



# **RISING ISLAMOPHOBIA IN SCOTLAND AND MEDIA SILENCE**

**mend**



# Rising Islamophobia in Scotland and Media Silence



## MUSLIM ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT

MEND is a not-for-profit company that helps to empower and encourage British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics.

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# Rising Islamophobia in Scotland and Media Silence

## Introduction

Scotland has witnessed an alarming rise in violent Islamophobic incidents in 2025, including multiple attacks on mosques. Yet, despite their severity, national media coverage has been late, limited and often superficial. This lack of serious reporting contributes to a dangerous narrative that Islamophobia is isolated and disconnected from wider far-right mobilisation. Failure to document these incidents not only undermines public awareness but also weakens policy responses and emboldens perpetrators.

As Linsay Taylor, CEO of Muslim Engagement and Development, has stated:

*“For Muslims in Scotland, the silence of the media is an additional harm alongside the violence itself. Every time an attack is brushed aside, communities are left to carry their pain alone, sending the message that our safety and dignity are seen as less important. That silence fuels fear, isolates victims and normalises Islamophobia.”*

By downplaying them, the media risks normalising Islamophobia and further marginalising Scotland's Muslim communities.

# Recent Incidents of Islamophobia in Scotland

Since the start of 2025, Scotland has experienced a series of serious Islamophobic attacks:

**Greenock, Inverclyde (January 2025):** A Hitler-inspired 16-year-old, plotted a mass murder at Inverclyde Islamic Centre. He was arrested on his way to carry out the attack and later pled guilty under the Terrorism Act.<sup>1</sup>

**Fife (February 2025):** Shops and religious centres were targeted with racist, Islamophobic posters.<sup>2</sup>

**Aberdeen (March 2025):** The Aberdeen Mosque and Islamic Centre was vandalised with white paint and a rock thrown through a window while worshippers were inside. A 17-year-old has been charged with hate crime.<sup>3</sup>

**Online Extremism (March 2025):** A Scottish youth was exposed running a Discord server where children discussed "killing Muslims."<sup>4</sup>

**Glasgow (March 2024):** A 13-year-old boy walking home from a local mosque was subjected to racial abuse before being brutally attacked. The attacker punched, kicked and stabbed him in an attempt to kill. He was sentenced to seven years in prison.

**Elgin, Moray (April 2025):** The local mosque was vandalised for the third time, with windows smashed. In 2019, it was defaced with racist graffiti.<sup>5</sup>

**Alloa (May 2025):** A mosque was deliberately set on fire. A man was arrested in connection with the incident.<sup>6</sup>

**Dundee (August 2025):** Convicted murderer Stewart Cochrane was jailed after threatening to "kill all Muslims" and assassinate the Prime Minister.<sup>7</sup>

**Newton Mearns (September 2025):** A young Muslim schoolgirl was assaulted by a male as she was walking home from school. He also made threatening comments against Muslims.

These are not isolated incidents but part of a broader trend of far-right activity in Scotland, coinciding with anti-asylum protests and the rise of extremist political rhetoric.

1. 'Hitler-Inspired Boy Planned Terror Attack at Mosque, and Pretended to Convert to Islam to Gain Access', *Sky News*, 11 Aug 2025: <https://news.sky.com/story/greenock-mosque-where-teenager-planned-massacre-says-it-acted-as-security-wake-up-call-13409526>

2. 'Shock at Racist Posters Targeting Fife Shopkeepers and Religious Centres', *The Courier*, 7 Feb 2025: <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/fife/5178101/racist-fife-posters-shopkeepers-religious-centres/>

3. 'Teenager Charged After Aberdeen Mosque Vandalised', *BBC News*, 17 Mar 2025: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cd7ejlv72evo>

4. 'Scottish Man Hosts Discord Where Children Discuss Killing Muslims', *The National*, 16 Mar 2025: <https://www.thenational.scot/news/25010094.scottish-man-hosts-discord-children-discuss-killing-muslims/>

5. 'Moray Mosque Vandalised For Third Time as Police Launch Investigation', *The National*, 16 Apr 2025:

<https://www.thenational.scot/news/25095454.moray-mosque-vandalised-third-time-police-launch-investigation/>

6. 'Alloa: Man Arrested After Fire at Mosque on Whins Road', *Alloa & Hillfoots Advertiser*, 16 Jun 2025:

<https://www.alloaadvertiser.com/news/25242997.alloa-man-arrested-fire-mosque-whins-road/>

7. 'Dundee Murderer Jailed for Violent and Threatening Online Posts Towards Prime Minister and Muslims', *The Courier*, 4 Aug 2025: <https://www.thecourier.co.uk/fp/news/courts/5299595/dundee-murderer-jailed-violent-posts-muslims/>





Elgin Mosque has been targeted in repeated Islamophobic attacks in recent years. During Ramadan in 2019, the building was defaced with swastikas and abusive graffiti of a religious and sexual nature.<sup>8</sup> In April 2025, its windows were smashed in what was the third attack on the site, reflecting a troubling pattern of recurring incidents against the community.



## Limited Visual Evidence

Photographic documentation of Islamophobic attacks in Scotland is scarce. Some community members choose not to share images so as not to cause alarm within the community, while media engagement with these attacks has often been minimal or superficial, with some outlets relying on stock images rather than visiting affected sites or speaking to local communities. The absence of visual evidence is therefore a reflection of insufficient media attention and community discretion. These attacks are real, harmful and part of a growing pattern of Islamophobia across the country, demanding urgent attention from both media and policymakers.

8. 'Man Jailed for Elgin Mosque Swastika Vandalism', BBC News, 25 May 2021: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-57241804>  
 9. 'Alloa: Man Arrested After Fire at Mosque on Whins Road', Alloa & Hillfoots Advertiser, 16 Jun 2025: <https://www.alloaadvertiser.com/news/25242997.alloa-man-arrested-fire-mosque-whins-road/>

10. 'Hitler-Inspired Boy Planned Terror Attack at Mosque, and Pretended to Convert to Islam to Gain Access', Sky News, 11 Aug 2025: <https://news.sky.com/story/greenock-mosque-where-teenager-planned-massacre-says-it-acted-as-security-wake-up-call-13409526>

11. 'Scotland's Tolerance Reputation 'a Myth'', BBC News, 8 May 2018: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-44040251>

## Media Silence, Delay and Minimisation

Most incidents have only received brief local coverage, often stripped of context or meaningful engagement with those affected. Coverage of the Alloa mosque arson in the *Alloa Advertiser* consisted of three sentences and a stock photo of police, with no interviews or community perspective.<sup>9</sup>

Where national outlets have covered incidents, reporting has been delayed and lacked depth. *Sky News* reported the Greenock terror plot six months after the arrest and made no reference to the wider surge in Islamophobic attacks across Scotland.<sup>10</sup>

### Alloa: Man arrested after fire at mosque on Whins Road

16TH JUNE CRIME EMERGENCY ALLOA



A MAN has been arrested after an incident at Alloa Mosque.

Police were called early this morning (Monday) and an area around the Whins Road premises was cordoned off.

A Police Scotland spokesperson said: "Around 4.50am on Monday, June 16, we received a report of fire damage to a mosque on Whins Road, Alloa.



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## Impact of Poor Coverage

Limited media reporting is compounded by wider social dynamics. The idea of 'Scottish Exceptionalism', that Scotland is more welcoming and less racist than the rest of the UK, can downplay the reality of Islamophobia. Research from the book *No Problem Here: Understanding Racism in Scotland* shows that minority ethnic groups continue to face discrimination and institutional barriers, and that many racist attacks go underreported.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, some in the Muslim community choose not to publicise incidents, often to protect young people or prevent further hostility. Combined with minimal or superficial media engagement, this contributes to underreporting and explains

why photographic evidence of attacks is often scarce. Recognising the existence of Islamophobia is essential to protecting communities and ensuring accountability.

These gaps in coverage and recognition have real consequences:

- **Silencing communities:** Muslim voices and experiences are sidelined, erasing the reality of those directly targeted.
- **Distorted narratives:** Far-right violence is minimised, giving readers the impression that such incidents are rare rather than part of a wave of Islamophobia.
- **Dangerous silence:** Selective reporting normalises Islamophobia, sending the message that Muslim lives matter less.
- **Policy implications:** Lack of national scrutiny reduces pressure on government and law enforcement to take action.

This selective reporting contrasts sharply with the extensive coverage often given to other forms of extremism, reinforcing perceptions that Islamophobic violence is less newsworthy.

## Youth Radicalisation and Online Spaces

A striking feature of recent incidents is the involvement of teenagers. Online platforms such as Discord and TikTok have become breeding grounds for far-right propaganda and Islamophobic conspiracy theories.

The Greenock case shows how quickly young people can be radicalised, from consuming hate at 13 to planning a terrorist massacre by 16. Others, like the Aberdeen and Discord suspects, highlight that this is not an isolated pattern. These young people are not “lone wolves” but are being groomed through online extremist networks. Yet the media rarely frames their actions this way, obscuring the organised nature of far-right extremism.

## Far-Right Anti-Immigration Activism in Scotland

The rise in Islamophobic incidents is closely linked to growing far-right activism. Protests outside hotels housing asylum seekers have provided a platform for extremist rhetoric. At a Falkirk rally, one speaker declared, “Keep Britain white. Keep Scotland white”, while another gave a Nazi salute and a banner read “Kill ‘Em All, Let God Sort ‘Em Out”.<sup>12</sup>

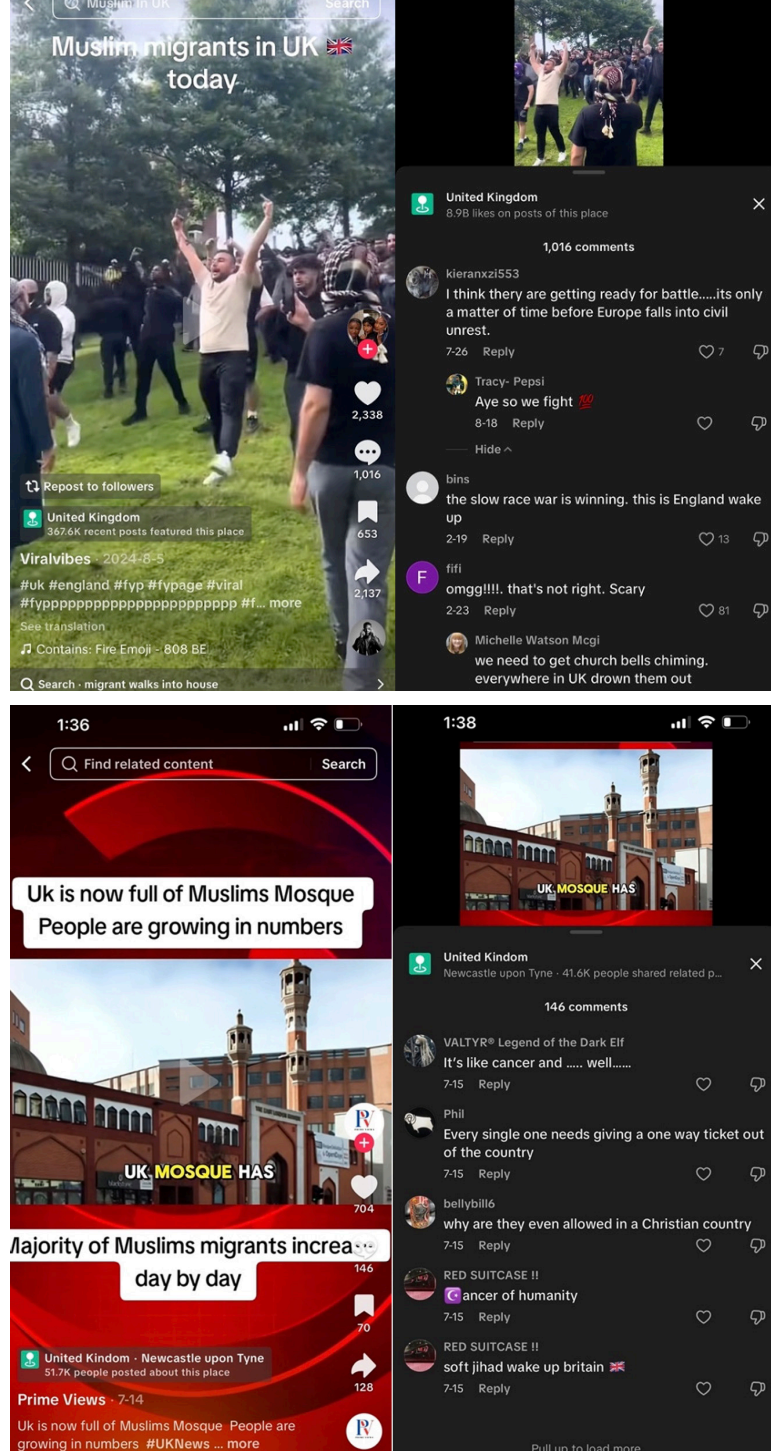
12. ‘Campaigners Say Anti-Asylum Hotel Protesters Are ‘Extremists’’, *BBC News*, 18 Aug 2025: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czxy19kdxnyo>; ‘Hundreds Face Off Outside Falkirk Hotel in Asylum Seeker Protests’, *BBC News*, 31 Aug 2025: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/czxyj5w5jn0o>

13. ‘Neo-Nazis and Convicted Violent Thug Organising and Backing Scots Anti-Immigration Protests’, *Daily Record*, 24 Aug 2025:

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/neo-nazis-convicted-violent-thug-35782563>

14. ‘Glasgow Group Concerned Over ‘Anti-Migrant’ Graffiti’, *The National*, 26 Aug 2025:

<https://www.thenational.scot/news/25418260.glasgow-group-concerned-anti-migrant-graffiti/?ref=rss>



These are not isolated protests but part of a growing wave of anti-immigrant protests outside Scottish hotels which are being backed by groups such as Britain First, the neo-Nazi Patriotic Alternative, and its splinter, the Homeland Party.<sup>13</sup> Their aim is to stir hostility toward Muslims and migrants under the guise of community concern. This messaging is being reinforced in public spaces with graffiti in Glasgow reading “Say no to Islam” and “Stop the boats”.<sup>14</sup> Such acts intimidate local communities and spread the false narrative that immigration is a cultural threat. By failing to connect these protests and hate crimes, media and policymakers risk underestimating the scale of the threat and the shared ideology driving anti-Muslim and anti-migrant hatred.





## Political and Policy Failures

The Cross-Party Group (CPG) on Tackling Islamophobia has made clear recommendations<sup>15</sup>, including:

- Mandatory faith literacy training for journalists and student teachers.
- Stronger strategies to monitor and counter Islamophobic content online.
- Formal adoption of the APPG definition of Islamophobia, recognising it as a form of racism.

Three successive SNP administrations have failed to act on these recommendations. This inaction undermines trust between Muslim communities and the Scottish Government and signals a lack of political urgency in tackling Islamophobia.

## Recommendations:

### Media Reform

Both national and local outlets must adopt guidelines for reporting Islamophobia, ensuring voices and wider context are central. Terrorist plots against Muslims must be covered with the same urgency and depth as other extremist threats.

### Government Action

The Scottish Government should adopt the CPG's recommendations without delay. A clear national strategy is needed, including mandatory faith literacy training and formal recognition of Islamophobia as racism.

## Youth and Online Interventions

The government must develop targeted programmes to prevent youth radicalisation and work with social media platforms to monitor and shut down extremist networks targeting young people.

## Community Engagement

Police Scotland and local authorities must strengthen partnerships with Muslim communities to build trust and improve incident reporting, ensuring incidents are addressed transparently and effectively.

## Funding and Security Support

The UK Government must simplify and streamline the Protective Security for Mosques Scheme to make it more accessible. Greater transparency is also needed on how many mosques have applied and been approved, so that gaps in support can be identified and addressed.

## Conclusion

Scotland is experiencing a rise in Islamophobic violence, yet media and government responses remain slow and inadequate. Mosque attacks, youth radicalisation and community trauma are too often minimised, sending a dangerous message that Islamophobia is tolerated. This is not an isolated problem; it is racism and extremism. Scotland must act now to ensure the safety and equality of its Muslim citizens.

15. Report of the Inquiry into Islamophobia in Scotland by the Cross-Party Group on Tackling Islamophobia, 2023: [https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Scotlands\\_Islamophobia\\_2023\\_Update.pdf](https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Scotlands_Islamophobia_2023_Update.pdf)



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