

# **Southport knife attack: Far-right riots, Islamophobia and anti-racism protests**

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# Agenda

- Far-right riots following the tragic murders in Southport
- Contemporary far-right ideology
- Islamophobia as a form of anti-Muslim racism
- Online propaganda and social media
- Standing up to racism

# Far-right riots following tragic murders in Southport

- Far-right riots occurred from 30 July to 5 August 2024, following the tragic murders in Southport on 29 July 2024.
- Fuelled by disinformation online that the suspect was a Muslim and an asylum seeker.
- Riots escalated into clashes with police, with hotels housing asylum seekers, mosques and Muslim graveyards being targeted.
- Police have made 1,117 arrests and identified hundreds more suspects whilst the CPS have brought a total of 677 charges so far (NPCC, 2024).

# Three-quarters of Muslims worried about their safety after far-right riots

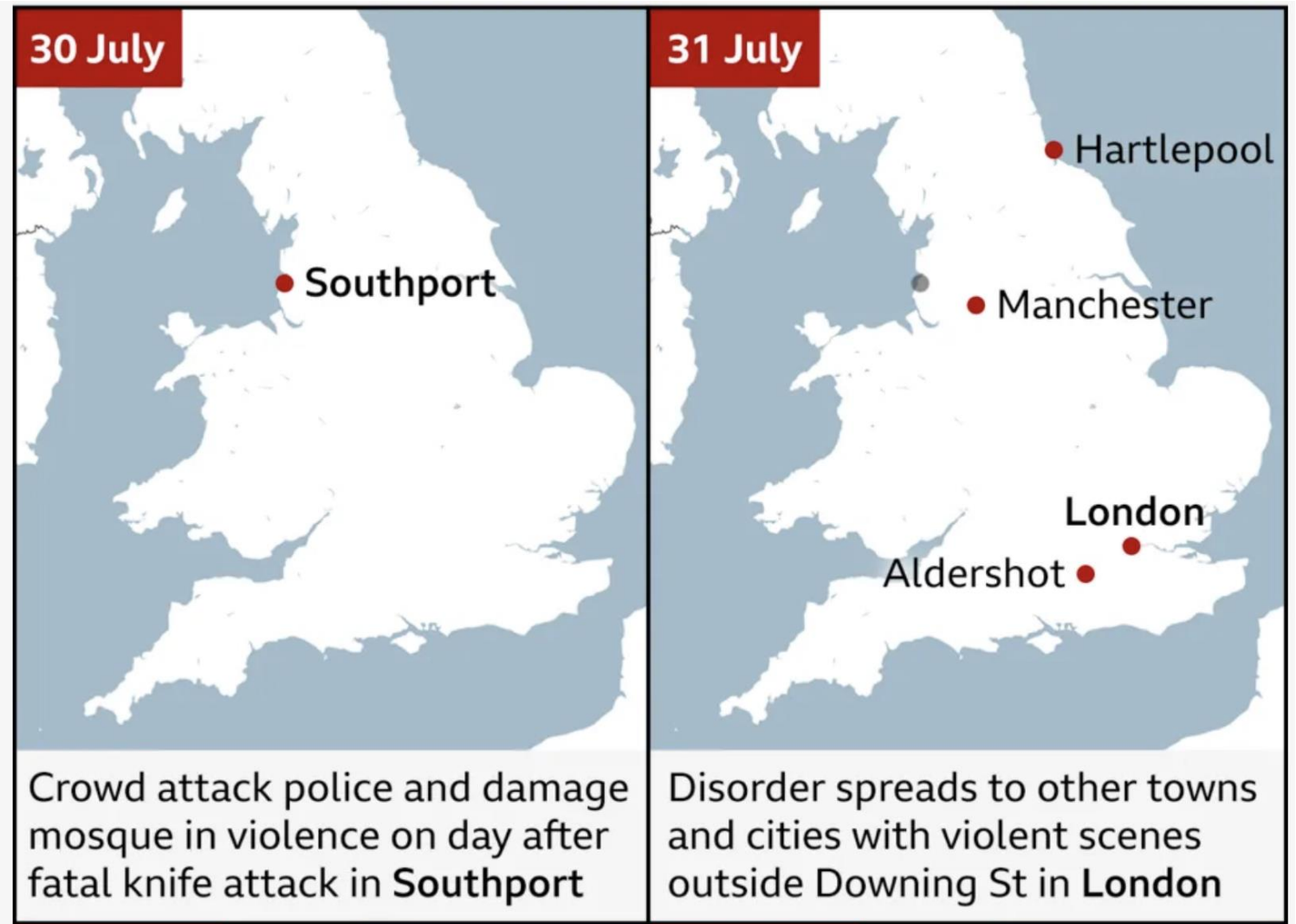
- Muslim Women's Network UK surveyed its members on how safe they felt in the UK before and after the riots. 75% said they were very worried about their safety, compared with 16% before the riots (Muslim Women's Network UK, 2024).



Muslim women attend Friday prayers at a mosque in Belfast after the riots. Pic: Reuters

[www.ntu.ac.uk](http://www.ntu.ac.uk)

# Where have the riots spread in the UK?

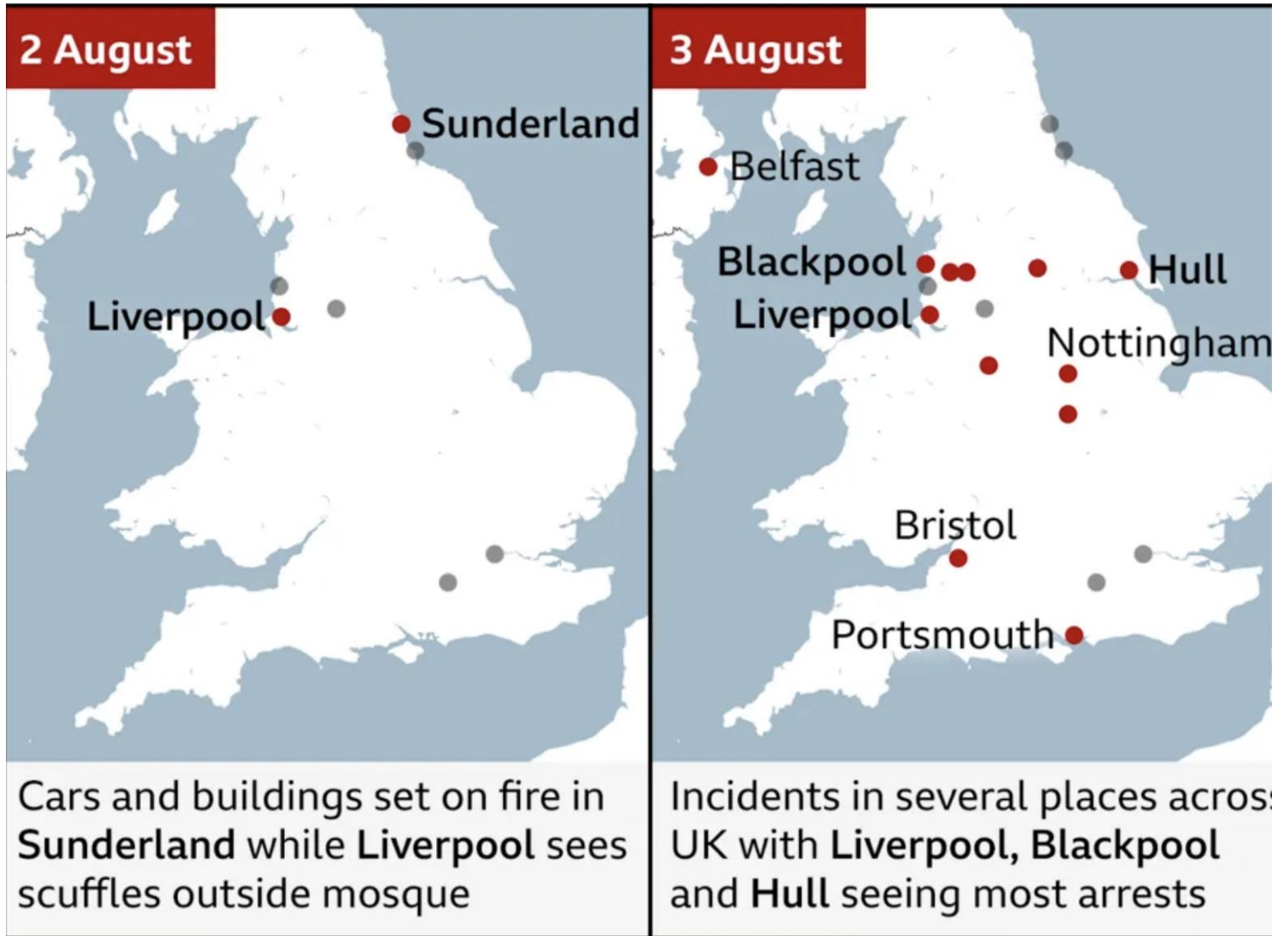


Source: BBC research

BBC

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# Where have riots spread in the UK?



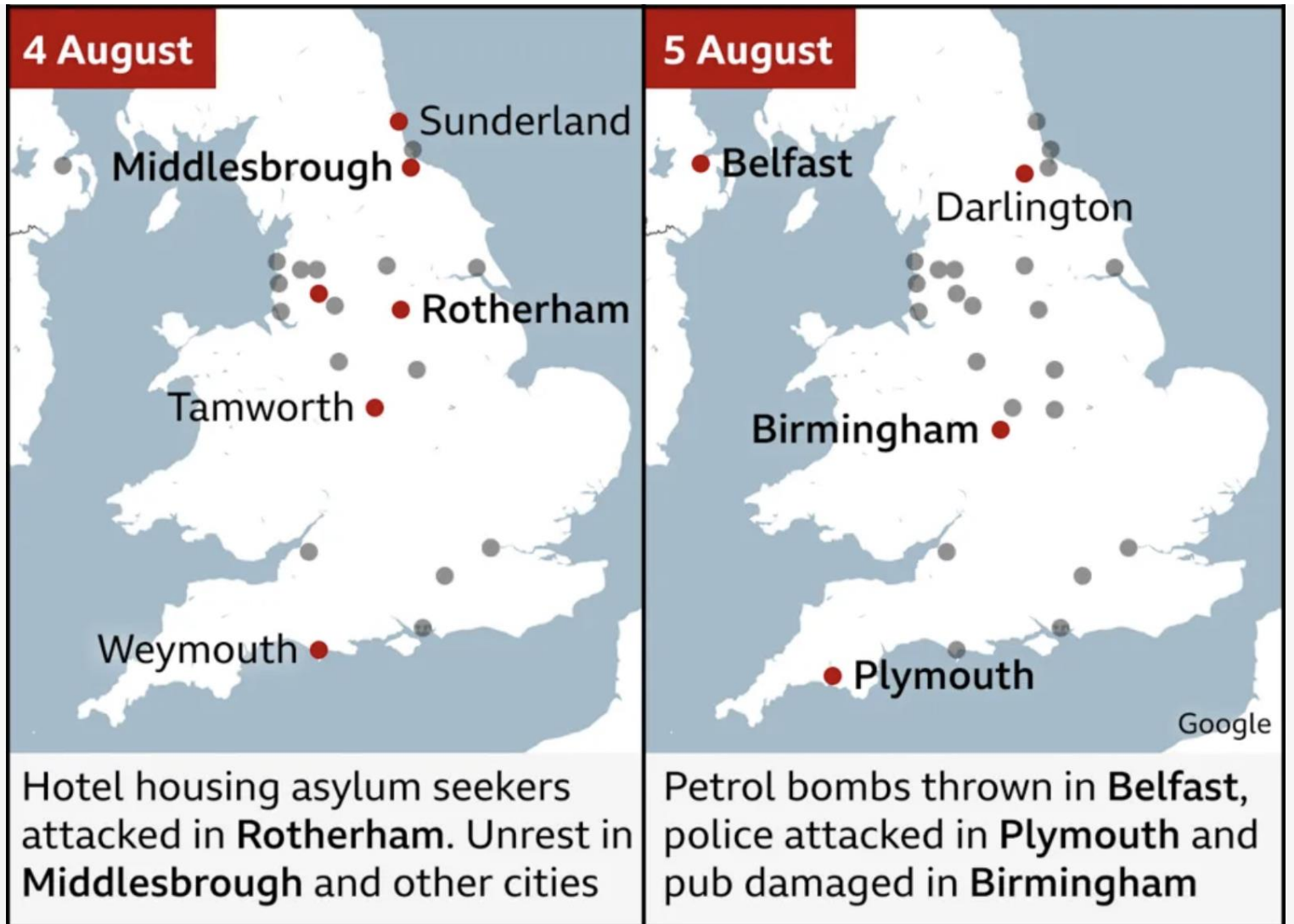
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# Where have riots spread in the UK?



Source: BBC research

**BBC**

# Haunting memories of “P\*\*i-bashing”



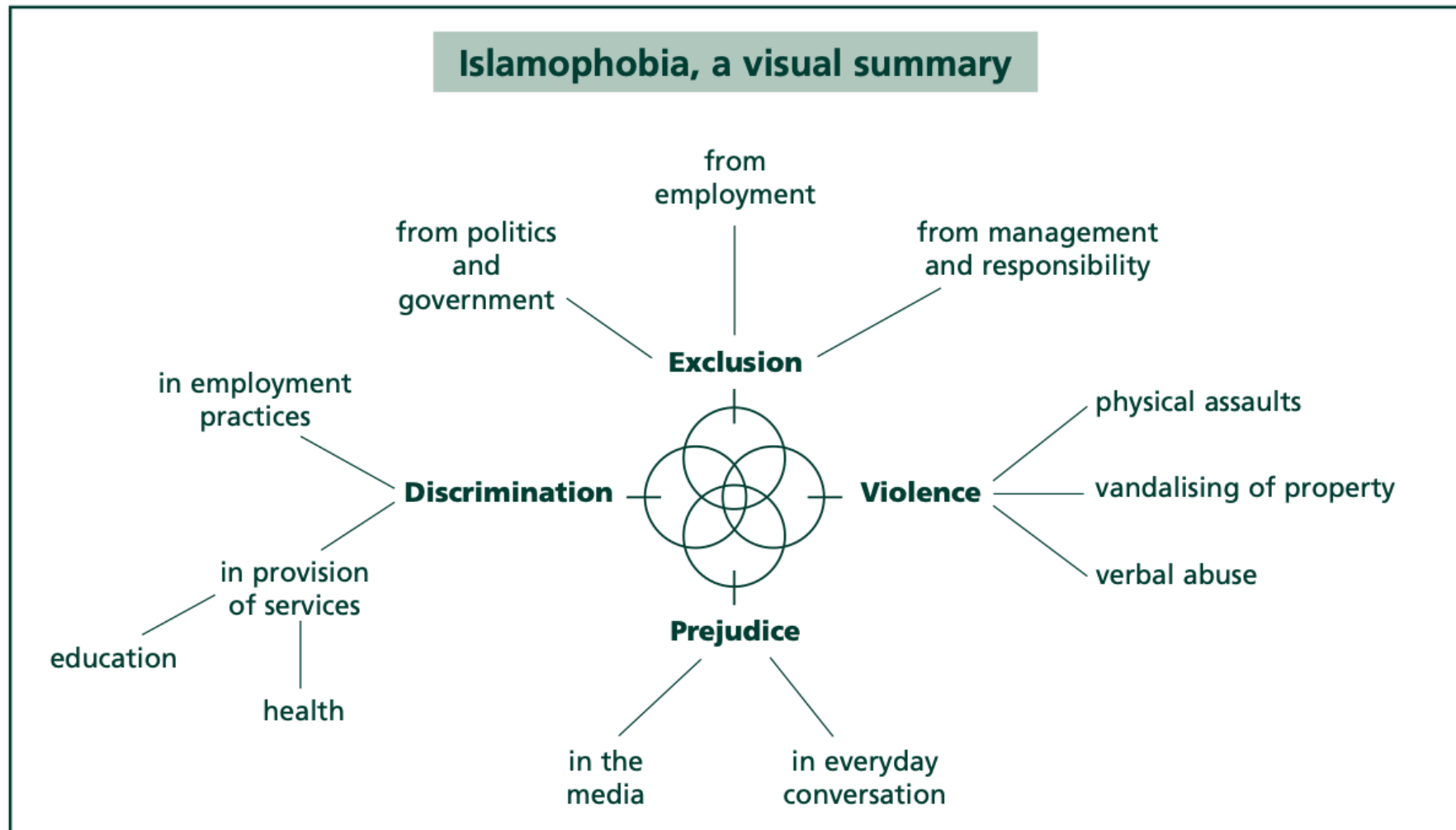
- Enoch Powell's 1968 speech, Rivers of Blood, resulted in ever-increasing attacks perpetrated by skinheads against South Asian people.
- “P\*\*i-bashing”, a term that refers to violent unprovoked attacks on South Asian people and their businesses, was widespread in the 70s and 80s.
- Powell vehemently opposed the changing demographic landscape of Britain.
- Nationalism remains a core feature of contemporary far-right rhetoric.



# Contemporary far-right ideology

- Racism, Islamophobia, Antisemitism, misogyny and anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric.
- Adapted to changing socio-economic and political climate.
- British identity is being 'threatened' by Muslim and migrant communities.
- There are two key forms of 'threat' relevant here, 'realistic' threats and 'symbolic' threats (Integrated Threat Theory - Stephan and Stephan, 2000).
- 'Realistic' threats include tangible conflicts of interest such as perceived competition over jobs, housing and other social/state resources, and physical harm to themselves or others.
- 'Symbolic' threats relate to people's social identities, such as the ingroup's 'way of life', including values and social norms.

# Runnymede Trust Report (1997)





A 20th-anniversary report

# Islamophobia

Still a challenge  
for us all

Edited by Farah Elahi and Omar Khan



All Party Parliamentary Group  
on British Muslims



## ISLAMOPHOBIA DEFINED

The inquiry into a working  
definition of Islamophobia

# islamophobia

islamophobia-definition.com

Islamophobia  
is rooted in racism  
and is a type of racism  
that targets  
expressions of Muslimness or  
perceived Muslimness

APPG on British Muslims

Despite Muslims being from diverse ethnic backgrounds, they are often racialised and discriminated against based on their name, their perceived cultural identity or beliefs

People may be targeted for their ethnicity, their gender and/or their Muslimness. If Muslimness is one of the reasons for the racism, it is Islamophobia

It is not Muslims who are targeted – but expressions of Muslim identity e.g., a woman with a headscarf or niqab, a man with a thobe, a mosque or a Muslim cemetery.

For example, Sikhs are sometimes targeted because a racist perceives their turban is an expression of Muslimness



**United Nations**

**International Day to Combat Islamophobia**  
**15 March**



A student clutches her textbook at the Community Girls School in Kotchandana refugee village, Pakistan. Muslim women and girls may face triple discrimination as female, ethnic minority and Muslim.

**PHOTO:** © UNHCR/Sara Farid

## What is Islamophobia?

Islamophobia is a fear, prejudice and hatred of Muslims that leads to provocation, hostility and intolerance by means of threatening, harassment, abuse, incitement and intimidation of Muslims and non-Muslims, both in the online and offline world. Motivated by institutional, ideological, political and religious hostility that transcends into structural and cultural racism, it targets the symbols and markers of being a Muslim.

This definition emphasises the link between institutional levels of Islamophobia and manifestations of such attitudes, triggered by the visibility of the victim's perceived Muslim identity. This approach also interprets Islamophobia as a form of racism, whereby Islamic religion, tradition and culture are seen as a 'threat' to the Western values.

Some experts prefer the label 'anti-Muslim hatred,' fearing that the term 'Islamophobia' risks condemning all critiques of Islam and therefore could stifle freedom of expression. But international human rights law



“ Let us keep working together to advance the shared values of inclusion, tolerance and mutual understanding – values that are at the heart of all major faiths and the United Nations Charter.”

– UN Secretary-General António Guterres



# Visibility of Islam

[www.ntu.ac.uk](http://www.ntu.ac.uk)



# Colonial and contemporary Islamophobia

- Orientalism: form of institutionalised power and systematic control over those viewed through its lens (Said, 1978)
  - Women of the East seen as ‘exotic’ and objects for the white man’s sexual gaze
- Contemporary Islamophobia shifted how female Muslim bodies are viewed
  - Once considered ‘passive’, now are viewed as ‘bodies of fear’
- ‘Muslim fertility’ has become central to contemporary far-right ideology
- Great Replacement Theory: White, Christian populations in the West are demographically and culturally replaced by non-white populations, especially Muslims, through high immigration levels and birth rates.

# Online Propaganda and Social Media

- Social media being used to spread disinformation, propaganda, recruiting new members, and coordinate far-right activities.
- False information on social media about the Southport suspect being a Muslim and migrant who had arrived in a small boat.
- Andrew Tate said on X that an ‘undocumented migrant’ who had ‘arrived on a boat’ had attacked the girls in Southport.
- Tommy Robinson told his followers on X that there “They’re replacing the British nation with hostile, violent, aggressive migrants ... Your children don’t matter to [the Labour government]”.
- Reform UK leader Nigel Farage questioned whether the police were being truthful about Southport’s attack not being ‘terror-related’.

# Far-right riots did not occur in a vacuum



- Islamophobia normalised by politicians and the mainstream media
- Muslims and migrants scapegoated
- Riots being framed as ‘legitimate concerns about immigration’ and rioters framed as ‘protestors’
- MP Zarah Sultana met with “sneering contempt” by Good Morning Britain’s panel when she suggested the riots should be called “Islamophobic”



# Political context of far-right riots

Brexit and ongoing moral panic around numbers of refugees from predominantly Muslim countries



Rishi Sunak's policy to 'stop the boats' and sending asylum seekers to Rwanda



The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination urged the British government to pass measures to curb hate speech and racist, xenophobic rhetoric used by British politicians and high-profile public figures which had played a direct role in fuelling these riots (The Guardian, 2024).





# Anti-racism protests

Counter protesters assemble ahead of a potential anti-immigration protest in Walthamstow, United Kingdom on on August 7. | Photo Credit: Getty Images

# Islamophobia has passed the “dinner table test”

- “Refusing to call out Islamophobia has emboldened the far right (Allen, 2024)
- Adopt the APGG definition of Islamophobia
- Accountability of mainstream politicians and media
- Social Media regulation



**Thank you for listening!**

