

THE GREAT DEBUNK

CHALLENGING ISLAMOPHOBIC CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Stop ritual slaughter of animals says top vet

MUSLIM CONVERT BEHEADS WOMAN IN GARDEN

MOSQUE PIG HEAD ATTACK 'SHOCK'

Darren Osborne jailed for life for Finsbury Park terrorist attack

1 in 5 Brit Muslims' sympathy for jihadis

SPECTATOR Taught to hate

9-YEAR OLD SCHOOLBOY IS JIHADI EXTREMIST

JIHADIST PLOT TO TAKE OVER CITY SCHOOLS

MailOnline Number of British Muslims will double to 5.5m in 20 years

SPECTATOR HOW TO SPOT THE JIHADI NEXT

MILLIONS ARE EATING HALAL FOOD WITHOUT KNOWING IT

NewStatesman The challenge to Islam

MUSLIMS ATE MY HAMSTER

CITY LON N POLICE AS OF SATURDAY 29th JULY 2015
TOWER HAMLETS IS OFFICIALLY OUTSIDE OF BRITISH LAW PLEASE KEEP OUT FOR YOUR OWN SAFETY AS WE CAN'T HELP YOU.
NO GO ZONE
IF YOU TRY TO WALK THROUGH, YOU WILL BE ARRESTED.

HORRIFIC BETRAYAL OF 1400 CHILDREN

DAILY EXPRESS MUSLIMS TELL BRITISH GO TO HELL!

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

In 1968, Conservative MP Enoch Powell delivered his famous “Rivers of Blood” speech giving a scathing critique of Commonwealth immigration. Powell believed that some immigrants sought “the exercise of actual domination” later suggesting that if immigration continued Britain’s major cities would become “coloured, until civil war comes”.¹ Almost six decades later, Powell’s ideas are being echoed by his successors in the Conservative Party which in recent years has increasingly shifted to the radical right.² Former Home Secretary Suella Braverman not only took a strong anti-immigration position but an anti-Muslim one, implying the threat of Muslim domination and a clash of civilisations.³

Previously considered controversial, Powell’s rhetoric of population replacement and a future race war has become central to conspiracy theories like the “Great Replacement” and white supremacist thinking, as the phrase “Enoch was right” has become popular among the far-right and wider neonationalist circles. As religion has become a prominent way of differentiating between social groups, Muslims have come to be regarded as an outgroup posing an existential threat to the British white race and culture through a number of popular conspiracy theories influenced by and impacting on Islamophobia.⁴

Belief in a Muslim threat is increasingly being fuelled by the media and politicians, as certain events and developments, such as terrorist attacks and immigration, are mobilised to create panic, offer a scapegoat and explanation during periods of crisis or ambiguity. External threats to western society are helpful to governments in unifying the public against a common enemy and distracting from their own failings. These ideas are repeated in mainstream spaces such as social media to reach wider audiences and can encourage extremist ideas. Globally, these ideologies have inspired horrific terrorist attacks such as the



1. ‘Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech’, *Anthropology 1001*, accessed 8 Apr 2024

https://anth1001.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/enoch-powell_speech.pdf;

‘Enoch Interview 1977’, YouTube, 28 Feb 2010, accessed 8 Apr 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xGLmFNZ1tM>

2. *State of Hate 2024: Pessimism, Decline and the Rising Radical Right*, Hope Not Hate, 2024, accessed 15 Mar 2024:

<https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/state-of-hate-2024-v15.pdf>

3. Suella Braverman, ‘Islamists are bullying Britain into submission’, *The Telegraph*, 22 Feb 2024, accessed 30 Feb 2024:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/22/islamists-are-bullying-britain-into-submission/>

4. Perceptions of a Muslim cultural, political, and demographic threat have been and are prevalent across Europe and North America. See: John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

2019 Christchurch mosque shootings and the 2011 Norway attacks, indicating their potential to result in violent extremism alongside everyday acts of Islamophobia.

While many do in fact reject these ideas, far-right conspiracy theories are now part of the British mainstream as the media, politicians, and public increasingly engage in the promotion of conspiratorial views indicating a Muslim cultural and demographic threat.⁵ Why are the ideological tropes of far-right extremism so embedded in our mainstream discourse? The rise of right-wing populist politics facilitated by public dissatisfaction with the governing elite, the spill over of far-right rhetoric into mainstream spaces, and the continuing negative representations of Muslims consumed by a public that are increasingly being exposed to conspiratorial ideas, have fed the perception of a Muslim peril that threatens the existence of British society and values.

Drawing on intergroup threat theory this report analyses the ways in which sections of British society perceive both a realistic and symbolic threat in Islam and Muslims which leads to prejudice between social groups.⁶ The ingroup, which defines itself as 'indigenous British', perceive a realistic threat in increasing Muslim numbers which is believed to pose a threat to their existence, and a symbolic threat in the Islamisation of Britain which poses a threat to their values, culture and beliefs. Islamophobic conspiracy theories build on threat perceptions of Muslim demographic and cultural colonisation produced through negative stereotypes, media representations, political messaging, and far-right narratives by which Muslims are categorised, defined and homogenised to present a unified threat to British society. As these ideas overlap, the demographic and cultural threat are combined to imply an imminent Muslim takeover of Britain.

This report examines the different conspiracy theories prevalent in the British mainstream, the various actors involved as well as their strategies of promotion, and the threat that these ideologies pose to Muslims in Britain. It uses previously published datasets and studies to consolidate existing knowledge while also bringing in new analysis in light of recent developments in British politics and society. Through a survey of public and political views expressed through various media channels it contributes to our understanding of the relationship between right-wing ideologies, racial and cultural anxieties, and Islamophobia. Finally, using demographic data, surveys and scholarly literature it forwards an understanding of how and why these conspiracy theories gain appeal despite the lack of factual basis, the reality of the Muslim demographic and cultural presence in Britain, and what we can do to combat these dangerous ideologies.

5. 'Far-right conspiracy theories are now embedded in the UK mainstream', *Open Democracy*, 14 May 2022, accessed 28 Feb 2024, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/far-right-mainstream-conspiracy-theory-uk/>

6. Walter G. Stephan, Oscar Ybarra, Kimberly Rios, 'Intergroup Threat Theory', in Todd D. Nelson (ed.), *Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping, and Discrimination* (Psychology Press, 2009), pp. 43-59.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

Islamophobic conspiracy theories have traditionally been promoted by the far-right who have long spread false claims of Muslim population replacement and the supposed Islamisation of Britain.

Through a range of popular conspiracy theories such as the Great Replacement and so-called Sharia no-go zones, conspiracists imply an existential Muslim threat to British society and values, which in turn encourages and legitimises violence towards Muslims alongside everyday acts of Islamophobia.

This report examines how the ideological tropes of far-right extremism have become so embedded in our mainstream discourse and why these conspiracy theories gain appeal despite a lack of factual basis.

Key Findings:

- Belief in Islamophobic conspiracy theories is higher among members of the Conservative Party than among the British public. 52% believe 'Sharia no-go zones' exist and 45% believe in a globalist plot to weaken European identity.
- The British public hugely overestimates the size of the Muslim population in Britain. Many believed that 22% of the British population would be Muslim by 2020 when in fact they only made up to 6.5% of the population in 2021.
- Islamophobic conspiracy theories flourish as a result of religious illiteracy which is supplemented by negative media portrayals that inform misconceptions as 55% of people get their information about Islam from the media.
- Far-right ideas are increasingly being promoted by politicians which feeds and validates far-right extremists who encourage intergroup conflict and violence, posing an increasing threat to minority communities.
- Though conspiracists see a Muslim threat to national identity and culture, Muslims have a stronger sense of belonging to Britain and attachment to a British identity than the wider public; 55% said their national identity was important to them, compared with 44% of the general population.

Recommendations:

- Raise awareness of Islamophobia and its dangers to both Muslims and British society.
- Increase monitoring of, and effective measures against, far-right content on social media.
- Introduce effective media regulations against biased reporting and misinformation.
- Increase positive portrayals of Muslims in the media.
- Adopt the APPG on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia.
- Hold politicians to account who promote conspiracy theories or incite religious hatred.
- Ensure that counter-extremism policies address the threat of far-right extremism.
- Reject the previous Government's extremism definition as an attack on civil liberties and lawful dissent.

1

THE DEMOGRAPHIC THREAT

1. The Demographic Threat

The demographic threat in Islamophobic conspiracy theories is based on the wider myth of white genocide in which conspiracists believe that majority white populations face the threat of racial extinction through a deliberate plot of forced assimilation, mass immigration and/or violent genocide. In the UK, Muslims are held as the perpetrators in this theory which has been promoted by far-right figures who draw on issues around immigration and demographic change to promote anxieties of racial dilution and the eventual extinction of the British white population.

More popularly, the white genocide theory has taken the form of the Great Replacement and Eurabia conspiracy theories, terms that are often used interchangeably to warn of a Muslim takeover of Europe and cast the white majority as a dying race. As part of these conspiracy theories the ingroup highly distinguish between 'indigenous' British white populations and Muslims as the outgroup, despite race or origin. Worryingly, these conspiracy theories have permeated mainstream politics, the media and public opinion as current events and data are manipulated as 'evidence' of a perceived Muslim threat.⁷

Perceptions of a demographic threat involve the convergence of long held anti-immigration sentiments with more recent surges in anti-Muslim ones. Such perceptions have gathered strength following terrorist attacks and increasing immigration, especially following 9/11 and the influx of Muslim refugees in the wake of conflicts in the Middle East and Central Asia. As a result, narratives of Muslim demographic replacement focus on immigration from Muslim majority countries to portray a demographic threat to the 'indigenous' population. Another factor that feeds into perceptions of a Muslim demographic threat is that of higher birth rates, also termed "baby jihad".⁸ White nationalists paint Muslim women's fertility as a form of warfare against the West and point to birth rates to argue that Muslims pose an existential threat to Western society.

Social media has become an increasingly popular channel through which these ideas are being promoted. Social media users generate a 'synthetic white victimhood' through repetition of the white genocide narrative and use images as half-truths to produce 'evidence' of the death of Europe.⁹ Urgency is given to these debates through research, projections and reference to events and incidents which are used by adherents to inflate Muslim population size and present the Muslim threat out of proportion to the demographic reality.

7. Steve Rose, 'A deadly ideology: how the 'great replacement theory' went mainstream', *The Guardian*, 8 Jun 2022, accessed 8 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/08/a-deadly-ideology-how-the-great-replacement-theory-went-mainstream> ; Andrew Brown, 'The myth of Eurabia: how a far-right conspiracy theory went mainstream', *The Guardian*, 16 Aug 2019, accessed 8 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/16/the-myth-of-eurabia-how-a-far-right-conspiracy-theory-went-mainstream>

8. Margaret Hodson, "Baby Jihad", *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 7:1 (2022), pp. 108-120.

9. Bharath Ganesh, 'How the Swarm of White Extremism Spreads Itself Online', *The Spinoff*, 28 Mar 2019, accessed 20 Feb 2024: <https://thespinoff.co.nz/media/28-03-2019/how-the-swarm-of-white-extremism-spreads-itself-online>

1.1 The Great Replacement

The Great Replacement is a white nationalist, far-right conspiracy theory that was popularised by French author, Renaud Camus in his 2012 book of the same name. According to this theory, European populations are being demographically replaced by non-white peoples, particularly Muslims, through immigration and a decline in European birth rates. The theory has also been popularised by contemporary right-wing commentators like Douglas Murray in his book, *The Strange Death of Europe*, which echoes Camus and points to places in Europe where it is claimed that “population replacement” is currently taking place.¹⁰

The Great Replacement theory has found popularity in the UK and is frequently cited by opponents of immigration and those with Islamophobic views, not only from among the far-right but increasingly among the British public, politicians and the media. In 2023, research by The Policy Institute at King’s College London found that a third of the public believed that the Great Replacement is true and is currently happening in Britain.¹¹

Public perceptions of Muslim population size are indicative of a greater susceptibility to the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. According to research by Ipsos, the British public hugely overestimates the number of Muslims in the country and is also inaccurate about the rate at which the Muslim population is growing.¹² At the time of the survey in 2016, the British public believed that 1 in 6 Britons were Muslim, when actually less than 1 in 20 were. They also believed that 22% of the British population would be Muslim by 2020, yet 2021 Census figures show that Muslims only make up 6.5% of the population of England and Wales.¹³ However, despite the lack of factual basis the conspiracy theory is still gaining ground.

Proponents of the Great Replacement conspiracy use a range of methods to promote the theory including memes, distortions of demographic data and debunked science. Research has shown that the concept has become more widespread on social media in recent years, peaking after the Christchurch attack in 2019.¹⁴ An increasing number of tweets on the social media platform X frame the Great Replacement as a reality to critique multiculturalism and immigration. Conspiracists warn of a “genocide” or the “ethnic cleansing” of the white race through a “Muslim takeover” or “invasion”, making reference to an “Islamic state” as either

10. Peter Osborne, ‘Douglas Murray and the mainstreaming of the ‘Great Replacement’ theory’, *Middle East Eye*, 20 May 2022, accessed: 4 Jun 2024: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/douglas-murray-mainstreaming-great-replacement-theory>

11. *Conspiracy Belief Among the UK Public and the Role of Alternative Media*, The Policy Institute, King’s College London, June 2023.

12. *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, 2018, accessed 12 Mar 2024, https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2018-03/a-review-of-survey-research-on-muslims-in-great-britain-ipsos_0.pdf

13. Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021, accessed 27 Mar 2024, [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religionbyageandsexenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=Download%20the%20data,-.xlsx&text=It%20is%20important%20to%20note,\(3.9%20million\)%20in%202021.](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religionbyageandsexenglandandwales/census2021#:~:text=Download%20the%20data,-.xlsx&text=It%20is%20important%20to%20note,(3.9%20million)%20in%202021.)

14. Jacob Davey and Julia Ebner, ‘*The Great Replacement*’: *The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019, accessed 1 Feb 2024: <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Great-Replacement-The-Violent-Consequences-of-Mainstreamed-Extremism-by-ISD.pdf>

a perceived contemporary reality or a projection for the near future.¹⁵ Data, research and graphs are also used, repurposed and distorted to give an air of credibility to claims of a great replacement in process.



The Caliphate C @TheCaliphateEU · Mar 24
 The city of Bradford is an example for all of Europe.

Pakistanis keep on spreading and colonizing the city.

Across Europe, white cities and countries are being colonized by Muslim migrants and no one can stop it.

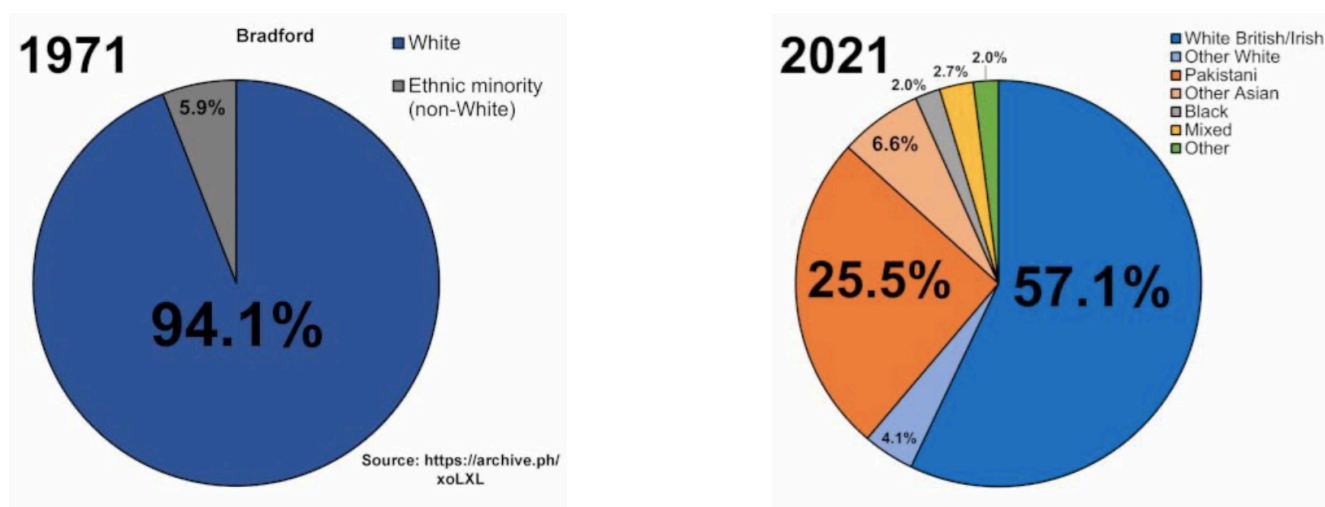


Fig. 1. Source: X, @TheCaliphateEU

Fig. 1 shows the way in which numerical data is presented to exaggerate the Muslim demographic threat.¹⁶ This comparison of the ethnic makeup of Bradford between 1971 and 2021 conceals the historical complexities of post-war Britain, decolonisation and migration to show a simplified image of Muslim increase. Yet, even as Pakistani's make up to 25.5% of Bradford's population after decades of migration from South Asia, the white population remains the majority. At the same time figures are manipulated to portray a threat of Pakistani, or Muslim, colonisation. The 2021 pie chart differentiates between the types of "white" and types of Asians to reduce the white population to those considered "indigenous", and conflate Pakistani with Muslim, disregarding the racial diversity in British Islam. If we look at the actual 2021 census figures for religion, Muslims make up to 30.5% of Bradford's population, which though close, is still less than those who identify as Christian and significantly less than the white British population.¹⁷

15. New British Union, X, 15 Oct 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/NewBritishUnion/status/1713515095513342299?s=20>

16. @TheCaliphateEU, X, 24 Mar 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/TheCaliphateEU/status/1771694941728538944>

17. 'How life has changed in Bradford: Census 2021', Office for National Statistics, 19 Jan 2023, accessed 25 Apr 2024: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000032/>

Conspiracists also use videos of increasing Muslim visibility as ‘evidence’ of a Muslim takeover of public places, such as congregational prayers in open spaces and religious processions.¹⁸ While such scenes are not as common as implied, they are nevertheless capitalised on to depict a menacing Muslim presence. Similarly, videos of migrant boats and people landing on European shores are used to provide an imagery of foreign, or rather Muslim, conquest.¹⁹ Again, the religion of migrants are implied to raise fears of a Muslim “invasion”. Such images make a difference, as was the case during the EU Referendum in which immigration was a major issue in the campaign for Brexit and impacted voting intentions. For example, Nigel Farage’s anti-migrant poster showed a queue of mostly non-white migrants and refugees, suggesting immigration was pushing Britain to “breaking point”.²⁰

While many migrants have sought asylum in the UK after fleeing dangerous conditions in the Middle East and Central Asia, statistics show an increasing number of arrivals from non-Muslim majority countries as well. In the first quarter of 2024, 20% of arrivals on small boats were Vietnamese and 19% Afghan. In the 12 months to 21 April 2024, there was an almost five-fold increase in Vietnamese arrivals compared to the previous 12-month period.²¹ Even as people from Afghanistan (9,307) and Iran (7,400) made up the largest number of asylum seekers in 2023, assessments of refugees arriving in Britain overlook the 255,000 visas that were issued to Ukrainian refugees as of April 2024, problematising conspiracist claims of increasing and almost entirely Muslim migration.²² This is not to contest the legality of arrivals but rather conspiracist claims of increasing and almost entirely Muslim migration.

With the lack of factual basis for replacement narratives, many conspiracists also resort to fictional depictions of Muslim increase. AI generated images are increasingly being used to portray apocalyptic images of white extinction (fig. 2)²³ and Britain transformed into a Middle Eastern landscape. Images are exaggerated to depict a backward, rundown society, as Muslim people and their culture are seen to pollute the urban landscape (fig.3).²⁴ These pictures provide an imagery that reinforces threat perceptions and the implausible prediction of a future Muslim Britain.

18. Ashlea Simon, X, 10 Dec 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/AshleaSimonBF/status/1733788717851050334?s=20>

19. Paul Golding, X, 30 Aug 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/GoldingBF/status/1696930846521823239?s=20>

20. ‘Farage heavily criticised over ‘vile’ migrant poster’, *ITV News*, 19 Jun 2016, accessed 5 Jun 2024:

<https://www.itv.com/news/2016-06-19/gove-i-shuddered-at-farages-migrant-breaking-point-poster>

21. Additional statistics relating to illegal immigration (April 2024), Home Office, updated 22 Apr 2024, accessed 25 Apr 2024:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-relating-to-the-illegal-migration-bill/additional-statistics-relating-to-illegal-migration-march-2024>

22. Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme (Homes for Ukraine) and Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data, Home Office, updated 25 Apr 2024, accessed 25 Apr 2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukraine-family-scheme-application-data/ukraine-family-scheme-and-ukraine-sponsorship-scheme-homes-for-ukraine-visa-data--2#total-ukraine-scheme-visas-issued-to-people-254300>

23. Delfi Media, X, 21 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/DelfiMedia/status/1760240028335178203>

24. Ordentio, X, 1 Mar 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/ordentio/status/1763532933304909992?s=20>

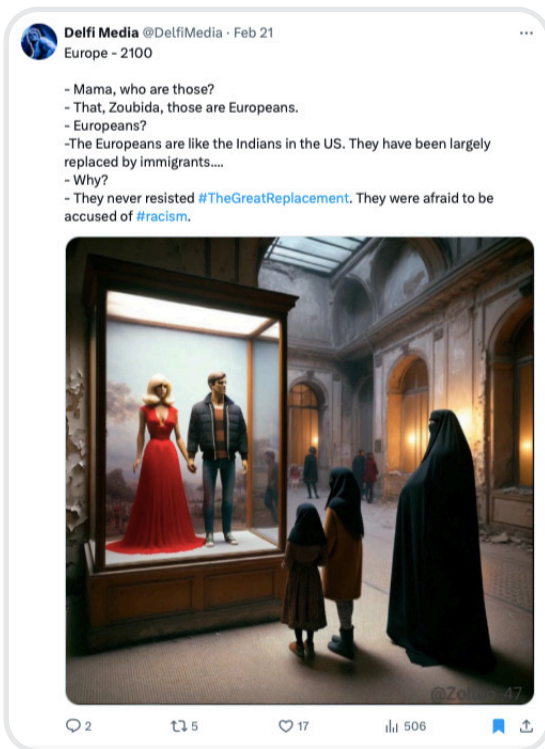


fig. 2. Source: X, @DelfiMedia



fig. 3. Source: X, @Ordentio

1.2 Eurabia

The Eurabia conspiracy theory became prominent and mainstream in contemporary political discourse after 9/11 and particularly after increased migration to Europe in 2015.²⁵ The conspiracy theory was developed by British-French author Bat Ye'or in the early 2000s and posits that globalist entities led by French and Arab powers aim to Islamise and Arabise Europe. Though the conspiracy includes a cultural dimension, the main fear is a demographic threat seen in strategic immigration and high birth rates by which Muslims will form a majority of Europe's population by the end of the twenty-first century and establish a Muslim continent.

Eurabia has been popularised through its own literary genre in which writers use Islamic extremism to stand in for a vast Muslim movement and essentialise Muslims as a threat to western politics and populations. In her book *Londonistan*, Melanie Phillips claims that London, dubbed "Londonistan", has become a country within a country and a hub for Islamic terror and extremism.²⁶ She writes that Islamic Jihad is the armed wing of the British left and is in the process of conquering Britain. Similarly, Douglas Murray depicts Muslims as

25. Eirikur Bergmann, 'The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory', in Andreas Önnertors and André Krouwel (eds.) *Europe: Continent of Conspiracies: Conspiracy Theories in and About Europe* (Routledge, 2021), pp. 36-53.

26. Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan: How Britain is Creating a Terror State Within* (Encounter Books, 2006).

a dangerous threat and laments the minoritisation of white British in London as a result of immigration and birth rates. He believes that European civilisation is dying and blames the elite for enacting the “suicide” and “extinction” of Europe’s ‘indigenous’ populations.²⁷ Eurabia writers build on the notion of Muslim appeasement by elites who plot to hand over Europe to the Arabs.²⁸ Both authors equate Muslims with extremism, present them as a dangerous threat and implicate Britain’s leaders as facilitating the so-called Muslim takeover. Both Phillips and Murray write for the mainstream media through which their conspiratorial messages are disseminated and reach a wide audience providing the vocabulary, core ideas and legitimacy for varying expressions of Eurabia.

The Eurabia conspiracy theory has been particularly influential among the far-right media and its readership. In 2016, *Breitbart* published an article titled “Islamic Academic: Migrants want Eurabia, Globalists using migrants to destroy the west”, commenting on an interview with Moroccan academic, Abdessamad Belhaj. According to *Breitbart*, Belhaj, “warned that Muslims in Europe view migration as the start of the Islamisation of the continent ... establish parallel societies ... [and that European elites] encourage migration and accommodate Islam”.²⁹ In the interview in question, Belhaj uses broad generalisations and sweeping statements in his critique of Islamic societies.³⁰ He implies that “Islamists” are the leaders of Muslim communities in Europe and through accommodation by European elites are replacing left wing politicians, bestowing on them great power and influence than is realistically so. Belhaj himself engages in conspiratorial views. He suggests that the “massive Islamisation worldwide” has been financed by “oil countries” such as Saudi Arabia and Iran whose “donations” have allowed them to “re-Islamise migrants in Europe ... to disseminate conservative and political Islam”.³¹ While the Eurabia theory has been widely discredited by academics, Belhaj does not mention it by name, but rather advances the core tropes of the conspiracy theory which he alludes to in his assessment of the political implications of Muslim migration.³² These tropes are easily recognisable in far-right spaces, where the use of academic opinion validates existing conspiratorial views as a large number of readers approve of Belhaj’s claims to confirm their own.

Eurabia is not limited to the far-right and has gained a wide following among the British public as its ideas have entered the mainstream. Recent polling revealed that belief in a form of the Eurabia conspiracy theory remains high, as 27% believe that “Globalist elites are encouraging immigration into Europe as part of a plot to weaken European identity”.³³ Social

27. Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity and Islam* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017).

28. “The Crescent and the Cross”, *Financial Times*, 10 Nov 2007, accessed 28 Feb 2024: <https://ghostarchive.org/archive/RRDjv>

29. Virginia Hale, ‘Islam Academic: Migrants Want Eurabia, Globalists Using Migrants to Destroy The West’, *Breitbart*, 14 Aug 2016, accessed 5 Mar 2024: <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2016/08/14/islam-academic-migrants-want-eurabia-globalists-using-migrants-to-destroy-the-west/>

30. ‘Mutual benefits: Islamic moral economy and Neo-Liberalism’, Migration Research Institute, 2 Aug 2016, accessed 25 Apr 2024: <https://migraciokutato.hu/en/2016/08/02/mutual-benefits-islamic-moral-economy-and-neo-liberalism/>

31. Ibid.

32. Matt Carr, ‘You are now entering Eurabia’, *Race & Class*, 48:1(2006), pp. 1-22.

33. *State of Hate 2024*, p. 110.

media is a popular channel through which the Eurabia theory is being promoted and where we can see the influence of Eurabia literature. “Londonistan” has become a popular term on X used by conspiracists to warn of a Muslim takeover of the capital. This narrative suggests that the Arab world is funding Muslims from France to come to the UK who will then take over positions of power.³⁴ As a result, conspiracists are particularly suspicious of non-white political leaders.

Adherents of Eurabia have seen London’s Muslim domination in the racial origins of its mayor and Britain’s former prime minister. The classification between brown and Muslim is blurred as Rishi Sunak has been depicted alongside Muslim politicians Sadiq Khan and Hamza Yousaf to warn of a Muslim political takeover.³⁵ Sadiq Khan’s position as mayor of London has been one of particular scrutiny and target. Former Conservative MP Lee Anderson suggested that Khan had given the capital away to his Islamist “mates”.³⁶ Others have suggested that Khan has used his position and power to establish the “caliphate of Londonistan”, a terror base for Muslim extremists.³⁷ On the other hand, Sunak who is a Hindu of Indian origin has been portrayed as a Muslim and whilst he was prime minister was believed to be facilitating the Muslim political takeover of Britain. However, Sunak himself has been accused of Islamophobia. He himself used an Islamophobic trope against Labour MP Zarah Sultana and has excused Islamophobia in the Conservative Party by refusing to call it out.³⁸

The Eurabia conspiracy theory presents particular political outcomes which have implications on the perception of Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim as a realistic threat to both the white population and western institutions of power. As a result, both the Eurabia and Great Replacement theories have not only elicited hostile views and opinions towards Muslims but also Islamophobic violence, as white supremacists and far-right extremists see it as their duty to defend western democracy and the continuity of the white race.³⁹

34. James, X, 17 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/SoNowUknow2/status/1758938426278113315?s=20>

35. Britain First, X, 29 Mar 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/BFirstParty/status/1641067933517377537?s=20>

36. Eleni Courea, ‘Tory MP Lee Anderson claims ‘Islamists’ have got control of Sadiq Khan’, *The Guardian*, 23 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Jun 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/23/tory-mp-lee-anderson-claims-islamists-have-got-control-of-sadiq-khan>

37. David Vance, X, 27 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/DVATW/status/1762507973312569745>

38. Rhiannon James, ‘Rishi Sunak accused of using ‘Islamophobic trope’ against Labour MP’, *The Independent*, 15 Jan 2014, accessed 25 Apr 2024: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sunak-islamophobic-trope-zarah-sultana-b2479103.html>;

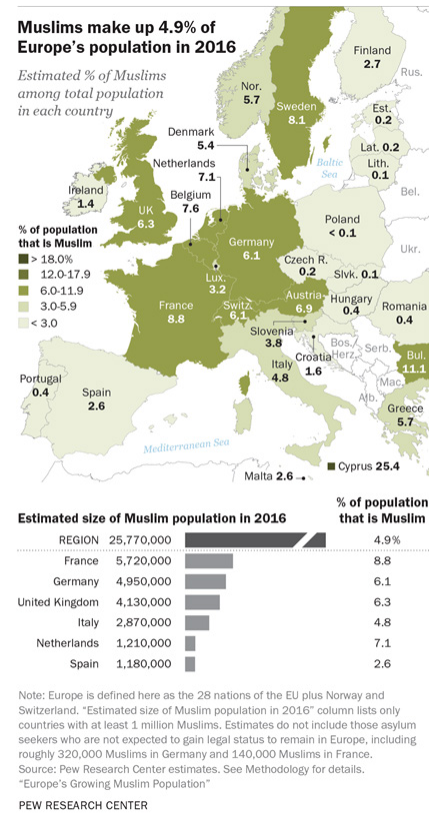
Peter Walker, ‘Sunak says no Islamophobia issues in Tory party despite Anderson remarks’, *The Guardian*, 26 Feb 2024, accessed 25 Apr 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/26/lee-anderson-sadiq-khan-tory-london-mayor>

39. See Section 4 of this report: ‘Islamophobic Conspiracy Theories and Violence’, pp. 29-31.

1.3 Population Politics of a Muslim Takeover

Population replacement conspiracy theories present the Muslim and western antagonism as a demographic struggle in which reproductive power and migration are weaponised by Muslims in the Islamic conquest of the west. According to this narrative Muslims have more children, increase in numbers and eventually take power. On anti-Muslim websites strategic reproduction, also referred to as “birth jihad”, is believed to be the most important weapon for “Islamisation”.⁴⁰ Here the term ‘jihad’ is repurposed to inspire fear of Muslims and Islam. For example, the far-right British National Party warn of a “demographic jihad” which they claim is the “domination and eventual takeover of a country by Islamic population growth”.⁴¹ Jihad is still seen as an act of aggression against the west, however, Muslims are believed to achieve domination through “outbreeding” and immigration rather than the use of violence and war.

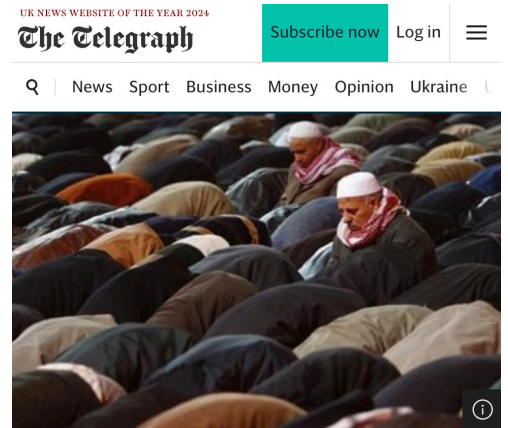
Perceptions of a Muslim demographic threat seek legitimacy through statistics and projections that are used as ‘evidence’ of Muslim population replacement. The Pew Research Centre’s 2017 projections on Europe’s growing Muslim population has been and continues to be influential among conspiracists.⁴² Pew’s analysis provides estimates of Europe’s Muslim population under different levels of migration. They predict that even with no future migration, Europe’s Muslim population is expected to increase by 10 million by 2050 as a result of higher fertility rates and a younger population. In a medium migration scenario, the UK is projected to see the largest growth in Europe with a Muslim population of 16.7% by 2050. Pew’s 2015 predictions suggested that Europe’s Muslim population is expected to increase by 63% by 2050 reflecting fears in response to the European migrant crisis.⁴³ Though these are predictions based on perceptions of a culturally static and homogenous Muslim society and possible, or rather unlikely, scenarios, presenting a series of “what ifs?”, this research has been magnified by right-wing media outlets who warn of the UK’s Muslim population tripling by 2050 by which the country would have the highest Muslim population in Europe.⁴⁴ Those who promote such conspiracy theories pick the highest levels of Pew’s



migration estimates and ignore the others to exaggerate the Muslim demographic threat.⁴⁵ Dominant groups become less tolerant and express higher degrees of anger and fear of minority groups when they are exposed to demographic projections suggesting that they will become a numerical minority.⁴⁶ The mainstream and social media represent demographic data within an Islamophobic framework to reinforce and increase perceptions of a Muslim threat.

Pew's research has long fuelled wider concerns by which the right-wing media have produced sensationalised narratives of population replacement.⁴⁷ A 2011 article in the *Daily Mail*, used Pew Research Centre's earlier projections to warn that by 2030 "Britain will have more Muslims than Kuwait".⁴⁸ While such figures may reflect a certain reality they conceal the complexities of demographic proportions and population diversity in Britain. Kuwait has a relatively smaller population than the UK. In 2022, of its approximately 3.1 million population, it has been estimated that 76% were Muslim.⁴⁹ If we compare these figures to England and Wales, although there are more Muslims numerically, they only make up to 6.5% of the population.⁵⁰ Though the figures do not indicate a serious Muslim threat, media messaging evokes Islamophobic sentiments and conspiratorial views. Recent studies have continued to focus on the growing Muslim population which right leaning media outlets have capitalised on, citing academics and 'experts' as authorities to provide legitimacy to threat perceptions.⁵¹

Similarly Census data on religion in England and Wales has also been used to intensify fears of a Muslim increase and push exaggerated claims of Muslim population growth. The 2021 Census showed an increase in the number of people who described themselves as Muslim and a decrease among Christians.⁵² Following the release of this data the mainstream media



45. 'Partly false claim: Map predicts Muslim population in Europe in 2050', *Reuters*, 20 May 2020, accessed 5 Jun 2024: <https://www.reuters.com/article/idUSKBN22W27L/>

46. Milan Obaidi, Jonas Kunst, Simon Ozer, and Sasha Y. Kimel, 'The "Great Replacement" Conspiracy: How the Perceived Ousting of Whites Can Evoke Violent Extremism and Islamophobia' *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 25:7 (2022), pp. 1675-1695.

47. Adrian Michaels, 'A fifth of European Union will be Muslim by 2050', *The Telegraph*, 8 Aug 2009, accessed 7 Mar 2024: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/5994045/A-fifth-of-European-Union-will-be-Muslim-by-2005.html>

48. Steve Doughty, 'Number of British Muslims will double to 5.5m in 20 years', *Daily Mail*, 28 Jan 2011, accessed 8 Mar 2024: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1351251/Number-British-Muslims-double-5-5m-20-years.html>

49. 'US State Dept 2022 report on International Religious Freedom in Kuwait', *US State Department*, 2022, accessed 28 Apr 2024: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kuwait/>

50. Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics, Nov 2022, accessed 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>

51. Katherine Lawton, 'White British school children 'could be a minority within 40 years' with just 50 to 60 per cent of the population to define themselves as white British by the year 2060, study claims', *Daily Mail*, 13 May 2023, accessed 6 Mar 2024: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12078861/White-British-school-children-minority-40-years-study-claims.html>

52. Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021, Office for National Statistics, Nov 2022, accessed 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>

produced sensationalist headlines warning “White British people now minority in UK’s two largest cities” and “England and Wales now minority Christian countries”.⁵³ While the Muslim population has grown these headlines overlook the diversity of Britain’s population and encourage conspiratorial beliefs as headlines are repeated to claim that the UK will become a Muslim country within the next century.⁵⁴ However, upon examination of the 2021 census figures “Christian” still remains the most common response to the religion question, followed by “no religion”.⁵⁵ The number of Muslims has increased by 2.4% in the last decade while Christians form the largest religious group in England and Wales at 46.2%.

This decline in Christianity cannot simply be ascribed to an increase in the Muslim population and is due to a number of factors. Scholars have argued that because they are an aged population, death rates affect the decline in the number of Christians.⁵⁶ It has also been argued that many Christians lost their religion in the 1960s and raised their children non-religious. As a result, the decline in Christianity can also be attributed to the growth of the non-religious which saw the largest increase in the 2021 Census at 12%.



Number of British Muslims will double to 5.5m in 20 years

By STEVE DOUGHTY FOR THE DAILY MAIL
 UPDATED: 15:48, 28 January 2011



25
 View comm

- Muslims to make up quarter of world's projected population of 8.3billion
- 72 countries already have one million or more Muslims
- Britain to have more Muslims than Kuwait by 2030

The Muslim population in the UK will almost double to 5.5million within 20 years, it has been claimed.

Immigration and high birth rates will mean nearly one in ten Britons will be Muslim by 2030, according to a worldwide study about the spread of Islam.

And the forecasts mean Britain will have more Muslims than Kuwait.



53. Gabriella Swerling, ‘White British people now minority in UK’s two largest cities, census reveals’, *The Telegraph*, 29 Nov 22, accessed 6 Mar 2024: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/11/29/uk-census-results-2021-white-ethnicity-london-birmingham/>; ‘England and Wales now minority Christian countries, census reveals’, *The Guardian*, 29 Nov 2022, accessed 6 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/29/leicester-and-birmingham-are-uk-first-minority-majority-cities-census-reveals>

54. Kaya Burgess, ‘UK’s Muslim population could treble by 2050, research finds’, *The Times*, 30 Nov 2017, accessed 7 Mar 2024: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/uk-s-muslim-population-could-treble-by-2050-research-finds-8x5c278w3>

55. Religion by age and sex, England and Wales: Census 2021.

56. Harriet Sherwood, ‘Why is the Christian population of England and Wales declining?’, *The Guardian*, 29 Nov 2022, accessed 6 Jun 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/29/why-is-the-christian-population-of-england-and-wales-declining>

2

THE CULTURAL THREAT

2. The Cultural Threat

Religion as a form of social identity has gained particular relevance as it has come to be tied up with issues of community identity, stereotyping, and political conflict. Changes in the theory of racism in European society has entailed a shift towards cultural racism, which in the UK evokes cultural differences from the British 'norm'.⁵⁷ As a result, the perception of a Muslim takeover is not only seen in numbers, but also a value-related takeover perceived in the symbolic threat of the Islamisation of Britain. Islamisation or the implementation of Sharia is often seen as a consequence of Muslim demographic increase by which conspiracy theories overlap. Cultural accommodation for Muslims such as Sharia finance, the availability of halal food, prayer spaces and religious dress have all been attacked as examples of Britain's Islamisation.⁵⁸

Belief in a cultural threat increases with the perception of a Muslim existential threat to national identity and culture.⁵⁹ Ingroups with Muslim threat perceptions see Islam as incompatible with British values, culture and democracy. Because of this incompatibility, Muslims are seen as separate communities who live by their own systems and values as opposed to British ones. This is believed to be part of the process of Islamisation whereby Islamic systems operate in so called Sharia no-go zones which threaten to expand across Britain. This process of Islamisation is seen as part of an intergroup clash of civilisations resulting from Islamic culture's failure to reconcile with that of the west.⁶⁰

The notion of a "clash of civilisations" has been used by conspiracists to reinforce the cultural threat of Islam and frame Muslims as the enemy of western civilisation.⁶¹ A history of intergroup conflict is highly influential in beliefs of a cultural clash and lead to perceptions of intergroup threat.⁶² "Clash of civilisation" theorists hold that Islam and Christendom have been in perpetual conflict since the seventh century, while prophecies that Islam would overwhelm Christian Europe have a long history.⁶³ With Islam viewed as the traditional enemy of Christianity, conspiracy theorists often bemoan the decline of the religion in Europe and see the struggle against Islam as a cultural or holy war.

57. Cora Alexa Doving, "Muslims Are ...": Contextualising Survey Answers', in C. Hoffmann and V. Moe, (eds.), *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice. Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Contemporary Norway* (Scandinavian University Press, 2020), pp. 254-273.

58. 'British Airways "unveils" new sharia-compliant uniforms for Muslims', *Bare Naked Islam*, 11 Jan 2023, accessed 7 Mar 2024, <https://barenakedislam.com/2023/01/11/british-airways-unveils-new-sharia-compliant-uniforms-for-muslims/>

59. Obaidi, et al., 'The "Great Replacement" Conspiracy'.

60. Fatih Üenal, 'The "Secret Islamization" of Europe: Exploring Integrated Threat Theory for Predicting Islamophobic Conspiracy Stereotypes', *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 10:1 (2016), pp. 94-108.

61. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

62. Stephan, et al., 'Intergroup Threat Theory'.

63. Philip Jenkins, *God's Continent: Christianity, Islam, and Europe's Religious Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-25.

2.1 No-Go Zones

In a recent interview, then Conservative MP Paul Scully said that parts of Birmingham and London were no-go areas unsafe for non-Muslims to enter.⁶⁴ Though Scully later apologised for his comments, he was repeating a conspiratorial belief that areas in Britain with dense Muslim populations are governed by Sharia law where police and non-Muslims cannot enter.

The idea of Muslim no-go zones has been promoted by the right since the early 2000s and has since made its way into the mainstream.⁶⁵ Politicians and commentators have used their platforms to warn of an existential threat seen in Muslims and Islam in response to terrorist attacks, immigration, and fears about community cohesion and racial and religious segregation.

The no-go zone conspiracy theory entered mainstream politics through the previous Conservative government. Recent polling by Hope Not Hate revealed that 52% of Conservative Party members believe that “Parts of many European cities are under the control of Sharia Law and are ‘no-go’ zones for non-Muslims”.⁶⁶ Conservative MPs have increasingly used pro-Palestine activism to suggest that London is a no-go zone under the control of ‘Islamists’. Former Home Secretary, Suella Braverman, used increasing public support for Palestine to imply that Islamist extremists have taken control of the country.⁶⁷ Former Conservative MP, Lee Anderson claimed that Islamists had taken control over London and its mayor Sadiq Khan, who had “given our capital away to his mates”.⁶⁸ Khan’s ‘Muslimness’ has widely been used by politicians, the media and public alike as ‘evidence’ of London’s Islamisation.

The no-go conspiracy theory has been central to the counter Jihad movement in the UK which expanded in the early 2010s and focuses on the perceived threat of the Islamisation of Europe.⁶⁹ Among them the far-right extremist organisation, the English Defence League have evoked the notion of a “clash of civilisations” and propagated fears of a Muslim desire to dominate Britain and impose Sharia law.⁷⁰

64. Nadeem Badshah, ‘Tory MP Paul Scully claims there are ‘no-go’ areas in Birmingham and London’, *The Guardian*, 26 Feb 2024, accessed 4 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2024/feb/26/tory-mp-paul-scully-claims-there-are-no-go-areas-in-birmingham-and-london>

65. David Batty, ‘How ‘no-go zone’ myth spread from fringes to mainstream UK politics’, *The Guardian*, 2 Mar 2024, accessed 5 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/02/how-no-go-zone-myth-spread-from-fringes-to-mainstream-uk-politics>

66. Press release: Polling Conservative Party members 2024, Hope Not Hate, 28 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Mar 2024: <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2024/02/28/press-release-polling-conservative-party-members-2024/>

67. Suella Braverman, ‘Islamists are bullying Britain into submission’, *The Telegraph*, 22 Feb 2024, accessed 26 Feb 2024: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/02/22/islamists-are-bullying-britain-into-submission/>

68. Eleni Courea, ‘Tory MP Lee Anderson claims ‘Islamists’ have got control of Sadiq Khan’, *The Guardian*, 23 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/feb/23/tory-mp-lee-anderson-claims-islamists-have-got-control-of-sadiq-khan>

69. Mark Townsend, ‘Anti-Muslim prejudice ‘is moving to the mainstream’, *The Guardian*, 5 Dec 2015, accessed 28 Mar 2014: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/dec/05/far-right-muslim-cultural-civil-war>

70. Richards, Julian, ‘Reactive Community Mobilization in Europe: The Case of the English Defence League’, *Behavioural*

Among the Mosques: Author's study of Muslim Britain reveals a no-go area for white people, children 'attacked for being white', parents making families live under Taliban-like rules and women who can't leave home without permission

- Author Ed Husain visited places of worship across UK for *Among the Mosques*
- Would turn up unannounced to the largest weekly gathering, Friday prayers
- Spoke to taxi drivers, business owners, Imams and worshippers about religion
- Islam in Britain is dominated by ultra-orthodox sect promoted by the Deobandis
- Control over half of Britain's mosques, and gave birth to Taliban in Afghanistan
- One person described 'Bolton, Dewsbury and Blackburn' as 'different universe'
- Books for sale detail how women should be banned from leaving the house
- Mosque in Didsbury, in converted church, has a sign for the 'Sharia Department'
- White men revealed 'no-go areas' in Blackburn where they would be 'jumped'
- White woman in Bradford predicts it will become 'an apartheid city' in 30 years

By MAILONLINE REPORTER

PUBLISHED: 18:35, 4 June 2021 | UPDATED: 22:26, 4 July 2021

Counter jihadist, Raheem Kassam, former editor-in-chief of *Breitbart News* London and former UKIP member, propagated the no-go zone myth in his 2017 book focusing on areas across the USA and western Europe.⁷¹ Kassam presents Muslim no-go zones as a transatlantic phenomenon, affecting western nations, as part of the clash of civilisations narrative. In Britain Kassam visited and identified Dewsbury as a no-go zone where the existence of “the Sharee Council” is used as evidence of its no-go status, from which the native population has fled, and in which crime and violence are widespread. However, as of 2021, Dewsbury had a population of 46% that identified as Christian and a considerably lower 28.8% that identified as Muslim.⁷² At the same time, the white population continued to form the majority at 50.8%. Kassam’s claim is based on his personal perception and biases. Similarly, the no-go zone myth relies on Muslim cultural and demographic visibility rather than factual data and information to construct a threat where it does not exist.

The right-wing media have been instrumental in bringing the notion of Muslim no-go zones to the wider public using publications like Kassam’s and the visibility of Muslims in public spaces as ‘evidence’ for their existence. The *Daily Mail* used Ed Husain’s 2021 book *Among the Mosques* as evidence of areas in Britain where Muslims live under Taliban-like rules, Sharia courts operates and white men cannot enter due to the fear of violence.⁷³ Similarly, *GB News* have been particularly active in pushing the myth of no-go zones with presenters stating that such areas exist across the UK along with the threat of sharia being implemented in Britain.⁷⁴

With the mainstreaming of the no-go zone myth, belief in the conspiracy theory is relatively high. A 2021 study conducted at the University of Birmingham found that 26.5% of the British public believed that ‘there are areas in Britain that operate under Sharia law where non-Muslims are not able to enter’.⁷⁵ Another more recent study has shown that 30% of the British public believe that Muslim no-go zones actually exist across Europe.⁷⁶

Birmingham and London are two cities that are often depicted as so-called Muslim no-go zones. However, Census figures show that Muslims are still a minority in these cities, problematising the notion of exclusively Muslim areas. While there has been an increase in the number of Muslims, in 2021 Birmingham still had a 34.0% Christian population compared to

Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 5:3 (2013), pp. 177–93.

71. Raheem Kassam, *No Go Zones: How Sharia Law is Coming to a Neighbourhood Near You* (Regnery Publishing, 2017).

Kassam was also a senior fellow at Gatestone Institute, an American think tank known for publishing anti-Muslim content and conspiracy theories, including Muslim no go zones: <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org>

72. ‘Dewsbury (West Yorkshire, Yorkshire and the Humber, United Kingdom) - Population Statistics, Charts, Map, Location, Weather and Web Information’, *www.citypopulation.de*. accessed 13 Feb 2024:

https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/yorkshireandthehumber/west_yorkshire/E63000970_dewsbury/

73. ‘Among the Mosques: Author’s study of Muslim Britain reveals a no-go area for white people, children for white people ‘attacked for being white’, parents making families live under Taliban-like rules and women who can’t leave home without permission’, *Daily Mail*, 4 Jun 2021, accessed 7 Mar 2024: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-9648477/Author-visited-Muslim-mosques-Britain-reveals-no-areas-white-men.html>

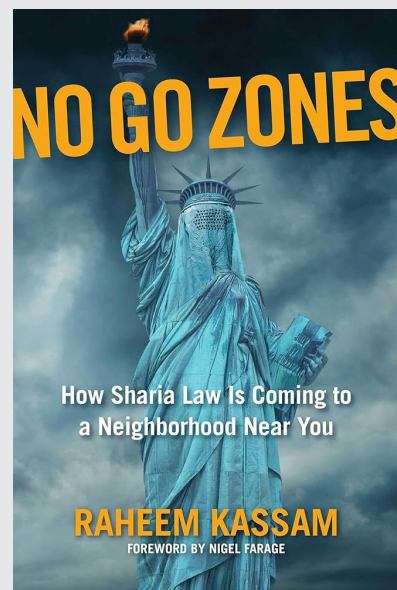
74. ‘Eamonn Holmes says there are ‘no-go areas’ in UK as he gives Northern Ireland comparison’, *GB News*, 27 Feb 2024, accessed 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/eamonn-holmes-no-go-areas-paul-scully-britain>

75. Stephen H. Jones and Amy Unsworth, *The Dinner Table Prejudice Islamophobia in Contemporary Britain*, University of Birmingham, 2022, p. 25.

76. *State of Hate 2024*, Hope Not Hate, p. 110.

a 29.9% Muslim population.⁷⁷ Contrastingly, London had an even smaller Muslim population at 6.3% with the majority declaring no religion, accounting for 43.8% of the population.⁷⁸ If we consider Tower Hamlets alone, an area that has often been described as a Muslim no-go zone, 39.9% are Muslim, 22.3% Christian and 27.1% have no religion, revealing a diversity rather than religious uniformity.⁷⁹

Like many conspiracists, those who subscribe to the Muslim no-go zones theory promote these ideas on social media platforms. As Islamophobic conspiracy theories often overlap, social media users use similar tactics to textually and visually depict Muslim no-go zones through reference to a Muslim invasion.⁸⁰ Users also disseminate propaganda with maps to point out alleged Islamic no-go zones and have fabricated police notices warning people not to enter these zones (figs. 4 and 5).⁸¹ While the impact of the traditional far-right on the broader British public is questionable, far-right rhetoric is increasingly equipped by politicians and the media reaching wider audiences which is often accepted as “truth” from what are believed to be credible sources and authoritative figures.



Figs. 4 and 5. Source: www.bellingcat.com

77. ‘How life has changed in Birmingham: Census 2021’, Office for National Statistics, 19 Jan 2023, accessed 14 Apr 2024: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E08000025/>

78. ‘How life has changed in the City of London: Census 2021’, Office for National Statistics, 19 Jan 2023, accessed 14 Apr 2024: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000001>

79. ‘How life has changed in Tower Hamlets: Census 2021’, Office for National Statistics, 19 Jan 2023, accessed 14 Apr 2024: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/censusareachanges/E09000030>

80. Paul Golding, X, 20 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/GoldingBF/status/1759865480657961124>

81. ‘Debunking Maps of Alleged “Islamic No Go Zones” in London’, *Bellingcat*, 9 Nov 2018, accessed 24 Feb 2024: <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/11/09/debunking-maps-alleged-islamic-no-go-zones-london-2/>

2.2 The Symbolic Muslim Threat

The perceived symbolic threat of Muslims and Islam are bound up in questions of Muslim loyalty to the nation and a contested sense of belonging. While this is often identified in the threat of extremism, it is increasingly seen in the cultural incompatibility of Islam and Muslims with the west. Though the counter jihad movement has pushed the narrative which conflates the cultural incompatibility of Islam and a global threat, these ideas have become increasingly widespread.⁸²

Negative attitudes towards Islam are linked to perceptions of a Muslim symbolic threat. In a 2023 poll, 44% of the British public believed that Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation. The top reasons given by respondents for their negative views were that Muslims are unwilling to integrate and are not loyal to the UK.⁸³ These attitudes were even higher among Conservative party members among whom 58% think Islam is a threat to the British way of life.⁸⁴ Views towards Muslims are impacted by events and threat perceptions. Polling in 2017 showed that 52% of the public believed that Islam poses a “serious threat” to western civilisation and around a quarter said Islam is a dangerous religion that incites violence.⁸⁵ The UK saw a number of terror attacks in 2017 and many agreed that their suspicions of Muslims had increased as a result.

With a lack of understanding of Islam, Sharia law is often associated with extremism and violence in the public psyche, reinforced by images of public floggings in Muslim countries. It is therefore perceived as a threat to British democracy and liberal values. Many use statistics from polls to suggest a symbolic threat in British Muslims’ desire for Sharia law. A 2024 poll commissioned by the far-right think tank Henry Jackson society claimed that a third of British Muslims want to see Sharia law implemented in the UK.⁸⁶ With no indication of what Sharia means to British Muslims and what this might look like, *GB News* presenter, former UKIP politician and now leader of Reform UK, Nigel Farage called this revelation “terrifying”, using population projections to raise the fear of a Muslim symbolic threat to British values.⁸⁷ Similar polls have previously been used by conspiracy theorists to question the Muslim sense of belonging to Britain and cast them as cultural outsiders who are opposed to British values. This attitude is also applied to Muslim leaders who are often rejected and accused of working to undermine British values and democracy and believed to be in the process of introducing Sharia law in the UK.⁸⁸

82. *State of Hate 2019: People Vs the Elite?*, Hope not Hate, 2019, 23 Feb 2024, accessed 16 Mar 2024:

<https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/state-of-hate-2019-final-1.pdf>

83. *State of Hate 2024, Hope Not Hate*, p. 65

84. ‘Press release: Polling Conservative Party members 2024’, Hope Not Hate, 2024.

85. *State of Hate 2019*, Hope Not Hate, p. 16.

86. Camilla Turner, ‘Just one in four British Muslims believe Hamas committed murder and rape in Israel’, *The Telegraph*, 6 Apr 2024, accessed 9 Apr 2024: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/04/06/one-in-four-british-muslims-believe-hamas-israel/>

87. Ben Chapman, ‘Genuinely terrifying’: Nigel Farage ‘disturbed’ by shock poll exposing British Muslim attitudes: ‘32% want Sharia law!’, *GB News*, 8 Apr 2024, accessed 11 Apr 2024:

<https://www.gbnews.com/news/nigel-farage-disturbed-shock-muslim-poll>

88. *From Theory to Action: Incitement to Violence and Hate in UK Conspiracy Theory Online Spaces*, Hope not Hate, 2024, p. 16, accessed 12 Mar 2024: https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/HnH_uk-conspiracy-theory_2024-01-v1.pdf

3

CONSPIRACY THEORISTS AND IDEOLOGUES

3. Conspiracy Theorists and Ideologues

As Islamophobic conspiracy theories have moved into the mainstream, they are increasingly being pushed by the far-right, politicians and the media alike, who all combine to impact on public opinion. As a result, each of these groups contribute to the development and promotion of conspiracy theories in a range of public and ideological spaces. Certain conventions are maintained in the dissemination and depiction of the Muslim threat showing a convergence of conspiracy narratives that traverse different groups and platforms, especially as conspiracists appeal to British culture and race based on a shared ideology of neonationalism.⁸⁹

3.1 The Far-Right

Islamophobia has become the driving force behind the rise of far-right movements in the UK, as anti-Muslim prejudice has replaced immigration as their “key driver”⁹⁰ Islamophobic conspiracy theories have become part of a far-right transnational movement where anti-Muslim discourse is shared across Europe, particularly online where the central theme of Islamophobic websites is the Muslim conspiracy to subjugate and Islamise Europe.⁹¹ Similar themes are shared by the far-right media and right-wing populist politicians to push an anti-Muslim agenda.

Conspiracy theories are a key component of the counter jihad movement which expanded rapidly in the UK in the mid-2010s following the 2015 Paris attacks and the refugee crisis. Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, better known as Tommy Robinson, is a prominent figure in the movement who has endorsed the white genocide myth. In his book *Enemy of the State*, Robinson claimed that white majority areas of his hometown Luton had suffered ethnic cleansing and that the UK was “sleepwalking” into a Muslim takeover.⁹² After the decline of the English Defence League (EDL), Robinson established the short lived Pegida UK (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) in 2016 and has since dedicated his efforts to promote an exaggerated Muslim threat through social media, books and his own website, gaining an increasing following. Robinson’s influence is evident in his role in instigating the 2024 far-right riots that shook the country and saw violent attacks against Muslims and mosques.

Far-right political parties also leverage the majority group’s fear of replacement to advance conspiratorial views.⁹³ Britain First are particularly active on X in promoting the Great Replacement theory and the supposed Islamisation of the UK.⁹⁴ Co-leader Ashlea Simon has warned that whites will be a minority in the UK by 2066, that the UK’s major cities are already lost to the Great Replacement, and that “Islamic London” is a “conquered city on the brink of civil war”.⁹⁵ Far-right political parties utilise the clash of civilisations narrative and implicate

89. Eirikur Bergmann, *Neo-Nationalism: The Rise of Nativist Populism*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

90. *State of Hate 2019*, Hope Not Hate, p. 3.

91. Shooman, ‘Between Everyday Racism and Conspiracy Theories’.

92. Tommy Robinson, *Enemy of the State*, (Press News Limited, 2015).

93. Obaidi, et al., ‘The “Great Replacement” conspiracy’.

94. Britain First, X, 20 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/BFirstParty/status/1740070201964581190?s=20>

95. Ashlea Simon, X, 18 Oct 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/AshleaSimonBF/status/1714446170834059631?s=20>; Ashlea Simon, X, 24 Oct 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/AshleaSimonBF/status/1716802235143704605?s=20>

the governing elite in Muslim population replacement to appeal to public dissatisfaction with the government and gain electoral support.⁹⁶ Similarly, the British National Party have used highly nationalistic messaging to call people to action to resist the Muslim takeover of Britain, referring to its supporters as “freedom fighters” who will defend “our nation and the survival of our culture”.⁹⁷ Again the notion of a clash of civilisations and civil war is used to intensify threat perceptions and national duty is evoked to rouse people to action.

The far-right media also gives voice to and is complicit in disseminating the notion of a Muslim threat. *Breitbart*, has a significant UK based readership and regularly publishes articles warning of the cultural and demographic Islamisation of Britain, and provides positive coverage of the counter jihad movement in the UK. Similarly, *GB News* has given platform to radical right politicians and far-right ideas. They too propagates an alarmist narrative of a Muslim threat, and its high-profile presenters use the platform to promote harmful conspiracy theories and a divisive political rhetoric.

Far-right websites have long promoted Islamophobic conspiracy theories to induce fear of Islam and Muslims and promote violence and Islamophobia. Among them, *Gates of Vienna* features many writers from the transatlantic counter jihad movement which call for and have inspired violence against the “threat” of Islam. *Gates of Vienna* was one of the most cited websites in Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik’s manifesto along with *Jihad Watch*.⁹⁸ Paul Weston, the far-right British politician has been a regular contributor to the blog and promotes the idea of a white genocide in Britain through Muslim population replacement. Weston argues that a European civil war is inevitable by 2050 as a result of Muslim demographic increase.⁹⁹ As Muslims are already living in Europe, he warns that the enemy is firmly embedded within and plotting to establish a “global caliphate”. He calls on readers to “resist the Islamic takeover and fight back” warning that “our civil war could well become a global nuclear war against Islam”.¹⁰⁰ Another writer, who refers to themselves as “El Ingles”, goes as far as to call for a genocide of Muslims as the only way to stop the “Muslim problem”: “violence edging towards genocidal would be an inevitable part of removing this threat”.¹⁰¹

96. Ashlea Simon, X, 3 Nov 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at:

<https://twitter.com/AshleaSimonBF/status/1720407346201968774>

97. ‘Poll Show Majority of Muslims in Britain Support ISIS’, *British National Party*, 5 Apr 2017, accessed 13 Mar 2024:

<https://bnp.org.uk/time-take-stand-against-islamism/>

98. Shooman, ‘Between Everyday Racism and Conspiracy Theories’.

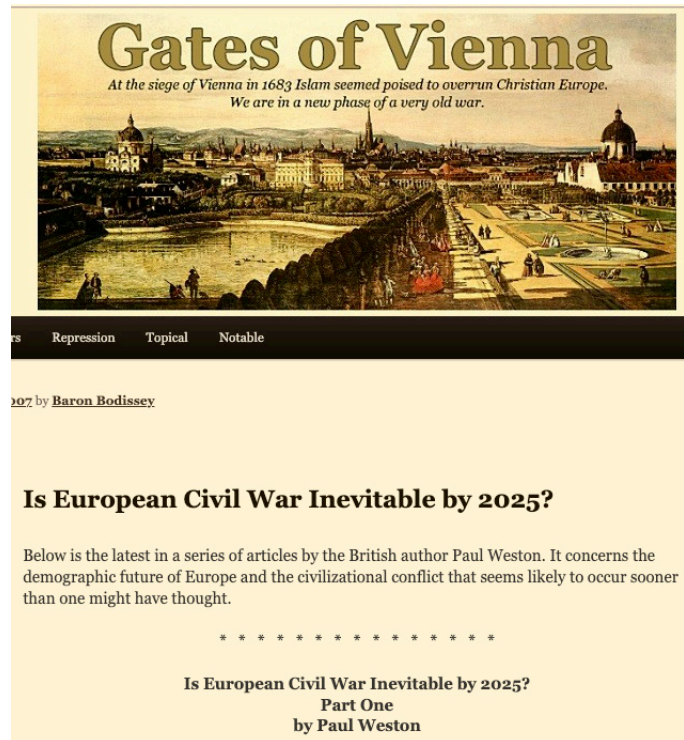
99. Paul Weston, ‘Is European Civil War Inevitable by 2025?’, *Gates of Vienna*, 31 Mar 2007, accessed 6 Mar 2024:

<https://gatesofvienna.net/2007/03/is-european-civil-war-inevitable-by-2025/>

100. Ibid.

101. El Ingles, ‘Surrender, Genocide... or What?’, *Gates of Vienna*, 23 Apr 2008, accessed 6 Mar 2024:

<https://gatesofvienna.net/2008/04/surrender-genocide-or-what/>



Far-right actors and groups all have in common a strategy of promoting the idea of a clash of civilisations and violence as a solution to the perceived Muslim threat. A common feature of far-right extremists is a highly structured thinking style aimed at making sense of societal events where their ideas are seen as the only solution to societal problems.¹⁰² These individuals tend to receive and trust information mainly from their ingroup by which ideas are easily transferred across diverse far-right spaces. While the far-right are more extreme in their calls for violence, similar ideas are being echoed by politicians.

3.2 Politicians

Populist politicians in Europe have portrayed Muslims as the “fifth column” who are organised and intent on destroying western culture from within.¹⁰³ These fears are linked to concerns over immigration from Muslim majority countries. In 2016, Jane Collins, former UKIP MEP tweeted: “Muslim men have been carrying out sex attacks in the UK for over 20 years and that threat continues with migration from Muslim countries”.¹⁰⁴ Though differing in character and content, such ideas are also a feature of mainstream politics as the idea of a Muslim sexual threat has been echoed by some within the previous British government.¹⁰⁵

Research confirms that political conservatism correlates with perceptions of both symbolic and realistic threats, and intergroup anxiety.¹⁰⁶ Polling by Hope Not Hate revealed that Conservative party members increasingly lean towards conspiratorial thinking as 52% believe in Sharia no-go zones, while 45% believe in a globalist plot to weaken European identity.¹⁰⁷ Belief in Islamophobic conspiracy theories is higher among Conservative politicians than it is among the British public.

Scholars agree that extreme political ideologies predict an increased susceptibility to conspiracy beliefs.¹⁰⁸ As the Conservative party has moved towards the radical right, members are increasingly willing to use conspiracy theories to construct conflict between the ingroup and Muslim outgroup to gain support in “opposing a threatening enemy”.¹⁰⁹ Politicians distract and scapegoat by inventing a problem around a minority and then offer a solution to eradicate it. This has increasingly been the case with Muslim communities and counter-extremism measures. More recently the previous Conservative government targeted Muslims by labelling Palestinian supporters and Muslim organisations as

102. Jan-Willem van Prooijen, Andre P. M. Krouwel, and Thomas V. Pollet, ‘Political Extremism Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories’, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6:5 (2015), pp. 570-578.

103. Shahram Akbarzadeh & Joshua M. Roose, ‘Muslims, Multiculturalism and the Question of the Silent Majority’, *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31:3 (2011), pp. 309-325.

104. ‘Nigel Farage: migrant sex attacks to be ‘nuclear bomb’ of EU referendum’, *The Guardian*, 5 Jun 2016, accessed 7 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/05/nigel-farage-migrant-sex-attacks-to-be-nuclear-bomb-of-eu-referendum>

105. Faisal Hanif, ‘GB News, Grooming Gangs and Suella Braverman’s Racialised Tropes’, *Byline Times*, 5 Oct 2023, accessed 1 May 2024: <https://bylinetimes.com/2023/10/05/gb-news-grooming-gangs-and-suella-bravermans-racialised-tropes/>

106. Stephan, et al., ‘Intergroup Threat Theory’.

107. *State of Hate 2024*, Hope Not Hate, p. 36.

108. Van Prooijen, et al., ‘Political Extremism Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories’.

109. Adam Koper, ‘Quick, blame the deep state! The tactics at play when Tories spout conspiracy theories’, *The Conversation*, 5 Mar 2024, accessed 7 Mar 2024:

<https://theconversation.com/quick-blame-the-deep-state-the-tactics-at-play-when-tories-spout-conspiracy-theories-225031>

“extremists” to construct a dangerous threat and offer solutions through protest laws and the counter-extremism agenda.¹¹⁰ Similar ‘threats’ have been placed in peaceful protests on university campuses with students calling on their universities to divest from Israeli companies and academic collaborations. Former Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak was accused of “scaremongering” and “inflaming” the situation by suggesting student protestors were propagating “harassment and antisemitic abuse.”¹¹¹

Politicians often feed and play on popular perceived threats and hostilities towards outgroups leading to discriminating policies and in turn increase public paranoia and suspicion. They also provide fodder to extremist views, as far-right activists are increasingly piggy backing on mainstream rhetoric from the Conservative right by which far-right conspiracy theories find wider appeal.¹¹²

At the same time, far-right parties have been gaining in popularity in Europe over the last twenty years and have gone from the fringe to the mainstream, as can be seen by the success of politicians like Marine Le Pen, Viktor Orbán, Geert Wilders and more.¹¹³ These individuals have promoted and gained support through highly nationalistic and often Islamophobic views, finding appeal among a wider public that is increasingly placing their electoral support behind far-right political parties. Far-right politicians and their parties have made significant gains in the 2024 European parliamentary elections, signifying a wider acceptance and normalisation of far-right ideologies.¹¹⁴ In France the far-right National Rally won a sweeping victory over Emmanuel Macron’s centrist Renaissance, prompting a snap general election in France. Similarly, the far-right Alternative for Germany, Austria’s Freedom Party and Hungary’s Fidesz received considerable support, while in the Netherland’s Geert Wilder’s Party for Freedom performed particularly well. Many of these parties and their members have promoted Islamophobic conspiracy theories, advanced the idea of Islam and Muslims as an existential threat and advocated anti-Muslim laws and policies.

110. Aina Khan, ‘Prejudice, Islamophobia’: Free speech fears as UK redefines extremism’, *Al Jazeera*, 15 Apr 2024, accessed 18 Apr 2024: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/15/prejudice-islamophobia-free-speech-fears-as-uk-redefines-extremism>

111. Anna Fazackerley, ‘Rishi Sunak accused of scaremongering over UK students’ Gaza protest camps’, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2024, accessed 6 Jun 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/article/2024/may/11/rishi-sunak-accused-of-scaremongering-over-uk-students-gaza-protest-camps>

112. *Fear and Hope 2022: A Realignment of Identity Politics*, Hope Not Hate, 2022, p. 55, accessed 12 Mar 2024: <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2022/08/16/fear-hope-2022/>

113. Jon Henley, ‘How Europe’s far right is marching steadily into the mainstream’, *The Guardian*, 30 Jun 2023, accessed 6 Jun 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/30/far-right-on-the-march-europe-growing-taste-for-control-and-order>

114. ‘Far right surges in EU vote, topping polls in Germany, France, Austria’, *Al Jazeera*, 9 Jun 2024, accessed 11 Jun 2024: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/6/9/germany-and-frances-far-right-make-gains-in-eu-elections>

3.3 Media

While the right-wing media are pivotal in disseminating fear through tropes about Muslims underlined with perceptions of violence and threat, mainstream media outlets across the political spectrum contribute to these views through negative portrayals of Islam and Muslim communities in Britain. John E. Richardson has argued that British newspapers essentialise Muslims and Islam through representations that maintain their position as the inferior other and by which they are contrasted as backward against a civilised west.¹¹⁵ Muslims are subject to a process of separation, differentiation and negativisation in which they are divided by their lack of Britishness and in which Muslim cultural difference is used to construct their cultural deviance and in turn a cultural threat.¹¹⁶

Numerous studies have confirmed that Muslim terrorism dominates media coverage of Muslims where they are represented as a unified threat and associated with terrorist activity.¹¹⁷ This negative 'hypervisibility' of Muslims across the media impacts public opinion by encouraging negative social representations by which Muslims are construed as both a symbolic and realistic threat to the national ingroup.¹¹⁸

Though conspiracy theories are rarely mentioned by name, their ideas are increasingly repeated by a range of outlets. Right-wing media outlets like *The Times*, *Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph* have carried a number of articles over the last two decades warning of a Muslim population increase, and the decline of the white population and Christianity. Though not as alarmist in their reporting, *The Guardian* and *The Independent* have also reported on the prospect of white British people becoming a minority in the UK and the decline of Christianity.¹¹⁹ In this way the media mainstream perceptions of a Muslim threat through reporting that implies the Islamisation of Britain and a rhetoric that forms part of conspiracy narratives.

As a majority of British public get their information on Islam through the media, negative portrayals fuel misconceptions about Muslims and contribute to a greater susceptibility towards Islamophobic conspiracy theories among the wider public.

115. John E. Richardson, *(Mis)Representing Islam: The Racism and Rhetoric of British Broadsheet Newspapers* (John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004). See also: Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (Vintage, 1997).

116. Richardson, *(Mis)Representing Islam*, pp. 227-233

117. See: Elizabeth Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*, (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2002); Kerry Moore, Paul Mason and Justin Lewis, *Images of Islam in the UK: The Representation of British Muslims in the National Print News Media 2000-2008* (Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, 2008); Faisal Hanif, 'State of Media Reporting on Islam and Muslims', Centre for Media Monitoring, 2019, accessed 01 May 2024: <https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/CfMM-Quarterly-Report.pdf>

118. Rusi Jaspal and Marco Cinnirella, 'Media Representations of British Muslims and Hybridised Threats to Identity', *Contemporary Islam*, 4:3 (2010), pp. 289-310.

119. Ian Jones, 'Leicester and Luton among 14 areas where white population now in minority', *The Independent*, 29 Nov 2022, accessed 6 Mar 2024: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/luton-leicester-london-slough-redbridge-b2235261.html>; 'England and Wales now minority Christian countries, census reveals', *The Guardian*, 29 Nov 2022, accessed 6 Mar 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/29/leicester-and-birmingham-are-uk-first-minority-majority-cities-census-reveals>

3.4 British Public

While many do hold favourable views on Islam and Muslims, Islamophobic conspiracy theories have become increasingly popular and found new audiences and adherents in recent years. A survey of public opinion in online spaces shows that while the majority of users reject these theories, there is a shocking amount of opinion in favour of and accepting of these ideas. Individuals with higher levels of ingroup identification and a right leaning political orientation are more likely to believe in Islamophobic conspiracy stereotypes.¹²⁰ Furthermore, susceptible individuals are at risk of being drawn towards conspiracy theories as social media allows users to present messages directly to the public who are increasingly exposed to unscrutinised information.

As the British public overestimate the size of the Muslim population, there is evidence to suggest that people develop outgroup bias towards groups that are perceived to be growing in size.¹²¹ In a Comres poll in 2018, approximately 37% of a representative sample of the British population thought that the percentage Muslims in the UK was over 20% when it was actually 5%.¹²² This reflects a heightened sense of threat amongst members of the ingroup who inflate numbers beyond demographic reality.¹²³ A lack of contact and knowledge fuels misconceptions, uncertainty, and suspicion which lead ingroups to exaggerate threats where they do not exist.¹²⁴ According to research by Ipsos, the public have a limited understanding of Islam with only 32% stating that they had a good understanding of the religion.¹²⁵ Media representations of Muslims have a great influence on the majority's interpretation of Muslims, especially where contact between communities is small.¹²⁶ 55% of people said they get their information about Islam from the media.¹²⁷ Frequent media association of Muslims with terrorism has repercussions on social representations of Muslims who come to be regarded by the ingroup as having terrorist links or sympathies.¹²⁸

Those who get their news from the *Daily Mail*, *The Sun*, or *GB News* are more likely to think that Islam is a threat to western civilisation.¹²⁹ 72% of *GB News* viewers think "Islam poses a serious threat to Western civilisation" and 58% believe that Muslim no-go zones exist.¹³⁰ *GB News* viewers confirm belief in Islamophobic conspiracy theories and fears of a Muslim

120. Fatih Üenal, 'The "Secret Islamization" of Europe'.

121. Obaidi, et al., 'The "Great Replacement" conspiracy'.

122. MEND – Islamophobia Poll October 2018, p. 20, accessed 6 Jun 2024:

<https://savanta.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/MEND-Islamophobia-Poll-October-2018-1.pdf>

123. Richard Alba, Ruben G. Rumbaut and Karen Marotz, 'A Distorted Nation: Perceptions of Racial/Ethnic Group Sizes and Attitudes Toward Immigrants and Other Minorities', *Social Forces*, 84:2 (2005), pp. 899-915.

124. Stephan, et al., 'Intergroup Threat Theory'.

125. *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, Ipsos MORI, pp. 77-78.

126. Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin, *Framing Muslims: Stereotyping and Representation After 9/11* (Harvard University Press, 2011).

127. *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, Ipsos MORI, pp. 77-78.

128. Jaspal and Cinnirella, 'Media Representations of British Muslims'.

129. *State of hate 2024*, Hope Not Hate, p. 65.

130. *State of hate 2024*, Hope Not Hate, p. 43.

takeover of Britain in response to highly negative reports that depict Islam and Muslims as a threat to British values, democracy and the white population. Terms like “Londonistan” are used in comments sections to describe the Islamisation of Britain’s capital, figures like Tommy Robinson and Enoch Powell are praised as heroes, and viewers/readers seek to rally one another to action against the perceived Muslim threat and a future cultural war.¹³¹ Criticism of politicians is expressed in racist terms, as Muslim politicians are seen to be infiltrating positions of power to secure the Muslim takeover of Britain.

Public comments in various online spaces often mirror one other to suggest such views intersect across far-right and mainstream spaces. Ideas advanced by the far-right are repeated by the online community which include calls to direct action and violence to meet the perceived Muslim demographic and cultural threat to Britain.

131. 'Radical' rhetoric being 'pumped out' of British mosques - 'Police are too SCARED to do anything!', *GB News*, YouTube 11 Mar 2024, accessed 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ldj4aRgM3CY>

4

ISLAMOPHOBIC CONSPIRACY THEORIES AND VIOLENCE

4. Islamophobic Conspiracy Theories and Violence

Alongside the prominence of conspiracy theories, violent acts in its name have also increased. Research by Hope Not Hate has found that far-right terrorism is on the rise and that conspiracy networks have become increasingly violent as many threaten and justify violence against their 'enemies'.¹³² The Policy Institute at King's College London found that of the minority of the public that would be prepared to take part in direct action linked to conspiracy theories, most said violence would be justified.¹³³

Through paranoia about the extinguishing of white culture, conspiracy narratives contribute to a worldview that justifies and encourages violence. Scholars have examined the link between Islamophobic conspiracy theories like The Great Replacement and its potential to result in violent extremism. The perception of white extinction or replacement is associated with the 'persecution of Muslims, violent intention and Islamophobia'.¹³⁴ Perceived demographic shifts impact violent extremism as the idea of group replacement drives hostile ingroup attitudes. Great replacement rhetoric legitimises violence because it portrays the majority population as victims under an existential threat justifying violence to avert such a threat.¹³⁵

Some of the most horrific acts of terrorism have been carried out by far-right extremists who have been influenced by and hold strong Islamophobic conspiratorial beliefs. The need to protect the white race was a dominant element of white supremacists' justifications for carrying out their racially motivated violent attacks.¹³⁶ Anders Breivik, who carried out the 2011 Norway attacks subscribed to the Eurabia conspiracy theory. He believed that the EU was a project to turn Europe into Eurabia and part of a Muslim plot to turn the continent into an Islamic society. Though his attack was not specifically carried out against Muslims, Breivik's views were informed by anti-Muslim ideologies. He called on others to take actions to expel all Muslims from Norway and launched his attack to prevent the 'cultural suicide' of Europe, killing 77 people.¹³⁷

Similarly, Brenton Tarrant, who killed 51 Muslims in the Christchurch mosque shootings in 2019, believed in the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. Minutes before the attack, Tarrant posted a manifesto titled *The Great Replacement* on the right-



The Great Replacement

TOWARDS A NEW SOCIETY



132. *From Theory to Action*, Hope not Hate, 2024, p. 16; *State of Hate 2023: Rhetoric, Racism and Resentment*, Hope not Hate, 2023, p. 12; accessed 12 Mar 2024: <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/state-of-hate-2023-v7-1.pdf>

133. *Conspiracy Belief Among the UK Public and the Role of Alternative Media*, The Policy Institute, King's College London, June 2023.

134. Obaidi, et al., 'The "Great Replacement" Conspiracy'.

135. Intergroup threat perceptions lead to negative behaviours and intentions to harm outgroup members. See: Stephan, et al., 'Intergroup Threat Theory'.

136. Obaidi, et al., 'The "Great Replacement" Conspiracy'.

137. Eirikur Bergmann, 'The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory'.

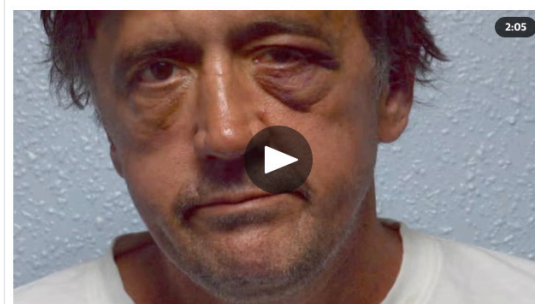
wing discussion board *8chan* in which he reproduced ideas and material that had already been around for a long time. Tarrant was influenced by the white genocide theory, alluded to a global war between the Christian and Muslim world and encouraged radicalisation and violence in response.¹³⁸

While the Norway and Christchurch attacks were among the most horrific, in 2019 the UK saw more far-right terror attacks and plots than any other European country, with many inspired by far-right propaganda including the manifestos of Breivik and Tarrant.¹³⁹ In 2021 MI5 warned that racist tropes were fuelling far-right terror, which as we have seen has increased in media, political and public representations of Muslims.¹⁴⁰

In 2017, Darren Osborne rammed a van into a crowd of Muslims coming out of Finsbury Park Mosque, killing 51-year-old Makram Ali and injuring ten others. The weekend prior to the attack he was heard saying “I’m going to kill all the Muslims. Muslims are all terrorists. Your families are all going to be Muslim. I’m going to take it into my own hands”.¹⁴¹ Osborne believed Muslims to be a threat to the nation and was influenced by Britain First and the EDL. He had subscribed to Tommy Robinson’s email list and in the months before the attack, received an email saying that a “nation within a nation” is forming in the UK, built on “violence and on Islam”.

Darren Osborne jailed for life for Finsbury Park terrorist attack

Van attack on north London mosque left one man dead and 12 injured



Daughter of Finsbury Park van attack victim speaks about her father - video

Islamophobic conspiracy theories have not only proved fatal for Muslims but also those believed to be sympathetic to them. In 2016, Thomas Mair murdered Labour MP Jo Cox who he believed was a “traitor” to the white race. Mair believed in the Great Replacement and Eurabia conspiracy theories and had links to British and American far-right political groups including the EDL.¹⁴² He was particularly fascinated by Breivik and like him believed that white people were facing an existential threat. Mair saw Cox as a “collaborator” against the white race due to her support for Syrian refugees and Muslim communities. Cox’s murder was followed by a large number of tweets celebrating her death and lauding Mair as a hero alongside the hashtags #MakeBritainWhiteAgain, #whitepower, #BanIslam and

138. Mattias Gardell, ‘The Radicalization of Western Man’: The Great Replacement, White Radical Nationalism, and Lone Wolf Violence’, in James R. Lewis and Ahil N. Awan (eds), *Radicalisation: A Global and Comparative Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2024) pp. 301-322.

139. ‘Far-right conspiracy theories are now embedded in the UK mainstream’, *Open Democracy*, 14 May 2022, accessed 28 Feb 2024: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/far-right-mainstream-conspiracy-theory-uk/>; see also: Robert Lambert, ‘Anti-Muslim Violence in the UK: Extremist Nationalist Involvement and Influence’, in Max Taylor, P. M. Currie and Donald Holbrook (eds.), *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*, (Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 31-65.

140. Gordon Corera ‘Racism fuelling far-right threat in UK - MI5’s Ken McCallum warns’, *BBC News*, 14 Jul 2021, accessed 8 Mar 2024: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57829261>

141. Dominic Casciani, ‘Finsbury Park: What led Darren Osborne to kill?’, *BBC News*, 1 Feb 2018, accessed 21 Mar 2024: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42886464>

142. Eirikur Bergmann, ‘The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory’.

#DeportallMuslims.¹⁴³ Both terrorists were inspired by the perception of a Muslim threat which not only resulted in fatal consequences but poses the danger of inspiring others as they themselves were inspired by far-right extremists.

The perceived Muslim threat has been used to warn of an imminent and close approaching civil war in Britain, a concept that is highly promoted on far-right blogs and repeated by far-right politicians and the online public to inspire hostility towards Muslims.¹⁴⁴ Extremist public opinion expressed online give calls to action including the mass deportation of Muslims, militant organisation and attacks, the use of weapons and artillery against Muslims, the demolition of mosques, and “chemical castration” to stop Muslims from having children.¹⁴⁵ Through reference to a “white genocide”, social media users call for a “white uprising” to stop the Muslim “invasion” of the UK.¹⁴⁶ One user wrote: “I have been calling for martial law for weeks! Deploy the armed forces, make a curfew and never mind rubber bullets, use live rounds, unless of cause [sic] you want shariah law and the Muslim takeover of the UK”.¹⁴⁷

Extremists use crisis narratives that imply all crises experienced by the ingroup can only be solved through hostile action against the outgroup. Islamophobic conspiracy theories draw on these crisis narratives to inspire extreme action, including ethnic cleansing, violence and terrorism.¹⁴⁸ As a result, these conspiracy theories have real and dangerous consequences for Muslim communities and others who are not only viewed with suspicion and subject to Islamophobia, but are at risk of violence from extremists who view them as a threat to their survival.

143. ‘Research finds MP Jo Cox’s murder was followed by 50,000 tweets celebrating her death’, Birmingham City University, 28 Nov 2016, accessed 8 Mar 2024: <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/news-events/news/research-finds-mp-jo-coxs-murder-was-followed-by-50000-tweets-celebrating-her-death>

144. James Glenday, ‘Britain First: A day with the UK’s anti-Islam alt-right group’, *ABC News*, 4 Mar 2017, accessed 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-03-05/a-day-with-alt-right-britain-first/8324680>

145. Me & 72 Virgin Male Goat#MeToo, 2016, comment on: Donna Rachel Edmunds, ‘Muslim Terrorists Are Running Whole Prison Blocks Under Sharia Law’, *Breitbart*, 5 Apr 2016, accessed 5 Mar 2024: <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2016/04/05/muslim-terrorists-running-whole-prison-blocks-sharia-law/>

146. New British Union, X, 13 Oct 2023, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/NewBritishUnion/status/1713515095513342299?s=20>

147. Ethelstan, X, 29 Feb 2024, accessed 5 Apr 2024, available at: <https://twitter.com/stancooper4/status/1763172423388614766?s=20>

148. Davey and Ebner, *‘The Great Replacement’: The Violent Consequences of Mainstreamed Extremism*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2019.

5

THE MUSLIM THREAT: MYTH OR REALITY?

5. The Muslim Threat: Myth or Reality?

5.1 Constructing the Myth of a Muslim Threat

As explained above perceptions of a Muslim threat to Britain, its population and culture have increased in recent years. But how and why have Islamophobic conspiracy theories gained so much traction?

Certain events and developments have influenced threat perceptions that are in turn mobilised to promote conspiracy theories. Scholars have argued that belief in conspiracy theories and threat perceptions are associated with the need to understand and explain societal events and ambiguous circumstances.¹⁴⁹ Fake news stories about Muslims have been used to explain periods of crises by which a “threatening” outgroup is used as a scapegoat in times of social, political or economic uncertainty.¹⁵⁰ The white genocide conspiracy theory was brought to the forefront in response to terror attacks, immigration and Brexit, following which the Great Replacement and Eurabia theories were elevated to new heights.¹⁵¹

Immigration from Muslim majority countries has been a central element of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory. The 2015 European migrant crisis was pivotal in increasing outgroup threat perceptions and led to an increase in the circulation of Great Replacement theory, especially as refugees arrived from places like Syria and Afghanistan. Right-wing populists have been successful in depicting Muslim migrants as external threats, or ‘invaders’, drawing on stereotypes of a homogenous group of violent, backward, anti-western extremists.¹⁵² Anti-immigrant opinion has combined with anti-Muslim views to magnify the perceived Muslim threat.

Anti-immigrant views were also central to 2016 United Kingdom European Union membership referendum and a decisive factor in voting intentions of those seeking Brexit. Vote leave campaigners drew heavily on anti-immigration messaging which often implied Muslim migration to the UK and was framed as a question of national survival.¹⁵³ Scholars have agreed that intentions to vote leave may have been partly motivated by Islamophobic conspiracist beliefs and Islamophobia.¹⁵⁴ Leave voters were found to be motivated by perceptions of

149. Asbjørn Dyrendal, ‘Conspiracy Beliefs about Jews and Muslims in Norway’, in Hoffmann, C. & Moe, V. (eds.) *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice. Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Contemporary Norway* (Scandinavian University Press, 2020), pp. 187-210.; Van Prooijen, et al., ‘Political Extremism Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories’; Üenal, ‘The “Secret Islamization” of Europe’.

150. Professor Imran Awan, et. al., ‘Covid-19: What are the Drivers of the Islamophobic Infodemic Communications on Social Media? Study 3 Key Findings’, Birmingham City University, 2021, accessed 25 Mar 2024: <https://bcuassets.blob.core.windows.net/docs/csu2021314-muslim-covid-report-a4-landscape-study-3-interactive-15-12-21-132844803432119456.pdf>

151. Eirikur Bergmann, ‘The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory’.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

154. Viren Swami, David Barron, Laura Weis, and Adrian Furnham, ‘To Brexit or not to Brexit: The Roles of Islamophobia, Conspiracist Beliefs, and Integrated Threat in Voting Intentions for the United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum’, *British Journal of Psychology* 109:1 (2017), pp. 156-179.



immigration as a threat to the nation state and the integration of different peoples and cultures. Some were also motivated by the belief that Europe is being Islamised. These debates focused on a fear that along with refugees from Syria, Muslims would access Europe via Turkey on the likelihood of its membership to the EU.¹⁵⁵

Many leave voters had a highly negative view of Islam. 42% of Brexit voters thought Islamist terrorists reflected widespread hostility to Britain amongst the Muslim community.¹⁵⁶ Research on conspiracy theories conducted at the University of Cambridge in 2018 revealed that voting for Brexit was associated with a wide range of conspiratorial beliefs, including the Great Replacement and the Muslim demographic takeover. 31% of Brexit voters subscribed to the Great Replacement theory, while 47% believed their government was hiding the truth about immigration.¹⁵⁷ The study also confirmed that conspiracy theories were, by that time, mainstream rather than marginal beliefs.

The incidence of terrorist attacks has been prominent in portrayals of Muslim aggression and the threat they pose to western societies. Belief in Islamophobic conspiracy theories has been shown to correlate and increase in response to terror attacks, in which Islam is seen to provide the ideology which incites violence and by which all Muslims are implicated. Up to 29% of the British public believe that British Muslims promote violence and 39% believe that British Muslims glorify terrorism.¹⁵⁸ While the mainstream media have been complicit in the association between Muslims and terrorism, right-wing media and politicians have been pivotal in disseminating fear through the trope of Muslim violence to raise fears of jihad on the streets of Britain. This is evident in the anxieties expressed by some Conservative politicians who have used pro-Palestine demonstrations to imply support for terrorism and an “extremist” takeover of London’s streets.¹⁵⁹

The Gaza crisis has also been used to push the Great Replacement theory to suggest that the war is part of a plot to “flood” Europe with more Muslims.¹⁶⁰ The conflict in Gaza has led to a huge rise in Islamophobia more broadly and anti-Muslim activists have used it to attack Muslims and Islam.¹⁶¹ Tommy Robinson has consistently posted anti-Palestinian content couched in a version of the Great Replacement theory in which he claims that “insidious political interests”

155. Bergmann, ‘The Eurabia Conspiracy Theory’, pp. 45-6.

156. *State of Hate 2019*, Hope Not Hate, pp. 22-25.

157. ‘Brexit and Trump voters more likely to believe in conspiracy theories, survey study shows’, University of Cambridge, accessed 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/brexit-and-trump-voters-more-likely-to-believe-in-conspiracy-theories-survey-study-shows>

158. *State of Hate 2024*, Hope Not Hate, p. 65.

159. Suella Braverman, ‘Islamists are bullying Britain into submission’, *The Telegraph*, 22 Feb 2024.

160. *State of Hate 2024*, Hope Not Hate, p. 13.

161. The Islamophobia Response Unit reported a 365% increase in reports of Islamophobia in October 2023 alone: ‘Press Statement: Islamophobia Response Unit’, 16 Feb 2024, accessed 1 May 2024: <https://www.theiru.org.uk/data-shows-increase-in-islamophobia/>

are seeking to “push Gazan ‘refugees’ into the west”.¹⁶² Politicians have also capitalised on the conflict and the public’s response to it to push conspiratorial views. In turn, news outlets like *GB News* have exploited political rhetoric to propagate the equation of “extremism” with Muslims and fuel fears of a Muslim threat to British politics and social order.¹⁶³

Conspiracy theories that implicate a Muslim threat flourish as a result of religious illiteracy. This lack of knowledge is supplemented by media portrayals and the repetition of Islamophobic tropes which reinforce outgroup threat perceptions and inform misconceptions about Muslims and Islam. Journalists draw on a restricted repertoire of representations and a ‘collective cultural memory’ to reinforce stereotypical images of ‘the Muslim’ in the contexts of conflict, controversy and deviance.¹⁶⁴ Muslim cultural difference is portrayed as cultural deviance which poses a symbolic threat, as normality is defined in line with the norms and values of the ingroup.¹⁶⁵ The perception of identity threat resulting from exposure to negative representations induce coping strategies, such as Islamophobic attitudes and behaviour. This ‘hypervisibility’ of Muslims in public discourse magnifies the Muslim threat which overshadows the threat from far-right extremism and the threat of Islamophobia to Muslims themselves.

This hypervisibility is currently being played out in the media through a hysterical reaction to the election of Muslim councillors which many suggest has been won on the back of a ‘foreign war’. Media outlets have used criticism and fearmongering around candidates who have made pro-Palestine statements to accuse them of running on a Gaza ticket and replacing local concerns with foreign conflicts.¹⁶⁶ The media fixation on Muslim councillors and their support for Palestine suggests to readers that Muslim public participation is a threat to British politics. Green Party candidate, Mothin Ali has been the subject of much media attention, as he proclaimed “Allahu Akbar” (God is great) upon election to Leeds city council.¹⁶⁷ Though a harmless phrase, its association with both Muslims and terrorists is implied and has been overstated as something to be feared. While the repetition of a Muslim threat is used in a variety of contexts it maintains a basis in extremism and the incompatibility of Islam and Muslims with the west.

The previous Conservative government are also complicit in the construction of the myth of a Muslim threat. While counter-extremism policies already disproportionately target Muslims, in March 2024 Michael Gove pushed forward a new definition of extremism which demonises Muslim civil society groups as ‘Islamist’ with an implied threat to name them

162. *State of Hate 2024*, Hope Not Hate, p. 56.

163. ‘Britain is more tolerant of Muslim extremists than most Muslim countries’, *GB News*, YouTube, 1 Feb 2024, accessed 13 Mar 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJZ3OdU5FOW>

164. Richardson, *(Mis)Representing Islam*, p. 230.

165. Jaspal and Cinnirella, ‘Media Representations of British Muslims’.

166. ‘Dozens of pro-Gaza activists are elected to councils across Britain as fears grow the Middle East conflict will dominate many town halls after Muslim Vote group issues Keir Starmer with a list of 18 demands’, *Daily Mail*, 6 May 2024, accessed 7 May 2024: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13385449/Dozens-pro-Gaza-activists-elected-councils-Britain-fears-grow-Middle-East-conflict-dominate-town-halls-Muslim-Vote-group-issues-Keir-Starmer-list-18-demands.html>

167. Camilla Turner, ‘Victorious Leeds Green Party councillor shouts ‘Allahu Akbar’ after ‘win for Gaza’, *The Telegraph*, 4 May 2024, accessed 8 May 2024:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/05/04/green-party-mothin-ali-allahu-akba-leeds-gipton-harehills/>

as 'extremists'.¹⁶⁸ As a result, any Muslim group calling for social justice is at risk of being labelled as such. For instance, Gove named a number of mainstream Muslim civil society organisations who would be measured against the Conservative government's definition of extremism.¹⁶⁹ All of this plays well to the right-wing of the Conservative party and was part of an effort to reclaim voters deserting the party for Reform UK, as Britain approached the 2024 general elections.

The previous Conservative government's policies exaggerated the threat of Islamist extremism, which was reinforced by a number of 'independent' voices. Their new counter-extremism Centre of Excellence was established in response to a perceived increased extremist threat since 7 October and will draw on expertise of the Commission for Countering Extremism. Yet, the Commission's head Robin Simcox, a former employee of the far-right, anti-Muslim Henry Jackson Society (HJS), has himself been described as having "alarming ties" to extremist far-right networks.¹⁷⁰ Simcox has previously promoted anti-Muslim conspiracy theories and dismissed Islamophobia.¹⁷¹

So-called 'independent' voices appointed to review extremism are simply echoed the government position. The Independent Review of Prevent called for greater focus on Islamist rather than far-right extremism, sharpening Prevent's target on Muslims. Like Simcox, William Shawcross, the author of the review has also had ties to HJS and himself expressed anti-Muslim conspiratorial views.¹⁷² Similarly, Sara Khan's review on the impact of Islamist groups on social cohesion suggests a growing Islamist threat claiming that towns and cities across the UK are struggling to deal with extremism.¹⁷³ The report was published not long after the unveiling of Gove's new definition of extremism and fuelled an already heated debate on the supposed rise of extremism as many government officials located and exaggerated a growing Islamist threat in pro-Palestine activism. Each of these 'independent' voices not only support the previous government's policy but create a climate of fear and perceptions of threat from Islamist extremism, which by extension imply a Muslim threat.

168. Simon Hooper, 'UK government targets Muslim groups with new definition of extremism', *Middle East Eye*, 14 Mar 2024, accessed 7 Jun 2024: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-government-targets-islamists-new-definition-extremism>

169. Zoe Grunewald, Kate Devlin, 'Michael Gove names groups under consideration for 'extremism' ban', *Independent*, 14 Mar 2024, accessed 6 Jun 2024:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/michael-gove-extremism-definition-groups-b2512477.html>

170. Nafeez Ahmed, 'New Government Counter-Extremism Chief's Ties to Pro-Trump Hate Groups', *Byline Times*, 13 Apr 2021, accessed 7 Jun 2024:

<https://bylinetimes.com/2021/04/13/new-government-counter-extremism-chiefs-ties-to-pro-trump-hate-groups/>

171. 'The Appointment of Robin Simcox is Deeply Concerning for British Muslims', *Muslim Engagement and Development*, 11 May 2021, accessed 7 Jun 2024:

<https://www.mend.org.uk/the-appointment-of-robin-simcox-is-deeply-concerning-for-british-muslims/>

172. William Shawcross, 'Yes, the problem is 'Islamic fascism'', *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 Aug 2006, accessed 7 Jun 2024:

<https://www.jpost.com/opinion/op-ed-contributors/yes-the-problem-is-islamic-fascism>

173. 'The Khan Review: executive summary, key findings and recommendations', Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, 25 Mar 2024, accessed 7 Jun 2024: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-khan-review-threats-to-social-cohesion-and-democratic-resilience/the-khan-review-executive-summary-key-findings-and-recommendations>

5.2 The Reality of Muslims in Britain

As this report has shown, Islamophobic conspiracy theories rely on half-truths to exaggerate a Muslim threat that is out of proportion to reality. Rather than celebrate diversity, conspiracists see demographic changes and the development of a vibrant multicultural Britain as a symptom of British decline. These theories advance irrational fears of an existential Muslim threat, which this report has exposed as far from reality.

Scholars have dismissed demographic projections propagated by the Great Replacement as erroneous and unscientific.¹⁷⁴ Visions of Muslims achieving a majority status in Europe within the century assume very high rates of population growth and do not take into account cultural influences that may affect Muslim women and their reproductive choices.¹⁷⁵ While Pew's research projected that the Muslim population of Europe would increase significantly over the coming decades and much propaganda has focused on Muslim birth rates, Muslim fertility rates are expected to decline with second and third generation immigrants.¹⁷⁶ At the same time, fertility rates among Muslim societies around the world are changing with the lowest birth rates found in western regions of the Muslim world who are among those that have the closest relationships to Europe through migration.¹⁷⁷ As a result, the possibility of Muslim immigrants "outbreeding" the white population is extremely low.

Demographic shifts in UK cities can be explained by population movement. The reduction in the white population of London has been characterised as "white flight" in which it is believed that the indigenous population have been forced out of their neighbourhoods by foreign migrants. However, the movement of the white population has been attributed to "working class aspiration and economic success".¹⁷⁸ Population propaganda does not factor in white population increases in areas outside of London, while the decline in the city's white population can be explained by a number of factors including emigration, low birth rates, search for new opportunities and movement to the countryside.

The conspiracy of Muslim no-go zones assumes a Muslim cultural domination alongside a demographic one and the incompatibility of Islam with British values and way of life. Fears of the Islamisation of Britain are seen in the operation of Sharia courts among Muslim communities in the UK believed to have replaced the British legal system. However, these institutions operate in the private sphere and are limited to religious rulings that do not interfere with or overrule British law.

Statistics that suggest Muslims want Sharia in the UK are used to contest their belonging and loyalty to Britain. However, research has shown that a large majority of Muslims in the UK feel a strong sense of belonging to Britain and have a stronger sense of attachment to

174. Obaidi, et al., 'The "Great Replacement" Conspiracy'.

175. Jenkins, *God's Continent*, pp. 1-25.

176. Europe's Growing Muslim Population, Pew Research Centre, 2017.

177. Jenkins, *God's Continent*, p. 21.

178. Mark Easton, 'Why have the white British left London?', *BBC News*, 20 Feb 2013, accessed 6 Mar 2024: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-21511904>



a British identity than the wider public.¹⁷⁹ 85% said they felt they belonged to Britain and 55% said their national identity was important to them, compared with 44% of the general population. Previous polling also found British Muslims are more likely to feel a stronger connection to Britain than the population at large.¹⁸⁰ While their religious identity is also important, many believe that being Muslim and British is wholly compatible.

Due to a wider lack of understanding of Islam, Sharia is often understood as a medieval legal or punitive system by which the desire for its implementation among some British Muslims is feared as a symbolic threat. However, Sharia means different things to different people, and while it can include criminal justice, for many it is restricted to family matters. There is no clear consensus on what Sharia in the public sphere should look like and what is meant when Muslims indicate support for Sharia.¹⁸¹ Even in Muslim majority countries research shows that there is greater support for implementing Sharia in the domestic sphere and less support for punishments.¹⁸² At the same time many have said that Sharia should only apply to Muslims and non-Muslims should be free to practice their own religion. Even in countries that practice Sharia, their legal systems can be described as a hybrid of Islamic law and Western-inspired constitutions and legal codes in which secular and western influences are apparent.¹⁸³

Conspiracy theories draw on stereotypes which see global Muslims as a monolith and ignores the diversity within it. Muslims around the world have varying beliefs and practices, which is reflected even more so in British Islam. It is this very diversity that prevents a united effort towards a domination of Britain perceived by conspiracists and reduces the Muslim threat to an unrealistic imagination.

179. *A Review of Survey Research on Muslims in Britain*, Ipsos MORI, pp. 33-36.

180. Frances Perraudin, 'Half of all British Muslims think homosexuality should be illegal, poll finds', *The Guardian*, 11 Apr 2016, accessed 12 Apr 2024: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/apr/11/british-muslims-strong-sense-of-belonging-poll-homosexuality-sharia-law>

181. John L. Esposito, Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Shariah: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 19-20.

182. *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*, Pew Research Centre, April 2013, accessed 12 Apr 2024: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2013/04/30/the-worlds-muslims-religion-politics-society-beliefs-about-sharia/>

183. Esposito and DeLong-Bas, *Shariah*, p. 21.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

The rising popularity of Islamophobic conspiracy theories poses a significant risk to Muslims through a rhetoric that encourages hostility and violence towards them. Though many within British society dismiss these conspiracy theories, growing susceptibility and exposure to these ideas will not only increase everyday Islamophobia but the potential for physical harm and extreme violence. The lack of public knowledge of Islam, inefficient online monitoring of far-right content, political targeting and media representations ensure that these conspiracy theories thrive and go unchallenged.

As examined in this report, Islamophobic conspiracy theories have broader implications that affect Muslims in Britain and its wider society:

- The tendency to divide Islam and the west has implications for the social inclusion of British Muslims. Negative views towards and threat perceptions of Muslims impact the way they are positioned in relation to the category “British” leading to exclusionary practices that further divide communities.
- Conspiratorial beliefs and Islamophobic attitudes also result in discriminatory policies which target Muslims and those perceived to be Muslim, such as legislation and government policies that are anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. This consolidates and legitimises wider discriminatory attitudes.
- Negative attitudes towards Muslims have implications on how Muslims are treated resulting in not only Islamophobia but opinions on the rights and privileges they should or should not be given in relation to other groups and the rest of British society.
- Islamophobic conspiracy theories increase intergroup threat perceptions that lead to paranoia and suspicion of Muslim communities which can impact a sense of belonging and British identity which is currently strong among British Muslims.
- Far-right ideas are increasingly adopted and their wider acceptance feed and validate far-right extremists who pose an increasing threat to minority communities and encourage intergroup conflict.

Recommendations

In countering the increasing spread of Islamophobic conspiracy theories, there are some practical steps we can take to minimise the risks they present to British Muslims and reduce intergroup threat perceptions and suspicion, towards building a more inclusive and tolerant society that respects diversity and equality for all:

- **Islamophobia awareness:** raise awareness and educate British society on the discrimination Muslims are increasingly facing. This should include the dangers of conspiratorial beliefs and its negative impact on British society.
- **Social media monitoring:** social media companies need to ensure equally vigilant monitoring of far-right content and take effective action against users who incite hatred and violence towards religious communities.
- **Media regulation:** ensure fairer reporting and better regulation of biased reporting by media outlets and their propagation of negative stereotypes and conspiratorial beliefs. News outlets need to uphold journalistic integrity and better understand the crucial role they play in the representation of British Muslims and its impact on British society.
- **Muslim representation:** the media should give voice to actual Muslims and increase coverage of positive portrayals of them and their contributions to British society. As many get their information about Islam from the media, this will help towards countering misinformation and increase knowledge on the diversity and reality of Muslims in Britain.
- **Political accountability:** politicians should be held to account for fuelling conspiracy theories and the government should apply equal measures in addressing discrimination towards all religious groups and communities. By adopting the APPG on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia effective mechanisms can be put in place to tackle Islamophobia.
- **Countering far-right extremism:** the government's counter extremism policies need to give greater attention to the threat of far-right extremism and better understand their role in promoting both Islamophobic and racially motivated violence.
- **Extremism definition:** all political parties need to reject the Government's extremism definition as an unwarranted attack on civil liberties by delegitimising lawful dissenting.

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