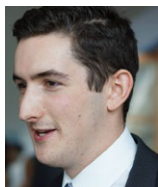


Towards a new 'populist' party? UKIP's interim manifesto and the future of the UK radical right



Is UKIP becoming radicalised under its new leader? [William Allchorn](#) takes a look at the history of Gerard Batten's leadership and finds that the party continues past trends of ideological nativism and authoritarianism. What has changed under Batten is that the party now has overt organisational links to the far right.

Current leader of UKIP, Gerard Batten, [announced](#) recently that he would be taking the party in a new, 'populist' direction. Batten [defines](#) populism (rather simply but also ambiguously) as 'policies that are popular with voters'. In their latest manifesto, however, the party's [stance](#) on a range of issues – from the NHS to Brexit, immigration, and prisons policy – suggests not so much a shift in a populist direction but more towards a nativist and authoritarian form of politics.

Context: Gerard Batten & the trajectory of the UKIP

Gerard Batten is a longstanding member of UKIP. Originally part of the [Anti-Federalist League](#), Batten was a founding member of the party and its first General Secretary from 1994-1997. In 2004, he was successful in gaining a seat on the European Parliament for London, and in 2009-14 served as UKIP's chief whip. In 2008, he launched an unsuccessful attempt for London's Mayorality – garnering only 1.2% of the vote. More recently, he was Brexit spokesman for the party before becoming interim leader in February 2018.

Before and during his leadership, Batten has courted controversy mainly in his activities and comments about multiculturalism and Islam. In 2006, he [commissioned](#) a document that asked Muslims to sign a declaration rejecting violence and stating that parts of the Quran promoted 'violent, physical jihad'. In 2008, Batten [invited](#) Dutch anti-Islam campaigner and *Party for Freedom* (PVV) leader Geert Wilders to the European Parliament to screen his controversial film, *Fitna*. Finally, in 2010, Batten [pledged](#) to end the building of new mosques in the UK, until and unless a non-Muslim place of worship was built in Mecca.

More recently, Batten has been heard [likening](#) Islam to a 'death cult, born and steeped in fourteen hundred years of violence and bloodshed' and [Mohamed](#) to 'a paedophile who kept sex slaves'. The latter comments were made at a march organised by former leader of the EDL, Tommy Robinson. Added to this, he has since allied himself to some of the most notorious anti-Islam protests groups at this time, such as the DFLA, as well as alt-right bloggers who were [granted](#) membership of the party back in June. Much to Nigel Farage's disgust, Batten has also [considered](#) allowing Tommy Robinson to become a member of the party – a break from a previous policy proscribing membership to those formerly of the extreme-right, neo-fascist BNP or anti-Islam EDL.

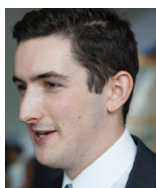
UKIP's Interim Manifesto – a shift to the (extreme) right?

UKIP's latest [interim manifesto](#) therefore marks less of an ideological and more of an organisational shift to the right for the party – allying itself with some of the causes of Britain's anti-Islamic street protest scene. In his interim manifesto, Batten calls for an NHS Health Card to stop 'health tourism' by foreign nationals; the end of LGBT-inclusive relationships education in primary schools; 'a security-based screening policy' designed to restrict people who 'follow a literalist and extremist interpretation of Islam'; and a separate system of Islamic prisons in order to supposedly shield non-Islamic prisoners from extremism and conversion (*ibid*).

Such a rightward shift isn't new to Batten's leadership, however. It has simply been turbo-charged and given new organisational prominence. In UKIP's 2017 General Election manifesto under Paul Nuttall, for example, the party [called](#) for mandatory screening programmes for girls at risk of female genital mutilation and a ban on wearing partial and whole face-coverings in public places. Moreover, Nigel Farage also engaged in such dog-whistle tactics when leader of the party. At the 2015 UK General Election, for example, Farage [suggested](#) that migrants should stop using the NHS for access to HIV treatment. Finally and most famously in the 2016 EU Referendum campaign, he was [pictured](#) in front of a poster with the words 'Breaking Point' superimposed over a picture of Syrian refugees crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border in 2015, which was later compared to anti-foreigner propaganda used in Nazi Germany.

In conclusion then, Batten's leadership continues a UKIP trend of ideological nativism and authoritarianism over recent years. What has changed is the party's overt organisational links to more extreme elements of Britain's far right scene. This is not to say that the party has become extremist *per se* but that it is in danger of becoming tainted by its flirtations with such movements as it vies to regain electoral relevance. As political science research on the radical-right [shows](#), right-wing populist parties who are tarred with the brush of extremism tend to be less electorally successful in the long term. Despite a boost in [membership](#) (by 15%) and [polling figures](#) (by 5%) since Theresa May's July Chequers summit, therefore, the party would be wise to steer clear of its flirtations with the extreme right – lest it fall into electoral oblivion, post-Brexit.

About the Author



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