



**Far-Right Violence:  
Lessons to be Learned from  
New Zealand Attacks Briefing  
Paper from Muslim Engagement  
and Development March 2019**

## Far-Right Violence: Lessons to be Learned from New Zealand Attacks

### Briefing Paper from Muslim Engagement and Development

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This morning, as the world reels from the sadness, shock, and outrage of the devastating attacks at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, latest reports indicate that nearly 50 people have already been confirmed dead in acts of far-right politically motivated violence. These atrocities are a stark reminder of the global consequences of Islamophobia and all forms of hatred which leave innocent individuals vulnerable to acts that defy humanity.

This far-right inspired tragedy and the associated manifesto demonstrate the need to radically recalibrate the ways in which far-right violence is understood and tackled within security discourse and strategies. Indeed, the murder of Jo Cox by Thomas Mair in 2016 and the murder of Makram Ali by Darren Osborne in the Finsbury Park attack in 2017 are deadly reminders of the threat posed by far-right violence here in the UK that must be effectively tackled and eliminated. Meanwhile, the MEND ComRes poll in 2018 showed that 61% of the British public believe that far-right political groups are responsible for Islamophobia in the UK.

Meanwhile, the Government commendably provides funds of £14million per year for synagogues and Jewish schools. However, with no regular funding for mosques, the last 'Places of Worship Security Fund' launched in 2016 provided only £2.4 million to be distributed across mosques, churches, temples, gurdwaras, and other institutions. Considering the rising threat of far-right violence, as illustrated by the events in Christchurch and those outlined in this briefing, we must now learn the lessons of this tragedy in New Zealand and ensure that we are protecting our citizens from violence and abuse.

#### **MEND therefore urges the UK Government to:**

1. Clearly and urgently outline its plans to tackle far-right politically motivated violence in the UK.
2. Confirm its commitment to financing mosque security, as is correctly provided to synagogues.
3. Outline its strategy to implement primary legislation to deal with social media offences and hate speech online, including the removal of extreme content.
4. Confirm its commitment to working with social media companies to protect free speech while developing an efficient strategy to tackle hate speech online in consultation with Muslim grassroots organisations.

As such, this paper seeks to offer a brief (but by no means exhaustive) analysis of the threat of the far-right in the UK context.

## The Prevalence of Far-Right Violence

Far-right violence is not a new nor isolated phenomenon. According to the [Global Terrorism Index](#), the UK suffered 12 far-right attacks in 2017. Meanwhile, the number of people imprisoned in relation to far-right activity has increased [nearly five times](#) since June 2016 - [tripling in the space of a year](#). Furthermore, despite the inherent flaws within the current PREVENT strategy, the number of far-right referrals has increased by 36% between the year 2016-17 and 2017-18.

Moreover, despite media coverage suggesting that a large proportion of terrorist attacks are inspired by Islamism, Europol figures [show](#) that less than 2% of all terrorist attacks across Europe were 'religiously motivated' between 2009-2013. In reality, separatist and ethno-nationalist organisations [pose](#) a far more significant threat across EU countries. Indeed, 87% of terrorist attacks in 2017 were [perpetrated](#) by such ethno-nationalist or separatist individuals or groups.

While the murder of Jo Cox in 2016 and the attack at Finsbury Park in 2017 are arguably the most prominent examples of far-right violence in the recent UK context, they are by no means isolated incidences. Other examples over the past two decades include, but are not limited to:

- **1999:** David Copeland set off three nail bombs in London targeting the black, Bangladeshi and gay communities respectively, killing three and injuring 129. Copeland was a former member of both the BNP and National Socialist Movement. He later stated that, "My aim was political. It was to cause a racial war in this country. There'd be a backlash from the ethnic minorities, then all the white people will go out and vote BNP."
- **2007:** another BNP member, [Robert Cottage](#), was convicted for possessing the largest amount of chemical explosive of its type ever found in the country, as well as ball bearings in anticipation of a future civil war. Cottage believed that "the evils of uncontrolled immigration" would lead to an imminent and inevitable civil war.
- **2008:** [Martyn Gilleard](#), a Nazi sympathizer, was jailed after police discovered an armoury of four nail bombs, gun powder, fuses, live bullets, swords, axes, knives and a bayonet along with internet material on how to poison people and make bombs. It is believed that he intended to target Muslim, black, and Jewish people with the bombs. According to Gilleard, "Unless we the British right stop talking of racial war and take steps to make it happen, we will never get back that which has been stolen from us. I'm so sick and tired of hearing Nationalists talk of killing Muslims, of blowing up mosques, of fighting back. Only to see these acts of resistance fail to appear."
- **2008:** [Nathan Worrell](#) was found guilty of hoarding bombmaking materials and other materials for terrorist purposes, as well as racially aggravated harassment. Worrell plastered local lampposts with racist stickers stating "Only inferior white women date outside their race. Be proud of your heritage. Don't be a race-mixing slut" and made comments that "It's our country. Let's win it back. Repatriation now."
- **2009:** [Neil Lewington](#) wanted to emulate his far-right heroes, including David Copeland and Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh. He was jailed for his plans to construct tennis ball shrapnel bombs to target Asian families, along with detonators and explosives. He is reported to have commented that "the only good P\*ki was a dead P\*ki".

- **2013:** [Pavlo Lapshyn](#) was jailed in 2013 for the murder of 82 year old Mohammed Saleem and planting three bombs near mosques in Walsall, Tipton and Wolverhampton. According to police, it was only because Lapshyn got the wrong time for Friday prayers that the blasts did not cause mass injuries.
- **2015:** the neo-Nazi white supremacist, [Zack Davies](#), was jailed after being radicalised online and using a claw hammer and machete to attack Dr Sarandev Bhambra in an attempt to decapitate him because he was Asian.
- **2018:** [Jack Renshaw](#), an EDL supporter and former leader of the BNP youth wing attempted a plot to murder Rosie Cooper, MP, as part of his campaign to achieve a “white Britain by any means necessary”. He stated that, “The refugee problem is part of a bigger problem, it’s a symptom of a disease,” he added. “That disease is international Jewry. In World War Two we took the wrong side ... National Socialists there to remove Jewry from Europe once and for all. Instead we let these parasites live among us.”
- **2019:** In February an unnamed 33-year-old was arrested in West Yorkshire “as part of an investigation into suspected extreme right-wing activity”.

### **Far-Right Hatred Online**

In January 2019, a clip was widely circulated of a man filming himself hurling racist and Islamophobic [abuse](#) at school girls in East London. In the 2-minute clip, the suspect can be heard making references to Dr Mengele, an SS officer and physician, infamous for his role in the Nazi regime for conducting inhumane experiments on prisoners at Auschwitz concentration camp. Abhorrent language litters the video, including reference to the girls as “black c\*\*s” who are going to “breed like f\*\*\*ing rats” and calling for their sterilisation. He continued “This was England,” and “We’re going to be f\*\*\*ed with this lot. I think what we might have to do is think of something like old doctor Mengele [...] so the c\*\*ts can’t f\*\*\*ing multiply”.

Meanwhile, [Demos](#) have noted that, between March 2016-March 2017, 143,920 Tweets were sent from the UK that were considered to be derogatory and anti-Islamic - this amounts to almost 400 per day. Such anti-Muslim sentiments are particularly acute following incidents such as the London Bridge attack in 2017, following which the Guardian [reported](#) that 32 of the top 100 most shared tweets expressed negative sentiments about Muslims.

In a similar pattern, a 2018 Amnesty International report entitled ‘[Toxic Twitter](#)’ encapsulated how online spaces can be harmful for women, particularly for those from marginalised communities. The report highlighted how minority individuals are targeted with violence and abuse because they are perceived to be representative of an entire community - with women of colour being 34% more likely to be targeted. Amnesty [concluded](#) that the abuse women face online is [infringing](#) upon their human rights, and social media platforms need to publish meaningful data on how they handle violence and abuse, improve reporting mechanism, provide clarity on how abuse reports are handled, and improve security and privacy features.

A particularly insidious problem is that online networks have developed which seek to capitalise on hateful rhetoric and methodically sow further discord by propagating far-right populist narratives. A recent report by the New York-based research institute, [Data & Society](#), entitled *Alternative Influence: Broadcasting the Reactionary Right on YouTube* attempts to map this network, described as the Alternative Influence Network (AIN). It revealed members of this network to include infamous far-right activists such as: Tommy Robinson, founder of the English Defence League (EDL); Richard Spencer, a prominent American White supremacist;



and Lauren Southern, a Canadian far-right activist who was denied entry to the UK because of her anti-Islamic views.

The lack of accountability and regulation of social media platforms has even given prominent political figures the green light to propagate hate speech. Conservative MP, Bob Blackman, who has been previously accused of [advocating Islamophobia](#) was also found to be a [member](#) of several far-right and Islamophobic social media groups. UKIP councillor Eric Kitson shared Islamophobic and anti-Semitic pictures on his personal Facebook page. Similarly, Karen Sunderland, a 2018 candidate for Lewisham Council [tweeted](#) that “Islam has become the new Nazism”.

### Far-Right Parliamentary Activity

The acceptability and normalisation of far-right agendas within our political institutions is demonstrating a concerning trajectory.

In October 2017, Bob Blackman hosted anti-Muslim extremist [Tapan Ghosh](#) at an event in the House of Commons. Tapan Ghosh, an Indian Hindu-nationalist who claims to have created the ‘Hindu Defence Force’, is well-known for his extreme views against Muslims and Islam. For example, he has praised the genocide of Rohingya Muslims in Burma when he tweeted: “Shame on Islam... how can we blame the Myanmar Buddhists for driving them out?”; he has called for the UN to control the birth rate of Muslims when he asked: “Why it doesn’t try to control birth rate of Muslims world over?”; and has even suggested that “all Muslims are jihadis”.

Likewise, UKIP peer, Lord Pearson, has been widely condemned for his comments regarding Islam and his [hosting](#) of far-right figures such as Tommy Robinson in the House of Lords. SNP MP, Stewart Malcolm McDonald, raised a point of order with the Commons Speaker, John Bercow, stating “I understand that sometimes we have to engage in views that one might not agree with, but surely the fact that a man who is as guilty as he is on stirring up racial hatred, organising violent, thuggish crimes around the country, setting up the EDL and everything that comes with it crosses a line, and such a person should not be invited to walk amongst us on the parliamentary estate.”

With the current wide-ranging debates surrounding anti-Semitism and Islamophobia within political parties, it is imperative that politicians critically assess their own role in intentionally or inadvertently fuelling xenophobic narratives and agendas, whether this be in political statements, on social media, or within policy recommendations.

### Media Responsibility

Studies have shown that, with 21 negative references to Muslims within British media output for every single neutral or positive reference, the media plays an integral role in spreading prejudice, stereotypes and xenophobic views of vulnerable groups. These negative representations are incredibly detrimental to community cohesion and the subsequent ability of minorities to fully participate and engage as equal members of society.

Considering the overly negative representation of minorities and British Muslims within the British press, the media’s monopoly on public understanding has detrimental impacts which are acutely felt by minority social, ethnic and religious communities, and Muslims in particular. In the fast-paced world we live in, the majority of the public lacks the time and resources to go out of their way to fully research, critically analyse, and evaluate every article they read. Therefore, the repetitive negative misrepresentation of a particular community by newspapers inevitably results in distorted understandings and, ultimately, the fostering of prejudices. Indeed, a YouGov [poll](#) conducted in 2018 by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) found that 90% of Britons surveyed had not been inside a mosque in recent years. Another

[poll](#) conducted by YouGov in 2002 found that 74% knew “nothing or next to nothing about Islam” and 64% stated that what they did know was “acquired through the media”.

The prevalence of Islamophobia within the British press has been highlighted by several studies, including that of Paul Baker, Tony McEnery, and Costas Gabrielatos who conclude that, the “most salient finding is that the British Press most frequently positions Islam and Muslims in stories or contexts that relate to conflict”. Similarly, another [study](#) by Cardiff University found that the bulk of coverage on British Muslims was focussed on “Muslims as a threat (in relation to terrorism), a problem (in terms of differences in values) or both (Muslim extremism in general)”. The study noted that in more than a quarter of the articles investigated, Islam was posed as being “dangerous, backward or irrational” and being in contrast to British Values.

Notable tabloid publications that have thus developed an infamous reputation for publishing controversial, xenophobic and Islamophobic stories including The Sun and The Daily Mail; both being singled out for criticism by name by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The ECRI [accused](#) the Daily Mail, of playing a “prominent role in encouraging prejudice” against vulnerable groups, whilst also reporting that both the Daily Mail and the Sun “are responsible for most of the offensive, discriminatory and provocative terminology”. Concluding that “hate speech in some traditional media continues to be a serious problem”, the report highlighted articles such as the Sun’s *Rescue boats? I’d use gunships to stop migrants*, in which the columnist, Katie Hopkins, likened migrants to cockroaches, and also highlighted The Sun’s front-page headline *1 in 5 Brit Muslims’ sympathy for jihadis* which was subsequently found to be wholly inaccurate and a forced retraction and correction was issued. The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) also [pointed](#) to the disturbing journalism of the Sun and the Daily Mail, arguing that, “The two right wing tabloids in our sample, the Daily Mail and Sun, were unlike anything else in our study... what really differentiated these two titles was their aggressive editorialising around threat themes, and in particular how they presented refugee and migrants as a burden on Britain’s welfare state. Both papers also featured humanitarian themes at a much lower level than any other newspapers in our study. Overall, this meant that the Sun and the Daily Mail exhibited both a hostility, and a lack of empathy with refugees and migrants that was unique.”

However, the Sun and the Daily Mail are reflective of a wider problem. Indeed, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Zeid Ra’ad Al-Hussein, drew similar conclusions in 2015, when he noted that “decades of sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse, misinformation and distortion” were identified as a major problem in British press. He called on all European countries to take a firmer line on racism and xenophobia which “under the guise of freedom of expression, are being allowed to feed a vicious cycle of vilification, intolerance and politicization of migrants, as well as of marginalized European minorities”.

Despite all of the above, the narrative that Muslims are a uniquely ‘dangerous’ threat to society persists. However, [research](#) carried out by Queen Mary University was also published today examining sympathies for violent protest and terrorism (SVPT) amongst different ethnic and religious groups. It reported that twice as many White Britons (15%) expressed extremist sympathies with SVPT versus those of Pakistani origin (8%) and that that 18% of Christians were found to hold extremist views, compared to 8% of Muslims.

**Within this context of far-right political violence and divisive rhetoric, the UK must learn the lessons of the appalling events in Christchurch, New Zealand. It is, therefore, imperative that Islamophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic attitudes are tackled**

and that people of all backgrounds and faiths stand in solidarity against prejudice and violence. As such, MEND calls upon the UK Government to:

1. Clearly and urgently outline its plans to tackle far-right politically motivated violence in the UK.
2. Confirm its commitment to financing mosque security, as is correctly provided to synagogues.
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#### **How MEND can assist parliamentarians and policy makers**

- Providing briefings, information, analysis, and expertise on the impact of PREVENT on communities.
- Arranging opportunities for MPs to engage with their local Muslim communities.
- Conducting research within Muslim communities.
- Connecting MPs to local stakeholders.

**If MEND can be of any assistance to your work, please feel free to contact**  
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