

# BORIS JOHNSON

**IMPACT:** Boris Johnson is a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom and former Foreign Secretary and Mayor of London who has a history of making inflammatory anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, and racist remarks.

- Boris Johnson has been a Member of Parliament in the United Kingdom (U.K.) since May 2015. He served as the Mayor of London from May 2008 to May 2016 and as the U.K.'s Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs from July 2016 to July 2018.
- In early August 2018, **Johnson published an op-ed in *The Telegraph* that used an anti-Muslim slur to refer to religious head-covering worn by some Muslim women.** In the piece he argued while the burqa is “oppressive and ridiculous,” it should not be banned. He wrote: **“It is absolutely ridiculous that people should choose to go around looking like letterboxes,”** mainstreaming this phrasing as a comparison to Muslim women who wear the burqa. In this column, **he stated that women who wear the burqa resemble “bank robbers.”** Nesrine Malik, a British-Sudanese columnist for *The Guardian*, argued that Johnson’s rhetorical use of the burqa is meant to be “a code - for Muslims, brown people, and all others who want to dictate their ways onto the helpless and authentic people.” In a poll by *Sunday Express*, 53 percent of voters did not think his comments warranted disciplinary action.
- In August 2018, *The Independent* reported that Johnson’s party, the center-right Conservative (or Tory) Party, held a meeting with their chairman, Brandon Lewis, and Fiyaz Mughal, the founder of a British organization that measures anti-Muslim attacks, called Tell MAMA. The meeting was intended to help the Tories address issues of Islamophobia but Mughal stated: “A series of correspondence went back to the chair’s office saying a number of steps needed to be taken to build reassurance around tackling anti-muslim [sic] hatred or islamophobia [sic]. And absolutely nothing happened.”
- According to Tell MAMA, **Johnson’s comments emboldened other civilians to mock the niqab.** Interviewed for an article in *The Independent*, **Mughal stated that “there is a direct link with Mr. Johnson’s comments and an impact on visibly Muslim women as a whole.”**
- An August 2018 investigation by *The Sunday Times* revealed that **Boris Johnson’s official Facebook page contained “hundreds of Islamophobic messages,” including “calls to ban Islam, deport Muslims and ‘vile’ attacks on London Mayor Sadiq Khan.”**
- In August 2018, Steve Bannon, the former head of the “alt-right” media platform *Breitbart* and former White House architect of various anti-Muslim policies under the Trump Administration, told *The Sunday Times* that Johnson had “nothing to apologize for” in reference to his *Telegraph* piece. **Bannon has praised Johnson for his “authenticity” and said he “has the potential to be a great prime minister, not a good one.”** A July 2018 *Buzzfeed* report revealed that **“Bannon was in private contact with Johnson while he was in Britain.”**
- In August 2018, an independent panel of the **Tory Party investigated Johnson and in December he was cleared of charges that his comments constituted a violation of the Party’s code of conduct.** The panel stated Johnson was “respectful and tolerant” and was fully entitled to use “satire” to make his point in his column in August.
- In May 2016, Johnson won Douglas Murray’s ‘President Erdogan Offensive Poetry’ competition for his lewd poem about the Turkish president. Murray is the associate director for the Henry Jackson Society, a neo-

# BORIS JOHNSON

conservative British think tank, and has [claimed](#) that “since its beginning, Islam has been pretty violent.”

- Johnson resigned from his position as Foreign Secretary in July 2018, [citing](#) PM May’s failure to implement Brexit fast enough. Brexit refers to a [referendum](#) held in 2016, which called on the British government to exit the European Union. **Johnson has been a strong advocate for Brexit and was referred to as the “architect of Brexit” by an article in *The Guardian*. In the eleven months after Brexit, *The Independent* reported that cases of religious and racially motivated hate crimes increased by 23 percent.**
- In February 2018, at the end his time as Foreign Secretary, Johnson worked with [Hedayah](#), a Center for [Countering Violent Extremism](#) (CVE) in Abu Dhabi.
- In March 2014, Johnson [published a column discussing “radicalization,” in \*The Telegraph\*, arguing that, “We need to be less phobic of intrusion into the ways of minority groups and less nervous of passing judgment on other cultures.”](#) The *BBC* [reported](#) that a representative of “counter-extremist” Think Tank [Quilliam](#) agreed with Johnson’s comments “about a ‘fatal squeamishness’ of intervening in the behavior of a “protected group.”
- In a 2005 [article](#) for *The Spectator*, **Johnson argued that Islamophobia was a “natural reaction” to Islam, and that “the problem is Islam. Islam is the problem.”** He went on to **claim that “judged purely on its scripture,” Islam “is the most viciously sectarian of all religions in its heartlessness towards unbelievers.”**
- Johnson has a history of making racist comments. In a 2002 article for the *Daily Telegraph*, **Johnson described Black people, using degrading racial slurs and tropes**, as “piccaninnies” and talked about “watermelon smiles.” The article came up during the 2008 London mayoral campaign, and Johnson stated: “I feel sad that people have been offended by those words and I apologise for them.”
- As Foreign Secretary, Johnson’s stances on foreign intervention and counterterrorism were criticized. In a [speech](#) called “The struggle against Islamist terror: How global Britain is helping to win” that he gave at the Foreign Office in London in December 2017, Johnson **asserted that “British foreign policy is not the problem; it is part of the solution” to fighting terrorist groups. He encouraged the idea of a clear-cut ‘war on terror’ by saying, “But if we are going to win, then we need to scrap the idea that Western foreign policy is somehow the principal cause of the problem. It is a fallacy that is at once glib, egotistical and which simply feeds the narrative of the jihadis.”** Dr. Adnan Siddiqui, Director of [CAGE](#), remarked: “Mr. Johnson’s comments give air to right-wing groups and follow on from his earlier statements on Brexit which have inspired a narrow, insular nationalism, the consequences of which are being felt not only by Muslims, but all right-minded people concerned with justice.”