

European media lens: Reporting on the UK riots and their broader implications

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Since the beginning of August, several countries have issued safety warnings to their citizens residing in the UK, highlighting the alarming surge in far-right protests and riots. The UK, often hailed as one of the world's most diverse and inclusive societies, now finds itself grappling with some of the worst civil unrest it has witnessed in over a decade.

On July 29 three young girls were tragically killed in Southport, a town in North-west England. Since then, anti-immigrant and far-right violence has spread, fueled by false claims that the perpetrator was a Muslim and an asylum seeker, this rumor has been debunked.

In this article, we will analyse how our partners in France, Poland and Germany have examined the coverage of the UK riots by media outlets in their respective countries. It is important to explore how these media narratives have been shaped and to understand the broader implications, such as the potential to perpetuate anti-Muslim sentiment. By examining these media narratives, we can gain deeper insight into the role media plays in shaping public opinion during times of crisis.



Far-Right Narratives in French Media: How Boulevard Voltaire and Valeurs Actuelles Frame the UK Riots

Our French partner, ALDA has been closely monitoring the coverage of the UK riots in French media. Their media analysis sheds light on how different outlets are framing the events, with a particular focus on the narratives being pushed by far-right publications.

For instance, Boulevard Voltaire claims that the UK government severely represses legitimate concerns of citizens over migration framing the riots as a direct consequence of mass migration and lack of open conversation, almost justifying the violence. Valeurs Actuelles on the other hand, draws its readers' attention to "equally violent" islamo-leftists demonstrations. This terminology 'describes a perceived political alliance between the left political spectrum and Islamist movements' which is often used by far-right figures to discredit the left and accuse them of collaboration with radical Islamic ideas.

Both newspapers are known for their strong anti-migration stance and alignment with the far right. These articles depict the riots as the tipping point for citizens facing mass migration, presenting them as justified. Furthermore, both articles are keen to denounce the response to these riots by Muslim

and anti-nationalist groups as violent, making clear links between migration, Islam, and violence. The repeated association of migration, Islam, and violence in these articles is a strategic attempt to validate their anti-immigration and anti-Islam positions. The framing not only justifies the riots as a form of citizen revolt but also vilifies those who respond to it from a non-nationalist or Muslim perspective, thereby deepening societal divisions and fostering a climate of fear and mistrust.

It furthermore downplays the racism and anti-Muslim hatred fueling the riots, instead painting a fear-based and negative picture of those who stand against far-right groups. Such approach aligns with the far-right agenda of these newspapers, which seeks to oppose migration and promote nationalist ideals.

Poland: TV Republika's Dangerous Narratives on the UK Riots

Our Polish partner, the Never Again Association, has also been closely monitoring the coverage of the UK riots in Polish media, with a particular focus on the commentary from TV Republika, a television station known for its right-wing stance. Their analysis reveals a deeply troubling narrative in how TV Republika frames these events, highlighting dangerous and divisive rhetoric that not only justifies the riots but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes.

TV Republika hosts and commentators, such as Michał Jelonek and Cezary Gmyz, have framed the riots as a justified reaction to an "existential threat" posed by Muslims and immigrants in the UK. Jelonek condemns the British police's actions against demonstrators who oppose what he describes as the country being "ruled by Muslim communities," suggesting that the violence from far-right protestors is a legitimate response to this perceived threat. Gmyz echoes this sentiment by painting a picture of the UK as a nation in decline, allegedly overrun by Sharia law and no-go zones where police are afraid to go.

This framing of the riots as a necessary resistance against an alleged existential threat is particularly alarming. Far-right figure Marian Kowalski further contributes to this narrative by glorifying violence and contrasting the supposed militant upbringing of Muslim boys with what he describes as a lack of "pride" and "struggle" among ordinary Brits. This rhetoric not only reinforces harmful stereotypes but also perpetuates a climate of fear and hostility towards Muslims.

Additionally, TV Republika's commentary aligns with a broader far-right agenda by framing the riots as a form of necessary resistance against an alleged culture invasion. The station frequently links migrants, especially Muslims, with violence and lawlessness, dehumanising these communities and presenting them as a threat to national security. This narrative serves to justify far-right extremism and deepen societal divisions.

Much like far-right media in France, TV Republika's coverage supports anti-immigration and anti-Muslim views. By framing the riots as a justified reaction and pushing for harsh policies, the station deepens divisions and fosters fear. This sensationalist approach simplifies complex issues, making it harder to find effective solutions for migration and integration challenges.

German media on the racist riots in the UK

The racist riots in Great Britain also play a role in Germany. The association Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen took a closer look at how the German media is reporting on this topic:

Protests ("Proteste"), vandalism ("Randale"), a tough test ("Ausschreitungen", "Krawalle") - this is how many media in Germany describe the racist riots in the UK. For example, the German weekly magazine Stern headlines: "Riots. Vandalism in British cities after bloodshed" ("Ausschreitungen. Randale in britischen Städten nach Bluttat"). The Münchner Merkur, a Bavarian subscription newspaper, writes: "Riots shake England - the first tough test for Labor leader Starmer" ("Krawalle

erschüttern England – für Labour-Chef Starmer der erste Härtetest"). An article on the news portal of tagesschau, Germany's best-known news program, only says: "After knife attack in Southport. Great Britain cannot calm down" ("Nach Messerattacke in Southport. Großbritannien kommt nicht zur Ruhe").

These headlines trivialise what we are currently seeing in the UK: racism. In particular: anti-Muslim racism.

However, the word "racism" is rarely mentioned in reporting. There is also a lack of perspectives from those affected by racist violence. Trivialisation and one-sidedness in reporting are dangerous - both for those affected and for our understanding of democracy. For example, describing racist riots as "protests" (used in all three articles mentioned above) gives the impression that racist violence is an acceptable expression of political opinions. Such framing makes it easier for right-wing extremists to present their inhumane ideas and acts of violence as legitimate. This helps them gain supporters.

It is therefore important to call racism by its name and to include the perspectives of Muslims, people from BAME backgrounds and people with a migration background for a more nuanced reporting about the racist riots in UK.

What can we take away from this?

In conclusion, media coverage across GTTO partner countries—Poland, France, and Germany—reveals a troubling pattern. The justification of violent riots in the UK, initially sparked by online misinformation, has become a tool for right-wing as well as mainstream media outlets. These outlets frequently exploit and falsely link Islam, violence, and migration—a strategy that is deeply problematic and serves to further entrench division and discrimination. The spread of anti-Muslim and anti-migrant rhetoric, along with the scapegoating of Muslim communities, is both unacceptable and dangerous. Furthermore, the use of one-sided reporting only serves to reinforce harmful stereotypes, fuels division, and undermine objective understanding, ultimately perpetuating discrimination and exacerbating social tensions.

The riots in the UK starkly demonstrate how misinformation and racist rhetoric can lead to real-world violence against marginalised communities. Such violence is inexcusable, and addressing it requires a broader societal debate and a focus on the root causes of these issues.

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