ANALYSIS:

Policing hate crime: Past, present and future challenges

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Professor Peter Joyce and Dr Wendy Laverick explore how hate crime has evolved since the Second World War, the impact of the more recent rise of far right extremism and the challenges facing policing in the current political climate.

Hate crime, sometimes referred to as bias-motivated crime, has a long historical pedigree in the UK. In a recent book (Racial and Religious Hate Crime, published by Palgrave in 2019) the

two authors (Wendy Laverick and Peter Joyce) plotted the historical origins and contemporary manifestations of this problem and evaluated the response of the state and the police service in combating hate crime.

In this article, we will briefly place the policing of hate crime in a post-war historical perspective. *W*e will then consider how the recent and current political environment impacts on hate crime and presents new hurdles, which successful hate crime strategies need to take into account and address.

Post-war hate crime

Hate crime refers to a wide range of actions which are motivated by blind prejudice on the part of a perpetrator towards a social group to which the victim belongs,(or is presumed to belong) and to which the perpetrator is opposed.

Jewish communities were front line targets of hate crime in early post-war Britain, (as was evidenced in the anti-Semitic riots in 1947) but the arrival of immigrants from the West Indies in the late 1940s also made them the victims of hate crime. At that time this was referred to as racially motivated violence, based on a perception of the superiority of the white race, which had been nurtured in the colonial context.

Prejudice was not, however, confined to Jewish and Black communities. The arrival of Muslim immigrants of Asian descent commenced in the mid 1950s, (primarily from South Asia) who were joined by Muslims from other parts of the world during the 1970s. Their arrival was the pretext for new manifestations of hate crime, (to which the term 'P*ki-bashing was sometimes applied) which were documented by local studies such as that relating to East London, produced by the Bethnal Green and Stepney Trades Council in 1978, entitled 'Blood on the Streets.'

This study documented how hate crime in that area was especially directed at the Bengali community and the violence was severe, including 'hammer attacks, stabbings, slashed faces, punctured lungs, clubbings, gunshot wounds, people beaten with bricks, sticks and umbrellas or kicked unconscious'. A total of 64 murders inspired by racial motives were documented in the period 1970 and 1986, 50 of which occurred in the five years of 1976, 1978, 1979, 1980 and 1981.

Prejudice in this period was also displayed towards Irish communities. Building on anti-Irish prejudice that was articulated during the mid-nineteenth century (which was encapsulated by the NINA appendage to job advertisements, ['No Irish Need Apply']) it was frequently accompanied by physical attacks on the streets. Britain in the 1950s and 1960s was an era when 'No Blacks. No Irish. No Dogs' signs were openly displayed on boarding houses in British cities.

The state and post-war hate crime

Although hate crime was not a new post-1945 phenomenon, it did not figure highly on the list of priorities for the state, the criminal justice system or the police service. Serious outbreaks of racially-motivated violence (in particular the race riots in Notting Hill in 1958 and the subsequent murder in that area of Kelso Cochrane in 1959 which at the time the police denied had a racial motive and for which no person has ever been convicted) did not produce a climate favourable to effectively combating the problem.

Although white persons involved in the events of 1958 were dealt with appropriately by the courts, the criminal justice system was not at that time taking the problem as seriously as should have been the case. In particular, when responses were made by agencies such as the police service, they were reactive in nature. And although efforts were made during the 1960s to address racial discrimination which was viewed as an underpinning of hate crime (commencing with the 1965 Race Relations Act), it was coupled with measures to introduce immigration control whereby the 1962 and 1968 Commonwealth Immigrants Acts and the 1971 Immigration Act whittled down provisions of the 1948 Nationality Act and served to restrict rights of entry of persons from Commonwealth countries. This approach identified immigration – and not hate crime – as a key social problem that had to be addressed.

It was perhaps not unsurprising that some of the political rhetoric used in the 1960s and 1970s exploited racial divisions and created a situation that underpinned and abetted hate crime. This was not confined to far right political parties, (the National Front being formed in 1967) but entered the political mainstream. Examples included the campaign mounted by the Conservative Party in Smethwick at the 1964 general election (who campaigned on the slogan 'if you want a n***er for your neighbour, vote Labour') and the infamous 'Rivers of Blood Speech' by then Conservative politician and MP, Enoch Powell.

The scale of the problem

Successful strategies to combat hate crime rely on reliable data regarding the extent and nature of the problem. Although some local studies gave snapshots of the situation regarding hate crime, there was no data available at a national level.

The first attempt to quantify the extent of the problem nationally came in 1981. A study for the Home Office estimated that there were 'about 7,000 or so racially-motivated incidents each year'. Although other surveys (using victimisation data) suggested the problem was more severe than this (the Policy Studies Institute's third National Survey of Ethnic Minorities in Britain published in 1984, suggesting that the extent of racial attacks was around 10 times greater than the Home Office figure), 1981 was a milestone in the interest displayed by the state in this problem. But it did not, however, herald a sea change of attitude or approaches within the criminal justice system to providing an adequate approach to tackling hate crime.

One issue was the attitude displayed by the police service. Communities in which large numbers of immigrants lived were often viewed as deviant in police circles – areas in which drug-taking, prostitution and crime (especially street crime or mugging) flourished. Regarded as a 'dangerous alien colony in an otherwise wholesome society.' (as one account of policing in Moss Side in 1981 expressed the situation). These communities were often on the receiving end of robust police actions which were characterised by the use of stop and search powers, in which, on the receiving end, were perceived to be based on random, stereotypical assertions of a 'black youth – crime' connection.

Perceptions that black communities were over-policed but under-protected in the sense that racial violence was not accorded the attention it merited by the police service formed the basis of criticisms that were put forward regarding the inadequacies of the investigation by the MPS into the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993.

The election of a Labour government in 1997, however, provided a climate that was much more receptive to hate crime being regarded as a key problem. It was then accorded the attention by the criminal justice agencies that it merited. In making his observations of incompetence and institutional racism as key factors in explaining errors of omission and commission that were made in the murder investigation, Sir William Macpherson made a series of recommendations

as to how racist incidents should be dealt with henceforth.

His key recommendation – that a racist incident should be defined as 'any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person' was accepted by the government and adopted by the police service. Thus, this ensured that a victim-oriented approach would be pursued towards hate crime in the future.

Policing hate crime post-Macpherson

A key issue that was exploited by far right political parties (notably the National Front and the British National Party, which was founded in 1982) was that the legislative focus on race hate excluded hate crime based on other factors, especially that of religion. During the latter decades of the twentieth century, Islamophobia became a problem – a key aspect of what was dubbed 'the new racism' that concentrated on religious and cultural practices, which were depicted as regressive as opposed to ethnic or racial factors.

Initially, the 1986 Public Order Act made it an offence to stir up hatred on grounds of race, religion and sexual orientation. Subsequent legislative changes in Jack Straw's 1998 Crime and Disorder Act contained a raft of offences, (wounding, assault, damage, stalking, harassment and threatening or abusive behaviour) which if proven to be racially or religiously motivated would carry a sentence uplift. The 2003 Justice Act, then more significantly the 2006 Racial and Religious Hatred Act, strengthened the law regarding religiously-motivated hate crime.

Five strands of hate crime

These formed the backdrop of changes made within the criminal justice system, so that in 2007 the main agencies agreed a common definition of what was now officially dubbed 'hate crime'. This covered five strands – disability, gender-identity, race, religion/faith and sexual orientation.

Police forces were required to regularly produce statistics regarding the extent of these five monitored strands, the recording of which commenced in April 2008. Crimes are recorded under four categories – public order offences, violence against the person, criminal damage or arson and other notifiable offences.

The five monitored strands do not cover all possible aspects of hate crime. In addition to the five monitored strands, individual police forces can collect data on other aspects of hate crime. Of particular contemporary significance is the issue of misogyny – the dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women. The Nottinghamshire Constabulary records data of this nature but recent revelations concerning the abuse that several female politicians have faced, contributes to the case in favour of making misogyny a sixth monitored hate crime strand.

Additionally, hate incidents are also recorded by police forces, but do not enter into statistics relating to hate crime. These are often dealt with by multi-agency working, which may or may not entail the use of police enforcement powers. Although especially in a post-2010 era of austerity – it may be queried as to whether incidents such as spitting, graffiti or throwing rubbish into gardens – merits any form of police attention. It is often likely to be the case that those who carry out serious acts of hate crime probably commenced activities of this nature through minor instances of incivility that they got away with and thus became emboldened to commit more serious acts. Taking hate incidents seriously may thus nip anti-social activities in the bud, before they become translated into serious manifestations of crime.

The contemporary scale of hate crime

This article has charted some key changes made to the policing of hate crime since 1945. How successful have these changes been ?

According to Home Office Data, in 2018/19 there were 103,379 hate crimes recorded by police forces in England and Wales. This was a 10% increase compared with 2017/18 (94,121 offences) and means that the number of police recorded hate crimes has more than doubled since 2012/13 (when the figure was 42,255).

Other mechanisms through which hate crime can be reported (with the exception of the CSEW) tell a similar story – Tell MAMA (which records Islamophobic hate crime) reported a 26% rise in reports during 2017 compared to the previous year and the Community Safety Trust (which records anti-semitic hate crime) recorded 892 anti-semitic incidents in the UK in the first 6 months of 2019. This is the highest number of such incidents ever recorded by the organisation in a January – June period and a 10% increase on the similar period in 2016.

Although it may be argued that some of this increase can be attributed to an increased tendency of victims to report incidents, which in previous years they would not have done – a course of action that may in part be attributed to a greater confidence on the part of victims that the police service and other criminal justice agencies will deal fairly and professionally with their complaint. It also seems highly likely that the scale of the problem has increased in recent years.

This begs the question, why ? And the answer rests heavily on the existence of a political climate that is favourable towards hate crime being committed.

Far right political extremist organisations

Political extremism associated with the politics of the far right has become an increasing phenomenon in recent years in both Europe and the United Kingdom.

The following is a brief account of some of the major Political Extremist Parties (PEPs) that exist in countries that are in the EU. This illustrates the extent of their electoral support in the early years of the twenty-first century. This shows that right wing extremism is a vibrant political force in Europe, a situation that was reinforced in Spain's general election on 11 November 2019 when the far-right party Vox more than doubled its representation (from 24 seats in April 2019 to 52 in November 2019) and became the country's third largest political party.

The link between the activities and rhetoric of PEPs in connection with the extent and nature of hate crime is discussed in reports periodically issued by the organisation European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). And as we live in a global community, connected by means of communication that traverse national borders, events in Europe related to political extremism and hate crime have a knock-on effect in the UK.

France – The Front Nationale (since June 2018 re-branded as Rassemblement National) whose leader, Marine Le Pen, reached the second ballot (run-off election) of the election for the Presidency of France in 2017 in which she secured 33% of the national vote.

Germany – The Alternative for Germany which obtained 12.6% of the vote and 94 seats in the 2017 elections to the Bundestag, making it the nation's third largest political party in terms of its representation.

Austria – The Freedom Party of Austria which following the 2017 legislative elections (in which it secured 27% of the popular vote, making it the country's third largest party), entered a coalition with the Austrian People's Party. In the most recent legislative elections held in September 2019, the Party's support declined but it still secured 16.2% of the vote and had 31 of its candidates elected.

Belgium – Vlaams Belang, (which changed its name from the Vlaams Blok in 2004) secured 19% of the vote in the May 2019 parliamentary elections.

Holland – The Party for Freedom which obtained 20 seats and 13.1% of the vote in the 2017 general election, making it the country's second largest party.

Italy – Italy has a number of right wing populist parties of which Lega (formerly known as Lega Nord until 2018) emerged as the strongest following the 2018 general election and the country's largest party, participating in a coalition government until 2019 with its leader, Matteo Salvini serving as Deputy Prime Minister. Lega left office in August 2019.

Denmark – The Danish People's Party which in the 2015 election (delete it) received 21% of the vote, making it Denmark's second party. Its electoral support declined in the 2019 general election, however, when it obtained 8.7% of the vote and lost 21 of its 37 seats.

Norway – The Progress Party secured over 16.3% of the national vote in the 2013 general election and since then it has been a participant in a coalition government, in which the Conservative Party was the largest Party. This governing arrangement was continued after the 2017 elections (in which it obtained 15.2% of the vote).

Sweden – The Sweden Democrats polled 12.9% of the vote and returned 49 candidates to Parliament in the 2014 general election. This made the Sweden Democrats the third largest party in the Country. In the 2018 Parliamentary elections, the Sweden Democrats polled around 17.5% of the vote and increased its representation to 62 MP's, (added apostrophe) retaining its position as the Country's third largest party.

Greece – Golden Dawn whose performance in the two sets of Parliamentary elections held in January and September 2015 was similar to its showing in 2012 when it secured around 7% of the national vote. However, rocked by a scandal in which its leader and several other Golden Dawn MPs were arrested for the murder of an anti-fascist rapper, Pavlos Fyssas in 2013, it lost

all of its Parliamentary representation in the 2019 general election in which it secured only 2.9% of the vote.

Bulgaria – The United Patriots is a coalition of three right wing parties. It won twenty-seven seats and polled around 9% of the vote in the 2017 Parliamentary elections. Subsequently, the coalition became a component of the government headed by Boyko Borisov.

Hungary – The Country's government since 2010 has been headed by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán who heads the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) Party, which has been described as right wing populist. Far-right politics is articulated by parties including Jobbik, (the Movement for a Better Hungary) which in the 2018 Parliamentary elections polled 19.6% of the vote and won 26 seats. This made it Hungary's second largest political Party in the National Assembly.

Party similarities

These parties share several similarities. They are often nationalist to the point of being xenophobic (a stance that generally makes them hostile to the EU and supportive of leaving it) and their message is frequently Islamophobic. They are not however necessarily anti-Semitic, as the anti-Islam message often results in them voicing support for the state of Israel.

In the UK, far right extremism has been articulated by several organisations that have replaced the position on the far right of British politics, once occupied by the National Front and British National Party. These have included the English Defence League (founded in 2009) and Britain First (that was set up in 2011.

Far right political ideology and rhetoric

Far right political extremism has been variously branded as 'fascist', 'neo Nazi' and 'populist'. There are distinct differences between each of these political ideologies: however, as has been stated above, the term 'Populist Extremist Parties'(PEP'S), is generally used as an umbrella term under which to discuss the ideology and rhetoric of political organisations of this nature.

Populist ideology suggests that the policy pursued by governments should reflect the views of 'ordinary' members of the general public. What are discerned as the fears, prejudices and uncertainties felt by 'ordinary' people are then exploited to political advantage.

Accordingly, populist rhetoric condemns what is described as the 'political establishment' (an attitude which sometimes brings it into conflict with institutions of the state such as the judiciary) for being out of touch with the needs as beliefs of the people. It eschews any form of political correctness, it endorses conspiracy theories (which in the UK has often taken the form of holocaust denial), it embraces nationalistic sentiments at the expense of multi-culturalism and is willing to utilise 'big lie' techniques of political propaganda to sell its own policies and denigrate those of its opponents. Criticisms of the views it puts forward are often branded 'fake news', a term popularised by President Trump in America following his election in 2016.

Political rhetoric of this nature provides a political climate within which hate crime flourishes. This situation threatens to undermine the social cohesion agenda and promote residential segregation on the part of communities that feel themselves to be under threat. As was evidenced in 1995 at Manningham and in 2001 in a number of towns in Northern England, segregation of this nature creates tensions between communities which can result in severe outbreaks of disorder.

Policing far right extremism

Far right political extremism is taken seriously by the government as was made clear in the 2015 Counter-extremism strategy and in earlier and subsequent Hate Crime Action Plans. The 2015 strategy defined extremism as 'vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.' It also argued that Neo-Nazi extremism 'promotes violence beyond terrorism, with appalling levels of hate crime carried out against minority communities. Extremists who are careful to avoid directly supporting violence, nevertheless create an environment in which division and hatred is propagated'. In short, it was argued that political extremism provides the underpinning for violence that includes all forms of hate crime and which in extreme circumstances can result in acts of terrorism.

Thus police resources have been directed into combating right wing extremism, whose investigations have led to convictions of some of those engaged in activity of this nature. For example, in the wake of the murder of Lee Rigby at Woolwich in 2013 and subsequent revenge attacks, a number of arrests were made in relation to comments that had been posted on Twitter and Facebook which were deemed to incite racial hatred and violence. One conviction was achieved under the provisions of the 1988 Malicious Communications Act in relation to an

offensive image that had been posted on Facebook. In December 2016 the neo-Nazi group National Action (which had reportedly celebrated the murder of Jo Cox MP earlier that year) became the first right-wing group to be proscribed under anti-terrorist legislation and in November 2018, three persons were convicted of being members of the organisation.

Key political imperatives

However, the attention directed at extremism is not solely focused on far right political activity, it also embraces extremist ideology and terrorist activities associated with Islamist militancy. The government's counter-terrorist strategy, CONTEST, contains 4 work streams, one of which is Prevent. This became divided into two programmes in 2011 and the Preventing Violent Extremism Programme (PVE) was heavily focused on Muslim extremism. Similarly, figures suggest that although the Channel Programme (which was initially piloted in 2007 as a work stream of Prevent) targets all form of extremism, the majority of persons referred to it were Muslims deemed to be at risk from Islamist extremism. Far fewer referrals (15% according to government figures published in 2016) related to far-right extremism. Approaches of this nature suggest that tackling Muslim extremism is viewed as a key political imperative, an approach that means tackling hate crime takes place within an unfavourable political climate.

There thus arises the danger that if approaches to counter extremism are not viewed as even-handed, they may contribute to a climate which depicts Muslims as a the main threat to the security of the UK and thus contribute to a climate that supports Islamophobic hate crime.

Social media and extremism

Additionally, policing right wing extremism poses several challenges. It is often articulated in ways other than through formally constituted political parties and frequently makes use of the internet and social media to propagate its messages of hate.

Dealing with any form of cyber crime poses considerable challenges to the contemporary police service (especially when dealing with platforms that originate outside of the UK, such as the USA-based organisation Stormfront which propagates white nationalism and white supremacy) and there is often a reliance on the large IT companies to self police material such as online hate speech.

The Home Affairs Committee report (Hate Crime: Abuse, Hate and Extremism Online) noted in 2017 that 'the weaknesses and delays in Google's response to our reports of illegal neo-Nazi propaganda on You Tube were dreadful' and that it was 'shockingly easy to find examples of material that was intended to stir up hatred against ethnic minorities on…the social media platforms— YouTube, Twitter and Facebook'.

Subsequently, some progress has been made such as the removal of the Facebook pages of the organisation Britain First and its leaders in March 2018 and the permanent banning the same year of the former leader of the English Defence League by Twitter for violating its 'hateful conduct' rules. But such action is not performed consistently.

In the wake of the 2016 referendum (which is considered below in connection with hate crime), subsequent developments to combat hate crime included the Home Secretary's announcement in October 2017 of the creation of the National Online Hate Crime Hub. This is managed by the National Police Chiefs' Council and aims to further improve the response delivered by the police to online hate crime. In particular it seeks to provide better support for victims and to drive up the number of prosecutions. This applied to all forms of online hate crime including anti-semitism.

However, police responses to political extremism become more difficult when such sentiments are adopted by mainstream political organisations and enter into popular political debate. This was the case with the 2016 referendum in the UK on continued membership of the EU.

The 2016 Brexit Referendum

The Leave campaign was conducted by two political organisations – the 'official' campaign, Vote Leave, which was endorsed by a number of senior Conservative politicians and the 'unofficial' campaign, GO (Grassroots Out) Movement, which was especially associated with UKIP and its then leader, Nigel Farage.

The Leave campaign lent heavily on populist rhetoric to achieve its political objective. Membership of the EU was depicted as an 'establishment' interest, one which conflicted with, or rode roughshod over, the opinions and concerns of 'ordinary' people. Immigration was emphasised by the Leave campaign and those sections of the media that supported it as a key example of how political correctness had prevented previous debate on this subject. It was

depicted as the root cause of a myriad of contemporary social ills that included crime, terrorism, lack of jobs and strains on public services such as education, health and transport. Regaining national sovereignty (sloganised as 'take back control') by leaving the EU was depicted as the way to remedy these alleged ills and enable the UK to revert to being a green and pleasant land of yesteryear.

Populist rhetoric was also associated with approaches which failed to tell 'the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth'. This included the suggestion that an additional £350 million a week would be saved by leaving the EU, which could then be spent on the health service. This figure neglected to take into account the UK's budget rebate and money that the EU allocated to the UK (which presumably would have to be provided by the UK government when EU funds were no longer available), figures that considerably reduced the sum that would be saved by quitting the EU.

Perhaps the most infamous example of this lack of candour was the Unofficial Leave Campaign's poster, Breaking Point. This pictured a queue of Syrian refugees at the Croatia-Slovenian border and which thus had no relevance to the principle of free movement of people between EU member states. But it was an emotive way with which to condemn immigration which the Leave Campaign wished to associate with the EU in the public mind, as was evidenced in the poster's sub-heading, 'The EU has failed Us All'.

The Brexit Referendum and hate crime

There were numerous explanations as to why people voted the way they did in the 2016 referendum and it is not the authors' view that those who voted to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum were all motivated by the dislike of immigration or were inspired by racist thoughts in general.

However, the entering of immigration and its alleged undesirable consequences into mainstream political debate in 2016 did have an impact on hate crime. Once the genie of political incorrectness was released from the forces that had previously constrained it, a political dynamic was unleashed which those who freed it were incapable of controlling.

Those harbouring racist sentiments were able to latch onto anti-immigration aspects of the Leave Campaigns in addition to right wing extremist rhetoric that was available on the internet

and social media platforms and in some cases to act out their biases or prejudices in the form of hate crime. The adverse political climate in which immigration had been depicted gave such violent actions a perverse form of legitimacy and – as is the case with lone wolf terrorism – to provide a sense of purpose to those who otherwise felt that their lives lacked meaning.

During the campaign, the Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered by a person inspired by right wing extremism and who latched on to the climate of anti-immigration sentiment that arose during the campaign and attacked a politician whose pro-Brexit stance made her, in his mind, a traitor.

Following the referendum result, statistics were released which indicated a spike in hate crime. Data released by the National Police Chiefs' Council stated that between 1 and 14 July, 3,001 hate crimes and hate incidents had been reported to police forces in England and Wales, this was a 20% increase on the equivalent period in 2015. Figures provided in a Parliamentary briefing suggested a similar trend – in July 2016 the number of reported religious and race hate crimes was 44% higher than in July 2015. And, as has been indicated above, this upward trend in hate crimes has subsequently been maintained.

Factors other than Brexit contributing to hate crime

Although the emphasis placed by the Leave campaign on immigration contributed to an increase of hate crime, this was not the only factor that helps to explain the increase of such activities in recent years.

Islamist extremism (especially when taking the format of terrorist attacks) tends also to increase the extent of Islamophobic hate crime. This was the case in the wake of soldier Lee Rigby in Woolwich in 2013 and was also observed following the attacks at the Manchester Arena and London Bridge in May and June 2017. It was reported that there was a 44% increase in hate crimes in June 2017 compared to June 2016, violence that included the revenge attack directed at worshippers leaving Finsbury Park Mosque in June 2017, killing one person and injuring several more.

An additional issue that helps account for hate crime underpinned by anti-semitism has been its articulation by organisations not associated with the Far right. Traditionally in the UK, anti-semitism was the preserve of far right political parties, the most notable one being Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists which was active during the 1930s.

More recently, however, anti-semitism has become associated with additional sources. Sometimes dubbed the 'new anti-semitism' and dated from the 1970s, one contemporary aspect of anti-semitic discourse consists of hostility towards Jews that is rooted in the nature of the state of Israel and its policies, whereby anti-semitism can be cloaked under the guise of anti-Zionism. This hostility is sometimes expressed in ways that have been described as 'playing the Nazi card' whereby Nazi or related terms or symbols (such as swastikas) are used in reference to Jews, actions undertaken by the state of Israel, Zionism or other aspects of the Jewish experience.

This has resulted in groups other than the far right being associated with rhetoric of this nature. This includes Radical Islam (whose concern is with the State of Israel's treatment of the Palestinian Arabs) and the political left when (in the words of the 2006 All-Party Inquiry into Anti-semitism) 'the language used to criticise Israel exceeds the boundaries of genuine political debate and evolves into an attack on Jews generally'.

In the UK, charges of anti-semitism have been levelled against the Respect Party and also against the Labour Party in the wake of Jeremy Corbyn's election as Labour leader in 2015. Particular issues raised have included the Labour Party failing to act with sufficient robustness against those of its members who have made anti-semitic utterances and – in a more general sense – for being overly cautious in endorsing the definition of anti-semitism that had been put forward by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016.

As with the Brexit referendum campaign, hate crime is encouraged by a climate that is favourable towards anti-semitism. Referring to the 1,382 anti-semitic incidents that were recorded by the Community Safety Trust in 2017 (and a further 872 reports of potential incidents that were received by the CST but not included in the published figures) this organisation argued that the factors that influenced the high level of anti-Semitic incidents in 2017 'appear to be a continuation of those that similarly affected the level of incidents during 2016 ' whereby there was a rise in all forms of hate crime following the 2016 referendum, to which there should be added 'the unprecedented publicity regarding controversies about the alleged and actual antisemitism in the Labour Party'. It was asserted that both of these issues 'are likely to have emboldened offenders, whilst also causing victims to be more aware of the need to report incidents'.

The 2019 General Election

The debates that have taken place within Parliament since 2016 and especially since Boris Johnson became Prime Minister in July 2019 have been characterised by acrimony. Despite attempts by former Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, to persuade politicians to moderate the language of political debate, there is a real danger that the 2019 general election will be characterised by inflammatory language and intolerant debate.

One potential aspect of this is if the government chooses to adopt a populist reaction to the battles it has experienced in Parliament in recent months, in an attempt to secure Brexit by presenting the election as 'the people versus Parliament', suggesting the latter institution has thwarted the will of the people as expressed in the 2016 referendum.

A danger with this is that mounting an attack on Parliament can undermine support for the system of representative democracy that has evolved in the UK over many centuries. This can then result in a new form of politics in which minority views and concerns (including the need to take firm action against hate crime) are sacrificed to the wishes and whims of what has been referred to as the 'tyranny of the majority,' by the nineteenth century political thinkers Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill.

The Conservative Party minus its Remain faction (many leading members of which have either been expelled from the party or who have voluntarily left it) will uncompromisingly back the UK leaving the EU, as is made obvious in its campaign slogan 'Get Brexit Done'. It is certain that the Brexit Party (formed in 2019 and which enjoyed considerable success in the elections to the European Parliament) will also ensure that Brexit is centre stage, posing the fear that the campaign will become a re-run of the 2016 referendum campaign in which immigration again becomes raised within the populist context of regaining national sovereignty. And sentiments of this nature put forward within the context of a divided, acrimonious society are likely to create an adverse political climate, that is conducive to hate crime and unsupportive of meaningfully addressing it.

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This article can be found here:

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Policinginsight