

TOMMY ROBINSON

IMPACT: Tommy Robinson is a British anti-Muslim and anti-immigration activist. A co-founder of the racist English Defense League, Robinson believes Islam is a “disease” and Muslims are invading Europe. He has been connected to trans-national anti-Muslim activists and organizations, including PEGIDA. Robinson has had numerous criminal convictions and is currently serving time in jail.

- [Stephen Christopher Yaxley-Lennon](#), is a **British activist and a co-founder of the English Defense League (EDL)**, identified by anti-racism advocacy group, Hope Not Hate, as a [racist organization](#). He goes by the [pseudonym](#), Tommy Robinson, and has been described by Heavy as a **“right-wing anti-Islam activist,”** and an **“Islamophobic extremist,”** by Hope not Hate.
- [Robinson](#) co-founded the [EDL](#) in [Luton, England](#) in 2009. The group became **known for its street demonstrations, which often “descended into violence and racist and Islamophobic chanting.”** In 2010, supporters [chanted](#) “Allah is a paedo” and **attacked police at an EDL rally** in the town of Stoke-On-Trent. Elsewhere, **EDL supporters have shouted racist slurs and been caught on camera chanting: “Burn the mosque!”** Demonstrators at EDL rallies have been [recorded giving Nazi salutes](#). In 2010, the Guardian [revealed](#) the group planned to “hit racially sensitive areas in attempt to provoke disorder over summer.” In August 2010, the group held a [demonstration](#) in Bradford involving hundreds of “far-right activists” who threw “bricks, bottles and smoke bombs,” and fought with the police.
- In **October 2013, Robinson announced his departure from the EDL** at a [press conference](#) **alongside the controversial “counter-extremism” think-tank, Quilliam**. He told the [BBC](#), “Whilst I want to lead the revolution against Islamist ideology, I don’t want to lead the revolution against Muslims.” **Robinson later claimed that Quilliam paid him to leave the EDL** in a “deal the anti-extremism think-tank coordinated so they could take ‘credit’ for his resignation.”
- In a 2013 [interview](#), Robinson revealed that **he was a former member (2004) of the British National Party (BNP), a far-right, racist, and anti-immigrant party**, [stating](#) “I was looking for a way out, I was looking for somebody to be addressing this Islamic extremist problem.”
- In 2013, **Robinson endorsed the UK Independence Party (UKIP) arguing: “They are saying exactly what we say, just in a different way.”** Members of the party have [stated](#), “Islam is a cancer that needs eradicating ... clear them all off to the desert,” have labeled Muslims [“evil,”](#) and [pledged](#) to ban the full-face veil and outlaw [Sharia](#) law. The party’s former leader, Nigel Farage, called British Muslims a [“fifth column.”](#)
- In **2015, Robinson became involved with the development of the UK chapter of PEGIDA**, which stands for Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the Occident, a **German-based far-right and anti-Muslim movement**. Robinson **claimed to be working with nationalist groups across Europe to counter the “Islamification of our countries.”** In 2015, he [spoke](#) at a PEGIDA launch in the Netherlands and told the crowd to “all stand together” to fight [Islamification](#). In 2015, he [spoke](#) to 40,000 individuals at a PEGIDA rally in Germany, [stating](#), “this current immigration is an invasion. Our borders are being overrun... A country that cannot control its borders will soon not be a country.”
- Robinson has [described](#) Islam as a **“disease”** and a **“threat to our way of life.”** In 2016 he [stated](#), **“I’m not far-right... I’m just opposed to Islam. I believe it’s backward and it’s fascist.”** He also [claimed](#), **“The current refugee crisis is nothing to do with refugees. It’s a Muslim invasion of Europe.”** [Robinson](#) has [described](#) the Prophet Muhammad as a “paedophile,” and [threatened](#) to subject **British Muslim communities to “the full force of the EDL.”** While addressing an EDL audience in 2011, Robinson [stated](#) that “every single Muslim” in the UK had “got away with” the [7/7 bombings](#), holding all Muslims responsible for the violent actions carried out by a group of individuals. He [referred](#) to the English city of Birmingham as the “terrorist epicenter of Britain.”
- Robinson has [called for a ban on “Muslim immigration,”](#) and [claimed](#) migrants entering Europe are “harassing women, they’re raping women, they’re culturally and ideologically, not going to assimilate.” The Guardian [reported](#) that in January 2016, Robinson [tweeted](#): “I’d personally send every adult male Muslim that has come into the EU over the past 12 months back tomorrow if I could. Fake refugees.”
- Robinson has [written for the Canadian far-right media organization, Rebel Media](#). On the organization’s website, **Robinson is listed as a Shillman Fellow**. The [fellowship](#) is run through the anti-Muslim organization, [David Horowitz](#)

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[Freedom Center](#), and is funded by tech billionaire [Robert Shillman](#).

- Matt Collins, head researcher at Hope Not Hate, [stated](#) that **Robinson “was one of the main drivers of anti-Muslim sentiment in this country [UK].** He masqueraded as a journalist, an author and an expert on Islam and he is none of these things.”
- The wife of the [Darren Osborne](#), the man who carried out the Finsbury Park mosque attack, [stated](#) that in the weeks leading up to the attack, Osborne was “brainwashed” and had “been watching a lot of Tommy Robinson stuff on the internet.”
- Robinson has been **associated with anti-Muslim activists Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer, both of whom were banned from the UK in 2013.** Geller voiced her support for Robinson’s departure from the EDL, stating, “his time is better spent working for the defense of England and human rights against Sharia and Islamization in different and more effective ways.” It was [suspected](#) that Robinson, along with Geller and Spencer, would form a new organization [based](#) on Geller’s “Stop Islamization of Nations.” After learning that Robinson “was [allied](#) with the Quilliam Foundation,” whom Geller and Spencer considered “false moderate Muslim deceivers,” they withdrew their support for Robinson and [stated](#) he was “no longer on the board of SION.”
- Robinson has been arrested and jailed numerous times in England. In 2005, he was [jailed](#) for assaulting a police officer. In January 2013, he was jailed for [10 months](#) after “admitting to using someone else’s passport to unlawfully travel to the United States.” In January 2014, he was sentenced to [18 months](#) for mortgage fraud.
- On **May 25, 2018 Robinson was arrested “after broadcasting an hour-long video over Facebook from outside Leeds crown court. In the video he made comments that risked causing a trial to collapse.”** As Robinson’s case went viral online, the New York Times [reported](#) that the **US-based Middle East Forum (MEF) “posted articles that portrayed him as a martyr for free speech,” and right-wing media joined in,** including “Fox News’s Tucker Carlson — who declared that freedom of speech was ‘dying’ in Britain.” On May 29, 2018, Robinson was jailed for [13 months](#) for contempt of court.
- In **June 2018, far-right activists, neo-Nazis, and others organized to call for his release.** Robinson’s supporters organized a [demonstration](#) at Trafalgar Square in London on June 9, 2018. The **demonstration consisted of 15,000 protesters and turned violent.** A Guardian [article](#) reported that “protesters hurled bottles, metal barriers and other objects at police lines.” In response, a letter sent to the Guardian from a **group of British parliamentarians, union leaders, and Political activists stated that “the racist right are using Robinson to reorganize,” and noted that “Nazi salutes and Islamophobia” were present during the protest.** Calls for his release came from Dutch anti-Islam politician [Geert Wilders](#), along with supporters from the [United States](#) and [Australia](#).
- [Described](#) by the Center for American Progress as a “**far-right think-thank...known for its anti-Islam views,**” the **MEF claimed to have “provided all the funding and helped organized” the violent June 9th “Free Tommy” rally.** The group funded Robinson’s legal defense and organized another [rally](#) in his defense held on July 14, 2018. In 2019, [Daniel Pipes](#), MEF’s president, confirmed to The Times of Israel that his group has spent roughly [\\$60,000 on three demonstrations defending Robinson’s legal trial.](#)
- Robinson was **banned from Twitter in 2018 after having breached its “hateful conduct” policy.** Prior to this, Robinson’s account had been temporarily suspended several times. At the time he was blocked, Robinson’s account had about 413,000 followers. In February 2019, the Guardian [reported](#) that **Robinson had been “permanently banned from Facebook and Instagram** for repeatedly breaking policies on hate speech.” In April 2019, Robinson was [banned](#) from Snapchat. Additionally, in April 2019, [Youtube](#) “placed his [Robinson’s] videos under restrictions aiming to limit their spread.”
- In October 2018, a [video](#) was posted on social media showing schoolchildren harass and violently assault Jamal Hijazi, a 15 year old Syrian schoolboy in Huddersfield, England. As the video went viral, **Robinson put out two videos of his own claiming that Hijazi was “not innocent” and accused him of attacking “young English girls in his school.”** Hijazi’s lawyer [stated](#) that Robinson’s videos on social media “turned Jamal into the aggressor, and the bully into a righteous white knight,” [and](#) that **Robinson “tried to use Jamal’s case as a platform for one of his anti-Muslim rants.”** In 2021, **Hijazi sued Robinson for libel, seeking up to £190,000 in damages.** During the trial, Robinson [declared](#) himself bankrupt. In closing statements of the trial, Hijazi’s lawyer [noted](#) that “We do rely on the defendant’s [Tommy Robinson]

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agenda, which we say is an anti-Muslim one, which is why he waded into this ... Jamal was the victim of that.” Robinson defended himself at the trial and maintained that his comments were substantially true. In July 2021, Robinson lost the case and the judge ordered him to pay £100,000 in libel damages to Hijazi.

- In March 2021, the Independent called into question Robinson’s bankruptcy claims given he’d received “hundreds of thousands of pounds in donations and funding.” The report found that in little over two months in 2018 he “received almost £425,000 in donations from his supporters.” **A video producer who previously worked for Robinson told the Independent he “witnessed the transfer of large sums from a crowdfunding page into the activist’s [Robinson] business account.”** He once asked Robinson about what the withdrawal of £33,000 in donations was being used for, to which Robinson reportedly responded “mates I’ve got to pay back” for “seshes”. **The video producer told the Independent: “We realised that he was withdrawing huge amounts of [donations] in cash from a business bank account, and just giving it to his friends who were selling him coke and who he owed for nights out.”**
- In April 2021, a New York Times piece noted that “few fringe figures have enjoyed more cross-national appeal than Tommy Robinson.” **Interviews and newly released documents from a court case showed that MEF provided Robinson with “financial backing for three years, using cash from an American tech billionaire [Robert Shillman] and Trump donor,** while its president helped shape his message.” The 2021 NYT article found that money from American-based organization “is apparently drying up” and now **Robinson is turning to Moscow. It found that he had gone on a media tour of Russia last year, which was also a trip to “seek accounts with Russian banks.”**
- One of Robinson’s supporters includes Danish politician, Morten Messerschmidt, the leader of the Danish People’s Party (DPP), which has a history of racism and anti-Muslim bigotry. In April 2024, Robinson’s documentary, Silenced, was launched in the Danish Parliament in Copenhagen, at an event organized by DPP.
- In April 2021, the Guardian reported that **MEF had also tried to unsuccessfully enlist the help of Senator Ted Cruz as well as other right-wing figures, to secure a U.S. visa for Robinson.** Court documents revealed that Robinson “discussed moving his family to Texas in 2019, where he would earn money by speaking at venues ‘including evangelical churches.’”
- An April 2021 piece in the New York Times interviewed Caolan Robertson who produced videos for a number of far-right youtubers, including Robinson. Robertson revealed that **a 2018 video, which was viewed over 2.8 million times, posted by Robinson claiming he had been attacked by an African migrant in Rome, was manufactured and misrepresented what actually happened.** The video producer said, “We would choose the most dramatic moment — or fake it and make it look more dramatic.” The NYT reviewed the raw footage and noted that the “YouTube video was edited to give the false impression that Mr. Robinson was threatened. The full footage shows he was the aggressor.”
- In July 2022, a three-year inquiry into the Telford child abuse scandal was released, revealing more than 1000 victims who were sexually exploited by a group of Pakistani men over the span of 30 years in Telford, England. In response to the scandal, Robinson organized a protest, that gathered around 1500 people, in Telford where he launched “The Rape of Britain: Survivor Stories”, his documentary about “Muslim grooming gangs.” Over the next few months after the Telford protest, Robinson published three more films to which critics have accused of being a money-making tactic. According to Nick Lowles, Robinson was accused by Hope not Hate of exploiting child abuse and sexual violence to spread his own anti-Muslim agenda.
- **Robinson has repeatedly advanced the “Muslim grooming gangs” trope, claiming that Muslim men in Britain are grooming and sexually abusing white girls in the country. This trope has been advanced by a number of far-right figures as well as mainstream media. A 2020 journal article by Dr. Ella Cockbain and Dr. Waqas Tufail found that this dominant narrative is “misleading, sensationalist and has in itself promoted a number of harms,” and that “claims of how Muslim culture and faith supposedly perpetuate sexual abuse have helped collectively demonise British Muslim communities.”** Additionally, a 2020 report from the UK Home Office debunked the “Muslim grooming gangs” claim, noting that research found that “group-based offenders are most commonly White”.
- In June 2024, Robinson organized a protest where his supporters were heard shouting Islamophobic chants, such as “who the f*** is Allah”, “this is London, not Londonistan”, and other hateful slogans.
- In July 2024, Robinson spoke at a demonstration he organized where he screened his documentary, against court orders. The documentary repeated false accusations he made about a Syrian refugee in 2021 that led to him losing a court case. A few days

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later, Robinson fled abroad, evading court hearings over showing the banned documentary.

- On July 29 2024, there was a stabbing attack in Southport, England that resulted in the deaths of three young girls. Following the attack, police did not reveal the identity of the suspect. In the hours after the attack, there was an uptick in the spread of misinformation on social media regarding the identity of the suspect. Social media users spread false claims about the perpetrator being a Muslim asylum seeker. In an effort to dispel the misinformation online, authorities released the identity of the perpetrator, noting that it was a 17-year-old Christian male from Cardiff, Wales. Despite this, misinformation continued to spread and right-wing voices online amplified anti-Muslim bigotry. **One of these voices was Robinsons, who while abroad, played a leading role in spreading false information about the attack. On X, Robinson ran commentary and videos documenting the riots, and argued that the rioters had “legitimate concerns” and called for “mass deportations”.** In response to the Southport attack, anti-Muslim mobs descended on the town and attacked the Southport mosque. Worshippers inside the mosque were locked in while the mosque was firebombed. For a week after the attack, the UK experienced dozens of anti-Muslim riots across the country, targeting Muslim homes, mosques, and Muslim-owned businesses. Rioters also targeted a hotel housing asylum seekers and attempted to set it on fire while also vandalizing the building as they chanted “get them out”.
- A spokesperson for Hope not Hate said that following the stabbing attack, “Tommy Robinson was regularly tweeting calling Islam a mental health issue, sharing videos of disorder and encouraging to join future demonstrations. One said: ‘Get there and show your support. People need to rise up.’” Robinson’s anti-Muslim commentary also included claims of “innocent English people being hunted down” and “our women are not halal meat.”
- In response to Robinson spreading anti-Muslim disinformation on social media, Sabby Dhalu, co-convenor of Stand up to Racism, said “Tommy Robinson is deliberately stoking up racism and Islamophobia, whilst on the run. It’s no accident that the riots took place days after Robinson mobilized 15,000 in Trafalgar Square last week. Fascists are emboldened”.
- This was not the first time that Robinson played a role in inciting violence through his anti-Muslim and xenophobic commentary. On June 19, 2017, Darren Osborne targeted Muslim worshipers at a mosque in Finsbury Park, London, when he deliberately drove a van into a group of Muslims who had just taken part in Ramadan night prayers. The attack resulted in the death of 51-year-old Makram Ali and left 11 others injured. On June 23 2017, Osborne was charged with terrorism-related murder and attempted murder. In early February 2018, he was found guilty of both charges and sentenced to life imprisonment.
- **During his trial, it was revealed that a few weeks prior to the attack, Osborne was heavily “brainwashed” after watching a drama about the Rochdale grooming sex scandal and becoming radicalized after reading posts by Tommy Robinson. A month before the attack, Osborne’s partner said he “binged on social media postings by Robinson and members of Britain First”.** Commander Dean Haydon of Scotland Yard’s counter-terrorism command said that Osborne’s quick descent into developing a terrorist intent to kill was influenced by online content from Robinson: “It is out there, people can access it and – as we’ve seen in this case – it certainly affected Osborne in the way it did and certainly played a key part in his radicalisation.”
- Osborne began following Robinson on social media two weeks before his attack. During this period, Robinson sent him a group email saying: “There is a nation within a nation forming beneath the surface of the UK. It is a nation built on hatred, on violence and on Islam.” Other emails sent by Robinson to his listserv, included those claiming that “It has now been left to us, the ordinary people of the United Kingdom, to stand up to hate, to unite and in one voice say ‘no more.’” Another email said: “Dear Darren, you know about the terrible crimes committed against [name redacted] of Sunderland,” it read. “Police let the suspects go... why? Is it because the suspects are refugees from Syria and Iraq?”
- **Nick Lowles, chief executive of Hope Not Hate, said the Finsbury Park attack clearly emphasized the role of far-right figures and media in “propelling anti-Muslim hatred into the mainstream”.** Lowles further added: “We have long argued that the authorities have not properly understood the nature of anti-Muslim extremism and rhetoric and the potential impact it can have on the Darren Osbornes of this world”
- After being banned from multiple social media platforms, **Robinson has migrated to using Telegram where he has a significant online following.** According to a piece in The Wired, much of the organization of the recent far-right violence has

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taken place in Telegram, which has low oversight in terms of the content being shared. Since the riots, Telegram has taken measures to ban false information and posts that call for violence.

- While previously banned from X (formerly Twitter) for breaching its policies concerning hateful conduct, **under Elon Musk, Robinson, along with other far-right voices, was welcomed back.** According to Dr. Mark Owen Jones, an Associate Professor of digital humanities at Northwestern University in Qatar, X now has become a disinformation delivery system where spread of misinformation has been targeting the UK. Rather than acknowledging the lack of X's oversight, Musk seems to be encouraging the far-right movement, even stating that "civil war is inevitable".
- Robinson has published an autobiography, Enemy of the State, and co-authored Mohammed's Koran: Why Muslims Kill for Islam.

Bridge Initiative Factsheet