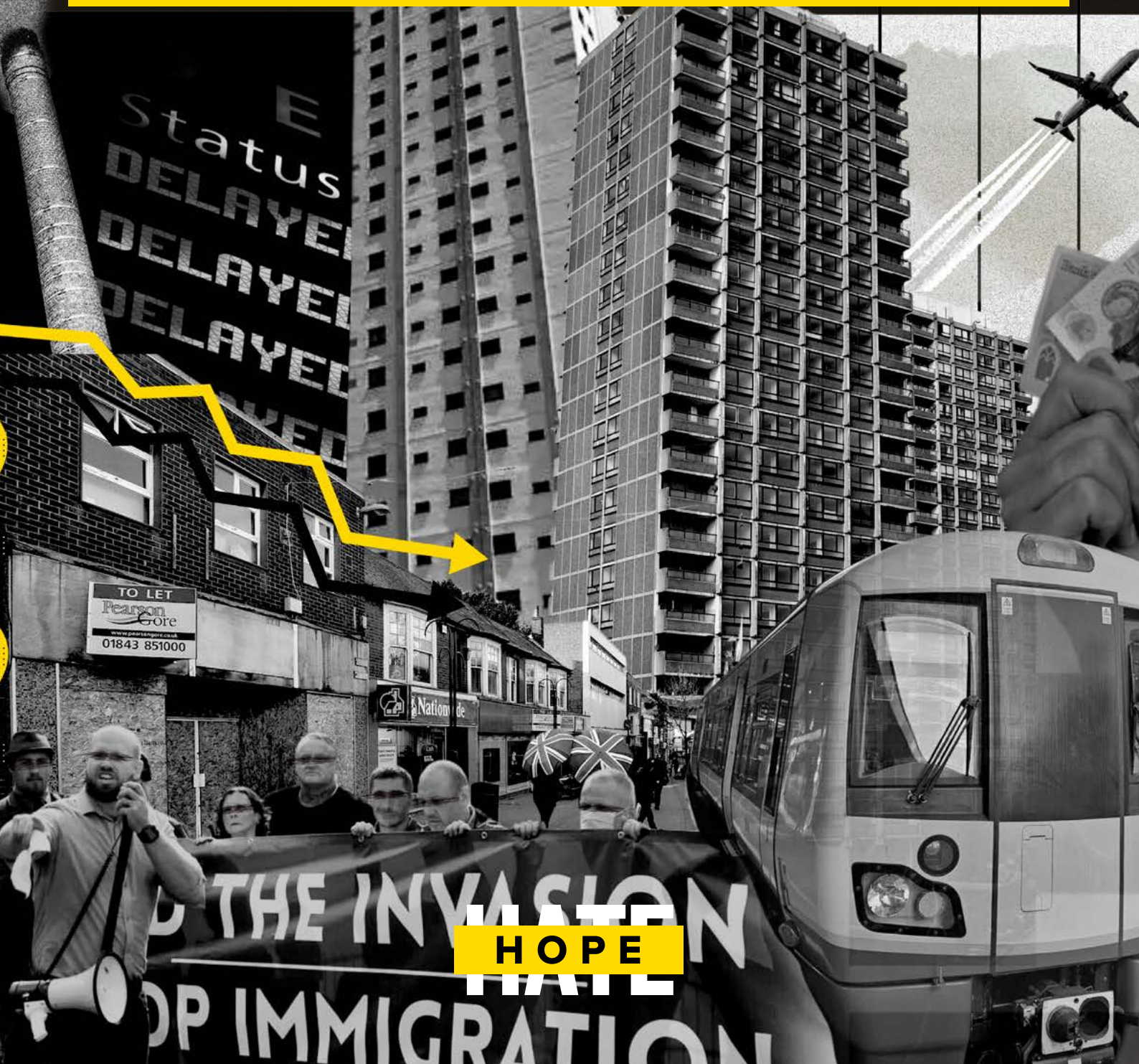


STATE OF HATE 2024

PESSIMISM, DECLINE AND THE RISING RADICAL RIGHT





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EDITORIAL

WELCOME TO OUR **State of HATE 2024** report, the most comprehensive and analytical guide to the state of far-right extremism in Britain today.

This year's report comes at a key moment in British politics. The sense of pessimism and declinism that is very evident in our polling is likely to lead to a change in government. But at the same time, this very same mood could turn on a new administration if it is not seen as delivering meaningful change quickly, and this could open the door for an increasingly confident Radical Right – either from a more right-wing Conservative Party or an outside populist movement.

This year's *State of HATE* report focuses heavily on the Radical Right, a political phenomenon we define as right-wing populist in outlook, with strongly anti-immigration and anti-elite rhetoric, but differs from the traditional far right in that it advocates an illiberal democracy rather than overthrow of the system itself.

Over the past year we have seen the Radical Right emerge as a major force in the UK, especially inside the Conservative Party. We have also seen the continuing growth of a Radical Right ecosystem that includes *GB News* and *The Telegraph*, *The Spectator* and individual political commentators such as Matthew Goodwin and Douglas Murray.

While much of the focus has been on Radical Right Conservative MPs, who have been pushing the Prime Minister to adopt more hardline anti-immigrant policies and water down or even reverse his net-zero targets, Nigel Farage still looms large in the background. It remains to be seen if he will stand for Reform UK at the next general election, but it is hard to believe that a post-election landscape, when the Radical Right feels unconstrained in its ability to attack a probable Labour government, does not feature Farage playing a prominent role. His reluctance to stand for Reform UK is possibly because

he sees his future within a more right-wing Conservative Party, which, he has argued, is the only viable option in our current two-party system.

Farage joining the Conservatives is certainly an idea that the majority of party members support.

The conflict in the Middle East has polarised opinion in the UK and has seen an upsurge in antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. Sadly, anti-Muslim sentiments have been whipped up by some politicians and elements of our media and very little of it has received any attention or condemnation. This rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric, coupled with the appalling suffering in Gaza, plays into the hands of Islamists and antisemitic extremists, who view the world in a very simplistic imperialism vs anti-imperialism frame, and could cause societal problems in the coming year.

As this report explains, the threat of far-right terrorism remains very real. Last year, we saw a record number of far-right activists and sympathisers convicted of terror-related offences. While some of this can be explained by more aggressive policing, it is also symptomatic of the growing extremism of some elements of the far right and the availability of terrorist propaganda online.

I'd like to finish by thanking everyone who has contributed to this report and the thousands of others who donate every month to our **HOPE Action Fund** – it is because of your support that we can produce in-depth publications such as this.

If you are not yet a member of our fund, then please do sign up. For as little as the cost of a cup of coffee or a sandwich every month, you can help us continue vital work, positively affecting communities up and down the country.

With the storm clouds gathering, I believe our work is needed more than ever.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KEY HEADLINES

- There is a growing mood of pessimism and declinism amongst the population and this is leading to deteriorating attitudes to democracy and the political system
- The Radical Right is blossoming. If anything, 2023 is the year it came of age
- Aggressive anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim and transphobic narratives are increasingly being articulated by right-wing politicians and media commentators
- Opposition to action to address climate change is increasingly being adopted by the Radical Right
- The conflict in the Middle East is polarising society, leading to an upsurge in antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred
- A record number of far-right activists and sympathisers were convicted of terror-related offences in 2023

STATE OF THE NATION

- There is a growing mood of pessimism in British society. Asked to describe modern Britain, 43% of respondents choose the word “declining”
- The cost of living crisis still dominates people’s concerns, followed by the NHS and the economy more generally
- A majority of people still think immigration has been good for Britain, but at 55% this is lower than it was two years ago. Attitudes towards immigration are more nuanced than many politicians and commentators think

DEMOCRACY

- Only 6% strongly agree with the statement that “the political system works well in the UK” and 79% think that “politicians don’t listen to people like me”
- A third of Britons think that “in certain circumstances, violence can be necessary to defend something you strongly believe in”
- 48% of those intending to vote Conservative at the next election say they would prefer to “having a strong and decisive leader who has the authority to override or ignore parliament” over “having a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system”

RADICAL RIGHT

- Last year saw real growth in the Radical Right, inside and outside the Conservative Party
- GB News is increasingly important in shaping and articulating the Radical Right agenda
- Conservative Party members are increasingly open to Radical Right ideas and a majority would welcome Nigel Farage joining the party
- The Radical Right is increasingly adopting anti-net zero narratives and opposing action designed to

limit or reverse climate change

FAR RIGHT

- The traditional far right remains splintered and marginalised. Patriotic Alternative suffered a damaging split in the summer of 2023, with many key activists leaving to form the Homeland Party
- Anti-migrant activism continues to dominate the far-right agenda, with at least 123 specifically anti-migrant demonstrations and 158 visits to accommodation by so-called “migrant hunters” during 2023
- Britain First remains the main far-right electoral threat, but its top-down structure and lack of activists means it can only stand a handful of candidates at a time

TERRORISM

- A record number of far-right activists and sympathisers were convicted of terror-related offences last year
- The average age of those convicted was 32, while four of those convicted were teenagers
- 19% of the 6,817 people referred to Prevent were considered by police to be “extreme Right Wing concern”, considerably higher than the 11% with perceived “Islamist concerns”

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

- The conflict has led to a huge rise in antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred in the UK, with CST reporting a 589% increase in antisemitic incidents while Tell MAMA has reported a 335% increase in anti-Muslim incidents
- The conflict has polarised British society and has led to a worsening of views towards Muslims, reversing slightly more positive attitudes in recent years
- The conflict has split the British far right, with hardline nazis like Nick Griffin and Mark Collett siding with the Palestinians and attacking “Zionist” influence, while anti-Muslim activists, such as Stephen Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) strongly supporting Israel

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

- The belief in a range of bizarre and dangerous conspiracy theories amongst the British people remains depressingly high
- There is generally a correlation between one’s general attitudes and the type of conspiracy theories one might support
- 12% claim to support the statement that “the official account of the Nazi Holocaust is a lie and the number of Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II has been exaggerated on purpose”, while 27% support the claim that “Globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity”



PESSIMISM, DECLINE AND A RISING RADICAL RIGHT

JOE MULHALL and NICK LOWLES

COUNTER-INTUITIVELY, at a time when the Conservative Party appears to be heading for an election defeat – and, if the polls are to be believed, a landslide defeat at that – the Radical Right is blossoming. If anything, 2023 is the year it came of age.

The Conservative Party has long had a hard right, but has primarily been conservative and traditionalist. Britain has long had a Radical Right, whether that be in the form of UKIP, the Brexit Party or the forces that drove forward Brexit itself, but these were largely movements driven by the single issue of securing the country's departure from the European Union.

Now, in 2024, it is fair to say that Britain has a fully-fledged Radical Right movement, with one foot inside the Conservative Party and the other outside.

In May 2023, we witnessed the formation of the New Conservatives, a Radical Right group inside the Conservative Party which, in its own words, stood for “the realignment of British politics”. Led by MPs Danny Kruger and Miriam Cates, the New Conservatives has attracted the support of about 30 other MPs, including Sir Iain Duncan Smith, Dame Priti Patel, Sir John Redwood and Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg.

The New Conservatives have called for “legal” immigration to be halved; substantial tax cuts; the abolition of the workers’ rights we have achieved whilst in the European Union; preventing young people who fail their A-Levels from securing loans to enter Higher Education; banning “gender ideology in schools”; and giving all parents the right “to oversee the Sex Education their children receive”.

In the week leading up to the formation of the New Conservatives, London played host to the National Conservatism Conference, an international gathering of politicians, academics and political commentators from across the Radical Right. Organised by the US-based Edmund Burke Foundation, the event was the latest in a series of conferences around the world that have hosted high profile far-right politicians, including Viktor Orbán and Giorgia Meloni.

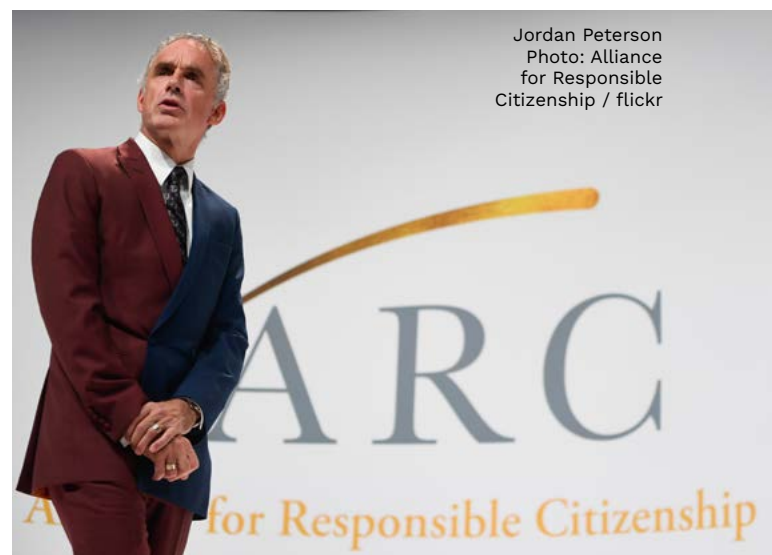
Much of the rhetoric emanating from the stage was indistinguishable from the sort of conspiratorial and reactionary speeches found at traditional far-right meetings. Speakers warned about “transgenderism”, “wokeism”, “cancel culture”, “neo-marxism”, “globalists” and the “end of our way of life.”

Among the speakers were the then-Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who told the conference that “people coming here illegally do possess values which are at odds with our country” and that “the unexamined drive towards multiculturalism” is a “recipe for communal disaster.” Also speaking was the then-Immigration Minister Robert Jenrick, who argued that “those crossing tend to have completely different lifestyles and values to those in the UK”. The ministers spoke alongside Conservative backbench MPs and leading right-wing commentators, such as Melanie Phillips, Douglas Murray and former academic, now right-wing political activist, Matt Goodwin.

At a previous National Conservatism conference, the Conservative Party strongly criticised one backbench MP for attending. This time there was no such condemnation.

London was also the venue for an even larger Radical Right event later in the year, when thousands of people attended a three-day conference organised by the newly formed Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (the ARC), which claims to “explore a better story for the family, community and nation, while also exploring how each individual can be empowered to live a fulfilled, responsible life as a citizen”.

Among the big names involved with the ARC are Canadian academic and “anti-woke” influencer Jordan Peterson, two former Prime Ministers of Australia and two members of the US House of Representatives –



Jordan Peterson
Photo: Alliance
for Responsible
Citizenship / flickr

Rishi Sunak
Photo: Number 10 / flickr



including Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana, who was little-known when the ARC's advisory committee was first announced but had been elevated to the powerful position of House Speaker by the time of its inaugural conference. Also included was Vivek Ramaswamy, the tech-entrepreneur who recently ended his bid to be the Republican candidate for president in 2024.

This burgeoning and increasingly confident Radical Right has real sway on the direction of the Conservative Party. Influenced by those within it and fearful of those outside, Rishi Sunak's government has increasingly been adopting some of its agenda since becoming Prime Minister. While he himself has been lukewarm on the Rwanda plan – as has the new Home Secretary, who once called it “batshit” – he has nevertheless ploughed forward with it.

Sunak has also made repeated forays into the world of culture wars, something he claimed to be uninterested in during his initial leadership bid. He has repeatedly mocked transgender people and even appointed a Minister of Woke in the form of “a Common Sense Tsar”.

Then, in September last year and to the delight of his Radical Right MPs, he announced that he was delaying or even cancelling several climate targets that Boris Johnson's government had set. Further still, he mocked Labour's own green ambitions, claiming that they were being driven by woke ideology.

One of his ministers, Mark Harper, went even further, parroting a conspiracy theory about 15-minute cities.

RADICAL RIGHT ECO-SYSTEM

Beyond the Tory party are a handful of smaller Radical Right parties. Some – such as the once-influential UKIP – have collapsed and shifted ever further right, while others, like David Kurten's Heritage Party and Laurence Fox's Reclaim Party, remain electorally irrelevant. However, Reform UK stands out amongst this grouping of smaller parties and is currently exerting a modicum of influence, both within the Conservative Party and beyond it. Reform is currently polling at 12%, and while it is at present unlikely to win seats at the forthcoming general election,

its ability to take Tory votes could well pressurise the Government to shift further right as polling day approaches. It is already being weaponised by the right wing within the Conservatives to demand and justify the transformation of the whole party.

Outside of the political parties, a growing Radical Right infrastructure has emerged to facilitate and encourage the radicalisation of the Tory Party and buttress the wider Radical Right agenda. A range of think tanks and organisations run out of 55 Tufton Street – including the TaxPayers' Alliance, the Global Warming Policy Foundation, Restore Trust, Net Zero Watch and the Institute of Economic Affairs – are all exerting a gravitational pull on the Tory Party.

However, most important is the growth of a specific media scene that platforms and elevates Radical Right politicians, activists and ideas. Most prominent is GB News, an increasingly influential media outlet for conservative opinion that regularly pushes far-right, Radical Right and conspiratorial narratives.

One of the main driving forces behind the Radical Right movement is Paul Marshall, the co-owner of GB News and founder of UnHerd. A hedge-fund manager with an estimated wealth of over £600m, Marshall heavily funded the Brexit campaign and in 2019 gave £500,000 to the Conservative Party. However, as we reveal in this report, he also has “liked” and retweeted dozens of racist, Islamophobic and homophobic tweets. This not only raises serious questions about the direction of his existing political and media investments – it also makes him unfit to buy his next intended investments, *The Telegraph* and *The Spectator*.

Marshall's desire to buy these titles, which would make him the most powerful media baron in the UK, is understandable. They, together with GB News, would mean that he would own the most influential conservative outlets in the UK and so – potentially – have an influence on the future direction of the movement.

There is probably little he would have to change at *The Telegraph* and *Spectator*, where a growing number of columnists appear to be obsessed with fighting “wokeness” and the “liberal elite”.

Other media outlets like Talk TV also regularly platform figures like Douglas Murray, who has a long history of extreme views. In addition to all of this is the impact of social media, most notably the toxification of X (formerly Twitter) under Elon Musk's ownership.

One of the things that unites this complex and varied scene is the so-called “culture war”, specifically the opposition to “woke” politics, particularly transgender rights and multiculturalism, as well as a certain conception of “free speech”. Together, this Radical Right insurgency is a dangerous challenge to Britain's liberal democracy and is undermining the rights of minority and vulnerable communities.

PESSIMISM

The forthcoming election will be fought against a backdrop of rising pessimism and an increasing sense of declinism amongst the British people.

As our massive 25,000-person poll shows, more than half of British people describe themselves as pessimistic about the future. There are slightly more people (37%)

who think their lives will be worse than those of their parents than who think they will be better (36%).

When asked to describe modern Britain, 43% choose “declining” and 25% selected “weak”.

While views on immigration are more positive and nuanced than most politicians and media commentators would imagine, there remains a direct correlation between those who are more pessimistic about life and those who have negative views towards immigrants and multiculturalism more generally.

As we describe on page 19, we created a “Pessimism Index”, combining the answers to several questions in our poll, and we discovered that the core “pessimistic” group in society accounts for 20% of the population. Two thirds of this group felt multiculturalism was failing, compared to 48% of the population as a whole, and 57% felt immigration had been bad for Britain, as opposed to 45% generally.

We are also witnessing a growing gender split in society. Whereas once age and education were the defining divisions in society, now gender is becoming equally, if not more, important. Our polling finds that young women are woke and proud, while men are increasingly the opposite.

THE FASCIST FRINGE

Beyond the increasingly important Radical Right movement is the traditional fascist fringe, which at present lacks a dominating force. Since the collapses of both the British National Party (BNP) and the English Defence League (EDL), the movement has failed to unite under a single banner. For a period, it looked as though Patriotic Alternative (PA) could be this force, but a damaging split in April 2023 scuppered their chances of uniting the fascist fringe and has resulted in an even more splintered scene than before.

As such, the scene comprises a collection of relatively small but active organisations, none of which have comprehensive national coverage, but rather regional strength. PA remains the largest force but is now competing against its growing list of splinter groups, including the Homeland Party (HP) and the National Support Detachment (NSD), as well as the tiny Independent Nationalist Network (INN).

PA remains strong in the North West and Yorkshire, while Homeland took most of its Scottish and West Midlands branches as well as large sections of its East Midlands and East of England membership. The other splinter groups remain small, with the NSD, led by former PA member Alek Yerbury, leading a small but active group of fascists active mainly in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire.

The only other notable group currently active is Britain First (BF), still led by Paul Golding. While it has a regional structure that covers most of England – with occasional forays into Wales and Northern Ireland – its main areas of activity are the North West where its headquarters are based, as well as the South East. BF remains one of the most active far-right groups and boasts the best infrastructure, with its small but dedicated group of activists travelling the country regularly to exploit local tensions. However, Golding will no doubt be frustrated by BF’s failure to significantly grow its active membership again over the past year, despite his best efforts. Internal squabbles and high activist turnover mean that BF remains a constant but not a growing threat.

Together these groups pose a low-level community threat, exacerbating tensions in the areas that they target. In the past year, several of these small organisations have also started to develop an electoral strategy.

Britain First has been re-registered as a political party since 2021, and has fought a string of local and by-elections, receiving derisory results so far. PA has been attempting to register for some time, but remains thwarted by the Electoral Commission, an embarrassment compounded by Homeland’s recent successful application. As an interim measure, PA announced it will run a handful of candidates in local elections as independents. The British Democrats, a fascist BNP splinter party that spent much of the last decade gathering dust, received an injection of new members in 2022, many of them experienced ex-BNP activists. At present, the British Democrats and Homeland – plus the recently registered party of Alek Yerbury – are the only ethnonationalist parties of any size or activity in the UK.

While none will obtain success at the ballot box in

PA activists in Erskine, Renfrewshire, 5 February 2023. PA’s Scottish branch has since defected en masse to the Homeland Party. Picture: HOPE not hate



the immediate future, elections do provide useful focal points for them to raise money, animate activists and provide a sense of purpose that is lacking in the more diffuse forms of activism that non-parties are restricted to.

For some fascist activists, the splintered nature of the scene and the lack of any viable electoral route to power has resulted in an openness to more extreme forms of activism. In 2023, there were 23 far-right activists convicted of terror-related offences. This is a rise compared to 2022, which was already a record year. Driving this rise in convictions is a combination of more robust policing with a seeming willingness to bring prosecutions for a range of terror-related offences, as well as continued high levels of terrorism activity on the fascist fringe fuelled by easy access to terrorist content on so many social media platforms.

Last year saw the release from prison of several people convicted for membership of National Action, a proscribed terror group. While many have not been heard of since, others returned to the political fray. Chief amongst them was Matthew Hankinson, one of the NA leaders, who refused to engage with any deradicalisation programmes in prison and so served his full six-year sentence. Without the constraints of those who were released from prison early, Hankinson is, if anything, even more radicalised since being released.

MAJOR ISSUES

Across both the Radical and traditional far right, there is one issue that continues to dominate their attention: migration. The more extreme elements of the movement see the arrival of asylum seekers as a racial threat to the “indigenous” white population, while others perceive it as a cultural threat. While many are opposed to all new arrivals, regardless of country of origin, special anger is reserved for people of colour and especially Muslims. The notion that Muslims pose a unique danger, and that Islam is incompatible with British society, remains a central belief across much of the movement.

This anger has manifested as another record year for anti-migrant street activism by the far right, with at least 123 specifically anti-migrant demonstrations and 158 visits to accommodation by so-called “migrant hunters”. However, the far right’s revived interest in immigration and asylum over the last year has piggybacked on mainstream anti-migrant rhetoric emanating from both the media and the Conservative government. The result has been widespread societal anger which the far right is seeking to stoke further and exploit.

Another issue that remains at the top of the movement’s agenda is anti-LGBTQ+ politics, with an especial focus on transphobia. As with opposition to immigration, transphobia is a topic that unites the whole movement, from the mainstream through to the most extreme elements of the fascist fringe. For many on the far right, transgender people pose a threat to their binary understanding of gender and a challenge to their rigid concept of gender roles within the family and wider society. However, it is also seen as an issue

Palestinians search through the rubble of their destroyed homes hit by Israeli strikes in the northern Gaza Strip.
Photo: UN Photo/Shareef Sarhan

that has mainstream appeal, something exemplified by reams of hostile media coverage of transgender people and even Prime Minister Rishi Sunak making jokes about transgender people in the House of Commons recently.

Beyond anti-immigration and anti-trans activism are a range of other issues that animate different elements of the scene to differing extents. Complaints about supposedly politically motivated state oppression of far-right activists are ever present, with the recent conviction of PA’s Sam Melia receiving widespread attention. Similarly, much of the Radical and far right also oppose environmental policies such as traffic regulation schemes and net-zero related policies, framing them as power grabs by an oppressive state.

WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Towards the end of 2023, much of the far right turned their focus to the war in Gaza. Sadly, as is so often the case, whenever there is conflict in the Middle East there is fallout on the streets of Britain. Antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crime have both risen sharply in the months since the horrifying Hamas attack on 7 October and the subsequent Israeli bombing and invasion of Gaza.

Many on the organised far right have seen the ongoing conflict as an opportunity to exploit anger and advance their own divisive politics. As expected, the scene is split depending on which minority community the individual or organisation generally dislikes most. Those who primarily push Islamophobia have been vocally pro-Israel, while those motivated



by antisemitism have been pushing pro-Palestine content. The latter is usually the more extreme elements within the far right.

However, this divide is not as clear as it once was. There is an increased fluidity between the two camps, with some activists who have traditionally eschewed overt antisemitism dabbling more openly. This particularly occurs in relation to the Great Replacement theory, with a range of actors pushing the narrative that the war is part of a plot to “flood” Europe with more Muslims. Some are explicitly stating this is a “Jewish plot” while others remain more vague.

While commenting regularly on events in the Middle East, much of the far right, including Stephen Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson), have focused more on pro-Palestinian activity within the UK, especially the series of large demonstrations in London. This bubbled over into violence in November when far-right activists and football hooligans descended on the capital for a protest.

The conflict has been met with a massive surge in antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred in the UK. According to the Community Security Trust (CST), which protects the Jewish community and monitors anti-Jewish hatred, there has been a 589% increase in antisemitic incidents since 7 October. Likewise, Tell MAMA, which records anti-Muslim incidents, have recorded a 335% increase during the same period.

HOPE not hate’s own polling of teachers found that 11% had witnessed incidents they consider antisemitic and 7% incidents they considered Islamophobic.



Success for the Radical Right could see Nigel Farage enter the Conservative Party
Photo: Gage Skidmore

LULL BEFORE THE STORM

Over half of the world’s population will be going to the polls in national elections this year, and there is a very real threat that Radical Right, authoritarian and anti-democratic parties will prevail in many of them. The Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi is likely to be returned in India. Populist and Radical Right parties are likely to come first in many EU Parliament elections, with most others coming second. And then, in November, Donald Trump has a real chance of becoming President of the United States again, though this time with an even more reactionary agenda.

The UK is also expected to go to the polls this year and while the Conservatives seem likely to lose, their electoral defeat could create the perfect opportunity for a Radical Right surge in the UK. Just as pessimism and declinism appear to be propelling Labour to power, so they could also be its undoing. The financial realities of the state of the British economy, coupled with political timidity and an aggressive and increasingly confident Radical Right intellectual and media eco-system, could quickly turn people against the new government.

Whether this benefits the Radical Right inside or outside the Conservative Party remains to be seen. A post-election leadership battle within the Conservative Party will be fought between centre-right moderates and the Radical Right. Success for the Radical Right could see Nigel Farage enter the Conservative Party and its centre of political gravity swing to the right. A victory for the centre-right is likely to be met with the emergence of a serious Radical Right party outside the Conservative Party.

Either way, 2024 could be the lull before the storm. The groundwork that has been done – intellectually and organisationally – to build up the Radical Right over the past year could well mean that Britain is facing a serious threat from the far right over the next few years.

PESSIMISM AND DECLINE

A HEAVY MOOD HANGS OVER BRITAIN

Every year HOPE not hate conducts a *State of the Nation* poll to better understand the views of the British public. It helps us determine the issues and vulnerabilities the far right could exploit over the coming year. NICK LOWLES reviews the pulse of the nation.

A MOOD of pessimism and decline has descended over the British public in way that appears likely to see the back of the Conservative Government but could well indicate trouble in the years that follow.

In a poll of 25,000 people, conducted by FocalData for HOPE not hate in late December and January, the British public had little to cheer about. Against a backdrop of a cost-of-living crisis which, according to the Resolution Foundation, is likely to leave living standards lower at the end of this parliament than it was at the start for the first time since the war. People are restless, angry and demoralised. What's more, this mood of pessimism and decline transcended political allegiances.

Half of people (50%) said that they were pessimistic about the future and more people thought they would be worse off in their lives than their parents.

When asked to choose three words that described Britain today, 43% selected "declining", while "weak" came second with 25%.

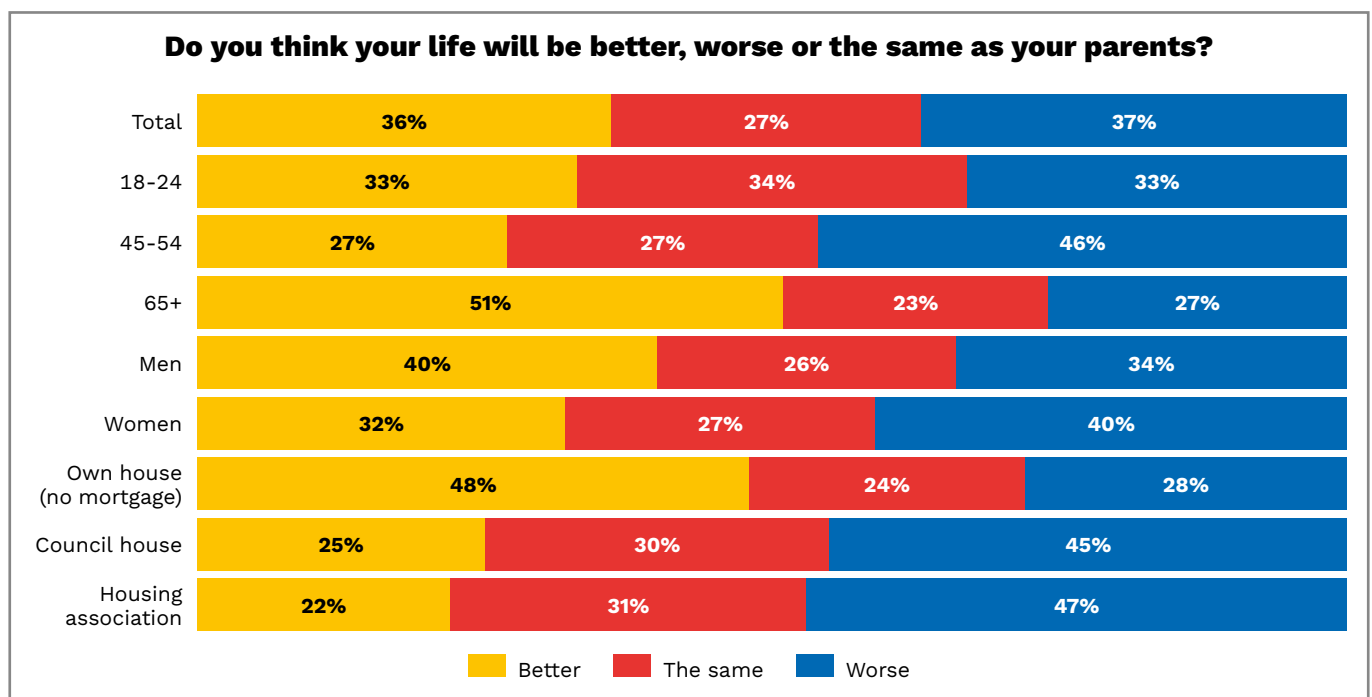
But these headline figures are only half the story. Many people are even more pessimistic about the future.

Generally, those who earn less and have been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis feel far more pessimistic than the more affluent. Likewise, those with mortgages, who have felt the financial impact of interest rate rises, are more pessimistic than those who own their properties outright or those who rent.

Labour voters are much more pessimistic than Conservative voters, though those who intend to vote Reform UK are the most pessimistic of all. The 52% of Reform UK voters who describe Britain as "declining" are only outdone by the 59% of those who voted Conservative in 2019 but now intend to vote Reform UK.

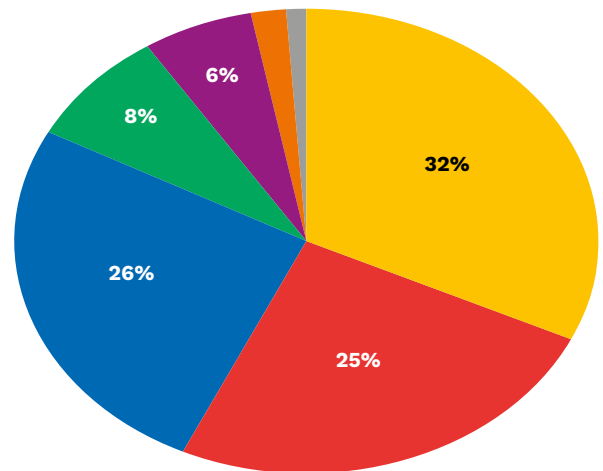
Older people felt this sense of decline more than younger people. While 49% of 55-64 year olds and 48% of those over 65 described Britain as "declining", only 34% of those aged between 25 and 34 felt likewise.

Religion is also a factor. Half of those who do not identify with any religion described Britain as



Thinking about the financial situation for you and your household, which of the following best describes your experience?

- I feel like I'm getting by, but making cutbacks - I can afford the essentials but I'm having to cut back on luxuries and the things that make life enjoyable
- I feel worried about my financial future: I'm currently keeping up with essential payments but I fear I won't be able to soon if things continue as they are. I cannot afford luxuries at the moment
- I feel comfortable: I have enough money to afford essentials and save for a rainy day, and I can enjoy some luxuries, if I'm careful with my budget
- I feel financially desperate: I currently cannot afford essentials such as food, rent or mortgage. I am already taking extreme measures such as skipping meals or missing rent payments
- I feel well-off: I don't need to worry about money, I can usually afford both essentials and luxuries, and save money if I want to
- Don't know
- None of these



“declining”, only 26% of 1,467 Muslims choose that word. The one group that appear to buck the national trend are Black people. Three quarters of this diverse community (76%) are optimistic about the future, 50% higher than the national average, and two thirds (67%) thought their lives would be better than those of their parents, almost twice the national average.

SKIPPING MEALS

The pessimistic mood in society is heavily influenced by the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, the extent of which is shown graphically in our polling. Asked about the financial situation for themselves and their household, 8% described themselves as “financially desperate” and unable to “afford essentials such as food, rent or mortgage” and are already “skipping meals and rent payments.”

A further 25% say they are worried about their financial future, and while they are currently keeping up with essential payments, they don't believe they will be able to for much longer if things continue as they are.

By contrast, only 6% of respondents considered themselves well off, being able to pay for essentials and luxuries whilst also being able to save.

The sharp cost of energy and the price of food are the two ways that people have been impacted most by the cost-of-living crisis over the last couple of years.

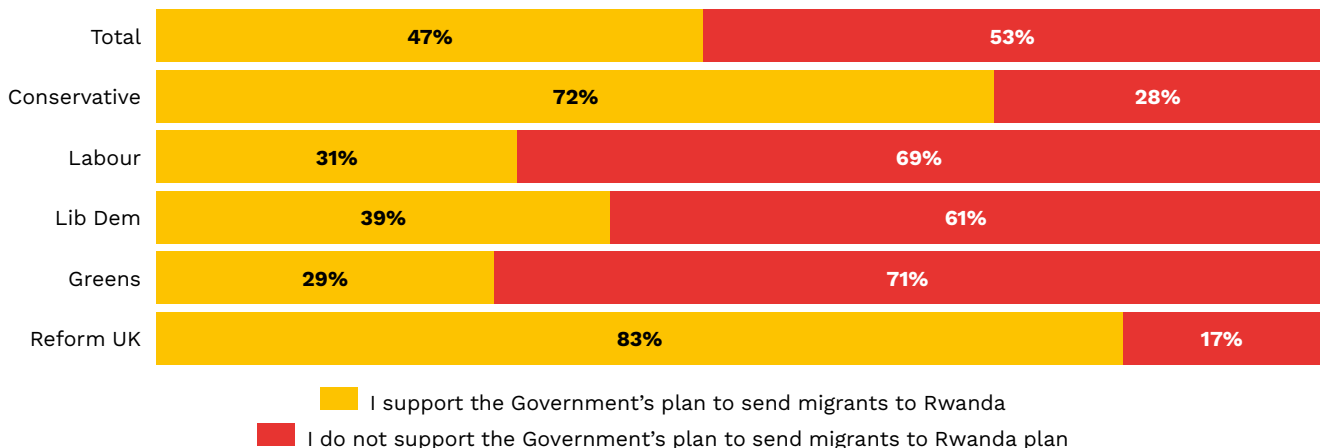
IMMIGRATION

Unsurprisingly, 64% of people listed the cost-of-living crisis as the most important issue facing them and their family, while the NHS came second with 47%.

Immigration and asylum came fifth, at 18%, up from 14% in a similarly large poll 12 months ago. Of course, for some voters, immigration was much more of a concern. Almost a third of people over 65 listed it as one of their three most important issues, as did 27% of current Conservative Party voters and 56% of Reform UK voters. In fact, immigration and asylum was only 1% behind the cost of living crisis as the main issue of concern for Reform UK voters.

Once again, the poll highlighted that the British

Please say which statement in each of these pairs you most agree with, even if you don't agree with either entirely



STATE OF THE NATION

– KEY HEADLINES

HOPE not hate commissioned FocalData to undertake a poll of 25,000 people at the turn of the year, making it one of the biggest polls to be commissioned by anyone for some time.

Here are the key findings:

- There is a deep mood of pessimism and decline amongst the British public and this is likely to herald a change of Government this year
- There is a clear correlation between pessimism and more negatives attitudes towards “the other”
- Attitudes towards immigration is more nuanced than some politicians and media commentators like to admit. While many people are strongly opposed to “illegal” immigration and think the Government’s immigration policy is weak and ineffective, the majority of people are opposed to the Rwanda scheme, think immigration has been good for Britain and are concerned about reducing immigration into key sectors like the NHS and social care
- While there is general acceptance that Muslims face daily discrimination and are treated unfairly by the media, 43% think Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation
- Gender is becoming an increasingly important fault line in British society, with the attitudes of men and women becoming increasingly divergent
- Only a third of people identify with a side in the “culture wars” and even within the “woke” and “anti-woke” camps opinion is often divided on key issues
- Nigel Farage received a significant boost in how young people viewed him since going on *I’m a Celebrity*
- Only 9% of people do not believe climate change is happening and there is overwhelming support for the world to move away from the use of fossil fuels
- Opinion towards democracy is poor, with most people believing that the political system is broken and that none of the main political parties speak for people like them. A third of people believe that in certain circumstances, violence can be necessary to defend something you strongly believe in
- While 67% of people prefer having “a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system”, 33% would support “a strong and decisive leader who has the authority to override or ignore parliament.” However, opinion amongst current Conservative Party voters is split 52/48
- While the majority think Britain is a successful multicultural country, there are some concerns over integration and more work has to be done to ensure this issue cannot be further weaponised by those who seek to divide us

public take a more nuanced position on immigration and asylum than many politicians and media commentators would care to admit.

A majority of people (56%) still believe that on the whole immigration has been good for Britain, though only 46% of those intending to vote Conservative and just 25% of those backing Reform UK think the same.

How one frames the question around immigration can massively alter how people view it. Almost half of voters say they would be more likely to vote for a candidate if they “commit to dramatically reducing immigration”, yet 40% say they would be less likely to vote for a candidate whose immigration policies made it harder for the NHS and social care sector to recruit the staff it needs.

When given a list of words to best describe the Government’s approach to immigration and asked to choose two, 32% chose “ineffective”, 25% picked “not strong enough” and 22% say “unrealistic”.

This makes attitudes to the Government’s Rwanda plan even more interesting, with 47% supporting “the Government’s plan to send migrants to Rwanda, even if it means breaking or bypassing the Human Rights Act”, while 53% did not.

NEW FAULT LINES

Our polling highlights gender as an increasingly important fault line in understanding British society today. For the past decade or two, pollsters and academics have identified age and education as key determiners of how people think and vote. While these factors remain important, gender is increasingly emerging as another key division in society. Women, especially younger women, being considerably more liberal than men, especially older men. This is especially the case over social and cultural issues.

While there have always been slight differences between how men and women view issues, the difference between them is now wider than before. On issue after issue, women are more progressive than men.

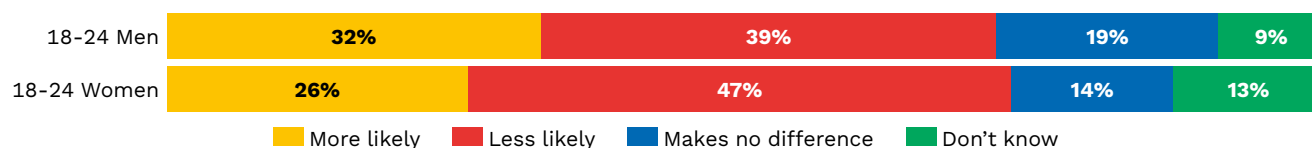
Politically, men are more likely to vote for a candidate who promises to reduce immigration than women, while women are more likely to think that Black and Asian people face discrimination in their everyday lives and support a political party that promises to spend more on the NHS.

On cultural issues, the divisions between men and women are even greater. Almost twice as many women think that gay couples should be allowed to adopt children than men, while men are almost twice as likely to consider themselves to be “anti-woke” than women.

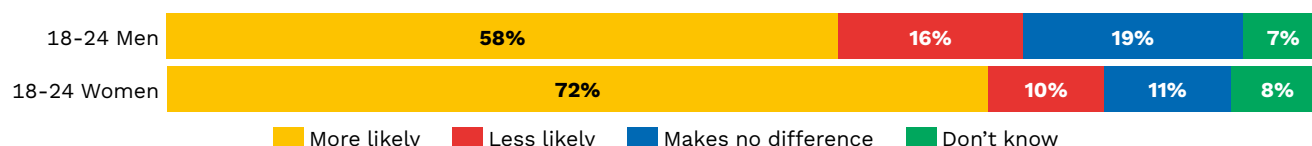
The gap is even greater when young women are compared to men over 65 years of age. While 31% of women aged between 18 and 24 consider themselves “woke”, just 4% of older men think the same. Conversely, 40% of men over 65 identify themselves as “anti-woke” compared to just 9% of young women. Young women are three times more likely to believe that Islam is compatible with the British way of life than those who believe it is not. For older men it is almost the exact opposite.

Growing gender gap

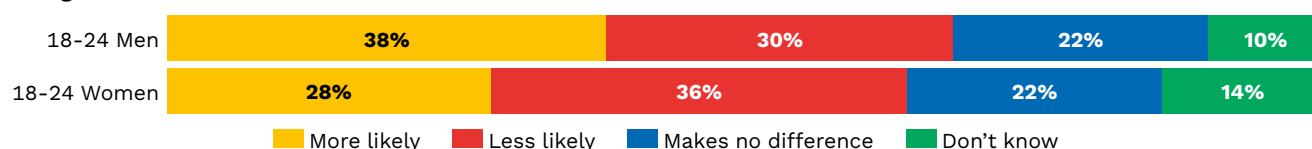
Are you more or less likely to vote for a candidate in the next General Election if they support changes to our immigration system that will make it harder for the NHS and social care sector to recruit staff from abroad



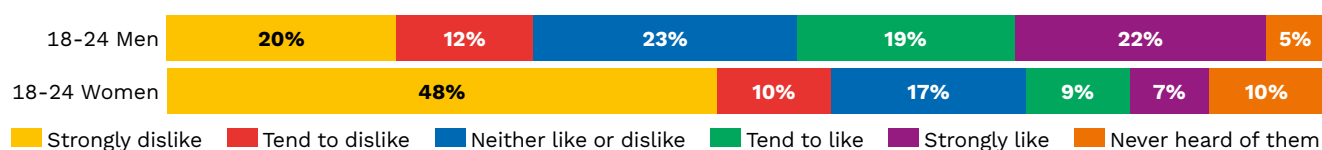
Are you more or less likely to vote for a candidate in the next General Election if they commit to spending more on the NHS



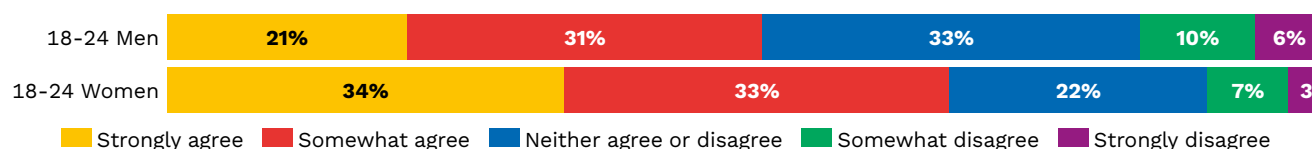
Are you more or less likely to vote for a candidate in the next General Election if they commit to dramatically reducing immigration



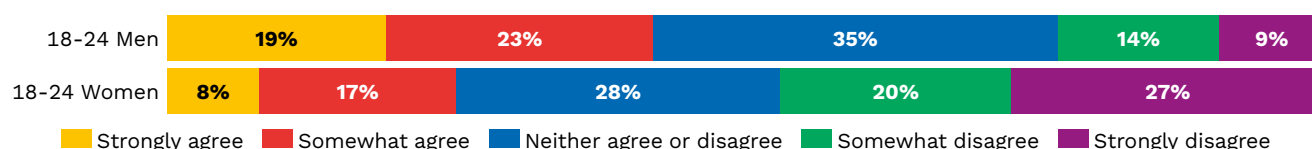
To what extent do you like or dislike Andrew Tate



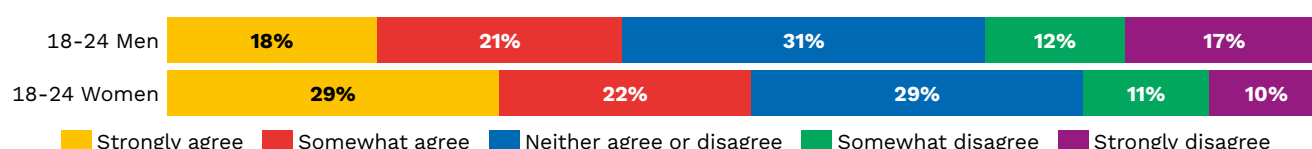
Black and Asian people face discrimination in their everyday lives



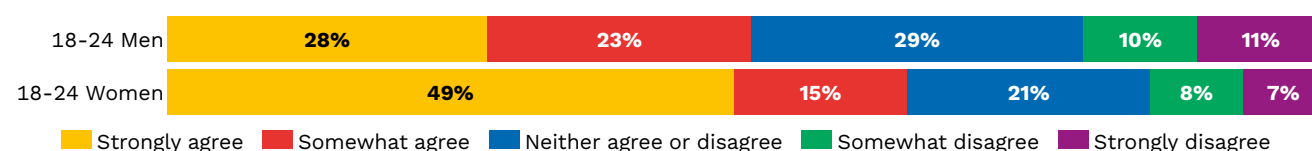
Feminism has gone too far and makes it harder for men to succeed



People should be able to identify as being of a different gender to the one they had recorded at birth



Gay couples should be allowed to adopt children



Older men are twice as likely to support the Government's Rwanda plan than young women, but three times as less likely to support gay couples adopting children.

RACISM

Racism continues to blight society. Almost one in five people from minority ethnic communities say they had experienced racial abuse over the past year, while one in ten say they have suffered racist violence. One in seven say they have experienced racial discrimination in the workplace. Given that over 4,000 people from minority ethnic communities were questioned in this poll, these figures are both robust and highly alarming.

CULTURE WARS

Cultural issues are increasingly being weaponised in the battle of ideas and, as we see in this report provide a way for far-right groups to gain traction and support amongst wider audiences in society.

When people were asked if they are "woke" or "anti-woke", 16% identified themselves as "woke" and 22% said they were "anti-woke". However, a larger group (36%), said they were neither and a further 26% had never heard of these terms.

A third of 18–24-year-old women identified themselves as "woke" and just 9% as "anti-woke". Conversely, 40% of men over 65 viewed themselves as "anti-woke", while just 4% as "woke".

However, those who identified as "woke" or "anti-woke" did not always think as homogeneous groups when it came to individual social and cultural issues. A third of those who claimed to be "woke" agreed with the statement "feminism has gone too far and makes it harder for men to succeed", with 40% disagreeing. While 46% of those who identified as "anti-woke" agreed with this statement, a sizeable minority, 23%, did not.

Half the people questioned in the poll (51%) agree that "Black and Asian people face discrimination in their everyday lives", with just 19% of people saying they disagree.

However, when asked if Britain is institutionally racist, opinion was more eventually split. Just over a third (36%) thought it was, while a third (33%) thought it was not.

Footballers taking the knee equally divides people. Overall, 41% of people agree that "Footballers should be supported in taking the knee in opposition to racism" while 26% disagree. Women are twice as likely to support footballers taking the knee than oppose it, while men are more evenly split. Age divides opinion

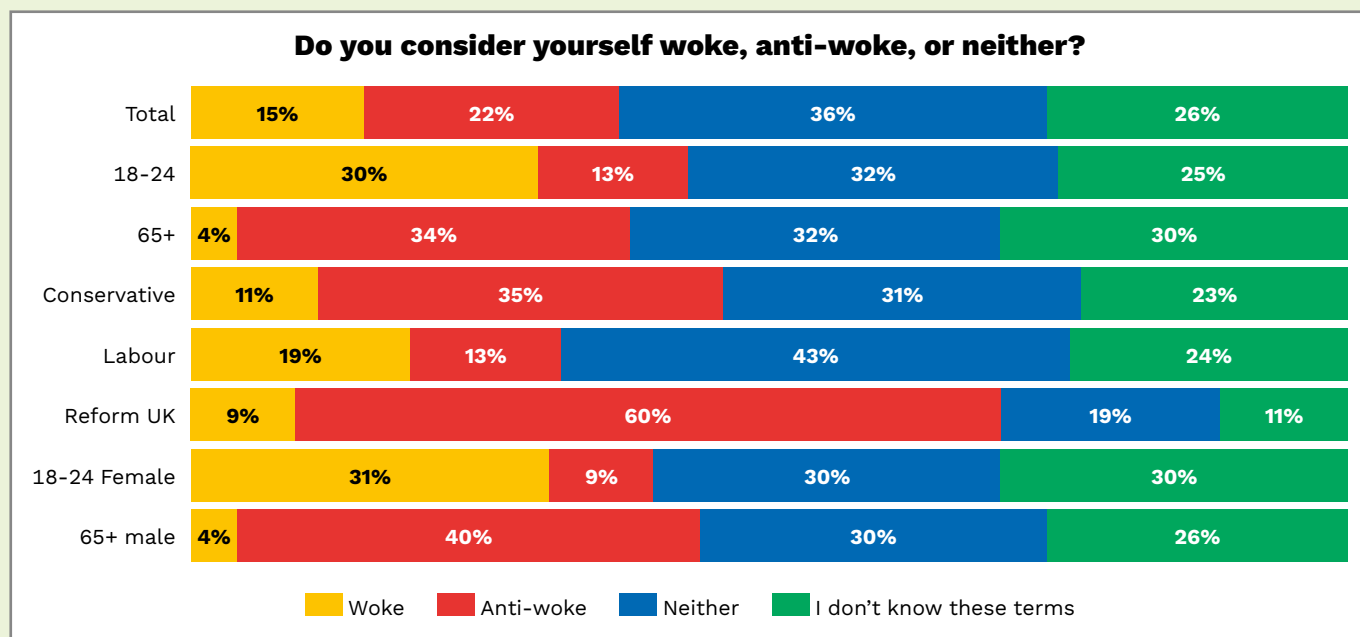
Likewise, almost half (44%) of those who identified as "anti-woke" agreed that gay couples should be allowed to adopt children, while only 32% disagreed.

Amongst the "woke" group, 66% agreed that "gay couples should be allowed to adopt children" and 16% did not.

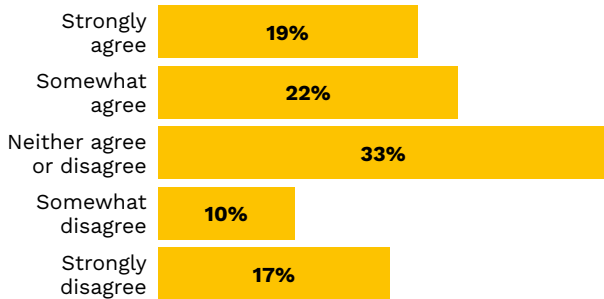
The one area where there was a clear difference of opinion was on transgender rights. While 59% of those who identified as "woke" agreed that "people should be able to identify as being of a different gender to the one they had recorded at birth", 50% of the "anti-woke" group disagreed.

Where there was some agreement though was on whether "the media invent or exaggerate culture wars as a political tactic". While 55% of the population as a whole agreed with this statement, the figure for those who claim to be "woke" was 64% and those identifying as "anti-woke" 57%.

While some are deliberately trying to divide people along culture war lines, it is always important to remember that the understanding of, and boundaries between, those identifying as "woke" and "anti-woke" are sometimes not clearly defined and change issue by issue.



Footballers should be supported in taking the knee in opposition to racism | To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



too. Over half of young people (53%) aged between 18–24-year-olds support footballers taking the knee compared to just 13% who oppose it. However, amongst those over 65-year-olds 44% oppose footballers taking the knee while just 28% support them.

NEGATIVE VIEWS ABOUT ISLAM

Attitudes to Muslims are more complex and generally more negative. While 46% of people agree that “discrimination is a serious problem for Muslims in Britain”, as opposed to 20% who disagree, views on other issues relating to British Muslims and Islam are more varied.

Four times as many people believe that “it is wrong to blame an entire religion for the actions of a few extremists” than those who disagree with the statement. However, 58% believe that “Muslim communities need to do more in response to the threat of Islamist extremism”, while just 9% do not agree.

By a margin of almost two to one, people think Islam poses a threat to civilisation. Amongst over 65s, this margin rises to three to one and amongst Reform UK voters the margin is eight to one.

The attitude of Muslim respondents to these questions are interesting. Two thirds (67%) agree that “discrimination is a serious problem for Muslims in Britain”, with 12% disagreeing. Meanwhile, 78% agree that “it is wrong to blame an entire religion for the actions of a few extremists”, with 8% disagreeing. Half of the 1,487 Muslims polled thought that “Muslim communities need to do more in response to the threat of Islamist extremism”, while just 20% disagreeing.

By a margin of 62% to 10%, Muslim respondents think that “most Muslim immigrants have successfully integrated into wider British society”. In the society overall, the split between those who agree and disagree with this statement is 47% and 22%.

Almost twice as many people agree that “the media is too negative towards Muslims”. Three quarters of Muslims agree with this statement, as opposed to just 8% who disagree. However, slightly more people who intend to vote Conservative disagreed with this statement compared to those who agreed, while for Reform UK voters just 18% agree and 55% disagree.

THE PESSIMISM INDEX

Our State of the Nation poll suggests that there is a direct link between pessimism and fear and dislike or even hate of “the other”. By combining the results of several questions about mood and views on the country, we have created a Pessimism Index where we can see what those who are most pessimistic feel about Britain and the key issues of the day.

By combining those who choose Pessimistic over Optimistic, selected “decline” as one of their words to describe Britain today and those who thought their lives would be worse than that of their parents, we found that 16.3% of Britons were deeply pessimistic about the state of Britain today.

Our pessimistic group are found across the demographic and political spectrum. They are slightly more likely to be women, 92% are white and are slightly less likely to have a degree than the population as a whole.

Of those who gave a preference as to who they were going to vote for, 44% said they would vote Labour, 15% Reform UK and 14% for both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

They are more likely to think that British politics and democracy generally is not working, with 84% thinking that the political system is broken and only 6% thinking it is not.

We found that this 16% were more opposed to immigration and more likely to feel that multiculturalism has failed than those not in the pessimism group. While 58% of the non-pessimistic group in society think immigration has been good for Britain, 57% of the pessimistic group think it has been bad. Likewise, two thirds of this group (65%) do not think multiculturalism is working, compared to 45% of the non-pessimistic group.

The pessimistic group is also much more likely to think the Government’s approach to immigration is “ineffective” and “not strong enough”, oppose action on climate change and claim to believe in conspiracy theories.



COUNTRIES THAT CAUSE TROUBLE

We asked respondents which countries they thought caused the most trouble in the world and the answers highlighted how differently young people see things.

While the general population picked Russia, China, North Korea and Iran as the four countries that they believed caused most trouble, young people aged between 18 and 24 choose Russia, US, Israel and North Korea.

Thinking internationally now, which of the following countries cause the most trouble in the world?



Thinking internationally now, which of the following countries cause the most trouble in the world? – 18 to 24



Please say which statement you most agree with, even if you don't agree with either entirely:

52%

Britain is a successful multicultural society where people from different backgrounds generally integrate and live together

48%

Britain's multicultural society isn't working and different communities generally live separate lives

MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

As we discuss elsewhere in this report, the conflict in the Middle East has deeply divided public opinion in the UK. However, while passions have been inflamed between those who support Israel and those who side with the Palestinians, the reality is that the majority of people do not take one side over another, answering “do not care” or “don't know”.

Only 38% of the public choose a side, with 22% siding with the Palestinians and 16% with Israel. A further 21% say they support both sides equally and 27% say they support neither side. The rest say they don't know.

Of course, opinions varied massively amongst certain segments of society. Conservative voters were twice as likely to back the Israeli side as the Palestinian side (27% v 13%), while amongst Labour voters it was three to one in favour of the Palestinians. However, like society at large, the majority of both Conservative and Labour voters either supported neither side, both equally or did not know.

Opinion amongst Muslims and Jews were, perhaps unsurprisingly, polar opposites. Three quarters of Muslim respondents sided with the Palestinians and 5% sided with Israel. Amongst Jewish respondents, 48% sided with Israel and 12% the Palestinians. A quarter of Jewish respondents said they supported both sides equally, while 11% said they supported neither side.

There is also a clear difference in attitudes between young people and old people. Almost half of young people (45%), side with the Palestinians and just 8% with Israel. Amongst those over 65, support for Israel is running twice as high as it is for the Palestinians.

LOSING FAITH IN DEMOCRACY

The opinions of the British public towards our politicians and our political and democratic institutions continues to be poor and is partly driven by our general mood of pessimism.

Over half of people are not satisfied that the political system works well in the UK, double the amount who do. Almost two thirds agree with the statement that the political system is broken, with just 14% disagreeing. Four in ten people agree that “I feel confident that at least one of the main political parties reflect what I think”, with 27% disagreeing.

Slightly over two thirds of people (68%) agree with the statement that “politicians don't listen to people like me”, with only 9% disagreeing.

However, these headline figures disguise huge variation by political outlook. Over half of current Labour

supporters do not think the political system works well in the UK, more than double the level of Conservative voters. However, this is still behind Reform UK voters, where the figure is 59%.

Three quarters of Reform UK voters believe that the political system is broken, with just 9% disagreeing. Green Party voters have an equally poor opinion of the current political system.

Unsurprisingly, 81% of Reform UK voters agree that “politicians don't listen to people like me”, as do 72% of Green voters.

DANGERS AHEAD

Our polling shows that Britain is seriously divided and dangers lie ahead. While 64% of people want to see a change of Government, including a majority of those who voted for the Conservatives in 2019, serious problems will remain.

The NHS remains loved by the British people but there is a widespread acceptance that it is failing to deliver the care many urgently need. Without a serious cash injection, it's hard to see how this situation will change.

Attitudes towards multiculturalism should also offer a warning about what might happen. Despite politicians like Suella Braverman claiming that it has failed, the British public disagree - though not by much. If we are to make multiculturalism work, and explain why it does, we can't be complacent.

The pessimism and sense of decline that is enveloping the country at the moment should serve as a warning that more difficult times are to come.

People appear desperate to see the back of the current Government, but there does not appear to be a lot of enthusiasm towards Labour and Keir Starmer in particular. Unless he can show real change in his first 100 days and generate a sense of optimism, the mood of pessimism could quickly engulf him too.

From the NHS to immigration, the cost-of-living hardship to integration and multiculturalism, the British public are fed up with the status quo.

On top of that, and free from the constraints of power, we are likely to see an increasingly aggressive Radical Right, be it in or outside the Conservative Party. If we think Radical Right politicians and their friends in the media are bad now, just wait until small boats continue to arrive. The rhetoric will be much worse and far more divisive.

This *State of the Nation* report captures the mood of Britain today and flags the dangers of what might come tomorrow. It is for all of us to ensure the dark clouds are lifted.

ARE CONSERVATIVE VOTERS FALLING OUT OF LOVE WITH DEMOCRACY?

IT SEEMS an incredible question to ask, but are Conservative Party voters losing faith in parliamentary democracy? It certainly seems so from our polling.

According to our mega 25,000-person poll, conducted by Focaldata for HOPE not hate at the turn of the year, 48% of those intending to vote Conservative at the next election say they would prefer “having a strong and decisive leader who has the authority to override or ignore parliament” over “having a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system”.

That would be quite an incredible figure for any major political party, but it is especially surprising given that the Conservative Party is usually considered the defender of tradition, the establishment and law and order.

The idea that half of current Conservative voters would prefer a more authoritarian type of government would be highly questionable if the poll had been of 1,000 people, with current Conservative voters making up just 230, reflecting their current 23% average in the polls.

But our poll was of 25,000 people and the number of current Conservative voters polled was 4,981.

Compare this to Labour supporters, 70% of whom backed “having a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system”.

Overall, 67% of respondents to our poll backed “having a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system”, while 37% backed “having a strong and decisive leader who has the authority to override or ignore parliament”.

By 79% to 21%, Liberal Democrat supporters back liberal democracy. At 68%, Scotland has the highest level of support for liberal democracy in the UK.

Older people are slightly more in favour of a liberal democracy than young people.

It also signifies a significant drop in support for liberal democracy from the 2019 Conservative Party voter, who, in our poll, backed “having a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system” by 56%, compared to 44% who preferred “having a strong and decisive leader who has the authority to override or ignore parliament”.

This is almost identical to a 20,000-person poll we conducted a year ago, which found that 57% of 2019 Tory voters backed a liberal democracy and 43% preferred a strong authoritarian leader.

Polling in this country and abroad has found that people on the right of politics are more likely to have an authoritarian mindset. Just over half (53%) of those saying they would vote Reform UK prefer “having a strong and decisive leader who has the authority to



override or ignore parliament” to a liberal democracy. These are almost identical figures for those who say they would vote Reform UK in the coming election.

There are two probable explanations for this drop in support for liberal democracy. The first is that many moderate 2019 Conservative voters, who are much more likely to support a liberal democracy, have since deserted the Conservative Party, thereby increasing the proportion of those who want a strong leader.

Indeed, 66% of the 1,084 respondents who voted Conservative in 2019, but now would vote Labour, support a liberal democracy.

The second explanation is arguably just as simple. Liberal democracy is not working well for the Conservatives. They are lagging well behind in the polls and the party is making quite a mess at running a liberal democracy.

It should be alarming to everyone that so many supporters of the governing party prefer an authoritarian system of government over a liberal democracy. It perhaps also explains why this government has been able to whittle away at our democratic institutions, undermine and smear the judiciary and the media, and introduce laws that curtail our freedoms, without much complaint from their supporters.

BEYOND BAME

MISBAH MALIK on challenging assumptions and navigating the nuance of ethnic minority attitudes

THE ATTITUDES of Britain's Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) respondents require more nuanced research as the evidence of a universal concept of "BAME attitude" or a "BAME experience" is increasingly inadequate, a huge HOPE not hate survey has found.

During December 2023 and January 2024, HOPE not hate polled 24,954 people across the United Kingdom, of whom 3,689 were from minority communities, on a range of socio-economic and political issues.

There is a discernible demand and responsibility for more sophisticated analyses of where, how and why these attitudes diverge, in order for politicians and policymakers to better understand and address the diverse needs of this group.

GENERAL MOOD

Reflective of the mood of the country as a whole, the prevailing sentiment among BAME respondents reflects a pervasive sense of deterioration, predominantly attributed to the cost of living crisis. "Decline" is the top word that BAME respondents associated with Britain today, with over half (59%) identifying the cost of living crisis as the biggest issue impacting them personally.

Concurrently, there exists a palpable disillusionment with the political establishment, underscored by widespread disenfranchisement and perceptions of political inefficiency. More than half think the political system is broken (58%) and most feel unlistened to by those in power (59%). There is a large appetite for a change in government (64%) – however, worryingly, less than half (42%) think that one of the main political parties reflects what they think.

Despite comparable identification of the challenges that exist by BAME and white respondents, a notable divergence emerges concerning future outlooks. Despite being more likely to consider themselves disadvantaged in society (35% versus 27%), more likely to report struggling with the cost of living crisis (41% versus 32%), and more likely to report being affected by cuts to public health services (38% versus 34%), BAME respondents exhibit a greater propensity for optimism (63% versus 47%).

Higher levels of resilience built up over generations of hardships may be an explanation for this; indeed this group are more likely than their white counterparts to think their life will be better than their parents' (42%

versus 35%). Similarly, prevailing ethos of ambition are common within migrant communities, and the concurrent "bootstraps" mentality often necessitates optimism.

Linked to this, while disadvantage and discrimination still exist, ethnic minorities have been making gradual progress in narrowing gaps with white people in terms of education, wages, and life expectancy, as well as general race relations. These ongoing advancements are likely to be given more positive weight by BAME respondents than white respondents, some of whom may actually view this negatively, contributing to a racial optimism gap.

RACE, IMMIGRATION AND MULTICULTURALISM

As a collective, the BAME group are unsurprisingly progressive on issues related to race. They are more likely to acknowledge Britain's institutional racism than white respondents (45% versus 33%), and the majority see multiculturalism as a success (68% versus 49%). With many being first, second or third generation immigrants themselves, they are overwhelmingly supportive of immigration as a benefit for Britain (72% versus 52%), and are half as likely to subscribe to right-wing narratives that immigrants are going to "overwhelm us and destroy our democracy" (27% versus 51%).

This is reflected in their support for liberal immigration policies across both asylum and economic migration. BAME respondents as a whole disagree with raising the annual income threshold for a spouse visa to £38,000 (65%), do not support the Rwanda plan (66%) and are in favour of increasing safe and legal routes, for example expanding family reunification to include parents (56%).

However, the simplistic narrative of "BAME solidarity" that often underlines assumptions about this progressiveness hides the nuanced attitudes within these communities, shaped by diverse cultural legacies and international contexts. Notably, disparities emerge concerning attitudes towards specific religious and cultural groups, highlighting the inadequacy of race as a sole determinant of ideological alignment, even about issues related to race itself. For example, whilst BAME respondents generally appear tolerant of Muslims and are almost half as likely to view Islam as a "serious threat to Western civilisation" (29% versus 47%), Islamophobia amongst Hindu respondents is akin to that of white respondents, a result of the mainstreaming of Hindutva politics within India and the diaspora. Similarly, Hindu nationalist narratives about immigration and "invasions" of asylum seekers,



specifically Muslims, overlaps with rhetoric peddled by far-right actors. Over half (54%) of Hindus support the Rwanda plan, even if it means breaking or bypassing human rights laws and international treaties, closer to the attitudes of traditional far-right audiences (64%) than BAME audiences (33%).

FEMINISM

As a whole, the BAME group attitudes towards feminism and women's rights are in line with broader society, with half (49%) having a positive view of feminists.

However, young BAME men are almost twice as likely to have negative views of feminists than young BAME women (45% versus 25%). This reflects trends arising in wider society; gender gaps are nothing new, but a tide of reactionary politics amongst young men is enhancing division along age and gender lines, where their attitudes are increasingly at odds with those of young women. Young men across all ethnicities are three times more likely than young women to call themselves “anti-woke”, reflective of a pushback against liberal attitudes, particularly regarding feminism.

Perceptions of diminishing space for male agency are fostering scepticism towards feminist ideologies. Indicatively, these young men perceive feminism as hostile, morphing from a commitment to gender equality to an ideology aimed at punishing men; almost half think that feminism has gone “too far” (43%).

Whilst the attitudes of young BAME men are akin to those of white young men, young BAME women are much less likely to have a positive view of feminists than young white women (56% versus 71%). This bolsters the wider ongoing discussions regarding the need for tailored narratives and inclusivity within feminist discourse.

LGBTQ+ ISSUES

Polling suggests that some BAME people hold prejudiced attitudes around LGBTQ+ issues. Compared to their white counterparts, they're less supportive of trans rights, diverse gender identities, and non-traditional family structures.

Religious convictions are a likely cause of conservative attitudes here. Seventy-six per cent of BAME respondents identified as following a religion, compared to 53% of white respondents.

Within wider society there is a divide between the attitudes of those who follow a religion and those who don't, particularly when it comes to homosexuality – of which religions, particularly orthodox interpretations, can take a negative view. Sixty-seven per cent of non-religious respondents agree that gay couples should be able to adopt children, dropping to 53% for religious respondents.

This drops even further for BAME respondents – only one third (35%) think that gay couples should be able to adopt children. The influence of religion is more pronounced here as cultural defence often results in ethnic minorities in the UK practising a higher level of religiosity; not only do more of them practise a religion, but to a higher strictness, resulting in more conservative attitudes.

Again however we see diversity in perspectives within the BAME community. Black respondents are almost twice as likely to disagree with gay adoption than Asian respondents (39% versus 23%). Furthermore, 34% of Muslims disagree with gay adoption, twice that of Hindus (15%) and Sikhs (17%), suggesting large divergence even within the Asian responses. This is a perfect example of how topline analysis of BAME attitudes, devoid of drilled-down dissection, can lead to at best clunky and at worst entirely misguided representations of ethnic groups and religions.

Also interesting is the negligible impact that age has on BAME respondents' attitudes towards LGBTQ+ issues. Whilst cultural transitioning and the tendency for third and fourth generation immigrants to display lower levels of religiosity would suggest that young BAME respondents would be more liberal, in fact their views remain in line with the older BAME respondents, as do the percentages of those who identify as religious. Again we see the cut through of the reactionary, anti-woke movement amongst young people, here exacerbated with the influence of religion on attitudes.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND ANTISEMITISM

Alarmingly, BAME respondents were more likely to endorse antisemitic conspiracy theories than white respondents. A third claim to support the statement that Jewish people have an unhealthy control over the world's banking system, and they are twice as likely to support the claim that the official account of the Holocaust has been exaggerated.

Racial differences are not often explained by common theories regarding antisemitism. Influenced by antisemitic tropes about wealth and power in contrast to the discrimination they themselves face, BAME respondents are potentially more likely to excuse anti-Jewish behaviour and attitudes as “punching up”, and therefore acceptable.

Furthermore current events in Israel and Palestine – specifically the UK's initial support of Israel's right to self-defence, at odds with the 41% of BAME respondents who solely support the Palestinian side – are likely to be adding fuel to the fire and opening up more doors to antisemitic conspiracy theories for some.

It is evidently insufficient to look only at broad racial categories as a determinant of experiences or attitudes. Diverging views within the BAME group clearly highlights how oppression by the same racial power structures does not produce a homogenous worldview, even on issues related to race and racism. As in wider society, the intersection and interplay of various identities like age, religion, gender and ethnicity introduce intricate fault lines within and between the BAME community.

Examinations of the complex and divergent realities and perspectives within this group are needed to depart from outdated notions of a homogenous BAME group. By continuing to act on the premise that such a group exists, politicians lazily and dangerously overlook real problems, but also miss potential opportunities and avenues for effective policy making.

BRITAIN'S RADICAL RIGHT

NICK LOWLES and JOE MULHALL

POLITICS USED to seem simpler for anti-fascists. The line between fascists and mainstream Conservatives felt clearer. While there was always crossover, there were times when fascists focused on dominating the streets through violence and were overtly obsessed with race while mainstream Tories were generally concerned more with a small state and deregulation. However unpleasant the Conservatives might have been on immigration, there was generally a difference between them and the more extreme far right. Sadly, that already blurred line has become ever fainter and the distinction less clear.

In recent years there has understandably been a lot of talk about the “mainstreaming” of far-right politics in Britain. Unquestionably we have seen increasing examples of extreme rhetoric that has traditionally been confined to the far-right fringe being echoed by ostensibly mainstream figures. Of course, the border between the mainstream and the far right has always been porous – better understood as a continuum rather than two distinct groups – but a form of conspiratorial and overtly discriminatory politics has become increasingly normalised.

For some, Britain is seen as something of an exception because of the near-complete absence of a far-right electoral threat. With the rapid decline of the British National Party (BNP) and then UKIP, and the failure of Radical Right start-ups such as Nigel Farage's Reform UK and Laurence Fox's Reclaim Party to gain any electoral traction, one might think that Britain is bucking the international trend.

The truth, however, is that we face the same fundamental challenge to liberal democracy as many other nations. The difference is that it has emerged *within* and around the Conservative Party, rather than as a distinct radical or far-right alternative. In short, Britain lacks a successful far-right party because there is currently little space for one.

In Britain this form of politics is advanced by a growing collection of think tanks, campaign groups, smaller political parties, academics and media outlets. Importantly, Radical Right politics is increasingly being adopted within the Conservative Party, which is radicalising in a way not dissimilar to what has happened to the Republican Party in the United States.

We also have a growing ecosystem that, while continuing to accept the fundamentals of democracy, rejects certain values of liberal democracy, such as minority rights and

pluralism. It seeks to exploit economic pessimism, inequalities and real or perceived grievances, and offers simplistic solutions, scapegoating and demonising – which, deliberately or otherwise, undermines trust in the political process. This ecosystem also propagates and utilises conspiracy theories to spread its ideology.

One of the things that unites this complex and varied scene is so-called “culture war” issues and opposition to “woke” politics, particularly transgender rights, a certain conception of free speech and multiculturalism.

Together, this Radical Right insurgency is a dangerous challenge to Britain's liberal democracy and is undermining the rights of minority and vulnerable communities. And, worryingly, it is becoming increasingly confident and influential in British society.

THE CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

The most visible example of the growing influence of Radical Right politics in Britain is the transformation happening within the Conservative Party, most notably in its rhetoric around the issue of immigration and asylum seekers and its strident opposition to wokeness. In recent years, we have seen an increasing willingness to use language

(left to right)
Laurence Fox,
Nigel Farage
(photo: Gage-
Skidmore),
and Suella
Braverman
(photo:
UK Gov.)



traditionally avoided by mainstream politicians.

The party has always had a wing open to espousing more extreme and at times explicitly racist politics. But what is taking place now is on an altogether different level. The plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda for processing has been met with widespread anger and opposition, and risks Britain being at odds with UK and international law.

Despite legal challenges and domestic and international criticism, the government continues to attempt to force through the policy regardless, even if it means breaking or changing the law. While the policy itself is extreme in nature, it is the way that the government has been willing to trample over legal conventions that is most reminiscent of Radical Right parties in other countries. There is also a conscious strategy to adopt Radical Right and conspiratorial language to generate fear and anger amongst sections of British society in order to win electoral support.

The difference is not simply the severity of the language and policies on immigration, but more the adoption of a wider far-right narrative that has become commonplace on the US right in recent years.

For some within the party, anti-immigration is just one part of a wider “war on woke” that has often resulted in influential members of the Government using language on a range of issues that is indistinguishable from that used by far-right extremists. Central here is the way that they have attempted to “other” whole groups in society they see as enemies, presenting themselves as anti-elite and demonising some of the core institutions of British society.

Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman once told newspapers that if judges ruled against her, they were “wet liberals” and “soft on criminals”. Former

Prime Minister Liz Truss has railed against “left-wing extremists”, whom she says have taken over Britain’s institutions.

The adoption of language and positions more traditionally articulated by the far right has not been confined to the issue of immigration. As Dr Aaron Winter of Lancaster University put it, “the Tory Party has mainstreamed far-right ideas on immigration, race, trans rights and more”.

We are also witnessing the adoption of other far-right and conspiratorial tropes. When watering down the Government’s net-zero targets, Prime Minister

Rishi Sunak deliberately and quite consciously lied about the views of the Labour Party, accusing them of wanting to tax meat and force households to have seven bins. Even when confronted by journalists about these ludicrous lies, the Conservative Party and its ministers continued to peddle them.

At the last party conference, it got worse, with Transport Minister Mark Harper saying the Tories would stop the “misuse of 15-minute cities,” which he claimed is “the idea of local councils deciding how often you can go to the shops”. Of course the claim is totally untrue and just another example of the adoption of conspiratorial views by the Conservative Government.

The Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, Layla Moran, took to Twitter to hit back at Harper: “In Oxford we’ve been descended upon by ultra right conspiracy theorists purporting to speak for local residents who largely stayed away. It is genuinely chilling to see Government ministers play to this crowd.”

HAVE THE TORIES BECOME RADICAL RIGHT?

Due to our electoral system our two main parties are very broad ideological coalitions. This makes it hard to argue that the Conservative Party is now “Radical Right”. However, there is certainly a wing within it which comfortably fits the definition and the party as a whole is increasingly adopting Radical Right policies and rhetoric as part of its electoral strategy.

Sunak’s background in international banking and hedge funds means he is unlikely to agree with the more strident elements of anti-elite Radical Right language, though it hasn’t stopped him opportunistically parroting it. James Cleverly, the new Home Secretary whose job it is to implement the Rwanda plan, has privately described it as “batshit”. Lord Cameron, the new Foreign Secretary, has also privately opposed the scheme in the recent past, as indeed, has Sunak himself.

Despite these private condemnations, the debate has shifted from whether the policy is acceptable to how best to implement it – a good example of how radical right policies become normalised quickly. This is another example of how Sunak has been willing to put private concerns aside and adopt Radical Right rhetoric and policies for short-term electoral gain.

Standing for party leader after Boris Johnson had been toppled, Sunak trod a very mainstream political and economic strategy. Indeed, up against the firebrand free-marketeer Liz Truss, Sunak initially made a virtue of his normality. It was back to business as usual, he announced, contrasting his more moderate tone against the backdrop of the chaos of the Johnson years.

Of course, this approach did not last long, as it quickly became apparent that while the country at large might have wanted a more orthodox leader, many Tory Party members were in a different place. Sunak swung right in an attempt to revive his leadership bid, talking tough on immigration, demanding “free speech” absolutism and demonising the cultural left, whom he argued had captured many British institutions.

His change of direction was both too late and not believed, and Sunak was beaten by Truss. However,



THE NEW CONSERVATIVES



Danny Kruger and Miriam Cates

The New Conservatives is a Radical Right group of Tory MPs, led by Danny Kruger and Miriam Cates. It was launched in May 2023 and is believed to have 25 members, though another 10-15 attend its events. Key members include Jonathan Gullis, Tom Hunt and Mark Jenkinson.

Among those who have signed its manifesto are former leader Iain Duncan Smith, former Home Secretary Priti Patel and former leader of the House, Jacob Rees-Mogg.

While the group claims to want the Conservative Party to return to the policies and direction of the 2019 Conservative manifesto, its agenda is far more right wing.

It has publicly called for the halving of immigration into Britain within a year, but suggested policies such as closing “the temporary schemes that grant eligibility for worker visas to ‘care workers’ and ‘senior care workers’” would have a devastating impact on our health and social care service.

It wants to cut taxes, and so by extension public services, and restrict access of some working-class kids to go to university.

The New Conservatives strongly engage in culture-war politics, calling for the “ban of gender ideology in schools and ensur[ing] parents’ rights to oversee the Sex Education their children receive.”

The New Conservatives were at the heart of the attempted right-wing Conservative rebellion against Rishi Sunak’s Rwanda Bill and specifically called for the ECHR to be ignored. The group also wants to see Labour’s equality legislation torn up.



her premiership lasted just 44 days and following the chaos of her reign, Sunak emerged as leader.

While it initially appeared as though Sunak was going to return to traditional Conservative orthodoxy, it became apparent that he was going to navigate a strategy of playing both sides simultaneously. Sunak adopted a fiscally cautious approach much to the anger of the libertarian right, and largely left the “anti-woke” culture warriors in his cabinet to do as they wished. However, with a general election approaching and his popularity continuing to decline, Sunak is now following a divisive wedge-issue strategy to highlight the differences between himself and Labour.

Sunak consciously allowed Braverman and others to shift ever further right on immigration and multiculturalism, securing the necessary populist and supportive headlines in the right-wing press, whilst quietly telling more serious media outlets that he privately disagreed with some of her statements. He was only eventually forced to act against her when she openly criticised the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and accused the Met of two-tier policing ahead of a predictably violent far-right demonstration in Whitehall.

Braverman’s dismissal has, however, not halted Sunak’s adoption of Radical Right language. His recent announcements on scaling back Britain’s green targets and his public defence of motorists are couched in right-wing culture-war language about environmental zealots – despite the fact that many of the policies he is now overturning were actually introduced by Conservatives in the first place.

So, while it would be going too far to say the Conservative Party has become a Radical Right party in its entirety, it is fair to argue that there is a wing within the party that is unquestionably comparable to other far-right parties around the world.

THE FIVE FAMILIES

The Radical Right within the parliamentary Conservative Party are to be found in the self-dubbed “five families” – the five groups of MPs who initially posted their opposition to Sunak’s Rwanda Bill earlier this year. At the heart of this grouping is the New Conservatives, a strongly anti-immigrant and social authoritarian group made up of about 25 MPs. Leading them are Miriam Cates and Danny Kruger.

Others in the “five families” include the pro-Brexit European Research Group, led by Mark Francois, the Common Sense Group, chaired by John Hayes, who describe themselves as “Trump-style populists”, and the Conservative Growth Group, a libertarian small-government group, led by former ministers Ranil Jayawardena and Simon Clarke.

Making up the quintet is the Northern Research Group of red wall Tories, led by Jake Berry. Many owe their political success to Boris Johnson, though this group is probably the least ideologically right-wing of the five groups.

Supporting the five outside Parliament is the Conservative Democratic Organisation, set up by Lord Peter Cruddas in 2022 to support a beleaguered Boris Johnson, who used the political threat posed by Reform UK to attack what they saw as a “drag to the left” under Rishi Sunak.



Prime Minister
Rishi Sunak
Photo: UK
Prime Minister

Most recently, the five have been joined by the recently established Popular Conservatives, led by Liz Truss. Whilst more economically libertarian in outlook, the new group has weaved Radical Right rhetoric around immigration and anti-elite culture-war politics into its political repertoire.

While the rebellion by the “five families” embarrassingly fizzled out, the Radical Right opposition to Sunak has not ended. In a clear attempt to undermine his leadership, an attempted coup took place, with the active participation of the *Daily Telegraph*, when YouGov polling and data analysis was used to show Sunak’s unpopularity and the scale of a likely Labour victory. Fronting up this attempt was Lord Frost, one of the key architects of implementing Brexit, as well as a number of former Sunak aides and advisors.

OTHER RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES

The Radical Right ecosystem also operates politically outside the Conservative Party, most notably Reform UK. Led by Richard Tice, Reform UK is the successor to Nigel Farage’s Brexit Party which was formed in November 2018 and rebranded following the UK’s exit from the European Union. While until recently it had struggled to have any real purpose or obvious political vision, it is now seeing a shift in its political fortunes as right-wing anger at Rishi Sunak has continued to grow.

With its hardline views on immigration and anti-climate action policies, Reform UK is currently polling at 12%, which, while too low to achieve any significant electoral breakthrough, could see it cost the Conservatives dozens of seats in the forthcoming general election.

How much Reform UK poses a challenge to the Conservatives will largely depend on the future plans of its erstwhile leader and current Honorary President, Nigel Farage. Having spent the last couple of years hosting a primetime show on GB News, he further boosted his post-Brexit profile – and bank balance – by coming third in the reality show *I’m A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here*.

If Farage returns to frontline politics with Reform UK ahead of the general election, then he could dramatically transform their political fortunes, with one poll suggesting that he himself could win the Essex seat of Clacton and bring a handful of other South Yorkshire, Kent and Essex seats into play for the party. Without his return, Reform UK is likely to see its support squeezed during the election campaign, as the Conservatives raise the supposed danger of open-door migration if Labour wins.

That said, Reform UK’s increased polling performance

of late has rattled the Conservative Party and is being weaponised by its right wing to demand and justify the transformation of the whole party.

RADICAL RIGHT INFRASTRUCTURE

There is also a growing Radical Right infrastructure in media and culture that has emerged to facilitate and encourage the radicalisation of the Tory Party and buttress the wider Radical Right agenda.

This was perhaps best illustrated by the National Conservatism Conference in May. Organised by the US based Edmund Burke Foundation, the event was the latest in a series of conferences around the world that have hosted high profile far-right politicians, including Viktor Orbán and Giorgia Meloni.

Much of the rhetoric emanating from the stage was indistinguishable from the sort of conspiratorial and reactionary speeches found at traditional far-right meetings. Speakers warned about “transgenderism”, “wokeism”, “cancel culture”, “neo-Marxism” and “globalists” and the “end of our way of life.”

Another group operating on the fringes of the party is the New Culture Forum. Set up by former UKIP London Assembly member Peter Whittle, it claims to challenge “the cultural orthodoxies dominant in the media, academia, education, and wider British culture.”

The NCF functions from 55 Tufton Street, described by the BBC as “the other black door shaping British politics”. Among the many dubious organisations that operate from that address are the Tax Payers’ Alliance and the Global Warming Policy Foundation – and it is the former home of many others, such as Vote Leave and Brexit Central. Restore Trust, the supposed “anti-woke” group which attempted to take control of the National Trust, operated from this building, as did Net Zero Watch and the right-wing Institute of Economic Affairs.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Global Warming Policy Foundation, a climate change sceptic “think tank”, publicly welcomed Rishi Sunak’s weakening of the net-zero targets, stating that it was a “significant first move” towards completely dismantling the net-zero targets altogether. FairFuelUK, which is run by Reform UK’s London Mayoral candidate Howard Cox and also operates out of Tufton Street, likewise welcomed the move, saying it offered a “breathing space” to overturn the ban on petrol and diesel car sales.

Also backing Sunak’s announcement was the Net Zero Scrutiny Group, made up of 25 backbench Conservative MPs, led by Thanet South MP Craig Mackinlay and founded by Steve Baker MP. The group also operates out of Tufton Street and whilst it claims not to deny climate change, it draws heavily on research by the climate-change-denying Global Warming Policy Foundation.

This collection of think tanks provides both policy recommendations for the Conservatives, but also pressurises the party, encouraging its rightward and conspiratorial drift.

THE MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Perhaps most important though has been the growth of a specific media scene that platforms and elevates Radical Right politicians and activists and is increasingly influencing the agenda of the Tory Party.



Lee Anderson and Jacob Rees-Mogg

The existence of a reactionary and right-wing media is by no means a new phenomenon in Britain. However, recent years have seen the emergence of new and influential outlets that peddle a politics that even the traditional right-wing print media has historically balked at. In turn this has pulled more mainstream publications rightwards and editorial standards downwards.

Most prominent of these is GB News, an increasingly influential media outlet for Conservative opinion that regularly pushes far-right, Radical Right and conspiratorial narratives. While viewpoints vary across its programmes, a number of GB News' most high-profile presenters use the platform to promote harmful conspiracy theories and socially divisive, hyper-partisan political narratives.

The channel has been found in breach of Ofcom's due impartiality rules four times in 2023, and faces 11 ongoing investigations at the time of writing. Yet this hasn't stopped former Deputy Chair of the Tory Party Lee Anderson and Jacob Rees-Mogg accepting their own shows, and a range of MPs, including cabinet ministers, appear regularly on the channel.

Another regular on GB News is Matthew Goodwin. Formerly a respected academic, his dramatic shift right has seen him become an increasingly influential figure within the Radical Right for his ability to provide a thin veneer of respectability to increasingly extreme politics.

Beyond GB News there is also a growing roster of columnists in *The Telegraph* and *Spectator* who seem obsessed with fighting back against "wokeness" and the "liberal elite." Other media like Talk TV also regularly platform figures like Douglas Murray who has a long history of extreme views.

In addition to all of this is the impact of social media, most notably the toxification of X (formerly Twitter) under Elon Musk's ownership. While social media has always posed a problem, Musk's Twitter, with its lax moderation policies, poor enforcement and embrace of formerly banned extremists, has become a safe place for extreme people and politics to flourish.

WHERE NEXT?

Whether it is a section of our media landscape, the collection of influential think-tanks or the Conservative Party itself, Radical Right politics has a range of powerful and influential voices in Britain. We are already seeing the result of this with extreme policies such as the Rwanda plan and the use of ever more extreme and conspiratorial rhetoric from supposedly mainstream political figures.

Sadly, things could be set to get worse in the coming months. Despite people like Lee Anderson and Suella Braverman no longer being in the cabinet, there seems little chance that the Conservative Party's rightward shift is at an end.

In the short term, we are likely to see Sunak's government continue to announce ever more extreme conspiratorial and sometimes incendiary policies as we approach the next election. Lagging behind in the polls, the Conservative election strategy is to appeal to its 2019 Red Wall voters, many of whom have deserted the Tories over the past two years but have not gone over to Labour.

The expected success for far-right and Radical Right parties in next summer's European elections will only encourage those, inside and outside the party, to move ever further to the right. This is likely to be repeated as we approach the highly charged US presidential elections this November, especially, as looks likely, if Trump is the Republican nominee. With so much of the UK right gaining political and ideological inspiration from the US, a heavily confrontational electoral battle, with immigration and anti-woke narratives at its core, will naturally find its way over here, especially in the far-right ecosystem inside and outside the Conservative Party.

While Sunak is likely to continue to adopt Radical Right policies for short-term opportunistic reasons, the more ideologically-driven Radical Right is preparing for the post-election scenario where, in the event of a Labour victory, it believes it can take over the party with a true believer. And exclusive polling of Conservative Party members by HOPE not hate (see page 36) suggests that they have a chance – if they can get a candidate into the final two.

If that route fails, then we could see Reform UK really come into its own, as a proper alternative to the Conservatives for the right-wing vote.

If we think things are bad now, they could still get far worse very soon.

THE CLIMATE CHANGE SCEPTICS

NICK LOWLES

THE *DAILY TELEGRAPH* columnist Allison Pearson was indignant when she heard the news that the blast furnace at the Port Talbot steel works was set to close. “Make no mistake,” she wrote in the paper, “some 141,931 people (the population of greater Neath Port Talbot) have been sacrificed on the altar of net zero.”

She was not alone in blaming net-zero policies for the closure of the South Wales steel works, and with it the loss of 3,000 jobs.

“It is a disaster that Net Zero is costing 3,000 steel jobs and that we will stop being a primary steel producer,” Nigel Farage wrote on X.

Reform UK leader Richard Tice blamed “eco-zealots”.

Of course, the reality behind the closure of the Port Talbot blast furnace was somewhat more complicated, and owed more to the failure of Government policy and the post-Brexit economic landscape, but these were inconvenient truths behind a chance to knock the green agenda.

Increasingly, the Radical Right is targeting climate action as a new political battleground. Few now deny climate change is happening, publicly at least, but some question whether humans are primarily responsible and most challenge any action to limit or reverse it.

There are always economic arguments for not undertaking this or that initiative, and at a time of economic problems and during a cost of living crisis, some of these might carry some weight. But all too often, these economic arguments merely conceal a scepticism about climate change and disdain for any action to address it.

The main climate-sceptic organisation in the UK is the Global Warming Policy Foundation, a right-wing think tank set up by the late Conservative Party chancellor Nigel Lawson in 2009, which claimed to be an “all-party and non-party think-tank and a registered educational charity which, while open-minded on the contested science of global warming, is deeply concerned about the costs and other implications of many of the policies currently being advocated.”



The late Conservative Party chancellor Nigel Lawson. Photo: Chatham House

The Foundation describes its main purpose as being to “bring reason, integrity and balance to a debate that has become seriously unbalanced, irrationally alarmist, and all too often depressingly intolerant. [...] Our main focus is to analyse global warming policies and its economic and other implications.”

CLIMATE SCEPTICISM AND THE RADICAL RIGHT

Much of the global populist right continues to question or reject the scientific consensus on climate change. This partly stems from the perception that climate activism is dominated by the left-wing, who are variously portrayed as deluded, anti-freedom and/or financially motivated elitists. Climate scepticism and denial are also strongly linked to conspiratorial thinking.

Among elements of the populist and radical right, a deep hostility towards perceived “left-wing” positions dovetails with a suspicion of transnational projects, meaning that in some cases, efforts to combat climate change are portrayed as a left-wing, “globalist” plot to weaken national sovereignty and suppress the freedoms of ordinary people.

In most European and North American countries, it is the populist and radical right which has led the charge against net zero targets and other attempts to introduce climate action measures.

The AfD in Germany has profited in the polls by leading the campaign against the Bundestag’s net zero ambitions.

As US President, Donald Trump massively reduced the number and influence of government scientists, initiated a frenzy of oil and gas drilling and withdrew from the Paris climate deal. Should he win re-election, his second term would likely see an even more determined effort to undermine climate action.

“Trump will undo everything Biden has done, he will move more quickly and go further than he did before,” Myron Ebell, who headed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) transition team for Trump’s first term, told *The Guardian*. “He will act much more expeditiously to impose his agenda.”

In recent rallies, Trump, the likely Republican nominee, has called renewable energy “a scam business” and vowed to “drill, baby, drill”.

On his first day in office, Trump has said he would repeal “crooked Joe Biden’s insane electric vehicle mandate” and approve a glut of new gas export terminals, which have currently been paused.

He has also called climate change “mythical”, “nonexistent”, and “an expensive hoax”.

Of course, its “open-minded” approach to climate change is highly questionable, especially as the image on the home page of its website suggested the planet was not warming.

Bob Ward, policy and communications director at the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics, told *The Guardian* that “Some of those names [on the GWPF’s Academic Advisory Council] are straight from the Who’s Who of current climate change sceptics.”

The campaigning arm of the GWPF is the Global Warming Policy Forum and the Director of both organisations is Dr Benny Peiser, a German-born climate sceptic. As recently as 2022, Peiser was quoted as saying: “It’s extraordinary that anyone should think there is a climate crisis. Year after year our annual assessment of climate trends document just how little has been changing in the last 30 years. The habitual climate alarmism is mainly driven by scientists’ computer modelling, rather than observational evidence.”

THE NET ZERO SCRUTINY GROUP

Another part of the Conservative Radical Right ecosystem is the Net Zero Scrutiny Group of Conservative MPs, which was founded in 2021 to oppose many of net zero pledges made by Boris Johnson’s Government ahead of the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow. Steve Baker MP was its initial chair, but he was replaced in September 2022 by Craig Mackinlay MP after Baker took up a ministerial job.

Shortly after the group was formed, Baker told *Sky News* that he “genuinely believe[s] that when the full costs of net zero start hitting us, if people have never been given a choice at the ballot box, we could end up with something bigger than the poll tax, certainly bigger than Brexit, because the numbers of people hit by it and their inability to cope will be huge”.

In January 2022, 20 NZSG members co-signed a letter to the *Telegraph* calling for the then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Chancellor Rishi Sunak to lessen the impact of inflation and “cost-of-living pressures” by removing VAT and environmental levies on domestic energy.

The letter claimed that the “Climate Change Levy on business energy use” was “making UK energy-intensive businesses uncompetitive” and called for a “new approach to our energy security,” meaning increased North Sea exploration for oil and gas and support for fracking.

A month later, the group wrote to Boris Johnson directly to state their opposition to the ban on fracking.

While the group claims to accept climate science, it is closely linked to the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF), one of the pre-eminent institutions denying climate change in the world.

According to the excellent DeSmog website, which monitors climate deniers and sceptics, the GWPF said in 2015 that “policies to ‘stop climate change’ are based on climate models that completely failed to predict the lack of warming for the past two decades”. It has also expressed the view that carbon dioxide has been mischaracterised as pollution, when in fact it is a “benefit to the planet”.

One of the main funders of the GWPF is the Sarah Scaife Foundation, which coincidentally has \$30 million worth of shares in energy companies including Exxon and Chevron.

Another key funder is Donors Trust, described by the American publication *Mother Jones* as the “dark money ATM” of the conservative movement in the US. While Donors Trust does not formally have a position on climate change, it does fund a number of organisations questioning the link between fossil fuel emissions and climate change and others blocking attempts to legislate against greenhouse gas emissions.

Mackinlay employs Harry Wilkinson, the GWPF’s head of policy, as his parliamentary aide and the NZSG used GWPF research and polling in its material.

Steve Baker, the group’s founder, was a trustee of GWPF until he stepped back following his promotion to a Northern Ireland ministerial job.

The NZSG is closely linked to the European Research Group, of which Baker was a key member, the free-market Institute of Economic Affairs and the anti-fuel duty lobbying group, FairFuelUK. The head of FairFuelUK is Howard Cox, the Reform UK candidate for London Mayor.

Several longtime climate-sceptic Tories are also involved with the NZSG, including Philip Davies and Peer Lord Lilley. They were two of the five Conservative MPs who voted against the groundbreaking 2008 Climate Change Act. The others were Christopher Chope MP, Andrew Tyrie (now a peer) and Ann Widdecombe.

Another NZSG supporter is Andrea Jenkyns MP, who sits on the Boards of both the GWPF and Net Zero Watch.

On becoming a Director of Net Zero Watch, Jenkyns told the media: “Westminster has been gripped by groupthink on climate and energy policy for far too long... I’m looking forward to spreading the word that there are more rational approaches to these issues.”

Another supporter of NZSG is Lord Frost, a close confidant of Boris Johnson and a key conspirator in the recent attempts to unseat Rishi Sunak. He too is a GWPF Board member.

According to parliamentary records, Neil Record, chairman of both the Global Warming Policy Forum and the Institute of Economic Affairs, gave Steve Baker a £10,000 donation in January 2023.



Craig Mackinlay and Steve Baker

In October 2021 the Global Warming Policy Forum rebranded itself as Net Zero Watch, a campaign that claims to “scrutinise” the UK government’s net-zero emissions plans and provide a “clear view of the reality of climate and energy policies”.

Writing on the *Open Democracy* website, Adam Bychawski claimed that the American Friends of the GWPF received more than \$1.3m from US donors, of which at least \$864,884 has been channelled to the UK group. He went on to assert that of the £1.45m that the GWPF has received in charitable donations since 2017, at least 45% has come from the US.

In September 2022 Net Zero Watch published two reports rejecting climate science on the greenhouse effect.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY

The huge spike in oil and gas prices following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the recent cost of living crisis has provided the climate sceptics with the perfect opportunity to attack the green agenda. Climate change might be happening, they assert, but Britain simply cannot afford the action required to address it.

An investigation by *The Guardian*, in February 2022, found Steve Baker and Craig Mackinlay MPs, founders of the newly formed Net Zero Scrutiny Group, touring the Commons tea rooms warning against the economic cost of climate action. Of particular target were the newly elected MPs in the so-called Red Wall seats, who were told by Baker and Mackinlay that their seats were at risk by the Government’s obsession with the net zero targets.

Tory MPs told *The Guardian* that Baker and Mackinlay showed them polling that had been commissioned by the GWPF that set out a stark picture of a population deeply concerned about the cost of living and wary of paying “higher taxes to help reach net zero”.

Over the course of the next year, several letters written by the Net Zero Scrutiny Group appeared in the press, signed by dozens of Conservative MPs and peers, urging a halt to the government’s green pledges.

In September 2023 it appeared their lobbying paid off when Rishi Sunak announced a u-turn on several key climate targets, including the delaying of ending the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and the phasing out of gas boilers.

Sunak went further, ridiculing Labour for its apparent obsession with the green agenda and even claiming that they wanted to tax meat and forcing households to have seven bins. “Even when confronted by journalists about these ludicrous assertions, Conservative Party ministers continued to peddle these lies.” At the recent Conservative Party conference it got even worse, with Transport Minister Mark Harper saying the Tories would stop the “misuse of 15-minute cities “... “what is sinister is the idea of local councils deciding how often you can go to the shops “. It is indeed sinister, just as it is totally untrue and just another example of the adoption of conspiratorial views by the Conservative Government.

The Liberal Democrat MP for Oxford West and Abingdon, Layla Moran, took to Twitter to hit back at Harper: “In Oxford we’ve been descended upon by

WHO’S BEHIND NUMBER 55?



55 Tufton Street Photo: R4vi / wikipedia.org

55 Tufton Street is the epicentre for the Radical Right in the UK. Situation a few hundred metres from Westminster and around the corner from Conservative Party central office, 55 Tufton Street is home to a vast array of radical right and libertarian organisations.

Here is a selection of past and present occupants:

- Global Warming Policy Foundation
- Institute of Economic Affairs
- Civitas
- Taxpayers Alliance
- New Culture Forum
- Vote Leave
- Leave Means Leave
- UK2020
- European Foundation
- Global Vision



ultra right conspiracy theorists purporting to speak for local residents who largely stayed away. It is genuinely chilling to see Government ministers play to this crowd.”

BATTLEGROUND

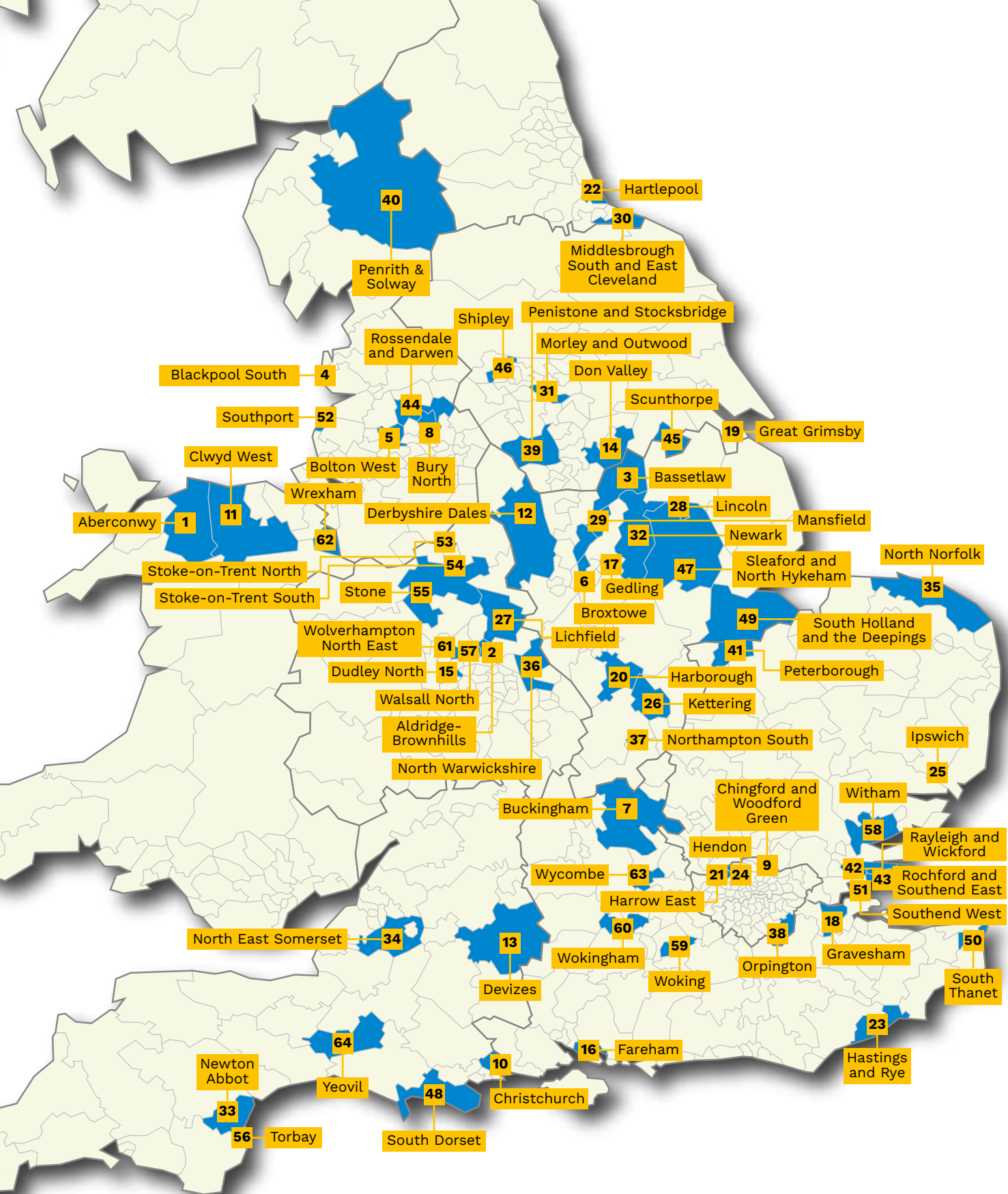
Even though Labour has itself rowed back from its £28bn-a-year green investment pledge, it is clear that climate action is going to be a central plank of the election campaign. Egged on by the Conservative Radical Right, Sunak looks set to continue to attack the so-called “green zealots” of Labour.

In this he will be supported and encouraged by the likes of Allison Pearson, who seems only too keen to write about the issue in her *Telegraph* column.

“Personally, I think the Climate Change Act should be repealed, and Britons freed from its crazy, punitive legal targets. But that’s for another time,” she wrote. “Rishi Sunak has made an excellent start. Carry on, Prime Minister. We’re right behind you.”

What she fails to tell readers, of course, is that she now sits on the Board of the Global Warming Policy Foundation, the climate-sceptic group that is funded by the fossil fuel industry.

RIGHT WING TORIES



The Radical Right covers a broad spectrum of groups and ideas, some more extreme than others. Some Conservative MPs align themselves fully to most elements of the Radical Right eco-system while others just subscribe to parts of it.

On this map we identify 65 Conservative MPs who have been linked to two of the main elements within the Radical Right eco-system, the anti-immigrant and authoritarian New Conservatives and the climate sceptic Net Zero Scrutiny Group.

Others have been included for more other reasons. Sally Ann Hunt has promoted anti-Muslim tropes on social media, while Marco Longhi is Honorary President of Turning Point UK, whose activities have attracted the support of former nazi Combat 18 thugs and football hooligans.

We have also included people who signed the amendments to the Rwanda Bill which called for international law and our human rights obligations to be set aside. Fairness, democratic values and the Rule of Law are – and have to remain – central to a way any Government conducts itself.



Categories: ● New Conservatives ● Net Zero Scrutiny Group ● Rwanda rebels ● Other reasons

1. Robin Millar	● ● ● ●	33. Anne Marie Morris	● ● ● ●
2. Wendy Morton	● ● ● ●	34. Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg	● ● ● ●
3. Brendan Clarke-Smith	● ● ● ●	35. Duncan Baker	● ● ● ●
4. Scott Benton	● ● ● ●	36. Craig Tracey	● ● ● ●
5. Chris Green	● ● ● ●	37. Andrew Lewer	● ● ● ●
6. Darren Henry	● ● ● ●	38. Gareth Bacon	● ● ● ●
7. Greg Smith	● ● ● ●	39. Miriam Cates	● ● ● ●
8. James Daly	● ● ● ●	40. Mark Jenkinson	● ● ● ●
9. Sir Iain Duncan Smith	● ● ● ●	41. Paul Bristow	● ● ● ●
10. Sir Christopher Chope	● ● ● ●	42. Mark Francois	● ● ● ●
11. David Jones	● ● ● ●	43. Sir James Duddridge	● ● ● ●
12. Sarah Dines	● ● ● ●	44. Sir Jake Berry	● ● ● ●
13. Danny Kruger	● ● ● ●	45. Holly Mumby-Croft	● ● ● ●
14. Nick Fletcher	● ● ● ●	46. Philip Davies	● ● ● ●
15. Marco Longhi	● ● ● ●	47. Dr Caroline Johnson	● ● ● ●
16. Suella Braverman	● ● ● ●	48. Richard Drax	● ● ● ●
17. Tom Randall	● ● ● ●	49. Sir John Hayes	● ● ● ●
18. Adam Holloway	● ● ● ●	50. Craig Mackinlay	● ● ● ●
19. Lia Nici	● ● ● ●	51. Anna Firth	● ● ● ●
20. Neil O'Brien	● ● ● ●	52. Damien Moore	● ● ● ●
21. Bob Blackman	● ● ● ●	53. Jonathan Gullis	● ● ● ●
22. Jill Mortimer	● ● ● ●	54. Jack Brereton	● ● ● ●
23. Sally-Ann Hart	● ● ● ●	55. Sir Bill Cash	● ● ● ●
24. Dr Matthew Offord	● ● ● ●	56. Kevin Foster	● ● ● ●
25. Tom Hunt	● ● ● ●	57. Eddie Hughes	● ● ● ●
26. Philip Hollobone	● ● ● ●	58. Dame Priti Patel	● ● ● ●
27. Michael Fabricant	● ● ● ●	59. Jonathan Lord	● ● ● ●
28. Karl McCartney	● ● ● ●	60. John Redwood	● ● ● ●
29. Ben Bradley	● ● ● ●	61. Jane Stevenson	● ● ● ●
30. Sir Simon Clarke	● ● ● ●	62. Sarah Atherton	● ● ● ●
31. Andrea Jenkyns	● ● ● ●	63. Steve Baker	● ● ● ●
32. Robert Jenrick	● ● ● ●	64. Marcus Fysh	● ● ● ●

AN APPETITE FOR A RADICAL RIGHT AGENDA

NICK LOWLES surveys Conservative Party members

THERE IS a real appetite amongst Conservative Party members for more right-wing policies, exclusive polling for HOPE not hate has discovered, but as yet, members have not coalesced around a future party leader to drive these changes through.

From immigration to multiculturalism, climate action to culture wars, Conservative Party members were clearly far to the right of the current Government, in what is a clear indication that the party could shift markedly to a more Radical Right space.

Four-fifths of Conservative Party members (80%) believe the UK should be prepared to ignore and/or overrule human rights legislation and the European Convention on Human Rights to ensure asylum seekers are sent to Rwanda, whilst, in a damning indictment of Rishi Sunak's approach to immigration, 52% describe the Government's approach to immigration as "not strong enough" and 41% believe it is "ineffective".

Do you have a positive or negative view towards the following groups?

Immigrants



Muslims



Jews



Roma



LGBT+



Feminists



Positive Negative Neither

For each of the following statements, please tell us whether you believe them to be true or false?

Parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are "no-go" zones for non-Muslims



Global elites are encouraging immigration as part of a plot to weaken European identity



The threat of climate change is being exaggerated by Governments and the media in order to control our lives



True False Neither Don't know

OMNIBUS SURVEY

HOPE not hate asked the polling company Omnibus to survey Conservative Party members so we could ascertain the appetite for a more Radical Right leader in the event of the Tories losing the next general election and a change in leadership.

The polling shows quite clearly there is such an appetite, with Conservative Party members being quite hostile to minorities and negative about Britain's multicultural society.

Just under half (45%) have a negative attitude to immigrants, with just 20% having a positive attitude. A similar number (40%) have a negative attitude to Muslims, with only 19% having a positive attitude. There is even greater negative feelings towards the Roma (49%), with just 13% having a positive view.

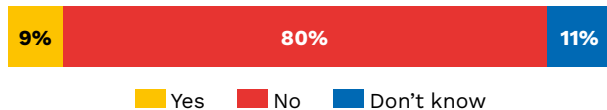
There are slightly better impressions of people who identify themselves as LGBT+ and feminists, though even here there are more people who hold negative views than those who hold positive ones.

The only minority group in our survey about whom Conservatives felt more positive were Jewish people, with 57% having a positive view and just 7% having a negative view.

Rwanda

In April 2022 the UK and Rwanda signed an agreement that would deport people seeking asylum in the UK to Rwanda, where their asylum claim would be processed. This plan has faced opposition from the European Convention on Human Rights, delaying plans to deport asylum seekers.

Should the UK be prepared to ignore and/or overrule human rights legislation and the European Convention on Human Rights to ensure asylum seekers are sent to Rwanda?



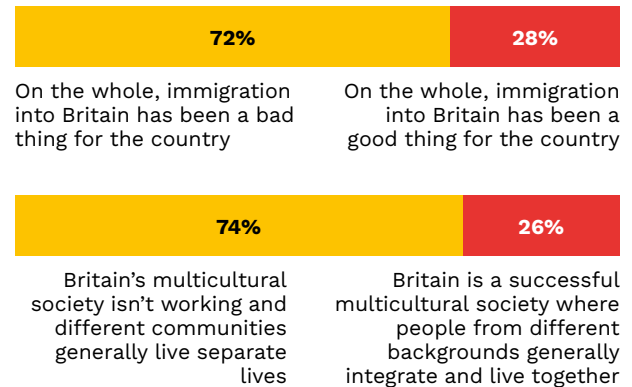
Almost three quarters of respondents (72%) think, “On the whole, immigration into Britain has been a bad thing for the country”, whilst just 28% agree with the statement, “On the whole, immigration into Britain has been a good thing for the country.”

This is a massive change since we last polled Conservative Party members, in 2020, when 55% thought immigration into Britain has been a good thing for the country.

It is also at odds with society at large. Earlier this year, in a poll of 25,000 people, 55% thought immigration had been a good thing for the country, with 45% thinking otherwise.

There has been a similar deterioration of views in relation to Britain’s multicultural society. Seventy-four per cent of Conservatives supported the claim that Britain’s multicultural society isn’t working and that different communities generally live separate lives, compared to 26% who supported the claim that Britain is a successful multicultural society where people from different backgrounds generally integrate. Amongst the population as a whole, 52% supported the claim that Britain is a successful multicultural

Please say which statement in each of these pairs you most agree with, even if you don’t agree with either entirely:



society where people from different backgrounds generally integrate, while 48% supported the notion that multiculturalism isn’t working.

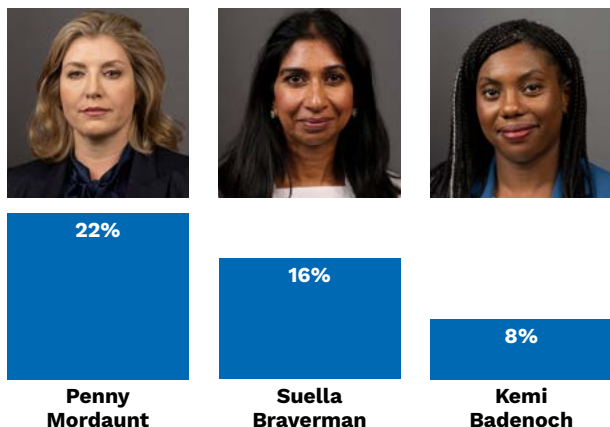
More worryingly, Conservative Party members lean towards conspiratorial thinking, with 52% of those polled supporting the claim that “parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are “no-go” zones for non-Muslims,” with just 21% claiming to believe this statement is false.

Almost half of members (45%) support the claim that “Globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity”, a view that’s common in far-right conspiracy theory circles. Just a quarter of members (26%) said this statement was not true.

These figures are far worse than those of the British public generally. In a 25,000-sample poll, conducted by HOPE not hate over Christmas and New Year, 30% of Britons supported the claim that “parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia



Former British Home Secretary Priti Patel (left) and Rwandan Foreign Minister Vincent Biruta (right) sign the Rwanda policy on 14 April 2022
Photo: UK Home Office

Potential new leader

Law and are ‘no-go’ zones for non-Muslims”, whilst 27% supported the claim that “Globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity”.

We asked Conservative Party members their views on a number of culture war issues, and again, their views were more hardline than the general public. When asked if they thought, “Feminism has gone too far and makes it harder for men to succeed”, 40% agreed and 28% disagreed. Amongst the general public the answers were 31% and 33% respectively.

When asked if “to move forward as a Nation, we must acknowledge the mistakes during the period of the British Empire,” a quarter (24%) agreed, but over half (54%) disagreed. Amongst the general population, the figures were reversed. Almost half of respondents (46%) believed it was important to acknowledge mistakes, while 24% disagreed.

There was even greater disparity when asked if footballers should be supported taking the knee in

Would you support or oppose Nigel Farage joining the Conservative Party?

opposition to racism. Amongst the general public, 41% believed that footballers should be supported, with 21% disagreeing. Amongst Conservative Party members, only 21% backed footballers taking the knee; 58% disagreed.

It is quite clear that the attitudes and views of Conservative Party members have hardened on immigration and minorities since our last poll. In 2020, 47% of party members thought Islam was a threat to the British way of life; now it is 57%. Only 18% of members think Islam is compatible with the British way of life.

OLDER MEMBERS

Party members who are over 65, who make up 48% of the membership, are more right wing than their younger counterparts. Almost four-fifths (78%) think immigration has been bad for Britain, compared to 65% amongst those aged between 44 and 64, while 81% think multiculturalism has failed, a view shared by 66% of party members under 44.

Older members are almost twice as likely to believe that their Government’s immigration policy is “not strong enough” compared to those under 44 years of age, while 89% believe the UK should be prepared to ignore and/or overrule human rights legislation and the European Convention on Human Rights to ensure asylum seekers are sent to Rwanda, while only 2% believe we should not.

ANTI-GREEN AGENDA

Conservative Party members generally oppose action to limit or reverse climate change. What’s more, a significant minority (19%) do not believe that climate change is happening in the first place, with a further 8% declaring themselves undecided.

More (47%) believe that it has not been proven that human behaviour is primarily responsible for climate change, than believe it is responsible (38%).

Less than half of Conservative Party members think it is essential that the world moves away from fossil fuels, while 57% disagree or are undecided.

Immigration word cloud

Which of the following words would you use to describe the Conservative Government's approach to immigration?
Select up to 3.



Those over 65% are slightly more likely to get their political news from GB News than younger members, but significantly more likely to watch the BBC than those aged between 45 and 64.

Younger members – those aged under 44 – are 40% more likely to watch Sky News than older members, but only 1% will read *The Times* or the *Daily Express*, compared to 9% for each newspaper among members overall.

Just 7% of Conservative Party members choose the Conservative Home website as one of the three places they get their news.

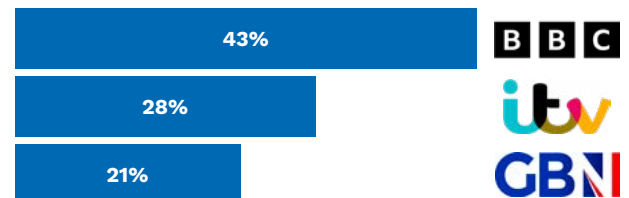
A NEW LEADER

There is a clear appetite for more right-wing policies amongst Conservative Party members and this could easily translate to support for a Radical Right leader of the party. However, when asked about a replacement for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, if he were to stand down now, members had not yet decided on who that might be. Given a list of seven possible leadership candidates, moderate Penny Mordaunt received the support of 22% of those polled. Next was former Home Secretary Suella Braverman, on 16%. No other person polled above 10%. However, 40% of respondents either said “none of the above” or did not know.

Perhaps some were looking outside the parliamentary party, and indeed the party, for a leader. When asked if they supported or opposed Nigel Farage joining the Conservative Party, 55% said they would be happy if he joined and only 35% opposed.

Many Conservatives have already written off the

Where Conservatives watch their political news



Where Conservatives read their political news



party's chances in the forthcoming general election and are turning their attention to what happens after – with some calling it the battle for the soul of the Conservative Party. Those on the right believe that the party has lost its way and needs to commit to much stronger anti-immigration policies, a reversal of green policies, tax cuts and a smaller state. Our polling suggests that party members are overwhelmingly open to these policies – however, because it is Conservative MPs who will whittle down the candidates to the two who will be presented to party members, there might not be a clear Radical Right option for them to choose.

GB NEWS AND THE RADICAL



GBN

BRITAIN'S NEWS CHANNEL

WATCH
LIVE

GREGORY DAVIS

GB NEWS started off 2023 with a slew of New Year's resolutions. The *Guardian* reported that the channel's chairman, Alan McCormick, sent an email to staff last January detailing how it would become more "disciplined", including mandatory staff training on media law and Ofcom regulations.

If the channel's conduct in 2023 was the work of a better-trained and more disciplined team, we can only imagine how woeful it might otherwise have been. GB News has remained a toxic and chaotic presence in the British media, one which disseminates baseless conspiracy theories and divisive commentary while suffering an endless stream of embarrassing spats and internal ructions. Having apparently aimed to avoid the scrutiny of Ofcom investigations, the channel ended the year having been found in breach of regulations on four occasions in 2023, with another 11 investigations ongoing.

The launches of GB News and its rival TalkTV, in June 2021 and April 2022 respectively, have changed the face of news broadcasting in the UK. Whereas political programming was once restricted to mainstream channels, and aspired to a degree of balance and neutrality in accordance with Ofcom regulations, British viewers now have the option of consuming unabashedly right-wing news and current affairs

programming 24 hours a day.

TalkTV is part of the wider Murdoch network, a well-known presence on the British and global media landscape. But the launch of GB News now seems to be just one part of a wider effort to rival Murdoch's formidable presence, one that involves businessmen and organisations that are far less known to the public, in a tangled web of connections.

REFORM & RECLAIM

Much of the trouble GB News has had with the broadcasting regulator Ofcom stems from its determination to employ as many serving politicians as possible, with all the predictable issues of balance and bias that this strategy entails. The number of Radical Right politicians now hosting programmes on GB News and TalkTV is unprecedented, and has also proven to be a major headache for Ofcom.

Over the course of 2023, there was a dizzying array of professional politicians employed by GB News and TalkTV. Four presenters across the two channels have formal roles within Reform UK: Honorary President Nigel Farage and leader Richard Tice host shows on GB News, while Deputy Leader David Bull and spokeswoman Alex Phillips host weekend shows on Talk TV. As *Private Eye* noted in January, these shows have occasionally run back-to-back, meaning that a Reform UK representative was hosting on TalkTV for six hours straight.

RIGHT MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Two other GB News presenters, Martin Daubney and Michelle Dewberry, were previously elected as MEPs for Reform UK's predecessor, the Brexit Party. Also employed as presenters at various points throughout 2023 by GB News were: then-Conservative Party Deputy Chairman Lee Anderson, who later defected to Reform UK; Conservative MPs Jacob Rees-Mogg and Esther McVey; former DUP leader Arlene Foster; and Reclaim's leader Laurence Fox. In October, it was announced that Boris Johnson would be joining the channel, though he has yet to host a show.

Even the formal slots give only a partial picture of how much airtime these presenters get, as GB News presenters are often called in to speak as guests on other shows: Richard Tice appeared as either host or guest on eleven occasions in the first 21 days of January 2024.

In relation to the use of politicians as presenters, Ofcom draws a distinction between news and current affairs programming, with politicians forbidden from presenting the former and permitted to present the latter.

Four Ofcom investigations last year found that programmes on GB News had broken rules, three of which were due to lack of impartiality and the other, an episode of the *Mark Steyn Show* broadcast in October 2022, had allowed anti-vaccination conspiracy theorist Naomi Wolf to "promote a serious conspiracy theory without challenge or context".

However, there are another 11 investigations ongoing, suggesting that a backlog will continue to pile up unless the channel can modify its behaviour. There are four ongoing investigations into the channel's on-air promotion of the "Keep Cash" campaign, which called for Government to introduce legislation to ensure that physical currency would not be phased out, and one programme has already been found in breach of guidelines preventing broadcasters from "advancing their own views on matters of political or industrial controversy or current public policy".

CONSPIRACY WORLD

The most striking feature of GB News, one which sets it apart even from most right-wing newspapers, is its promotion of a paranoid, conspiratorial worldview that was once largely confined to social media posts and small web forums. This is exemplified by the output of Neil Oliver, who hosts an hour-long show on Saturday evenings. His monologues, videos of which are very widely shared on far-right and conspiracy-theorist social media channels, consist of a quick-fire promotion of interconnected conspiracy narratives; a typical example from September 2023 wove a frightening narrative around ULEZ, shadow governments, immigration, inflation, Central Bank Digital Currencies, 15-minute cities and Agenda 21.



Oliver is far from alone; the *Britain's Newsroom* host Beverley Turner caused outrage in July by tweeting her belief in a theory, first popularised by US presidential candidate Robert Kennedy, that COVID-19 might be a bioweapon designed to cause less harm to East Asian and Ashkenazi Jewish people. A few months later Turner would tweet her belief that sexual assault allegations against Russell Brand showed that he was "winning" and "a hero", prompting a dramatic on-screen spat with co-host Andrew Pierce, who described her response as "shameful".

Alongside its regular hosts, the channel has repeatedly invited crankish figures from around the world to extol their theories to GB News viewers. As mentioned above, the channel was criticised by Ofcom in April for allowing Naomi Wolf to describe the vaccine rollout as "mass murder" and a "bioweapon", and compare those administering the jabs to doctors in 1930s Germany.

FOX, WOOTTON AND ROBINSON

GB News's greatest embarrassment of recent times came in late September, however, in an incident that would elicit the highest number of complaints to Ofcom in 2023 and lead to the sacking of three high-profile presenters. On a guest appearance on *Dan Wootton Tonight*, Reclaim leader Laurence Fox launched into an appalling tirade about female journalist Ava Evans, for which he received no pushback from Wootton, who giggled throughout.

Wootton would later apologise and claim that he had not been amused by the "offensive and misogynistic remarks," but this defence was critically undermined by texts later released by Fox which showed the two had exchanged jokey messages about it later that evening, with Wootton sending laughing-face emojis and gleefully imagining the audience "freaking out" over the comments.

Both men were sacked, and while Wootton has maintained his silence ever since, Fox has continually

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH: A RADICAL RIGHT INSURGENCY



Another key component of the Radical Right media ecosystem is *The Daily Telegraph*, which, in recent years, has transformed itself from the pillar of old Conservatism to the vanguard of the anti-woke culture war.

A cursory search on the *Telegraph* website finds 1,089 articles that mention “woke”, of which 270 were published since the beginning of 2023.

Spearheading the *Telegraph*’s shift to the Radical Right are numerous columnists who, though given the freedom to air their own views, collectively indicate the newspaper’s direction of travel.

There is David Frost, one of the architects of Brexit, who in the past year has warned against mass migration, called for UK legislation to override the ECHR and advocated for substantial tax cuts.

Allison Pearson has written articles against climate action, diversity and multiculturalism. In mid-December, columnist Allister Heath told us, “The horrifying truth about woke ideology has finally been revealed. It gives open support to genocide.”

A month earlier, Sherelle Jacobs predicted that a “new right-wing party will replace the Tories if they keep surrendering to the establishment. The idea that the Conservative Party, the most successful political party in Western European history, whose members are not overwhelmingly affluent and many in positions of power, are somehow outside the Establishment is comical, but there’s where Radical Right thinking is.

Nick Timothy, Theresa May’s former Chief of Staff and future Tory MP, wrote a few weeks ago that “multiculturalism is becoming a Trojan Horse for Islamist domination.”

In recent weeks, *The Telegraph* has been central to a plot to depose the Prime Minister and seemingly replace him with a right-wing alternative. It colluded with David Frost and others on the Tory right to run a series of highly dubious polls and data analysis to suggest that a new Tory leader, committed to reducing immigration and cutting taxes, could beat Labour.

The Daily Telegraph, for so long the newspaper of British conservatism (with a small “c” and large “C”) is now part of the Radical Right insurgency against the establishment.



(left to right) Laurence Fox, Dan Wootton and Calvin Robinson

lashed out at the channel for supposedly abandoning its free speech principles. Also sacked at this time was Calvin Robinson, the radical priest and host of *Calvin Robinson’s Common Sense Crusade*, who lost his job after speaking out in Wootton’s defence.

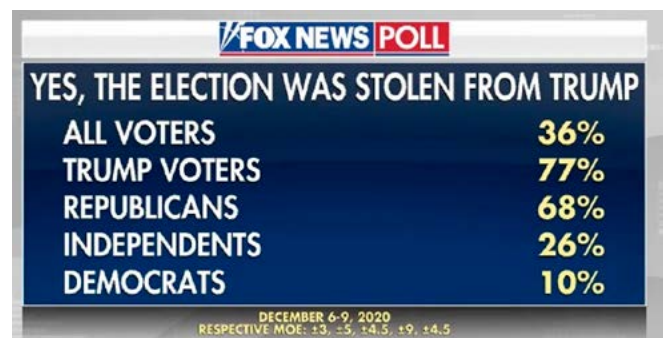
AUDIENCE CAPTURE

Aside from the particular challenge of Ofcom regulation, GB News has similar issues to those surrounding Elon Musk’s ownership of Twitter. Having cited freedom of speech and a lack of censorship as their *raison d’être*, both organisations are nonetheless reliant on the goodwill of advertisers, who can withdraw support if the content and behind-the-scenes dramas become too toxic and headline-grabbing.

But any modicum of restraint and editorial control will diminish their support from their often conspiratorial and hardline viewer base, and lead to accusations that they represent “controlled opposition”, meaning an ostensibly radical outlet that is secretly working to lure otherwise free-thinking viewers away from dangerous topics.

To illustrate the challenges of riding a conspiracy-driven populist wave, one can also look to the fate of Fox News, which once held an unchallengeable position of dominance in the American right-wing media space that saw Republican candidates competing for its support. Fox News hosts were among the most enthusiastic promoters of Trump’s “stolen election” narrative – landing the channel a whopping \$787.5 million defamation payout to Dominion Voting Systems in the process – but still came under considerable criticism from Trump and his supporters for any hint of balanced reporting or criticism directed his way.

It is clear that GB News forms part of a wider effort to shape and direct the Radical Right in the UK, but less clear exactly how its owners intend to use that influence – and whether those directing it have the necessary skills to prevent it from spinning out of their control.



BROADCASTER FOR THE RADICAL RIGHT

ACCORDING TO our 25,000-person poll, carried out by Focalddata at the turn of the year, 4.4% of Britons get their news from GB News and the vast majority are firmly on the right of British politics.

Half of GB News viewers are over 55 years of age, and 59% are men. Seventy per cent are homeowners, and the same number do not have a university degree.

The majority (58%) voted Conservative at the last election, while just 12% voted Labour. However, there has been a big shift since then. While support for Labour remains at 12%, support for the Tories has slumped to 20%, with 43% saying that they would vote for Reform UK.

Unsurprisingly, GB News viewers are against any action to limit or reverse climate change and are strongly in favour of strict rules to limit the numbers of migrants coming to the UK.

GB News viewers are so strongly in favour of limiting immigration that half would be more likely to vote for an election candidate who pledges to reduce immigration even if they “support changes to our immigration system that will make it harder for the NHS and social care sector to recruit staff from abroad” – twice the national average.

A shocking 27% do not believe that climate change is happening, with a further 15% unsure.

Half (46%) deny climate change poses a threat to the future well-being of themselves and their families, while 60% believe it has not been proven that human behaviour is primarily responsible for climate change, with a further 14% unsure.

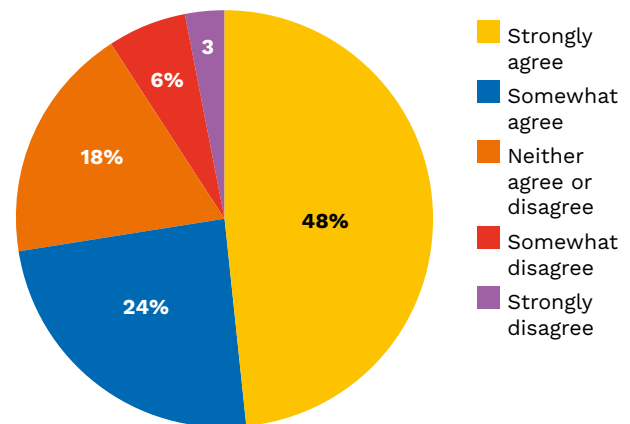
On culture-war issues, 57% identify themselves as “anti-woke”, compared 20% of BBC viewers and 15% of those who watch *Channel 4 News*. Half of viewers agree with the statement that feminism has gone too far and made it harder for men to succeed, and 58% believe that men are less masculine than they used to be, with just 14% disagreeing. Over 60% oppose footballers taking the knee, compared to just 27% of the general public as a whole.

Unsurprisingly, 63% of GB News viewers have a negative opinion on left wingers, whilst 62% have a positive opinion of right wingers.

Do you consider yourself woke, anti-woke, or neither?

	Total	GB News viewers
Woke	15%	17%
Anti-woke	22%	57%
Neither	36%	19%
I don't know these terms	26%	7%

Now thinking about Muslims communities living in Britain, do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation



Over three quarters (76%) like Nigel Farage and 37% like Tommy Robinson, with just 26% disliking him.

GB News viewers have a dim view on the state of British democracy. Two-thirds (68%) think the political system is broken, whilst 73% do not believe that politicians listen to people like them.

Only half of viewers (53%) believe having a liberal democracy with regular elections and a multi-party system is a preferable system of government, while 47% prefer “having a strong and decisive leader who has the authority to override or ignore parliament.”

Two-fifths agree with the statement that “in certain circumstances, violence can be necessary to defend something you strongly believe in.”

Predictably, GB News viewers have a poor opinion on Muslims. Three-quarters (72%) think “Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation,” while only 15% think “Islam is generally compatible with the British way of life.”

A repeated complaint against GB News is its regular promotion of conspiracy theories, but the opinions of their viewers suggests why. Over a quarter (28%) supported the claim that “Jewish people have an unhealthy control over the world’s banking system,” while 58% supported the statement that “parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are ‘no-go’ zones for non-Muslims.” Three out of five supported the claim that “globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity,” while the same number support the notion that “the threat of climate change is being exaggerated by governments and the media in order to control our lives.”

REVEALED: THE ANONYMOUS FAR RIGHT TWEETS OF A MEDIA BARON

Sir Paul Marshall, the founder of news and commentary website *Unherd* and co-owner of right-wing channel GB News, is believed to be preparing a bid to buy the *Telegraph* and *Spectator*. If the sale goes ahead, Marshall will be among the most powerful media owners in the country, writes GREGORY DAVIS.

But HOPE not hate has revealed that Marshall's social media activity, hidden behind a private and anonymised Twitter account, suggests that he holds a deeply disturbing view of modern Britain.

Marshall has repeatedly liked and retweeted extremist content from an array of far-right and conspiracy-theorist accounts for months, endorsing tweets that call for mass-deportation of migrants and which suggest a civil war between "native Europeans" and "fake refugee invaders" is imminent.

Much less is known and written about the motivations of the men who bankroll the channel, however. All Perspectives Ltd, the holding company that owns GB News, is owned by two major shareholders: Legatum Ltd and Sir Paul Marshall, who own 41.2% of the company each.

Worth an estimated £680 million from his career as a hedge fund owner, Marshall is believed to be preparing a takeover bid for the historic *Telegraph* and *Spectator* outlets, with funding from billionaire investor and Republican mega-donor Ken Griffin, who donated \$66 million to Republican candidates in the 2020 US elections and a further \$5 million to Florida Governor Ron DeSantis the following year.

With ownership of *Unherd*, GB News, the *Telegraph* and the *Spectator*, Marshall would instantly join the ranks of the UK's most powerful media moguls. He would also have considerable influence over the direction of right-wing thought in the UK – and if his social media activity is anything to go by, that is a prospect that should worry us all.

In September 2023, Marshall set his Twitter account to Protected mode, meaning that only those that follow his account can view his activity, and he can choose whether to accept new followers. He then removed any identifying information from the profile and changed the username to @areopagus123, which matches that of a company set up by Marshall in 2021, Areopagus Ventures, and which seems to derive from John Milton's polemic in defence of free speech, *Areopagitica*.



A tweet liked by Sir Paul Marshall in January 2024

MARSHALLING RESOURCES

The on-air controversies and backstage dramas that have dogged GB News since its inception have ensured that the channel has received a level of media interest that is wildly disproportionate to its viewing figures.



Paul Marshall's account as it appeared in September 2023 (left) and February 2024 (right)

Sir Paul Marshall.
Photo:
ARC Forum /
wikimedia.org



His decision to protect and disguise his account may have been an effort to avoid scrutiny, as in the weeks that followed his bid to buy the *Telegraph* and *Spectator* he began to receive greater attention, including profile articles in several newspapers. However, his 4,700+ followers – which include numerous MPs and journalists – would still be able to see the account's activity.

“FAKE REFUGEE INVADERS”

Marshall is an infrequent tweeter himself, and much of his activity on the platform is spent “liking” and retweeting the content of others. But this activity paints a deeply concerning picture of his politics. Marshall appears to spend much of his time on social media scrolling through and endorsing tweets from extreme Islamophobic and anti-migrant activists, including notorious hate accounts such as the Britain First Deputy Leader Ashlea Simon, American anti-Muslim campaigner Amy Mek and the shady Italian anti-migration account Radio Genoa.

Among the tweets “liked” by Marshall in recent months are extremist declarations that border on calls to violence, including a tweet which declared that it was:

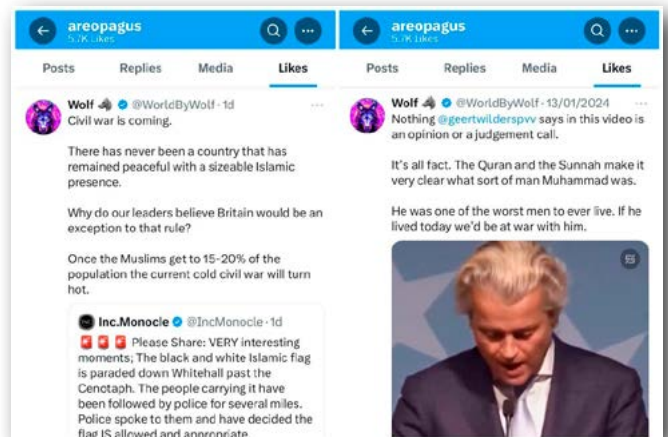
“a matter of time before civil war starts in Europe. The native European population is losing patience with the fake refugee invaders”

while in January 2024 he liked another which warned that:

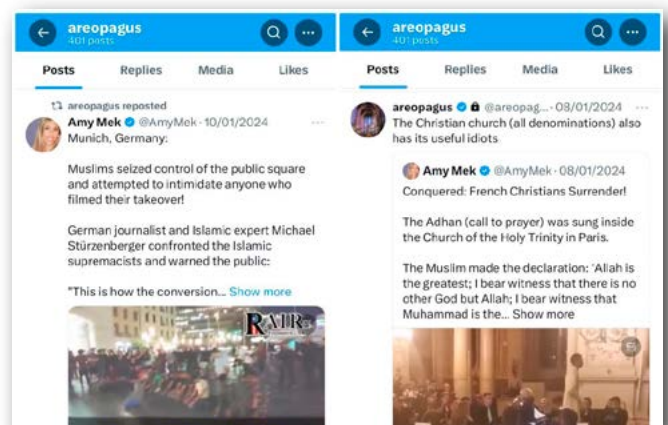
“If we want European civilization to survive we need to not just close the borders but start mass expulsions immediately. We don’t stand a chance unless we start that process very soon.”

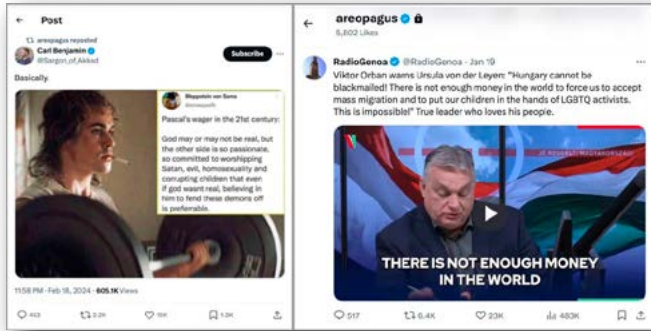


One account that seems to find favour with Marshall is “WorldByWolf”, an anti-Muslim account whose tweets Marshall has liked or retweeted 16 times in 2024 so far. Sentiments endorsed by Marshall include yet another Islamophobic prediction of a civil war in Europe and praise of anti-Muslim Dutch populist Geert Wilders:



Another anti-Muslim campaigner to have caught Marshall’s eye is Amy Mek, a notorious pro-Trump campaigner whose social media output has consistently focused on demonising Muslims. Earlier this year Marshall retweeted a post from Mek which warned of the “four stages of Islamic conquest”, which stated that Muslim immigration was a form of “infiltration” that would lead to “the establishment of a totalitarian Islamic theocracy.” In another post, he condemned “useful idiots” in the Church for engaging in interfaith activities with Muslims:



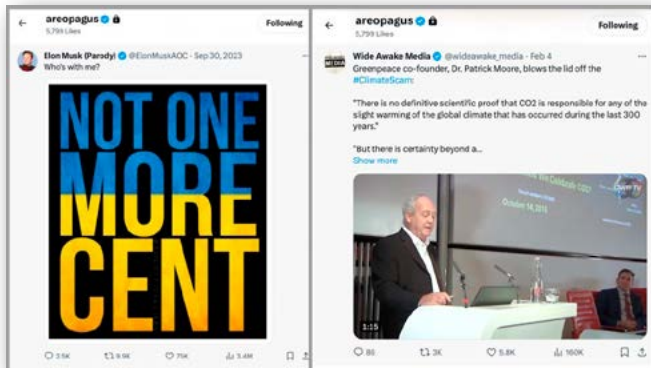


Tweet reposted by Marshall, 18 February 2024

Muslims and migrants are not the only groups targeted in posts endorsed by Marshall, however. A post he retweeted in February appeared to group homosexuality with “worshipping Satan, evil [and] corrupting children”, referring to the other side as “demons”, while in January he “liked” a post from RadioGenoa that lauded Hungary’s autocratic leader Viktor Orbán as a “true leader” for his anti-migrant and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric.

“The other side is so passionate, so committed to worshipping Satan, evil, homosexuality and corrupting children, that even if god wasn’t real, believing in him to fend these demons off is preferable”

Further recent posts endorsed by Marshall suggest that he holds other fringe views that are common on the Radical Right but are rejected by the vast majority of the public, such as dismissal of the scientific consensus on climate change and a desire to see Ukraine cut off from international support:



Marshall’s political activities in previous years are well-documented: a longtime donor to the Liberal Democrats, he left the party over their stance on the UK’s membership of the European Union and went on to become a significant donor to the Leave campaign. Ahead of the 2019 General Election he would donate £500,000 to the Conservative Party under Boris Johnson.

After HOPE not hate approached Mr Marshall for comment, every tweet and almost 300 likes were removed from the account over the following 48 hours, and a representative for Marshall issued the following statement:

“Paul Marshall’s account is private but is nonetheless followed by 5000 people including many journalists. He posts on a wide variety of

subjects and those cited represent a small and unrepresentative sample of over 5000 posts. This sample does not represent his views.

“As most X/Twitter users know, it can be a fountain of ideas, but some of it is of uncertain quality and all his posts have now been deleted to avoid any further misunderstanding.”

It is not clear why Marshall would have repeatedly endorsed posts that do not represent his views, and while it is true to say that the posts here are a small sample, similar posts from radical right and conspiracy theorist accounts make up a significant proportion of Marshall’s likes and retweets over the past three months.

Either way, it is clearly worth asking whether someone who has repeatedly endorsed divisive and hateful content of admittedly “uncertain quality” is the right person to control a influential wedge of the British media.



Paul Marshall

Sir Paul Marshall is CIO and Chairman of Marshall Wace LLP, founder and owner of UnHerd Media and an investor in GB News Ltd. He is a founding Trustee of Ark, the children’s charity, and Chairman of Ark Schools, which manages 39 primary and secondary academies across England.

Paul Marshall’s profile on the ARC Forum website

LEGATUM, UNLIMITED

GREGORY DAVIS

THE PARENT company of GB News, All Perspectives Ltd, is controlled by two major shareholders: Legatum Limited, which is a sprawling Dubai-based private investment fund, and hedge-fund manager Sir Paul Marshall, who also owns the current affairs commentary website *Unherd*. Both appear to be on a mission to expand their influence on British politics, using media, think tanks and politicians.

At the heart of Legatum Ltd's influence operation is the Legatum Institute, a London-based free-market think tank founded and funded by the owners of Legatum Ltd.

The Legatum Institute's prior efforts at exerting political influence are well-documented; its former Economics Director Shanker Singham was reported to have been heavily involved in drafting Boris Johnson and Michael Gove's ultimatum to Theresa May in 2017, and in 2018 the Charity Commission forced the Legatum Institute to remove a pro-Brexit report from its website as a breach of its guidelines on political impartiality.

The institute's most recent activity has been centred on setting up the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship (ARC), a well-funded yet nebulous project which aims to provide an "international community with a vision for a better world".

There is significant overlap between ARC, Legatum and GB News.

Two of the Legatum Ltd founders and Baroness Philippa Stroud, until recently the CEO of the Legatum Institute, sit on the advisory board of the ARC, as does Sir Paul Marshall and his son, former Mumford & Sons banjo player Winston Marshall. Also included are Baroness Helena Morrissey, a director of the GB News holding company All Perspectives Ltd, and Colin Brazier, a former presenter on the channel.

Baroness Philippa Stroud is the CEO of ARC Forum, having apparently transferred from her CEO role at the Legatum Institute in March.

In early November, ARC held a three-day event in Greenwich, south east London, bringing together academics, politicians and activists on the political from across the globe.

Among the big names involved with the ARC are Canadian academic and "anti-woke" influencer Jordan Peterson, two former Prime Ministers of Australia and two members of the US House of Representatives – including Rep. Mike Johnson of Louisiana, who was little-known when the ARC's membership was first announced but had been elevated to the powerful position of House Speaker by the time of its inaugural conference. Also included was Vivek Ramaswamy, the tech-entrepreneur who recently ended his bid to be the Republican candidate for President in 2024.

Unsurprisingly, the energetic backbench Conservative MPs Danny Kruger and Miriam Cates, are also involved in ARC. This duo have been at the forefront of much of the recent machinations within the Conservative Party and wider conservative movement. Both spoke at the National Conservatism conference, and co-founded the New Conservatives group of MPs that has become a significant thorn in the side of Rishi Sunak's leadership.

Cates and Kruger's New Conservative group has itself recently been a recipient of Legatum's largesse; on 1 December 2023 the group reported a £50,000 donation from Legatum Institute Limited, which it promptly began distributing among its MPs for use in local campaigning.

One of the central focuses of the ARC conference was climate-change scepticism. The former Australian PM Tony Abbott told a fringe event that "the anthropogenic global warming thesis, at least in its more extreme forms, is both ahistorical and utterly implausible," and also gave an insight into how a politician might obscure their climate-denial by agreeing in principle but rejecting any efforts that might tackle it.

The Danish self-proclaimed "climate-skeptic" Bjorn Lomborg took to the stage to argue that although climate change is a problem, "it's by no means the end of the world, and this is important – this is the story that we need to get out!" A panel-talk with climate-sceptics Alex Epstein and Marian Tupy similarly ended with the chair Amanda Stoker announcing that "we have a better story of abundance and resilience as a counter to that narrative of perma-crisis."



(left) Sir Paul Marshall and (right) Baroness Stroud speaking in London 2023. Photos: ARC Forum / wikimedia.org

REFORM UK

REFORM UK

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY



Reform UK is the relaunched political project that started life as the Brexit Party in 2019. The party had a successful first outing at the European elections in that year, in which then-leader Nigel Farage led the party to the highest vote share, at a time of deep dissatisfaction with the Conservative and Labour parties. The party then had a fairly disastrous entry in the general election in December of that year; it eventually broke its promise to contest every seat and pulled candidates from every constituency with a Conservative incumbent, after intense pressure from Boris Johnson and Brexit supporters.

Following the departure of Farage and its relaunch as Reform UK under new leader Richard Tice, the party has made little headway in living up to its initial successes. Tice's policies and manner have aroused little enthusiasm, and until recent months the party had remained stuck around the 5% mark in national polling despite a substantial drop in support for the Conservative Party. Despite occasional upticks in nationwide polling and favourable coverage in certain newspapers, Reform candidates' performances in by-elections throughout 2023 saw candidates achieve 1-4% of the vote as disaffected Tory voters stayed

home rather than transferring their allegiance to Reform.

A YouGov MRP poll released in January suggested that the party was now achieving a nationwide vote share of 9%, an improvement on previous years but a result that would not win them a single seat at a general election. However, much depends on the future plans of erstwhile leader and current Honorary President, Nigel Farage. Having spent a successful 2.5 years hosting a primetime show on GB News, he further boosted his post-Brexit profile – and bank balance – by making it to the final episode of reality show *I'm A Celebrity... Get Me Out Of Here!*

It is widely believed that Farage might soon rejoin Reform UK as leader, which he retains the right to do thanks to Reform's unusual structure as a limited company with him as sole controlling interest. While Farage's return would undoubtedly see a boost to Reform UK's polling, it would not necessarily overcome the severe structural deficits that the party faces. It lacks a working local branch structure that could carry out the legwork for an election campaign, and its candidate selection process looks as shambolic as it was in 2019, when dozens of the party's candidates were revealed to be embarrassingly unsuitable or extreme. Without a major shift in gear, Reform will remain more potent as a threat to the Conservative Party than a serious contender for power.

Photo:
Reform
Party



THE REFORM VOTER

With Reform UK regularly polling between 8-12%, it is worth taking a deeper look at the people it is attracting. NICK LOWLES reports:

HOPE NOT HATE'S mega poll of 25,000 voters gives us a good idea as to who is attracted to Reform UK and why. Of the 1,843 people who said that they would vote Reform UK if the election were held at the time they completed the survey, just over a third (36%) were over 65, another third were aged between 45 and 64 and 29% were aged between 18 and 44.

Sixty per cent were male and 75% did not have a university degree. Over nine out of ten were ethnically white, while half of the remainder were Asian (predominantly Hindus and Sikhs).

A higher proportion of Reform UK voters (49%) own their own home outright compared to the population as a whole (36%), and its voters are also likely to be marginally poorer than society as a whole.

A third (32%) say they get their news from the *Daily Mail* (compared to 22% of society in general), while another 42% list the *Daily Telegraph*, *The Sun* and the *Daily Express*, compared to 31% generally.

More Reform UK supporters (26%) get their news from GB News, while 23% list the BBC. For society as a whole, 4% choose GB News and 43% choose the BBC.

When it comes to political views, the Reform UK voter is fairly hardline on immigration and multiculturalism. Over three quarters (76%) think immigration has been bad for Britain, while 81% do not think multiculturalism is working. Eighty-one per cent agree with Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's recent comments that "immigrants are going to overwhelm us and destroy our democracy," with 64% strongly agreeing. Over four-fifths (83%) support plans to send asylum seekers to Rwanda.

Only 21% think Muslims face discrimination in today's Britain, while 77% believe that "Islam poses a serious

Photo:
Facebook



threat to Western civilisation."

Unsurprisingly, most Reform UK supporters (60%) identify themselves as "anti-woke", with just 9% saying that they are "woke". This should be compared to the national average of just 22% who define themselves as "anti-woke" and 15% as "woke". Only 11% of Reform UK supporters do not understand these terms, as opposed to 26% in society as a whole.

On cultural issues, Reform UK voters are far to the right of population as a whole. Over a third hold very negative feelings towards trans people, twice that of the general public, whilst almost half (46%) have very negative attitudes towards climate-change activists. This is probably not surprising, given that 41% think that climate change is not happening or are not sure.

The poll suggests deeply authoritarian attitudes amongst Reform UK voters. Over half (53%) would prefer a strong leader with the power to ignore or override Parliament, while 41% support the claim that "in certain circumstances, violence can be necessary to defend something you strongly believe in."

Reform UK voter attitudes to immigration and multiculturalism

24%

On the whole, immigration into Britain has been a good thing for the country

76%

On the whole, immigration into Britain has been a bad thing for the country

19%

Britain is a successful multicultural society where people from different backgrounds generally integrate and live together

81%

Britain's multicultural society isn't working and different communities generally live separate lives

JOKER IN THE PACK

NICK LOWLES assesses Nigel Farage's political options

IT HAS been a question dominating much of the political debate for the past couple of years – will Nigel Farage return to frontline politics? It now seems as though he will have to finally make a decision in the next few months, the outcome of which could heavily impact the results of the next general election and, indeed, the future direction of the Conservative Party.

Nigel Farage, probably only second to Boris Johnson, has been the leading and most consistent figure on the right of British politics for two decades. Having begun his political career in the Conservative Party, Farage switched to the fledgling UK Independence Party in 1993, becoming leader in 2006, before standing down three years later only to return the following year.

It was then, after the demise of the BNP, that Farage turned UKIP into a serious political force. After huge success in the 2014 European Elections, UKIP gained almost four million votes, at a 12.6% share, in the 2015 General Election. It was to head off the threat from UKIP that then-Prime Minister David Cameron promised a referendum on membership of the European Union.

It was this referendum that really brought Farage into being as a national political figure. This vote was also credited with providing the “outsider” momentum for Donald Trump’s US presidential election victory a few months later.

Farage stepped away from UKIP in 2018, declaring his work done, but returned the following year as leader of the new Brexit Party when it appeared that Theresa May was not delivering the Brexit that he and other hardliners wanted. The stunning success of the Brexit Party in the 2019 European Elections led to May being thrown out as leader and replaced by Boris Johnson.

While the Brexit Party contested the 2019 General Election, it had little purpose or direction. With the party agreeing not to contest Conservative-held seats or key targets, the party obtained a paltry 644,000 votes (2.1%) and it soon faded into obscurity.

Farage stood down as Brexit Party leader in 2021 to focus on a new career in the media, first on Fox News and then presenting his own show on GB News.

TIME TO RETURN?

As the Conservative Party’s fortunes have tumbled, several prime ministers later, the pull for Farage to return is growing. However, he has so far been reluctant.

While polling, from HOPE not hate and others, suggests that a return by Farage to frontline politics will boost Reform UK’s fortunes up to a possible 15% in the polls, he appears to have decided against it so far, because the voting system is skewed towards a two-party system and offers little space for a third party. Why give up his lucrative media career for another defeat at the ballot box?

Last October, Farage attended the Conservative Party conference for the first time since he left the party in 1993. While Farage was officially there in his capacity as a GB News presenter, his presence generated huge chatter about a possible switch to the Conservatives. While Farage himself dismissed the notion of re-joining as long as Sunak was there, he left the door open for a return at a later date.

For his part, Sunak, desperate to win favour with his increasingly angry and unsettled membership, told the media that he would be open to Farage joining.

With the general election just months away, it appears that Farage has three options in front of him. The first is to return to frontline politics as the leader of Reform UK, a party – or more accurately a company – that he owns. Polling earlier this year suggests that he would have a good chance of winning a seat in Clacton, where Douglas Carswell was once a UKIP MP.

If Farage did return as leader of Reform UK, he would bring a handful of other seats into play in South Yorkshire, Kent and Essex, but, more significantly, it would have a devastating impact on the electoral prospects for the Conservative Party, which would undoubtedly face a serious wipeout.

If the two-party system has been the main barrier preventing a Radical Right party from proper electoral representation, the prospects of the political annihilation of the Conservative Party at the next election must be appealing for Farage.

Another possible scenario depends on the breakup of the two-party system. Say

Reform wins two or three seats in the upcoming general election, Farage among them. The ensuing post-election Conservative Party civil war, plus a drop in popularity for the Labour Party perhaps due to defections to the Greens could create the conditions, in a year or so, where a majority of the electorate supports parties beyond the main two.

Of course, Farage might think that this is still a lot of work, without a guarantee of success.

I'M A CELEBRITY BOOST



Nigel Farage's appearance in *I'm A Celebrity* has certainly boosted his standing amongst young people, according to HOPE not hate's polling.

In a recent 25,000-sample poll, 24% of 18-24 year olds had a positive view of Farage, with 8% strongly liking him and 16% somewhat liking him.

A year before, HOPE not hate polling found that just 12% of young people had a positive view of him.

Then, 17% of young people had never heard of him, compared to 13% now.

However, while his support amongst young people has slightly increased, so have the numbers who dislike him. Twelve months ago, 34% of young people had a negative view of him, while now this figure is 35%.

Overall, 32% of people say they like Farage, while 39% say they dislike him.

He might decide to sit out this election in the hope that he is accepted into the Conservative Party and, through that, get a national platform in one of the two main parties which could lead to a leadership position. However, it would take some time for this to happen. He would need to get elected into Parliament and only then would he be considered for the leadership – something the Conservative Party itself will surely not allow.

Farage's third option is just to remain as a media commentator and pass up the chance to return to frontline politics. While this strategy might be the easiest, and certainly the most lucrative, it is hard to see Farage sitting out an upheaval in British politics in which he could be at the centre.

Following the recent by-elections, Farage is once again dropping hints that he might return to frontline politics, but it remains uncertain which of the three options he will eventually choose. What is clear, though, is that whichever decision he makes will have a major impact on British politics. More than any other modern-day politician, Nigel Farage remains the joker in the pack.

Nigel Farage.
Photo: Michael
Vadon / flickr

POPULIST/ RADICAL RIGHT

Photo:
Derek Bennett

PATRIOTS ALLIANCE (UKIP & ENGLISH DEMOCRATS)

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY

The UK Independence Party, better known as UKIP, is a far-right party that played a leading role in pushing for the UK to leave the European Union. Founded in 1993 as a single-issue Eurosceptic campaign group, the party began to perform well in local and national elections under the leadership of Nigel Farage, and it was their growing popularity in the years leading up to the 2015 general election that prompted then-Prime Minister David Cameron to promise a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU if given another term. However, the party has since faced a catastrophic fall in fortunes, with their vote share and income dwindling to the point of oblivion. It faced relentless infighting and ten changes of leadership between the resignation of Nigel Farage in 2016 and the election of current leader Neil Hamilton in 2021.

Hamilton's leadership has brought much-needed stability to the party, but has done nothing to reverse its drift towards far-right obscurity. Its candidates receive woeful results in local and national elections, with a particular low-point being the 61 votes pulled in by Deputy Leader Rebecca Jane in the July 2023 Uxbridge and South Ruislip by-election.

In September 2023 the party announced a merger with the English Democrats, an even less politically significant far-right force that calls for greater autonomy for England. The two will now be referred

to on ballot papers as the "Patriots Alliance", although this is unlikely to move the dial in any significant way. In January 2024, it was announced that Hamilton would be stepping down as leader of the party and a leadership election would take place in the weeks ahead.

HERITAGE PARTY

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY

The Heritage Party is a minor political party set up by former UKIP official David Kurten in May 2020. It largely campaigns on culture war issues and conspiracy theories, with Kurten being a highly active promoter of right-wing populist conspiracy theories surrounding COVID-19, climate change and globalism.



The party has failed to make any electoral impact. It fielded 63 candidates in the 2023 local elections – up from just 15 in 2022 – but won no seats. Party leader Kurten came a distant last in his chosen ward, as did many of their other candidates. Despite this lack of public support, Kurten is an enthusiastic self-promoter on social media and appears regularly as a guest on GB News.





TURNING POINT UK

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

Turning Point UK is the British offshoot of the influential American conservative group Turning Point USA, which was launched in 2019 with some fanfare and much derision. The group was intended to emulate the success of its American parent group in mobilising young conservatives on college campuses, but failed to create any organic presence in universities here and has essentially been moribund for some time.

However, following the addition of COO Nick Tenconi to the group, it appears to be in the process of reinventing itself as a street-protest organiser, taking a key role in the demonstrations against drag queen storytelling sessions throughout the year. These included organising regular and increasingly confrontational demonstrations outside the Honor Oak pub in Lewisham, many featuring Laurence Fox as a guest speaker and all of which were vastly outnumbered by counter-protesters.

In November the group was involved in the furore surrounding Remembrance weekend, with the group helping to organise a demonstration based on fears that pro-Palestine protesters would desecrate the Cenotaph but which actually ended with far-right protesters clashing with police. Despite publicly asking that “Nazis, fascists and nutters” not attend their demonstrations, their events have seen a mix of ageing football hooligans from the anti-migrant Patriots of Britain alongside QAnon influencers and other conspiracy theorists.

CALVIN ROBINSON

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

Calvin Robinson is a far-right commentator and evangelical priest who developed a following largely through his weekly show on GB News, *Calvin's Common Sense Crusade*, which often saw him wearing his priest's cassock on air. Robinson mixes his strict interpretation of Christian morality with an anti-immigrant and conspiratorial outlook that has become increasingly extreme over time, such as repeatedly calling for an end to non-Christian migration to the UK.



In October 2023, he was sacked by GB News after leaping to the defence of his friend Laurence Fox, following the latter's abusive on-air tirade against the journalist Ava Santina. The loss of this prominent outlet will likely diminish his significance going forward, though he still regularly travels to speak at evangelical conferences around the world.

LAURENCE FOX AND RECLAIM

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST



Laurence Fox is a former actor and musician who since 2020 has carved out a career as a Radical Right provocateur and aspiring politician. His views came to attention following an appearance on BBC's *Question Time* in January 2020, when he dismissed the idea that racism played a part in media hostility towards Meghan Markle. He soon capitalised on the controversy that followed, launching a career as a commentator and establishing the Reclaim Party in September that year, which he dubbed as a “UKIP for the culture wars”.

Fox's political ambitions have been dogged by administrative issues and derisory election results. In March 2021 he received just 1.9% of the vote in the London mayoral election, despite the endorsement of Reform UK and a significant media profile, and in July 2023 he pulled in just 2.3% in the Uxbridge by-election following Boris Johnson's resignation. The party is exclusively bankrolled by pro-Brexit businessman Jeremy Hosking, who has donated £3.5 million to date.

Fox also launched a media career, culminating in hosting a show on GB News after frequently filling in as a guest host on Nigel Farage's slot. However, he was subject to a very high-profile sacking in October after a misogynistic rant against journalist Ava Santina on another GB News show, *Dan Wootton Tonight*, the aftermath of which saw Fox, Wootton and their friend Calvin Robinson all lose their jobs.

Despite Fox suggesting that he might stand again in the 2024 London mayoral election, there are significant doubts about the viability of Reclaim going forward. Reclaim Party Ltd, the private company that controls the party, was almost struck off by Companies House at the start of 2024 after failing to file its accounts, and Fox has stated that the leaders of Reform UK and the SDP have both approached Hosking to solicit his support and abandonment of Reclaim.



KATIE HOPKINS

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

Katie Hopkins is a provocative far-right former columnist and current social media figure. First coming to attention as a particularly unpleasant contestant on BBC series *The Apprentice*, Hopkins then launched a career as a talking head on discussion shows, frequently called upon to provide offensive commentary on issues around race, class, weight and many other topics.

Her career in mainstream media, including stints as a host on LBC and columnist for *The Sun* and *Daily Mail*, slowly ground to a halt after her increasingly extreme statements went beyond what her respective employers could tolerate, including a 2015 column for *The Sun* in which she referred to migrants as “cockroaches” and “feral humans”, and a tweet calling for a “final solution” following the Manchester bombing in 2017.

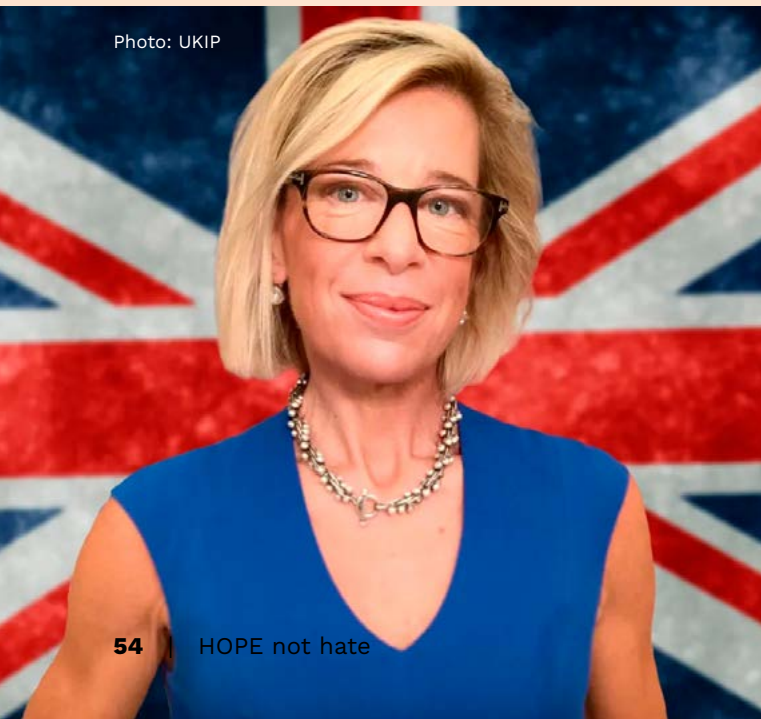
Like many far-right influencers, Katie Hopkins expanded influence into new audiences during the pandemic by consistently downplaying the severity of the virus and opposing lockdowns and the vaccine.

She also played a minor role in the forthcoming London mayoral election in September, when HOPE not hate revealed that the Conservative candidate for Mayor, Susan Hall, had retweeted a post from Hopkins which referred to Sadiq Khan as the “nipple-height Mayor of Londonistan”, among other bigoted posts.

Hopkins was among the horde of far-right influencers to be given their Twitter accounts back in 2023 following Elon Musk’s general amnesty for suspended accounts. She has not been able to command the same level of attention as before her suspension, however, despite her one million followers and continued efforts to start arguments with other high-profile accounts.

Following the imprisonment of her former collaborator Alex Belfield on stalking charges, Hopkins has continued to perform a series of live solo shows in small theatres around the country, with 24 dates announced so far.

Photo: UKIP



THE MALLARD

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET / MAGAZINE



The Mallard is a small right-wing blog set up in 2016 that has published a printed magazine since April 2021. Describing itself as “conservative”, the outlet is far to the right of even the current incarnation of the Conservative Party and gives voice to a niche brand of “High Tory” philosophy, popular among right-wing university students and few others.

Despite the efforts to maintain a somewhat mainstream appearance, articles reveal that their authors share much in common with more lowbrow outlets of the far right; a contributor argued in October that London’s pro-Palestine demonstrations raised “a question of race; the preservation of the White British,” while editor-in-chief Samuel Martin complains of “anti-whiteness” and endorses anti-migrant tweets from the far-right activist Steve Laws on Twitter.

In July 2023, the magazine announced that its paper edition would be printed on a quarterly basis going forward, rather than monthly, but did not explain why this decision was taken.

BREITBART LONDON

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET



Breitbart London is the UK branch of the US media empire founded by Andrew Breitbart in 2005. At one point hugely influential in US right-wing politics, Breitbart helped to establish and cement the careers of far-right influencers such as Steve Bannon, Milo Yiannopoulos and Raheem Kassam. Breitbart has since lost ground to other far-right outlets in the US, however, and its UK branch never achieved the same prominence in the British media landscape as its parent company had in the US.

Breitbart London launched in 2014 with the explicit intention of importing US culture war issues to the UK, with then-Executive Chairman Steve Bannon telling the *New York Times* that they saw the UK as a “front in our current cultural and political war.” Adopting the then-ascendant UKIP as a political vehicle, Breitbart London – and particularly Raheem Kassam – played a key role in directing the party to diversify its platform from a singular focus on anti-Europe sentiment into a more overtly xenophobic and anti-establishment party.

As of 2023, the London operation is much-diminished in both stature and staff. Now sharing a landing page with the rest of Europe on the Breitbart website, it appears to have just a handful of staff covering the whole of Europe, churning out regurgitated articles originating in more mainstream outlets.



Stephen Lennon at the
Hearts of Oak launch

HEARTS OF OAK

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET

Founded in February 2020, Hearts of Oak was originally presented as an alliance between far-right and libertarian activists, including Stephen Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson), Carl Benjamin (AKA Sargon of Akkad) and a number of former UKIP activists, including ex-leader Gerard Batten.

Hearts of Oak launched with a protest on Parliament Square demanding the deportation of Muslim perpetrators of on-street grooming. Hearts of Oak described itself as a “populist, anti-establishment movement” that brought together a group including Lennon, various former UKIP figures and evangelical Christian activists. The group announced that it would campaign on immigration, political correctness and protecting children from the “LGBTQ agenda”.

Disrupted soon after its launch by the COVID-19 pandemic, the group’s operations have moved online and it has since developed into an online platform. Co-founder Peter McIlvenna now produces regular interviews for the group’s YouTube channel, covering an array of topics but with a focus on anti-Muslim content, opposing COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, and anti-LGBT+ content that is framed as opposition to the sexualisation of children.

In 2023, HOPE not hate revealed that McIlvenna and fellow co-founder Alan Craig had long been members of a secretive organisation called the New Issues Group that worked to push anti-Muslim politics and met secretly on the parliamentary estate.

THE LOTUS EATERS

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET

LEADER: CARL BENJAMIN (AKA SARGON OF AKKAD)

The Lotus Eaters is a podcast and media platform set up by misogynistic influencer Carl Benjamin (AKA Sargon of Akkad). Benjamin first came to notoriety via his YouTube channel, which was involved in the so-called “Gamergate” phenomenon, where misogynistic video game enthusiasts mounted harassment campaigns against female game developers and journalists.

Benjamin has courted controversy ever since, being banned from social platforms for the use of racial slurs and infamously stating that he “wouldn’t even rape” the Labour MP Jess Phillips. In 2018, Benjamin would join UKIP under the leadership of Gerard Batten, and stood as a candidate in the 2019 European elections.

The Lotus Eaters’ website hosts a wide array of text, audio and video content, some free to view and some placed behind a paywall for subscribers, and has eight regular contributors across the platform.



Carl Benjamin
Photo Rebel
Wisdom

A FORCE FOR GOOD

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: ALISTAIR MCCONNACHIE

A Force For Good (AFFG) is a Scottish pro-Unionist campaign and self-described “think tank” headed by Alistair McConnachie.

McConnachie is a former UKIP organiser who was forced out of the party in 2001 for engaging in Holocaust denial.

He was paid by the Orange Order for “social media services” ahead of the 2014 independence referendum, and also addressed the tiny but extreme TradSoc conference in 2019.

Under the AFFG banner, McConnachie produces a regular but little-viewed stream of video content, with guests including David Clews of Unity News Network, David Kurten of the Heritage Party and Niall Fraser of the Scottish Family Party. McConnachie and AFFG have also attracted press for protesting against pro-independence marches and supporting anti-trans demonstrations.

He is also founder of Independent Green Voice, a tiny political party that has fielded former BNP activists Max Dunbar and John Robertson as candidates. In 2021, the group was accused by the Scottish Greens of having cost them seats, due to the similar name and logo possibly confusing voters.



DIVIDED LOYALTIES



The far right causing trouble in London on Armistice Day. Photo: YouTube

The conflict in the Middle East has split the British far right, but all have sought to use it to justify their extremist and divisive world view. JOE MULHALL reports

SADLY, AS IS so often the case, whenever there is conflict in the Middle East there is fallout on the streets of Britain. Instances of antisemitic and Islamophobic hate crime have sharply increased in the months since the horrifying Hamas attack on 7 October and the subsequent Israeli bombing and invasion of Gaza.

At times of heightened emotions, when people are understandably angry at the suffering they are witnessing abroad, some have wrongly held whole communities in the UK responsible for the actions of foreign governments or people of the same religion.

Tell MAMA, which records and monitors anti-Muslim incidents, recorded 895 cases in the six weeks that followed Hamas's deadly terror attacks. The figures covering 7 October to 19 November demonstrated a six-fold increase in cases from the 2022 figure of 142 cases (110 offline, 32 online).

An even more dramatic increase was recorded by the Community Security Trust, which tracks antisemitic

incidents. In just 47 days following the start of the conflict they recorded at least 1,563 antisemitic incidents across the UK. This is the highest ever total reported to CST across a period of this length, and they have been operating since 1984.

However, the result has not just been a horrifying spike in hate crime but also widespread use of discriminatory language on social media and at demonstrations that, while not reaching a criminal threshold, is still dangerous and deeply hurtful to the communities being targeted.

At the most extreme end there are those who engage in violent or pro-genocide antisemitism, or outright Holocaust denial or revisionism as a part of their criticism of the actions of the Israeli state. More common are those who engage in conspiratorial antisemitism and use antisemitic tropes, especially in relation to supposed Jewish power and influence.

The most common trope being deployed by some

is the suggestion that Jews, the “Zionist lobby”, the “Israel lobby” or even Mossad are somehow steering UK domestic politics to such an extent that political leaders cannot be trusted. Another common antisemitic position is the implicit or explicit blaming of Jewish people as a group for the policies of the Israeli state. This includes those who use the term “Zionism” solely to abuse Jewish people, rather than as a descriptor of a broad and varied political, cultural, social and/or religious ideology.

When it comes to the current Islamophobia, one of the most common attacks that Muslims have faced during the current conflict is that “Muslims are terrorists”. While it is right to call Hamas terrorists, the idea that all Muslims support Hamas or have sympathies towards terrorism is of course racist. This is something that many Muslims and non-Muslims of Asian heritage face whenever there is a terrorist attack or war in the Middle East. Central here is the idea that Muslims are uniquely violent or that their religion inherently encourages it. One of the more common ways this is presented is people demanding Muslims apologise or condemn violence carried out by other Muslims to whom they have no connection.

FAR RIGHT REACTION

It is the dramatic rise in racist hate crime and the prevalence of antisemitism and Islamophobia across society that is most concerning at the moment. However, as is always the case, many on the organised far right have seen the ongoing conflict as an opportunity to exploit anger and advance their own divisive politics.

As expected, the British far right is split depending on which minority community the individual or organisation generally dislikes most. Those who primarily push Islamophobia have been vocally pro-Israel while those motivated by antisemitism have been pushing pro-Palestine content. The latter is usually the more extreme elements within the far right.

Britain’s most active fascist organisation, Patriotic Alternative (PA), has regularly discussed the ongoing war and has used it to push the “White Genocide” theory, an overtly antisemitic version of the “Great Replacement”. PA has claimed that one of the motivations for Israel’s actions is to consciously push Palestinians into Europe as part of a Jewish plot to replace the white population.

The group has always been extremely antisemitic, so it comes as no surprise that it has used the war to justify its hateful prejudice. For example, PA’s neo-Nazi leader Mark Collett has seized the opportunity to spread his longstanding Holocaust denial, posting: “We have now reached the point where gullible Westerners are being fed the fanciful tale of babies being roasted alive in an oven. [...] This narrative has been used ever since the end of World War 2 in order to instil White guilt, it will now be used to call for the complete destruction of Gaza.”

Similar to PA, is the predictable reaction of the now-irrelevant former leader of the British National Party, Nick Griffin. Like Collett, he too has used the ongoing war to try and promote Holocaust denial. “Every



Deputy Editor
of 5Pillars,
Dilly Hussain.
Photo: YouTube

Western European alive has had a lifetime of being shown those terrible pictures of the piles of corpses at Dachau and Belsen,” posted Griffin on Telegram. “How is this footage from Gaza any different? Only that the dead at Dachau & Belsen were the victims of callous neglect, supply lines bombed to oblivion and – most of all – typhus. Some were undoubtedly murdered by the Nazis, but most DIED.” He has also argued that antisemitism has gone from “hating Jews for no reason” to “saying Jews should stop killing babies in Gaza” which he believes means “The Zionist have thrown away their Holocaust© cudgel.”

In November last year Griffin appeared on the Blood Brothers podcast, hosted by the Islamist extremist and Deputy Editor of 5Pillars, Dilly Hussain. More recently, the founder of Britain First, Jim Dowson, also appeared on the show. Clearly, both Islamist and far-right extremists are using the war in Gaza to unite around their common antisemitism.

THE ISLAMOPHOBIC FAR RIGHT

There is a section of the far right that, while hating Muslims, prioritises antisemitism. However, there are also obsessively Islamophobic activists and organisations who praise Israel.

Britain First, for example, have supported and celebrated Israel’s reaction, writing numerous posts like, “Israel bombs multiple targets in the Gaza strip. Could you imagine Boris Johnson dealing with Britain’s enemies like this? 🇮🇱🇺🇦”

However, the best example of this is Stephen Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson). While he was leader of the English Defence League, there was a small Jewish Division. In 2016 he visited Israel, and in May 2021 he attended a pro-Israel demonstration in London, draping himself in the Israeli flag. His attendance was quickly and roundly condemned by leading figures within the Jewish community. More recently, his attempt to “report on” a rally against antisemitism in London in November resulted in his arrest. Despite all this, his longstanding support of Israel hasn’t stopped

his occasional embrace of racial pseudoscience and conspiratorial antisemitism such as his article *Tommy's Statement: The Jewish Question*, released during the pandemic.

Since the start of the war in Gaza, Lennon has posted pro-Israel and anti-Palestinian and anti-Muslim content constantly. He has also pushed a version of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory, warning that, "insidious political interests," are "attempting to pave the way to push Gazan 'refugees' into the West (which would no doubt free up a lot of land in Gaza)." Unlike Patriotic Alternative however, who overtly state that this is a plot by "the jews", Lennon is more vague and instead highlights the Islamist threat posed by Muslim Palestinians. "How about go fuck yourselves, not welcome, don't want them, they can live in that radical Islamist shithole called Gaza. We have enough murderous beardy wierdys here already," read one post on Telegram.

OPPOSING PRO-PALESTINIAN ACTIVISM HERE

While commenting regularly on events in the Middle East, much of the far right, including Lennon, have focused more on pro-Palestinian activity within the UK, especially the series of large demonstrations in London. This bubbled over into street activism in November when far-right activists descended on London.

As was the case during the Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2020, rumours had spread online that the Cenotaph might be desecrated by protestors. Tensions were significantly ramped up in the preceding week by the then-Home Secretary Suella Braverman, who posted on Twitter that it was "entirely unacceptable to desecrate Armistice Day with a hate march through London." Most shockingly, Braverman proceeded to justify any grievances that far-right demonstrators might hold against the police, noting what she described as "a perception that senior police officers play favourites when it comes to protesters."

Anger spread further when Radical Right commentator Douglas Murray tweeted: "UK Hamas supporters [...] plan to defame our war-dead and desecrate the Cenotaph itself. This is the tipping point. If such a march goes ahead then the people of Britain must come out and stop these barbarians." Unsurprisingly he failed to attend himself, preferring to whip up others.

Despite the fact that the planned march was never due to pass the Cenotaph and the area around Whitehall, rumours spread fast that pro-Palestine demonstrations would desecrate the monument to Britain's war dead. Up until two weeks before the event, the football hooligan world had shown little interest in the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. However, convinced the Cenotaph could face attack, they began to mobilise. The hooligan chat groups saw an outpouring of vile racism and threats, and one WhatsApp group saw its numbers double in seven days as hooligans and racists piled in. The day before the demonstrations, HOPE not hate raised the alarm about what we were seeing in the groups, which were awash with terrorist videos, vile racism and threats of violence. There were even links shared to buy high-calibre crossbows, with many commenting how they would like one to take out their opponents. Lennon added fuel to fire in a series of videos and emails



Douglas Murray
@DouglasKMurray

...

UK Hamas supporters are now planning a "million man march" on Remembrance Day. They plan to defame our war-dead and desecrate the Cenotaph itself. This is the tipping point. If such a march goes ahead then the people of Britain must come out and stop these barbarians.

19:18 · 02/11/2023

calling for all British men to come into London to make a stand.

The day saw 1,500 far-right activists and hooligans arrive in London, and a bloody confrontation with police, where officers responded to volleys of punches and flying traffic cones with baton-charges, resulting in at least 92 far-right activists being arrested. Tommy Robinson's decision to jump in a taxi shortly after he had arrived in Chinatown followed by about 200 right-wing protesters has not gone down too well within the hooligan fraternity, many of whom resented his fame and wealth anyway.

DIVIDED LOYALTIES

Just as the far right has been divided over who to support in the ongoing war in Ukraine, so too are they over the conflict in the Middle East. Activists and organisations have simply applied the old adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." This doesn't mean that large sections of the far right don't hate both Muslims and Jews, but most have chosen a side based on which community they see as the bigger threat.

Broadly, the more extreme elements of the movement prioritise antisemitism while the more moderate end focuses on Muslims. Some see it as further evidence that "the Jews" wield secret world power, while others are using Hamas as proof that all Muslims are terrorists. Both positions are reprehensible and hold whole religious and ethnic groups responsible for the actions of governments and groups over which they have no control or allegiance.

However, people on all sides of the political spectrum are engaging in racism, either consciously or unconsciously, when discussing and protesting this conflict. Some with no affiliation to the far right have carried out horrendous hate crimes. So while it is always important to understand and monitor the actions and beliefs of the far right, we have to remember that they are often merely the most extreme or organised manifestation of wider societal prejudices.

FROM RHETORIC TO VIOLENCE

NICK LOWLES reports on how incendiary and often false claims by politicians and the media led to violent disorder on the streets of London

A WHATSAPP group, populated with current and former football hooligans, inspired by political and media rhetoric, became a key organising platform that led to violent disorder in central London on Armistice Day – Saturday 11 November.

A total of 126 people were arrested on the day, the vast majority of them part of a 1,500-strong mob who were protesting against the much larger pro-Palestinian demonstration. More were arrested afterwards. It was the worst public disorder London had seen since far-right sympathisers protested against a Black Lives Matter march in the summer of 2020.

The WhatsApp group was run by a Glasgow-based Millwall fan named Steve Dolin and contained 680 members. In the beginning of November, the conversations pertained generally to football, lager, and past fights. There was very little talk about events in the Middle East, or even the pro-Palestine marches in London.

Indeed, a protest organised by Turning Point UK, a far-right group, to “protect” the Cenotaph against an earlier demo for Palestine attracted just 25 people.

All this changed on 2 November as some Government ministers and media commentators raised the prospect of the Cenotaph being “desecrated” by pro-Palestinian protestors on Armistice Day. This caused outrage in the hooligan fraternity. The tone of Dolin’s WhatsApp group immediately became angry.

Within 24 hours the first details of a counter-protest were being posted up on the group.

“Time for us all to reunite protect our war memorials on Remembrance Sunday,” wrote Steve.

“Think we have all just had enough now mate,” replied Gary.

Very quickly members of the group posted up reports of who was likely to come.

“Millwall will turn out I reckon”, one person wrote. Another said that Gillingham would show too. “Small but naughty”, Callum E added.

Quite quickly, anger turned to threats of violence and retribution.

A video was circulated by a former British soldier who expressed his anger at “ Hamas Palestinian supporters taking to the streets of our capital city and calling for Jihad against Christians and the police, who are pathetic, do nothing.”

He went on: “The Cenotaph is a monument that is as sacred to us as any church or any mosque to any other religion. I understand now there are rumours that these same Hamas sympathisers, terrorists, are going to come down to London on Remembrance Sunday and try and hijack our march. Our veterans march, our time when we pay our respect to our fallen, our dead.

“And this is a message to any Hamas sympathiser, Palestinian scumbag – try it. Fucking try it. We will exert a violence on you that you have never experienced. Don’t mess with the veterans because we have the backing of the football supporters and you won’t get anyone more patriotic than them.

“Try it Hamas. You are scum.”

This video was met with mass approval on Dolin’s WhatsApp group, which was growing rapidly. A week after the participants began talking about the protests, the group had swelled to 1,500 people – the maximum permissible for a WhatsApp group.

Others posted similar messages. Billy Charlton, a Chelsea hooligan and nazi, posted up the video of Brenton Tarrant’s deadly attack on a mosque in New Zealand in 2020. The same video was also reported in the WhatsApp group by a user named “H”, an active participant in the group.

The Met Police’s assertion that the pro-Palestine demo was not going anywhere near the Cenotaph did nothing to pacify the hooligans. The police were woke liars, many wrote, and could not be believed.

Suella Braverman’s article in *The Times*, accusing the Met of two-tier policing, was widely applauded by the hooligans, many of whom posted up messages in support of her and what she had said.

As Armistice Day approached, the rhetoric on the WhatsApp group grew ever more aggressive, with numerous people posting up threats of violence against Muslims.

On the day itself, several people posted up running commentaries of what was happening, including videos and photos from on the ground. Some members of the WhatsApp group were also arrested for violence and disorder.

The violence was the worst we have witnessed in central London for many years. The clashes lasted several hours, as small groups of far-right supporters and hooligans battled with police and pro-Palestinian demonstrators.

While Steve Dolin’s hooligan WhatsApp group was pivotal in encouraging people to protest and providing a platform on which to issue threats of violence, many were inspired by the dangerous rhetoric, much of it false, by certain politicians and media outlets that the Cenotaph was seriously under threat.

A TIMELINE TO DISORDER

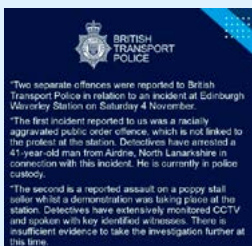
28 OCTOBER:
Huge pro-Palestinian
demo in London
frightens many in
Jewish community
and angers right-wing
commentators



7 NOVEMBER:
Peter Moncer begins
leaving long series of
threatening and violent
messages and voice
notes on hooligan chats



7 NOVEMBER:
GB News
announce "Urgent
Cobra meeting
convened ahead
of Remembrance
Sunday as protest
outrage explodes"



7 NOVEMBER:
British Transport
Police issue
statement
claiming CCTV
on poppy
seller attack is
inconclusive



29 OCTOBER:
Several politicians and
Sunday papers call for
future pro-Palestinian
demos to be banned



7 NOVEMBER: Daily Mail
reports on poppy seller
being attacked.
Hooligans and far right
go apoplectic



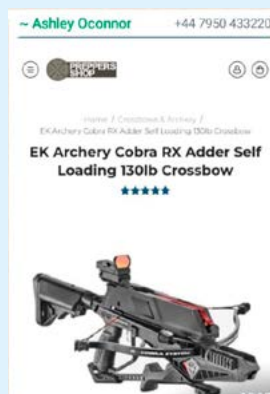
8 NOVEMBER:
Mail headline
met by furious
reaction on
hooligan chats.
More far-right
terrorist videos
posted up



2 NOVEMBER:
Douglas Murray and
others begin talking
up the threat to
the Cenotaph from
pro-Palestinian
protesters



6 NOVEMBER:
More violence
threatened on
hooligan chats



8 NOVEMBER:
Images of high-velocity
crossbows and other
weapons are put on
hooligan chats, followed
by numerous calls to
attack Muslims. "It's war,"
one person announces.

2 NOVEMBER:
Counter-demo called



6 NOVEMBER: Tommy
Robinson releases a
"Your Country Needs
You" video, which
encourages people to
attend protest



9 NOVEMBER:
Writing in *The Times*,
Suella Braverman
accuses the Met Police
of two-tier policing.



13 NOVEMBER: Suella Braverman is
sacked as Home Secretary



11 NOVEMBER: Mass disorder
breaks out across central
London as 1,500 hooligans
and far right turn out to
protect the Cenotaph



11 NOVEMBER: Third Khan
fake video drops and
hooligans respond with
anger



3 NOVEMBER: Prime Minister Rishi Sunak says planned protests on Armistice Day would be “provocative and disrespectful” and claims Cenotaph could be “desecrated”



3 NOVEMBER: Far-right group Turning Point UK promotes counter-demo at Cenotaph. Hooligan chats begin to take up the issue



3 NOVEMBER: Met Police forced to issue statement denying that the pro-Palestinian protest will be going past the Cenotaph. Statement does little to dissuade far right



4 NOVEMBER: Tommy Robinson issues video encouraging people to protect the Cenotaph



6 NOVEMBER: Home Secretary Suella Braverman backs Met Commissioner's call for pro-Palestinian demo to be suspended for the Remembrance Sunday weekend



6 NOVEMBER: Racism grows on hooligan chats



5 NOVEMBER: Met Police issue statement stating flags removed from Cenotaph for cleaning ahead of Remembrance Sunday, as they are every year



5 NOVEMBER: Matt Ridley, great-grandson of man who designed Cenotaph, says decision to remove flags from Cenotaph is giving in to the mob. Others on right pile in



9 NOVEMBER: Furious reaction on right in support of Braverman, including one tweet from Douglas Murray viewed 372,000 times



9 NOVEMBER: Prime Minister tells Met Police Commissioner: “On your head be it” over decision not to ban pro-Palestinian demo



9 NOVEMBER: Tommy Robinson mocks Met Police



10 NOVEMBER: Daily Mail front page: “Come for Suella and you come for all of us”



10 NOVEMBER: Evening Standard calls for peace



10 NOVEMBER: First of three fake AI-generated Khan videos appears



10 NOVEMBER: Hooligans voice their support for Braverman

10 NOVEMBER: Many politicians call for Sunak to sack Braverman for her two-tier policing article, but he says he “has full confidence” in her.

ANTISEMITISM SURGES IN THE UK

ANTISEMITISM IN THE UK POST-7 OCTOBER

The rise in antisemitism since 7 October 2023 has not surprised the Jewish community. When the conflict between Israel and Palestine has spiked, so too have incidents of antisemitism here in the UK. However, the intensity in which this has taken place in the UK since 7 October cannot be understated, and therefore the sense of isolation and fear felt by much of the Jewish community cannot be ignored.

In 2023, the Community Security Trust (CST) has recorded their highest ever total of antisemitic incidents since they began collecting this data. 4,103 incidents were recorded. This is an increase of 147% compared to 2022 and 81% higher than 2021, their previous highest recording year. Of the 4,103 instances of antisemitism, 66% took place on or after 7 October, showing the backlash of hate that the Jewish community has experienced. These are far from normal figures; this is a 589% increase in antisemitic incidents taking place in the same time period in 2022.

The speed at which antisemitism began to increase in the UK is deeply worrying. CST received their first report at 12:55pm on 7 October when a car drove past a synagogue in Hertfordshire with a Palestinian flag attached, windows wound down and an occupant shaking their fist in the air towards the synagogue. The targeting of Jewish institutions or predominantly Jewish areas, as perceived proxies for Israel, is a theme of these kinds of incidents. On the morning of 9 October, "Free Palestine" was graffitied on a bridge in Golders Green, a well-known centre of the Jewish community in London. The pro-Palestine marches that have taken place in London and around the country have caused an immense amount of anxiety for the Jewish community. Whilst it's right that a core part of a democracy is protecting the right to protest, there are valid concerns about the antisemitic banners, groups and slogans on display.

The Jewish community in the UK is approximately 300,000 people. That's about 0.5% of the population of the UK. For such a small community to suffer such a huge increase in hostility, it takes a toll.

Many members of the Jewish community have experienced directly antisemitism since 7 October, or know someone who has. What this means is a feeling of isolation as a community and fear. For the Jewish community, there is a worry about where this expression of antisemitism will go and how this country can build back positive bonds between different groups in the UK.

WHO ARE THE ANTISEMITES?

HOPE not hate has polled 25,000 people in the UK from December 2023 to January 2024 on a wide range of issues and through this we are able to identify a core anti-Jewish group of people in the UK. This core anti-Jewish group is estimated to make up 5% of the people surveyed. This 5% are not homogenous in their beliefs, backgrounds and motivations. However, they are very disengaged and dissatisfied with the political system, more likely to support conspiracy theories and often hold socially conservative views and negative attitudes to other minority groups.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the core anti-Jewish group, they are fairly evenly spread amongst all age groups, with the biggest group being the over 65s (23%). 55% of them are male, and 45% are female. In terms of geography, 22% of this group are in the Greater London area.

The ethnicity breakdown of the 5% finds that 71% are White, 16% Asian or Asian British, 4% Black, 3% Mixed or Multiple Ethnic and 6% Other. The 5% are 39% Christian, 36% not religious and 18% Muslim. 66% of this groups hold educational qualifications below degree level, and 34% hold a degree or higher.

IDEAS AND BELIEFS

Within the 5% there is a conspiratorial streak. The 5% tend to be more climate sceptic than the rest of the population, as well as more likely to believe conspiracy theories about globalist elites using immigration to weaken European identity, or believe that 'no-go' zones for non-Muslims exist in European cities.

Jewish cemetery, Edmonton, London after a racist attack in which 100s of graves were daubed with swastikas & stones overturned & smashed.
Photo: David Hoffman



Their views of the world are more likely to be anti-West and anti-Israel than the rest of the population. The countries they view as causing the most trouble are Russia (53% to 70%), Israel (48% to 23%) and the USA (42% to 24%).

Interestingly however, is the finding that within the core anti-Jewish group there isn't a majority who deny the Holocaust. 27% think it's true that the 'official account of the Nazi Holocaust is a lie', while 48% disagree.

Anti-Jewish beliefs, for a section of the 5%, go hand in hand with anti-Muslim beliefs. 43% of the group believe that Islam is a generally threat to the British way of life, whilst 27% think it is generally compatible.

The 5% are also more likely to hold socially conservative views. 41% think that gay couples should not be allowed to adopt, compared to 18% of the rest of the population. 52% disagree that people should be able to identify with a different gender to the one recorded at birth, compared to 30% of the rest of the population.

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

The core 5% group that we've identified feel very strongly that the political system isn't working for them. In many contexts over time, political dissatisfaction and a sense of pessimism goes hand in hand with rising antisemitism, where people find

answers to their questions in blaming the ills of society on Jews. This group feels more disadvantaged (38%) compared to those not in our core anti-Jewish group (21%). 76% believe that the political system is broken and 82% say that politicians do not listen to them. This finding of political alienation is important – not because they should find a political home, but because it shows the way in which antisemitic beliefs interact with the feeling of being outside the system.

IS THERE UNITY?

It would be very wrong to assume that the whole of the 5% share the same political views. Within HOPE not hate's polling it shows that nearly the same proportion of people voted Conservative (28%), Labour (29%) or did not vote at all (25%) in 2019. The polling also simultaneously finds a strand of the 5% who find themselves very likely to back an anti-racist charity and are very disapproving of Nigel Farage, but also another strand who would be very unlikely to support an anti-racist group and indicate strong support for Farage. 20% of the group have a very negative view of left-wing people and 21% of the group have a very negative view of right-wing people. Antisemitism crosses over political ideologies and is not confined to the far right. Within the 5% there is a divergence over where they would sit on a political spectrum, however they unite in their Jew-hatred.

POLARISED PERSPECTIVES

HOW THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT IS IMPACTING DOMESTIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS MUSLIMS IN THE UK

MISBAH MALIK

IN RECENT years there has been a discernible shift in attitudes towards multiculturalism, reflective of improvements in race relations more broadly. However, this is juxtaposed with a continuation of deeply ingrained Islamophobia, and an increasing polarisation of attitudes towards Islam and Muslims.

International events and, crucially, the political and media rhetoric that accompanies them, have historically been a catalyst for hardening domestic attitudes amongst those already predisposed to certain views. Events such as the Rushdie affair, the Gulf War and the Iraq War have all had a polarising effect on public attitudes towards Muslims.

The escalation of conflict in Israel and Gaza since October 2023 has proven to be no exception to this. It has provided refreshed polarising narratives and the opportunity for people to reaffirm and recommit to existing values and mindsets.

Our nationwide polling¹ delineated two groups arising from the conflict in the Middle East: those for whom negative attitudes towards Muslims have either emerged or intensified, and those for whom the conflict has fostered or reinforced positive attitudes. Crucially, these groups exhibit distinct demographic differences, indicative of an escalating divergence along gender, age and political affiliation fault lines.

The polling revealed that 31% of the population acknowledge that the conflict has either created or strengthened their negative attitudes towards Muslims. This hostility is concentrated amongst certain demographics already predisposed to anti-Muslim prejudice. Notably, men over 65, educated to below degree level, who align themselves with right-wing political parties or ideology, are twice as likely to harbour negative views of British Muslims as a result of the conflict. This group make up a significant proportion of what we identify as the “hardcore anti-Muslim” segment of the population, where they are heavily over-represented, particularly in relation to age. They were already more likely to have negative attitudes towards Islam, and be sceptical of multiculturalism more broadly; 61% think Islam is incompatible with British values and over half (51%) associate Islam with violence.

Contrastingly, 33% of the public said the conflict has maintained or enhanced the positive views they had of Muslims. Young women with degrees who politically subscribe to left-leaning parties are over

twice as likely to be part of this group, reflecting their preexisting affiliation to more liberal ideologies and more tolerant attitudes. They’re almost twice as likely to view Islam as compatible with British values and way of life and strongly reject the perception of Islam as a religion of violence.

Predictably, attitudes towards Muslims are also reflective of wider opinion on the conflict itself. Those who have more sympathy towards the Israeli side than the Palestinian side are almost three times as likely to have negative attitudes towards Muslims. Most tellingly, those that did pick a side, regardless of what side they picked, are less likely to think that people with different views on the conflict can live together peacefully in the UK. The conflict is undeniably a polarising issue, fed by but also feeding into pre-existing attitudes towards Muslims.

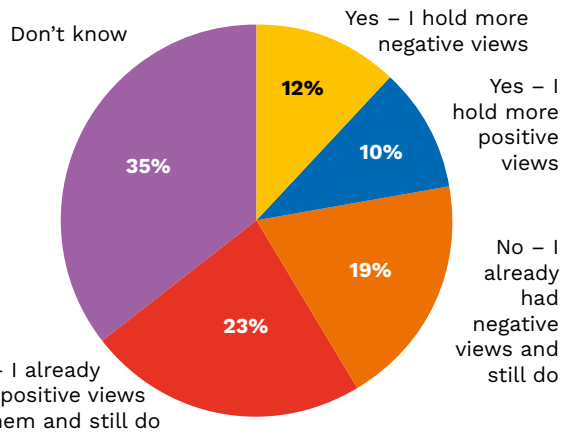
But how does a conflict thousands of miles away trigger such intense repercussions in the UK?

Narratives perpetuated by political leadership in the mainstream are crucial here. The last few years in particular have seen the Conservative party sliding to the right², with much of their messaging echoing the extreme rhetoric of organised far-right actors and groups as they attempt to appeal to an increasingly



Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman villanised pro-Palestinian demonstrations as “hate marches”
Photo: Simon Dawson / 10 Downing Street

Thinking about ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the way British Muslims are responding to it, have your views of British Muslims been affected?



right wing group of supporters. Culture wars targeting “invasions” of asylum seekers, the “misguided dogma of multiculturalism” and lefty “activist lawyers” have become increasingly divisive.

Unsurprisingly therefore, almost immediately after the conflict escalated in October, the political mainstream jumped to propagate a narrative that lazily but dangerously draws from Islamophobic tropes.

We saw the then-Home Secretary Suella Braverman villanise pro-Palestinian demonstrations as “hate marches”. Then, demonising those protesting on Armistice Day, Braverman echoed far-right clash-of-civilisations rhetoric that condemns Islam and Muslims as culturally incompatible with and subsequently a threat to the “progressive” Western world and Western values. This has long been the cornerstone of anti-Muslim ideology and underpins the link between instability in the Middle East and heightened Islamophobia in the UK.

This narrative originated during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, where televised “Death to America” chants kick-started the “guilty by association” fallacy used to implicate all Muslims worldwide as part of a violent monolith. But the major catalyst was 9/11, which institutionalised and preserved this trope through the War on Terror. Since then it has been frequently deployed to villanise dissent about foreign policy in particular. The motives and identity of anti-war demonstrators in 2003 for example were routinely discredited within the discourse of “deviance” and “incivility”, relegating their protests to the realm of disorder and violence much like the pro-Palestine “hate marches” have been.

The success of these divisive narratives about incompatibility is worryingly apparent in how dominant they have become in not just the “hardcore anti-Muslim group” but across wider society. Forty-four per cent see Islam as a “serious threat to Western civilisation” and 56% see the habits, customs and values of Muslims as different to them – the largest result for any religion. When those who identified as having negative views of Muslims as a result of the conflict in the Middle East were asked why they held

Why do you have negative views of Muslims?

British Muslims promote violence

29%

British Muslims glorify terrorism

36%

British Muslims are intolerant to free speech and call for violence against those who hold different views

44%

British Muslims are not loyal to the UK

43%

British Muslims are antisemitic

32%

British Muslims do not want to integrate into British society

50%

Islam is a supremacist religion

34%

Don't know

6%

Prefer not to say

4%

None of these

5%

such views, the top three reasons were: that British Muslims are unwilling to integrate (48%); are intolerant to free speech and those with different views (43%); and are not loyal to the UK (42%).

Crucially, these narratives are not just about incompatibility, but also fear of this incompatibility, as tropes about Muslims are interwoven with perceptions of violence and threat. The right-wing media in particular are pivotal in disseminating this fear. Inflammatory headlines about the threat of “jihad on our streets”³ and a religious war⁴ that will “unite Muslims under one Islamic caliphate”⁵ mobilises fear that massively contributes to the breakdown of community relations. The concentration of these narratives in right-wing press circles further enhances polarisation; it is no surprise that our polling found that those who get their news from the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, or GB news are considerably more likely to think that Islam is a serious threat to Western civilisation.

These tropes do not just underpin narratives but also policy, exposing the Government’s wider agenda. The Home Office’s response to the conflict has created an echo chamber for Islamophobia veiled behind the facade of security concerns; 63% of people in the UK are concerned about the threat of an Islamist terror

attack due to how British Muslims are responding to the situation in the Middle East. Reports of proposals to broaden the definition of extremism to include anyone who “undermines” the country’s institutions and values is particularly worrying, as the shadows of McCarthyism give little doubt that this will be used to target Muslim communities speaking out against the UK’s foreign policy decisions. Absence of funding for anti-Muslim hatred, despite soaring hate crimes, only further goes to expose the Government’s wider political agenda.

Analysing the actions of the Government in response to rising levels of anti-Muslim hatred, it is clear that they are not only grossly negligent in enacting solutions, but are part of the problem. The conflict in Israel and Palestine has become another pawn they can play to draw in the most extreme fringes of their support base, revitalising Islamophobia tropes to feed a culture war that they think will win them an election, all at the expense of the safety and wellbeing of British Muslims. They continue to prioritise sensationalist narratives intended solely to be headlines splashed across the front pages of newspapers, devoid of any nuance that could underpin successful policy or leadership.

Despite all this, there remains an appetite for cohesion and, with it, hope. Over half the country (57%) are optimistic that those with different views on the conflict can live together peacefully in the UK, and 61% think that cohesion initiatives that bring people together at this time should be a priority.

Polarisation is very hard to claw back from, and unpicking the social identities formed as a result is incredibly difficult. Polarisation undermines interpersonal trust, the very fabric of good community relations, by stoking suspicion and fear of “the other side”. Most worryingly, it is self-strengthening, rewarding extreme positioning that makes nuanced and collaborative discussion that could challenge divisive rhetoric increasingly less effective. This provides space for far-right actors to flourish, exploiting division to attack progressive values as identity-based suppression. This sets the country in a dangerous direction, one where extreme and violent far-right ideology is increasingly legitimised as a natural alternative to liberalism, the fallout of which would be devastating for our democracy. Not only must concerted efforts to tackle anti-Muslim hatred be prioritised, but the wider framework of increasingly polarised attitudes and identities that underlies this issue must also be dismantled. This requires a whole-of-society approach including, crucially, political willingness and leadership.

ENDNOTES

- 1 This article is based on a nationwide poll of 24, 953 people between 19 December 2023 and 16 Jan 2024, as well as a poll specifically on the Middle East conflict of 1589 people between 30 November 2023 and 1 December 2023.
- 2 <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2023/10/08/turning-right/>
- 3 <https://www.gbnews.com/opinion/patrick-christys-jihad-israel-palestine-latest-world>
- 4 <https://www.gbnews.com/news/nigel-farage-warns-of-religious-war-as-concerns-over-uk-pro-palestine-protests-grow>
- 5 <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/24500110/authorities-prove-jewish-people-do-count-sun-says/>

DOUGLAS MURRAY

Nick Lowles

ONE OF THE prominent British critics of Islam is Douglas Murray, who has lost no time in linking the actions of Hamas to a wider threat posed by Islamism and Muslim immigration into Europe more generally.

While Murray is insistent that his concern is about Islam and not Muslims more generally, his writings and social media posts regularly venture into more pernicious and racist territory.

Murray has repeatedly equated those attending pro-Palestinian demonstrations in London, where the call is for a ceasefire, with support for Hamas and even support for the genocide of Jews.



Douglas Murray ✓
@DouglasKMurray

Once again @owenjones lies about Israel and shows his own desire to be complicit in the mass murder of Jews.



Owen Jones ✓ @OwenJones84 · 1d

Protesters have shut down access to an arms company which produces weapons for Israel.



Douglas Murray ✓
@DouglasKMurray

Britain has already had a taste of 'Intifada'. At Manchester Arena. On London Bridge (twice). On Westminster Bridge. On our tubes and buses. And yet we allow this filth to be called for on our streets?



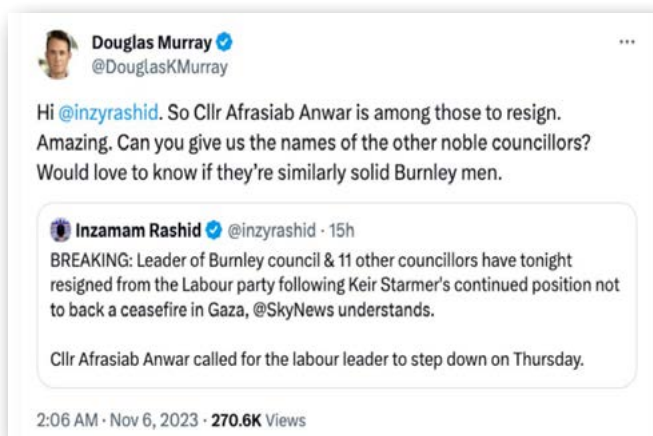
Douglas Murray ✓
@DouglasKMurray

UK Hamas supporters are now planning a "million man march" on Remembrance Day. They plan to defame our war-dead and desecrate the Cenotaph itself. This is the tipping point. If such a march goes ahead then the people of Britain must come out and stop these barbarians.

- AN ANTI-MUSLIM PROPAGANDIST

Murray's false claim on 2 November that pro-Palestinian demonstrators were planning to desecrate the Cenotaph contributed to the heightened tensions that mobilised people onto the streets..

There have also been times when he slips into outright racism. After news broke that several Burnley Labour councillors had resigned from the party in protest over the leadership's position on Gaza, Murray tweeted:



Another person to be on the receiving end of Murray's racist abuse was former Labour spin-doctor Alastair Campbell, who Murray accused of "destroying our country by bringing millions of illegal settlers here. This sick man deserves a reckoning."



Murray hardly moderates his opinions for other media outlets either. In November, in an article for the *Jewish Chronicle*, he shocked many by claiming that Hamas were worse than the Nazis. For evidence, he claimed that the Waffen SS were unhappy at the killing of six million Jews whilst Hamas revelled in it.

"Very few felt that shooting Jews in the back of the head all day and kicking their bodies into pits was where their own lives had meant to end up," Murray wrote. "Many spent their evenings getting blind drunk to try to forget. Nazi commanders had to worry about

staff 'morale.' When the war ended, the Nazis tried to pretend that Treblinka and other death camps never existed."

Many people were understandably furious.

"This is incredibly misleading – some may say grotesque – description of what actually happened," wrote former *Jewish Chronicle* journalist Daniel Sugarman. "I have no idea how the @JewishChron could feel comfortable publishing it."

A few weeks before, writing in *The Spectator*, Murray advocating the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza, a position that is internationally recognised as a form of ethnic cleaning – which of course breaks international law.

A particular focus of Murray's anger is the Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf. In one YouTube interview last November, Murray said that Yousaf had "infiltrated our system".



Of course, Murray has a long track record of deeply unpleasant, racist and offensive statements. In 2006 the Conservative front bench severed relations with Murray.

Last May, speaking at the radical right

National Conservatism conference in London, Murray sparked outrage by asserting that nationalism had a bad name "because the Germans mucked up in a century."

Despite these clear racist and anti-Muslim sentiments, Murray continues to write for *The Telegraph*, *The Spectator* and the *Jewish Chronicle*.



ENDNOTES

This article is based on a nationwide poll of 24,953 people between 19 December 2023 and 16 Jan 2024, as well as a poll specifically on the Middle East conflict of 1,589 people between 30 November 2023 and 1 December 2023.

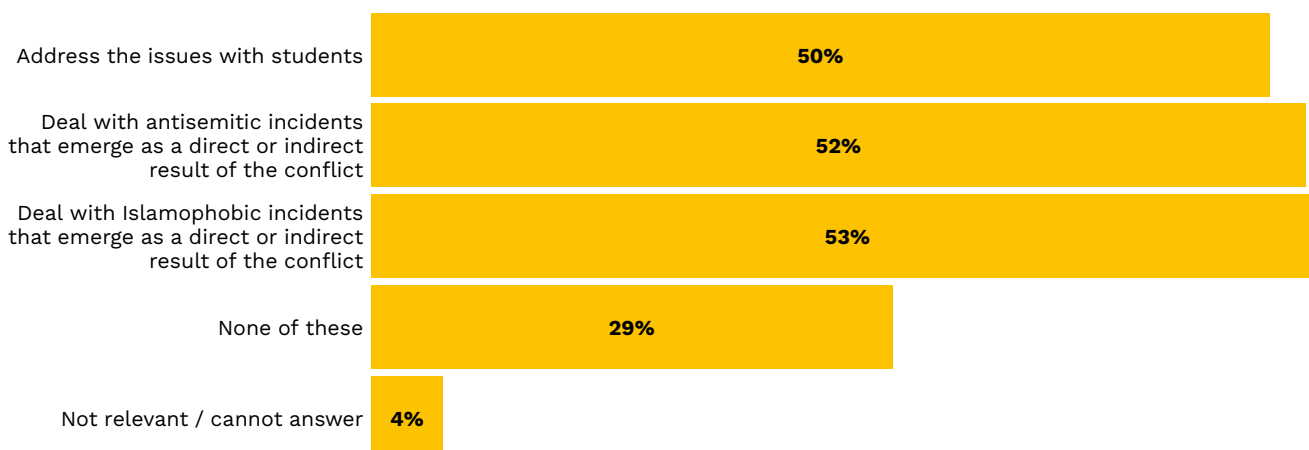
TEACHERS STRUGGLE TO DEAL WITH MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT IN SCHOOLS

The Israel-Palestine conflict is a polarising issue that is creating division within the UK and threatening wider cohesion. MISBAH MALIK reports:



Cardiff Solidarity for Palestine protest, 21 October 2023. Photo: Owen Blacker

Regarding the conflict in the Middle East, are you confident you can:



ANTISEMITIC and Islamophobic hate crimes have skyrocketed, with both Muslim and Jewish communities fearful for their safety. Within wider society, increasingly polarised attitudes towards the conflict are escalating division, with potentially devastating and long-term consequences for community cohesion.

THIS DIVISION IS ALSO PLAYING OUT AMONGST CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN SCHOOLS.

HOPE not hate polled 4,646 secondary school teachers on 29th January 2024. Over half (52%) reported that children in their schools have been discussing the conflict in Israel and Gaza.

Worryingly, approximately one fifth of teachers are documenting negative consequences on pupils' emotions and behaviour as a result of the conflict. Pupils are distressed (22%) and angry (21%), causing arguments with other students (18%). This includes antisemitic (11%) and Islamophobic (7%) behaviour.

These findings are all heightened for schools in deprived areas, measured by the proportion of students eligible to receive free school meals. Here, teachers are almost twice as likely to report arguments between students over the conflict (26%, versus 15% for the most affluent schools).

Similarly explaining the increased reporting in London (26% of teachers in the capital monitored pupils arguing about the conflict, versus the 18% national average), this is likely due to the higher prevalence of ethnic minority students within these schools.

TEACHERS ARE NOT WELL EQUIPPED OR CONFIDENT IN THEIR ABILITY TO DEAL WITH THESE ISSUES.

Schools have a duty to promote social cohesion, and are uniquely placed to do so, but the Israel-Palestine conflict is a clear blocker to this. We have identified a significant gap in teachers' abilities to address the divisions that are arising in classrooms over the conflict.

Only half of teachers polled feel confident in addressing the issues emerging with students. This

confidence is lowest amongst classroom teachers at the lowest seniority.

A significant gap in resources and guidance is causing this. Less than half of the teachers polled (42%) believe their school is willing to appropriately address these emerging issues, and only 11% say their school has the resources to support them in doing so. There is a lack of support for less senior teachers in particular; only 3% of classroom teachers report having had training to deal with sensitive issues like this.

CRUCIALLY, THIS IS A TIME SENSITIVE ISSUE.

The rifts being created between students are self-reinforcing, as like any divisive issue they reward increasingly extreme positioning. The longer this issue is left untreated, the less effective nuanced and collaborative discussions required to mediate tensions become. This will have long-term consequences on interpersonal relationships between students, and cohesion both within the school and wider community.

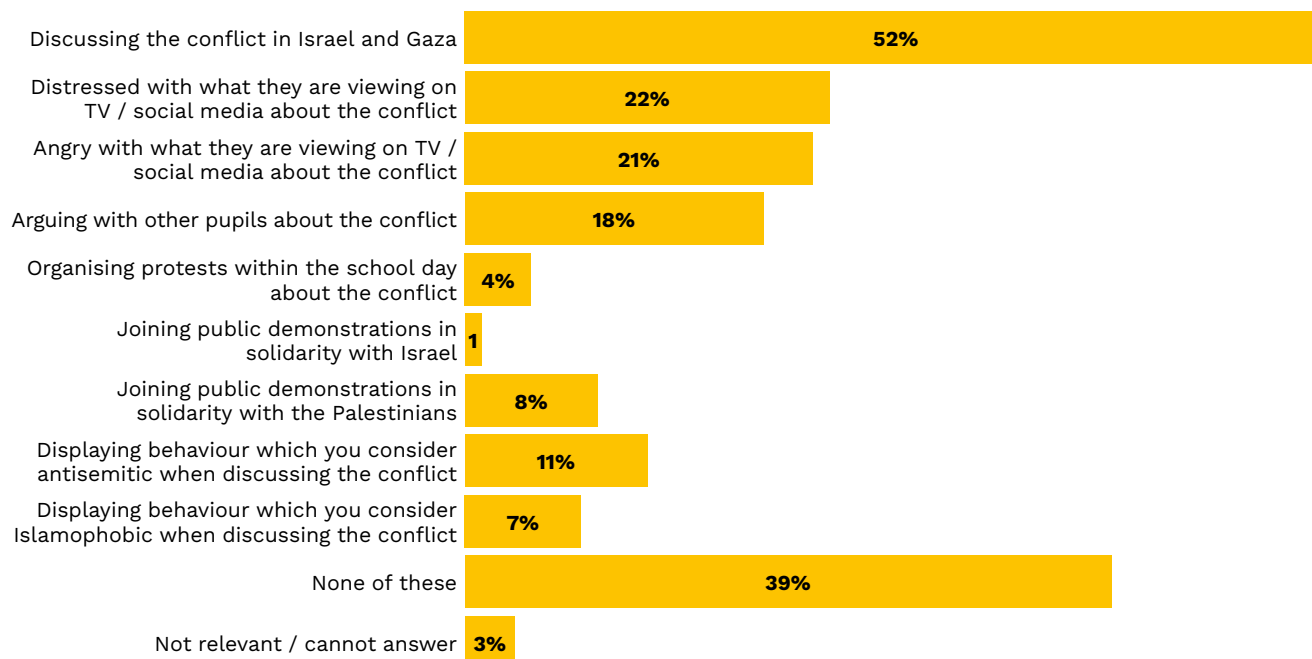
GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE FOR TEACHERS MUST GO FURTHER.

Practical Guidance

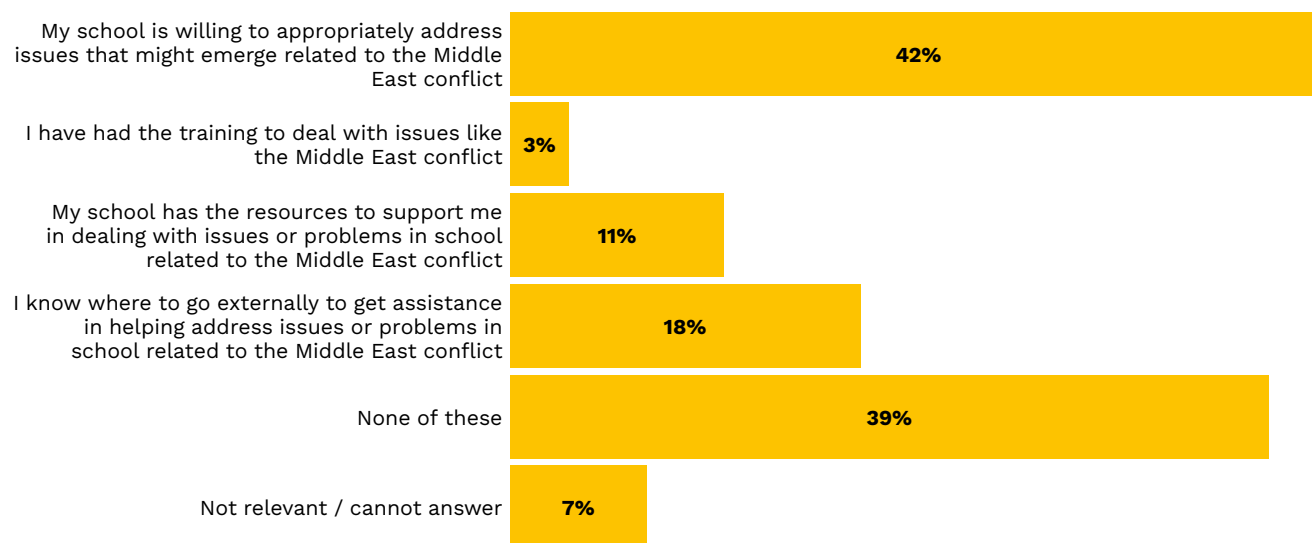
Current advice for schools on how to approach conversations about Israel and Palestine is not sufficient. It signposts resources about extremism and terrorism but notably lacks usable instruction for nuanced and legitimate conversation. It also does not recognise the different ways that these issues are arising in schools, not just in conversations in classrooms, but also through posts on social media, requests for fundraising initiatives, badges being worn, and questions from parents.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that teachers need to have the skills and be empowered to navigate difficult conversations in schools, not just on this current conflict but other divisive issues that increasingly feature in our society. The Government has a duty to provide useable guidance on how teachers should be addressing these issues as they arise in a way that is productive, yet still safe, impartial and adhering to existing duties.

Since 7th October, have you witnessed pupils at your school...



Which of the following are true?



Collaboration

The Department for Education and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities must work collaboratively to tackle this problem together. Any strategy to address cohesion within schools must integrate into the Government's wider strategy of mitigating the impact that the conflict is having on wider community relations.

Drawing on the expertise of organisations like HOPE not hate, which have in-depth understanding of how external events can be exploited for hateful purposes and used to deepen divides, is crucial for developing strategies for intervention. Collaborating with teachers, school leaders, faith groups, and education and cohesion experts, will create targeted and thoughtful solutions.

Investing in skills for dialogue

There is a clear gap in resources available to teach students to have respectful dialogue and civil discourse about sensitive or controversial topics in general, beyond just this specific context. These skills are currently only being practised in secondary school Citizenship classes and occasionally English and PSHE lessons, with very little offered at primary and further education levels.

Funding for relevant and age-appropriate resources, to ensure these skills for productive dialogue are proactively embedded across the curriculum, would better equip students to engage in conversations around sensitive topics.

TWITTER UNDER ELON MUSK: A YEAR IN REVIEW

by **DAVID LAWRENCE**

ON 28 October 2022, the tech billionaire Elon Musk announced his successful acquisition of the social media platform Twitter with the words: “the bird is freed.”

Despite having far fewer active users than rival platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, Twitter plays an outsized role in public discourse due to its widespread use by politicians, media outlets and other influential figures and is considered by Musk to be a “de facto public town square”.

However, he has since used his \$44 billion investment to attempt to “eliminate” a supposed “woke mind virus” that he believes to be “pushing humanity towards extinction”. In the name of this crusade, he has introduced a raft of reckless and apparently ad hoc changes that have altered the platform – now named X – dramatically.

Roughly 80% of Twitter’s staff were sacked or quit in the six months following the Musk acquisition, with its content moderation team replaced almost wholesale by the crowd-sourced “fact-checking” mechanism Community Notes. Altering its “hateful conduct” policy, the company has simultaneously reinstated thousands of previously banned accounts, while Musk himself amplifies far-right conspiracy theories and threatens his critics with legal action.

It is therefore unsurprising that a range of studies have reported a drastic increase in forms of hate speech on the platform, a fact that has alienated many advertisers and reportedly halved the company’s valuation within a single year.

But what does all this mean for the British far right?

BACK WITH A VENGEANCE

Unsurprisingly, the UK’s far-right and conspiracy theorist milieus have rushed to take advantage of the laxer moderation policies, with numerous accounts reappearing after a period in exile for violating Twitter’s policies.

Among the first was the American-British misogynist influencer **Andrew Tate**, who has had at least three Twitter accounts previously suspended. Since his return in November 2022, he has amassed an enormous 8.7 million following, feeding his audience a steady stream of toxic conspiratorial content including, recently, WWII revisionism.

Others include the UK’s leading anti-Muslim activists, most notably the former English Defence League (EDL) leader and serial criminal **Tommy Robinson** (441,000 followers at time of writing), who used the platform to advertise his far-right demonstration in Telford, Shropshire, this January. The former For Britain leader **Anne Marie Waters** (58,000 followers) and the disgraced former reporter **Katie Hopkins** (one million followers) have also been permitted back. Meanwhile, **Britain First** (67,000 followers), a far-right group notorious for harassing asylum seekers at their accommodation sites, has returned alongside its leaders **Paul Golding** (170,000 followers) and **Ashlea Simon** (79,000 followers).

Policies appear to have been unevenly applied. Some well-known, overtly fascist accounts that initially returned – such as the official account of **Patriotic Alternative**, the UK’s premier neo-Nazi group, and its leaders **Mark Collett** and **Laura Towler** – were soon rescinded. However, figures of comparable extremism, such as the white nationalist **Colin Robertson** (AKA Millennial Woes – 31,000 followers) and the pseudonymous fascist **Morgoth** (28,000 followers), have been permitted to remain.

Meanwhile **David Icke** (599,000 followers), the UK’s most infamous conspiracy theorist, has resumed his campaign of COVID-19 disinformation and antisemitism on the platform. The British conspiracist **Martin Geddes** (170,000 followers) was also reinstated alongside many of his fellow promoters of QAnon, a conspiracy movement that flourished on social media in the run up to the 2020 US Presidential Election.

Notably, the large majority of the accounts mentioned above have taken advantage of Musk’s paid “X Premium” service, which has replaced the “legacy” verification system previously used to denote the authenticity of an account. Alongside a veneer of legitimacy, the service algorithmically boosts the content of those willing to pay. For a time, Britain First even held an “official organisation” gold check mark, considered by Golding to be “a huge boost to our credibility”.

Significantly, verified users can even receive a share in ad revenue. For example, in July 2023, Tate claimed to have received over \$20,000 from the platform. As the American neo-Nazi Lucas Gage told Mark Collett in November, before his eventual suspension: “I get paid to red pill [radicalise] people. I’m getting paid by impressions. So last month I made \$900 on X, red pill. That I never thought I’d ever see.”



“RED PILLED” ELON

Just as concerning as the output of far-right extremists is that of Musk himself. Despite his voiced intention to transform X into “the best source of truth in the world”, the billionaire appears to be remarkably rash with regards to amplifying misinformation to his enormous 170 million following.

This includes conspiratorial content. For example, in November 2023 Musk promoted the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory, a groundless partisan smear that alleges that influential figures in the Democratic Party ran an occult child sex ring from a Washington DC pizza restaurant (he has since deleted the post). Pizzagate was a precursor to QAnon, a movement Musk has directly signalled towards.



In September, he responded to a post claiming that the billionaire philanthropist George Soros was leading an “invasion” of “illegal immigrants” into Europe, writing that “The Soros organization appears to want nothing less than the destruction of western civilization.” Soros has long been a target for

antisemitic abuse, including versions of the “White Genocide” conspiracy theory that alleges that Jews are encouraging immigration into the West in order to undermine white populations.

In November, Musk replied “You have said the actual truth” to a user who claimed that “Jewish communities [sic]” have been “pushing” “hatred against whites”, also making reference to “hordes of minorities” that are “flooding their country”. Musk later called the tweet the “dumbest” that he’s ever done.



Musk has also engaged in dialogue with notorious extremists on his platform. For example, after the reinstatement of **Alex Jones** (2.1 million followers), the USA's most infamous conspiracy theorist, in December 2023, Musk participated in a lengthy live-streamed chat on X that included Jones, Tate and the American far-right activists **Laura Loomer** (848,000 followers) and **Jack Posobiec** (2.4 million followers).

While Musk claims to be “against anti-Semitism of any kind”, his actions have been praised by the far right across the globe, many of whom believe that they have an ally in the world's richest individual. Some conspiracy theorists remain highly dubious of Musk, particularly after his visit to Auschwitz this January (Icke said of the trip: “It would take more courage not to [visit Auschwitz] given his owners”). Nonetheless, many have celebrated his widening of “the Overton window” – the boundaries of acceptable debate – as a watershed event. In the words of Mark Collett:

“he’s tweeting about the way people from the Jewish community use their power over white people, and their influence has a negative effect on white people [...] did you ever think things would advance this far, when we’d end up with the richest man on the planet buying a social media platform, then using it to talk about Jewish power, or Zionist power?”



A “FREE-FOR-ALL HELLSCAPE”?

On purchasing Twitter, Musk assured advertisers that the platform “obviously cannot become a free-for-all hellscape”. However, research from a variety of academics, watch dogs and news outlets have reported a sharp increase in hate speech and disinformation on the platform since the acquisition.

For example, research from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) between June 2022 and February 2023 found that antisemitic tweets doubled after Musk's takeover. In March 2023, BBC analysis of more than 1,100 previously banned accounts found that “a third appeared to violate Twitter's own guidelines”, that over 270 “have spread misinformation, mainly about elections and Covid vaccines”, and that nearly 190 promoted “hate and violence, including depictions of rape as well as abuse directed at women and the LGBT community”.

Twitter has long been used by reporters, commentators and others as a means of gathering live updates on, and reactions to, world events. However, the open nature of the platform also enables the easy insertion of disinformation and hate into mainstream conversation, and the new “Community Notes” system appears woefully inadequate to dealing with this problem. A notable recent example was the flood of false information that followed the 7 October Hamas attacks on Israel and the ensuing war in the region,

including material intended to spark hatred against both Jews and Muslims. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reported that antisemitic content surged by more than 900% on X following the attacks.

Despite claiming to be a defender of “free speech”, Musk has repeatedly threatened critics with legal action. For example, he has initiated lawsuits against both the Center For Countering Digital Hate and Media Matters for their analysis of hateful content on the platform.

Musk has also threatened legal action against the ADL, and notably endorsed the “#BanTheADL” campaign launched by the Irish white nationalist and self-described “raging anti-semite” **Keith O'Brien** (AKA Keith Woods – 168,000 followers). Bizarrely, Musk has blamed the ADL itself for anti-Jewish hatred on the platform he owns, writing: “The ADL, because they are so aggressive in their demands to ban social media accounts for even minor infractions, are ironically the biggest generators of anti-Semitism on this platform!”



A DANGEROUS GAME

Of course, toxic content is hardly unique to X. All major social media platforms have endemic issues with antisemitism, hate speech and other online harms and many have been disastrously slow in taking action on these issues. This includes Twitter prior to Musk's takeover. However, Musk has undone much of the limited progress the platform had made, with terrible and potentially ruinous results.

On X, the far right have detected greater opportunities to propagate, to falsify, to recruit and to organise, with fewer consequences. For some such users, verification offers additional credibility and potentially even a source of income. Meanwhile, Musk's own actions have emboldened many far-right activists and legitimised some of their talking points.

We have previously highlighted the attempts of extremists to establish bespoke “alt-tech” media platforms with few moderation policies, including the Twitter clones Gab and Parler, but most have failed to get off the ground. Now, many extremists believe that they have a home on Twitter itself.

This is an unsettling realisation as we enter the biggest election year in world history, with more than two billion people across 50 countries, including the UK, the US, India set to go to the polls in 2024. The stakes of viral misinformation are potentially greater than ever.

FASCIST FIGHT CLUBS



PATRIK HERMANSSON

THE INTERNATIONAL trend of fascist martial arts clubs has come to Britain. In May 2023, a group using the name Active Club Scotland (ACS) posted its first propaganda video. HOPE not hate can reveal that the secretive group has members who have made bomb threats and marched with the now-banned nazi terror group National Action. Other groups in the UK are simultaneously incorporating elements of the international Active Club movement.

Small fascist martial arts training groups going by the name “Active Clubs” have been promoted since 2017 by American far-right activist Robert Rundo. The concept has its origins in the Rise Above Movement, a far-right street-fighting group in California. Since then, Active Clubs have sprung up across the US and Europe, forming a decentralised network without a central leadership. Through online channels on platforms such as Telegram, followers are encouraged to start their own clubs. Members attempt to keep

anonymous, blurring their faces and identifying features in all videos and images.

Far-right martial arts and fighting clubs have previously been active in the UK. For example, White Stag Athletic Club was exposed by HOPE not hate in 2022, collapsing after its leader was arrested and convicted for terror offences, and Sigurd Legion was active in 2014-16 and operated with a similar philosophy. However Active Club Scotland is the first explicit branch of the Active Club network in the UK.

The club has trained and recorded propaganda videos for its Telegram channel at the commercial mixed martial arts (MMA) gym Evo Gym in Stirling, where two of its members, one of which is Shaun Caldwell (AKA Shaun McAlonan), also regularly work out. When HOPE not hate contacted the gym for a comment on the club recording videos on their premises the owner defended ACS, saying that “it doesn’t look like far-right propaganda to me, it’s just guys training” and claiming that he has known one of the clubs members “for years”.

Active Clubs aim to recruit young men by giving them a way to channel their beliefs into something tangible offline. The concept directly challenges what they see as an increasingly passive far-right movement and seeks to exploit a feeling of impatience with online activism. Active Clubs often deride existing fascist groups and present themselves as an elite force at the forefront of the movement.

The aim is to increase the combat readiness of its members for an imagined future marked by violent conflict between ethnic groups, or even a possible fascist revolution. The expectation of violent conflict seeps through all messaging from the Active Clubs. “Those who bleed more in training bleed less in battle,” an American club posted on its Telegram channel in January. An oft-repeated slogan is to “awaken the warrior spirit”. This is a call to violence and discipline for a coming far-right mass movement that Rundo believes is around the corner.

Another central theme in Active Club communications is the idea that physical exercise and hardship are necessary to prove their nationalist beliefs and to fulfil the hypermasculine ideal. Developing physical strength and a capacity for violence is perceived to be contributing to the far-right movement overall, even if their direct political activism is minimal.

The groups are encouraged to downplay their politics to the wider world and instead focus on camaraderie between men and the benefits of physical fitness, encapsulated in their motto: “tribe and train”. ACS’s first Telegram message read:

“We are not about politicking or engaging in the current nonsense plaguing the right in our nation, the soul [sic] aim is to create a strong band of brothers to tribe and train”



Active Club Scotland members

The call is not applied in practice. While direct calls to violence and terrorism have been criticised by leading members of the network, most clubs, including ACS, continue to make their politics explicit through the use of clear fascist imagery and slogans, as well as defacing anti-fascist and progressive stickers and posters. ACS frequently forwards messages referencing the white supremacist slogan the “14 Words” on its Telegram channel.

ACTIVE CLUB SCOTLAND

Key members of ACS are long-term far-right activists. The group’s Glasgow-based leader, Scott Cowan, has attended multiple anti-migrant demonstrations organised by Patriotic Alternative in Erskine, Renfrewshire, over the last year and was previously



Active Club Scotland training in Stirling

Peter Stewart and Scott Cowan at anti-migrant demonstration in Erskine.



involved in the Scottish Defence League (SDL), a more overtly fascistic sister organisation to the English Defence League, as far back as 2009. Cowan is also a member of the nazi biker club Totenkopf MCC based in East Kilbride, a group named after the skull symbol used by Hitler's Schutzstaffel (SS), which the club also uses on its patches. The club's nazi sympathies are open. In one photo, Cowan and other members pose behind a version of the NSDAP flag with a Totenkopf in its centre. In another, Cowan wears a Blood Drop Cross of the Ku Klux Klan on his leather vest, along with a Confederate flag facemask and other white supremacist symbols.

Another member of ACS is Peter Stewart. Stewart has attended at least one anti-migrant demonstration in Erskine alongside Cowan, and is involved in Blood & Honour, the UK's nazi punk scene. Notably, Stewart also marched with National Action (NA) in the group's demonstration in Darlington, County Durham, in November 2016. HOPE not hate photographed Stewart holding a large flag bearing NA's symbol. NA was a nazi network proscribed under anti-terror legislation by then-Home Secretary Amber Rudd just one month after the march in Darlington. A number of NA activists continued to organise despite the ban and one prominent ex-member, Jack Renshaw, hatched a plot to murder a Labour MP with a machete in 2017.

Paul Illingworth is a body builder and member of ACS. Like Stewart, he has links to Blood & Honour. An



Shaun Caldwell in a skull mask

ardent antisemite, Illingworth bragged online about shouting "Sieg Heil" while on a holiday in Berlin in 2017 and he has shared Holocaust denial videos by well-known denier Bishop Richard Williamson.

Several members of ACS have links to Patriotic Alternative (PA). Scott Conner from Glasgow was a prominent member of PA Scotland, prior to the branch breaking away to form the Homeland Party. HOPE not hate has previously exposed Conner for his extreme beliefs. He has privately professed the view that "Big banks and the Jew owns [sic] the United States". He also carries a deep hatred of black people, whom he describes as being "naturally very hostile towards other groups, Mentally retarded and are overly emotional. N****r is gonna n*g".

VIOLENT PASTS

A core component of the Active Club worldview is a narrative of white victimhood and attack from political opponents. These stories help motivate recruits, direct anger and empower members by making them feel like they are taking action. It also justifies violence in return. Messages by ACS make it clear that the capacity for violence is a central element of its organising. In June 2023, Scott Conner challenged members of Proud Boys Scotland on Telegram to a fight and said they would "learn the difference between an active club and a drinking club".

Members of ACS have a history of making violent threats as well as practising martial arts, as have many others in the Active Club network internationally. The Rise Above Movement described itself as the "premier MMA club of the Alt-Right" and the Active Club network has internationally organised MMA tournaments. However, their violence is not limited to the ring. Rundo was convicted for assaulting a police officer at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, an event at which the anti-fascist protester Heather Heyer was murdered. Rundo also has a conviction for travelling to political rallies to incite violence in 2018.



Peter Stewart
in Darlington,
County Durham in
November 2016

Shaun Caldwell is a former Patriotic Alternative activist and a member of ACS. Caldwell has, according to *The Ferret*, applied to the army reserves and wrote online in August 2021: “I have served and am serving again soon.” Caldwell has posted photos of himself making a nazi salute and posing with a sword and has also stated that he is ready for “guerrilla warfare” and claimed to have a “militia” consisting of “ex forces” men in Forth Valley. According to his own Telegram messages he “[u]sed to do a tonne of competitive martial arts”. ACS has trained at Caldwell’s regular gym in Stirling.

Member John Montgomery from Greenock was jailed for two and a half years for making bomb threats and death threats against Scottish Socialist Party activists in 2007. Montgomery also had material from violent nazi group Combat 18, including posters on his walls. Like Cowan and Stewart, Montgomery has links to the Scottish Defence League and attended a small demonstration organised by the SDL, alongside the National Action splinter group Scottish Dawn, in Alloa in March 2017.

INSPIRED OTHERS

Active Clubs are a clear example of the ongoing trend of physical fitness and building combat readiness in the far-right. But Active Club-like elements have also been incorporated into existing far-right organisations that similarly idealise hypermasculinity and seek to build a capacity for violence.

The British Movement (BM) is one of the few openly nazi groups still active in the UK today. Founded in 1968, it is currently led by Steve Frost and Benny Bullman. After a long period of little activity, the organisation has in recent years become more active, including opening a gym for training martial arts in Manchester in late 2023. In one of its blogs, the group explains the development in a similar way to the

Active Club network, claiming to reject “the easy life of sitting in front of the TV on cold winter nights”.

The gym is run by ex-military John O’Brien from Lancashire. O’Brien was convicted of involvement in the Dover riots in 2016, during which he was filmed attacking people with a wooden pole. Similarly to ACS members, O’Brien also has a connection to Blood & Honour, and has acted as a bodyguard for its members.

In recent years, Patriotic Alternative has also sought to combine traditional activism with elements from the Active Club network through its “PA Fitness” subgroup, with ACS members Caldwell and Conner both having attended PA Fitness training sessions.

White Stag Athletic Club (WSAC), an Active Club-inspired hiking and martial arts club, also had links to PA Fitness, especially its Telegram chat group. WSAC collapsed after its leader, Ashley Podsiad-Sharp, was arrested and later convicted on terrorism offences.

Another example is Vanguard Britannica, which has been active in the UK since 2022. The group engages in traditional activism such as sticker and banner drops over highways, often with antisemitic messages. However, the group has increasingly adopted Active Club elements and now frequently organises martial art training sessions with its members. The group’s members have also met up with ACS and have connections with the international Active Club network.

The growing Active Club network shows that fitness and self-improvement is a powerful organising tool. It allows members to associate actual positive physical improvements to fascist ideology. Moreover, the focus on violence makes Active Clubs a direct threat. The fantasies of a violent future can motivate violence against its political opponents and minorities, not just in the future but today.

LENNON'S DODGY BUSINESS DEALINGS

NICK LOWLES and JOE MULHALL

HOPE NOT HATE is writing to HMRC, the tax authority, to demand an investigation into the business affairs of Stephen Lennon, AKA Tommy Robinson, and his former wife Jenna Lennon. This comes after our own examination has found that despite running multiple businesses over the last six years, potentially bringing in millions of pounds, none of these companies appear to have filed a single tax return. In fact, all seemingly closed down shortly before a tax return was required or action taken against them for late submission.

In May 2017 Jenna Lennon, Stephen's then wife, set up Lennon Consultancy Ltd, which cited its purpose at Companies House as book publishing. According to three people who worked with Lennon during this period, as much as £2m came through this account over the next 18 months. In March 2021, *The Independent* published financial documents which showed that he received more than £400,000 during a three-month period that year. And this was before Lennon was arrested for interfering with a court case in Leeds, and his huge Free Tommy demonstrations in London.

On 1 November 2018, Jenna Lennon stood down as the director of Lennon Consultancy Ltd and was replaced by Stephen Lennon, who also became the company's sole shareholder. Four days later, on 5 November, Lennon stepped down from the company and Jenna was reinstated as the sole director and shareholder.

Literally days later, an Extraordinary Resolution was passed to wind up the company under the 1986 Insolvency Act. For a company that had raked in as much as £2 million over the preceding 18 months, the application for insolvency was a strange turn of events.

The very day that Stephen Lennon relinquished control of Lennon Consultancy, 5 November 2018, he and Jenna set up Bubba Media, which described its business as a "news agency". This was to be a short-term business, as within six months the company had been dissolved, but not before Hope Consultants (later to become Hope and Pride Ltd) had been formed, with Jenna Lennon as sole director.

Like Lennon Consultancy and Bubba Media before it, Hope and Pride Ltd employed Stephen Lennon as a paid consultant and this was the vehicle through which

he conducted his political and media operations for the next 18 months. In early April 2019, Lennon launched TR News, as a right-wing media operation, but this was merely the trading name for Hope and Pride. A few weeks later, he announced his candidature for the 2019 European elections. Again, donations for this campaign went to Hope and Pride Ltd.

In February 2021, with Stephen facing a very costly libel action and struggling with drug addiction, the Lennons divorced, Jenna claiming that her husband's political activities were putting her and her children at huge risk.

Three months later, in May 2021, and just a few weeks after Lennon's libel trial, Jenna began the process of closing down Hope and Pride Ltd.

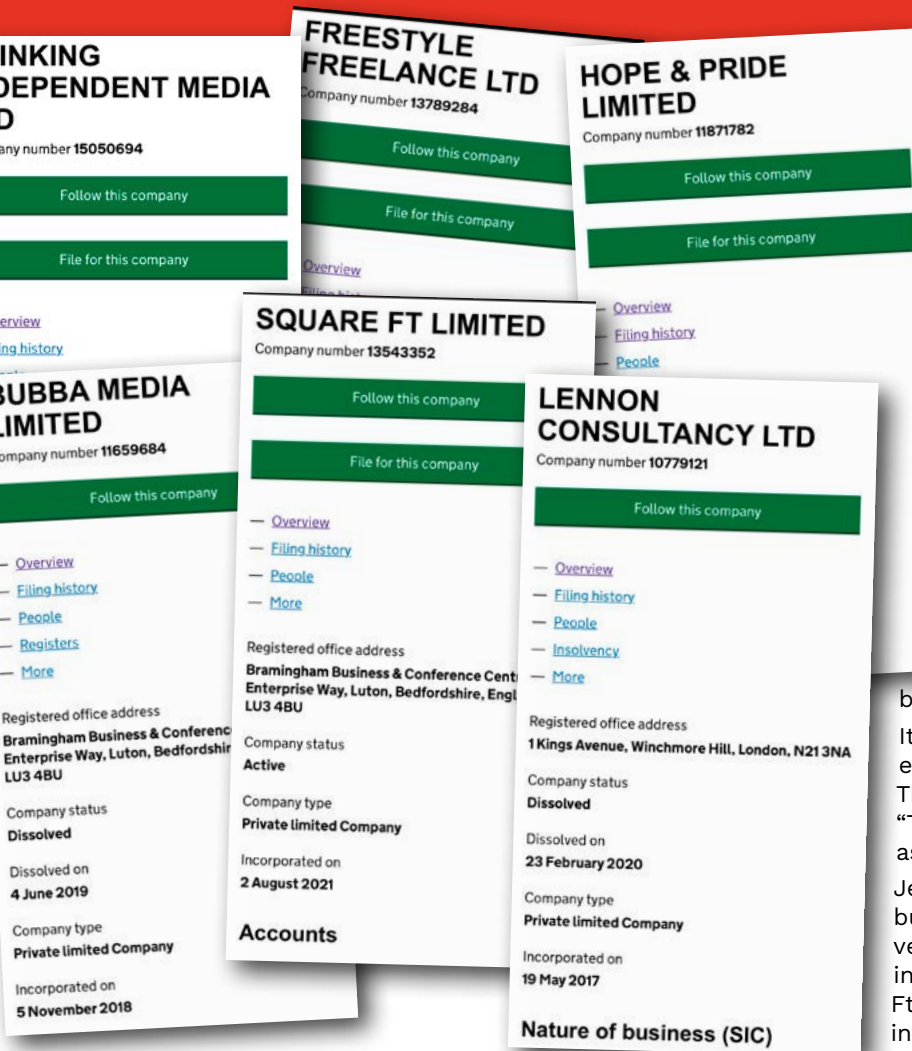
If it appeared that Jenna Lennon had grown tired of Stephen's political and extra-curricular activities, then this proved to be very short-lived. Just six weeks after Companies House posted up the first notice to close Hope and Pride Ltd, a new filing was made suspending the striking off action.

Furthermore, on 2 August 2021, Jenna Lennon set up Square FT Ltd, with herself as the sole director and person with significant control, which, according to its website, provided "solutions for independent and freelance journalists".

Despite claiming to be a resource for journalists, Stephen Lennon is the only identifiable person who has ever used – or benefited from – Square FT services. All rather strange given that one of the main reasons for the divorce was how Lennon's political work was adversely impacting on Jenna and her family.

On 13 October, as Lennon was heading to Westminster Magistrates Court to receive the verdict in a trial where he had been accused of stalking the then-*Independent* journalist Lizzie Dearden, an email went out to supporters asking for money to help pay his legal costs. The appeal was hosted on the Square FT website.

A few weeks later, in early December 2021, Lennon announced his first *Rape of Britain* film, which claimed to identify Muslim groomers of white girls in Telford, and planned to release it alongside a demonstration in the town. Over the next few weeks a flurry of appeals for funds went out by email via his remaining social media outlets, GETTR and Telegram. He asked for financial assistance to support his investigation, to supposedly help relocate survivors and their families,



and to pay for the cost of security and surveillance. Each of these appeals led people to a donation page on the Square FT website.

All the different appeals he sent out between October 2021 and January 2022 seem to have gone into the same bank account as the appeal on the Square FT website to fund general work – and that account was simply “Donate TR”.

Shortly before Christmas 2021, Stephen Lennon began telling his supporters that he had been offered a job with a new independent media company, Urban Scoop, which he claimed would provide a monthly salary and support him in his work. Lennon only began promoting Urban Scoop, and its all-important fundraising page, after *The Independent* contacted both him and Jenna over allegations that it was Jenna who actually ran Square FT.

While Lennon declined to comment, he immediately removed a link to Square FT from the header of his GETTR account and then, a day later, replaced it with a link to the donation page hosted on the Urban Scoop website.

Urban Scoop is the trading name for Freestyle Freelance Ltd, incorporated on 8 December 2021 by Adam Geary, one of Lennon’s oldest and closest friends. Geary was listed as the sole director of the company.

On paper, Urban Scoop was now the vehicle for Lennon’s political and media operations, but donations via the Urban Scoop website and its associated emails appeared to be going into an account named “TR Donate” – the same account that receives donations to Square Ft Ltd. Furthermore, the address of the

accounts linked to the Urban Scoop and Square Ft Ltd fundraising both used the same address on notifications sent to people donating – suggesting that it was actually one and the same bank account.

In November 2023, in a modus operandi similar to businesses set up by the Lennons, Adam Geary began the process of closing down Freestyle Freelance Ltd. This came just weeks after the company was supposed to have filed its accounts. On 5 December, an insolvency order was issued and a company meeting was held 10 days later to formally shut down the business. Interestingly, the liquidator appointed to oversee the closing of the company is the same name regularly used by Jenna Lennon when her various businesses have closed.

It would appear that Geary planned for this eventuality. On 4 August 2023, Geary set up Thinking Independent Media Ltd, which cites “Television programming and broadcast activities” as its business with Companies House.

Jenna Lennon has also been busy on the business front. Despite it supposedly being the vehicle for Stephen Lennon’s political activities in the autumn of 2021, Jenna declared Square Ft Ltd dormant in a filing with Companies House in the spring of 2023, suggesting that he had ceased trading in any meaningful way long before

its accounts were due in August 2022. As a result, the company was exempt from producing normal accounts.

The strike-off action against Hope and Pride Ltd, initiated in May 2021 and then suspended six weeks later, was formally discontinued in February 2023, as it appears Jenna Lennon reactivated the company. However, five months later, yet another strike-off order was issued and last October a company meeting was convened to formally wind up the business.

An accompanying statement, issued by the same liquidator who was dealing with Geary’s company, suggested that Hope and Pride Ltd had debts with HMRC of £317,423, suggesting turnover in excess of £1.5m.

The way that Stephen Lennon, Jenna Lennon and now Adam Geary have run their business affairs clearly need to be investigated. It seems highly dubious that none of their companies – which have purportedly brought in millions – have filed one single tax return with Companies House. At the very least, HMRC needs to investigate.

In one final twist to this story, Lennon continues to send out emails to his supporters through Urban Scoop, with Freestyle Freelance Ltd – a company which is now in liquidation – appearing as the company name at the bottom of each email. Donations via his emails and the Urban Scoop website also appear to go the same bank account – TR Donate – that they always have done, once again suggesting the money is being funnelled into the bank account of another company, which in itself suggests fraudulent behaviour.

THE SILENT PARTNER

NICK LOWLES and JOE MULHALL expose Stephen Lennon's lucrative clothing business

NEW EVIDENCE has emerged linking Stephen Lennon to a clothing company which, according to its latest accounts, has over £350,000 of assets.

Casual Basement is an online clothing company specialising in high-end Italian fashion, such as Stone Island and CP menswear, clothing most associated with football hooligans. The company regularly advertises on clothing worn by professional boxers and MMA fighters.

Lennon has repeatedly denied a link to the company, but new evidence strengthens our belief that he has a financial interest in it.

In 2018 and 2019, Lennon posted up several videos promoting the clothing business and encouraging his supporters to buy from the company. While he was to later claim that he was just helping out a friend, many people were not convinced.

Now, HOPE not hate has obtained a voice recording where Lennon admits to having been involved in setting up a clothing business and, separately, a video where he is selling goods to a friend and then locking up the Casual Basement warehouse himself. These bits of information, coupled with the testimony of four people with first-hand knowledge of Lennon's business dealings, mean that we are absolutely confident that he is involved in the clothing company.

Casual Basement is the trading name of Designer Labels Direct Int. Ltd (DLDI), a company that was set up in October 2018 by Karen and James Benton. It was registered to a business address in Shoreditch, east London.

On 14 November 2018, DLDI changed its registered address to Bramingham Business and Conference Centre on Enterprise Way in Luton, the same address as six of Lennon's companies. Five days later, on 19 November 2018, the registered address was moved back to Shoreditch. Karen and James Benton declined to comment on their ownership of DLDI and any possible connection to Lennon.

Casual Basement now operates out of a warehouse on an industrial estate in north Bedfordshire, very close to a property Lennon claimed he has rented in the last few years. It was previously based at Enterprise House, Wrest Park, Silsoe, a stone's throw from where Lennon used to live.

In its last filed accounts (year to 31 October 2022), the company listed its assets at over £580,000, with capital and reserves at £254,000.

Several high-profile boxers and MMA fighters have promoted Casual Basement, including highly rated former world champion Jordan Reynolds, who has won all seven of his professional fights.

In January 2021, ownership of DLDI was taken over by Samville Ltd, a company run by Andre Samson, arguably Lennon's oldest and closest friend. In his book *Enemy of the State*, Lennon writes about how he and Samson bought a Porsche when they were teenagers.

Around the early years of the EDL, Samson and Lennon were directors of Maximum Trading Ltd, which declared its business as "development and sell real estate", though at slightly different times. Years later, Samson worked for Lennon at Rebel Media, the right-wing Canadian outfit, where he was paid £3,000 a month.

Samson, then operating under the name Andre Major (believed to be his mother's maiden name) left Rebel at the end of January 2018, a week before Lennon himself packed it in. Andre Samson has denied that Lennon had any financial stake in the company. "I am 100% owner of my business and I can categorically confirm that Stephen Lennon has no financial interest in my business and never has," he told HOPE not hate.

Stephen Lennon has also denied any connection to Casual Basement.

However, these denials appear to be contradicted by Lennon's own actions and boasting. In November 2018, he performed a livestream from the Casual Basement warehouse, where he claimed that he promoted the company to his supporters in return for free clothes.

Andre Samson played down his connections to Lennon, but in fact had been working for Rebel Media. Emails and WhatsApp messages obtained by HOPE not hate





prove that Samson, who went under the name Andre Major, was a crucial part of Lennon's operation. A photo of Andre Major and Lennon together in the Rebel Media office prove that Major and Samson are one and the same person.

The new evidence seals the deal. In a recording first published by Clown World, a former associate of Lennon's but now an arch critic, Lennon boasts to Lucy Brown about helping to set up a clothing business.

"I'm actually fucking working in this clothing business we've set up," Lennon says laughing. He goes on to explain that he has to be at the clothing unit to let the electrician in before heading into London to meet his solicitor.

This recording was from early 2019, just weeks after Casual Basement had been formed.

HOPE not hate has also obtained a video of Lennon selling some Stone Island and CP clothes to a few men and then personally locking up the Casual Basement warehouse.

This additional information confirms what HOPE not

hate has heard from several people, including the former partner of Lennon's cousin, Kev Carroll.

"Kev was quite open that Lennon ran the place," she told HOPE not hate. "He picked out a new Stone Island jacket from there and of course he didn't have to pay for it."

"I know that is his baby," she added. "They were all so secretive. Kev used to remind me that no-one could know it was his. He just got people to run it."

Even Jenna Lennon's father has boasted to friends about his son-in-law owning a clothing outlet which brought in thousands every month.

Stephen Lennon's name does not appear on the company paperwork, but then it never does. For the last fifteen years, from the tanning salon, which was fronted by Jenna Lennon, to the plumbing business, which only had his father's name on company papers, and more recently his political and media interests, Lennon has always remained in the shadows, quietly controlling things. In the business world it is called a "silent partner".

BLACKPOOL NAZI JAMBOREE REVEALED

NICK LOWLES

BRITAIN'S MOST prominent nazi music promoter is putting on a two-day gig in Blackpool in August, HOPE not hate can exclusively reveal.

Dubbed "The Real Rebellion", the event will be held over the weekend of 2-3 August and will include bands from the US, Germany, Spain, Canada and of course the UK.

The event is being put on by Chad Charles, a veteran British nazi, under the name of Street Sounds Promotions, and tickets are selling for £40 for the weekend or £25 for a day ticket.

Among the bands playing will be the Canadian band Battlefront, which describes itself as "Nationalist skinhead", which of course means a nazi band. Its album, *In The Storm*, has a German soldier throwing a hand grenade on the cover and includes songs such as "Aryan Soldiers", "Pride is our Will" and "String 'em Up".

Another nazi band playing is Combat BC, from Germany, who have played in the UK on several occasions. They are likely to be accompanied to Blackpool by a sizeable contingent of German nazi skinheads.

Other bands playing are Wellington Arms, from the US, and Thumbscrew, a white-power band from Spain.

Wellington Arms is another white-power band. Formed in 2008, its frontman is Eric Scott, a veteran nazi skinhead, who had previously ran a band called Violent Retaliation. Interviewed in a Czech nazi skinhead magazine many years later, Scott describes dropping out of the music scene for a number of years.

"I was much too busy getting crunked and tooled up with the mob to care about music," he said. "Picking up a guitar wasn't as nearly as fun as cracking somebody in the jaw with some steel and I don't need

Chad Charles,
veteran
British nazi



a rock ‘n’ roll life to hook up with the birds so it was whatever.” he said.

The British bands playing in Blackpool are no less extreme. The lead singer of London Breed is Brad Hollamby, formerly of the infamous nazi band Squadron. The drummer of the band is Lemmy, another veteran nazi.

Code One is not an openly nazi band, but several members have long histories in the Blood & Honour scene.

REBELLION FESTIVAL

The Real Rebellion is set to coincide with Rebellion, a four-day punk festival being held at the Winter Garden from 1 to 4 August. More than 300 bands will perform on six stages, and there will also be a literary festival and a punk art exhibition.

This long-standing punk festival has no political agenda and actually includes several well-known anti-racist performers, such as the Tom Robinson Band.

Chad Charles will no doubt attempt to claim that The Real Rebellion is merely a non-political Oi/punk add-on to the larger festival, though he might have a hard time convincing people.

In addition to the bands, a significant proportion of the several hundred attending will be nazi skinheads who would more commonly be involved in the now-declining Blood and Honour music scene.

Charles is himself an unabashed nazi, having been involved in the scene for almost 40 years. Before setting up Street Sounds Promotions, Charles put on gigs through Punishment Block, which he ran with veteran C18 nazi Al Mounsey. The two men eventually fell out, with Mounsey increasingly frustrated at Charles for organising events without informing him.

Mounsey died of cancer last year, but not before he began to question the politics he had supported for over 40 years.

Despite being on benefits, Charles runs a high profile nazi mail order business – Streetwear Productions, which recently morphed into Street Sounds Productions (SSP).

The Facebook site for SSP leaves little to the imagination. One T-shirt design carries a large picture of the nazi “Totenkopf” (death’s head), while others carry the fascist sunwheel and the alphanumeric code “28”, which refers to Blood and Honour.

One of his latest designs carry the numbers 1, 4, 8, 8. The 1 and 4 refer to the 14 words, a popular white supremacist slogan: “We must secure the existence of



our people and a future for white children.” The 8 and 8 is a commonly used slogan for Heil Hitler.

Charles makes these T-shirts himself and prints them on a machine he has at home.

Quite how he can get away with running a business whilst he and his wife claim benefits is unclear. He was investigated by HMRC early last year and appears to have convinced them that his operation was more of a hobby than a normal business.

While the potential income for Street Sounds Promotions should make it clear this is not a hobby, he is clearly attempting to navigate benefit rules by hiding the amount of money he is making. The Blackpool gig alone should bring in anywhere between £8,000 and £12,000, based on a possible 200-300 attending. On top of that there will be all the merchandise sold.

Charles is organising another gig in May, which he is billing as a birthday bash and selling tickets at £20 each.

To avoid further interest from HMRC, Charles has not registered Street Sounds Promotions as a company with Companies House, and asks people buying tickets to give money to friends and family. In the past he used a PayPal account set up by his wife. Now, people buying tickets for Blackpool are asked to send it to the PayPal account of Jason Boyce, lead singer of Code One.

COMEDIAN

In one further embarrassment to Charles, his son, the comedian and TV presenter Dan Charles, appears to be politically on the left. He has reposted Jeremy Corbyn’s call for a ceasefire in the Gaza conflict, as well as political satire aimed at Suella Braverman, and even posts made by HOPE not hate.

There is no suggestion that Chad Charles’ son agrees with his father’s politics.



ANTI-LGBTQ+

KELLIE-JAY KEEN-MINSHULL

CATEGORY: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVIST

Kellie-Jay Keen-Minshull (AKA Posie Parker) is a British anti-trans activist best known for her t-shirts and stickers with the slogan “adult human female”. Keen-Minshull is a leading voice in the anti-trans movement in the UK and overseas.



She has increasingly supported and aligned herself with the far right, which has similarly targeted trans people in recent years. Keen-Minshull has posted anti-Muslim tweets and expressed admiration for Tommy Robinson. In response, she has been praised by the far right and collaborated with extremist social media influencers. She has appeared on the livestreams of the conspiracy theorist Richie Allen’s channel twice, been interviewed by Laurence Fox, and is a frequent guest on GB News.

Far-right activists have also supported her at her rallies. In September 2022, an event hosted by Keen-Minshull in Brighton was streamed by Hearts of Oak. Members of the Independent Nationalist Network and Alpha Team Assemble also attended.

At a demonstration in Newcastle in January, Lisa Keen-Minshull held a demonstration in Newcastle in January where a speaker named Lisa Morgan referenced Adolf Hitler’s term “the big lie”, drawing a parallel to those supporting trans rights today. Hitler used the term in *Mein Kampf* to agitate against European Jews.

Keen-Minshull also organises demonstrations overseas. In March, a group of nazis from the National Socialist Network, led by Thomas Sewell, attended one of her events in Melbourne, Australia.

FAMILY EDUCATION TRUST

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

Family Education Trust is a campaign group opposing the rights of LGBTQ+ people, especially those of trans people. The group opposes LGBTQ+ education in schools and argues in favour of discriminating against same-sex couples in terms of adoption and access to care. The group supports legislation requiring teachers to “out” trans children to their parents and wants discrimination on the basis of gender identity to not be a hate crime.

The group’s leadership has praised Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. In 2022, the group promoted the anti-Drag Queen Story Hour campaign. In 2023, Harry Miller from Fair Cop and far-right commentator Calvin Robinson spoke at their events.

FAIR COP

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: HARRY MILLER



Fair Cop was established to protect police officers who face disciplinary issues for expressing anti-trans, misogynist and other anti-LGBTQ+ views. It was started in 2019 by former police officer Harry Miller after he was investigated for posting anti-trans views on social media.

In 2023, Fair Cop intervened on behalf of James Goddard, previously an organiser in Patriotic Alternative, after he posted anti-LGBTQ+ rants online and was investigated by the police. Miller was arrested in 2022 after posting a picture of the progress pride flag fashioned into a swastika.

Miller has appeared alongside several far-right activists on social media and offline. In 2020, he spoke at the Hearts of Oak annual conference and was interviewed by Carl Benjamin (AKA Sargon of Akkad) on the Lotus Eaters in 2023.

SCOTTISH FAMILY PARTY

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY

LEADER: RICHARD LUCAS



The Scottish Family Party (SFP) was launched in 2017 by former UKIP candidate Richard Lucas. The party opposes same-sex marriage and many forms of gender equality legislation. It is also strongly anti-abortion and has campaigned vigorously on the issue.

In recent years, the SFP has posted an increasing amount of anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ campaign content on social media. It argues that “Transgender Ideology” is damaging and “confusing children”. However, the party also opposes protections for children. The SFP disagrees with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, saying it undermines the rights of parents. The party argues that parents should be allowed to beat their children. The SFP also opposes hate crime legislation.

SFP received some press attention in 2023 after Niall Fraser represented the group at the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election, receiving just 1% of the vote. He had previously claimed he would “brick up” the entrance of a sexual health facility in Glasgow, and in August was filmed abusing the First Minister Humza Yousaf at a Fringe event, shouting “F*ck you. You are a pestilence on the land.”

The group also has links to the fascist Homeland Party, a group that splintered from Patriotic Alternative last year. In January, Lucas (pictured) was interviewed by Simon Crane, who was then PA’s Scottish organiser and was previously active in the SFP. Crane is now a leading figure in Homeland. Fraser would go on to appear on an official Homeland broadcast in June.



DRAW QUEEN STORY HOUR AND ANTI-LGBTQ+ HATE

DRAW QUEEN Story Hour (DQSH) are events aiming to inspire children to read while teaching lessons on diversity. It started in the US in 2015 and has since spread internationally. DQSH has been dragged into the “culture war” and been increasingly attacked by conservative press as well as far-right groups who seek to capitalise on homophobia and transphobia.

The attacks are part of increasing anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric from the far right.

Anti-LGBTQ+ ideas are deep-rooted in reactionary and far-right milieus. They tend to idealise traditional family structures and binary gender roles, while obsessing over societal decline. DQSH protestors frame themselves as the protectors of innocent children by claiming the events feature overly sexualised content that promotes unhealthy attitudes and even indoctrinates young attendees.

Far-right and conspiracy theory groups have led a vitriolic campaign against DQSH events in the UK since summer 2022. These continued into 2023.



HONOR OAK PROTESTS

The Honor Oak pub in London was the target of the most prolonged anti-DQSH campaign. Primarily led by Turning Point UK, the protest at points turned violent and on one occasion demonstrators broke a window of the pub.

Laurence Fox, who has spewed anti-LGBTQ+ hate online, spoke at one protest in September. James Harvey, who has previously denied the Holocaust and leads the far-right conspiracy theorist group Students Against Tyranny, has also played a key role in the protests.



PATRIOTIC ALTERNATIVE

Patriotic Alternative has been at the forefront of organising anti-DQSH protests over the last two years.



TATE BRITAIN PROTESTS

The largest anti-DQSH protest in the UK took place outside of Tate Britain in London in February. Signs by protesters read “groom dogs not children”. In attendance were several Patriotic Alternative and Homeland activists as well as ardent conspiracy theorists. The infamous Holocaust denier Michèle Renouf also took part.

IDENTITARIANS



IDENTITY ENGLAND

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: CHARLIE FOX

Led by Charlie Fox, Identity England (IE) is a tiny identitarian organisation made up of the few remaining activists from the defunct UK branch of Generation Identity and its now-defunct successor organisation, The Identitarian Movement.

In an attempt to mimic more successful identitarian groups in Europe, IE occasionally performs stunts designed to attract social media coverage. In 2023, the group held a banner outside the offices of MI5 but received no coverage.

IE's few activists are closely associated with Britain First, with Fox accompanying Paul Golding to Warsaw in November for the Polish National Day demonstration.

The group continues to run an active Telegram channel with a little over 3,100 subscribers and maintains a website that is sporadically updated.



GREATER IDENTITARIAN LEGION

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

Greater Identitarian Legion (GIL) emerged in June 2021 and began promoting its stickering actions on Telegram. As its name suggests, GIL is an identitarian group inspired by Generation Identity (GI). However, GIL is virulently anti-LGBT+ and more explicit in its racism than GI. Its leader has written his own self-published book based on the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory.

The group is made up of a tiny handful of activists, whose actions consist of putting up stickers and very occasionally producing leaflets. Activists from GIL have attended far-right-linked demonstrations in 2023.



THE SHIFTING TERRAIN OF ANTI-MIGRANT ACTIVISM IN 2023



MISBAH MALIK and NICK STEVENS

Anti-migrant hate has always been a central part of far-right politics in Britain. It has returned to the top of the extremist agenda with a dramatic increase in the amount of activism across the UK.

Anti-migrant activism rose once again last year; up by over 20% on 2022 which was itself a bumper twelve months for this corner of the movement. Far-right, anti-migrant activism took place on at least 278 days out of 365 in 2023.

Yet this figure still only presents a partial view of the situation. In 2022, visits to sites of temporary accommodation by so-called “migrant hunters”, to film and harass both staff and occupants, made up by far the largest component of this activism, with at least 247 such instances. Meanwhile, the number of demonstrations – generally regarded as the far right’s usual fare – lagged a long way behind, as only eight specifically anti-migrant protests took place that year.

In 2023, however, the huge surge in demonstrations which took place following a riot at the Suites Hotel in Kirkby, Merseyside meant that the split between these two forms of activism came closer to being 50:50. Altogether, there were at least 123 demonstrations, nearly an 18-fold increase on 2022, and 158 “migrant hunter” accommodation visits throughout 2023 as a whole.

In the early part of the year especially, the far right returned to the streets with a frequency not seen for many years. During a period of six weeks until the end of March 2023, the far right were mobilising for demonstrations around the country at a rate of over four a week.

From Kent to Cornwall and from Dorset to Renfrewshire, far-right activists either led campaigns, orchestrated accommodation visits or tried to insert themselves into local opposition movements against plans to house migrants nearby. Some demonstrations were flashes in the pan; mobilisations which either burned brightly for a short period, or struggled to get off the ground at all. Others, however, were much longer, drawn-out affairs, for example in Erskine, where 20 demonstrations took place throughout the year.

In the latter half of 2023, this picture changed once again. The energy and enthusiasm for demonstrations had dissipated, whilst the accommodation visits of the “migrant hunters” became more infrequent.

Taking their place has been a new form of “always-on” protest or “anti-migrant blockades” outside proposed accommodation sites.

SETTING THE SCENE

In June 2023, HOPE not hate researchers David Lawrence and Safya Khan-Ruf analysed how and why anti-migrant activism had exploded in the first half of that year.

They focused on five key points: first, that far-right activists were capitalising on increasingly extreme language from the media and the Conservative Government; second, that there had been a concerted effort on the part of far-right activists to blur the lines between their protests and locally-led

campaigns; third, that after the initial protest boom until March, demonstrations were more spaced out with organisers preferring more time to mobilise activists; fourth, that the demonstrations themselves were smaller but more extreme; and finally, that a constant air of instability hung over the movement, with the smallest spark having the potential to cause a surge in activism.

This attention on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers that was the primary focus of the far right in 2023 was by no means a new phenomenon. Such groups have been a consistent focus for the movement, which are commonly misunderstood as being a major cause of national decline. They are subjected to an array of rhetorical tropes.

These tropes tend to align around particular topics: injustices regarding supposedly preferential treatment provided to migrants over homeless Brits, especially armed forces veterans; the claims of profligate spending on services for migrants by the Government in the context of an economic downturn; the allegedly unique form of sexual threat posed by male migrants towards women and children near accommodation sites; and, increasingly, a supposed “invasion of fighting age men” (a phrase solely reserved by the far right for young Black and Brown men) who together are considered to pose an existential threat to the body politic.

These types of arguments and tropes are ubiquitous across far-right social media, disseminated on their accounts by leading figures in the movement. The spread of these talking points has been facilitated by the twin threat of a Conservative Government increasingly willing to engage in the kind of anti-migrant rhetoric that would ordinarily have been the preserve of the far right, and the normalisation of inflammatory arguments by the mainstream right-wing media.

This is not to say that the far right is satisfied with the Conservative Government and its approach to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. In 2023, the far right was quick to identify what it believed to be a gap between the tough talk of the Government, and the concrete impact on immigration levels, and on cross-Channel migration in particular.

The Government’s proposed policy to send asylum seekers to Rwanda, ruled unlawful by the UK Supreme Court in November 2023 and opposed in the House of Lords in January 2024, has also been met with widespread scepticism amongst the far right. PA’s leader Mark Collett, for example, has described the policy as “a publicity stunt intended to draw attention away from the real issue – record levels of LEGAL migration”, whilst “migrant hunter” Steve Laws has repeatedly criticised the Government for the policy’s cost and ineffectiveness.

Consequently, this has had an impact on the nature and tone of far-right demands. With a Conservative Government considered by the far right as too weak to act on immigration, and with the looming prospect of a new Labour Government in 2024 (which they perceive as weaker still), elements of the anti-migrant movement are becoming more hardline.

Whereas previously there existed a broad acceptance



James Costello and David Adams, Cannock, Staffordshire, 11 March 2023. Picture: HOPE not hate

of “stop the boats” as the principle demand, these elements are hardening their position, resulting in explicit encouragement of activists to shift towards calls for repatriation. Indeed, for a small but growing number of activists in this space, this repatriation demand is beginning to extend beyond refugees, asylum seekers and those who have arrived through irregular means. For these activists, it is increasingly being directed at anyone in the UK who is non-white, indicating the disturbing radicalisation of a corner of the anti-migrant movement.

THE FAR RIGHT AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In order to insert itself into localised opposition to temporary accommodation plans, the far right has sought out opportunities for community engagement. This has been done with the aim of not only influencing local discourse but to conceal its true politics.

For example, Patriotic Alternative and its splinter groups - the Homeland Party and the National Support Detachment (NSD) - have focused on masquerading as members of the “local resistance” so as to blur the lines between their own activities and campaigns led by local residents. In doing so, this has enabled far right activists to portray themselves as “concerned citizens” or as “reflecting grassroots opinion”.

Ordinarily, this approach has tended to follow a similar set of tactics. These have included: disseminating leaflets, infiltrating local community Facebook groups, blending into residents meetings and protests, or establishing their own campaigns which are subsequently made to appear as local community run operations. Altogether, the objective has been, where possible, to dissolve into the background, to steer localised opposition movements in a predetermined direction and to shape the narrative. It has been important, however, for far-right activists to avoid being seen as involved. As such the far right has often

tried to limit its visibility, seeking to avoid those local movements themselves as being called “far right”.

In general, though, this strategy was far from effective. On the one hand, sporadic interactions at a local level did occasionally stir up hate and cause tensions within their target communities. However, on the other hand it was also not uncommon for local people to loudly object to what they perceived as far-right opportunism when it came to hijacking localised opposition groups.

TACTICAL DEVELOPMENT: THE “ALWAYS-ON” DEMONSTRATION

One location in which this tactic was successful in 2023 was Llanelli. Back in 2022, elements of the UK far right were often seen in and around this market town in the south of Wales. The Britain First battle bus had been taken there for a campaign day, whilst the fascists in PA had held multiple leafleting sessions, each time claiming to have distributed hundreds of pieces of material.

However, in May 2023, the news that the Government planned to move asylum seekers into the nearby Stradey Park Hotel spread rapidly around the far right. Whilst local opposition mobilised, far-right activists from outside the area, including several from PA, inserted themselves into activities on the ground. Their involvement ensured that the tone of the campaign became increasingly extreme.

As part of the local opposition to the plans, activists blockaded the hotel’s sole entrance to restrict deliveries of goods and, eventually, people onto the site itself. For a period it was the go-to location, with activists dropping in and out to support and help.

One of the reasons for this tactical shift was that the “demo fever” that had gripped the movement wasn’t sustainable in the long run. A lack of success for the far right demonstrations likely also played a role. By the end of March, the lack of tangible success - i.e.



Alek Yerbury, on an Anti-Immigration Demo in Hull, March 2023

the widespread failure to upend accommodation plans - meant that enthusiasm for the tactic had begun to seep away.

The first sign of the blockade appeared on 6 June, with local residents waking to find several large boulders arranged in front of the site entrance. This was done in such a way as to stop coaches from entering. Gleeful far-right activists shared a clip of the boulders that had originated with PA Wales activists Jeff Marsh. Across social media, Britain First, Tommy Robinson, PA and others all celebrated this escalation of the tactical battle against their enemy.

Whilst demonstrations continued to happen in Llanelli, even they began to take on a different, elongated form; multiple protests were organised outside the hotel entrance which took place between 11am and 4pm, with the good weather and energy keeping activists out longer. Following a march through the town in late June, and with no movement on the plans in sight, a last ditch legal challenge fell flat. For activists, this was the final straw. With seemingly all other options exhausted, an overnight blockade of the site came into being as demonstrators immediately set up outside the hotel entrance.

The subsequent announcement by the Home Office in October 2023 that the Stradey Park Hotel plans were being scrapped provided a shot in the arm to many far-right activists. Members of fascist group PA, and its splinter The Homeland Party, were jubilant. Calling the Llanelli protests and blockade “the Gold Standard of community politics in action”, activists highlighted how Llanelli ought to be viewed as a prototype for how local communities can be radicalised via outside involvement by the far right.



The NSD's “Officer Commanding” in Lincolnshire, Scott Pitts

Despite the Welsh summer weather and the specific features of the Stradey Park Hotel site, activists protesting at RAF Scampton have attempted to replicate the Llanelli blockade at its main gate over the autumn and winter.

Former PA Yorkshire member and founder of the National Support Detachment (NSD), Alek Yerbury, was instrumental in organising the ongoing RAF Scampton protest camp; a blockade outside the main entrance to the historic Lincolnshire air base. The camp has been operational 24/7 since early autumn, with NSD's "Officer Commanding", Scott Pitts, also frequently staying at the camp several nights a week at the time of writing. Since its inception, the Scampton camp (along with the other, much smaller camps around the base) has existed as another "always on" protest, and has welcomed a smorgasbord of known far-right activists to attend for events, to show support and, for some, to stay over on site. This has included members of the EDL splinter group, the Yorkshire Patriots, the former leading UKIP figure Katie Fanning, and, more recently, long time anti-Muslim activist Anne Marie Waters.

Though the camp has been a focal point for activists, the demands of running the Scampton camp in terms of activist energy and general materials are significant. Together with the plain fact that the objective of the camp is destined for failure, these growing demands will most likely lead to the Scampton camp's collapse early in 2024. Fundraisers and tacky lines of merchandise are producing dwindling levels of support. Meanwhile, the sub-zero winter temperatures have meant emergency generators, fuel and large quantities of firewood are needed to protect the health of activists, at a cost to the already insecure state of the camp's finances. Despite these outlays, several key figures have had to leave the site due to illness. The camp has also been blighted by disagreements, arrests and accusations of drug and alcohol abuse on site, with Yerbury stating that he has been "absolutely disgusted by the sheer amount of whinging" from other activists.

Whilst the Llanelli blockade provided a boost to the far right, the likelihood of the Scampton camp being successful is now slim. Although West Lindsey District Council has voted unanimously to launch a fresh legal challenge against the use of the Scampton site, there is no sign that the plans are to be overturned. That being so, the most likely scenario is that the Scampton protest camp continues to act as a drain on energy and resources for the movement.

WEAPONISING ANTI-MIGRANT HATRED

Anti-migrant activism was once again the focal point for the far right last year. The anger towards the Government's perceived failures on cross-Channel migration, and for its temporary accommodation plans, drove the far right onto the streets and into communities with a worrying frequency.

Haemorrhaging support across the country, the Conservative Government weaponised anti-migrant hatred and xenophobia in 2023 in a desperate bid to claw back those deserting the party. As a result, anti-migrant politics has been towards the top of

the Government's messaging, with plans to "stop the boats" repeated constantly. This has emboldened the far right, which has often perceived itself as being responsible for shaping the narrative on immigration.

On a concrete level, however, the movement has achieved little. The protest surge in the spring generated a slight buzz around certain individuals in the movement, whilst the "migrant hunter" accommodation visits have generated views, clicks and revenue for those carrying them out. Though the Llanelli blockade was successful in forcing a reversal of the accommodation plans, comparable efforts at RAF Scampton are looking increasingly doomed. If and when the Scampton camp collapses, such has been the chaos surrounding it that it would be surprising if activists chose to replicate the tactic again in 2024.

What can be said for certain is that a 2024 election will bring with it an onslaught of anti-migrant rhetoric by the right-wing media and the Conservative Government, who will intensify culture wars for electoral gain. HOPE not hate's 2023 *Stoking the Flames* report presented statistical analysis of how far-right, anti-migrant activity escalates alongside anti-migrant rhetoric in the political mainstream. As the election campaign ramps up, and the tone becomes more hostile, antifascists should expect the same from the far right.

Additionally, upcoming elections present an opportunity for far-right actors to move into political spaces. The Homeland Party's recent success in registering as a political party may reinvigorate PA's own quest for registered status, or to field candidates as independents. Party status affords fascist organisations a sheen of legitimacy, and enables these groups to take their extreme anti-migrant politics directly to voters. Whilst the chances of winning seats are very slim, these groups will aim to exploit the platform of electoral politics to their benefit.

Among the bigger name organisations such as UKIP and Britain First will also attempt to exploit anti-migrant sentiment in target areas. In Llanelli, for example, UKIP have selected the Voice of Wales activist Stan Robinson as their candidate, and Anne Marie Waters has used Scampton to launch a leadership bid. As always, far-right electoral movements will need to decide whether to focus on more winnable council seats in the local elections or immediately attempt the steep and expensive task of fighting for a seat in a General Election.

Finally, it is highly likely that the far right will continue targeting organisations that support people who are immigrants and asylum seekers, particularly as debates about Rwanda reach boiling point. Part of the Conservative Party's anti-migrant culture war has been highlighting the role of so-called "activist lawyers"/"leftie lawyers" in stopping deportation flights to Rwanda. This has seeped into far-right discourse on the subject, with legal institutions often lambasted by activists on Telegram. One small anti-migrant organisation led an action last year to block the phone lines of an immigration law firm. As the far right scrabbles around for new tactics, migrant rights organisations and law firms will undoubtedly come under scrutiny in one form or another.

UNDERCURRENTS OF HATE: HOW MAINSTREAM POLITICS AROUND IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM PROPS UP ANTI-MIGRANT HOSTILITY

ROSIE CARTER

THE CONSERVATIVE Government started the year with a chipper announcement of “tough government action” to curb immigration through limiting international students from bringing family members to the UK. While student migration to the UK has huge economic benefits and has not been a topic of much public salience – indeed, our own research has shown that the public rarely even consider international students within their understanding of immigration – this cynical start to the year is emblematic of the Government’s approach to immigration over the past few years.

Their commitment to hard talk and cruel action on immigration has gone as far as tearing the Conservative party apart, as disagreements over the Rwanda plan continues to widen the chasm between the Radical Right and the rest of the party. Arguably comparable to the immigration policy of the BNP in its heyday in the late 2000s, the Government’s controversial plan is to send people seeking asylum in the UK to Rwanda, where their claims would be processed and if granted refugee status, they would stay.

After a series of legal challenges that saw immigration lawyers smeared as “activist lawyers”, the Supreme Court ruled that the plan was not legal.

The Labour party estimated costs of the scheme would be nearly £400 million over the next five years, despite the policy having very little impact on channel crossings or deportations.

Increasingly hard talk on immigration from the Conservative government, cosy up to the European far right such as Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in the process, has not just made a lot of noise but revamped public interest in immigration and asylum, creating further divides.

The Government’s hardline approach stokes public concern around the issue, whilst they simultaneously pursue a line of unworkable, cruel and unrealistic policies.

The reality is that the immigration and asylum system is incredibly complex. Asylum seekers have to arrive on UK soil to submit a claim, while the Government has continued to slander these people as illegal and shut down safer options, though there are very few alternatives. The Government’s own Safe Routes report published in January this year showed that only 700 people had been settled in the UK through designated nationalities resettlement programmes.

“Stopping the boats” is more likely to happen if the

Government increases the safe and legal routes available for those in need of them.

All the same, immigration and asylum continues to dominate the agenda. And a rightward shift of the Conservative government has failed to capture attention away from the far right. Amidst growing concerns alongside weakening trust in the political system, the far right have thrived.

The rising salience of migration in recent years, following a post-Brexit slump, can largely be attributed to the volume of political noise.

HOW MAINSTREAM HOSTILITY FEEDS THE FAR RIGHT

The far right’s revived interest in immigration and asylum over recent years has piggybacked on a mainstream anti-migrant rhetoric. Earlier in 2023, HOPE not hate published *Stoking the Flames*, a report that found a direct link between Government announcements on, and mainstream media coverage of immigration and asylum and far right activity online.

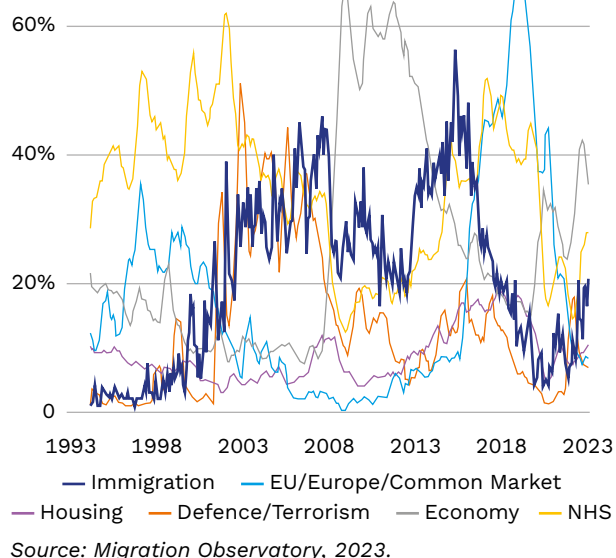
The report analysed 660,000 Telegram messages from far-right chat groups on the topic of migration alongside key moments in mainstream politics and media on immigration and asylum between January 2021 and March 2023. This data was looked at alongside 3468 articles mentioning *immigra**, *migra**, *asylum* or *refugee* in *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express* and *The Sun*, as well as a list of 164 policy announcements and Government statements made during same the time period.

The research was stark in highlighting the link between far right activity online and hostile language and policy in the political and media mainstream. Increased media coverage about migration in *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express* and *The Sun* correlates with far-right engagement, with clear overlaps in themes between media coverage of migration and far right social media messages. And our analysis showed that far-right engagement online spiked around key government announcements, such as the Rwanda plan.

DEEPENING HOSTILITY WITHIN COMMUNITIES

While the debate around immigration and asylum in the UK is clearly about far more than numbers, failure to invest in the asylum system appropriately has seen a growing asylum backlog, that is, the number of asylum cases awaiting a Home Office decision – has grown substantially in recent years (although this has finally started to fall in 2023, it remains large). As the backlog has grown, the cost of the UK’s

Salience of Immigration in the UK, 1994-2023



asylum system increases as the Government have an obligation to support people left waiting for their cases to be processed who are not permitted to work, while integration for people seeking sanctuary is hampered because they are left in limbo.

This has led to a crisis over asylum accommodation. Accommodation is provided by the Home Office through private contractors for people seeking asylum who have nowhere to live or cannot meet basic living costs. The long backlog in processing asylum cases has meant that for many, accommodation intended to be temporary has become far more permanent, with many trapped in unsuitable and unsafe accommodation, with hotels and B&Bs becoming used as standard by contractors.

This means there is little direct Government oversight, and the accommodation is incredibly expensive with these companies making enormous profits. These have become points of local tension in many cases. Narratives about “illegal immigrants” being given “5 star treatment” have quickly set in, while the cancellation of weddings or holidays in hotels being used for asylum accommodation feed community resentments – often stoked by the far right.

In 2023 we recorded at least 123 anti-migrant demonstrations across the UK, an 18-fold increase from last year. We have also calculated that anti-migrant activism took place on at least 278 of the 365 days in 2023, or 76% of the year.

The riots we saw in Kirkby in February 2023 saw huge crowds of approximately 400 people drawn to protest the housing of people seeking asylum in a local hotel. Far-right groups like Britain First (BF) and Patriotic Alternative (PA) had made visits to the hotel in the weeks preceding the demonstration, although the protest appeared to have been largely locally-driven.

And local support blended increasingly with the far right in Llanelli, Pembrokeshire. Over a number of weeks, hundreds of people have attended demonstrations outside the Stradey Park Hotel in the

Furnace area of Llanelli, a site earmarked to house asylum seeking families. A permanent camp was set up at the entrance to the hotel in May 2023, where local supporters of the campaign and far right figures such as Jeff Marsh and Voice of Wales blocked the delivery of Home Office supplies, harassed security guards, police and politicians, and even breaking into the hotel and setting beds on fire. After five months of protest, the Home Office abandoned their plans to use the hotel as an accommodation site.

The far right falsely claimed a victory in Llanelli, with activists from fascist groups Patriotic Alternative and Homeland calling it the “Gold Standard of Community Politics in action”. But there are no winners here. The unworkability of the site was apparent from the start, but in the process, 95 people working in the hotel lost their jobs in the transfer of the contract over to Clearsprings. The hotel was gutted to cram people into the site, rendering it unusable – a great loss to the town’s tourist economy and at great expense to the taxpayer. The anger and hate stirred up in this community will long outlive Clearsprings’ contract.

There is a sad story to be told about the pain communities will feel as a result of the Government’s policy failings on asylum. Chasing anti-migrant hatred and cruel, yet ineffective, “deterrent” policies to grab headlines and fuel a hostile narrative has pumped hate into communities.

The far right have seized the opportunity to return to street action, while politicians have trapped themselves in a cycle of hysteria about migration, not a problem but one of the most fundamental of human processes. People have always moved, and they always will. It is no great surprise that they are unwilling to find “solutions”, but instead pump millions of taxpayer money into making life harder for some of the most vulnerable people in society. Hard talk on immigration has fired up a divisive and dangerous public debate, all the while undermining trust in the political system.

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM AFTER A CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT

2023 has been a year in which there has been a lot of noise about immigration and asylum, from the “illegal” immigration bill to the far right back on the streets and in communities. Looking to 2024, a General election year, which the Conservatives had lined up as a “small boasts election”, it seems the volume is unlikely to be turned down.

If the polls are to be believed, a change of power from the Conservative government to the Labour party could see certain hostile policies that the Conservative government has put in place scrapped. However, the Right is already lining up to make gains on a potential Labour government, harking back to the public discourse on asylum in the early 2000s.

HOPE not hate will continue to keep an eye not only on far right activity around immigration and asylum, but also from the mainstream right, where the rhetoric has become increasingly difficult to differentiate from that of the far right. Moreover, we will continue to support communities to be more resilient to the politics of hate.

LLANELLI – A FAILED HO

ANKI DEO

LONG STANDING far-right activists and local communities whipped up by the Government, media and social media joined together at the anti-migrant camp in Llanelli, South Wales. The likes of Patriotic Alternative, Voice of Wales, UKIP and a host of independent actors used the backdrop of the Stradey Park Hotel for shameless self promotion. Meanwhile, a newly dedicated group of local anti-migrant activists organised themselves. After the Home Office announced in early October that it would no longer be using the hotel, deep-rooted and hard-to-reverse rifts set into the community whilst outside agitators chased the next shiny thing.

The longevity and intensity of the protests in Llanelli can partially be attributed to unique circumstances: the beloved status of the hotel, its geographic accessibility and the dramatic way in which 95 locals were made redundant by a parent company based 250 miles away. Many aspects of how everything played out will be familiar across the country: statutory services informed by the Home Office at the last minute; racist beliefs dismissed as “community concerns” until too late; targeting of groups who challenged protesters; homelessness and gender-based violence used to justify prejudice.

What happened in Llanelli in the 135 days between the public announcement of the use of the hotel and the Home Office withdrawing is a prime example of anti-migrant activism in communities in 2023, and how this was enabled by the Conservative government’s hostile asylum policy alongside the broader context of the cost of living crisis and the stripping of public services for communities.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT

The confusion around the announcement of the use of the Stradey Park Hotel exemplifies a wider government failure to create a workable plan for asylum accommodation. The Stradey Park Hotel was seen as the cornerstone of a growing tourism industry following the closure of tin, steel and coal mines in the area. Pair this deep sense of neglect with the visible decline of the local environment and economic deprivation exacerbated by the cost of living crisis and it is understandable how locals adopted an “us versus them” narrative, pitting themselves against asylum seekers. The Home Office refused to elaborate on their decision-making process.

There was obvious negativity and unrest at a public meeting just a week after the announcement, which preceded the announcement that the 95 staff employed at the hotel would be made redundant. Although the job

Richard Tice, Leader of the Reform Party, at a Stradey Park Hotel protest
Photo: Twitter



HOME OFFICE EXPERIMENT

loss was a galvanising call to action for many, there were some who were anti-migrant right from the beginning. From May to July, local opposition included legal and political efforts as well as the far-right mobilisation; as soon as the camp was established, the right wing of this fragile coalition became increasingly hostile. Calls for dispersal accommodation were quickly drowned out in favour of demanding that Wales stop accepting asylum seekers altogether, unsurprising given the constant stream of inflammatory alarmism on immigration in politics and the media. Any suggestion that concerns might be rooted in racism was met with anger and defensiveness.

INVOLVEMENT OF THE ORGANISED FAR RIGHT

In a year where the far right travelled across the UK to protest almost every weekend, what was striking was the way in which some figures ingratiated themselves with the local community. Local protesters were in daily contact with known far-right activists such as Jeff Marsh, Alan Merritt and Philip Watkins, as well as Stan Robinson and Dan Morgan from Voice of Wales. Over the course of weeks, the discourse went from local to national. Near-constant live broadcasts from the camp spread news to social media groups across the UK, and the Llanelli groups filled with shared videos and posts from Dover to Dublin. Alongside anti-migrant content came transphobic and climate-denying messages, as well as symbols and slogans linked with Welsh nationalism.

Locals created a neighbourhood watch-style group to “alert others of any suspicious, intimidating or predatory behaviour of concern... without being accused of being racist”. Those who didn’t support protesters were threatened to stay in line: one legal campaigner went from saying “there are elements creeping into town which lead me to fear for people’s safety” to giving protesters “full praise” for mostly behaving “in a law-abiding and peaceful manner”. He had been harassed by protesters for raising concerns.

LAW AND ORDER

Protesters were at the camp and it was permanently policed for over 100 days from July to October. At least 25 protesters – a mixture of locals and far-right interlopers – have been arrested, an indication of their determination and boldness in the face of national attention. The windows of the shared constituency office of Nia Griffith MP and Lee Waters MS were smashed and fireworks were put through the letterbox (a man was later sentenced). Dyfed Powys police had to cancel officer leave and redeploy officers from as far as 85 miles away in order to maintain order. Those arrested were celebrated by many protesters as heroes on the right side of history; fundraisers for their legal fees have been set up with multiple small contributions from protesters.



Stan Robinson and Dan Morgan from Voice of Wales

Security officers contracted by Clearsprings Ready Homes to protect the vacant hotel site were doxxed, followed and filmed by protesters. Despite having sub-contracted security and other firms, representatives from Clearsprings took no ownership over the situation – at an August public meeting in the midst of the protest, an official from Clearsprings was blithely optimistic about “new employment opportunities” at the hotel, whilst the Home Office representative conceded that “there will always be some issues”.

EFFECT OF PROTEST ON WIDER COMMUNITY

The cumulative effect of online rhetoric, racist leafleting and the protest itself created an atmosphere of fear in town. Workplaces, shops and pubs became fraught with side taking, and there were even reports of bullying in local schools based on parents’ actions. At the same time, the protest camp developed a real sense of community: people spent chunks of time – including on night shifts – socialising, eating, singing and posting online. Mothers, grandmothers and litter pickers joined ranks with Welsh Defence League hooligans and climate conspiracy theorists. That many sought out food and company at a far-right protest speaks to wider policy failure – with the cost of living crisis exacerbating the struggles of people already vulnerable from more than a decade of austerity, they bought into scarcity narratives when it came to food, GP and dentist appointments and school support.

Protesters gave local businesses the ultimatum of supporting the protest or facing consequences. They review-bombed a local Indian restaurant and bed shop making deliveries to the hotel site, and called for boycotts of a bar, a leisure centre and a local paper. Conversely, they encouraged people to support a skip company who, after being shouted at by protesters on the driveway of the hotel, chose to take their delivery back. Businesses responded by either panickedly insisting their impartiality or siding with the protesters,

COMMUNITIES FIGHTING BACK



2023 WAS A difficult year for communities, but many pushed back hard against the politics of hate. HOPE not hate has been supporting people affected by far-right agitation in a variety of ways, but it is not always easy for well-meaning people to take initiative when civic infrastructure is at its most vulnerable.

A number of community groups counteracted malicious leaflets from the likes of Patriotic Alternative (PA) and Britain First to correct public perceptions. In Llantwit Major, Vale of Glamorgan, a short and factual community leaflet was produced to inform people of the real, fascist values behind PA's sudden involvement in the area, and to urge them to ignore a planned demonstration. In Llanelli, Carmarthenshire, leaflets were passed out at a local pride celebration to encourage members and allies of the LGBTQIA+ community to stand in solidarity with refugees and people seeking asylum by attending a solidarity picnic.

Community groups have also hosted events in solidarity with those targeted by far-right groups and a hostile Government. Just down the coastline from the Bibby Stockholm barge, Portland Global Friendship Group hosted a global music festival on the beach. In Kegworth in the East Midlands, locals joined forces with hotel residents to do a community litter pick. In Morecambe, Lancashire, a vigil was held outside the war memorial after it was vandalised with Nazi graffiti.

HOPE not hate has been producing newspapers for communities for years as a way of spreading hopeful messages. This year, six thousand copies of a community newspaper written in both English

and Welsh were delivered in Llanelli in response to continued tensions over asylum accommodation. Fifteen thousand copies of a paper were delivered in Bradford, both to raise awareness of local services and invite people to two community fun days which were held over the summer.

However, obstacles remain in the way for those hoping to stand up for their community. These include a lack of funding, free or subsidised venue space and council or political support. These difficulties can be partially attributed to the stripping back of local services and the immense financial issues faced by councils all over the UK. Some communities are taken by surprise due to a lack of understanding and awareness of how people are being radicalised online, or not having the

resources to proactively tackle this. People can also be afraid to speak out confidently, particularly if they are not sure if their efforts will be supported.

This year, HOPE not hate published eight new resources to support local authorities, councillors, third sector organisations and community activists in building up resilience and responding to the far right. We've also provided training to refugee and asylum support organisations and council officers on having safe, effective and empathetic community conversations. But without cohesion as a genuine priority at both the local and national level, it will be much harder for positive initiatives to flourish in communities.



A local man dressed as a Welsh cake.
Credit: Llantwit Major AFC on Facebook



Members of the fascist group 'Patriotic Alternative' protested in Llanelli earlier this month Photo: UAF / Twitter

sending free goodies to the camp in the hope of a shout out in the protest groups with thousands of active local residents. These actions will have ongoing effects on a local economy where growth is at 3% gross value added from 2009-2019 compared to 80% in the nearby, bigger town of Swansea (ONS).

WINNERS AND LOSERS

Private companies reaped the rewards of the turmoil whilst the public purse was left to foot the bill. Clearsprings does not have a duty to report profits publicly, however from public records, the financial future for their directors and shareholders looks bright: they reported a sixfold increase in profits from 2021-22, with profits after costs and tax in 2022 of £28m. Their contract with the Home Office runs until 2029.

The Home Office has managed to dodge a large share of the blame. Any vitriol aimed at politicians has fallen predominantly on the Welsh Government and the Labour MP and MS. Protesters are quick to blame the Welsh Nation of Sanctuary policy without considering that the asylum backlog of almost 100,000 people that has made hotels necessary is squarely the responsibility of Westminster. In a meeting with HOPE not hate in August, the Home Office indicated that it was crucial to try to move in the asylum-seeking families in order to deter future camp-out protests. This would have come at the cost of a struggling community and the safety of asylum seekers, unaware of the hostilities they were joining. The Government's anti-migrant MO and ineptitude in tackling the backlog forced their own civil servants to calculate the relative benefits of sacrificing community cohesion in one town versus risking copycat activity.

The Dyfed Powys Police and Crime Commissioner estimates that the total costs for officer duty time



were £800,000 (of which £300,000 was overtime) and there were additional direct costs of £400,000. Carmarthenshire County Council also made a claim to the Home Office for costs of £230,000 for costs incurred by the local authority, indicating that 2,700 council officer hours had been spent on dealing with the issue. Neither organisation has received notice of any Home Office commitment to compensation.

Stan Robinson from Voice of Wales now plans to stand as UKIP's parliamentary candidate in the general election. With Reform also standing, he is unlikely to succeed, but it means the people of Llanelli will have to endure his toxic rhetoric for some time longer. Labour is likely to retain the seat, but relationships in the community, particularly with protesters, are strained. Llanelli is a dramatic example of what can go wrong when bad policies are implemented badly, but it is too easy to view it as the exception. To do that is to let off the hook a government whose rhetoric left the door open for the far right to march through, and whose policy of mismanagement and obfuscation has divided and gutted a community already struggling with the economic and social degradation of the past decade.

ANTI-MIGRANT AND ANTI-MUSLIM

BRITAIN FIRST

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY

LEADER: PAUL GOLDING



Britain First was launched in 2011 when some 40,000 current and former British National Party (BNP) members, supporters and donors received an unsolicited email, and a further 5,000 people received a glossy mailshot, introducing the new group and its chairman, Paul Golding.

Launched by Jim Dowson and led by Golding, both formerly of the BNP, the group began its confrontational political activities by promoting actions designed to intimidate and ignite violent responses from Muslim communities.

While always struggling to get more than a few dozen people on the streets, Britain First rose to become one of the best-known far-right groups in the UK, in large part due to its success on social media. At its peak, the group's Facebook page had over 1.9 million likes and in November 2017, President Trump retweeted three anti-Muslim videos posted by then-deputy leader Jayda Fransen.

Since forming over a decade ago, Golding has regularly changed the style and focus of Britain First in the hope of finding a winning formula that, so far, remains elusive. In recent years Golding has once again pivoted the focus of Britain First in the hope of garnering mainstream traction. With cross-Channel migration by boats hitting the headlines, he made opposing it a core element of Britain First's activism. Emulating the mosque invasions that made the group notorious, Golding and his activists continue to storm into migrant accommodation and confront people with cameras. Unfortunately for Golding, this tactic has not secured the same wide spread on social media as the group experienced in its early years.

While the group made its name through confrontational street protests, it has regularly focused its energy on electoral politics. Golding worked hard to ensure the party was re-registered and, after numerous failed attempts and legal challenges, the group finally succeeded in 2021. However, prior to this success he had already begun to reorganise Britain First into a more serious electoral machine. In early 2019, the group restructured into more formal regional branches and refocused on local politics, more closely emulating the old BNP. Britain First's dreadful results have not stopped the group from persevering with electoral politics.

BRITAIN FIRST IN 2023

2023 was a disappointing year for Britain First. Despite consistently campaigning and engaging in some form of activism most weeks, the group has

been dogged by continual infighting, high activist turnover and has failed to significantly grow its offline activist base.

One positive for the group has been its growth on X (formerly Twitter). Following Elon Musk's shakeup of the platform, Britain First received its account back in October 2022 and in 2023 has taken advantage of the platform's new paid for verification process. Paul Golding has risen to over 150,000 followers, Ashlea Simon to over 60,000 and the official Britain First account has over 50,000.

However, this increase in social media following has not translated into a noticeable growth in the number of people willing to attend campaign events on the ground.

The past year also saw Britain First's dismal electoral performance continue. At May's local elections, Golding came last in his target ward of Swanscombe, Dartford, with just 5% of the vote. He quickly proclaimed that, despite the evidence, his candidacy had merely been a "paper candidacy" to distract attention from the group's real target wards. But his candidates fared little better in those places – Nick Scanlon also came last on 10% in Darenth ward, while Paul Harding came third in Hockley & Ashingdon with 13%. In both cases, the Britain First candidate was defeated by a local independent candidate.

As expected, it was deputy leader Ashlea Simon who performed best, coming second in Walkden North (Salford) with 405 votes. However, the result will come as a major disappointment to the party; Simon's vote actually went down from last year, both in raw numbers and vote share, despite six months of intense campaigning.

Ashlea Simon stood again in the Tamworth by-election in October but received just 580 votes (2.3% of the vote), placing 4th out of 9 candidates. The group hailed it as a success due to beating the Liberal Democrats, the Greens and UKIP but will no doubt



have been disappointed with such a low vote share after a prolonged period of campaigning in the area. Last year there was also a reminder of where the extreme politics of Britain First can lead. In June, Richard Osborne was jailed for three years and ten months after admitting to stirring up racial and anti-LGBT+ hatred. Osborne also admitted to the possession of two weapons, including a shotgun for which he did not possess a licence. HOPE not hate revealed that Osborne had engaged in anti-migrant activism with Britain First. In August 2020, pictures show Osborne behind a Britain First banner reading “Close Down Migrant Hotels” at an action targeting the Coventry Hill Hotel.

2023 was a lacklustre year for Britain First, and there is little indication this year will be any different. The group has announced that Nick Scanlon will stand to be London Mayor at this May’s election. Whether it will also target the General Election will be one to watch.

ANNE MARIE WATERS

CATEGORY: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVIST

Anne Marie Waters is one of the UK’s best-known far-right, anti-Muslim activists.

A former Labour councillor, in 2013 Waters became heavily involved in the international so-called “counter-jihad” scene. In 2014, she launched Sharia Watch UK, a now-dormant site, and helped organise the cancelled Muhammad cartoon exhibition in London in September 2015.

In January 2016, Waters emerged as a key figure in Pegida UK, the UK branch of the pan-European anti-Muslim street movement, alongside Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson). The venture quickly flopped.

Waters represented UKIP in elections in 2015, gaining press for describing Islam as “evil”. In 2017, she announced her run for the UKIP leadership at a disorderly demonstration in Manchester, telling the crowd that “Islam is a killing machine”. Waters was lambasted by numerous figures within the party, including Nigel Farage, but still finished second with 21% of the vote.

She subsequently launched her own party, For Britain, in October 2017 that quickly attracted Islamophobic UKIP exiles, ex-BNP members and other extremists. The following month, Waters featured in an undercover ITV exposé, during which she was filmed saying: “We are becoming an Islamic state [...] My thinking is we need to reduce their birthrates now.”

As former BNP activists flooded into For Britain, Waters’ language became increasingly conspiratorial and fixated on race. In August 2019, Waters spoke at the conference of Generation Identity UK, a group which advocated for a form of racial segregation, making direct reference to the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory in her address.

After folding For Britain in July 2022, Waters rejoined UKIP in April 2023 and has since announced her intention to run for its leadership.

GAVIN BOBY

CATEGORY: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVIST

Gavin Bobby is a planning lawyer and self-styled “mosque buster” who founded The Law and Freedom Foundation to prevent planning applications for mosques.

At time of writing, his website claims that has won 60 out of the 99 cases he has taken on.

His involvement usually amounts to advising local people on tactics to oppose planning permission or change of use of a building into a place of worship.

Bobby also runs a small YouTube channel where he updates supporters on the progress of his campaigns, as well as discussing a range of issues such as cross-Channel migration, grooming gangs and the demographic changes within the UK.

He is also well connected within the international anti-Muslim movement, having spoke at numerous far-right demonstrations including PEGIDA in Dresden.

In 2023, he claimed to have been involved in 13 cases, winning seven and losing six.



4 FREEDOMS LIBRARY

CATEGORY: ONLINE FORUM

4 Freedoms is a tiny online anti-Muslim discussion forum run by Alan Ayling (AKA Alan Lake), formerly linked to the English Defence League.

The forum now has just a handful of regular posters, Ayling among them. Most chat rooms have fewer than 20 posters and membership to the forum is closed to new members.



PROUD BOYS BRITANNIA

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

Proud Boys Britannia (PBB) is the UK offshoot of the US-founded “western chauvinist” far-right movement, the Proud Boys.

The group has just a handful of activists and operates mostly as a social club that travels to locations for drinks and socialising. The group also runs an active Telegram channel with just over 2,500 subscribers, which mainly posts childish and misogynist jokes and memes.

While remaining tiny, the group has created a branch structure with separate email addresses and Telegram channels for Scotland, Wales, England North/Midlands and England South. Despite this, PBB has little influence within the wider UK far right and is widely regarded as something of an embarrassment, owing to its Fred Perry uniforms, rituals, language and adolescent humour.



STEPHEN YAXLEY-LENNON (AKA TOMMY ROBINSON)

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Stephen Lennon remains the best-known far-right extremist in Britain. In the last five years he has been dogged by legal, health and personal problems and now splits his time between the UK and Spain.

2023 was another difficult year for Lennon, though he is more high-profile than he has been in some time.

For much of the year, Lennon was focused on finally releasing his documentary *Silenced*. When Lennon lost his libel case against Jamal Hijazi in 2021 the court also placed an injunction on him which stopped him from publishing a long-trailed, self-produced documentary about the case. He was categorically told that if repeated his libellous claims about a Syrian refugee schoolboy he could face prison. For the next two years, Lennon festered, increasingly furious and embarrassed that he had so publicly lost the case. However, in May last year the pressure became too much and he released the film before moving to Spain.

Not content with repeating his libellous claims piecemeal on various podcasts, Lennon had long been exploring ways to release the whole film in a way that he hoped might look like an accident. On 1 April, a new MICE Media version of *Silenced* was premiered by Lennon in Copenhagen at a meeting in the Danish Parliament, hosted by the Danish People's Party and The Free Press Society.

The Copenhagen screening may have been the film's world premiere, but there was still a lot to do before it could be released on the internet. At some point, Lennon and Bryn Davis from MICE Media agreed to meet in person to finalise arrangements. In keeping with Lennon's lavish lifestyle, it seems they agreed to

meet in the Bahamas. A HOPE not hate investigation worked out that Lennon had travelled to the island via Havana. While in Cuba, Lennon filmed a new clip for *Silenced* while sitting outside the 4* hotel in which he begged supporters for money. From Cuba, Lennon made his way to Freeport, the main city on Grand Bahama, the closest island to Florida.

After the gathering in the Bahamas things moved fast. On 21 May, MICE Media announced it would release the film in four days. Just 25 minutes later, at 1:58am, Urban Scoop, the media company Lennon works for, sent out an email to its supporters responding to the tweet. Laughably the email claimed, "it's not me publishing it," and that, "I do not support the release of the film. [...] I have said openly and publicly that I did not want this documentary to be made public, in line with the injunction laid down by the courts. Even if I do not agree with the court order, I do respect the law." His explanation was that, "it has been circulating among journalists since its creation."

As HOPE not hate has shown, these claims are absurd. Lennon was intricately involved in collaborating with MICE Media to release his libellous film. Despite making these claims, Lennon eagerly set about promoting the film's release on his various social media platforms. Another Urban Scoop email explained that, "When it can be accessed, we will let our supporters know where they can watch and share it."

Since the film's release, Lennon has appeared on numerous podcasts and been interviewed by a number of media outlets. While he has repeatedly claimed to have no knowledge of, or involvement in, the film's release, he has praised the airing of it and repeated his libellous claims about Hijazi.

Since the release of the film and aware of the possibility of his arrest for contempt of court, Lennon has spent long periods hiding in a luxury, six-bedroom, seven-bathroom mansion in south-eastern Spain

REBEL NEWS

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET

Rebel News is a far-right Canadian outlet best known for its on-off relationship with anti-Muslim activist Stephen Lennon, launched a UK branch in 2022. Following the departure of their sole regular employee Lewis Brackpool, however, the outlet appears to have no UK-based writers and all content is produced by overseas correspondents.



YORKSHIRE PATRIOTS

CATEGORY: STREET NETWORK

LEADER: DAVID SMALLER (AKA DAVID SUNDERLAND)

The Yorkshire Patriots is a minor splinter group of the English Defence League (EDL). Led by David Smaller (AKA David Sunderland), the group took an organising role in the 2018 "Free Tommy" protests in Leeds that brought hundreds to the streets to support Stephen

Yaxley-Lennon during his stint in jail that year.

The group has since failed to recapture such numbers, for example holding a small march in Dewsbury in 2019 that nonetheless saw seven arrests and cost the taxpayer £215,000 to police.

The Yorkshire Patriots re-emerged into prominence in 2023. Smaller and his allies organised and supported numerous anti-migrant protests in the North of England in conjunction with Alek Yerbury and his burgeoning National Support Detachment, with significant overlap between the two groups.

The largest was a 10 June demo that, after months of advertising, brought roughly 100 hardcore fascists and hooligans to the streets of Leeds. This included members of the PA splinter groups the Highland Division and the Independent Nationalist Network, alongside longer-standing nazi groups including the National Front, the British National Socialist Movement, Blood & Honour (B&H), Combat 18 and the "Infidels" network.

More recently, Smaller and other activists have been active in the ongoing protest camp in RAF Scampton, a former airbase earmarked to house asylum seekers in Lincolnshire.

worth over £1.3 million. He has flown over a series of friends and fellow far-right activists to keep him company during his self-imposed exile. He also launched a new podcast series that has failed to gain any real traction.

HOPE not hate launched a campaign to get justice and we submitted an extensive dossier to the Attorney General, calling on them to bring Contempt of Court proceedings against Lennon for his blatant breach of the injunction. Following our submission, in November, the Attorney General notified Lennon that he faces prosecution and could face up to two years in prison.

Towards the end of the year, Lennon hit the headlines again after returning to the UK and calling his supporters onto the streets. Following the start of the war in Israel/Palestine, London saw enormous pro-Palestine demonstrations in October and November. When one was planned to happen on Armistice Day anger spread, whipped up by then home secretary Suella Braverman, that Palestine supporters could attack war memorials in London.

Having had his account reinstated on X (formerly Twitter), Lennon used his return to the platform to call on his supporters to defend the Cenotaph in Westminster. On the day a mixture of Lennon supporters and football hooligan gangs descended on London resulting in violent clashes with the police. However, Lennon was widely criticised after jumping in a taxi and fleeing from the scene while many of those he mobilised were arrested.

Later that month Lennon turned up in London again, this time to attend a rally against antisemitism. Despite the organisers of the event making it clear he was not welcome, he still tried to participate. However, he was soon arrested and charged with failing to comply with an order excluding him from the area of the march. He spent the night in prison and was bailed until January 2024.

EAST ANGLIAN PATRIOTS

CATEGORY: STREET NETWORK

LEADER: ANDY REYNOLDS

The East Anglian Patriots (EAP) is a minor far-right street group headed by Andy Reynolds, a former English Defence League (EDL) activist from Lowestoft, Suffolk. The group first came to attention a decade ago for organising protests against a mosque in Lincoln.

EAP re-formed in March 2023, attempting to capitalise on the wider anti-migrant protest movement. Reynolds organised a small protest against an asylum accommodation site in Norwich in July, addressed by Alek Yerbury of the National Support Detachment, James Harvey of Students Against Tyranny, and the Tommy Robinson ally Glen Saffer. The demo was outnumbered by counter-protestors and was marred by arrests.

The group attempted to organise another protest against an asylum accommodation site in Diss, Norfolk in October, but on the day itself the plans collapsed and the EAP contingent remained in a local pub.



VOICE OF WALES

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET

LEADERS: DAN MORGAN AND STAN ROBINSON

Voice of Wales (VoW) is a far-right media outlet run by Dan Morgan and Stan Robinson, which creates a range of content including articles, videos, livestreams and social media output.

Since being permanently banned from YouTube in 2021, it now releases content via its own website and on minor platforms such as Gettr, where it has almost 17,000 followers and Telegram, where it has 3,350 subscribers.

VoW has become increasingly influential over the past two years, garnering a growing audience within the far right. Having provided support and coverage for protests against migrant accommodation and anti-Drag Queen Story Hour rallies in 2022, VoW would come to play a prominent role in the 2023 demonstrations at the Stradey Park Hotel in Llanelli, regularly reporting from the months-long protest camp established in the town and accosting MPs and councillors on the demonstrators' behalf.

The group suffered a reputational hit in October 2023, when co-founder Dan Morgan was convicted of fraud and handed a suspended sentence for his role in a large-scale scam that stole millions of pounds from people who believed they were applying for compensation for mis-sold PPI.

VoW retains a close connection with UKIP. Co-founder Stan Robinson has been selected as the UKIP candidate for Llanelli in the upcoming general election, and the group has regularly exploited its foothold in the area to arrange local meetings for the party.

VoW is closely related to Students Against Tyranny (SAT), which was established by James Harvey to tackle the supposed "wokeness" of universities. While remaining a separate group, Harvey is seen as something of a protégé of Morgan and Robinson.

SAT has attempted to organise a number of ill-fated demonstrations over the past year, many of which got cancelled at short notice or were dwarfed by much larger counter-protests. Harvey also brought embarrassment to the VoW after making monkey noises when referring to the Somali national anthem on one stream and denying the scale of the Holocaust in another, the latter of which he eventually apologised for after a public backlash.

MIGRANT HUNTERS

STEVE LAWS

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Steve Laws is a prominent “migrant hunter” activist from Kent; another who has attempted to rebrand himself as a journalist and “concerned citizen”. He is a former member of the now-defunct anti-Muslim party, For Britain and a failed UKIP candidate in the Southend West by-election, quickly became a leading figure in the “migrant hunter” movement around 2020.

Laws, a painter and decorator by trade, began as one of a number of activists who spent their time filming, harassing and intimidating refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. However, unlike Amanda Smith and Alan Leggett, for example, Laws was rarely to be seen heading to temporary migrant accommodation to find targets for his content. Instead, historically Laws was more focused on the Dover coast, filming arrivals and monitoring numbers, though not in any formalised sense. Laws’ regular content production and prolific Telegram usage helped him to quickly grow an online following, with over 10,000 subscribers to his YouTube channel.

Online, the substance of Laws’ social media output is indistinguishable from figures and groups across the far right. His obsession with immigration and migrants has led him to repeatedly use dehumanising language such as “invaders” and “swarms”, and he has been vocal in his support for the “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory. Laws’ frequent ethnonationalist-style outbursts lead him to regularly post about his desire for mass deportations of migrants. He has also concocted a conspiracy theory that the Government is concealing the actual numbers of migrants arriving in the UK through the Channel Tunnel.

Laws has garnered a close relationship with the fascist organisation, Patriotic Alternative (PA). This manifests in several ways, such as: appearing on podcast streams with avowed PA supporters and PA’s leader, Mark Collett, posting sympathetic messages online towards PA and its methods (such as describing its members as “sound”), showing support for PA member James Costello (imprisoned in 2023) and, most notably, speaking at PA’s conference in October 2022 alongside a propagandist for a pan-Nordic, militant nazi organisation that is banned in Finland.

Like so many others in his area of the movement, Laws has come into contact with the law on more than one occasion. In 2020, he was found guilty of taking a dinghy without the owner’s consent. He appealed this decision in late 2021 (the court discontinued the case in March 2022). In 2021, Dover Harbour Board also filed an injunction against Laws, Alan Leggett (AKA Active Patriot), and others, for unauthorised dockside filming. Whereas some of his co-defendants agreed, Laws



refused to sign an undertaking to stay away from the docks and opted for a further court hearing.

In a big boost, Laws was reinstated to Twitter in 2023, hitting 50,000 followers in September. Laws’s YouTube channel, however, saw a marked reduction in video output, with those posted generally steering further away from anything resembling Dover monitoring and towards anti-migrant content more broadly. This included a longer-form “documentary” called “The Invasion”, a collection of clips from the public domain stitched together by Laws with extremely low production value and a soporific voice-over commentary. Similarly, Laws produced a twenty-minute, undercover documentary from migrant camps in north France. In it, Laws focused predominantly on refugee and asylum seeker NGOs working in France, who he believes are “facilitating illegal immigration to England”.

March 2023 saw the Laws-led demonstration in Dover, to which around 100 far-right activists mobilised with reports of brief clashes with police. Laws himself gave a speech, along with former-PA activist Alek Yerbury. Laws was present again in Dover in September, this time at a minuscule demonstration alongside National Front leader, Tony Martin. Laws spoke at another small demonstration in October, a “Stop The Boats” protest in Westminster he organised with Alek Yerbury. Despite the small attendances at these demonstrations, Laws remains a major player in the “migrant hunter” scene.

More recently, Laws has championed the PA-splinter group, The Homeland Party.



LITTLE BOATS

CATEGORY: NETWORK

Founded by wedding DJ Jeremy Davis in August 2020, Little Boats was created during a period of heightened mainstream focus on migrants and was set up, ostensibly, as an anti-migrant vigilante group to patrol the Kent coastline confronting migrants. The group has previously referred to itself as a “flotilla” and has been aligned with Steve Laws, the former For Britain member and “migrant hunter”. Little Boats takes its name from the Little Ships of Dunkirk, hundreds of private boats which sailed across the Channel to rescue Allied forces stranded on Dunkirk beach during WWII.

Whilst it has claimed previously to have engaged in night patrols in the English Channel, these days it is essentially a social media operation manned by Davis which shares generic anti-migrant and anti-Islam content. Its supporters regularly post about the supposed “invasion” of Britain.

Offline in 2023 it appeared to achieve nothing of note, however online it still retains a fairly sizeable presence. For a time, Little Boats disseminated a map of migrant accommodation to be targeted for harassment, but this quickly became out of date and superseded by other organisations. In August, the group appeared to be changing tack, as Davis suggested that “Quisling institutions” assisting refugees, asylum seekers and migrants would be targeted by Little Boats activists in a spree of direct action. In the end, the sum of this direct action amounted to blocking the telephone switchboard of an immigration law firm for an hour.

HUGH THORNE (AKA BASED WELSHMAN)

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Hugh Thorne is a far-right activist and “citizen journalist”. Thorne has a focus on anti-migrant activism as well as a broad set of conspiracies around COVID-19, lockdown, net zero and so-called “15-minute cities”.

Thorne’s audience on YouTube had stagnated around the 10,000 subscriber mark heading into 2023. However, having claimed he filmed for “six weeks” covering the anti-migrant protests at Stradey Park Hotel in Llanelli, Thorne saw a modest increase in his YouTube subscribers last year.

Whilst covering the Stradey Park demonstration, Thorne was arrested for aggravated trespass. He also appeared, and was live-streaming, at the Remembrance Day demonstration called by Stephen Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) and others, which descended into a riot as far-right protesters battled police around the Cenotaph.

ALAN LEGGETT (AKA ACTIVE PATRIOT)

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Alan Leggett, from Grimsby in Lincolnshire, goes by the name “Active Patriot” and is one of the most prominent “migrant hunter” activists in the UK. In the past, Leggett was a loyal acolyte of Tommy Robinson, and tried to imitate his idol by also transforming himself into a so-called “citizen journalist”.

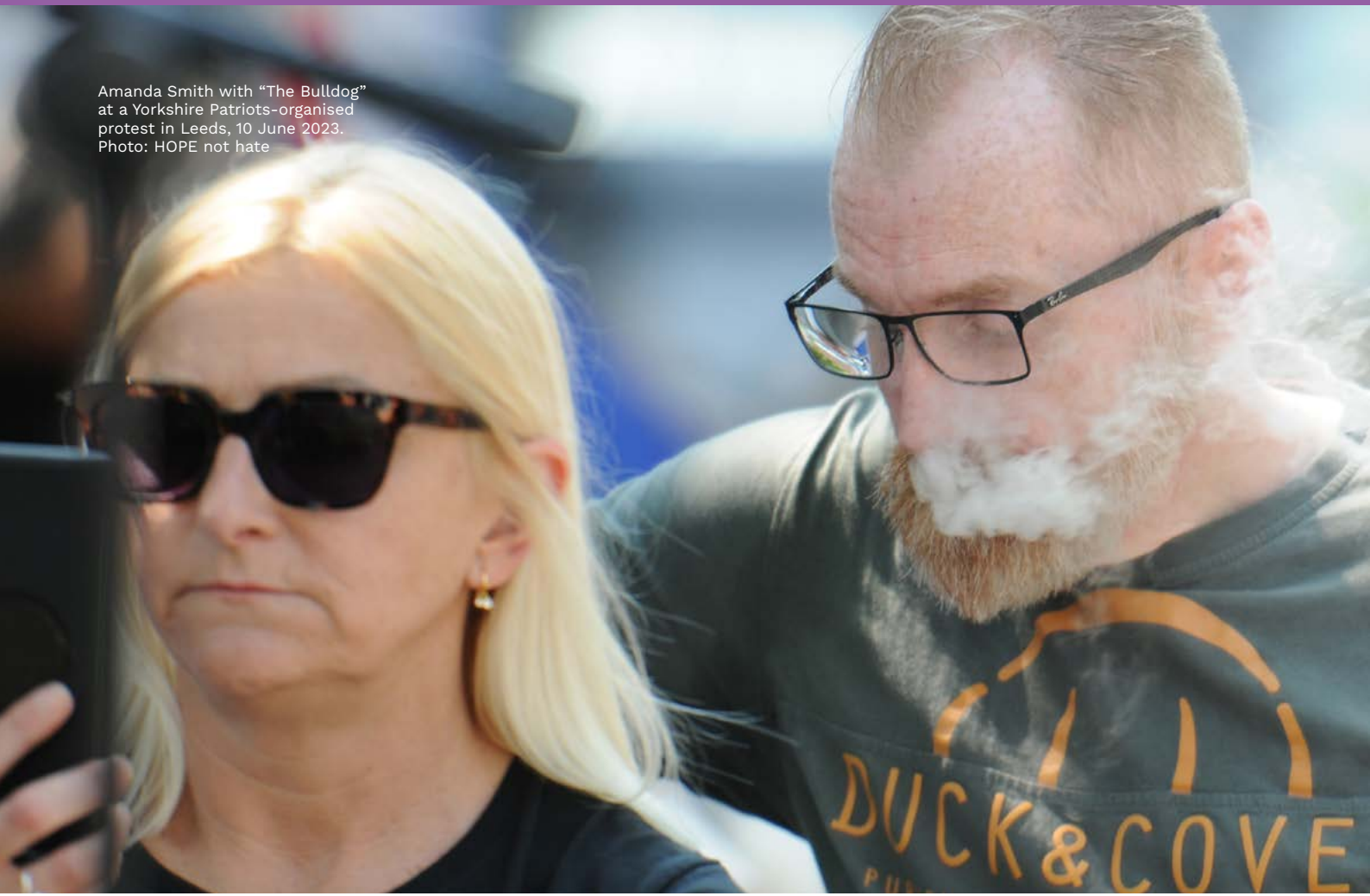
Leggett has in the past tried to mimic the Tommy Robinson-style public documentary airings, playing a film about “Muslim grooming gangs” on a portable screen, often outside police stations around the north of England. Audiences for these events were tiny across the board. However, Leggett’s decision to film the screenings themselves meant he was able to produce a large quantity of content for his social media channels. This has helped to propel him and his accounts to greater prominence over the past two or so years, despite falling out with many figures across the movement.

In 2022, Leggett began targeting migrant accommodation in earnest, making at least 38 trips to film and harass both occupants and staff. A close associate of Amanda Smith (AKA Yorkshire Rose), the pair made many such visits together, and in 2023 that relationship continued, with Leggett making at least 27 migrant accommodation visits, many of them alongside Smith. Leggett also appeared at a number of anti-migrant protests throughout 2023, including in Dover, Hull, Lincoln and Skegness.

Outside of his usual filming excursions around the Midlands, Yorkshire, North East and North West in 2023, Leggett had a tumultuous year. In February, he was dealt a heavy blow with the banning of his YouTube account, along with subsequent ones he attempted to set up. In March, Leggett was charged with racially-aggravated threatening abusive words or behaviour after he filmed a suspected grooming gang case in Bradford in September 2022. August saw Leggett in trouble with the law once more, with him being found guilty of malicious communications regarding a video dating back to 2020. In October, Leggett was sentenced for a different malicious communications charge dating back three years, and was subjected to a long list of sanctions, including a ten month prison sentence suspended for two years and a fifteen-year restraint order.



Amanda Smith with "The Bulldog" at a Yorkshire Patriots-organised protest in Leeds, 10 June 2023. Photo: HOPE not hate



AMANDA SMITH (AKA YORKSHIRE ROSE)

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Yorkshire Rose, real name Amanda Smith, is a “migrant hunter” from Castleford in West Yorkshire and is among the most prolific migrant accommodation harassers in the country. Over the course of 2023, Smith made 56 visits to asylum accommodation, predominantly across the Midlands, Yorkshire, North East and North West. To give a sense of the scale of her activism over previous years, in 2022 she made 124 such visits.

Smith, a former organiser for the English Defence League (EDL) and Britain First, posts videos frequently onto her YouTube and other social media channels which document her accommodation visits. These visits often take place alongside her “security” – a man known as “The Bulldog” – and occasionally with fellow “migrant hunter” Alan Leggett (AKA Active Patriot). The visits themselves tend to follow a similar pattern: Smith films her approach to the accommodation with vague commentary about the location in question, followed by some filming of migrants through windows or in accommodation’s grounds, coupled with an attempt to gain entry to the building. These attempts are generally thwarted by gates and/or locks, or by a security detail who will block entry and often escort Smith and associates off the premises. Usually, the security then become targets for Smith’s ire.

In addition to rounding on staff and security, Smith

regularly changes up her tactics to try and force the kinds of interactions and content she wants for her channel. These vary from feigning confusion (“I was told this hotel was for homeless people”) to faking kindness towards asylum seekers. The frequency of Smith’s content, coupled with her often confrontational approach, has led to her YouTube channel now having over 2.5 million views.

In October last year, Smith was arrested for aggravated trespass at RAF Scampton and subjected to bail conditions restricting her from within 200 metres of the site. In January 2024, this was extended by a further three months. Smith is no stranger to situations such as this. Back in January 2021, she and Leggett were arrested for causing alarm and distress, and were supposedly hit with bail conditions banning them from North Yorkshire. Previously, Smith has also harassed staff at COVID-19 test centres, claiming the virus was fake, and engaged with a range of other conspiracies.

Smith has previously posted content on her social media from the fascist group, Patriotic Alternative, as well as posting and often reposting messages full of racism and Islamophobia. She has also referred to Channel-crossings as an “invasion”. Last year Smith was accompanied on several occasions by Michael Horgan, the man behind the Michator Media YouTube channel. Horgan, an NHS nursing associate in Nottinghamshire, made multiple videos from anti-migrant campaigns around the country in 2023, consistently with much higher production value than Smith, Leggett and others.



THE BULLDOG

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

A close associate of Yorkshire Rose, “The Bulldog” acts as Rose’s security as the pair travel to film at migrant accommodation, often harassing staff and security in the process. A ferocious racist, The Bulldog uses his social media accounts to post appalling slurs and vitriol, as well as to amplify and promote various anti-migrant demonstrations throughout 2023, including those at Rotherham, Skegness and Dover.

Offline, The Bulldog had a busy year, particularly in the first half of 2023, accompanying Yorkshire Rose on 35 visits to temporary migrant accommodation across the Midlands and the North. Most of these events generally consisted of purposeless arguments with hotel staff and multiple failed entry attempts, but the pair (often accompanied by Active Patriot) also regularly posed with banners outside accommodation containing slogans such as “England For The English: Stop White Genocide”.

The Bulldog was also present at an anti-migrant demonstration in Leeds in June organised by Yorkshire Patriots, which featured Alek Yerbury and an assortment of neo-nazis. In July, following what seemed to be a verbal altercation with a police officer, he was arrested at a demonstration against RAF Scampton’s use as temporary migrant accommodation, which processed through Lincoln town centre. It is notable that there was a decline in his offline activism following his arrest, with only four of his 35 accommodation visits coming in the second half of 2023.

CHRIS JOHNSON

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Chris Johnson is an independent anti-migrant activist who dedicates his time to the methodical video documentation of irregular Channel-crossings landing around Dover, tracking the number of vessels and arrivals. He also posts more general updates about rescue operations in the Channel, and weather reports at sea. Johnson is out on the coastline virtually on a daily basis, and it is rare for him not to upload a video (no matter how short) to his Facebook page.

Johnson’s constant, regular videos has made him a well-respected figure on the far right, but he differs from other activists in the anti-migrant scene in a number of key ways. The first is that, contrary to the likes of Yorkshire Rose and Active Patriot, Johnson never appears in front of the camera, indicating that his activism is perhaps something less of an ego-trip than it is for many others in the movement. Instead, he maintains a rigid focus on both numbers and weather conditions for crossings. Second, Johnson refrains from the usual levels of racist vitriol online that is commonplace across the anti-migrant and “migrant hunter” scene. By contrast, Johnson limits himself to making generalised criticisms about immigration and immigration policy on his posts, under which the comments will quickly descend into the usual bile from supporters. Finally, whereas other activists in the movement with an equivalent following to Johnson’s would ordinarily be exploiting it as a revenue stream, Johnson appears never to ask his followers for financial support. Taken together, these mark Johnson out as a unique figure in this corner of the movement.

Early in 2023, Johnson appeared to make the decision to abandon his YouTube channel with over 1,500 subscribers, instead posting his daily videos onto his Facebook account. In centralising his content in this way, Johnson has been rewarded with generally much higher views and engagement this year.

PATRIOTS OF BRITAIN

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

Established in the lead-up to a small anti-immigration demonstration in London in September 2022, Patriots of Britain (POB) pushes predominantly anti-migrant content to its target audience of football supporters, who it wants to unite across clubs.

Patriots of Britain has a negligible imprint on the UK far-right scene. Its follower count across social media is low, and its viewership on YouTube generally even lower. POB’s Telegram admin is Chris Bateman, who was active in Basildon BNP in 2020, is a member of the British Democrats and has been seen campaigning with Britain First.

Offline, the group has not fared well in 2023. It staged a tiny protest at the start of the year outside Serco HQ against cross-Channel migration, as well as a “protect the statues” demonstration in London in October to which no one showed up.

FAR-RIGHT HEATHENS

“Heathenry” is a new religious movement inspired by the pre-Christian customs and beliefs of Germanic peoples, in particular Norse Scandinavia and Anglo-Saxon England, in the Iron Age and Early medieval periods.

Attitudes to race constitute a key dividing line in Heathenry today. Many follow a “universalist” system, believing their religion to be open to all those who wish to practise it, with some groups (often termed “hearths” or “kindreds”) espousing an explicitly anti-racist stance. However, others follow a “folkish”, or

racially exclusive version, believing Heathenry to be the sole preserve of white people, particularly those of Northwestern European descent. This latter form is sometimes termed “Odinism” or “Wotanism”.

While many folkish groups claim to be non-political, some promote a far-right worldview and have considerable areas of overlap with the organised far right in both ideology and personnel. Odinism is a long-running current within fascist and white supremacist politics, with believers sometimes coming into conflict with the Christian far right.

ODINIC RITE

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: JEFFREY HOLLEY (AKA HEIMGEST)



The Odinic Rite (OR) is a “folkish” Heathen organisation founded in the UK in 1973 by John Gibbs-Bailey and John Yeowell. Yeowell, a former member of Oswald Mosley’s blackshirts, became the group’s first director. He was replaced by Jeffrey Holley (AKA Heimgest) in 1989, causing schisms within the group. Holley now resides in British Columbia, Canada.

While OR today is small, it has been influential on folkish Heathenry both in the UK and overseas. OR offshoots have emerged in Australia, Germany and the US, and former members have gone on to found both the Odinist Fellowship and Woden’s Folk.

One prominent current figure in the UK is Phil Reddall (AKA Redwald), an ex-British National Party (BNP) councillor and organiser for North Shropshire. Reddall, who also has links to Patriotic Alternative, produces video content under the name Mannaz Tribe and is currently a regular writer for the Arktos Media website.



ODINIST FELLOWSHIP

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: RALPH MICHAEL HARRISON (AKA INGVAR)



The Odinist Fellowship (OF) is a registered charity that follows a “folkish” version of Heathenism.

The OF emerged from the Odinic Rite in the 1990s, and is headed by Ralph Michael Harrison (AKA Ingvar), a longstanding far-right activist and original editor of the now-defunct *Right Now!* magazine. Since 2014, the group has used a sixteenth-century chapel in Newark-on-Trent, Nottinghamshire as its temple.

The group has proved attractive to a number of far-right activists, including members of Patriotic Alternative (PA) and its splinter group, the Homeland Party. In July 2023, the temple was visited by Alek Yerbury, a former PA activist who now heads the National Support Detachment. Harrison himself attended anti-migrant protests led by Yerbury in Lincoln and Skegness last year.

The well-known Heathen YouTuber, Tom Rowsell (AKA Survive the Jive), officiates the Hearth of Devon, his local OF group.

SURVIVE THE JIVE

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

Tom Rowsell (AKA Survive the Jive) has carved out a career as the far-right’s go-to expert on “Indo-European” history and Paganism, producing a regular stream of video, podcast and social media content that is often interspersed with racist tropes and far-right talking points. He has built a sizeable online following, at time of writing having 219,000 subscribers on YouTube and 26,600 on Twitter.

A former freelance journalist, Rowsell has been active in far-right circles in the UK since the early 2010s and spoke at the Generation Identity UK conference in July 2019 and at a Traditional Britain Group event in December 2021. He has also attended fascist events overseas, such as the Identitarian Ideas conference in Stockholm in 2017, which was organised and addressed by leading white nationalists from across Europe and the US.

Rowsell has also appeared on a multitude of far-right and white nationalist shows, including those of Colin Robertson (AKA Millennial Woes), Marcus Follin (AKA The Golden One), Edward Dutton (AKA The Jolly Heretic), Arktos Media and Red Ice Radio.

Rowsell officiates the Hearth of Devon, his local branch of the Odinist Fellowship, a folkish Heathen group.

He was also the organiser of the Pagan Futures conference in June 2022, which featured Dann Capp and Boaz Vilallonga and brought a crowd of over 100 to London.



WODEN'S FOLK

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: GEOFFREY DUNN (AKA WULF INGESSUNU)

Woden's Folk is a fringe group founded in 1998 by Geoffrey Dunn (AKA Wulf Ingessunu), a former National Front activist who was also previously involved in the Odinic Rite. The group has a specifically Anglo Saxon focus and has prominent messianic elements, prophesying the coming of a “Folk Fuhrer”, a version of Woden, who will save the “English folk”.

The tiny but extreme group received press attention in 2019 for holding torchlit ceremonies at National Trust and English Heritage sites, including Avebury in Wiltshire and Wayland's Smithy in Oxfordshire.

Activists to have passed through Woden's Folk include former members of the National Front, the British National Party and also National Action, a nazi group now banned under anti-terror legislation. It also includes current and former members of Patriotic Alternative.

THE FYRGEN

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

Dann Capp is a graphic designer and musician who runs a folkish Heathen podcast and social media project under the name “The Fyrgen”. While the podcast has been on hiatus since May 2023, Capp remains a prominent figure in the UK's far-right Heathen sphere, and is closely affiliated with Woden's Folk.

Since August 2020, Capp has also run a cryptocurrency channel and chat group for far-right activists on the messaging app Telegram. Under the alias “Steed”, Capp uses the platform to offer investment advice peppered with racism and conspiracy theories.

Capp's “Heathen Folk” music project, The Wolcensmen, performed at the Pagan Futures conference in June 2022, organised by Tom Rowsell (AKA Survive the Jive). He is also involved in the Woodlander Initiative, designing the website of the land-buying scheme.



HOLOCAUST DENIAL

ALISON CHABLOZ

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Alison Chabloz is a musician, blogger and Holocaust denier from Glossop in Derbyshire who runs her own website.

She is one of the UK's most notorious Holocaust deniers and has served three jail terms for breaking a range of laws. In 2018, she was convicted for sending an offensive, indecent or menacing message and for a song in which she called Auschwitz a "theme park for fools."

She was sentenced again in April 2022 for "grossly offensive" antisemitism in a video posted online in April 2020. She was handed a prison sentence of 22 weeks, eleven of which were to be served at HMP Bronzefield and the rest on licence.

She continues to maintain a website to infrequently promote her work and update her supporters.



CASTLE HILL
PUBLISHERS

CASTLE HILL PUBLISHERS / COMMITTEE FOR OPEN DEBATE ON THE HOLOCAUST

CATEGORY: PUBLISHER

Castle Hill Publishers (CHP) is a publisher of Holocaust denial literature, set up in 1998 by the convicted German Holocaust denier, Germar Rudolf. In 2014, it merged with the American Holocaust denial organisation, CODOH (Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust). In 2022 CHP was sold to CODOH after shipping books from the UK to Europe became "financially and legally untenable" because of Brexit. It publishes the Holocaust Handbook series which includes over 50 books by some of the most high profile deniers in the world.

In 2022, founder Germar Rudolf stepped back from both CODOH and Castle Hill. A cryptic message on its website suggests that Rudolf's decision was motivated by "them" - AKA Jews - attacking him, but makes no mention of whether his 2020 conviction for exposing his genitals in a children's playground, while holding a bottle of baby oil, had anything to do with his decision to step back from running the Holocaust denial enterprise.

The organisation now operates as the bookstore for CODOH and its CEO is Michael Santomauro.

HISTORICAL REVIEW PRESS (HRP)

CATEGORY: PUBLISHER

At one point the HRP was the leading publisher of Holocaust denial literature in Britain. Run by Anthony Hancock, he published notorious books such as the reissue of *Did Six Million Really Die?* And the newspaper *Holocaust News*.

Despite the death of founder Hancock in 2012, the HRP continues to exist. However, today it is just a website that sells a variety of fascist, far right and Holocaust denial literature, much of it produced by other publishers. Though it says it is open to new submissions, it has not published an original book for some time.

BNP demo in support of David Irving, arrested in Austria. Michèle Renouf (center). Photo: David Hoffman



MICHÈLE RENOUF

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Michèle Renouf is an Australian-born former model and has been a leading international Holocaust denier since the 1990s.

She has a long history of working with neo-nazis, Islamists and conspiracy theorists of all sorts to push her antisemitism. She is perhaps best known for her links to antisemites in the Middle East.

Though less influential than she once was, she continues to be active and has been seen on pro-Palestine and anti-trans demonstrations, as well as at events organised by the fascist group Patriotic Alternative in recent years.

NICK KOLLERSTROM

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

Nick Kollerstrom is a former honorary research fellow at University College London who was dropped by the university in 2008 after it emerged he was engaging in Holocaust denial. In an article entitled: “the Auschwitz ‘Gas Chamber’ Illusion”, Kollerstrom claimed that although there were gas chambers at Auschwitz these “were operated for purposes of hygiene and disinfection, in order to save lives and not take them”. In 2014, he released the book *Breaking the Spell*:



The Holocaust: Myth and Reality through Germar Rudolf’s Holocaust denial publishing house, Castle Hill Publishers.

In addition to Holocaust denial Kollerstrom has written books pushing conspiracy theories about the 7/7 London bombings, the supposed death of Paul McCartney, 9/11, and Ukraine.

He continues to appear on conspiracy theory shows as well as events.

DAVID IRVING

CATEGORY: INDEPENDENT ACTIVIST

David Irving is a key British Holocaust denier, once considered to be one of the most successful and respectable of the “revisionists”. Irving made his reputation as a historian after gaining access to hitherto unaccessed personal papers of former leading Nazis, some of whom he interviewed.

In recent years he has become increasingly irrelevant. While he remains an internationally recognised name in the Holocaust denial world, Irving is now an elderly man and rarely appears in public.

Old clips of his talks are still widely accessible and he may do the odd speaking engagement in the coming year, but he is a shadow of his former self and too frail to do much else now. He continues to update his archaic website but almost solely to add links to news articles from other sites. He also maintains the Focal Point Publications website where a dwindling audience of fans can still buy his books.

PREJUDICE DRIVES CONSPIRACY THEORIES

NICK LOWLES

THE BELIEF in a range of bizarre and dangerous conspiracy theories amongst the British people remains depressingly high, polling conducted for HOPE not hate reveals. Questioned on a range of controversial opinions, the 25,000 respondents in our Focaldata poll are broadly in line with the results from previous years.

Support for conspiracy theories often transcends traditional political divides, and so people who have very progressive views on many issues sometimes agree with certain theories that are supported by people with vastly different political views. However, there is generally a correlation between general attitudes and the type of conspiracies one might support.

Polling on conspiracy theories always needs to be caveated by the fact that some people might not have heard of these theories before being quizzed in a poll. We also cannot know what importance respondents place on their support for statements in the poll. However, the size of this poll, at 25,000 people, gives us confidence in concluding that we are all more likely to support theories that in some way reflect our broader worldview, which may account to why people might claim to support a conspiracy theory even if they have not heard of it before the poll.

For example, we found that Muslims who have a negative attitude towards Jewish people are more likely to support antisemitic conspiracies about Jewish control of the banking system and the Holocaust. The same goes the other way round too, with Jewish people who have negative views on Muslims more likely to support the myth of “no-go zones” for non-Muslims.

Likewise, 49% of those who have strong anti-immigrant views are likely to support the notion that “globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity”, with just 19% claiming that this statement to be false. Amongst the general population, 28% claim to support this statement.

Almost three in five of those people (58%) with strong anti-Islam views support the statement that there are “parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are ‘no-go’ zones for non-Muslims” – twice that of the national average.

What is also concerning is not only the number of people supporting certain conspiratorial statements, but the even higher numbers who claim they are not sure. While this can be partly explained by people not having heard the conspiracy theory before, the lack of knowledge about some of the most extreme theories demonstrates how pernicious conspiracies are.

The most provocative statement in our questions was

25,000 people were asked if they believed a number of common conspiratorial statements. The numbers who claimed to believe these statements were true was alarming

Jewish people have an unhealthy control over the world's banking system



Parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are ‘no-go’ zones for non-Muslims



The official account of the Nazi Holocaust is a lie and the number of Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II has been exaggerated on purpose



Regardless of who is officially in charge of governments and other organisations, there is a single group of people who secretly control events and rule the world together



Globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity



The threat of climate change is being exaggerated by Governments and the media in order to control our lives

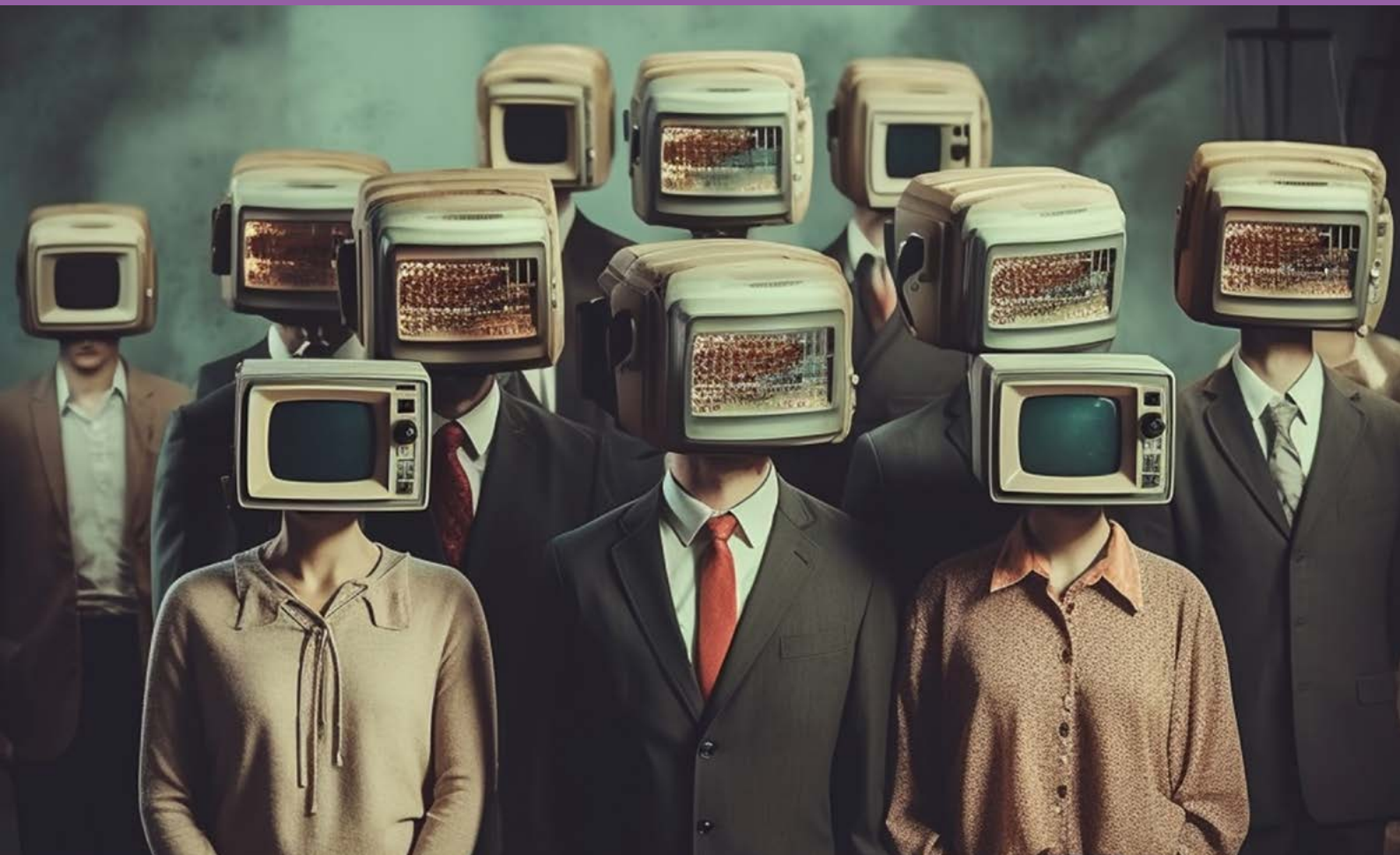


■ Definitely true
 ■ Probably true
 ■ Neither true or false
 ■ Probably false
 ■ Definitely false
 ■ Don't know

the proposition that “the official account of the Nazi Holocaust is a lie and the number of Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II has been exaggerated on purpose.” While only 5% of respondents thought this statement was “definitely true”, with a further 7% saying it was “probably true”, 23% of respondents said that they were undecided about the statement.

If the headline figures for the support for conspiracy theories were not bad enough, drilling down into the data reveals even more alarming results.

Reform UK voters were much more likely to support conspiracy theories. A quarter of Reform UK voters claim to support the statement that “Jewish people have an unhealthy control over the world’s banking



system”, while 61% agree that “parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are ‘no-go’ zones for non-Muslims”, twice the national average. The same proportion of Reform UK voters (60%) claim to support the statement that the “official account of the Nazi Holocaust is a lie and the number of Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II has been exaggerated on purpose” as the rest of the population. However, 52% support the claim that “Regardless of who is officially in charge of governments and other organisations, there is a single group of people who secretly control events and rule the world together”, compared to 34% nationally.

The biggest gap between the attitudes of Reform UK voters and the public generally comes with the statement “globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity.” A shocking 60% of Reform UK voters claim to support this trope, compared to 27% nationally, and even this is depressingly high.

Twice as many Reform UK voters support the statement that “the threat of climate change is being exaggerated by Governments and the media in order to control our lives” compared to the national average.

It has widely reported in the past that young people tend to believe in conspiracy theories in greater numbers than other age groups in society, but our polling does not reflect this. The opinions of the 2,645 18-24 year-olds were only very marginally more inclined to conspiratorial thinking than the general public as a whole and, in anything, were slightly less so than the 25-34 age group.

Our poll suggests that men are more likely to support

conspiracy theories than women and Muslims are more likely to support theories compared to other religious groups. People who view themselves as “disadvantaged” and those with very negative views of the political system are also disproportionately prone to supporting conspiracy theories.

There have always been some people who support conspiracy theories, whether because they think it’s funny, consider it anti-establishment or are rooted in sincere belief, but the numbers supporting such ideas increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Any hope that this would decline with time has not been borne out with our polling. If anything, the support for some theories has actually increased.

It is easy to dismiss such beliefs as daft and inconsequential, but a conspiratorial mindset encourages distrust in authority, in science and in mainstream media, and can undermine a cohesive society. Beliefs in such conspiracies can easily act as a gateway to extremism and in turn feed violent ideologies.

As we mentioned in last year’s *State of Hate* report, the adoption of some conspiratorial views by seemingly more mainstream commentators and social media influencers, such as Kanye West and Andrew Tate, has introduced many – especially the young – to ideas that were previously only found on the extreme fringes of society.

While very few of those who follow such social media influencers will go on to become political extremists, many go on to become more tolerant, or even more susceptible, to ever-more extreme conspiracy theories. And that is a threat to us all.

CONSPIRACY THEORISTS

David Icke



DAVID ICKE

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

David Icke is arguably the UK's most famous conspiracy theorist and antisemite.

Icke emerged into the public eye as a sports presenter in the 1980s and briefly as a Green Party representative. After experiencing an "awakening" in 1990, he became notorious for his extreme conspiratorial beliefs, in particular those concerning the existence of evil extraterrestrials and "hybrid human-reptile" bloodlines he believes to be controlling world events. However, the "reptilian theory" is just one element of the hugely convoluted narrative Icke has developed over his long career, which incorporates vaccinations, mind control, Satanic ritual abuse, 9/11 trutherism and a barrage of paranormal and New Age beliefs.

Ickism borrows heavily from pre-existing New World Order (NWO) narratives, many of them drawn from American far-right militia movements. Whilst he denies charges of antisemitism, he regularly blames nonsensical subcategories of Jewishness - such as "Rothschild Zionist/Khazarian Mafia/Sabbatean-Frankists" - for long-standing antisemitic tropes. For example, he has attempted to rehabilitate the

Protocols of the Elders of Zion - a notorious forgery that outlines a Jewish plot for world domination - by claiming that it accurately documents the plans of a "Sabbatean-Frankist Death Cult" rather than all Jews. He has also long demonised George Soros, the Rothschild family and other Jewish individuals and organisations as supernaturally evil puppeteers.

Icke's prolific output and gift for self-promotion has enabled him to spread his blend of NWO narratives, antisemitism and the paranormal to a worldwide audience. From 2020, he has effectively exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to gain a new prominence, denying the existence of the virus in videos viewed millions of times and becoming a figurehead for the conspiracy theory-driven protest movement in the UK and overseas. This included headlining a series of large anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine demonstrations in London.

Icke's online reach has been hindered by bans from several mainstream social media platforms, although he had his Twitter account reinstated in early 2023 (at time of writing he has a 570,000 followers on the platform). In recent years, the ageing conspiracist has increasingly delegated duties to his sons Jaymie and Gareth, who are themselves prominent in the UK's conspiracy theory scene and run the streaming service, "Ickonic".

THE LIGHT

CATEGORY: MAGAZINE

EDITOR: DARREN NESBITT

The Light is a monthly conspiracy theory magazine that denies the existence of COVID-19 and climate change, and has promoted antisemitism and far-right politics.

The Light emerged in September 2020 in tandem with the UK's burgeoning anti-vaccine protest movement. Edited by the "flat earther" Darren Nesbitt, *The Light* is designed to mimic a traditional newspaper and has grown into a significant voice in the conspiracy theorist alternative media. Every month, thousands of copies are handed out on street stalls or left alongside mainstream publications in newsagents to be taken free of charge.

In January 2022, Nesbitt claimed the magazine had a huge 250,000 print run, distributed by volunteers organised on Facebook and Telegram. The fortunes of the outlet have dipped since, with Nesbitt blaming the loss of "hundreds of subscribers" on the cost-of-living crisis. Interest in *The Light* has also likely waned as public anxiety about the pandemic has lessened.

Nonetheless, *The Light* continues to find a wide reach across the UK and has broadened its focus from pandemic theories to a wider "culture war" outlook, taking aim at an "insane woke collectivist ideology" and incorporating strong anti-trans prejudice into its output. It also increasingly includes content denying the existence of climate change.

Notably, the outlet has also platformed and promoted some of the UK's best-known far-right figures and antisemites, introducing them to new audiences. This includes the Holocaust denier John Hamer, the antisemite David Icke, and various white supremacists. It also includes anti-Muslim figures such as Anne Marie Waters and Katie Hopkins, and longstanding far-right activist Robin Tilbrook.

The tone of *The Light* is highly alarmist and occasionally violent. For example, an article in the June 2022 issue stated that "under the 1947 Nuremberg Code, MPs, doctors and nurses can be hanged if found guilty of medical experimentation". Elsewhere, the magazine has called for a "Second Nuremberg Trials", referring to the execution of leading Nazis in November 1945.

The Light remains a significant producer and promoter of conspiratorial content online, and has repeatedly promoted content from the Holocaust denier Mark Collett, leader of the fascist group Patriotic Alternative, including a post railing against "replacement migration".

October 2022 saw the launch of a sister paper *The Light Australia*, which uses the same format and has published nine issues at time of writing.



KEEP TALKING

CATEGORY: DISCUSSION GROUP

ORGANISER: IAN FANTOM



Keep Talking is a conspiracy theory group that holds meetings in the UK capital, organised by Ian Fantom. Prominent Holocaust denier Nick Kollerstrom has been an active member of the group, and has sold his denial material at events.

The group has held meetings on a wide range of conspiracy theories, featuring figures from both the political left and the far right. This includes Holocaust deniers such as Alison Chabloz and James Thring, the antisemite Gilad Atzmon, the far-right activist Robin Tilbrook of the English Democrats and David Shayler, a former MI5 agent-turned-9/11 "truther" who has declared himself the Messiah.

The group has suffered setbacks and cancelled meetings due to the attentions of anti-fascist and anti-racist campaigners, but as of 2023 continues to hold meetings.

UNITY NEWS NETWORK

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET



Unity News Network (UNN) is a conspiracy theory website headed by David Clews, a former Conservative and Labour councillor in Renfrewshire, Scotland.

Founded in 2018 by Clews and Carl Pearson, who was then UKIP's Scottish youth leader, UNN built an audience by supporting the protest movement to free the anti-Muslim extremist Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (AKA Tommy Robinson) during his spell behind bars that year. The outlet's following grew significantly after it began spreading conspiratorial content relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of writing, it has over 100,000 followers on Facebook, 55,000 on Twitter and almost 23,000 on Telegram.

While Pearson is no longer involved in the project, under Clews UNN has also adopted an increasingly extreme outlook. For example, the outlet has promoted the White Genocide conspiracy theory and described the West as being in the grip of "cultural Marxist degeneracy". UNN also remains plugged into the conspiracy theory protest scene, with Clews attending various demonstrations in recent years.

Clews has also established increasingly tight links to the UK's fascist fringe, most notably speaking at the conferences of the nazi group Patriotic Alternative (PA) in 2022 and 2023. Clews has also hosted PA leaders on UNN streams, as well as James Costello, a repeat guest who was jailed in November 2023 for eighteen hate crime offences. Other guests include former British National Party (BNP) leader Nick Griffin. Clews has also himself appeared on PA-related streams and other fascist shows.

It is therefore unsurprising to find that the UNN chat on Telegram is swamped with open antisemitism, other forms of racism and far-right content more broadly.



Piers Corbyn, the older brother of former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, is among the UK's busiest conspiracy theorists.

A former Labour councillor and organiser, Corbyn originally made a name in the conspiracist milieu as a climate change denier, gaining press coverage for rubbing shoulders with the Holocaust denier Nick Kollerstrom.

However, he gained national notoriety as a figurehead of the UK's anti-vaccine protest movement shortly after COVID-19 lockdowns began in 2020. Corbyn organised and headed a multitude of conspiracy theory-driven anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine demonstrations at which he was often arrested, generating extensive press coverage. He was also arrested in 2021 for distributing leaflets likening vaccination efforts to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Corbyn stood in the London mayoral election in 2021 for his own political party, Let London Live (LLL), but received less than 1% of the vote. He has gone on to contest other local and parliamentary elections, although both he and other LLL candidates have reliably returned paltry results.

In October 2021, a week after the murder of Sir David Amess MP, Corbyn led a small group of protesters who erected a gallows in Parliament Square. In December, Corbyn was again arrested after he told a demonstration that they needed to "get a bit more physical" with those who supported restrictions and "take down lying MPs". He added that they needed to: "hammer to death those scum who have decided to go ahead with introducing new fascism [...] We've got to get a list of them [...] and if your MP is one of them, go to their offices and, well, I would recommend burning them down [...]."

Corbyn has broadened his focus away from COVID-19 and onto other issues, reflecting a wider shift in the conspiracy theory-oriented protest movement. This includes taking aim at Drag Queen Story Hour events, the children's book reading sessions, and particularly conspiracy theory-driven campaigns against "Low Traffic Neighbourhoods" and Low Emission Zone measures in Oxford, London and other cities. He also received press attention after labelling the 7 October Hamas attack in Israel as a "false flag operation."

ENGLISH CONSTITUTION PARTY

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY



The English Constitution Party is a tiny political party devoted to the cause of English nationalism, combined with a strong tendency towards conspiracy theories.

Led by Graham Moore (AKA Daddy Dragon), the party makes little impact politically but retains a small support base and gained some attention early in 2023 after Moore called for its supporters to bring rape alarms and eggs along to a protest against the Coronation of King Charles.

The group had an annual event in Runnymede in August, which appeared to have attracted around 40 attendees. Towards the end of the year, Moore began to overt antisemitic statements to social media, perhaps signalling a shift in the direction of the party.



Richie Allen is the Manchester-based protégé of conspiracy theorist David Icke, and runs a regular audio show.

The Richie Allen Show emerged from Icke's short-lived broadcast, The People's Voice, and was for a time hosted on Icke's website. It has become a staple platform for conspiracy theorists, including antisemites and Holocaust deniers. While Allen claims his guests are on to "debate", they are often given an easy ride and praised despite their extreme positions.

Repeat guests include some of the UK's most infamous Holocaust deniers, such as Nick Kollerstrom (whom Allen has described as an "old friend"), and Alison Chabloz (whom Allen described as a "remarkable woman, extraordinary woman"). Other repeat guests include Mark Collett, leader of the fascist Patriotic Alternative and the most prominent nazi currently active in the UK, as well as the Islamist hate preacher Anjem Choudary.

He has also hosted various mainstream politicians, including the current Conservative MP Desmond Swayne and the former Tory minister Ann Widdecombe.

Allen is now banned on many mainstream social media platforms, although regained his Twitter account in November 2022. At time of writing, he has a sizable following of 65,000 on the platform.

UK COLUMN

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET

UK Column is a conspiracy theory-oriented online media outlet. Founded in 2006 by Brian Gerrish and aiming to “highlight the rise of a dangerous political dictatorship”, UK Column was originally a small newsletter but has grown into a website that produces a regular stream of articles, video content and occasional offline meetings. The site received a considerable boost during the COVID-19 pandemic, and remains a significant voice in the UK conspiracy theorist alternative media.

UK Column also has areas of overlap with the far right. For example, the site has focussed on Drag Queen Story Hour, in step with a broader far-right backlash against the children’s storytelling events, which UK Column presented as a deliberate plot to “brainwash” children. Far-right ideologies promoted by the outlet include the “Cultural Marxism” theory, and even the “Kaltergi Plan”, a variant of the White Genocide conspiracy theory that alleges that a sinister plot is underway to wipe out white Europeans.

Commissioning editor Alex Thomson has made several appearances on Patriotic Weekly Review, the online show of Patriotic Alternative (PA) leader Mark Collett, as well as various other fascist and white nationalist shows. Gerrish and Thomson have also made repeated guest appearances on the show of British white nationalist Colin Robertson (AKA Millennial Woes).



an alternative, conspiratorial curriculum, and has published photos of children engaging in crossbow and combat training. *The Times* reported in 2023 that “as many as 20 children of primary school age” attend the school, and that “obstructive” staff members blocked Ofsted from inspecting the site.

While Hope Sussex presents a “family friendly” New Age image, organising alternative music festivals and craft events, it has also hosted a number of far-right figures and radical conspiracy theorists. An early contributor to the project was Alpha Team Assemble, the militant anti-vaccine group, until the group fell out with the Hope Sussex organisers. The site has also hosted events featuring David Icke, the UK’s best-known conspiracy theorist, the far-right social media personality Katie Hopkins and Kate Shemirani, a leading British anti-vaxxer notorious for her extreme statements.

HOPE SUSSEX COMMUNITY

CATEGORY: COMMUNITY CENTRE

Hope Sussex Community is an “autonomous community” centre established in 2022 near Netherfield in East Sussex.

The project emerged from the conspiracy theory-driven anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine protest movement, and was spearheaded by Matt and Sadie Single, former British National Party (BNP) officials. In Matt Single’s words, the aim of the project is to build: “a community of wide-awake people that have removed their children from an insidious State education system, that [...] seeks to denigrate our children using self-loathing, fear and intolerance to create future generations of easily manipulated drones”.

Hope Sussex encourages parents to remove children from mainstream schools in favour of learning



JAMES DELINGPOLE

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

James Delingpole is a columnist and podcast host who has written for publications including the *Telegraph*, *The Spectator* and served as editor of the UK-spinoff of the Breitbart media franchise, *Breitbart London*. He continues to work as a film reviewer for *The Spectator*, while interviewing a wide array of conspiracy-theorist influencers for his podcast, the *Delingpod*.

While his output has long been dominated by divisive and conspiratorial themes, particularly relating to immigration, Islam and climate change, his tone began to shift during the COVID-19 pandemic and since then his output has documented a wholesale embrace of outlandish and paranoid conspiracy theories.

While Delingpole has only alluded to Holocaust denial himself, he has continued to invite prominent deniers on to his podcast and signposted their work to his followers. In January 2023, he invited the author and Holocaust denier John Hamer on for a discussion on Winston Churchill, in which the latter complained that Nazi Germany had been unfairly “demonised” and that the war only broke out due to Winston Churchill being bribed by Zionists.

Delingpole also organised some live versions of his podcast format in 2023, hosting more high-profile guests like GB News host Neil Oliver in April and veteran conspiracy theorist David Icke in November.



PAUL JOSEPH WATSON / SUMMIT NEWS

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

Paul Joseph Watson is a British conspiracy theorist who first came to prominence as a contributor to Alex Jones' notorious website Infowars, a key platform in the promotion of right-wing conspiracy theories on the American right and influenced the future MAGA movement of Donald Trump. Watson has cited Jones and fellow British conspiracy influencer David Icke as being the two key influences in shaping his worldview in his late teens, leading him to set up his own conspiracy blog in 2001.

He soon attracted the attention of Alex Jones, and the pair would collaborate heavily for the next two decades on producing content for Infowars's extensive network of websites and video platforms. While Watson's early content consisted of material

CONSERVATIVE WOMAN

CATEGORY: MEDIA OUTLET

Conservative Woman is a radical right conspiracy theorist website set up in 2014 that, despite its name, has majority-male contributors. It grew in popularity during the pandemic, in which it took a stridently anti-lockdown and anti-vaccine stance, and claims to have 1.5 million monthly views.

Among the articles published in 2023 was a piece by James Delingpole suggesting that February's earthquake in Turkey and Syria, which killed almost 60,000 people, was man-made, and a three-part piece denying that the HIV virus can cause AIDS.

Like many on the conspiratorial right, the conflict in the Middle East is divisive issue for Conservative Woman; while its columns are uniformly pro-Israel and it has published a five-part critique of antisemitism in the so-called "Truth Movement", its readers comment section is dominated by anti-Israel sentiment and antisemitic conspiracy theories.

The CONSERVATIVE WOMAN

promoting a huge range of conspiracy beliefs, including 9/11 trutherism, chemtrails and the New World Order superconspiracy, over the past ten years his conspiracy theorising has increasingly aligned with the values and political targets of the US and European far right, demonising Muslims and migrants and spreading false news about liberal and left-wing politicians.

Having built his own large social media following, in particular through his videos on YouTube (a platform on which he has 1.95 million subscribers), Watson has distanced himself from Infowars in recent years. Documents released as part of the Sandy Hook defamation case against Jones - which resulted in the latter being ordered to pay \$1bn dollars to the parents of the victims - painted an embarrassing case for both parties, highlighting the huge markups and profits of their supplements business and also Watson's private criticisms of Jones' conduct in relation to Sandy Hook.

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NAZI, FASCIST AND ETHNONATIONALIST

PATRIOTIC ALTERNATIVE

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: MARK COLLETT



Patriotic Alternative (PA) is a nazi group launched in September 2019 by Mark Collett, a former leading member of the British National Party (BNP). While small, PA quickly became the most active far-right group in Britain, although major splits in 2023 have significantly reduced the group's organisational capacity.

Aiming to unite isolated fascists into cohesive far-right communities, PA gained recruits from across the splintered British far right, connecting ex-BNP stalwarts with alt-right social media personalities, veteran Holocaust deniers, politically inexperienced young fascists and several former members and associates of the now-proscribed nazi terror group, National Action (NA).

The group uses a multi-pronged approach, employing forms of traditional campaigning and online activism to spread its core racist, antisemitic message. PA has repeatedly failed to register as a party. It has therefore supported candidates from other fascist vehicles, such as the British Democrats, or resorted

to dirty tactics to influence elections. This includes distributing misleading leaflets made to appear as Labour Conservative campaign literature but with pro-immigration messaging, designed to stoke anti-immigration sentiment against the major parties.

The group also draws from the playbook of the "alt-right", the loose, tech-savvy white nationalist movement that emerged in the 2010s, and PA is orbited by a slew of far-right social media personalities who produce hours of extremist content a week. Bans from most mainstream online platforms means that PA depends on loosely-moderated alternatives, most notably the video platform Odysee and the messaging app Telegram, impeding PA's reach but allowing ever-more extreme ideologies and rhetoric to flourish.

Despite the group's nazi underpinnings, PA downplays its most extreme elements, particularly its antisemitism, when dealing with the public, focusing on "demographic change" as its key issue.

PA has mimicked other far-right groups in exploiting cross-Channel migration, in particular targeting temporary asylum accommodation sites, as a means to gain footholds in local communities. Tactics include disseminating targeted leaflets in surrounding areas, infiltrating local community Facebook groups and residents' meetings, and supporting or organising protests around sites earmarked to house asylum seekers and refugees. PA then claims credit if plans are eventually scrapped.

PA has also latched onto an existing campaign against Drag Queen Story Hour, a series of storytelling sessions for children organised at public libraries, smearing performers and LGBTQ+ people in general as paedophiles.

FAULT LINES

Despite its high output and considerable media coverage, the group's growth has slowed in recent years. There are several apparent reasons for this loss of momentum.

Firstly, PA's brazen nazism has alienated many on the British far right, let alone wider society. Collett himself has a long history in fascist politics and carries much baggage. HOPE not hate has repeatedly exposed PA's links to National Action, gaining PA much negative attention. Members have also come under increasing scrutiny from the authorities; HOPE not hate has identified five individuals linked to PA who were handed prison sentences for hate crime or terror-related offences in 2023 alone.

Moreover, the group's internal practices have undoubtedly hampered its growth. PA's extreme vetting procedures, which were introduced by National Admin Officer Kenny Smith after a series of anti-fascist infiltrations, have given rise to much anxiety around



Laura Towler, Kenny Smith and Mark Collett



PA activists in Erskine, Renfrewshire, 5 February 2023. Many have since defected to the Homeland Party. Picture: HOPE not hate

data security and proved off-putting to many potential recruits. PA has also struggled to retain its activists, many of whom have lapsed into inactivity or defected to other vehicles, growing frustrated with its endless social events and online streams. Others have been forced out amid bitter disputes, often with Collett himself.

PA's structure also renders it vulnerable to splinters. The group's branches act with considerable autonomy, and the national rank-and-file gather only a few times a year. PA's multi-pronged approach has also fostered strategic disputes and a disjointed understanding of the group's purpose. This has led to significant gulfs between regions, a recipe for disaster.

SPLINTERS

So far, PA has spawned four distinct splinter groups. The first to form was the Independent Nationalist Network (INN), after a cluster of activists, mostly in the Midlands, broke away in July 2021. Next, a handful of former Scottish activists launched the Highland Division in October 2022, although neither group has produced much notable activity to date.

More significant was the desertion of the Leeds-based activist Alek Yerbury this February. Allying himself with a circle of former English Defence League (EDL) activists in Yorkshire, Yerbury launched the National Support Detachment (NSD) in April and has headed numerous anti-migrant protests.

However, by far the most consequential rupture occurred in April 2023 after Kenny Smith led a group of disgruntled officers to break away and form the "Homeland Party". Smith took with him some of PA's best-known figures, most of its Regional Organisers and its Scottish and West Midlands branches almost wholesale.

The split ostensibly owes to a dispute over the vetting procedures enforced by Smith, who believes that Collett prioritises online content creation over offline campaigning, registering as a party and engaging in local politics. However, Collett and Smith were on opposite sides of the civil war that racked the BNP in the late 2000s and their recent alliance has always seemed precarious.

PA remains larger and better known than any of its splinters, there is little doubt that the schisms have

been damaging and demoralising, denting PA's output, undermining its leadership and providing alternatives to which future defectors can turn.

PA POST-SPLIT

Since the split, the leadership has attempted to firm up support amongst the fascist fringes through even more extreme messaging, and has sought to repair links to groups it had previously spurned. PA has also loosened its vetting, an approach that will swell numbers at PA actions but may also compromise the group's security and may further dilute its sense of unified purpose.

Homeland's successful registration as a political party has humiliated the PA leadership. PA has previously signalled that it may pursue legal action against the Electoral Commission, but it is unclear whether Collett and Towler will follow through with this costly action. Some PA members are standing in the May local elections as independents, although are unlikely to find electoral success.

The conviction and incarceration of some of PA's key activists is also taking a heavy toll. Most significantly, Sam Melia – the de facto third-in-command at PA – was sentenced to two years in March 2024 for intent to stir up racial hatred and for encouraging racially aggravated criminal damage. The charges relate to his central role in the Hundred Handers, a fascist propaganda network, which was exposed by HOPE not hate in August 2020. PA has lost a central organiser, although his trial generated considerable publicity on the far right and radical right media sphere.

The group will also continue to exploit anti-migrant sentiment as its key means of public outreach. However, PA often has to compete with other far-right groups – including the NSD and Homeland – for the same campaigns.

Nonetheless, these outreach efforts demand close attention. The UK's fascist milieu remains fragmented, but it is broadly pulling in the same direction. These fringe groups are intent on injecting their poison into communities, and believe anti-LGBT+ and especially anti-migrant sentiment provide an opening. It would be unwise to underestimate the harm this may cause, and anti-fascists and campaigners across the UK must meet the challenge head on.

HOMELAND PARTY

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY

LEADER: KENNY SMITH



The Homeland Party is a fascist political party that splintered from Patriotic Alternative (PA) in April 2023. The group formed after Kenny Smith, PA's National Administration Officer, led many of PA's appointed officers to defect en masse, including the large majority of the Scottish and West Midlands branches and chunks of the East Midlands and East of England membership.

The split was strategic rather than ideological, borne out of a loss of faith in PA's leadership and a desire to pursue "community politics" and local elections. However, the new group faces steep challenges.

IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGY

Drawing on traditions of fascist strategy promoted by the National Front in the 1980s and the British National Party in the 2000s, Homeland aims to gain "control of the levers of power" at a local level. Smith has therefore encouraged activists to join parish and community councils, the lowest tier of local government, in order to build political experience and local profiles, as well as to infiltrate trade unions, local parent councils, NHS trusts and even allotment societies to the same end.

Similar to the BNP, Homeland intends to exploit feelings of grievance in majority white neighbourhoods, for example by linking housing shortages, crime and conservation issues to immigration. Like much of the wider UK far right, the group has attempted to engage in campaigns against asylum accommodation sites in order to gain footholds in communities.

The group seeks distance from PA's toxic reputation, hoping to establish what Treasurer Jerome O'Reilly has described as "a squeaky clean media image from the start", and exerts tighter controls on the online output of its members. Of course, Homeland is just as rife with extreme bigotry as PA, and some members have pasts in hardline nazi outfits. At the

core of Homeland is the "White Genocide" myth, the belief that Jews are orchestrating a demographic shift in a deliberate attempt to weaken and replace "indigenous" Brits. However, the group downplays such beliefs in public, referring euphemistically to "internationalist elites" supposedly behind a "forced dissolution into a global mass".

PROGRESS AND PROSPECTS

Homeland possesses a small core of dedicated activists who are determined to learn from PA's mistakes. In September, the group claimed to have selected 22 "local leads", and in October announced that it had seven members sitting on community and parish councils, with more on the way. Nine months after its founding, the group finally succeeded in registering as a political party and will be looking to contest its first round of elections in May 2024.

However, only a minority of the PA membership defected to Homeland, and while the group has activists in at least nine regions, they are often scattered and isolated. Even in regions where PA's key organisers jumped ship – such as the South West and Wales – so far, the group has been virtually invisible.

Homeland also initially struggled to establish an online following. Collett and Towler had both built sizable online audiences prior to founding PA and brought eyes and members to their organisation. Homeland has no comparable figure, and in October cancelled its sole regular stream, "HomeTalk", due to low viewing figures. However, the group has since shifted towards short form video content on YouTube, TikTok and other platforms, with some such videos finding tens of thousands of views.

While Homeland's recent registration as a party has provided a bump in membership, it remains small and its extreme vetting procedure for full "activist" status – which requires photo ID and home visits – will undoubtedly alienate some potential sign-ups.

Moreover, some of its initial forays into "community politics" through anti-migrant campaigning have faltered. This is clearest in Cannock, Staffordshire, where the group was told it was unwelcome by local campaigners after Homeland staged its debut demonstration in April. The group also abandoned its long-running effort to co-opt an anti-migrant campaign in Erskine, Renfrewshire after months of effort.

It is also unclear how successful Smith will prove in holding the new grouping together. Homeland is predicated on the belief that white Brits face an impending extinction, and many of its younger activists have been radicalised in an antagonistic online culture that delights in violating liberal conventions and social taboos. The group may therefore struggle to contain its more radical elements through the prolonged and mundane minutiae of local politics.

Homeland is a new organisation with a long-term vision, and the political landscape is unpredictable. Committed fascists are attempting to infiltrate local institutions, and this demands the close attention of anti-fascists and campaigners. While achieving party status has given the group some much needed momentum at the start of the year, at present Homeland remains a peripheral political force.

Kenny Smith



NATIONAL SUPPORT DETACHMENT

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: ALEK YERBURY

The National Support Detachment (NSD) is a street-oriented organisation headed by former Patriotic Alternative (PA) member Alek Yerbury. Having established himself as the figurehead of a small but prolific band of fascists in Northern England, Yerbury hopes to harness the wider anti-migrant groundswell into a formal political movement.

Yerbury joined PA Yorkshire in the autumn of 2021. He went on to become a regular public speaker, resulting in a slew of negative press for his resemblance to Adolf Hitler.

In March 2023, HOPE not hate exposed Yerbury's appalling statements about the murder of Jo Cox, a Yorkshire MP assassinated by a nazi in 2016, and others in which he advocated the use of firearms on migrants, the internment of his political enemies in forced labour camps and much else.

Yerbury split with PA in February 2023 after a spat with the leadership and allied himself with a circle of former English Defence League (EDL) activists in Yorkshire. He launched the NSD in April, an outfit that aims to act as a "support to nationalism in Britain, through organised efforts to overcome the tactics of deplatforming, intimidation and suppression practiced by the hard left". Yerbury, who himself has a military background, has sought to incorporate faux-military trappings into the NSD. The apparent aim of the outfit is to establish a cadre primed for confrontation with leftwing activists.

Recruiting Scott Pitts as the NSD's "Officer Commanding" in Lincolnshire, the pair work closely with Yorkshire Patriots, an EDL splinter led by David Smaller (AKA David Sunderland). Another ally is Katie

Fanning, a Manchester-based ex-UKIP official and former associate of PA.

Often collaborating with other groups, the NSD/Yorkshire Patriots collective has arranged or supported numerous protests in 2023, seeking to steer anti-migrant anger towards a wider, conspiratorial far-right worldview. The largest was a 10 June demo that brought roughly 100 fascists and hooligans to the streets of Leeds. However, other protests have seen turnouts smaller than 50, largely composed of the same travelling far-right activists who are reliably outnumbered by counter-protestors. Turnouts have been disappointing even in Skegness and Lincoln, where Yerbury and his allies have made a long-term effort to co-opt local campaigns.

Recently, they have sought to emulate the successful campaign against a planned asylum accommodation site in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire. Yerbury and Pitts have helped organise an ongoing protest camp at RAF Scampton, a former airbase earmarked to house asylum seekers in Lincolnshire, since October 2023. While the camp has been marred by squabbles and arrests, at time of writing the camp continues.

Shifting towards electoral politics, Yerbury has registered a party based on "the principle of racial, social and cultural unification, and the principles of a militarised society" that seeks to contest national elections. He has proactively established links to existing anti-migrant campaigns across the UK, hoping to hold regular public meetings and to cultivate candidates. His initial application for the "Great British National Workers Party" was rejected by the Electoral Commission in December on the grounds that the name was too similar to an already registered party. Yerbury was eventually successful in registering the National Rebirth Party in February.



Alek Yerbury (centre)

Hadden Adam



THE HIGHLAND DIVISION

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

The Highland Division (HD) is a “leaderless”, openly nazi groupuscule that splintered from the Scottish branch of Patriotic Alternative in October 2022, following a dispute with Kenny Smith, who was then PA’s national Admin Officer.

While some core members cannot be named for legal reasons, activists have included Tony Girling, a former PA organiser based in Alva, Clackmannanshire, and Hadden Adam, a former PA activist from Elgin, Moray. In May 2022, *The Ferret* released images of Adam performing nazi salutes and posing with weapons and nazi memorabilia.

HD undertook a number of small actions in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling, but soon suffered the attention of law enforcement. Hoping to avoid further legal

issues, the group shifted towards anti-migrant street demonstrations.

After an angry confrontation with Smith at a PA protest in Erskine in February 2023, HD members supported protests headed by Alek Yerbury in Skegness and Leeds. Yerbury returned the favour by travelling to a HD-organised protest in Elgin in June. However, the handful of activists that materialised were hopelessly outnumbered by hundreds of counter-protestors.

While remaining hostile to Smith and Homeland, Adam and other HD activists have repaired the relationship with PA, attending the group’s national camp in July. HD figures were also present at the May 2023 “Unity” meeting organised by the INN, as well as a New British Union meeting in Penrith the same weekend, an event attended by an undercover reporter from the *Mail on Sunday*.

Under the weight of legal issues, at present HD is largely dormant.

MILLENNIAL WOES

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

Colin Robertson, AKA Millennial Woes, is a far-right content creator from Linlithgow, West Lothian who became one of the most prominent figures in the British alt-right scene in the mid-2010s via his now-suspended YouTube channel. In recent years he had aligned himself with the Patriotic Alternative group, but was then distanced from that scene after a bitter fallout.

Since then he has had a

radically diminished influence, although his annual “Millenniyule” series of live streamed interviews in December still draws some notable guests. His Twitter account, which was suspended in late 2018, was one of many far-right accounts to be reinstated in February 2023 following Elon Musk’s takeover of the platform.

THE REALITY REPORT

CATEGORY: NETWORK

The Reality Report, a collective of far-right activists led by hooligan Vinnie Sullivan, is a small group of online content creators. The group has been quieter in 2023 than previous years, spending more time on local history projects and launching a coffee brand than anything resembling political activism.



INDEPENDENT NATIONALIST NETWORK

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

The Independent Nationalist Network (INN) is a tiny fascist group that splintered from Patriotic Alternative (PA) in July 2021.

Claiming to be a “leaderless collective”, the group is in practice headed by the former PA members Richard Lumby, a Birmingham-based ex-British National Party organiser, and Matthew Joseph Strutt (AKA Anglo Joe) from Droitwich, Worcestershire. Another well-known but controversial figure is the Norfolk-based Chris Mitchell, formerly PA’s East of England Regional Organiser.

Early on, the INN sought to establish links with the UK’s conspiracy theory-driven protest scene, in particular Alpha Team Assemble, a militant anti-vaccine group. It has also supported several anti-migrant protests in the Midlands.

However, the INN’s main activity has revolved around the “Stop Drag Queen Story Hour” campaign, attending protests in an effort to cancel the children’s book reading sessions. In April 2023, Mitchell was convicted for hate crime offences for maliciously targeting a drag performer the previous year.

Having spent much energy squabbling with PA, Strutt led calls for “unity” on the fascist fringes in 2023, organising a meeting in May in Leeds that brought the PA leadership together with figures from the British Democrats, the Highland Division, the anti-migrant Midlands Says No campaign and Alek Yerbury and his allies.

The INN has continued to collaborate with PA and Yerbury, but is only sporadically active and remains confined to the outside fringe of far-right politics.



THE WOODLANDER INITIATIVE

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: SIMON BIRKETT

The Woodlander Initiative is a land-buying scheme spearheaded by Simon Birkett (AKA Woodlander), a Wiltshire-based tattoo artist and long-standing far-right activist.

Birkett, who has a past in the National Front, the British National Party and the Conservative Party, has been on the fringes of Patriotic Alternative (PA) since 2020. From his self-built, “off grid” cabin in the Warminster area, Birkett runs a YouTube channel and appears on various fascist streams, usually to give advice about homesteading.

In June 2023, Birkett launched the The Woodlander Initiative, a land-buying scheme aimed at far-right activists and conspiracy theorists. Purchasing land is a long-standing aspiration for many on the far right, who desire a space in which they can host events with fewer risks. With funding from its shareholders, The Woodlander Initiative has the long-term aim of owning land in every county in the UK.

Alongside Birkett, the other director of the venture is Joe Knight (AKA Wessex Nomad), an online content creator from Somerset. Dan Capp (AKA The Fyrgen), covered elsewhere in this report, is also heavily involved in the project, building its website. Others include Craig Whyte (AKA Ruffian Dick), a former co-host of the now-defunct fascist podcast, The Absolute State of Britain, who was outed by HOPE not hate in 2021. Senior members of PA have invested in shares, as have members of the Homeland Party.

As of December 2023, The Woodlander Initiative claims to have 400 members, to have raised £100,000 and to be in the process of finalising a plot purchase.



INN members including Richard Lumby (third from right) and Matthew Strutt (right) at an anti-migrant demo in Walsall, 8 May 2023.

BRITISH DEMOCRATS

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY

LEADER: JIM LEWTHWAITE



The British Democrats is a fascist political party that splintered from the British National Party (BNP) in 2013. The split was led by Jim Lewthwaite, a former BNP councillor in Bradford, and Andrew Brons, formerly one of the BNP's two MEPs and before that a leader of the National Front.

As the BNP collapsed, the British Democrats offered a home for defectors and exiles. However, the group failed to capitalise on any early momentum and support quickly drained away. Other than fielding small numbers of candidates at elections, the group has spent much of the last decade gathering dust.

The British Democrats received an injection of new members in 2022, celebrated by Lewthwaite as "unprecedented growth". Many of the new recruits were former members of the anti-Muslim party For Britain which had folded that year, including Cllr Julian Leppert in Epping Forest and other former BNP figures in London, Essex and Kent.

Despite this influx, the group stood just five candidates in the 2023 local elections, receiving poor results and its sole sitting councillor, Julian Leppert, losing his seat. It has however gained a handful of councillors at the parish level, the lowest tier of local government.

Lewthwaite and other figures remain active in the UK's traditional fascist milieu, including the fascist magazine *Heritage & Destiny*, and in 2022 he made an attempt to relaunch the Yorkshire Forum, a far-right discussion group. The British Democrats also maintains links to Patriotic Alternative (PA), the most active fascist group in the UK, with PA activists often campaigning for its candidates in election periods.



HERITAGE & DESTINY

CATEGORY: MAGAZINE



Heritage and Destiny (H&D), a bi-monthly magazine, is the most important print publication produced by the traditional British fascist scene.

Edited by former British National Party (BNP) organisers Mark

Mark Cotterill and Peter Rushton

Cotterill and Peter Rushton, the publication retains a readership among the old guard of the British far right. It has, however, made efforts to expand its readership in recent years, including establishing a presence on social media.

H&D also hosts an annual conference in Preston, Lancashire, which is held in remembrance of various deceased British fascists and is addressed by a series of ageing activists. The events have received attention after Isabel Peralta, a notorious Spanish fascist and H&D's "European correspondent", entered the country to address the 2022 and 2023 conferences.

The most recent event, in September 2023, was attended by roughly 80 people and featured speeches by Peralta alongside Patriotic Alternative (PA) Leader Mark Collett and Deputy Leader Laura Towler, Jim Lewthwaite of the British Democrats, Mark Bullman (AKA Benny) of the nazi band Whitelaw, and Stephen Frost of the British Movement. The meeting proved a source of conflict within the far right, after former PA activist Alek Yerbury and his ally Katie Fanning were barred from the event. The pair subsequently blamed their ban on the PA leadership in a bout of online mudslinging.

CANDOUR AND THE A.K. CHESTERTON TRUST

CATEGORY: MAGAZINE

Edited by Colin Todd, *Candour* magazine is Britain's longest-running fascist publication. However, it has long been in decline and is now an irrelevance on the modern far-right scene.

The Trust was first launched in 1996 to promote the work of veteran fascist A.K. Chesterton and continued the publication of his magazine after his death.

In recent years, *Candour* is published less frequently and circulated amongst a dwindling circle of fascist readers.



Candour & The A.K. Chesterton Trust

TRADITIONAL BRITAIN GROUP

CATEGORY: DISCUSSION GROUP

VICE PRESIDENT: GREGORY LAUDER-FROST

Founded by Gregory Lauder-Frost in 2001, the Traditional Britain Group (TBG) is a London-based organisation that hosts far-right gatherings, dinners and conferences.

Lauder-Frost is a former leading member of the Conservative Monday Club, a pressure group eventually banned by the Tory Party for its racism, and was also Vice President of the anti-communist Western Goals Institute and a former UKIP member. He is also involved with Arktos Media, the far-right publishing house.

The TBG has become a key meeting point for the British far right and an important stopover for international far-right figures. The TBG has endeavoured to maintain an elitist, “High Tory” image, meaning it has been attended by Conservative Party figures alongside open fascists.

Past speakers have included the American “alt-right” figurehead Richard Spencer, Markus Willinger of Generation Identity as well as future UKIP leader



Gregory Lauder-Frost

Gerard Batten. The group received press attention in 2013 after Tory MP Jacob Rees-Mogg addressed the group’s annual dinner (he later apologised for his appearance). European far-right politicians include MEPs from the anti-Muslim German party Alternative für Deutschland and the Estonian finance minister Martin Helme.

The TBG remained a significant British far-right presence on social media, posting regularly across Facebook, Twitter and Telegram.



NATIONAL HOUSING PARTY UK

CATEGORY: POLITICAL PARTY

LEADER: JOHN LAWRENCE



The National Housing Party UK (NHPUK) is a minor far-right political party. NHPUK launched in 2021 under the Oldham-based former Britain First activist John Lawrence and Pat McGinnis, a London-based former British National Party (BNP) activist. NHPUK’s two key policies are “a complete halt to permanent settlement immigration and to leave the 1951 UN Refugee Convention”.

Registering as a party in March 2022, NHPUK has since spent much of its time humiliating itself in local elections. This includes McGinnis achieving a single vote in the Camden Council by-election (Hampstead Town ward) in July 2022.

Alongside producing online content for a tiny audience, the group has also held a number of regional meetings

and engaged in small protests, including supporting anti-migrant protests in Leeds in 2023.

STEVEN BOOKS / LEAGUE OF ST GEORGE

CATEGORY: PUBLISHER

League Enterprises / Steven Books is the commercial arm of the long-standing League of St George, which was founded in 1974 by former members of Oswald Mosley’s Union Movement.

The League of St George sporadically releases a magazine, *League Sentinel*, while Steven Books continues to publish extremely low-quality reprints of obscure fascist pamphlets, as well as selling far-right books by other publishers.

It also hosts a series of Oswald Mosley speeches on SoundCloud and links to Mosley speeches on YouTube. The League’s website is updated very infrequently, usually with obituaries.

BLACKHOUSE PUBLISHING / SANCTUARY PRESS

CATEGORY: PUBLISHER



In 2011, Janet Slatter launched Black House Publishing, named after the British Union of Fascists HQ, the “Black House”. It published reissued versions and reprints of fascist, nazi, Third Position and right-wing literature from authors including Oswald Mosley, Oswald Spengler, and Australian far-right author Kerry Bolton.

However, in March 2019 Slatter launched Sanctuary Press alongside Black House and moved much of the explicitly fascist and all the Oswald Mosley books to the new website.

The Blackhouse website also has a blog with articles by a range of writers, including Kerry Bolton.

ARKTOS MEDIA

CATEGORY: PUBLISHER



Launched in 2009 by Daniel Friberg and John Morgan, Arktos Media is one of the most important purveyors of European New Right and alt-right literature in the world. Arktos Media Ltd is still registered in the UK, though much of its operation is based in other countries.

Friberg remains its Chairman, alongside managing Director Tor Westman. The Belgian far-right activist Robert Steuckers is the current Editor-In-Chief of the Arktos Journal. Leader of the fascist Traditional Britain Group, Gregory Lauder-Frost, used to be the head of Arktos UK, but is no longer in the role.

Arktos has published over 250 books, ranging from new texts, translations and reissues. Amongst its catalogue of authors are influential fascist and far-right “thinkers” including Alexander Dugin, Alain De Benoist and Guillaume Faye. Arktos has also reissued texts by influential philosophers amongst the far right, including Julius Evola and Oswald Spengler.

It has experienced problems publishing and distributing its books since its former printer, Lightning Source (a unit within Ingram Content Group), terminated its services in early 2023.

Arktos maintains a range of social media accounts and also has a regular podcast, often hosting high profile far-right figures from around the world.



VANGUARD BRITANNICA

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION



Vanguard Britannica (VB) is a fascist group that engages primarily in sticker and graffiti actions. Its first stickers were put up in Leicestershire in August 2022, but it has since expanded to most parts of the country with a focus on the Midlands, the North of England and the South East.

During 2023, VB has grown and organised more ambitious actions. It has done multiple banner drops over highways in England with antisemitic and anti-immigrant messaging. It has also increasingly adopted elements from the “active club” scene and turned to physical exercise and martial arts training as part of its regular activities.

EDWARD DUTTON

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR



Edward Dutton (AKA The Jolly Heretic) is an British YouTuber and proponent of pseudo-scientific “race science”, a school of thought that purports that intelligence and other characteristics are almost entirely biologically determined, and varies significantly between “races” of people. Dutton taught at University of Oulu in Finland but was removed after an investigation by the university found him guilty of plagiarising a student’s dissertation.

Dutton has since taken to vlogging and independent eugenicist research and commentary. He has written for a number of fringe far-right journals, including the *Quarterly Review* and race science outlet OpenPsych. Since January 2019, he has sat as editor-in-chief of the notorious *Mankind Quarterly* and become a prominent individual in international race science circles. He spoke at the Traditional Britain Group conference in 2022.

His often childish tone does not seem to have been a detriment to his success on YouTube. The channel has 83,000 subscribers, as of January 2024. It combines interviews with prominent members of the far right with monologues in which he espouses his racist views with a scientific veneer. Unlike many of his contemporaries and despite his extreme views, Dutton has so far avoided a YouTube ban and has racked up almost eight million views to date. In May 2023, he started a Substack and associated podcast which has since reached over 6,000 subscribers.

In 2023, Dutton’s content went through a significant professionalisation. During the year he started producing more documentary style videos and travelled to the US to film a documentary which he is yet to release. He has also appeared frequently at offline events, including international conferences and events for supporters in the UK. On his new podcast he has also interviewed activists in his field of race science and the broader far right, including Jared Taylor, Peter Brimelow, Greg Johnson and Renaud Camus. Notably, he interviewed Katie Hopkins in December, indicating an increasing access to more mainstream figures.



NEEMA PARVINI

CATEGORY: INFLUENCER / CONTENT CREATOR

Neema Parvini (AKA Academic Agent) is a YouTuber and academic with a large international following. He has held positions at Richmond American University and the University of Surrey, specialising in Shakespeare. He was let go from Surrey in relation to his far-right activism.

Parvini's views are extreme and often aligned with that of the scientific racism community. For example, he has tweeted that "blacks are closer to homo erectus" and that black and white people are "different species". Parvini also frequently quotes fascist philosopher Julius Evola.

Parvini has monetised his commentary on current far-right topics and sells premium subscriptions with additional content. While his degrees and academic work are all in the area of literature, he sells online courses to his followers in the area of economics, politics, mathematics and physics, as well as writing.

Parvini has spoken at a range of conferences. These included the Traditional Britain Group in 2022 and 2023, Nomos in London alongside Colin Robertson (AKA Millennial Woes), and Scyldings alongside Carl Benjamin (AKA Sargon of Akkad) and Curtis Yarvin.

NEW BRITISH UNION

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: GARY RAIKES

The New British Union (NBU) is an attempted revival of Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, headed by former BNP organiser Gary Raikes.

Launched in 2013, the organisation has failed to meet its initial goal of becoming an electoral force. The group regularly changes strategy, voicing its intention to register as a political party while also arguing that fascism cannot win at the ballot box.

The latter position came to the fore in May 2023 when a journalist from *The Mail on Sunday* filmed deputy leader Clive Jones expressing support for "lone wolf" tactics at one of its meetings. The exposure prompted the organisation to change names of its branches, from "cells" (which was considered too terroristic-sounding) to "units".

The NBU's extremism and clear fascist aesthetics has proved attractive to some, and it continues to draw in small numbers of young activists to its ranks. Over the last year, it has made a renewed push towards its younger audience by using Instagram to recruit members, restarting its video channels and creating a TikTok account.



WHITE LIVES MATTER ENGLAND

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

White Lives Matter England (WLME) is an offshoot of the US propaganda campaign that became active in August 2022 and has engaged in sticking racist messages across England on an irregular basis since.

The group uses tactics similar to the now-defunct Hundred Handers. It encourages activists to print out stickers from a centralised archive and place them in public spaces, photos of which are then posted on WLME social media channels. Because the name of the group is a now common far-right slogan and its messages are often fairly generic, the stickers have been reused by a range of activists not directly engaged with WLME, as well as newly-formed groups lacking original material. This includes the PA offshoot, the Highland Division, and many youth groups. In this way, the group's main influence is lowering the bar of entry for offline activism.

The group does not have a clear leadership structure, but has a small number of activists who manage its channels and chat groups and others who simply promote the groups content. Activity in 2023 has continued in a similar vein as 2022, with stickers put up on a number of occasions across England. There is however little activity in terms of organising in the UK beyond updating social media channels. Most cases of stickering are done on the initiative of activists who are not directly affiliated with WLME.



BRITISH MOVEMENT (BM)

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: STEVE FROST



Founded in 1968, the BM initially viewed itself as a highly intelligent, drilled and ideological physical force to counter the democratic adventures of their former stablemates, the National Front.

It has certainly attracted violent, racist thugs to its ranks, but its desire to be viewed and regarded as the ideological and intellectual vanguard of the far-right was never realised and any coherent leadership has been absent since the early 1980s.

The continuing decline of, and acrimony within, the Blood & Honour music network has breathed some slight life into the BM over the past four or five years, with the group now effectively running what's left of the network.

The BM has tried to raise its profile by producing swathes of racist stickers as well as semi-literate online magazines and podcasts. In the North West, BM activists do banner groups and town centre photo ops.

Historic antagonisms between the BM and other far-right groups have dissipated with time and many now collaborate by holding joint meetings and protests.

BM members attend, and speak, at the annual Tyndall memorial event, hosted by Heritage and Destiny, while BM members are joined by Blood and Honour activists and Leeds hooligans at their regular protests against migrants and asylum seekers.

The BM is active in London and the South East, the North West, Yorkshire, the East Midlands and Scotland. There is a smattering of support elsewhere, such as South Wales, but far less than in the past.

BRITISH NATIONAL PARTY (BNP)

CATEGORY: ORGANISATION

LEADER: ADAM WALKER



Formed in 1982, the BNP is still the most successful far-right political party in British history.

Since former leader Nick Griffin lost his seat in the European parliament in 2014 the proverbial nail has been in the BNP's coffin.

Other than purchasing a home advertised in *Hare & Hound*, the highbrow periodical for country gents, the BNP leadership has done little other than file a yearly return to the Electoral Commission.

The party is by far the most cash rich of far-right groups in Britain, principally funded by death-bed bequests. Griffin largely spent his final years as leader getting old people to pledge their fortunes to the party, before he was ousted.

There are still sporadic attempts by former members and staffers to wrestle the party out of the hands of the two criminals that now own the BNP, but the time to rescue both the party and its household name has long passed.

The current leadership of Adam Walker and Clive Jefferson has little discernible interest in keeping up a pretence the party is functioning – except for a website where the obligatory attempts to solicit donations continue.

Those whom cut their political teeth in the BNP have flitted between various minor parties and groups for years, but the British Democrats [formerly the British Democratic Party] under the tutelage of former BNP MEP Andrew Brons would appear to have found for themselves the mantle of a serious, neo-nazi political party.



COMBAT 18**CATEGORY: ORGANISATION****LEADER: WILL BROWNING**

Combat 18 emerged from the BNP stewarding group in 1991 and became the dominant force in the far right from 1994 until 1998, when an internal feud ripped the group apart. The '18' in the name represents the first and eight letter of the alphabet, A and H – Adolf Hitler. As the name suggests, the group was avowedly nazi and militant.

A street force soon transformed itself into a group that advocated violence and terrorism. At its peak it had about 500 people in its orbit, though just a few dozen were properly in its core. C18 was behind several serious attacks and some members were even involved in terrorism.

The group declined in the UK after its initial leader Charlie Sargent murdered a close supporter of his key rival and new, more militant leader, Will Browning.

However, Combat 18 embodied militant fascism and likeminded groups sprung up across Europe. C18 units in Belgium, Sweden, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Poland, the Czech Republic, Italy and Serbia have all been involved in terrorism over the years.

C18 hardly exists in the UK anymore. There are a few legacy members, those who still identify with the group, but it was not active in 2023. There were a couple of attempts to hold gigs, though not under their own name, but each came to nothing.

Will Browning (pictured) remains its leader, though he now spends most of his time living with his partner in the Netherlands.

**BRITISH FREEDOM PARTY (BFP)****CATEGORY: ORGANISATION****LEADER: JAYDA FRANSEN**

Formed in 2018, the British Freedom Party (BFP) remains basically the trio of party leader Jayda Fransen, former British National Party leader Nick Griffin and his consigliere Jim Dowson.

BFP has given up on its earlier strategy of standing Fransen in elections to spoil their far-right rivals, particularly Paul Golding of Britain First.

Although Fransen still broadcasts Griffin's irregular rants and political briefings, it's becoming clear Fransen is not, nor does she want to be, the foil against Griffin and Dowson's real enemies – Golding and Lennon.

Dowson and Griffin have increasingly spent time on Dowson's religious projects which has included (of all things) the building of an apparent chapel in Dowson's back garden from where he broadcasts religious sermons. If anything, Dowson and Griffin seem far more interested in the far-right in the Irish Republic where their protégé Niall McConnell has an increasingly disruptive relationship with better established neo-nazis and fascists there.

THE NATIONAL FRONT (NF)**CATEGORY: ORGANISATION****LEADER: TONY MARTIN**

Founded in 1967, few other parties (on either the extreme right or even the extreme left) have split, factionalised and even stood against itself in elections as much as has the National Front.

Once a party with 17,500 members, today's incarnation is a mere shadow of the party it once was.

With each passing year the NF becomes more tired and irrelevant but we have long accepted there will likely always be some individual somewhere, trying to keep the flame of perpetual failures alive.

The NF's current leader Tony Martin has put extraordinary time and effort into building some kind of cult of leadership around himself. But other than diminishing numbers around a pub table in Croydon, south London, Martin's leadership has had – if such a thing were possible – a further detrimental effect on the party.

Previous conversations around merging other far-right

groups into the NF proceeded on the basis that, by reputation at least, the NF would have some kind of party apparatus. They broke down when it became apparent that other than an old name, the NF has no such apparatus to speak of, little or no membership and as the old saying goes, no future.

The NF's leadership has from its very early days been mired by ambitious incompetents. The current leader has never ceased to surprise us just with how ineffectual his leadership is.

With no apparent party business to keep him occupied, Martin now trawls events across London organised by other people, making vain attempts to cajole political activists into debate. Martin is blissfully unaware that he is intellectually incapable of engaging in actual or coherent political debate.

Previously active branches and individuals in Yorkshire and Lancashire have walked away or folded and currently we're not even sure the NF has a membership to speak of.

The annual Remembrance Day parade persists, but despite an increase of far-right activity in general, the NF's leader could not attract more than 20 participants to last November's insult to British and Commonwealth war dead.

FAR RIGHT TERROR CONVICTIONS HIT RECORD HIGH

A RECORD number of far-right activists and sympathisers were convicted of terror offences in 2023, surpassing the previous year, which was already a record high. Twenty-three people were convicted of offences from sharing online terror videos to disseminating and encouraging terrorism via podcasts. While the number of convicted far-right activists is higher, so too is the average age of those convicted. In 2022, the average age of those convicted was 29, last year it was 32. Three of those arrested were over 60 years of age, with another three over 40. Only four of those convicted were teenagers, compared to nine in 2022.

None of those convicted carried out a terrorist act, or even an equally violent attack, though several were caught in the preparation of such offences. Ex-soldier William Howitt planned to burn down a left-wing bookshop in Nottingham before he was arrested. Ben Styles was caught with a home-made sub-machine in garage and Charles Cannon was found guilty of collecting instructions on how to make explosives and weapons whilst talking “enthusiastically about stabbing asylum seekers”.

Several of those convicted were linked to, or supported, far right groups. Possibly the most high profile of those convicted was Kristofer Kearney, an activist with Patriotic Alternative who, after a long extradition process from Spain, pleaded guilty to sharing Telegram posts glorifying and encouraging extreme right-wing terror attacks, and encouraging attacks on Jews and Muslims.

Another Patriotic Alternative supporter convicted was former prison officer Ashley Podsiad-Sharp, who was sentenced to eight years’ imprisonment for possessing a terrorist handbook. Like Kearny, Podsiad-Sharp had been a National Action supporter, before switching allegiance to Patriotic Alternative.

In addition to those convicted, several people who had either previously committed terrorist offences, some who were out on licence, were returned to prison after committing further offences.

One of these was Harry Vaughan who, in 2020, was given a suspended sentence despite admitting 14 terrorism offences and two of possessing indecent images of children. He was imprisoned in November after admitting further crimes including making an indecent photograph of a child.

There was deep disquiet when Vaughan only received a suspended sentence, with many critical of the judge, believing that he was given a particularly lenient sentence compared to others who received custodial sentences for far less. The judge in the case described Vaughan, who went to an elite school and whose father worked as a clerk at the House of Lords, was a “very intelligent young man” but he “now has convictions for terrorist offences which will stay with him for life and I think that is a saddening case and also a salutary

	Number of far right supporters convicted	Average age	Number of teenagers
1997-2001	8	34	0
2002-2006	11	38	2
2007-2011	18	34	2
2012-2016	15	31	2
2017-2021	76	28	12
2022-2023	55	31	13

example of how this can affect young people.” Clearly, the suspended sentence Vaughan received in 2020 did little to reduce his paedophilic instincts. In previous State of Hate reports we have noted that much of the increase in the terrorist convictions of far right activists and sympathisers was down to new legislation and more aggressive enforcement. In the 1990s, when Combat 18 was the primary nazi group in Britain, the glorification and promotion of terrorism, including the circulation of bomb manuals and hitlists, were commonplace yet, at most, people received minimal sentences on incitement to racial hatred charges.

The rise in terror convictions comes as 6,817 referrals to Prevent to the year end of 31 March 2023, an increase of 6.4% on the previous year and the third highest number since figures were first recorded in 2015/16. For the third year running, the number of referrals for Extreme Right Wing concerns (1,310 – 19%) was greater than those for Islamist concerns (781 – 11%).

The largest increase in referrals came from the Education sector, which accounted for 2,684 referrals, 39% of the total. Ninety per cent of referrals were men and 32% were aged between 15 and 20 years old. Only slightly fewer, 31%, were aged under 14.

According to the Home Office, as of 30 June 2023, there were 234 people in custody for terrorism-connected offences in Great Britain. Of these, 152 (65%) were categorised as holding Islamist-extremist views and further 63 (27%) were categorised as holding Extreme Right-Wing ideologies. The remaining 19 prisoners (8%) were categorised as holding beliefs related to other ideologies.

However, the internet and the global nature of the nazi terror movement means there is far more extreme and violent content in circulation and much of it of a terrorist nature. Terrorist atrocities are shared and glorified and fantasies and plots are disseminated. 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.

ROGUES' GALLERY

ELLIOT BROWN

Elliot Brown (25) was found guilty at Bristol Crown Court in January 2023 of two-terrorism related offences. Brown recorded a video in which he used a smart device to recite how to make a specific explosive substance.

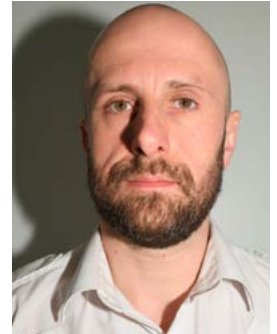
In March 2020, he then proceeded to share what he recorded in a Telegram chat group where members expressed extreme right-wing views and ideology. Brown's offending came to light during a separate terrorism-related investigation.



ASHLEY PODSIAD-SHARP

Ashley Podsiad-Sharp (42), a former prison officer, was sentenced to eight years' imprisonment and an additional five years on licence (following his release from prison) for possessing a terrorist handbook.

A former member of National Action, Sharp had more recently been involved in Patriotic Alternative.



JAMES FARRELL

James Farrell (32) pled guilty in February 2023 for sharing terrorist material. Also admitted expressing antisemitic, racist and neo-Nazi views. Farrell, from Glasgow, had been in contact with like-minded individuals from the North-East of England and other parts of the UK using Telegram.



VAUGHN DOLPHIN

A far-right extremist who experimented with home explosives, boasted about fireballs and built a gun was detained for eight and a half years. Vaughn Dolphin (20) from Walsall, filmed himself in a gas mask surrounded by smoke after blowing up his kitchen in an attempt to mix explosives.



SERJ FORSTER

Serj Forster (26), a serving soldier, was discharged from the Army after being found guilty of having bomb-making manuals and links to a right-wing group.

Prosecutors said he had been involved with the far-right since he was aged about 13.



ALAN MADDEN

A extreme right-wing conspiracy theorist with an "unhealthy interest" in weapons and proscribed organisations" was jailed for seven-and-a-half years. Alan Madden (65), from the Wirral, smuggled a semi-automatic pistol home from South Africa and kept it in his bedroom. He admitted stirring up racial hatred and possession of a gun, ammunition and a flick knife.



STEVEN DONOVAN

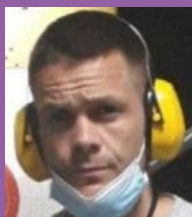
Steven Donovan (32), from Huddersfield, pleaded guilty to a number of offences including stirring up racial hatred, dissemination of terrorist material and possession of a knife.



KRISTOFER KEARNEY

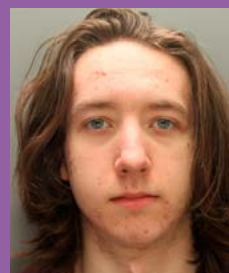
An activist with Patriotic Alternative pleaded guilty to sharing Telegram posts glorifying and encouraging extreme right-wing terror attacks encouraging attacks on Jews and Muslims.

Kristofer Kearney (39) was sentenced to four and a half years imprisonment.



NICHOLAS STREET

Nicholas Street (21), from Liverpool, was sentenced to 30 months in jail after pleading guilty to three counts of possessing terrorist documents contrary to Section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000. He was also tried and found guilty at an earlier hearing of offences contrary to section 1 of the Terrorism Act 2006.



LUKE SKELTON

Luke Skelton (20), from Washington, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment and one year on extended licence, after being found guilty of planning an act of terrorism.

The court was told that he not only wrote about his plans to commit a terrorist act but went as far as carrying out hostile reconnaissance by researching and visiting potential targets.



DARREN REYNOLDS

Darren Reynolds (60) was found guilty of eight offences under the 2000 and 2006 Terrorism Act for possession and dissemination of material containing information likely to be useful to a person committing an act of terrorism and encouraging others to commit terrorist offences. He was sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment.



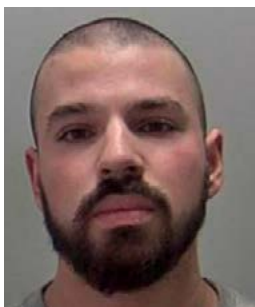
RICHARD OSBORNE

Solihull-based Richard Osborne (53) was sentenced to almost four years after admitting to posting material online to stir up racial hatred as well as supporting National Action, a far-right banned terrorism group, online.



BEN STYLES, LEAMINGTON SPA

A Nazi sympathiser, who built a submachine gun in his garage after becoming obsessed with the New Zealand mosque killer, was jailed for seven years. Ben Styles (25) made the lethal makeshift firearm at his home and kept terrorism manuals in "preparation for a religious war"



CHRISTOPHER GIBBONS

Christopher Gibbons (40) was sentenced to eight years in prison for eight counts of encouraging acts of terrorism, contrary to section one of the Terrorism Act 2006, and two counts of dissemination of terrorist publications, contrary to section two of the Terrorism Act 2006.

Gibbons, along with Tyrone Patten-Walsh aired homophobic, racist, antisemitic, Islamophobic and misogynistic views on their podcast, and on some occasions they encouraged listeners to commit acts of terrorist violence.



TYRONE PATTEN-WALSH

Tyrone Patten-Walsh (36), was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment after being convicted on eight charges under the Terrorism Act for content on a podcast he ran with Christopher Gibbons.



MALAKAI WHEELER

A teenager from Swindon was sent to prison for six years after being convicted of terrorism offences at Winchester Crown Court. 18-year-old Malakai Wheeler was guilty of six offences relating to the possession and dissemination of terrorist material.



UNIDENTIFIED TEENAGER

A 15-year-old boy has been convicted of a terrorism offence following an investigation by Counter Terrorism Policing South East found the boy had identified a specific target which he planned to attack, and also that he had made a crude weapon.

UNIDENTIFIED TEENAGER

A 17-year-old boy from Nottingham received a twelve-month sentence for four offences under the 2006 Terrorism Act after being found guilty of the possession of material containing information likely to be useful to a person committing an act of terrorism and the direct/indirect encouragement of terrorism to others to the commission, preparation, or instigation of acts of terrorism.

WILLIAM HOWITT

A 27-year-old ex-soldier who admired Adolf Hitler was found guilty of preparing a terrorist act. The court heard how William Howitt planned to burn down a left-wing bookshop in Nottingham. He wrote a detailed plan of the attack, which included painting a swastika and "white lives matter" on the wall before setting fire to the building.



JOE METCALFE

Joe Metcalfe (17), from Bradford, was found guilty of preparing to commit an act of terrorism, four charges of disseminating a terrorist publication and one charge of encouragement of terrorism. Metcalfe had planned to kill Muslims whilst disguised as a police officer. He was sentenced at Leeds Crown Court 10 years imprisonment.



ALFIE STEVENS

A long-time far right activist received a two year suspended sentence after pleading guilty of sharing extreme right-wing terrorist material on Telegram. Alfie Stevens (24), of Surrey Quays, south-east London, pleaded guilty to three charges of dissemination of a terrorist document.

Despite Stevens' several years of involvement in the far right, the judge accepted that he had underlying problems and was an "easy target" for radicalisation.



CHARLES CANNON

Charles Cannon (22) was found guilty of collecting instructions on how to make explosives and weapons. The court heard how Cannon had "extreme and disturbing far-right beliefs" and "talked enthusiastically about stabbing asylum seekers". Despite

being convicted of seven counts of possessing documents that could be used to prepare acts of terrorism, including a bomb manual, he avoided prison due to his age, mental health and autism.

COLIN WEBSTER

Colin Webster, (61), from Kelty, Scotland, was convicted for offences under the Terrorism Act after sharing an online video supporting National Action, a proscribed extreme right-wing terrorist group. He was fined £800, with an additional £40 surcharge.



RETURNED TO PRISON

ROGER SMITH

53-year-old Roger Smith, a convicted terrorist from Nottinghamshire, was returned to jail after admitting to breaching a notification order and being in possession of offensive weapons.

Smith, pleaded guilty to three counts of failing to comply with requirements under his 10-year Part 4 Notification Order, contrary to the Counter Terrorism Act 2008, by failing to notify police of a phone number, email address and passport.

NATHAN WORRELL

Nathan Worrell (50) was imprisoned for violating anti-terrorism conditions applied after his convictions after having been sentenced to two years and six months in 2019 for spreading neo-Nazi material around his hometown of Grimsby and Hull.

Worrell had previously been jailed for seven years and three months in 2008 for possessing material for terrorist purposes and racially-aggravated harassment.

OUT AND ANGRY

They are the 'Class of 2017'. Young and dedicated nazis caught after HOPE not hate revealed the banned terror group National Action (NA) was still very active and increasingly dangerous.

Chief among their number is one (Jack Renshaw) jailed for life in 2019 for plotting to murder a sitting MP and a police officer.

By 2022, nineteen were eventually imprisoned for belonging to National Action after it was banned. Many faced violent recrimination and bullying in prison. The majority were kept under the supervised protection of prison governors' (Rule 43), keeping them exiled from the general prison population for their own safeties.

But slowly, one by one, they are being released. The vast majority were free and on license, but some have been returned to prison for breaches of condition.

Whilst in prison, the authorities have tried to engage them in de-radicalisation programmes, to varying degrees of success. Those who cooperated got out of jail early. Claudia Patatas, the Portuguese national who named her child after Hitler, slipped out of the country in 2022. Another foreign national, the soldier Mikko Vehvilainen who was jailed for eight years in 2018 was set to be deported to Finland in early 2024.

Alice Cutter, a 'Miss Hitler' runner-up, was released in 2022, followed shortly after by her former fiancé Mark Jones later in 2023.

Others have had more troubled relationships with the authorities.

Darren Fletcher, also known as the infamous 'Klan Man', was released in 2022 but has since been returned to prison twice. Late last year he was sentenced to a further two years for making threats. He initially undertook a hunger strike but that ended almost as quickly as it started.

Oliver Bel was jailed in 2021, but he was released and then also returned to prison late in 2023.

Most worryingly, former NA hard-hitter Matthew Hankinson was released in late 2023. After refusing to engage with the de-radicalisation programmes he was made to serve his full sentence, which meant that he was under no restrictions on his release.

Hankinson, from Newton-le-Willows, has since made numerous threatening posts on 'X', including one where he fantasises about a female police officer "screaming as they are stabbed to death."



Hopefully this oppressive piece of filth will end up like Keith Palmer & die screaming as they are stabbed to death by the foreign Islamists they protect. A Nation can not survive its Traitors, such creatures need to be pushed out & exiled from White society for itto survive. 🍌

UNIONISM STUMBLES FORWARD

Last year HnH met people “linked” to loyalist paramilitaries whilst they still had the ear of the DUP. They reiterated that a United Ireland is a threat they can and will meet with the ferocity of the Red Army at Stalingrad.

On 3 February, the Northern Ireland Assembly sat for the first time in nearly two years.

The Democratic Unionist Party’s (DUP) refusal to take their seats at Stormont was, it claimed, due to internal trade barriers caused by the Northern Ireland Protocol. The DUP’s intransigence on the issue meant they seemed to many to be in the pocket of loyalist paramilitaries, whose political objectives and desires were vocally being projected on them.

The dispute between the DUP, the British and Irish governments and Sinn Féin had more facets than almost any other in Northern Irish history. The presence of loyalist paramilitary mouthpieces in DUP backrooms obfuscated the cynic’s view that the DUP’s irritation was in no small part due to them having ceded the position of First Minister to the Republican Sinn Féin.

If that sounds childish, remember that Sinn Féin previously refused to take their seats in the Assembly over a dispute concerning fuel bills.

A cross-border poll on Northern Ireland’s future is mooted within the decade. Unionists nit-pick that any poll should not be cross-border. Yet, aside from a notable few, Unionists and loyalists resolutely refuse to entertain even the idea of a United Ireland as vehemently as they do a cross-border poll.

Last year HnH met people “linked” to loyalist paramilitaries whilst they still had the ear of the DUP. They reiterated that a United Ireland is a threat they can and will meet with the ferocity of the Red Army at Stalingrad.

Whenever Unionists face institutional or constitutional difficulties, they turn to their armies. But two years on from sabre-rattling and eye-watering threats over the Northern Ireland Protocol, the threatened military onslaught never materialised, giving no indication of the military capability loyalists still claim to have.

People close to the UVF and UDA cite their swollen ranks as evidence they could confront even the Irish military, with a campaign mirroring the IRA’s against the British Army. They reiterate there is no issue with burning much of Northern Ireland to the ground to make it uninhabitable.

Hearing that threat of ungovernable civil disobedience, as opposed to heavily masked armies, leaves one to envisage a return to the 1970s, when Catholics were driven over the border by mobs of Unionists and loyalists.

There is (very) minor cause for loyalist paramilitaries to enthuse about their capacity to thwart a United Ireland. Recently released papers reveal the Irish government gave considerable thought during the 1970s to occupying “up to 60%” of Northern Ireland during the Troubles when a previous power-sharing initiative collapsed. Much of the occupied land would probably have been isolated farm or arable (which one assumes loyalist paramilitaries would happily cede under flames anyway), but Irish civil servants panicked not just at the cost, but also what would happen if the British *did* withdraw its military.

The Republic determined that aside from ensuing economic disaster, military intervention was effectively impossible. “This is beyond our military and administrative capabilities,” the report warned.

In our meeting with people close to the paramilitaries, claims were made of “tens of thousands of Protestant men” anticipating this scenario, but there’s no evidence indicating the main paramilitary leaders are as capable of training their recruits for war as they were in the 1970s. And the UVF has, more or less, the same leadership now as then.

Nobody discounts that in a post-Brexit Northern Ireland, the 31% of people who identify as “Northern Irish” includes a sizeable number of Protestants committed to the peace process.

Similarly (based on 2021 figures), among the near-43% who identify as British, there’s an overwhelming number of people sick to the back teeth of the drug-dealing and gangsterism of the paramilitaries.

Part of any plan drawn up in Dublin (or elsewhere) would cede far more governance and opportunity to Unionists and loyalists than it would have in the 1970s. The Irish border is not the Korean demilitarized zone or the Berlin wall – but those structures were created to keep one group of homogenous people apart.

And this, perhaps, more than it does for an increasingly disinterested British government, explains the continued millions of euros and pounds still pumped into Northern Ireland and sections of Unionism and loyalism yearly by the Irish and British governments.

These old loyalist paramilitary gangs, without political power or will of their own, would struggle to make a decent living without it. The “mainstream” UVF is actively seeking to transition into a (potentially) legalised entity of retired former paramilitaries.

In 2017 the UVF-linked leadership of the Red Hand Commandos even applied to be removed as a proscribed organisation. Their application was denied.

The active UDA spent much of last year in (another) violent internal feud. Rival drug lords went to war in Newtownards for two weeks during May. The feud, over a lucrative drug patch, saw dozens flee their homes after



Stormont, Belfast -
Northern Ireland
Photo: William Murphy

firebombings and threats. Both sides openly identified with either “mainstream” or “renegade” factions of the organisation. UDA activists were later linked to dissident republicans targeting police officers. The cost of such unthinkable cooperation? Drugs.

While both the UDA and UVF have co-operative, complying and well-funded “mainstream” factions, prosecutions for membership of these still-illegal groups is almost unheard of. Priti Patel, the former Home Secretary, held a meeting last year with an unelected loyalist representative, considered at the time to be the link between the UVF and the DUP.

Instead of targeting unelected, unanswerable individuals who do the bidding of paramilitaries, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) Paramilitary Taskforce target the paramilitaries lower down the ladder for drugs. Few (if any) charges are laid for membership.

These high-profile raids rarely uncover viable firearms. As was suggested to us, this indicates that mainstream “factions” still agonisingly guard their rusting arsenals. In one meeting we heard – though cannot substantiate – that elder quartermasters are still cleaning aging arms, kept in dumps away from the gangsters in Belfast.

For the UVF, which has retained some semblance of being one organisation, problems with their notorious East Belfast “Brigade” have gnawed away at their reputation for years. The autonomy the East Belfast Brigade enjoys heralds back to the 1990s, when the UVF and UDA fought a bloody war over the formation of the loyalist Volunteer Force – a viciously sectarian, violent offshoot of the UVF that refused to accept a ceasefire.

East Belfast’s problematic behaviour came to a head in 2019 with the murder of Ian Ogle, a popular local UVF man, and things have snowballed since. Stories of drug-dealing, extortion, intimidation (“shows of strength”) and violence led to the PSNI asking the courts for exclusion orders keeping some of East Belfast most senior identities from their centre of operations on Newtownards Road.



Since 2022, swathes of East Belfast members have drifted back to the mainstream UVF. At the time it was suggested the Shankill Road leadership would have taken control of the renegade East Belfast brigade, but feared a confrontation so violent and far-reaching that loyalism in its entirety would be dragged into a bloody feud.

Some of the people we met linked to East Belfast UVF in 2021 were among those who had drifted – though it is maintained they still have control over East Belfast.

But with 22 people “linked” to the East Belfast Brigade convicted for drug dealing in the past eighteen months – and more still facing court for extortion and even murder – 2023 was the UVF leadership’s (other) peacetime *annus horribilis*.

With uncertainty as to whether the UVF were actively “transitioning” thirty years after the ceasefire, the *Belfast Telegraph* reported funding to one of the UVF’s partner charities was at risk after a paramilitary parade on the Shankill Road last September. This was a critical time for the DUP/UVF love-in. The UVF on the Shankill feared a loss of funding for legitimate activity,



as well as their ability to legitimately direct the DUP to stay out of Stormont.

On Remembrance Sunday 2023, as on every Remembrance Sunday in living memory, the UVF's brigade staff delivered a message from the leadership in crowded clubs and bars. These "invite-only" affairs are never recorded.

Although one Irish newspaper reported this year's message was delivered (in at least one of five locations) by masked and armed men, we were reassured there was no "colour party".

The UVF announced it was "standing down" a number (some reports say seven, others say eight) of mid-ranking UVF officials and officers in East Belfast. The message received press coverage across Ireland – akin to a soccer team sacking its manager. The statement was delivered in East Belfast to some shock and some delight. And there is absolutely no arguing with the Remembrance Sunday statement.

The reality is that loyalist paramilitaries and Unionist politicians – often the worst of a thoroughly decent community – are in disarray. The Unionist politicians stumble from one bad decision to another, while gangsters hold communities to ransom.

The relationship between mainstream Unionism and Paramilitary Loyalism in times of "peace" is rarely cordial. The crisis Unionists envisaged, but failed to take political capital from, is largely viewed as a mess

of their own making.

There can be little doubt despite some palpable reticence, that a United Ireland is on the horizon – someday. Staying out of the power-sharing at Stormont didn't harden the DUP's support and may have damaged it in the long term.

Late in January 2024, under duress from every quarter, the DUP forced itself back into Stormont. Doubtless it was a pragmatic and desperate decision. The fallout, which enraged vocal loyalists, was a climb-down from earlier demands that their sacred "seven tests" were met. It forced the DUP's leader into a public, debilitating spat with high-profile loyalists.

Whether it's fair to surmise or not, loyalists cannot be blamed for feeling – not for the first time – their demands for better jobs have been once more sacrificed by the "Big House" Unionists.

Thousands are flocking to paramilitary groups, from boredom, idleness and that legacy of the blood and soil of Ulster and its fighting men.

Thirty years after the ceasefire, and 27 years after the Good Friday Agreement, more Protestant Unionists are involved in paramilitary groups than are working on the shopfloors, factories and docks that made once Protestant Belfast the industrial capital of Ireland.

And the paramilitary bosses just get fatter and richer. Supposedly illegal paramilitaries remain entrenched in the psyche of so many – for better or worse.

THE LOYALIST PARAMILITARIES

ULSTER DEFENCE ASSOCIATION

Once the largest paramilitary force in Western Europe, the UDA is a shadow of its former self. Split into warring factions, the “mainstream” UDA operates out of East and South Belfast with mild homogeneity throughout the province.

Synonymous with drug dealing and drug related violence, some UDA factions have aligned with powerful drug gangs from the Republic of Ireland in a volatile relationship that saw rival gangs crossing the border to intimidate one another on at least three occasions last year. Some Dublin-based drug gangs were naïve in underestimating how many [armed] men some factions could call upon.

Last year rival UDA gangs went to war with one another in a feud that saw dozens made homeless. One emasculated group sought the protection of the “mainstream” UDA who disavowed them as even members.

It is fair to say the name UDA carries little of the ceremony and discipline its name would suggest.

The relationship between rival UDA and UVF gangs who operate within the same communities is equally competitive, as much over territory as it is history, firearms and members. The children of senior UVF and UDA figures were filmed fighting each other in the streets on one occasion last year – which resulted in one being forced from their home.

The UDA’s mainstream leadership, which seeks to operate as a soothsayer for all that is loyalism, will refuse to stand down until other groups of the same name dissipate.

ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE

Suggestions last year that the UVF’s Shankill-based leadership would forcibly remove the troublesome East Belfast UVF’s leadership fell short of the mark. Instead the UVF leadership “stood down” mid-ranking members who had set themselves up as leaders of the East Belfast “Battalion”.

It is believed that a rapprochement was reached between the two leaderships and much of the apparatus of East Belfast UVF appears to have fallen in line with the parent body.

In what was viewed as another critical time for loyalism and unionism, the actions and behaviour of some within East Belfast UVF over the past two years seriously undermined the UVF’s input into unionist politics.

Like the mainstream UDA, the UVF’s input and/or tacit approval still remains cautiously sought by unionist politicians and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Sir Jeffrey Donaldson delivered a briefing to



them on his plan to return to power-sharing via their joint auspices of the Loyalist Communities Council (LCC – which superseded the Combined Loyalist Military Command Council).

The UVF’s leadership still sees itself as a military body and it remains engaged in low level paramilitary activity under the very noses of people whom fund its non-violent initiatives.

The UVF leadership’s current predicament is similar to that of the UDA’s leadership, keeping relevant while the tide of events moving Northern Ireland ever more away from its violent paramilitary past.

LOYALIST VOLUNTEER FORCE

Founded after a split in the UVF in 1997, the Loyalist Volunteer Force were the first loyalist paramilitary group to “decommission” weapons in 1998. Since then, the LVF has morphed into a disparate and ruthless cross-community drug gang operating ostensibly but not exclusively, away from Belfast.

It would be impossible to guess the membership of the LVF, though it is likely very small. There is also a blurring, quite deliberately, as to where the loyalist paramilitary force ends and organised crime begins. Some of the LVF’s leadership has recently been drawn from the Catholic community, which has led to bitter animosity from other loyalist groups.

After decommissioning old and rusted weaponry, the LVF’s current arsenal was purloined from the UVF and passed around drug gangs and dissident loyalist and republican groups.

Last year one alleged LVF member was charged over the 2021 murder of his uncle, also a senior LVF member.



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