



The Far-Right's Love Affair with Islamophobia

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Abstract

Anti-Muslim racism is increasingly becoming a prominent feature of far-right extremist groups and political figures across Europe and North America. This article examines the growth of Islamophobic discourse and actions among far-right political figures and street protest movements in Europe, focusing on the UK, France, and the Netherlands, as well as in North America, particularly Canada and the US. This paper will demonstrate that anti-Muslim racism, over other forms of racism, is increasingly defining the policies of these political elites, and occupies the foremost area of concern for these protest movements. This form of ‘Othering’ through racial and political posturing can have potentially devastating implications for Muslims living in Western nations and can result in such things as targeted legislation, hate crimes, and social marginalization.

Introduction¹

Anti-Muslim bias and hatred dates back to the inception of the Islamic faith in the Arabian Peninsula. When Islam was confined to the city of Makkah, it was opposed by the ruling elite, the Quraysh. As Islam expanded beyond the borders of Makkah, it was opposed by a number of tribes within Madinah and beyond. When Islam grew into an imperial superpower, it was confronted by European Christendom, among other rival empires. Throughout the period of colonialism and thereafter, the Orientalist gaze became prominent in the works of European academics, chroniclers, writers, and artists,² and arguably continues to persist through variant manifestations.³ Much of the anti-Muslim racism and bias in the present context has been referred to by some as Islamophobia. According to Allen Islamophobia is an

ideology similar in theory, function and purpose to racism and other similar phenomena, that sustains and perpetuates negatively evaluated meaning

¹ Sections of this paper were originally published in the *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook 2019*.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (New York: Vintage Books 1979).

³ Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the politics of empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books 2012).

*about Muslims and Islam in the contemporary setting in similar ways to that which it has historically...that inform and construct thinking about Muslims and Islam as Other. Neither restricted to explicit nor direct relationships of power and domination but instead, and possibly even more importantly, in the less explicit and everyday relationships of power that we contemporarily encounter, identified both in that which is real and that which is clearly not.*⁴

This type of ‘Othering’ of Muslims has increasingly become a focal point of far-right extremist movements in Europe and North America. This paper discusses how these extremist groups have become increasingly vocal against Islam. In many cases, they have defined themselves exclusively in opposition to Islam and Muslims. This paper examines the growth of Islamophobic rhetoric and actions among far-right political figures and street protest movements in Europe, focusing on the UK, France, and Netherlands, as well as North America, particularly Canada and the US. This paper will demonstrate that anti-Muslim racism, over other forms of racism, is increasingly defining the policies of these political elites, as well as occupying the foremost area of trepidation for these protest movements. That is not to say that anti-Muslim racism has become the sole concern of the far right, but rather that it is increasingly becoming a focal point for these individuals and groups. Islamophobic attitudes exist across the political spectrum; however, far-right manifestations of Islamophobia have become more overt, emboldened, and popularized through political rhetoric. As anti-Muslim discrimination is a growing phenomenon in European and North American societies,⁵ these far-right anti-Muslim movements and political figures develop a broader appeal, thus further legitimizing anti-Muslim racism in the public discourse, while seemingly normalizing far-right protest movements and anti-Muslim bigotry in the political sphere.

The terms anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia are used synonymously in this paper. Some may argue that the term anti-Muslim racism is preferable, to avoid

⁴ Chris Allen, *Islamophobia* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing 2010), 190.

⁵ Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims are coming: Islamophobia, extremism, and the domestic War on Terror* (New York: Verso 2014).

shielding 'Islam' from direct criticism. However, in the current climate, racist treatment towards Muslims is rarely separated from attacks on Islam. In other words, Muslims have become targets because they identify with Islam.⁶ As such, these terms are used interchangeably in this paper.

Far-right Extremist Views in the West

Far-right political parties in European and North American societies are not a new phenomenon. As Golder notes, far-right parties have formed coalition governments in Finland, Austria, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, as well as other European nations. However, the surge of popularity of far-right views, particularly within Western politics, over the past decade has brought about some cause for concern.⁷ According to Golder, the fastest growing party family in Europe is the far-right party family. In other words, far-right political parties are the fastest growing type of political affiliation in Europe. A similar trend is seen in the North American context with conservative and far-right politicians gaining prominence in Canada and the US.

Far-right ideologies, particularly in the realm of politics, have increasingly been defined along the lines of radicalism, extremism, populism, and nationalism. These terms are contested and have been defined in various ways across the Global North. For the purposes of this paper, 'radical' refers to views that are anti-establishment, or challenging to the 'system.' 'Extremist' views are those that oppose democratic processes altogether.⁸ The notion of 'populism' asserts that society is divided into two camps, the 'pure people' and 'the corrupt elite.'⁹ Here, the 'pure people' are an imagined group¹⁰ that possess characteristics and qualities that represent the masses, whereas the 'corrupt elite' include establishment political figures, media personalities, and intellectuals, who celebrate liberal

⁶ It is worth noting that Sikhs and other minority communities that 'appear' to be Muslim can also be victims of Islamophobia. Again, this type of behavior is directed at its victims because of a perceived association with Islam.

⁷ Matt Golder, 'Far right parties in Europe,' *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 19, 2016, 477-497.

⁸ Golder, 'Far right parties in Europe,' 477-497.

⁹ Cas Mudde, 'The populist zeitgeist', *Government Opposition*, vol. 39, 2004, 541-563.

¹⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso 1991).

values, internationalism, and multiculturalism. Furthermore, populism can be exclusionary, marginalizing cultural, religious, and ethnic minorities,¹¹ as these groups do not possess the imagined qualities of the 'people.' 'Nationalism' is a term in politics that denotes a strong relationship between the state and nation.¹² Nationalism can manifest in various forms. For example, civic nationalism, though manifesting differently in various contexts, generally promotes the idea of a homogeneous state in which people choose to be citizens through accepting common values and cultural practices. In contrast, ethnic nationalism asserts that one's belongingness to a nation is dependent upon one's ethnic origins and is therefore exclusionary in nature.

The growth of far-right ideologies in Europe and North America

For the sake of brevity, I have limited my discussion of far-right movements in Europe to the UK, France, and the Netherlands. That is not to say that other European nations have not also seen a growth of far-right anti-Muslim movements. Far-right movements have also become increasingly popular in Germany, Finland, Norway, Greece, Switzerland, and other nations.¹³ Furthermore, Todd Green notes that extreme right-wing Islamophobic parties constitute the second- or third-largest parties in the parliaments of Norway and Denmark and have the largest representation in the Swiss parliament.¹⁴ When examining the growth of far-right views in Europe, it is clear that it was through far-right anti-Muslim rhetoric that Brexit was promoted in the UK.

UK. The UK referendum to leave the European Union (EU), commonly referred to as 'Brexit,' was predominantly supported by far-right groups and politicians, and garnered almost fifty-two percent support amongst the UK population. It is important to note that Brexit was not solely caused by far-right groups and

¹¹ Golder, 'Far right parties in Europe,' 477-497.

¹² Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2007).

¹³ Ulrike Vieten and Scott Poynting, 'Contemporary far right racist populism in Europe,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 37, no. 6, 2016, 533-540.

¹⁴ Todd Green, *Fear of Islam: An introduction to Islamophobia in the West* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2015).

politicians. Rather, Brexit was symptomatic of racist attitudes already existent in British society that have been spurred on by both liberal and right-wing political figures. Political actors across the spectrum have for years promoted policies that facilitated “manufacturing the social and political conditions for this momentous decision. While Brexit added an accelerant on those conditions and allowed racism to flourish, it did not create them.”¹⁵ Brexit simply brought to light the racist and anti-Muslim attitudes that had been festering in the British public consciousness for decades. The overtly racist rhetoric employed by far-right political figures and activists served to galvanize the movement to leave the EU.

One of the most prominent images employed in the campaign to leave the EU was a poster featuring swathes of refugees, seemingly lined up at the gates of the UK borders. With implicit reference to the refugee crisis stemming from the ongoing war in Syria and Iraq, these concerns were clearly targeted towards fears of an influx of the Muslim ‘Other.’ In bright red letters, the poster stated ‘BREAKING POINT,’ suggesting that these dark-skinned ‘Others’ were poised to invade the UK, catalyzing the erosion of the white English majoritarian culture. The poster’s subheadings suggested that this perceived tidal wave of refugees was brought on by the failings of the EU and that the only way to regain control of the borders would be through Brexit. Though these claims were fictitious and unsubstantiated, they drew heavily from the type of rhetoric commonly employed by far-right groups in the UK, particularly those of the English Defence League (EDL), promoting the notion that English culture and identity was under attack by an antithetical Muslim ‘Other.’

¹⁵ Satnam Virdee & Brendan McGeever, ‘Racism, Crisis, Brexit,’ *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol 41, no. 10, 2018, p. 1812.

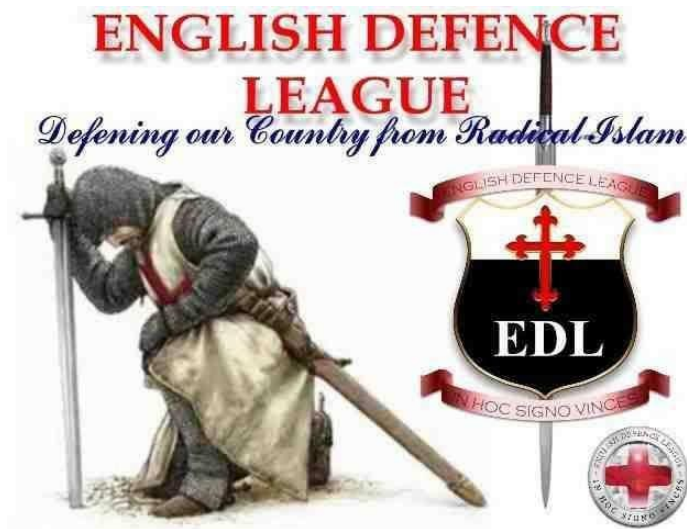


The EDL was formed in 2009 in response to protests against British soldiers returning from Afghanistan that were organized by the British-based radical Islamic group Al-Muhajiroun.¹⁶ The EDL is an Islamophobic street protest movement aimed at preserving UK identity and culture. It is one of the more extreme far-right movements in the UK. Finding popular support among a number of football hooligans, the EDL has increasingly gained mainstream credibility, despite its outlandish claims that Islam is threatening British civilization. One of the central beliefs amongst members of the EDL is that Muslims are culturally subsuming the UK through a massive influx of immigration and that the political elite are going to great lengths to cover this up. It is, therefore, not surprising that a number of its members vastly overestimate the Muslim population of the UK.¹⁷ EDL members allege that unless there are major political and/or legislative reforms, the ongoing Islamization of the UK will eventually reach a point at which Muslims will forcefully impose Islamic law and beliefs on their 'host' society through political pressure or violence. The EDL, like many other far-right movements around the world, incorporates imagery of anti-Muslim militancy and

¹⁶ Kevin Braouezec, 'Identifying common patterns of discourse and strategy among the new extremist movements in Europe: The Case of the English Defence League and the Bloc Identitaire,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 37, no. 6, 2016, 637-648.

¹⁷ Ibid.

nostalgia for the Middle Ages, particularly the Crusades, in their messaging and advertisements.¹⁸



This type of imagery is intentional as one of their central tenets involves combating what they perceive as “radical Islamic ideologies,” which they rarely, if ever, distinguish from orthodox Islamic practice and beliefs. The above EDL advertisement, despite misspelling ‘defending,’ reinforces the notion of the ‘nationalist subject.’¹⁹ The nationalist subject is a fallacious conception of citizenship that presumes that members of the majority group in society maintain certain core values, beliefs, and traits that embody the true essence of the nation. People who conceive of themselves as nationalist subjects believe that they are entitled to determine who does and does not belong in society. Furthermore, they are entitled and empowered to expel ‘Others’ who do not belong. In other words, the EDL feels empowered to determine the values, identity, and culture of the nation, as well as to identify the elements, groups, and individuals they see as contaminating it. These views are similar to those expressed by a number of far-right movements in France.

¹⁸ Andrew Elliot, ‘A vile love affair: Right wing nationalism and the middle ages,’ February 14, available on *The Public Medievalist* at <https://www.publicmedievalist.com/vile-love-affair/> (viewed 21 December 2017).

¹⁹ Ghassan Hage, *White nation: Fantasies of white supremacy in a multicultural society* (New York: Routledge 2000).

France. While the UK has traditionally promoted a multiculturalist social cohesion model of integration, France has had a stronger assimilationist approach to the integration of immigrant populations.²⁰ This has manifested in a number of state policies that have limited the display of religious practice and attire in the public sphere. Such policies include a ban on the *hijab* in public schools in 2004 and the *niqab* in 2010, as well as an attempted ban on the *burkini*, a full-body swimsuit worn by some Muslim women, in a number of French municipalities in 2016. More recently, public debate over the *hijab* and its disjunction from French culture and society aroused controversy in the private sector, as Decathlon, Europe's largest sports retailer, halted its plans to sell a sports *hijab* because of growing criticism and scrutiny from French politicians.²¹ This trajectory towards eliminating visual signifiers of Muslimness from French society are thinly veiled attempts to control the Muslim female subject under the guise of promoting liberty, freedom, and the state policy of *laïcité*. *Laïcité*, or French secularism as I will term it, can be understood as a political system in which there is a strict separation between religion and the state on matters of public policy.²² *Laïcité* has traditionally been formulated as a separation of Catholicism from the state. In more contemporary times it has been used as a tool to police Muslims in French society. As Selby notes, "[i]f during the first half of the twentieth century the separation of church and state was intended to displace Catholicism, in recent decades Islam has been increasingly depicted as the new challenge for French secularism."²³ Within France this dates back to the post-war era in the 1940-1960s when there was a large increase in Muslim immigrants arriving from North Africa as unskilled laborers. The consistent growth of Muslim migrants over the decades sparked tensions as state discourse framed Muslims as a threat to French culture and society. This was apparent in the Stasi Commission Report, published by the French government in 2003, which examined the application of secularist

²⁰ Braouezec, 'Identifying common patterns of discourse and strategy among the new extremist movements in Europe.'

²¹ Elian Peltier and Aurelien Breeden, 'A sports hijab has France debating the Muslim veil, again', February 28, 2019, *The New York Times*. Retrieved March 3, 2019, from The New York Times Website: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/world/europe/france-sports-hijab-decathlon.html>

²² Charles Taylor, *The age of secularism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2007).

²³ Jennifer Selby, 'French secularism as a 'guarantor' of women's rights? Muslim women and gender politics in a Parisian banlieue,' *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2011, 441-462 (442).

principles in France. The report emphasized *laïcité* as a fundamental pillar of French society and essential for national unity and cohesion. However, the Stasi Commission Report positioned “Islam as overly ‘political’ and ‘patriarchal’ and describe[d] Muslim women as ‘oppressed’ by their religious tradition.”²⁴ Additionally, the report associated Islam with polygamy, genital mutilation, and forced marriages.²⁵ This report led to the French government passing a law banning conspicuous religious symbols in public schools in 2004. The majority of cases in which the law was applied involved Muslim women wearing the headscarf.²⁶ Hence, Muslims have become the direct targets of French secularism in contemporary times through discourses of ‘liberating’ Muslim women from their ‘oppressive’ religious beliefs and practices. This historic legacy of racism and limiting of religious and cultural expression in the public sphere has fostered an atmosphere in France in which political parties can openly target minority communities by claiming they are threatening French culture and identity. One such organization is the Front National.

The Front National has long been perceived as a far-right political party with openly anti-immigration, anti-Semitic, and anti-Muslim views. Founded in the 1970s and composed of neo-fascists and opponents of decolonization, it was perceived as a fringe party at its inception. However, in the 2017 French election, the Front National, led by Marine Le Pen, the daughter of party founder, Jean-Marie Le Pen, found herself in a runoff election against Emmanuel Macron, ultimately losing by a reasonable margin. That a far-right party like the Front National was able to gain enough support to make it to a runoff election vote in France was considered shocking at the time. Le Pen has openly advocated a ban on all religious attire in the public space; has claimed that she would put a halt to all immigration in France; has denied France’s role in the Vel d’Hiv Roundup in which French police mass arrested 13,000 Jews to send to Auschwitz;²⁷ and has

²⁴ Selby, ‘French secularism as a ‘guarantor’ of women’s rights?’, 445.

²⁵ Stasi Commission, *Stasi Commission Report* (Paris: Gouvernement du France 2003).

²⁶ Alia Al-Saji, ‘The racialization of Muslim Veils: A philosophical analysis,’ *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 36, no. 8, 2010, 875-902.

²⁷ Ethan Katz, ‘How Marine Le Pen relies on dividing French Jews and Muslims,’ April 19 2017. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved October 23, 2017, from The Atlantic Website:

likened Muslims' observance of prayers in France to the Nazi occupation.²⁸ Yet, in the 2017 French election, Le Pen's Front National still managed to obtain thirty-four percent support from French voters. Far-right anti-Muslim extremist views have also become increasingly popular amongst street protest movements in France. Once such movement is the Bloc Identitaire.

The Bloc Identitaire was created in 2003 and "describes itself as very attached to the defence of national and regional identities and also the common values shared by the European 'civilisation' to whom they claim to belong."²⁹ Therefore, the Bloc is even more exclusionary than the EDL and is composed exclusively of white nationalists. Like the EDL, the Bloc invokes the idea of returning to a 'golden age,' which, though not clearly defined, is presumably a time predating the arrival of large immigrant communities in France, particularly Muslims. This 'golden age' has been succeeded by a civilization on the verge of collapse because of immigrant populations. Deflecting accusations of being a racist organization, the Bloc relies on the notion of white victimhood, claiming that they are at the forefront of protecting France's national heritage. A number of its members have blamed Muslim populations for increased crime rates in France and, through online mediums, have advocated violence toward and murder of Muslims and other immigrant populations.³⁰ In the Netherlands, vitriolic hate speech is not only common amongst street protest movements, but most loudly proclaimed by political figures who have dramatically risen in popularity.

The Netherlands. Undeniably, one of the most outspoken racist and Islamophobic European politicians is Geert Wilders, the founder and leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. Wilders' anti-Muslim hatred was most prominent in a short film that he produced called *Fitna* (2008), which explicitly

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/04/marine-le-pen-national-front-jews-muslims/523302/> (viewed 24 December 2017).

²⁸ David Patrikarakos, 'Marine Le Pen's surprise voters,' January 23 2017. *Politico* Retrieved October 23, 2017, from Politico Website:

<http://www.politico.eu/article/marine-le-pen-surprise-muslim-islam-supporters-national-front-banlieues/> (viewed December 24, 2017).

²⁹ Braouezec, 'Identifying common patterns of discourse and strategy among the new extremist movements in Europe,' 639.

³⁰ Ibid.

linked texts from the Qur'an with violence and terrorism. Wilders was eventually charged with hate speech under Dutch law in 2009 for the film but was later acquitted. The media frenzy surrounding the trial served to bolster his reputation as a staunch defender of European values and culture in face of the tidal wave of Islamization confronting Europe. In the 2017 Dutch election, almost half of his one-page election manifesto was committed to the de-Islamization of the Netherlands. A part of his political platform included closing all mosques and Islamic religious schools, drastically changing immigration policies, and banning the Qur'an.³¹ Furthermore, had he won the election, Wilders would have imposed a 'head rag' tax on Muslim women who wear the *hijab* and was willing to pay settled Muslims to leave the Netherlands.³² Though Wilders lost the 2017 Dutch election, one cannot deny the impact that he has had on the Dutch political landscape. Seen as a fringe minority party in 2006, Wilders' PVV party became the third-largest party in parliament in the 2010 Dutch election. Furthermore, Wilders's fiery populist rhetoric has pushed the country's political discourse further to the right. This has helped spawn the popularity of other far-right and centre-right political parties, such as the Forum for Democracy (PvD) who advocate similar views as Wilders, but have taken a more sanitized approach to their anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim attitudes and rhetoric.³³ Presumably, figures like Wilders have also fueled the growth of far-right populist groups, like Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA), a racist anti-Muslim group based in Germany, which was inaugurated in the Netherlands in 2015. Far-right views and politics have also grown substantially in Canada and the US.

Canada. Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens have done an extensive study on the growth of far-right extremist groups across Canada and found that there are no fewer than 100 far-right extremist groups in Canada.³⁴ These groups vary in size,

³¹ Cas Mudde, *Populist radical right parties in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2007).

³² Stephanie Marsh, "This is exactly what he wants": How Geert Wilders won by losing,' March 16 2017, from *The Atlantic* Website: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/03/geert-wilders-won-by-losing-netherlands-vote/519834/> (viewed October 23, 2017)

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens, 'Uneasy alliances: A look at the right-wing extremist movement in Canada,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, vol. 39, no. 9, 2016, 819-841.

ranging from three members to a few dozen. However, some groups have an exceptionally large following. One group, based out of Quebec called 'La Meute' (the Wolf Pack) has over 40,000 followers on Facebook.³⁵

Like far-right groups in Europe, La Meute specifically has grievances with Muslims and the Islamic faith, and perceive them as threats to Quebecois culture and identity. Ultimately, members of this organization fear Islamization and believe that Muslims living in Canada want to impose *sharia*. Therefore, the group openly advocates for the banning of *halal* food and are critical of Canadian multiculturalism policies. The growth of far-right extremist groups in Canada has been particularly concerning as the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) has noted that the threat of far-right and white supremacist ideologies outweighs radical Muslim religious ideologies with regards to national security.³⁶

Far-right extremist groups in Canada are overwhelmingly white supremacist in nature. These groups tend to be transitory and unorganized, but have been on the rise over the past two decades.³⁷ They target a number of minority groups particularly Muslims, Jews, and First Nations communities. Much of the anti-Muslim racism espoused by far-right groups in Canada is seen increasingly on online platforms. A study commissioned by the Canadian Broadcasting Company (CBC) suggests that the frequency of language that is Islamophobic, sexist, racist, or xenophobic has increased by 600% from 2015 to 2016. The same study found that language expressing far-right and white supremacist views increased by 300%, while anti-Muslim language online increased by 200% in Canada during this period.³⁸ The proliferation of far-right views and ideas online may be helpful in understanding the growth of far-right and anti-Muslim views in Canadian politics.

³⁵ Jonathan Montpetit, 'Inside Quebec's far right,' December 14 2016, from CBC Website: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-far-right-la-meute-1.3876225> (viewed 12 October 2017)

³⁶ Alex Boutilier, 'CSIS highlights white supremacist threat ahead of radical Islam,' March 15 2015, from The Toronto Star Website: <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2015/03/15/csis-highlights-white-supremacist-threat-ahead-of-radical-islam.html> (viewed October 23 2017).

³⁷ Perry and Scrivens 'Uneasy alliances: A look at the right-wing extremist movement in Canada.'

³⁸ CBC News, 'Canadians appear to be more hateful online,' January 20 2017, from CBC Website: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/marketplace-racism-online-tips-1.3943351> (viewed October 23 2017)

In 2011, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated in an interview with CBC News that the greatest threat to Canada's national security was 'Islamicism.' It is unclear exactly what this term means; however, the implied sentiment was that violence inspired by Muslim extremists occupied the primary focus of the national security apparatus. More recently, prominent Conservative politician Kellie Leitch ran for the Conservative Party leadership in 2017. A part of her platform involved a proposed screening process for immigrants coming to Canada to see if they possessed 'anti-Canadian values.'³⁹ What 'anti-Canadian values' Leitch was referring to were never clearly defined nor, and more troubling, was it clearly defined who was in a position to define what 'anti-Canadian values' were. However, Leitch has had a history of trying to cleanse Canada from 'Other' cultures, when she, along with Citizenship and Immigration Minister, Chris Alexander, unveiled Bill S-7, the Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act. Echoing notions of the 'nationalist subject,'⁴⁰ this Bill was designed to prevent immigrants entering Canada from engaging in certain 'barbaric' cultural practices. No specific culture was defined in this legislation; however, cultural practices stereotypically associated with Muslims such as polygamy, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, and honor-based violence were all listed.⁴¹ The bill was clearly meant to inflame sentiment against Muslims, as it prohibited practices that were already illegal, while implicitly giving the impression of outlawing certain imagined cultures that were trying to infiltrate Canadian society. The growth of far-right views in public and political discourse have also emerged in the US through street protest movements in numerous states across the nation.

USA. The current wave of far-right extremism in the US, manifesting in white supremacist protest movements across the nation, has been attributed to a growing sense of anger and misplaced fears of marginalization amongst young white

³⁹ Anne Kingston, 'How Kellie Leitch accidentally revealed Canadian values,' May 26 2017, from *Macleans* Website: <http://www.macleans.ca/politics/how-kellie-leitch-accidentally-revealed-canadian-values/> (viewed November 5 2017).

⁴⁰ Hage, *White nation*.

⁴¹ Tamara Shephard, 'Harper government to table zero tolerance for barbaric cultural practices bill,' November 5 2014, from *Inside Toronto* Website: <https://www.insidetoronto.com/news-story/4961733-harper-government-to-table-zero-tolerance-for-barbaric-cultural-practices-bill/> (viewed 14 October 2017).

American men. Michael Kimmel (2015), an American sociologist, has examined the notions of white masculinity in the US and has found that a growing number of young white men are feeling discontent with the 'system' and are raging against it.

⁴² Kimmel believes that the reason for this anger is because the age of unquestioned white male privilege is coming to an end. Kimmel is not arguing that white privilege has ceased to exist. On the contrary, it is still embedded in the fabric of US society. However, the idea of *unquestioned* white male privilege is coming to an end. In other words, the US is *more* just with regards to labor laws, civil rights laws, and other forms of legislation than in previous generations. While the US is not a post-racial society, there is, however, arguably more recourse to justice for 'out'-groups than in previous generations. As such, the 'in'-groups, or members of the majoritarian culture may be feeling that the privileged world around them is slowly shrinking and that enrages them. As Kimmel observes, when one has experienced privilege their entire life, moving towards a more egalitarian society feels like oppression. These feelings of discontent and disillusionment have fueled the growth of an extremely Islamophobic 'new' far right in the US, commonly referred to as the alt-right, which is increasingly becoming apparent in US political discourse.

A prominent far-right ideologue who recently came to prominence in US politics is Steve Bannon. Bannon was the former White House Chief Strategist to the President of the USA and executive chairman of Breitbart News, a far-right American news, opinion, and commentary website. Bannon was credited with being the architect of the nationalist-populist program promoted by the Trump campaign during the 2016 US presidential election. In his capacity as Chief Strategist to the US President, Bannon was the driving force behind a controversial executive order which, under the pretext of national security, barred individuals from seven Muslim-majority nations from entering the US. This travel ban was infamously dubbed the 'Muslim ban' because of how it was promoted throughout the 2016 US Presidential campaign. Prior to becoming Chief Strategist, Bannon openly espoused Islamophobic views, advocating the notion that America was at

⁴² Michael Kimmel, *Angry white men: American masculinity at the end of an era* (New York: Nation Books 2015).

war with radical Islam.⁴³ Though Bannon eventually resigned from his position as Chief Strategist, he continued to impact US politics with his far-right agenda through his position at Breitbart News; as he stated in one interview, “at the White House I had influence, at Breitbart I (have) power.”⁴⁴ Bannon was able to exercise this ‘power’ as Breitbart represented the mouthpiece for the far-right political base, which greatly influenced the 2016 US Presidential election. Not surprisingly, Bannon openly promoted claims that Christianity is in a civilizational war with Islam.

In 2014, Bannon addressed attendees at a conference hosted by the Vatican with a dire warning, claiming that the Judeo-Christian West was in the beginning phases of an apocalyptic war with Islam. He claimed that Islam was “threatening to overrun a prostrate West weakened by the erosion of traditional Christian values.”⁴⁵ Furthermore, Bannon argued that ISIS was an expression of Islamic expansionism that was reminiscent of Europe’s troubled historical experiences with Muslims and Islam. In one such passage he stated:

*I believe you should take a very, very, very aggressive stance against radical Islam...If you look back at the long history of the Judeo-Christian West struggle against Islam, I believe that our forefathers kept their stance, and I think they did the right thing. I think they kept it out of the world, whether it was at Vienna, or Tours, or other places. ... It bequeathed to us the great institution that is the church of the West.*⁴⁶

⁴³ Scott Shane, ‘We are at war with radical Islam,’ February 1 2017, *New York Times* Website: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/02/01/us/stephen-bannon-war-with-radical-islam.html?mcubz=0> (viewed 23 October 2017).

⁴⁴ The Economist, ‘The future of Bannonism,’ August 25 2017,’ from *The Economist* Website: <https://www.economist.com/news/united-states/21727089-donald-trumps-adviser-has-gone-his-ideas-stick-around-future-bannonism> (viewed 23 October 2017).

⁴⁵ Jason Horowitz, ‘Steve Bannon carries battles to another influential hub: the Vatican,’ February 17 2017, Retrieved from *New York Times* Web site: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/07/world/europe/vatican-steve-bannon-pope-francis.html> (viewed 23 December 2017).

⁴⁶ Tara Golshan, ‘In 2014 Steve Bannon explained his world view. This year, he helped craft a visa ban that fit it,’ January 31 2017, Retrieved from *Vox* Web site: <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2017/1/31/14439908/steve-bannon-worldview-visa-ban> (viewed 20 December 2017).

Similar views have been expressed by evangelical lobbyists that have influenced far-right politics throughout US history in support of an aggressive Middle-Eastern foreign policy favoring the state of Israel.⁴⁷ These evangelical lobbyists support Jewish control over Jerusalem as they believe it is a precondition for the second coming of Jesus Christ along with the kingdom of heaven.⁴⁸

Conclusion

This article examined how far-right protest movements and political figures across Europe and North America are increasingly voicing Islamization as a primary issue of concern, thereby appealing to populist sentiment. Far-right political figures and activists are not the only proponents of Islamophobia in North America and Europe. Liberal strands of Islamophobia have clearly contributed to anti-Muslim bias in these societies through legislation and targeted policies.⁴⁹ Far-right political figures and protest movements have increasingly voiced stronger, overt Islamophobic rhetoric to gain public support for discriminatory actions and policies targeting Muslims. This paper is not implying that Islamophobia only exists in overt manifestations such as those promoted by the far right. Rather, these overt expressions of anti-Muslim racism, which can be characterized as far-right approaches to Islamophobia, normalize anti-Muslim bias and racism in public and political discourse. Not long ago, a number of these political parties, such as the Front National and the PVV, were considered fringe political parties. However, they are now increasingly being viewed as legitimate parties contributing to and impacting the political landscape in their nations despite their draconian views which openly promote platforms that target and police Muslims in their societies. These far-right political zealots feed off of identity issues to vilify Muslims, which in turn legitimizes outlandish claims of far-right protest movements like the EDL and Bloc Identitaire, whose members have advocated for violent solutions to stem

⁴⁷ Steven Salaita, *Anti-Arab racism in the USA: Where it comes from and what it means for politics today* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press 2006).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ For detailed discussions on this topic see: *The Muslims are Coming* (2014) by Arun Kundnani, as well as *American Islamophobia* (2018) by Khaled Baydoun.

the tidal wave of Islamization.⁵⁰ The steady growth, incitement, and normalization of anti-Muslim racism has practical consequences for Muslim minority communities in Western nations including targeted legislation, hate crimes, and social marginalization.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Braouezec, 'Identifying common patterns of discourse and strategy among the new extremist movements in Europe.'

⁵¹ Stephen Sheehi, *Islamophobia: The ideological campaign against Muslims* (Atlanta: Clarity Press 2011).