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Overview of the Far-Right

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Introduction

This paper considers the 'far-right', an overarching term that includes a range of ideologies encompassing both the radical right (democratic) and extreme right (anti-democratic) (Ravndal & Bjørgo 2018).

The defining characteristic of the far-right for this paper is:

A narrative of **racial and/or cultural threat** to a 'native' group arising from perceived alien groups within a society.

This is considered a working definition intended to bound this paper only, this should not be treated as comprehensive.¹

This paper focuses on the far-right in the United Kingdom. However, far-right activism is transnational, and so it has not been possible to limit this research exclusively to the UK, nor can the UK far-right be considered in isolation from the wider far-right (Zúquete 2015).

The far-right is not composed only of discrete and easily identifiable groups. While various organisations are components of the far-right, including gangs, protest movements, pressure groups, and political parties, the far-right as a whole is amorphous. Its messiness is inherent, stemming from a diverse range of ideologies and narratives enacted over a wide range of geographic contexts by multiple actors. Adding to this, digital technology has allowed an already complex patchwork of groups, influencers and activists to diffuse further through multiple and sometimes overlapping presences on an array of digital platforms. While some far-right activists may join a local group, activists are also now able to choose from, and contribute to, a limitless range of ideologies and ideologues digitally. It follows that the ideologies and narratives presented here should not be considered as discrete or static, but rather readers should understand that ideas both overlap and crosspollinate across networks both digital and physical.

The following outlines the core ideological features of far-right groups and influencers. It then goes on to note some of their aims and objectives before providing an overview of the scale of far-right activism in the UK.

¹ A fuller definition of the far-right proposed by Ravndal and Bjørgo (2018: 6) is: acceptance of social inequality, authoritarianism, and nativism. The definition used here focuses on aspects of nativism for the purposes of clarity and the opportunity to emphasise the dichotomy between racial and cultural approaches to belonging found in the far-right. It is also a way of compensating for the increasingly 'liberal' rhetoric emphasised in radical right-wing formations e.g. defence of minority rights which, depending on interpretation, could conflict with Ravndal and Bjørgo's inclusion of social inequality as a feature of the far-right.

Ideology & Narratives

Ideology can be considered as the mental frameworks used by individuals to make sense of the world, and encompasses beliefs, ideas and values. Ideology is often implicit and so understanding ideology in far-right groups requires interpretation of the limited data available. As part of this process there is often a gap between how far-right activists view themselves and how their ideas are understood by outside observers (Busher 2018). As a result, terms commonly used to describe different factions within the far-right are often contested.

Fascism

The starting point for understanding far-right ideology is inter-war fascism as embodied by regimes that came to power in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. At its most basic fascism is a 'palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism' (Griffin 1991: 26). Palingenesis refers to a belief in the need of renewal and a rebirth. Populist is used in this context as a belief in the role of the mass of people in politics, even where they are led by a vanguard or elite. Ultra-nationalism is used as a label for nationalism that goes beyond existing norms and liberal understandings of the nation to view it as a higher goal in need of protection from both internal and external corrupting influences. The vision of a national community arising from the ashes of crisis is a key mobilising influence in fascism (Griffin 1991: 38). Fascism is also a revolutionary ideology, aiming for wholesale political change with a distinct political vision rather than reforms from within (Griffin 1991: 15; Copsey 2008: 79). While the idea of the nation as both special and in need of defence inevitably leads to a racist component, this is not synonymous with the extreme biological racism and anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime (Griffin 1991: 48). Fascism as an ideological competitor to Communism and Liberalism collapsed in Europe in 1945 but has continued to exert influence since.

Neo-Nazism

Nazi Germany has become the dominant model for fascism and a range of groups and activists have incorporated elements of Nazism into their ideology (Copsey 2008: 79). In the United States existing white-supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan co-opted Nazi symbols and rhetoric into their existing belief systems (Camus & Lebourg 2017). White-supremacy has come to replace the racial hierarchies of Nazi Germany and the central goal of neo-Nazi organisations has become the territorial separation of whites from other races (Camus & Lebourg 2017).

In the UK several groups retain elements of neo-Nazi ideology including the use of Nazi symbols and rhetoric: Combat 18, Blood and Honour, the British Movement, and National Action and successor groups. A further factor has been the embracing of neo-Nazism by some elements within skinhead culture and the white power music scene (Cotter 1999). There is also an extensive reservoir of neo-Nazi infused content online in web forums such as Stormfront and the diffuse online sphere known as the 'Alt-Right' (Wendling 2018:130).² A recent development has been the influence of US-based ideologue James Mason on a small number of militant neo-Nazi groups

² The presence of neo-Nazis causes chagrin among seemingly more moderate white-nationalist elements within the Alt-Right. Wendling uses the example of the Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi website, to illustrate how a Nazi hardcore at times forces itself to prominence in the Alt-Right.

including US group Atomwaffen Division and, in the UK, National Action successor System Resistance Network (Macklin 2018).³

Neo-Fascism

Neo-Nazism is a highly visible strain of fascism and the memory of the Second World War in Europe, in particular the Holocaust, will always mark neo-Nazis as extremists (Goodwin 2011: 22). The fascist ideological project has continued and ultra-nationalism and rebirth have remained central planks of the ideology but have been re-interpreted to offer something distinct from 'traditional' fascism (Copsey 2008: 82)

As an example, the New-Right was a French intellectual movement that sought to distance itself from overt racial hierarchies and develop a new approach based instead on ethnopluralism.⁴ While race remains a key organising principle of the ideology it was expressed through differentiation rather than hierarchy; the New Right sought to defend what they understood as a right to ethnic difference (Camus & Leborg 2017: 123). This ties with a broader critique of globalisation and cultural homogenisation that they argued would destroy European civilisation (Zúquete 2018: 11). The New Right was not uniform or static and its thinking on race and identity evolved considerably over time, leading to the divergence of the Identitarian movement which retained a commitment to more explicit ethno-culturalism (Zúquete 2018: 12).

A further development of the New Right was the adoption of a metapolitical strategy that recognised cultural practice, understood broadly as anything liable to have a long-term influence over political society, as a key battleground (Camus & Leborg 2017: 120). This form of cultural warfare was lifted from left wing thinkers such as Gramsci, who argued that culture was a tool by which the ruling elite maintains hegemony and that only by establishing an alternative culture could alternative ideologies mount a challenge (Copsey 2013; Nagle 2017; Zúquete 2018: 7).

The New Right, along with other neo-fascist forms, has been fiercely criticised on the grounds that it retains a fascist core and is an attempt to repackage old ideas in more fashionable forms (Camus & Lebourg 2017: 148). In the UK the detoxification of fascism made some inroads into the British National Party under leader Nick Griffin. Griffin attempted to rehabilitate the party by playing down the racial, anti-Semitic and conspiratorial aspects of the party's nationalism that had been allowed to go unchecked (Copsey 2013; Goodwin 2011). New Right and Identitarian ideas are also heavily embedded in the UK branch of ethnopluralist group Generation Identity (Zúquete 2018: 27). Accounts of the Alt-Right have argued that the fingerprints of this metapolitical strategy are evident in the practices of the movement, in particular the use of 'memes' in political discourse (Nagle 2017).

Populism

Recently, populist radical right parties have done well in elections across Europe and contributed to a wider narrative that liberal democratic norms are under threat (Goodwin and Eatwell 2018). Mudde (2007) defines a populist radical right party as one with an ideology that combines nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.

³ Mason's writings lionised Charles Manson as someone prepared to do what was necessary to attack the 'system'. Groups influenced by Mason tend to be overtly critical of other far-right activists as insufficiently committed. This constellation of groups was known to be connected by the message board *Iron March* (Macklin 2019).

⁴ Not to be confused with the more common usage of new right in the UK associated with economic deregulation.

Populism, in this context, is the belief that societies are split between virtuous masses of people and a narrow and corrupt elite (Mudde 2007: 22). Mudde (2007: 49) further distinguishes between radical groups that accept democracy but oppose some democratic norms such as protection for minorities, and explicitly anti-democratic extreme right groupings. As with the new right, the concept of populism has been contested by scholars who argue that populism is a vehicle for discredited neo-fascist ideologies to re-enter mainstream politics (Mammone 2008; Copsey 2008: 80).

Although populism is most usually associated with electoral politics, it has also been used to describe anti-Muslim protest groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) (Bartlett, Birdwell & Littler 2011). Ideologically the EDL has been identified both as fascist (Alessio & Meredith 2014), and as a new form of far-right politics (Jackson 2011). Pilkington (2016) categorises the EDL as being on the populist radical right, recognising the group's ultra-patriotism and anti-Muslim rhetoric, but also its essential accordance with democratic values.⁵

The Islamisation narratives promoted by the EDL tie it to a group of international activists and organisations loosely referred to as the counter-jihad (Busher 2015; Meleagrou-Hitchens & Brun 2013). Gaining prominence in the post 9/11 atmosphere, counter jihad groups have tended to present their activism as opposing Islamic-extremism rather than Muslims as a group (Archer 2013). Opposition is framed as based on the desire to preserve and protect native cultures and rights from outside aggression in the form of 'Islamisation' (Meleagrou-Hitchens & Brun 2013). A core element of this has been the overt rejection of racism by counter jihadists, in particular anti-Semitism, and the seeming embrace of 'liberal' attitudes on LGBT rights and religious freedom (Lee 2016; Pilkington 2016). In this context, nationalism and nativism are expressed culturally, with the nation defined through a shared culture and history as opposed to racial characteristics (Meleagrou-Hitchens & Brun 2013).

Radical right-wing populism represents the boundary between far-right and mainstream politics, as it is understood in this paper. The nativism of populist groups lends itself to the 'othering' of minorities, be they racial, religious or sexual. However, populist groups and influencers hold these views in varying configurations.

Narratives

While the academic debate on far-right ideologies is extensive, it is largely separate from the opinions of activists themselves. Few of us would recognise our own ideological influences, preferring instead to believe we act based on the 'truth' (van Dijk 1998). Ideology is discussed openly in some parts of the far-right, but more commonly it is embedded in narratives. Narratives are often portrayed as factual, but the structure, cast of characters and focus of different narratives reveals something of the ideology that underpins them (Hansen & Machin 2013; Hammack & Pilecki 2012). Narratives in the far-right vary according to the beliefs of those telling them, but they often reflect common themes:

Anti-minority narratives – That target minority groups threaten majority/native groups. This may include targeting specific ethnic minorities by linking them to criminality or

⁵ The EDL is only a single manifestation of anti-Muslim prejudice and other manifestations have been more extreme. Peder Jensen (pen name Fjordman) is an anti-Muslim writer popular in the counter-jihad whose work was extensively reproduced in the compendium produced by Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik (Jackson 2013; see also Berntzen & Sandberg 2014). For a more recent analysis of a contemporary group – the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) see Feldman & Allchorn (2019).

questioning their intelligence. Anti-Semitism is widespread within some but by no means all sections of the far-right. Far-right activism can also include amplifying mainstream news designed to cast target minority groups in a bad light (Lee 2015).

Demographic threat – That a combination of immigration and birth rates will result in the ‘native’ population becoming a minority in the near future. This narrative is closely linked to concepts such as ‘white genocide’, common in neo-Nazi and white supremacist settings, as well as the ‘great replacement’ featured more heavily in neo-fascist thinking. Anti-Muslim narratives also focus heavily on the demographic threat posed by Muslim immigration and birth rates as well as the perceived threat from Islamisation (Melagrou-Hitchens & Brun 2013).

Collapse – That some type of ethnic or cultural strife is inevitable as a result of the growing threat presented by minority groups. In neo-Nazi circles this may manifest as ‘race war’, elsewhere this may be presented as predictions of civil war or civil disorder (Jackson 2013).⁶

Conspiracism – Conspiracy theories are defined as the belief that a small group of actors are working towards some malevolent end (Barkun 2003). Conspiracy theorising is common in large segments of the far-right. Anti-Semitic conspiracy theories in which a Jewish elite is envisaged as controlling world events (e.g. the idea of a Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG)) are common. In other areas theories such as Eurabia, White Genocide, the Great Replacement, and the Kalergi plan are more prevalent.

Anti-elite narratives – That the current political and social leadership bears responsibility for the current or coming crisis. For neo-Nazis ruling elites are often presented either as Jewish or Jewish controlled. In areas of the far right where anti-Semitic conspiracy theories are not endemic this is often framed differently e.g. ‘globalist’, ‘the left’ or ‘cultural Marxist’ (Archer 2013: 171; Zúquete 2018: 26). The far-right also exhibits a collective sense of persecution, presenting themselves as victims of government oppression.

Historical revisionism – That key historical events have been distorted in the interests of suppressing far-right ideology. While this can be interpreted as a form of conspiracy theory, historical revisionism has been particularly prevalent in the form of Holocaust denial (Lipstadt 1993; Hobbs 2018).

Points of Conflict

Based on the above analysis, there are several clear points of fracture between different formations in the UK far-right:

Biological vs cultural distinctions – While some elements of the far-right are attempting to shed biological conceptualisations of race in favour of taking culture and identity as makers of belonging, this is a significant break with more traditional interpretations based on racial nationalism.

Neo-Nazism – The symbols, rhetoric and ideology of Nazism remain toxic. While there are some openly neo-Nazi formations in the UK, open support for Nazism is a taboo in other areas of the far-right (Pilkington 2016: 98; Wendling 2018: 130).

⁶ This is a common theme of far-right fiction (Berger 2016a).

Ethno-pluralism vs supremacy – Where race is taken as a central organising principle, different ideological positions draw competing conclusions. While neo-Nazis and related groups argue for white-supremacy, ethnopluralists argue instead for the need to preserve difference.

Support for democracy – A key marker for distinguishing radical right populists from the extreme right, the far-right as a whole varies on attitudes to democracy (Mudde 2007). This distinction needs to be treated with caution as understandings of democracy vary between groups and ideologies.

Esotericism – Recent developments among extreme neo-Nazi groupings in the US and UK have revealed inherent tensions between secular or Christian-styled neo-Nazis and those who embrace more spiritual interpretations of neo-Nazism. The influence of the fascist Satanist group the Order of the Nine Angles has caused rifts in some groups (Hope Not Hate 2019).⁷

⁷ For more on the Order of the Nine Angles and its connections to fascism see: Kaplan 2002; Goodrick-Clarke 2003; Senholt 2016.

Aims & Objectives

Although there is an implicit assumption that far-right activism sets out to achieve concrete political aims, there are also non-political motivations for far-right activism, for example ensuring the continuation of belief systems (Billig 1978: 98); developing a social identity (Lewis n.d.) excitement (Pilkington 2016); or in some cases financial gain (Reynolds 2018).

Where wider political aims are present, they vary depending on the ideology. Neo-Nazi and neo-fascist influenced groups are the most extreme, with both sets seeking to enact revolutionary changes to bring about racially homogenous nations, although there are infinite variations within this broad goal including establishing white ethno-states, enforced repatriation of minorities, and in some cases genocide. Radical groups instead seek to work within established norms, albeit with a critical stance on liberal values. In these instances aims are often more modest, seeking to change immigration laws or greater policing of suspect groups through established political channels.⁸

What follows describes four strategies employed by UK based far-right groups and influencers: electioneering; protest; normalisation; violence.

Electioneering

There have been three major far-right parties active in the post-war UK: The National Front (NF), the British National Party (BNP), and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). Both the NF and the BNP still exist but have peaked in terms of electoral support. The NF fielded 303 candidates in the 1979 election but performed worse than in previous years. The BNP fielded 338 candidates at the 2010 general election and secured over half a million votes but did not secure an MP. At the earlier 2009 European elections the BNP secured two MEPs.

UKIP does not have a fascist tradition but the party seems to be moving towards a more explicitly anti-Muslim stance under current leader Gerard Batten (Walker 2018a). This is a break from the party's radical right origins focusing Euroscepticism, opposing immigration on economic grounds, and anti-establishment rhetoric (Ford & Goodwin 2014). Party mainstay Nigel Farage has left the party over its new direction, while prominent far-right influencers have been invited in, including anti-Muslim campaigner Tommy Robinson.⁹ At the time of writing UKIP has representation in the House of Lords, Welsh Assembly, European Parliament, and in several local authorities.

Several other far-right parties contest elections in the UK, however this is often more to generate awareness of far-right ideas rather than for the prospect of victory.

Protest

The most noticeable objective of the far-right has been in the form of protest. The objective of protests and associated activities is seen as influencing lawmakers rather than acquiring power directly. In the case of the EDL, the objective of street demonstrations was framed by activists as awareness raising (Pilkington 2016: 38).

⁸ For examples of far-right policy proposals/demands see: <https://www.generation-identity.org.uk/demands/> ; <https://bnp.org.uk/policies/> ; and <https://www.forbritain.uk/policy>

⁹ Robinson, as a former member of the EDL, is barred from formally becoming a member of UKIP and so serves as an advisor (BBC 2018). In addition, three far-right YouTube influencers have become members: Sargon of Akkad, Count Dankula, and Paul Joseph-Watson (Walker 2018b; Childs 2018).

Even when the EDL was at its peak converting the movement into a political party was rejected as preserving its status as a single-issue protest group was a tool to differentiate the EDL from far-right political parties such as the BNP (Busher 2018).¹⁰

A wide range of groups organised demonstrations in 2018, with a rally in support of far-right influencer Tommy Robinson achieving an attendance upwards of 10,000 (Hope Not Hate 2019). Far-right groups have also formed part of the attendance at larger demonstrations (see: Generation Identity 2018). Contemporary protest groups are frequently patterned after the EDL; commonalities include the use of social media as an organisational tool and connections to football violence (Garland & Treadwell 2010; Jackson & Feldman 2011). None of the groups currently active has been as successful in attracting support as the EDL at its height (Busher 2018).

Although street demonstrations are the most visible and widely reported action associated with far-right movements they have embraced a wide range of activities including boycotts, leafletting campaigns, petitions, flash demonstrations, memorials and social media based activism (Busher 2018). Likewise, although street demonstrations have become associated with anti-Muslim narratives, other far-right groups, including neo-Nazis, have also used street demonstrations.¹¹

Normalisation

The far-right also seeks to change the boundaries of acceptable public debate. This approach has been referred to variously as metapolitics (Johnson n.d.), moving the 'Overton window' (Nagle 2017:41), and meme-campaigns (Wendling 2018). A strategy of cultural influence has always been implicit in far-right activity. However, the influence of the New Right (see above) has made 'cultural combat' a more explicit goal. In some cases these soft power approaches have played out online where the far-right has made extensive use of the internet (Berlet 2008), the web (Atton 2006) and social media (Nouri et al 2017). However, there is also a pervasive concern that there is an increasing acceptance within mainstream groups and parties to embracing neo-fascist ideas where they prove popular with votes (Kallis 2015: 6).

Far-right factions are also becoming more aesthetically distinctive. Groups such as National Action and Generation Identity have made a concerted effort to improve their overall aesthetic appeal and distinguish themselves from older forms of far-right activism (Macklin 2018). The web has also created new opportunities for the far-right to engage in media production, most notably the rich variety of far-right material made available on video sharing sites such as YouTube. These include documentaries, pseudo-news presentations, podcasts, audio books and vlogs. The far-right music scene also remains active and white power rock and roll has been conceptualised as a key propaganda tool for the racist skinhead scene (Cotter 1999; Schaffer 2013). While the far-right is still associated with raucous rock and roll other genres have also developed ties to the far-right, including metal (national socialist black metal)¹² and synthwave (fashwave)¹³ (Gardell 2003; Spracklen 2013; Bullock & Kerry 2017). Far-

¹⁰ The group did form a pact with the short-lived British Freedom Party.

¹¹ For example, in March 2015 nine people were arrested at a Newcastle demonstration organised by National Action and reportedly attended by 100 supporters of the far-right including BNP representatives and members of the British Movement, The British Voice, and National Front. Members of Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski (NOP) (National Rebirth of Poland) were also present (Bernhard 2015; Southern 2015; see also Macklin 2018).

¹² See <https://soundcloud.com/tags/nsbm>

¹³ See <https://soundcloud.com/user-625608547>

right culture has also experienced a renaissance in fashion with new brands entering the market to serve far-right sub cultures (Miller-Idriss 2018).¹⁴

Violence

While terrorism stemming from the far-right is a concern, violence from the far-right also arises spontaneously and in the form of hate crime. Spontaneous violence often arises from far-right protest activity and can involve clashes with opposition demonstrators (Treadwell & Garland 2011; Pilkington 2016).¹⁵ Far-right ideology is often linked to violence against specific groups. In the past some far-right groups have explicitly targeted minorities and political opponents for ideological reasons e.g. Combat 18 (Ryan 2004; Lowles 2001).¹⁶ There is also an established link between high-impact events such as Islamist-inspired terrorism and the Brexit referendum and hate crime reporting (Faith Matters 2018; Weaver 2018a). Evidence from the US suggests that the presence of hate groups in a county is positively related to ideologically motivated violence (Adamczyk et al 2014). In one in-depth analysis of anti-Muslim incidents in the UK far-right links were reported in less than a quarter of physical incidents but around 70% of online incidents (Copsey et al 2013). Overall, the far-right and hate crime are distinct but seemingly connected phenomena; however, the relationship between them is difficult to unpack precisely.

Far-right terrorism - violent direct action carried out for propagandistic effect (Schmid 2012) - is rare in the UK, but there have been recent high-profile incidents of far-right terrorism internationally. Distinguishing terrorism from spontaneous violence and hate crime can be difficult as attacks are often unclaimed or, little is known about the attacker's motivations (Ravndal & Bjørge 2018: 7).¹⁷ A Europe-wide analysis of right-wing terrorism and violence between 1990 and 2015 suggests that the role of organisations in violence was less significant than the threat of lone actors (Ravndal 2016). The typology of lone actor itself has come under fire as researchers have pointed out the extensive ideological engagement that accompanies even lone terrorist actions (Berntzen & Sandberg 2014; Schuurman et al 2017; Hoffman 2018). Analysis has sought to differentiate between peripheral lone actors that are unable to join a group or that have been rejected, and embedded lone actors that detach from a group for practical reasons (Lindekilde et al 2018). This ties with the recent history of far-right terrorism in the UK where none of the attacks have been directed by a group,

¹⁴ For example, Phalanx Europa, a clothing company co-founded by Austrian Generation Identity activist Martin Sellner <https://phalanx-europa.com/en/> (Miller-Idriss 2018).

¹⁵ A January 2016 protest in Dover that reportedly included elements from the National Front, SE Alliance, Scottish Defence League and Combat 18 descended into violence as supporters fought with counter protesters. At one-point rival protesters interrupted a pantomime being held in the nearby Dover Discovery Centre (BBC 2016, Lennon 2017).

¹⁶ The current state of Combat 18 is difficult to determine. Although there is little sign of an organisation the Combat 18 brand is still potent and has appeared recently in graffiti in a Birmingham alleyway close to the site of a murder (Coussins 2018) as well as in a notebook composed by Connor Ward (Mulholland 2018).

¹⁷ As an example, in 2016 Thomas Conington fire-bombed the Edinburgh Central Mosque. Conington has a history of racist violence and attacked the same Mosque in 2015. Conington also reportedly wore a swastika tattoo on his chest. Media reporting of the incident frames it as a racist attack rather than terrorism (King 2017). Based on the available information, it is not clear if Conington intended his actions as part of a wider political strategy of terror or not. A recent sentencing statement on a separate issue notes Conington has an 'anti-social personality disorder' (Judiciary Scotland 2019).

although two attackers (David Copeland and Zack Davies) had or claimed ties to far-right groups.¹⁸

In addition to successful attacks, planned attacks are often disrupted before they are carried out. This creates difficulty for classification as it is unknown if an attack would have gone ahead or not. Typically, there is less publicly available information available about far-right plots than successful attacks. As with the successful far-right attacks, perpetrators are often lone actors.¹⁹

A further concern of far-right violence of all kinds is its potential radicalising effects amongst target groups. There has been an extensive policy debate on cumulative extremism from a range of perspectives (Eatwell 2006). More recent work has argued that despite some clear relationships between opposing groups that the connections between groups play out in distinctive social and political contexts (Busher & Macklin 2015).

¹⁸ Copeland was a member of the National Socialist Movement at the time of his attacks, but claimed he acted alone (Ryan 2004; Hopkins 2000). Davies claimed membership of National Action but was this was denied by the group (Macklin 2018).

¹⁹ An exception to this may be the case of Jack Renshaw. Renshaw announced his plans to murder Labour MP Rosie Cooper as well as a police officer investigating him for child grooming offences to a group splintered from proscribed neo-Nazi organisation National Action. The group's leader Christopher Lythgoe was reported to have told him 'don't fuck it up' although he was ultimately found not guilty of encouraging Renshaw (ITV News 2018; Khomami 2018). While Renshaw was convicted of the plot to kill Cooper, he was not convicted of being a member of National Action (DeSimone 2019)

Table X: Far-Right Terror Attacks in the UK 1999-2019²⁰

Name	Date	Location	Victims	Notes
David Copeland	April 1999	Various locations, London	Nick Moore, John Light, and Andrea Dykes. Andrea Dykes was four months pregnant.	Detonated explosives in Brick Lane, Brixton, and Soho.
Pavlo Lapshyn	April – July 2013	Small Heath, Birmingham	Mohammed Saleem	Stabbed victim to death (April), also detonated bombs near mosques (June - July).
Zack Davies	January 2015	Mold, Wales	Sarandev Bhambra	Attacked victim with a knife, left life changing injuries.
Thomas Mair	June 2016	Birstall, W. Yorkshire	Jo Cox MP	Gun and knife attack also wounding Bernard Kenny who tried to intervene.
Darren Osborne	June 2017	Finsbury Park, London	Makram Ali	Attacked a crowd of Muslim worshipers with a vehicle killing one.

²⁰ This does not include a wide range of other terror offenses, for example those associated with membership of National Action (Macklin 2018). Also excluded are attacks where either motivation or perpetrators were unclear.

Table X: Foiled Far-Right Terror Attacks 2014-2019 (not comprehensive)

Name	Date uncovered	Location	Notes
Michael Piggin	February 2012	Loughborough, Leicestershire	Stockpiled weapons, diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome post arrest.
Connor Ward	November 2014	Banff, Aberdeenshire	Acquired bomb making components and kept a list of Mosques.
Liam Seabrook	May 2017	Thornaby, Middlesbrough	Stockpiled weapons and made threats to kill.
Ethan Stables	June 2017	Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria	Planned to attack an LGBT event.
Peter Morgan	July 2017	Edinburgh	Began to assemble an explosive device.
Jack Renshaw	July 2017	Warrington, Lancashire	Planned to murder Rosie Cooper MP and a police officer investigating him.

Size, Reach, and Impact

This section provides an overview of the size and impact of far-right groups and influencers in the UK. There are four sources of data to gather an idea of the scale of the UK far-right: membership estimates, election data, attendance at physical events, and online data.

Membership Estimates

Formal membership data is often difficult to establish on the far-right as many of the groups considered do not have formal membership criteria. Membership estimates for three organisations are available:

- UKIP has a total of 23,600 members in August 2018 (House of Commons Library 2018). It is unclear if UKIP will be able to sustain its current level of support with several members resigning memberships over the party's direction (Weaver 2018b; Deans 2019). However, recent reporting suggests that the party may have been able to increase its membership in the interim to 26,500 (Hope Not Hate 2019)
- A 2015 analysis by OpenDemocracy based on a consultation with Hope Not Hate estimated the BNP's membership at 500 (Ramsay 2015). This was down from an estimated 14,000 members around the 2010 general election (Goodwin 2011: 125)
- National Action had between 100 and 150 'adherents' while successor groups have been smaller and more fragmented, with the West-Midland's based Triple K Mafia Telegram group gaining 21 members at its peak (Macklin 2019).

Election Data

While the BNP persists, the departure of Nick Griffin and the failure to generate a significant electoral breakthrough have left the party a marginal presence on the far-right. For UKIP, previous work has identified a constituency of 'left behind' voters, mainly older, male and white working-class, prepared to support the party (Ford & Goodwin 2014). However, it is not clear if these voters will continue to support the party as it becomes more overtly anti-Muslim or defect to the newly constituted Brexit Party under former leader Nigel Farage.

The most recent by-election in the UK was held at Newport West in April 2019. Two far-right parties stood candidates, For Britain which received .7% of the vote, and UKIP which received 8.6%. UKIP's vote share was a 6% increase on the previous election in the seat. Although local issues were in play, the increase in UKIP's support may be attributable to the ongoing concerns around Brexit. However, the planned Farage-led Brexit party did not stand a candidate.

The 2016 Batley and Spen by-election took place in the aftermath of the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox by Thomas Mair, an extreme right-wing terrorist. The larger parties (including UKIP) did not contest the election, however three far-right parties did. The BNP achieved 2.7%, Liberty GB 1.1%, and National Front .4% of the vote.

Attendance Estimates

A further measure of support is through attendances at events organised by groups and influencers.

At its peak the EDL was estimated to have 25-35,000 active members (Bartlett & Littler 2011). Of these Pilkington (2017) notes that between 200 and 3000 may attend any one demonstration. Street demonstrations are still common, but the scene is now fragmented between several organisations. In 2018 the largest demonstrations were held in support of Tommy Robinson (10-12,000 in London on the 9th of June) and a march including far-right groups in support of Brexit (5-7,000 in London on the 9th of December). These events were not tied to specific organisations. The largest single organisation event was organised by the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (2,500 Birmingham 24 March) (Hope Not Hate 2019).

Attendances can also be used to gauge the levels of support for groups that do not engage in protest.

- Music network Blood and Honour held a concert in September 2018 to mark the anniversary of the 1993 death of Skrewdriver singer Ian Stuart Donaldson. Campaign organisation Hope Not Hate reports 400 attendees of which around 100 were estimated to have travelled from Europe (Hope not Hate 2019).
- Far-right youth group Generation Identity organised a conference in 2018 attended by an estimated 50 people, although reporting from GI's website suggests attendance at protest events is smaller (Shepard 2018).

Online data

There is an extensive far-right presence online. Much of this is in the form of websites and web forums (Bowman-Grieve 2009; Atton 2006). Major white-nationalist hub Stormfront was estimated to have 300,000 members in May of 2015 (Southern Poverty Law Centre 2017). However, its not clear where membership is based or how active individuals are. The Stormfront Britain sub-board currently has in excess of a million individual posts dating back to 2004.

Platforms such as YouTube have allowed far-right influencers to style themselves as an alternative media to develop strong ties to audiences and promote their own counter cultural credentials (Lewis n.d.). This is further boosted by algorithms that serve up similar ideological content (O'Callaghan et al 2015).

Analysis of Twitter has centred on the US-centric and pro-Trump 'alt-right', noting in particular that the ambiguity of alt-right ideology makes it difficult to concretely measure (Berger 2018). One estimate suggests that Twitter may host more the 100,000 supportive accounts, but that many of these may be automated (Berger 2018: 51). An earlier analysis of white-nationalists and neo-Nazi accounts on Twitter noted a geographic concentration in the US, UK and Canada (Berger 2016b). A recent analysis of the ultra-extreme Fascist Forge web forum noted a similar geographic concentration based on a much smaller number of users (<200) based on introductory posts (Lee & Knott 2019).²¹

A brief overview of some of the key far right groups and influencers audiences on social media is presented below. This is not a systematic sample and so should not be used to generalise or make overarching conclusions about the far-right on social

²¹ Fascist Forge was intended to continue the legacy of the Iron March board frequented by members of Atomwaffen Division and National Action. Fascist Forge went offline in February 2019 but has since re-emerged (Lamourex 2019).

media. These accounts represent the far-right superstructure on social media; they are the most visible and have the largest audiences. Beneath this is a much larger sublayer of smaller accounts often supportive of specific influencers, groups or ideologies.

Limitations

The figures above are reasonable indicators of support for the far-right in the UK. However, several obstacles prevent a comprehensive assessment of the scale of the far-right in the UK:

- The far-right is increasingly transnational and therefore isolating audiences or members in a single country is often difficult, particularly online audiences may be composed of supporters from all over the world.
- Organisations are often informal, making the number of members difficult to specify.
- Physical mobilisations are sometimes shared between groups and influencers making it difficult to untangle relative audience sizes.
- Online presences are often distributed across multiple accounts, for example prominent figures within specific groups may maintain their own accounts, or support may be distributed across a range of smaller accounts supportive of the group.
- The motivations of audiences are not always clear and may not indicate support for an ideology.
- Media interest in the far-right means that groups and influencers can sometimes gather media coverage far beyond their normal audiences.²²
- Far-right activism and activists are also amplified by far-right news outlets such as Defend Europa, Rebel Media, Red-Ice Radio, and Breitbart News.
- Online content is persistent, so even where a specific influencer or group is banned, leaves a group, or changes position, previous content remains available online.²³
- Large amounts of far-right activity are clandestine, e.g. the widespread use of secure apps such as Telegram, or services such as Discord.

²² There has been an interest in covering the UK far-right from the channel RT. The Ruptly YouTube channel includes a two and a half hour livestream of the protests in support of Tommy Robinson in June 2018 with 138,937 views: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfQqdg-2fmw>. Likewise, US right-wing media Fox News carried a supportive interview with Tommy Robinson following his release in summer 2018. The YouTube version of the interview has 804,832 views. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYfStBZ2w8w>.

²³ At the time of writing, content claiming to be from a London branch of National Action is still available via wordpress.com. The page includes a reading list as well as an account of a September 2016 anti-Brexit march which describes the theft of a beret from comedian and activist Eddie Izzard. It is unclear from the account if the thief, likely David Czerwonko, was considered affiliated with National Action (Press Association 2016). Subsequent reporting on Czerwonko reveals wider connections to National Re-Birth of Poland as well as a violent attack on a central London squat. He was subsequently prevented from re-entering the UK after a return visit to his native Poland (Hope Not Hate 2017). The National Action account also notes that 'National Socialists' were joining together to offer a bounty on Izzard's beret. N.B. the URL is not included here due to ethical considerations.

Table X: Far-Right Social Media Audiences (9 April 2019) (non-exhaustive)

Name	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Gab
Influencers				
Paul Joseph Watson	712,117	942,000	1,610,491	84,387
Jack Buckby (Rebel Media)	2,900	11,000	1,192,603 ²⁴	728
Sargon of Akkad (Carl Benjamin)	9,500	148,00	937,246	37,362
Milo Yiannopoulos	2,322,558	NA	861,176	69,145
Count Dankula	17,642	200,000	477,417	5,158
Tommy Robinson	NA	NA	391,070	26,467
Mark Collet	2,700	NA	81,047	2,599
Paul Weston	4,501	NA	30,145	282
Jayda Fransen (Britain First)	8,058	NA	15,089	15,327
James Goddard (Yellow Vests)	NA	NA	7,185	416
Katie Hopkins	43,483	925,000	NA	4,417
Anne-Marie Waters (For Britain)	5,399	NA	NA	4,495
Paul Golding (Britain First)	NA	NA	NA	14,981
Luke Nash-Jones (Make Britain great Again)	375	1,232	NA	477
Nick Griffin	28,887	35,300	NA	11,530
Benjamin Jones (GI)	NA	1,376	NA	NA
Gerard Batten MEP	NA	51,500	NA	NA
Groups				
Britain First	NA	246	58,162	46,579
Make Britain Great Again	106,651	1,245	46,183	408
Generation Identity	NA	5,601	5,091	3,344
EDL	NA	NA	1,595	1103
NW Infidels	NA	790	NA	NA
Democratic Footbal Lads Alliance	14,631	4,252	NA	NA
Football Lads Alliance	9,615	NA	NA	NA
System Resistance Network	NA	NA	NA	246
Parties				
UKIP	580,763	209,000	36,075	349
For Britain	30,633	23,000	16,143	1,255
BNP	214,549	13,000	11,962	NA
National Front	NA	9	832	NA

²⁴ N.B. This is the figure for Rebel Media as a whole, not for Buckby's content specifically.

Conclusions

'Far-right' is considered here as a container term for a diverse set of views ranging from revolutionary neo-Nazism to radical right-wing populism that seeks to work (mostly) within established democratic systems. These views are all characterised by hostility to perceived alien groups within societies, although the level and form of this hostility varies widely. Far-right ideologies are seldom advocated directly but are more usually embedded in narratives. There are a range of narratives common across the far-right. Some of the most prominent include claims of threats to the well-being of the race or society from outsiders e.g. white genocide, Islamisation, Jewish domination.

Historically, far-right parties have yet to breakthrough into mainstream politics in the UK. Despite this, the far-right drift taking place within UKIP has created, arguably, the most successful far-right party the UK has seen. It is not clear what the level of support for UKIP is at present or if the anti-Muslim direction will be sustained. More commonly, the far-right is engaged in a campaign of awareness-raising, pressuring political leaders where possible and a more generalised project of normalising far-right ideas. Although raising awareness is a common objective of political movements, elements of the far-right have developed a specific project to sanitise and intellectualise far-right ideas in order to challenge existing societal norms. Terrorism and wider violence are a product of far-right activism, but they are rarely endorsed directly by far-right actors. This can include violence arising spontaneously at demonstrations and hate crime linked to ideology. Far-right terrorists and plotters are often described as lone actors, but even where they have acted alone their beliefs and actions have been shaped by ties to the wider far-right milieu.

From the available data it is difficult to estimate the scale and levels of support for the far-right in the UK. The most extreme groups such as National Action seem to have little support anywhere outside of specialised and often difficult to access forums and servers. Outside of this however there is seemingly a vast reservoir of support for neo-Nazi, neo-fascist and populist ideas available online. While this paper has attempted to focus on the UK, much of this content is international with a bias towards North America and the UK. Even among UK-based influencers audiences on social media were in the hundreds of thousands. However, there is less information on where audiences are located, or their levels of support for those they follow. Relatedly, online support has not translated to offline mobilisations. No group has recaptured the success of the English Defence League, although supporters of Tommy Robinson are still prepared to turn out in support of him personally.

Extrapolating slightly, there are three broad trends in the UK far-right to watch:

1. The current far-right drift seen in UKIP is a dynamic process and may not be sustainable. However, UKIP is seemingly well-placed to benefit from any protest vote that accompanies a European election in 2019.²⁵ UKIP was able to increase its vote by 8% at the recent Newport West by-election and the list

²⁵ At the time of writing there is no clarity on if these elections will be held.

system used in European elections removes a traditional barrier to smaller and more dispersed far-right parties. UKIP may also be able to tap into new reservoirs of supporters through prominent affiliates, in particular Tommy Robinson.

2. While the frequency of lone actors makes far-right terrorism unpredictable, developments at the extreme end of the far-right spectrum in the UK seemingly have the most potential for terrorist violence. At the forefront of this are groups influenced by James Mason's *Siege* and subsequent texts. Although these groups are often tiny and derided by other far-right activists, they constitute a concerning ideological hardcore.

3. The majority of far-right activity takes place online. Ideologically this space is diverse, featuring positions ranging from populists who attempt to maintain a publicly acceptable face to more hardcore neo-Nazi groups. This is a broad and hard to define space but includes explicitly racial groups like Generation Identity and single-issue groups such as the counter jihad movement. This is also the space where attempts are being made to push the accepted boundaries of discourse and override traditional taboos around questions of race and identity.

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