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A hatred exposed

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The Guardian exposé of the English Defence League should now persuade Westminster to take anti-Muslim hatred seriously

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The Guardian's brave and insightful undercover [investigation into the activities of the EDL](#) should finally persuade Westminster politicians to take the issue of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim violence seriously. Our own research supports the findings of the [Guardian investigation](#), most importantly concerning the extent to which the EDL is fuelled by visceral, violent anti-Muslim hatred.

The [video](#) that accompanies the Guardian report should leave no room for doubt that members of the EDL are echoing sentiments about Muslims they have adopted from sections of the mainstream media and the BNP. It is no coincidence that Nick Griffin has been peddling exactly the same hatred towards Muslims for the last decade. Similarly, a cursory examination of the records of [Islamophobia Watch](#) over the last five years provides a sense of the extent of Islamophobia in the mainstream media.

Daily Mail commentator Peter Oborne is right to argue that it has become "permissible to fabricate malicious falsehoods and therefore foment hatred against Muslims in a way which would be regarded as immoral and illegal if perpetrated against any other vulnerable section of society".

While that hatred clearly has links to aspects of racism it is the description of Muslims as terrorists and Muslims as extremists that gains most traction in EDL and BNP circles - just as it does in sections of the mainstream media. As a result the EDL can attract supporters who are genuinely adamant that they are not racist.

For example, the Guardian video reveals EDL leader Guramit Singh, a Sikh, repeating the claim made by mainstream journalist Andrew Gilligan that Islamic Forum Europe and the East London Mosque represent a hub of Islamist extremism that runs counter to British democracy and security. For Singh that makes Tower Hamlets, Britain's largest Muslim community, a target for future EDL demonstrations and campaigns. For Tower Hamlets residents old enough to remember the violence that accompanied the racist campaigns of the National Front and the antisemitic campaigns of the British Union of Fascists such a prospect is ominous.

Our research suggests that the EDL is one manifestation of widespread anger and violence towards Muslims in the UK. We have documented what this means: attempts to bomb Muslim targets, murder, grievous bodily harm, arson attacks on mosques and most frequently, abuse and violent intimidation of Muslims, especially Muslim women in the street. The shift towards Muslim targets for violent attack has been especially marked since 9/11.

Prior to 9/11 we can find no record of a racist attack in the UK in which the victim is berated for being "a Muslim terrorist" or "Muslim extremist". During the last decade it has become commonplace.

With notable exceptions, it is almost as difficult to find records since 9/11 of Westminster politicians defending Muslims from the charge of being terrorists and extremists.

Instead we find a long list of politicians who have sought to define and embrace "good Muslims" while attacking "bad Muslims". If these "bad Muslims" were limited to the al-Qaida inspired terrorists who bombed London on 7/7 and the extremist members of al-Muhajiroun it might at least be an accurate categorisation. Instead, the concept of "bad Muslim" has come to demonise thousands of ordinary Muslims who do not wish to compromise their religious or political principles.

One unintended consequence of this mainstream political discourse is that EDL and BNP supporters have appropriated the "bad Muslim" target. Time and again they cite mainstream Westminster politicians and media pundits as their sources and

role models for their campaigns against "Muslim extremists".

Our research also confirms what Mujibul Islam says about the impact the growth of the EDL is having in terms of violence towards Muslims away from EDL demonstrations. His account of Muslims being attacked by EDL supporters on trains and in the street is important and mirrors the behaviour of violent racist groups like Combat 18 in the past.

Westminster politicians should therefore reflect long and hard on the problems posed by the [English Defence League](#) (EDL).

It is only vigilant policing that has so far prevented major public disorder at an EDL demonstration. Experience suggests, however, that it is only a matter of time before serious public disorder follows in the wake of an EDL protest. That will have serious adverse implications for community relations just as National Front demonstrations did it in the 1970s.

In her response to the *Guardian* report [Samia Rahman](#) is right to highlight the failure of the BNP to make a significant impact at the general election. It would be complacent, however, to see that as a sign that anti-Muslim violence by the EDL and kindred spirits in the UK is on the wane. On the contrary, street level political violence of all kinds feeds off apathy and antipathy towards the ballot box.

In March we joined academics and campaigners in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons to argue that the formation of an all-party parliamentary group on Islamophobia was long overdue. The *Guardian* has now produced evidence to clinch the case.

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