

May 15, 2026

Prejudice & Bias

The shortcut your brain just took

SDS · DNA





Wapman & Belle, Boston University, 2014: only 14% of BU students gave the mother answer.

Replicated at scale by Banaji and colleagues at Harvard in 2022 with ~7,000 participants. 82% failed to give the mother answer.





Describe the Attacker:

- 1 Was the victim a man or a woman?
- 2 Was the attacker a man or a woman?
- 3 How old was the attacker?
- 4 What city was this in?
- 5 Did the attacker have a weapon?
- 6 Did your brain assign an ethnicity, race, or face?



Information Given

"A person was mugged on a train."

That's it.

What your brain filled in

- Victim — gender, age
- Attacker — gender, age, race
- Setting — city, time of day
- Implied weapon
- A face

None of it came from the story!



"Cognitive Shortcut"

heuristics



Southport, England — July 2024

A 17-year-old attacker stabbed children at a Taylor Swift dance class. Three girls died.

Hours later

Social media filled the information gap.
"Muslim. Migrant. Asylum seeker."

24 hours

Mob attacked the local mosque.
50+ police officers injured.
Riots spread across the UK.

The reality

The attacker was a UK-born teenager from Wales — not Muslim, not an asylum seeker.



Ulsan, South Korea — Feb 2022

A 17-year-old attacker stabbed children at a Taylor Swift dance class. Three girls died.

What 50 parents said at the school protest

"We're worried about cultural differences."

"Some foreign news mentioned extreme crimes involving Muslims."

Who these families actually were

Korean government 'special contributors.'

Hyundai Heavy Industries subcontractor employees.

Children eventually admitted after consultations.

What we'll cover.

1

The machinery

Stereotype, discrimination, stigma, prejudice

2

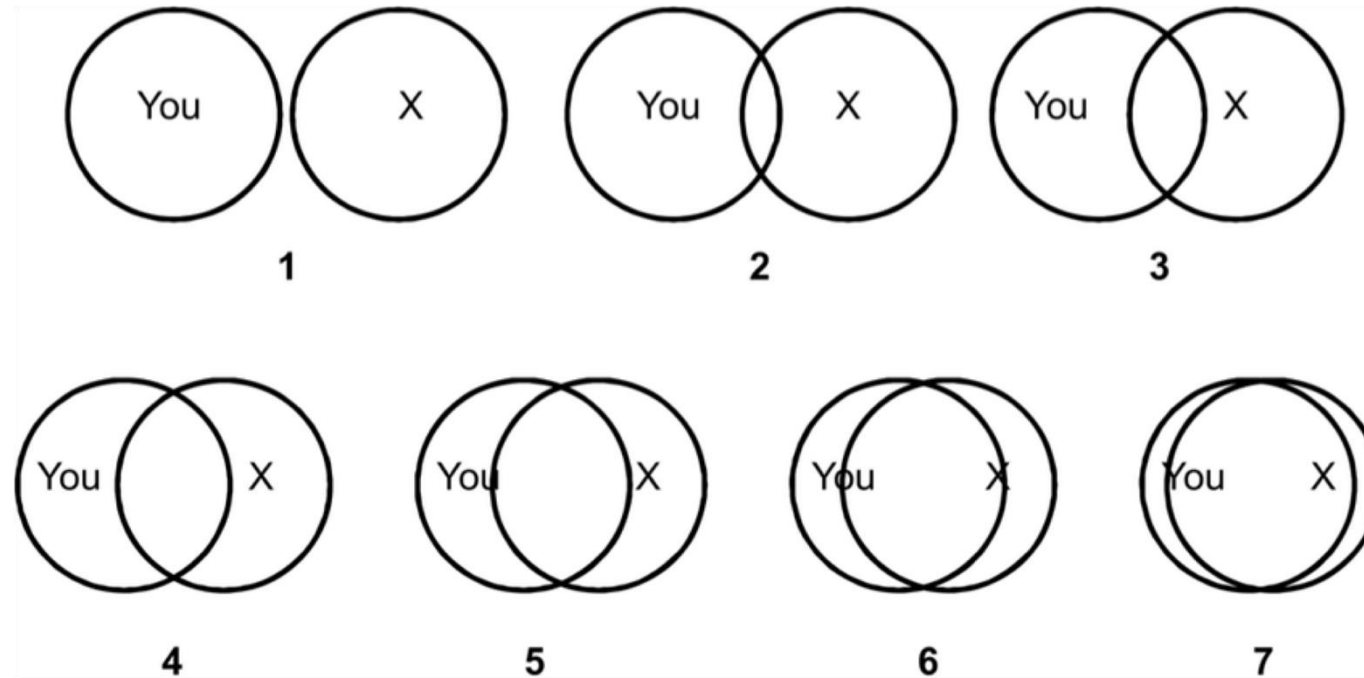
The engines

Why our brains keep doing this

3

The amplifier

How algorithms scale bias



“The Inclusion of Other in the Self” scale (Aron et al., 1992).

The Machinery

Stereotype. Discrimination. Stigma. Prejudice,

Stereotype 固定觀念

A cognitive shortcut. The 'least effort principle.'

Stereotypes are simplified perceptions formed as cognitive shortcuts (Allport, 1954). While they may facilitate understanding, they often lead to biased judgments (Brown & Hewstone, 2005).

- stereotyping is not a moral failure. Every brain does it. Brains that didn't would not have survived evolutionarily.
- visible traits (skin colour, gender, age) trigger stereotypes in milliseconds — before conscious thought.

Positive stereotypes too.

"Asians are good at math."

Flattering — but they still flatten a person into a category. Harder to challenge because nobody complains.

Stereotypes: Schema about people



Ps either saw an image with the person being held up being Black (A – like this one) or White (B)

45 minutes later, Ps given a recognition test.

20 % of Group B falsely recognized an image where the other man (White) had the knife.

60% of Group A falsely recognized an image where the other man (Black) had the knife!

(Boon & Davies, 1987)

Discrimination 差別

When the shortcut becomes behaviour.

Discrimination occurs when out-groups are treated unequally (UN, 2013). Institutionalized discrimination disproportionately affects stigmatised groups (e.g., less funding for stigmatised ethnic children, Major et al., 2005).
. It is any unfair treatment or arbitrary distinction based on race, sex, religion, nationality.

Example: a Japanese child notices the man next to the empty seat is from Afghanistan, walks away to stand instead. The shortcut became a physical action.

Stigma 烙印, 污名

When society at large locks the shortcut into place.

"From a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one."

— Goffman (1963)

Medieval Europe

Red hair → evidence of witchcraft

20th-century Korea

Left-handedness → tied behind back

Modern Japan

Tattoos → barred from onsen, jobs

Stigma is societal devaluation of out-groups, often rooted in perceived threats (Bhanot et al., 2021; Goffman, 1986).
Stigma is not about the trait. It's about what a society decided the trait means.

Prejudice 偏見

The attitude that holds the other three together.

"An antipathy based upon a faulty and inflexible generalisation."

— Allport (1954)

Stereotype

→ *the belief*

Discrimination

→ *the behaviour*

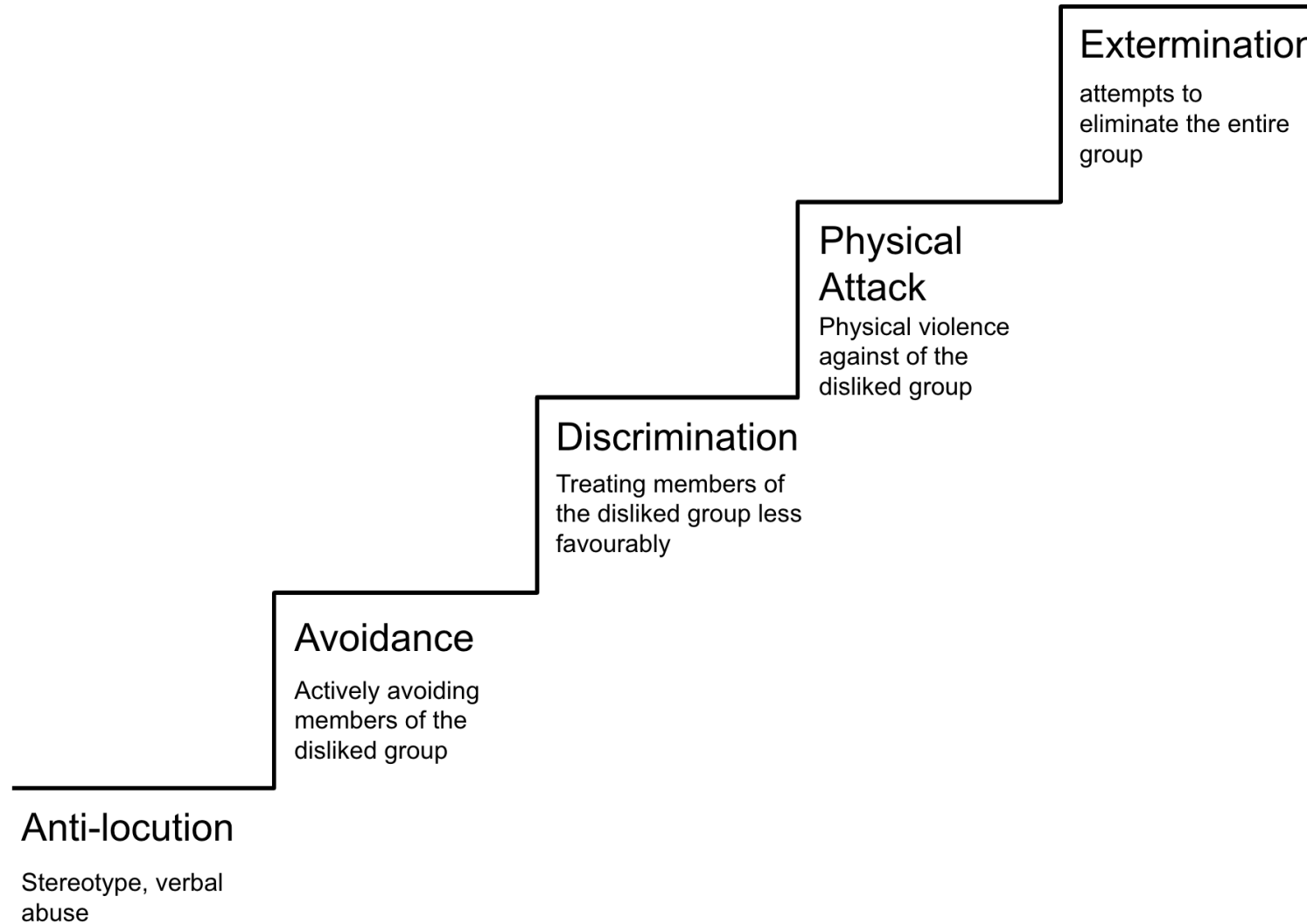
Stigma

→ *the societal classification*

Prejudice

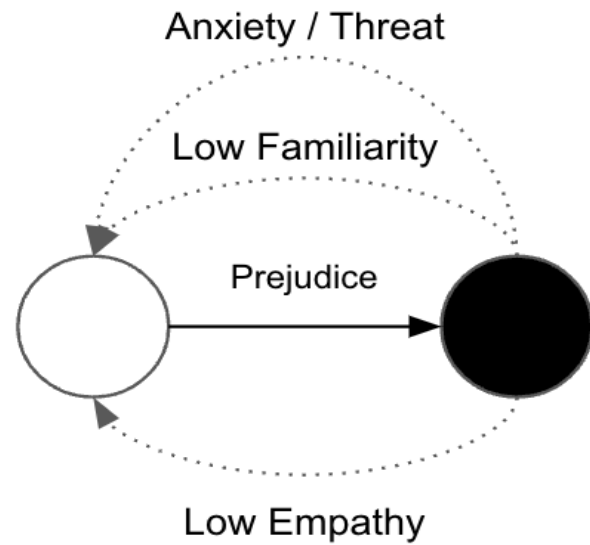
→ *the emotional glue*

Prejudice

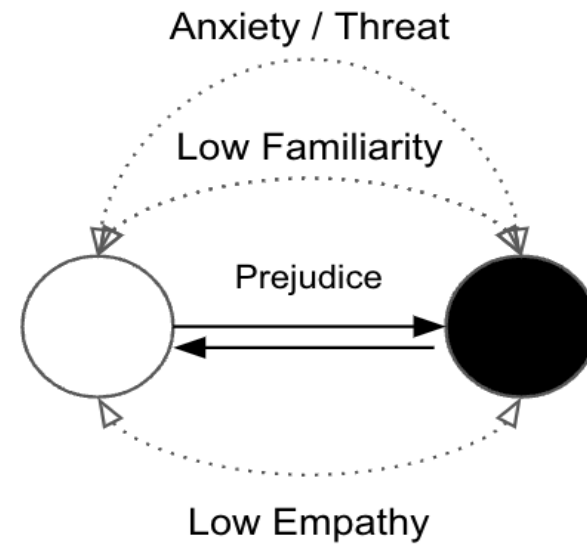


Reproduced from Allport's Scale of Prejudice (Allport, 1954)

Belief▷
 Attitude ———▶



*Current Understanding of
 Prejudice Formation Between
 Ingroup and Outgroup*



What we should really see

Bipolar Nature of Prejudice

(Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008; Bowlby, 1969; Allport, 1954; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003)

Three examples.

A

The passport gate

Automated border control speaks the country's language. Designer's view: kindness. Foreign passport holder's view: a daily reminder. Same machine, two experiences.

B

Devine's bus

White participants describe overt racism. Participants of colour describe someone shifting slightly on a bus, eyes that don't quite meet. Bias lives in the perception layer.

C

Self-generated stereotypes

An international student stays silent in class — “my Japanese isn't good enough” — even when it is. No one imposed this. The brain generated it from anxiety about belonging.

**When was someone 'kind' to you
in a way that felt like a stereotype?**

Or — when did you wonder if your kindness landed that way?



The engines.

Why our brains keep doing this.

Bias 1

Illusion of fluency

If it looks easy, you assume you can do it.

Bias 2

Confirmation bias

The brain collects receipts for what it already believes.

Classic example: an all-male engineering team performs well. Conclusion: "men are better engineers."

The brain often fails to ask: how would a mixed team have performed? The confirming evidence is sufficient.

Once a stereotype is in place, the brain spends the rest of its life collecting receipts for it. Contradictions get explained away as exceptions.

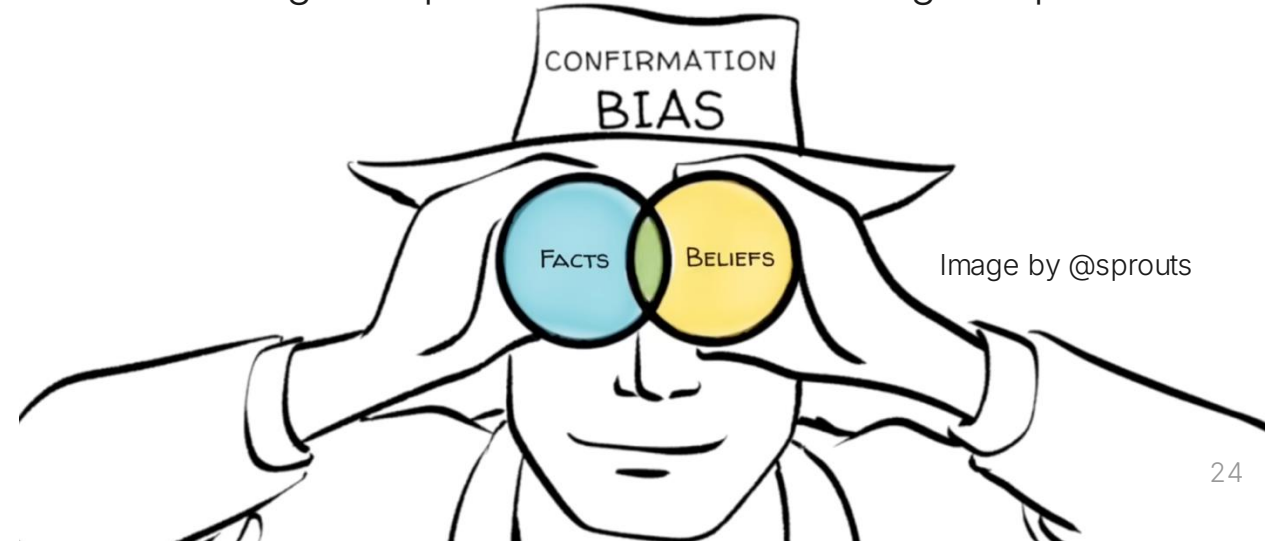


Image by @sprouts

Bias 3

Negativity bias

cafe

Results ①

Share

カフェルン

4.8 ★★★★★ (5) · ¥1,000–2,000
Coffee shop · 106 5 Chome-4-7 Yatsu
Closes soon · 9 PM · Opens 11 AM Fri

Dine-in · Kerbside pickup · No delivery



Brown Sound Coffee

4.5 ★★★★★ (300) · ¥1,000–2,000
Cafe · ☑ · 2 Chome-8-11 Tsudanuma
Cozy coffee shop with paninis & desserts

Closed · Opens 8 AM Fri

Dine-in · Takeaway · No delivery



Yatsu Cafe

4.2 ★★★★★ (101) · ¥1–1,000
Cafe · ☑ · 4 Chome-4-18 Yatsu
Closed · Opens 10:45 AM Fri

Dine-in · Takeaway · No delivery



Cafe Keimeisha Yatsu

4.2 ★★★★★ (256) · ¥1,000–2,000
Cafe · ☑ · 4 Chome-6-34 Yatsu
Closed · Opens 10 AM Fri

Dine-in · No delivery



喫茶ecotone



Price Rating Hours All filters



Brown Sound Coffee

4.5 ★★★★★ (300) · ¥1,000–2,000
Cafe · ☑

Overview Menu Reviews About

Directions Save Nearby Send to phone Share

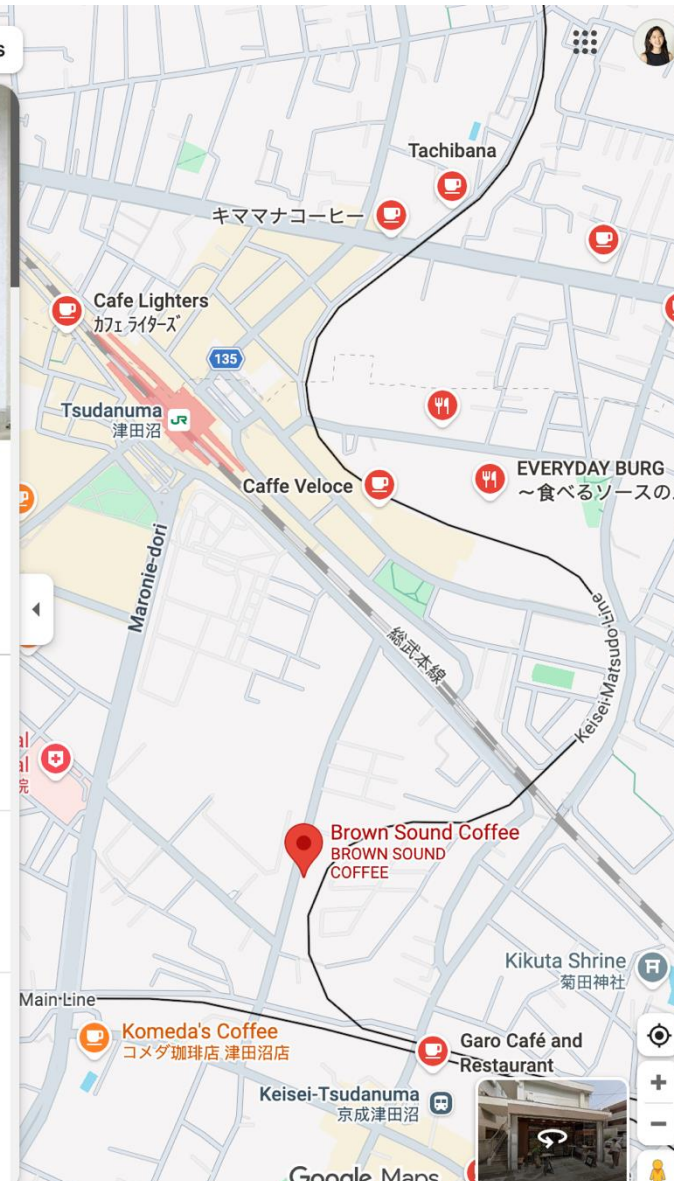
Compact cafe presenting specialty coffees, iced drinks & paninis, plus desserts. >

✓ Dine-in · ✓ Takeaway · ✗ Delivery

2 Chome-8-11 Tsudanuma, Narashino, Chiba 275-0016

Closed · Opens 8 AM Fri

¥1,000–2,000 per person





Brown Sound Coffee

4.5 ★★★★★ (300) • ¥1,000–2,000

Cafe • 🚫

←

Brown Sound Coffee

×

Overview

Menu

Reviews

About

K. Lang

Local Guide · 22 reviews · 28 photos

★★★★★

11 months ago

Very cute coffee shop! We visited from Kamagaya just to try the coffee and food and it was well worth it. The coffee was delicious, the sandwiches were a fantastic surprise and the desserts were a wonderful way to end the meal. My husband ... [More](#)







Like

Share

Grisha Szep

Local Guide · 9 reviews · 17 photos

★★★★★

10 months ago

Friendly and stylish baristas that make excellent oat milk lattes. I walk quite far from my workplace, just so I can taste the delicious coffee here! [More](#)

25



Michael R

Local Guide · 32 reviews · 25 photos



★★★★★ 5 years ago

Nice little cafe with a friendly atmosphere. You might struggle to get a seat though, especially on weekends.



Like



Share

Response from the owner 4 years ago

thank you for coming ☕



Garrett

Local Guide · 389 reviews · 506 photos



★★★★★ 5 years ago

Super friendly baristas & a great cold brew. Love the hip ambiance.



Like



Share

Response from the owner 4 years ago

thank you for coming ☕



Simon

Local Guide · 164 reviews · 327 photos



★★★★★ Edited 6 years ago

Nice atmosphere and great coffee



おはぎ
1 review



★☆☆☆☆ 2 years ago

The staff's attitude is terrible. They are so rude when handing over the product, I wonder what kind of customer service they are trained to provide. I will never go there again.

Meal type

Other

Price per person

¥1,000–2,000

Food: 3

Service: 1

Atmosphere: 2

Translated by Google · [See original \(Japanese\)](#)

Bias 3

Negativity bias

One bad experience with a member of any group is louder than fifty good ones.

This is why one outlier news story can reshape attitudes about an entire population.



**Which engine
did you catch yourself running
*in the last week?***



Act 4

The amplifier.

How algorithms scale bias.

How recommendation works.

1**Engagement is the goal**

Not truth, not balance, not your wellbeing.

2**The algorithm learns what keeps you**

Then it feeds you more of that.

3**Outrage and confirmation keep you**

So the algorithm learns to give you outrage and confirmation.

4**Filter bubble → echo chamber**

Filter bubble: the visible result. Echo chamber: what happens when everyone in your bubble talks only to each other.

Britain | A manufactured panic

London is far safer than violent viral videos will have you believe

Contrary to social-media lore, it is one of the safest cities in the world

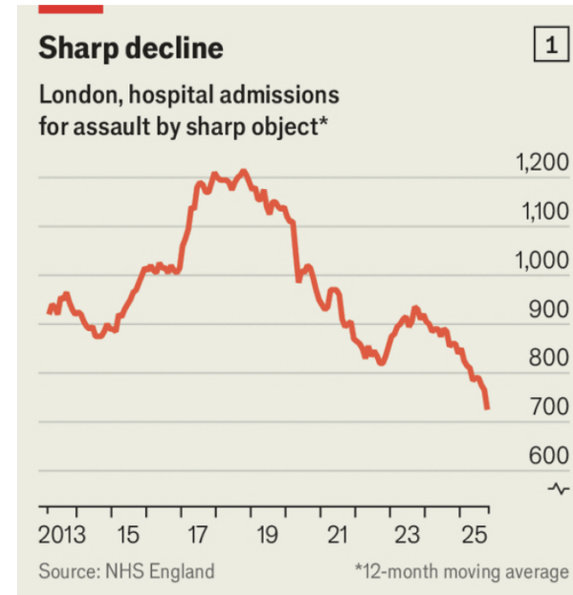


CHART: THE ECONOMIST

London does have problems. Visitors are warned about phones being snatched by thugs on electric bikes, and shoplifting has risen sharply. But the perception that London is overrun by violent criminals appears to be based largely on social media's knack for exaggeration. *The Economist* scraped all posts on X mentioning "London" and keywords related to violent crime, between 2020 and 2025. Last year the number of such

posts was double the yearly average between 2020 and 2024. Their popularity has risen too. In 2025 the average number of likes and retweets per post was almost double that in 2024.

Part of this online rubbishing is to blame migrants. The proportion of "London crime" posts that also mention Islam, migrants or race has doubled since 2023. Posts mentioning "Londonistan"—used in right-wing circles to lament the supposed Islamification of the capital—have doubled since 2020.

DNA from today's Class

1 · The machinery — Stereotype, discrimination, stigma, prejudice. Four words, not one. *Stereotype is the belief. Discrimination is the action. Stigma is what society locks in. Prejudice is the feeling underneath.*

2 · The engines — Four reasons our brains keep producing all of this. *Illusion of fluency. Confirmation bias. Negativity bias.*

3 · The amplifier — Algorithms now run these engines faster than any individual brain can. *Engagement pays. Outrage engages.*

- 1 · Notice it in yourself.** Catch your own shortcuts as they happen. The image your brain produces before you've decided what to think.
- 2 · Notice it in others.** Sit in a meeting, watch a hiring conversation, and name what's operating. "That's confirmation bias." "That's a stereotype, not a judgment."
- 3 · Notice it in yourself as a target.** When you stay silent, when you defer, when you assume you don't belong — ask whether that's you, or whether that's the suggestion engine talking. Identify the internalised stereotype before you act on it.
- 4 · Notice it in authority.** When someone with power tells you *"this is just how it is"* — *"all our board members should be Japanese men because they make the best decisions"* — you can now name what's happening. And question it.



+ Have the confidence to make mistakes.