



Beatriz Lopes Buarque

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## AI and the far-right riots in the UK

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*LSE Fellow Beatriz Lopes Buarque explains the role played by AI in fuelling last year's far right riots in the UK.*

The riots that erupted across several cities in the UK following the horrifying **stabbing of three young children at a Taylor Swift-themed dance event** in Southport in 2024 have been widely linked to the mainstreaming of the far right and the amplifying nature of social media. In recent years, xenophobic views have not only been shamelessly expressed by politicians, but they have also gained media exposure, facilitating the **mainstreaming of the far right and its blend of racism and xenophobia**. Social media algorithms, designed to prioritise emotionally charged content, further intensified the circulation of posts targeting and vilifying

Black/Brown migrants, particularly Muslims, thereby **contributing to an environment that facilitated subsequent violence**.

The combination of these two factors seems to have been exacerbated by artificial intelligence. Funded by the LSE Urgency Grant Scheme and with the support of LSE Department of Media and Communications, I organised a workshop to explore some of the ways in which AI fuelled what has been described as the “**largest outbreak of far-right rioting and disorder in the post-war period**”. I brought together leading experts on the far right, alt-tech, racism, algorithmic culture, societal security, digital culture, and misogyny: Dr Aaron Winter (University of Lancaster), Allysa Czerwinsky (University of Manchester), Dr Ashton Kingdon (University of Southampton), Dr Julia Ebner (University of Oxford), Dr Meropi Tzanetakis (University of Manchester), and Dr Robert Topinka (University of Birbeck).

In this piece, I summarise some of our key findings that spark urgent and critical conversations on the intersection of AI, racism, and violence.

## Amplifying visual representations of racist conspiracy theories

A quantitative analysis of the 622 posts made by the X account of the far-right political party Britain First and the self-proclaimed media outlet Europe Invasion from 4 July to 4 August 2024 revealed a strong positive correlation between the total number of views and the number of “likes”, shares, and comments in the posts containing visual representations of racist conspiracy theories such as the great replacement. Their amplification was about 30% higher than for other posts.

The great replacement conspiracy theory conveys the belief that “**White European populations are being deliberately replaced at an ethnic and cultural level through immigration and the growth of minority communities**” and was visually represented in these accounts through images and videos depicting Black and Brown migrants, particularly

Muslim men, as “invaders” and White people, especially men, as “heroes” entitled to protect the nation. In audiovisual pieces shared by the examined accounts Black and Brown Muslims (especially men) were recurrently associated with criminality and social disorder, whereas White individuals (men, women, and even children) shouting at migrants and beating them were praised for their perceived courage. In this way, visual representations of racist conspiracy theories in the days leading up to the riots openly incited violence against racialised migrants.

## Weaponising White femininity and White masculinity through Generative AI

By analysing the algorithmic behaviour of the @EuropeInvasionn account, we observed that posts featuring images created using generative AI received, on average, a disproportionately higher number of views than those containing traditional photos or videos. This points to both the virality potential of AI-generated visuals and the ease with which these tools can be used to produce racist visual content. Of the 388 posts shared by the account in the weeks leading up to the Southport attack and in its immediate aftermath, 43 featured AI-generated images.

As illustrated below, many of these images weaponised White femininity by portraying White British and European women as vulnerable figures in need of constant protection, as they have been “surrounded” by seemingly threatening Black and Brown Muslim men. White masculinity was similarly weaponised, depicting White men as heroic defenders of the nation, conforming to imposed ideals of masculinity and nationalist duty.









Examples of AI-generated images

## Amplifying cross-ecosystem flows between alt-tech and mainstream platforms

Alt-Tech platforms are alternative technology platforms created to provide services similar to mainstream social media and tech companies, but with different content moderation policies. These platforms typically position themselves as champions of free speech and alternatives to what their supporters perceive as censorship or political bias on mainstream platforms. By examining how the far right responded to each phase of the Southport tragedy across different platforms, we noticed that accounts on alt-tech platforms such as Gab, Bitchute, Rumble, and Odyssey strategically used and repurposed content from traditional media and mainstream social media (X, Facebook, YouTube, TikTok) to advance xenophobic and racist ideas, creating a cyclical flow of harmful content.

Certain mainstream news stories were repeatedly circulated on alt-tech platforms as supposed evidence that the British government allegedly prioritises migrants over so-called “native” White Britons, reinforcing conspiracy theories common in far-right circles and intensifying resentment toward migrants.

## The creation of ‘ambient extremism’ through algorithmic systems of recommendation

Another cross-platform trend identified in our workshop highlights the complementarity among X, TikTok, and Instagram in fostering what can be described as ‘ambient extremism,’ where extremist memes, ideas and arguments once confined to obscure message boards and online subcultures now circulate on mainstream platforms, further blurring the lines between hate speech and socially acceptable discourse. They have thus become part of the ambient, everyday conversations. Many of the posts shared on the X account @EuropeInvasionn between July and August 2024 were originally shared on TikTok or Instagram and they presented a similar pattern: they showed groups of Muslims gathered in the streets of London, accompanied by captions like “What do you think?”—explicitly encouraging engagement. Although the videos conveyed the idea that Muslims do not integrate into British society, they have not been considered hate speech and, consequently, they were not removed from both platforms. ‘Ambient extremism’ seems to be closely tied to the broader mainstreaming of the far right, which played a significant role in shaping the conditions that led to the riots.

A textual analysis of the posts shared by the X accounts of Britain First and Europe Invasion revealed that many of the messages shared before and after the riots reflected xenophobic and racist views openly expressed by British politicians across the political spectrum, echoing the idea that the growing presence of migrants is leading to Britain’s collapse.

# Exposing the roots of the far-right riots

The role played by AI in the riots was our key object of investigation. However, as our research shows, blame does not lie with AI alone. Rather than being the root cause, AI has primarily functioned as a medium and amplifier for the deeper issue: the normalisation of the far right's toxic blend of racism and xenophobia. Unless this underlying social and political dynamic is addressed, AI recommendation systems and generative tools will continue to reflect—and reinforce—ideologies that have caused harm for centuries, occasionally manifesting in acts of violence.

*The findings of this research project will be presented in more detail during an [online event](#) on 26 June .*

*This post gives the views of the author and not the position of the Media@LSE blog, nor of the London School of Economics and Political Science.*

Featured image: Photo by [Sean Robbins](#) on [Unsplash](#)

## About the author



### Beatriz Lopes Buarque

Dr Beatriz Lopes Buarque is a politics scholar and LSE100 Fellow, specialising in the global far right and its politics of conspiratorial truth. Her research explores the intersection of digital capitalism with issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and truth.

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