# Police review reveals social media failures in managing Southport riot aftermath



A review of the police response to last summer's riots in the UK has highlighted significant shortcomings in managing the risks posed by social media, particularly in light of an incident that resulted in violent unrest following the tragic stabbing of three young girls in Southport. Axel Rudakubana, aged 18, was convicted in January for the murders of Alice da Silva Aguiar, nine, Bebe King, six, and Elsie Dot Stancombe, seven, and is serving a minimum sentence of 52 years for the attack that occurred during a Taylor Swift-themed dance class.

The report, released by His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, Sir Andy Cooke, found that while there was no conclusive evidence of coordination by extremist groups, the violence primarily stemmed from "disaffected individuals, influencers or groups" incited online. The review indicated that the majority of those involved were local residents, and emphasized that the unrest was largely not motivated by ideology or political views.

According to the report, various factors contributed to the disorder, including social deprivation, austerity, economic downturn, political decisions regarding migration and asylum, and a declining trust in policing. The rapid dissemination of information, alongside misinformation on social media, significantly exacerbated the situation, with inspectors noting that misleading content remained unaddressed for too long.

Sir Andy Cooke pointed out that police forces, grappling with limited resources, have not invested adequately in technology or tools necessary for managing online content effectively. A police communications lead cited an absence of a coherent strategy to counter misinformation and disinformation, describing the state of affairs as lacking a “proper answer” to the challenges posed by online narratives.

The report urges social media companies to act more swiftly in removing misleading posts and calls for the regulatory body Ofcom to have enhanced powers to enforce compliance. Cooke argues that these companies must take responsibility, regardless of their country of origin, urging police chiefs to be more proactive in addressing disinformation and clarifying facts publicly.

The review underscored that the unrest was predictable; despite prior national assessments indicating a low risk of disorder, historical patterns of violence against venues housing asylum seekers were overlooked. A senior intelligence officer expressed concerns that police operations resembled “writing the manual as it happened,” revealing a significant deficit in preparedness and planning.

The National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) responded to the findings, asserting that the report does not accurately reflect the policing's role in combatting harmful online material. NPCC chair Chief Constable Gavin Stephens maintained that while lessons can be learned from the report, law enforcement should not bear the primary responsibility for regulating online content. He emphasised that ensuring the accuracy of information is the collective responsibility of content creators, platform providers, and regulatory bodies.

Despite the criticisms, Stephens highlighted the successes of police media strategies and reiterated the importance of refining their approach to ensure preparedness and resilience in the face of future challenges. The current review marks the second examination of the police response since the riots, aiming to draw lessons and improve accountability in managing societal unrest influenced by digital platforms.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c78w7nlwz9po> - This article details the missed opportunities by authorities to intervene in Axel Rudakubana's violent behavior prior to the Southport attack, highlighting systemic failures in addressing warning signs.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jan/23/police-failed-to-arrest-southport-killer-when-caught-with-knife-two-years-before-attack> - This report discusses how police failed to arrest Rudakubana when he was found carrying a knife two years before the Southport attack, raising questions about law enforcement's handling of the case.
* <https://www.ft.com/content/0279cab7-7ed6-4d04-8751-498dad6fbabd> - This article examines the Southport murder trial of Axel Rudakubana, igniting a national debate on the UK's approach to justice and terrorism, and highlighting issues with the release of information due to strict contempt of court laws.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jan/23/southport-attacker-axel-rudakubana-jailed> - This piece reports on the sentencing of Axel Rudakubana to life with a minimum term of 52 years in prison for the murders of three young girls in Southport, detailing the circumstances of the attack and the legal proceedings.
* <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cr7e8k73v8lo> - This article covers the community's reaction in Southport to the revelation that Axel Rudakubana was known to authorities prior to the attack, with residents demanding answers about the missed opportunities to prevent the tragedy.
* <https://news.sky.com/story/southport-child-killer-jailed-for-minimum-of-52-years-13294476> - This report discusses the sentencing of Axel Rudakubana to life imprisonment with a minimum term of 52 years for the murder of three young girls in Southport, and the subsequent public inquiry into the state's failure to recognize the risk he posed.
* <https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMiyAFBVV95cUxOTUdCQ0VmQTRVdllHdHlidG9ETmw1NVRseU94QXd2eHczV0xCMHk4d1l3bkN0M0FaczVQVUhQcjF4QlBWa3p6Tks1RWY4WTNRem9zSTFBeU96ZG40WVpfZUozNmVOVGo0WE03NHRLb3VtVTB4X0tGVml1OFVyWWhlZTJVRXRNN2FkNVloUDZLWUYwRlJPZTVEQnIyWmZ2WURJdzBxX0NOUFVMYnlfaGpjbVNOT1ltd3BZTWRtLXZmd3pmTnRnLThJYw?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en> - Please view link - unable to able to access data