

Britain First: More than the mere sum of the parts left over by the BNP and EDL

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Britain First is a new far-right party that has made waves in its confrontational approach and Islamophobia. Here, [Chris Allen](#) profiles the group, writing that while in many ways they are a traditional far-right organisation, they are more than the mere sum of the parts left over by the BNP and EDL.



The recent [decision to grant planning permission](#) for a new mosque in Dudley comes after more than a decade of arguing and wrangling in the West Midlands town. As well as the financial cost – alleged to be in the millions – the highly divisive nature of the campaign has been played out at the expense of community relations, creating a void that different far-right groups and organisations have historically sought to exploit.

It is maybe no surprise that the far-right's 'new kid on the block', Britain First sought to get in on the act. Unlike the British National Party (BNP) which gained a seat on the local council and the English Defence League (EDL) which organised some of its biggest marches in the town, Britain First took the protest in a new – and somewhat vile – direction, [announcing that they planned to bury a dead pig a on the site](#) declaring that the Qur'an forbids any building on ground containing 'swine'.

And when it's not making threats in Dudley, Britain First is standing candidates for public positions, such as in the recent by-election in Rochester and Strood, or running social media campaigns that somewhat insidiously lurk behind rather less innocuous messages that offer [support to 'our' war heroes](#) on Remembrance Sunday or even more bizarrely, [loveable dogs](#).

Who are Britain First?

Although separate, Britain First has links to both the BNP and EDL. It was founded by former BNP member James Dowson, a Scottish Calvinist minister with close links to loyalist paramilitaries. While in the BNP, Dowson was seen as a credible challenger to Nick Griffin's leadership after the 2010 elections. Soon after though, Dowson acrimoniously split from the party following allegations he made [unwanted sexual advances to a female colleague](#).

Soon after, Dowson linked up with Paul Golding, a former BNP councillor, launching Britain First in May 2011 with the intention to protect British and Christian morality. The same were also behind the launch of the Protestant Coalition in Belfast in 2013 – [a political alternative to the Ulster Unionist and Democratic Unionist parties](#) – although little impact was made until after the murder of Lee Rigby in May 2013.

Uploading a video on YouTube, Britain First declared its intention to place Islamist preacher Anjem Choudary under a citizen's arrest alleging that he was responsible for the radicalisation of Rigby's killers, Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale.

Until Rigby's death, neither Islam nor Muslims had overtly featured in any of Britain First's strategies or actions. In many ways it was conspicuous by its absence. Yet since, Rigby's murder has remained a prominent feature of Britain First's political campaigning. Following this year's European elections, the chair of the [Electoral Commission apologised](#) for allowing Britain First to use the phrase "Remember Lee Rigby" on voting slips.

What do they stand for?

As with the BNP and EDL before it, Britain First believes that there needs to be an immediate halt to immigration in order to safeguard the existence and lineage of the indigenous British people. For them, the greatest threat comes

from Islam and Muslims and they seek to position themselves as [providing the 'frontline resistance'](#) to the 'Islamification' of Britain. Part of this is the need to protect Christianity. Not only is Christianity an integral part of British identity and heritage, but unlike its far-right predecessors which used Christianity in a tokenistic way, Britain First's hierarchy have a far more apocalyptic vision. For them, the end times will come following an [apocalyptic battle between Christians and Muslims](#).

As though in preparation for this battle, the group has taken increasingly militaristic and confrontational approach towards Muslims. This was evident earlier this year when it began ['Christian Patrols' in Tower Hamlets in London](#). Members arrived in the borough in three ex-military jeeps with a banner 'We are the British resistance' emblazoned across one. They then made videos showing them emptying cans of beer outside a mosque during Friday prayers in what they described as an attempt to draw out the extremists.



More recently, Britain First 'battalions' have begun to ['invade' mosques en masse](#). With many wearing badged waterproof jackets and flat caps, they film themselves refusing to remove their shoes before confronting worshippers and imams on a range of tenuously connected issues. These include Britain being a Christian country, the failure to stop members of Muslim communities from participating in grooming gangs, the need to read the Bible, and the assertion that Muhammad was a false prophet. They also aggressively force Muslims to accept copies of British army Bibles. With these tactics, Britain First cultivates a clear and direct militaristic tone and ethos that carries with it a rather insidious and dangerous message.

In many ways, Britain First is a traditional far-right organisation, its name taken from the bimonthly newspaper of the British National Front (NF) some forty years ago. And like the NF – as also the BNP – Britain First has sought to function within the formal political mainstream: its website showing a countdown facility to the 2015 general election. In recent months however, the group appears to have shifted more towards street-level activities, those more akin to the EDL for instance.

A different kind of beast

Yet Britain First is more than the mere sum of the parts left over by the BNP and EDL. This can be seen in the way in which Britain First has been able to make significant impact whilst mobilising only a tiny percentage of those available to the EDL: rarely do Britain First's videos show more than about ten members. In disseminating the actions of a few to the news feeds of the many, Britain First have been better at controlling the content and message of its outputs; a lesson learned from the EDL and the damage caused by the proliferation of videos on YouTube showing EDL to be overtly racist and incoherently drunk.

And from this better controlling of the message has emerged three somewhat unique characteristics. The first is Britain First's increasingly confrontational approach which seeks to intimidate and provoke. With allegations of Britain First organising combat training for its members, such developments can only be seen to be extremely worrying particularly if – or when? – it is able to provoke a response, violent or otherwise, from Muslims.

Second is the increasing emphasis on militarism. From the use of ex-army vehicles in its Christian Patrols to the

forcing of British army Bibles onto unsuspecting Muslims in mosques, from the language of resistance to that of invasion and the emergence of different 'battalions', Britain First cultivates a clear and direct militaristic tone and ethos. In doing so, its messages resonates with the geo-political where the resistance required in Birmingham or Bradford for instance is the same as that required in Baghdad or Kabul.

And thirdly is the eschatology underpinning the message. Going beyond the mere adoption of employing Christianity to demarcate and differentiate 'us' from the Muslim 'other', Britain First's hierarchy would seem to be focusing on a much bigger picture: of an apocalyptic end game that rewards with salvation rather than anything else.

Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the Author

Chris Allen is a Lecturer in the Institute of Applied Social Studies at the University of Birmingham. For the past decade and a half, he has been researching the phenomenon of Islamophobia which has included researching the far-right and counter jihad groups. Since publishing his book, "Islamophobia" (Ashgate, 2010) he has published widely across Europe, appears regularly in the media and was, until recently, an independent member of the Government's Anti-Muslim Hate Working Group. You can find him on Twitter [@DrChrisAllen](#).

