

BRIEFING PAPER

mend



**REFORM
UK**

REFORM UK

MEND Briefing: Reform UK

Reform UK is a British far-right party led by Nigel Farage. In the 2024 General Election, the party won [five seats](#) in Parliament, with its elected MPs including Farage, former Conservative Party chairman Lee Anderson, ex-party leader Richard Tice, and former banker James McMurdock. The fifth MP, Rupert Lowe, was [suspended](#) from the party in March 2025 following allegations of bullying and threats toward party chairman Zia Yusuf. He now sits as an Independent.

As well as winning five seats, Reform came [second](#) in 98 constituencies, earning 4.1 million votes nationally – 14.3% of the vote share, making it the third largest party by popular vote after Labour and the Conservatives. This also marked the [highest](#) vote share ever received by a far-right party in a British general election.

The party is now aiming to expand its foothold in the upcoming [local elections](#) on 1st May 2025, with 23 local authorities set to be contested. That same day, a [by-election](#) will also take place in the Cheshire parliamentary constituency of Runcorn and Helsby, following the [resignation](#) of Labour MP Mike Amesbury after he was charged with assault. Reform is currently seen as the [favourite](#) to win the seat, which Labour has held since 1983.

1. Who are Reform UK?

In December 2018, Farage [resigned](#) from the UK Independence Party (UKIP), criticising then-leader Gerard Batten for his “obsession with Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (to use [the far-right activist] Tommy Robinson’s real name) and fixation with the issue of Islam [that] makes UKIP unrecognisable to many of us.”

He subsequently [launched](#) the Brexit Party in February 2019 to push for a “clean-break Brexit”. The party went on to win 29 seats in the 2019 European elections – more than any other UK party. Following the UK’s formal withdrawal from the EU a year prior, the party was [rebranded](#) as Reform UK in January 2021.

Reform’s rising popularity must be viewed in the broader context of growing public disillusionment with mainstream political parties – a sentiment fuelled by deepening socio-economic challenges and a climate of increasing hostility towards Muslims, migrants, and other marginalised communities. [Polling](#) by HOPE not hate revealed that 68% of respondents feel politicians do not listen to people like them, while only 9% believe they do.

The party has in turn positioned itself as the working person’s alternative to the mainstream establishment, framing itself as the voice of ordinary people against a corrupt political elite. Populist figures within the party amplify this narrative by stoking distrust in the establishment, frequently accusing them of betraying national interests – particularly on issues like immigration and multiculturalism. For example, following the deadly knife attack in Southport in July 2024, Farage took to Twitter (now X) to [question](#) “whether the truth is being held from us” – insinuating a cover-up by the authorities and political establishment regarding the identity of the attacker, who numerous far-right voices falsely [claimed](#) was an undocumented Muslim immigrant.

This taps into rising Islamophobic and anti-migrant sentiment, much of which has been exacerbated by the scapegoating of minority communities in the wake of ongoing economic crises. Years of austerity, coupled with the cost-of-living crisis, have been further compounded by the fallout from Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. The result has been widespread socio-economic hardship: high unemployment, stagnant wages, and a steady decline in living standards. The UK now [ranks](#) among the least socially mobile countries in the Western world, with 22% of the population living in poverty.

This has contributed to widespread anger and disillusionment with mainstream parties, pushing many voters to seek alternatives. In its *State of Hate 2025* [report](#), HOPE not hate highlights how economic insecurity leaves individuals more susceptible to divisive rhetoric, especially narratives suggesting that others are benefiting at their expense.

Reform has capitalised on this growing frustration, often blaming minority communities for the economic challenges Britain faces today. HOPE not hate's polling data [reveals](#) that "the more pessimistic people are about their own lives, the more likely they are to support Reform UK, to believe multiculturalism is failing, and to oppose immigration."

2. What role does Reform UK play in the Islamophobia industry?

Islamophobia has emerged as a central pillar of Reform's political strategy. Senior figures within the party have routinely employed deliberately provocative rhetoric – often through the demonisation of Muslim communities to generate controversy and media attention. Islamophobia and other forms of racism are not isolated incidents but are endemic throughout the party, from its leadership to its grassroots.

Farage has a well-documented [history](#) of Islamophobic remarks, stretching back to his leadership of UKIP. In 2013, he [claimed](#) that some Muslims were "coming here to take us over", a sentiment he reinforced in 2015 by [suggesting](#) that alleged public concern over immigration was due to fears that some Muslims "want to become a fifth column and kill us." In the lead-up to the 2016 Brexit referendum, he infamously [posed](#) in front of a poster showing a line of predominantly non-white, presumably Muslim refugees, alongside the slogan "Breaking Point: The EU has failed us all." More recently, ahead of the last General Election, Farage [told](#) Sky News that many young Muslims "loathe much of what we stand for" – a statement widely condemned as racist and Islamophobic.

While still a Conservative MP, Lee Anderson [claimed](#) on GB News that Islamists had "control" over London's Muslim mayor, Sadiq Khan, and accused Khan of having "given our capital city away to his mates." His suspension from the Conservative Party over these remarks was quickly followed by Reform [welcoming](#) him into the party as its first sitting MP. Among other hateful comments, Anderson has [stated](#) that refugees and asylum seekers crossing the English Channel should "f*** off back to France."

In June 2024, Channel 4 News aired a damning [investigation](#) exposing the grotesque racism among some Reform members campaigning for Farage in his bid to become MP for Clacton-on-Sea. One canvasser, Andrew Parker, was caught on camera making a string of deeply Islamophobic and racist comments. He described Islam as "the most disgusting cult" and told potential voters that Reform would be "kicking all the Muslims out of the mosques and turning them into Wetherspoons." He also suggested that the army should use refugee boats crossing the Channel for "target practice", saying, "F***** just shoot them."

Additionally, multiple Reform [candidates](#) standing in the upcoming local elections have a history of sharing Islamophobic content, material from neo-Nazi groups, and racist conspiracy theories on social media.

Reform appears to be the British node in a broader transatlantic far-right network backed by [Elon Musk](#) and the Trump administration. This network promotes a nationalist agenda focused on anti-

immigration, Islamophobia, and so-called '[Judeo-Christian values](#)'. Musk has publicly [supported](#) far-right parties like Germany's AfD and aligned with authoritarian leaders such as Hungary's [Viktor Orbán](#). He has also used his X platform to amplify Islamophobic narratives to his vast online following, including false claims about '[grooming gangs](#)' in the UK.

Farage reportedly sought the backing of Musk, who was said to be [considering](#) a multi-million dollar donation to Reform after meeting Farage at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida in December 2024. Although their relationship [soured](#) after Musk allegedly pressured Farage to bring Tommy Robinson into the party, it remains deeply troubling that Farage was willing to entertain support from someone as inflammatory as Musk.

If Reform gains ground in upcoming local elections, there is a real risk that this divisive, far-right ideology will seep into British local government and policymaking.

3. What danger does Reform UK pose to British Muslims?

By advancing a deeply Islamophobic agenda, Reform has played a central role in the dangerous normalisation of anti-Muslim sentiment across British political, social, and cultural life. This has arguably catalysed a broader shift in British politics – one in which the Conservatives, in particular, have moved further to the right in an attempt to compete with Reform and appeal to disaffected white working-class voters.

These conditions laid the groundwork for the alarming violence seen last summer, when the UK experienced the largest wave of far-right rioting and unrest in the post-war era. Rioters frequently [targeted](#) mosques, Asian-owned businesses, hotels housing asylum seekers, and both Muslim bystanders and those perceived to be Muslim – acts seemingly provoked by far-right agitators like Tommy Robinson and Laurence Fox, who spread disinformation online about the identity of the Southport attacker.

Meanwhile, Reform officials and members played a prominent role in stoking the unrest. Farage was [accused](#) of “creating conspiracy theories” and inciting violence by former Metropolitan Police counter-terrorism chief Neil Basu, while a [Savanta poll](#) from August 2024 found that half of the British public hold Farage “personally responsible” for the riots.

Moreover, a *Byline Times* [investigation](#) revealed that Reform-affiliated Facebook groups are rife with far-right sentiment and support for the riots. Islamophobic posts described Britain as being “overrun with Muslims” and “becoming an Islamic country”, with many users expressing support for figures like Enoch Powell and Tommy Robinson. Strikingly, some members openly celebrated the violence – one post in the ‘Reform UK candidates’ group asked, “What took you so f*cking long?” Others used the group to promote “protests” outside asylum support centres and the offices of immigration solicitors.

Therefore, Reform, and figures such as Farage, have manipulated public anxieties to fan the flames of Islamophobia, gaining popularity as anti-Muslim sentiment becomes increasingly [mainstreamed](#) in political and media discourse. This climate threatens the safety and security of British Muslims, opening the door to further violence, discrimination, and the erosion of Britain's democratic and multicultural identity.

4. How should Muslim communities respond?

Turning out to vote is crucial to support candidates who genuinely represent local communities, and to reject those who seek to inflame hatred and sow division, including by tactically voting to prevent Reform candidates from gaining seats on local councils.

But simply voting is not enough. Looking ahead, Muslims must organise to challenge and expose Reform's divisive ideology. This means launching coordinated awareness campaigns – both online and on the ground in our towns and cities – in partnership with other civil society groups equally committed to countering Reform's growing influence.

At the same time, grassroots political engagement is vital. Every one of us can take action by contacting our local MPs and urging them to publicly reject Reform's toxic rhetoric. [Click [here](#) to contact your MP.]

This response is essential well beyond May 2025, as the threat posed by Reform is unlikely to disappear any time soon.

5. What is the role of government and policymakers?

MEND offers the following recommendations to government and policymakers in order to effectively combat the Islamophobia promoted by Reform:

1. **Formally adopt the definition of Islamophobia proposed by the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims:** *"Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness."* This definition should be applied alongside the [guidelines](#) produced by the Coalition Against Islamophobia.
2. **Conduct a thorough review of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006** with the aim of strengthening legal protections for religious communities, ensuring better safeguards from hate speech and incitement.
3. **Engage with credible Muslim civil society organisations** – particularly the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) – who actively monitor and document the effects of Islamophobic rhetoric, including that propagated by Reform, on British Muslim communities.



mend

e: info@mend.org.uk
Copyright © 2024 | mend.org.uk