

A Year of Hate: Anti-Drag Mobilisation Efforts Targeting LGBTQ+ People in the UK

Aoife Gallagher



Amman | Berlin | London | Paris | Washington DC

Copyright © Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2023). Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a company limited by guarantee, registered office address PO Box 75769, London, SW1P 9ER. ISD is registered in England with company registration number 06581421 and registered charity number 1141069. All Rights Reserved.

www.isdglobal.org

Contents

Executive Summary	4
Key Findings	5
Glossary	6
Timeline and Context	8
Key Actors	10
Patriotic Alternative	10
Turning Point UK	11
Independent Nationalist Network	11
Alpha Men Assemble	12
“Child protection” groups	12
Various Conspiracy Influencers	12
Other groups	13
Key Tactics	14
Protesting	14
Calling libraries to complain ahead of the events	14
Leafleting local areas	15
Email campaigns	15
Key Narratives	16
Drag performers are paedophiles or hurting children	16
Drag performers are “indoctrinating” children	16
Conclusion	17

Executive Summary

Research by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) has found that in the year since June 2022, anti-drag mobilisation in the UK has become a key focus for a variety of groups and actors. Anti-vaxxers, white nationalist groups, influential conspiracy theorists and “child protection” advocates have at times formed an uneasy – even fractious – coalition of groups opposing all-ages drag events. The driving force behind these protests is a mix of far-right groups and COVID-19 conspiracists.

While public debate about what is appropriate entertainment for children, and at what ages, is absolutely legitimate and deserves fair hearing, the identified tactics used by these actors only serve to undermine that discussion with chilling consequences for free expression, and create fertile ground for a potential uptick in violence. Furthermore, our analysis has found evidence that the UK is importing anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and strategies from similar movements in the US, with the “groomer” slur - used to frame LGBTQ+ people as a danger to children - becoming commonplace among anti-LGBTQ+ campaigners. Even though UK activity has not reached the level of violence seen in the US, abuse and harassment of hosts, performers and attendees at such events is a regular occurrence, and multiple events have been cancelled due to safety concerns.

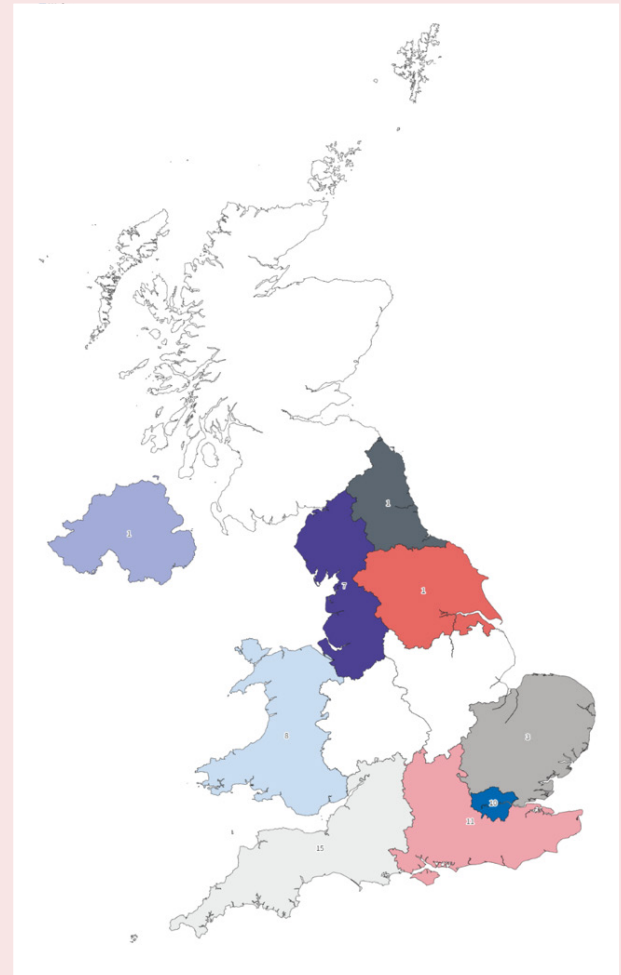
This report documents anti-drag activity in the UK by searching news reports, Twitter mentions and messages shared in relevant UK Telegram channels and groups. It outlines the actors involved, the tactics used and the impact of such activity between June 1, 2022 and May 27, 2023.

Key Findings

ISD found a total of 57 all-ages drag events targeted during the period analysed. Of these 57:

- Protesters were present at 51 events
 - 10 of these events were cancelled ahead of time
 - The protests regularly involved harassment and abuse of performers, staff, parents and police, with a number of violent clashes as well as arrests reported.
- The majority of these events (49) took place between the end of July 2022 and the end of August 2022 when Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH) embarked on a tour across libraries in the UK.
- The protesting and harassment of drag events was organised and attended by individuals with varied ideologies and beliefs, including white nationalists, sovereign citizen groups, conspiracy theorists, anti-vaccine activists and child protection groups.
- The events targeted in 2023 also drew the attention of a number of Conservative Party politicians, a noteworthy example of how such activity is being mainstreamed.
- In April 2023, a man involved in anti-drag mobilisation was convicted of hate crimes for publishing statements online accusing a drag queen of “grooming children”.

Figure 1 Number of drag events targeted per region in the UK



- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------|
| ● North East | ● London |
| ● North West | ● South East |
| ● Yorkshire and the Humber | ● South West |
| ● East Midlands | ● Northern Ireland |
| ○ West Midlands | ○ Scotland |
| ● East | ● Wales |

Source: ONS Open Geography Portal, ONS

Glossary

5G Conspiracy Theory

A conspiracy theory whose believers assert that 5G technology – which underpins the current fastest mobile phone networks – is being implemented for sinister purposes. These include the spreading of the COVID-19 virus.

Anti-lockdown

The term “anti-lockdown” has come to stand in for a range of positions held by individuals who broadly oppose the implementation of restrictions on individual freedoms in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Anti-lockdown individuals or groups may advocate for alternative approaches, such as emphasizing individual responsibility or the prioritization of other societal needs alongside public health considerations.

Anti-vaccine

The terms “vaccine sceptic” and “anti-vaxxer” cover a wide range of attitudes that are characterised by distrust of a specific vaccine or vaccines in general. Vaccine sceptics are not categorically opposed to vaccines, but have reservations of varying degrees about them. Certain vaccine sceptics accept some vaccines but reject others, sometimes including the COVID-19 vaccines. By way of contrast, anti-vaxxer are fundamentally opposed to vaccines. Their reasons range from suppositions derived from conspiracy theories to the deeply held belief that all vaccines represent a harmful intervention into the body’s biochemical processes.

Christian nationalist

Christian nationalism has multiple definitions, but for ISD’s purposes it is understood to be an ideology that “idealises and advocates a fusion of Christianity and American [or Australian, or British] civic life” (Whitehead and Perry 2020:10). Christianity in this form is typically racialised (as white) and exclusionary (implying that other religions cannot or should not be part of the nation).

Doxxing

Searching for and publishing the private data of individuals or organisations on the internet, usually with malicious intent.

Drag Queen Story Hour (DQSH)

An event in which a drag performer (typically, though not always, a drag queen – usually a man dressed in female gendered clothes) reads books or tells stories, normally to children.

Extremism

Extremism is the advocacy of a system of belief that claims the superiority and dominance of one identity-based ‘in-group’ over all ‘out-groups.’ It propagates a dehumanising ‘othering’ mind-set that is antithetical to pluralism and the universal application of Human Rights.

Far-right

ISD’s definition of far-right is in line with far-right expert Cas Mudde, who conceptualises “far-right” as an umbrella term that includes both radical right-wing and extreme right-wing actors. Mudde states that both radical and extreme right-wing actors believe that “inequalities between people are natural and positive,” but have differing attitudes towards democracy. Radical right-wing actors are not against democracy in principle, while extreme right-wing actors reject democracy as a form of government.

Parents’ rights

In the context of this report, “parents’ rights” groups are organisations or collections of individuals whose unifying objective is to advocate for the rights of parents to choose the kinds of materials, lifestyles, ideologies and beliefs their children are exposed to. In this context, they may oppose the hosting of all-ages drag events or other events that showcase LGBTQ+ identities.

Save The Children

In this context, Save The Children (often stylised #SaveTheChildren) is a conspiracy theory offshoot of QAnon, claiming that there is a wide-reaching conspiracy by powerful individuals who are trafficking children for the purposes of paedophilia and ritualistic abuse.¹⁴

Sovereign Citizens

The Sovereign Citizens movement comprises a highly heterogeneous anti-government ideology that originated in the United States. Adherents are united in their belief that the U.S. government illegitimately rules over them. They live under the assumption that by declaring themselves sovereign, they are not obliged to abide with government legislation.

While it is an ideology that has manifested in many different forms, contemporary interpretations are frequently linked to conspiratorial and extremist beliefs. U.S. law enforcement agencies have labelled the movement a domestic terrorist threat. In recent years, anti-government sentiments in relation to imposed COVID-19 measures triggered a surge in popularity of Sovereign Citizens-related ideas in many national contexts.

White nationalism

White nationalism is advocacy for a separate white society or white nation, also sometimes referred to as a white ethnostate. The Anti-Defamation League describes white nationalism as a euphemism for white supremacy; the term is now used to “refer to a form of white supremacy that emphasizes defining a country or region by white racial identity and which seeks to promote the interests of whites exclusively, typically at the expense of people of other backgrounds”.

White supremacism

White supremacy is a system of belief that posits the superiority of whites over non-whites, and advocates that white people should be politically and socially dominant over non-white people. This can extend to a belief in the need for violence against, or even the genocide of, non-white people.

Timeline and Context

Between June 2022 and May 2023, protest movements targeting UK drag events have become a central battleground for a range of groups and individuals with varying ideologies and beliefs. ISD tracked a total of 57 events that had been targeted, with 51 of these having protesters present and 10 being cancelled ahead of time because of complaints, abuse and the risk of danger to attendees and staff.

The first event targeted was a DQSH due to take place in the CLIP Theatre in London on 11 June 2022.² The event was organised by the nursing union the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and was planned as a story time event for toddlers and children under the age of seven. The event was cancelled after the RCN received a barrage of messages that it said were “discriminatory, homophobic, transphobic and exclusionary.”³ Pat Cullen, the general secretary and chief executive of the RCN said she regretted cancelling the event and that it would be organised again for another date, however RCN confirmed to ISD that it was “not possible to reschedule” the event.

In mid-May 2022, DQSH announced its UK summer tour, comprising 69 shows in libraries across 20 cities and regions in England and Wales, beginning on 25 July and ending on 1 September. The events were to consist of Aida H Dee, the drag persona of UK DQSH founder Sab Samuel, reading several children’s books that she had written in an entertaining pantomime style in libraries.

Two weeks before the start of the tour, the full list of DQSHUK events was widely shared in communities on Telegram popular with far-right activists and conspiracy theorists, with posts encouraging members to protest (see image 1).

The tour would often visit multiple libraries in one day in a certain town, city or region. ISD found that out of the 69 libraries listed in the DQSH summer tour, protesters showed up at 44. Seven of these events were cancelled because of the threat posed by the protests and in a small number of other cases, multiple events were amalgamated into one larger event in order to mitigate protests.

The protestors in attendance varied at each event, although from ISD’s review of video footage recorded

Image 1 (Top) Full list of DQSHUK events shared by Tommy Robinson’s Telegram channel with calls to be “ready to protest the grooming of our innocent children”. (Bottom) A post shared in the Telegram channel of a COVID-sceptic influencer encouraging protests at DQSHUK.

Tommy Robinson News

Someone has been very helpful and passed on this Information about drag queen story hours.

Please check for yourselves and if you can be ready to protest the grooming of our innocent children.

And tell the parents who take them there something about themselves.

Disgusting!!!!

DRAG QUEEN STORY HOUR UK TOUR TIMES, DATES, VENUES!

Reading

Reading Central Library @ 10:30, 25/07/2022

Tilehurst Library @ 14:00, 25/07/2022

Fiona Rose Diamond

!! LOCAL GROUPS AND ORGANISERS GET ON THIS DRAG QUEEN STORY HOUR AND STAND AGAINST THE SEXUALISATION OF CHILDREN !!

👁 1606 Fiona CoviLeaks, 18:14

at the protests, there appeared to be a small number of people who travelled across the country protesting at multiple events. See below for detailed information on the groups and individuals who were in attendance. Although many of the protests were scarcely attended, those protestors that did show up were frequently verbally abusive towards those attending the events, calling them “groomers” and accusing them of “sexualising children”. Protesters also often complained about the events being “funded by public money” and the closing of libraries to the public during the events. In some cases, clashes broke out with counter protestors and in a small number of instances, people were arrested.

Following the wave of protests during July and August 2022, there was a lull in anti-drag mobilisation until the beginning of February 2023. Between then and 27 May 2023, eight DQSH events have been targeted. Seven of these involved protests, while one event was cancelled ahead of time following complaints and threats.

Notably, the events in 2023 have also drawn the attention of several Conservative Party MPs and Peers. In January 2023, Conservative Party peer Emma Nicholson described a DQSH event due to take place in the Tate Britain the following month as “propaganda”. In an open letter, she also questioned whether “murderers, paedophiles, terrorists, furies and other fetishists” would be providing entertainment and said that “advocates for queer ideology” were “not appropriate role models for young children.”⁴ In March, Conservative MP Sara Britcliffe tweeted about a DQSH event due to take place at a literary festival in Lancashire, calling it “inappropriate” and urging the organisers to cancel it, which they did due to “safety concerns.”⁵ A month later, Nick Fletcher, Conservative MP for Don Valley, said that “serious questions” had to be answered about a “Glam camp” for children that took place over the Easter holidays in Doncaster. The event was described by the organisers as allowing children to create “a performance make-up look, sewing fashion garments and showcasing singing and drama talents.”⁶ Fletcher criticised the use of taxpayer money in hosting the event and said that he didn’t “see any reason” for it. The addition of political voices criticising such events is a notable example of the mainstreaming of such activity.

Key Actors

Actors were only noted as being involved in protests when online posts and/or news reports linked them to an event. It was not always possible to identify all those involved/present at each event, therefore the number of events each group or individual was involved in is likely underestimated in this report.

Patriotic Alternative

ISD found that the white nationalist group Patriotic Alternative (PA) was involved in at least 20 protests throughout 2022 and 2023 (36% of all events). Regional offshoots of the group were involved in leafleting areas in the run-up to the events and members were seen waving PA flags and holding banners at the protests (see image 5).

As noted by Hope Not Hate in 2022, PA's involvement in such activity is "highly opportunistic." The group perceive LGBTQ+ issues as wedge issues which they can then exploit to boost their profile and gain recruits. This is evident in the propaganda videos produced of their anti-drag activity. In one such video,⁸ a PA member handing out flyers for the group tells a member of the public that Sab Samuel is "teach[ing] them [children] perverse disgusting stuff" before saying "we are going to be a minority by 2066", a reference to the far-right Great Replacement conspiracy theory.⁹

The group once again turned their attention to protesting DQSH events in February 2023, most notably leading a protest on 11 February outside the Tate Britain in London where one person was arrested.¹⁰

Image 5 PA activists at a DQSHUK protest in July 2022



Figure 2 Types of actors involved in anti-drag activity and number of events associated with each

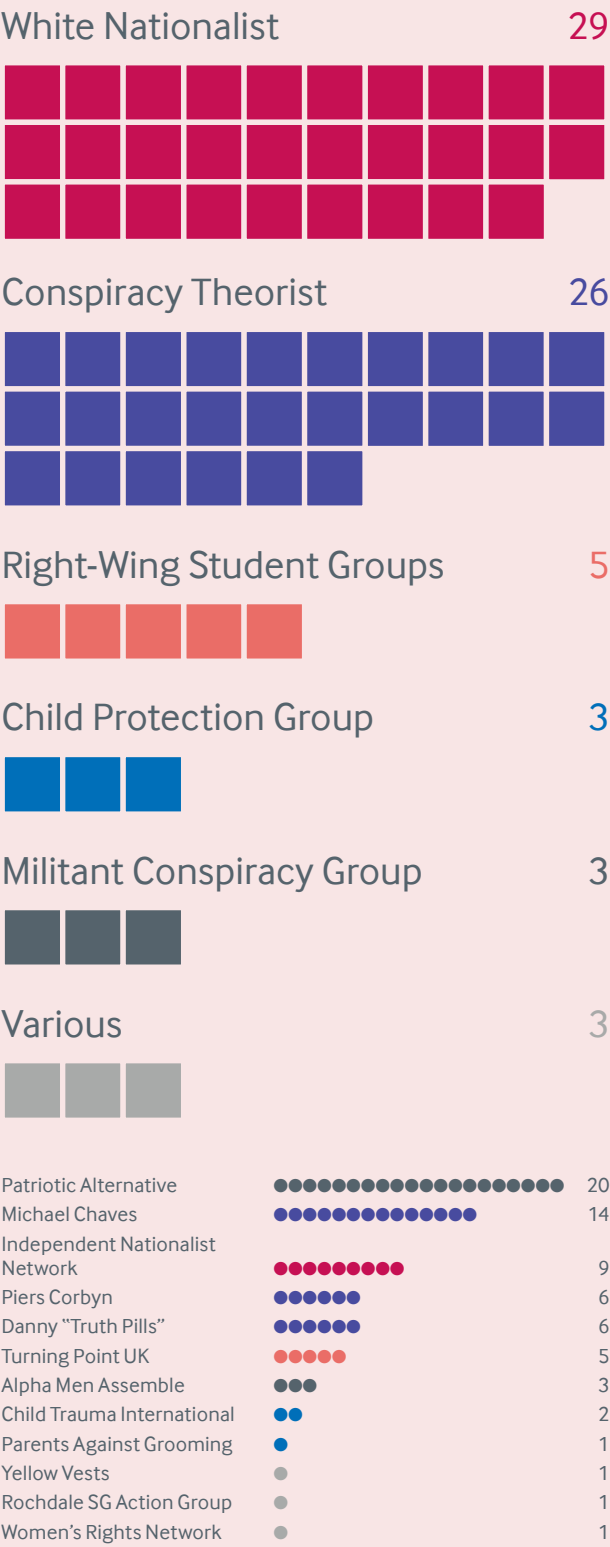


Image 6 TPUK's first tweet mentioning drag queens in relation to children



Turning Point UK

Spring of 2023 saw a new wave of protests against DQSH, with Turning Point UK (TPUK) establishing itself as a primary organiser. TPUK is an offshoot of the US conservative student group Turning Point USA. At the time of writing, TPUK had organised five such events in London, four of which were held outside the Honor Oak Pub in Lewisham which hosts a monthly DQSH and all ages drag brunch event.¹¹ The fifth was held to protest a non-existent event at the Great Exhibition Pub in East Dulwich. The website for the pub had not been updated and still listed a monthly DQSH event from the summer of 2022. The organisers of the events from last summer told the BBC that they had stopped hosting them “due to concerns over opposing protesters breaching their safeguarding policy.”¹²

TPUK turned their attention to drag events in January of 2023. The organisation’s first tweet mentioning drag in relation to children was a January 3 quote from GB News presenter Calvin Robinson who questioned “why drag queens are so keen to spend time with your children” (see image 6).¹³ Robinson was also present as a speaker at two of the protests organised by the group, alongside his GB News colleague Lawrence Fox.¹⁴

Independent Nationalist Network

The Independent Nationalist Network (INN) formed as a loosely organised splinter group from PA in 2021. It describes itself as a “a leaderless collective of autonomous community activists.” According to Hope Not Hate, its unofficial leader is Richard Lumby, a former British National Party organiser.¹⁵ Hope Not Hate has also pointed to the INN’s links to extremists, including a member who identifies as a National Socialist and has expressed support for nazi terrorist groups such as Atomwaffen Division.

INN was a central organiser in the protests targeting DQSH in the summer of 2022. The group called their campaign #ThisEndsNow and their Telegram channel was dominated by posts promoting the protests for the duration of July and August 2022. INN also distributed leaflets encouraging people to call or email their local authorities or MPs to complain about DQSH events in their area. Like PA, INN produced propaganda videos of their activity and celebrated when their involvement in the protests was mentioned in news reports.¹⁶

Due to the loosely organised nature of INN and the lack of transparency around their members, it was often difficult to document their attendance at protests. ISD only found documented evidence of their presence at 9 protests but also notes that INN was described by the website UK Column, which is known to post content about conspiracy theories, as “the most organised group” involved in protesting DQSH events.¹⁷

In April 2023, INN member Christopher Mitchell was convicted of hate crimes for publishing statements online accusing a drag queen of “grooming children”. He had also stated in a Facebook post that parents taking their children to DQSH events should “have their devices checked”, insinuating that parents may be involved in abusing children.¹⁸

Alpha Men Assemble

Alpha Men Assemble (AMA) formed in late 2021 and brought together a variety of people and ideologies with their main aim being to push back against pandemic restrictions. The group and its members are linked to COVID-19 conspiracy theories and anti-vaccine rhetoric, as well as sovereign citizen ideology, whose believers adhere to a set of pseudo legal principles which they claim makes them immune from the law.¹⁹ In late 2021

and early 2022, the group conducted military-style training exercises led by former members of the armed forces and were urged to fight back in a “global war” being waged by governments.²⁰

As reported by Hope Not Hate, AMA has close links to INN, with AMA founder Danny Glass agreeing that the groups should “connect and support each other”.²¹ As pandemic restrictions were lifted in 2022, AMA turned their attention to protesting DQSH along with other prominent COVID conspiracy groups and individuals.

“Child protection” groups

A smaller presence at a number of the protests that took place during the summer of 2022 were groups that bill themselves as “child protection” organisations.

An anti-DQSH protest in Belfast where attendees read religious scripture and held signs saying “hands off our children” was organised by a group calling themselves Parents Against Grooming. Former Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) councillor Jolene Bunting attended the Belfast protest said they were there “in opposition to child grooming”.²² Bunting subsequently breached an injunction against harassing Matthew Cavan, who was performing at the event under his drag persona Cherrie Ontop. Cavan told a court that Bunting had portrayed him as a “groomer” online, which led to him losing work, receiving death threats and being targeted by “paedophile hunters”.²³

In Blackpool and Somerset, representatives of an organisation called Child Trauma International were present.²⁴ The group says it fights back against so-called Satanic Ritual Abuse,²⁵ a type of abuse for which there is no corroborating evidence, but which has been the cause of moral panics in the US, UK and across the world since the 1980s, leading to hundreds of wrongful convictions.²⁶ Two members of the group managed to infiltrate the event in Blackpool, disrupting the performance and shouting abuse at Sab Samuel. They called the event “child grooming” and said it was “run by Masons,” a reference to Freemason conspiracy theories.²⁷

Various Conspiracy Influencers

Outside of organised groups, protests were also attended by a variety of individuals who had built up a following during the pandemic by spreading conspiracy

theories related to COVID-19, vaccines or restrictions put in place to stop the spread of the virus.

These include Michael Chaves, who posts online under the moniker Mad Mix Conspiracies. According to Byline Times, Chaves began posting about conspiracy theories in 2018, when he would discuss flat earth theories and beliefs about the New World Order and the Freemasons.²⁸ His popularity increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he began to espouse sovereign citizen beliefs and would serve “notices of liability” to healthcare workers, TV presenters and radio broadcasters, accusing them of “crimes against humanity”.²⁹ ISD found Chaves was present at 14 DQSH protests during the summer of 2022. Although it is unclear if Chaves is a member of INN, his content was shared on the INN Telegram channel dozens of times during the 2022 wave of anti-DQSH protests.

An individual with a similar modus operandi to Chaves posts online under the name “Truth Pills” and is known only by his first name “Danny”. Like Chaves, Danny attempted to make citizen’s arrests of drag performers and library workers and gave instructions to his followers online on how to do so.³⁰ He, along with Danny Glass from AMA, was involved in blocking Sab Samuel in his car following the DQSH event in Brighton’s Jubilee Library on 4 August, 2022 while also shouting slurs and derogatory accusations at him.³¹ Posts about protesting drag events from the US-based group Gays Against Groomers were shared in the Truth Pills Telegram channel multiple times during the summer of 2022, showing the influence of such groups in the UK.³²

Another individual whom ISD found at six protests was Piers Corbyn. Corbyn is the brother of former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and has in recent years come to embrace science denial and conspiracy theories. At a protest against DQSH in Wokingham in August 2022, Corbyn spoke about how the promotion of LGBTQ+ issues is “all part of the breakup of society” and is one element of a larger agenda to transform the world to a “Chinese social credit system.”³³ He also attended a court case to support an individual who was arrested for public order offences at the February 2023 DQSH protest at the Tate Britain.³⁴

Other groups

Apart from the groups listed above, ISD noted the presence of other organisations at anti-DQSH protests. These included members of the Yellow Vests, an international conspiratorial movement that grew out of the protest movement in France in 2019. In Bolton, a number of protesters wore high-vis vests with “Rochdale 5G Action Group” written on them, a reference to a movement against 5G technology. A protest in Glastonbury was also attended by Women’s Rights Network, a self-defined “gender critical” group that considers DQSH to be misogynistic and homophobic.³⁵

Key Tactics

Protesting

ISD found 51 drag events where protesters were present between June 2022 and June 2023. The numbers attending these events ranged from 5 people to a few dozen, with larger numbers present at weekend protests. Counter-protesters often outnumbered protesters at these events.

Parents taking their children to DQSH events, staff working in libraries and law enforcement were often subject to verbal abuse and harassment by protesters in attendance. Clashes between protest groups broke out at a number of events and ISD tracked five that resulted in arrests. Sab Samuel was confronted, blocked in his car and verbally abused by protesters following a DQSH event in Brighton in August 2022.³⁶ At two events (Reading and Blackpool), protesters managed to enter the libraries and hurled abuse at Samuel during the performance. In some cases, individuals in attendance threatened to perform “citizen’s arrests” on drag queens, referencing pseudo legal sovereign citizen theories to justify what they were trying to do (see image 2).³⁷

As well as events that were protested in person, ISD also found 10 events that were cancelled ahead of time due

to threats and backlash received by the libraries hosting the events and the risk of violence due to potential protests.

Calling libraries to complain ahead of the events

During the wave of protests in the summer of 2022, the members of online communities where the protests were organised and promoted were encouraged to call libraries and local councils to complain about the DQSH events taking place.

One woman who claims to be an “independent investigative journalist” was particularly active at encouraging this. Her typical mode of operation was to share the numbers of libraries on her Telegram channel (see image 3) and post recordings of her phone calls with library staff.³⁸ In these calls, she would question staff members over their knowledge of the DQSH events, with some conversations turning aggressive and confrontational.

Image 2 Instructions posted on Telegram of how to perform a “citizen’s arrest” on drag queens

Forwarded from Citizens Arrest 24A

Tips for citizens arresting a drag queen who is sexualising children!

1. Have a evidence pack printed with you and with the following.

a) Witness Statement/Affidavit of why you are making the arrest.
Your statement of truth and concerns.

B) All laws the drag queens are breaking,
child grooming
child exposure
child safeguarding
child exploitation
(If they take a child from one library to another library child trafficking)

2) Have all child sexual laws to hand with the relevant parts the drag queens are breaking highlighted.

3) Have all evidence printed off regarding previous drag queens who have been blocked from schools or arrested for inappropriate sexual behaviour with children.
(Their is numerous sources online)

Lots of evidence here 🍌🍌🍌

Image 3 Telegram post encouraging people to call libraries and complain about DQSH events

Get onto the Leeds libraries today guys lets get this sick show stopped we've got all week to make some more noise
Numbers for all Leeds libraries
Halton 0113 378 1865
Chapel Allerton 01133781859
Leeds Central +441133785005

<https://t.me/...>

Telegram

In lawful dissent

YouTube -

<https://youtube.com/...>



In one such call, when a library worker refused to answer her questions, she asked whether he “had a backbone” and said, “that’s the problem with men these days.”³⁹ It was clear from these calls that the woman subscribed to a mixture of ideologies and beliefs, including referencing sovereign citizen language and “adrenochrome” (see Narratives, above).

Leafleting local areas

Two of the most active groups involved in organising protests against DQSH were Patriotic Alternative (PA)


and the Independent Nationalist Network (INN). Both groups encouraged their members to distribute leaflets in their local areas to garner support for the protests (see image 4).

Email campaigns


Conspiratorial Telegram communities often shared the email addresses of local councillors and encouraged their members to “send your thoughts on these disgraceful Drag Queen Story Hour events.” An organisation called the Family Education Trust also created a letter template for people to use when emailing the libraries. The letter called DQSH events “highly sexualised” and said their true purpose was “indoctrination in the transgender agenda.”⁴⁰ This is part of a wider trend noted within anti-LGBTQ+ mobilisation where trans issues are conflated with drag.

Image 4 Leaflets created and distributed by INN and PA across the UK during the summer of 2022

Independent Nationalist Network



ThisEndsNow.jpg
1.9 MB
[DOWNLOAD](#)



ThisEndsNowBack.jpg
2.2 MB
[OPEN WITH](#)

Operation THIS ENDS NOW Leaflet is ready to print!

Please follow instructions below on how to receive the leaflets. (If you wish you can shop around and look for better prices)

Download the photos of the leaflets and upload them to the solopress website.

Forwarded from Patriotic Alternative Wales







Some more "Stop Drag Queen Story Hour" leaflets hitting Penarth and Barry today!

Key Narratives

The narratives employed by protestors in the UK follow similar patterns to those seen internationally, which frame drag events as a threat to children. The similarity in language and tropes across geographies is reflective of the transnational influence of such movements.

Piers Corbyn has claimed that the promotion of LGBTQ+ issues is part of a wider plan to encourage the “breakup of society.”

Drag performers are paedophiles or hurting children

One of the most common narratives among anti-drag campaigners is the claim that drag artists are paedophiles intent on abusing children. For example, emails complaining about DQSH events sometimes refer to the performances as “highly sexualised.” Sovereign Citizens attempting to make “citizen’s arrests” of drag performers have referenced “child sexual laws” in these attempts. And one woman who has frequently called venues attempting to have drag events cancelled has referenced “Adrenochrome” in her complaints,⁴¹ drawing on the QAnon conspiracy theory belief that children are ritually abused and have their blood extracted for consumption by Satanic paedophiles.

Frequent protest attendee Michael Chaves (see below) has regularly accused parents attending all-ages drag events of taking their children to “see a pedophile” and threatened to “arrest” drag queens for “grooming” children.⁴²

Turning Point UK activist Calvin Robinson has been quoted as asking “Why drag queens are so keen to spend time with your children,” making insinuations that the performers have nefarious motivations.

A member of the white nationalist group, the Independent Nationalist Network, was convicted in April 2023 of hate crimes for publishing statements online accusing drag queens of “grooming children.”

Drag performers are “indoctrinating” children

Drag performers are accused by some activists of having an ulterior motive of “indoctrinating” children. The specific charge is sometimes that they are trying to instil a belief in “gender ideology” or a “transgender agenda”.

In an email campaign created by an organisation that researches “family breakdown”, DQSH events are alleged to have the true purpose of “indoctrination in the transgender agenda.”⁴³ In the same vein, activist

Conclusion

In 2015, the UK received the top score in the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association's (ILGA-Europe) review of LGBTQ+ rights in Europe.⁴⁴ The year prior, same sex marriage was legalised (although this did not happen until 2020 in Northern Ireland), and 11 years before that Section 28 was overturned. This legislation had prohibited the "promotion of homosexuality" by local authorities, effectively banning the discussion of LGBTQ+ issues in schools since its introduction in 1988.

went ahead as planned despite threats and intimidation, a sign that despite the use of intimidatory tactics, this kind of activity has had little material success so far.

In a clear example of how progress can be easily lost, by 2023 the UK had fallen to 17th position in the ILGA-Europe review,⁴⁵ and the country had been condemned by the Council of Europe along with four other European countries (Russia, Poland, Hungary and Turkey) for "virulent attacks" on the LGBTQ+ community.⁴⁶ Police report statistics in 2022 told a similar story, with homophobic hate crimes doubling and transphobic hate crimes tripling over the previous five years.⁴⁷

This activity cannot be viewed as separate from wider anti-LGBTQ+ mobilisation in the UK. The 2023 ILGA-Europe report cited a lack of movement by the UK government on banning conversion therapy and reforming the gender recognition process. Widespread media coverage given to anti-trans rhetoric in the UK in recent years, as well as the number of high-profile UK-based campaigners associated with the movement, has been claimed to give the UK an international reputation as an unfriendly place for trans people.⁴⁸ In February 2023, the Conservative Party's Deputy Chairman Lee Anderson discussed a strategy of leaning in to "culture wars" in the next election, signifying further political emphasis being put on exploiting these issues.⁴⁹

As demonstrated above, UK activity is reflective of similar activity tracked by ISD in the US, Australia and France. Although the UK has not experienced the violent extremes of the US, the presence of identical narratives and similar tactics is indicative of the transnational influence on the UK movement.

While this kind of activity has the potential to become mainstreamed further in the UK, it is also important to acknowledge the presence of counter protesters, which often outnumbered those opposing the drag events. Moreover, the vast majority of events tracked by ISD

Endnotes

- 1 <https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/the-groomer-slur/>
- 2 <http://web.archive.org/web/20220518140035/> <https://twitter.com/thercn/status/1526925642247426049>
- 3 <https://www.rcn.org.uk/news-and-events/Blogs/hate-and-discrimination-will-not-be-tolerated-at-the-rcn-we-stand-for-better-310522>
- 4 <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2023/01/27/controversial-uk-politician-slams-tate-for-hosting-childrens-drag-queen-storytime-session>
- 5 <https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/23366372.drag-queen-criticises-sara-britcliffe-appearance-event-axed/>
- 6 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/04/24/glam-and-drag-camp-young-children-taxpayer/>
- 7 <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2022/08/05/stop-drag-queen-story-hour-a-new-far-right-campaign-emerges/>
- 8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVwFYIRluLs>
- 9 <https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/the-great-replacement-explainer/>
- 10 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-64610724>
- 11 <https://twitter.com/TPointUK/status/1626530558078492672>, <https://twitter.com/TPointUK/status/1634676681624506369>, <https://twitter.com/TPointUK/status/1643275062752018433>, <https://twitter.com/TPointUK/status/1658134531977691147>
- 12 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-64913587>
- 13 <https://twitter.com/TPointUK/status/1610247201095131136>
- 14 <https://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2023/02/drag-queen-story-time-hundreds-counter-protest-far-right-group/>, https://twitter.com/PoliticsJOE_UK/status/1635280112672477184
- 15 <https://hopenothate.org.uk/chapter/alpha-team-assemble/>
- 16 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11052687/Police-forced-escort-Drag-Queen-safety-protesters-storm-childrens-event.html>, <https://t.me/IndependentNationalistNetwork/327>, <https://t.me/IndependentNationalistNetwork/340>
- 17 <https://t.me/IndependentNationalistNetwork/466>
- 18 <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/23451533.protester-christopher-mitchell-court-drag-queen-slurs/>
- 19 <https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/sovereign-citizens/>
- 20 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10384239/Alpha-Men-Assemble-Inside-anti-vax-group-members-taught-wage-war-government.html>
- 21 <https://hopenothate.org.uk/chapter/alpha-team-assemble/>
- 22 https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2022/08/01/news/criticism_levelled_at_former_tuv_councillor_over_protest_at_drag_storytime_event_at_the_mac-2786722/
- 23 <https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2023-02-13/former-councillor-allegedly-compared-drag-queen-to-wolf-in-make-up>
- 24 <https://archive.is/92gS9>
- 25 <https://cticharity.com/about-us>
- 26 <https://www.vox.com/culture/22358153/satanic-panic-ritual-abuse-history-conspiracy-theories-explained>, <https://psmag.com/social-justice/make-a-cross-with-your-fingers-its-the-satanic-panic#.61dzb5vo3>
- 27 <https://www.facebook.com/alison.hocking.3/videos/3039460546309589>
- 28 <https://bylinetimes.com/2022/08/04/why-do-anti-vaxxers-hate-drag-queens/>
- 29 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/sovereign-citizens-uk-antivaxxers-b1947186.html>
- 30 <https://twitter.com/Nullen80/status/1552747280314269706>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mg76KY3Jh1E>
- 31 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjkk9p/drag-queen-story-hour-sab-samuel>
- 32 <https://t.me/c/1431407800/16006>, <https://t.me/c/1431407800/16789>
- 33 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTJfisz_aTY
- 34 <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11981689/Activist-arrested-protest-against-drag-queen-event-Tate-Britain-supported-Piers-Corbyn.html>
- 35 <https://www.womensrights.network/drag-queen-story-hour>
- 36 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjkk9p/drag-queen-story-hour-sab-samuel>

-
- 37 <https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/sovereign-citizens/>
- 38 https://t.me/queen_of_freedom/1665
- 39 <https://t.me/c/1431407800/17217>
- 40 <https://familyeducationtrust.org.uk/letter-to-send-to-local-libraries-to-object-to-drag-queen-story-hour/>
- 41 The woman in question shared these calls in Truth Pills - a popular Telegram channel that has since been made private.
- 42 <https://twitter.com/CovidRadicals/status/1551516857500327938>
- 43 <https://familyeducationtrust.org.uk/letter-to-send-to-local-libraries-to-object-to-drag-queen-story-hour/>
- 44 <https://ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2015/>
- 45 <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/annual-review-2023/>
- 46 <https://www.thepinknews.com/2022/01/25/council-of-europe-uk-lgbt-trans-rights-russ-apoland/>
- 47 <https://www.vice.com/en/article/93akz3/LGBTQ+-hate-crimes>
- 48 <https://twitter.com/LBC/status/1490424440454369281>
- 49 <https://www.thepinknews.com/2023/02/15/lee-anderson-tories-election-culture-wars-trans-debate/>



Amman | Berlin | London | Paris | Washington DC

Copyright © Institute for Strategic Dialogue (2023). Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is a company limited by guarantee, registered office address PO Box 75769, London, SW1P 9ER. ISD is registered in England with company registration number 06581421 and registered charity number 1141069. All Rights Reserved.

www.isdglobal.org