

CHARLIE KIRK'S LEGACY AND ECHOES OF THE CHRISTCHURCH TERROR ATTACK: WHITE SUPREMACY, ISLAMOPHOBIA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NZ'S POLITICAL MEMORIALISATION PRACTICES

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ABOUT CARE

The Centre for Culture-Centred Approach to Research and Evaluation (CARE) at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand, is a global hub for communication research that uses participatory and culture-centred methodologies to develop community-driven communication solutions to health and wellbeing. Through experiments in methods of radical democracy anchored in community ownership and community voice, the Centre collaborates with communities, community organisers, community researchers, advocates and activists to imagine and develop sustainable practices for prevention, health care organising, food and agriculture, worker organising, migrant and refugee rights, indigenous rights, rights of the poor and economic transformation.

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ABSTRACT

Charlie Kirk's murder on September 10, 2025, at Utah Valley University has raised critical questions around political violence, extremism, and the whitewashing of far-right discourse. A major figure of the American right wing and the leader who established Turning Point USA (TPUSA), the discourse that Kirk generated and the accompanying organizational strategies were intrinsically connected to white supremacist ideas, and specifically Islamophobic discourses. This white paper examines Kirk's promotion of the white supremacist "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory, his targeted attack on Muslim communities, and the broader global network of far-right extremism that has led to terror attacks, including the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks that claimed 51 lives in Aotearoa New Zealand. Drawing on the culture-centered approach (CCA), which centers the voices of marginalized communities that bear disproportionate burdens of white supremacist extremism, this white paper considers the recent attempts by New Zealand politicians to honor Kirk within Parliament. It argues that the attempt to memorialize Kirk in NZ parliament mainstreams hate speech, intensifies Islamophobia, and fundamentally undermines New Zealand's commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and multicultural equity. Policy recommendations are offered to safeguard democratic institutions from the penetration of extremist ideologies, prioritizing education, accountability, and community-led critical conversations.

INTRODUCTION

The September 10, 2025, murder of Charlie Kirk at a public event has highlighted not only the spreading tide of political violence in the U.S., situated in the broader backdrop of U.S. gun culture, but also the weaponization of the murder across networks of far-right extremism around the world.¹ Charlie Kirk, who was 31 years old, had become enormously influential through his association with TPUSA, an organization he had founded in 2012 and that he positioned as a youth branch of conservative activism.² However, in the guise of "free speech" and "patriotism," Kirk's career was marked by the dissemination of the white supremacist ideology, putting forth a vision of Christian nationalism replete with Islamophobic rhetoric.³ The white supremacist rhetoric produced by Kirk is part of a transnational communicative infrastructure that mobilizes around anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim rhetoric.⁴ The rhetoric, thriving on disinformation, is replete with hate, continually othering already marginalized communities.⁵ With the global proliferation of digital platforms that rapidly circulate hate, the white supremacist ideology plays a key role in shaping extremist violence targeting diverse marginalized communities, and poses serious risks to the health and wellbeing of minority populations, including migrants and Muslims at multiple intersections.⁶

This white paper draws on the Culture-Centered Approach (CCA), attending to the structural incorporation of supremacy in cultural narratives that perpetuate violence directed at marginalized communities, threatening the health and wellbeing of marginalized communities.⁷ The CCA notes that the study of extremism historically has failed to examine the role of cultural supremacy as an infrastructure for perpetuating extremist violence. In Aotearoa New Zealand, where the scars of the Christchurch terror attacks remain fresh, the proposed parliamentary tribute to Kirk by the ACT Party - subsequently blocked by Labor and the Greens - represents a dangerous normalization of the extremist ideology that fuelled the 2019 massacre.⁸ This white paper interrogates Kirk's ideological footprint, connecting it to white supremacy and Islamophobia, and analyzes the implications of memorializing such figures in New Zealand's political sphere.⁹ By doing so, it underscores the implications of mainstreaming of far-right white supremacist extremism that led to the Christchurch terror attack and the health ramifications of extremism, including heightened anxiety, trauma, and social fragmentation among Muslim and indigenous communities.

This analysis is timely and critical in the backdrop of the Christchurch terror attack in Aotearoa New Zealand, as post-assassination narratives risk whitewashing Kirk's legacy, much like the initial media responses to Christchurch that downplayed the attacker's white supremacist motivations.¹⁰ I argue that the discursive mainstreaming of white supremacy, combined with the biases of the Crown structures in critically engaging white supremacy and the inability to hold white supremacy to account reproduces an ecosystem that magnifies Islamophobia, fostering a climate where far-right extremism thrives.¹¹ Policy recommendations are proposed to prevent the entrenchment of hate in democratic processes, ensuring that memorials serve justice rather than division.

CHARLIE KIRK AND WHITE SUPREMACY

Charlie Kirk's ascent in conservative circles appealed to white youth through the mobilisation of the white supremacist ideology under the guise of cultural preservation. Underlying the white supremacist narrative is the construction of the US as a Christian, white nationalist state, rooted in white civilizational superiority.¹² TPUSA, under Kirk's leadership, sowed fear among white Christian youth by framing demographic shifts as existential threats, echoing the core tenets of white nationalism. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) has documented how the organization exploited anxieties about immigration, LGBTQ+ rights, and racial justice to advocate for a "white-dominated, male supremacist, Christian social order".¹³

Kirk's rhetoric frequently invoked the "Great Replacement" theory - a conspiracy narrative positing that white populations are being systematically replaced by non-white immigrants - a staple of white supremacist discourse that has inspired multiple mass shootings, including in Buffalo (2022) and El Paso (2019).¹⁴ In a March 1, 2024 episode of The Charlie Kirk Show, Kirk stated, "You believe in God, country, family, faith, and freedom, and they won't stop until you and your children and your children's children are eliminated."¹⁵ In another show in September 2021, he discussed the strategy of "the other side" bringing in voters" in "diminishing and decreasing white demographics in America."¹⁶

Constructing immigrants as threats, he crafted othering narratives such as, "Those are the men that will go into your communities and break into your homes and rape your women, take your children. But, hey, they're -- they're dreamers."¹⁷ Kirk then called for violent action:

Remember the whole whip fiasco? My position all along is, yes, it wasn't true, but of course you should be able to use whips against foreigners that are coming into your country. Why is that controversial?

Why do we have a military? Why do we have men with guns if we can't use them?

Having a country means being able to draw a line on the ground and say, this is our sovereign territory. If you enter, we have lethal force, and we're willing to use it. And you can escalate. You don't have to start with lethal force. You can start with rubber bullets, start with tear gas. You can start with firing next to them. Say, hey. We have weapons. We're willing to use them.

In 2024, as one of the key architects of the disinformation climate that catalyzed hate around the election, he promoted the obvious lie that Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio were eating dogs and cats.¹⁸ After sending a team to Springfield to interview white residents who had heard rumors, he peddled those rumors as proof to mobilize anti-immigrant hate.¹⁹ He continually fed the targeting of Haitian immigrants, suggesting that small towns were “unrecognizable to people who grew up there.”²⁰

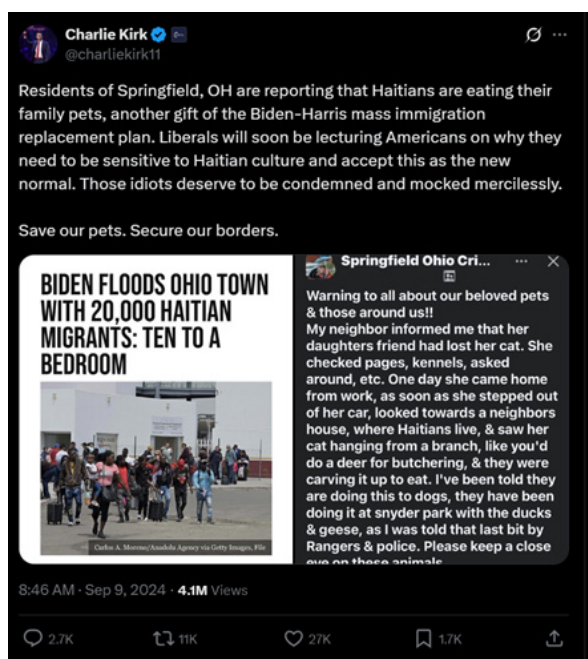


Figure 1: Charlie Kirk's promotion of disinformation targeting immigrants



Figure 2: The Far-right communicative infrastructure deployed by Kirk to target immigrants through disinformation

In public statements, Kirk asserted that liberty required a “Christian population,” tying freedom to racial and religious dominance.²¹ He hosted white nationalist figures like Steve Sailer on his podcast, praising him as a “noticer” of racial patterns in crime—a euphemism for racist pseudoscience.²² Kirk’s comments on “prowling Blacks” targeting whites and his skepticism toward Black professionals further entrenched racial hierarchies.²³ He stated, “If I see a Black pilot, I’m going to be like, boy, I hope he’s qualified,” and claimed it was a “fact” that “prowling Blacks go around for fun to go target white people”.²⁴ He also openly questioned whether a “moronic Black woman” in customer service was hired based on “excellence” or “affirmative action”.²⁵

These elements were not fringe; TPUSA events often featured alliances with Christian nationalists and anti-immigrant agitators, amplifying supremacist logic without overt symbols like Confederate flags. Post Kirk’s assassination, far-right groups like the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers have weaponized Kirk’s death to call for “state violence,” revealing how his work radicalized others.²⁶ From the framework of the CCA, this rhetoric erodes the wellbeing of communities of color by pathologizing their existence, leading to structural violence and health disparities.

CHARLIE KIRK AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Kirk's Islamophobia was overt and systemic, manifesting in attacks on Muslim political figures and broader narratives of civilizational clash. He repeatedly invoked 9/11 to stoke fears, labelling Muslim candidates like Zohran Mamdani a "Muslim Maoist" and warning of a "Muslim plot to take over the government".

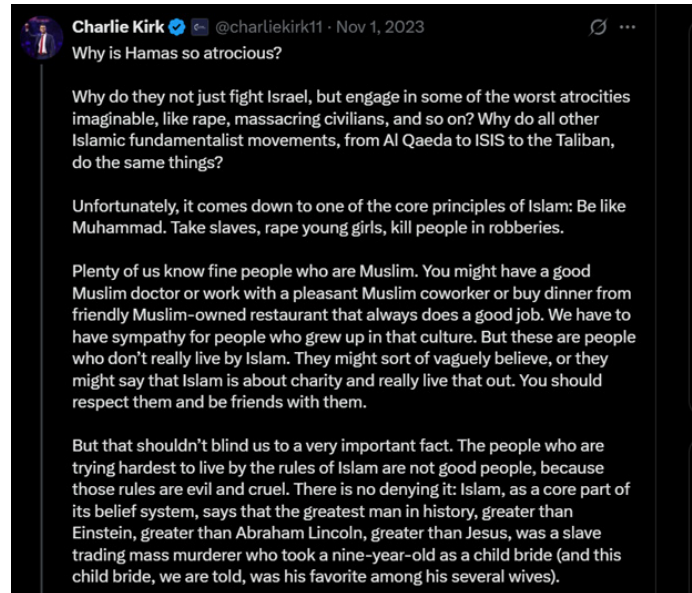


Figure 3: An example of Kirk's Islamophobic tweets

In 2025, Kirk targeted Somali-American Senator Omar Fateh, questioning his loyalty and claiming Muslims are "commanded to take over" host nations—a distortion rooted in anti-Muslim tropes.

He stated, "Islam is the sword the left is using to slit the throat of America," and claimed that "large dedicated Islamic areas are a threat to America".



Figure 4: An example of an Islamophobic tweet

He also publicly said that Islam is "not compatible with western civilization".



Figure 5: An example of an Islamophobic tweet



Figure 6: Kirk's promotion of The Great Replacement Conspiracy



Figure 7: Islamophobic and anti-immigrant rhetoric targeting the Somali-American Senator Omar Fateh

TPUSA's Turning Point Faith initiative further intertwined Islamophobia with Christian nationalism, portraying Muslims as threats to "biblical values". Kirk's alliances with figures like Gad Saad amplified claims that "Islam will conquer the West," fuelling dehumanizing stereotypes about Muslims.²⁷

Such discourse contributes to a climate of fear and anxiety around Muslim communities, where Muslim communities face heightened surveillance, discrimination, and violence—impacts that align with my research on how extremist rhetoric promotes violence targeting Muslims and undermines health access and mental wellbeing for targeted groups.

CONNECTIONS TO THE CHRISTCHURCH TERROR ATTACK

The Christchurch mosque shootings on March 15, 2019, perpetrated by Brenton Tarrant, were a direct manifestation of the global white supremacist ecosystem that Kirk amplified through his digital platforms.²⁸ Tarrant's manifesto cited the "Great Replacement" theory—also promulgated by Kirk—and a key element in white supremacist extremism as a defense against "white genocide".²⁹ The manifesto was "obsessed" with the idea that non-white Muslim people would "replace" white people through migration and birth rates, providing the "ideological glue" for an increasingly cohesive and transnational extreme-right.³⁰ The attack's livestream and memes spread rapidly online, much like videos of Kirk's assassination have since September 10, 2025, highlighting the role of digital platforms in amplifying extremism.

Kirk's rhetoric mirrored Tarrant's: both demonized Muslim immigration as an invasion, with Kirk's TPUSA events and public statements echoing the ecofascist and anti-Islam elements that shapes the extremism witnessed in the Christchurch terror attack.³¹ In Aotearoa New Zealand, where the attacks killed 51 and injured dozens, Kirk's influence via digital platforms reproduces the Great Replacement conspiracy and Islamophobia. Memorializing Kirk in the political mainstream risks retraumatizing survivors and validating the white supremacist ideology behind the Christchurch terror attack.³²

IMPLICATIONS FOR NEW ZEALAND POLITICIANS SUPPORTING AND MEMORIALISING KIRK

In the wake of Kirk's assassination, New Zealand's ACT Party, led by Deputy Prime Minister David Seymour, proposed a parliamentary moment of silence to honor Kirk, praising his "peaceful debate" and youth influence. This motion was blocked by the opposition, averting a symbolic endorsement of extremism. However, Seymour's public tribute and the response by a National Party influencer David Farrar of the violence as a "monumentally huge event" comparing it to "the assassination of the President or VP" underscore a troubling trend: the normalization of far-right figures imported from the U.S. in Aotearoa's institutions, contravening the Christchurch Call to address Islamophobia.³³

When I raised this alarm for precisely the reasons outlined in this white paper, the National Party Member of Parliament Joseph Mooney tweeted that NZ doesn't need a "Professor of Communication at one of its universities encouraging this kind of divisive and hyper-politicised rhetoric."³⁴

The political mainstreaming of a far-right activist who promoted Islamophobic white supremacy marginalizes Muslim and Māori voices:

- (a) creating an ecosystem where white supremacy thrives,
- (b) increasing the risks of white supremacist violence, and
- (c) perpetuating entrenched inequities by fostering environments of fear and exclusion.

The CCA foregrounds the central role of critically analysing the deployment of cultural narratives, in this instance, of cultural superiority, cultural supremacy, cultural hierarchy, othering, and dehumanization to drive infrastructures of extremism. White supremacy as an ideological apparatus continually produces its other in order to produce calls to violence, shaping the material infrastructure of extremism.

Kirk's Islamophobia directly echoes Tarrant's motivations, making parliamentary honours a form of structural violence that legitimizes white supremacist extremism, erodes trust in governance, and exacerbates trauma among affected communities. It also signals to global far-right networks that New Zealand is a receptive space, potentially inspiring further radicalization.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To mitigate these risks and align with New Zealand's bicultural and multicultural ethos, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Establish Guidelines for Parliamentary Memorials:** Parliament should adopt a policy requiring vetting of honorees for ties to extremism, involving consultations with iwi, Muslim communities, and human rights experts. Memorials must prioritize victims of hate, not perpetrators or enablers.
- **Enhance Education on Extremism:** Integrate mandatory training for politicians and staff on recognizing white supremacy and Islamophobia, drawing from Christchurch inquiries. Fund community-led programs in schools to counter far-right narratives, emphasizing health impacts. The lack of understanding and appropriate response to white supremacy in the New Zealand security and intelligence apparatus calls for continually "de-centering hegemonic knowledge constructions" within the security-intelligence communities through subaltern participation. The research and educational initiatives within the New Zealand security intelligence community should pay heed to this critical call for decolonization, centering Te Tiriti in how violent extremism is understood and grappled with, and should build the space for lessons learned from the Christchurch terror attack with humility and a commitment to listening to the voices of marginalized communities who bear the disproportionate burdens of the extremism.
- **Centre analyses of Islamophobia in Counter-terrorism:** Six years since the Christchurch terror attack, the New Zealand security intelligence community has failed to develop an effective and meaningful framework for mapping and responding to the white supremacist extremism that led to the attack. The inability to adequately understand, conceptualize, and respond to white supremacist extremism in the New Zealand security intelligence infrastructure stems from the whiteness of the infrastructure, immersed in the hegemonic values of white culture, approaching terror and extremism from these established values, and remaining unable to meaningfully listen to the voices of diverse communities that disproportionately bear the burden of white supremacist extremism. Specifically centering the voices and expertise of migrant, Muslim, and diverse communities and experts is critical to addressing white supremacist extremism.
- **Strengthen Digital Accountability:** Expand the Christchurch Call with domestic legislation mandating platforms to remove supremacist content swiftly. Politicians should disclose affiliations with groups like TPUSA to prevent conflicts of interest.
- **Promote Community-Centered Wellbeing:** Allocate resources for mental health support for Muslim and indigenous communities affected by extremist rhetoric. Encourage MPs to engage in dialogue forums led by marginalized voices, fostering inclusive memorials that honor resilience over division. This directly aligns with the CCA's goal of creating "voice infrastructures" to amplify the experiences of communities at the margins.
- **International Collaboration:** Partner with international organizations challenging Islamophobia to create networks of solidarity that connect the imaginaries and struggles of the global margins in pursuit of a more just and equitable future.

APPENDIX: SAMPLES OF CHARLIE KIRK'S ISLAMOPHOBIC TWEETS

- | Aug 14, 2016 | [post:53] | Muslim countries hostile to Israel at the Olympics. | 101 / N/A | Generalizes Muslim nations as anti-Semitic. |
- | Apr 9, 2017 | [post:61] | Radical Islam wants to kill Christians. | 2,590 / N/A | Equates Islam broadly with violence. |
- | Apr 2, 2019 | [post:60] | Will Ilhan Omar condemn Sharia stonings? | 11,775 / N/A | Smears Muslims via Sharia trope. |
- | Jul 26, 2019 | [post:50] | Ilhan Omar says America should fear white men. | 15,870 / N/A | Frames Muslim politicians as dangerous. |
- | Oct 23, 2023 | [post:46] | Mocks Muslim hate crime concerns. | 7,723 / 889,111 | Dismisses Muslim victimhood. |
- | Nov 10, 2023 | [post:47] | Muslims in Berlin prefer Sharia; deport them. | 3,532 / 394,371 | Portrays Muslims as disloyal invaders. |
- | Oct 31, 2023 | [post:70] | Islam's core principle: emulate Muhammad's violence. | 1,988 / 1,064,877 | Dehumanizes Muslims as violent. |
- | Mar 28, 2023 | [post:52] | Biden's Muslim solidarity was misplaced. | 3,239 / 217,296 | Ridicules Muslim victimhood. |
- | May 10, 2025 | [post:45] | Muslims plan to conquer West via naming streets. | 72,412 / 5,423,685 | Accuses Muslims of demographic conquest. |
- | Jun 2, 2025 | [post:48] | Islam incompatible with Western civilization. | 176,801 / 67,752,053 | Deems Islam inherently anti-Western. |
- | Jun 4, 2025 | [post:69] | Islam taking over West; need moratorium. | 41,523 / 2,402,751 | Frames Muslims as existential threat. |
- | Jun 7, 2025 | [post:68] | Why Muslims immigrate to Christian West? | 59,035 / 4,579,642 | Implies Muslims aim to undermine West. |
- | Jun 24, 2025 | [post:36] | Muslim socialist mayor a threat to US. | 157,668 / 12,946,405 | Links Muslim politician to terrorism. |
- | Jun 25, 2025 | [post:32] | Muslim mayor linked to 9/11. | 184,168 / 48,369,992 | Ties Muslim candidate to 9/11. |
- | Jul 1, 2025 | [post:19] | Muslim prayer is conquest of New York. | 39,819 / 2,163,530 | Depicts Muslim presence as invasion. |
- | Jul 14, 2025 | [post:55] | Islam commands government takeover. | 62,975 / 4,874,042 | Claims Islam mandates subversion. |
- | Jul 27, 2025 | [post:67] | Stand against Islam's growth in West. | 13,571 / 10,056,520 | Treats Islam as aggressive force. |
- | Jul 30, 2025 | [post:43] | Maher slams liberals for defending Islamists. | 11,981 / 458,896 | Amplifies anti-Sharia fearmongering. |
- | Aug 3, 2025 | [post:13] | Muhammad #1 name in UK; Great Replacement real. | 21,255 / 609,682 | Ties Muslim names to white supremacist theory. |
- | Aug 10, 2025 | [post:8] | Germany pays migrants in Arabic; Muslim invasion. | 6,748 / 195,961 | Labels Muslim migration an invasion. |

| Aug 13, 2025 | [post:62] | Islam has conquered Britain. | 50,117 / 5,824,948 | Claims Islam dominates Western nation. |

| Sep 2, 2025 | [post:51] | Muslim immigration is civilizational suicide. | 70,405 / 2,711,767 | Portrays Muslims as lethal to West. |

| Sep 3, 2025 | [post:42] | Islam aims to conquer demographically. | 17,989 / 769,382 | Defines Islam as conquest ideology. |

| Sep 9, 2025 | [post:49] | Islam is left's sword to destroy America. | 65,918 / 28,831,886 | Depicts Islam as anti-American weapon. |

Tweets sourced from X searches, showing Kirk's pattern of framing Islam/Muslims as threats. Engagement data reflects likes and views (where available). Critics (e.g., The Guardian, CAIR) label these as hate speech.

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