

Advance UK's Bet: Britain Must Name Its Adversary, Islamism

- amuse
- August 30, 2025



The United Kingdom faces a test of first principles. The question is not whether to welcome peaceful people of all backgrounds. The question is whether the British state will defend liberal civilization, in law and in culture, when faced with movements that deny its premises. Call this the Islamism question. By Islamism I mean the political program that seeks to place religious doctrine above secular law, that punishes blasphemy and apostasy, and that subordinates individual rights to clerical authority. Many Muslims reject this program, some at great personal risk. They are allies in a common project of British liberty. The problem is not Muslims as such, the problem is an illiberal political theology that calls for a separate legal jurisdiction and a different theory of sovereignty.

Elon Musk's public rupture with Nigel Farage concentrated this problem into a single moment. Musk called Farage weak sauce after a dispute about how forthrightly to confront Islamism and its network of apologetics. The criticism was not trivial. Musk had praised Farage's insurgent movement, then withdrew support when he judged that the party would hedge on questions that admit of no hedging, namely whether Britain has the will to protect speech, equal citizenship, and the supremacy of secular law. In the months since, Musk has urged support for Ben

Habib's Advance UK, a start-up party that says out loud what a nervous establishment will not, that the British constitution must be the uppermost law, that the police and prosecutors must enforce one standard of justice, and that immigration policy must filter for civic compatibility, not only for need.

Readers will immediately ask three questions. First, is this an attack on Islam as a faith? Second, what distinguishes Islamism from personal observance? Third, what should policy look like if we insist on British first principles? These questions are fair, and they should be answered plainly.

Begin with the first. A liberal state does not tell people what to believe. It protects their right to believe. The line is crossed when belief hardens into a program for theocratic rule, when it seeks to criminalize speech, to punish conversion, to erase the equality of women under civil law, to place religious courts above the Crown's courts, and to subordinate national loyalty to transnational clerical commands. When writers speak critically about Islam in [politics](#), they do not, or should not, condemn private worship, charitable works, or family life. They condemn a political doctrine. Britain has faced such doctrines before. Communism was not just an economic theory, it was a program for one-party rule and the overthrow of Parliament. Fascism was not just a national myth, it was a plan for a state that recognizes no limits. Liberal Britain rightly opposed both, while protecting the rights of individuals who held private views short of violent [conspiracy](#). The same distinction holds here.

Now the second question. What is Islamism, and why is it in tension with British law? Consider the central planks. First, Sharia supremacy, the proposition that divine law should trump Parliament and the courts. That conflicts with the rule of law, which rests on democratic legislation, judicial independence, and equal application to all citizens. Second, blasphemy and apostasy rules, the view that criticism of religion or departure from it is punishable. That conflicts with freedom of speech and freedom of conscience. Third, theocratic governance, the view that political authority derives its legitimacy from clerical interpretation. That conflicts with the British settlement that separates church structures from the coercive power

of the state. Fourth, gender inequality as a matter of law, including rules of testimony, inheritance, and guardianship that deny equal standing to women. That conflicts with the equality of the person. Fifth, religious supremacy and dhimmitude, the idea that non-believers may be tolerated but as second-class subjects. That conflicts with equal citizenship. Sixth, a warrior ethic of jihad is understood as political violence in defense or expansion of religious rule. That conflicts with public peace. Seventh, restraints on religious freedom for others, including bans on churches or proselytizing. That conflicts with Britain's open religious marketplace. Eighth, collective honor codes that punish women or dissenters outside lawful adjudication. That conflicts with the monopoly of force by the state. Ninth, polygamy and patriarchal family law that conflict with the monogamous civil marriage regime. Tenth, the primacy of the ummah over the nation-state. That conflicts with civic loyalty to the United Kingdom.

One can deny that these planks are essential to personal piety. Many Muslims do deny it. One cannot deny that these planks, taken as [politics](#), are incompatible with the British constitution. A liberal society does not compromise on these points. It can accommodate prayer, dietary rules, and religious dress, within broad bounds of safety and neutral law. It cannot accommodate a system that would replace the law. This brings us to Ben Habib and Advance UK. Habib, a British businessman with a family background that includes Muslim heritage, has said publicly that the British state must reassert its authority. He does not call for religious tests for citizenship, he calls for a civic test, and for a civilizational confidence that has been missing. His own biography gives him credibility to reject the claim that any criticism of Islamism is bigotry. It is easier to see a problem when you have seen it from the inside as well as the outside. This is why Musk's support matters. He has a nose for timidity in institutions. He judges that Farage, for all his contributions on Brexit and immigration, now trims when plain speech is required. A party that tries to please everyone on a foundational matter will please no one, and it will abandon those most at risk, namely liberal Muslims, secular immigrants, and girls who need the state to be their guardian.

Here the British record is mixed. Police and prosecutors have often punished speech that criticizes Islam as hate, while declining to act with equal vigor against intimidation by Islamist activists. Speakers have been investigated for quoting scripture in ways that offended clerics. Journalists and citizens have learned to self-censor, not because they hate their neighbors, but because they fear the [administrative state](#). At the same time, the state has been painfully slow to investigate networks of sexual exploitation across Great Britain, where officials feared accusations of racism more than they feared the abuse of working-class girls. This is not a blanket indictment of any community, it is a sober account of institutional failure. The common thread is a loss of nerve. The law must be colorblind and creed-blind. When the state polices jokes while ignoring threats, it teaches the public that law is a weapon, not a shield.

Critics will say that this analysis paints with a broad brush. They will point to Muslim neighbors who run shops, serve in the armed forces, or act as doctors and teachers. They will say, look, these are not enemies, these are citizens. I agree. The argument is not that persons who are Muslim are enemies. The argument is that a political program, advanced by clerics and activists, aims to change British law and British norms by bullying, by appeals to grievance, and by violence. A liberal society must be able to name that program and resist it without treating the peaceful as guilty by association. It must also be able to deport, after due process, those who break the law and who present a continuing threat. The point is equal justice, not collective blame.

What then should policy be, if we take the Islamism question seriously? Begin with speech. Repeal or revise statutes and guidance that convert offense into crime. The standard should be direct incitement or true threats, not hurt feelings. The police should be relearned in viewpoint neutrality. A country that cannot discuss religion candidly cannot govern itself. Next, law enforcement must enforce existing laws against intimidation, grooming, forced marriage, and illegal religious tribunals. The Crown Prosecution Service should view group coercion as an aggravating factor. Victim protection must be stronger, with independent advocates who are insulated from local political pressures. Where officials suppressed

investigations for political reasons, disciplinary action should follow. The administration of justice is a trust, not a marketing exercise.

Immigration policy should be honest about civic fit. Britain should favor applicants who affirm secular law, equal treatment of women and religious minorities, and the primacy of Parliament and the courts. That is not a religious test, it is a civic oath. Background screening should include investigation into known affiliations with political Islamist organizations that have advocated for parallel legal structures or for criminal penalties on blasphemy. Where applicants misrepresent such affiliations, that should be grounds for denial. As for asylum, the standard should focus on individual persecution and the likelihood of successful civic integration. The Home Office should be empowered to deport non-citizens who commit serious crimes, including crimes of intimidation and coercion, consistent with the UK's human rights obligations. None of this requires discrimination against peaceful Muslims. It requires clarity about the British constitutional order.

[Education](#) policy must teach British history with the candor that built the nation. Children should learn why religious wars ended, why the Bill of Rights limited sovereign power, why equality before the law is the jewel of the realm, and why free inquiry makes science and prosperity possible. They should also learn that freedom includes the right to criticize religion, to change religion, or to have none at all. Respect for persons does not entail silence about [ideas](#). To the contrary, it requires confidence that [ideas](#) can be judged in open debate.

Civil society has a role as well. Many religious leaders in Britain, including Muslim scholars who reject Islamism, have argued for a civic reconciliation that protects faith while resisting theocratic [politics](#). The state should welcome such voices and partner with them where appropriate. It should also draw bright lines about foreign funding for domestic religious institutions. Money from regimes that punish blasphemy or apostasy should not shape British pulpits or British schools. Transparency rules should be strict, and violations should have consequences. A liberal order is not neutral about regimes that deny its core freedoms.

Some will worry that this agenda risks stigmatizing people who are already targets of prejudice. The worry is not baseless. Demagoguery can attach itself to any cause. That is why clarity is essential. The case for a hard line is a case for classical liberalism. It is the case for a state that treats every person as an end, that protects conscience and contract, that keeps the peace with equal rules. It is the case against any program that would replace those rules with clerical edict or communal coercion. When Musk criticizes Farage for trimming his sails, he is, in effect, insisting that Britain say what it believes. Advance UK is attempting to give that insistence a party structure. Farage is free to join that project by speaking with equal clarity. There is room in a national renewal for those who once hesitated, provided the hesitation ends.

At this point a reader might ask whether all this is too sweeping. Does it tar an entire faith because some adherents hold illiberal views? The answer is no. There is nothing wrong with urging private piety toward charity and self-discipline. There is everything wrong with demanding that Parliament and the courts bend the knee to clerics, that critics be silenced, that women accept second-class status, that non-believers accept civic inferiority, that violence be blessed as a path to rule. A religion that confines itself to the sphere of private conscience and voluntary association can flourish in a liberal state. A political theology that seeks a separate sovereignty cannot. The duty of British government is to make that line bright, to guard it without apology, and to help those who want to live on the liberal side of it to do so in peace.

Musk's bet on Advance UK is not about personalities. It is about whether the center-right in Britain will choose clarity over calibration. Calibrated language has had a long run. It has produced metastasizing speech codes, selective law enforcement, and a civic fear that ordinary people can feel even if they cannot describe it. Clarity would mean that the government ceases to crawl toward whoever shouts loudest, that it enforces one standard for all, and that it confidently articulates the conditions of belonging in a free nation. If Farage wants a place in that project, he has one, because he helped open the political space for it. If he

wants Musk's respect back, the path is the same as it is for any statesman, tell the truth without flinching and defend the law without exception.

There is a final point about moral psychology. Liberalism asks people to live with disagreement, often deep disagreement. It asks for a discipline of self-command by everyone, majorities and minorities alike. Islamism, as a political program, teaches the opposite lesson, that disagreement with sacred doctrine is an injury, that the proper response is force, whether legal or extralegal. One program tends to peace. The other tends to conflict. The choice for Britain is therefore not just legal, it is ethical. It is about the kind of citizens the country hopes to form. That is why this debate cannot be dodged with euphemism. That is why policy must do more than manage headlines. It must defend the terms of a shared life.

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