

# NO-GO ZONE CONSPIRACY THEORY

**IMPACT:** The “no-go zone” is an anti-Muslim conspiracy theory claiming there are areas in Europe and the U.S. with dense Muslim populations that are governed by Sharia law and where police and non-residents are barred from entry. Although it has been debunked by European police officials and news organizations, the idea of the “no-go zone” continues to circulate and is often used to justify anti-immigration and anti-Muslim policies and rhetoric.

- The idea of the “[no-go zone](#)” first appeared in the early 2000s. In **2002, American journalist David Ignatius wrote that North African suburbs in Paris “become no-go zones at night.” Daniel Pipes, founder of the Middle East Forum, further popularized the term in 2006, using the phrase “no-go zone” to refer to the 751 “sensitive urban zones” that are targeted by the French government for urban renewal.**
- **Pipes’ post also credits Norwegian blogger Fjordman for defining “Muslim no-go zones” as areas “where anything representing a Western institution (post office truck, firemen, even mail order delivery firms) was routinely ambushed with Molotov cocktails.” Fjordman is the pseudonym of Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen whose articles were mentioned 111 times in the manifesto of Andres Breivik, a Norwegian white nationalist terrorist who murdered 77 people in 2011. In 2013, Pipes updated his blog after visiting several of the designated no-go zones, stating that these areas are actually mostly “unthreatening” and “routine.”**
- In January 2008, **Rt Rev Michael Nazir-Ali wrote a column in the Sunday Telegraph, warning of “no-go” areas “where adherence to this [Islamic extremism] ideology has become a mark of acceptability.” In response, the Liberal Democrat leader, Nick Clegg, said the bishop had not produced any evidence of “no-go areas” for non-Muslims, and described Nazir-Ali’s description as a “gross caricature of reality.” The Church of England bishop defended his comments in February 2008, stating, “The issue had to be raised. There are times when Christian leaders have to speak out. It’s my duty.”**
- On January 7, 2015, after the attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine in France, “[terrorism expert](#)” **Steve Emerson and Fox News host Sean Hannity discussed “no-go zones” in France. Hannity stated these zones meant “no non-Muslims, no police, no fire, their own court system.”** When then-French ambassador Gerard Araud [pushed back](#) on this claim, Emerson’s organization, the [Investigative Project on Terrorism](#), [cited](#) the French government’s “sensitive urban zones” list as his evidence. This list [includes](#) areas characterized by high unemployment and poverty in need of government attention; some, but not all, have large populations of Muslims.
- In a January 10, 2015 [interview](#) with Fox News host [Jeanine Pirro](#), **Emerson again claimed that there are Muslim no-go zones across Europe and the U.S. where Sharia overrides local laws.** Emerson [said](#) that “there are actual cities like Birmingham that are totally Muslim where non-Muslims just simply don’t go in;” (at the time of the interview, Birmingham’s population [was](#) 80% non-Muslim). Emerson also **claimed that in London, there are “Muslim religious police that actually beat” people who don’t dress according to “religious Muslim attire.”**
- Emerson’s comments drew criticism and backlash, including from the **then-UK Prime Minister David Cameron, who called Emerson a “complete idiot.” Emerson issued an apology for**

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his remarks, and *Fox News* hosts **Pirro** and **Julie Banderas** both issued on-air apologies for the repeated claims about no-go zones made on the channel.

- The day after *Fox*'s apology, **then-Republican presidential candidate Bobby Jindal** **repeated the “no-go zone” myth in a CNN interview**. He stated that “non-assimilationist Muslims establish enclaves and carry out as much of Sharia law as they can without regard for the laws of the democratic countries which provided them a new home.” When pressed, he was unable to offer an example of a “no-go zone.”
- **Since 2015, *Fox News* hosts and guests have continued to propagate the myth.** In February 2017, **Tucker Carlson interviewed Ami Horowitz, a filmmaker who produced a documentary alleging a crisis of violence in Sweden because of Muslim immigration and the proliferation of “no-go zones.”** The day after the interview, President Donald Trump **suggested** in a speech that there had been a terrorist attack in Sweden the day prior, in a defense of his proposals to restrict immigration.
- The former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt called Trump's speech “misinformation and slander.” Furthermore, **a Swedish newspaper explained how Horowitz's claims are false;** lethal crime is on the decline in Sweden, there are no statistics to back up the claim that refugees or immigrants are behind crimes, and there are no dangerous no-go zones that police refuse to enter.
- In August 2017, **Carlson again gave airtime to the conspiracy theory after he interviewed Raheem Kassam**, a UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party) politician and the former editor-in-chief of *Breitbart London*. Kassam wrote a **book** about “no-go zones” across the U.S. and Western Europe.
- In January 2018, the **U.S. Ambassador to the Netherlands Peter Hoekstra apologized for remarks he had made in 2015 in which he claimed that “there are no-go zones in the Netherlands”** and that “the Islamic movement” is behind politicians' and cars being burned.
- **Anti-Muslim organizations in the U.S. also propagate the “no-go zone” myth.** The *Gatestone Institute* has **published several** articles alleging the presence of “no-go zones” in Europe. **Frank Gaffney**, the founder of the *Center for Security Policy*, **discussed** the existence of “no-go zones” in an event at the Family Research Council, an **anti-gay hate group**. Officials in President Trump's **cabinet**, such as former-national security adviser **John Bolton** and Secretary of State **Mike Pompeo**, have ties to these individuals and organizations.
- **Even though most politicians in Europe deny the existence of no-go zones, some political figures and police officers have invoked the term when discussing security issues.** In 2015, following the revelation that two of the assailants in the deadly 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris were from the Belgian suburb of Molenbeek, the Belgian Home Affairs Minister **stated** that authorities do not “have control of the situation in Molenbeek.” His statement revived **claims** that Molenbeek is a **no-go zone**.
- After two police officers were injured in a petrol bomb attack while on duty **in 2016, the French police union stated: “there are still no-go zones in France ruled by a handful of gangs of criminals.”** Following the incident, French Prime Minister Valls **denied** the existence of “no-go

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zones” in France.

- In 2018, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that there are “no-go areas” in Germany that the state must “do something about.” She echoed earlier claims by the German Police Union chief that immigration has led to a rise in dangerous “no-go zones.” However, her Interior Minister declined to provide any names of “no-go areas.”
- Research in 2018 found that one-third of the British public believe the myth that “no-go zones” exist in the U.K. Their fears, stoked by anti-Muslim and anti-immigration rhetoric, fuelled hostility towards Muslims and propelled the Brexit vote. A 2018 article in *The Independent* noted “almost half of people who voted Leave in the EU referendum” believed in the “no-go zone” myth.

Bridge Initiative Factsheet