

Alexander Paul's address to the Conservative Party Conference , 2014



Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I am Alexander Paul.

I've just recently become an undergraduate student at the University of Warwick studying politics and international studies.

I was raised in an inner-city area in Southeast London not too far from Brixton. It is a pleasure to be given the opportunity to address you on a subject that I feel has had a major impact on our society but also a significant effect on me.

At this stage I would just like to ask two questions:

Who in this audience considers themselves to be a law-abiding citizen? I do too.

My next question is: who has had the misfortune of being stopped and searched? See not everyone.

Well, I too am a law-abiding citizen, with no criminal past, yet I have been stopped and searched not once, not twice but over 20 times from the ages of 13 to 18.

My first experience of being stopped and searched was lawful and informative. The police officer explained everything to me and told me the reasons why I was being stopped. Unfortunately, I soon discovered that this was a rarity. Subsequent experiences had left me feeling vilified, exploited, and angry. I soon realised that certain, only certain, police officers were abusing their power by stopping and searching me without justifiable reasons. How many times have I heard that I fit the description of another young black male who's committed a crime?

In 2013, the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported that in some areas black and Asian males were 29 times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people.

I would like to stress that, although there is a clear disproportionate amount of stop and search routines being carried out among black and Asian males, this is not just an issue of race. It affects young people of all races. This is a problem that pervades the whole of society.

In 2013, 500,000 stop and searches were carried out for drug-related offences. But 93% of those stopped had no illegal substances. Whilst the Inspectorate of Constabulary found in 2013 that 27% of 8,783 cases showed that no grounds were found or an officer entered a reason that would not justify a search.

This is a problem that creates a schism between the youth of today and the police. It has led to a breakdown of trust and confidence in those who are meant to serve the community. It also creates a perpetual stigma which can blight the self-confidence and positivity of those who aspire to be great citizens that make this nation what it is today.

In securing a better future, I do remind you not to forget that the youth are the future. This is an issue beyond party politics. I am pleased to see the active stance that Theresa May and her team have taken to bring about a change to address this injustice. I want to thank the Home Secretary for her continued endeavours to make sure Stop and Search is used fairly and when it is needed. It is widely known that Stop and Search is a great police power and deterrent to those who are foolish enough to carry illegal substances and/or weapons.

The Conservative Party doesn't always have the best reputation amongst many of my friends and contemporaries if I'm honest, but in reforming Stop and Search, Theresa May has made a lot of people think differently.

So thank you for your time and for listening to me so attentively.

I now have the pleasure of welcoming on to the stage, the Home Secretary, Theresa May.