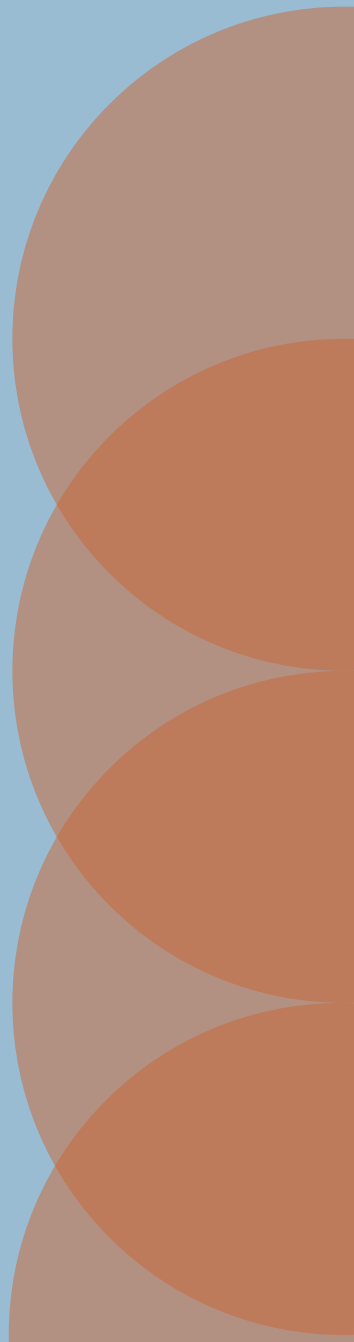




DIVIDING LINES

How Anti-Migrant Agitators Use Words To Pull Us Apart

By Nick Treloar, Nina Kelly and Dr Sanjiv Lingayah





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June 2026

*“Not everything that is faced can be changed,
but nothing can be changed until it is faced.”*

- James Baldwin

A few months ago, I was at a motorway service station with my mum trying to stop her from confronting two white women who were proudly wearing the pink insignia of a racist group that targets migrant men for being a threat to—presumably only white—women.

Recently I had an unfunny conversation with my partner about where we could feasibly live and work instead of England, should the political landscape reach a tipping point of danger for brown-skinned people like me and our children.

The racism is old, but signs like these surfacing more frequently indicate a new moment in time.

Whether the red flags are experiences, words, or literal flags, *Dividing Lines* reveals that they are in fact connected and sustained by an organised, well-funded narrative machinery, powered by anti-migrant agitators.

Nick Treloar’s unique investigative research decodes anti-migrant populist figures’ use of racist language, themes and stories and—in doing so—exposes the harm we face as their ideas become established.

One damaging story that emerges is the one embraced by the Women in pink on the motorway: the cynical co-opting of women and girls’ safety to license racist hatred.

The research also explores language in detail. For example, the use of the word ‘ordinary’ as a synonym for ‘White British’ symbolises an attempt to shift who counts as ‘one of us’, or ‘fully human’ in mainstream understanding.

And ‘mainstream’ is the right word. As *Dividing Lines* shows, those studied in this report are speaking to large swathes of people and making our discourse toxic. These individuals have enormous online reach, some of which is based on algorithms, giving them high visibility, rather than genuine popularity.

This report uncovers the overall language and narrative priorities of particular anti-migrant populists, and how they shape the world in which we all exist.

Equipped with this understanding, we are powerful.

But to expose divisive discourse is not enough. As per James Baldwin's evergreen wisdom, it is only by facing the problem that we light the path for solutions. And at Reframing Race, our formidable body of research on public mindsets tells us that people are ready to walk towards bold, life-affirming solutions if they are communicated in clear and compelling ways.

Let's take one example of deadly racial inequality. Black women in the UK experience nearly three times the rate of maternal mortality of white women; what is the answer? Well, we all instinctively know that it is not for more white women to die, which immediately reveals the lie behind racist ideas that the 'other' will take from the 'ordinary'. There is no win-lose scenario here; the solution is holistic and responsive maternal care for all women.

And the same is true for the big story that we must keep telling in irresistible ways: –real, transformative anti-racist futures are ones that will lift us all.

Nina Kelly

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About Reframing Race

Reframing Race exists to change the public conversation on racism in order to build an anti-racist future. We generate big ideas, fresh resources and groundbreaking research for anyone advocating for race equity. Our knowledge and data powerfully illuminate the problem, and measurably grow demand for the solutions we need to create a world in which we can all be safe and live well. You can find Reframing Race online at reframingrace.org.

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Introduction

Numerous figures with anti-migrant, anti-Muslim and racist politics have accrued millions of followers in the UK. They are harnessing a process known as ‘audience capture’ in order to influence our collective conversation. This dynamic has led to an increasing normalisation of racist ideas within public and political space.

The Racist Word of the Year initiative from Reframing Race decodes the ways that anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim populist figures are deploying language, themes and stories to divide us along racial lines.

The report and the research behind it identifies common rhetorical themes to produce a shortlist of words (or phrases) used by high-profile figures to advance anti-migrant, anti-Muslim and/or racist viewpoints. The study is an exploration into efforts to shape political and public debate. It shows how agitators attempt to mark parts of the population as less human based on their ‘race’, religion and migration status.

Many of the candidate words for the Racist Word of the Year 2025 are innocuous in other contexts. But set in highly racialised, anti-migrant and anti-Muslim discourse they cause racist harm. By this we mean they create a racial hierarchy with white British people at the top, worthy of their place in society and owed the protection of the law. Whereas migration-background, Muslim and Black and Minoritised Ethnic people are designated less worthy and subject to unusual punishment and control.

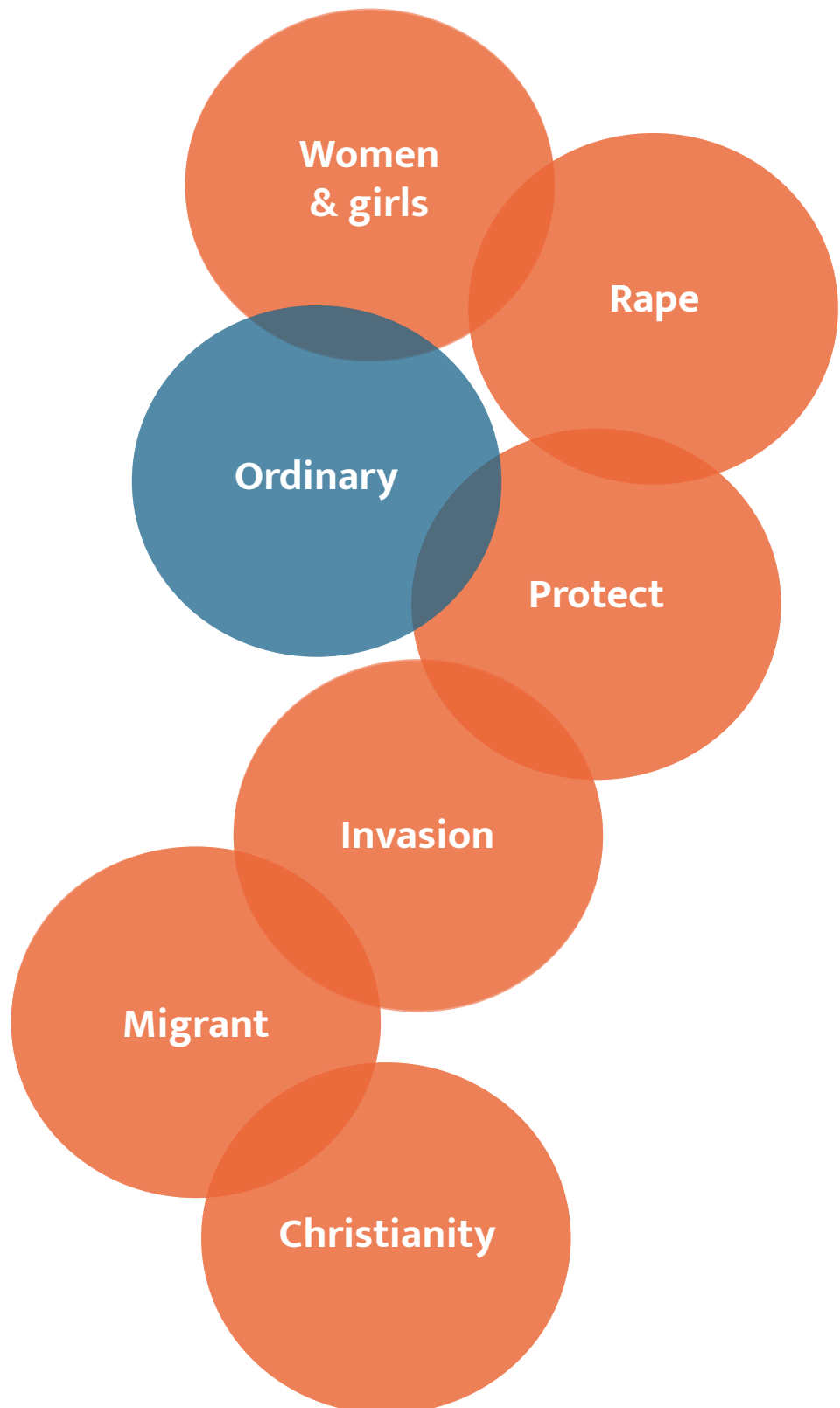
Method

This report is based on observational research conducted in November 2025 for the period of January 2025 to November 2025. It looks into the rhetorical strategies, language patterns, and social media reach of prominent individuals in the United Kingdom whose pronouncements revolve around ‘race’, religion and migration.

The research draws on platform analytics, public statements, social media posts, videos, and secondary academic and journalistic analyses. The shortlisted words were distilled from more than 40 hours of video content from prominent individuals. It was an immersive and difficult research process, given the volume of negative sentiments in the content being analysed. But it helped to establish a thorough understanding of the language, rhetorical patterns and common themes.

Shortlisted words and the selected Racist Word of the Year

The shortlisted words were chosen on the basis of frequency of use by prominent figures. Words were also selected because they encapsulate ideas and sentiments that these individuals use to try and shape our public and policy conversations.



The shortlist of words included:

- Women & girls
- Rape
- Ordinary
- Protect
- Invasion
- Migrant
- Christianity

Public and political figures often speak about the ‘safety’ of ‘women and girls’ in the context of a ‘migrant invasion’, or a ‘loss of Christian values’ as a result of the ‘Islamification’ of Britain. While ending all male violence and sexual violence against women and girls should be a priority, anti-migrant agitators ignore the greatest sources of harm—partners, ex-partners and domestic settings. Instead, they seek to label migrant and Muslim men as the major or sole threat to women, girls and families.

After considerable analyses and debate, ‘ordinary’ was selected as the Racist Word of the Year 2025. It was agreed upon by the Reframing Race Advisory Board from the shortlist. ‘Ordinary’ is being used by the anti-migrant, anti-Muslim agitators as meaning ‘white British’ and Christian. It is used to downgrade the worth of people with migration backgrounds, Muslim people and Black and Minoritised Ethnic people, and to exclude them from who gets to belong in UK society.

We are not suggesting we stop using the word ‘ordinary’, rather that we notice how it can be used in racialised, exclusionary and divisive ways to establish a ‘common sense’ idea that to belong is to be white, British and Christian. It also means that everyone else is viewed as lesser, other and out-of-place.

By shining a light on these lines that pull us apart we are better placed to choose something different. The findings emphasise the need to find ways to talk about multi-ethnic togetherness rather than division. It means that we can face up to the challenge of discussing and doing more to create futures in which all of us can live well.

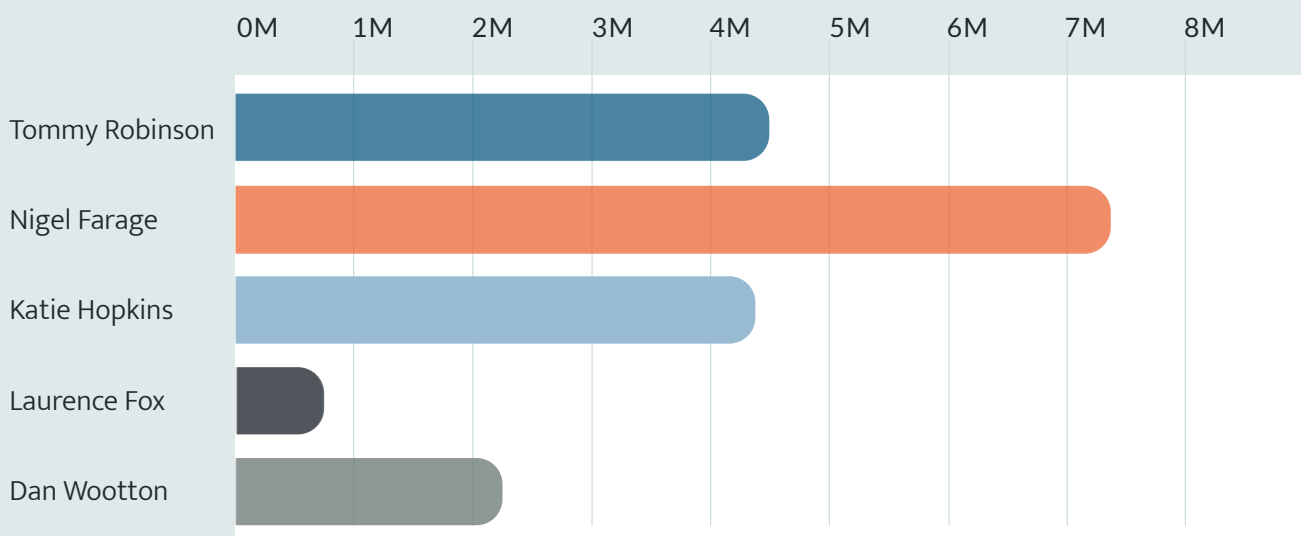
Platforms used by anti-migrant and anti-Muslim figures

Figures with anti-migrant and anti-Muslim politics rely on lightly-moderated platforms to amplify their views. X remains the platform of choice. Other common platforms include Telegram, Rumble, Odysee, BitChute and Truth Social. Research following the 2024 UK riots indicated that narratives were most widely shared on YouTube, Truth Social, X, TikTok and Rumble. The rise of so-called ‘citizen journalists’ within this ecosystem has further expanded reach.

Overview of key figures and their social media reach

Prominent anti-migrant and anti-Muslim figures in the UK ecosystem command large online audiences. Their reach—often surpassing millions—enables them to influence mainstream political debate. The chart below shows follower counts of several leading agitator figures in June 2026 (ahead of the publication of this report). The chart shows the large size of Nigel Farage’s social media following and why his words carry great weight.

CHART 1: FOLLOWER NUMBERS OF SELECTED ANTI-MIGRANT FIGURES
June 2026 (in millions)



Core themes across the anti-migrant & anti-Muslim ecosystem

Across speeches, videos and social-media posts, several themes recur with notable frequency, constituting a shared narrative framework.

Key narrative threads include:

MIGRATION AS AN EXISTENTIAL THREAT TO WHITE BRITISH PEOPLE

– signalled by terms such as “invasion”, “illegal immigration”, “flood”.

PROTECTION / DEFENCE

– protecting “our children”, “our women”, “our homeland”.

US VS THEM BINARIES

– “ordinary Britons” vs “elite”, “migrants”, “woke culture”.

CULTURAL / RELIGIOUS FRAMINGS

– heritage, Christianity (in opposition to Islam), values, cultural decline.

VICTIMHOOD / CENSORSHIP

– “silenced”, “ignored”, “censored”.

‘ANTI-WOKENESS’

– as a catch-all critique.

The concerted argument being made is that migrants, Muslims and Black and brown people pose an existential threat to white British people.

Individual rhetorical profiles

While there are commonalities and overlap in rhetorical patterns between figures espousing anti-migrant and anti-Muslim views, individuals have specific niches and appeal to particular audiences.



Tommy Robinson

Stephen Yaxley-Lennon—more commonly known as Tommy Robinson—emphasises ‘ordinary British people’, defence rhetoric, and the idea that the establishment is corrupt and betraying the public. His vocabulary is dominated by terms such as “invasion”, “Muslim”, “rape”, “betrayed”, “patriotism”, “traitors” and “cultural revolution”. His messaging strongly centres on fear, public safety and claims that Muslim men are threats to women and children, as well as the idea of ordinary people being let down. Robinson, along with others, is increasingly tapping into ‘Christianity’/ ‘Christian values’ as the antithesis to Islam and immigration.

By way of illustration, his speech from September 2025 at the Unite the Kingdom march included a variety of keywords that name perceived problems: ‘Muslim’, ‘invasion’, ‘migrant’. He speaks about Muslim men as rapists and the main threat to ‘women and daughters.’ He argues that ‘culture is being suppressed’ and rails against the establishment: ‘betrayed’, ‘traitors’, ‘propaganda’, ‘media’, ‘fake news’. And talks about ‘patriotism’, ‘Christianity’, ‘borders’, and ‘free speech’ as the answer.



Nigel Farage

Nigel Farage has a different rhetorical style to Tommy Robinson, yet still relies heavily on similar themes of immigration, sovereignty, cultural decline and elite betrayal. His most frequent terms include “migrant/immigrant”, “invasion”, “safety”, “foreign”, “deport” and “illegal”. He frames ‘native’ Britons as marginalised, and frequently anchors his messages in anti-woke narratives and national identity.

Farage says that people concerned about migration and how migrants are taking away jobs and money are ‘sensible’. It ‘isn’t racism’ it is because they ‘care’ about ‘their future’.

● **Comparative Analysis: Robinson versus Farage**

Both Robinson and Farage draw on and develop similar populist themes but with some differences in focus. Robinson centres his messaging on religious and cultural threat, often invoking Christianity, heritage and Islamification. Farage, however, is more interested in political sovereignty and anti-elite rhetoric.

Whilst Farage is more restrained than Tommy Robinson, he too speaks about the idea of 'invasion' and the 'risk' to women and girls. For example, in a statement from June 2025 he used in a single speech the words: 'mass immigration', 'illegal', 'family', 'community' and 'country', 'invasion', 'migrant', 'rape', and 'deported'. Therefore, there is an ideological connection between Farage and Robinson and, given the wider audience to which Farage has access, signature Robinson-type ideas are getting wide exposure.

One additional thing that Farage and Robinson have in common is that they are extending reach rapidly. Between November 2025 and June 2025 Tommy Robinson's follower count grew by more than 0.5 million across X and YouTube. Over the same period, Nigel Farage has gain around 0.5 million followers across X and TikTok.



Katie Hopkins

Katie Hopkins consistently frames immigration and multiculturalism as societal threats. Recurring words include "invasion", "flood", "threat", "crisis", "ordinary people" and "illegal". Hopkins emphasises cultural preservation and the protection/survival of women and children. She blames Black and Minoritised Ethnic people for a lack of assimilation. For example, when 11 people were stabbed on a train in Cambridgeshire in October 2025, Hopkins was a leading voice talking about 'protecting' a certain version of Britain.



Laurence Fox

Laurence Fox focuses on cultural grievance, 'anti-woke' messaging and claims of censorship. His rhetoric stresses threats to 'free speech', 'ordinary people', and British identity and argues that society favours 'non white' people. He talks about victimhood, including, for example, the things that white men can no longer supposedly do.



Other political influencers (Rupert Lowe, Darren Grimes, Richard Tice, Dan Wootton, Lee Anderson, Sarah Pochin, Zia Yusuf, Julia Hartley-Brewer)

Across these individuals, common vocabulary includes “invasion”, “foreign rapists”, “deport”, “protect our girls”, “Islamist” and “terrorist”. In other words, rhetorical continuity with more extreme influencers.

Common words and ideas across this grouping include that the ‘British people’ have had enough of ‘illegal immigration’, ‘thousands of illegals’, people are ‘not contributing’ and ‘mass deportations.’ For example, Julia Hartley-Brewer in August 2025 said, “If you put them [migrants] in uniforms, it’s an invasion!” She also stated that migrants represent a threat to security, e.g., “we don’t know who they are, some of them are terrorists.”

Common rhetorical formulations

The figures covered in this study all talk about ‘undocumented migrants coming in’ and most of them use the word ‘invasion’. Rhetorical frames appear to follow a pattern (see TABLE 1). Typical formulations use an adjective/pronoun to begin with e.g., the invader, the undocumented migrant etc.; then it is stated what is at risk, e.g., culture, values, community assimilation, ‘Britishness’; and finally, real-world impacts, e.g., the safety of women and girls.

TABLE 1: ANTI-MIGRANT RHETORICAL FORMULATIONS

ADJECTIVE/ PRONOUN	WHAT DOES IT RISK ?	WHAT DOES IT MEAN ?
Invasion/invader	Culture	Safety of women & girls
Undocumented migrant	Values	Taking jobs
Illegal immigrant	Community assimilation	Increased crime
Barbarian	Britishness	Rape
Islam	Civilisation	Losing our country

By adopting this pattern, those who use this language play on fear and blame. The figures studied assert connections between ideas and encourage the public to draw anti-Muslim, anti-migrant and racist conclusions.

Conclusion

The UK anti-migrant, anti-Muslim ecosystem shows strong thematic consistency across influencers, political figures and fringe activists and agitators. Central narratives revolve around invasion, migration, threat, danger to women and girls, cultural decline and the elites' betrayal of ordinary people. Populist 'us or them' choices and fear-based messaging form the backbone of the story being told.

Crucially, there is real-world impact. These anti-migrant, anti-Muslim and racist narratives are increasingly shaping political norms, discourse and policy debates in the UK as well as what happens on our streets and public spaces. Words that were previously kept underground increasingly fill our airways and take up space in the heads and hearts of some of the population.

But that is not the end of the story.

Afterword

Equipped with the insights above, we who believe in multi-ethnic togetherness become more powerful.

Dividing Lines' purpose is to illuminate this toxic undercurrent of determined and divisive voices in our public discourse in order to light the way for bold and captivating anti-racist stories.

Anti-racism serves as our foundation and lens, but Reframing Race's ultimate goal is to create futures where we can all live well. There is no room for leaving people behind or retreating to zero-sum formulas where in the general population there are 'winners' and 'losers.'

To centre our messages, though, we must first acknowledge the hostile ground onto which they land. The value of *Dividing Lines* is in helping us to discern the intention, organisation, and danger in the words and messages of those who want to pull us apart.

Initially, we struggled to define these agitators, i.e. the individuals studied above, and their politics. We labelled them far-right—and in many ways they are—but this description falls short.

Their influence extends beyond conventional politics and the left/right paradigm doesn't capture the full picture. These people have the most popular online voices, boasting significant mainstream UK and global reach.

They are campaigners and agitators, opportunists driven by self-aggrandisement and financial gain. Their 'solutions' show a disregard for the genuine interests of their followers. Instead, they manipulate people's deepest fears—real and imagined—inciting grievance, anger and ultimately violence.

We settled on the term 'anti-migrant agitators' in the report title. This definition encapsulates the principal characteristics that unite this group of influencers: racism, xenophobia, and a desire to create friction and exploit the insecurities of the masses.

However, we do not want to simply negatively label those swayed by the anti-migrant agitators' messages. The reality is that their audience represents a cross-section of our society. Someone's reason for being a 'follower' might include a need for belonging and meaning, or a genuine sense that life is hard and getting harder. These followers have been persuaded to believe the lie that their problems are the fault of migrants and Black and brown people.

At Reframing Race, we do not repeat the messages of anti-migrant agitators, even to refute them. Instead, we craft hopeful, compelling and irresistible narratives beyond racism. And we invite others to do the same.

For a world beyond racism, we need new stories. We can point the way towards futures capable of lifting us all. This is where real answers lie. And we know that when we head in this positive direction, we can bring with us the multi-ethnic many and build the power to not just talk transformation but to make it happen together.

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Bibliographic note

In addition, many posts were viewed on TikTok and X as well as numerous YouTube videos. A high proportion of videos that were watched on YouTube have now been deleted. In particular this is the case with videos from Tommy Robinson's YouTube channel from the 2025 Unite the Kingdom march and speeches.

If you would like more details of other sources, please email reframe@reframingrace.org

Methodology & caveats

This report draws on social-media analysis—particularly X, TikTok and YouTube—over an 11-month period in 2025. High-engagement posts and highlight sections were used as data points, as well as prominent and well known far-right figures. Additional sources included publicly available academic research, journalistic investigations and extensive review of video content across platforms.

For all the individuals researched within this work, the background research combed through their X history over the past 11 months (January to November 2025) and looked in depth at their ‘highlights’ section which shows their most interacted with tweets. This time frame was chosen to cover a long enough period to give the work a general understanding of themes and to cover the period of 2025 for the Racist Word of the Year.

Research took place over seven days of work and involved immersing into the anti-migrant world, listening and watching videos from 2025, conducting thematic analysis of qualitative data to build up patterns of common words and rhetorical framing that might constitute a ‘Racist Word of the Year’.

The videos were watched individually by a researcher who manually interpreted them, looking out for common words, patterns and rhetoric. From this was created a concise, research-based overview of the themes and rhetorical patterns that appear most often in the speeches and public statements from the figures studied.

This was aided by carrying out a grey literature search on google of the following questions:

“What words does the far right in the UK use most often?”

“Most influential right wing UK activists 2025”

“Most influential right wing UK politicians”

“Most followed far right accounts on social media UK 2025”

“Most followed far right accounts on social media”

“Which far right accounts have the most followers?”

“What words did Nigel Farage use most frequently in 2025?”

“What words does Tommy Robinson most often use in his speeches?”

Constraints included lack of access to full transcripts and advanced quantitative linguistic tools. As such, this report represents a sample rather than a complete dataset.



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