in online and political discourse, despite evidence to the contrary. Indeed, a Home Office **review** released in 2020 revealed that there is no evidence of a link between ethnicity and grooming gang members engaged in child sexual exploitation, with the vast majority of offenders being white and under the age of 30. However, this has not prevented even prominent politicians such as former Home Secretary, **Suella Braverman**, from continuing to perpetuate the myth, which not only contributes to sustaining Islamophobia but obscures the systemic issues underlying sexual exploitation and hinders genuine efforts to address them effectively.

Moreover, Braverman is not the first political figure to be accused of using far-right tropes to stir up hatred against Muslim communities in recent years. On publication of the aforementioned Home Office Report into 'grooming gangs', Dr Ella Cockbain and Dr Waqas Tufail have **observed** that Priti Patel (then Home Secretary) "called the findings 'disappointing because community and cultural factors are evidently relevant to understanding and tackling offending' and implied that, with better data collection 'including in relation to … ethnicity', the findings would have been different. This looks like a last-ditch attempt to keep a politically useful trope alive. Concerns with 'cultural factors' seemingly do not extend to understanding what motivates white British abusers."

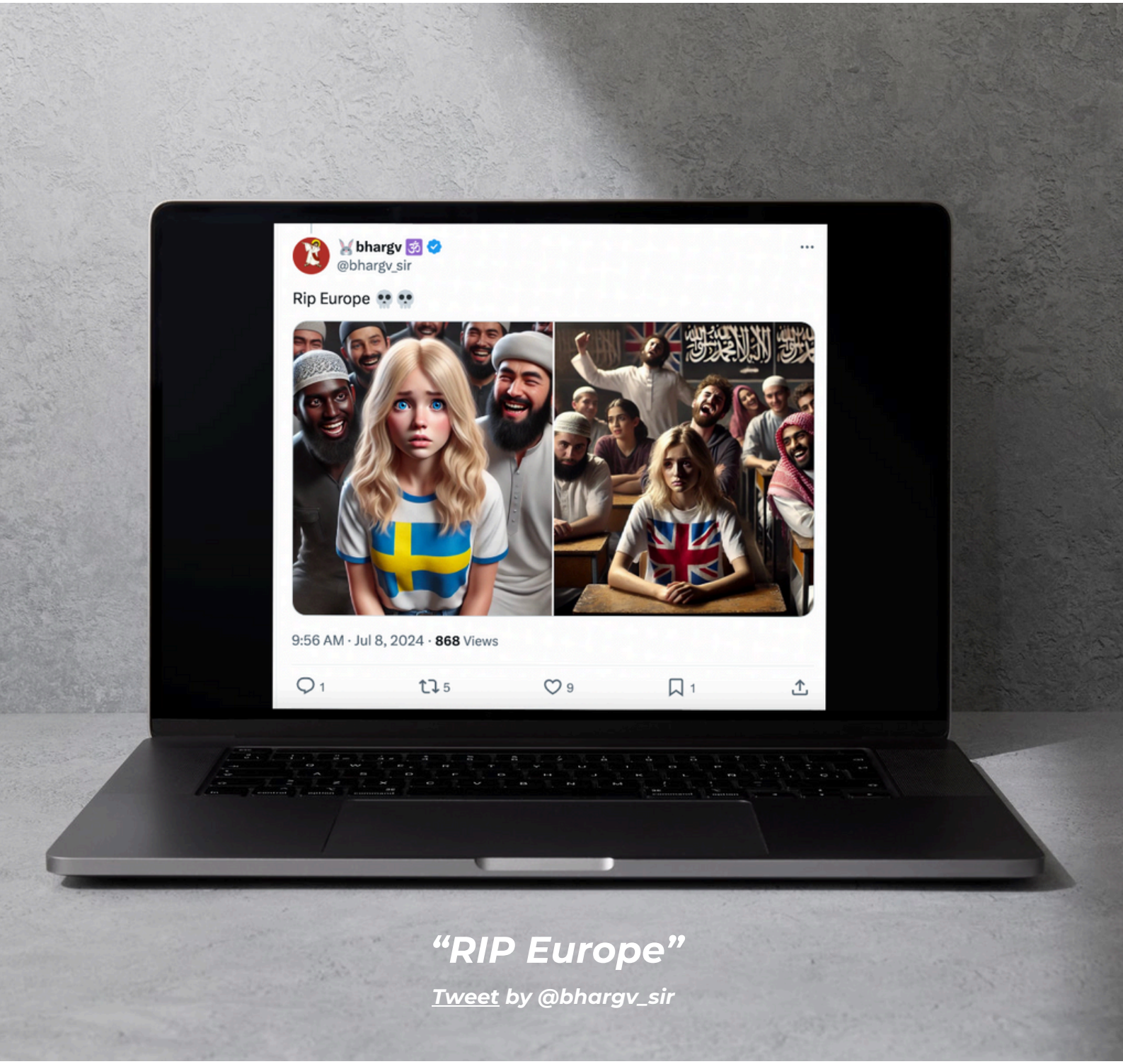
The confluence of Islamophobia, xenophobia, and racism can clearly be seen throughout this established trope. Social media profiles of prominent far-right figures are replete with AI-generated images of largely blue-eyed, blonde, white girls being accosted and harassed by bearded, Brown Muslim men. Moreover, such imagery is not limited to the UK, but has a broader reach to a supposed danger to European women and European identity. Consequently, it is impossible to examine this narrative that is so prominent within far-right messaging without acknowledging the sexual and racial politics that are driving much of their discourse.

Tweet by @whitebritishman



"Is this the future you want for your daughters and granddaughters?"

Tweet by @AshleaSimonBF



"RIP Europe"

Tweet by @bhargv_sir

Post found on Facebook groups run by Reform UK supporters during investigations by Byline Times.

Tweet by @EuropeInvasionn

"Send them back now deport the bastards they not British muslims but parasites and scroungers"

***Tweet* by @Kain1227295Kain**

***Tweet* by @yneemee1958**

While the concern throughout far-right narratives is ostensibly for the safety of white women and girls, a cynical analyst would note that far-right ideologies more broadly have very little concern for the wellbeing and genuine equality of women. Meanwhile, evidence has been uncovered demonstrating that survivors of child sexual exploitation are being actively groomed and ***exploited*** by far-right groups to further anti-Muslim agendas. Consequently, many have pointed to the ways in which issues of violence against women and girls have been weaponised by far-right sources, without any tangible contribution to attempts to actually address the real challenges. As **noted** by End Violence Against Women:

"We've seen the far-right's co-option of our movement to promote racist and white supremacist agendas... These individuals and groups are often known misogynists who have never before campaigned against rape or child sexual exploitation – in fact, they tend to support an extremely traditional, patriarchal notion of the family and interpersonal relationships. They co-opt and weaponise our movement against gender-based violence whenever it serves their anti-migrant agenda."

Muslims as an economic threat

The way in which the far-right capitalises on public discontent in times of economic uncertainty is a theme that will be discussed in greater detail below, however, the interplay between economic fears and Islamophobia is worth noting at this stage. Within far-right rhetoric, Muslims are frequently portrayed as an economic threat to 'ordinary' British citizens. Within this narrative, Muslims are framed as competitors for scarce resources such as jobs, housing, and welfare benefits, who are taking advantage of the UK welfare system to the detriment of those who are more deserving and truly entitled. As a result, the perception is that Muslim communities place an undue burden on the state, leading to economic hardships and reduced services for 'native' British citizens.

This rhetoric is designed to stoke fears that the economic opportunities of 'native' and 'deserving' citizens are being diminished by the presence of Muslims, particularly by those who are perceived as unwilling to integrate or contribute to the economy in a meaningful way.

Following an overarching reductionist approach that frequently characterises much of far-right logic, statistics and headlines surrounding issues such as Muslim unemployment are often taken out of context (and frequently wildly misquoted) to be presented as further 'evidence' that Muslims are incompatible with British values and work ethic. These analyses present a distorted view that **misrepresents** the lived realities and wider structural inequalities facing Muslim communities, fails to contextualise data in comparison with broader societal trends, and overlooks the vast **contributions** of Muslims to the UK economy. Such framing not only perpetuates harmful stereotypes but also diverts public attention from more significant systemic issues affecting the economy.

The Great Replacement Theory

One of the most pervasive and dangerous narratives of the far-right is the 'Great Replacement' theory, a far-right, white nationalist conspiracy that falsely **claims** there is a deliberate effort to replace white, Christian populations in Western countries with non-white (particularly Muslim) populations through high immigration levels and birth rates. **Proponents** often assert that these changes are being intentionally engineered by Jewish and political elites with the ultimate goal of erasing the white race ('**white genocide**') through the erosion of European cultural and ethnic identity.

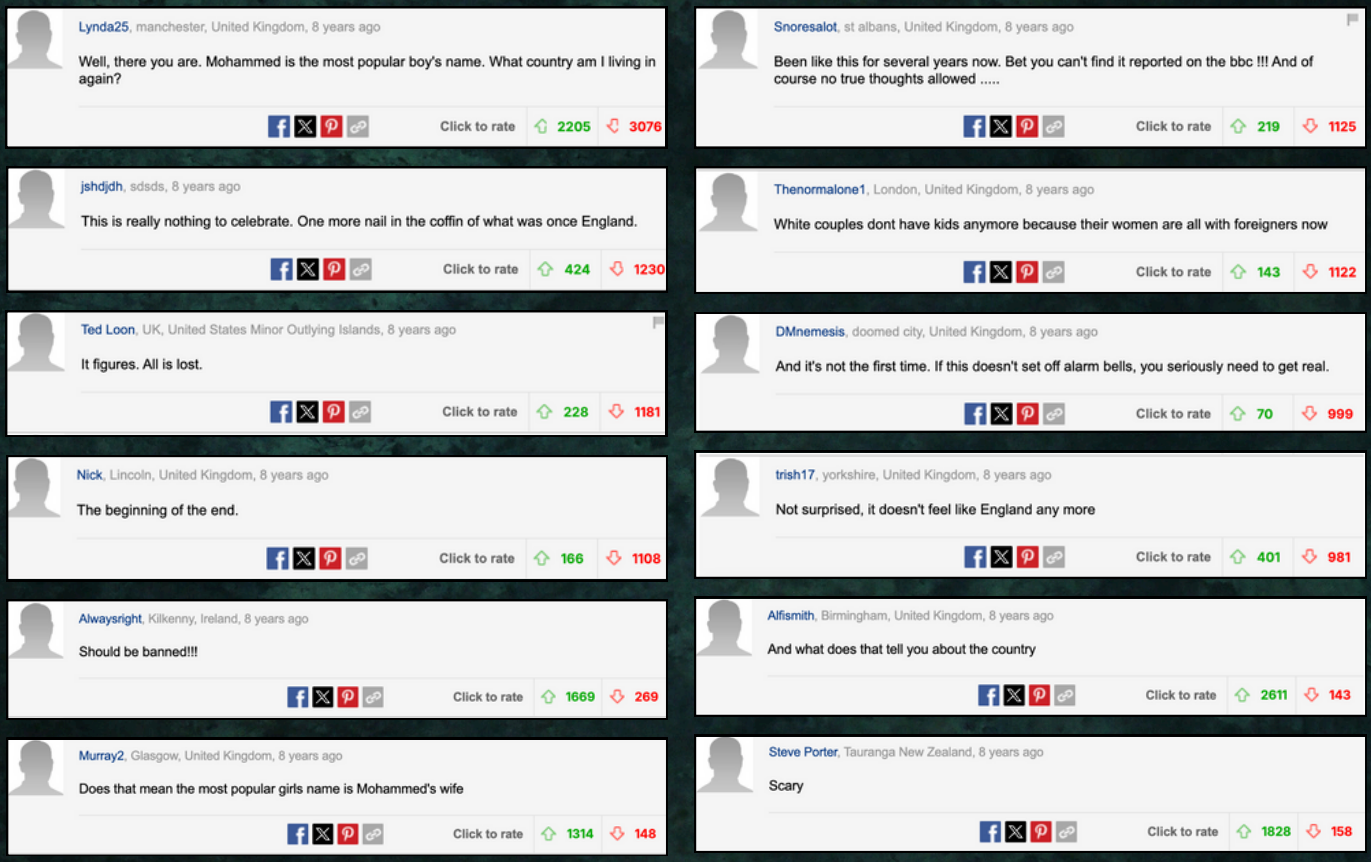
The Great Replacement theory has been adopted by far-right groups and individuals worldwide. It has **inspired** acts of violence, including the 2019 **Christchurch** mosque shootings in New Zealand and the 2019 **El Paso** and the 2022 **Buffalo** shootings in the US. The perpetrators of these attacks cited the Great Replacement theory as a motivating factor; the Christchurch shooter titled his manifesto "The Great Replacement".

In recent years, this theory has moved from the fringes into more mainstream global discourse. Some **Republican politicians** and right-wing **commentators** in the US have echoed similar ideas, suggesting that Democratic politicians are encouraging immigration to replace white voters and secure electoral advantages, given immigrants' traditional support for the Democratic Party. According to a 2022 YouGov **poll**, 61% of Donald Trump voters subscribe to the Great Replacement theory, highlighting its alarming spread and influence.

The Great Replacement theory also underpins the rhetoric of several right-wing European leaders. Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has repeatedly **warned** of a "plan for ethnic substitution" in Europe, alleging an "invasion" of immigrants from Muslim and African countries. Similarly, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in a televised **speech** after his election, spoke of a "great European population replacement program, which seeks to replace the missing European Christian children with migrants, with adults arriving from other civilisations".

Douglas Murray, a leading figure of the intensely anti-Muslim Henry Jackson Society, frequently espouses what has been described as “essentially an attenuated version of the great replacement theory for the Telegraph-reading classes”. In his 2017 book The Strange Death of Europe, Murray claimed that Europe is “committing suicide” due to “population replacement” and has called for a ban on immigration from Muslim countries. In the book, he wrote: “Any trip to thousands of locations across Europe can spark the fear of what the French writer and philosopher Renaud Camus has characterised as 'Le Grand Remplacement'."

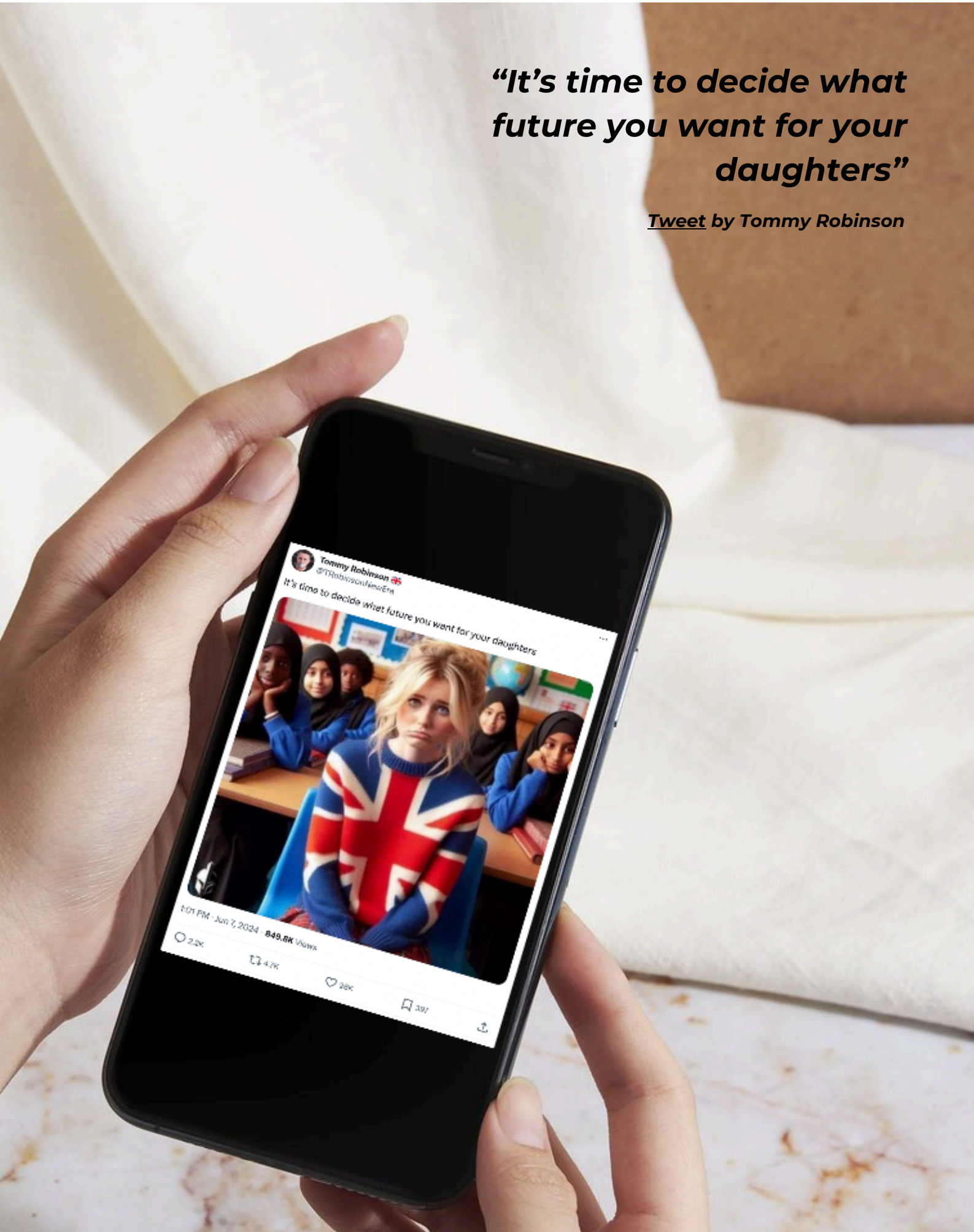
A study by King’s College London found that 32% of British respondents believe the Great Replacement theory is definitely or probably true. Meanwhile, outrage is sparked in online forums and newspaper sections when the popularity of the name Mohammed for newborns is cited, indicating the mainstreaming of such conspiracy theories in British society.



Examples of comments under a Daily Mail article, ‘Mohammed tops the list of most popular baby boy names in England and Wales as Oliver and Amelia stay favourites’.

“The great replacement is happening. Your children and grandchildren will be a hated minority. Is this the fututre you want for your granddaughters?”

Tweet by @AshleaSimonBF



"It's time to decide what future you want for your daughters"

***Tweet* by Tommy Robinson**

The Inversion of Victimhood

A common theme in far-right rhetoric is the portrayal of white, native Britons as victims of a concerted effort to marginalise and oppress them. This narrative inverts traditional understandings of racism and discrimination, arguing that it is white people who are now the primary targets of prejudice and exclusion. Far-right groups claim that policies promoting diversity and multiculturalism are actually forms of 'reverse racism' that disadvantage the white majority.

Sam Fowles **links** this victimisation to wider conspiracies surrounding the replacement and oppression of white populations:

"The conspiracy theory industry also produces other allegations, that we might call 'Great replacement-lite'. These eschew the theory's genocidal overtones but adopt the accompanying myths: that white British people are oppressed by powerful (but ill-defined) elites who act in the interests of foreigners in the interests of non-whites and 'foreigners'; universities are being 'forced' to 'drop white authors', the National Trust is 'erasing our history' by researching the colonial past of its properties; right wingers are 'afraid' to voice their views for fear of the 'woke mob' (an argument based on a report drawing on the evidence of just ten active academics). All feed into a public discourse based on fear of the other."

Nigel Farage has **capitalised** on this narrative throughout his political career by painting an image that "immigration has left our white working class as an underclass." This has galvanised conspiracies of asylum seekers and Muslims being prioritised at the **expense** of white British people, especially in terms of social services and housing: "they are a British Government" and "should care for British people first". As **explained** by Katherine Denkinson, "the claim that nobody is listening to white, working class boys has been a central tenet of far-right recruitment for decades. Setting themselves up as the only saviours in a hostile world, groups like the BNP, the National Front and, more recently, Patriotic Alternative, often suck in disenfranchised young men by convincing them that they will listen when nobody else has."

We have no intention of dismissing the genuine hardships facing white working-class communities, however, we reject the reductionist logic of the far-right that obscures the multi-dimensional causes underpinning these challenges. In reality, far-right agitators are doing a disservice to vulnerable followers by obscuring systemic issues and, therefore, distracting from attempts to offer genuine solutions to these problems that could create tangible benefits for the communities that they claim to serve.

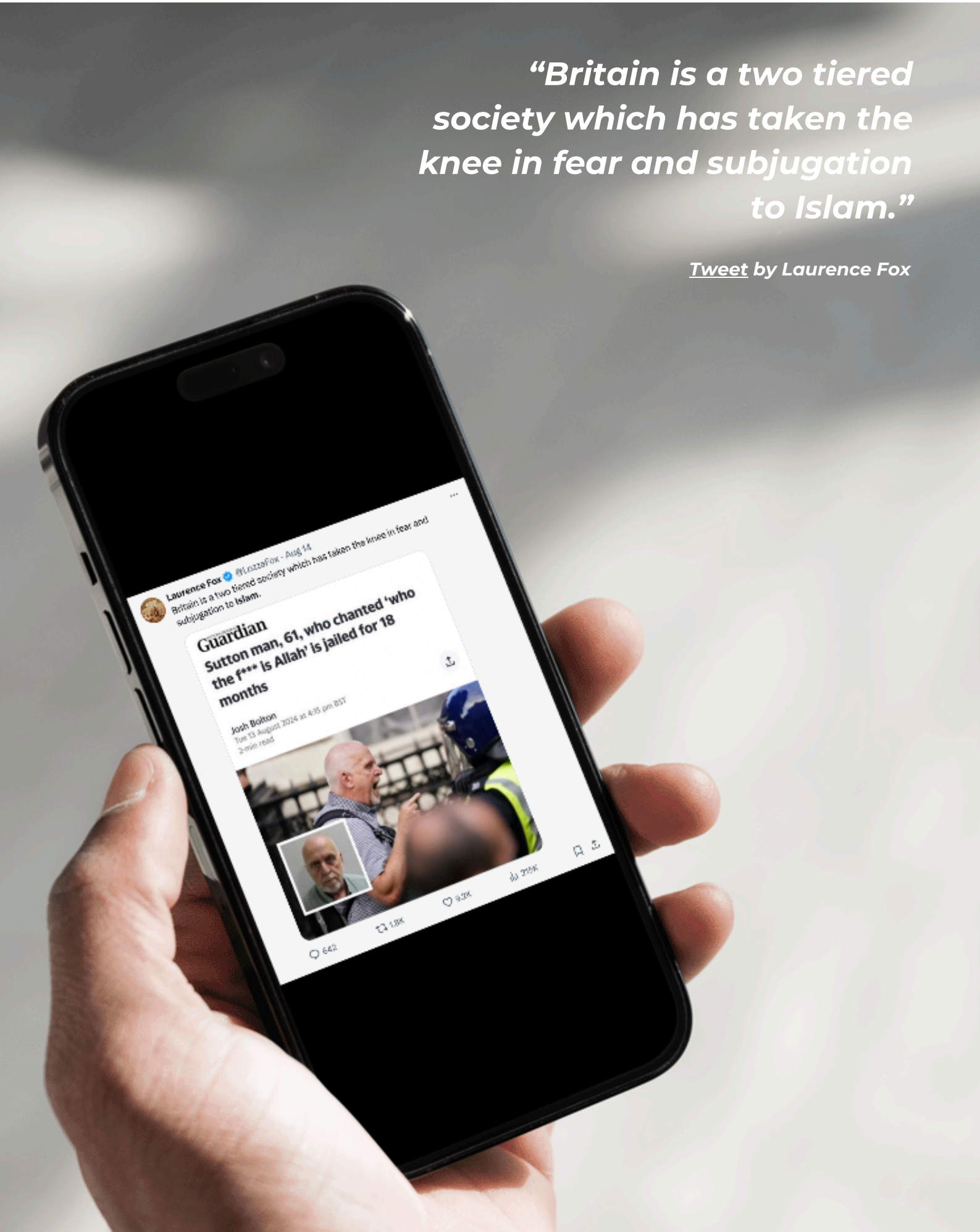
A current example of this inversion of victimhood is the myth of "two-tier policing" **propagated** by Tommy Robinson, Laurence Fox, and Nigel Farage, among others. Chouliaraki and Higgins have explained this discourse as:

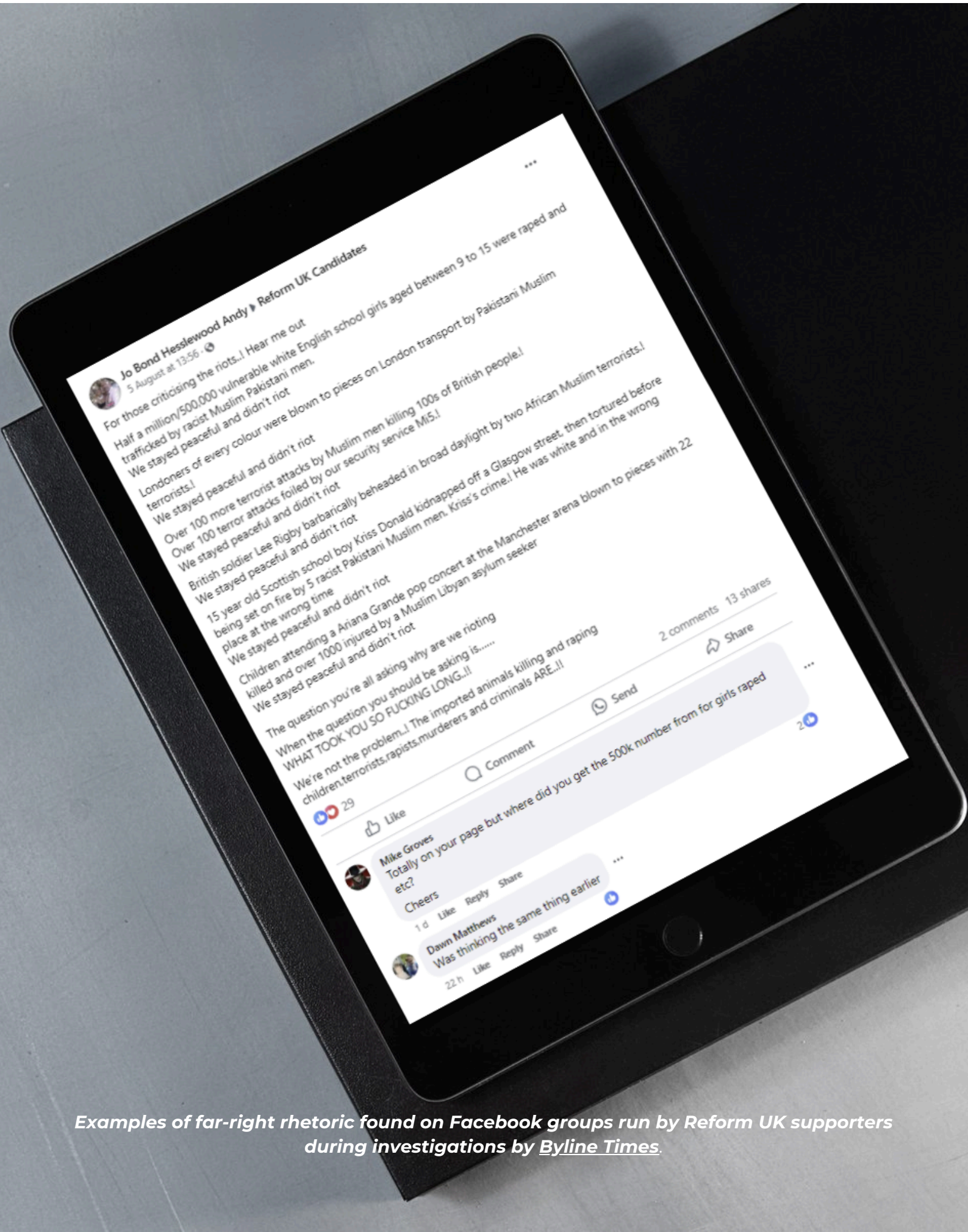
"progressive and/or racial minority protesters (such as those who participated in the #BlackLivesMatter uprisings of 2020) are treated with 'kid gloves' while the overwhelmingly white far-right is victimized by police. This is a myth, or rather, an upside-down truth. There is indeed 'two-tier' policing, but its victim is not the far-right... During the BLM uprisings... Many citizens developed a new consciousness about institutional racism in UK police forces... What we see in the claims of 'two-tier' policing is an attempt by the far-right to appropriate this new consciousness for their own benefit... [This is] a tactical claim to victimhood that positions white people in general (and white men in particular) as the primary victims of domestic state violence. What it strategically obfuscates in the process is both the racial bias documented to be inherent in state institutions, such as the Court in the UK, and the privileged place of white, far-right voices in the UK's parliamentary politics.

*This is not a new trick. The far-right has been using the communication strategy of reverse victimisation for years. Look at Nigel Farage's outrage, following his recent appearance at BBC's Question Time. Facing the audience's harsh questions, he **claimed** to be a victim of a dishonest political attack."*

“Britain is a two tiered society which has taken the knee in fear and subjugation to Islam.”

***Tweet* by Laurence Fox**





Examples of far-right rhetoric found on Facebook groups run by Reform UK supporters during investigations by Byline Times.

This victimhood narrative is closely tied to grievances about political correctness and '**wokeness**' which far-right groups argue is used to silence dissenting opinions and enforce a liberal agenda. The aforementioned idea that white Britons are being unfairly treated or 'replaced' by immigrants and minorities and deprioritised by the political establishment feeds into a sense of resentment and injustice, which can be a powerful motivator for political activism and even violence.

The victimhood narrative is also used to justify far-right actions, including protests, online harassment, and violent attacks. Far-right groups often frame their activities as self-defence or resistance against an oppressive system, positioning themselves as the true defenders of freedom and justice. This narrative not only fuels far-right mobilisation but also makes it more difficult to challenge racist, Islamophobic, and other hate-driven ideas, as any criticism is framed as part of the alleged conspiracy against the white majority.

Nationalism and Sovereignty

Nationalism is a core feature of far-right rhetoric, where it is often used to promote an exclusionary and aggressive form of patriotism. This type of nationalism is characterised by the belief that the UK is under threat from immigrants and ethnic or religious minorities, who are portrayed as diluting or undermining the national identity, as well as undeservedly occupying its resources. Far-right groups use this narrative to rally support for policies that prioritise the interests of the so-called 'indigenous' population while marginalising or excluding those considered 'outsiders'. In particular, far-right agitators call for a range of sanctions, from strict immigration controls, to deportations, and even voluntary or forced repatriation.

This is the driving force behind the fears of Muslims as an existential threat discussed above. However, while Muslims are perhaps the primary target in many ways, this hostility extends to non-Muslim migrants and refugees as well. That being said, the hostility directed at immigrant communities cannot be separated from its racially and religiously motivated underpinnings. Certainly, a brief examination of the reception of Ukrainian refugees (largely a white Christian population) lies in stark **contrast** to the discourse surrounding Syrian refugees and those from other non-white nations.

Far-right nationalism typically involves the glorification of a mythic past, where Britain is idealised as homogenous, pure, and untainted by foreign influences. This **romanticised** vision of the past is used to justify efforts to 'restore' the nation to its former glory by resisting multiculturalism and reversing the perceived erosion of traditional values. This use of the politics of memory also allows far-right actors to **represent** themselves as "the true heirs and bearers of national historical traditions and values". As researchers have **observed**, this weaponisation of the past ultimately seeks to "rehabilitate nostalgic ethno-nationalism as part of a politically articulated authoritarian revolt against liberal democracies and cosmopolitan social change in Europe".

“1960s London. No knife attacks. No civil unrest. No multiculturalism.”

***Tweet* by @EndWokeness**

Tied to this glorification of a carefully constructed version of history and traditions, is a pointed lack of self-awareness or group accountability. Certainly, it is easy to expose inconsistencies and self-contradictory arguments within many far-right arguments when one examines these assertions beyond the superficial slogans and headlines. For example, the idea that Muslim and migrant communities are stealing jobs from more deserving 'native' communities seems to disrupt simultaneous arguments that these communities refuse to work and rely on benefits. However, a rose-tinted nationalistic framework combined with the use of scapegoats allows far-right agitators and their supporters to avoid the accountability or discomfort that comes with confronting complicated socio-economic challenges.

Additionally, far-right nationalism often involves a strong emphasis on sovereignty and national independence, coupled with hostility towards international institutions, such as the European Union, which are seen as infringing on the nation's autonomy. This anti-globalist stance resonates with those who feel disenfranchised by globalisation and those who view supranational organisations as a threat to national sovereignty. While Brexit perhaps brought debates around sovereignty to the public consciousness with the greatest force, they feature heavily in debates surrounding human rights and the role of the **European Court of Human Rights**, especially regarding its granting of injunctions against **deportations** to Rwanda – a pivotal point of far-right interest.

This brand of nationalism is not about pride in one's country; it is about defining who belongs and who does not, often along ethnic, religious, or cultural lines. Moreover, in creating a narrative of 'us vs them' the far-right often demonise anti-racists and those that oppose far-right ideologies as '**race traitors**' and 'bleeding hearts' as a way to delegitimise opposition and legitimise discriminatory practices against those deemed 'un-British' or 'unpatriotic'.

Populism and Distrust of Political Elites

Populism is another key characteristic of far-right rhetoric, emphasising an intense distrust of political elites, the media, and other institutions perceived to be part of the 'establishment'. Far-right populists present themselves as the voice of the 'ordinary people' against a corrupt and out-of-touch elite that is accused of betraying national interests, particularly in relation to immigration and multiculturalism.

Within far-right discourse, this anti-establishment narrative often includes elements of wider conspiracy theories, such as the belief that elites are deliberately facilitating the Great Replacement or suppressing information about the dangers of Islam. Far-right groups argue that the mainstream media and political parties are complicit in this agenda, either out of ideological commitment or fear of being labelled as racist. This contributes to an erosion of trust in democratic institutions and the state apparatus.

While far-right movements have made great strides in painting themselves as a movement driven by the 'ordinary people' and the working classes, the organic grassroots swelling is a myth. As Sam Fowles correctly **asserts**, "Those with the most to gain from using far-right tropes are the powerful and privileged, including mainstream politicians and commentators. Their narratives focus people's anger away from those who caused the real causes of their problems and towards those who share many of the same struggles." Consequently, the resurgence of racism and the far-right is not a product of public 'common sense' grievances as it is overwhelmingly portrayed. **Instead**, it is "the logical conclusion of the more or less conscious manipulation by the elite of the concept of 'the people' and the working class to push reactionary ideas. These narratives place racism as a popular demand, rather than as something encouraged and perpetuated by elites, thus exonerating those with the means to influence and control public discourse through the media in particular. This in turn has legitimised the far-right, strengthened its hand and compounded inequalities. These actions divert us away from real concerns and radical alternatives to the current system."

This tactic of 'divide and rule' has been a long-standing political strategy to control populations by fostering divisions among its groups. By encouraging internal conflicts, those in power can weaken potential opposition and maintain dominance. This tactic was famously employed during British colonial rule in India, where the British exacerbated religious and ethnic differences between Hindus and Muslims, as well as in Ireland, where British authorities fuelled sectarian tensions between Protestants and Catholics, leading to prolonged conflict that served to weaken Irish resistance to British rule.

In the UK, minority communities, including Irish and later immigrant groups, have often been pitted against each other or the wider population, fostering a sense of 'us versus them'. This division distracts from systemic issues and reduces the potential for unified demands for change.

Looking at the dynamics of the recent riots, whilst the rioters may disproportionately be of working class backgrounds, so too are their victims. The minorities that have suffered the brutal impact of this violence are also disproportionately working class and have similarly been amongst the hardest hit by cuts and austerity. As such, those participating in the riots, in many ways, have more in common with their victims than some of the prominent figures advancing division between them. Indeed, it would be very difficult to describe many of the leading far-right figures in the UK as 'working class' or 'of the people'. Three out of five of Reform UK's current MPs (**Nigel Farage**, Richard Tice, and Rupert Lowe) are **privately educated** multi-millionaires, with Richard Tice largely **funding** the party and Nigel Farage **reportedly** being the highest-paid current MP, earning more than £1 million per year outside of his parliamentary role, for example through his appearances on the right-wing *GB News*.

However, Nigel Farage has famously refined the **image** of both himself and Reform UK as "**of the people**". In noting reports that Farage only drinks beer in public, Linus Westheuser **observes** that "the pint had been a crucial prop… His taste for Spanish prosecco, by contrast, was a reminder that Farage had previously been a City trader and continues to maintain strong connections to networks of right-wing billionaires. "Farage may be a prosperous, public-school educated MEP", **writes** Mark D'Arcy of the *BBC*, "but his language, style and character were shaped to appeal to working-class blokes and middle-class Eurosceptics." By building a carefully calibrated image, Farage is thus able to mobilise support against a political establishment **deemed** 'out of touch' with 'real people', whilst simultaneously deflecting from the realities of his own positionality and interests.

Farage has been heavily **criticised** since the outbreak of the riots due to his "irresponsible and dangerous" contribution to online speculation and misinformation surrounding the identity of the Southport perpetrator. Farage initially took to social media to **question** "whether the truth is being withheld from us" and later falsely claimed the attacker may have been on the security services' watch list. He was subsequently **described** as "nothing better than a Tommy Robinson in a suit". Such behaviour from a sitting MP legitimises far-right agitators and encourages racist and Islamophobic assumptions that fit their worldview.

Moreover, this further demonstrates both his intentional and strategic use of social media to engage directly with the public to rile up far-right anger and support for himself and his agenda. As a sitting MP, true questions could have been asked through numerous

parliamentary channels. However, posting them on an online forum allows Farage to capitalise on immediate public visibility and to leverage emotional responses as it limits the opportunities for immediate official responses that could discredit the impression that he is attempting to create.

At the same time, questioning “whether the truth is being withheld from us” clearly paints the impression of oppositional sides – the authorities and political establishment who are purposefully withholding information to obfuscate the true dangers of suspect communities vs us; the oppressed ordinary people alongside which Farage identifies himself. Creating this dichotomy and questioning the trustworthiness of the other side preemptively discredits any establishment responses or announcements that may call for calm or contradict the far-right worldview, while further cementing Farage’s position as a voice of leadership amongst his supporters.

Capitalising on Economic Crises

Economic crises have long been fertile ground for the far-right who capitalise on public grievances and anxieties as an opportunity to exploit public discontent and redirect frustrations toward scapegoated communities. In just over a decade and a half, the UK public has experienced the 2008 financial crash, recession, austerity, the impacts of Brexit, a pandemic, and a cost of living crisis. This has resulted in high levels of unemployment and precarious work, stagnant wages, the loss of homes, deprivation, and the destruction of public services and social security nets. Consequently, the UK is **considered** one of the least socially mobile societies in the Western world, with 22% of people living in **poverty**.

Poverty and socio-political disempowerment alienate people from mainstream politics and can result in a search for an outlet for grievances. As such, research has consistently noted a link between community deprivation and attraction to far-right political violence. As **highlighted** by Belgioioso et. al, "High local deprivation can erode the perceived legitimacy of political leaders and central institutions, undermine trust, increase political and social alienation, and even lead to support for the use of violence… Once individuals are politically disaffected after experiencing local deprivation, they can also become more susceptible to extremist right-wing ideologies."

Indeed, many of the areas experiencing violence over the past week are those **suffering** from high levels of unemployment and economic deprivation, which has been exacerbated by the cost of living crisis and the austerity-driven decimation of social and public services. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, the far-right continues to paint Muslim and migrant communities as an economic threat to the UK, undeservingly taking advantage of the economic benefits of being in the UK without offering any return contribution.

For too long, political commentators have tacitly endorsed this far-right reductionist logic, preferring to overlook the political decision-making that has led to these hardships, and providing space for far-right agitators to deflect blame onto migrants, Muslims, and other minority communities, thus heightening perceptions of injustice.

Consequently, we call on the government to show true leadership by openly and honestly recognising the roots of economic deprivation in these areas and directly engaging with local communities to address it.

Part III:
OPERATION AND STRATEGIES OF THE FAR-RIGHT

The far-right in the UK operates through a variety of channels and strategies, ranging from formal political parties and electoral campaigns to street protests, online propaganda, and grassroots activism. Understanding how these groups operate is crucial to understanding their influence and impact on British society.

Political Parties and Electoral Campaigns

Political parties have been a key vehicle for the far-right in the UK, providing a platform for promoting their ideology and gaining electoral support. Over the years, far-right parties like the British National Party and UKIP, and now Reform UK and smaller parties such as Lawrence Fox's **Reclaim Party** have participated in local, national, and European elections, with varying degrees of success.

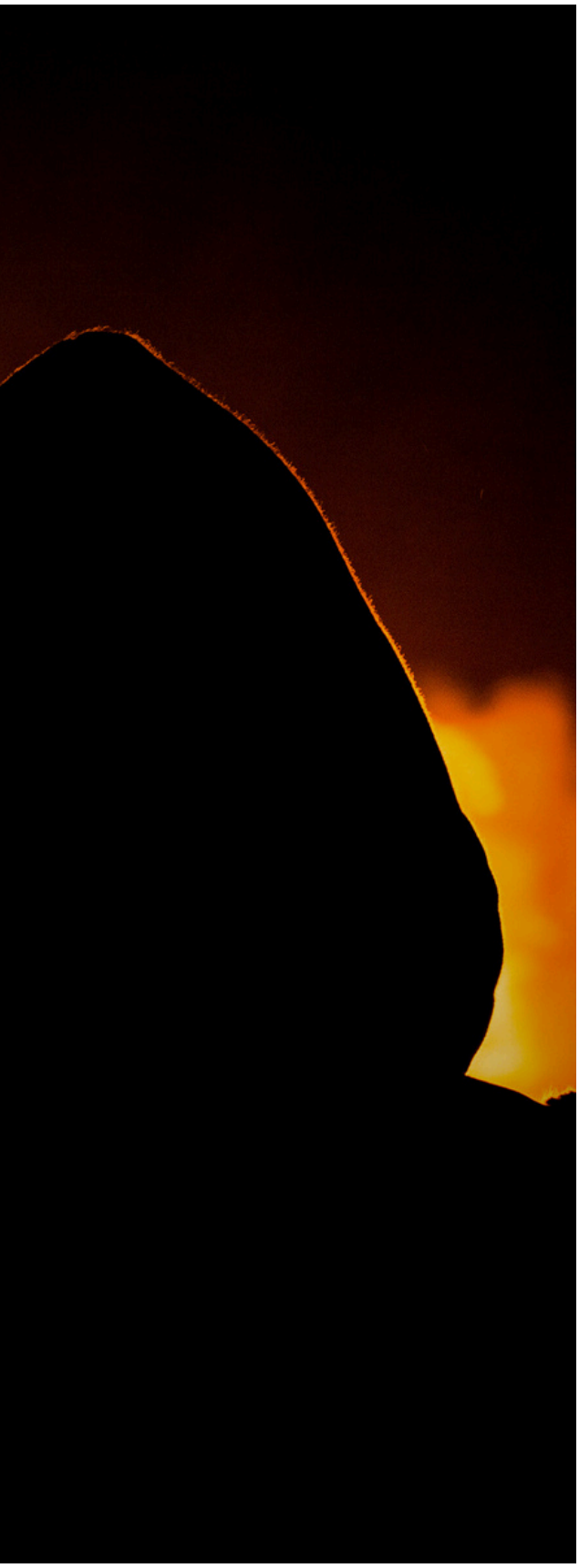
Far-right parties often focus their efforts on areas where they believe their message will resonate most strongly, such as regions with high levels of economic deprivation, social tension, and concerns about immigration. These areas are seen as fertile ground for far-right recruitment and campaigning, as the far-right can tap into existing grievances and present itself as the only political force willing to address them. These campaigns often use provocative and inflammatory language to stir up public emotions and gain media attention, which in turn helps to amplify the far-right's message. This was particularly **visible** in Reform UK's campaign strategy for the 2024 **general election**.

As a result of that election, Reform UK now has **five** sitting MPs, including Nigel Farage, having won 14% of the popular vote and coming second in 98 constituencies. By securing parliamentary seats, the party has not only gained a platform to influence national policy but has also moved the once-fringe ideologies of the far-right closer to the centre of UK politics. This electoral success has the potential to embolden other far-right groups, further normalising extreme viewpoints by making them a legitimate part of political discourse.

Indeed, the violence of the recent riots coming only a month after this electoral success should perhaps be seen as evidence of the increased confidence of far-right groups and ideologues in their perceived legitimate representation of the mainstream masses. This confidence can only be heightened when MPs such as Nigel Farage are themselves exacerbating tensions. Former counter-terror chief Neil Basu has **criticised** Farage for "giving the EDL succour, undermining the police, creating conspiracy theories, and giving a false

basis for the attacks on the police." Farage's remarks, suggesting that the truth behind the attack might be concealed and framing ongoing violence as the inevitable result of "mass, uncontrolled immigration", have received widespread condemnation from politicians and campaigners alike for fuelling extremist narratives. Brian Cox (husband of the late Jo Cox), **accused** Farage of "inciting a riot" and **noted** that "this is clearly not a case of accidental mischaracterisation. This is Reform and Farage in particular actively spreading disinformation and actively using insinuation to incite anxiety, concern and inflame emotions".

Moreover, the presence of Reform UK MPs in Parliament could potentially pressure other mainstream parties to adopt increasingly hardline positions on key issues to appeal to a broader electorate, thereby shifting the Overton window and further normalising far-right rhetoric in mainstream UK politics.



Street Protests and Politically Motivated Violence

Street protests, demonstrations, and even riots have also been a significant tactic for the far-right in the UK. Groups like the EDL rose to prominence on the back of **marches** and rallies in towns and cities across the country, often targeting areas with significant Muslim populations or communities that are perceived as being particularly vulnerable to 'Islamisation.' These tactics have echoes of the tactics of the BUF under Mosley in the 1930's as they marched through Jewish communities.

These protests are typically framed as a defence of British values and free speech, but they often involve confrontational and aggressive tactics, including mob violence and clashes with counter-protesters, the police, and local residents. The goal of these demonstrations is not only to assert the presence of the far-right in public spaces but also to provoke reactions that can be used to further the far-right's narrative of victimisation and resistance against a hostile establishment – especially when curated videos and images are circulated without context across social media platforms, as was seen in relation to the recent riots.

Street protests also serve as a recruitment tool, allowing far-right groups to attract new members and build networks of supporters. The visibility of these protests, often amplified by social media and news coverage, helps to normalise far-right ideas and increase their appeal to a broader audience.

However, there is a vast difference between legitimate peaceful protest and riots. While many media outlets and political commentators have **described** the recent violence as "pro-British marches" and "protests", this is irresponsible as it minimises the dangers of both the actions and the ideologies that are driving them. **Physical assaults** against minority communities, attacks on **mosques**, desecrations of **graves**, and the **arson** of hotels providing shelter to immigrants are all actions that go far beyond the boundaries of protest and constitute organised acts of

violence. Thus, these actions cannot and should not be framed as acts of protest against 'legitimate grievances' – they are acts of politically motivated violence. To refer to such incidents as protests not only mischaracterises their nature but also undermines the grave threat they pose to minority communities and our democratic rights by providing them with a "**blanket** of respectability".

False Equivalence

One of the pitfalls of approaching these riots as protests is that it creates a false equivalence. It presents the perpetrators of this violence on an equal footing with anti-racists, human rights activists, climate activists, and others on the left who use non-violent protests as part of their advocacy strategies. This is evident in the political response to recent **pro-Palestinian** protests which were overwhelmingly non-violent. Amongst the numerous pro-Palestine rallies that took place in London between October and December 2023, police made just 153 **arrests**, an average of 1 arrest per 20,000 people – a lower arrest rate than the Glastonbury music festival. With only 36 charges, 117 of the 153 people were released without charge. Despite this, mainstream politicians characterised the protests with languages such as "**mob rule**" and "**Islamist extremism**". At the same time, The UN special rapporteur on environmental defenders recently **declared** that the UK's crackdown on climate protesters is "chilling, regressive and a restriction on fundamental freedoms".

As such, responses to these riots must focus on violent criminal action and not conflate this action with the non-violent actions of other movements in a political attempt to minimise or excuse this violence, or in a misguided attempt for political 'balance'.

Politically Motivated Violence

Failing to recognise the violence for what it is merely exposes a continuing "**two-tier approach**" to extremism that fails to treat far-right motivated violence as seriously as violence that is religiously motivated and committed by Muslims. A number of commentators have **noted** that the public and political perception of the riots would have been markedly different had it been groups of Muslims that were undertaking such public violence. Indeed, the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) has warned that far-right violence in the UK is treated as "**thuggery**", where it would treat equivalent actions as terrorism if committed by Muslims.
From a prosecutorial standpoint, there are a variety of reasons that CPS may pursue public order offences rather than terrorism offences. However, it is worth noting that (to our knowledge) there have been no prosecutions under terrorism offences relating to the riots and sentences have been noticeably **less severe** than those of **left-wing** protestors prosecuted for disruptive but peaceful acts in recent times.

Moreover, regardless of prosecutions, it is necessary to analyse this violence within the context of terrorism to understand the gravity of the far-right threat. According to the **Terrorism Act 2000**, terrorism is the use or threat of actions that involve the use of firearms or explosives, or which is designed to influence the government, or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public/ section of the public for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.

These actions include:

- serious violence against a person;
- serious damage to property;
- endangering a person's life (other than that of the person committing the action);
- creating a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public; and
- action designed to seriously interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system.

Consequently, under this definition, there must be an acknowledgement that the organised politically motivated violence embodied by these riots constitutes terrorism.

As an illustration:

"the use or threat of action where... the use or threat is designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public"	Throughout this report, we have demonstrated the Islamophobia, racism, and anti-migrant hate at the core of these riots. There can be no doubt that the violence was a direct attempt to intimidate Muslim and minority communities – a section of the public.
"the use or threat of action where... the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause."	The far-right motivations driving this violence is clearly an ideological cause and may also be considered a racial cause in many ways as well.
"The use or threat of action... which involves the use of firearms or explosives is terrorism whether or not [the use or threat is designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public]."	In attacks against hotels housing asylum seekers, there are numerous reports of **fireworks** and other explosives being deployed against the buildings or police. Meanwhile, **petrol bombs** were reportedly thrown at mosques.
"Action falls within this [definition] if it— 1. *involves serious violence against a person,* 2. *involves serious damage to property,* 3. *endangers a person's life, other than that of the person committing the action,* 4. *creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public, or* 5. *is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system."*	Points 1-4 within this part of the definition are all actions that can be readily witnessed throughout the violence.

As such, the government must frame its response to the riots through the lens of terrorism and it must also urgently recalibrate its approach to and understanding of the domestic security threats currently facing the UK.

After four years of delays, the **Independent Review of PREVENT**, led by William Shawcross, was published in February 2023 to widespread **criticism** from academics, faith organisations and human rights organisations across civil society. At the beginning of the report, Shawcross **falsely** claims that all incidents of politically motivated violence that have occurred in the UK since 2019 "were Islamist in nature". Likewise, all six case studies that are explored in the report are of Muslims; none relate to extreme right-wing or other ideologies covered by PREVENT. His conclusion is ultimately that 'Islamism' is the primary threat to the UK, and that concern around the far-right has been overstated.

However, HOPE not Hate's *State of Hate 2024* **report** demonstrates that in 2023, 23 far-right activists and sympathisers were convicted of terrorist offences (a record for one year), noting: "As the British far-right becomes ever more confident and as the political and media discourse around immigration and Muslims gets even more toxic, so it is unsurprising that some far-right activists and sympathisers dream of, promote or plot terrorism." These riots further underscore that Shawcross' assessment is plainly wrong and that the far-right does indeed pose a significant threat to domestic safety in the UK. Moreover, if PREVENT's focus to this point was too heavily calibrated towards the far-right, as Shawcross suggests, this is further evidence that PREVENT itself is not fit for purpose.

We do not feel that the flaws in PREVENT are capable of being addressed through changes to its operation and application. We firmly agree with the conclusions of the **People's Review of PREVENT** that **PREVENT must be urgently scrapped. Instead, the government must develop a new approach to radicalisation that includes addressing the systematic disempowerment, economic deprivation, and slashing of social services that allows grievances to fester within communities** – grievances that can then be taken advantage of by nefarious actors and agitators of all different ideologies.

Clamping Down on Protests

There is a further danger in misidentifying the violence we have witnessed as protests. In responding to the violence, it would be hugely damaging to democracy and human rights if the government were to place increased **restrictions** on the right to peaceful protest.

In the past several years, the previous government passed a series of legislation designed to limit the right to protest, including the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023:

- **The Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022** severely **obstructs** the right to protest as a valuable tool of democratic engagement. It equips the police with expansive powers to clamp down on non-violent protest and lowers the threshold for "serious disruption"; **examples** include any protest that may, "by way of physical obstruction… prevent or hinder in a way that is more than minor, day-to-day activities (including journeys)"; "prevent or delay in a way that is more than minor, delivery of a time-sensitive

product", or "prevent or disrupt in a way that is more than minor, access to essential goods/services". The wording in the legislation allows police to determine what constitutes "serious disruption", meaning protestors are more likely to be caught up and subjected to restrictions. Among other **measures** under the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act is a new noise trigger, through which police can restrict protest activity that they deem too noisy, and the imposition of conditions on one-person protests and static demos that are now treated in the same way as protest marches.

- **The Public Order Act 2023** **imposes** further restrictions on protests. The act **provides** additional stop and search powers to the police in relation to protest offences such as locking-on, wilful obstruction of the highway, and obstructing major transport works. This means that if police have reasonable suspicion to believe one is carrying an object that could be used to commit any of these offences, they may conduct a stop and search. More concerning, however, is that the Public Order Act introduces an additional suspicionless stop and search power. This allows police to conduct stop and searches even where they lack reasonable grounds to believe one is carrying something that could be used for a protest offence. Considering the sustained criticism that existing stop-and-search practices have been shown to disproportionately impact people from ethnic minority backgrounds, this expansion has severe consequences for the rights to non-discrimination contained within the UK's domestic and international human rights obligations.

  Moreover, through the criminalisation of certain protest tactics, the Public Order Act limits the ways in which people can peacefully protest. As but one other example, a coalition of human rights organisations, including Amnesty International UK, Freedom from Torture, and Liberty, planned to mark World Refugee Day 2023 by dropping two banners from Westminster Bridge, reading: "Compassion not cruelty: refugees welcome." Yet, police ordered campaigners to not drop the banners, saying it presented a danger to the public (this is despite Amnesty carrying out similar banner drops in recent years, without the police objecting). As **stated** by Amnesty International UK's Chief Executive, Sacha Deshmukh: "If today's debacle is anything to go by – alongside the increasing clampdown on peaceful protest we are seeing across the country – then we have entered a very, very dark era for protest policing in the UK."

As such, these acts restrict the right to peaceful protest and exacerbate discrimination against minoritised communities. this raises particular concerns about the UK's compliance with its domestic and international human rights obligations, including rights surrounding peaceful association, political participation, and non-discrimination.

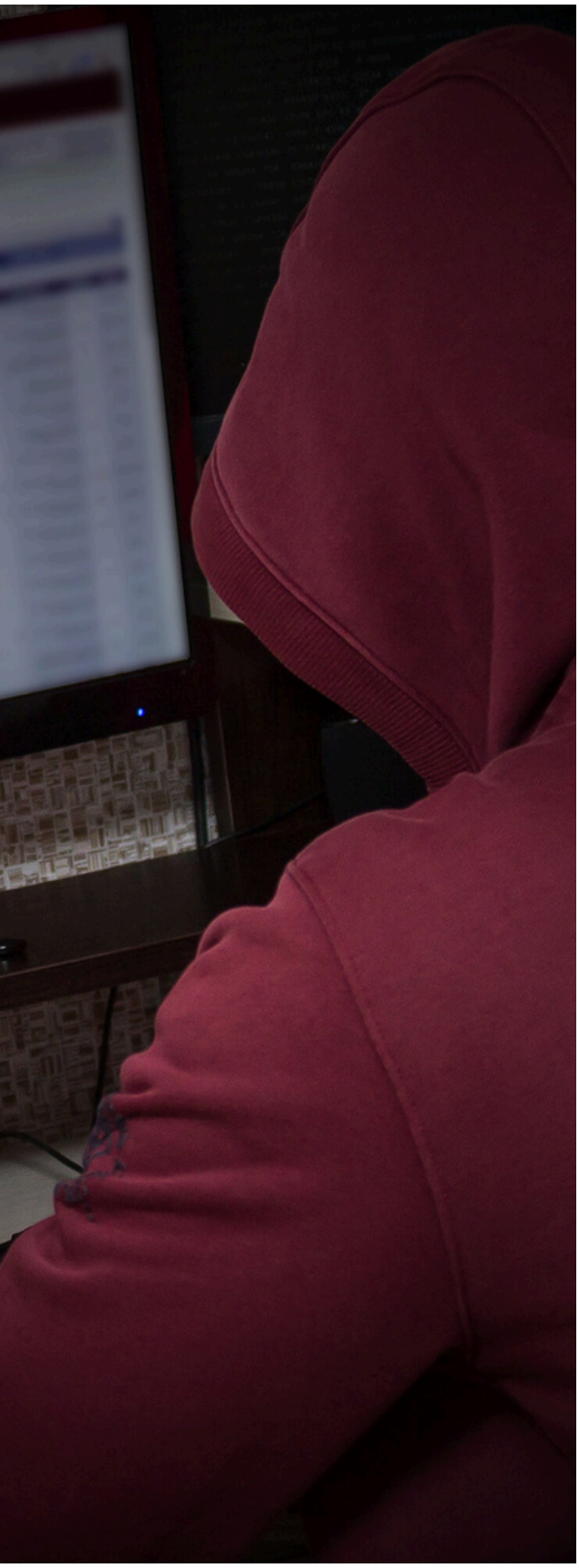
These rights are essential for a robust and healthy democracy, as well as holding governments to account. Therefore, **it is paramount that the government treats the riots we have seen as politically motivated violence and does not seek to address them through increased restrictions on non-violent protests.**

Grassroots Activism and Community Engagement

Often in conjunction with political campaigns and street demonstrations, the far-right in the UK also engages in grassroots activism and community outreach. This can take the form of **leafleting**, door-to-door canvassing, and organising local events, such as community meetings, and charity drives. For example, in the mid-2000s the BNP under Nick Griffin was **known** to encourage its members to participate in local activities such as cleaning up graffiti and repairing local children's play areas while wearing high-vis jackets with the party logo on them to garner local credibility.

These activities are designed to build a local support base and present the far-right as a legitimate and caring community actor. By engaging with local issues and offering tangible support to residents, far-right groups aim to win over voters who may not be attracted to their broader ideological agenda but who appreciate their focus on local concerns.

Grassroots activism also allows the far-right to establish a physical presence in communities, which can be important for the recruitment and retention of members. This type of engagement helps to create a sense of solidarity and belonging among supporters, reinforcing their commitment to the far-right cause.



Online Propaganda and Social Media

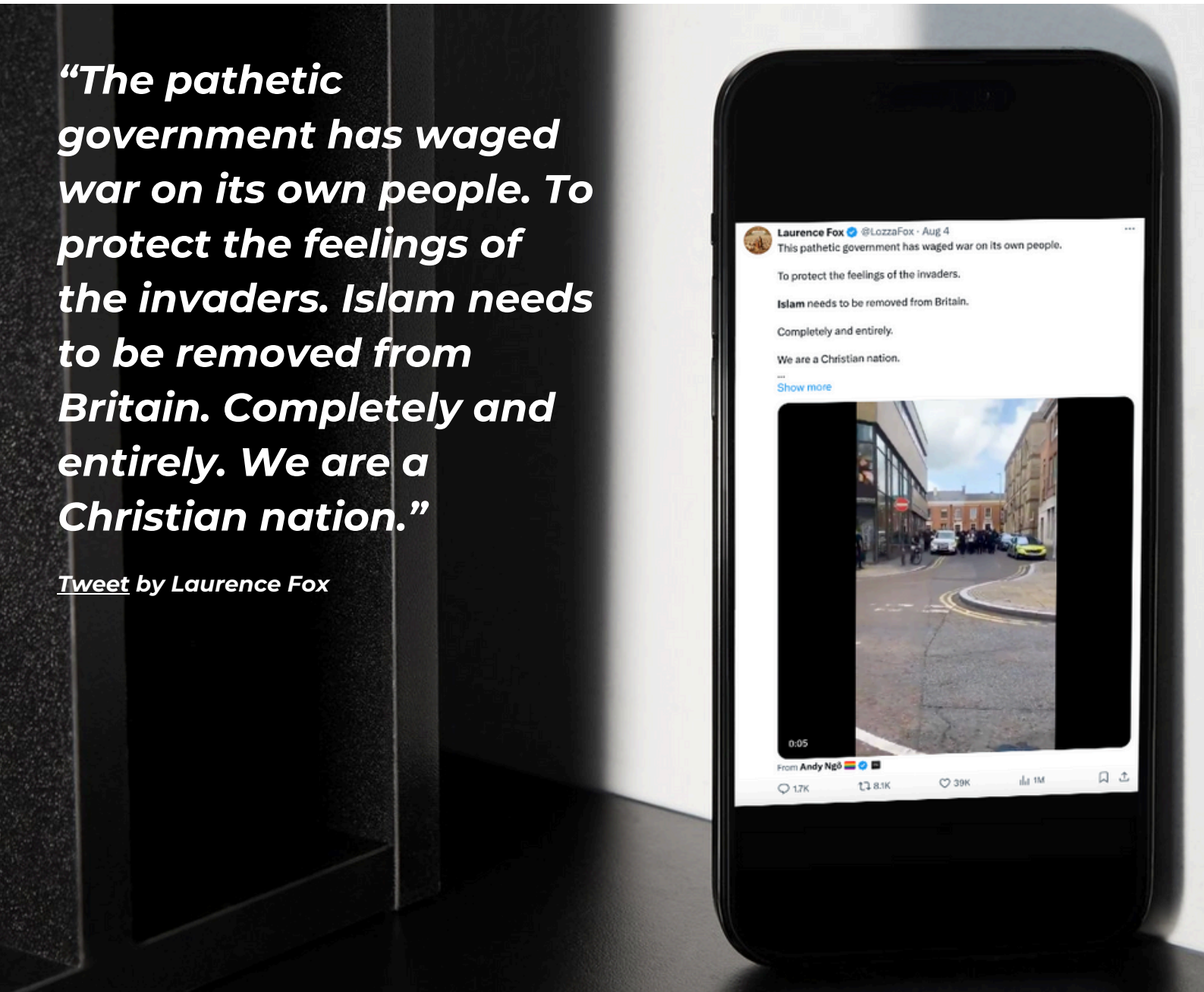
The rise of the internet and social media platforms has dramatically changed the way the far-right operates in the UK. Online platforms have become a crucial tool for spreading propaganda and conspiracy theories, leveraging right-wing news stories and political analysis, recruiting new members, and coordinating activities. Social media, in particular, has allowed far-right groups to reach a wider audience than ever before, bypassing traditional media channels and engaging directly with potential supporters, as well as influencing users who may not explicitly support or endorse far-right positions. This has been assisted by a lack of effective content moderation and **biases** in algorithms that are designed to identify users' preferences and **amplify** content accordingly – "a passing interest [in a piece of far-right content] can lead to a user being bombarded with extremist material".

The anonymity and decentralised nature of the internet, alongside a legislative landscape that has failed to keep pace with the rapid expansion of social media platforms and communications technologies, has also allowed far-right groups to operate more freely and avoid legal repercussions. Online forums, chat rooms, and encrypted messaging apps have become spaces where far-right activists can share ideas, plan activities, and coordinate campaigns without fear of repercussions from authorities.

The recent riots are a poignant reminder of how social media is being used as a tool to popularise support for far-right ideologies, ultimately serving as a **catalyst** for real-life violence and the incitement of hatred. As is well understood at this point, the unrest following the Southport stabbings was **exacerbated** by the rapid dissemination of disinformation online concerning the identity and background of the attacker, who was incorrectly portrayed as a Muslim refugee. This false narrative was strategically **amplified** by several far-right influencers and fake news sites, leading to widespread outrage and the mobilisation of far-right groups. High-profile **figures** such as **Andrew Tate**, Laurence Fox, and Tommy Robinson played a significant role in propagating these claims,

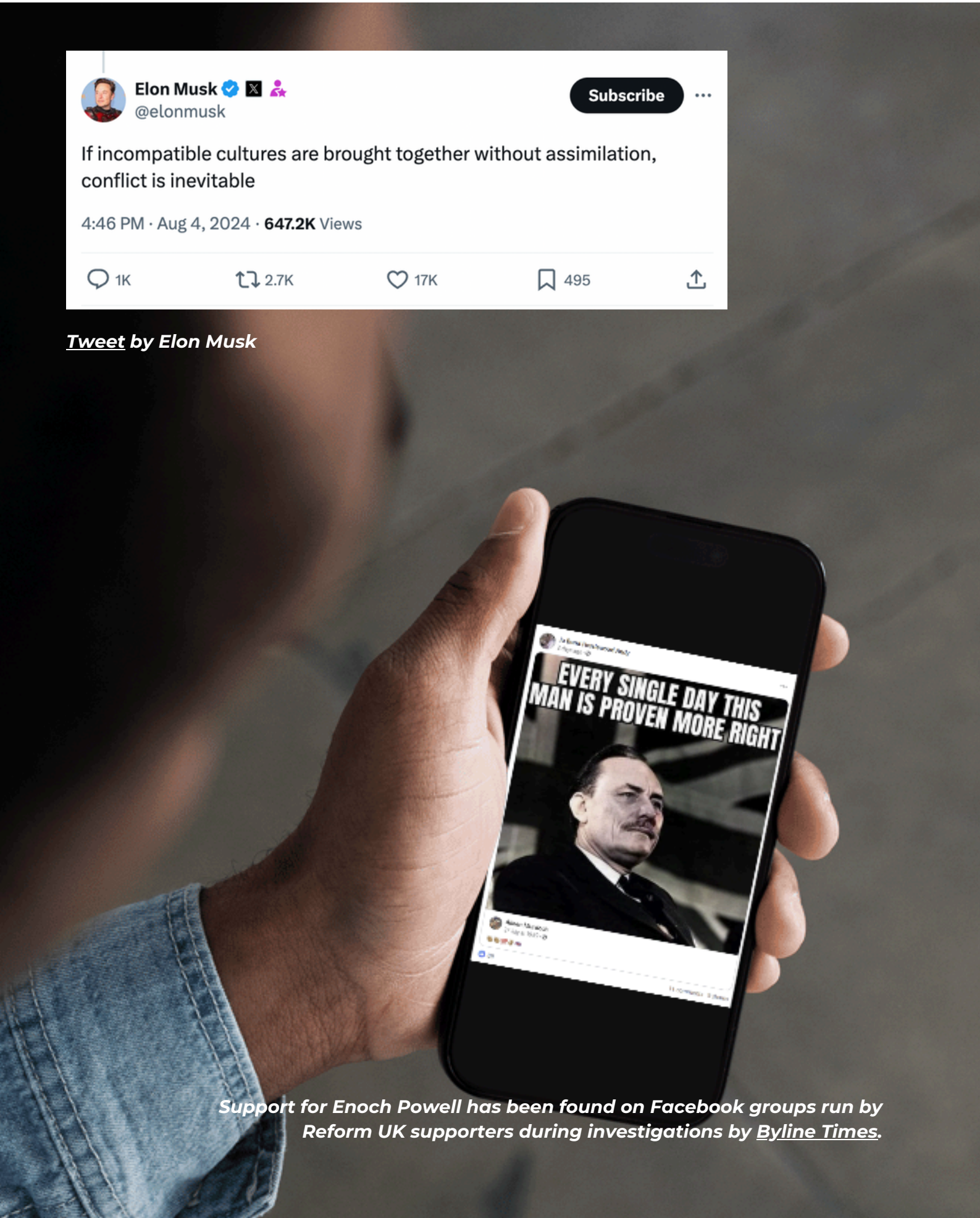
leveraging their substantial followings to amplify the misinformation. This resulted in the false narrative gaining traction, culminating in violent clashes with the police during a vigil for the victims in Southport.

Andrew Tate, for example, inaccurately **asserted** that the attacker was an "undocumented migrant" who had arrived "in the UK in a boat," despite official clarifications identifying the attacker as being born in Cardiff. Tate's video, which quickly garnered over 12 million views, was eventually removed for violating Twitter's terms of service. **Similarly**, Laurence Fox perpetuated the unsubstantiated claim that the attacker was Muslim, further inflaming tensions by stating that, "we need to permanently remove Islam from Great Britain". Unlike Tate's video, Fox's tweet remains online at the time of writing and he repeated the suggestion six days later, again, without repercussions. The combined efforts of such influencers, coupled with the viral nature of their content, thus played a critical role in escalating tensions and driving the unrest, highlighting the significant impact that disinformation, particularly when spread by influential figures, can have on public order and social cohesion.



"Enough of this madness now. We need to permanently remove Islam from Great Britain. Completely and entirely"

Tweet **by Laurence Fox**



***Tweet* by Elon Musk**

Support for Enoch Powell has been found on Facebook groups run by Reform UK supporters during investigations by Byline Times.

In recent years, social media companies, under pressure from governments and civil society, have increasingly taken steps to remove far-right content and ban extremist accounts, forcing far-right groups to constantly adapt their strategies. However, Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter (now X) in October 2022 marked a significant shift in how social media platforms regulate content, particularly concerning far-right rhetoric and hate speech. Ostensibly under the guise of 'free speech', Musk implemented changes that loosened content moderation policies, which had previously been in place to curb the spread of misinformation, hate speech, and extremist views – all of which were at the centre of igniting the violence seen in the riots. Under Musk's leadership, Twitter reinstated several accounts previously banned for violating these policies, including those of far-right figures and conspiracy theorists, such as Tommy Robinson (who was previously in the "**digital wilderness**" but became instrumental in sharing **disinformation** and inflammatory statements that **fanned the flames** of the riots). Consequently, Elon Musk has been **accused** of bearing some responsibility for igniting the violence witnessed, with Robinson himself thanking Elon Musk for being a "voice for the truth".

This deregulation has led to a noticeable increase in the visibility and normalisation of far-right, racist, and Islamophobic rhetoric across the platform. Hate speech, particularly Islamophobic, antisemitic, and racist content, surged as a result of these changes to applications of the platform's community guidelines. Particularly considering Musk's own support of far-right positions and involvement in disseminating **misinformation** that often targets minority communities, liberal ideals, and political establishments, the changes seen on X have been interpreted by many as an active effort to mainstream far-right ideologies that were previously considered fringe views on the platform. Musk was heavily **criticised** for his comments surrounding the riots, including for stating that "if incompatible cultures are brought together without assimilation, conflict is inevitable". Moreover, due to his large following, Musk's interaction with far-right posts on the platform **amplified** these messages exponentially.

This shift in Twitter/ X's regulatory stance over the last two years has had broader implications for social media and has been followed by a **pattern** of other platforms relaxing their policies, ending fact-checking initiatives, and reducing staff tasked with tackling hate speech. This raises significant concerns about the role of big tech in managing public discourse and the spread of misinformation and hate speech.

This interconnected landscape of misinformation, far-right rhetoric, and social media manipulation, therefore, underscores the urgent need for strategies to combat the spread of hate speech and protect vulnerable communities in the digital age. As such, the current situation has intensified **discussions** surrounding the effectiveness of the Online Safety Act (OSA) in combating the spread of disinformation on social media.

Is the UK Online Safety Act Fit for Purpose?

By Luc Steinberg, Media Diversity Institute

In the wake of a deadly knife attack at a dance studio in Southport on July 29, violent and racist rioting broke out across the UK. Misinformation spread like wildfire in the aftermath, fueled by the absence of official details about the 17-year-old attacker. Before long, far-right influencers like Tommy Robinson exploited the information vacuum, falsely identifying the perpetrator as a Muslim asylum seeker. Social media platforms, once again, became the battleground, with incendiary posts flooding platforms like X (formerly Twitter) and YouTube. Even X's owner, Elon Musk, jumped into the fray, tweeting that "civil war is inevitable" and promoting myths about "**two-tier policing**." His participation only served to fan the flames of unrest.

The UK riots threw a spotlight on the role of social media in amplifying misinformation and inciting violence. Are platforms doing enough to prevent harmful content from spreading or do they amplify it on purpose through the use of opaque algorithms in order to increase user engagement? And more pointedly, is the UK's Online Safety Act (OSA), which came into force in 2023, equipped to tackle such issues—without trampling on freedom of speech?
The Online Safety Act: Promises and pitfalls

The OSA places various responsibilities on online platforms and services that require them to implement systems and processes to ensure the safety of internet users from harms caused by illegal content, such as racially or religiously aggravated public order offences or inciting violence. And, more problematically, content that is deemed 'legal but harmful'. Steep fines of up to 10% of worldwide revenue can be levied upon platforms that fail to meet safety standards. Aspects of the OSA are to be rolled out incrementally by the UK's independent media regulator, Ofcom, ensuring that government overreach is avoided. Yet, while some provisions are already in effect — such as penalties for **spreading harmful misinformation** — critical elements that would hold platforms like X accountable won't take effect until 2025.
The OSA aims to curb the spread of dangerous misinformation and hate speech, but critics argue that its approach is flawed. The balance between protecting the public and preserving the diversity of thought online remains a delicate one. Algorithms that prioritise 'engagement' often amplify sensational or divisive content, putting marginalised communities at even greater risk of online harassment and silencing. Conversely, as I **wrote** in 2021 prior to the bill's adoption, the threat of fines may mean that social media companies over-moderate content, which often disproportionately silences minority voices, activists and social movements.

Under the OSA social media platforms will be required to review and collect data on how safe their recommendation algorithms are. It is hoped that this will decrease the number of users being exposed to illegal content before trust and safety teams are able to effectively moderate the content.

While Labour has said it will look into the OSA to find any **shortcomings** and adjust the legislation to potentially include more provisions for the removal of misinformation and disinformation, others have criticised the existing legislation for already being too restrictive on freedom of expression.

Comparing UK, US, EU

The European Union's Digital Services Act (DSA) takes a risk-based approach. Adopted in 2022 but still in the process of being implemented, the DSA designates platforms (VLOPs - Very Large Online Platforms) by their size and requires that the platforms implement measures such as risk assessments and take measures to mitigate these risks. The DSA also emphasises transparency - e.g letting users know why content has been removed.

In a world first July, the European Commission began **infringement proceedings** under the DSA rules in July against X (formerly Twitter) for failing to adequately address the preponderance of disinformation and illegal content on the platform as well as inadequately meeting the DSA's transparency requirements.

The EU has received both praise and criticism for the DSA, particularly from the US for potential overreach and stifling speech. The **Electronic Frontiers Foundation**, a US-based digital rights organisation, was encouraged by the DSA's approach for "not transforming social networks and search engines into censorship machines", but hesitated elsewhere saying "It gives way too much power to government agencies to flag and remove potentially illegal content and to uncover data about anonymous speakers."

The US, however, does not have an equivalent online safety law. The First Amendment, with few exceptions (CSAM for example), prevents the government from interfering with speech. Additionally, the infamous Section 230 of the 1996 **Communications Decency Act** absolves platforms from any responsibility for the user-generated content they host. Although there have been several bills that sought to overturn Section 230, others see it as having **enabled** the Internet to exist in the first place. The recent KOSA bill (**Kids Online Safety Act)** aims to tackle platform liability through a "duty of care" approach but is more focused on child safety than disinformation or hate speech. Although KOSA has garnered bipartisan approval, civil rights advocates have raised alarms about its potential to stifle free speech, particularly for marginalised communities. They fear the legislation could lead to the censorship of content related to minorities, LGBTQ+ issues, racism, and abortion.

Further afield, the refusal of lawmakers to effectively regulate social media in the US has drawn strong criticism from governments worldwide who seek to curb the influence of Silicon Valley in their own countries. Meanwhile, a powerful tech lobby has sought to block attempts at regulation, often claiming that any such regulatory pressures would stifle innovation.

Freedom of Speech vs. Freedom from Harm

The UK Online Safety Act, like laws elsewhere, forces us to consider uncomfortable questions about fundamental rights. On one side, there are those who argue that tighter regulation is necessary to stop hate speech from inciting real-world violence, like the recent Southport riots. On the other, many fear that these laws could stifle legitimate dissent and minority viewpoints.

At the same time, platforms need to consider their bottom line. They know that if they fail to

act on certain types of harmful speech then advertisers and users will simply leave. However, the sheer volume of user-generated content from billions of users makes their task monumental as well as complex.

Conclusion

Regulating media content is a balancing act. In the wake of the violent riots we once again find ourselves thinking about how to balance freedom of expression and people's right to be free from harm. How do we prevent the most hateful content from spilling over into real-world destruction without being accused of censorship? These questions don't have easy answers but that doesn't stop everyone shouting down the other side whenever the topic comes up; the Tories accusing liberals of chilling freedom of expression and silencing conservative voices, and Labour and liberals accusing right-wingers of incitement. Time will tell if the Online Safety Act is fit to tackle the online harms in the UK. And in the end, the process of content moderation is like democracy - it is never perfect but we have to try.

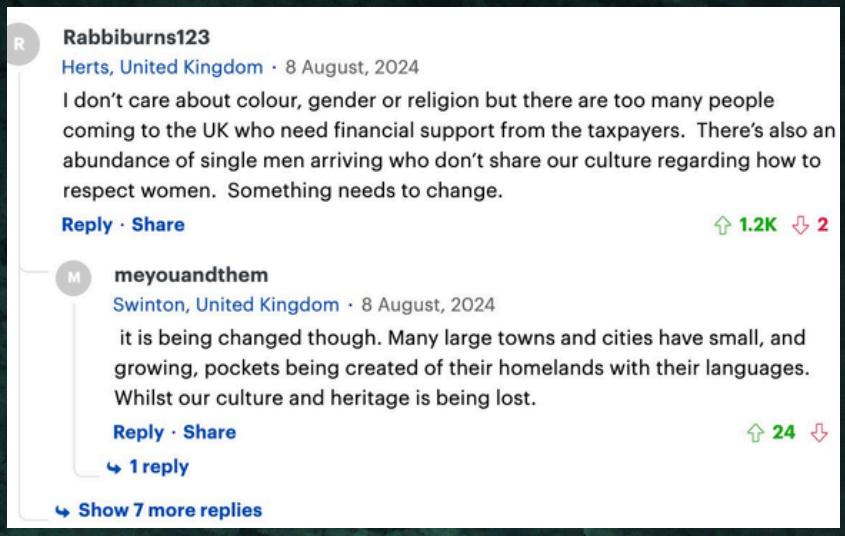
While discussions about a potential review of the OSA **persist**, it is worth noting four important points that currently render the OSA unable to address much of the troubling materials seen across online platforms that drove the violence experienced in many places across the UK:

- **Disinformation:** A defining feature of the recent violence was the role of disinformation in triggering the riots. As pointed out by **Julian Petley**, Section 179(1) of the Online Safety Act reforms parts of the Malicious Communications Act 1988 and the Communications Act 2003 to produce a false communications offence if a person posts messages containing information that they know to be false and intend it to cause "non-trivial psychological or physical harm to a likely audience". However, this offence is too **narrowly drafted** to address much of the disinformation witnessed in recent weeks in a court of law. In reality, it would be exceedingly difficult to prove that a person knew what they were posting was false and that they intended to cause harm. Consequently, it is difficult to see how a case could be brought against **Bernie Spofforth**, who reportedly was the first person to wrongfully claim that the perpetrator of the stabbings in Southport was "Ali Al-Shakati… an asylum seeker who came to the UK by boat last year and was on an MI6 watch list. If this is true, then all hell is about to break loose." Indeed, it would be **difficult** to prove that her active intention in posting this statement was to cause harm, and considering her **claim** that she received this information from someone in Southport, it would be similarly difficult to prove that she knew the claim to be false.

- **Comments sections:** As Community Policy Forum observed when the OSA was being debated in Parliament, comment sections on websites remain outside the scope of the OSA's regulation. When one considers the content and nature of comment sections, particularly those of mainstream newspapers, such as the Daily Mail, it is on these platforms that one often encounters the most "egregious forms of racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism, xenophobia, sexism, homophobia, and anti-trans sentiments… This has been demonstrated numerous times, with one public **experiment** posting Nazi propaganda on the comments section of the Daily Mail. The experiment highlighted the popularity with which such rhetoric is received on the platform, with direct quotes from Adolf Hitler being 'up-voted' amongst the comments."

  Moreover, the content published by such titles can only be seen to invite such discussions, as they have a long-held reputation for prejudicial and sensationalist stories about migrants, Muslims, and other minority communities. In 2016, both The Sun and The Daily Mail were highlighted for criticism by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance for playing a "prominent role in encouraging prejudice" against vulnerable groups. Therefore, it can be of little surprise that comment sections on websites of mainstream newspapers are a breeding ground for far-right ideologies. With the OSA failing to cover these spaces, they remain as a significant gap in need of urgent oversight. Interestingly, at the time of writing, the Daily Mail appears to be selectively disabling its comment section when attached to certain articles, perhaps as a response to the likelihood of problematic content that is currently under the spotlight. However, the comment section for other articles seems to remain functioning. Below is but a handful of example comments on an article published on 8th August 2024, entitled 'So where's the plan to stop the boats?' As can be seen quite readily from glancing at the comments,

many of them demonstrate key characteristics of far-right rhetoric and conspiracy theories, including clashes of culture, economic injustice, invasion, and lack of integration. These will all be discussed in greater detail in a later chapter of this report.



Comments under a Daily Mail article entitled, 'So where's the plan to stop the boats?'

- **Religiously motivated hate:** For the most part, the OSA does not create new offences, especially in relation to the spread of hate. Instead, it seeks to hold platforms accountable for dealing with and removing content that is already illegal under existing legislation. However, when it comes to Muslims specifically, the existing protections to combat Islamophobia are limited. The Malicious Communications Act 1988 (which was drafted long before the advent and explosion of social media) protects against the sending of messages that are indecent, grossly offensive, threatening, or false with the intent to cause distress or anxiety to the recipient. Similarly, the Communications Act 2003 makes it an offence to send a message that is grossly offensive, indecent, obscene, or of a menacing character. However, both of these provisions require communication directed at a specified victim. Much of the shocking content that gained traction in recent weeks related to Muslims as a group and was not necessarily explicitly threatening – even if intent were possible to prove – thus is likely outside of the scope of these protections.

  Moreover, there is a disparity in protections offered by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 (RRHA) in terms of how hatred is addressed depending on whether it is motivated by race or religion. Racial protections include words or behaviours that are abusive, insulting, or threatening. In comparison, religious protections only extend to threatening words or behaviour. Additionally, the burden of proof threshold for religiously motivated hatred is significantly higher, requiring proof that the accused intended to incite religious hatred, whereas it is enough for an accused to have been aware that their actions were likely to incite racial hatred, thereby covering reckless conduct. Muslims do not constitute a race. Therefore, much of the abusive and insulting content directed at them as a group on social media is difficult to prosecute under the RRHA due to the incredibly high threshold of intent and the exclusion of material that isn't explicitly threatening.

  The logic surrounding this disparity is based on fears of the potential curtailment of freedom of expression (Article 10 of the Human Rights Act) when it comes to the criticism of religion. This is a delicate balance that must be carefully considered, however, we would argue that the current balance in favour of freedom of expression insufficiently protects the human rights of Muslim communities – specifically non-discrimination under Article 14 and the right to life under Article 2 that includes a responsibility placed on the state to ensure one's safety. Consequently, we strongly urge the government to review this disparity and explore ways to ensure that the legislation properly captures Islamophobic abuse, especially in light of the ability of Islamophobic abuse and insults to translate into physical violence.

  In reviewing the legislation, we would also recommend the adoption of the APPG on British Muslims' **definition** of Islamophobia alongside the **guidelines** laid out by CAI. This is important because, while Muslims cannot be considered a race, Islamophobia functions and manifests itself as a form of racial discrimination. At the same time, the CAI guidelines are very explicit in their assertion that "criticism of Islam within legitimate realms of debate and free speech is not in itself Islamophobic." We feel that, while further work may need to be done to incorporate this into legislation, such clarifications go some way to protecting the essential balance of freedom of expression.

- **Media exemption:** This is another aspect of the OSA that Community Policy Forum

highlighted as a concern during its progress through Parliament. It is our position that the act's exceptions for the content of 'news publishers' risks exacerbating existing dangers posed by the continued failure to implement the regulatory framework established by the Royal Charter, and can only result in increasing the barriers to addressing disinformation aimed at demonising minority communities. The role of the mainstream media in promoting and normalising far-right ideologies and the impact of the exemptions under the OSA will be discussed in greater detail further below.

Leveraging the Mainstream Media

The mainstream press and broadcast news play a central role in platforming and normalising far-right ideologies, with figures such as Nigel Farage perfecting the art of media engagement and the practice of incendiary comments to create headlines, thereby leveraging the press to spread their messages. At the same time, many mainstream publications themselves actively contribute to the spread of far-right rhetoric through sensationalist and distorted reporting. **Surveys** undertaken in February 2021 reveal that 54% of people perceive journalists and reporters to be purposefully trying to mislead people by saying things that they know are false or gross exaggerations. Meanwhile, the current regulatory system is ill-equipped to deal with press abuses against minority communities, resulting in the perpetuation of conspiracy theories and abusive tropes as legitimate 'news'.

Sensationalism and Fear-Mongering

One of the most significant ways the media (and tabloid newspapers especially) has contributed to the mainstreaming of the far-right is through sensationalist reporting that capitalises on public insecurities and fears. Publications such as *The Sun, The Daily Mail*, and *The Daily Express* have gained notoriety for their provocative headlines and sensational stories, especially when covering issues related to immigration, Islam, and multiculturalism. These outlets often use inflammatory language and imagery that echoes the rhetoric of far-right groups, framing these issues as existential threats to British identity and security.

A series of detailed and academically verified reports from the Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM), analysing many thousands of articles, has found that British Muslims are habitually misrepresented in UK news media. Their November 2021 **report** analysed around 48,000 online articles and 5,500 broadcast clips from a wide range of news organisations, finding that nearly 60% of articles, and 47% of news broadcast clips, presented Muslims and/or Islam in a negative light. Moreover, more than 20% of articles associated Muslims and/or Islam with terrorism and/or extremism, thus reaffirming stereotypes that depict Muslims, particularly Muslim men, as inherently threatening.

A collection of front pages published by the Daily Mail

A collection of front pages published by the Daily Express

Thus, headlines frequently play into far-right narratives that paint immigrants and Muslims as dangerous and incompatible with British values, thereby reinforcing fears and prejudices of those already sympathetic to far-right ideologies but also introducing such ideas to a broader audience in a way that makes them seem more legitimate. Over time, this repetition of far-right talking points in mainstream media can shift public opinion and make extreme views seem more acceptable.

This consistent pattern of far-right sensationalism has severe repercussions for minority communities in public spaces, with the violence in the recent riots being a prime example of where such rhetoric can lead. The riots are indicative of how vilifying representations foster a hostile environment that can lead to harassment and violence directed at Muslim and minority communities. Certainly, hate crime data published by the Home Office reveals that as of March 2023 in England and Wales, Muslims represent the religious group experiencing the highest levels of **hate crime**, constituting 44% of the total religious hate crimes recorded by police. Furthermore, data demonstrates significant spikes in hate crime during and after significant socio-political events, such as the EU referendum, terror attacks in 2017, and Black Lives Matter protests – all of which were characterised by xenophobic, racist, and Islamophobic rhetoric. This is especially concerning in light of the fact that even senior political figures with columns in major news media publications have contributed to this normalising and legitimising of hostility towards minority communities. For example, Islamophobic instances **increased** by 375% in the week following Boris Johnson's comparison of Muslim women to "letterboxes".

The role of the mainstream media has been recently highlighted by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination who **called** on the UK to "develop and adopt a media strategy addressing the responsibility of journalists and broadcasters to avoid the use of hate speech and stereotypes in describing minority communities, and closely and effectively scrutinize newspapers and broadcasters with respect to content that incites racial discrimination and hatred or strengthens xenophobic attitudes".

Moreover, there are very limited avenues to address press abuses inflicted on minority communities.

Research has consistently demonstrated that the current primary regulator of the UK press, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) is ineffective and unfit for purpose. In fact, the Press Recognition Panel recently published a report highlighting that "the Government has stated on a number of occasions that the existence of [IPSO] as the regulator of large sections of the UK newsprint press has removed the need for the measures to ensure independent press regulation that Parliament voted for following the Leveson enquiry and report. And yet, a comprehensive review of available data demonstrates that IPSO is not a fully operating regulator of the UK press." As a result, the UK public have been left "as **unprotected** as ever from potential press harms".

In particular, IPSO continues to be incapable of tackling racism and discrimination, for a variety of reasons, including that its procedures for dealing with complaints mean that, in practice, they are unable to consider complaints relating to discrimination against groups of people. Consequently, while it may be possible for a named individual to pursue a case of

discrimination against a major newspaper (though seldom successful), there is no recourse for blanket discrimination against a group of people, such as Muslims. As a result, since its foundation in 2014, despite receiving many thousands of complaints relating to discrimination, to our knowledge, IPSO has **upheld** only three, none of which related to religion or race.

In reality, the system of press regulation in the UK has seen little improvement since the Leveson Inquiry (2011-2012), which concluded that British newspapers were not effectively regulating themselves, thereby leaving the public vulnerable to abuse, including intrusions, inaccuracies, and harassment. The Leveson recommendations led to a new regulatory framework that was designed to be independent of both the Government and industry to protect the interests of the public. Central to this new regulatory order was Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013, which was designed as a carefully calibrated mechanism to ensure that all news publishers can be held to account either through an approved regulator or through the courts. It underpins the system by:

- Providing an incentive for newspapers to voluntarily become members of a Leveson compliant regulator.
- Providing a disincentive for newspapers not to become members of a Leveson compliant regulator.
- Providing a low-cost route to justice for victims of press abuses.
- Protecting newspapers from expensive legal threats from wealthy claimants.

Ultimately under Section 40, if a newspaper is regulated by an approved regulator and a relevant legal case is brought against them, the claimant is liable for the costs (win or lose) if they refuse the implemented arbitration system. On the other hand, if a newspaper is not party to an approved regulator (and therefore not part of a low-cost arbitration system) the newspaper would be liable for claimant's costs, win or lose (unless this is considered inappropriate by a judge).

The previous Government continually refused to enact Section 40 and it was finally repealed with the passing of the Media Act, despite being originally passed by cross-party agreement. Without the enactment of Section 40 or a suitable alternative, the only Leveson compliant press regulator is IMPRESS, which includes a membership of roughly 120 titles that are largely small, specialist, or local in nature. In comparison, IPSO's membership includes almost every major news publication in the UK, as well as a large number of local, regional, and special interest publications. Consequently, with IPSO remaining ineffective, until Section 40 or a meaningful alternative is enacted, there is little protection for victims of press abuses.

As **noted** by the Press Recognition Panel prior to the passing of the Media Act, if Section 40 is repealed without a meaningful alternative in place, it will "fundamentally undermine the system of voluntary independent press self regulation that was agreed cross-party following the recommendations of the Leveson Inquiry. This abandons the public to intrusive and harmful press practices unless they can afford to challenge such conduct through the courts.

Even when individuals do have the means to challenge the press through the courts, these processes are expensive and can take years to resolve."

There have been a variety of suggestions for alternatives to the complete repeal of Section 40 found in the Media Act. However, we are currently unaware of any proposed alternatives that sufficiently protect the freedom of speech for publishers, encourage publishers to join an approved regulator, and provide protection to the public simultaneously. Consequently, at minimum, the repeal of Section 40 should be delayed until meaningful alternatives can be implemented by Westminster and the Scottish Parliament.

As such, **it is essential that Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 is reinstated and either the provision commenced with immediate effect or an equivalent put in place alongside alternative mechanisms to safeguard an independent system of self-regulation.**

At the same time, as will be discussed in greater detail below, **changing the definition of a recognised news publisher under the OSA to include only those regulated by a Leveson-compliant regulator would further encourage publications to voluntarily become members of a regulator that is fit for purpose and capable of tackling press abuses.**

Providing Platforms for Far-Right Figures

Another key factor in the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies is the media's willingness to provide platforms for far-right figures. Individuals such as Tommy Robinson have frequently appeared on mainstream news programs and in print media. Robinson himself has been featured on ***BBC's Newsnight*** and ***ITV's Good Morning Britain***. Even news media platforms such as 5Pillars (a "news, opinion and analysis-based **website** which concentrates on British Muslim news"), which frequently focuses on the dangers of **Islamophobia**, have **platformed** Mark Collett of Patriotic Alternative on their **podcast**, where he was interviewed by deputy editor, **Dilly Hussain**. Many far-right ideologues, such as Douglas Murray, are even fully embedded within the mainstream media and contribute regular columns to publications including the ***Spectator***, the ***Telegraph***, and the ***Daily Mail***.

The decision to host far-right figures on mainstream media platforms often stems from a commitment to impartiality and the belief that all perspectives should be heard. However, this approach can be problematic when it comes to extreme views as it falls into the trap of presenting a false equivalence – by providing an equal platform, the impression created is that such views are of equal credibility. Consequently, by giving far-right figures a platform with minimal challenge and fact-checking to their views, the media risks legitimising these views and granting them a level of credibility they might not otherwise have. At the same time, even when challenge is presented, many of these figures (**Douglas Murray** for example) are incredibly articulate and able to manipulate statistics and situations to fit their political narrative, giving them an image of credibility. As such, the confrontational format of many talk shows can sometimes backfire. Instead of discrediting far-right views, these formats can make them seem like just another side of a legitimate political debate as there is seldom the space to add sufficient context and nuance that would expose the vapidity of their arguments.

Framing and Narrative Control

The way in which issues are framed by the media also plays a significant role in the mainstreaming of far-right ideologies. By focusing heavily on topics like immigration, terrorism, and crime, and often linking them to ethnic or religious minorities, the media can shape public perception in ways that benefit far-right agendas. This framing often occurs through the selective presentation of facts, the use of specific language and imagery, and the choice of which stories to highlight.

As a recent example, the selective use of images is known to distort the public perception and understanding of stories. Therefore, alarm was recently raised when the ***Daily Mail*** used an image of a Muslim security guard who had disarmed an attacker against a headline "Knifed 'at random': Leicester Square 'knifeman' who stabbed mother and daughter, 11, did not know them, police believe". The irresponsible use of images in this way distorts understanding of the identity of the attacker and perpetuates a carefully constructed narrative in line with such tabloids' political agendas.

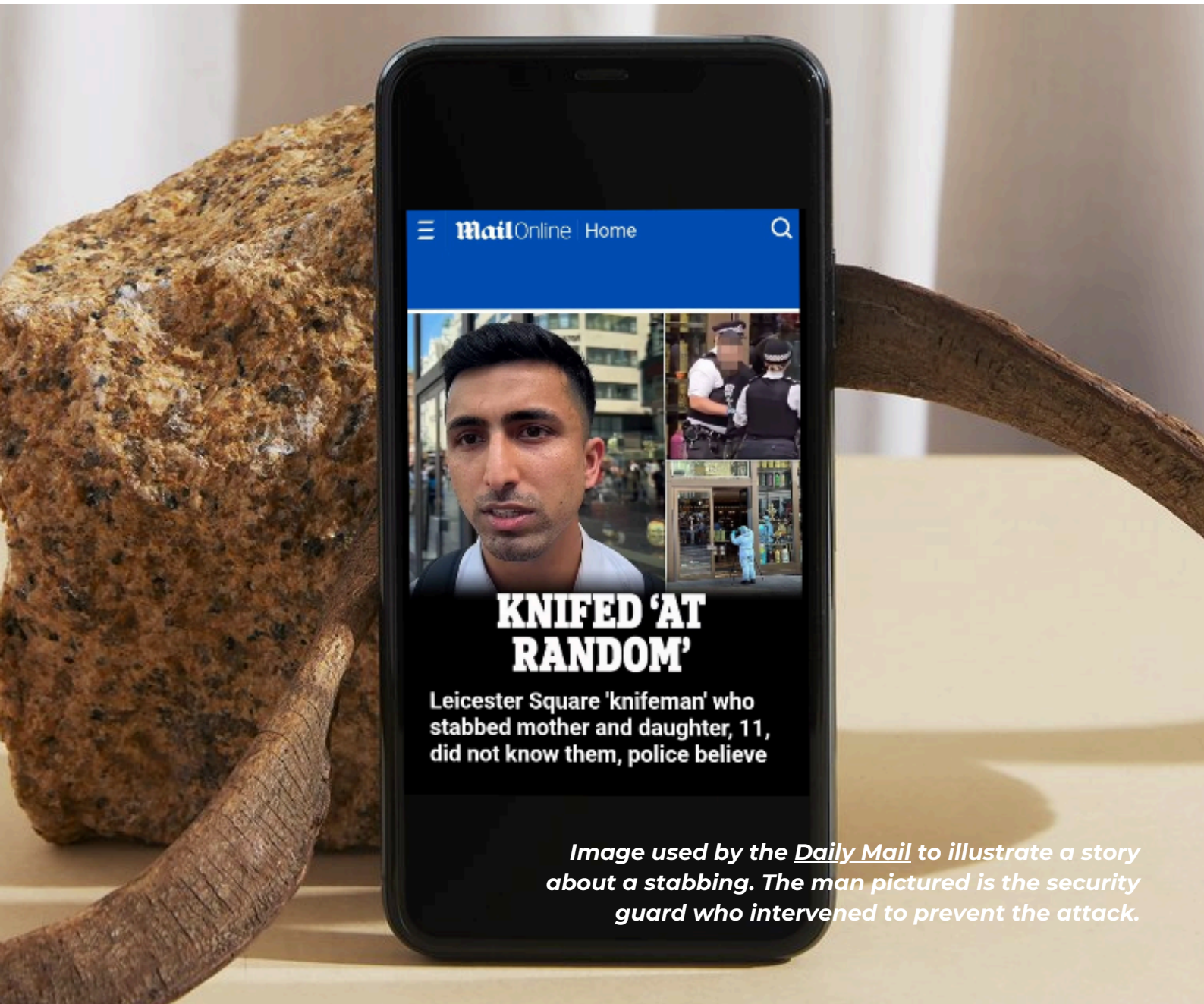


Image used by the Daily Mail to illustrate a story about a stabbing. The man pictured is the security guard who intervened to prevent the attack.

Other examples demonstrate a more explicit, intentional, and concerted framing of reporting in a way that fits a media narrative actively framing Muslim and minority communities as uniquely problematic. For example, during the pandemic, there was a distinct media narrative that Muslims were responsible for the spread of COVID-19. For instance, in June 2020, right-leaning news outlets including the *Telegraph*, the *Daily Mail*, and the *Sun* all ran the same **story** with headlines stating that half of the UK's imported COVID-19 cases were from Pakistan. This headline was based on highly skewed evidence – 30 cases over a three-week period in June 2020, in comparison to estimates of imported infections in the thousands during previous months, of which the vast majority **originated** from European countries on account of British citizens returning from abroad. This led to Muslims being smeared by **"hate propaganda"** within mainstream UK news media. Moreover, the timing of this report coincided with increased lockdown measures in the city of Leicester, which is home to a large Muslim population. Consequently, Muslim organisations **highlighted** the connection between such reporting and hatred being directed at Leicester's Muslim community as the supposed cause of these measures.

Below, **Dr Aurelien Mondon** and **Dr Katy Brown** further discuss how the mainstream media use exceptionalisation, amplification, deflection, and euphemisms to mainstream the politics of the far-right.

The role of media in the mainstreaming of far- and extreme-right politics

By Katy Brown and Aurelien Mondon

With Nigel Farage's return to prominence in British politics followed by racist riots in August, we have witnessed yet another resurgence of far-right politics and an increasingly emboldened extreme-right minority willing to take violence to the streets. This has made it all too clear that – whether it is through wider support, electoral victories or discursive normalisation – the impact of far-right successes on communities at the sharp end of their politics and on democracy more generally cannot be underplayed.

While media reporting on the far and extreme right is absolutely essential, uncritical coverage, which is the norm, is often unhelpful for both understanding and countering it, and can instead enable its mainstreaming. Indeed, media actors who claim to oppose the far right often end up being one of its biggest assets.

As the emboldened racism of the riots attests to, it is urgent that we find more effective counter-strategies and narratives to tackle both the far right and its mainstream enablers. With the media in a powerful position to set the agenda, more ethical and responsible coverage is an absolute necessity.

As such, the following discussion seeks to explore the ways that reporting on the far right can contribute to the mainstreaming process. We principally draw on examples from UK 'print' media to illustrate our points, though we believe that many of the observations below mirror patterns found in broadcast, social and other forms of media, as well as wider applicability to other contexts. In particular, we focus on 'quality' newspapers as opposed to tabloids or 'popular' press, not because the latter are inconsequential, but because the former are often assumed to be less favourable and beneficial to the far right in their coverage. In particular, our attention is turned to the more liberal media, with the Guardian in the UK being one of our core **case studies**. We argue that it is within this type of media that we can best gauge the process of mainstreaming as they nominally and openly stand in opposition to the far right. Thus, while other forms of media are highly pertinent, we must not lose sight of the continuing influence of such outlets.

In this short piece, we highlight some of the themes that we believe have been especially pervasive in either preparing the ground for the racist riots of 2024 or preventing their proper analysis. We outline four of them with particular relevance and prominence in this case:

- Exceptionalisation: Depicting the far-right as outside the norms of society.
- Amplification: Giving the far-right an exaggerated platform.
- Deflection: Distracting from the wider power dynamics by focussing on narrow understandings of the processes at play.
- And euphemisation: Using passive, less accurate, and less objectionable language in reporting that distorts accurate understandings.

Taking each theme individually, both before and as a response to the riots, we outline how these processes contribute to the mainstreaming of the far and extreme right within the national consciousness, especially in propagating specific implicit messages about such ideologies.

Exceptionalisation

Meaning: Placing the far right as well beyond the norm.
Message: 'The far right are just bad eggs'.

Exceptionalisation paints the far right as a fearful figure sitting well outside what is accepted in liberal society; it is an exception, an outlier, something distant from the norm. As one of the themes notable in original reactions to the resurgence of far-right politics in Europe, it served a useful purpose in highlighting the dangerous origins of such groups in fascism and Nazism. While we must of course continue to draw parallels with historic and extreme forms of such politics when applicable, limiting our understanding of the far right only to its most extreme embodiments risks ignoring the wider presence and embeddedness of exclusionary politics in society. A recent Guardian article exemplifies this issue, where the **headline** reads: "'Pervasive and relentless' racism on the rise, survey finds". Instead of **emphasising** the structural and institutional nature of racism, the article and associated image (of an AfD rally) place it almost entirely in the hands of the far and extreme right. Moreover, with the reconstructed far-right that we see today, this framing plays into their hands, where they too condemn the most extreme forms to legitimise their own position. Nigel Farage has been platformed multiple times claiming to have been key in defeating the BNP and far right, for instance, quoted in a **headline** from the New Statesman, announcing, "I've done more than anyone else to defeat the far right in Britain". Thus, media coverage has allowed far-right actors to engage in exceptionalisation of their own by placing themselves as moderate in comparison.

We can see exceptionalisation too in the response to the racist riots of August 2024 in the UK, where political and media narratives centred around denouncing general criminality and, as Prime Minister Keir Starmer put it, "**far-right thuggery**". Exceptionalisation saw those involved framed simply as opportunistic criminals (often evading any reference to the clear racism driving them) who were "**defiling**" the Union flag.

While we certainly must not downplay the levels of violence witnessed across various towns and cities, such framing detracts from the wider political climate that has been created by those same people who are now expressing horror. In the week before the riots, the Labour MP for Tamworth claimed that her constituents "wanted their hotel back" from the asylum seekers it was being used to house, and just days later, that same hotel was targeted in the violence. By exceptionalising these events and the people carrying them out, it precludes any need to face the responsibility of mainstream actors in normalising many of the ideas that the extreme right is violently enacting in the streets. By identifying the bad as 'over there', we, 'over here', can rest easy knowing that it exists outside of 'us'.

Amplification

Meaning: Hyping and giving the far right an exaggerated platform.
Message: 'The far right and their ideas are worthy of our attention'.

Amplification sees the far right afforded hyped and exaggerated coverage well beyond its popularity demands. This trend is directly linked to exceptionalisation because a kind of morbid fascination and voyeurism often surrounds the extremes. It is not surprising therefore to see far-right parties being hyped ahead of elections, their prospects exaggerated, and coverage simply evaporates if success is not met. Crucially, such infotainment is not the privy of right-wing tabloids but can be witnessed in 'quality' mainstream media. For example, this was particularly common in the Guardian's 2019 series on 'the new populism'. Perhaps most telling, on day two of the series, three articles and an interview were dedicated to Steve Bannon to discuss his European enterprise. What is striking is that Bannon is acknowledged to be failing in these articles and yet there is seemingly no reflection on the role that platforming him, including in his own words, played in granting him **legitimacy** beyond the worthiness of the news.

Amplification is clear in the response to the riots too, where significant space has been dedicated to far-right actors denying the far-right, racist nature of the violence. While the usual suspects like Farage and Lee Anderson were granted ample opportunities to deny their own culpability and reject the far-right characterisation, chose to lead an article with the headline, '"We are hardworking people – we're not far-right"'. In the piece that follows, nearly 40% of the content is either direct quotes or reported speech from an attendee denying that those involved were far right. This amplification stands in stark contrast to the level of coverage and quotation that targeted communities or people combating the far right have received, where their experiences have often been absent or at least muted in reporting. At worst, a false equivalence was created between the racist rioters and those trying to stand in their way, something which has been made worse by the use of concepts like 'polarisation'. As is so often the case, far-right voices are amplified at the expense of those most affected. Ultimately, this kind of coverage gives far-right actors an opportunity to dictate the terms of the debate, shaping their desired image and disseminating their ideas unbridled.

Deflection

Meaning: Diverting attention from power structures and towards certain actors/ideas.
Message: 'The far right is driven by bottom-up demands'.

Deflection distracts us from key power dynamics by centring our attention on bottom-up features, where the far right is portrayed as rising out of popular demand. Exceptionalisation and amplification already play a key role because they encourage us to focus excessive energy on the most extreme examples, avoiding nuance and depth which would account for the role of mainstream actors in the process. This can be seen through the priming of certain issues which are core to the agenda of the far right. For example, the construction of immigration as a key concern for voters has not only **amplified** their discourse and placed emphasis on their core issues, but it has diverted attention away from topics that would not

only be less comfortable for the far-right but would benefit the left and more progressive narratives. Indeed, this has often come at the expense of issues such as the cost of living and economy more widely, health, education, pensions, etc. The priming of immigration also leads to a deleterious, racialising effect on any discussions around other topics as all become read through this prism: 'immigrants are bad for the economy, they crowd our health services and schools, they weaken our welfare state', etc. This prevents a more complicated discussion from taking place about the radical, progressive changes necessary to address these issues.

The narrowing of public discourse was particularly clear during the campaign on Britain's membership in the European Union. As demonstrated by Martin Moore and Gordon Ramsay's extensive **survey** of media coverage of the referendum, while the economy was the most reported topic, immigration became "the most prominent referendum issue, based on the number of times it led newspaper print front page"', with coverage more than tripling over the course of the campaign. Such an exaggerated focus on this key far-right issue was **replicated** by mainstream political actors too, and not just in the Leave campaign; the Remain camp also attempted to make use of it as a scaremongering tactic, stressing that leaving the EU would make it harder to control borders. We can see therefore that framing these topics as arising from the bottom-up ignores the key agenda-setting role of political and media actors.

Emergent analysis of the riots has followed a similar trajectory, where they have been interpreted as representative of popular 'white working class' resentment towards immigration. A *Sky News* **article**, entitled "UK riots the result of successive governments' 'recklessly piling up' discontent in working-class communities through uncontrolled immigration", is emblematic of the deeply problematic narrative that emerges from such logic. Despite the myth of the 'left behind' or 'white working class' driving far-right politics being repeatedly **debunked**, the taken-for-granted assumption that these groups are leading the riots has abounded. While of course not denying some working-class involvement (like any socioeconomic category), framing the riots solely through this lens distracts from the key role played by political elites on the far-right, like Farage, but also those within the mainstream who have been responsible for normalising racism for many years. Whether it was the previous government's slogan to 'stop the boats', or the current ruling Labour Party's vow to 'fast-track deportations', we have seen a proliferation of racist policies, actions and rhetoric within mainstream politics. This is key as there is a tendency to blame the discussion of such issues on outsiders (the far-right) who force the otherwise good mainstream to engage on this terrain. Instead, we argue that the mainstream must be considered a key agent, if not the key agent, in the **mainstreaming** of far-right politics. Deflection therefore makes us focus on easy villains ('far-right thuggery') rather than the systemic issues that produce inequalities and embolden the far and extreme right.

Euphemisation

Meaning: Using less accurate or stigmatising descriptors for the far right.
Message: 'The far right are not really "far right"'.

Euphemisation denotes the use of descriptors for the far-right that are both less accurate

and less objectionable than those that are more appropriate. No other term expresses this better than 'populism' which became pervasive in the 2000s, even though it was originally pushed by the far-right itself to **avoid** more stigmatising ones. This is where we took our cue in our **research** on *the Guardian*'s 'new populism' series. While the series built on advice from prominent academics, many of the articles used 'populism' in a euphemistic manner rather than based on the very definitions that the series claimed to work from. It has become increasingly clear, as many studies have shown, that this widespread issue **extends** to academic circles which then feed back into public discourse via the media. One of the main issues with euphemisation is that such terms often facilitate the construction of the far right's self-image, enabled also by amplification. Populism, for example, not only euphemises but creates a clear discursive link with 'the people' and 'popular opinion', tying into the issues of deflection discussed earlier. Although this has changed since the start of the riots, we had witnessed a growing aversion to using the term 'far right', with populism and other euphemisms (such as 'hard right' or even 'centre right') used to label clearly far-right actors. Such a tendency was particularly clear this year when the BBC **apologised** for calling Reform UK 'far right'.

Similarly, euphemisms have abounded in coverage of the racist riots of August 2024, with much of the media repeatedly calling them 'protests' and the BBC **referring** to one as a 'pro-British march'. While there has been less reticence about calling them 'far right' (see exceptionalisation), many outlets have failed to emphasise the racism that underlies and drives them. This was made clear when former Labour and now-independent MP Zarah Sultana was interviewed on Good Morning Britain, with hosts Ed Balls and Kate Garraway showing disdain when she stressed the importance of calling them Islamophobic. Such avoidance paves the way for false equivalences, where anti-racist mobilisations are equated with those violently attacking minorities through references to 'rival protests'. By taking the far-right at its word, and describing it as it wishes to be described, we allow it to determine the agenda for how it is conceived and perceived. This sets a dangerous precedent where such groups are portrayed in a more positive light.

Mainstreaming: a dual process of legitimisation and delegitimisation

The interaction between these processes leads to the dual logic of legitimisation and delegitimisation which is core to the overall process of mainstreaming. These seeming contradictions actually go hand in hand to produce a message that conveys the far-right as representative of 'legitimate grievances' that the mainstream is better able to address: 'we may disagree with them but we cannot take away the fact that they have a point, so let the sensible moderate alternative deal with it instead.' What this means is that far-right politics itself is not challenged, simply the vehicle through which it is expressed. This is crucial as **research** points to the key role played by the mainstream in far-right mainstreaming, so reinforcing the mainstream as the solution without challenging the premise only leads to further normalisation and the emboldening of far-right politics.

The implications for this analysis point to the urgent need for better reporting practices which seek to counter rather than further normalise the far-right (and its mainstream expressions). While it is beyond the scope of this report to detail the precise form that such ethical coverage could take, we can use these problematic frames as a starting point: rather

than exceptionalising the far right, we can point to their contextual emergence and the links to mainstream groups; rather than amplifying the far right, we could instead give space to targeted groups or those engaged in combating it; rather than deflecting attention to the far-right's core issues and tired narratives of the 'white working class', coverage should focus on the issues affecting people in their daily lives and the elites that have been so instrumental in pushing far-right politics; rather than euphemise the far right using 'populist' or 'centre right', we should call a spade a spade and highlight the racism that is inherent to it. Only through politically engaged media coverage, which takes its role in fighting against exclusion seriously, can we develop more ethical reporting practices which counter the mainstreaming of far-right politics.

Impact on Public Opinion and Policy

Research has shown that the mainstream media possesses a distinct power to shape public opinions and political agendas. When far-right themes and messages are habitually echoed in the press and on television, the Overton window is shifted and fringe ideas come to be considered acceptable, thereby normalising extreme views and pushing the boundaries of mainstream political debate further to the right. This shift has a tangible impact on public opinion, which in turn impacts policy agendas. Politicians and political parties, aware of the media's power to shape public perception, have been known to adopt increasingly hardline stances on issues like immigration and national security to align with the views being promoted in the press. This dynamic has been especially evident since the Brexit referendum and the persistent sensationalisation of stories involving asylum seekers in the intervening years, which has coincided with the UK government implementing increasingly restrictive immigration policies and legislation, reflecting the influence of far-right rhetoric.

As explained by Sam Fowles:

*"The current migration hysteria wasn't spontaneous. In the early 1990s, **fewer than 5 per cent** of voters considered immigration an important issue. By 2010, it was one of the public's most pressing concerns. Between 2000 and 2006 the Sun, Daily Express and Daily Mail ran stories every day mentioning asylum seekers or immigration, generally portraying them in a negative light. The Conservative party adopted the 'dangers' of immigration as a major talking point and the media increasingly gave a platform to anti-immigration 'commentators' such as the former BNP leader Nick Griffin and Nigel Farage. Since then, the right-wing press has flooded readers with **headlines such as** 'True Toll of Mass Immigration on UK Life', 'The 'Swarm' On Our Streets' and 'Foreign Workers Get 3 in 4 New Jobs'."*

The Relationship Between the Press and Social Media

The mainstream media also plays a crucial role in amplifying far-right social media content. Stories and videos that originate on social media (especially those that use emotive language and an air of outrage) often get picked up by mainstream outlets and translated into 'news' stories, which can lend them an air of legitimacy and blur the lines between fringe and mainstream content. Moreover, concerning the recent riots and as pointed out by Bethany Usher:

*"algorithmic amplification on social media platforms means that false news spreads and images of mob violence can encourage more people to join in. Such dynamics of **hypercriminality"** – whereby sensational digital crime content fuels real criminality and vice versa – mean that we need a drastic rethink of the **codes of practice** for the production for journalistic crime content production across news, documentary, podcast, and social media platforms. Producers must consider the political, social, and representational dimensions of their work".*

At the same time, mainstream media publications themselves use social media platforms to disseminate their content to wider audiences. Earlier this year, Community Policy Forum

blished a **report** based on research by Keele University into Islamophobic discourse on cial media platforms. Within this **research**, there was a noted prevalence of what was termed "reiterative racism" across online spaces. This was particularly highlighted in examining social media interactions surrounding the COVID pandemic, where there was a repetitive mainstream reporting of COVID cases found in the Muslim community (as discussed concerning the farming of narratives above). The articles and commentary posted by media outlets to their social media accounts in these cases were not necessarily explicitly anti-Muslim but lacked contextualisation, with a selective focus on Muslims, thus building an association between Muslims and the spread of the virus and furthering far-right conspiracy theories blaming minority communities (and Muslims in particular) for outbreaks.

The approach by the mainstream media in the UK was heavily **criticised** by Muslim organisations at the time. Beyond what was perceived as a selective reporting focus on Muslim communities, concerns were also raised by issues such as a perceived pattern of media outlets attaching images of visibly Muslim communities and mosques to general reports about the pandemic that contained no explicit relation to Muslim communities, thereby cementing the connection between Muslims and COVID in the public consciousness. Criticisms were also raised regarding the attachment of historic photos of Muslims to current reports. While perhaps not intentionally anti-Muslim, this contributed to the perpetuation of conspiracy theories amongst far-right circles that Muslims were flouting lockdown rules. In one example, a photo of a Muslim family celebrating Eid several years previously was used in both ***Sky News*** and ***BBC*** reports about reactions to increased lockdown measures that were imposed just before Eid al-Fitr. This led to far-right agitators targeting the family and the wider Muslim community both online and physically, with the family reportedly receiving threatening phone calls. The images on both reports were subsequently **changed**.

While the above examples may be excused as unintentional, what is of far greater concern is the aforementioned purposeful sensationalisation, provocative headlines, and fear mongering that often characterises mainstream media coverage of topics involving far-right concerns, such as Islam, immigration, multiculturalism, and wider equalities. When these sensationalist stories are disseminated on social media, their reach grows exponentially and they are used by far-right actors and influencers as evidence of the righteousness their worldview.

Consequently, considering these patterns, addressing the dangers of far-right ideologies in online spaces must include consideration of the role of the mainstream media, as it is their content that often serves to mobilise and legitimise prejudicial, racist, and Islamophobic tropes across society at large. However, as previously mentioned, the OSA contains exemptions for news publishers that presents a significant gap which, if left unaddressed, will render wider attempts to address online disinformation and hatred futile.

Sections 18 and 19 of the Online Safety Act provide special protection for news publishers and journalistic content against heavy-handed regulation. These are sensible provisions if we are to assume that the current regulatory system governing the UK's press landscape is fit for purpose. Indeed, in theory, one could assume that gross inaccuracies and press abuses would be dealt with robustly by the existing regulatory system, meaning that the potential

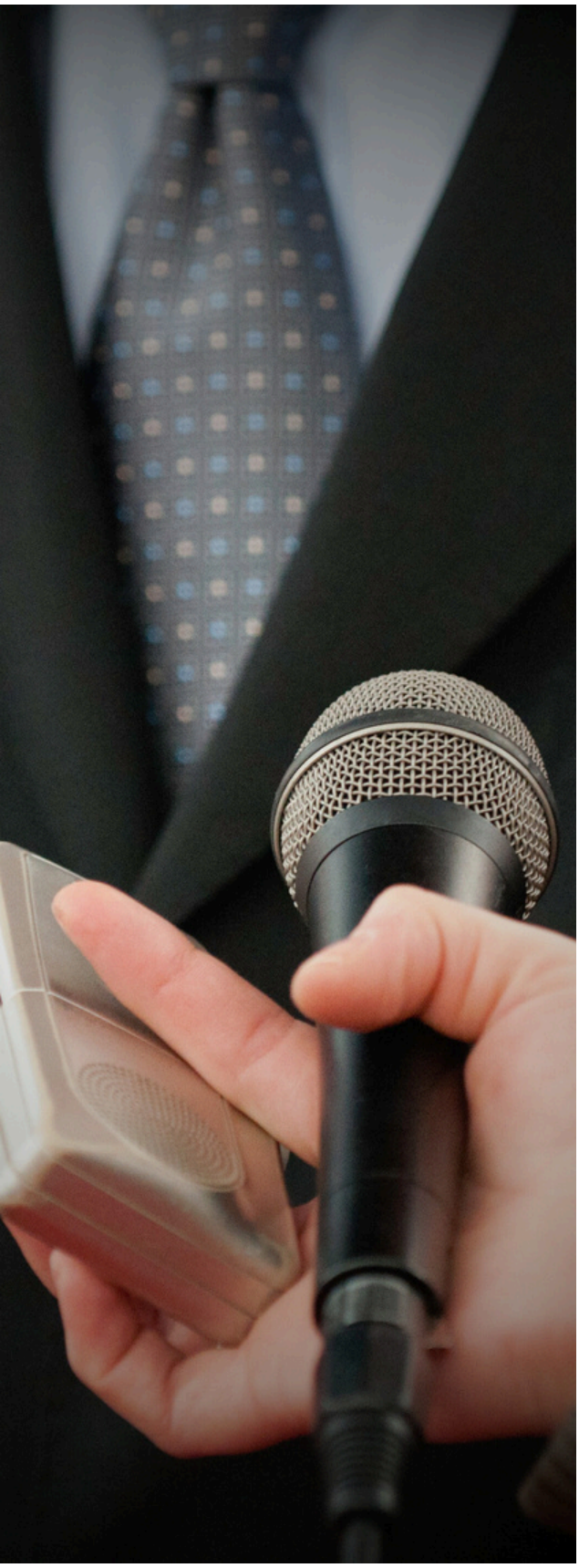
dangers of nefarious content reaching online spaces are mitigated. However, as previously noted, civil society has long pointed to severe failings of the current press regulatory system that leaves minority communities vulnerable to abuse. Therefore, if press abuses cannot be addressed within the existing press regulation system, and they are not being suitably addressed through online regulation, a vehicle is created through which online hate can spread.

Moreover, the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' laid out in Section 56 of the Online Safety Act is exceptionally broad. According to the act, a recognised news publisher is any entity that:

- Has a registered address in the UK and publishes information about its owner,
- Publicises news-related material that is created by more than one person in the course of a business (this does not need to be a business with a view to a profit),
- Has an editor and an editor's code of practice,
- And has a complaints process.

It is important to recognise that there are no requirements for the entity to be a member of any kind of regulator. Nor is a minimum threshold of standards stipulated that must be upheld within an entity's editorial code (for example, standards of accuracy) and the workings of a complaints process. Under these conditions, it would be remarkably easy for entities to claim the status of a news publisher despite publishing factually incorrect, prejudicial, and harmful but legal content whilst sheltering from accountability behind an editor's code and a complaints process that the entity itself has produced and has control over.

Consequently, we feel that **any review of the OSA and the UK's social media framework more broadly must include moves to amend the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' to ensure that it encompasses only those regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System.** Not only would this address problematic content on social media that cannot be efficiently addressed by a competent regulator, but it would also further incentivise publications to become members of such a regulator as not to do so would leave them governed by the oversight of individual social media platforms.



Co-opting Mainstream Politicians

As previously mentioned throughout this report, the far-right has managed to use various techniques to push public and political opinions further to the right. This allows the movement to co-opt mainstream politicians in promoting and advocating for far-right positions. In many cases, mainstream politicians have strategically adopted or echoed the themes and language of the far-right, often in an attempt to capitalise on public anxieties for the sake of electoral advantage. This not only legitimises fringe views but also contributes to a political climate that emboldens far-right actors, exacerbates social tensions, and as the riots attest, even incites violence.

One of the most significant ways in which politicians have mainstreamed far-right rhetoric is by adopting elements of nationalist and anti-immigration discourse. As highlighted earlier in this report, UKIP was highly effective in cementing the Brexit campaign in nationalist and anti-immigration rhetoric that resonated with far-right themes. As a result, politicians advocating for Brexit across the political spectrum frequently adopted far-right demands to "take back control" of borders and portrayals of the European Union as an external threat to British sovereignty. While this rhetoric was not explicitly far-right, it echoed long-standing far-right concerns about national identity, immigration, and the perceived erosion of British culture.

Similarly, in the years since the referendum, there has been a continuing trend of politicians increasingly relying on anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric as a means to score political points or appeal to specific segments of the electorate. This dangerous discourse has had real-world consequences, with the violence we are witnessing being directly tied to this inflammatory language. As Adeeb Ayton **observed** regarding the riots of recent weeks, “we must be honest about the fact that it is not only fringe rabble-rousers who have engaged in this kind of rhetoric. Some senior politicians from mainstream parties, as well as government appointees, have helped to set the mood music for such violence through a gradual normalisation of the demonisation of Muslims and

refugees in this country. Both share culpability for what is now unfolding." Likewise, Runnymede Trust **emphasise** that the recent violence directed at minoritised communities is an "inevitable outcome of years of state-sponsored Islamophobia and racism."

As just a handful of examples of politicians co-opting the rhetoric of the far-right in recent years:

- **David Cameron**: David Cameron is an important example at this point as he has **self-identified** as a "liberal Conservative" and has a history of broadly supporting both economically liberal and socially liberal policies. However, in his position as Prime Minister, his famous **declaration** in 2011 of the "failure of multiculturalism" was co-opted by the far-right and was perceived as legitimising their xenophobic and Islamophobic outlook. Consequently, while one couldn't possibly accuse David Cameron of being able to foresee the types of violence and extreme rhetoric that we are currently witnessing, this was an important moment in the trajectory of far-right rhetoric being brought into the mainstream.

- **Boris Johnson**: Islamophobic instances **increased** by 375% in the week following the now infamous **remarks** made by former Prime Minster Boris Johnson referring to Muslim women wearing the Niqab as "letterboxes" and "bank robbers" in 2018. Beyond Islamophobia, he also has a long history of **racist** remarks, attacking **'wokeness'**, and **criticising** the UK's human rights frameworks – all of which resonate with the language of the far-right.

- **Michael Gove**: Similar to Boris Johnson, **Michael Gove** reportedly has a history of making inappropriate comments about race, gender, and sexuality, as well as defending racist and Islamophobic comments made by others. When he was Secretary of State for Education, a dossier was created by Dominic Cummings that was **accused** of "advocating eugenics" and was based on the opinions of individuals affiliated with scientific racism and eugenics. Some of these figures were allegedly **invited** into the Department for Education to "explain the science of IQ and genetics to officials and ministers". Gove has close ties with the Henry Jackson Society, which has been **described** as a "threat to British democracy" and is renowned for its political attempts to exclude Muslims from public life. Ultimately, Gove has been **labelled** by Peter Oborne as "the unsung commander-in-chief of the Islamophobes inside the Conservative party".

- **Jacob Rees-Mogg**: In 2019, Jacob Rees-Mogg **posted** a video of a speech by a senior member of Germany's far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), saying the opinions expressed had "real importance".

- **Priti Patel**: On 3rd September 2020, then Home secretary, Priti Patel, publicly **complained** that "activist lawyers" were frustrating Home Office attempts to deport asylum seekers. Within days, a man entered a London law firm and **launched** a "violent, racist attack" with a large knife. Patel was warned by **government ministers**, **lawyers**, and the **Metropolitan Police** of the influence of her words in the attack. However, despite these warnings, a month later at the Conservative Party Conference, she again **raged** against "lefty lawyers", "do-gooders" and those that "will lecture us on their grand theories

about human rights". Two days later Boris Johnson similarly **claimed** that the criminal justice system was "being hamstrung by lefty human rights lawyers". Meanwhile, as mentioned in previous chapters of this report, both **Priti Patel** and **Suella Braverman** have been heavily criticised for continuing to spread conspiracies about grooming gangs that have been proven false by the Home Office itself.

- **Suella Braverman**: During her tenure as Home Secretary, Suella Braverman **claimed** that asylum seekers crossing the Channel in small boats "possess values which are at odds with our country" and are prone to "heightened levels of criminality," even linking them to "drug-dealing, exploitation, and prostitution." Furthermore, just a day after a man "driven by extreme right-wing terrorist ideology" **launched** three incendiary devices into an immigration processing centre in Dover, Braverman responded with **comments** highlighting a supposed "invasion of the South Coast". A now-deleted Facebook account reportedly in the name of the perpetrator was highlighted during the investigation as containing anti-Muslim sentiments, including one post that **stated** that: "the next time the job centre sanctions your money for not looking for enough work asked them about the thousands of people getting benefits cannot speak English can not write English how are they looking for work?"

- **Rishi Sunak**: Rishi Sunak built much of his 2024 election campaign around the mantra "Stop the boats", which was also central to the former government's legislative agenda, specifically draconian legislation such as the **Illegal Migration Act** and the **Safety of Rwanda Act**. This rhetoric has directly influenced far-right movements, with rioters across the country **chanting** "stop the boats" and "we want our country back." Such divisive language has also contributed to recent **attacks** on hotels housing asylum seekers in places like Rotherham and Tamworth, as well as an attack last year against a hotel housing asylum seekers in Knowsley, resulting in seven **arrests**. Sunak has also appeared on far-right media outlets such as ***GB News***, thereby legitimising their platform and giving it the credibility of a mainstream outlet hosting a Prime Minister.

- **Lee Anderson**: Earlier this year, former deputy chairman of the Conservative Party, Lee Anderson, **claimed** on GB News that "Islamists" had "got control" of London's Muslim mayor, Sadiq Khan, and that Khan had "given our capital city away to his mates." Although Anderson lost the party whip, leading to his defection to Reform UK, Conservative leader Rishi Sunak repeatedly **refused** to label his remarks as "Islamophobic", merely calling them "wrong", which indicates a troubling tolerance for Islamophobia within the Conservative Party.

- **Kemi Badenoch:** In **responding** to the recent riots, Kemi Badenoch pledged to end a "culture of silence" on the effects of immigration and stated that a new approach to integration is needed, as well as criticising the Equality Act.

- **Robert Jenrick:** Conservative leadership candidate Robert Jenrick recently **suggested** that anyone shouting "Allahu Akbar" - an Islamic phrase meaning "God is great" - should be "immediately arrested."

- **Sarah Edwards:** Labour MP, Sarah Edwards, has faced **calls to resign** after she identified

a local hotel housing asylum seekers and **stated** that people "want their hotel back". Within days, the **Tamworth Holiday Inn** was **stormed** with projectiles and fireworks.

As **highlighted** by Mobashra Tazamal: "Despite overwhelming evidence of Islamophobia, Conservatives haven't just failed to act, they've signalled to the public that anti-Muslim racism is acceptable." However, the Conservatives are not unique in responsibility. The **Forde Report**, which was commissioned in 2022 by Labour's National Executive Committee to investigate allegations of bullying, racism, and sexism within the party and published in July 2022, concluded that "Islamophobia is not treated with the same seriousness within the Labour Party as other forms of racism". Even Keir Starmer has attracted criticism following his **comments** during the general election about the failure to remove "people coming from countries like Bangladesh", as well as the Labour Party's increasing **shift** to the right (especially in terms of a progressively hardline stance on immigration) and "**abandoning left-wing voters**". During the election, the Labour Party even had a **foray** into the rhetoric of 'British jobs for British workers'.

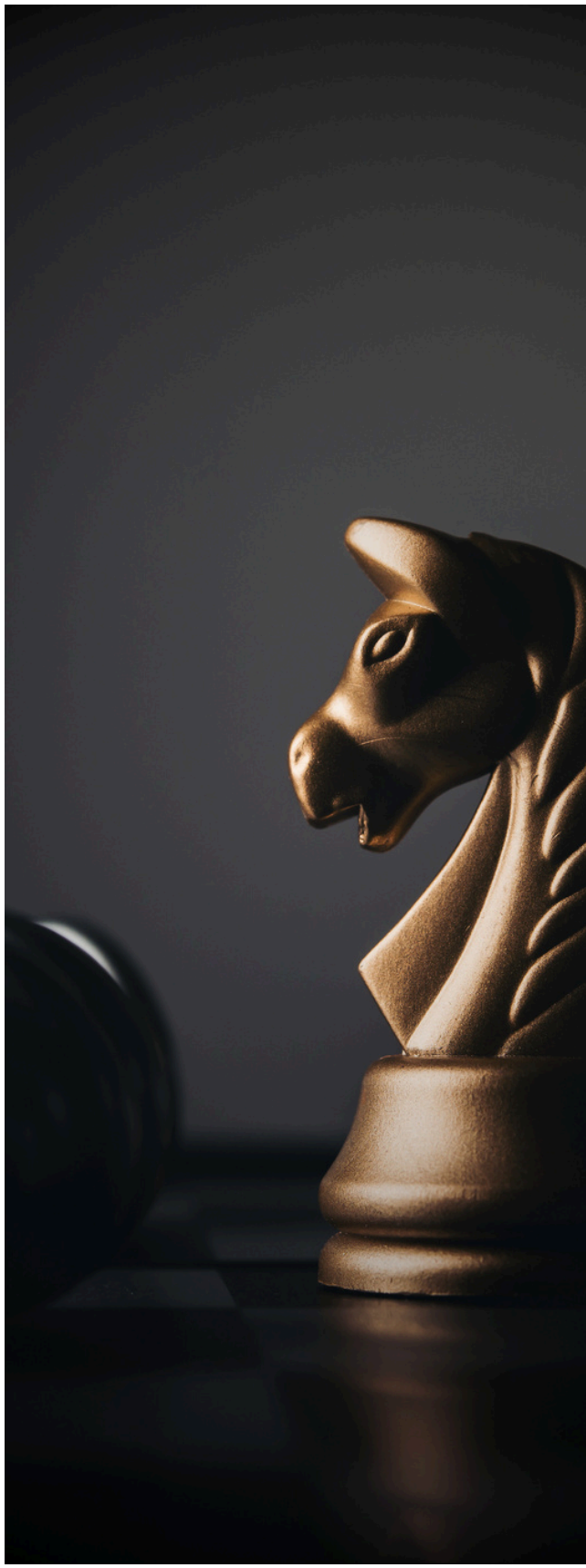
Far-right activists often interpret mainstream political rhetoric that echoes far-right ideologies as validation of their views, which can lead to increased activism, recruitment, and, in some cases, violence. Moreover, the failure of some politicians to unequivocally condemn far-right violence has further emboldened these groups. When political leaders equivocate or downplay the threat posed by the far-right, it sends a signal that such actions are, if not acceptable, then at least understandable – they are 'legitimate grievances'. This reluctance to confront far-right extremism reflects a broader unwillingness to address the role that mainstream rhetoric has played in fostering an environment where such violence can occur. Consequently, it is unsurprising that the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in concluding a four-year **investigation**, recently argued that the UK must urgently **implement** comprehensive measures to address the use of racist hate speech by British politicians and high-profile public figures. UN Committee member, Professor Gün Kut, **noted** that "there is direct connection between the actions of public figures and racial discrimination", adding that, "we've seen several examples of this in the case of the UK. There is a direct link between what the politicians and public figures say and what happens afterwards." In its final report, the Committee **stated** that:

"*The Committee recommends that the State party take all measures necessary to prevent and firmly combat racist hate crimes and hate speech and in particular:... Adopt comprehensive measures to discourage and combat racist hate speech and xenophobic discourse by political and public figures, including on the Internet, ensure that such cases are effectively investigated and sanctioned, and ensure also that public authorities, including high-level public officials, distance themselves from hate speech and xenophobic political discourse, and formally and publicly reject and condemn hate speech and the dissemination of racist ideas*".

As such, **an independent review into the role of political discourse in fueling these patterns of hate crime and violence is urgently needed.** It is imperative that all political parties come together to address the hatred and misinformation that have become pervasive in UK political debate. This requires not just denouncing the most egregious forms of rhetoric but also critically examining how mainstream political narratives contribute to a climate of fear and intolerance.

Charismatic Figureheads

A prominent feature of far-right movements is the role of charismatic figureheads in mobilising and maintaining support. As was witnessed in Tommy Robinson's departure from the EDL in 2013, when a powerful authority figure is absent, such groups quickly lose momentum.



At the same time, the rise of social media has brought about a transition within the broader far-right movement from a collection of centralised, formal groups to a decentralised, '**post-organisational**' structure. While official membership to physical grassroots organisations is perhaps dwindling, the role of influencers on social media is growing, meaning that the public reach of far-right ideologies is growing rapidly and the key figures of the far-right are not necessarily limited to leaders of official organisations.

Many of the individuals discussed in this report may not self-identify as far-right, and may even object to the characterisation. However, we have included them in this analysis as they are actors around which the far-right coalesce and mobilise due to their perceived tacit or explicit support of far-right ideologies. As such, we do not believe that their role in furthering the objectives and worldview of the far-right should be excluded from the analysis. As such, individuals who do not explicitly label themselves 'far-right' are still capable of holding the position of charismatic figureheads for far-right supporters.

Charismatic figureheads amongst the far-right include (but are not limited to):

- **Leaders of political parties:** Nigel Farage, Ben Habib.
- **Leaders of grassroots organisations:** Tommy Robinson, Anne Marie Waters, Jayda Fransen, Paul Golding, Mark Collett.
- **Journalists and political commentators:** Douglas Murray, Andrew Norfolk, Katie Hopkins, Rod Liddle, Brendan O'Neill, Isabel Oakeshott, Toby Young.
- **TV and radio personalities:** Emma Webb, Julia Hartley-Brewer, Dan Wootton.

- **Social media personalities:** Laurence Fox, Andrew Tate, Elon Musk, Milo Yiannopoulos.

To date, charismatic figures, such as Tommy Robinson, Laurence Fox, and Nigel Farage, are argued to bear responsibility for fanning the flames of disinformation amongst their followers and contributing to the violence of the riots and yet appear to have avoided prosecution or sanction.

Connections with International Far-Right Movements

The far-right in the UK does not operate in isolation but is part of a broader international network of far-right movements. British far-right groups have longstanding connections with far-right organisations in Europe, the United States, and beyond, sharing strategies, resources, and ideological inspiration. As but one example, Tommy Robinson's short-lived Pegida UK was a **franchise** of the German Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes (Patriotic Europeans against Islamisation of the Occident). Meanwhile, in 2022, Nigel Farage **reportedly** attended a **high-profile conservative conference** in Hungary alongside far-right Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán and Fox News' Tucker Carlson, at which speakers discussed the great replacement theory.

More recently, Nafeez Ahmed, in Byline Times, **highlighted** that Tommy Robinson's efforts to incite communal violence in the UK are part of a global far-right infrastructure, supported by conspiracy theorists and "alt-tech" platforms with links to the Trump campaign and the Russian government. As well as amplifying racist, Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant content online, those within this network provide Robinson with financial backing and ideological support.

These international connections have been facilitated by the rise of the internet, which has made it easier for far-right groups to communicate and collaborate across borders. Conferences, rallies, and online forums provide opportunities for far-right activists from different countries to meet, exchange ideas, and coordinate their efforts. The global nature of the far-right movement also means that events and developments in one country can have a significant impact on the far-right in other countries. For example, the success of far-right parties in Europe, such as the National Rally in France or the Alternative for Germany, has provided a model and inspiration for British far-right groups. Similarly, the rise of far-right populism in the United States, exemplified by Donald Trump's presidency, has emboldened far-right activists in the UK and given them a sense of legitimacy.

Part IV:

CREATING A ROADMAP TO TACKLE THE DANGERS OF THE FAR-RIGHT

As this report demonstrates, Far-right ideologies represent a profound and growing threat to the social fabric and security of the UK. Characterised by Islamophobia, xenophobia, nationalism, and authoritarianism, these ideologies not only undermine democratic values but also incite violence, hatred, and division within communities. Tackling this issue requires a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach that encompasses legislative change, industry initiatives, and educational efforts. The following chapter draws upon previous discussions throughout this report and attempts to outline a roadmap to effectively combat the dangers of the far-right by detailing actionable recommendations across these domains.

Politically Motivated Violence

As detailed in the above chapters, there is a disparity in how far-right violence is approached in comparison to similar actions perpetrated by Islamist ideologies. Consequently, it is essential that the recent violence is understood, not as mere "**thuggery**", but as organised politically motivated violence that is captured by the current definition of terrorism under the Terrorism Act 2000.

The government must frame its response to the riots through the lens of terrorism and urgently recalibrate its approach to and understanding of the domestic security threats currently facing the UK.

The riots have demonstrated the flaws in the Shawcross' Review, and, contrary to the conclusions of his analysis, the far-right does indeed pose a significant threat to domestic safety in the UK. Moreover, if as Shawcross suggests, PREVENT's focus to this point has been too heavily calibrated towards the far-right, this is further evidence that PREVENT itself is not fit for purpose. We do not feel that the extensive flaws in the PREVENT strategy are capable of being addressed through changes to its operation and application.

The PREVENT strategy must be urgently scrapped. Instead, the government must develop a new approach to radicalisation that includes addressing the systematic disempowerment, economic deprivation, and slashing of social services that allows grievances to fester within communities – grievances that can then be taken advantage of by nefarious actors and agitators of all different ideologies.

Prosecutions

Former head of UK counter-terrorism policing, Neil Basu, has recently **observed** that the worst far-right violence witnessed during the riots should be treated as terrorism. However, to our knowledge, there have been no prosecutions under terrorism offences relating to the riots and sentences have been noticeably **less severe** than those of **left-wing** protestors prosecuted for disruptive but peaceful acts in recent times. This appears to be an ongoing issue, with seemingly **lenient** sentences for far-right terror and hatred offences having been repeatedly raised as a concern by anti-racist campaigners in recent years. Moreover, there is further concern that charismatic figures who were responsible for fanning the flames of disinformation amongst their followers have thus far avoided prosecution.

The government should consider a review into the prosecution of far-right cases, including the role of CPS and the courts in the application of legislation and sentencing guidelines and the ability to prosecute charismatic figureheads of the far-right that fan the flames of violence. This review should seek to provide recommendations for strengthening existing legislation and sentencing guidelines to ensure that far-right violence is appropriately addressed.

Protest

While much of the media and political discourse surrounding the riots framed them as popular 'protests' expressing 'legitimate concerns', it is essential that the current government reject this narrative and does not follow the example of its predecessor in limiting the right to protest.

It is paramount that the government does not conflate the politically motivated violence of the riots with legitimate protests and does not seek to respond to the riots through legislation designed to increase the restrictions on non-violent protests.

Accountability for Economic Grievances

As pointed out in earlier chapters, economic crises facing the UK have provided fertile ground for the far-right to capitalise on public discontent and redirect frustrations toward scapegoated communities. At the same time, political commentators and mainstream politicians have tacitly endorsed this far-right reductionist logic, preferring to overlook the political decision-making that has led to these hardships, and providing space for far-right agitators to deflect blame onto migrants, Muslims, and other minority communities.

We call on the government to show true leadership by openly and honestly recognising the roots of economic deprivation and the collapse of local services across the UK and directly engaging with local communities to constructively address them.

Social Media and the Online Safety Act

The riots have exposed the use of social media in spreading hate – hate that can translate into physical violence. This has led to questions about the effectiveness of the Online Safety Act and the role of social media platforms in combatting hate.

We call on the government to either strengthen the Online Safety Act or introduce new legislation to:

- **Strengthen protections against the spread of disinformation in online spaces.**
- **Address the lack of regulation governing comments sections on news websites.**

The Role of Mainstream Media

The earlier chapters of this report discuss the far-right's leveraging of mainstream media to spread its ideologies. Addressing the role of the media in the mainstreaming of far-right rhetoric requires a combination of both industry initiatives and the enforcement of an effective regulatory system.

We call on the government to:

- **Amend the definition of a 'recognised news publisher' contained within the Online Safety Act to ensure that it encompasses only those regulated by a body approved by the Press Recognition Panel under the Royal Charter System.**

- **Either reinstate and commence Section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 with immediate effect or put in place an equivalent to safeguard an independent system of self-regulation.**

We call on the press industry to develop and adopt strategies addressing the responsibility of journalists and broadcasters to avoid the use of hate speech and stereotypes in describing minority communities. This must include initiatives to increase cultural and religious awareness amongst journalists and increasing diversity within newsrooms.

Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006

As discussed earlier in this report, there is a disparity in protections offered by the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 in terms of how hatred is addressed depending on whether it is motivated by race or religion. As a consequence, much of the abusive and insulting content directed at Muslims as a group on social media is difficult to prosecute under the Racial and Religious Hatred Act due to the incredibly high threshold of intent and the exclusion of material that isn't explicitly threatening.

We strongly urge the government to review and address the threshold disparity contained within the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 and explore ways to ensure that the legislation properly captures Islamophobic abuse. In addressing this disparity, we further recommend that the government protects the freedom of expression by adopting the APPG on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia alongside the guidelines laid out by CAI.

The Accountability of Mainstream Politicians

The role of politicians in failing to confront, tacitly endorsing, or actively echoing far-right rhetoric plays a vital role in normalising far-right ideologies and legitimising these positions in the eyes of the public, thereby emboldening far-right agitators and their supporters.

We call on the government to launch an independent investigation into the role of parliamentarians in fuelling far-right hate, with a view to adopting a comprehensive strategy to:

- **discourage and combat racist, Islamophobic, and xenophobic discourse by political and public figures,**

- **ensure that such cases are effectively investigated and sanctioned,**

- **ensure also that public authorities and officials distance themselves from and condemn such speech when it occurs.**

Educational Initiatives

One of the greatest challenges to addressing the far-right is overcoming the myths of inverse victimhood and exclusionary belonging that characterise the far-right's rhetoric. Countering these myths requires intensive educational initiatives that highlight the role of minority communities in building the society that we have today.

This need is echoed by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination who **noted** concern "about the lack of adequate incorporation of balanced accounts of the history of colonialism and chattel enslavement in the British Empire and colonialism in the school curricula across its jurisdiction. It is also concerned that the lingering legacies of colonialism and chattel enslavement continue to fuel racism, intolerance, racial stereotypes and racial discrimination in the State party, undermining the full enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by ethnic minorities".

This incomplete picture allows the far-right's glorified revisions of UK history to maintain traction over the public imagination. As such, we echo the Committee's recommendations.

We call on the government to:

- **Actively acknowledge past wrongs and raise awareness of the legacies and impacts of colonialism and slavery, as well as their impact on present-day manifestation of systemic racism.**

- **Create strategies to accurately reflect the history and legacy of colonialism and slavery within school curricula.**

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