

Political Affairs Digest

A daily summary of political events affecting the Jewish Community

Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

SCoJeC

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Q827 Chair (Yvette Cooper, Labour): What is your assessment of the reach, the scale of impact, the number of people who might be seeing far-right social media posts at any time? ...

Alex Krasodomski-Jones (Demos): ... If 10 years ago we had talked about 1 million people belonging to a far-right group in the UK we would have been horrified, but that is very different to what it means to be part of a Facebook group with 1 million members in it. I do not know if you can call it armchair activism, but the idea that you can take part and play a role within ultimately quite an extreme organisation from the comfort of your home without ever really committing to marching or going out on the streets is another change in how these things are taking place. ...

Q828 Chair: How far do you see what is happening as being people with extreme or racist views or far-right views talking to themselves, talking to each other in a way they may not have been able to do before but previously held those views, and how far do you see this as a process of radicalisation or grooming other people or spreading extremist views?

Alex Krasodomski-Jones: ... it is quite clear that there is an attempt here at outreach. ...

At one point Britain First, which I think now have been removed from Facebook, was larger than all the parties in the UK combined because of their Facebook presence. How did it get there? It was sharing content that was much more palatable. Anything around Armistice Day. Animal cruelty was another big topic, stuff that is very easy to access that then perhaps sends you further down the path of this. The fact that this content was out there and the fact, as we have already heard from Jacob and Chloe, that there is an attempt to tone down the language to focus on a more palatable version of extremism, to me can only be evidence for an attempt at outreach.

Chloe Colliver (Institute for Strategic Dialogue): ... these things do not happen in isolation from continuing offline radicalisation structures and opportunities. Marches, protests and latching on to other cultural aspects that are now manipulated by the far right, for example football clubs or support clubs, is also an important part of the threat picture that needs to be looked at, especially in terms of offline harms or potential violence.

Jacob Davey (Institute for Strategic Dialogue): ... What is quite concerning to us is

this use of not particularly controversial issues by far-right individuals that can potentially be used to on-board people. ... You are not bringing people on immediately with the hateful content or the hateful narratives, you are bringing people on with potentially these softer narratives that can then take them into an ecosystem where they get exposed to more radical points. ...

Q829 Stephen Doughty (Labour Co-op): ... to what extent do you think that we, Government and other regulatory bodies need to pay a lot more attention to those smaller channels in which it is being spread? I have a report here from Counter Extremism Project and it is talking about the use of Vimeo, VideoPress, archive.org, Bit Che, Dailymotion, VK, Spreadshirt, CafePress, WordPress. I have even been told that TripAdvisor is being used to spread links and signpost to far-right material. ...

Chloe Colliver: I think they are starting to grasp it now but I think that the questions around response are much harder when it comes to these kinds of platforms. Many of them do not have their own community standards or were set up with the purpose of being able to spread this kind of content, whether for libertarian, free-speech values or for a more extreme agenda. For those kinds of platforms it would be very difficult for a regulator to engage with a platform in order to try to encourage that kind of content removal, especially if it is not illegal content but if it is content that usually would meet the terms of service or the community standards of a larger platform.

What we have seen on Gab recently is an interesting example. In the US, after the Pittsburgh shooting, Gab was pushed into enforcing its terms of service more consistently than it has had to previously under political, technological and media pressure. ...

Q833 Stephen Doughty: ... To what extent are you seeing what we certainly saw around some of the Islamist groups, essentially rebranding, rebadging to avoid the proscription orders that exist? ...

Jacob Davey: We have seen that clearly with National Action and their rebranding into Scottish Dawn and NS131, and they were then proscribed. ...

Q835 Stephen Doughty: ... To what extent do you think that our armed forces personnel and even the police, vulnerable individuals within both those, are being targeted by far-right groups?...

Jacob Davey: I think there have been active and concerted efforts to target and recruit individuals in the armed forces, again across that whole range of spectrum of groups operating on the far right at the fringe but also some of Stephen Lennon's recent campaigning to try to on-board soldiers. ...

Q837 Rehman Chishti (Conservative): How do you address online material that demonstrates either sympathy to far-right ideology or extremist ideology that is not regarded as illegal or does not cross a threshold of what is deemed appropriate or not appropriate on social media outlets?

Jacob Davey: ... There is a grey area of content and there is a range of different responses that are advocated. Some people suggest a more heavy-handed takedown action from platforms, which I think we have seen potentially has a range of unintended consequences. That could be unintended flagging of non-radical content or driving individuals into these ecosystems where they cannot be engaged with.

I think there are other things that could be done, for example, to limit the impact of these groups. Digital education, for example, among young people, raising their awareness of the impacts and activities of propagandists and building resilience against that. ...

Q839 Rehman Chishti: ... Earlier you said that looking at open pages on Facebook you noticed a lot of anti-Muslim hatred. I come from a Muslim background and I get material where individuals sometimes do not put their picture up or they put up, "Useless MP, never in the constituency". All my constituents would know to the contrary. But when you then click on that person's page, it is filled with anti-Muslim hatred, whether it is with EDL—you look at it all the way through. There is disinformation against people in public

office where the message initially may be innocent and free speech that people can say, but you click on that and then see the litter of pure hatred towards people of faith. Do you have data on how much of that is happening?

Jacob Davey: ... there is a range of offline statistics around hate crime and hate speech that is religiously motivated. I believe it was around 9%. ... Online ... it is very difficult to get a precise sense of the scale but we and I think CASM have done some work looking at anti-Muslim hatred on Twitter, for example, and it is hundreds of thousands of individuals and tweets. ...

Q840 Rehman Chishti: ... The anti-Muslim hatred against the Mayor of London is vile and evil. Then you look at other Muslims who are parliamentarians or in public office and we get it at a lesser level than that. Do you have a data system, for Muslim parliamentarians or those in public office, to look at whether the intent behind either direct messages or indirect or innocent messages is linked to pure hatred of somebody's faith? ...

Chloe Colliver: ... Content moderators are sometimes placed just looking at content that is flagged for hate or just for harassment and may not have the expertise to understand that that is hate content as well as harassment content. ...

Q841 Rehman Chishti: ... I get material from an individual who then makes certain threats or certain assertions. Click on their page and it is complete hatred. On their own Twitter account it goes, "I was told by Twitter to delete this and I'll have my account back". Therefore, they delete certain material, which is quite purely hatred, and they get their account back. Should there be a system where if they continue to put material up there, irrespective of whether they delete it and get back their account, those individuals who put that material should then be banned forever if they continue? ...

Chloe Colliver: There currently are systems like that but they take a lot longer and it takes a lot more examples. I would have to check the exact number it has to be for Twitter or Facebook but it is something around three instances of content being reported and reviewed within a month or something. It needs to be that many to have the account removed permanently.

Q842 Rehman Chishti: ... Do you have any data in relation to individuals who have been convicted of hate crime in relation to where there were incidents of where they were sucked in by poisoned ideology, online or elsewhere? ...

Jacob Davey: As far as I am aware that does not exist currently. ...

Alex Krasodonski-Jones: We recently finished a review of hate crime data as held by the Metropolitan Police system. One of the key recommendations that came out of that report was that they desperately need to update how they recorded hate crime. ...

Q846 Alex Norris (Labour Co-op): Looking at the material that is coming out of the troll/bot accounts, we have heard about misinformation but we are looking online hate at the moment. Is it what by definition in UK law is hateful or is it misinformation designed to confound the democratic process of people within it, or all of the above?

Alex Krasodonski-Jones: Whether it breaches the legal threshold for hate speech I could not say but I would describe it very much as hateful. The content that was most widely circulated in the aftermath of the terror attacks by Russian affiliated accounts was hateful. There is no other word for it.

Q847 Chair: This is Russian-sponsored promotion of Islamophobia in the UK?

Alex Krasodonski-Jones: Yes.

Q850 John Woodcock (Independent): What you were describing at the beginning and throughout you could characterise as a professionalisation of the communication strategies of the far right. Do you have any sense of how that has occurred and whether it is being driven by a particular source? ...

Jacob Davey: ... extremists have always been early adopters of technology. If you think back 10 years ago at the BNP's web presence, it was already experimenting with social

media when that was probably not something that mainstream parties were engaging with so much. If you think about that, it is necessity breeds innovation. If you are coming at this from the fringe and you do not have access to some of the mainstream infrastructure that has traditionally been used to amplify your views, then you are going to experiment and, by necessity, get good at using a range of alternative communication tactics and techniques. ...

Q853 Stuart C. McDonald (SNP): ... you spoke a little bit about how organisations like National Action are able to reinvent themselves. When they are able to do that, how effective can proscription be? How disruptive is it as a tool?

Jacob Davey: I think if you look at some of the statistics, proscription has been very effective in starting to address the issue. ...

... the fact that these groups have been proscribed has made accessing the material and content online a lot more difficult. This time last year we did some work looking at the scale of the problem on YouTube. We found it very easy to get National Action-branded content on YouTube. Now we have not been able to find that. ...

Q855 Stuart C. McDonald: ... We have heard from Sara Khan, who is the Commissioner for Countering Extremism. She has concerns that the Counter Extremism Strategy from 2015 is now essentially already out of date because the far-right extremist organisations have evolved. ...

Chloe Colliver: We would be in agreement with that, that it needs refreshing and it needs new priorities, for example really making sure to deal with the issue of extremism as a whole and not just focus on violent extremism, which maybe misses the ideological recruitment side of the issue. ...

Part of that strategy is supposed to say there is no safe space for extremism. I think, as we have noted here, there are a number of online spaces currently not being tackled with any kind of response, that are currently safe havens for vile extremism. ...

To read the full transcript see

<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/home-affairs-committee/hate-crime-and-its-violent-consequences/oral/92650.html>

House of Commons Written Answers

Hate Crime: Convictions

Matthew Offord (Conservative) [191905] To ask the Secretary of State for Justice, what the conviction rate is for hate crime in the most recent period for which figures are available.

Lucy Frazer: In 2017, the most recent year for which figures are available, 7,888 defendants were proceeded against where the principal offence was one of the specific racially or religiously aggravated offences. Of those proceeded against, 6,084 defendants (77%) were convicted.

The conviction rate for other hate crime offences, where there is evidence of hostility or motivation against a person because of their perceived membership of a racial or religious group, or because of a perceived disability, sexual orientation or transgender identity are not separately recorded and could only be collected at disproportionate cost.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-15/191905/>

Religious Buildings: VAT

Graham P Jones (Labour) [193456] To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the Answer of 19 November 2018 to Question 190861 on Religious Buildings: VAT, whether his Department has plans to remove VAT on the repair and maintenance of places of worship after the UK leaves the EU.

Mel Stride: The UK will leave the EU at the end of March next year. The UK and EU negotiating teams have already reached agreement on the terms of an implementation period that will start on 30 March 2019 and last until 31 December 2020. During the implementation period, the UK will no longer be a Member State of the European Union, but market access will continue on current terms. We therefore will not remove VAT on repair and maintenance of places of worship during the implementation period.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-20/193456/>

Religion: Education

Stephen Timms (Labour) [193357] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to introduce a national entitlement to the study of religious education in schools.

Nick Gibb: The Department has received the Commission on Religious Education's review report, which includes its recommendation for introduction of a statutory national entitlement to the study of religious education and worldviews. This is under consideration, and the Department will make its views known soon.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-20/193357/>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.commissiononre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Final-Report-of-the-Commission-on-RE.pdf>

Religion: Education

Stephen Timms (Labour) [193359] To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to ensure that state-funded schools meet the statutory obligation to teach religious education as part of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Nick Gibb: It is the responsibility of individual schools to ensure that they meet their statutory obligations to teach religious education.

If an individual has concerns that a school may not be meeting its duty to provide religious education, they should first follow that school's complaint procedure. If the complaint is not resolved, then the issue can be escalated to the Department's School Complaints Unit for maintained schools, or the Education and Skills Funding Agency for academies, free schools, university technical colleges or studio schools. Information about school complaint procedures can be found here: www.gov.uk/complain-about-school.

The Secretary of State for Education has a range of powers to ensure schools comply with their statutory obligations. The exact powers used will depend on the nature of the statutory duty in question and the potential impact of any failure to comply. The powers used could include a direction under 497 of the Education Act 1996, a performance and standards warning notice under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and a referral to Ofsted for an inspection. Where academies are subject to the same statutory duties as maintained schools, the Secretary of State has powers to enforce compliance via the terms of the funding agreement.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-20/193359/>

UK Parliament Early Day Motion

Luciana Berger (Labour Co-op) (1875) Sara Conference 2018 – That this House notes the commencement of the Sara Conference on women and antisemitism; supports the aims and efforts of the APPG Against Antisemitism and Antisemitism Policy Trust in

seeking to highlight concerns about this gendered racist abuse; welcomes the cross-party nature of the initiative and the positive engagement of a wide range of stakeholders in the process; further welcomes the opportunity the conference provides to address concerns about gendered antisemitic abuse and the barriers this presents for entry to public life; condemns the particular, targeted abuse of Jewish women; notes the support of Her Majesty's Government for the conference and further calls on the Government, relevant agencies, and others in civil society, to associate themselves with the Sara principles published for the conference including commitments to improve and enhance discourse both online and offline.

<https://www.parliament.uk/edm/2017-19/1875>

Northern Ireland Executive

Northern Ireland Racial Equality Indicators Baseline Report: 2014 - 2017

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/racial-equality-indicator-baseline-report-2014-17.pdf>

Data tables

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/execoffice/racial-equality-indicator-baseline-report-data-tables.xlsx>

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Israel

House of Commons Written Answers

Israel: Palestinians

Frank Field (Independent) [191302] To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, what recent steps the Government has taken to end armed conflict between Israel and Palestine.

Alistair Burt: At this highly sensitive time in the region, there is an urgent need to restart the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. After the recent outbreak of violence, I called for everyone to step back from the brink and to avoid escalating the situation further. We continue to urge restraint from all parties and welcome the return to calm in recent days. We strongly support the mediation efforts of the international community led by Egypt and the UN and urge continued talks aimed at finding an enduring peace in Gaza under the control of the Palestinian Authority. We regularly press both parties to resume direct negotiations towards a two-state solution. I last discussed the Middle East Peace Process with the Israeli Ambassador to the UK on 11 October.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-14/191302/>

Palestinians: Antisemitism

Joan Ryan (Labour) [192699] To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with reference to her Department's Memorandum of Understanding with the Palestinian Authority, what discussions her Department has had with the PA on a video posted on social media on 2 November 2018 by PA Education Minister Sabri Saidam which included the line, it was said that the old continent was sick of the behaviour of the Jews at the time and therefore it planned to get rid of them.

Alistair Burt: The UK strongly condemns any language or actions that could stir up hatred and prejudice. Our sustained support to the Palestinian Authority (PA) is

underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding which requires the PA to commit to the principle of non-violence and to tackle language and avoid actions that could incite violence or hatred. The UK continues to urge the Palestinian leadership to uphold this principle. President Abbas restated his commitment to the two-state solution on September 27 at the UN General Assembly.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-19/192699/>

President Abbas' statement referred to above can be read at

<https://gadebate.un.org/en/73/palestine-state>

Christianity: Middle East

Henry Smith (Conservative) [193461] To ask the Right Honourable Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what discussions the Church Commissioners have had on maintaining the Christian community in the Middle East.

Caoline Spelman: The Church of England continues to work alongside the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem to support the Christian community in Jordan, Syria, Israel, Palestine and Lebanon. The Church also partners and engages with development and mission agencies working to support Christian communities overseas. Regular pilgrimage visits are made by parishes and dioceses of the Church of England, mainly to those holy sites that are not in conflict zones and which often involve meetings with local Christians

Westminster Abbey will be holding a special service on the 4th December at which His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales will attend to offer encouragement to Christians throughout the region and to celebrate the contributions they make to their communities

The Archbishop of Canterbury made an official visit to Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Territories in 2017, the primary purpose of which was to affirm the Christian community in the Holy Land, to identify and explore challenges relating to religious freedom and to give encouragement to St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. The Archbishop also met with Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian politicians during his visit

During the November parliamentary recess I joined a small group of MPs on a regional visit to see for myself the challenges faced by the Christian community in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. We visited a number of projects that are funded or supported by the Anglican Church, including hospitals and schools. Speaking with the different communities gave a helpful perspective on the significant challenges to the daily lives and movements of people.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2018-11-20/193461/>

House of Lords Written Answers

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL11378] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Verma on 20 June 2016 (HL413), whether they will make available the independent audits relating to UK direct financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority.

Lord Bates: In line with Section 27 of the Freedom of Information Act (2000), we withheld the audit reports of the Palestinian Authority (PA) from 2010 - 2015, in order to protect delivery of our poverty focused objectives.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-11-12/HL11378/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2016-06-06/HL413/>

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Baroness Deech (Crossbench) [HL11379] To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the Written Answer by Baroness Verma on 20 June 2016 (HL413), what is their assessment of (1) the adequacy of independent audits relating to UK direct financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority, and (2) the regular reviews of those audits, following of PwC's response to a complaint submitted to the UK National Contact Point for the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises that the narrow scope of its auditing work did not require it to consider the distribution of funds to individuals implicated as terrorists.

Lord Bates: UK officials safeguard and continuously monitor the expenditure of UK aid in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. UK aid is channelled through the EU Palestinian-European Socio-Economic Management Assistance Mechanism (PEGASE). Our money goes into a special, dedicated bank account before being paid to individuals who have been vetted in advance. Independent auditors then check that the money paid out of the UK dedicated bank account only goes to these vetted individuals after every disbursement. We remain confident that these measures enable us to adequately monitor and evaluate our support to the Palestinian Authority.

The UK National Contact Point has published its Initial Assessment of the complaint made by a UK NGO. This concluded that the issues raised in the complaint merit further examination. The Initial Assessment is not an indication of any wrongdoing by the respondent. The UK National Contact Point is now working with both parties to facilitate mediation on the issues raised. In line with its procedures, the NCP will not be expected to publish further information on the case until this stage of the process is complete and a Final Statement has been prepared.

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2018-11-12/HL11379/>

The answer referred to above can be read at

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Lords/2016-06-06/HL413/>

The report referred to above can be read at

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-ncp-initial-assessment-complaint-from-uk-lawyers-for-israel-uklfi-against-pricewaterhousecoopers-global-network-pwc/initial-assessment-by-the-uk-national-contact-point-for-the-oecd-guidelines-for-multinational-enterprises-complaint-from-uklfi-against-pwc>

United Nations

Secretary-General Urges Israel, Palestine to Realize Two-State Solution Promise, in Message for International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People

... This year's International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People takes place at a time of turmoil, trouble and torment. The decades-long Palestinian struggle for self-determination, independence and a life of dignity faces numerous obstacles, including: continued military occupation of Palestinian territory; ongoing violence and incitement; continued settlement construction and expansion; deep uncertainties about the peace process; and deteriorating humanitarian and economic conditions, particularly in Gaza.

The UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is providing indispensable services and

needs our full support.

I urge Israel, Palestine and all others with influence to restore the promise and viability of the two-State solution premised on two States living side by side in peace, harmony and within secure and recognized borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both.

Let us reaffirm our commitment to upholding the rights of the Palestinian people and to building a future of peace, justice, security and dignity for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

To read the full press release see

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sgsm19361.doc.htm>

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Relevant Legislation ** new or updated today

UK Parliament

Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/holocaustreturnofculturalobjectsamendment.html>

Marriage Act 1949 (Amendment) Bill

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/marriageact1949amendment.html>

Online Forums Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/onlineforums.html>

**** Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill**

<http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2017-19/organdonationdeemedconsent.html>

Second Reading, House of Lords

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-11-23/debates/AF8D9D0D-FD77-4FD2-9AF7-000C5B1FA4F0/OrganDonation\(DeemedConsent\)Bill](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2018-11-23/debates/AF8D9D0D-FD77-4FD2-9AF7-000C5B1FA4F0/OrganDonation(DeemedConsent)Bill)

Palestinian Statehood (Recognition) Bill

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2017-19/palestinianstatehoodrecognition.html>

Scottish Parliament

Human Tissue (Authorisation) (Scotland) Bill

<http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/108681.aspx>

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Consultations ** new or updated today

Reform of the legal requirements for divorce (closing date 10 December 2018)

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/reform-of-the-legal-requirements-for-divorce/>

The future of civil partnership in Scotland (closing date 21 December 2018)

<https://consult.gov.scot/family-law/the-future-of-civil-partnership-in-scotland/>

2021 Census: Outputs Strategy Consultation for Northern Ireland (closing date 9 January 2019)

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/dfp/2021-census-outputs-strategy-consultation-for-northern-ireland-document.pdf>

Extremism in England and Wales (closing date 31 January 2018)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/extremism-in-england-and-wales-call-for-evidence>

Draft guidance to challenge bullying in schools [Wales only] (closing date 15 February 2019)

<https://beta.gov.wales/draft-guidance-challenge-bullying-schools>

One Scotland: Hate Has No Home Here (closing date 24 February 2019)

<https://consult.gov.scot/hate-crime/consultation-on-scottish-hate-crime-legislation/>

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