

THE SELF-PROCLAIMED “MIGRANT HUNTERS”: WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT ARE THEIR TACTICS?



This briefing introduces the main far-right organisations and individuals with an anti-migrant focus. It is accurate as of June 2023 but please contact info@hopenothate.org.uk if you require an up-to-date assessment.

For further information on all of the significant far-right organisations we know to be active in the UK, you can refer to our most recent [State of Hate report](#). We also publish in-depth reports and news updates on [our website](#) frequently.

If you have any concerns about activity in your local area, do continue to share any intel (including photos, screenshots of social media, or overheard stories) with us, via: rightresponse@hopenothate.org.uk.

We also have a mailing list for the sector where we regularly share intel, you can sign up [here](#).

WHAT DO ORGANISATIONS THINK?

A survey of organisations working to support people who are asylum seekers and refugees carried out by Refugee Action's insight and data hub with HOPE not hate in March 2023 found that:

- **38%** of respondents said one of the main challenges they were facing around responding to the far-right threat was a **lack of understanding about what the far right threat is** and how we can respond
- **48%** of organisations report that far right activity against them or their service users has **increased in the last 12 months**
- **81%** of respondents are **very or extremely concerned** about the far-right threat

KEY GROUPS:

PATRIOTIC ALTERNATIVE



Active Membership: Roughly 150 willing to engage in offline activity. PA has a small but focused membership. The group has not grown much in the last year, which is partially due to internal conflict (see below) and a poor reputation among much of the wider far right. Individual members of PA, such as Mark Collett, also have large online followings on Telegram (currently 5,600). PA also has a number of younger followers, compared to organisations like Britain First, where the following is broadly older. Several members of PA are former members and associates of National Action, a terrorist organisation now banned by the Home Office.

Key members:

- **Mark Collett**, Leader. A former leading member of the BNP, he has promoted Nazi material and denies the Holocaust took place.
- **Laura Melia** (AKA Laura Towler), Deputy Leader based in Leeds. Towler initially made her name as a far-right propagandist on social media.
- **Sam Melia**, Yorkshire Regional Organiser. Husband of Laura Towler, Melia has cycled through several far-right groups, including a spell involved with National Action. Melia is a regular speaker at demonstrations.
- **Kenny Smith**, Former National Admin Officer. Smith was a part of an extremely ugly schism in the BNP, which Mark Collett was also involved in. He has, as of April 2023, broken away from PA to form his own separate group, Homeland (more info below). At time of writing, he has taken with him six of PA's Regional Organisers and more than half of its appointed officers.

Issues of focus:

- **Anti-migrant.** PA often refers to the idea of white British people being replaced by migrants, alluding to the “White Genocide” theory which alleges that there is a Jewish conspiracy to replace “indigenous” Brits by encouraging immigration.
- **Anti-LGBT+.** Drag Queen Story Hour is a focus of the group's anti-LGBT+ views. PA believes in the conspiracy theory that LGBT+ rights and feminism are encouraged by institutions (and the Jewish people that allegedly control them) because they divide white communities and lower white birth rates.

Tactics: As an organisation, PA's broad tactic is to appear innocuous and community-led on the surface, hiding its extreme views. For this reason, the group often keeps its name and branding off promotional materials for events, but then prominently displays their banners when attending the event itself.

- **Visits to asylum accommodation.** PA made 14 visits to asylum accommodation in 2022, and have been more active at demonstrations in 2023.
- **Leafleting.** A key tactic is leafleting areas to fuel local concern. Leaflets are often tailored to specific locations.
- **Community-focussed events.** PA organises events such as litter picking, camping trips and family fun days (such as banner making and art projects) with the aim of ingratiating themselves with the community and making their concerns seem local.
- **Infiltrating local Facebook groups.** PA targets community-focussed social media groups in order to stoke up tension. The content produced by PA actors will not always be easily recognisable as such, which makes it harder for admins and moderators to remove them from the groups.
- **Attending residence meetings.** Locally-organised events intended for open discussion for the community around issues of immigration have been attended by PA activists with no connection to the local area, again as a forum for them to voice their concerns around immigration.

2023 prospects: PA seems interested in a BNP-style shift towards local politics but was not successful in registering as a political party in 2022. Although the group attempts to hide its extremism, it may still struggle to attract new members who reject some of their extreme politics and underhand tactics. As of April 2023, Kenny Smith, the National Admin officer, has broken away from PA to form his own group called Homeland. This is in part due to a dispute over the group's failure to register as a political party, meaning a change in tactics and issues of focus is unlikely. The main change in terms of the anti-migrant protest scene will be that protests which were previously organised by PA might not have their name and logo on banners or advertising.

BRITAIN FIRST

Active Membership: Roughly 100 people willing to engage in offline activity. There is high turnover for fringe members but its core members are highly active. Some members have come from the BNP, which BF split from. The group has been very active on social media with a large following (17,500 on Telegram and 4700 on Twitter) but have struggled to convert this to in-person action.



Members, associates and connections:

- *Paul Golding* (founder and leader), has spent time in prison for an anti-Muslim hate crime. He ran unsuccessfully in the 2023 local elections.
- *Ashlea Simon* (chair, North West Regional Organiser). After Golding, Simon is the group's most visible and influential activist, and political candidate. She ran unsuccessfully in the 2023 local elections.
- At least five other figures linked to Britain First have spent time in prison on terrorism convictions.

Issues of focus: BF focuses on a handful of geographic areas to prevent itself being spread too thin. Areas it tends to focus efforts on include Northern Ireland, Greater Manchester and South East England.

- *Anti-Muslim.* BF has spoken about a “Muslim takeover of Europe” which also refers to the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory, which claims that ethnic white populations are being demographically and culturally replaced with non-white populations via mass migration. More recently, the group has focussed more on the “White Lives Matter” movement. BF is a Christian organisation which argues that part of the reason why society is deteriorating is because of the move away from traditional Christian values.
- *Anti-migrant.* The group has filmed for social media outside hotels but have also entered asylum accommodation in some cases, with at least 79 anti-migrant accommodation videos on its website. One of its main messaging tactics is to present asylum-seekers as potential terrorists or sexual predators. They also brand hotel staff as traitors, both online and in person, for protecting asylum seekers.

Tactics:

- *Visits to asylum accommodation.* BF activists have attended demonstrations outside asylum



Paul Golding, leader of Britain First

accommodation and have also visited hotels and other accommodation sites and had confrontations there. BF carried out 81 visits in 2022, a 53% increase from the year before. The aim is to generate inflammatory social media content of hotel residents and employees being harassed.

- *Filming small boat crossings in Dover.* Again, these tactics are mostly for generating conversation on social media. They create content of visits to Dover which is accompanied by hundreds of angry and racist comments on various platforms.

2023 prospects: BF have had bad local election results for two years running. In the May 2023 elections they failed to elect a single candidate, which will be a major disappointment to them.



A Britain First demonstration

VOICE OF WALES

Following: Voice of Wales is a far-right media outlet that creates a range of multimedia content including articles, videos, livestreams and social media posts. Since being permanently banned from YouTube in 2021, it now releases content via its own website and on fringe platforms. This includes Gettr, where it now has over 16,000 followers, and Telegram, with a little over 4500 subscribers. The group has become an increasingly significant threat in 2022, garnering a growing and dedicated following within the far right.



Members, associates and connections:

- *Dan Morgan and Stan Robinson.* Both UKIP members, Morgan and Robinson run the Voice of Wales platform. In January 2022, both men were arrested for aggravated trespass while covering a small anti-vaccine protest at a vaccine centre. The case was taken to court in August, but was thrown out.

Issues of focus: Voice of Wales claims to be committed to “telling the truth and exposing the dirty tactics in local councils and the Senedd that the mainstream media choose to ignore”. This includes:

- *Anti-migrant.* Over the past year, Voice of Wales has focused heavily on the issue of asylum accommodation in Wales being used to house asylum seekers and migrants. They have published at least 15 videos taken at hotels across Wales. Generally activists filming asylum accommodation sites do not interact with staff or asylum seekers.
- *Climate change denial.* Voice of Wales is opposed to the net zero target. It regularly

hosts events with Paul Burgess, the former “Spokesperson for the Environment” for the now defunct far-right party For Britain.

- *Anti-LGBT+.* This has been an increasingly prominent focus over the last year. Activity has mostly centred around opposition to Drag Queen Story Hour and support to the Public Child Protection Wales campaign against the Welsh Government’s new Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) curriculum, which they claim sexualises children and promotes homosexuality.

Voice of Wales also remains closely aligned with UKIP and attended Stephen Lennon’s (AKA Tommy Robinson’s) “Rape of Britain” demonstrations in Telford.

Tactics:

- *Platforming far-right organisations.* Voice of Wales have covered groups such as the Proud Boys, an American far right group that has been outlawed in Canada; Tommy Robinson, former EDL leader; and Neil Hamilton, formerly UKIP’s only Member of the Senedd.
- *Favourable coverage of far-right protests and events.* This includes live streaming activists aiming to disrupt players from Swansea City A.F.C. taking a knee in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement, as well as during clashes between police and demonstrators in Pembrokeshire opposing the housing of asylum seekers at a former military training base.

2023 prospects: Voice of Wales is becoming an increasingly prominent platform within the far right. It is likely to continue to grow, particularly as Morgan and Robinson recently met with Jason Miller, CEO of the Gettr, to discuss collaboration. Miller could potentially open the door to high profile US figures.



A Voice of Wales
livestream featuring
Katie Hopkins

YORKSHIRE PATRIOTS

Membership: Estimated active membership of several dozen, with a following of 2000 on Facebook.

Members, associates and connections:

- *David Smaller (AKA David Sunderland).* Leader of the group, he also has links to Patriotic Alternative.
- *Alek Yerbury.* Associate (see below).

Many members of the group are former English Defence League (EDL) activists.

Issues of focus: Anti-migrant and anti-Muslim.

Tactics:

- *Online organising:* The group primarily organises on Facebook, advertising events on its own group and in similar online spaces.
- *Street protests:* While the group is small, it has rallied its members to attend street protests across the North of England. YP has proved willing to collaborate with others, with Smaller speaking at PA protests, for example.

2023 prospects: The small group will remain an active part of anti-migrant demos across the North of England for the foreseeable future.

THE NATIONAL SUPPORT DETACHMENT

The NSD is a fringe far-right group launched in April by Alek Yerbury, a former activist with PA Yorkshire.

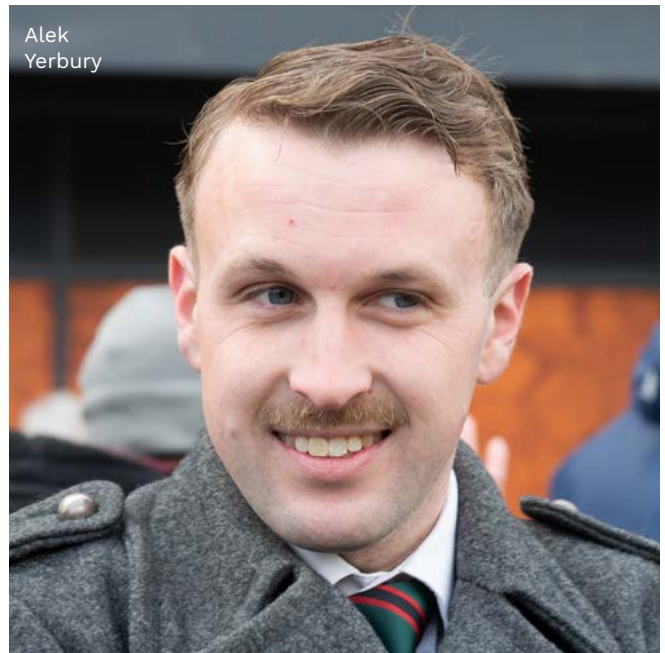
A former soldier for the British Army who has received press coverage for dressing like Hitler, Yerbury has a small but active following, with an account for his speeches on Telegram with 570 subscribers.

Members, associates and connections:

- Yerbury’s NSD works closely with the Yorkshire Patriots, an EDL splinter group, with several key activists straddling both groups.
- Yerbury maintains links to Patriotic Alternative activists in Yorkshire. He was previously affiliated with the group before breaking away in February this year.
- Yerbury and his circle have also collaborated with the Independent Nationalist Network, a fringe fascist group that splintered from Patriotic Alternative in 2021.

Areas of focus:

- *Anti-migrant.* Yerbury has a broad focus and wants to steer anti-migrant sentiment towards a far-right worldview in which followers are against the political establishment. He portrays the political



establishment as “Marxists” and enemies of the people.

- *Anti-politician.* Yerbury has been known to condone violence towards MPs, for example asking if terrorists could “do us a favour and release the weapons in parliament”.
- *Anti-union:* Yerbury is obsessed with the political left, and in particular trade unions. He has spoken of directing protests against trade union offices.

Tactics:

- *Marches and rallies.* Yerbury’s central effort is to organise and assist marches and rallies with an anti-politics, anti-immigrant focus. He attempts to establish links to other groups with similar tendencies, and to bring them together into one movement.
- *Online activism.* Yerbury has particularly targeted anti-migrant campaigns in Lincoln, protesting plans to house asylum seekers at RAF Scampton, and in Skegness, an attempt to capitalise on an existing campaign. In both cases he has created locally-specific Facebook groups in order to coordinate activism.
- *Ex-military focus.* Yerbury has made efforts to reach out to veterans and to position them prominently at his street demonstrations.

2023 prospects: Given his fascistic dress sense, oddball style of communication, tiny social media following and recent negative press, Yerbury seems like an unlikely figure to head a movement with wide support. However, we can expect particularly vicious anti-establishment rhetoric from events he has helped to organise.

HOW TO SPOT A FAR-RIGHT LEAFLET IN DISGUISE



Patriotic Alternative leaflets

These are common features of leaflets that groups like Patriotic Alternative distribute in communities to stir up tensions. Their aim is not to mobilise the community, although that is what the leaflets claim. Rather, their aim is to maximise their own reach and to add an air of legitimacy to their anti-migrant, antisemitic and anti-LGBT+ views.

- *Rural/nature imagery.* Bucolic images of the British countryside or animals often feature on leaflets, which serves to sanitise the image of organisations like PA and attract those who would find their real views off putting.
- *Language around defending or saving the town.* References to the circumstances of the town (e.g. naming roads, schools or other public services and images of local landmarks) shift the focus of the leaflet away from the far-right and build the illusion of localised concern.
- *Emphasis on unfairness towards “Brits” or British people.* Leaflets often contrast the spending or actions of the government and British people not having heating or homes. A particular focus is that “homeless veterans” have it worse than many asylum seekers.
- *Language around protecting children.* The aim here is to weaponise the very real problem of child sexual exploitation and use it to mobilise people who don’t realise they are subscribing to the other disturbing and extreme views of the group.

POLICE INVOLVEMENT: WHEN AND HOW?

As well as sharing intelligence and information with HOPE not hate, in some cases police will want to be informed of far-right activity, so that they can prepare a response. People will have varying degrees of comfort with working with the police, but in the following cases, it may be helpful for police to be informed:

- **Leaflets.** It is often helpful for local police to see leaflets being distributed in local areas as it allows them to assess community tensions.
- **Harmful online material.** Social media posts and comments should be reported through the site’s internal reporting process. It is helpful to keep a record of screenshots and images that are concerning in case they are needed in the future. Unless there is a clear action on a community post (for example, an action with a proposed date or time) or language/threats which constitute a breach of law, the police would not usually need to be involved.



- **Demonstrations.** It is important for local police to be informed of any demonstrations taking place well in advance. This is so that they can organise staffing, manage routes and locations for marches and demonstrations and avoid situations where opposing groups are in close contact. All local police service websites will have a webpage with a name like “Tell us” or “Contact us” where you can make these reports.
- **Hate crimes.** In order to generate accurate records of anti-migrant activity in the local area, hate crimes need to be reported to police. This includes harassment of people supporting asylum seekers as well as asylum seekers and migrants in the community. If the victim of the hate crime is unwilling to report it, you can report it anonymously on their behalf without compromising their privacy.

KEY INDIVIDUALS:



Amanda Smith with Tommy Robinson
(AKA Stephen Yaxley-Lennon)

AMANDA SMITH (AKA YORKSHIRE ROSE)

Following: Smith posts frequently on YouTube to her nearly 11,000 subscribers. Her channel has been viewed 1.8 million times, her most watched video being a visit to a hotel in Nottingham where she accosted a group of asylum seekers.

Members, associates and connections: From Castleford, Smith has organised for the far right several times in the past, including the English Defence League and Britain First, and is a supporter of Stephen Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson).

- *Alan Leggett (AKA Active Patriot).* In January 2021, Smith and Leggett were arrested for causing alarm and distress.
- *“The Bulldog” (real name unknown).* Smith regularly films content with “The Bulldog” who accompanies her to asylum accommodation to act as her ‘security’.

Issues of focus:

- *Anti-migrant.* Smith was by far the UK’s most prolific hotel harasser of 2022. She visited hotels and B&Bs used as asylum accommodation 253 times, an increase from 2021. She frequently posts anti-migrant and anti-Muslim content from fascist group Patriotic Alternative.
- *Conspiracy.* Smith has also harassed staff at COVID-19 test centres, claiming COVID-19 was fake. On her accounts she has posted 5G and New World Order conspiracy theories.

Tactics:

- *Filming in asylum accommodation.* Smith regularly films herself going to known asylum accommodation and harassing staff and security. She regularly switches tactics, from

feigning confusion (“I was told this hotel was for homeless”) to faking kindness towards asylum seekers. Smith has also been known to pose as a local journalist to gain access to asylum accommodation sites. She has also recently started a Telegram channel with “The Bulldog” where she shares her videos as well as anti-migrant content.

2023 prospects: Her tactics of filming hotels to stir up local community tensions is likely to be repeated. Over the past year Smith has involved herself in other campaigns, such as protesting Drag Queen Story Hour, so is likely ready to jump on any unrelated controversies that develop in 2023.



ALAN LEGGETT (AKA ACTIVE PATRIOT)

Following: Leggett has 8000 subscribers on YouTube, where he predominantly posts about hotels. He also has 60,000 followers on Twitter where he posts prolifically.

Members, associates and connections:

Leggett often partners with Amanda Smith (AKA Yorkshire Rose). Andrew Leak, the “Dover Bomber”, contacted Leggett frequently on social media, replying to him at least 73 times and mentioning him at least 100 times. Leak died after throwing up to three petrol bombs at an immigration processing centre in Dover.

Issues of focus:

- *Anti-migrant.* Leggett has been known to target migrants in a variety of ways, including filming newly-arrived migrants in Dover and visiting hotel accommodation. Many of his actions have led to court visits, and he was banned from West Yorkshire at the end of 2022.

■ *Anti-Muslim.* Leggett released a documentary about “Muslim grooming gangs” in December 2021 which he screened in seven towns in the north of England. From these screening events, Leggett generated content for his Telegram channel and these posts have been shared widely in far-right circles since.

Tactics:

■ *Filming in asylum accommodation.* Leggett made at least 38 visits to asylum accommodation sites in 2022, where he is routinely belligerent and rude to hotel staff. He also accosts asylum seekers staying in the accommodation, and has been known to lie to gain access (once pretending to be checking the fire doors).

2023 prospects: Leggett is likely to focus on growing his social media followings, which will mean he is likely to promote and possibly produce new migrant harassment videos. Our intelligence suggests that Leggett has been live streaming demonstrations outside of asylum accommodation he has attended.



STEVE LAWS

Following: Laws’s YouTube channel has 8,500 subscribers, but is most active on Telegram, where he has nearly 6,000 followers.

Members, associates and connections:

■ *Anne Marie Waters.* Laws appeared on a podcast with the leader of the anti-Islam For Britain party, which he has previously been an organiser for. More recently in 2022, he ran and lost as a UKIP candidate in Southend West.

Issues of focus:

■ *Anti-migrant:* Steve Laws is one of the most prominent figures in creating and distributing anti-migrant content online in the UK. Laws has complimented the methods of Patriotic Alternative, and spoke at the fascist group’s national conference in autumn 2022. He also supports Nigel Farage for being “the stepping stone towards our views going more mainstream”. He has repeatedly used dehumanising language to describe migrants and supports the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory. He has participated in several demonstrations across the past year, including an anti-migrant protest in Dover in June and a “Start Rwanda Deportations” event in September.

Tactics:

■ *Filming small boat crossings in Dover.* Unlike the other main anti-migrant activists, Laws does not spend his time filming asylum accommodation, but films arriving boats in Dover. Laws has been in court several times over charges related to this, including being found guilty of taking a dinghy without the owner’s consent.

■ *Engagement with national media.* Laws has repeatedly described himself as a journalist and portrayed himself as a concerned citizen, despite his far-right views. In 2021, he was a guest on TalkRadio, where he was erroneously described as a “social commentator” and was subsequently quoted in several mainstream newspapers.

2023 prospects: Laws was banned from Twitter and has not been reinstated. He is likely to continue his activities on the coast and potentially begin anti-migrant harassment at hotels, as he has asked his followers to name hotels he can make a documentary about.