

# DIGITAL DISSONANCE: AI IMAGERY AS A WEAPON OF FAR-RIGHT MOBILISATION IN THE UK

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## ABSTRACT

Amid the UK's recent surge in right-wing ideology and shifting sociopolitical forces, Artificial Intelligence (AI) emerges as the most formidable weapon in the digital arsenal. AI allows for the creation of images that augment perceptions of reality by propagating narratives that lack factual basis. Prominent figures of the UK's far right with large media followings have used AI to turn misinformation into seemingly authentic visuals, amplifying harmful narratives. The recent anti-immigration riots across the UK, following the Southport stabbings, can be viewed as a physical manifestation of this online crusade which extends such figures' violence beyond the digital realm. Far-right groups justify their violence by framing their actions as a defence of Britain, based on fabricated or distorted realities. This paper contends that AI-driven far-right extremism is a considerable factor in social division and the incitement of violence in the UK. To investigate this issue, data has been compiled to understand the reach of right-wing AI-produced imagery and public attitudes towards it. Additionally, this paper offers an analysis of such content posted to social media, focusing on sample posts collected from X (formerly Twitter). These posts, sourced from the accounts of politicians, news presenters, and a high-profile right-wing organisation, have been analysed using a Critical Discourse Analysis framework to assess their rhetoric, underlying ideologies, and role in social control. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on digital far-right extremism and stresses the need for decisive action against the misuse of AI leading to the infiltration of contemporary political communication.

## INTRODUCTION

The tragic Southport stabbings on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2024, which claimed the lives of three children, became a flash point for the far right, igniting national riots against immigration and fears of 'Islamisation' (Shah, 2024; Warsi, 2024). Though the attack had no inherent connection to either Islam or immigration, it unfolded against a backdrop of deepening anti-Muslim and anti-immigration rhetoric infiltrating the online landscape. AI-generated content is the latest weapon of the UK's far right, transforming misinformation into seemingly authentic visuals and amplifying pre-existing harmful rhetorics in a manner more insidious than traditional methods. Key examples explored in this paper include the spread of what are here deemed the 'cultural takeover' narrative and the 'them versus us' mentality. Left-wing media outlets have been particularly vocal in their criticism of the role of social media and certain actors play in facilitating far-right mobilisation. According to these sources, far-right groups use this misleading content to justify their violent retaliation in the form of riots, framing their actions as a defence of British citizens (Olusoga, 2024). The social media platform X (formerly Twitter), has become a key means of amplifying divisive narratives, with its algorithms facing criticism for promoting such content (Milmo and Quinn, 2024). Under Elon Musk's new ownership, X has shifted towards a more lenient approach to harmful content. This is exemplified by the reinstatement of far-right activist Tommy Robinson's account, which had previously been banned for posting hateful content (Evans, 2023).

This article intends to contribute to the emerging, albeit still limited, body of literature examining how AI imagery is being weaponised by the UK's far right to incite violence and division within communities. It begins by examining data on the public's interpretations of the recent riots, considering the role of prominent figures, social media, and the rise of the far right. The core of this article is anchored in a content analysis of four sample posts from X, unveiling how the UK's far right disseminate their anti-Muslim ideology through AI content. This analysis will lead to a discussion on the evolving digital ecosystem of far-right AI tools. The article concludes with an evaluation of the Online Safety Act (2023) and its response to the challenges posed by AI-generated content. This paper contends that AI-driven far-right extremism is a leading factor in social division and the incitement of violence in the UK, as demonstrated by the recent riots.

## PUBLIC ATTITUDES

Amid escalating concerns about violence in the UK (More in Common, 2024), there is an increasing consensus among the British public that social media is a leading cause of unrest. Polling data from YouGov (2024a), More in Common (2024), and

Ipsos (2024a) consistently points to social media as a major source of misinformation and social division. X has drawn particular indignation, criticised for its lenient approach to harmful content. A YouGov (2024a) study reveals that 58% of X users believe there is too much freedom to post offensive content on the platform. This widespread concern underscores not only the discomfort the public feels towards offensive content, but also the anxiety over the platform's capacity to propagate harmful narratives, potentially inciting division and hostility.

Elon Musk's ownership of X has intensified these concerns, particularly due to the platform's association with far-right figures such as Tommy Robinson and Nigel Farage (Merrin and Hoskins, 2025). Both men have been accused of using the platform to incite violence and to spread anti-Muslim rhetoric. Recent polling data reveals that 57% of Britons hold Robinson partially responsible for UK riots, while 47% attribute responsibility to Nigel Farage (YouGov, 2024b). This follows Musk's controversial decision to reinstate Tommy Robinson's account on X. The account had been previously banned for promoting hateful content, indicating a shift in the platform's stance toward far-right discourse. This decision has drawn further scrutiny when paired with Musk's remarks, made in response to videos of the Southport riots, suggesting an inevitable 'civil war' (Syed, 2024) in Britain. His comments were met with criticism from Prime Minister Kier Starmer, whose spokesperson stated there was 'no justification' for Musk's comments (Gerken et al., 2024). These actions have forged associations between the platform's lenient content moderation and instances of the incitement of violence. According to a Savanta survey (2024), 44% of respondents believe Musk bears some responsibility for recent riots.

The recent riots have left the population deeply disturbed, with Ipsos (2024a) data revealing that 73% of the public are either fairly or very concerned about the rise of right-wing extremism in the UK. This represents an increase of 11% since March 2024. Such a surge in concern reflects an awakening to the destructive impact of right-wing ideology and the dangerous hatred it ignites within society. Among Muslim communities, fears are intensified by the anti-Muslim narrative prevalent in right-wing media discourse, with a More in Common (2024) survey indicating that 53% of respondents expressed that the UK is an unsafe place for Muslim people. While empirical data specifically addressing public anxieties around right-wing AI content remains unrealised, the research outlined above on social media-driven division and rising fears of right-wing extremism suggests a strong foundation for similar concerns. These established anxieties imply that AI, with its potential to bolster extremist narratives, is likely perceived as a growing threat. From this, it is essential to examine the technologies which form the root of this hateful content.

## THE DIGITAL ECOSYSTEM OF FAR-RIGHT AI TOOLS

The digital landscape has witnessed an expansion of AI tools which have transformed the digital ecosystem. Among the most current widespread tools are ChatGPT and Google Gemini, yet these models have historically reinforced inequalities by embedding anti-Muslim sentiments within algorithmic frameworks. Earlier versions of ChatGPT, specifically Model GPT-3, delivered outputs which often associated Muslims with violence or terrorism, but not other religions (Samuel-Azran et al., 2024). Creators of GPT-3, OpenAI, acknowledged and rectified this bias, striving for a more 'constructive' and 'beneficial' model (Nguyen, 2024). Meanwhile, the rise of far-right AI systems have further diversified the digital landscape. These right-wing tools have emerged in response to ongoing debates about the perceived left-wing bias in AI systems. At the centre of this debate is an article by Motoki, Neto, and Rodrigues (2023), which claims that ChatGPT demonstrates a left-wing bias, favouring the UK's Labour Party. In response to perceived 'woke' constraints, platforms such as Freedom GPT and Truth GPT were established to enable unimpeded propagation of right-wing ideology. While fundamentally similar to ChatGPT, these platforms impose fewer content restrictions and moderation. This has precarious implications, particularly given its capacity to transmit misinformation and incite violence beyond the digital realm. Given the public backlash over misinformation and hateful content, especially on platforms like X (YouGov, 2024a; Hickey et al., 2025), the case for regulated AI models becomes increasingly compelling. On its website, FreedomGPT (no date) responds to accusations of producing harmful content, stating that these outputs reflect the intentions of users rather than the nature of the system. However, the impact of AI tools must be carefully considered; given the accessibility of these systems, sensible limitations should not be viewed as a threat to freedom. Instead, embedded restrictions and moderation acknowledges the subjectivity of perceived truths and a responsibility to protect minorities who are disproportionately targeted by this content. The proliferation of unregulated AI tools, which are weaponised to disseminate misinformation and intensify division, calls for decisive government intervention to safeguard communities from both online and offline violence.

## METHODOLOGY

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was used as a framework to explore and illuminate the underlying ideologies embedded within content posted to X. CDA is effective in exposing power dynamics within discourse, as it reveals how written and visual elements reinforce ideologies (Brennen et al., 2018). However, CDA has limitations as it may involve subjective interpretations which can introduce bias. By connecting the anti-Muslim ideologies within these posts to the broader social dynamics in the

UK, I aim to reduce the subjectivity inherent in CDA. For my selection criteria, I have chosen four sample posts from X based on the influence and prominence of their authors: a popular right-wing X account (Europe Invasion), two politicians (Ashlea Simon and Paul Golding), and a news presenter (Darren Grimes). Although the posts I selected do not feature the prominent figures previously mentioned, Tommy Robinson and Nigel Farage, it is important to recognise their contributions to broader anti-Muslim discourse. Each post was selected for its potential to reflect distinct ideological stances, its visual and textual rhetoric, and its role in social control. Through this selection, I aim to analyse how each post's rhetoric and embedded ideologies construct and reinforce anti-Muslim sentiment. Additionally, I will examine how these narratives contribute to fostering hostility toward Muslims, further perpetuating societal divisions. The posts will be analysed through two central themes: that of the 'cultural takeover' narrative, and the 'them vs. us' mentality.

## ANALYSIS

### The 'cultural takeover' narrative

Anti-Muslim imagery generated through AI frequently plays on the deeply rooted fear of a 'cultural takeover' (Tazamal, 2024). In recent years, anti-immigration sentiment in the UK has heightened, with 35% of the population believing that migration negatively impacts the country (Ipsos, 2024b). This growing unease has contributed to the rise of political parties like Reform UK and Britain First, which capitalise on these fears, vowing to protect British culture from the perceived threat of 'Islamisation' (Noha, 2016).

All of the sample posts collectively illustrate this narrative through the use of quintessentially British symbols. Depicted in Figure 1 is Big Ben, an enduring icon of British identity, engulfed in flames: a dramatic portrayal of cultural erosion leading to eventual obliteration. This striking imagery symbolises an imagined assault on the British identity. Similarly, Figure 2 draws on visual and textual rhetorics to evoke fears of an 'Islamised' Britain. It depicts British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer wearing a pink abaya (a traditional Islamic garment typically worn by Muslim women), intentionally creating a sense of incongruity. In the caption, poster Darren Grimes asks an open-ended question: 'what will Britain look like after 5 years...?' Grimes frames Starmer's 'Islamisation' of Britain as imminent, obliquely leading viewers to the conclusion that this is how Britain will look in five years. Starmer has faced criticism from those on the political far-right for his leniency on anti-immigration policies (Ibrahim, 2024). This image echoes the exaggerated claim that immigration will spread Islamic culture, 'infiltrating' the highest levels of British leadership.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 3 depicts a distressed British woman on the tube, surrounded by a large group of Muslim men laughing. This image makes use of the most prominent British symbol, the Union Jack, to make it clear how Britain is facing perceived attacks from Islam. Poster Ashlea Simon's language in her caption is emotive and personal, looking to evoke strong emotions from her audience. Her emphasis on Britons as 'abused minorities' with 'no rights' implies a dystopian future where British citizens are oppressed within their own country.



Figure 3

Finally, Figure 4 adds another dimension by targeting British institutions. The image portrays the police as complicit in the spread of Islamic dominance, with poster Paul Golding's provocative caption 'this image reflects current policing strategy perfectly' conveying a sarcastic critique. Framing British institutions as yielding to Muslim individuals implies a perceived loss

of national integrity. The visual pairing of traditional Muslim clothing and police uniforms is intended to symbolise a ‘cultural takeover’ and ‘Islamisation’ of Britain.



Figure 4

Collectively, Figures 1, 4 and 3 display an exaggerated presence of Muslim individuals, further reinforcing the idea that British people will become minorities in the UK. The images ingrain a sense of vulnerability and distrust, aimed at galvanising support for right-wing movements.

AI images achieve this by eliciting genuine emotions for simulated events, manipulating audiences to feel threatened under a false pretence. The prevailing ideology across these three images is the ‘Great Replacement Theory’ (Obaidi et al., 2021). This right-wing conspiracy contends that Western populations are being systematically replaced by migrants, a narrative which intensifies fears of cultural erosion. This could partially explain the rise in anti-immigration sentiment within the UK. This manipulation cultivates fear and distrust, illustrating how online material can incite offline violence by amplifying these distorted narratives. While fears of ‘cultural takeover’ amplify divisions, the ‘them vs. us’ mentality explored in the next section plays on fears of imminent violence between communities.

### The ‘Them Versus Us’ Mentality

Much of anti-Muslim AI-generated content is often deployed to disrupt social cohesion between majority and minority groups by perpetuating a polarising ‘them versus us’ mentality. Recent polling indicates that 85% of the population believes British society is divided (Ipsos, 2024a), highlighting how such divisive rhetoric resonates on a broader scale. This polarisation is often reinforced by depictions of violence perpetrated by Muslim communities, intentionally framed to justify hatred and sometimes violent retaliation as a form of self-defence. Together Figures 1, 2 and 3 reinforce this divisive narrative through their visual and textual rhetorics.

The composition of Figure 1 positions British and Muslim identities as oppositional forces. Both men’s demeanour suggests animosity and a clear polarisation between communities. The stark juxtaposition in attire, that of distinctive Muslim clothing against a stereotypical Western appearance, underscores a sense of ‘otherness’ and relies on visual stereotypes to incite hostility. Its caption: ‘Do you think the UK is heading for civil war?’ intends to instil fear in British people, hinting at potential violence.

Figure 2 adopts a similar visual tactic, using traditional Muslim clothing against British police uniforms, reinforcing a divisive ‘them vs. us’ mentality. This image shows a compromised power dynamic, suggesting UK law and order is subservient to Muslim influence in order to evoke feelings of unease and distrust in law enforcement and institutions. This sense of unease is further emphasised in Figure 3, which evokes feelings of isolation and discomfort by positioning the British girl away from the group of Muslim men. The men seemingly mock the girl or show hostility towards her, reinforcing her portrayal as an outsider. This dynamic underscores a ‘them versus us’ mentality as the collective demeanour of the men emphasises alienation and division. In Figure 3, Simon personalises her caption by implicating that the reader’s family is at risk, asking: ‘Is

this the future you want for your daughters and granddaughters?’ This rhetorical question creates a sense of immediate and personal threat, aimed particularly in parents and grandparents, framing the exclusion of Muslims from Britain as a justified act of protection.

These images are underpinned by a ubiquitous right-wing ideology that frames the presence of Muslims in the UK as inherently violent and threatening. This narrative reinforces a ‘them versus us’ dynamic, painting Britons as victims of Sharia law and acts of violence and further embedding a climate of fear and mistrust. In Figure 3, the depiction of Muslim men as a unified group preying on a vulnerable girl promotes a far-right mantra that Muslim men are a threat to British women. Far-right figures often claim that Islam fosters misogynistic views under Sharia law, which leads to increased violence against women (Rahbari, 2020). Meanwhile, Figure 1 escalates this perceived threat to a broader level, instilling fear in viewers and amplifying the narrative of cultural warfare. By framing themselves as ‘protectors’ of British culture and values, far-right figures can use these depictions to justify anti-Muslim and anti-immigration rhetoric, cementing their ideological position through fear and division. The UK riots were largely fuelled by a perception of violence attributed to Muslims (Venkataramakrishnan, 2025), a narrative which appears to be shaped by AI-generated misinformation. This highlights the profound dangers of AI in amplifying falsehoods and inciting social division.

### **THE IMPACT AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ONLINE SAFETY ACT (2023)**

Following the recent far-right riots in the UK, the Online Safety Act (OSA) has demanded significant attention due to the role social media played in inciting violence (YouGov, 2024a; More in Common, 2024; Ipsos, 2024a). Designed to protect internet users, the Act imposes regulations on media platforms, aiming to reduce exposure to harmful content. Although positioned as technology neutral, applying the same regulations to content generated by humans and AI (Kohl, 2024), its provisions regarding AI remain sparse and underdeveloped.

Despite prohibiting content that incites violence or promotes racial or religious hatred (Gov, 2024), the Act overlooks how AI facilitates creating and disseminating this content. Given AI’s expanding role in generating harmful and persuasive narratives, this legislative gap could have serious repercussions, as recent events have already foreshadowed. The Act navigates a delicate balance between upholding freedom of speech and enforcing effective moderation. Its ambition to protect users is inherently constrained by the avoidance of regulatory overreach, a challenge further complicated by the subjective nature of truth and differing perceptions of what constitutes harm. Tensions between censorship and free speech inevitably present ethical considerations surrounding AI. As previously discussed, unmoderated AI models such as FreedomGPT operate without content restrictions, contrasting with more regulated models like ChatGPT. These unregulated AI models represent a key enabler of harmful content. By failing to address the ethical challenges posed by the development of AI technologies and the presence of algorithmic biases, the OSA is unable to mitigate harmful content at its root.

The increasing use of AI tools to generate harmful content represents a growing challenge, as these tools are increasingly leveraged to circumvent traditional content moderation systems. Ofcom (2019), the regulatory body for the OSA, states that traditional moderation methods such as word detection and human review, struggle to effectively identify and regulate AI-generated content. This is particularly acute given the increasing realism and sophistication of AI imagery. Despite this, the OSA does not include suggestions on how to tackle this important issue, placing the burden on platforms to develop effective solutions. This oversight risks undermining the act’s effectiveness, as it fails to fully acknowledge the unique challenges posed by the evolution of AI-generated content.

The above factors considered, the OSA does not live up to the decisive government action needed to combat the harmful uses of AI. Given the profoundly dangerous risks posed by AI in disseminating harmful narratives, it is imperative to implement restrictions on this powerful tool. To enhance the Act’s effectiveness, it should incorporate regulations which establish clear restrictions on the content AI models can generate. Additionally, collaboration with media platforms is crucial to develop mechanisms for identifying, managing, and regulating AI content. Without comprehensive guidance on AI and acknowledgement of the power it wields, the Act leaves a void that could exacerbate the potential for both online and offline harm.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper contends that AI-driven far-right extremism has potential to aggravate digital division and incite offline violence. As the regulatory landscape lags behind the rapid evolution of AI technologies, urgent intervention is essential in safeguarding societal cohesion. The recent riots following the Southport stabbings underscore the frightening reality of anti-Muslim sentiment in the UK, which the population largely perceives as being fuelled by social media (YouGov, 2024a; More In Common, 2024; Ipsos, 2024a). AI-imagery intensifies this sentiment, using harmful rhetoric and ideology to evoke a sense of threat in the reader and cultivating feelings of danger that can legitimise and justify violence towards minority groups.



This issue is exemplified by the sample posts in the content analysis section above. Using Critical Discourse Analysis, this paper has uncovered two prominent themes within anti-Muslim discourse: the ‘cultural takeover’ narrative and a ‘them versus us’ mentality. Drawing on the rhetoric of the ‘Great Replacement Theory’, these posts evoke fear by suggesting Britain is on the brink of violent cultural cleansing, with Muslims framed as the aggressors in this perceived attack. These narratives are profoundly divisive, cultivating an environment of hostility and insecurity for minority groups in the UK and magnifying collective public anxiety. This issue is further compounded by the development of AI models such as FreedomGPT and TruthGPT, which facilitate the creation of harmful content by reducing levels of moderation.

The UK riots underscore the urgent need for a hard-line governmental response to the development and use of AI. However, the sample posts from the content analysis section illustrate how politicians are leveraging these tools to advance their agendas. This raises ethical concerns, as the policies shaping AI models could be influenced by such conflicting interest. In the absence of regulation, the UK’s social fabric risks further fragmentation, with the potential for intensified divisions and instability. Although the future of AI remains uncertain, there is no doubt that its capabilities will continue to grow exponentially.

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