

Protecting our Democracy from Coercion

By Lord Walney

The UK Government's independent adviser on political violence and disruption

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Foreword

We are at a crossroads in our democracy.

On a daily basis our elected representatives face violent threats and intimidation which require teams of armed protection officers to ensure their safety.

Noble causes such as the battle against climate change have been hijacked by extremist groups determined to bypass democratic norms and cause maximum disruption to society. At the same time hostile states have been emboldened, seeking to sow division in our communities by stoking hatred on our streets.

Based on foundations which are centuries old, the right to peaceful protest is a bedrock of our nation state. But the line at which we define peaceful has become a subject of fierce debate. How do we reconcile the tension between the protestors' right to free expression and the desire of others to avoid unnecessary disruption? The current legal balance is leaving many deeply dissatisfied. Polling carried out for this review shows that the government is out of step with public opinion when it comes to the type of powers needed to maintain order versus the widespread disapproval of disruptive protests.

It's with this in mind that I maintain we must hold true to our values. Chaos cannot be condoned, intimidation cannot be tolerated and brute force must not be allowed to win the argument.

Also, the phenomenon of regular marches in London and other cities protesting against the government's response to Israel's war against Hamas following the 7 October massacres has triggered a period of intense scrutiny on our public order framework. This review sets out a series of recommendations to address gaps in the law, how to deter criminal behaviour more successfully and enforce the law where it is clearly contravened. At the same time, it addresses how authorities can deal with the cumulative negative impact that repeated, large-scale protests may have on communities, businesses, and public services.

Central to this analysis is my conviction that we must do more to protect our politicians and institutions from intimidation. That includes the intimidation on display in the extreme, illegal protests which are on the rise here and in many fellow democracies.

It is a use of unacceptable force when protesters block roads to bring communities and businesses to a standstill or storm a council chamber to cause chaos in a meeting and physically intimidate politicians to change their vote. I have grown up with the tradition of marches and protest, like many on the Left of politics. But we

cannot allow, in its extreme, violent threats and vandalism to circumvent the peaceful calls for change, or a vote through the ballot box.

The fact that an activist believes their cause to be particularly noble, or argument irrefutable, does not make extreme acts acceptable; the law must be applied uniformly irrespective of the cause. This principle is vital in ensuring that democracy is not only defended in theory but upheld in practice. Lawmakers from across the political spectrum should come together to reject the idea that there are causes so important the end justifies the illegal means.

Instead, we must do more to champion, defend and foster the tools by which we bring change in our historic democracy. Unless we wake up to the severity of the potential threat posed by extreme groups and re-focus on the liberal-first principles on which British democracy has been built, there is a serious risk of enabling increased radicalisation on issues such as climate change that could result in more violent disorder in future.

As part of this report, I have studied organisations and ideologies on the extreme right wing and extreme left of British politics, the varied causes they espouse and methods they deploy, including the effectiveness of the response from the British state and civic society to the challenges they pose. I conclude, unsurprisingly, that there is a greater violent threat from the far right. Yet I find a worrying gap in our understanding of the extreme left, whose activists do not routinely employ violent methods yet systematically seek to undermine faith in our parliamentary democracy and the rule of law.

The analysis contained in this review is a contribution to the much-needed task of redressing this imbalance in our understanding of the damage that can be done to society by the extreme far left. It puts forwards several recommendations to further improve our understanding and resilience.

Above all, my review attempts to provide a critical lens through which we can protect our democratic values from intimidation and better serve the public. We must reassess and recalibrate our response to political violence and disruption, whatever its ideological underpinning. By proposing a reclassification of threats and recommending enhanced intelligence and policing capabilities, it seeks to set out the tools necessary to identify, protect against, and deter, extreme activity that goes beyond legitimate protest.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The right to express dissent is a fundamental tenet of our liberal democracy and must be protected. Yet the UK has a growing problem with extreme protest movements that use political violence, intimidation, incitement, law breaking, and disruption. **Extreme political activists are targeting core elements of Britain's democracy**, including elected representatives, the free press, and educational settings. They are using disruption tactics to impact the country's economy, targeting supply chains, fuel and energy, transport, and business and industry. All of this interferes with the rights of ordinary citizens in going about their daily lives. It is beyond question that we must uphold the right to protest, but so too must we defend our democracy from the tactics of extremists who seek to impose their beliefs on the rest of society with non-democratic and illegal activism.
- 1.2 What is clear to me is that while many of the **causes and issues of concern campaigned on are often entirely worthy or popular, they are being routinely driven by extreme activists**. These are often people who advocate extremist and anti-democratic forms of politics that have little traction with voters and cannot secure real electoral support. Yet they attach themselves to causes that parts of the public are concerned about, such as the environment, anti-racism, anti-war, transgender rights, levels of immigration, Brexit, defending public monuments, and the measures implemented around lockdowns. By leading high-profile protest movements around these causes, I am concerned that extreme activists achieve disproportionate prominence and can at times mobilise significant numbers, often with the explicit intention of causing havoc to our society and our democracy.
- 1.3 A major public poll conducted for my review shows a **public overwhelmingly opposed to mass disruption, criminal damage, or physical violence in the pursuit of political ends**. While 70% of those polled said protesting was an important way to raise awareness of a cause, over four in five (83%) agreed that violence and the destruction of public property only undermined the cause protestors claimed to support. The public overwhelmingly oppose protestors attacking the police (95%), defacing property (93%), or blocking roads and public transport meaning people's journeys are disrupted (74%).
- 1.4 Defending the right to protest, while also stopping extreme activists using intimidation, mass disruption, and criminality to achieve their political objectives is integral to upholding our democracy. It is a core principle of the British system that political change is brought about with legal and democratic means. For that reason, the **Government should put the liberal first principles of our political system** - upholding parliamentary democracy and

the rule of law, defending free expression and the free press, and not supporting or advocating for hostile states and non-state actors – **at the heart of how it confronts extreme protest movements.**

- 1.5 That means that protest movements should be treated the same by authorities, regardless of whether authorities believe a particular movement's cause is noble. **Central and local government must commit not to fund, work, nor consult with groups who do not commit to legal means to secure change or who engage in or facilitate intimidation or harassment. Outside of government, elected representatives of mainstream political parties should not engage with such groups.** Too many who have the privilege of making our laws have seen extreme, highly disruptive protests as a vital expression of democracy rather than the truth – that they are a threat to it. It is time to reset the balance and put our prized liberal democracy first.
- 1.6 The public do not accept violence or mass disruption as legitimate tactics, regardless of the cause. However, the response from authorities to extreme protest groups has too often been insufficiently robust, particularly when groups are acting on behalf of causes associated with the left. Extreme political movements are a well-recognised problem on the right, from the racist violence of the National Front in the 1970s through to today's anti-Muslim and anti-minority groups. Yet **too little attention has been paid to serious forms of violence, intimidation, and incitement of hatred on the extreme left.** Extreme left activists can, in relatively small numbers, cause enormous economic damage and drain police resources. At a time of economic difficulty, this activity has an especially pronounced impact. Government getting to grips with this issue is now imperative from both a law enforcement and economic perspective.
- 1.7 There are significant gaps in the Government's conception of extreme left movements. Many of the single-issue causes that are active in the UK today take the form of progressive social movements which I consider part of a broad Far Left subculture. I identified five such movements – environmental campaigns, anti-racism, anti-government protest; anti-Israel activism, and anti-fascism – and showed how they have made Far Left, anti-capitalist, anarchist, and anti-establishment ideologies an inseparable part of their worldview. **Yet the Government's rigid classification of Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue (LASI) separately risks missing the ideological overlaps between these groups and social movements that both animate and help explain them,** The Intelligence Services and Home Office should reclassify LASI threats to provide ideological coherence to the categories and add the word 'Extreme' to avoid unintentionally conflating mainstream left-wing views with the Far Left. This means replacing LASI with 'Extreme Left-wing and Anarchist' (ELA), for both terrorism and extremism threats from traditional revolutionary Far Left ideologies and new progressive

protest movements, and 'Other', for threats that have no ideological links to Islamists, the Extreme Right, or the Extreme Left.

- 1.8 **The Government should address the gaps in knowledge within government and law enforcement agencies of the ideologies, tactics, and actors within Extreme Left-Wing and Anarchist protest movements** and the repercussions on democracy and British society. The Government should classify threats based on a holistic assessment of the actors' own understanding of the issue around which they are seeking change, their tactics for achieving change, and their vision for the world they want to create. When threats are categorised narrowly based on the specific policy a protest movement wants to change then wider links with extreme left and anarchist ideologies risk being overlooked. I show, for example, that Extinction Rebellion, understood by many as an environmentalist organisation, is also fundamentally rooted in an anarchist analysis of society and ways of organising. To improve knowledge of extreme protest movements, the role of Independent Adviser on Political Violence and Disruption should be permanent, with appropriate resourcing, tasked with informing government and relevant parts of the public sector about the evolving nature of the threat and advising on our collective response.
- 1.9 **To better counter the influence and law breaking of extreme political protest movements, police should have a robust understanding of these networks and extensive intelligence.** The police should improve intelligence and collaboration on political violence and disruption, especially between central intelligence gathering functions and local operational capabilities. This is clearly an area that draws controversy on civil liberties grounds. Accordingly, the Home Secretary should also task His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to conduct a short review on whether undercover surveillance is being used appropriately in the context of public order and aggravated activism.
- 1.10 Many extreme protest movements advocate mass disruption and law breaking as a core tactic for achieving their objectives outside of democratic procedures. Some are led by organisations and people who support violence or celebrate terrorism. **The Government should introduce a mechanism to restrict the activity of organisations which have a policy of using criminal offences for which the penalty includes imprisonment (such as destruction of property) or causing serious disruption or injury to persons to influence government or public debate where its policy and activities make this a necessary in a democratic society to protect the rights of others.** Distinct from proscription, which rightly entails severe sanctions, this would mean authorities restricting these groups' ability to organise or fundraise.

- 1.11 Legislation that was created during my review to counter the effects of disruptive protest and extreme political activism look to be having some good effect. However, there are reasonable concerns about whether there is the right balance in favour of public order and civil liberties. **The Government should monitor the ongoing implementation of measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 to ensure that provisions relating to extreme protest movements are being applied proportionately and effectively.** There is some evidence that police do not make full use of these new powers, while in other cases they may have been misapplied.
- 1.12 The recent Gaza protests saw some protesters inciting antisemitic hatred and supporting terrorism, yet few were charged for these offences. **The Government should develop a transparent mechanism to review police and Crown Prosecution Service charging decisions to ensure that public order and terrorism legislation is being appropriately implemented in respect of political protest.** As well as a failure to arrest and charge some protesters, justice may also be denied in the courts, particularly when activists claim to be acting on behalf of causes that are popular or perceived to be morally righteous. **The Lord Chancellor and Lady Chief Justice should convene a process to examine the potential issue of juries acquitting defendants and judges applying laws differently when they are transgressed in the name of progressive causes like climate change and anti-racism.**
- 1.13 **The Government should look at further tightening several laws, to strengthen the legislative framework for responding to political protest, political violence, and disruption.** The Government must ensure that police consider the cumulative disruption and harm done to a particular group by a succession of extreme political protests, such as the explosion of antisemitic hate crime currently being experienced by many Jewish people coinciding with the Gaza protests. **The Government should amend the Public Order Act 1986 to expand the grounds on which a police force can recommend a march is not permitted to go ahead on a particular date beyond the narrow grounds that it risks serious public disorder.** Specifically, new triggers should be added to section 13 of the Public Order Act, allowing the police to apply to the Home Secretary to prohibit processions from going ahead, where the police reasonably believe the procession will likely result in intimidation from threatening or abusive conduct, or where there is a demonstrable cumulative impact on serious disruption.
- 1.14 **The police and Crown Prosecution Service should interpret and apply the law on encouraging terrorism broadly so any celebration of terrorist acts, or praise for terror groups and individuals, is viewed as a form of indirect encouragement.** If courts do not support this interpretation of current

legislation, the Government should keep under review the introduction a summary-only terrorism offence that explicitly prohibits the celebrating, praising, glorifying, or endorsing of acts of terrorism, proscribed terrorist groups, or terrorists. The police with the Crown Prosecution Service should develop a new code of practice, or operating framework, to clarify public order and terrorism legislation in respect to of political protest and publish guidance for the statements, chants, or symbols that, in the context of a political protest would likely constitute an offence. The Government should ensure police officers and the Crown Prosecution Service have the knowledge they need to counter terrorism by maintaining and regularly updating an internal list of images and symbols associated with proscribed organisations.

- 1.15 Extreme protest movements do significant damage to society and the economy, impeding the business of ordinary people trying to get to work, school, seeking urgent medical care, or visiting loved ones. This is intolerable. The Government should take steps to help workers and the public defend themselves against extreme activists. **Those who suffer loss because of serious disruption from extreme and unauthorised protest deserve a right to redress from the groups who organise the action.** There should be compensation for workers who lose earnings because of disruption, and so the Government should develop a mechanism to allow individuals and businesses who can evidence significant personal harm or economic damage from illegal disruptive protest to claim damages from protest organisers.
- 1.16 **Far too little is in place to support businesses and industries that are impacted by disruption or targeted by extreme activists blocking their premises and causing criminal damage.** The Government should consider a civil measure making it easier for businesses to pursue extreme protest organisers for damages. Defence companies and energy providers that are vital to local economies, national security and resilience are being particularly targeted by extreme protest groups. They are fringe groups with few supporters yet are causing significant damage. The government should consider ways to ensure increased resilience of supply for defence manufacturers and energy providers whose operations are being disrupted by illegal protest. This could include setting a protective buffer zone around certain sites or expediting injunctions on certain protestors not to enter such a zone.
- 1.17 Extreme protest movements that cause mass disruption and law breaking draw a great amount of police resource and can cause physical injuries to police officers. **The Government should consider the viability of requiring protest organisers to contribute to policing costs when groups are holding a significant number of large demonstrations which cause serious disruption or significant levels of law-breaking.** This could take the form of placing greater requirements on protest organisers under Section

11 of the Public Order Act 1986 to contribute to safety arrangements and resource planning and increase the level of fines for failure to comply with such requirements. **The Government should also amend sections 12, 13 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 to allow police forces to balance the resource requirements of policing the public's right to protest with other frontline priorities.** Police should be able to manage the cumulative impact on policing resource demand by setting any conditions as appear necessary on processions and assemblies, or recommend that the frequency of processions is reduced, to prevent the policing of marches disproportionately impacting other policing priorities.

- 1.18 Extreme activists and protest movements harass and intimidate politicians, most often in the area around Parliament and in their constituencies. This can escalate to physical violence. In recent years, there has been a terrorist attack that saw the assailant make it into the grounds of the Palace of Westminster, while two MPs were murdered in their constituencies by terrorists. **The targeting of elected representatives by extremists calls for greater action.** The Prime Minister should call on the Speaker of the House to convene a conference on protecting our democracy by guaranteeing the ability of MPs to go about their work without threat, harassment, violence, or intimidation. As part of this, the Home Secretary should order a review of the balance between access and security within the area surrounding Parliament, and the Metropolitan Police Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team should develop a plan to improve the recording and reporting of harassment and intimidation directed against MPs. The Government should also extend the scope of Expedited Public Spaces Protection Orders – exclusion orders currently available to local authorities to protect schools and healthcare settings from persistent and unreasonable protest activity – to include places vital to the functioning of democratic governance, such as MPs' constituency offices and council chambers.
- 1.19 Extreme activists and protest movements threaten free speech and the free press, targeting printing presses and television studios, and intimidating journalists reporting on protests. **Protesters are intimidating schools and teachers when children are taught things they disagree with, while at universities academics and guest speakers are targeted to shut down free debate.** There should be statutory guidance on managing blasphemy-related incidents in schools that upholds teachers' freedom of expression and does not automatically suspend teachers involved. On Relationships and Sex Education and blasphemy-related incidents, for example, schools are not required to engage with or appease local activist groups or religious institutions.
- 1.20 Much extreme political activism happens online, and activists use online platforms to organise and draw support. However, **in attempting to confront**

how activists promote extremism and criminal activity online, we must not create a culture where regulators and companies simply seek to avoid all controversy. The desire to shield people from the corrosive effects of hateful speech and prejudice that can be pervasive on online platforms is understandable and often justified. Yet across liberal democracies, policy makers are in danger of embedding a culture in which is too reticent to act against the threat to democracy from abuse and intimidation in the physical environment but simultaneously is eager to restrict speech in the online world to the extent that discourse vital to democratic debate is curtailed. So outside of content that incites violence or criminal hatred, the Government should give greater protection to freedom of expression and should **pay greater regard to the dangers of interpreting hate crime too broadly.** In its Codes of Practice and guidance on the thresholds for illegal content relating to incitement to hatred, Ofcom must set out the importance of freedom of expression.

- 1.21 **There are an increasing number of ways that tech can be used to counter extreme political activism.** The Government should boost national capacity to challenge political violence and disruption in the online and technological space and look at ways to support the intelligence services and relevant teams within government in having more resources to identify disinformation and mal-information generated by hostile states and extremists. Authorities should work with social media companies to encourage the removal of such content and consistently enforce terms of service.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 I was appointed to lead a review as Independent Advisor on Political Violence and Disruption in February 2021. Prior to this, in November 2019, I was appointed as the UK Special Envoy for Countering Violent Extremism.
- 2.2 The Home Secretary in conjunction with the Prime Minister's Office tasked me with examining the activities of the Far Right, Far Left and other extreme political groups in the UK. Specifically, my terms of reference contained the following objectives:
- increasing HMG's understanding of the challenge posed by the Far Left, Far Right and other extreme groups in the UK, a specific area of focus will be on the ways in which the output of these groups drives terrorism, violence, and other forms of criminality, including disruptive and antisocial behaviour
 - increasing HMG's understanding of approaches taken by international partners to extremist movements, including the ways in which different countries conceptualise and respond to the Far Left and Far Right
- 2.3 My terms of reference also outlined the pressing social need for a wide review of extremism and terrorism on all sides of the political spectrum and the activities of Far Right and Far Left extremists. I was instructed to consider the tipping point between political activism and criminal behaviour, the ways in which extreme political groups influence British citizens, and how such activities might undermine the wellbeing and cohesiveness of society.
- 2.4 When appointed, I committed to present my findings and recommendations to the Prime Minister and Home Secretary for publication.
- 2.5 It is my intention to improve understanding within government, civil society, the media, and the public. It is my hope that this will in turn improve leadership in responding to these issues by enabling those responsible to treat different threats accurately and proportionately. I also sought to learn from the ways in which international partners respond to analogous threats.
- 2.6 In line with the remit of this review, I have primarily focussed on both the Far Right and the Far Left, including the many single issue campaigning groups and social movements that I argue are part of a broad Far Left subculture in the UK today. I did not give the same level of attention to Islamist extremism, which has been covered in detail in other reviews, although I discovered and document alliances between the British Far Left and Islamist organisations on anti-Israel and antisemitic activism.

- 2.7 It is a fundamental pillar of our liberal democracy that we all enjoy the right to peaceful protest.
- 2.8 The rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, protected by Articles 10 and 11 respectively, are within the European Convention of Human Rights, and are incorporated into British law by the Human Rights Act.
- 2.9 However, like all legislation guaranteeing certain freedoms, that right comes with limitations. Yet the challenge from extreme protest movements and activism includes political violence, law breaking, and disruption.
- 2.10 My review documents, for example, how those on the Far Right exploited the politics around Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic to advance their narratives, targeted and threatened journalists and politicians, and clashed with Far-Left activists in violent street protests.
- 2.11 It also documents the extreme and disruptive tactics of those on the Extreme Left who have manipulated progressive causes – such as the campaign for climate action or anti-racism – to advance an ideological cause.
- 2.12 I highlight gaps in our in-depth understanding of the ideologies that motivate the extreme protests which have marred our city streets in recent years. I urge the Government to reassess its understanding of extreme left and anarchist movements and to tighten its response to activists both on the Far Left and Far Right who threaten our democratic way of life.
- 2.13 Protestors who seek to cause mass disruption often justify breaking the law as necessary to maximise the effect on the rest of society and the economy to achieve change. Law breaking and criminality, particularly vandalism and trespass, sit within the wider phenomenon of disruption.
- 2.14 Much of the political violence documented in this review is rioting and street violence directed towards police and other activists during protests and counter-protests. Parts of this review also cover the points at which political violence reaches the terrorism threshold.
- 2.15 I have also included discussion of incitement and intimidation by extreme political activists, and expressions of force such as blocking roads and making public spaces impassable, because even when those responsible do not directly engage in violence, they can still have a significant effect on their victims. When journalists, academics, teachers, and politicians are subjected to threats that seek to silence and coerce them, the nature of our liberal democracy is eroded.
- 2.16 As my review has found, extreme protest movements also target the economy as part of their strategies to bypass and subvert the democratic process to achieve their objectives. Mass disruption used by activists inflicts substantial costs to businesses, taxpayers and it can inhibit ordinary working people from

going about their everyday lives. Vital, sometimes lifesaving, public services, can be badly affected.

- 2.17 This review has found evidence of how Far Left environmental activists have vandalised and obstructed national infrastructure construction, blocked fuel supplies, and delayed the transportation of food and other essential products when they shut down motorways. This is particularly troubling at a time when the country is attempting to focus on restoring sustainable growth and tackling the rising cost of living.
- 2.18 It is vital that our response upholds the primacy of the will of the British people expressed in democratic elections. When activists break the law, not only do they impose their views on the rest of society without the democratic consent of the people, but they also often seek to compare themselves favourably to previous generations of civil rights protestors. Yet today, the UK's liberal democracy and open channels of information give people the agency to secure societal change through democratic consent.
- 2.19 So rather than assessing the validity of any protest by the apparent progressive nature of its cause, justifying a greater degree of law breaking for issues deemed more noble, we should judge all protest on whether they are seeking to influence the democratic process legitimately or seeking to coerce it by force. Governments and elected representatives should pledge only to engage with groups seeking to enact change through democratic consent.
- 2.20 The recommendations that I set out here outline a path for how the Government can address extreme political activism on both sides of the political spectrum.

Methodology

- 2.21 To write this review, I engaged widely with relevant stakeholders including the Government, public bodies, international partners, the public, academia, civil society, and those impacted by extreme protest movements, lawbreaking, and disruption.
- 2.22 I am grateful to all those who contributed and helped shape my thinking on this important topic. In recent years, there have been many important publications around countering terrorism and extremism. In this review, I have not sought to recreate that work but to add to the body of our understanding of the threat posed to our liberal democracy from extreme political activism.

Evidence Gathering

Public Engagement

Public Polling and Focus Groups

2.23 To obtain a better understanding of public views on political protest and disruption in the UK, I commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and Kantar Public to undertake focus groups and a representative online survey respectively. The research comprised two strands of data collection:

- A representative survey of members of the public, comprising 21 demographic and attitudinal questions. In total, 2,012 members of the public took part, selected using random probability sampling via Kantar's 'Public Voice' panel. The survey data was weighted to ensure a nationally representative spread across key demographic characteristics including age, gender, region, and socio-economic grade. Descriptive analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS.
- Twelve online focus groups which explored views in greater depth. Participants were purposively sampled to ensure diversity across key characteristics such as region, political affiliation, political activism, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic grade. Data were managed and analysed using NatCen's case and theme-based approach.

Call for Evidence

2.24 As part of the evidence gathering, I also ran a public call for evidence between March and May 2021 to hear from the public and civil society about their views and experiences. The call for evidence was open to both individuals and to civil society groups. In all, there were 581 responses, 537 from individuals, 27 from organisations, and 17 from respondents who chose not to provide identifying information and so may have been from groups or individuals.

Stakeholder Interviews

2.25 I gathered a wide range of perspectives from relevant stakeholders, including policymakers, the police, protest groups, and business affected by political violence and disruption.

2.26 I interviewed officials from the UK intelligence community, the Home Office, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport.

- 2.27 I interviewed senior leaders at the Metropolitan Police, Met Intelligence, the force's intelligence function, and the National Police Coordination Centre, which provides support to police forces across the country.
- 2.28 I also interviewed subject matter experts from academia and think tanks, spoke to representatives from the protest group Extinction Rebellion, and I met with representatives from business affected by protest.

Specialist Roundtables

- 2.29 To help me better understand the threats from extreme political movements, I convened three roundtables with subject matter experts on the Extreme Right, the Extreme Left, and the growing challenge of disinformation. The first two discussions were held under Chatham House Rule with leading academics, civil society, and public commentators with subject matter expertise or who had been personally affected by Extreme Right or Extreme Left campaigns of intimidation. The discussion on disinformation and conspiracy theories took the form of a public webinar and I am grateful to the Counter Extremism Project for hosting.¹
- 2.30 Defending and preserving a free society was a recurring subject throughout my review. To help determine where the boundaries for doing so should be set and to consider what are the essential principles underpinning a democratic society, I convened two roundtable discussions in autumn 2021. These were held with leading figures from academia, law, political commentary, journalism, and the criminal justice system. Conducted in accordance with the Chatham House Rule, participants were drawn from across the political spectrum, with the one prerequisite being that they all ascribe to an essentially democratic point of view.

Literature Review and Official Documentation

- 2.31 To build my understanding of the nature and scale of extreme protest movements operating in the UK today I reviewed primary open-source materials from relevant extreme groups and individuals, reviewed relevant literature from academics and think tanks, and looked at previous public reviews and assessments related to political violence and disruption. Data and documentation provided by the Government and police has also been an incredibly important resource for understanding how the state both

¹ Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories, and Solutions Without Censorship, Tuesday 4 May 2021. (Opening remarks: Lucinda Creighton, Counter Extremism Project senior advisor in Europe, former Irish minister of state for European affairs). Speakers: Dr David Jeffery, lecturer on British politics, populism, and local government at Liverpool University; Aaron Sibarum, reporter at The Washington Free Beacon and writer; Naama Kates, host of INCEL podcast; Liam Duffy, London-based CEP advisor, author of CEP's latest report "Western Foreign Fighters and the Yazidi Genocide", <https://www.counterextremism.com/press/cep-virtual-roundtable-lord-walney-disinformation-conspiracy-theories-and-solutions-without>.

understands and responds to political violence, disruption, and extremism more widely.

Academic research

- 2.32 I took the decision to commission academic research on the Far Left ecosystem in the UK, as this was a key area for this review yet I discovered there was relatively little secondary source research available.²
- 2.33 The primary aim of the research was to map the relationships within the British Far Left, focusing on shared ideologies, tactics, and activities, providing a high-level overview of shared personnel and/or institutional linkages and front organisations. The secondary aims were to explore how coherent the Far Left ecosystem is and the extent to which activities are coordinated, to identify the causes that are of the most important to the Far Left as well as the issues on which its constituent groups and individuals disagree and/or diverge, and to examine the intellectual and institutional origins of the Far Left.

² Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British Far-Left: A Study Of A Political Ecosystem* (2021).

Glossary

Terms Used

Anti-fascism – is used by this review to refer to non-state opposition to perceived fascism. While the term encompasses nonviolent activities, including calling on the authorities to act against fascists,³ this review is predominantly concerned with militant or radical anti-fascism, a de-centralised, non-hierarchical social movement that engages in both violent and non-violent forms of direct action against perceived fascism and other forms of the Far Right. Typically, but not exclusively associated with the Far Left and commonly known as Antifa in North America and continental Europe.⁴

Civil disobedience – is understood by this review as a term usually used by political activists to refer to the open, deliberate, and nonviolent breaking of a law, regulation, or order, including those of governments, courts, police, and military officials. Often disobeying laws perceived to be unjust or to bring about a change in behaviour.⁵

Culture wars – is used by this review to refer to culturally contentious or divisive issues that typically are centred around identity rights (such as race and gender), socio-political history (such as colonialism) and the cultural landscape (such as immigration).⁶

Disruption – is used by this review to refer to the interference in people’s everyday lives and the ordinary operations of an organisation or business. During this review the Government defined ‘serious disruption’ in the Public Order Act 2023 as cases in which individuals or an organisation –

- are by way of physical obstruction prevented, or hindered to more than a minor degree, from carrying out –
 - their day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey)
 - construction or maintenance works, or
 - or activities related to such works,

³ In the UK, this includes mainstream civil society opposition to the Far Right such as the self-described “anti-fascism campaign group” HOPE not hate. HOPE not hate, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/hopenothate?lang=en>.

⁴ Nigel Copsey, Samuel Merrill, Crest Research (2021), ‘Understanding 21st Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, pp.9-10.

⁵ Margaret E. Crahan, edited by Joel Krieger, *Civil Disobedience, The Oxford Companion to the Politics of the World* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 137.

⁶ Andrew Anthony, ‘Everything You Wanted To Know About The Culture Wars But Were Afraid To Ask’, *The Guardian*, 13 June 2021 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/13/everything-you-wanted-to-know-about-the-culture-wars-but-were-afraid-to-ask>.

- are prevented from making or receiving, or suffer a delay that is more than minor to the making or receiving of, a delivery of a time-sensitive product, or
- are prevented from accessing or suffer a disruption that is more than minor to the accessing of, any essential goods or any essential service.⁷

Direct action – is understood by this review as a term usually used by political activists to refer to activities that seek to achieve an end directly, bypassing established political, economic, or social processes such as parliamentary democracy. The term encompasses both nonviolent and violent activities that typically target individuals, groups, and property to bring about a change in behaviour or disrupt perceived wrongdoing by institutions, businesses, or governments. Nonviolent direct action may include strikes, sit-ins, tree-sits, locking-on, and boycotts or refusing to pay for goods and services. (Certain protests organised without the necessary authorisation are included in nonviolent direct action for the purposes of this review).⁸ Violent direct action may include assault, vandalism, arson, street blockades, sabotage, and property destruction.⁹

Extreme protest movement – is used by this review to refer to a protest movement (see below) whose activities demonstrate active opposition to democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.

Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism – is defined by the Government as terrorism motivated by one or more of the following broad ideologies:

- White supremacism – the belief that the ‘white race’ is biologically superior to other races, often calling for the replacement of Western parliamentary democracy with Neo-Nazi or fascist regimes
- White/(ethno-) nationalism – the belief that that the ‘white race’ and ‘Western culture’ faces an existential threat from mass migration and demographic change, for which Jews are typically blamed, often calling for the repatriation or deportation of people who are not white (if necessary forced)
- Cultural nationalism – the belief that ‘Western culture’ is under threat from mass migration and from a lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural

⁷ Section 34, Public Order Act 2023, HMG, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/15/section/34>.

⁸ There is no legal obligation when organising a stationary demonstration in public spaces. However, the organiser of a public march has a legal obligation to inform the police in advance if “reasonably practicable”. There are also sometimes procedures for organisers to follow regarding protests on land owned by local councils and public bodies as well as on privately-owned land where protests may be considered trespass. ‘Protests and marches: letting the police know’, HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/protests-and-marches-letting-the-police-know>; ‘PROTEST – YOUR RIGHTS’, Liberty (2020), <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/nusliberty-rights-document-a5.pdf>, pp. 4-8.

⁹ ‘Direct Action’, Activist Handbook, <https://activisthandbook.org/tactics/direct-action>; ‘Direct Action Manual’, Mutual Aid Disaster Relief, (2021), https://mutualaiddisasterrelief.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/direct_action_manual_3-1.pdf.

groups, often accompanied by anti-Muslim hatred and the promotion of anti-establishment conspiracy theories¹⁰

Extremism – is defined in the Prevent strategy as the vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. Calls for the death of members of our armed forces, whether in this country or overseas is included in this definition.¹¹

Far Left – is used by this review as an umbrella term for groups and ideologies to the left of mainstream politics that seek to end social inequality and who, in so doing, seek to overturn current systems of government and reshape society, typically along communist, socialist, or similar principles, or who reject democratic processes, preferring instead industrial or direct action.¹²

Far Right – is used by this review as an umbrella term for groups and ideologies that sit to the right of mainstream politics, particularly in relation to race, culture, and identity, which are perceived as under threat. Within the UK, the Far Right encompasses political parties, protest movements, pressure groups and street gangs, some of which work within democratic processes and contest elections while others are anti-democratic, having adopted direct action or, at times, terrorist strategies.¹³

Hate crime – is defined by the police, the Crown Prosecution Service, and the criminal justice system as "any criminal offence which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice towards someone based on a personal characteristic".¹⁴

Identity politics – is used by this review to refer to an approach to socio-political issues through the lens of a particular identity, such as race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.¹⁵

¹⁰ 'The Threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Protect UK, (February 2023), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-extreme-right-wing-terrorism>. For more details on the genesis of the Government's definitions see 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, pp. 5-6; 23-25.

¹¹ 'Prevent Duty Guidance: England and Wales', Home Office, (2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales#f-glossary-of-terms>.

¹² Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 5; 'The Threat from Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single Issue Terrorism (LASITY)', Protect UK, (November 2022), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-left-wing-anarchist-and-single-issue-terrorism-lasit>.

¹³ Ben Lee, 'Understanding The Far-Right Landscape', Crest Research (July 2017), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-far-right-landscape/>; Ben Lee, 'Overview of the Far-Right', Crest Research, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834424/Ben_Lee_-_Overview_of_the_far_right.pdf.

¹⁴ There are five centrally monitored strands of hate crime: race or ethnicity; religion or beliefs; sexual orientation; disability, and transgender identity. 'Hate crime, England and Wales, 2021 to 2022', Home Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2021-to-2022>.

¹⁵ Frank Newport, 'Identity Politics in Context', *Gallup*, 3 December 2021, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/357812/identity-politics-context.aspx>.

Ideology – is used by this review to refer to a wide-ranging system of beliefs, ways of thought, and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social action.¹⁶

Islamism – is used by this review to refer to a political ideology founded in the 20th century which sees Islam as a complete socio-political system and broadly advocates for an expansionist ‘Islamic’ state, or Caliphate, governed by Sharia (Islamic principles and law). Today Islamism takes many forms; some advocate revolutionary violence to secure change, many more do not. While Islamists in the West have mostly abandoned the aim of a Sharia-governed state in their own country for now, they belong to a trans-ethnic network of like-minded individuals and groups that work through institutions and mosque networks to revive their understanding of Islam in all aspects of social and political life.¹⁷ Regardless of their willingness to engage in violence or not, Islamist movements share a claim to authenticity and normative Islamic practice.¹⁸

Gender critical – is used by this review to refer to the belief that sex is both biological and immutable and distinct from the (cultural and social) concept of gender.¹⁹ High profile proponents of gender critical views tend to be women with a background in feminist activism, who are referred to by their opponents using the derogatory label ‘TERF’ (trans exclusionary radical feminist) which is intended to signal that their positions exclude trans women from the status of women.²⁰

Green anarchism – is used by this review to refer to activism that combines the principles of anarchism with an environmental focus and direct-action tactics. Often seeking to address both social and ecological issues, it advocates for a non-hierarchical, anti-capitalist society that is in harmony with nature, with decentralised decision-making and collective equality.²¹

Law breaking – is used by this review as an umbrella term for the open and deliberate breaking of a law, regulation, or order, including those of governments, courts, police, and military officials. Both nonviolent and violent criminal activities are included in this definition.

Left Wing and Single-Issue Terrorism – is defined by the Government as terrorism in support of the following goals:

¹⁶ ‘ideology’, Oxford Reference, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095956722>.

¹⁷ Robin Simcox, Hannah Stuart, ‘The United Kingdom’s approach to counterterrorism’, in *Routledge Handbook of U.S. Counterterrorism and Irregular Warfare Operations*, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9781003164500-38/united-kingdom-approach-counterterrorism-robin-simcox-hannah-stuart>, p. 447.

¹⁸ ‘Challenging Hateful Extremism’, Commission for Countering Extremism (October 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf, p. 43.

¹⁹ Patrick Brione, ‘Employment Tribunal rulings on gender-critical beliefs in the workplace’, House of Commons Library (December 2022) <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/employment-tribunal-rulings-on-gender-critical-beliefs-in-the-workplace/>.

²⁰ ‘Ms A Bailey vs Stonewall Equality Ltd’, Employment Tribunal, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62e1307c8fa8f5649a40110a/Ms_A_Bailey_vs_Stonewall_Equality_Limited_Reserved.pdf.

²¹ ‘Green Anarchism: Towards the Abolition of Hierarchy’, *Freedom News*, <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2014/08/29/green-anarchism-towards-the-abolition-of-hierarchy/>; ‘What is Green Anarchy?’, The Anarchist Library, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-what-is-green-anarchy/>; see also ‘Green Anarchy’, ADL, <https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/green-anarchy>.

- **Left wing terrorism** – the replacement of current systems of government with socialist, communist, or similar variations
- Anarchist terrorism – the replacement of current systems of government, law enforcement and other institutions with a decentralised system that prioritises complete liberty, individual freedom, and collective equality
- **Single-issue extremism** – change to a specific policy or practice, such as factory farming or carbon emissions.²²

Political violence – is used by this review to refer to the use or threat of physical harm to achieve political goals. Scholars have used the term broadly to include violence by non-state actors against the state and/or civilians (known as ‘civil violence’), violence by a state against civilians and/or non-state actors (known as ‘state violence’), and deprivation or social injustice (known as ‘structural violence’).²³ This review is predominantly concerned with civil violence, which includes, but is not limited to, terrorism, intercommunal violence, and mass protest, rioting and rebellion.²⁴ Violence between protestors and counter protestors is included in this definition.

Protest movement – is used by this review to refer to a group of people united by beliefs or aims who take public action designed to bring about social or political change and/or to register objection to something. The right to peaceful protest is enshrined in articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 which protect freedom of expression and freedom of assembly respectively.²⁵ Peaceful protest includes but is not limited to letters to elected representatives, petitions, rallies, demonstrations, marches, and strikes.

Terrorism – is defined in the Terrorism Act 2000 as the use or threat of serious violence against a person or serious damage to property where that action is designed to influence the government or to intimidate the public and is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, or ideological cause.²⁶

Individuals and Groups Mentioned

5Pillars – is a British Islamist media outlet edited by Roshan Muhammed Salih and Dilly Hussain.²⁷ The organisation has expressed support for an Islamic caliphate, Sharia (Islamic principles and law) penal codes and physical jihad.²⁸ 5Pillars have

²² Left-wing, Anarchist and Single-issue Extremism in the UK, EUA & JTAC, (report number SA002-20), 2020.

²³ Margaret E. Crahan, edited by Joel Krieger, *Political violence, in The Oxford Companion to the Politics of the World*, (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 669.

²⁴ Stathis N. Kalyvas, edited by Erica Chenoweth, Richard English, Andreas Gofas, and Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Landscape of Political Violence, in The Oxford Handbook of Terrorism*, (Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 10–33.

²⁵ ‘UK Public General Act’, HMG, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/42/schedule/1>.

²⁶ Such actions also include those that: endanger a person’s life, other than that of the person committing the action; create a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public; or are designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system. ‘UK Public General Act’, HMG, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11/section/1>.

²⁷ ‘Our Team’, 5Pillars, <https://5pillarsuk.com/about/our-team/>.

²⁸ Sara Khan, ‘5Pillars UK: What are British Islamists thinking?’, *Sara Khan*, 20 November 2017, <https://www.sarakhan.co.uk/blog/5pillars-uk-what-are-british-islamists-thinking/>.

repeatedly abused and intimidated Muslim liberals, counter-extremists, and human rights activists.²⁹

Anonymous – is a decentralised international hacktivist group.

Antifa – is a term commonly used in North America and continental Europe to describe militant or radical anti-fascism. The term is described by the Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats (CREST) as a “de-centralised, non-hierarchical social movement. It is loosely structured on dispersed networks of local groups. It has a distinctly anti-authoritarian orientation, consisting, for the most part, of anarchists; anarcho-communists; left-libertarians; and radical socialists. The movement is transnational, but it responds in local conditions.”³⁰

Anti-Fascist Network – is a national Far Left militant anti-fascist group with several local branches such as the Merseyside Anti-Fascist Network which is referred to in this review.

Atomwaffen Divison – also known as National Socialist Order, Atomwaffen Divison is a predominately US-based white supremacist group that was active between 2015 to 2020 and was proscribed in the UK in April 2021 on the grounds that the group’s online propaganda had encouraged and promoted terrorist acts.³¹

Black Lives Matter – is a movement best known in the UK for inspiring widespread and mass anti-racism protests during the summer of 2020. The protests were inspired by similar demonstrations across the United States in response to the murder in Minneapolis in May 2020 of a black man, George Floyd, by a white officer.³² The movement was highly likely targeted for co-option by organised Far Left groups, but its amorphous and decentralised nature appeared to protect it from infiltration. Nonetheless, BLM leaders in the UK share a revolutionary, anti-capitalist outlook.³³

Bristol Anarchist Federation – is a local branch of the nationwide Anarchist Federation,³⁴ one of whose stated goals is to “support resistance against capitalism, state, and other oppression where it exists, and attempt to spark it where it does not.”³⁵ The Anarchist Federation website includes slogans such as ‘All Cops Are Bastards’ and ‘Don’t Grass Your Class’, the latter in reference to not reporting seeing someone shoplifting or stealing from work.³⁶

²⁹ Sara Khan, ‘5Pillars UK: What are British Islamists thinking?’, Sara Khan, 20 November 2017, <https://www.sarakhan.co.uk/blog/5pillars-uk-what-are-british-islamists-thinking/>.

³⁰ Nigel Copsey, Samuel Merrill, Crest Research (2021), ‘Understanding 21st Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>.

³¹ ‘Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations’, Home Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>.

³² ‘The Government response to covid-19: freedom of assembly and the right to protest’ (March 2021), <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5153/documents/50935/default/>, para 9.

³³ ‘faq’, ukblm, <https://ukblm.org/faq/>.

³⁴ Bristolaf, <https://bristolaf.wordpress.com/>; ‘About the AF’, Anarchist Federation, <http://afed.org.uk/about/about-the-af/>.

³⁵ ‘About the AF’, Anarchist Federation, <http://afed.org.uk/about/about-the-af/>.

³⁶ ‘Stickers’, Anarchist Federation, <http://afed.org.uk/publications/stickers/>.

Britain First – is a Far Right political party founded in 2011. Considered to be a contemporary successor to the British National Party (BNP), it has former BNP members among its founders and leadership³⁷ and the party has continued the BNP’s anti-Muslim policies and rhetoric.³⁸

British National Party – is a Far Right political party formed in 1982 by John Tyndall, co-founder of the National Front.³⁹ Under the leadership of former National Front member Nick Griffin, the BNP successfully attempted to move the party away from a violent and neo-Nazi image winning seats up until in the 2009 local and European elections.⁴⁰ However, electoral support for the BNP stuttered after 2010 and its supporters would increasingly become involved in street violence.⁴¹

Burning Pink (formerly ‘Beyond Politics’) – is a Far Left climate change protest group and registered political party under the leadership of Extinction Rebellion co-founder Roger Hallam.⁴²

Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) – is a Far Left campaign group that seeks to eliminate British and global nuclear weapons.⁴³ It is a member of Together for Palestine, a coalition of six British Far Left and Islamist groups that organised a series of anti-Israel demonstrations in 2021 and 2023.⁴⁴

Class War – is an anarchist campaign group established in 1982.⁴⁵ It describes itself as “first a combative, funny, populist anarchist newspaper [which] then mutated into a similar political organisation”.⁴⁶

Collective Action LDN – is a radical Far Left activist group that campaigns on issues of race, trans rights, Palestine, immigration, and policing.⁴⁷

³⁷ ‘The far-right: What is Britain First?’, *Sky News*, 30 November 2017, <https://news.sky.com/story/the-far-right-what-is-britain-first-11149915>.

³⁸ Dr Joe Mulhall, ‘Modernising and Mainstreaming: The Contemporary British Far Right’, Hope not Hate, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834417/Joe_Mulhall_-_Modernising_and_Mainstreaming_The_Contemporary_British_Far_Right.pdf, p. 3.

³⁹ ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf.

⁴⁰ After winning a seat in the London Assembly in 2008, the BNP went on to win two seats in the European Parliament and several county council seats in 2009. Dominic Casciani, ‘BNP gains from Labour disaffection’, *BBC News*, 4 May 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7382831.stm, Martin Wainwright, ‘EU Elections: BNP’s Nick Griffin wins seat in European parliament’, *The Guardian*, 8 June 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/jun/07/european-elections-manchester-liverpool>; Nigel Morris, ‘Review of the Year 2009: The BNP’, *Independent*, 23 December 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/review-of-the-year-2009-the-bnp-1847867.html>.

⁴¹ ‘BNP vote increases, but fails to win seat’, *BBC News*, 7 May 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/8667231.stm; Matthew Goodwin, ‘The BNP is finished as an electoral force’, *The Guardian*, 4 May 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/may/04/bnp-local-elections-electoral-force-finished>.

⁴² PA Media, ‘Climate activists cleared of one charge after pink paint protest in London’, *The Guardian*, 20 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/20/climate-activists-cleared-of-one-charge-after-pink-paint-protest-in-london>.

⁴³ ‘Who we are’, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, <https://cnduk.org/who/>.

⁴⁴ ‘Help fund the national demonstration for Palestine’, Crowdfunder, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/demo-for-palestine>.

⁴⁵ About Class War, Class War, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/ClassWarOfficial/about_details.

⁴⁶ About Class War, Class War, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/ClassWarOfficial/about_details.

⁴⁷ Collective Action LDN, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/collectiveactionldn?locale=en_GB, Collective Action LDN, Linktree, <https://linktr.ee/CollectiveActionLDN>, Collective Action Now, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/collectiveactuk>.

David Icke – is a former sports presenter and notorious antisemitic conspiracy theorist.⁴⁸ Icke has reportedly accused Jews of helping to plan the coronavirus outbreak and secretly being behind antisemitic attacks on their own communities as well as suggested that Adolf Hitler was Jewish and an agent of Zionism.⁴⁹

Deep Green Resistance UK – is a radical environmentalist group that aims to dismantle civilisation and capitalism to save the planet.⁵⁰

Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA) – is a Far Right street group that initially presented itself as a movement of football fans and veterans against extremism,⁵¹ yet has been increasingly associated with controversial Far Right figures and groups known for promoting hostility to Muslims.

English Defence League (EDL) – is a Far Right street group co-founded by Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) that emerged in Luton in 2009 in response to the provocative activities of the extreme Islamist group Al Muhajiroun.⁵²

Event 202 – is an organisation founded by Mark Steele, considered by The Guardian to be “one of Britain’s foremost proponents of the conspiracy theory that 5G causes Covid-19”.⁵³

Extinction Rebellion – is a radical environmentalist group who use law breaking and mass disruption tactics to call for urgent action to address climate change. The group’s founders and leading activists came from a series of organisations aligned with green anarchist ideologies which emerged out of the anti-capitalist Occupy movement of 2011.⁵⁴

Forever Family (‘FF Force’) – is an anti-racist group established in 2020. The group came to prominence for its members para-military uniforms and marching during its participation in Brixton’s Afrikan Emancipation Day that year.⁵⁵ There have been concerns about FF Force leaders allegedly inciting racial hatred (see Khari

⁴⁸ Lee Harpin, ‘Icke antisemitic conspiracies viewed over 30 million times, new research shows’, *The JC*, 1 May 2020, <https://www.thejc.com/news/icke-antisemitic-conspiracies-viewed-over-30-million-times-new-research-shows-uxt0ji1g>.

⁴⁹ Lee Harpin, ‘Icke antisemitic conspiracies viewed over 30 million times, new research shows’, *The JC*, 1 May 2020, <https://www.thejc.com/news/icke-antisemitic-conspiracies-viewed-over-30-million-times-new-research-shows-uxt0ji1g>.

⁵⁰ See ‘About DGR-UK’, Deep Green Resistance UK, <https://deepgreenresistance.uk/about-dgr-uk/>. Deep Green Resistance describes itself as “a strategy to save the planet, based on an analysis of civilisation that sees it as inherently destructive”. See Deep Green Resistance UK, <https://deepgreenresistance.uk/>.

⁵¹ Ben Bryant and Tomasz Frymorgen, ‘Football Lads Alliance: We could have a civil war in this country’, *BBC Three*, 9 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/e5ee9e0a-18d7-49a4-a3c2-80b6b4222058>.

⁵² Ben Bryant and Tomasz Frymorgen, ‘Football Lads Alliance: We could have a civil war in this country’, *BBC Three*, 9 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/e5ee9e0a-18d7-49a4-a3c2-80b6b4222058>. Matthew Feldman, ‘The DFLA: a(nother) new UK far right movement?’, *TruePublica*, 7 May 2019, <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2019/05/04/the-dfla-another-new-uk-far-right-movement/>.

⁵³ Ben Quinn and Archie Bland, ‘Facebook removes Save Our Rights UK Covid denial videos’, *The Guardian*, 28 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/28/coronavirus-denial-videos-are-removed-from-facebook>.

⁵⁴ ‘About us’, Rising Up, <https://risingup.org.uk/about-us>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190418201628/https://risingup.org.uk/about-us>; ‘What else have you done’, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#what-else-have-you-done>; ‘Where did the idea come from’, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#where-did-the-idea-come-from>.

⁵⁵ Jack Malvern, ‘Black Lives Matter: Brixton protestors in fatigues mark end of slavery’, *The Times*, 3 August 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/black-lives-matter-brixton-protesters-in-fatigues-mark-end-of-slavery-p06qmbw6d>.

McKenzie). After the shooting in 2021 of leader Sasha Johnson the group appears to be inactive.⁵⁶

Friends of Al-Aqsa (FOA) – is an anti-Israel campaign group, founded by Leicester-based activist Ismail Patel.⁵⁷ It is a member of Together for Palestine, a coalition of six British Far Left and Islamist groups that organised a series of anti-Israel demonstrations in 2021 and 2023.⁵⁸ Founder and leader Patel has previously visited Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Gaza, been filmed in 2009 stating “we salute Hamas for standing up to Israel” and in 2021 praised the killer of tour guide Eli Kay in Jerusalem as a “martyr”.⁵⁹ FOA is endorsed by Palestinian activist Zaher Birawi on its website,⁶⁰ an individual considered by Israel to be a senior Hamas operative.⁶¹

Green Anti-Capitalist Front – is an alliance of radical left-wing activist groups that are “united by a belief that capitalism is one of the core causes of the environmental crisis”.⁶²

Hizb ut-Tahrir – is a revolutionary Islamist group (‘The Party of Liberation’) and political party founded in Jerusalem in 1953 which advocates for a global Islamic caliphate and the introduction of sharia governance using Arab/Muslim military coups.⁶³ It was proscribed by the Government in January 2024.

HS161 – is a militant anti-fascist group with several local branches including HS161 Eastbourne and HS161 Wales that are referred to in this review.

Insulate Britain – is a splinter group of Extinction Rebellion, orchestrated by Roger Hallam,⁶⁴ with a radical environmentalist agenda that is fundamentally rooted in an anarchist and anti-capitalist ideology. Insulate Britain uses disruption tactics, such as traffic obstruction, to raise awareness of their campaign to fund the insulation of social housing and for there to be a national plan for low energy homes.⁶⁵

Just Stop Oil – is a splinter group of Extinction Rebellion, supported by Roger Hallam,⁶⁶ with a radical environmentalist agenda that is fundamentally rooted in an

⁵⁶ ‘Sacha Johnson shooting: Case against four men collapses’, *BBC News*, 22 February 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-60479678>.

⁵⁷ ‘We are Friends of Al-Aqsa (FOA)’, Friends of Al-Aqsa, <https://www.foa.org.uk/whoweare>.

⁵⁸ ‘Help fund the national demonstration for Palestine’, *Crowdfunder*, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/demo-for-palestine>.

⁵⁹ David Rose, ‘Leaders of groups behind London pro-Palestinian march have links to Hamas’, *The JC*, 19 October 2023, <https://www.thejtc.com/news/leaders-of-groups-behind-london-pro-palestinian-march-have-links-to-hamas-ng34ql4i>.

⁶⁰ ‘We are Friends of Al-Aqsa (FOA)’, Friends of Al-Aqsa, <https://www.foa.org.uk/whoweare> (screenshot of endorsement, which appears in a rolling sequence alongside other endorsements, available upon request).

⁶¹ ‘TERRORISTS IN SUITS: The ties between NGOs promoting BDS and Terrorist Organisations’, State of Israel Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy, https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/terrorists_in_suits/en/De-Legitimization%20Brochure.pdf, para. 10 & pp. 72-73.

⁶² ‘Green Anticapitalist Front’, *radar.squat.net*, <https://radar.squat.net/en/green-anticapitalist-front>.

⁶³ ‘Home Secretary declares Hizb ut-Tahrir as terrorists’, Home Office, 15 January 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-declares-hizb-ut-tahrir-as-terrorists>; Charlie Parker, ‘Who are Hizb ut-Tahrir, the London protest organisers?’, *The Times*, 24 October 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/who-are-hizb-ut-tahrir-london-palestine-protest-organisers-kmhkdnbrv>.

⁶⁴ Ali Mitib, Ben Ellery, David Brown, ‘The people behind the Just Stop Oil chaos’, *The Times*, 9 November 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-people-behind-the-just-stop-oil-chaos-58ftr87ck>.

⁶⁵ ‘What is Insulate Britain and what does it want?’, *BBC News*, 17 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58916326>.

⁶⁶ Tom Ball, ‘Insulate Britain founder recruits student ‘revolutionaries’ to save planet’, *The Times*, 28 January 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/insulate-britain-founder-recruits-student-revolutionaries-to-save-planet-t5sgvbtdp>; ‘Roger Hallam denied bail and kept incarcerated without trial.’, *Just Stop Oil*, 19 January 2023, <https://juststopoil.org/2023/01/19/roger-hallam-denied->

anarchist and anti-capitalist ideology. Its stated campaign is to end all licences and exploration, development and production of oil and gas in the UK.⁶⁷ The group has used disruption tactics, such as blocking roads and critical fuel sites around the country,⁶⁸ and, increasingly, high-profile acts of vandalism and disruption of sporting or cultural events.⁶⁹

Khari McKenzie – is a rapper and alleged founder of Forever Family (or ‘FF Force’).⁷⁰ He has shared the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Israel was to blame for the racist killing of George Floyd, accused Jews of being responsible for slavery through the “Rothschild bloodline”, and referred to Jewish activists who successfully campaigned for the rapper Wiley to be removed from social media platforms for antisemitism as “devils”.⁷¹

London Black Revolutionaries – is a group that describes itself as a “closed black and Asian revolutionary socialist group [with] anti-racist, anti-fascist, anti-homophobic, and anti-sexist principles”.⁷² In June 2020, London Black Revolutionaries co-organised a demonstration in central London demanding an end to deaths in police custody,⁷³ which resulted in significant public disorder and violence.⁷⁴ The group has claimed that they are “disgruntled with the way other organizations lack any militancy” and “lack any real connection with ordinary working-class people”.⁷⁵ In 2014, they stated that they aim to go into colleges across London to recruit and politicise students.⁷⁶

Malcolm X Movement (MXM) – is a radical black socialist anti-racism campaign group founded in 2014. In June 2020, MXM co-organised a demonstration in central

bail-and-kept-incarcerated-without-trial/; Just Stop Oil, Twitter, 23 July 2023, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1683141367155810307.

⁶⁷ Just Stop Oil, <https://juststopoil.org/>.

⁶⁸ For example, Just Stop Oil targeted fuel terminals in April 2022 and blocked the M25 in November 2022. See ‘Just Stop Oil protests: Terminal operations suspended and arrests made’, *BBC News*, 1 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-60951403> and ‘Just Stop Oil: major delays on M25 and at Dartford crossing as activists return for second day’, *The Standard*, 8 November 2022, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/just-stop-oil-dartford-crossing-bridge-tunnel-protest-m25-essex-surrey-b1038270.html>.

⁶⁹ Joe Sommerlad, ‘Just Stop Oil: Are the climate group’s demonstrations at sporting events against the law?’, *Independent*, 7 July 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/just-stop-oil-protests-law-b2371250.html>.

⁷⁰ McKenzie was appointed director of Forever Family Ltd when the company was incorporated by Companies House on 20 June 2020, see ‘FOREVER FAMILY LTD’, Companies House, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/12686269/officers>.

⁷¹ Guy Adams, ‘The new face of race hate: Marching through London they claimed to be fighting bigotry – but as this exposé by Guy Adams lays bare, their leaders revel in anti-Semitic abuse... with chilling echoes of 1930s fascism’, *Daily Mail*, 7 August 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8605455/GUY-ADAMS-Forever-Family-Force-leader-reveals-antisemitic-abuse.html>; ‘CAA sounds alarm over black-shirted paramilitary group in South London led by a man who rails against ‘Zionist bloodlines’’, *Campaign Against Antisemitism*, 11 August 2020, <https://antisemitism.org/caa-sounds-alarm-over-black-shirted-paramilitary-group-in-south-london-led-by-a-man-who-raises-against-zionist-bloodlines/>.

⁷² Simon Childs, ‘We interviewed the Revolutionaries Pouring Concrete on London’s ‘Anti-Homeless’ Spikes’, *VICE*, 13 June 2014, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dpwx5x/london-black-revolutionaries-have-claimed-responsibility-for-pouring-concrete-on-the-anti-homeless-spikes>.

⁷³ Emergency National Demonstration – Black Lives Matter – End Deaths in Political Custody, Facebook, 13 June 2020, <https://fb.me/e/1u15WiknZ>.

⁷⁴ ‘London protests: Demonstrators clash with police’, *BBC News*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53031072>.

⁷⁵ Simon Childs, ‘We interviewed the Revolutionaries Pouring Concrete on London’s ‘Anti-Homeless’ Spikes’, *VICE*, 13 June 2014, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dpwx5x/london-black-revolutionaries-have-claimed-responsibility-for-pouring-concrete-on-the-anti-homeless-spikes>.

⁷⁶ Simon Childs, ‘We interviewed the Revolutionaries Pouring Concrete on London’s ‘Anti-Homeless’ Spikes’, *VICE*, 13 June 2014, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/dpwx5x/london-black-revolutionaries-have-claimed-responsibility-for-pouring-concrete-on-the-anti-homeless-spikes>.

London demanding an end to deaths in police custody,⁷⁷ which resulted in significant public disorder and violence.⁷⁸ MXM has previously celebrated street violence and promoted a favourable view of Far Left and Republican terrorism and political violence.⁷⁹

Mark Steele – founder of Event 202 and considered by the Guardian to be “one of Britain’s foremost proponents of the conspiracy theory that 5G causes Covid-19”.⁸⁰ In 2018, Steele labelled two Gateshead Council members “baby killers” leading to a conviction for using words to cause harassment, alarm, or distress.⁸¹

Mohammed Hijab – is an Islamist activist and social media influencer. Hijab has made provocative videos and inflammatory statements focusing on Jews and Israel. In 2021, for example, Hijab was filmed at an anti-Israel rally declaring “the difference between us and them is that for them, they think life begins. For us, we believe that death begins. We believe that life begins at death. We don’t care about death. We love death.”⁸²

Momentum – is a national Labour pressure group founded in 2015 to mobilise grassroots electoral support for Jeremy Corbyn MP.

Muslim Association of Britain (MAB) – is an Islamist activist group established in 1997 by Kemal El-Helbawy, a leading Muslim Brotherhood figure.⁸³ The government’s independent Muslim Brotherhood Review described MAB as an intrinsic part of the Muslim Brotherhood’s activist network in the UK.⁸⁴ It is a member of Together for Palestine, a coalition of six British Far Left and Islamist groups that organised a series of anti-Israel demonstrations in 2021 and 2023.⁸⁵

National Action – is a racist neo-Nazi terrorist group that emerged in late 2013 as a youth-oriented white supremacist group following a National Socialist ideology.⁸⁶ It was proscribed by the UK government in December 2016 on the grounds that the groups’ tweets in connection with the terrorist murder of Jo Cox MP inferred that the

⁷⁷ Emergency National Demonstration – Black Lives Matter – End Deaths in Political Custody, Facebook, 13 June 2020, <https://fb.me/e/1uI5WiknZ>.

⁷⁸ ‘London protests: Demonstrators clash with police’, *BBC News*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53031072>

⁷⁹ Sukant Chandan, ‘MXM Film Festival in Ireland: ‘Translating Malcolm X Into Irish’’, *MALCOLM X MOVEMENT*, 26 March 2016, <http://mxmovement.blogspot.com/2016/03/mxm-film-festival-in-ireland.html>.

⁸⁰ Ben Quinn and Archie Bland, ‘Facebook removes Save Our Rights UK Covid denial videos’, *The Guardian*, 28 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/28/coronavirus-denial-videos-are-removed-from-facebook>.

⁸¹ Ian Johnson, ‘Man who thinks street lights cause cancer called Gateshead councillors ‘baby killers’’, *ChronicleLive*, 23 October 2018, <https://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/gateshead-council-5g-mark-steele-15319350.amp>.

⁸² ‘BBC interviews ‘we love death’ activist on tackling Jew-hate’, *The JC*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.thejc.com/news/bbc-interviews-we-love-death-activist-on-tackling-jew-hate-k6lt69pe>.

⁸³ ‘Egyptian Islamic thinker, former Muslim Brotherhood official Kamal El-Helbawy dies’, *Ahram Online*, 1 March 2023, <https://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/2/489897/Egypt/Society/Egyptian-Islamic-thinker,-former-Muslim-Brotherhoo.aspx>.

⁸⁴ ‘Muslim Brotherhood Review: Main Findings’ (December 2015), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486948/53163_Muslim_Brotherhood_Review_-_PRINT.pdf.

⁸⁵ ‘Help fund the national demonstration for Palestine’, *Crowdfunder*, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/demo-for-palestine>.

⁸⁶ ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, *Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament* (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf.

killing should be emulated and, as such, amounted to unlawful glorification of terrorism.⁸⁷

No Fixed Abode - Anti-Fascists (NFAAF) – is a radical anti-fascist group that was involved with the 2021 Kill the Bill protests in Bristol. NFAAF celebrated the riot that occurred during the protests, and shared advice to those who had taken part on how to frustrate the subsequent police investigation.⁸⁸ NFAAF describes itself as “a group of squatters, travellers and homeless people combating fascist and bailiff thuggery”.⁸⁹

No Outsiders – is a programme designed to teach primary-age pupils about the Equalities Act 2010 and British values, celebrating difference and diversity, and preparing children for a life in modern Britain.⁹⁰ Opposition to the programme led to a series of abusive and intimidating protests outside schools in Birmingham in 2019.⁹¹

Palestine Action – is a Far Left, anarchist, anti-Israel activist group founded in 2020 that engages in law breaking and business disruption in order to “take direct action against Israel’s arms trade in Britain” and, more broadly, to “end Israeli apartheid”.⁹² It has repeatedly targeted sites belonging to defence technology company Elbit UK, which the group targets for its links to Israel.⁹³ Palestine Action has worked with other Far Left social movements such as Extinction Rebellion and its splinter factions.

Palestinian Forum in Britain (PFB) – is a Palestinian cultural organisation and member of Together for Palestine, a coalition of six British Far Left and Islamist groups that organised a series of anti-Israel demonstrations in 2021 and 2023.⁹⁴ PFB has a long-standing history of alleged links to or support for Hamas: PFB chair Zaher Birawi is considered to be a senior Hamas operative by Israeli intelligence;⁹⁵ it was co-founded by Mohammed Sawalha, exposed as member of Hamas’s political bureau in 2017 by The Times;⁹⁶ and PFB deputy head Adnan Hmidan has posted pictures of Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin on his social media, including one with the caption “I love this man”.⁹⁷

⁸⁷ Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations’, Home Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>.

⁸⁸ NFA-AF, Twitter, 22 March 2021, https://twitter.com/nfa_antifascist/status/1374048734649143297.

⁸⁹ NFA-AF, Twitter, https://twitter.com/nfa_antifascist?lang=en.

⁹⁰ ‘Parents protest over Birmingham school’s LGBT equality teaching’, *BBC News*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47040451>.

⁹¹ ‘Parents protest over Birmingham school’s LGBT equality teaching’, *BBC News*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47040451>; ‘Sex education: The clash of LGBT and religious rights – BBC Newsnight’, BBC Newsnight, YouTube, 15 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKdzYmVSMus>.

⁹² ‘Palestine Action’, <https://www.palestineaction.org/>, archived at: <https://archive.ph/4qQIW>; ‘Four Sentenced to Prison After Dismantling an American Weapons Factory in Wales’, Palestine Action, 26 June 2023, <https://www.palestineaction.org/teledyne-sentence/>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230626161635/https://www.palestineaction.org/teledyne-sentence/>.

⁹³ ‘Lay Siege on Israel’s Weapons Factory in Leicester’, Palestine Action, May 2021, <https://palestineaction.org/siege#siege>.

⁹⁴ ‘Help fund the national demonstration for Palestine’, Crowdfunder, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/demo-for-palestine>.

⁹⁵ ‘TERRORISTS IN SUITS: The ties between NGOs promoting BDS and Terrorist Organisations’, State of Israel Ministry of Strategic Affairs and Public Diplomacy, https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/generalpage/terrorists_in_suits/en/De-Legitimization%20Brochure.pdf, para. 10 & pp. 72-73.

⁹⁶ David Brown, Catherine Philip, Richard Spencer, ‘Finsbury mosque leader Mohammed Sawalha part of Hamas politburo’, *The Times*, 7 November 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/finsbury-mosque-leader-mohammed-sawalha-part-of-hamas-politburo-0cdn3gs80>.

⁹⁷ Marc Goldberg, ‘Palestinian protestors need to reflect on the meaning of ‘resistance’’, *The JC*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/lets-talk/palestinian-protestors-need-to-reflect-on-the-meaning-of-resistance-ylz2xkmr>.

Patriotic Alternative – is a racist and antisemitic Far Right group founded in 2019 by former BNP youth leader Mark Collett.⁹⁸ The group promotes the Great Replacement Theory, the view that a white indigenous European populations are being replaced by non-European immigrants,⁹⁹ and members regularly film themselves carrying out provocative public stunts in line with this conspiracy theory.

Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) – is a Far Left anti-Israel activist group and key convener of Together for Palestine, a coalition of six British Far Left and Islamist groups that organised a series of anti-Israel demonstrations in 2021 and 2023.¹⁰⁰ PSC has history of alleged support for Hamas: two former leaders met with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Gaza in 2012;¹⁰¹ and the group has advocated Palestinians’ right to armed resistance”.¹⁰² Patrons include several individuals with a history of antisemitism concerns.¹⁰³ In 2021, PSC opposed the Government’s decision to proscribe Hamas in its entirety,¹⁰⁴ and the group claimed that Hamas’s terrorist attacks on 7 October 2023 were not “unprovoked”.¹⁰⁵

Pie and Mash Squad – is a Far Right group with links to football hooliganism and the English Defence League.¹⁰⁶

Piers Corbyn – is a Far Left climate change denier, Covid-19 conspiracy theorist and prominent anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx protestor. While it is his incitement during anti-lockdown protests that is the focus of this review, more recently he has promoted conspiracy theories relating to the Hamas terrorist attacks on 7 October 2023. This includes being filmed claiming that the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians on October 7 was a ‘false flag’ operation, suggesting that Israeli babies had not been beheaded and questioning whether the Israeli hostages are paid actors.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁸ ‘Patriotic Alternative: Uniting the Fascist Right?’ (August 2020), https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HnH_Patriotic-Alternative-report_2020-08-v3.pdf; Dominic Kennedy, ‘At the gym, in the hills, the far-right fight clubs where men train to make Britain white’, *The Times*, 9 October 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/at-the-gym-in-the-hills-the-far-right-fight-clubs-where-men-train-to-make-britain-white-7kq6pp2sk?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1633763703.

⁹⁹ ‘Great Replacement Theory’, Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/great-replacement-theory>.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Help fund the national demonstration for Palestine’, Crowdfunder, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/demo-for-palestine>.

¹⁰¹ David Rose, ‘Leaders of groups behind London pro-Palestinian march have links to Hamas’, *The JC*, 19 October 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/leaders-of-groups-behind-london-pro-palestinian-march-have-links-to-hamas-ng34q14i>.

¹⁰² ‘Israeli Election Results & Palestinian Resistance’, *Palestine Solidarity Campaign*, 8 November 2022, <https://palestinecampaign.org/israeli-election-results-palestinian-resistance/>.

¹⁰³ For patrons see ‘Our Patrons’, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, <https://palestinecampaign.org/about/patrons/>. They include Jeremy Corbyn MP, playwright Caryl Churchill and rapper Lowkey (Kareem Dennis). See Helen Lewis, ‘Why British Jews are worried by Jeremy Corbyn’, *The Atlantic*, 10 December 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/12/british-jews-are-worried-jeremy-corbyn-and-labour-party/603259/>, ‘Lincoln’s blood libel and seven Jewish children’, *CST*, 20 January 2011, <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2011/01/20/lincolns-blood-libel-and-seven-jewish-children>, and Nic North, ‘Jeremy Corbyn praised ‘good messages’ of anti-Zionist rapper Lowkey’, *The JC*, 30 August 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/jeremy-corbyn-praises-good-messages-of-anti-zionist-rapper-lowkey-gcznaw20> respectively.

¹⁰⁴ ‘PSC statement on the decision by the UK Government to proscribe Hamas in its entirety’, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, <https://palestinecampaign.org/psc-statement-on-the-decision-by-the-uk-government-to-proscribe-hamas-in-its-entirety/>.

¹⁰⁵ ‘PSC statement on escalation of violence’, *Palestine Solidarity Campaign*, 9 October 2023, <https://palestinecampaign.org/psc-statement-on-escalation-of-violence/>.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Calling Bullshit on the Anti-Refugee Memes Flooding the Internet’, *VICE*, 10 September 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/zngwz9/kleinfeld-refugee-memes-debunking-846>.

¹⁰⁷ Rory Tingle, ‘Fury as conspiracy theorist Piers Corbyn claims October 7 massacre was an Israeli ‘false flag’ operation – after his ex-Labour leader brother Jeremy repeatedly refused to call Hamas terrorists in TV interview’, *Daily Mail*, 15 November 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12751333/piers-corbyn-vile-conspiracy-theory-hamas-terror-attacks-israel.html>.

Resistance GB – is a self-styled journalism platform that has disseminated conspiracy theories including about the coronavirus pandemic and vaccines.¹⁰⁸ It is led by former Conservative councillor William Coleshill, who has been filmed chasing Rt Hon Michael Gove MP through Whitehall as well as confronting Jess Philips MP and the BBC journalist Nick Watt.¹⁰⁹

Richard Barnard – is the co-founder of the direct-action anti-Israel group Palestine Action. He reportedly praised terrorist prisoners in Israel – members of the terrorist group Islamic Jihad¹¹⁰ – as “heroes”.¹¹¹ In 2020, Barnard was arrested as part of an Extinction Rebellion protest that involved activists climbing onto the roof of a commuter train in London’s Docklands.¹¹²

Roger Hallam – is the co-founder of Extinction Rebellion and its splinter factions Burning Pink and Heathrow Pause and is involved with successor groups Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil. Hallam is a proponent of civil disobedience to exact change, and he has argued that lawbreaking “is the essence of the non-violent method”.¹¹³ In September 2019, Hallam was arrested when protesting the expansion at Heathrow Airport by attempting to fly drones inside the exclusion zone.¹¹⁴ He caused controversy later that year when he appeared to downplay the significance of the Holocaust, describing it as “almost a normal event ... just another fuckery in human history”.¹¹⁵ He has said that he would continue a protest even if it blocked an ambulance with a dying patient onboard.¹¹⁶ Hallam’s rhetoric is apocalyptic and revolutionary: he has repeatedly described a future world in which the current failure to act on climate change has led to a complete breakdown of civil society, including a world characterised by “war and violence, the slaughter of young men and the rape of young women on a global scale”.¹¹⁷ “

¹⁰⁸ Ben Quinn, Dan Sabbagh and Niamh McIntyre, ‘Ex-councillor thrown out of Tory party among mob at Stamer incident’, *The Guardian*, 8 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/08/ex-councillor-william-coleshill-thrown-out-tory-party-among-mob-starmer-incident-resistance-gb>.

¹⁰⁹ Ben Quinn, Dan Sabbagh and Niamh McIntyre, ‘Ex-councillor thrown out of Tory party among mob at Stamer incident’, *The Guardian*, 8 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/08/ex-councillor-william-coleshill-thrown-out-tory-party-among-mob-starmer-incident-resistance-gb>.

¹¹⁰ TOI Staff, ‘Terror charges and life sentences: The 6 Palestinians who escaped Gilboa Prisons’, *The Times of Israel*, 6 September 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/terror-charges-and-life-sentences-the-6-palestinians-who-escaped-gilboa-prison/>.

¹¹¹ David Rose and JC Investigations Team, ‘Unmasked: British anti-Israel activists plotting mayhem across UK’, *The JC*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/unmasked-british-anti-israel-activists-plotting-mayhem-across-uk-5lg8v2zFfC9aRJ1NIm1f3k>.

¹¹² David Rose and JC Investigations Team, ‘Unmasked: British anti-Israel activists plotting mayhem across UK’, *The JC*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/unmasked-british-anti-israel-activists-plotting-mayhem-across-uk-5lg8v2zFfC9aRJ1NIm1f3k>.

¹¹³ Roger Hallam, ‘The Civil Resistance Model’, in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, p. 101.

¹¹⁴ PA Media, ‘Extinction Rebellion co-founder arrested at Heathrow protest’, *The Guardian*, 14 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/14/extinction-rebellion-co-founder-arrested-at-heathrow-protest>.

¹¹⁵ Kate Connolly and Matthew Taylor, ‘Extinction Rebellion founder’s Holocaust remarks spark fury’, *The Guardian*, 20 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/20/extinction-rebellion-founders-holocaust-remarks-spark-fury>.

¹¹⁶ Kate Gill, ‘I would block ambulance with dying patient onboard, says XR founder Roger Hallam’, *Independent*, 5 October 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/climate/ambulance-roger-hallam-extinction-rebellion-v6cfe3668>.

¹¹⁷ For example, in April 2022 the Guardian reported attending a lecture by Hallam: “One Monday night in March, Roger Hallam is talking about the end of the world as we know it. [...] He predicts hundreds of millions of climate refugees by 2030, and worse. ‘Mass slaughter, mass rape, mass starvation,’ he says. ‘That’s what’s coming down the line.’” See Dorian Lynskey, ‘Just Stop Oil: behind the scenes with the activists’, *The Guardian*, 10 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/10/just-stop-oil-behind-the-scenes-with-the-activists>. Also See Extinction Rebellion UK, ‘Advice to Young People as they face Annihilation | Roger Hallam | 2012’, *YouTube*, 9 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnpOnO71wno>.

Sara Wilkinson – is a senior figure in the direct-action anti-Israel group Palestine Action and reportedly a leader of Extinction Rebellion North¹¹⁸

Sasha Johnson - was a member of Forever Family ('FF Force') and a Black Lives Matter activist, who has called for the formation of a "black militia" in the UK.¹¹⁹

Save Our Rights UK – is an activist group involved in anti-lockdown protests in the UK with a stated mission to 'end corruption' and 'change the systems so that the interests of the people are the driving force, rather than those of big corporations and archaic institutions'.¹²⁰ In 2021, The Guardian reported that the group had published an interview with antisemitic conspiracy theorist David Icke, and that their website was "a platform for some conspiracy theories of the most extreme kind".¹²¹

Socialist Workers Party (SWP) – is a Far Left campaign group with Trotskyist ideological roots. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on Israel perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023, the group has published material that appears to justify the terrorist group's violence,¹²² alongside an editorial calling for "a global intifada".¹²³

Stand Up To Racism – is a Far Left anti-racism campaign established in 2013 with origins in the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party and closely linked with Unite Against Fascism.¹²⁴

StandupX – is a group that, in 2020, helped organise a demonstration in central London against lockdowns, mass vaccinations, mandatory wearing of face masks and other coronavirus restrictions.¹²⁵ According to the Daily Mail, the group is linked

¹¹⁸ David Rose and JC Investigations Team, 'Unmasked: British anti-Israel activists plotting mayhem across UK', *The JC*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/unmasked-british-anti-israel-activists-plotting-mayhem-across-uk-5lg8v2zFfC9aRJ1NIm1f3k>.

¹¹⁹ Jack Wright, Martin Robinson and James Fielding, 'Now 'Black Panther of Oxford' Sasha Johnson's political party question claim that she was shot by a gang, and slam police who ruled death threats weren't credible 'without speaking to her' ', *Daily Mail*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9614869/Sasha-Johnson-target-shooting-political-party-claims.html>.

¹²⁰ Save our Rights UK – Mission & Vision Statement, LinkedIn, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/louise-may-creffield-2473861bb/overlay/1606745914139/single-media-viewer/?profileId=ACoAADMihdcBaDomasau7-8lKNdlbGudrvv5pRo>.

¹²¹ Ben Quinn and Archie Bland, 'Facebook removes Save Our Rights UK Covid denial videos', *The Guardian*, 28 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/28/coronavirus-denial-videos-are-removed-from-facebook>.

¹²² In its social newspaper the Socialist Worker (issue: 18-24 October 2023), the SWP published an article titled 'Why we say by any means necessary', which includes the following sub-title: "Following the assault on Israelis by the Palestinian resistance. There are those who say a violent fight back is never justified. Isabel Ringrose explains that the oppressed have a right to take up arms against their colonisers." The article itself goes on to say: "That's why the resistance by Palestinians against the racist Israeli terrorist state is a wholly justified". See 'Why we say by any means necessary', *Socialist Worker*, 18-24 October 2023, https://socialistworker.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Binder1_new.pdf, p. 14. On 9 October 2023, SWP published an article on "why it's right to back the Palestinian resistance" "with rocks or with rockets". See 'Arm yourselves with the arguments: why it's right to back the Palestinian resistance', *Socialist Worker*, 9 October 2023, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/news/arm-yourself-with-the-arguments-about-why-it-s-right-to-oppose-israel/>.

¹²³ In an editorial titled "Revolution! It's time for a global intifada", the SWP state: "The sheer destructiveness of capitalism is why it must go, and why we need a global intifada. We need a revolution in Palestine and the Middle East to slay the beast of imperialism, and we need a revolution in the West that can tear the head off the system. See 'Revolution! It's time for a global intifada', *Socialist Worker*, 18-24 October 2023, https://socialistworker.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Binder1_new.pdf, p. 5.

¹²⁴ Unite Against Fascism was formed in 2003 as a united front for two strands of anti-racism activism in the UK and brought together the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), founded by the SWP in 1992 (having previously run from 1977 to 1982), and the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR), founded in 1995 by activists from the small Trotskyist group Socialist Action, best known for its close relationship with former London Mayor Ken Livingstone. These two groups, the ANL and NAAR, were reflected in UAF's leadership: the national organiser of the ANL, Weyman Bennett – who was also a member of the SWP Central Committee at the time - became the Joint Secretary of UAF; and the second Joint Secretary was Sabby Dhalu, who joined from the NAAR. SUTR was established in 2013 and its two co-convenors are the two Joint Secretaries of the UAF, Bennett and Dhalu. See Daniel Allington and David Toubé, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), pp. 15, 90-91.

¹²⁵ Damien Gayle, Mattha Busby and Ben Quinn, 'Coronavirus: police break up anti-lockdown protest in London', *The Guardian*, 26 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/26/london-lockdown-protesters-urged-to-follow-covid-rules>.

to Far Left activist Piers Corbyn and has promoted several conspiracy theories relating to the Covid-19 vaccine and 5G technology.¹²⁶

StopRSE – is a national anti-relationship and sex education campaign established by convert to Islam Kate Godfrey-Faussett in 2018. The campaign website (which at the time of writing has been taken offline) stated that it opposed “the teaching of secular liberal sexual ideologies to the youngest of children and against their parents’ wishes”.¹²⁷ Godfrey-Faussett has drawn criticism for having quoted Adolf Hitler on her website, appearing to equate relationship and sex education in schools with indoctrination akin to Nazi propaganda.¹²⁸

Stop the War Coalition – is a Far Left organisation established in 2001 that campaigns against the UK’s involvement in military conflicts. It is member of Together for Palestine, a coalition of six British Far Left and Islamist groups that organised a series of anti-Israel demonstrations in 2021 and 2023.¹²⁹ Stop the War Coalition founding chair Lindsey German was a member of the Socialist Workers Party.¹³⁰ Stop the War Coalition’s 2022 statement following the war in Ukraine that drew an equivalence between NATO and Russian aggression prompted Labour leader Keir Starmer to demand Labour MPs distance themselves from the group.¹³¹

Yellow vest movement – modelled on the original French anti-fuel tax protestors, known as *gilet jaunes* (yellow vests), in the UK during this review yellow vests were adopted by both Far Left anti-austerity protestors and by pro-Brexit protestors some of whom had links to the Far Right.¹³²

¹²⁶ Dan Sales, ‘Rise of the anti-maskers: How protests against face coverings are gathering pace across Britain as activists linked to Jeremy Corbyn’s brother Piers use social media to spread ‘resist the new world order’ message’, *Daily Mail*, 11 August 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8616483/Rise-anti-maskers-protests-against-face-coverings-gathering-pace-Britain.html>.

¹²⁷ ‘Stop RSE Campaign: evidence dossier’, *Secularism*, <https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/stop-rse-campaign-evidence-dossier.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Damon L. Perry, ‘Mainstreaming Islamism in Britain: Educating for the “Islamic Revival”’, Commission for Countering Extremism. (September 2019), <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d95fd08ed915d39a060aec1/Mainstream-islamism-in-britain-education-for-the-islamic-revival.pdf>.

¹²⁹ ‘Help fund the national demonstration for Palestine’, Crowdfunder, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/demo-for-palestine>.

¹³⁰ ‘Stop the War Coalition: What You Need To Know’, *Sky News*, 10 December 2015, <https://news.sky.com/story/stop-the-war-coalition-what-you-need-to-know-10336426>.

¹³¹ Jessica Elgot, ‘Corbyn will not regain Labour whip while endorsing Stop the War, suggests Starmer’, *The Guardian*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2022/apr/11/jeremy-corbyn-will-not-have-labour-whip-restored-starmer-suggests>.

¹³² Adam Forrest, ‘Yellow vests: Protestors from right and left demonstrate in high-vis jackets in London’, *Independent*, 12 January 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/yellow-vests-london-uk-protest-march-austerity-brexit-right-left-wing-a8724851.html?r=29027>; Ben Quinn and Jon Henley, ‘Yellow vests: protestors fight for ideological ownership’, *The Guardian*, 13 January 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/13/yellow-vests-protesters-fight-for-ideological-ownership>.

3. Chapter One: Extreme Political Protest

- 3.1 There is a large range of extreme protest movements operating in the UK today that fall in scope of this review.¹³³ It is not required to cover them all in significant depth. However, it is worthwhile to provide an overview of some of the broad contours of the nature and scale of extreme activism across the political spectrum and in response to specific issues, the motivating ideologies and causes, and the impact on people's lives and the public interest.
- 3.2 I do not attempt to suggest an equivalence between the Far Right and the Far Left. The former is clearly a much more pronounced terrorist threat and has been responsible for bloodshed on British streets, while the latter has more commonly engaged in disruptive behaviour causing economic and social damage. Other protest groups do not fall on traditional political lines, focusing on a single issue instead. Some, particularly on the Far Right and Far Left, focus their violence on each other.
- 3.3 All have in common a willingness to step outside the bounds of decent political procedure or discourse in furthering their goals. They may rely on disruption,¹³⁴ intimidation, threats, law breaking or violence. Providing some background to the groups, people, ideologies, and tactics involved is required to help understand why it is imperative that the government response is suitably serious – albeit tailored.

Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism

- 3.4 The UK faces an ongoing terrorism threat from groups and individuals on the Far Right involved in serious political violence.¹³⁵ The government refers to this as Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism. Previously known as Right-Wing Terrorism,¹³⁶ the word 'Extreme' was added in 2021 following concerns about stigmatising those with mainstream right-wing views.¹³⁷ I welcome this addition. Language used to describe terrorism must be accurate and precise, and it is right for the authorities to seek to avoid unintentionally conflating mainstream political views with the Far Right.

¹³³ The term extreme protest movement is used by this review to refer to a group of people united by beliefs or aims who take public action designed to bring about social or political change and/or to register objection to something, and whose activities demonstrate active opposition to democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.

¹³⁴ The term disruption is used by this review to refer to interference in people's everyday lives and the ordinary operations of an organisation or business.

¹³⁵ The Far Right is used by this review as an umbrella term for groups and ideologies for groups and ideologies that sit to the right of mainstream politics, particularly in relation to race, culture, and identity, which are perceived as under threat.

¹³⁶ ERWT was originally categorised as Domestic Extremism and renamed Right-Wing Terrorism following a recommendation in the 2017 Operational Improvement Review of the counter-terrorism apparatus.

¹³⁷ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para 21.

Scale of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism

3.5 The threat to the UK from terrorism is substantial,¹³⁸ meaning an attack is likely.¹³⁹ The threat level is set by the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) and the Security Service (MI5),¹⁴⁰ and now includes an assessment of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism alongside the predominant threat, Islamist Terrorism.¹⁴¹ There is no single indicator, however, of the scale of the threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism. The Government holds data on several aspects of the threat, at various points in its development.¹⁴² While there are noticeable differences in the ratios, the figures below help us approximate the scale – and to a smaller degree the nature – of the Extreme Right-Wing threat.

¹³⁸ The threat in Northern Ireland is assessed separately. 'Terrorism threat levels', MI5, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>.

¹³⁹ 'Current threat level in the UK', Metropolitan Police, <https://www.met.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/t/terrorism-in-the-uk/current-threat-level-UK/>.

¹⁴⁰ 'Terrorism and national emergencies', HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/terrorism-national-emergency>.

¹⁴¹ Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism as well as Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single Issue Terrorism were incorporated into the terrorism threat assessment as part of the transfer of responsibility for what was previously known as Domestic Extremism from Counter Terrorism Policing to MI5, as recommended by David Anderson QC in his 2017 Operational Improvement Review of the counter-terrorism apparatus following a series of attacks that year. See Chapter four for further details of this transfer and the government's response to political violence and disruption more widely. See 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, paras. 2-4.

¹⁴² These figures cover the following periods:

-Terrorism attacks, March 2017–June 2023, open-source analysis conducted for this review (see footnote 144).

-Fatalities, April 1999 – June 2023, open-source analysis conducted for this review (see footnote 145).

-Foiled terrorism plots, March 2017–December 2021, CTP update, December 2021.

-MI5 caseload, as at November 2022, MI5 annual threat update, November 2022.

-CTP caseload, as disclosed in the Independent Review of Prevent, February 2023.

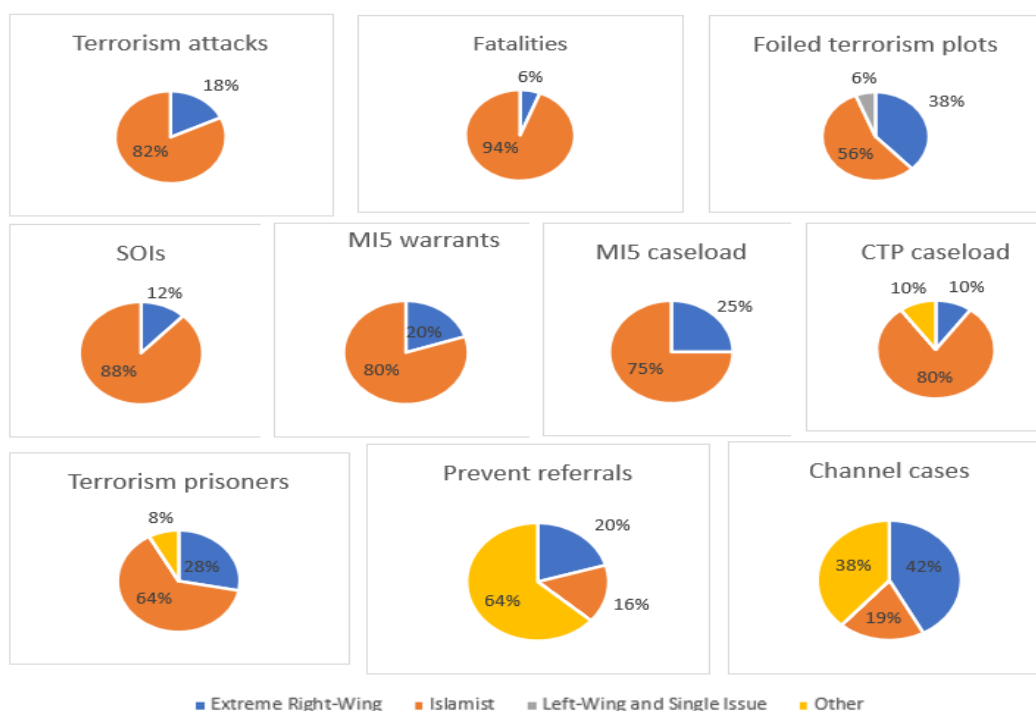
-Subjects of Interest, week commencing 26 April 2021, ISC enquiry into Extreme Right Wing Terrorism, July 2022.

-New warrants issued in 2020–2021, ISC enquiry into Extreme Right Wing Terrorism, July 2022.

-Terrorism prisoners, as at 31 March 2023, Statistics on the operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation, Year to March 2023.

-Prevent referrals and Channel cases, 2021/22, Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, England and Wales, April 2021 to March 2022.

Figure 1: Scale of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism



3.6 The number of successful attacks inspired by Extreme Right-Wing ideologies has remained low, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the overall terrorism threat picture. This review identified 17 terrorist attacks in Great Britain since March 2017,¹⁴³ of which three, or 18%, were Extreme Right-Wing in motivation.¹⁴⁴ These attacks have tended to be less lethal than those motivated by Islamist ideologies. At the time of writing, Extreme Right-Wing terrorists had killed six people in the UK: Makram Ali in 2017, Jo Cox MP in 2016, Mohammed Saleem in 2013, and three deaths in the 1999 London nail bombings. Over the same period, Islamist terrorists killed 95 people in the UK.¹⁴⁵

3.7 There has been an uptick in foiled plots linked to Extreme Right-Wing ideologies in recent years.¹⁴⁶ Of the 32 terrorism plots prevented by the

¹⁴³ The UK intelligence and policing communities started providing information about the numbers of foiled terrorism plots after the Westminster Bridge terrorist attack in March 2017. This review has also taken March 2017 as the starting point for measuring successful attacks.

¹⁴⁴ Terrorism attacks: This review identified the following 17 terrorist attacks in Great Britain from March 2017: Khalid Masood, Westminster Bridge, March 2017 – Islamist (five fatalities); Salman Abedi, Manchester, May 2017 – Islamist (22 fatalities); Khuram Shehzad Butt, Rachid Redoune & Youssef Zaghba, London Bridge, June 2017 – Islamist (eight fatalities); Darren Osbourne, Finsbury Park, June 2017 – Extreme Right-Wing (one fatality); Ahmed Hassan, Parsons Green, September 2017 – Islamist; Salih Kater, Westminster, August 2018 – Islamist; Mahdi Mohamud, Manchester Victoria, December 2018 – Islamist; Vincent Fuller, Stanwell, March 2019 – Extreme Right-Wing; Usman Khan, Fishmonger’s Hall, November 2019 – Islamist (two fatalities); Brusthom Ziamani & Barry Hockton, HMP Whitemoor, January 2020 – Islamist; Sudesh Mamoor Faraz Amman, Streatham, February 2020 – Islamist; Khairi Saadallah, Reading, June 2020 – Islamist (three fatalities); Munawar Hussain, Burnley, December 2020 – Islamist; Ali Harbi Ali, Leigh-on-Sea, October 2021 – Islamist (one fatality); Emad Al Swealmeen, Liverpool Women’s Hospital, November 2021 – Islamist; Edward Little, Hyde Park, September 2022 – Islamist; Andrew Leak, Dover, October 2022 – Extreme Right-Wing.

¹⁴⁵ This includes 41 fatalities in attacks from 2017 onwards, Jalal Uddin in 2016, Drummer Lee Rigby in 2013, and 52 people in the 7/7 London bombings in 2005.

¹⁴⁶ ‘MI5: 31 late-stage terror plots foiled in four years in UK’, *BBC News*, 10 September 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58512901>.

Intelligence Community and Counter Terrorism Policing between March 2017 and December 2021, 12 were related to Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism,¹⁴⁷ accounting for 38% overall. When the same update was provided in January 2020, just under 30% of the total foiled attacks were motivated by an Extreme Right-Wing ideology.¹⁴⁸

3.8 MI5 reporting refers to “late-stage attack plots”,¹⁴⁹ the implication being that the individuals interdicted were on a trajectory towards a physical terrorist attack rather than other forms of terrorism, such as online propaganda offences or fundraising. While MI5 do not publish a list of these plots, presumably to avoid jeopardising potential prosecutions,¹⁵⁰ it is possible to identify attack planning from reporting of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism arrests and cases.¹⁵¹ As such, the 12 foiled plots may include:

- May 2017: Liam Seabrook arrested and later sentenced (31) to eight year’s imprisonment for among others making threats to kill, in the wake of the Manchester Arena bombing and having stockpiled weapons.¹⁵²
- June 2017:¹⁵³ Ethan Stables (19) arrested and later sentenced to an indefinite hospital order for planning a machete attack at a Gay Pride event in Barrow-in-Furness.¹⁵⁴
- July 2017:¹⁵⁵ Jack Renshaw (22) arrested and later sentenced to life imprisonment for plotting to kill Labour MP Rosie Cooper and a local police officer.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁷ ‘Latest Home Office statistics reveal 7 late-stage plots foiled since March 2020’, *Counter Terrorism Policing*, 9 December 2021, <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/latest-home-office-statistics-reveal-7-late-stage-plots-foiled-since-march-2020/>.

¹⁴⁸ Eight of the 25 attacks at that time were motivated by Extreme Right-Wing ideology. See ‘Report 2021-2022’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, <https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/ISC-Annual-Report-2021%E2%80%932022.pdf>, para 11.

¹⁴⁹ See MI5 annual threat updates, November 2022 and July 2021, ‘Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update’, *MI5*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update> and ‘Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update 2021’, *MI5*, 14 July 2021, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update-2021>.

¹⁵⁰ Not all individuals arrested in relation to suspected terrorism are charged with terrorism offences. For example, some are transferred to immigration authorities and others are dealt with under mental health legislation.

¹⁵¹ The Community Security Trust rightly identifies the difficulties in tracking some foiled plots, especially those where the defendant was not charged with or was acquitted of preparing for acts of terrorism under section 5 of the Terrorism Act (TACT) 2006. See ‘UK Terrorism Databases Explainer’, CST, <https://cst.org.uk/public/data/file/9/c/CST%20Terrorism%20Databases%20Explainer.pdf>, p. 23.

¹⁵² Tom Wilkinson, ‘Nazi-sympathiser threatened to bomb mosques following Manchester Arena attack’, *Manchester Evening News*, 9 February 2018, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/nazi-sympathiser-threatened-bomb-mosques-14271534>.

¹⁵³ ‘Barrow man charged with terrorism offence after alleged threats against gay people’, *North West Evening Mail*, 28 June 2017, <https://www.nwemail.co.uk/news/barrow/16440979.barrow-man-charged-with-terrorism-offence-after-alleged-threats-against-gay-people/>.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Man found guilty of planning terror attack on Cumbria gay event’, *The Guardian*, 5 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/05/man-found-guilty-planning-terror-attack-cumbria-gay-event-ethan-stables>.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Killer Instinct’, Hope not Hate, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/killer-instinct/>.

¹⁵⁶ ‘In the Central Criminal Court Regina vs Jack Renshaw Sentencing Remarks of Mrs Justice McGowan’, Judiciary of England and Wales, 17 March 2019, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/r-v-renshaw-sentence17.5.19.pdf>.

- July 2017:¹⁵⁷ Peter Morgan (34) arrested and later sentenced to 12 years' imprisonment convicted of terrorism offences having assembled bomb-making equipment and materials.¹⁵⁸
- October 2018: Steven Bishop (40) arrested and later sentenced to four years' imprisonment for stockpiling equipment to bomb a London mosque.¹⁵⁹
- September 2019: Paul Dunleavy (16) arrested and later sentenced to five and a half years' imprisonment for preparing a terrorist attack by researching converted firearms.¹⁶⁰
- August 2020: Dean Morrice (33) arrested and later sentenced to 18 years' imprisonment for stockpiling bomb-making materials.¹⁶¹
- December 2020: Matthew Cronjager (17) arrested and later sentenced to 11 years and four months in a young offender institution for preparing an act of terrorism, namely the murder his non-white friend using a 3D printed firearm.¹⁶²
- April 2021:¹⁶³ Ben Styles (23) arrested and later convicted of terrorism offences having been making a submachine gun and ammunition to fight a religious war against the Jews.¹⁶⁴

3.9 When assessing the scale of the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism threat it is important to also consider these plots qualitatively. Whether the plot is realistic and, if so, what the potential lethality is, and whether there was any involvement by undercover law enforcement are all significant factors in assessing seriousness. At one end of the scale of recent plots is teenager Paul Dunleavy who wanted to convert a firearm and use it in a "race war" but whom the judge concluded was unlikely to have gone through with it, describing his preparations as "inept".¹⁶⁵ At the other end is Jack Renshaw

¹⁵⁷ John Hislop, 'Right-wing extremism caught with explosive items jailed for 12-years', *The Edinburgh Reporter*, 17 August 2018, <https://theedinburghreporter.co.uk/2018/08/right-wing-extremist-caught-with-explosive-items-jailed-for-12-years/>.

¹⁵⁸ 'Terrorism prosecutions in Scotland – Peter Morgan', Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, <https://www.copfs.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism-prosecutions-in-scotland/#peter-morgan>.

¹⁵⁹ Victoria Ward, 'Extremist admits planning to blow up London mosque in suspected revenge for Manchester bombing', *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 April 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/08/extremist-admits-planning-blow-london-mosque-suspected-revenge/>.

¹⁶⁰ Duncan Gardham, Fiona Hamilton, 'Paul Dunleavy: School pupil obsessed by mass shootings jailed over neo-Nazi terror attack plans', *The Times*, 7 November 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/paul-dunleavy-school-pupil-obsessed-by-mass-shootings-jailed-over-neo-nazi-terror-attack-plans-f5tq3ltlw>.

¹⁶¹ 'Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update 2021', *Mi5*, 14 July 2021, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update-2021>.

¹⁶² 'R vs Matthew Cronjager', *Courts and Tribunals Judiciary*, 19 October 2021, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/R.-v.-Matthew-Cronjager-Sentencing-Remarks.pdf>.

¹⁶³ Andy Richardson, 'Ben Styles, 23, charged with terrorism offences', *Birmingham Live*, 14 April 2021, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/ben-styles-23-charged-terrorism-20384490>.

¹⁶⁴ 'Leamington Spa: Ben Styles built sub-machine gun "for religious war"', *BBC News*, 25 February 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-60527204>, Gemma Parry, 'Nazi who built a submachine gun in his garage after becoming obsessed with the Christchurch mosque killer is jailed for seven years', *Daily Mail*, 29 June 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12245041/Nazi-built-submachine-gun-garage-jailed-seven-years.html>

¹⁶⁵ Daniel De Simone, 'Rugby teenager Paul Dunleavy jailed for terror offences', *BBC News*, 6 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-54843050>.

whose plan to kill Rosie Cooper MP and a police officer was advanced and, but for his arrest, was likely to have been carried out.¹⁶⁶ The absence of a public record of foiled plots makes it difficult to assess the overall scale of the threat from these failed terrorist attempts.

- 3.10 Other metrics involve Security Service and police resources. In his annual threat update in November 2022, the head of MI5 said that Extreme Right Wing Terrorism threat now accounted for a quarter of MI5's counter-terrorist caseload,¹⁶⁷ up from around one in five in July the year before.¹⁶⁸ The proportion of approximately 3,000 individuals under investigation by MI5 for being a potential threat to national security, known as Subjects of Interests (SOIs),¹⁶⁹ that are Extreme Right-Wing is much lower at 12%,¹⁷⁰ and one in five warrants for MI5 intrusive activity issued in 2020–2021 related to suspected Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism.¹⁷¹¹⁷² Finally, 10% of the Counter Terrorism Police (CTP) network's approximately 800 live investigations involve Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism.¹⁷³ While these figures relate to separate processes, some overlap is expected and the reasons for the differences in ratios are not clear. Regardless, the UK intelligence community is grappling with a substantial minority threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism.
- 3.11 An increase in investigations has affected the make-up of Britain's terrorist prisoner population. Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism now accounts for over a quarter (28%, n=65) of those in custody for terrorism-related offences, having risen year-on-year since 2017, both in volume and as a proportion of the terrorism offender cohort.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁶ 'In the Central Criminal Court Regina vs Jack Renshaw Sentencing Remarks of Mrs Justice McGowan', Judiciary of England and Wales, 17 March 2019, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/r-v-renshaw-sentence17.5.19.pdf>.

¹⁶⁷ 'Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update', *MI5*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update>.

¹⁶⁸ 'Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update 2021', *MI5*, 14 July 2021, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update-2021>.

¹⁶⁹ David Anderson Q.C., *Attacks In London And Manchester March-June 2017*, Independent Assessment of MI5 And Police Internal Reviews, December 2017, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/664682/Attacks_in_London_and_Manchester_Open_Report.pdf, para 1.24.

¹⁷⁰ SOI data dates to April 2021 which may account for some but likely not all the difference.

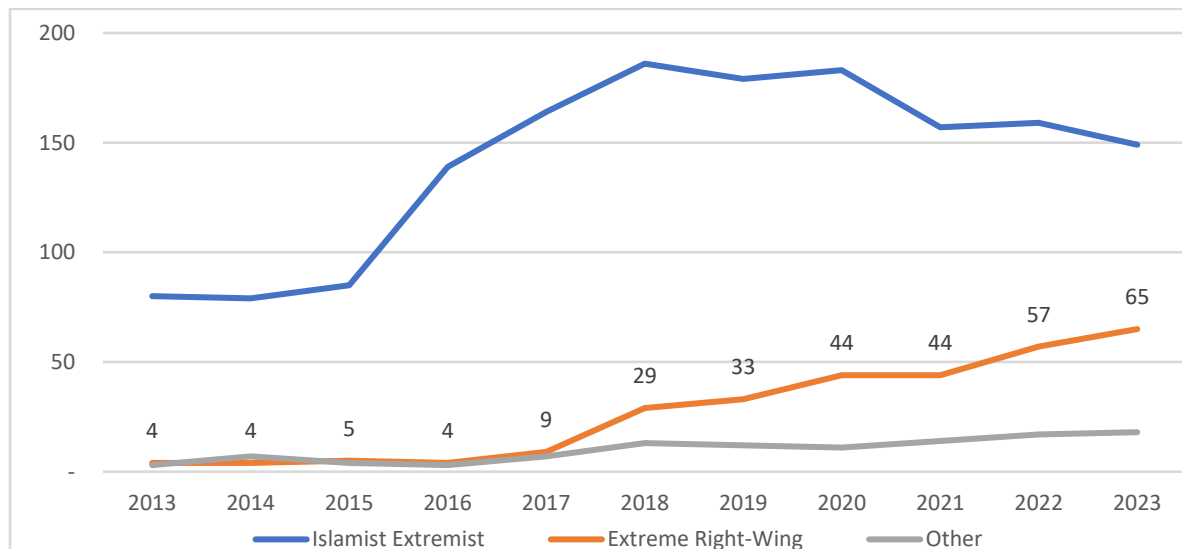
¹⁷¹ The Home Secretary authorises warrants for MI5 to use intrusive investigation tools, such as intercepting telephone communications, surveillance in a private space, or interference with property, against an individual when there is sufficient justification on national security grounds. See 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, p. 95

¹⁷² 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para 193

¹⁷³ 10% figure was published in the Independent Review of Prevent in February 2023 (see para 3.10) while on 1 June 2023, CTP tweeted that they were "currently working on more than 800 live investigations". See Counter Terrorism Policing, Twitter, 1 June 2023, <https://twitter.com/TerrorismPolice/status/1664225024054792195>

¹⁷⁴ See 'P.01: Number of persons in custody for terrorism-related offences, by ideology', in 'Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000: quarterly update to March 2023: annual data tables', available at: 'Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000, quarterly update to March 2023', Home Office (June 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-quarterly-update-to-march-2023>.

Figure 2: Number of persons in custody for terrorism-related offences, by ideology, as at 31 March 2013 to 31 March 2023



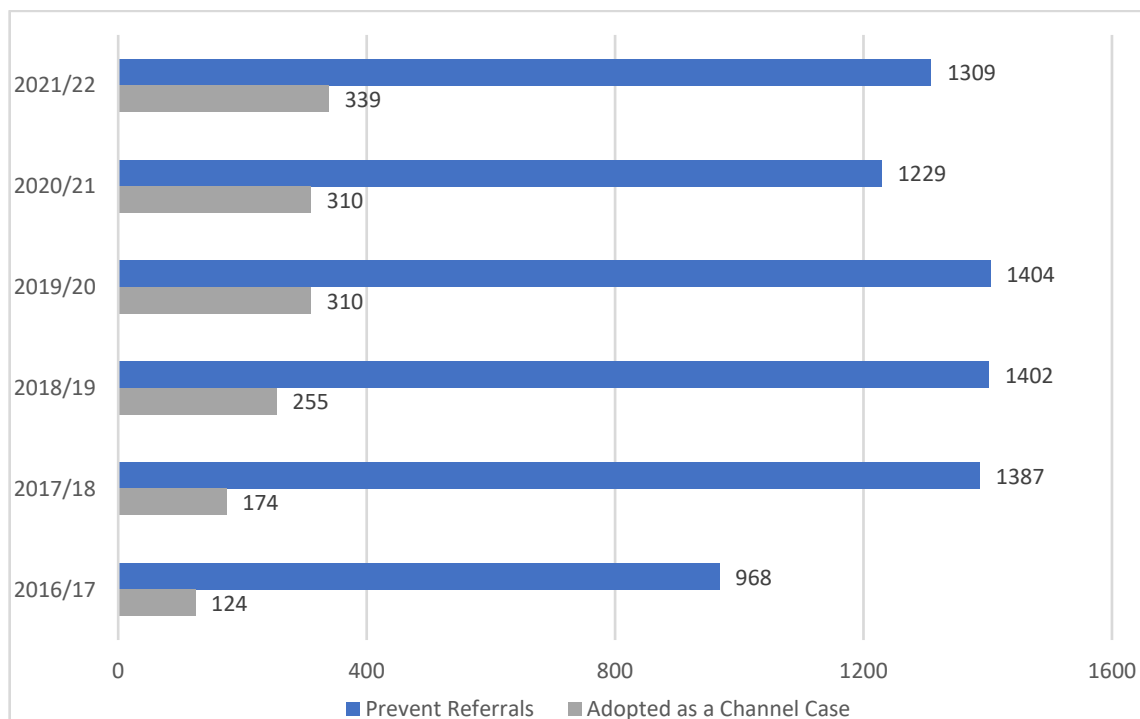
3.12 In my view, it is likely that this increase is a result of both the proscription of Extreme Right-Wing terrorist groups creating opportunities for prosecution and an increased appetite to use terrorism legislation against the Far Right. There will likely be an increased threat from Extreme Right-Wing terrorist offenders both in prison and on probation.

3.13 A final indicator is annual Extreme Right-Wing referrals to the Government's counter radicalisation programme, Prevent, which remained between 1,200 and 1,400 annually during the five-year period to March 2022, accounting for between one fifth and one quarter of Prevent referrals overall.¹⁷⁵ Over the same period, however, the number of Extreme Right-Wing referrals subsequently adopted by Channel – a multi-agency programme to provide support to individuals who are at risk of becoming involved in terrorism – steadily increased from 174 to 339 and now account for 42% of Channel cases.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ 'Table 6: Type of Concern of those referred, discussed at a Channel panel and adopted as a Channel case, 2016/17 to 2021/22', in 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, England and Wales, April 2021 to March 2022: data tables', available at: 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2021 to March 2022', Home Office (January 2023) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2021-to-march-2022>.

¹⁷⁶ 'Table 6: Type of Concern of those referred, discussed at a Channel panel and adopted as a Channel case, 2016/17 to 2021/22', in 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, England and Wales, April 2021 to March 2022: data tables', available at: 'Individuals referred to and supported through the Prevent Programme, April 2021 to March 2022', Home Office (January 2023) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/individuals-referred-to-and-supported-through-the-prevent-programme-april-2021-to-march-2022>.

Figure 3: Number of Extreme Right-Wing Prevent referrals and Channel cases, 2016/17 to 2021/22



3.14 Prevent referrals, however, do not necessarily track the terrorism threat picture by ideology and should not be used to gauge emerging threats. This is in part because the large volume of referrals categorised by Prevent as neither Extreme Right-Wing or Islamist but as ‘mixed, unclear, or unstable’ in recent years has served to obscure the data on motivating ideology.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, both the 2023 Independent Review of Prevent and the 2022 Intelligence and Security Committee Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism inquiry concur that Prevent referrals are a better indicator of response, particularly of increased risk awareness and focus, than of risk.¹⁷⁸

- **The UK intelligence community is grappling with a substantial minority threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism.**
- **The UK has not seen a mass casualty Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism attack since 1999. Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism attacks and plots, however, are a feature of the current terrorist threat picture.**

¹⁷⁷ The category ‘mixed, unclear, or unstable’ was removed in the 2021/22 data and replaced with several different categories, which this review amalgamated as ‘other’. They are: Other, Conflicted, No specific extremism issue, High CT risk but no ideology present, Vulnerability present but no ideology or CT risk, No risk, vulnerability or Ideology Present, School massacre, Incel, and Unspecified. For more detail on this discussion see Independent Review of Prevent, 2023, paras. 4:33-4:59.

¹⁷⁸ Independent Review of Prevent (February 2023), p. 48, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, p 74.

- **There will likely be an increased threat from Extreme Right-Wing terrorist offenders both in prison and on probation.**

Nature of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism

- 3.15 The Far Right encompasses a wide range of ideologies that can inspire people to engage in or support terrorism. While there is broad agreement around certain core concepts on the Far Right – nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and a strong state, for example – there is crossover between ideologies, and groups and networks may be ideologically diverse.¹⁷⁹ A consequence acknowledged by MI5 of this broad spectrum of Extreme Right-Wing views is that proving ideological motivation for certain actions can be difficult, which in turn complicates determining what constitutes terrorism.¹⁸⁰
- 3.16 The government identifies the following three broad ideologies as motivating Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism:¹⁸¹
- White supremacism – the belief that the ‘white race’ is biologically superior to other races. Often calling for the replacement of Western parliamentary democracy with Neo-Nazi or fascist regimes.
 - White/(ethno-) nationalism – the belief that that the ‘white race’ and ‘Western culture’ faces an existential threat from mass migration and demographic change, for which Jews are typically blamed. Often calling for the repatriation or deportation of people who are not white (if necessary forced).
 - Cultural nationalism – the belief that ‘Western culture’ is under threat from mass migration and from a lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural groups. Often accompanied by anti-Muslim hatred and the promotion of anti-establishment conspiracy theories.¹⁸²
- 3.17 Groups that openly endorse political violence to achieve their goals are most commonly White Supremacist or White Nationalist in nature. However, while Cultural Nationalism is the least explicitly violent, MI5 has assessed that what

¹⁷⁹ The five core concepts were identified by scholar Cas Mudde. See Ben Lee, ‘Understanding the Far Right Landscape’, CREST (July 2017) <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-far-right-landscape/>.

¹⁸⁰ ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para 36.

¹⁸¹ There are other movements that influence the Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism scene in the UK, notably the international Nazi-Satanist group Order of the Nine Angles.

¹⁸² ‘The Threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Protect UK (February 2023), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-extreme-right-wing-terrorism>. For more details on the genesis of the Government’s definitions see ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, pp. 5-6; 23-25.

it calls the mainstreaming of Cultural Nationalist principles in public discourse may increase the potential reach of such grievances. This is a matter of concern given that many of the most serious Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism incidents in recent years were carried out by individuals motivated by Cultural Nationalist sentiments.¹⁸³

- 3.18 The consensus within the UK Intelligence Community is that the role of Extreme Right-Wing groups in facilitating terrorism has diminished in recent years, likely linked to changes in the Far Right itself but also due to state responses, most notably proscription. Since December 2016, successive Home Secretaries have proscribed several Extreme Right-Wing terrorist organisations. The first, the neo-Nazi terrorist group National Action, along with its subsequent aliases,¹⁸⁴ was an organic in-person network, with its origins in the youth wing of the British National Party (BNP).¹⁸⁵ There have since been several high-profile prosecutions of National Action members, which JTAC has assessed mitigates the likelihood of similar, real-world groups forming in the UK.¹⁸⁶
- 3.19 The Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism threat has since evolved away from structured terrorist groups like National Action to a more diffuse online threat.¹⁸⁷ Some of the more recently proscribed groups exist as the UK branches of groups that are predominantly based in North America and Europe, and largely develop their networks online, such as the Feuerkrieg Division (FKD) and The Base: which are linked to the neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division from the United States.¹⁸⁸ FKD members in the UK have been convicted of largely online terrorism offences. This includes an unnamed teenage leader of the British franchise, convicted of both disseminating and possessing terrorist publications in 2021,¹⁸⁹ and self-described FKD “UK cell

¹⁸³ ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para 59, 64 & 65.

¹⁸⁴ National Action is also known as “Scottish Dawn”, “NS131 (National Socialist Anti-Capitalist Action)” and System Resistance Network (SRN). Sonnenkrieg Division was established as a splinter group of SRN. ‘Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations’, Home Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>.

¹⁸⁵ Lizzie Dearden, ‘National Action terror plot: How once-ridiculed BNP Youth leader planned neo-Nazi machete attack’, *Independent*, 18 July 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/national-action-terror-plot-jack-renshaw-bnp-edl-rosie-cooper-machete-dog-a8451126.html>; Daniel De Simone, ‘How neo-Nazi group National Action targeted young people’, *BBC News*, 21 March 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-48279225>; ‘Briefing: National Action’, HOPE not hate, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/research-old/investigations/briefing-national-action/>.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Director General Ken McCallum gives annual threat update’, *Mi5*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.mi5.gov.uk/news/director-general-ken-mccallum-gives-annual-threat-update>.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations’, Home Office, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>.

¹⁸⁹ Crown Prosecution Service, Twitter, 8 February 2021, <https://twitter.com/cpsuk/status/1358789983990124547>; Damien Gayle and agency, ‘Britain’s youngest convicted terrorist avoids jail’, *The Guardian*, 8 February 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/feb/08/britains-youngest-convicted-terrorist-avoids-jail>.

leader” Luca Benincasa, convicted of membership of the proscribed group and possession of documents likely to be useful to a terrorist in 2023.¹⁹⁰

- 3.20 The primary threat from Extreme Right-Wing terrorist groups today is their ability to radicalise and inspire so-called self-initiated terrorists,¹⁹¹ defined as “persons who mobilise to threaten or use violence without material support or personal direction from a terrorist organisation; but who may still be influenced or encouraged by the rhetoric or ideology of a group”.¹⁹² Access to extremist material online is assessed as one of the key drivers for self-initiated terrorists.¹⁹³ Despite the relatively low number of real-world Extreme Right-Wing groups in the UK, the internet has made it easier for Extreme Right-Wing individuals and groups to share extreme content. Therefore, radicalisation processes have been amplified and MI5 no longer sees a requirement for ‘real-life’ contact in Extreme Right-Wing recruitment.¹⁹⁴ It is in these online dynamics where we see the value of proscription, while undoubtedly still a valuable tool, reaching its limit. This will require an innovative response.¹⁹⁵
- 3.21 In terms of where the threat is coming from, the biggest risk – regardless of ideology – comes from self-initiated terrorists, those acting without explicit direction from a terrorist group.¹⁹⁶ This has been the case for Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism: one study of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism offending in the UK between 1999 and 2022 found that a large majority of both attacks and plots were carried out by individuals acting alone and that none of the attacks were directed by an Extreme Right-Wing group. By contrast, the majority of those convicted of non-violent and non-plot related terrorism offences (typically online or membership offences¹⁹⁷) had some group affiliation.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁰ ‘Neo-Nazi Luca Benincasa locked up for terror and child sex crimes’, *BBC News*, 25 January 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-64404704>; ‘Man sentenced for being a member of a proscribed organisation’, South West Police, 25 January 2023, <https://www.south-wales.police.uk/news/south-wales/news/2023/ion-jan/man-sentenced-for-being-a-member-of-a-proscribed-organisation/>.

¹⁹¹ ‘The Threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Protect UK (February 2023), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-extreme-right-wing-terrorism>.

¹⁹² ‘Self-Initiated Terrorists (S-ITs)’, Protect UK (December 2021), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/self-initiated-terrorists-s-its>.

¹⁹³ ‘Self-Initiated Terrorists (S-ITs)’, Protect UK (December 2021), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/self-initiated-terrorists-s-its>.

¹⁹⁴ ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, pp. 13 & 15, para. 39.

¹⁹⁵ See chapter four for a more detailed discussion of the implication of this phenomenon on the UK Government’s response to Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Self-Initiated Terrorists (S-ITs)’, Protect UK (December 2021), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/self-initiated-terrorists-s-its>.

¹⁹⁷ Typically, these were membership of a proscribed Organisation (section 12, Terrorism Act 2000), encouragement of terrorism (section 1, Terrorism Act 2006), dissemination of terrorist publications (section 2, Terrorism Act 2006), and possessing documents useful to terrorism (section 58, Terrorism Act 2000).

¹⁹⁸ The study identified 14 Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism attackers, all but two of whom acted alone, and 22 plots, all of them lone actors. There were 54 additional terrorism offenders identified. See Benjamin Lee, ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism in the UK’, CREST (December 2022), https://crestresearch.ac.uk/download/4179/report_extreme_right_wing_terrorism_in_the_uk_22-052-01-1.pdf.

- 3.22 Regarding demographics, the Extreme Right Wing Terrorism landscape remains dominated by men and there have been no female Extreme Right-Wing attackers or plotters to date.¹⁹⁹ Age wise the picture is less clear: while a significant percentage of MI5's Subjects of Interest are under 24, it is also the case that the three Extreme Right-Wing terrorist attacks since March 2017 were carried out by men in their 50s and 60s.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, there is no correlation between the sophistication of the foiled Extreme Right-Wing plots identified for this review and offender age.
- 3.23 Finally, the 2022 Intelligence and Security Committee Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism inquiry noted evidence that several young people convicted of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism offences in the UK had mental health issues, specifically the neuro-developmental conditions Asperger's or autism spectrum disorder.²⁰¹ This observation is supported by other research: one study of European lone actors found that 30% of those motivated by Extreme Right-Wing ideologies had a mental health disorder;²⁰² and, while the dataset for UK Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism offending did not specifically analyse mental health, the authors noted the prevalence of autism spectrum disorders as well as substance and alcohol abuse.²⁰³ However, little is known about how mental health problems interact with other factors during radicalisation and the extent to which there is a causal relationship between mental health disorders and involvement in terrorism remains unclear.²⁰⁴
- 3.24 In terms of what the threat looks like, Extreme Right-Wing terrorists routinely target individuals and communities who are the focus of their ideological grievances. As well as promoting ideas about a so-called race war and targeting Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in general,²⁰⁵ recent Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism plots and attacks have been antisemitic (for example, with Jews and synagogues being targeted²⁰⁶), misogynistic and anti-

¹⁹⁹ Two women, Claudia Patatas and Alice Cutter, have been convicted (in November 2018 and March 2020 respectively) of being members of National Action. Hatty Collier, 'Claudia Patatas and Adam Thomas: Neo-Nazis who named baby after Hitler convicted of National Action membership', *The Standard*, 12 November 2018, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/neonazi-fanatics-who-named-baby-son-after-hitler-convicted-for-national-action-membership-a3987796.html>; 'Miss Hitler' and three others guilty of National Action membership', *BBC News*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-51966050>.

²⁰⁰ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, paras 43 & 90.

²⁰¹ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, paras. 6, 84.

²⁰² Simon Copeland and Sarah Marsden, 'The Relationship Between Mental Health Problems and Terrorism', CREST (November 2020), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-relationship-between-mental-health-problems-and-terrorism/>, pp. 10.

²⁰³ Simon Copeland and Sarah Marsden, 'The Relationship Between Mental Health Problems and Terrorism', CREST (November 2020), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-relationship-between-mental-health-problems-and-terrorism/>, p. 20.

²⁰⁴ Simon Copeland and Sarah Marsden, 'The Relationship Between Mental Health Problems and Terrorism', CREST (November 2020), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-relationship-between-mental-health-problems-and-terrorism/>, p. 4.

²⁰⁵ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para. 170.

²⁰⁶ 'Durham neo-Nazi teenager convicted of planning terror attack', *BBC News*, 20 November 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-50470957>.

establishment (targeting female MPs²⁰⁷), homophobic (targeting Gay Pride²⁰⁸), anti-migrant (targeting an immigration centre²⁰⁹), conspiracy theorist (targeting 5G masts²¹⁰), and, now commonly,²¹¹ anti-Muslim (targeting Muslims and mosques²¹²) in nature.

3.25 A simple attack or low-sophistication methodology is most likely form of terrorist attack in the UK, irrespective of ideology; this includes using bladed weapons or vehicles.²¹³ This is in part because the UK controls access to firearms and explosive precursors.²¹⁴ The UK has avoided a sophisticated Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism attack of the kinds seen overseas, notably Brenton Tarrant's live-streamed mass shootings in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand that killed 51 people in 2019 and Anders Breivik mass shooting and bomb attack that killed 77 mostly young people in Norway in 2011. While most of the foiled Extreme Right-Wing plots identified for this review involved either explosives at various stages of development or rudimentary firearms, the Extreme Right-Wing threat picture in the UK overall is more pedestrian than the high-profile international attacks.

- **The Extreme Right-Wing in the UK has evolved away from structured terrorist groups to a more diffuse online threat.**
- **The primary threat comes from individuals acting without explicit direction from a terrorist group but who are motivated by elements from three broad ideologies all of which perceive a racial and/or cultural threat to 'native' Britons.**

²⁰⁷ Nadia Khomami, 'Alleged neo-Nazi admits plotting murder of MP Rosie Cooper', *The Guardian*, 12 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jun/12/man-pleads-guilty-to-plot-to-labour-mp-rosie-cooper>.

²⁰⁸ 'Man found guilty of planning terror attack on Cumbria gay event', *The Guardian*, 5 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/feb/05/man-found-guilty-planning-terror-attack-cumbria-gay-event-ethan-stables>; Ethan Stables, *BBC News*, 5 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42920765>.

²⁰⁹ 'Attack at Dover immigration centre - investigative update', Thames Valley Police, 5 November 2022, <https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news/thames-valley/news/2022/october/31-10-2022/attack-at-dover-immigration-centre---investigative-update/>. Archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20221201232347/https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/news/thames-valley/news/2022/october/31-10-2022/attack-at-dover-immigration-centre---investigative-update/>.

²¹⁰ 'Jury convicts Yorkshire pair following trial at Leeds Crown Court', *Counter Terrorism Policing*, 5 June 2023, <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/jury-convicts-yorkshire-pair-following-trial-at-leeds-crown-court/>.

²¹¹ MI5 has assessed that Anti-Muslim hatred has replaced general immigration as the key driver for the growth of the Far Right in recent years, following a series of Islamist terrorism attacks and the ongoing refugee crisis. 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para. 168.

²¹² 'Terror threat teen wanted to attack mosque and kill 10,000', *BBC News*, 6 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-wiltshire-59899865>.

E.g. the Finsbury Park mosque attacker; a man seeking to kill Muslims who stabbed a person in Surrey in 2019; and a Britain First supporter who drove into a curry house owner in Harrow in June 2017). See 'The Evolving Terror Threat to the UK', *RAFFAELLO PANTUCCI*, <https://raffaellopantucci.com/2023/01/17/the-evolving-terror-threat-to-the-uk/>.

²¹³ 'Self-Initiated Terrorists (S-ITs)', Protect UK (December 2021), <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/self-initiated-terrorists-s-its>.

²¹⁴ 'Knives, bladed items and hazardous materials', Business in Focus, This guide was produced as part of a business advice project by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute. <https://www.tradingstandards.uk/media/documents/news--policy/consultation-responses/knives,-bladed-items-and-hazardous-materials-consultation.pdf>.

- **Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism plots in the UK have typically been immature in nature and do not reflect high-profile international attacks such as those in Christchurch or Norway. Nonetheless, the perpetrators have often assembled weapons, most commonly bomb-making equipment, and materials, and so the potential for fatalities remains.**

Future Challenges of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism

- 3.26 The scale of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Extreme Right-Wing terrorism threat has yet to be seen. Analysts in the West were concerned that increased online activity during the national Covid-19 lockdowns would increase opportunities for individuals to encounter both extremist material and individuals and to reinforce extremist beliefs.²¹⁵ So far, however, the UK has not seen the growth in Extreme Right-Wing attacks, networks and plots directly linked to the pandemic and the government response that is visible in other parts of Europe.²¹⁶
- 3.27 Nonetheless, the intelligence community, the Home Office, and police²¹⁷ recognise the potential impact of the pandemic. Alongside the possible driving impact of economic decline caused by the pandemic, they are concerned about the prevalence of conspiracy theories and disinformation among Extreme Right-Wing terrorists, notably anti-government conspiracies and those blaming certain groups for creating or spreading the virus, and the galvanising effect on the Far Right of the rise of identity politics and the Black Lives Matter public protests during lockdowns.²¹⁸
- 3.28 Another challenge is support for the Far Right from hostile states, notably Russia. The 2022 Intelligence and Security Committee Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism inquiry found evidence to suggest Russian state support for Far-Right groups in the UK as a means to exacerbate socio-political tensions.²¹⁹ An earlier inquiry into Russian influence in the UK by the same committee established that the UK is a priority target for Russian disinformation and attempts at political influence overseas, including through social media and

²¹⁵ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, pp. 19-22.

²¹⁶ Raffaello Pantucci, 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism in the UK: How Concerned Should We Be?', *RUSI*, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/extreme-right-wing-terrorism-uk-how-concerned-should-we-be>.

²¹⁷ 'CTP warn about greater risk of radicalisation during COVID-19 lockdown', *Counter Terrorism Policing*, 22 April 2020, <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/ctp-look-to-bolster-prevent-referrals-during-lockdown/>.

²¹⁸ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, pp 21-22, paras 47, 54, 55 & D, p. 65, para 172.

²¹⁹ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (July 2022), https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para 128 & 129.

so-called hack-and-leak operations, the use of cyber tools to access to sensitive material to then release publicly.²²⁰

3.29 Many of the key challenges in countering Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism are in the online space. Broadly, there are three issues. First, the internet has made it easier for ordinary people to access Far Right content which can incite and radicalise. While mainstream social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter typically moderate the most extreme content, the Commission for Countering Extremism is concerned about non-violent Far Right rhetoric online creating an environment that is conducive to violence.²²¹ I agree. Second, more explicit content remains on fringe platforms, dedicated Extreme Right-Wing sites and encrypted platforms. This includes videos of attacks, attack manifestos, and content that glorifies Extreme Right-Wing attacks, all of which risks further radicalisation and provides likeminded people with opportunities to connect. Finally, the biggest challenge for the intelligence community and law enforcement is determining whose activity online will become real world terrorism.

- **While the UK has not seen growth in Extreme Right-Wing terrorism directly linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, there are concerns around the growth in conspiracy theories and of movements like Black Lives Matter acting as a spur for the Far Right.**
- **Support for the Far Right in the UK from hostile states such as Russia is a concern.**
- **The internet has reduced the barrier to entry to the Far Right by making it easier to access and promote extreme content on various platforms and with different levels of moderation and encryption. Distinguishing between Extreme Right-Wing keyboard warriors and proto-terrorists is now a significant challenge.**

Far Right Protest

3.30 In the UK, the Far Right includes a range of ideologies, all of which perceive a racial and/or cultural threat to 'native' Britons. The term encompasses political parties, protest movements, pressure groups and street gangs, some of which work within democratic processes and contest elections while others are anti-democratic, having adopted direct action or, at times, terrorist strategies.²²²

²²⁰ 'Russia Report – Press Notice', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/20200721_Russia_Press_Notice.pdf.

²²¹ 'Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism', Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, para 45.

²²² Ben Lee, 'Understanding The Far-Right Landscape', Crest Research (July 2017), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-far-right-landscape/>; Ben Lee, 'Overview of the far right', Crest Research, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834424/Ben_Lee_-_Overview_of_the_far_right.pdf.

- 3.31 The Far Right has been a significant source of violence, criminality, and incitement in recent years. Far Right street groups have been able to mobilise significant numbers for marches and protests. Such protests typically target minority communities, particularly Muslims, and incitement from the Far Right continues to be a significant driver of racial and religious hate crime in the UK. These protests have regularly involved violent clashes with Far Left counterdemonstrators and the police.
- 3.32 I have observed the Far Right mobilising around specific issues where there may be some popular sympathy to win support for their less palatable political objectives. My review has found instances of Far Right groups and individuals seeking mainstream backing through protest on areas of public concern around counter terrorism, immigration, and multiculturalism. The risks associated with this strategy include public disorder, disruption, and violence with counter protestors, as well as hate crime, intimidation, and intercommunal violence. As previously discussed, in extreme cases, I am concerned that such rhetoric risks inspiring acts of terrorism.

The Retreat of The Far Right from British Electoral Politics

For decades, the Far Right in Britain was a relatively unified and coherent force in UK electoral politics as represented first by the National Front and later by the British National Party (BNP).²²³ Today, the electioneering Far Right is relatively fragmented and weak; Britain First and other Far Right parties contest elections but typically more to raise awareness of their Far Right ideas than to win seats.²²⁴

During the 1970s, the National Front grew to become the country's fourth largest party in terms of vote share,²²⁵ but by the early 1990s it had largely disbanded and fractured.²²⁶ Under the leadership of former National Front member Nick Griffin,²²⁷ the BNP then attempted to move the party away from a violent and neo-Nazi image, to gain greater acceptance with voters.²²⁸ Capitalising on public debates over integration and multiculturalism prompted, in part, by the 2001 race riots in England,²²⁹ the BNP became a political force during the 2000s with a high point in the

²²³ Far Right Round Table.

²²⁴ Ben Lee, 'Overview of the far right', Crest Research, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834424/Ben_Lee_-_Overview_of_the_far_right.pdf, p 8.

²²⁵ Whiteley, Paul (1979). "The National Front Vote in the 1977 GLC Elections: An Aggregate Data Analysis". *British Journal of Political Science*. 9 (3): 370–380.

²²⁶ Brian Whelan, 'Exposed: far-right veteran seeking London multicultural vote', *Channel 4 News*, 3 May 2014, <https://www.channel4.com/news/graham-williamson-front-national-liberal-party-bnp-election>.

²²⁷ Haroon Siddique, 'Profile: Nick Griffin', *The Guardian*, 19 November 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/nov/19/bnp-leader-nick-griffin>.

²²⁸ Ian Cobain, 'Racism, recruitment and how the BNP believes it is just 'one crisis away from power' ', *The Guardian*, 22 December 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/dec/22/politics.thefarright>.

²²⁹ Lucy Ward, 'How the BNP turned racial hatred into votes', *The Guardian*, 12 December 2001, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2001/dec/12/politics.race1>; Daniel Trilling, 'How the 2001 northern riots boosted the far right – and reshaped British politics', *The Guardian*, 15 June 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/jun/15/race-riots-far-right-britain-stereotypes-nationalist-politics>.

2009 local and European elections.²³⁰ However, electoral support for the BNP stuttered after 2010 and its supporters would increasingly become involved in street violence.²³¹ The party was struck off the electoral register in January 2016 for an administrative error, re-registered the following month,²³² and fined £3,000 in 2022, for late delivery of annual accounts.²³³

A contemporary successor to the BNP is Britain First, founded in 2011, which has former BNP members among its founders and leadership,²³⁴ and continued the BNP's anti-Muslim inflection.²³⁵ The party's modest electoral highpoint came in the 2016 London Mayoral elections when leader Paul Golding came eighth with over 30,000 votes, or 1.2%.²³⁶ Struck off in 2017, the party re-registered in 2021,²³⁷ and fielded a small number of candidates in the May 2022 local elections. The party focussed its efforts in Salford, where party chair Ashlea Simon was standing.²³⁸ Simon came second to Labour in Salford's Walkden North ward with 508 votes,²³⁹ a position she repeated in 2023 albeit with 405 votes.²⁴⁰ Britain First remains a fringe outfit today.

Major Far Right Groups

3.33 Perhaps the most notorious, albeit disbanded, far right street group is the English Defence League (EDL), which emerged in Luton in 2009 in response to the provocative activities of the extreme Islamist group Al Muhajiroun. One former EDL member has said that it was Al Muhajiroun protestors calling British soldiers in Iraq “terrorists” and holding up signs saying “British soldiers

²³⁰ After winning a seat in the London Assembly in 2008, the BNP went on to win two seats in the European Parliament and several county council seats in 2009. Dominic Casciani, 'BNP gains from Labour disaffection', *BBC News*, 4 May 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7382831.stm; Martin Wainwright, 'EU Elections: BNP's Nick Griffin wins seat in European Parliament', *The Guardian*, 8 June 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2009/jun/07/european-elections-manchester-liverpool>; Nigel Morris, 'Review of the Year 2009: The BNP', *The Independent*, 23 December 2009, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/review-of-the-year-2009-the-bnp-1847867.html>.

²³¹ 'BNP vote increases, but fails to win seat', *BBC News*, 7 May 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/election_2010/8667231.stm; Matthew Goodwin, 'The BNP is finished as an electoral force', *The Guardian*, 4 May 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/may/04/bnp-local-elections-electoral-force-finished>.

²³² Aisha Gani, 'BNP struck off register of UK political parties because of 'clerical error' ', *The Guardian*, 8 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jan/08/bnp-struck-off-uk-political-parties-register>; 'British National Party', The Electoral Commission, <https://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/Registrations/PP3960>.

²³³ 'Electoral Commission concludes investigations into political parties: British National Party and Burning Pink', The Electoral Commission, <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media-centre/electoral-commission-concludes-investigations-political-parties-british-national-party-and-burning>.

²³⁴ 'The far-right: What is Britain First?', *Sky News*, 30 November 2017, <https://news.sky.com/story/the-far-right-what-is-britain-first-11149915>.

²³⁵ Dr Joe Mulhall, 'Modernising and Mainstreaming: The Contemporary British Far Right', *Hope not Hate*, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834417/Joe_Mulhall_-_Modernising_and_Mainstreaming_The_Contemporary_British_Far_Right.pdf, p. 3.

²³⁶ 'London Mayor Results 2016', *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/election/2016/london/results>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190721124320/https://www.bbc.com/news/election/2016/london/results>.

²³⁷ Gergana Krasteva, 'Britain First is now a registered political party after applying nine times', *Metro*, 28 September 2021, <https://metro.co.uk/2021/09/27/far-right-group-britain-first-registers-as-political-party-15325859/>.

²³⁸ 'VIDEO: BRITAIN FIRST CANVASSING TEAM POUNDS THE STREETS IN SALFORD TARGET AREA!', Britain First, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/video_britain_first_canvassing_team_pounds_the_streets_in_salford_target_area; 'Who is Britain First's Ashlea Simon', *Hope not Hate*, 28 March 2023, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/2023/03/28/who-is-britain-firsts-ashlea-simon/>.

²³⁹ 'Election results: 5 May 2022', Salford City Council, <https://www.salford.gov.uk/your-council/elections-and-voting/elections/election-results/archived-results/election-results-5-may-2022/>.

²⁴⁰ 'Election results [2024]', Salford City Council, <https://www.salford.gov.uk/your-council/elections-and-voting/elections/election-results>.

go to hell” during a military homecoming parade in Luton that year – and being seen to be protected by the police – that catalysed counter-protesters and football hooligan networks into forming the new group headed by Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, better known as Tommy Robinson.²⁴¹

- 3.34 Ideologically, the EDL denied it was a Far Right group, and claimed to protest only “Islamic fundamentalists” and Sharia law, and to condemn violence “unless in self defence [sic]”.²⁴² However, EDL leadership claims of non-racism and non-violence were quickly belied by its members’ conduct as the group’s protests quickly became violent. Police made 35 arrests in Birmingham in August 2009 when one of the group’s first protests descended into violent clashes between EDL supporters and what press reports from the time described as “Asian men” backed by the Far Left anti-fascist group, Unite Against Fascism (UAF).²⁴³ Such scenes were repeated in the city the following month leading to 90 arrests.²⁴⁴ Protestors threw bottles, bricks and placards at one another and there were reports of property damage and EDL supporters urinating on bus seats.²⁴⁵
- 3.35 The EDL was initially successful in mobilising people to its demonstrations in the low thousands.²⁴⁶ The EDL organised national protests, local street protests, and so-called flash demonstrations, held without giving the authorities proper notice.²⁴⁷ Broadly, the impact of the group’s prolific activities was threefold. First, EDL protests presented a significant public order problem across the county. Early bystanders described scenes as a “full-blown riot” and “war zone”, with “people with small children [...] running into shops for cover”.²⁴⁸ There were particularly violent scenes at a march in Birmingham in

²⁴¹ Lizzie Dearden, ‘Anjem Choudary: How Islamist preacher sparked rise of Tommy Robinson and the far-right’, *The Independent*, 19 October 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/anjem-choudary-tommy-robinson-islam-preacher-far-right-edl-luton-protests-islamists-terror-a8589236.html>. For more detail on the emergence of the EDL in 2009 see Jon Garland and James Treadwell, ‘No surrender to the Taliban’, the British Society of Criminology (2010), https://www.britisocrim.org/volume10/2010_Garland_Treadwell.pdf.

²⁴² In August 2009, the EDL website accused the anti-fascist group United Against Fascism (UAF) of wrongly labelling it “a racist BNP front” claiming it welcomed “any Muslim, Jewish in fact ANY other group”. See ‘Latest News 10/08/09’, *EDL News*, <http://englishdefenceleague.org/edl-news-080809.html>, archived at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20090812053838/http://englishdefenceleague.org/edl-news-080809.html>.

²⁴³ Robert Booth and Alan Travis, ‘“Patriot” league plots more clashes with anti-fascist activists’, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/aug/09/defence-league-casuals-birmingham-islam>; Jon Garland and James Treadwell, ‘No surrender to the Taliban’, the British Society of Criminology (2010), https://www.britisocrim.org/volume10/2010_Garland_Treadwell.pdf, p. 24.

²⁴⁴ Robert Booth, ‘Police arrest 90 after clashes at rightwing rally’, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/sep/06/rightwing-rally-arrests-birmingham>, ‘Violent race riot flared after mosque chief urged Muslims to confront right-wing ‘English Defence League’ protestors’, *Daily Mail*, 7 September 2009, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1211414/Anti-fascists-clash-right-wing-protesters-Birmingham.html>.

²⁴⁵ Robert Booth and Alan Travis, ‘Patriot’ league plots more clashes with anti-fascist activists’, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/aug/09/defence-league-casuals-birmingham-islam>; Robert Booth, ‘Police arrest 90 after clashes at rightwing rally’, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/sep/06/rightwing-rally-arrests-birmingham>.

²⁴⁶ Elizabeth A Morrow and John Meadowcroft, ‘The Rise and Fall of the English Defence League: Self-Governance, Marginal Members and the Far Right’, Political Studies Association (April 2018), <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0032321718777907>, p. 540; James Treadwell, ‘White riot: the English Defence League and the 2011 English riots’, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (March 2012), <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/publications/cjm/article/white-riot-english-defence-league-and-2011-english-riots>.

²⁴⁷ Pilkington, Hilary (2016). *Loud and Proud: Passion and Politics in the English Defence League*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 14.

²⁴⁸ Robert Booth and Alan Travis, ‘“Patriot” league plots more clashes with anti-fascist activists’, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2009/aug/09/defence-league-casuals-birmingham-islam>.

July 2013, when around 2,000 EDL supporters clashed with police and counter protesters from the UAF, including hurling items including bottles and cobblestones. One police officer suffering concussion.²⁴⁹ Later, fifty men were sentenced to more than 75 years in total for violent disorder.²⁵⁰

3.36 Relatedly, the anti-Muslim nature of the EDL and its protests²⁵¹ risked fuelling inter-communal tensions and anti-Muslim hate crime.²⁵² In some cases, this risk was so severe that planned EDL marches in Muslim-majority areas were banned by the Home Secretary were banned “to ensure local communities and property are protected”.²⁵³ I remain concerned about the long-term damage, fear and division done to community cohesion by such corrosive protests.

3.37 Finally, the costs of policing EDL protests were significant. Single protests cost police forces between £250,000 and £850,000,²⁵⁴ and a 2013 BBC investigation revealed that policing EDL marches in England in the four years since 2009 had cost 17 forces more than £10million.²⁵⁵ In 2013, three Police and Crime Commissioners publicly raised concerns over the cost of policing EDL protests, and two applied for government grants to help meet the costs.²⁵⁶ Inevitably, given the aggressive nature of many EDL protests, commentators began to be asked whether this was a price worth paying.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁹ Matt Lloyd, ‘Violence erupts as EDL holds rally in Birmingham’, *BirminghamLive*, 10 October 2014, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/local-news/violence-at-edl-birmingham-rally-5165256>.

²⁵⁰ ‘Fifty sentenced for Birmingham EDL protest violence’, *BBC News*, 9 January 2015, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-30751692>.

²⁵¹ In July 2012, the EDL published a mission statement which was openly hostile to Islam and Muslims. See ‘Mission Statement’, English Defence League, <http://englishdefenceleague.org/mission-statement>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20120906085939/http://englishdefenceleague.org/mission-statement>. For a discussion of the Islamophobia in this statement see ‘Anti-Muslim Hate Crime and the Far Right’, Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies, Teesside University (June 2013), <https://tellmamauk.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/antimuslim2.pdf>, para 5.5. See also George Kassimeris and Leonie Jackson. 2014. ‘The Ideology and Discourse of the English Defence League’, p.2.

²⁵² See Jonathan Githens-Mazier and Robert Lambert, *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: a London Case Study* (University of Exeter: European Muslim Research Centre, 2010), p. 17.

²⁵³ In August 2011 the Home Secretary banned all marches in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and four neighbouring boroughs for 30 days, later extended to the whole of the City of London. The following year, The Home Secretary banned the EDL from both marching and holding static protests in Waltham Forest, Islington, Tower Hamlets, and Newham in North-East London for 30 days. See Press Association, ‘EDL march in London banned by home secretary’, *The Guardian*, 26 August 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/26/edl-march-london-banned>; Matthew Taylor, ‘EDL march in London banned at police request’, *The Guardian*, 31 August 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/aug/31/edl-march-london-banned-police>; ‘London EDL marches stopped by government ban’, *BBC News*, 25 October 2012, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-20084304>; Chloe Hirst, ‘EDL march banned in Walthamstow but goes ahead outside Houses of Parliament’, *East London Lines*, 26 October 2012, <https://www.eastlondonlines.co.uk/2012/10/edl-march-banned-in-walthamstow-but-goes-ahead-outside-houses-of-parliament/>.

²⁵⁴ For example, the expected cost of policing an EDL protest in Manchester in 2015 was £250,000. An EDL demo in Bristol in July 2012 cost £495,000, while a protest in Leicester in October 2010 cost £850,000. See Neal Keeling, ‘Cost of policing English Defence League march likely to be six-figure sum’, 7 March 2015, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/cost-policing-english-defence-league-8791412> and Daniel Binns, ‘Police don’t know how much EDL protests in Walthamstow cost taxpayers’, *Guardian-Series*, 18 December 2012, <https://www.guardian-series.co.uk/news/10113938.police-dont-know-much-edl-protests-cost-taxpayers/>.

²⁵⁵ The figure is likely to have been higher since the data is based on Freedom of Information responses from 17 out of 37 police forces in England contacted and excludes the Metropolitan Police Service. See Divya Talwar, ‘Cost of policing EDL protests a ‘considerable concern’’, *BBC News*, 19 July 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23364013>.

²⁵⁶ ‘Policing of EDL demonstrations cost West Yorkshire Police £3 million’, *Halifax Courier*, 28 November 2013, <https://www.halifaxcourier.co.uk/news/policing-of-edl-demonstrations-cost-west-yorkshire-police-ps3-million-2670503>; Divya Talwar, ‘Cost of policing EDL protests a ‘considerable concern’’, *BBC News*, 19 July 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23364013>.

²⁵⁷ Jessica Elgot, ‘EDL Marches Costing Taxpayers £10m In Police Patrolling Costs’, *Huffington Post*, 19 July 2013, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/07/19/edl-cost_n_3622366.html.

- 3.38 The political party Britain First was another explicitly anti-Muslim Far Right group that emerged in 2011 just as differences within the EDL leadership were starting to undermine its dominance of the Far Right protest movement.²⁵⁸ The party's opposition to what it called the "Islamisation"²⁵⁹ of the UK was part of a wider shift by some from the biologically racist politics of the traditional Far Right towards an agenda that characterised Muslims as a particular threat to native British culture.²⁶⁰ In 2014, the party became known for targeting mosques, trying to force their way onto the premises in so-called Mosque Invasions,²⁶¹ and for their distinctive Britain First-branded militaristic jungle-green fleeces and watch hats. Britain First leader Paul Golding was fined twice over an 18-month period in 2015 and 2016, for wearing a uniform with political objectives.²⁶² The wearing of paramilitary and political uniforms was made an offence under the Public Order Act 1936 and intended to curb the activities of Sir Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, or 'Blackshirts'.²⁶³ By the time Britain First chair Ashlea Simon contested the 2022 Wakefield by-election, the party had adopted a more traditional anti-immigrant position, with her battle bus featuring with the slogans "Stop immigration" and "British people first".²⁶⁴
- 3.39 Alongside the EDL, another group that has proven able to draw large numbers of people onto the street is the Football Lads Alliance (FLA), later the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA). The FLA's first march in June 2017, which ended at the site of the London Bridge terrorist attack, was reported to have attracted 10,000 people,²⁶⁵ and within weeks the group had 30,000 supporters on Facebook.²⁶⁶ Like the EDL, the FLA made some early

²⁵⁸ Joel Busher et al, 'The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During 'Hot Periods' Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism', CREST (February 2022), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/> p. 22.

²⁵⁹ 'The far-right: What is Britain First?', *Sky News*, 30 November 2017, <https://news.sky.com/story/the-far-right-what-is-britain-first-11149915>.

²⁶⁰ Dr Joe Mulhall, 'Modernising and Mainstreaming: The Contemporary British Far Right', Hope not Hate, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834417/Joe_Mulhall_-_Modernising_and_Mainstreaming_The_Contemporary_British_Far_Right.pdf, p. 3.

²⁶¹ Helen Pidd and Declan Lloyd, 'Police investigate far-right 'invasions' of Bradford and Glasgow mosques', *The Guardian*, 13 May 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/13/police-far-right-invasions-bradford-glasgow-mosques-britain-first>; Brian Whelan, 'Britain First: inside the extremist group targeting mosques', *The Guardian*, 19 June 2014, <https://www.channel4.com/news/britain-first-far-right-anti-muslim-extremists-mosques>.

²⁶² Paul Wright, 'Britain First leader Paul Golding convicted for wearing 'intimidating' fleece', *International Business Times*, 8 January 2016, <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/britain-first-leader-paul-golding-convicted-wearing-intimidating-fleece-1573621>.

²⁶³ Chris York, 'Jayda Fransen Guilty: Britain First Deputy Leader Convicted Of Religiously Aggravated Harassment', *Huffington Post*, 29 November 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/jayda-fransen-guilty_uk_581b4523e4b0ab6e4c1baa27.

²⁶⁴ 'VIDEO: BRITAIN FIRST ACTIVISTS INUNDATE WAKEFIELD', Patriot Organisation, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/britain_first_activists_inundate_wakefield.

²⁶⁵ Ben Bryant and Tomasz Frymorgen, 'Football Lads Alliance: We could have a civil war in this country', *BBC Three*, 9 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/e5ee9e0a-18d7-49a4-a3c2-80b6b4222058>.

²⁶⁶ Bhvishya Patel, 'Nazi salutes in the heart of London: March by 'far-right anti-Muslim football supporters' turns violent as dozens fight with officers and marcher yells 'I'll kill you' at police', *Daily Mail*, 14 October 2018, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6272589/March-Democratic-Football-Lads-Alliance-turns-violent-marcher-yells-Ill-kill-you.html>.

attempts to distance itself from the Far Right,²⁶⁷ presenting itself as a movement of football fans and veterans against extremism.²⁶⁸ However, controversial Far Right figures and groups known for promoting hostility to Muslims quickly gravitated towards its marches and were tolerated by its leadership.²⁶⁹ A DFLA march in London in October 2018 showed that the group had taken a more overtly extreme turn: organisers said they were protesting "returning jihadists", "thousands of AWOL migrants", "rape gangs and groomers", and "veterans treated like traitors";²⁷⁰ and some demonstrators threatened violence at both the police and Far Left counter-protesters.²⁷¹

3.40 Today, the most prominent, albeit much smaller, Far Right group is Patriotic Alternative, founded in 2019 by former BNP youth leader Mark Collett.²⁷² The group promotes the Great Replacement Theory, the view that a white indigenous European populations are being replaced by non-European immigrants,²⁷³ and members regularly film themselves in the countryside with banners saying, "White British minority by 2066" and "We will not be replaced". Patriotic Alternative has been characterised by the Jewish charity the Community Security Trust as both racist and antisemitic.²⁷⁴ For example, Lady Michele Renouf spoke at the group's 2022 spring conference.²⁷⁵ Reouf has in the past supported Holocaust denier David Irving and who was investigated by police in Germany for suspected incitement after she made comments denying the Holocaust.²⁷⁶

3.41 Patriotic Alternative initially focused on building an online presence through its blog and social media campaigns, such as its 'White Lives Matter' stickering

²⁶⁷ The group's early crowdfunding website stated: "We are a new movement with a new purpose to fight extremism, and we in no way display or condone racist behaviours." Louis Emanuel, 'Heavy police presence in London as Football Lads Alliance and EDL march', *The Times*, 24 June 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/heavy-police-presence-in-the-capital-as-football-lads-alliance-and-edl-march-xtcprkrw7>.

²⁶⁸ Ben Bryant and Tomasz Frymorgen, 'Football Lads Alliance: We could have a civil war in this country', *BBC Three*, 9 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/e5ee9e0a-18d7-49a4-a3c2-80b6b4222058>.

²⁶⁹ Ben Bryant and Tomasz Frymorgen, 'Football Lads Alliance: We could have a civil war in this country', *BBC Three*, 9 May 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/e5ee9e0a-18d7-49a4-a3c2-80b6b4222058>. The DFLA: a(nother) new UK far right movement?, Matthew Feldman, Centre for the Analysis of the Radical Right, 4 May 2019, <https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2019/05/04/the-dfla-another-new-uk-far-right-movement/>. Archived here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190504224040/https://www.radicalrightanalysis.com/2019/05/04/the-dfla-another-new-uk-far-right-movement/>.

²⁷⁰ James Morris, 'DFLA march in London: Far-right protest spills into violence as police officers attacked', *The Standard*, 16 October 2018, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/crime/dfla-march-in-london-farright-protest-spills-into-violence-as-police-officers-attacked-a3961276.html>.

²⁷¹ Bhvishya Patel, 'Nazi salutes in the heart of London: March by 'far-right anti-Muslim football supporters' turns violent as dozens fight with officers and marcher yells 'I'll kill you' at police', *Daily Mail*, 14 October 2018, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6272589/March-Democratic-Football-Lads-Alliance-turns-violent-marcher-yells-ill-kill-you.html>.

²⁷² 'Patriotic Alternative: Uniting the Fascist Right?' (August 2020), https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HnH_Patriotic-Alternative-report_2020-08-v3.pdf.

²⁷³ 'Great Replacement Theory', Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/great-replacement-theory>

²⁷⁴ https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/at-the-gym-in-the-hills-the-far-right-fight-clubs-where-men-train-to-make-britain-white-7kq6pp2sk?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1633763703.

²⁷⁵ Lady Michèle Renouf - The Modified SACHS Concept // Patriotic Alternative 2022 Spring Conference, 11 March 2022, https://odysee.com/2022_spring_conference_ladmichele:c.

²⁷⁶ 'British woman investigated for Holocaust denial in Germany', *The Independent*, 18 February 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/british-holocaust-denial-germany-police-investigation-europe-news-latest-a8216586.html>.

campaign,²⁷⁷ and offline primarily through outdoor activities, such as its summer camp, hiking, and fitness courses, and conferences.²⁷⁸ Leaders are reported to have been involved in various forms of physical and combat training that could be seen as readying for street fighting.²⁷⁹ So far, the group has not achieved the mass mobilisation seen by the EDL and the DFLA. While it claims 15,000 supporters,²⁸⁰ anti-racism campaigners assess Patriotic Alternative's membership to be in the low hundreds,²⁸¹ and its annual conference in November 2021 was attended by around 250 people.²⁸² Having been largely removed from mainstream social media (except YouTube²⁸³), the group uses alternative platforms, such as Telegram, where it has more than 5,000 subscribers,²⁸⁴ and Odysee.com for video sharing, where at the time of writing it has almost 2,000 followers.²⁸⁵ In April 2023, it was reported that members Patriotic Alternative allegedly frustrated with what they called the group's lack of political direction and focus had left and formed a new group called Homeland.²⁸⁶

3.42 While it is too early to assess the full impact of Patriotic Alternative and Homeland activities, anti-racist campaigners have observed that the group began to unite elements of the fractured Far Right in the UK, including by attracting both a former member of National Action as well as previous supporters of Yaxley-Lennon.²⁸⁷ Two studies of the group have argued that

²⁷⁷ Following the Black Lives Matter protests in summer 2020, Patriotic Alternative members filmed themselves displaying banners saying 'White Lives Matter' in locations around the UK and encouraged other to do the same. See Lizzie Dearden, 'British far right 'becoming more racist' after Black Lives Matter protests, report finds', *Independent*, 15 August 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/far-right-black-lives-matter-protests-racism-patriotic-alternative-hope-not-hate-a9672401.html>; 'Patriotic Alternative: Far-right Ben Nevis promo video slammed', *The National*, 8 August 2020, <https://www.thenational.scot/news/19499673.patriotic-alternative-far-right-ben-nevis-promo-video-slammed/>.

²⁷⁸ For an overview of the group's activities see 'Patriotic Alternative: Uniting the Fascist Right?' (August 2020), https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HnH_Patriotic-Alternative-report_2020-08-v3.pdf, p. 3. For the group's description of its 2021 annual summer camp and hike, see 'National Summer Camp and Hike 2021', Patriotic Alternative, 12 July 2021, https://www.patrioticalternative.org.uk/national_summer_camp_hike_2021. One member, jailed for terrorism offences in June 2023, was known at Patriotic Alternative's 'Head of Fitness' after he set up a channel called Fascist Fitness to hand out exercise and fitness tips, see 'Far-right fitness guru jailed over terror manifestos', *BBC News*, 23 June 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-66000035>. Police intelligence reports detail how the group holds events and conferences for its members, see 'National Public Order - Public Safety Cultural Nationalism Thematic Group Assessment Patriotic Alternative (PA)', National Police Coordination Centre (January and February 2023), https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/disclosure-logs/operations-coordination-committee/2023/324-2023-npcc-sib-patriotic-alternative-group-assessment-february-2023-final-1_redacted.pdf, slide 10.

²⁷⁹ Dominic Kennedy, 'At the gym, in the hills, the far-right fight clubs where men train to make Britain white', *The Times*, 9 October 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/at-the-gym-in-the-hills-the-far-right-fight-clubs-where-men-train-to-make-britain-white-7kq6pp2sk?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1633763703.

²⁸⁰ Dominic Kennedy, 'At the gym, in the hills, the far-right fight clubs where men train to make Britain white', *The Times*, 9 October 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/at-the-gym-in-the-hills-the-far-right-fight-clubs-where-men-train-to-make-britain-white-7kq6pp2sk?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1633763703.

²⁸¹ Ben Quinn, 'Patriotic Alternative 'trying to inflame local tensions' in Britain to spread far-right stance', *The Guardian*, 15 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/feb/15/patriotic-alternative-trying-to-inflame-local-tensions-in-britain-to-spread-far-right-stance>.

²⁸² Dan Taylor, 'Police called after far right group gathers for conference at The Villa hotel in Levens', *Daily Mail*, 2 November 2021, <https://www.nwemail.co.uk/news/19686642.police-called-far-right-group-gathers-conference-villa-hotel-levens/>.

²⁸³ Patriotic Alternative, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/@PatrioticAlternative/featured>.

²⁸⁴ Patriotic Alternative Official, Telegram, <https://t.me/PatrioticAlternativeOfficial>.

²⁸⁵ Patriotic Alternative, Odysee, <https://odysee.com/@PatrioticAlternative:f>.

²⁸⁶ Hamish Morrison, 'Patriotic Alternative split results in 'dangerous' Homeland group', *The National*, 24 April 2023, <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23477488.patriotic-alternative-split-results-dangerous-homeland-group/>.

²⁸⁷ 'Patriotic Alternative: Uniting the Fascist Right?' (August 2020), https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HnH_Patriotic-Alternative-report_2020-08-v3.pdf.

typifies a shift in the British Far Right away from anti-Muslim mobilisation back to more biologically racist themes following the high-profile Black Lives Matter protests in June 2020.²⁸⁸

- **The UK does not currently face a significant threat from the Far Right at the ballot box. Groups that engage in electioneering are fragmented, weak, and contest elections more to raise awareness for their ideas rather than win seats.**
- **Public protest is a key strategy of Far Right groups in the UK, to raise awareness and to influence both lawmakers and public debate. Prominent anti-minority groups and influencers have engaged in mass street mobilisation and intimidation, while newer, more traditionally racist groups film provocative stunts for social media content.**
- **Far Right street protests present a serious public order problem, they risk stoking inter-communal tensions, and the costs of policing protests safely is a significant challenge.**

Far Right Hijacking of Mainstream Issues

3.43 While the Far Right in Britain has not been able to win meaningful support for its extreme political programme, it has in recent years looked for ways to mobilise around specific issues where there is some popular sympathy. Since Far-Right groups tend to be explicitly hostile towards ethnic minority communities, something which the British public is not,²⁸⁹ some have taken up connected secondary concerns as cover for their real agenda. Alongside the stated opposition to Islamist extremism described in the previous section, the primary areas of public concern where I have observed Far Right groups seeking public backing are around issues relating to immigration, integration, and identity politics. These are subjects on which it is entirely legitimate to take a wide range of views, and to campaign accordingly. Yet the Far Right has instrumentalised popular sentiment to engage in threatening and sometimes violent activism and to recruit support for a more extreme agenda.

Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation

3.44 The revelation of widespread sexual exploitation of mainly white girls by largely Asian men in towns and cities across the Midlands and North, about

²⁸⁸ Dr. William Alcorn, 'Turning Back to Biologised Racism: A Content Analysis of Patriotic Alternative UK's Online Discourse', *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, 22 February 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/02/22/turning-back-to-biologised-racism-a-content-analysis-of-patriotic-alternative-uks-online-discourse/>; Lizzie Dearden, 'British far right 'becoming more racist' after Black Lives Matter protests, report finds', *Independent*, 15 August 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/far-right-black-lives-matter-protests-racism-patriotic-alternative-hope-not-hate-a9672401.html>.

²⁸⁹ 'Attitudes to race and inequality in Great Britain', *Ipsos*, 15 June 2020, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-uk/attitudes-race-and-inequality-great-britain>.

which there was justified public anger, has been particularly seized upon by Far Right and anti-minority activists. More commonly known as grooming gangs, the issue is one around which the EDL, its former leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, Britain First, the DFLA and Patriotic Alternative have all framed themselves over the last decade.

- 3.45 Within weeks of the publication in August 2014 of the independent report on child sexual abuse in Rotherham, the EDL had organised what it called on Facebook, "a protest against the Pakistani Muslim grooming gangs," labelling Rotherham as the "Islamic paedophile capital of Britain". Police arrested four in connection with the event and were themselves attacked by protestors with missiles and barriers.²⁹⁰ Far Right activists also targeted several grooming gang trials. In March 2018, Britain First leader and deputy Paul Golding and Jayda Fransen were convicted of religiously aggravated harassment after they harassed people, distributed leaflets, and posted videos with anti-Muslim messages during a rape trial at Canterbury Crown Court the year before.²⁹¹ In May 2018, Yaxley-Lennon was arrested outside Leeds Crown Court when a judge had to pause jury deliberations on account of Yaxley-Lennon livestreaming from outside the court, confronting defendants and potentially prejudicing the jury.²⁹² He was found to be in contempt of court for breaching reporting restrictions, with judges describing his so-called citizen journalism²⁹³ as a "serious interference with the administration of justice".²⁹⁴ A 'Free Tommy' demonstration the following month, after Yaxley-Lennon was jailed for contempt of court, attracted around 15,000 people.²⁹⁵
- 3.46 The Far Right's hijacking of the grooming gangs scandal has been flagged as concerning by both politicians and counter-extremism experts. In December 2018, the former Labour Shadow Minister Sarah Champion warned about groups on the political extremes taking up the abuse of women "for their own political agenda".²⁹⁶ In her 2019 report as Commissioner for Countering Extremism, Sara Khan described how Far Right actors were able to exacerbate local tensions in Sunderland around allegations of sexual assaults

²⁹⁰ 'EDL supporters attack police during Rotherham sex abuse protest', *The Guardian*, 13 September 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/sep/13/edl-english-defence-league-protesters-attack-police-rotherham-demonstration>.

²⁹¹ 'Challenging Hateful Extremism', Commission for Countering Extremism (October 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf, p. 102.

²⁹² 'Tommy Robinson could have caused Huddersfield grooming trials to collapse and child rapists go free', *Independent*, 20 October 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/tommy-robinson-prison-jail-grooming-gangs-huddersfield-leeds-contempt-court-facebook-video-a8592871.html>.

²⁹³ Secret Barrister, 'No, Tommy Robinson's court win is not a victory for "freedom of speech"', *The New Statesman*, 5 October 2023, <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk-politics/2018/08/no-tommy-robinson-s-court-win-not-victory-freedom-speech>.

²⁹⁴ Ben Quinn, 'Tommy Robinson faces jail after being found in contempt of court', *The Guardian*, 5 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jul/05/tommy-robinson-failed-to-check-on-reporting-ban>.

²⁹⁵ Damien Gayle and Zac Ntim, 'Protestors charged after pro-Tommy Robinson rally in London', *The Guardian*, 11 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/jun/11/protesters-charged-after-pro-tommy-robinson-rally-in-london>.

²⁹⁶ Katie Razzall and Yasminara Khan, 'Far-right and far-left extremists use abuse for own agenda - Sarah Champion', *BBC News*, 20 December 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-46635022>.

committed by asylum seekers.²⁹⁷ One study documented 18 demonstrations in the area, between September 2016 and October 2017, and between May 2018 and December 2018, in response to separate claims of sexual violence.²⁹⁸ The campaigns involved both local anti-minority activists and national groups and influencers, such as Yaxley-Lennon and Britain First – who at times appeared to be vying for leadership on the issue²⁹⁹ – as well as the DFLA. The largest protest, in September 2018, resulted in minor clashes with counter protestors, including from Far Left anti-racist group Stand Up to Racism.³⁰⁰

- 3.47 More recently, Patriotic Alternative has mobilised around the issue, with members of the group’s West Midlands branch leafleting a large march against grooming gangs organised by Yaxley-Lennon in Telford in January 2022 and holding up banners saying “100+ Telford girls raped by foreigners” and “Our ‘leaders’ let it happen”.³⁰¹ In April 2021, the podcast Patriotic Talk, then closely linked to Patriotic Alternative, featured as a guest Australian neo-Nazi Thomas Sewell who on air called for the mass rape of police officers, social workers and politicians involved in “cover up” of on-street grooming in the UK.³⁰² The episode was later taken down, according to Sewell, because “the Patriotic Alternative guys thought it was a little bit too spicy and it might risk them getting proscribed”.³⁰³

Immigration, Small Boats, and Housing for Asylum Seekers

- 3.48 Favours greater controls on immigration cannot be framed as solely the preserve of the Far Right. Polling continues to indicate public reservations about levels of migration and the issue of small boats crossing the channel,

²⁹⁷ ‘Challenging Hateful Extremism’, Commission for Countering Extremism (October 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf, p.70.

²⁹⁸ Joel Busher et al, ‘The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During ‘Hot Periods’ Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism’, CREST (February 2022), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/>, p. 15

²⁹⁹ Joel Busher et al, ‘The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During ‘Hot Periods’ Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism’, CREST (February 2022), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/>, p. 55, 57 & 62.

³⁰⁰ Joel Busher et al, ‘The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During ‘Hot Periods’ Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism’, CREST (February 2022), <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/>, p. 72, see also The Newsroom, ‘Three arrested after demonstrations take place in Sunderland city centre’, *Sunderland Echo*, 28 February 2019, <https://www.sunderlandecho.com/news/three-arrested-after-demonstrations-take-place-sunderland-city-centre-254435>.

³⁰¹ ‘Tommy Robinson Telford Activism | January 2022’, Patriotic Alternative, YouTube, 1 February 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OCpCfQYic5g>.

³⁰² Gregory Davis and David Lawrence, ‘Patriotic Alternative – Britain’s Fascist Threat’, HOPE not hate, November 2021, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/patriotic-alternative-report-2021-11-v3.pdf>, p. 14.

³⁰³ Dominic Kennedy, ‘At the gym, in the hills, the far-right fight clubs where men train to make Britain white’, *The Times*, 9 October 2021, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/at-the-gym-in-the-hills-the-far-right-fight-clubs-where-men-train-to-make-britain-white-7kq6pp2sk?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter#Echobox=1633763703.

and this is true of voters in traditionally Labour-supporting parts of the country, as well as among Conservative voters.³⁰⁴

- 3.49 Far Right groups have sought to capitalise on such public feeling around small boat crossings in the English Channel, and the housing of migrants in hotels across the country. Britain First, for example, has filmed leaders allegedly “exposing” hotels for accommodating migrants and asylum seekers for its website.³⁰⁵ Following the evacuation of refugees from Afghanistan in August 2021, Britain First targeted several hotels in locations being used to accommodate those refugees, including Telford, Stoke-on-Trent, and Colchester. Anti-racism campaigners claim these videos were viewed 40,000 times in under two months.³⁰⁶
- 3.50 Patriotic Alternative demonstrations against the re-housing of migrants crossing the Channel have attracted protestors across the country. The group denied suggestions that it organised the violent anti-migrant protest outside a hotel in Knowsley, Merseyside on 10 February 2023.³⁰⁷ The protest arose after a video of a school girl being asked for her phone number allegedly by an asylum seeker was circulated widely online, including by Far Right activists who alleged the man was staying at the Knowsley hotel.³⁰⁸ It was subsequently reported that both Britain First and Patriotic Alternative had posted content on social media singling out the hotel for accommodating migrants in the weeks before the riot.³⁰⁹ Moreover, Patriotic Alternative activist James Costello was filmed at the protests and weeks earlier he and other members had distributed anti-migrant leaflets in the area.³¹⁰ During the riot,

³⁰⁴ Matt Dathan, ‘Migrant Channel boat crossings could cost Tories election’, *The Times*, 8 November 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/migrant-channel-boat-crossings-could-cost-tories-election-wskmdwxb3>.

‘‘Stop the boats’’ now second-biggest concern of UK Tory voters — poll’, *Politico*, 9 March 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/stop-the-boats-now-second-biggest-concern-of-tory-voters-poll/>.

³⁰⁵ ‘VIDEO: BRITAIN FIRST EXPOSES THE DOLPHIN HOTEL IN SOUTHAMPTON FOR HOUSING ILLEGAL MIGRANTS!’, Patriot Organisation, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/video_britain_first_exposes_the_dolphin_hotel_in_southampton_for_housing_illegal_migrants; ‘VIDEO: BRITAIN FIRST EXPOSES THE IBIS IN ROTHERHAM FOR HOUSING ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS!’, Patriot Organisation, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/video_britain_first_exposes_the_ibis_in_rotherham_for_housing_illegal_migrants; ‘VIDEO: BRITAIN FIRST EXPOSES THE BELVOIR HOTEL IN NOTTINGHAM FOR HOUSING MIGRANTS!’, Patriot Organisation, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/video_britain_first_exposes_the_belvoir_hotel_in_nottingham_for_housing_migrants; ‘VIDEO: BRITAIN FIRST EXPOSES THE GREEN GABLES HOTEL IN SCARBOROUGH FOR HOUSING MIGRANTS!’, Patriot Organisation, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/video_britain_first_exposes_the_green_gables_hotel_in_scarborough_for_housing_migrants; ‘VIDEO: BRITAIN FIRST TEAM VERBALLY ABUSED AND INTIMIDATED AT SCARBOROUGH MIGRANT HOTEL!’, Patriot Organisation, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/video_britain_first_team_verbally_abused_and_intimidated_at_scarborough_migrant_hotel; ‘VIDEO: PAUL GOLDING ASSAULTED AND VERBALLY ABUSED AT YORKSHIRE MIGRANT HOTEL!’, Patriot Organisation, https://www.patriot-organisation.com/video_paul_golding_assaulted_and_verbally_abused_at_yorkshire_migrant_hotel.

³⁰⁶ Diane Taylor, ‘Far-right groups in UK target hotels housing Afghan refugees’, *The Guardian*, 25 October 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/25/far-right-groups-in-uk-target-hotels-housing-afghan-refugees>.

³⁰⁷ Diane Taylor, ‘Far-right protesters clash with police at Merseyside hotel housing asylum seekers’, *The Guardian*, 10 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/10/far-right-demonstrators-clash-with-police-at-liverpool-hotel-housing-asylum-seekers>.

³⁰⁸ Revealed - Video that sparked migrant hotel riot: Clip of schoolgirl, 15, being ‘hassled for her phone number by man, 25,’ is behind night of violence after it was shared on social media by activists, *Daily Mail*, 11 February 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11739567/Riot-sparked-local-fury-schoolgirl-posted-video-saying-sexually-harassed.html>.

³⁰⁹ Mobilising the mob: How far-right fuelled asylum hotel riot with malicious rumour and misinformation, *Independent*, 14 February 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/knowsley-asylum-seeker-hotel-riot-b2281367.html>

³¹⁰ Patriotic Alternative posted anti-migrant leaflets before Merseyside riot, *The Times*, 13 February 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/patriotic-alternative-posted-anti-migrant-leaflets-before-merseyside-riot-ngpvgrzh8>

protestors set fire to a police vehicle leading to fifteen arrests.³¹¹ To date, nine males have been charged with violent disorder, among them four teenage boys.³¹²

- 3.51 In the two weeks that followed the Knowsley riot, Patriotic Alternative organised anti-migrant protests in Hull, Leeds and Erskine in Scotland, and then Skegness in Lincolnshire and Newquay in Cornwall,³¹³ with members also joining a larger protest in Cannock in Staffordshire.³¹⁴ In Cornwall, the group was met by a counter-protest, featuring individuals dressed in all black wearing balaclavas (so-called black bloc tactics), organised by the radical anti-capitalist group Cornwall Resists.³¹⁵

Identity Politics – Protecting Statues and Drag Queen Story Hour

- 3.52 I have seen examples of the Far Right seeking to gain traction through elements of the so-called culture wars, such as around public reservations about both the removal of public statues with links to slavery and colonialism, and ‘drag queen story hour’ events for parents and young children.
- 3.53 In response to the vandalism of the Cenotaph and the Sir Winston Churchill statue during a Black Lives Matter protest in June 2020, the DFLA organised the ‘Defend our Memorial’ protest allegedly to protect statues from another planned BLM protest.³¹⁶ Stephen Yaxley Lennon and Britain First supported the action.³¹⁷ Concerns about potential clashes with these groups saw the BLM organisers cancel their protest.³¹⁸ On the day, protestors clashed with police officers and there were significant violent incidents with those who had nonetheless gathered in support of BLM. There were reports of 15 people being treated for injuries, including two police officers, and six members of the

³¹¹ Staff and asylum seekers attacked at Knowsley hotel, police say, *BBC News*, 16 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-merseyside-64955270>.

³¹² ‘Four charged following recent incident of disorder in Knowsley’ (May 2023), Merseyside Police, <https://www.merseyside.police.uk/news/merseyside/news/2023/may/four-charged-following-recent-incident-of-disorder-in-knowsley/>; ‘Five charged after warrants in Kirkby following incidents of disorder in Knowsley’ (July 2023), Merseyside Police, <https://www.merseyside.police.uk/news/merseyside/news/2023/july/five-charged-after-warrants-in-kirkby-following-incidents-of-disorder-in-knowsley/>.

³¹³ PA Media, ‘Asylum seeker hotel protests take place in Skegness and Newquay’, *The Guardian*, 25 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/25/asylum-seeker-hotel-protests-take-place-in-skegness-and-newquay>.

³¹⁴ Ben Quinn, ‘Patriotic Alternative ‘trying to inflame local tensions’ in Britain to spread far-right stance’, *The Guardian*, 15 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2023/feb/15/patriotic-alternative-trying-to-inflame-local-tensions-in-britain-to-spread-far-right-stance>; PA Media, ‘Asylum seeker hotel protests take place in Skegness and Newquay’, *The Guardian*, 25 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/25/asylum-seeker-hotel-protests-take-place-in-skegness-and-newquay>.

³¹⁵ Steve Topple, ‘Patriotic Alternative had a bad weekend, despite the Guardian amplifying its views’, *Canary*, 27 February 2023, <https://www.thecanary.co/trending/2023/02/27/patriotic-alternative-had-a-bad-weekend-despite-the-guardian-amplifying-its-views/>; Cornwall Resists, Twitter, 25 February 2023, <https://twitter.com/resistg7/status/1629534511892422660?s=20>.

³¹⁶ Simon Osborne, ‘Fears of violence as far-right groups outline plan to ‘defend’ London statues this weekend’, *Express*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1293961/london-news-racism-protest-black-lives-matter-democratic-football-lads-alliance-statues>; ‘Far-right protesters and police clash as 5pm curfew set for demonstrations’, *ITV News*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-06-13/black-lives-matter-protesters-must-disperse-by-5pm-on-saturday-police-warn>.

³¹⁷ Dan Sabbagh, ‘Campaigners fear far-right ‘defence’ of statues such as Churchill’s’, *The Guardian*, 10 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/10/far-right-protesters-plan-defence-of-statues-such-as-churchills>.

³¹⁸ ‘Black Lives Matter protest called off over far-right fears’, *ITV News*, 12 June 2020, <https://www.itv.com/news/2020-06-12/black-lives-matter-protest-called-off-over-far-right-fears>.

public were taken to hospital.³¹⁹ Over 100 people were arrested for offences including violent disorder, assault on police, possession of an offensive weapon, breach of the peace, being drunk and disorderly and possession of Class A drugs.³²⁰

3.54 Drag queen story hour involves drag artists reading stories for parents and children in venues such as public libraries, art galleries, pubs, and schools (it was established in San Francisco in 2015).³²¹ There is nothing inherently extremist about parents not wanting their children to attend these events or believing that civic buildings are not an appropriate venue for these activities. Such discussions are a healthy function of public debate. However, the drag queen story hour events have become a flashpoint between Far Right and Far Left or anti-fascist activists.³²² One event at Tate Britain in February 2023 saw 30 demonstrators gather for a protest by Patriotic Alternative, with five activists managing to get inside the gallery.³²³ They were met by counter-demonstrators, led by the Far Left group Stand Up To Racism, with some scuffles between demonstrators.³²⁴ One person was arrested on suspicion of making a racially aggravated offence to a police officer.³²⁵ A series of Far Right protests outside a south London pub hosting monthly drag queen performances for families turned violent on 24 June 2023 when protesters, including members of the DFLA, Britain First and the neo-Nazi music network Blood & Honour, clashed with trans rights and anti-racism counter demonstrators, led by a local coalition of trans activists called South East London Love.³²⁶ Both sides alleged violence by the other on social media and the police arrested three people, two for assault, and one for a public order offence.³²⁷

³¹⁹ 'London protests: Demonstrators clash with police', *BBC News*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53031072>.

³²⁰ 'London protests: More than 100 arrests after violent clashes with police', *BBC News*, 14 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53037767>.

³²¹ Tim Jonze, '“I'm just trying to make the world a little brighter”: how the culture wars hijacked Drag Queen Story Hour', *The Guardian*, 11 August 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2022/aug/11/im-just-trying-to-make-the-world-a-little-brighter-how-the-culture-wars-hijacked-drag-queen-story-hour>.

³²² Danya Bazaraa, 'Right-wing protesters and counter-demonstrators clash over drag queen story hour at London pub which says there is no such event (though they did hold one last year)', *Daily Mail*, 10 March 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11844865/Right-wing-protesters-demonstrate-against-drag-queen-story-hour-pub-says-no-event.html>.

³²³ Geraldine Kendall Adams, 'Protesters clash outside Tate Britain over Drag Queen Story Hour', Museums Association, 14 February 2023, <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2023/02/protesters-clash-outside-tate-britain-over-drag-queen-story-hour/#>.

³²⁴ Liam James, 'Protesters clash at Tate Britain over drag queen reading to children', *Independent*, 11 February 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/tate-britain-drag-protest-aida-dee-b2280414.html>.

Siba Jackson, 'Tate Britain: Protesters clash over drag queen story time at London art gallery', *Sky News*, 12 February 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/tate-britain-protesters-clash-over-drag-queen-story-time-at-london-art-gallery-12808361>

³²⁵ Harry Taylor, 'One arrested amid Tate Britain protest over drag queen children's event', *The Guardian*, 11 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/11/tate-britain-protest-drag-queen-childrens-storytelling-event-arrest>.

³²⁶ Jess O'Thompson, 'Exclusive: The Truth About the Far Right Attack on Honor Oak', *Trans Safety Network*, 27 June 2023, <https://transafety.network/posts/far-right-attack-on-honour-oak/>; '10 days until Turning Point UK and their Nazi mates will again try to attack our community. Please join us to help confront them and show them how wrong they were to think they could gain a foothold back in South London. We hope to see you there.', South London Love, Twitter, 14 June 2023, <https://twitter.com/SELondonLove/status/1668899503187820544>.

³²⁷ Patrick Sawyer, 'Trans activists 'attacked' at children's drag queen story time event', *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 June 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/06/24/trans-activists-attacked-children-drag-london-honor-oak-pub/>.

- **The Far Right has instrumentalised popular sentiment around immigration, integration, and identity politics to engage in threatening and sometimes violent activism and to recruit support for a more extreme agenda.**
- **Recurring themes in these campaigns are the protection of women and children from a perceived outsider or unnatural threat and the perceived failure of political leaders and authorities to protect native white Britons.**
- **Campaigns now typically involve Far Right campaigners filming their real-world activities and sharing the content on social media content both to amplify the physical protests and to raise awareness of their issues and agenda.**

Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism

3.55 The threat to the UK from Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT) is much smaller than that from Islamist Terrorism and Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism. A terrorist attack in the UK motivated by LASIT ideology to assessed be highly unlikely.³²⁸ While the majority of LASI activity remains focused on protest action, covered in the next section, it is worthwhile to briefly sketch the nature and scale of LASIT in the UK.

Scale of Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism

- 3.56 There is little data to gauge the scale of LASIT in the UK. While the country has avoided a fatal LASIT attack, there has been some disrupted activity in recent years,³²⁹ which will likely have resulted in a small number of MI5 investigations and a handful of LASIT offenders in prisons. There are currently no LASIT proscribed organisations in the UK. Other metrics such as Prevent referrals do not delineate LASIT as a motivating ideology and individuals will have been categorised as other.
- 3.57 Of the 32 terrorism plots prevented by the Intelligence Community and Counter Terrorism Policing between March 2017 and December 2021, two were related to LASIT,³³⁰ accounting for 6% overall. As previously mentioned, the absence of a public record makes it difficult to identify foiled plots.

³²⁸ 'The Threat from Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT)', Protect UK, 11 November, 2022, <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-left-wing-anarchist-and-single-issue-terrorism-lasit>.

³²⁹ 'The Threat from Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT)', Protect UK, 11 November 2022, <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-left-wing-anarchist-and-single-issue-terrorism-lasit>.

³³⁰ 'Latest Home Office statistics reveal 7 late-stage plots foiled since March 2020', Counter Terrorism Policing, 9 December 2021, <https://www.counterterrorism.police.uk/latest-home-office-statistics-reveal-7-late-stage-plots-foiled-since-march-2020/>.

However, from reporting of terrorism cases, the two likely cases – both single-issue – are:

- August 2019³³¹: Gabrielle Friel was arrested and later sentenced (aged 22) to 10 years' imprisonment for possessing articles for terrorist purposes, having amassed a crossbow, crossbow arrows, a machete, and a ballistic vest; Friel had fantasies about spree killings and claimed an affiliation with the involuntary celibate, or incel,³³² movement.³³³
- August 2021: Oliver Lewin (37) arrested and later sentenced to six and a half years' imprisonment for plotting attacks against communications masts and roads.³³⁴ Lewin was an antisemitic conspiracy theorist committed to overthrowing the government.³³⁵

3.58 In addition, the following LASIT activity would likely not be included in MI5 figures:

- January 2018: Nikolaos Karvounakis arrested and later sentenced (aged 35) to eight years and four months' imprisonment for planting an explosive device in Edinburgh. Karvounakis's motivating ideology came from his support for an international eco-terrorist group originating from Mexico known as the International Terrorist Mafia. Karvounakis's plot was not interdicted by the authorities but failed of its own accord.³³⁶

³³¹ Dave Finlay, 'Gabrielle Friel, an 'incel follower' obsessed by mass murder, gets 10-year jail sentence', *The Times*, 13 January 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gabrielle-friel-an-incel-follower-obsessed-by-mass-murder-gets-10-year-jail-sentence-0l6xqs7bz>.

³³² The Involuntary celibate, or incel, movement is a misogynistic online subculture typically comprising heterosexual men who are unable to find sexual partners despite wanting them and who express hate towards people whom they blame for this. While there have been several violent incidents in the UK referenced by the media as incel-inspired, investigations have not shown this to be the primary motivating factor. The phenomenon raises difficult questions around how we conceptualise terrorism. The incel movement shares some features with extremist and terrorist ideologies, notably the duty to protect an in-group from a perceived threat and a supremacist outlook, and some advocates have shown a willingness to engage in violence. However, incels do not have a coherent political platform and those who chose violence rarely do so to bring about social or political change. Incel-related activity is assessed as currently below the terrorism threshold in the UK.

'The Threat from Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT)', Protect UK, 11 November 2022, <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-left-wing-anarchist-and-single-issue-terrorism-lasit>. For a wider discussion of the incel phenomenon, see Lewys Brace, 'A Short Introduction To The Involuntary Celibate Sub-Culture', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 26 August 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/a-short-introduction-to-the-involuntary-celibate-sub-culture/>.

³³³ 'Terrorism prosecutions in Scotland', Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, <https://www.copfs.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism-prosecutions-in-scotland/#gabrielle-friel>; 'Sentencing Statements, HMA v Gabrielle Friel', Judiciary of Scotland, 12 January 2021, <https://judiciary.scot/home/sentences-judgments/sentences-and-opinions/2021/01/12/hma-v-gabrielle-friel>; Dave Finlay, 'Gabrielle Friel, an 'incel follower' obsessed by mass murder, gets 10-year jail sentence', *The Times*, 13 January 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gabrielle-friel-an-incel-follower-obsessed-by-mass-murder-gets-10-year-jail-sentence-0l6xqs7bz>.

³³⁴ 'Man convicted of planning a terrorist attack on national infrastructure to "topple the government"', Crown Prosecution Service, 19 December 2022, <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/man-convicted-planning-terrorist-attack-national-infrastructure-topple-government>; David Mercer and Duncan Gardham, 'COVID conspiracy theorist Oliver Lewin jailed for planning terror attack to 'topple government'', *Sky News*, 20 January 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-conspiracy-theorist-oliver-lewin-jailed-for-planning-terror-attack-to-topple-government-12790787>.

³³⁵ The prosecutor stated: "Mr Lewin, in fact, stated his goal was to topple the British government. He believed that it was dominated by a Jewish elite who took orders from Israel." He also believed that believed that the coronavirus vaccine would result in mass deaths. Rangzeb Hussain, 'Terrorist who wanted to "topple the government because it was dominated by Jews" jailed', *I am Birmingham*, 21 January 2023, <https://www.iambirmingham.co.uk/2023/01/21/terrorist-wanted-topple-government-dominated-jews-jailed/>.

³³⁶ 'Police Scotland welcomes sentencing of Nikolaos Karvounakis', Police Scotland, February 2022, <https://www.scotland.police.uk/whats-happening/news/2022/february/police-scotland-welcomes-sentencing-of-nikolaos-karvounakis/>; 'Terrorism prosecutions in Scotland',

- June 2020: Dominic Noble (32) arrested and charged with possessing and viewing documents likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism in relation to suspected left-wing terrorism.³³⁷ Few details are available because Noble committed suicide while awaiting trial. However, his social media activity appeared to include threats to kill public figures with whom he disagreed, specialist knowledge with which to carry out the threats, and ideological motivations.³³⁸

3.59 As with ERWT, a qualitative sense of these plots, their realism and potential seriousness, is important. In all four cases, the picture is unclear. While Friel had amassed significant weaponry and had a previous conviction for wounding a police officer (when he was a student), he was acquitted of preparing for terrorism motivated by or affiliated with incels.³³⁹ Lewin wanted to overthrow the government and wipe out media organisations³⁴⁰ and, while his preparations for terrorism were extensive, the sentencing judge assessed his prospects of successfully doing so as remote in the extreme.³⁴¹ Karvounakis's claim that he had not intended his device to detonate was refuted by the judge who stated that all necessary components were present and so the potential for explosion and significant injury remained,³⁴² and the full details of Noble's case have not been made public. However, the low level of LASIT activity in the UK limits the potential for qualitative analysis to determine trends.

- **A Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue attack in the UK is judged highly unlikely. Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue activity remains focused on protest action and most issues relate to public disorder.**
- **The limited disrupted Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue terrorist plots in recent years were inspired by various ideologies or movements, involved a range of weapons and targets, and had differing degrees of realism and potential seriousness.**

Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, <https://www.copfs.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism-prosecutions-in-scotland/#nikolaos-karvounakis>; 'Sentencing Statements, HMA v Nikolaos Karvounakis', Judiciary of Scotland, 16 February 2022, <https://www.judiciary.scot/home/sentences-judgments/sentences-and-opinions/2022/02/16/hma-v-nikolaos-karvounakis>.

³³⁷ Brad Deas, 'Huddersfield man charged with terrorism offences', *Telegraph & Argus*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/18502677.huddersfield-man-charged-terrorism-offences/>.

³³⁸ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 60

³³⁹ 'Terrorism prosecutions in Scotland', Crown Office & Procurator Fiscal Service, <https://www.copfs.gov.uk/crime-info/terrorism-prosecutions-in-scotland/#gabrielle-friel>; 'Sentencing Statements, HMA v Gabrielle Friel', Judiciary of Scotland, 12 January 2021, <https://judiciary.scot/home/sentences-judgments/sentences-and-opinions/2021/01/12/hma-v-gabrielle-friel>; Dave Finlay, 'Gabrielle Friel, an 'incel follower' obsessed by mass murder, gets 10-year jail sentence', *The Times*, 13 January 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gabrielle-friel-an-incel-follower-obsessed-by-mass-murder-gets-10-year-jail-sentence-0l6xqs7bz>.

³⁴⁰ Rangzeb Hussain, 'Terrorist who wanted to "topple the government because it was dominated by Jews" jailed', *I am Birmingham*, 21 January 2023, <https://www.iambirmingham.co.uk/2023/01/21/terrorist-wanted-topple-government-dominated-jews-jailed/>.

³⁴¹ Jessica Murray, 'UK conspiracy theorist Oliver Lewin jailed for planning terrorist attack', *The Guardian*, 20 January 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/jan/20/uk-conspiracy-theorist-oliver-lewin-jailed-for-planning-terrorist-attack>.

³⁴² 'Sentencing Statements, HMA v Nikolaos Karvounakis', Judiciary of Scotland, 16 February 2022, <https://www.judiciary.scot/home/sentences-judgments/sentences-and-opinions/2022/02/16/hma-v-nikolaos-karvounakis>.

- **Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue terrorist incidents should be considered on a case-by-case basis.**

Nature of Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism

3.60 Regarding motivating ideologies, LASIT is defined by the Government as terrorism in support of the following goals:

- Left wing terrorism – the replacement of current systems of government with socialist, communist, or similar variations, ultimately to establish a classless society.
- Anarchist terrorism – the replacement of current systems of government, law enforcement and other institutions with a decentralised system that prioritises complete liberty, individual freedom, and collective equality.
- Single-issue terrorism – change to a specific policy or practice, such as factory farming or carbon emissions.³⁴³

3.61 While LASIT is small in terms of the scale of the threat in the UK, it is vast in terms of the motivating ideologies it encompasses. Across Europe, Far Left ideologies typically refers to Marxist and Marxist-Leninist traditions (including Trotskyism, Stalinism, and Maoism) in the form of more structured groups with leading figures;³⁴⁴ in the UK, however, such groups have refrained from violence and terrorism.³⁴⁵ Anarchists share revolutionary aims and an anti-capitalist agenda with traditional Far Left ideologies, but they organise themselves very differently, forming a loose movement with unstructured groups, flexible membership and no prominent leadership.³⁴⁶ While there is a philosophical discussion around the inevitability of violence for any movement looking for revolutionary change, neither extreme Left-Wing ideologies nor anarchism is inherently violent or terroristic. Nonetheless, they both have adherents who are prepared to embrace violence to achieve their political goals.

3.62 The government distinguishes single issue terrorism from Far Left and anarchist ideologies on the grounds that it seeks to change a specific policy or practise, rather than seeking to replace the whole economic, political, or social

³⁴³ Left-wing, Anarchist and Single-issue Extremism in the UK, EUA & JTAC, 22 April 2020 (report number SA002-20); Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2023), <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/European%20Union%20Terrorism%20Situation%20and%20Trend%20report%202023.pdf>, p. 89.

³⁴⁴ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2022), https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Tesat_Report_2022_0.pdf, p. 67.

³⁴⁵ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), chapter 3.

³⁴⁶ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2022), p. 67.

system.³⁴⁷ Single issues of current concern include anti-fascism, animal rights, environmentalism, anti-abortion, anti-vaccination, and the incel movement.³⁴⁸ These issues come from broad and diverse political traditions but become a terrorism threat when adherents advocate the use of terrorist violence to influence the government or intimidate the public in their support.³⁴⁹ The evidence gathered for this review shows, however, how LASI ideologies often crossover. For example, I observed overlap between anarchism and environmentalism, notably the way in which a largely peaceful organisation like Extinction Rebellion is rooted in an anarchist analysis of society and ways of organising. However, in relation to terrorism specifically, JTAC has assessed that where multiple ideologies are present, one of them will likely dominate the individual's mindset.³⁵⁰

3.63 There is insufficient UK data from which to draw trends in terms of what LASIT looks like and where it comes from. While there is a history of terrorism and political violence by extreme LASI groups in the West, notably in continental Europe during the 1970s and 1980s as well as today, terrorism is not characteristic of the British Far Left. Widening the evidence base to include LASIT in Europe gives us a better sense of the nature of the threat but is caveated by the fact that countries use different definitions of LASI terrorism. The most comprehensive database of left-wing and anarchist terrorism – the Europol European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation and Trend (TE-SAT) annual reports³⁵¹ – likely includes phenomenon that would not constitute terrorism under UK law. TE-SAT includes not only incidents of serious violence and criminality, such as the sabotage of critical national infrastructure, which in the UK today would likely meet terrorism investigatory thresholds, but also lower profile crimes such as arson and vandalism, which likely would not. Nonetheless, given that such activity is within scope of the review at large, it is worthwhile to consider recent trends within violent left-wing and anarchist extremism in Europe.

3.64 In terms of where the violent left-wing and anarchist threat is coming from, most attacks in Europe over the last 15 years have been anarchist in nature, and anarchists have been routinely more violent than the traditional Far Left.³⁵² Attacks have been carried out or planned by both Far Left and

³⁴⁷ LASIT assessment, EAU & JTAC, 2020.

³⁴⁸ 'The Threat from Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT)', Protect UK, 11 November 2022, <https://www.protectuk.police.uk/threat-risk/threat-analysis/threat-left-wing-anarchist-and-single-issue-terrorism-lasit>.

³⁴⁹ CONTEST 2023, HM Government, July 2023,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/650b1b8d52e73c000d54dc82/CONTEST_2023_English_updated.pdf, para 24.

³⁵⁰ LASIT assessment, EAU & JTAC, 2020.

³⁵¹ Contains data on failed, foiled, or completed attacks as well as arrests and convictions.

³⁵² Francesco Farinelli and Lorenzo Marinone, 'Contemporary Violent Leftwing and Anarchist Extremism (VLWAE) in the EU: Analysing Threats and Potential for P/CVE', RAN Practitioners, 2021, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ran_vlwae_in_the_eu_analysing_threats_potential_for_p-cve_112021_en.pdf, p. 6-8.

anarchist organisations and by individuals, acting alone or in small groups.³⁵³ In terms of what the threat has looked like, the most common *modus operandi* has been arson (with IEDs or Molotov cocktails) and targets have included critical infrastructure, government institutions and private companies, resulting in significant damage to both public and private property.³⁵⁴ Violence perpetrated by Far Left and anarchist extremists against police forces during demonstrations and intimidation of perceived right-wing political opponents has been noted as areas of concern among EU member states.³⁵⁵

- 3.65 There are three particularly notable features of LASIT in Europe in recent years. The first is the premeditated nature of most of the attacks. Targets are routinely symbolic (e.g., of the state or capitalism, or as enabling social injustice³⁵⁶), the use of IEDs requires preparation, and typically, perpetrators have attempted to evade detection (unlike, for example, Islamist terrorist attackers).³⁵⁷ The second is the specific use of the internet by Far Left and anarchist extremists to claim responsibility for their attacks online, on dedicated websites (such as the Indymedia affiliated websites) or social media platforms, and to show solidarity with the wider international activist community, including with like-minded prisoners.³⁵⁸ Online direct action guides, containing for example, information on target selection and police evasion, are also a potential terrorism risk. The third is the recurrence of certain campaigns and narratives within LASI terrorism and extremism beyond the obvious, notably anti-technology, or anti-science campaigns (i.e., to fight perceived control by states or companies, or to protect the environment),³⁵⁹ support for the Kurdish cause and the PKK (the militant Kurdish nationalist organisation, the Kurdistan Workers' Party), including travel to fight alongside Kurdish militias in Syria),³⁶⁰ and cooperation with extreme animal rights and environmentalist movements.³⁶¹
- 3.66 Some of these European trends are evident on a case-by-case basis in the limited LASIT in the UK. Animal rights and ecological activism has crossed the line into terrorism in the UK, including using IEDs. In the 1980s and 1990s, the direct action group the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and its violent splinter group the Animal Rights Militia (ARM) were responsible for letter

³⁵³ Francesco Farinelli and Lorenzo Marinone, 'Contemporary Violent Leftwing and Anarchist Extremism (VLWAE) in the EU: Analysing Threats and Potential for P/CVE', RAN Practitioners, 2021, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ran_vlwae_in_the_eu_analysing_threats_potential_for_p-cve_112021_en.pdf, p. 6-8.

³⁵⁴ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2023), p. 56.

³⁵⁵ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2023), p. 63.

³⁵⁶ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2022), pp. 64-65.

³⁵⁷ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2023), p. 62.

³⁵⁸ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2022), p. 64.

³⁵⁹ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2023), p. 58.

³⁶⁰ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ran_vlwae_in_the_eu_analysing_threats_potential_for_p-cve_112021_en.pdf, p. 8.

³⁶¹ Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol (2023), p. 65; Francesco Farinelli and Lorenzo Marinone, 'Contemporary Violent Leftwing and Anarchist Extremism (VLWAE) in the EU: Analysing Threats and Potential for P/CVE', RAN Practitioners, 2021, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-11/ran_vlwae_in_the_eu_analysing_threats_potential_for_p-cve_112021_en.pdf, p. 8.

bombs and incendiary devices being placed under cars targeting politicians as well as businesses and research institutes involved in animal testing.³⁶² In the 2000s, the animal rights group Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC), tried to shut down the research organisation Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS).³⁶³ Thirteen activists were convicted of conspiracy to blackmail in three trials between 2009 and 2014 for their roles in the campaign, which included sending incendiary devices and hoax bombs, causing criminal damage to people's homes and cars, and falsely accusing staff members of being paedophiles.³⁶⁴ One judge described the campaign as "synonymous with intimidation, violence and terror", while another said the aim was to shut down HLS by creating a "climate of fear".

3.67 A spate of anarchist terrorism in the Bristol area between 2011 and 2014 also followed the main *modus operandi* seen at European level. Three insurrectionary anarchist groups – the Informal Anarchist Federation, the Angry Foxes Cell and the Earth Liberation Front – claimed responsibility for a series of sabotage and arson attacks,³⁶⁵ including a bomb attack on a Magistrates Court,³⁶⁶ and arson attacks on railway signaling and a police firearms training centre.³⁶⁷ Alongside the similarities in terms of method of attack and targets – infrastructure, police and security institutions, and private businesses – the attacks were also typically followed by online claims of responsibility, usually posted on the 'Indymedia' and international anarchist '325.nostate' websites, and solidarity with anarchist prisoners abroad.³⁶⁸ Police suspected but have been unable to find an anarchist nicknamed 'Badger' and to date there have been no prosecutions.³⁶⁹ While a British-based man was charged with terrorism offences in relation to running the 325 website,³⁷⁰ which

³⁶² 'Animal Rights Extremism', Understanding Animal Research, <https://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/regulation/animal-rights-extremism>.

³⁶³ 'Animal Rights Extremism', Understanding Animal Research, <https://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/regulation/animal-rights-extremism>.

³⁶⁴ Press Association, 'Animal rights activist jailed for six years for Huntingdon Life Sciences plot', *The Guardian*, 17 April 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/apr/17/animal-rights-activist-jailed-six-years-huntingdon-life-sciences-debbie-vincent>; Matthew Weaver and agencies, 'Animal rights activists jailed for terrorising suppliers to Huntingdon Life Sciences', *The Guardian*, 25 October 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2010/oct/25/animal-research-animal-welfare>; Owen Bowcott, 'Court jails Huntingdon animal test lab blackmailers', *The Guardian*, 21 January 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2009/jan/21/huntingdon-animal-rights>.

³⁶⁵ Brian Whelan, 'Bristol arson attack linked to anarchist terror network', Channel 4 News, 28 August 2013, <https://www.channel4.com/news/informal-anarchist-federation-bristol-arson-attack-anarchist>.

³⁶⁶ Michael Loadenthal, 'The Politics of the attack: a discourse of insurrectionary communiques', Spring 2015, http://ebot.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/9817/Loadenthal_gmu_0883E_10805.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=n; p. 1. Archived here: https://web.archive.org/web/20230822105048/http://ebot.gmu.edu/bitstream/handle/1920/9817/Loadenthal_gmu_0883E_10805.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=n.

³⁶⁷ Shiv Malik, 'Anarchist group claims it started blaze at police firearms training centre', *The Guardian*, 28 August 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/aug/28/anarchist-fire-police-firearms-training>.

³⁶⁸ David Rose, 'Dark farce of the Bristol bomber: 50 attacks in four years. . . and he's gutted the brand new £18 million police firing range. So who IS the mystery anarchist making fools of Avon and Somerset Constabulary?', *The Mail on Sunday*, 31 May 2014, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2644814/Who-Bristol-anarchist-responsible-50-attacks-4-years.html>.

³⁶⁹ 'Anarchist' suspect sought by police over attacks', BBC News, 3 December 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-30299600>.

³⁷⁰ He was charged with providing a service enabling others to access terrorist publications contrary to section 2 of the Terrorism Act 2006, fundraising for terrorist purposes contrary to section 15 of the Terrorism Act 2000, and two counts of possession of information likely to be useful to a terrorist contrary to section 58 of the Terrorism Act 2000. He was convicted of drugs offences 'CPS drop terrorism charges

published details of the Bristol attacks among others, the prosecution offered no evidence at trial.³⁷¹

3.68 The Bristol attacks illustrate the impact of such terrorism; up to 100 attacks over a four-year period caused material damage to public and private property, significant disruption (for example knocking out communications masts for several days at a time) and cost approximately £20 million.³⁷² They also highlight the challenges of anarchist attacks; informal, leaderless networks are by definition difficult to disrupt; and the authorities' knowledge of the wider anarchist activist scene in the UK is limited, at least according to one largely sympathetic account of anarchist activism in Bristol.³⁷³

- **Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue terrorism encompasses a broad range of motivating ideologies and includes both centrist and decentralised groups seeking revolutionary change as well as those seeking a targeted change to a specific policy or practice.**
- **Most Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue terrorist attacks in Europe over the last 15 years have been anarchist in nature, and anarchists have been routinely more violent than the traditional Far Left.**
- **Potential trends at European level include the premeditated nature of Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue terrorist attacks, including symbolic, often anti-state, targets; the use of the internet to claim responsibility, show solidarity with the wider activist community, and share resources; and the cross-pollination of radical campaigns and causes.**

Far Left and Anarchist Protest

3.69 Far Left protest is extra parliamentary in nature and is today commonly expressed through its involvement in single issue campaigning groups and social movements rather than through traditional groups advocating a revolutionary political platform. These are typically progressive movements focused on moral and cultural issues more than the material conditions of life in the UK.

against alleged administrator of anarchist website', Bindmans, 15 October 2021, <https://www.bindmans.com/knowledge-hub/news/cps-drop-terrorism-charges-against-alleged-administrator-of-anarchist-website>.

³⁷¹ Lizzie Dearden, 'Prosecutors drop anarchist terror charges against drug dealer', *Independent*, 13 October 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/anarchist-terror-case-gloucestershire-dropped-b1937594.html>.

³⁷² Richard Smith, 'EXCLUSIVE: Cops hunt anarchists who have left a £20m trail of destruction', *Mirror*, 3 December 2014, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/cops-hunt-anarchists-who-left-4736786>; <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-30299600>.

³⁷³ Philip Kleinfeld, 'English Anarchists Have Been Caught Up in an Anti-Terrorism Police Crackdown', *Vice*, 14 January 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qbe7aw/the-police-are-cracking-down-on-brisols-anarchists-833>.

- 3.70 It is helpful to think of such campaigns and social movements as part of a broad Far Left subculture. By this I mean understanding the various actors on the Far Left and the loose forms of association between them as a subculture both in an anthropological sense, i.e., as a distinctive social sub-group characterised by forms of behaviour or rituals (like punks or goths), and in a political sense, where members believe certain forms of political action – in this case typically the ‘street politics’ of protest and, for a minority, insurrection – are more authentic than representative democracy.³⁷⁴ While different ideological traditions co-exist within the Far Left subculture – and often disagree with one another – they are all able to recognise themselves and one another as part of the ‘the left’ and they share, albeit to differing degrees, an identifiable set of sociopolitical values and assumptions.
- 3.71 In recent years, I have observed five prominent campaigns within the British Far Left subculture that have involved, to differing degrees, political violence, disruption, and law breaking that is relevant to this review. They are: environmental movements and those calling for drastic action to address climate change; anti-racism campaigns, notably Black Lives Matter; anti-government protest, such as Kill the Bill (opposing the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023); anti-Israel protest; and anti-fascism. While none of these issues is exclusively left-wing, their protests have typically been led by campaigners who are also vocal anti-capitalists or anarchists and, broadly, these movements make Far Left, anti-capitalist, anarchist, and anti-establishment ideologies an inseparable part of their worldview, internal organisation, and tactics. They have also proven important channels for those on the Far Left to mobilise support.

Environmentalism – Extinction Rebellion, Insulate Britain, and Just Stop Oil

- 3.72 In the last five years, the UK has been experiencing waves of activism and protest by radical environmentalist groups who act in both large and, increasingly, small numbers causing maximum disruption to call for urgent action to address climate change. This movement is best known for several periods of mass disruption caused by Extinction Rebellion from late 2018 to 2020, high profile obstruction of the M25 by Insulate Britain in late 2021, and, in recent years, targeted instances of disruption and vandalism by Just Stop Oil at key oil infrastructure sites and, increasingly, high profile cultural and sporting events and road blockings.

³⁷⁴ I am indebted to Daniel Allington and David Toube for this analysis. Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British Far-Left: A Study Of A Political Ecosystem* (2021).

- 3.73 While these are different organisations with their own demands and *modus operandi*, they are united by a radical environmentalist agenda that is also often fundamentally rooted in an anarchist and anti-capitalist ideology. This is evidenced by the organisations from which these groups' leadership emerged, from their internal ways of organising, decision-making and tactics, and from the rhetoric of the movement's *de facto* leaders.
- 3.74 These groups have largely avoided both the street violence that often accompanies radical protest movements and co-option by the Far Left. They have particularly sought to use law breaking, or civil disobedience as they frame it, along with mass disruption to force their message into the public debate. However, their decentralised nature coupled with the urgency of their 'ends justify the means' rhetoric risks lone actors engaging in riskier or violent activism. The threat of escalatory violence from members of the public who feel that the authorities are not taking sufficient steps to protect them from disruption is also not insignificant.
- 3.75 Extinction Rebellion's founders and leading activists came from a series of organisations aligned with green anarchist ideologies which emerged out of the anti-capitalist Occupy movement of 2011.³⁷⁵ Extinction Rebellion's primary founders – former organic farmer Roger Hallam, bushcraft instructor Simon Bramwell,³⁷⁶ and biophysicist Gail Bradbrook³⁷⁷ – created a group called Rising Up! in 2016, which, in turn, brought together activists from radical environmentalist or anti-capitalist groups, including Earth First! Occupy Democracy, Plane Stupid, and Reclaim the Power.³⁷⁸ In addition, Bradbrook and Occupy activist George Barda had set up Compassionate Revolution as a registered company in 2015 to manage the financial side of the movement.³⁷⁹
- 3.76 Extinction Rebellion promotes three core demands: To Tell The Truth, to Act Now, and to Go Beyond Politics. By this they mean that governments must declare “a climate and ecological emergency”, take immediate action to halt biodiversity loss and reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero, and create so-called citizen's assemblies to guide decision-making on climate

³⁷⁵ For more discussion on Rising Up! and Extinction Rebellion's links to green anarchism see pages 66-71. For the leaderships' links to the Occupy movement see 'About us', Rising Up, <https://risingup.org.uk/about-us>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190418201628/https://risingup.org.uk/about-us>; <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#what-else-have-you-done>; <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#where-did-the-idea-come-from>.

³⁷⁶ 'Simon Bramwell's #PaintTheLand launch speech', Writers Rebel, (June 2021), <https://writersrebel.com/simon-bramwells-painttheland-launch-speech/>; Simon Bramwell, LinkedIn, <https://uk.linkedin.com/in/simon-bramwell-24b2a1139>.

³⁷⁷ Other named founders are Stuart Basden, Ian Bray, Robin Boardman, Clare Farrell, Nils Agger, Frieda Luerken and Sibi. 'Who are your Founders?', Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#who-are-your-founders>.

³⁷⁸ 'What credentials do you have to be doing what you are?', Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#what-credentials-do-you-have-to-be-doing-what-you-are>.

³⁷⁹ Extinction Rebellion's online FAQs state: "Compassionate Revolution [...] supports movements campaigning for action on the climate emergency, handling all the practical aspects of fundraising, making grants and paying expenditure". See 'What is the relationship between rising up and Extinction Rebellion (and Compassionate Revolution)', Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#what-is-the-relationship-between-rising-up-and-extinction-rebellion-and-compassionate-revolution>; 'XR Funding and Expenditure', <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1uECIf0De2VsCUzNccv2adcSzR8BmU3pnz0RTFpE418/edit#>; 'Compassionate Revolution', Companies House, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/09622618/officers>.

issues.³⁸⁰ To this end, the group deploys non-violent direct action and civil disobedience, which it believes is the most effective method to “to persuade governments to act justly”.³⁸¹ Extinction Rebellion, its parent groups, and its splinter groups have all consistently reiterated their opposition to violence as a method for political change.³⁸² Activists have presented their commitment to non-violence in predominantly pragmatic terms.³⁸³ In an essay for Extinction Rebellion’s Handbook, for example, Hallam argues that, while exciting, violence is too often counterproductive:

3.77 Violence is a traditional method [of disruption]. It is brilliant at getting attention and creating chaos and disruption, but it is often disastrous when it comes to creating progressive change.³⁸⁴

3.78 Hallam goes on to explain that to ensure non-violence during protests “people need to be trained to stay calm and groups need to be assigned the role of intervening when tempers flare”.³⁸⁵ On the ground, groups linked to Hallam run nonviolence training days for volunteers where, according a journalist who attended one run by Just Stop Oil, the group “weeds out any volunteer who might not to be able to sustain nonviolence under pressure”.³⁸⁶ Such an approach has arguably been effective: while some Extinction Rebellion leaders have flirted with ideas of martyrdom (see page 69) the movement has largely avoided the recurring clashes with the police, assaults or affray that often accompany radical protest.³⁸⁷ Splinter groups Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil have, however, both engaged in riskier behaviour characterised by increased risk of serious injury, often to the protestors themselves.³⁸⁸

³⁸⁰ ‘About Us’, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/demands/>; see also ‘About Us’, Rebellion Global, <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>.

³⁸¹ ‘About Us’, Rebellion Global, <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>.

³⁸² For example, in its online FAQs, Extinction Rebellion states: We engage in peaceful civil disobedience to draw attention to the key issues of our time. We remain strictly nonviolent. On its website, Rising Up! states: WE ARE A NON-VIOLENT NETWORK Using nonviolent strategy and tactics as the most effective way to bring about change [...] Our movement is explicitly nonviolent and we intend no harm to any person. During its disruption of the M25 in October 2021, Insulate Britain declared the motorway a “site of non-violent civil resistance”, while Just Stop Oil refers to itself as “a nonviolent civil resistance group”. See ‘FAQs’, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#you-have-been-reported-in-the-press-for-allegedly-smashing-windows-what-are-your-views-on-criminal-damage>; ‘About Us’, Rising Up, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190418201628/https://risingup.org.uk/about-us>; ‘Insulate Britain declares M25 ‘site of non-violent civil resistance’, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/26/insulate-britain-declares-m25-site-of-non-violent-civil-resistance>; ‘Get Involved’, Just Stop Oil, <https://juststopoil.org/get-involved/>.

³⁸³ In its online FAQs Extinction Rebellion states: “we do not judge those in struggles that have resorted to violence. Some of us are non-violent for tactical reasons and some for moral reasons.” “Why do you think nonviolence is important?”, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#why-do-you-think-nonviolence-is-important>.

³⁸⁴ Roger Hallam, ‘The Civil Resistance Model’, in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, p. 100.

³⁸⁵ Roger Hallam, ‘The Civil Resistance Model’, in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, p. 101.

³⁸⁶ Dorian Lynskey, ‘Just Stop Oil: behind the scenes with the activists’, *The Guardian*, 10 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/10/just-stop-oil-behind-the-scenes-with-the-activists>.

³⁸⁷ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 119.

³⁸⁸ For example, Just Stop Oil demonstrators invaded Silverstone track at the beginning of the 2022 British F1 Grand Prix. During the subsequent trial, the prosecution argued that “they sat down in front of the ongoing cars - Formula 1 motor racing cars [...] there was clearly an immediate risk of serious harm being caused.” Passing sentence, the judge said: “This was not trespass or obstruction of a highway or criminal damage – to put it colloquially this was in a different league.” See ‘British Grand Prix ‘Just Stop Oil’ protest posed ‘serious harm’ risk to F1 drivers, court told’, *Sky Sports*, 25 January 2023, <https://www.skysports.com/f1/news/12433/12795147/british->

- 3.79 Neither Extinction Rebellion nor its related groups consider criminal damage or the destruction of property to be illegitimate. Early examples of Extinction Rebellion ‘actions’ included human roadblocks and pouring paint or fake blood over public buildings³⁸⁹ – tactics still used today by its splinter organisations.³⁹⁰ In its online FAQs, the group states: “We have resorted to breaking windows in a couple of campaigns, this is called an ‘escalation strategy’ and it is necessary to create the drama to focus attention on an issue”.³⁹¹ Similarly, Hallam has argued: “You have to break the law. This is the essence of the non-violent method because it creates the social tension and the public drama which are vital to create change”.³⁹² Academic research on the British Far Left commissioned for this review argues that this tactic of deliberate property damage is best understood as a modern manifestation of the 19th century insurrectionary anarchist concept of ‘propaganda by the deed’ – in this case a “largely theatrical performance of radicalism”, unlike the original assassinations and bombings which deployed lethal violence – designed both to educate and to inspire the public to join the cause.³⁹³
- 3.80 From early on, Extinction Rebellion argued that violence would alienate the large numbers of people, whose participation would be required for building the kind of mass movement that could force the state to act or be overthrown. The importance of assembling a coalition of supporters – an inclusive uprising – was key.³⁹⁴ The need for large numbers was, however, not about building a democratic majority, or even a consensus within society. According to their ideas about effective civil disobedience, only the involvement of a very small percentage of the population, as little as 3.5 per cent, would be needed for a successful uprising.³⁹⁵

grand-prix-just-stop-oil-protest-posed-serious-harm-risk-to-f1-drivers-court-told & ‘Just Stop Oil protesters spared jail for Silverstone track invasion during British Grand Prix’, *ITV*, 31 March 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2023-03-31/defiant-just-stop-oil-protesters-avoid-jail-over-british-gp-track-invasion>.

³⁸⁹ For example, Extinction Rebellion’s April 2019 call for the public to block London’s roads and, in October 2019, activists sprayed the Treasury with fake blood. See Damien Gayle, ‘Extinction Rebellion calls on protesters to block London streets’, *The Guardian*, 13 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/13/extinction-rebellion-calls-protesters-block-london-streets> and Mattha Busby, ‘Extinction Rebellion protesters spray fake blood on to Treasury’, *The Guardian*, 3 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/03/extinction-rebellion-protesters-spray-fake-blood-treasury-london>.

³⁹⁰ For example, in July 2023 Just Stop Oil activists sprayed orange paint over the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and continued to block London streets by slow marching through traffic. See Russell Hope, ‘Just Stop Oil: Activists ‘committed criminal damage’ by spraying government building, Grant Shapps says’, *The Guardian*, 19 July 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/just-stop-oil-activists-committed-criminal-damage-by-spraying-government-building-grant-shapps-says-12923759> and Lydia Chantler-Hicks, ‘Just Stop Oil block roads in London as protests resume’, *The Standard*, 28 November 2022, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/just-stop-oil-london-protest-gas-oil-met-police-government-b1043082.html>.

³⁹¹ ‘You have been reported in the press for allegedly smashing windows, what are your views on criminal damage?’, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#you-have-been-reported-in-the-press-for-allegedly-smashing-windows-what-are-your-views-on-criminal-damage>

³⁹² Roger Hallam, ‘The Civil Resistance Model’, in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, p. 101.

³⁹³ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), pp. 7, 45-48.

³⁹⁴ ‘About Us’, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/about-us/>.

³⁹⁵ Among the ten values listed on its website, Extinction Rebellion states “2. WE SET OUR MISSION ON WHAT IS NECESSARY. Mobilising 3.5% of the population to achieve system change”. See ‘About Us’, Rebellion Global, <https://rebellion.global/about-us/>. This assessment is supported by Hallam who argues “approximately 1-3 per cent of the population is ideal”. Roger Hallam, ‘The Civil Resistance Model’, in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, pp. 104.

- 3.81 For some leaders in the Extinction Rebellion movement, causing disruption and law breaking on a large scale is also intended to overwhelm law enforcement and the criminal justice system;³⁹⁶ Hallam calls it the ‘civil resistance model’.³⁹⁷ During the group’s April 2019 protests, the police did begin to run out of space in cells and vehicles, with those arrested having to be taken to police stations further out of central London.³⁹⁸ Framing these activities as a “rebellion”, the intent has been to create a situation in which the Government is either forced to implement the activists’ demands, or in which the Government, and even the wider political and economic system, is ultimately overthrown. Hallam explains it as follows:
- 3.82 The authorities now have a serious dilemma. Let people continue to party in the streets. Or opt for repression. The authorities cannot let you continue. But if they go for mass arrests or use violence, then millions of people will see it. [...] The more people they take off the streets, the more come on to them. [...] The arrogance of the authorities leads them to overreact. And the people [...] will rise up and bring down the regime.³⁹⁹
- 3.83 However, the rhetoric of uprising and rebellion, of “system change, not climate change”⁴⁰⁰, without a programme of policies for how to address climate change, or what new economic and political system should be put in place, makes this form of activism particularly difficult to reconcile within a democracy. By focusing its demands on the creation of a Citizen’s Assembly rather than adopting specific policy proposals, Extinction Rebellion has largely avoided scrutiny of its vision for the future.⁴⁰¹ Bradbrook has even spoken about not offering any solutions as being “one of the super clever things” about their movement.⁴⁰²
- 3.84 While non-violent, Extinction Rebellion’s protests have not been without significant consequences. More than 1,000 people were arrested during the

³⁹⁶ Ben Webster & Will Humphries, ‘Police overwhelmed by Extinction Rebellion protesters plotting to clog up justice system’, *The Times*, 19 April 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-overwhelmed-by-extinction-rebellion-protesters-plotting-to-clog-up-justice-system-btmb2hz6f>.

³⁹⁷ Roger Hallam, ‘The Civil Resistance Model’, in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, p. 100.

³⁹⁸ Jack Hardy, ‘Extinction Rebellion: Climate protesters dodge arrest after police run out of cells’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 April 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/04/16/extinction-rebellion-climate-protesters-dodge-arrest-police/>.

³⁹⁹ Roger Hallam, ‘The Civil Resistance Model’, in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, pp. 102, 104.

⁴⁰⁰ In April 2019, Extinction rebellion activists moored a large pink boat to Oxford Circus, in central London, with a banner that read “System change, not climate change”. The slogan has also been used by organised Far Left groups like the Socialist Workers Party as well as at radical environmentalist and anti-globalist rallies. See Ben Webster & Will Humphries, ‘Police overwhelmed by Extinction Rebellion protesters plotting to clog up justice system’, *The Times*, 19 April 2019 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-overwhelmed-by-extinction-rebellion-protesters-plotting-to-clog-up-justice-system-btmb2hz6f> and ‘Who we are’, System Change not Climate Change, <https://systemchange-not-climatechange.at/en/who-we-are/>.

⁴⁰¹ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 123.

⁴⁰² Psychedelics, Extinction & Social Change, The Psychedelic Society, Facebook, 19 January 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/PsychedelicsUK/videos/psychedelics-extinction-social-change/379059322652585/>; Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p.123.

group's ten days of action in April 2019,⁴⁰³ which were reported to have cost the Metropolitan Police £16 million.⁴⁰⁴ A further two-week-long round of Extinction Rebellion protests in London in October 2019 reportedly cost the Metropolitan Police £21 million.⁴⁰⁵ To provide a sense of scale, the Police Commissioner at the time compared the total of £37 million for two waves of protest to the £15m spent every year on the force's violent crime taskforce.⁴⁰⁶ By August 2021 it was estimated that Extinction Rebellion activism had cost taxpayers around £50 million.⁴⁰⁷ The failure to prevent this group from closing roads and taking over busy shopping streets reportedly cost London shopkeepers £12 million in lost takings during the April 2019 protests.⁴⁰⁸ That is to say nothing of the cost of damage that the activists caused through vandalism to private and public property.

- 3.85 There has also been justified public concern about Extinction Rebellion protests disrupting ambulances and preventing people from reaching hospitals to see loved ones in emergencies.⁴⁰⁹ Although Extinction Rebellion has said that its activists let emergency vehicles through,⁴¹⁰ this policy does not seem possible to implement in practice, we saw ambulances becoming held up in traffic jams caused by protestors blocking roads.⁴¹¹ Similarly, Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil's 'Blue Light' policy has been criticised⁴¹² by paramedics after ambulances have been caught in tailbacks.⁴¹³ Moreover, not everyone in the movement agrees with the 'Blue Light's' policy; key

⁴⁰³ 'Extinction Rebellion Protests: What happened?', BBC News, 25 April 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-48051776>.

⁴⁰⁴ Martin Beckford, 'Eco Warrior Bill: Extinction Rebellion's protests which shut down parts of London cost the taxpayer £16million', *The Sun*, 28 June 2019, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/9398163/extinction-rebellion-protest-taxpayer-cost/>

⁴⁰⁵ Vikram Dodd, 'Extinction Rebellion protests cost Met police £37m so far', *The Guardian*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/oct/22/extinction-rebellion-protests-cost-met-police-37m-so-far>.

⁴⁰⁶ Vikram Dodd, 'Extinction Rebellion protests cost Met police £37m so far', *The Guardian*, 22 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/oct/22/extinction-rebellion-protests-cost-met-police-37m-so-far>.

⁴⁰⁷ Tom Ball & Ben Webster, 'Extinction Rebellion protests cost £50m ... and counting', *The Times*, 21 August 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/extinction-rebellion-protests-cost-50m-and-counting-k8rx3tvsc>.

⁴⁰⁸ Jonathan Leake, Shanti Das and Shingi Mararike, 'We'll win fight with maths, vow Extinction Rebellion protesters', *The Times*, 21 April 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/well-win-fight-with-maths-vow-extinction-rebellion-protesters-hxjx29bqf>.

⁴⁰⁹ Disturbing footage from October 2021 shows a woman begging Insulate Britain activists to let her pass to get to a hospital where her elderly mother was being taken by ambulance. It was later reported that she had been let through. 'Tearful woman pleads with Insulate Britain protesters to let her get to sick mother in hospital', *Independent*, 4 October 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/climate/tearful-woman-pleads-with-insulate-britain-protesters-to-let-her-get-to-sick-mother-in-hospital-b2185939.html>.

⁴¹⁰ Jessica Townsend, 'Seeing Blue: Extinction Rebellion's Blue Light Policy', Extinction Rebellion, 2 September 2021, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/09/02/seeing-blue-extinction-rebellions-blue-light-policy/>.

⁴¹¹ Rory Tingle & James Gant, 'Ambulance on emergency call is caught in Extinction Rebellion traffic jam as protesters block Parliament in London and try to storm Cardiff's new BBC building', *Daily Mail*, 3 September 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8693433/Extinction-Rebellion-activists-GLUE-hands-pavement-outside-Parliament-London.html>; Nicola Gwyer, 'Ambulance forced to change route to Addenbrooke's during Extinction Rebellion roadblock', *Cambridge News*, 12 August 2019, <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/cambridge-news/extinction-rebellion-ambulance-addenbrookes-hospital-16741207>.

⁴¹² Both groups say they will move out of the way for emergency vehicles with siren sounding and blue lights on. See 'Statement from Insulate Britain: We must acknowledge we have failed', Insulate Britain, 7 February 2022, <https://insulatebritain.com/2022/02/07/statement-from-insulate-britain-we-must-acknowledge-we-have-failed/>; "'I will continue to do all I can to protect my loved ones"- Just Stop Oil supporters march to resist new oil, gas and coal', Just Stop Oil, 12 May 2023, <https://juststopoil.org/2023/05/12/i-will-continue-to-do-all-i-can-to-protect-my-loved-ones-just-stop-oil-supporters-march-to-resist-new-oil-gas-and-coal/>.

⁴¹³ Josh Layton, 'Paramedic calls out Insulate Britain 'idiots' blocking ambulances on 999 calls', *Metro*, 29 October 2021, <https://metro.co.uk/2021/10/27/paramedic-calls-out-insulate-britain-idiots-blocking-ambulances-15496963/>.

ideologue Hallam has said explicitly that he would continue a protest even if it blocked an ambulance with a dying patient onboard.⁴¹⁴

3.86 Road blockings impact the public negatively beyond medical emergencies. During the trial of three Insulate Britain protestors who had obstructed the M25 for three and a half hours in September 2021, the prosecutor told the court that more than forty thousand vehicles had been affected at a financial cost of over £60,000. Among those vehicles had been an ambulance enroute to an emergency chest pain call out, a woman trying to visit her 95-year-old mother who had had a fall, a special needs teacher who was late for class and pilot whose flight had to be rescheduled.⁴¹⁵ Most recently, road blockings by Just Stop Oil in July 2023 caused a woman to miss her mother's funeral.⁴¹⁶ In my view, such disruption is unacceptable. However urgently people feel about climate change, indifference to the lives of others like this is selfish and likely also counterproductive.

3.87 A defining feature of Extinction Rebellion is its commitment to decentralisation. The group's online FAQs explains:

We are a decentralised organisation – anyone can do things in the name of Extinction Rebellion if they agree with and adhere to our principles and values – people don't need anyone's permission on that basis. We have a self-organising system. Power is invested in roles through the use of mandates rather than held by people. It is a creative system that grows in response to the organisations [sic] needs.⁴¹⁷

3.88 Extinction Rebellion's parent organisation Rising Up! has the same policy.⁴¹⁸ In their rejection of hierarchies in favour of creativity and local autonomy, both groups are fundamentally anarchist in nature.⁴¹⁹ According to one investigative journalist's report into Extinction Rebellion in August 2020, "People do not formally join XR, and there is no central membership list". Instead, there are local groups, or "circles" organised around themes and supporters' skills, such as finance or legal support, or around "shared identities, such as XR doctors,

⁴¹⁴ Kate Gill, 'I would block ambulance with dying patient onboard, says XR founder Roger Hallam', *Independent*, 5 October 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/tv/climate/ambulance-roger-hallam-extinction-rebellion-v6cfe3668>.

⁴¹⁵ Michael Murphy, 'Insulate Britain protest 'delayed ambulance by nearly an hour'', *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 April 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/04/22/insulate-britain-protest-delayed-ambulance-nearly-hour/>.

⁴¹⁶ Alex Davies, 'Daughter who missed 90-year-old mum's funeral blasts Just Stop Oil 'Didn't elect you!'', *Express*, 21 July 2022, <https://www.express.co.uk/showbiz/tv-radio/1643575/Daughter-mum-funeral-Just-Stop-Oil-row-Piers-Morgan>; 'Woman DESTROYS Eco-Protesters After They Made Her Miss Mum's Funeral', Piers Morgan Uncensored, Youtube, 20 July 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDbMY7oM18A>.

⁴¹⁷ 'What is your structure, how do you organise?', Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#what-is-your-structure-how-do-you-organise>.

⁴¹⁸ Among the values listed on the Rising Up! website is: "10. WE ARE BASED ON AUTONOMY AND DECENTRALISATION We collectively create the structures we need to challenge power. Anyone who follows these core principles and values can take action in the name of RisingUp!". These values are repeated verbatim on Extinction Rebellion's website. See 'About Us', Rising Up archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20190418201628/https://risingup.org.uk/about-us> and 'About Us', Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/about-us/>.

⁴¹⁹ Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anarchism>.

XR farmers or XR Muslims”.⁴²⁰ Organising in small groups in this way echoes the anarchist model of affinity groups.⁴²¹

- 3.89 Analysis of Extinction Rebellion’s decentralised structure in academic research commissioned for this review found that it has been both a strength and a weakness for the movement. Activists interviewed made the case that the movement’s decentralised structure had been effective in preventing infiltration and co-option by other groups, notably the organised Far Left, an assessment the authors agreed with. It likely also allowed the group to retain broad support across the political spectrum.⁴²²
- 3.90 However, there are obvious risks, not least the lack of an internal mechanism to prevent dangerous activism in the organisation’s name. The decision by some activists, for example, to climb onto the roof of a London underground train during rush hour in October 2019 led to both angry clashes with commuters and an acknowledgement by Extinction Rebellion leaders that the action had been a mistake.⁴²³ Such risk is not limited to individuals. It is possible for a local Extinction Rebellion group to act both within the movement’s guiding principles but in ways which the parent group might find unpalatable. An example of potential reputational risk is Extinction Rebellion Muslim’s invitation to Muhammad Rabbani, managing director of the Islamist organisation Cage,⁴²⁴ to participate in a Ramadan panel discussion titled ‘Muslim Views on Civil Disobedience’ in May 2021.⁴²⁵ At the time, Cage had already been accused of supporting convicted Islamist terrorists and its senior staff of expressing support for violent jihad in specific contexts.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁰ Matthew Taylor, ‘The Evolution of Extinction Rebellion’, *The Guardian*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/04/evolution-of-extinction-rebellion-climate-emergency-protest-coronavirus-pandemic>.

⁴²¹ Shaun Ewald, ‘Affinity Groups’, The Anarchist Library, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/shawn-ewald-affinity-groups>.

⁴²² Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), pp. 124-126.

⁴²³ Damien Gayle and Ben Quinn, ‘Extinction Rebellion rush-hour protest sparks clash on London Underground’, *The Guardian*, 17 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/17/extinction-rebellion-activists-london-underground>; Mark Townsend, ‘Tube protest was a mistake, admit leading Extinction Rebellion members’, *The Guardian*, 20 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/oct/20/extinction-rebellion-tube-protest-was-a-mistake>.

⁴²⁴ ‘About Us’, CAGE, <https://www.cage.ngo/cage-about-us>, archived at: <https://archive.ph/6VLmB>; Simon Hooper, ‘Man unlawfully stripped of UK citizenship reunited with family after four years’, *Middle East Eye*, 8 May 2021, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uk-man-unlawfully-stripped-citizenship-reunited-family-after-4-years>.

⁴²⁵ ‘Muhammad Rabbani of @UK_CAGE, Valentina Maccario from XR Muslims & Jac Scollen, a rep from XR Working Class, will discuss civil disobedience, criminalisation of marginalised communities & how we expand opportunities for activism’, Extinction Rebellion Muslims, Twitter, 24 April 2021, <https://twitter.com/XRmuslims/status/1385862469890027520>; ‘Muslims Views on Civil Disobedience - Muslims Talk Climate Science’, Muslims for Extinction Rebellion, Extinction Rebellion UK and Extinction Rebellion, Facebook, 2 May 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/events/1243664489384088/>.

⁴²⁶ For example, CAGE director Adnan Siddique, when asked about an al-Qaeda affiliate’s truck bombing in Syria, told the Home Affairs Select Committee in 2015 that suicide bombings are “a price worth paying”. Also in that year, CAGE director Asim Qureshi described ISIS executioner Mohammed Erwazi as a “beautiful young man”. Both incidents were widely reported at the time. Moreover, in its October 2019 report the independent Commission for Countering Extremism (CCE) identified CAGE as an example of groups making the moral case for violence by “expressing solidarity with those seen as at the forefront of jihad”. The CCE provided examples of Cage support for convicted Islamist terrorists, including campaigning for Aafia Siddiqui, a Pakistani national who was sentenced to 86 years in prison in the US in 2010 for the attempted murder of a US Army Captain and whose cause animates Islamists and jihadists in the West today. See Laura Hughes, ‘Cage: In some cases suicide bombings are ‘a price worth paying’’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 November 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/12001952/Cage-In-some-cases-suicide-bombings-are-a-price-worth-paying.html>; ‘Cage quizzed on claims about security services jailings and killings’, *This Week*, BBC, 6 March 2015, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0610blb>; ‘Challenging Hateful Extremism’, Commission for Countering Extremism, (October 2019),

- 3.91 Extinction Rebellion's parent organisations Compassionate Revolution and Rising Up! were overt in their green anarchist and anti-capitalist ideology.⁴²⁷ As well as advocating a radical overturning of the political and economic system, they advocated undemocratic means and law breaking to achieve their aims. They justified direct action and law breaking by claiming that Britain was not a democracy, and that both the institutions of government and the media were controlled and manipulated by elites.⁴²⁸
- 3.92 This was a revolutionary narrative that Extinction Rebellion pushed when it was first launched.⁴²⁹ It was also evident in Rising Up! campaigns in 2017 and 2018, which were promoted by Extinction Rebellion on its website and in talks.⁴³⁰ These were typically small, single-issue campaigns with an anti-capitalist and anti-establishment leaning.⁴³¹ For example, while ostensibly

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hatefu|_Extremism.pdf, p.44.; 'Case Profiles: Aafia Siddiqui', Cage, 23 January 2014, <https://www.cage.ngo/aafia-siddiqui>.

⁴²⁷ There were also reports of alleged antisemitism on Compassionate Revolution's Facebook page and, in addition, one post from 2016 was reported to show a man outside Parliament dressed as Guy Fawkes and carrying a barrel, with the post stating that it was time to "physically remove morally corrupted MPs", which could be interpreted as incitement against MPs. See Nick Craven, 'Extinction Rebellion founder in race storm: Vile anti-Semitic posts found on Facebook page run by Left-winger behind climate change movement', *Mail on Sunday*, 20 July 2019, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-7268425/Extinction-Rebellion-founder-race-storm-Vile-antisemitic-posts-Facebook-page-runs.html>.

⁴²⁸ Both organisations carried the following statement on their 'About us' webpages:

"Why this is necessary. We are initiating and promoting campaigns of civil disobedience in the UK, which may include the breaking of laws. Our movement is explicitly nonviolent and we intend no harm to any person. We believe this is necessary as a means to respond to [sic] scientifically attested ecological threats and to challenge gross social injustices [...] Through our action we seek to bring about

- A functioning democracy based on informed consent. We do not believe we have a functioning democracy in the UK. It has been captured by corporate and private interests and the media is owned by wealthy billionaires who use their power to systematically undermine informed public debate.
- Transformation of the political system, society and economy to ones which maximise well-being and minimize harm. The existing political and economic system is set to destroy civilisation and much if not all life on earth if allowed to continue. This is most apparent in our society's inability to cut the carbon emissions which are creating catastrophic climate change, and through its reckless destruction of bio-diversity.
- A society of genuine equality without poverty and privilege. At present UK is becoming ever more grossly unequal due economic arrangements which vastly favour the wealthy elites."

See 'About Us', Compassionate Revolution, 2019, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20191009201443/https://compassionate-revolution.net/about-us.html> and 'About Us', Rising Up, 2019, archived at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20190418201628/https://risingup.org.uk/about-us>. For further criticism of British democracy by Rising Up! See Gail Bradbrook, 'This Election Stinks! How to Fake A Democracy', Rising Up, 12 May 2017, <https://risingupuk.wordpress.com/2017/05/12/this-election-stinks-how-to-fake-a-democracy/>.

⁴²⁹ For example, in a 2019 video titled 'Welcome to the Rebellion', Bradbrook speaks directly to the camera and says: The democracy we have right now is essentially deeply flawed, deeply flawed. It is OK for lobbyists, who have billions of pounds of money to spend on these issues, to be constantly in government pushing for their agendas which generally do with. Self-interest and money making, not the interests of the ordinary person. I think it's a deeply toxic system. It's got this machinery based on the idea that we have to have constant economic growth. And you can't have constant economic growth on a finite planet. [...] Conventional politics is fucked. The question is not what needs to happen and what the problems are. The question is how do things change? We've got an ongoing tradition of civil disobedience in this country. [...] So what we're doing in Extinction Rebellion is saying it's time to really come together and express our power. It shouldn't be left to politicians and it shouldn't be left simply to experts. See 'Welcome to the Rebellion!', Extinction Rebellion, YouTube, 21 April 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=52o3hCOE1R8>.

⁴³⁰ 'What else have you done', Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#what-else-have-you-done>.

⁴³¹ In a video titled 'Heading for Extinction and What to do About it', Bradbrook lists several previous campaigns, which can be identified as including: graffitiing Kings College London (KCL) in January 2017 to stop the university investing in fossil fuels; obstructing a tunnel to Heathrow in February 2017 to protest proposed expansion of the airport; a campaign "chalk spraying Barclays bank" in Stroud in May 2017 to encourage the bank to reverse its investment in fracking; a civil disobedience campaign in May 2017 in support of cleaners at the London School of Economics; vandalism of The Sun offices ahead of the general election in June 2017 holding a banner saying "'Murdoch propaganda #fakedemocracy"; protestors with a banner saying "Stop Killing Londoners Cut Air Pollution" blocking Tower Bridge in London in October 2017; a protest against Universal Credit outside a Job Centre in March 2018; and a mass trespass on a private estate in Cirencester in April 2018 (described as "something really fun we did"). While some of these campaigns are more directly environmental than others, almost all were social justice campaigns with a largely anti-establishment outlook.

campaigning against Barclay's investment in fracking companies, Bradbrook told protestors: "We've had enough of the pretence that Britain has a real democracy. It's all about lining the pockets of rich people, banks, and corporations, and that's not good for anyone ultimately".⁴³²

3.93 The extent to which Extinction Rebellion adopted an overtly anti-capitalist stance was a point of contention as the group first gained prominence. More radical anti-capitalist environmentalists were concerned that without "greater focus on the capitalist roots of climate catastrophe" any government action to tackle climate change in response to Extinction Rebellion's campaigns would fall disproportionately on the poor.⁴³³ Others responded by arguing that in fact "anti-capitalist practice and principle that runs through the [Extinction Rebellion] movement" but that to adopt an explicitly anti-capitalist stance "would be suicide for the movement".⁴³⁴ In my view, Extinction Rebellion's approach was likely tactical rather than the result of genuine moderation. This tension, however, between appearing moderate enough to retain public support or being a more overtly radical campaign with a smaller number of dedicated followers, is one that persists today within the broader environmentalist movement in the UK. After Extinction Rebellion committed in January 2023 to "temporarily shift away from public disruption as a primary tactic",⁴³⁵ it would appear that Just Stop Oil has taken on – and stepped up – the mantle of direct action.⁴³⁶

3.94 Relatively early in its campaign, some of Extinction Rebellion's founders behaved in ways that indicated that they held or endorsed overtly radical,

See 'Heading for Extinction and What to do About it', Extinction Rebellion, 18 September 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2Vkc4SnwY0&t=136s> [42:00-48:00]. For the KCL divestment campaign see also 'Spray Paint Action by Kings College Climate Emergency', Real Media Youtube, 19 January 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5eeYt_98c24; for Heathrow blockade see Alice Ross, 'Heathrow protest by climate activists causes delays on M4', *The Guardian*, 21 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2017/feb/21/heathrow-protest-climate-activists-closes-m4-motorway>; for Barclays campaign see Eddie Bisknell, 'Anti-fracking protesters spray paint Barclays bank in Stroud', *Stroud News & Journal*, 6 May 2017, <https://www.stroudnewsandjournal.co.uk/news/15269579.pictures-anti-fracking-protesters-spray-paint-barclays-bank-in-stroud/>; for LSE cleaners' protest see 'Life not money at the LSE', Facebook, 11 May 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=1888180911462451&set=pcb.1888182774795598>; for The Sun protest see Rising Up Facebook, 7 June 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/RisingUpUK/posts/pfbid02ZTkJofU94teFYZfL8j37U1MtnY7coV1qniNpGyfuucYpMovb3n3DWahV8LW36Svl>; for Stop Killing Londoners see 'Stop killing Londoners road block disco', Stop Killing Londoners Facebook, 27 February 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/events/tower-bridge/stop-killing-londoners-road-block-disco/1633654240029426/>; 'Stop Killing Londoners Cut Air Pollution Protest Blocks Tower Bridge', In Pictures, 2017, <https://www.in-pictures.co.uk/image/I0000VrNUptJHD.I>; Life not Money at the LSE Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100066727638593>; for the Universal Credit campaign see 'Protest and civil disobedience at Stroud Job Centre', Rising Up Facebook, 15 March 2018, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=412214735885083; for the mass trespass see 'Bathurst Estate trespassers call for land justice', *Wilts and Gloucestershire Standard*, 30 April 2018, <https://www.wiltsglosstandard.co.uk/news/16193968.bathurst-estate-trespassers-call-land-justice/>.

⁴³² Eddie Bisknell, 'Pictures: Anti-fracking protesters spray paint Barclays bank in Stroud', *Stroud News and Journal*, 6 May 2017, <https://www.stroudnewsandjournal.co.uk/news/15269579.pictures-anti-fracking-protesters-spray-paint-barclays-bank-in-stroud/>.

⁴³³ 'Green Anti-Capitalist Front Manifesto & Open Letter to Extinction Rebellion', Freedom, 11 March 2019, <https://freedomnews.org.uk/green-anti-capitalist-front-manifesto-open-letter-to-extinction-rebellion/> archived at: <https://archive.ph/wGjYx>.

⁴³⁴ Samuel Hayward, 'Extinction Rebellion and anti-capitalist politics', *Ecologist*, 10 May 2019, <https://theecologist.org/2019/may/10/extinction-rebellion-and-anti-capitalist-politics>.

⁴³⁵ 'We Quit', Extinction Rebellion, 31 December 2022, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2022/12/31/we-quit/>.

⁴³⁶ Robert Booth, 'Extinction Rebellion announces move away from disruptive tactics', *The Guardian*, 1 January 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/01/extinction-rebellion-announces-move-away-from-disruptive-tactics>.

even militant, attitudes. For example, in November 2019, Bramwell, spoke at an event for Deep Green Resistance UK, a radical environmentalist group that aims to dismantle civilisation and capitalism to save the planet.⁴³⁷ A promotional video for the event titled 'By Any Means Necessary' showed images of traditional protest interspersed with those of unidentified activists sabotaging infrastructure and armed groups.⁴³⁸ This tacit arms-length endorsement of violence is a hallmark of Deep Green Resistance UK.⁴³⁹ During the event, Bramwell told those gathered that they were "living in a system where our mere act of non-violence against that system, is perpetrating violence against the rest of the planet".⁴⁴⁰ Asserting a duty to "take down civilisation", he advocated "civil disobedience and direct sabotage" and "shutting down fossil fuelling, direct sabotage, mass civil disobedience".⁴⁴¹ In my view, such rhetoric risks inciting others to serious criminality.

- 3.95 Rising Up! has not been unequivocal about violence either. On social media the group often supported the revolution in Rojava in northern Syria and the Kurdish militias fighting there. For example, in January 2018, Rising Up! posted a video message from the YPG, or the People's Protection Units, calling on others to join them,⁴⁴² while in March 2019, they posted a eulogy for a British anarchist and prison abolitionist who was killed fighting with the Women's Protection Units (YPJ) in Rojava.⁴⁴³ On several occasions Rising Up! also shared content supportive of the Kurdish revolution from anarchist websites.⁴⁴⁴ In February 2018, it shared a statement from an armed

⁴³⁷ See 'About DGR-UK', Deep Green Resistance UK, <https://deepgreenresistance.uk/about-dgr-uk/>. Deep Green Resistance describes itself as "a strategy to save the planet, based on an analysis of civilisation that sees it as inherently destructive". See Deep Green Resistance, <https://deepgreenresistance.uk/>.

⁴³⁸ By Any Means Necessary? Diversity of tactics in the fight for life on earth, Deep Green Resistance Facebook, 29 September 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/dgruk/videos/541233010018337>.

⁴³⁹ On its website the group is clear that it is not involved in violent direct action. However, it is also clear that non-violent action will not be enough and that, "Our planet needs a separate but parallel underground organisation, dedicated to resisting in ways that fall outside the bounds of legal challenges and civil disobedience." See About DGR-UK, Deep Green Resistance UK, <https://deepgreenresistance.uk/about-dgr-uk/>.

⁴⁴⁰ For a video of the November 2019 Deep Green Resistance event see 'By Any Means Necessary? Diversity of tactics in the fight for life on earth', Deep Green Resistance, YouTube, 4 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGfslp0uyQ4> [1:12:04-1:12:17].

⁴⁴¹ Rachael Venables, 'Enough is Enough: XR co-founder filmed calling for 'take down' of civilisation', *LBC*, 3 February 2020, <https://www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/nick-ferrari/enough-enough/xr-co-founder-filmed-calling-sabotage-civilisation/>.

⁴⁴² 'Remembering Anna Campbell and honouring her spirit, love of life and dedication to fighting for a better planet.', Rising Up, Facebook, 15 March 2019,

<https://www.facebook.com/178365215936704/posts/pfbid02wc8aaprb4Ffemc3jwUWvHdqL1Fk3wmHwGCdpHQKb471x3FUbcabGcmXrxRHkTLHl/?d=n>, Matt Blake, 'British woman killed fighting Turkish forces in Afrin', *The Guardian*, 19 March 2018,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/19/briton-kurds-anna-campbell-dies-fighting-turkey-syria-afrin>; Rising Up, Facebook, 29 January 2018,

<https://www.facebook.com/178365215936704/posts/pfbid037zryiasrZv21yAxiC9NFZt9NzS2z3Qvy9khwydvPa7hRU248mDBucMRLBbUSwBXAl/?d=n>; 'Message from internationalist fighters in Afrin', *ANF News*, 28 January 2018, <https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/message-from-internationalist-fighters-in-afrin-24518>.

⁴⁴³ 'Remembering Anna Campbell', Rising Up Facebook, 15 March 2019,

<https://www.facebook.com/178365215936704/posts/pfbid02wc8aaprb4Ffemc3jwUWvHdqL1Fk3wmHwGCdpHQKb471x3FUbcabGcmXrxRHkTLHl/?d=n>, for more on Anna Campbell see 'A Tribute to freedom fighter Anna Campbell', *ANF News*, 16 March 2023,

<https://anfenglishmobile.com/news/a-tribute-to-freedom-fighter-anna-campbell-66063>.

⁴⁴⁴ For example, on 24 March 2018, Rising Up! shared an article titled 'As Afrin Falls, the World Rises for Rojava' on the website *It's Going Down*, which describes itself as "a digital community center for anarchist, anti-fascist, autonomous anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements", while on 18 March 2018, Rising Up! shared a Facebook post featuring imagery of individuals posing with weapons from Rojava Solidarity Worldwide, a group that describes itself as an "Internationalist anarchist and antifascist supporters of the Rojava

internationalist militia fighting in Rojava and calling themselves “Antifascist Forces in Arfin”,⁴⁴⁵ published by the website Insurrection News Worldwide.⁴⁴⁶ This website has routinely published articles and statements from anarchist groups celebrating Far Left terrorist attacks in Europe.⁴⁴⁷ In the accompanying picture the militants are holding an Antifa flag. While there is nothing illegitimate about supporting the cause of Kurdish freedom, it is striking that a group publicly pledging itself to non-violence repeatedly posted content revering revolutionary anarchist militancy overseas.

- 3.96 Over the course of Extinction Rebellion’s early activism, Hallam became increasingly uncompromising.
- 3.97 In September 2019, he led a small breakaway group of activists protesting the expansion at Heathrow Airport by attempting to fly drones inside the exclusion zone,⁴⁴⁸ potentially endangering public safety.⁴⁴⁹ Plans to use drones in this way had been criticised by some in the Extinction Rebellion movement as too disruptive, potentially violent, and likely to lose public support,⁴⁵⁰ prompting Hallam to set up the splinter group Heathrow Pause.⁴⁵¹ Later that year, Hallam caused further controversy when he appeared to downplay the significance of the Holocaust, describing it as “almost a normal event ... just another fuckery

Revolution and the Kurdish Freed”. See ‘As Afrin Falls, the World Rises for Rojava – it’s Going Down’, Rising Up Facebook, 24 March 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/178365215936704/posts/pfbid02kTcDpGTTwwMBDskcQxEZmq3hPtqcTBUntHrpBh62ZZCwbFFYMGdVvxxwSeRLuje5El/?d=n> and ‘Rojava Solidarity Worldwide’, Rising Up Facebook, 18 March 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/178365215936704/posts/pfbid0kBS0CG2K9ENa17kySnfGprL1VTgtKNJ1LiUbm3jn13wjyGNKZJgYLFtBCpbdkdql/?d=n>.

⁴⁴⁵ ‘Rojava Solidarity Worldwide’, Rising Up Facebook, 13 February 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/178365215936704/posts/pfbid094gDtWDX3nZPMqd2dbwHBfUEyfiabN7epsZv8HgV2xw7fhZq2QcYfavQCZFU m4Y6l/?d=n>. Archived at Rojava: ‘Statement from Antifascist Forces in Afrin (AFFA)’, Insurrections News, 13 February 2018, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180305063401/https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.com/2018/02/13/rojava-statement-from-antifascist-forces-in-afrin-affa/>.

⁴⁴⁶ Insurrection News Worldwide is a pro-anarchist website that describes itself as dealing in “counter-information & incitement from the global front lines of anti-capitalist insurrection & social war”, see ‘Reykjavík, Iceland: NATO Memorial Tarded and Feathered for World Afrin Day’, Insurrection News Worldwide, 25 March 2018, <https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.wordpress.com/page/2/>.

⁴⁴⁷ For a few of the many examples, see Santiago Maldonado Cell, ‘Rome, Italy: Explosive Attack Against a Carabinieri Police Station in San Giovanni’, Insurrection News (captured on the Internet Archive 10 December 2017), <https://web.archive.org/web/20171210223013/https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.com/2017/12/08/rome-italy-explosive-attack-against-a-carabinieri-police-station-in-san-giovanni-by-santiago-maldonado-cell-fai-fri/>; ‘Athens, Greece: Explosive Attack Against the Evelpidon Court Complex’, Insurrection News, 28 March 2018, (captured on the Internet Archive 12 November 2019), <https://web.archive.org/web/20191112113858/https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.com/2018/03/28/athens-greece-explosive-attack-against-the-evelpidon-court-complex-by-circle-of-asymmetric-urban-warfare-fai-fri/>; ‘Greece: Responsibility Claim from Popular Fighters Group for the Bombing of the Athens Court of Appeals’, Insurrection News, 16 January 2018, <https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.wordpress.com/2018/01/16/greece-responsibility-claim-from-popular-fighters-group-for-the-bombing-of-the-athens-court-of-appeals/>; ‘Conspiracy of Cells of Fire – Nemesis Project – Act 2 (Parcel-bomb attack against the German Minister of Finance)’, Insurrection News, 16 March 2017, <https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.wordpress.com/2017/03/16/conspiracy-of-cells-of-fire-nemesis-project-act-2-parcel-bomb-attack-against-the-german-minister-of-finance/>; ‘Letter bomb explodes inside IMF offices in Paris, another 8 devices suspected in the post (France, Greece)’, Insurrection News, 20 March 2017, <https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.wordpress.com/2017/03/20/letter-bomb-explodes-inside-imf-offices-in-paris-another-8-devices-suspected-in-the-post-france-greece/>; ‘Greece: Poster for Anarchist Prisoner of War Konstantinos ‘Dinos’ Yiagtzoglou’, Insurrection News, 24 November 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20180121050230/https://insurrectionnewsworldwide.com/2017/11/24/greece-poster-for-anarchist-prisoner-of-war-konstantinos-dinos-yiagtzoglou/>.

⁴⁴⁸ ‘Extinction Rebellion co-founder arrested at Heathrow protest’, *The Guardian*, 14 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/14/extinction-rebellion-co-founder-arrested-at-heathrow-protest>.

⁴⁴⁹ ‘Extinction Rebellion plans Heathrow drone protest’, BBC News, 31 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-48470623>.

⁴⁵⁰ Sanjana Varghese, ‘Extinction Rebellion’s Heathrow drone protest is tearing it in two’, *Wired*, 10 June 2019, <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/extinction-rebellion-heathrow-airport-drones>.

⁴⁵¹ Heathrow Pause, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/HeathrowPause>.

in human history”.⁴⁵² Hallam withdrew from his formal positions within Extinction Rebellion in July 2020 to set up a new direct-action political party, Beyond Politics, also known as Burning Pink.⁴⁵³

- 3.98 Hallam’s action may have been part of a strategy by Extinction Rebellion to move the so-called Overton Window, in other words to change public opinion such that previously unthinkable policies are acceptable to the public and so become available to politicians to pursue. A climate activist interviewed for research commissioned by this review claimed that Extinction Rebellion insiders knew “[Hallam] was deliberately trying to be provocative [...] and they would distance themselves from him”, adding “it was all part of a plan ... they were deliberately going to incite and provoke, to get attention and to push the Overton Window”.⁴⁵⁴ Regardless of how intentional Hallam’s actions were, the group’s strategy appears real. There are frequent references to the Overton Window in the group’s literature and, in August 2020, reflecting on how realistic a demand for zero carbon by 2025 was compared to a year beforehand, Bradbrook told a journalist: “The Overton window has been smashed wide open”.⁴⁵⁵
- 3.99 In both early 2020 and since the first national lockdown of that year, Extinction Rebellion and other closely associated campaigns switched to methods of disruption and law breaking that can be carried out by smaller numbers of committed activists. These groups also focused narrowly on more specific policy goals. The Stop HS2 campaign and HS2 Rebellion, which targeted the construction of the high speed rail line connecting London, Birmingham and the North, was an early example of this.⁴⁵⁶ In spring 2020, activists tried to disrupt work on the line, including by camping in trees and woodlands,⁴⁵⁷ sabotaging and damaging equipment,⁴⁵⁸ and blocking access to construction sites.⁴⁵⁹ Activists dug an extensive network of tunnels close to Euston Station

⁴⁵² Kate Connolly and Matthew Taylor, ‘Extinction Rebellion founder’s Holocaust remarks spark fury’, *The Guardian*, 20 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/nov/20/extinction-rebellion-founders-holocaust-remarks-spark-fury>.

⁴⁵³ Matthew Taylor, ‘The Evolution of Extinction Rebellion’, *The Guardian*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/04/evolution-of-extinction-rebellion-climate-emergency-protest-coronavirus-pandemic>.

⁴⁵⁴ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 186.

⁴⁵⁵ Matthew Taylor, ‘The Evolution of Extinction Rebellion’, *The Guardian*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/aug/04/evolution-of-extinction-rebellion-climate-emergency-protest-coronavirus-pandemic>.

⁴⁵⁶ The Stop HS2 campaign was advertised on Extinction Rebellion’s website as an “XR HS2 Action” hosted by a local Facebook group called Save the Colne Valley. See ‘Search results for HS2’, Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/?s=hs2>. Coopting the ‘rebellion’ brand, HS2 Rebellion says it is “entirely distinct from Extinction Rebellion” but affirms that it “does form part of the Movement of Movements”. See HS2 Rebellion, <https://www.hs2rebellion.earth/>.

⁴⁵⁷ Phil Mackie, ‘HS2 protesters spending coronavirus lockdown in trees’, BBC News, 4 May 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-coventry-warwickshire-52488267>.

⁴⁵⁸ Witness Statement of Richard Jordan, High Court of Justice Birmingham District Registry Claim No. QB-2022-BHM-000044, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1064254/15_Witness_Statement_of_Richard_Jordan.pdf, para 12.

⁴⁵⁹ ‘Protesters block HS2 building sites during ongoing coronavirus lockdown’, ITV, 4 May 2020, <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2020-05-04/protesters-block-hs2-building-sites-during-ongoing-coronavirus-lockdown>.

in a further attempt to stop progress on the rail line.⁴⁶⁰ By February 2021, it was reported that the cost of trying to contend with anti-HS2 activists had cost £49 million.⁴⁶¹

3.100 Insulate Britain emerged in 2021 demanding the UK government act to insulate housing in Britain.⁴⁶² The group launched a high-profile campaign in the form of relatively small groups of activists blocking motorways, particularly the M25, in September 2021.⁴⁶³ As discussed, the disruption to the public was significant. The failure by authorities to prevent these activities, or to quickly move on demonstrators, also led to angry scenes in which members of the public retaliated, including by attempting to drag activists out of the road,⁴⁶⁴ using a vehicle to push protesters out of the way,⁴⁶⁵ or, on one occasion, by throwing ink over the protesters.⁴⁶⁶ Insulate Britain was widely described as an “off-shoot” of Extinction Rebellion in the British media,⁴⁶⁷ while Hallam was described as its “mastermind”.⁴⁶⁸ In a supportive statement, Extinction Rebellion said they were separate organisations that “share much common ground”.⁴⁶⁹

3.101 A further iteration of these smaller law-breaking campaigns is Just Stop Oil, a coalition demanding an end to all licences and the exploration, development and production of oil and gas in the UK.⁴⁷⁰ Hallam has also supported Just Stop Oil, including by recruiting for the group, particularly from among

⁴⁶⁰ Barney Davis and John Dunne, ‘HS2 protesters dig secret 100ft network of tunnels in Euston Square as bailiffs move in’, *The Standard*, 27 January 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/hs2-rebellion-euston-square-gardens-protest-tunnel-b901275.html>.

⁴⁶¹ Aaron Chown, ‘Cost of stopping HS2 climate protests hits £49m’, *The Times*, 10 February 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/cost-of-stopping-hs2-climate-change-protests-hits-50m-k8f8mp3r9>. Archived at: <https://archive.ph/AUZna#selection-849.0-849.47>.

⁴⁶² Insulate Britain joined Twitter in May 2021, Facebook in June 2021, and Instagram in August 2021, before launching its high-profile campaign targeting the M25 in October 2021. See Insulate Britain, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/InsulateLove>; Insulate Britain, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/insulatebritain/about_profile_transparency; Insulate Britain, Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/insulatebritain/>, <https://www.getreading.co.uk/news/uk-world-news/insulate-britain-launches-new-campaign-21958725>.

⁴⁶³ ‘Who are Insulate Britain, the group blocking M25 traffic, and what are they campaigning for?’, ITV, 20 September 2021, <https://www.itv.com/news/2021-09-20/who-are-insulate-britain-the-group-blocking-the-m25-and-what-do-they-want>.

⁴⁶⁴ Rebecca Speare-Cole, ‘Insulate Britain protesters dragged off M25 junction by angry drivers and police’, Sky News, 13 October 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/insulate-britain-blocks-m25-to-demand-insulation-of-uk-homes-despite-injunction-12432747#:~:text=Several%20Insulate%20Britain%20members%20had,spots%20to%20sit%20down%20again>.

⁴⁶⁵ Damien Gayle, ‘Video shows Range Rover pushing Insulate Britain activist at sit-in’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/oct/19/video-shows-range-rover-pushing-insulate-britain-activist-at-sit-in>.

⁴⁶⁶ ‘Insulate Britain protesters have ink thrown on them as they block roads near Dartford Crossing and the A40 in North Acton’, Sky News, 27 October 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/insulate-britain-protesters-block-roads-in-dartford-and-west-london-12445743#:~:text=Insulate%20Britain%20protesters%20have%20had,the%20M25%20in%20recent%20weeks>.

⁴⁶⁷ See for example, Tom Gillespie, ‘Insulate Britain: Extra injunction granted after protesters block Port of Dover’, Sky News, 24 September 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/insulate-britain-sorry-as-it-blocks-port-of-dover-in-climate-protest-12416324>; Jacob Bentley-York, ‘New Rebels: Who are M25 eco protestors Insulate Britain’, *The Sun*, 13 October 2021, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/16126456/protest-group-insulate-britain/>; Matthew Weaver, ‘Climate activists block M25 for sixth time in fortnight over insulation’, *The Guardian*, 27 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/sep/27/climate-activists-block-m25-for-sixth-time-in-fortnight-over-insulation>; ‘Who are Insulate Britain, the group blocking M25 traffic, and what are they campaigning for?’, ITV, 20 September 2021, <https://www.itv.com/news/2021-09-20/who-are-insulate-britain-the-group-blocking-the-m25-and-what-do-they-want>.

⁴⁶⁸ Ali Mitib, Ben Ellery and David Brown, ‘The people behind the Just Stop Oil chaos’, *The Times*, 9 November 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-people-behind-the-just-stop-oil-chaos-58ftr87ck>.

⁴⁶⁹ ‘What is Insulate Britain and what does it want?’, BBC News, 17 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-58916326>; ‘Be Impossible, Demand the Realistic: Statement on Insulate Britain from XR UK’, Extinction Rebellion, 29 October 2021, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/10/29/be-impossible-demand-the-realistic-statement-on-insulate-britain-from-xr-uk/>.

⁴⁷⁰ Just Stop Oil, <https://juststopoil.org/>.

students, and by participating in its disruption of the M25 in November 2022.⁴⁷¹ In July 2023, Hallam addressed a Just Stop Oil activists allegedly gathered to celebrate their achievements, suggesting continued involvement with the group.⁴⁷² In line with Hallam's philosophy, the group has used disruption tactics, such as blocking roads and critical fuel sites around the country,⁴⁷³ and, increasingly, high-profile acts of vandalism and disruption of sporting or cultural events.⁴⁷⁴

3.102 For example, in April 2022 Just Stop Oil supporters blocked 10 key oil terminals around the country, with, as the group said on social media "a potential impact on fuel supply for London and the South East".⁴⁷⁵ In the same month, Just Stop Oil broke into the UK's largest inland oil terminal at Kingsbury and chained themselves to pipes, disrupting oil supplies,⁴⁷⁶ while in August 2022, activists attached themselves to oil tankers, deflated oil tanker tyres, and tunnelled below a carriageway to block a key delivery route to an Essex oil terminal.⁴⁷⁷ Just Stop Oil also targeted petrol stations around this time. In April 2022, around 40 activists glued themselves to two forecourts in Surrey and smashed petrol pumps,⁴⁷⁸ while in August 2022 one activist caused almost £10,000 worth of damage to petrol pumps in Essex. He was fined £2000 and given a four-month suspended prison sentence.⁴⁷⁹

3.103 In my view, by targeting national energy infrastructure and opposing developments to bolster the country's energy security, these Just Stop Oil protests are likely to further alienate the public by aggravating factors that could worsen Britain's energy crisis and cost of living crisis.

3.104 In the last two years, Just Stop Oil has targeted high-profile cultural institutions, such as the Baftas,⁴⁸⁰ the opera at Glyndebourne, the Chelsea

⁴⁷¹ Tom Ball, 'Insulate Britain founder recruits student 'revolutionaries' to save planet', *The Times*, 28 January 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/insulate-britain-founder-recruits-student-revolutionaries-to-save-planet-t5sgvbtdp>; 'Roger Hallam denied bail and kept incarcerated without trial.', Just Stop Oil, 19 January 2023, <https://juststopoil.org/2023/01/19/roger-hallam-denied-bail-and-kept-incarcerated-without-trial/>.

⁴⁷² Just Stop Oil Twitter, 23 July 2023, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1683141367155810307.

⁴⁷³ For example, Just Stop Oil targeted fuel terminals in April 2022 and blocked the M25 in November 2022. See 'Just Stop Oil protests: Terminal operations suspended and arrests made', BBC News, 1 April 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-60951403>; Lydia Chantler-Hicks, 'Just Stop Oil: major delays on M25 and at Dartford crossing as activists return for second day', *The Standard*, 8 November 2022, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/just-stop-oil-dartford-crossing-bridge-tunnel-protest-m25-essex-surrey-b1038270.html>.

⁴⁷⁴ Joe Sommerlad, 'Just Stop Oil: Are the climate group's demonstrations at sporting events against the law?', *Independent*, 7 July 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/just-stop-oil-protests-law-b2371250.html>.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Update! 10 key oil terminals have now been blocked by supporters of Just Stop Oil, with a potential impact on fuel supply for London and the South East.', Just Stop Oil Twitter, 1 April 2022, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1509781530595446785.

⁴⁷⁶ Colin Drury, 'Just Stop Oil: Activists hacksaw into UK's largest inland terminal and chain themselves to pipes', *Independent*, 7 April 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/just-stop-oil-protest-kingsbury-terminal-b2052785.html>.

⁴⁷⁷ 'Just Stop Oil: Eight arrests as Grays oil tanker blocked', BBC News, 30 August 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-62721045>.

⁴⁷⁸ Charlotte McLaughlin, Henry Martin and Rory Tingle, 'Police FINALLY remove eco zealots after they shut down two M25 petrol stations for SEVEN HOURS as group led by 'John Lennon-lookalike' who was jailed over climate protests targeted forecourts during rush-hour', *Mail Online*, 28 April 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10762165/Eco-anarchists-SABOTAGE-Shell-petrol-station-M25.html>.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Just Stop Oil protesters sentenced for blocking Esso petrol station at Grays in Essex', ITV News, 21 November 2022, <https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2022-11-21/just-stop-oil-protesters-sentenced-for-blocking-petrol-station>.

⁴⁸⁰ Naomi Clarke, 'Just Stop Oil campaigners stage noisy protest at Baftas', *Independent*, 13 March 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/baftas-government-tom-hiddleston-royal-albert-hall-london-b2034903.html>.

Flower Show,⁴⁸¹ and the BBC proms.⁴⁸² In June 2022, two activists glued themselves to the frame of a Vincent van Gogh painting, while two more threw tomato soup the artist's Sunflowers later that year.⁴⁸³ For a sense of scale, the group claimed five "act[s] of civil resistance inside an art gallery" during one week alone in July 2022.⁴⁸⁴

3.105 Just Stop Oil has regularly disrupted major sporting events, including several Premier League football matches and the British F1 Grand Prix in 2022 and, so far in 2023, the world snooker championship, the British golf Open, the premiership rugby final, the second Ashes test at Lords, and Wimbledon.⁴⁸⁵ Activists have typically invaded the grounds, locking-on in some way or dousing it in orange powder or glitter.⁴⁸⁶ Just Stop Oil has claimed that such high-profile disruption are necessary to "force the issue [...] up the news agenda", arguing that disrupting oil companies or government departments is not as effective.⁴⁸⁷

3.106 Most recently, Just Stop Oil activists have been slow marching on London roads since April 2023.⁴⁸⁸ Worryingly, there have been several incidents of frustrated members of the public retaliating, including by ripping banners out of protestors hands,⁴⁸⁹ throwing water over protestors,⁴⁹⁰ and, in one instance, by punching and kicking a protestor.⁴⁹¹ I am concerned about the potential for what might be called 'cumulative retaliation', whereby the public's repeated experiences of Just Stop Oil disruption coupled with the authorities' apparent ineffectiveness in gripping the situation leads to an escalation in public responses and, potentially, serious violence.

3.107 Just Stop Oil's theatrical campaigns should be viewed as a continuation of the 'propaganda by the deed' popularised by Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain. As with those groups, the burden on policing is significant. For

⁴⁸¹ Seren Hughes, 'Just Stop Oil protests in pictures', *The Times*, 27 June 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/url-picture-gallery-just-stop-oil-extinction-rebellion-climate-protests-uk-2023-88bnfrckm>.

⁴⁸² 'Just Stop Oil protesters interrupt the Proms', BBC News, 15 July 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-66207576>.

⁴⁸³ Damien Gayle, 'Just Stop Oil activists throw soup at Van Gogh's Sunflowers', *The Guardian*, 14 October 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/14/just-stop-oil-activists-throw-soup-at-van-goghs-sunflowers>.

⁴⁸⁴ 'BREAKING. For the fifth time in the last week supporters of Just Stop Oil have taken an act of civil resistance inside an art gallery.', Just Stop Oil Twitter, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1544271348796637184.

⁴⁸⁵ Will Bolton, 'Just Stop Oil policing bill would fund 200 Met officers' salaries', *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/07/25/just-stop-oil-police-bill-funds-200-met-officers-salaries/>.

⁴⁸⁶ Joe Brophy, 'Who are Just Stop Oil and why do they keep targeting sporting events? Andy Murray agrees with cause but doesn't want protests to disrupt Wimbledon', Talk Sport, 3 July 2023, <https://talksport.com/sport/1442744/who-just-stop-oil-why-sport-premier-league-ashes-wimbledon/>.

⁴⁸⁷ 'Just Stop Sport?', Just Stop Oil statement to BBC Newscast, 7 July 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0fzp0qs> (07:06 - 08:09).

⁴⁸⁸ Jess Waren and PA Media, 'Just Stop Oil protests cost Met Police £7.7m since April', BBC News, 25 July 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-66301164>.

⁴⁸⁹ Danya Bazarara and Mark Duell, 'Londoners fight back against the Just Stop Oil eco-zealots: Furious by-standers rip banners from their hands, motorists scream abuse and driver rams activist and 'runs over her foot' as slow-marching protesters ignore police orders to stay off the streets', *Daily Mail*, 2 May 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12037979/Furious-Londoners-fight-against-Just-Stop-Oil-eco-zealots.html>.

⁴⁹⁰ 'Just Stop Oil protesters drenched while slowing traffic in London', The Times and Sunday Times Youtube, 22 June 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NVbW9kBrh8w>.

⁴⁹¹ 'Just Stop Oil protester punched and kicked', BBC News, 19 July 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-66249612>.

example, Just Stop Oil protests cost the Metropolitan Police £7.5 million over a nine-week period at the end of 2022,⁴⁹² and £7.7 million over a 13-week period since April 2023.⁴⁹³ During those 13 weeks, the Metropolitan Police responded to 515 Just Stop Oil protests, an average of more than five a day, at a cost equivalent to the annual salary of around 200 officers.⁴⁹⁴

3.108 The impact on the criminal justice system from Just Stop Oil activism is not insignificant. By June 2023, Just Stop Oil claimed its supporters had been arrested 2,200 times since launching in February 2022, resulting in 138 convictions.⁴⁹⁵ The high number of repeat arrests and convictions among a small number of, often young, supporters make clear that criminal sanction has done little to deter these activists. Nor is it not uncommon for protestors to defy bail conditions when carrying out disruptive protests.⁴⁹⁶ In April 2022, for example, Louis McKechnie told *The Times* that he had been arrested 17 times and had spent time in prison for his role in Insulate Britain's M25 road blockings.⁴⁹⁷ Since then, he was returned to prison after he joined the disruption of 2022 British Grand Prix while on bail for tying himself to a goalpost at a Premier League football game.⁴⁹⁸ McKechnie remains unrepentant, telling Just Stop Oil in July 2022: "This isn't my first time in prison for this, and it won't be my last. We won't stop demanding that the government protect us, until they actually start protecting us".⁴⁹⁹

3.109 Finally, I am particularly concerned by the trajectory of Hallam's revolutionary apocalyptic rhetoric and its potential to incite others to engage in riskier or violent activism. Extinction Rebellion, its parent groups, and its offshoots share the conviction that conventional politics and protest methods have failed, and this is one of the ways they seek to justify their disruptive methods.⁵⁰⁰ Academic research commissioned for this review also found that

⁴⁹² 'Just Stop Oil protests cost the Metropolitan Police £7.5m in just nine weeks', *ITV News*, 5 February 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/london/2023-02-05/just-stop-oil-protests-cost-the-metropolitan-police-75m>.

⁴⁹³ Jess Warren & PA Media, 'Just Stop Oil protests cost Met Police £7.7m since April', *BBC News*, 25 July 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-66301164>.

⁴⁹⁴ Will Bolton, 'Just Stop Oil policing bill would fund 200 Met officers' salaries', *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 July 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/07/25/just-stop-oil-police-bill-funds-200-met-officers-salaries/>.

⁴⁹⁵ Seren Hughes, 'Just Stop Oil protests in pictures', *The Times*, 27 June 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/url-picture-gallery-just-stop-oil-extinction-rebellion-climate-protests-uk-2023-88bnfrckm>.

⁴⁹⁶ See, for example, '3 Just Stop Oil Supporters Defy Authoritarian Bail Conditions', Just Stop Oil Twitter, 15 June 2023, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1669329290566029315; 'Case Dismissed!', Just Stop Oil Twitter, 22 June 2023, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1671898830864883712.

⁴⁹⁷ Mario Ledwith, 'Just Stop Oil protester: I don't care if I'm the most hated man in Britain — I'll ruin my life to give others a future', *The Times*, 15 April 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/just-stop-oil-protester-i-dont-care-if-im-the-most-hated-man-in-britain-ill-ruin-my-life-to-give-others-a-future-vpd0v3cxk>; see also 'Louis' story', *Animal Rebellion*, <https://animalrebellion.org/about/the-arrestees/louis-story/>.

⁴⁹⁸ Jacque Talbot, 'Protester who chained himself to Everton post staying in prison thanks to F1 stunt', *Daily Star*, 7 October 2022, <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/sport/f1/protester-who-chained-himself-everton-28181582>.

⁴⁹⁹ 'When Love Overcomes Fear', Just Stop Oil, 18 July 2022, <https://juststopoil.org/2022/07/18/when-love-overcomes-fear/> Archived here: <https://archive.ph/9gb07#selection-795.0-795.24>.

⁵⁰⁰ For example, in a statement in support for Insulate Britain in October 2021 Extinction Rebellion wrote: "Does it not seem "obvious" that drastic action of this kind was coming? Petitions don't work, marches don't work, demonstrations don't work; writing letters doesn't work, talking to MPs doesn't work, standing outside Parliament doesn't work. Politicians don't listen, corporations don't care, and populations

some of Extinction Rebellion's statements demonstrated "a faith in the moral and strategic correctness of its own position which appears impervious to criticism, being based in a rigidly Manichean outlook and in what appears to be taken for certain knowledge of the future".⁵⁰¹ An example of this was the following defence of Insulate Britain's high-profile blockings of the M25:

3.110 So that's why Extinction Rebellion has tactics 'you don't agree with', why Insulate Britain is so repetitively annoying. Because we've both done the graft of travelling to the future and decided that an alternative should be on offer. Because we are the good guys.⁵⁰²

3.111 While there are obvious risks associated with such an 'ends justify the means' approach, Hallam has recently taken things further, repeatedly describing a future world in which the current failure to act on climate change has led to a complete breakdown of civil society.⁵⁰³ In a lecture titled 'Advice to Young People as they face Annihilation', based on an essay of the same title written while he was detained in relation to the Heathrow drone protest in September 2019, Hallam invokes an End Times vision of a world characterised by 'war and violence, the slaughter of young men and the rape of young women on a global scale'.⁵⁰⁴ He creates a sense of urgency by asking his audience to imagine that in their protest they are protecting their loved ones from future attacks, telling them that genocide and gang rape is the future for them and their generation.⁵⁰⁵ Hallam's call to arms is millenarian: current society and its rulers are corrupt; humanity will cease unless governments are overthrown; and activists must be prepared to make "very real sacrifices" to save the planet.⁵⁰⁶ Describing the failure of both liberal civil

don't have a clue about how change really happens, because change only ever happens to them, not with them." 'Be Impossible, Demand the Realistic: Statement on Insulate Britain from XR UK', Extinction Rebellion, 29 October 2021, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/10/29/be-impossible-demand-the-realistic-statement-on-insulate-britain-from-xr-uk/>.

⁵⁰¹ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 191.

⁵⁰² 'Be Impossible, Demand the Realistic: Statement on Insulate Britain from XR UK', Extinction Rebellion, 29 October 2021, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/10/29/be-impossible-demand-the-realistic-statement-on-insulate-britain-from-xr-uk/>.

⁵⁰³ For example, in April 2022 the Guardian reported attending a lecture by Hallam: "One Monday night in March, Roger Hallam is talking about the end of the world as we know it. [...] He predicts hundreds of millions of climate refugees by 2030, and worse. 'Mass slaughter, mass rape, mass starvation,' he says. 'That's what's coming down the line.'" See Dorian Lynskey, 'Just Stop Oil: behind the scenes with the activists', *The Guardian*, 10 April 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/apr/10/just-stop-oil-behind-the-scenes-with-the-activists>.

⁵⁰⁴ 'Advice to Young People as they face Annihilation | Roger Hallam | 2012', Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK YouTube, 9 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnPOnO71wno>.

⁵⁰⁵ Hallam states: "A gang of boys will break into your house demanding food. They will see your mother, your sister, your girlfriend, and they will gang rape her on the kitchen table. They will force you to watch, laughing at you. At the end, they will accuse you of enjoying it. They'll take a cigarette and burn out your eyes with it. You will not be able to see anything again. This is the reality of climate change. Because this is the reality of social collapse, what it actually means for you and your generation. They're not going to tell you this at school. You're not going to get to read about it on the Greenpeace website. People won't tell you about it at a climate change demonstration." 'Advice to Young People as they face Annihilation | Roger Hallam | 2012', Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK YouTube, 9 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnPOnO71wno>.

⁵⁰⁶ For example, in the lecture he describes those who "run society" as "the most immoral and depraved generation in the history of humanity", before telling his followers: "This is what needs to happen now, you need to bring down the world's governments in the next 10 years. Take them over, and enact emergency measures to massively reduce carbon emissions to zero, to suck carbon out of the atmosphere, and to undertake geoengineering measures to stop the melting of the ice in the Arctic. Only these actions have a chance of halting the slide towards extinction. These objectives therefore, need to be pursued ruthlessly, with total focus and dedication to the goals. Otherwise, all will be lost for good and indescribable suffering will be the inevitable fate for you and future generations". 'Advice to

society and “the radical left” he ascribes a transcendental role for the law breaking he encourages:

3.112 Putting yourself in harm's way is in fact the only way you can reduce the greater harm coming down the line. When you act, your despair will lift in resistance to the death which is planned for you. You will find the happiness which presently feels impossible.⁵⁰⁷

3.113 Just Stop Oil regularly posts content from supporters on their website and social media explaining why they did what they did, and it is rare to hear justifications which do not deploy these apocalyptic visions, urgency, or sense of sacrificial purpose.⁵⁰⁸ Extinction Rebellion and related groups echoed this message.⁵⁰⁹ When mass disruption and law breaking is framed in this way, in my view it is a direct incitement to others to engage in serious criminality and conduct which risks significant harm.

3.114 Successive Home Secretaries have condemned Just Stop Oil activists in forthright terms.⁵¹⁰ In my view, they are right to do so. Aside from its likely ineffectiveness in a liberal democracy like the UK, it is simply wrong to use expressions of force to try to subvert the democratic process rather than engaging in the difficult but necessary task of winning public consent for your proposals through legitimate means, no matter how important you think those proposals are.

3.115 Since the submission of this report, Just Stop Oil activists formed a new youth-focused direct-action group, Youth Demand, to campaign across a range of issues.⁵¹¹ According to its website, Youth Demand campaigns for an

Young People as they face Annihilation | Roger Hallam | 2012', Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK YouTube, 9 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnpon071wno>.

⁵⁰⁷ 'Advice to Young People as they face Annihilation | Roger Hallam | 2012', Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK YouTube, 9 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnpon071wno>.

⁵⁰⁸ 'These are the faces of four incredibly brave people who are currently in tunnels preventing the flow of the very thing ending all life on Earth: #oil.', Just Stop Oil Twitter, 24 August 2022, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1562532649021079553; "'Stand with those future generations and with all the ordinary people willing to sacrifice their freedom to protect our future. We must stop the harm that is new oil and gas.'", Just Stop Oil Twitter, 14 February 2023, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1625496793831333892; 'Listen to why Eben took this action today.', Just Stop Oil Twitter, 4 July 2022, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1544025160054984704.

⁵⁰⁹ Extinction Rebellion's online FAQs states: "Many of us have faced arrest, fines, convictions for our actions; some of us have been on hunger strike and gone to jail. So we are willing to take the consequences of our actions and to make personal sacrifices in order to do them. Business as usual is simply no longer a viable option", while its Guide to Planning Effective No-Violent Direct Action lists 'sacrifice' a key component: "Willingness to stand up for what we believe in: it shows the public we are walking our talk." 'Your campaign seems to focus on mass disruption. Are you not scared about what damage you might do to people's lives?', Extinction Rebellion, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/the-truth/faqs/#your-campaign-seems-to-focus-on-mass-disruption-are-you-not-scared-about-what-damage-you-might-do-to-people-s-lives>; The How to Guide, Planning Effective NVDA, Rebel Toolkit, <https://rebeltoolkit.extinctionrebellion.uk/books/upskilling-rebels/page/nvda#>. Archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230609011915/https://rebeltoolkit.extinctionrebellion.uk/books/upskilling-rebels/page/nvda>.

⁵¹⁰ David Hughes, 'Just Stop Oil protesters 'wreaking havoc' and costing millions, says No 10', *Independent*, 30 August 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/boris-johnson-priti-patel-just-stop-oil-home-secretary-downing-street-b2155665.html>; Suella Braverman, 'Eco-zealots are not just causing mayhem – they are risking lives', *The Mail Plus*, 15 October 2022, <https://www.mailplus.co.uk/edition/comment/229635/eco-zealots-are-not-just-causing-mayhem-they-are-risking-lives>.

⁵¹¹ Daniel Boffey, 'Revolutions are coming': who are Youth Demand and what do they want?', *The Guardian*, 11 April 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/11/revolutions-are-coming-who-are-youth-demand-and-what-do-they-want?CMP=share_btn_url.

end to new oil and gas drilling as well as “for an end to genocide” through a “two way arms embargo on Israel”.⁵¹² In April 2024, Youth Demand sprayed Labour Party headquarters with paint; targeted the Labour leader’s home, hanging a banner which read “ Starmer – Stop the Killing” and placing children’s shoes – to represent the deaths of children in Gaza – in his family’s front garden;⁵¹³ and partnered with anarchist, anti-Israel activist group Palestine Action in spraying red paint on the Ministry of Defence.⁵¹⁴

3.116 As with Extinction Rebellion and its other splinter groups, Youth Demand justifies its lawbreaking on the grounds that democracy has failed, writing on social media: “The Youth refuse to comply with a system that is killing us all. It is clear we cannot vote our way out of this, we must force an end to the genocides ourselves, it is time to step up and act. to provide the necessary solutions”.⁵¹⁵ I am concerned that this position can open the way for increasingly extreme action. I am also struck by Youth Demand’s hybrid causes, which further supports my view that far from being single-issue groups there is common ideological ground – and shared personnel – between so-called progressive social movements within the Far Left subculture in the UK.

- **While Extinction Rebellion and its splinter groups Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil have different demands and *modus operandi*, they are united by a radical environmentalist agenda that is also often fundamentally rooted in an anarchist and anti-capitalist ideology.**
- **These groups have particularly sought to use law breaking along with mass disruption to force their message into the public debate. They have largely avoided both the street violence that often accompanies protest movements and co-option by the Far Left.**
- **These groups’ conviction that conventional politics and protest methods have failed, coupled with senior leaders’ apocalyptic revolutionary rhetoric risks lone actors inspired by the urgency of the environmentalist message engaging in riskier or violent activism. The decentralised nature of these groups additionally removes any potential brake on such escalation.**

⁵¹² Youth Demand, <https://youthdemand.org/>

⁵¹³ Eirian Jane Prosser, ‘Just Stop Oil’s ‘youth wing’ sprays red paint over Ministry of Defence just days after targeting Labour HQ’, *Daily Mail*, 10 April 2024, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13293597/Just-Stop-Oils-youth-wing-sprays-red-paint-Ministry-Defence-just-days-targeting-Labour-HQ.html>.

⁵¹⁴ Chas Geiger, ‘Pro-Palestinian protesters spray red paint on Ministry of Defence’, BBC News, 10 April 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68781130>; ‘Palestine Action and Youth Demand paint Ministry of Defence’, Freedom News, 19 April 2024, <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2024/04/19/palestine-action-and-youth-demand-paint-ministry-of-defence/>, archived version: <https://archive.ph/sA1Yn>.

⁵¹⁵ Youth Demand, Twitter, 8 April 2024, https://twitter.com/youth_demand/status/1777353862602535204.

- **The threat of escalatory violence from members of the public who feel that the authorities are not taking sufficient steps to protect them from disruption is not insignificant.**

Anti-Racism – Black Lives Matter

3.117 The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the UK is best known for inspiring widespread and mass anti-racism protests during the summer of 2020 as the country emerged from the first national lockdown in response to the coronavirus pandemic. The protests were inspired by similar demonstrations across the United States (US) in response to the murder in Minneapolis in May 2020 of a black man, George Floyd, by a white police officer.⁵¹⁶

3.118 Over the summer tens of thousands of people joined the BLM-led protests, including those who had never attended a protest before.⁵¹⁷ The anti-black racism cause is itself compelling, as was the potency of the BLM protests. Nonetheless, I am concerned about the high levels of public disorder that accompanied the protests, in particular violence towards the police and the destruction of historic monuments and statues. In my view, there is no justification for violence and lawbreaking, no matter how noble the cause.

3.119 The BLM movement in the UK had first mobilised in the summer of 2016,⁵¹⁸ inspired by the BLM group that had emerged in the US in response to the killing of the black teenager Trayvon Martin in Florida in 2012 by an armed neighbourhood-watch volunteer.⁵¹⁹ Early BLM campaigners in the UK, known as Black Lives Matter UK (BLMUK),⁵²⁰ deployed the kind of mass disruption and direct-action protest tactics that were popularised in 2018 and 2019 by Extinction Rebellion.⁵²¹

⁵¹⁶ 'The Government response to covid-19: freedom of assembly and the right to protest. Thirteenth Report of Session 2019–21.', 17 March 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5153/documents/50935/default/>, para 9.

⁵¹⁷ Mattha Busby, 'This is a historic moment': UK anti-racism protesters on what needs to change', *The Guardian*, 12 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/12/black-lives-matter-historic-moment-protesters-on-why-they-have-been-demonstrating>.

⁵¹⁸ One researcher has claimed the first BLM chapter was started in Nottingham in 2015, but the first public BLM protests identified by this review were in the summer of 2016. 'Black Lives Matter: how the UK movement struggled to be heard in the 2010s', *The Conversation*, 7 June 2021, <https://theconversation.com/black-lives-matter-how-the-uk-movement-struggled-to-be-heard-in-the-2010s-161763>; 'Meet the faces behind the UK Black Lives Matter movement', BBC Three, 19 August 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/c594f65e-4e7a-4370-9a65-ddf7b0d116d3>.

⁵¹⁹ 'Meet the faces behind the UK Black Lives Matter movement', BBC Three, 19 August 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/c594f65e-4e7a-4370-9a65-ddf7b0d116d3>; Matthew Weaver and Jamie Grierson, 'Black Lives Matter protest stops flights at London City airport', *The Guardian*, 6 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/06/black-lives-matter-protesters-occupy-london-city-airport-runway>; Douglas Pyper and Jennifer Brown, 'Black Lives Matter protests: UK reaction to the killing of George Floyd', House of Commons Library, 4 June 2020, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/black-lives-matter-protests-uk-reaction/>.

⁵²⁰ Black Lives Matter UK, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/ukblm>; Black Lives Matter UK, <https://ukblm.org/about/>.

⁵²¹ Tracy McVeigh, 'Why activists brought the Black Lives Matter movement to the UK', *The Guardian*, 6 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/06/black-lives-matter-uk-found-vital-social-justice>.

3.120 For example, in August 2016, BLMUK activists organised a so-called “nationwide #Shutdown”,⁵²² blocking key roads into Birmingham and Nottingham, and blocking roads around Heathrow Airport, Whitechapel and Shoreditch in London.⁵²³ A spokesperson attempted to justify the action on the grounds that “other forms of protest had been exhausted” so they were instead using disruption as a tactic to bring “back to the mainstream discussions around black lives”.⁵²⁴ In September 2016, BLMUK activists stopped flights at London City Airport by chaining themselves to a tripod on the runway. The group tweeted that they were demonstrating against the effects of air pollution on black people,⁵²⁵ and in an online video said the “climate crisis is a racist crisis”.⁵²⁶ The nine activists who blocked the runway were charged and, when it emerged that they were all white, they were publicly accused of appropriating the BLM banner by veteran left-wing black campaigners.⁵²⁷

3.121 In October 2016, BLMUK joined a memorial procession in central London for people who had died in custody in the UK.⁵²⁸ The day before the march, BLMUK postered London and Manchester with fake Home Office adverts highlighting the lack of convictions at the time and alleging complicity between the police and Independent Police Complaints Commission (now Independent Office for Police Conduct).⁵²⁹ BLMUK activist Wail Qasim defended his organisation’s “subvertising” campaign as awareness-raising in an article in the Guardian.⁵³⁰ BLMUK’s direct action tactics echoed those of anarchist campaigners who had similarly vandalised London bus stops with anti-police posters in August 2015 and in December 2014.⁵³¹

⁵²² ‘We call a nationwide #Shutdown because #BlackLivesMatter, because this is a crisis.’, Black Lives Matter UK, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/ukblm/status/761262306974203904>.

⁵²³ Haroon Siddique, ‘Black Lives Matter protests block roads around UK’, *The Guardian*, 5 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/05/black-lives-matter-protest-sparks-heathrow-traffic-chaos>

⁵²⁴ Haroon Siddique, ‘Black Lives Matter protests block roads around UK’, *The Guardian*, 5 August 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/aug/05/black-lives-matter-protest-sparks-heathrow-traffic-chaos>

⁵²⁵ Matthew Weaver and Jamie Grierson, ‘Black Lives Matter protest stops flights at London City airport’, *The Guardian*, 6 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/06/black-lives-matter-protesters-occupy-london-city-airport-runway>.

⁵²⁶ ‘Climate crisis is a racist crisis. Cut emissions. Open borders. #Shutdown.’, Black Lives Matter UK, Twitter, 6 September 2016, <https://twitter.com/ukblm/status/773058142133518336>.

⁵²⁷ Jamie Grierson, ‘Nine people charged over Black Lives Matter protest at City airport’, *The Guardian*, 7 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/sep/07/nine-people-charged-black-lives-matter-protest-london-city-airport>.

⁵²⁸ “Back up, back up, we want freedom, freedom, all these sexist racist cops, we don’t need them, need them.” #UFFCMarch’, Black Lives Matter UK, Twitter, 29 October 2016, <https://twitter.com/ukblm/status/792358515880919041>.

⁵²⁹ The posters featured logos of the Home Office, the Metropolitan Police, HM Government, and the Crown Prosecution Service and read: “Fam When the Feds murder people, the IPCC investigate. But, you know what’s booky? Eight out of nine of IPCC senior investigators are ex-Feds. 1577 deaths since 1990. 0 convictions. Ah.” ‘Here’s why we postered London and Manchester with fake Home Office adverts for tomorrow’s @UFFCcampaign

March’, Black Lives Matter UK, Twitter, 28 October 2016, <https://twitter.com/ukblm/status/792068353724674049>.

⁵³⁰ Wail Qasim, ‘Our ‘subvertising’ continues the fight for justice for those who die in custody’, *The Guardian*, 28 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/28/bus-stop-posters-ufcc-protest-deaths-custody>.

⁵³¹ Helena Horton, ‘Anti-police posters return to London bus stops’, *Dazed*, 4 August 2015,

<https://www.dazeddigital.com/artsandculture/article/25762/1/anti-police-posters-return-to-london-bus-stops>. Tim Chester, ‘Fake bus stop posters in London attack Metropolitan Police’, Mashable on Agency, 15 December 2015, <https://www.anarchistagency.com/in-the-news/mashable-fake-bus-stop-posters-in-london-attack-metropolitan-police-december-15-2015/>.

3.122 BLM, as it is better known today in the UK, re-emerged in 2020 following Floyd's murder. In the US, the killing had sparked widespread protests, unrest and rioting in more than 30 cities within a week.⁵³² The initial response in the UK was a series of small peaceful protests outside the US embassy in London in the days following Floyd's killing. At one, approximately 20 attendees held homemade signs and flag saying 'Black Lives Matter',⁵³³ at another, four people held up 'Black Lives Matter' placards from Stand Up to Racism (SUTR),⁵³⁴ an anti-racism campaign with its origins in the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP).⁵³⁵ SUTR also organised a series of "doorstep" 'Take The Knee' demonstrations across the country in June 2020 under the banner 'Black Lives Matter' and 'Justice For George Floyd'.⁵³⁶

3.123 From this point on, BLM demonstrations in the UK became larger, despite COVID-19 regulations restricting public gatherings (with no exception for public protest at that time⁵³⁷) and, at times, violent. On 31 May 2020, protestors gathered largely peacefully in London, Cardiff and Manchester holding placards and chanting 'Black Lives Matter'.⁵³⁸ The Metropolitan Police stated there had been 23 arrests in London, including for assault on an emergency worker, possession of an offensive weapon, and breach of the peace.⁵³⁹ On 3 June 2020, around 15,000 people marched through central London from Hyde Park to Whitehall under the BLM banner,⁵⁴⁰ in what was an overwhelmingly peaceful demonstration, until the evening when around 200 remaining protesters, many wearing masks or balaclavas,⁵⁴¹ were involved in

⁵³² 'George Floyd protests: Unrest escalates in demonstrations in more than 30 US cities', The Daily Telegraph YouTube, 31 May 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DxZVfwudvC8>.

⁵³³ Sam Truelove, 'Protesters gather at US Embassy in London after death of George Floyd in America', *My London*, 28 May 2020, <https://www.mylondon.news/news/zone-1-news/protesters-gather-embassy-london-after-18326986>.

⁵³⁴ 'We say #BlackLivesMatter #JusticeForGeorge #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd at the US embassy this morning - socially distanced protest', Stand Up To Racism, Twitter, 30 May 2020, <https://twitter.com/AntiRacismDay/status/1266718418784452609>

⁵³⁵ 'What is the SWP role in Stand Up to Racism?', Daily Politics BBC Two, 11 October 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p04bpqdx>; Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem (2021)*, pp. 89-91

⁵³⁶ 'Wherever you are, at 6pm on Wednesday 3 June, #TakeTheKnee +/- hold a sign on your doorstep to say #BlackLivesMatter', Stand Up To Racism Twitter, 2 June 2020, <https://twitter.com/AntiRacismDay/status/1267868183043637251?s=20>; 'Black Lives Matter Roundup (3 - 17 June 2020)', Institute of Race Relations, 18 June 2020, <https://irr.org.uk/article/black-lives-matter-roundup-3-17-june-2020/>; Tomáš Tengely-Evans, 'Protests across Britain show the breadth of Black Lives Matter movement', *Socialist Worker*, 17 June 2020, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/news/protests-across-britain-show-the-breadth-of-black-lives-matter-movement/>.

⁵³⁷ 'The Government response to covid-19: freedom of assembly and the right to protest. Thirteenth Report of Session 2019-21', 17 March 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5153/documents/50935/default/> para 30 & 31.

⁵³⁸ Mark Brown, 'Thousands gather in Britain to support US George Floyd protests', *The Guardian*, 31 May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/may/31/crowds-gather-in-britain-to-support-us-george-floyd-protests>.

⁵³⁹ Aamna Mohdin and Vikram Dodd, 'UK protesters accuse police of targeting black people during lockdown', *The Guardian*, 1 June 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/01/uk-police-accused-of-targeting-black-people-during-lockdown>.

⁵⁴⁰ Lydia Catling, 'Shocking moment police officer is kicked to the ground during Black Lives Matter protest in London as he backs away from jeering crowd', *Mail Online*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8391287/Met-police-officer-kicked-ground-Black-Lives-Matter-protest-London.html>; Simeon Brown, 'Thousands join Black Lives Matter protest in London over George Floyd death', Channel 4 News, 3 June 2020, <https://www.channel4.com/news/thousands-join-black-lives-matter-protest-in-london-over-george-floyd-death>.

⁵⁴¹ Lydia Catling, 'Shocking moment police officer is kicked to the ground during Black Lives Matter protest in London as he backs away from jeering crowd', *Mail Online*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8391287/Met-police-officer-kicked-ground-Black-Lives-Matter-protest-London.html>.

skirmishes with police on Whitehall.⁵⁴² They threw bottles and other objects at police officers, with videos showing one police officer being kicked to the ground.⁵⁴³ The Metropolitan Police said there had been four arrests.⁵⁴⁴

3.124 Over the weekend of 6 and 7 June 2020, the same London locations saw far larger crowds and while most of the demonstrators were peaceful, there were also serious incidents of violence, with some police officers left unprotected and without riot gear.⁵⁴⁵ Videos showed police officers being chased down Whitehall as demonstrators hurled objects and attacked them with sticks and rocks.⁵⁴⁶ Protestors threw fireworks at officers,⁵⁴⁷ and one police officer was thrown from her horse resulting in a cracked collarbone, broken ribs, and a collapsed lung.⁵⁴⁸

3.125 The high levels of violence towards the police from a minority of BLM protestors led the chair of the Metropolitan Police Federation to call on the Metropolitan Police Commissioner to grip the disorder, apologise to officers, and ensure they were properly equipped. Reporting that 62 officers had been injured over the three London BLM protests, he alleged that they were being used by some as an excuse to attack police officers.⁵⁴⁹ The Home Secretary reported that the violence had resulted in 135 arrests.⁵⁵⁰ The demonstrations in London that weekend also saw protestors vandalising historic monuments and national memorials, including the statue of Winston Churchill in Parliament Square. Several other campaign movements and protest groups were also involved in the demonstrations in London. As well as BLM, the Metropolitan Police informed me that they had recorded activists present from the anarchist group Antifa, the Green Anti-Capitalist Front, and the Far Left anti-racism campaign Stand Up To Racism. Among the groups that joined the

⁵⁴² Aamna Mohdin, Lisa O'Carroll and Dan Sabbagh, 'Thousands gather in London for George Floyd protest', *The Guardian*, 3 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/03/thousands-gather-in-london-for-george-floyd-protest>.

⁵⁴³ Lydia Catling, 'Shocking moment police officer is kicked to the ground during Black Lives Matter protest in London as he backs away from jeering crowd', *Mail Online*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8391287/Met-police-officer-kicked-ground-Black-Lives-Matter-protest-London.html>.

⁵⁴⁴ Aamna Mohdin, Lisa O'Carroll and Dan Sabbagh, 'Thousands gather in London for George Floyd protest', *The Guardian*, 3 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/03/thousands-gather-in-london-for-george-floyd-protest>.

⁵⁴⁵ Tony Thompson, 'Federation calls on senior MPS leaders to apologise for failing to protect officers during protests', *Police Professional*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.policeprofessional.com/news/federation-calls-on-senior-mps-leaders-to-apologise-for-failing-to-protect-officers-during-protests/>.

⁵⁴⁶ Emily Lawford, 'Footage from London Black Lives Matter rally shows police running from protesters as they are pelted with objects', *The Standard*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/police-flee-protesters-clash-black-lives-matter-demonstrations-a4462296.html>; Bhvishya Patel, James Fielding and Martin Robinson, Priti Patel vows 'justice' after Boris says Black Lives Matter protests were 'subverted by thugs' on weekend of violence and vandalism, *Mail Online*, 7 June 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8397019/Police-injured-missiles-London-Black-Lives-Matter-rally.html>.

⁵⁴⁷ 'George Floyd: London anti-racism protests leave 27 officers hurt', *BBC News*, 7 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-52954899>.

⁵⁴⁸ Bhvishya Patel, James Fielding and Martin Robinson, Priti Patel vows 'justice' after Boris says Black Lives Matter protests were 'subverted by thugs' on weekend of violence and vandalism, *Mail Online*, 7 June 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8397019/Police-injured-missiles-London-Black-Lives-Matter-rally.html>.

⁵⁴⁹ Tony Thompson, 'Federation calls on senior MPS leaders to apologise for failing to protect officers during protests', *Police Professional*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.policeprofessional.com/news/federation-calls-on-senior-mps-leaders-to-apologise-for-failing-to-protect-officers-during-protests/>.

⁵⁵⁰ 'Public Order. Volume 677: Debated on Monday 8 June 2020', *Hansard*, 8 June 2020, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-08/debates/212DD2A6-B810-4FDE-B3BD-1642F5BA1E86/PublicOrder>.

Far Right counter-protests, the police recorded the Football Lads Alliance, Britain First, Britain No Surrender – Resistance England, as well as Veterans Against Vandalism. The police also noted the presence of a small number of activists identified with the Yellow Vest movement.

- 3.126 More than 210,000 people attended BLM protests in 260 towns and cities across the country in six weeks in June and early July 2020.⁵⁵¹ While the majority passed peacefully,⁵⁵² there were also instances of public disorder, including violence and vandalism, outside of London.
- 3.127 Among the best known was in Bristol, where protestors tore down the statue of Edward Colston, a seventeenth-century merchant, slave trader and philanthropist from the city,⁵⁵³ before throwing it into the nearby harbour.⁵⁵⁴ Avon and Somerset Police did not deploy officers to intervene despite being at the scene, later defending their decision as tactical to avoid serious injury to officers.⁵⁵⁵ In September 2020, six people accepted conditional cautions for criminal damage for their role in the statue toppling.⁵⁵⁶ Four others, charged with criminal damage in December 2020,⁵⁵⁷ elected for their case to be heard by a jury in Bristol Crown Court (rather than remain at magistrates court),⁵⁵⁸ where they were subsequently acquitted.⁵⁵⁹
- 3.128 The incidents in Bristol raise serious questions about the authorities' capability to manage public disorder on this scale. Policing decisions not to deploy officers into protests owing to the threat of violence do not give the public confidence their ability to maintain law and order. The subsequent trial casts doubt on juries' willingness to discharge their duty to "give a true verdict according to the evidence" in morally and politically charged cases. The fact that those acquitted had not contested toppling the Colston statue prompted a warning from former Supreme Court Judge Lord Sumption that the verdict undermined the rule of law.⁵⁶⁰

⁵⁵¹ Aamna Mohdin, Glenn Swann and Caroline Bannock, 'How George Floyd's death sparked a wave of UK anti-racism protests', *The Guardian*, 29 July 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/29/george-floyd-death-fuelled-anti-racism-protests-britain>.

⁵⁵² 'Public Order. Volume 677: Debated on Monday 8 June 2020', Hansard, 8 June 2020, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-06-08/debates/212DD2A6-B810-4FDE-B3BD-1642F5BA1E86/PublicOrder>.

⁵⁵³ 'Edward Colston', The British Museum, <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG133284>.

⁵⁵⁴ Emily Lawford, 'Footage from London Black Lives Matter rally shows police running from protesters as they are pelted with objects', *The Standard*, 8 June 2020, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/police-flee-protesters-clash-black-lives-matter-demonstrations-a4462296.html>.

⁵⁵⁵ 'Chief defends decision not to intervene in statue protest', Police Federation, 10 June 2021, <https://www.polfed.org/news/latest-news/2021/chief-defends-decision-not-to-intervene-in-statue-protest/>; 'Edward Colston statue toppling was 'difficult to predict'', BBC News, 11 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56357691>.

⁵⁵⁶ 'Edward Colston statue: Four in court over toppling of memorial', BBC News, 25 January 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-55796406>.

⁵⁵⁷ 'Edward Colston statue: Four charged with criminal damage', BBC News, 9 December 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-55248263>.

⁵⁵⁸ 'Bristol: Arrests as four charged with toppling Edward Colston statue plead not guilty', Sky News, 25 January 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/bristol-arrests-as-four-charged-with-toppling-edward-colston-statue-plead-not-guilty-12198707>.

⁵⁵⁹ 'Edward Colston statue: Four cleared of criminal damage', BBC News, 5 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-59727161>.

⁵⁶⁰ Jonathan Sumption, 'Make no mistake, the 'Colston Four' verdict undermined the rule of law', *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/01/08/make-no-mistake-colston-four-verdict-undermined-rule-law/>.

3.129 The British media began to ask whether BLM had been taken over by Far-Left activists.⁵⁶¹ In the summer of 2020, for example, The Times reported that the SWP had discussed how they could capitalise on BLM momentum.⁵⁶² While BLM distanced itself from the SWP,⁵⁶³ long-standing SWP activist Gary McFarlane continued to represent himself to the media as a BLM activist and had been doing so since at least 2016.⁵⁶⁴ One explanation for this is that BLMUK was the main BLM group in the UK in 2016 and demonstrators at its event, including McFarlane, were pictured holding SWP and SUTR placards.⁵⁶⁵ In October of that year, however, BLMUK joined radical and/or feminist groups in renouncing the SWP for its failure to properly investigate rape and sexual assault allegations against a senior member.⁵⁶⁶ Moreover, by 2020, there were several groups, websites, and social media accounts either identifying themselves as BLM in the UK or using the Black Lives Matter slogan. The amorphous, decentralised nature of the movement in 2020 meant that ascertaining BLM leadership and decision-making was not a straightforward matter.

3.130 Nonetheless, it would not have been surprising for the SWP to have targeted BLM as a movement. Academic research on the Far Left commissioned for this review found that it has not been uncommon for Marxist-Leninist groups to attempt to co-opt broader social movements with the aim of persuading more mainstream activists attracted by the cause to the need for revolutionary socialism.⁵⁶⁷ McFarlane described this tactic in the SWP's newspaper, the Socialist Worker, while commenting on the BLM protests in July 2016:

- *The endemic racism in the US and in Britain is a part of capitalist society.*
- *People on the demonstrations want a militant fight against racism and are receptive to the idea of the need to fight and defeat capitalism. [...]*
- *Organised socialists can help to widen and deepen the struggle by arguing for the need to link up with workers.*

⁵⁶¹ Guy Adams, 'Revealed: The British arm of Black Lives Matter's full agenda - abolish the police, smash capitalism... and close all prisons', *Mail Online*, 19 June 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8441405/The-avowed-aims-British-arm-Black-Lives-Matter.html>.

⁵⁶² Ben Ellery and Mutaz Ahmed, 'Hard left 'hijacks' Black Lives Matter movement', *The Times*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hard-left-hijacks-black-lives-matter-movement-lpmfn3f2j>.

⁵⁶³ Ben Ellery and Mutaz Ahmed, 'Hard left 'hijacks' Black Lives Matter movement', *The Times*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hard-left-hijacks-black-lives-matter-movement-lpmfn3f2j>.

⁵⁶⁴ Ben Ellery and Mutaz Ahmed, 'Hard left 'hijacks' Black Lives Matter movement', *The Times*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hard-left-hijacks-black-lives-matter-movement-lpmfn3f2j>; 'Meet the faces behind the UK Black Lives Matter movement', BBC Three, 19 August 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/c594f65e-4e7a-4370-9a65-ddf7b0d116d3>.

⁵⁶⁵ Capres Turner, 'Our fury matters – black activists speak out', *Socialist Worker*, 19 July 2016, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/features/our-fury-matters-black-activists-speak-out/>; 'Meet the faces behind the UK Black Lives Matter movement', BBC Three, 19 August 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/c594f65e-4e7a-4370-9a65-ddf7b0d116d3>

⁵⁶⁶ 'Stand Up To Racism: Stand Up to Rape Culture', *Media Diversified*, 6 October 2016, <https://mediadiversified.org/2016/10/06/stand-up-to-rape-culture/>.

⁵⁶⁷ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), pp. 91 & 96.

- *We need Black Lives Matter activists to go to workplaces—into factories, bus garages and hospitals—and argue for trade unionists to join the struggle.*
- *If we're going to defeat racism we need to defeat capitalism.*
- *To do that we need to mobilise the force that makes capitalism work, the working class.*⁵⁶⁸

3.131 Others asked whether BLM's underlying ideology and its leadership was inherently Marxist in light of the movement's demand to 'defund the police'.⁵⁶⁹ In October 2020, for example, the former Home Secretary Sajid Javid said he distinguished between the fight for racial justice and BLM as an organisation, calling the latter a "neo-Marxist organisation that wants to overthrow capitalism and get rid of the police".⁵⁷⁰ In the US, one study of BLM leaders concluded that several were avowed Marxists.⁵⁷¹ The allegation was not straightforwardly denied by activists in the UK. For example, BLMUK's online FAQs stated that while it was not a Marxist organisation, as not all of its members are Marxists, those in the group are "all anti-capitalists, and are committed to dismantle class as well as gender and racial domination".⁵⁷²

3.132 Alongside the violence and public disorder that accompanied some of the BLM protests in the summer of 2020, other more radical black groups 'gained public prominence at the time by adopting the 'Black Lives Matter' slogan. Two such groups are Forever Family and the Malcolm X Movement. I am concerned at their endorsement and use of violence, their inciting of racial hatred, and their platforming of terrorists.

3.133 In August 2020, a newly established group Forever Family or FF Force, attended the Afrikan Emancipation Day celebrations in Brixton, South London, to demand reparations for slavery.⁵⁷³ Members of the group marched in black

⁵⁶⁸ Capres Turner, 'Our fury matters – black activists speak out', *Socialist Worker*, 19 July 2016, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/features/our-fury-matters-black-activists-speak-out/>.

⁵⁶⁹ BLMUK lists 'Defund the police' among its demand on its website, 'Our Platform', Black Lives Matter UK, <https://ukblm.org/demands/>. The group reiterated its demand to 'defund the police' through the summer of 2020. It did this both on social media and through members' writing public commentary. On twitter, see, for example, 'Our vision for a world in which police and prisons are obsolete is more than resistance to racism, it is a recognition that UK police and prisons has done little for public safety.', Black Lives Matter UK, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/ukblm/status/1278659286332248065>. See also a Guardian article by academic Adam Elliott Cooper which explains BLM's position, published in July 2020. While Elliott Cooper did not reveal his connection to BLM UK in the article, two months later, in September 2020, BLM UK registered as a community benefit society under the name Black Liberation Movement UK and Elliott Cooper was a founding member. Adam Elliott Cooper, "Defund the police' is not nonsense. Here's what it really means", *The Guardian*, 2 July 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jul/02/britain-defund-the-police-black-lives-matter>; 'General FAQs', Black Lives Matter UK, <https://ukblm.org/faq/>; and 'Black Liberation Movement UK Limited', Financial Conduct Authority, <https://mutuals.fca.org.uk/Search/Society/30740>.

⁵⁷⁰ Jon Stone, 'Black Lives Matter is 'not force for good' says Tory MP Sajid Javid', *Independent*, 5 October 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/sajid-javid-black-live-matter-blm-racism-tory-mp-b806336.html>.

⁵⁷¹ Mike Gonzalez, *BLM: A New Marxist Revolution* (Encounter Books: New York, 2021)

⁵⁷² 'FAQs', Black Lives Matter UK, <https://ukblm.org/faq/>.

⁵⁷³ Jack Malvern, 'Black Lives Matter: Brixton protesters in fatigues mark end of slavery', *The Times*, 3 August 2020, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/black-lives-matter-brixton-protesters-in-fatigues-mark-end-of-slavery-p06qmbw6d>.

para-military fatigues, replicated military formations, and raised their fists in the black power salute.⁵⁷⁴ Present that day was Sasha Johnson, a member of FF Force and BLM activist, who has called for the formation of a “black militia” in the UK.⁵⁷⁵ The Metropolitan Police later confirmed that officers had advised FF Force members that the way in which they were marching may have constituted an offence under the Public Order Act 1936 (that prohibits the wearing of political or paramilitary uniforms) and that a case had been given to the Crown Prosecution Service for them to determine whether any offences had occurred.⁵⁷⁶ It is unclear whether members of the group were charged.

3.134 There were also concerns about FF Force leaders allegedly inciting racial hatred. Antisemitism campaigners criticised the group’s alleged founder, rapper Khari McKenzie,⁵⁷⁷ after he shared the antisemitic conspiracy theory that Israel was to blame for the racist killing of George Floyd, accused Jews of being responsible for slavery through the “Rothschild bloodline”, and referred to Jewish activists who successfully campaigned for the rapper Wiley to be removed from social media platforms for antisemitism as “devils”.⁵⁷⁸ Johnson was recorded repeatedly telling a black man who disagreed with her “you’re a coon”⁵⁷⁹ and disparaging ethnic minority politicians David Lammy, Sadiq Khan, and Priti Patel as “tokenistic”.⁵⁸⁰ Such comments essentially accuse people of colour of supporting attitudes thought to be against the supposed interests of their racial group. Evoking ideas of race betrayal like this is regressive and abusive and there ought to be no place for it in a genuinely anti-racism campaign.

3.135 Another radical group black group involved in BLM protests in the summer of 2020 was the Malcolm X Movement (MXM), which describes itself as “a radical Black & Asian-led Black Power socialist anti-(neo-)colonial

⁵⁷⁴ Jonathan Bucks and Jemma Carr, ‘Who are Forever Family? The secretive British protest group with uniforms, body armour, walkie-talkies and military-style drills who resemble the Black Panther movement in ‘battle against racism’, *Mail on Sunday and Mail Online*, 2 August 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8585073/Who-secretive-British-protest-group-Forever-Family-Force.html>; Sean Ingle, ‘Black power: the fists and the fury that shook America – and inspired generations’, *The Guardian*, 31 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2020/aug/31/black-power-the-fists-and-the-fury-that-shook-america-and-inspired-generations>.

⁵⁷⁵ Jack Wright, Martin Robinson and James Fielding, ‘Now ‘Black Panther of Oxford’ Sasha Johnson’s political party question claim that she was shot by a gang, and slam police who ruled death threats weren’t credible ‘without speaking to her’’, *Mail Online*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9614869/Sasha-Johnson-target-shooting-political-party-claims.html>.

⁵⁷⁶ ‘The Public Order Act 1936. MQT on 17/09/2020 between 10:00 and 13:00’, 22 September 2020, <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/public-order-act-1936>.

⁵⁷⁷ McKenzie was appointed director of Forever Family Ltd when the company was incorporated by Companies House on 20 June 2020, ‘Forever Family Ltd’, Companies House, <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/12686269/officers>.

⁵⁷⁸ Guy Adams, ‘The new face of race hate: Marching through London they claimed to be fighting bigotry - but as this exposé by GUY ADAMS lays bare, their leader revels in anti-Semitic abuse... with chilling echoes of 1930s fascism’, *Daily Mail*, 7 August 2020, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8605455/GUY-ADAMS-Forever-Family-Force-leader-revels-antisemitic-abuse.html>; ‘CAA sounds alarm over black-shirted paramilitary group in south London led by a man who rails against ‘Zionist bloodlines’’, Campaign Against Antisemitism, <https://antisemitism.org/caa-sounds-alarm-over-black-shirted-paramilitary-group-in-south-london-led-by-a-man-who-raises-against-zionist-bloodlines/>.

⁵⁷⁹ Ben Obese-Jecty, ‘BLM racists don’t speak for me. How have racial slurs become progressive politics?’, *The Critic*, 6 August 2020, <https://thecritic.co.uk/blm-racists-dont-speak-for-me/>.

⁵⁸⁰ Jack Wright, Martin Robinson and James Fielding, ‘Now ‘Black Panther of Oxford’ Sasha Johnson’s political party question claim that she was shot by a gang, and slam police who ruled death threats weren’t credible ‘without speaking to her’’, *Mail Online*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9614869/Sasha-Johnson-target-shooting-political-party-claims.html>.

movement”⁵⁸¹ and was founded in London in 2014.⁵⁸² On 13 June 2020, MXM led what it called the “#BlackResistance”⁵⁸³ against the Far Right who had gathered in central London – a week after the first mass BLM protests in the capital – ostensibly to protest national monuments and statues from vandalism. After BLM called off their protest, MXM and another radical black group went ahead with theirs and used social media to valorise the violence that ensued.⁵⁸⁴ (For more detail on this counter protest see the sub-section on anti-fascism).

3.136 Alongside celebrating street violence, in recent years MXM’s events in recent years have promoted a favourable view of terrorism and political violence. For example, a MXM film festival ‘Translating Malcolm X into Irish ’in West Belfast in 2015 featured contributions from Leila Khaled, dubbed ‘the poster girl of Palestinian militancy’ after she hijacked a passenger jet in 1969 on behalf of the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Gerry MacLochlainn, convicted of IRA terrorism offences, and Dr Moussa Ibrahim, former media spokesperson for Colonel Gaddafi’s socialist regime in Libya. Palestinian liberation, Irish republicanism and Gaddafi’s socialism were presented by MXM as all part of the “global anti-imperialist movement against racism and colonialism”.⁵⁸⁵

3.137 The groups social media content has promoted radical narratives that risk fueling racial tensions and encouraging attacks on representatives of the state such as politicians and the police. This includes referring to giving MPs “the 1804 Haiti treatment”,⁵⁸⁶ which could be read as a euphemistic reference to the massacres of white French colonists that took place on the island that year at the end of the Haitian Revolution.⁵⁸⁷ It also includes sharing a quote from Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin which could be seen as

⁵⁸¹ Malcolm X Movement, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/mxmovement>.

⁵⁸² MXM held its first public event, ‘STRIKE THE EMPIRE BACK: legacies and examples of liberation from neo-colonialism and white supremacy organised’, in June 2014 while stating it would launch formally in 2015. ‘MXM Event Reports’, Malcolm X Movement, <http://mxmovement.blogspot.com/p/mxm-event-reports.html>; ‘Strike the empire back: legacies and examples of liberation from neo-colonialism and white supremacy’, Malcolm X Movement, Facebook, 14 June 2014, https://www.facebook.com/events/885934718088311/?ref_dashboard_filter=upcoming.

⁵⁸³ ‘#Sellouts & the colonial left r focusing on fascist/police imagery from yesterday and are erasing the #BlackResistance. If u support #blackliberation & #antiracism then you would amplify black youth asserting their and our collective humanity by conducting this historic action.’, Malcolm X Movement, Facebook, 14 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/MalcolmXMovement/posts/pfbid02MEKivJ4tQpiF8Erg4X4db2aJL5D6B8QBFTcakfGi4Q5TXKV9HJbmoXyYabv5Gwqcl>.

⁵⁸⁴ ‘#thread #BlackPower #BlackRevolution #BlackYouth History was made today in Ldn: Militant independent black working class youth-led history, in the face of an formidable array of forces railed against them from the govt, to the fascist, from left /#BLMUK to wellknown celebrities.’, Malcolm X Movement, Twitter, 13 June 2020, <https://twitter.com/mxmovement/status/1271876097572036610>.

⁵⁸⁵ ‘MXM Film Festival in Ireland: ‘Translating Malcolm X Into Irish’, Malcolm X Movement, 26 March 2016, <http://mxmovement.blogspot.com/2016/03/mxm-film-festival-in-ireland.html>.

⁵⁸⁶ In September 2020, in response to a tweet about MPs receiving subsidised alcohol and food, MXM tweeted “We should be shaking off the gates of parliament and giving them the 1804 Haiti treatment”. ‘Look at what they are doing to our children and look at their glutinous selves. We should be shaking off the gates of parliament and giving them the 1804 Haiti treatment.’, Malcolm X Movement, Twitter, 29 September 2020, <https://twitter.com/mxmovement/status/1310960347122151428>.

⁵⁸⁷ ‘Jean-Jacques Dessalines’, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Jacques-Dessalines>.

encouraging violence against the police,⁵⁸⁸ and calling on its Facebook followers to “burn down” the City of London and capitalism.⁵⁸⁹ MXM also posted that the “Global south” should uphold death sentences against “the yt man” (a derogatory shorthand for white people), saying that in Libya western mainstream journalists should have been “chopped”, claiming that these individuals were really disguised military intelligence.⁵⁹⁰

- **The summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests were accompanied by high levels of public disorder, notably violence towards the police and the destruction or vandalism of historic monuments and statues.**
- **The protests raised questions about police capacity to manage public disorder on such a scale while high profile acquittals for criminal damage casts doubt on juries’ willingness to discharge their duty in morally and politically charged cases.**
- **The movement was highly likely targeted for co-option by organised Far Left groups, but its amorphous and decentralised nature appeared to protect it from infiltration. Nonetheless, Black Lives Matter leaders in the UK share an anti-capitalist outlook.**
- **Several radical black groups operating at the time physically fought both Far Right actors and the police, valorising this street violence as ‘black resistance’. These groups have additionally made the moral case for terrorism and political violence as a legitimate response to colonialism and accused ethnic minority politicians of race betrayal.**

Anti-Government Protest – ‘Kill the Bill’

3.138 Protest is fundamental to our vibrant democracy. It provides a means for people to participate in public life, express dissatisfaction with current conditions and leaders, and demand social, political, and economic change.

3.139 Facilitating peaceful protest is the responsibility of the government, discharged primarily through the police. To provide a sense of scale, in the last five years the Metropolitan Police has provided policing to between three or four thousand events in London annually, including protests, sporting

⁵⁸⁸ In April 2021, the MXM Facebook account shared a quote from Vladimir Lenin encouraging people to organize in groups to attack the police. “Let groups be organised of 3, 10, 30 persons. Let every group learn, if it is only by beating up policemen.” - #VladimirLenin, 1905.’, Malcolm X Movement, Facebook, 22 April 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/MalcolmXMovement/posts/1756485907865097>.

⁵⁸⁹ In January 2021, the group posted an article about amateur traders destabilising the stock market, commenting “#GameStop shows how we are just powerless serfs forced into death without any ability to access the very financial services and products that were sold to us as somehow democratising through the process of privatisation. Burn down wall st and city of London. Burn down capitalism.” ‘#GameStop shows how we are just powerless serfs forced into death without any ability to access the very financial services and products that were sold to us as somehow democratising through the process of privatisation. Burn down wall st and city of London. Burn down capitalism.’, Malcolm X Movement, Facebook, 28 January 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/MalcolmXMovement/posts/1695837470596608>.

⁵⁹⁰ ‘China upholds death sentence against yt man from Canada. Global south should do more of this. Libya should have chopped the yt man military intel disguised as western mainstream ‘journalists’ as the Jamahiriya fell.’, Malcolm X Movement, Facebook, 10 August 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/MalcolmXMovement/posts/1836415339872153>.

events, ceremonial events, and festivals.⁵⁹¹ While the majority pass peacefully, in recent years, increasing amounts of police time and resources have been spent dealing with disruption, law breaking, and, on occasion, violence during protests.⁵⁹²

3.140 During this review, the Government passed the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 in response to the evolving challenge of such disruption. While much of the opposition to this legislation was peaceful, I also observed evidence of the disruption and criminality it was trying to address, coming largely from anti-government and anarchist activists. In my view, the conduct of some activists during the passage of these Bills through Parliament showed why some of the provisions in that legislation were both justified and necessary. Since submission of this review, the Government has introduced a package of measures to prohibit the climbing of statues, the possession and use of pyrotechnics and to consider the total impact of disruption from protests.⁵⁹³ I welcome this step.

3.141 When the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill was first introduced in March 2021, it was Bristol that was the epicentre of Far Left and anarchist activism against the proposed legislation and it was this city which witnessed the worst scenes of riot and violence as part of these protests.

3.142 On 21 March 2021, around 3,000 people staged a 'Kill the Bill' protest on College Green, in Bristol's city centre. During the day, Avon and Somerset Police noted some incidences of criminal damage, including graffiti,⁵⁹⁴ and asked motorists to avoid the area due to potential disruption to traffic.⁵⁹⁵ However, that evening around 500 activists staged a sit-in outside Bridewell Police Station, also in the city centre, which descended into a riot.⁵⁹⁶ A

⁵⁹¹ For example, the Met Police Force Management Statement 2022 (published in 2023) states that total number of events managed by the Met peaked at 3,977 in 2017/18 and that there had been 2,933 in 2021/22. 'Force Management Statement 2022', Metropolitan Police Force, <https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/force-content/met/about-us/force-management-statement-2022.pdf>, p. 185

⁵⁹² The Met Police Force Management Statement 2022 reports that overall, both demand and asset shortfall relating to Public Order were increasing from its 2021 assessment. It noted, in particular, the impact of "Protest behaviour driven by movements such as Yellow Jackets, Extinction Rebellion, Anti Vaccination and Kill the Bill creat[ing] significant challenges and an increase in new demand" and of "coordinated multi-site national campaigns crossing force boundaries", as well as gaps in the Met's capacity to manage "post protest investigative work and so-called protestor removal after e.g., protestors glue or lock themselves to public building or infrastructure. . 'Force Management Statement 2022', Metropolitan Police Force, "<https://www.met.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/force-content/met/about-us/force-management-statement-2022.pdf>, pp. 8, 186-187.

⁵⁹³ 'Protest Measures. Volume 745: debated on Thursday 8 February 2024.', Hansard, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-08/debates/71E44C6F-BD00-48EE-B0CA-42A8FD45C4B7/ProtestMeasures>.

⁵⁹⁴ 'The protest is now focused on Bridewell Street so we'd advise motorists to avoid this area. We're aware of a small number of incidences of criminal damage during the afternoon - including graffiti -and these will be investigated.', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 21 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1373696936449040389>.

⁵⁹⁵ 'The protest has moved into Park Street & the Fountains so we're asking people to avoid this area due to the potential disruption to traffic. Officers are continuing to engage with those attending. Enforcement action will be taken retrospectively when necessary and proportionate.', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 21 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1373650839743643650>.

⁵⁹⁶ 'Bristol Kill the Bill protest: Riot police disperse protesters', BBC News, 26 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56542893>.

minority of protestors threw fireworks and other objects at officers,⁵⁹⁷ smashed the police station's windows and set fire to police vehicles.⁵⁹⁸ The following morning, the force reported having made seven arrests in relation to the incident.⁵⁹⁹ Further demonstrations in the following days resulted in enforcement action and arrests: on 23 March 2021, fourteen people were arrested as the police broke up sit-down protests in the city centre,⁶⁰⁰ and three nights later, on 26 March 2023, a further ten people were arrested during police dispersal of another sit-in outside Bridewell Police Station.⁶⁰¹

3.143 Information released by Avon and Somerset Police confirmed that 39 officers were assaulted and injured in the rioting outside Bridewell Police Station and a further five were assaulted and injured during the third dispersal five days later. Injuries typically included cuts and bruises from being hit with wooden placards, glass bottles, fireworks, and rocks or from being kicked and stamped on.⁶⁰² A further 23 officers were assaulted without injury, typically recorded as having missiles thrown at them or being spat at.⁶⁰³ A local protest solidarity group released a report stating that 62 protestors had been injured during the first three protests.⁶⁰⁴ The police subsequently paid damages to five people involved in the second dispersal but did not admit liability.⁶⁰⁵

3.144 Two years on, 34 mostly young protestors have been convicted for their role in the violence and sentenced to a combined total of over 100 years.⁶⁰⁶ Protestors were convicted of offences including arson, assaulting an emergency services worker and, most commonly, riot.⁶⁰⁷ It was later reported to have been the biggest use of riot charges – the most serious public order

⁵⁹⁷ 'Officers are continuing to deal with a smaller number of protestors in Bridewell St. They've had projectiles thrown at them, including a firework, & have been verbally abused. This is unacceptable behaviour & those responsible for offences will be identified & brought to justice.', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 21 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1373712754666840069>.

⁵⁹⁸ Ian Collier, 'Bristol 'Kill The Bill' protest: 21 officers injured - two seriously - by rioters who 'came for fight with police'', Sky News, 22 March 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/bristol-kill-the-bill-protest-20-officers-injured-two-seriously-by-rioters-who-came-for-fight-with-police-12253360>.

⁵⁹⁹ 'Chief Constable Andy Marsh & PCC Sue Mountstevens have issued a statement condemning the violent disorder in #Bristol 20 officers were injured during the incident - two seriously - and 7 arrests have been made so far. A significant inquiry is underway.' Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 22 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1373938392354930688>.

⁶⁰⁰ 'Bristol protests: Police action at Kill the Bill demo', BBC News, 24 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56505553>.

⁶⁰¹ 'Bristol Kill the Bill protest: Riot police disperse protesters', BBC News, 26 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56542893>; 'Projectiles, including eggs and glass bottles, are being thrown at officers. Protestors are also pulling at officers' shields while lasers are being shone in their faces. We will not tolerate violent disorder. Arrests have been made.', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 26 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1375577284812365827>.

⁶⁰² '358-21 Disclosure Op Hyacinth Officer injuries and assaults', <https://media.aspolice.net/uploads/production/20230322152024/358-21-Disclosure-Op-Hyacinth-Officer-injuries-and-assaults.pdf>, pp. 1-4.

⁶⁰³ '358-21 Disclosure Op Hyacinth Officer injuries and assaults', <https://media.aspolice.net/uploads/production/20230322152024/358-21-Disclosure-Op-Hyacinth-Officer-injuries-and-assaults.pdf>, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁰⁴ Tristan Cork, 'More than 60 people said they were injured by police in the first three 'Kill the Bill' protests', *Bristol Live*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bristol-kill-bill-people-said-were-injured-5317757>.

⁶⁰⁵ Steven Morris, 'Police pay damages to Bristol protesters after assault claims', *The Guardian*, 17 November 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/nov/17/police-settle-claims-over-alleged-assaults-on-bristol-protesters>.

⁶⁰⁶ Sean Morrison, 'Two years after Bristol's Kill the Bill unrest, protesters condemn 'unjust' sentences and the media narrative', *The Bristol Cable*, 22 March 2023, <https://thebristolcable.org/2023/03/two-years-bristols-kill-the-bill-clashes-protesters-disproportionate-punishment-changing-the-media-narrative/>; 'Crowds gather in Bristol two years after Kill the Bill protest', BBC News, 21 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-65033086>.

⁶⁰⁷ Geoffrey Bennett, 'All the Bristol 'Kill the Bill' rioters jailed so far almost a year on', *Bristol Live*, 12 March 2022, <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bristol-kill-bill-rioters-jailed-6768971>.

offence – in decades,⁶⁰⁸ indicating the scale of the violence and law breaking seen during that week.

3.145 Avon and Somerset Police had advised the public not to attend the three protests that week citing public health risks and stating that gatherings were not permitted under COVID-19 regulations in place enforcing the third national lockdown.⁶⁰⁹ At the time, protests were neither explicitly banned nor explicitly permitted (as they had been at times earlier in the pandemic⁶¹⁰).⁶¹¹ While the Home Secretary at the time criticised the Bristol protestors for not following the regulations,⁶¹² the Prime Minister at the time criticised the violence but said that people had the right to protest peacefully and legally.⁶¹³ That week, the chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council at the time stated that subsequent protests were "still illegal"⁶¹⁴ The legal status of protests at the time was, therefore, unclear and potentially hard for both the police and the public to follow.⁶¹⁵ In my view, such legal ambiguity around people's rights to free expression and assembly is unhelpful and must be avoided.

3.146 After changes to the COVID-19 regulations the following week explicitly permitted protests (with certain conditions), Bristol saw several largely peaceful protests.⁶¹⁶ However, small minorities of protestors caused "significant disruption",⁶¹⁷ according to the police, by blocking main roads. On 3 April 2021, for example, after around 1,500 people marched through Bristol,

⁶⁰⁸ Tom Wall, "Kill the bill": surge in Bristol riot charges prompts alarm over civil liberties', *The Observer*, 12 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/12/kill-the-bill-surge-in-bristol-riot-charges-prompts-alarm-over-civil-liberties>

⁶⁰⁹ 'Protestors have left Castle Park and are now marching through #Bristol city centre. Once again, we'd remind those in attendance protests aren't currently permitted. We're still in a pandemic which has cost many lives and remains a significant challenge for the NHS.', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 26 March 2021,

<https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1375494203254452224>; 'A significant number of people have gathered in Castle Park in #Bristol. Officers are engaging with them and asking them to disperse. All gatherings remain a breach of COVID restrictions. We continue to urge people not to attend. We will take enforcement action if necessary.', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 26 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1375487400705679362>; 'Officers are in attendance at a protest of around 130 people at College Green in #Bristol this evening - our statement is below', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 23 March 2021,

<https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1374437800557174795>; 'We're asking people not to attend an advertised protest in #Bristol later today. Our communities have already sacrificed so much as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We must all keep playing our part to stop any further spread.', Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 21 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1373576409256448000>.

⁶¹⁰ 'The Government response to covid-19: freedom of assembly and the right to protest. Thirteenth Report of Session 2019-21', 17 March 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5153/documents/50935/default/>, para 46.

⁶¹¹ At the time, all of England was subject tier 4 restrictions contained in The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (All Tiers) (England) Regulations 2020, which did contain an explicit exemption from the prohibition on gathering for the purpose of protest (as there had been in tiers 1-3). 'The Government response to covid-19: freedom of assembly and the right to protest. Thirteenth Report of Session 2019-21', 17 March 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5153/documents/50935/default/> para 42-43.

⁶¹² Andy Gregory and Lizzie Dearden, 'Bristol protest: Priti Patel says demonstrators were 'selfish' as seven arrested after 20 police officers injured', *Independent*, 26 March 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/bristol-protest-police-arrest-riot-b1820467.html>.

⁶¹³ Lizzie Dearden, 'Bristol protest: Fears of further violence at 'Kill the Bill' protests across country as 'extremists' blamed', *Independent*, 22 March 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/bristol-riots-policing-bill-protest-violence-b1820756.html>.

⁶¹⁴ Lizzie Dearden, 'Police chief urges people not to join 'illegal' protests over weekend before Covid laws relaxed', *Independent*, 26 March 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/protests-kill-the-bill-bristol-covid-laws-b1823084.html>.

⁶¹⁵ Martin Booth, 'Independent Report on Bristol violence says police may have acted illegally', *Bristol 247*, 1 July 2021, <https://www.bristol247.com/news-and-features/news/independent-report-on-bristol-violence-says-police-may-have-acted-illegally/>.

⁶¹⁶ 'Police Power and the Right to Peaceful Protest', All Parliamentary Group on Democracy and the Constitution, 1 July 2021, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6033d6547502c200670fd98c/t/60dcb2dbca4d9050ca9fe09d/1625076444200/Clapham+and+Bristol+Inquiry+Report+-+APPROVED.pdf>, p. 25

⁶¹⁷ 'Kill the Bill protests: Seven arrests in Bristol's fifth demo', BBC News, 4 April 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56631172>.

100 protestors blocked the M32 motorway, with seven people being arrested during the disruption.⁶¹⁸

- 3.147 Alongside emerging from national lockdown, the weeks before the Bristol riot had also seen photographs and video footage circulating widely on social media of Metropolitan police officers detaining women at a vigil in memory of Sarah Everard on Clapham Common.⁶¹⁹ According to an anarchist website, a small number of people had been gathering nightly on College Green to protest sexual violence against women and it was from these vigils that the Kill the Bill protest emerged:
- 3.148 Alongside this, many had been sharing an anonymous call-out for a demonstration against the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, under the slogan #KillTheBill. The demo explicitly stated it had no organisers, so there was no one for the police to pressure to cancel it, just call-outs from dozens of groups and news outlets.⁶²⁰
- 3.149 This account is supported by evidence provided by Avon and Somerset Police to an inquiry into police conduct at Clapham Common and Bristol by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democracy and the Constitution, which claimed engagement beforehand had proven “difficult because organisers were not always prepared to come forward for fear of a £10,000 fine”.⁶²¹ Additionally, a local paper reported that physical posters had been pasted around Bristol and an online version had been shared widely on social media.⁶²²
- 3.150 The de-centralised nature of the Bristol Kill the Bill may also indicate the political leanings of some of those involved, with the protests being widely supported on social media by anarchist groups. Online accounts by the Bristol Anarchist Federation stated that some of its members or those of the larger national Anarchist Federation, of which it is part, were present at the first three

⁶¹⁸ ‘Kill the Bill protests: Seven arrests in Bristol’s fifth demo’, BBC News, 4 April 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-56631172>; ‘The group have marched onto the M32 and are currently sat on the carriageway. The motorway has subsequently been closed to inbound traffic at Junction 3 in the interests of safety.’, Avon and Somerset Police, Twitter, 3 April 2021, <https://twitter.com/ASPolice/status/1378449797116538883>.

⁶¹⁹ ‘An inspection of the Metropolitan Police Service’s policing of a vigil held in commemoration of Sarah Everard’, HMICFRS, 30 March 2021, <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/an-inspection-of-the-metropolitan-police-services-policing-of-a-vigil-held-in-commemoration-of-sarah-everard/>.

⁶²⁰ ‘What actually happened in Bristol and how a narrative is built’, Anarchist Federation, 22 March 2021, <http://afed.org.uk/what-actually-happened-in-bristol-and-how-a-narrative-is-built/>.

⁶²¹ ‘Police Power and the Right to Peaceful Protest’, All Parliamentary Group on Democracy and the Constitution, 1 July 2021, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6033d6547502c200670fd98c/t/60dcb2dbca4d9050ca9fe09d/1625076444200/Clapham+and+Bristol+Inquiry+Report+-+APPROVED.pdf>, p.44.

⁶²² Tristan Cork, ‘Bristol ‘Kill The Bill’ protest on Sunday: Avon and Somerset Police urge people not to go’, *Bristol Live*, 19 March 2021, <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bristol-kill-bill-protest-sunday-5204220>. The Bristol Anarchist Federation shared on Twitter both a picture of the physical poster and an online version, ‘Why yes, we will be spamming this for the next few days, thanks for asking.’, Bristol Anarchist Federation, Twitter, 18 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/BristolAFed/status/1372443590530596872>; ‘Governments already started to waiver on this, keep up the pressure! #KillTheBill’, Bristol Anarchist Federation, Twitter, 19 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/BristolAFed/status/1372914085256433664>

protests,⁶²³ but the group denied organising the protests.⁶²⁴ Another radical group involved was No Fixed Abode—Anti-Fascists (NFAAF),⁶²⁵ which tweeted encouraging people to attend the first protest but to “mask up” and avoid sharing footage showing the faces of anyone without their face covered.⁶²⁶ The following day NFAAF celebrated the subsequent riot, tweeting an image with pictures of a burning police vehicle and smashed windows accompanied by the words “well done! Nice work.” The image was accompanied by advice to those who had taken part on how to frustrate the police investigation, including by keeping footage of the riot offline and getting rid of anything incriminating, such as clothes or phones. The advice was reportedly made by the Bristol Anarchist Federation.⁶²⁷

3.151 On the day of the violence at the Bridewell Police Station, several other anarchist or radical groups supported the protests on social media. Collective Action LDN tweeted: “Solidarity with protesters in Bristol tonight as the cops once again instigate violence”.⁶²⁸ Brighton Antifascists tweeted: “Solidarity with all the comrades out there in Bristol fighting the bill and facing hard repression, you’re absolute heroes. Spread the fire”.⁶²⁹ The Far Left Socialist Workers Party (SWP) tweeted “full solidarity” with the demonstrators and accused the police of attacking the protestors.⁶³⁰

3.152 The weeks that followed saw widespread opposition to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill across the country, which brought together mainstream human groups, unions, and national Far Left groups with local

⁶²³ The Bristol Anarchist Federation is part of the nationwide Anarchist Federation. Anarchist Federation, <http://afed.org.uk/>; Bristol Anarchist Federation, <https://bristolaf.wordpress.com/>. For blogposts see ‘What actually happened in Bristol and how a narrative is built’, Anarchist Federation, 22 March 2021, <http://afed.org.uk/what-actually-happened-in-bristol-and-how-a-narrative-is-built/>; ‘Flowers vs batons – police attack second Bristol #KillTheBill Protest’, Anarchist Federation, 24 March 2021, <http://afed.org.uk/flowers-vs-batons-police-attack-second-bristol-killthebill-protest/>; ‘I had my hands up – my first experience with police brutality’, Anarchist Federation, 28 March 2021, <http://afed.org.uk/i-had-my-hands-up-my-first-experience-with-police-brutality/>.

⁶²⁴ ‘(further down they cite, alongside the awesome @SistersUncut, AFed, BLM, and the venerable Ian Bone as the ‘infiltrators’), Bristol Anarchist Federation, Twitter, 24 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/BristolAFed/status/1374656063551762433>.

⁶²⁵ NAAF describes itself as “a group of squatters, travellers and homeless people combating fascist and bailiff thuggery”. NFA-AF, Twitter, https://twitter.com/nfa_antifascist.

⁶²⁶ ‘PLEASE ALL IN #Bristol #BristolProtest Please remember to mask up. EVERYONES ELSE: be careful about sharing footage with people’s faces who arent wearing masks. #KillTheBill’, NFA-AF, Twitter, 21 March 2021, https://twitter.com/nfa_antifascist/status/1373742412540051467; ‘Still Tons of peolpe in Bristol, if your not sure if to go. It’ll be on for a while yet. Livestream = <https://youtu.be/ErweTCp3em0> *WEAR A MASK & BRING SUPPLYS*’, NFA-AF, Twitter, 21 March 2021, https://twitter.com/nfa_antifascist/status/1373747044477718534.

⁶²⁷ ‘At the #BristolProtest Yesterday Read This (made by @BristolAFed)’, NFA-AF, Twitter, 22 March 2021, https://twitter.com/nfa_antifascist/status/1374048734649143297.

⁶²⁸ ‘Solidarity with protesters in Bristol tonight as the cops once again instigate violence.’, Collective Action Now, Twitter, 23 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/collectiveactuk/status/1374488285184073743>. Collective Action LDN’s Twitter account and Linktree page feature the raised clenched fist image, a common symbol of revolutionary social movements. On Linktree, the group links to open-source guides to organising protest, including on direct action Collective Action Now, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/collectiveactuk>; Collective Action LDN, <https://linktr.ee/CollectiveActionLDN>.

⁶²⁹ ‘Solidarity with all the comrades out there in Bristol fighting the bill and facing hard repression, you’re absolute heroes. Spread the fire.’, Brighton Antifascists, Twitter, 21 March, 2021, <https://twitter.com/brightonanti/status/1373739750214021127>

⁶³⁰ ‘Today police in #Bristol continued where they left off in London last week - attacking people who are protesting police violence and the plans to give them new powers. Full solidarity to the #BristolProtest opposing police violence & all the cops represent #KillTheBill’, Socialist Workers Party, Twitter, 21 March 2021, https://twitter.com/SWP_Britain/status/1373756453945757697?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1373756453945757697%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fthebristolcable.org%2F2022%2F04%2Fmother-of-jailed-kill-the-bill-protester-we-never-thought-shed-get-this-long%2F.

radicals. Over 150 organisations, including the advocacy group Liberty, Unite, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, wrote to the Home Secretary to oppose the Bill on the grounds that it would curb the right to protest and disproportionately impact Gypsy and Traveler communities.⁶³¹ Separately, a coalition of smaller, local radical groups – including local anti-fascists and BLM groups – signed an open statement opposing the Bill.⁶³² Extinction Rebellion and its local groups signed both.⁶³³

3.153 National protests were coordinated by groups that can be broadly considered part of the Far Left subculture, including the Socialist Workers Party and its anti-racism campaign Stand Up To Racism,⁶³⁴ Extinction Rebellion, various Black Lives Matter groups, Traveler groups and LGBT+ organisations.⁶³⁵ While these passed largely peacefully, a minority of demonstrators caused disruption at several locations across the country. On 27 March 2021, demonstrators in Manchester blocked tramlines,⁶³⁶ while in Cambridge protesters gathered outside the city's police station, with some climbing the roof.⁶³⁷ On 3 April 2021, the Metropolitan Police arrested 107 protestors on suspicion of violent disorder, assault on police and possession of an offensive weapon.⁶³⁸ The London protest was also marked by violence against the police, with videos showing demonstrators scuffling with police officers along Whitehall and in Parliament Square, in some cases punching officers and throwing objects at police.⁶³⁹ Demonstrators shouted abuse and told an injured police officer that he had brought this on himself.⁶⁴⁰ The Metropolitan Police reported that ten police officers had been injured, although none seriously.⁶⁴¹

⁶³¹ Aubrey Allegretti and Maya Wolfe-Robinson, 'New anti-protest bill raises profound concern and alarm, human rights groups say', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/14/new-anti-protest-bill-raises-profound-concern-human-rights-groups-say>.

⁶³² Mike Urban, 'Activists unite to voice their opposition to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill', *Brixton Buzz*, 15 March 2021, <https://www.brixtonbuzz.com/2021/03/activists-unite-to-voice-their-opposition-to-the-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill/>.

⁶³³ '3 April United for our right to protest: Extinction Rebellion, United for Black Lives and others collaborate in national day of action against the Policing Bill', Extinction Rebellion, 2 April 2021, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/04/02/united-for-our-right-to-protest-extinction-rebellion-united-for-black-lives-and-others-collaborate-in-national-day-of-action-against-the-policing-bill/>; '#KillTheBill: Joint Statement on the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill From XR, BLM local groups, RAAH and more', Extinction Rebellion, 15 March 2021, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/03/15/killthebill-joint-statement-on-the-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-from-xr-blm-local-groups-raah-and-more/>.

⁶³⁴ See glossary for more detail on the relationship between the Socialist Workers Party and Stand up to Racism.

⁶³⁵ Sophie Squire and Isabel Ringrose, 'Protests at new level as thousands march across Britain against police bill', *Socialist Worker*, 3 April 2021, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/news/protests-at-new-level-as-thousands-march-across-britain-against-police-bill/>; '3 April United for our right to protest: Extinction Rebellion, United for Black Lives and others collaborate in national day of action against the Policing Bill', Extinction Rebellion, 2 April 2021, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2021/04/02/united-for-our-right-to-protest-extinction-rebellion-united-for-black-lives-and-others-collaborate-in-national-day-of-action-against-the-policing-bill/>.

⁶³⁶ 'Kill the Bill Manchester protest: 18 arrested after protesters block tram lines', BBC News, 27 March 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-56552440>.

⁶³⁷ Harry Gold, 'Cambridge Kill the Bill protesters slam 'sickening' scenes in Bristol', *Cambridgeshire Live*, 27 March 2021, <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/local-news/cambridge-police-station-protest-cambridgeshire-20271342>.

⁶³⁸ 'Kill the Bill protests: More than 100 arrested in London', BBC News, 4 April 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-56632030>.

⁶³⁹ Damien Gayle, 'Kill the bill' protesters rally across England and Wales', *The Guardian*, 3 April 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/03/kill-the-bill-protesters-rally-across-england-and-wales-on-saturday>.

⁶⁴⁰ 'Hundreds of Kill the Bill protesters clash with police at central London rally', The Sun YouTube, 3 April 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xgiAXvSgJE>.

⁶⁴¹ Tammy Hughes and Luke O'Reilly, 'Kill the Bill: 26 arrests and 10 officers injured as thousands of protesters descend on central London', *The Standard*, 4 April 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/protest-london-kill-the-bill-anti-lockdown-extinction-rebellion-b927730.html>.

3.154 More radical groups and individuals also attended the demonstrations. On 1 May 2021 in London, some protestors waved anarchist flags.⁶⁴² Also present in large numbers that day was the United Voices of the World (UVW),⁶⁴³ a direct-action campaigning trade union that campaigned against the Bill,⁶⁴⁴ and, in 2021, received a £15,000 grant from Black Lives Matter UK.⁶⁴⁵ On social media UVW has referred to “blood thirsty cops”,⁶⁴⁶ a dehumanising of the police that I observed in Bristol, notably in the social media output of some of the anarchist groups that supported the violent protests. In my view, ascribing violence and brutality to the police in this way is unhelpful and potentially counter-productive.

- **The Kill the Bill protests in Bristol in spring 2021 were characterised by exceptionally high levels of violence and law breaking directed at symbols or representatives of the state such as police buildings and vehicles as well as police officers.**
- **The Bristol protests were anti-government and anarchist in nature. Spontaneous and leaderless to begin with, they were attended and supported by anarchist or radical groups who both valorised the violence online and posted advice on how to frustrate subsequent police investigations.**
- **The protests were also characterised by an uncertainty over the legal status of protests at the time owing to the Covid-19 lockdowns. Such legal ambiguity around people’s rights to free expression and assembly is unhelpful and must be avoided.**
- **Protest groups ascribing violence and brutality to the police multiplies the risk of confrontation. Mainstream actors should distance themselves from such unhelpful and potentially counterproductive behaviour.**

Anti-Israel and Antisemitic Activism

3.155 There are many protest movements and campaign groups in the UK focussed on geopolitical issues and foreign conflicts. The vast majority exercise their

⁶⁴² “Kill the Bill’ protesters descend on central London’, The Daily Telegraph YouTube, 1 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aj55hWlUqCw> [0:20]

⁶⁴³ “Kill the Bill’ protesters descend on central London’, The Daily Telegraph YouTube, 1 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aj55hWlUqCw> [0:41]

⁶⁴⁴ ‘UVW Launches call for evidence against protest bill’, UVW Union, 12 May 2021, <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2021/05/uvw-launches-call-for-evidence-against-protest-bill/>, ‘The UVW comes out in force for international workers day’, UVW Union, 4 May 2021, <https://www.uvwunion.org.uk/en/news/2021/05/the-uvw-comes-out-in-force-for-international-workers-day/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20210504143656/https://twitter.com/UVWunion/status/1389589731210629126>

⁶⁴⁵ Nadine White, ‘Revealed: Who Will Get First Black Lives Matter UK Grants After £1m Fundraiser’, *Huffington Post*, 18 February 2021, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/black-lives-matter-uk-funding-revealed_uk_602ba983c5b6741597e48b2f.

⁶⁴⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20210505224345/https://twitter.com/UVWunion/status/1390039576773865475>

legitimate right to campaign and protest in an entirely peaceful and proper fashion.

- 3.156 However, activism around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict stands out as being a focus of incitement and intimidation as well as the use of law breaking by some activists. There is a distinction here between mainstream campaigners who primarily focus on promoting the Palestinian cause through legal means and those that focus their activism on hostility towards Israel. I judge the latter fringe activism to be largely a part of the Far Left subculture in the UK: usually framed as anti-Zionism in support of Palestinians, it accuses Israel of imperialism, colonialism, and oppression; and its antisemitism is often presented in connection with anti-capitalist conspiracy theories, such as the antisemitic trope of Jewish bankers controlling the globe.⁶⁴⁷ It is this movement that has proven most willing to use law breaking, intimidation, and at times, violence.
- 3.157 One of the groups in this movement that has most aggressively engaged in law breaking and business disruption is Palestine Action.⁶⁴⁸
- 3.158 Since its founding in July 2020,⁶⁴⁹ Palestine Action has targeted sites belonging to the technology company Elbit Systems UK,⁶⁵⁰ a subsidiary of Elbit Systems, itself an Israeli-linked international defence and security technology company.⁶⁵¹ Palestine Action has repeatedly targeted Elbit UK offices and factories, vandalising the premises, and bringing work and production for the UK Ministry of Defence to a halt. As well as breaking into these buildings, causing large amounts of criminal damage, and glorifying their vandalism online,⁶⁵² activists have climbed onto factory roofs, chained themselves to the inside of the buildings, and blocked entrances to stop production from going ahead.⁶⁵³
- 3.159 Palestine Action claim to have targeted Elbit UK's London headquarters 15 times over two years “ –disrupting business by blockading, occupying and defacing the property” – until the company allegedly vacated the property, for which the group claim credit.⁶⁵⁴ Such performative direct action – or propaganda by the deed – inevitably raises concerns around the likelihood of

⁶⁴⁷ 'Antisemitic Imagery and Caricatures', Antisemitism Policy Trust, 2020, <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Antisemitic-imagery-May-2020.pdf>, p. 17

⁶⁴⁸ Palestine Action, <https://www.palestineaction.org/>

⁶⁴⁹ Robert Inlakesh and Al Mayadeen, 'Direct Action works – Elbit Oldham Shut Down', Jewish Voice for Labour, 19 January 2022, <https://www.jewishvoiceforlabour.org.uk/article/pashutselbit/>.

⁶⁵⁰ 'Shut Elbit Down', Palestine Action, <https://palestineaction.org/siege#siege>.

⁶⁵¹ 'Vision & Mission', Elbit Systems, <https://www.elbitsystems-uk.com/about-us/vision-mission>.

⁶⁵² 'Walls, floors, ceilings, electrical points, lights & laptops – nothing in here is unbreakable: we are Palestine Action #ShutElbitDown #Nakba74', Palestine Action, Twitter, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1525894702733606914.

⁶⁵³ Sonia Kataria, 'Arrests at pro-Palestinian Leicester drone factory protest', BBC News, 29 March 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-60905989>

⁶⁵⁴ 'Palestine Action Permanently Shut Down Israeli Arms Firm's London HQ', Palestine Action, 20 June 2022, <https://www.palestineaction.org/london-hq-shut/>, archived: <https://archive.ph/wrbc#selection-1001.0-1001.68>.

copycat attacks or escalation. For example, on at least four occasions in April and May 2022,⁶⁵⁵ Palestine Action activists vandalised the front of the building with paint, and reportedly locking the building so that the office was unable to open.⁶⁵⁶ Around the same time, the Elbit UK office in Birmingham was targeted twice, with individuals described by Palestine Action as “autonomous activists” vandalising the outside of the building and smashing windows.⁶⁵⁷

3.160 There can be no doubt that Palestine Action is using illegal methods to attempt to close subsidiaries of a registered company operating lawfully in this country.⁶⁵⁸ In that regard, the aim of Palestine Action is not dissimilar to that of the campaign waged by animal rights extremists against the animal testing company Huntingdon Life Sciences, albeit deploying different tactics. Small groups of extreme activists sabotaging businesses with whom they disagree not only create a climate of intimidation for private companies and their staff, but they also have a detrimental effect on local economies and employment opportunities. In January 2022, it was reported that Elbit UK had sold its subsidiary in Oldham, Greater Manchester, a defence power systems manufacturer,⁶⁵⁹ after months of the factory being targeted by vandalism and disruptive protests.⁶⁶⁰ While some employees moved as part of the deal,⁶⁶¹ Elbit UK was reported to have served redundancy notices to local employees a few months beforehand.⁶⁶² Furthermore, such direct action campaigns incur financial costs; sympathetic media reports allege that Palestine Action’s first

⁶⁵⁵ Palestine Action carried out protests on 13th and 20th April 2023 and twice in May 2023, including on 20th.

<https://peoplesdispatch.org/2022/04/13/palestine-action-activists-deface-and-blockade-london-hq-of-elbit-systems/>; ‘Elbit London HQ shut down by XR Youth in support of Palestine Action’, Real Media, YouTube, 20 April 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwWfN_OpCII; ‘We’ve shut down the London headquarters of Israel’s largest arms firm, for the second time in a week! Don’t want to see Elbit’s HQ reopen? Join Palestine Action: [#ShutElbitDown](http://bit.ly/JoinResist)’, Palestine Action, Twitter, 20 May 2022, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527591501441732609.

⁶⁵⁶ ‘BREAKING: Palestine Action have sprayed Elbit Systems’ London headquarters with red paint and locked on to the building, preventing access to the Israeli weapons hub. Not a single day of rest for perpetrators of apartheid! [#ShutElbitDown](https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527555679996755971)’, Palestine Action, Twitter, 20 May 2022, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527555679996755971; ‘We’ve shut down the London headquarters of Israel’s largest arms firm, for the second time in a week! Don’t want to see Elbit’s HQ reopen? Join Palestine Action: [#ShutElbitDown](http://bit.ly/JoinResist)’, Palestine Action, Twitter, 20 May 2022, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527591501441732609; ‘We’re back at 77 Kingsway, where Elbit Systems strategise the production of their weapons, which are “battle-tested” on Palestinians before they even go to market [#ShutElbitDown](https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527574149341880320)’, Palestine Action, Twitter, 20 May 2022, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527574149341880320; ‘13 activists in the past two days have been arrested for taking action against the TWO headquarters belonging to Israel’s largest arms firm in Britain. Their presence is so dominant in this country, they have TWO HQs.’, Palestine Action, Twitter, 17 May 2022, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1526644059342790657.

⁶⁵⁷ Nathan Clarke, ‘Palestine Action says ‘autonomous activists’ behind city centre office paint attack’, *Birmingham Live*, 30 March 2022, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/palestine-action-says-autonomous-activists-23544208>; Nathan Clarke, ‘Birmingham city centre office block targeted with red paint for second time’, *Birmingham Live*, 19 May 2022, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/birmingham-city-centre-office-block-24001155>; ‘The landlords of Israeli arms firm HQ get hit once again at their Birmingham office — @JLL #EvictElbit NOW!’, Palestine Action, Twitter, 19 May 2022, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527322985492668422.

⁶⁵⁸ In its press releases Palestine Action states: Palestine Action is a direct-action network of groups and individuals formed with the mandate of taking action against the sites of Elbit Systems and other companies complicit in Israeli apartheid, calling for all such sites to be shut down. <https://www.palestineaction.org/palestinian-prisoners-statement/>

⁶⁵⁹ ‘TT Electronics Buys Ferranti Power & Control Business from Elbit’, *Magnetics Business & Technology*, 27 January 2022, <https://magneticsmag.com/tt-electronics-buys-ferranti-power-control-business-from-elbit/>

⁶⁶⁰ Imogen Clyde-Smith, ‘Arms firm sells part of Oldham business after months of protests’, *The Oldham Times*, 12 January 2022, <https://www.theoldhamtimes.co.uk/news/19840066.arms-firm-sells-part-oldham-business-months-protests/>.

⁶⁶¹ Marc Selinger, ‘TT Electronics buys Ferranti Power & Control’, *Janes*, 11 January 2022, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/tt-electronics-buys-ferranti-power-control>.

⁶⁶² Imogen Clyde-Smith, ‘Arms firm sells part of Oldham business after months of protests’, *The Oldham Times*, 12 January 2022, <https://www.theoldhamtimes.co.uk/news/19840066.arms-firm-sells-part-oldham-business-months-protests/>.

year of campaigning cost Elbit UK more than \$22million and more than 100 days 'manufacturing'.⁶⁶³

3.161 Despite the severity of Palestine Action's campaign against Elbit UK, there were several early instances of activists being acquitted at trial or discharged without trial.⁶⁶⁴ The first Palestine Activists taken to trial were acquitted of criminal damage charges by a magistrate's court despite having admitted to locking-on to gates and throwing red paint over an Elbit UK factory. According to Palestine Action, the judge ruled that a conviction would be disproportionate to the defendants 'right to protest, enshrined in law under Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights, protecting freedom of expression and assembly respectively, especially considering that their beliefs were genuinely held and were rooted in "important issues", and they had chosen their location specifically.⁶⁶⁵ In another acquittal, the defendants argued that their action had been a proportional and reasonable response to a company they believe is guilty of war crimes in Gaza.⁶⁶⁶

3.162 In my view, it is essential for the upholding of the rule of law that trials of this nature are not politicised. The same is true of climate activism. Those who break the law as part of political protest must be met with the same response, no matter the cause on whose behalf they claim to be acting.

3.163 More recently, Palestine Action activists facing criminal damage charges have found less success in UK courts. Two activists were sentenced to 16 and 27 months for criminal damage in May 2023,⁶⁶⁷ and a further four were sentenced to between 23 and 27 months in June 2023 for conspiracy to commit criminal

⁶⁶³ Asa Winstanley, 'One year in, Palestine Action is hitting drone maker Elbit', The Electronic Intifada, 6 August 2021, [hardhttps://electronicintifada.net/blogs/asa-winstanley/one-year-palestine-action-hitting-drone-maker-elbit-hard](https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/asa-winstanley/one-year-palestine-action-hitting-drone-maker-elbit-hard).

⁶⁶⁴ In December 2021, three Palestine Action activists were acquitted of criminal damage charges by a magistrate's court after locking on to gates and throwing red paint over Elbit UK's Shenstone factory in January 2021. In November 2022, five Palestine Action activists were acquitted of conspiracy to commit criminal damage by a jury in relation to vandalism of Elbit UK's London headquarters in October 2020. <https://www.palestineaction.org/not-guilty/>; Bethany Rielly, 'Jury acquits five Palestine Action activists who threw paint on London HQ of an Israeli arms firm', *Morning Star for Peace and Socialism*, 23 November 2022, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/b/jury-acquits-five-palestine-action-activists-who-threw-paint-on-london-hq-of-an-israeli-arms-firm>.

In October 2022, three Palestine Action activists were discharged without trial, in relation to alleged occupation and vandalism of Elbit UK's Bristol headquarters in November 2021. In September 2022, charges of criminal damage and aggravated trespass against five activists had been dropped in relation to action at Elbit UK's Shenstone factory in July 2022. Kit Klarenberg, 'Palestine Action activists walk free after another case bites the dust', The Electronic Intifada, 20 October 2022, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/palestine-action-activists-walk-free-after-another-case-bites-dust/36521>; Kit Klarenberg, 'Case against Palestine Action collapses again', The Electronic Intifada, 10 October 2022, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/case-against-palestine-action-collapses-again/36441>.

⁶⁶⁵ 'Palestine Action Activists Found NOT GUILTY After Defacing Israeli Arms Company', Palestine Action, 6 December 2021, <https://www.palestineaction.org/not-guilty/> archived at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240114230943/https://www.palestineaction.org/not-guilty/>; 'Judges Convict Palestine Action: Resistance in the Face of Repression', Palestine Action, 12 February 2023, <https://www.palestineaction.org/resistance-repression/> archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230918132908/https://www.palestineaction.org/resistance-repression/>.

⁶⁶⁶ Jury acquits five Palestine Action activists who threw paint on London HQ of an Israeli arms firm, *Morning Star*, 23 November 2022, Bethany Rielly, 'Jury acquits five Palestine Action activists who threw paint on London HQ of an Israeli arms firm', *Morning Star for Peace and Socialism*, 23 November 2023, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/b/jury-acquits-five-palestine-action-activists-who-threw-paint-on-london-hq-of-an-israeli-arms-firm>.

⁶⁶⁷ 'Two Sentenced to Prison After Dismantling Runcorn Weapons Factory', Palestine Action, 18 May 2023, <https://www.palestineaction.org/prison-sentences/> archived here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230518193904/https://www.palestineaction.org/prison-sentences/>;

damage.⁶⁶⁸ According to Palestine Action, six activists are detained as of July 2023 and “over 100 more are facing custodial sentences”.⁶⁶⁹ The group attributes its change in fortune to the impact of a 2022 ruling on a point of law following the high-profile acquittal of the ‘Colston Four’, the protesters who toppled the Bristol statue of the slave trader Edward Colston.⁶⁷⁰ The Court of Appeal ruled that where protest resulted in significant damage or was violent, defendants would not be able to argue that a conviction would disproportionately interfere with their right to protest.⁶⁷¹

3.164 Regardless, such acquittals receive confusion and polarised responses which is unhelpful. I welcome the clarity which the Court of Appeal ruling brings to the law in relation to violent or non-peaceful conduct during protest.

3.165 Since the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel, Palestine Action has targeted several other institutions as part of its anti-Israel ‘direct action campaign’, including spraying red paint over the BBC’s headquarters,⁶⁷² squirting tomato ketchup on a statue of Arthur Balfour in Parliament,⁶⁷³ allegedly planning to ‘lock-on’ to the London stock Exchange,⁶⁷⁴ damaging a painting of Lord Balfour at Trinity College, Cambridge,⁶⁷⁵ and partnering with radical environmentalist group Youth Demand to spray red paint on Ministry of Defence.⁶⁷⁶

3.166 It is clear to me that Palestine Action is part of the anti-Israel social movement within the Far-Left subculture in the UK. I come to this conclusion based on the nature of Palestine Action itself, its veneration of the so-called Palestinian resistance, and the significant crossover – in terms of personnel and actions – with other Far Left social movements. First, Palestine Action self-consciously

⁶⁶⁸ ‘Four Sentenced to Prison After Dismantling an American Weapons Factory in Wales’, Palestine Action, 26 June 2023, <https://www.palestineaction.org/teledyne-sentence/>; Archived at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240308132036/https://www.palestineaction.org/teledyne-sentence/>.

⁶⁶⁹ ‘Palestinian Prisoners Call for the Freedom of Palestine Action Prisoners’, Palestine Action, 8 July 2023,

<https://www.palestineaction.org/palestinian-prisoners-statement/>, archived:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230918130243/https://www.palestineaction.org/palestinian-prisoners-statement/>.

⁶⁷⁰ ‘Judges Convict Palestine Action: Resistance in the Face of Repression’, Palestine Action, 12 February 2023,

<https://www.palestineaction.org/resistance-repression/>; archived here:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20230918132908/https://www.palestineaction.org/resistance-repression/>.

⁶⁷¹ Haroon Siddique and Damien Gayle, ‘Colston four: protesters cannot rely on ‘human rights’ defence, top judge rules’, *The Guardian*, 28 September 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/sep/28/colston-four-protesters-cannot-rely-on-human-rights-defence-top-judge-rules>; Press Summary, ATTORNEY GENERAL’S REFERENCE ON A POINT OF LAW, No. 1 of 2022, (pursuant to section 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1972) Case No: 202201151 B3, 28 September 2022, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AG-Ref-Colston-Four-summary-280922.pdf>.

⁶⁷² Clea Skopeliti, ‘BBC building sprayed with red paint in ‘protest over Israel-Hamas coverage’, *The Guardian*, 14 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/oct/14/bbc-building-red-paint-protest-israel-hamas-coverage>.

⁶⁷³ ‘Palestinian protesters squirt ketchup on statue in Houses of Parliament’, *The Guardian*, 12 November 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/nov/12/palestinian-protesters-squirt-ketchup-on-statue-in-houses-of-parliament>.

⁶⁷⁴ Vivian Ho, ‘Six arrested over suspected plot to disrupt London Stock Exchange’, *The Guardian*, 14 January 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/jan/14/six-arrested-over-suspected-plot-to-disrupt-london-stock-exchange>.

⁶⁷⁵ Harriet Heywood & Brian Farmer, ‘Lord Balfour: Pro-Palestinian protesters damage University of Cambridge painting’, BBC News, 8 March 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68515368>.

⁶⁷⁶ Chas Geiger, ‘Pro-Palestinian protesters spray red paint on Ministry of Defence’, BBC News, 10 April 2024,

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-68781130>; ‘Palestine Action and Youth Demand paint Ministry of Defence’, *Freedom News*, 19 April 2024, <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2024/04/19/palestine-action-and-youth-demand-paint-ministry-of-defence/>.

adopts anarchist tactics of direct action and non-cooperation with the police,⁶⁷⁷ referring to itself as “direct-action network of groups and individuals”, and the organising principle of an ‘affinity group’,⁶⁷⁸ a small group of 5 to 20 people known to one another who work together autonomously on direct actions or other projects.⁶⁷⁹

3.167 Second, Palestine Action positions itself as part of the wider Palestinian struggle to end “Israeli apartheid”.⁶⁸⁰ For example, its actions often coincide with flareups in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,⁶⁸¹ and Palestine Action co-founder Richard Barnard founder reportedly praised terrorist prisoners in Israel – members of the terrorist group Islamic Jihad⁶⁸² – as “heroes”.⁶⁸³ The group’s other co-founder Huda Ammori is a former campaign officer for the Far Left anti-Israel activist group, Palestine Solidarity Campaign.⁶⁸⁴ The group also works with other actors in the anti-Israeli UK activist scene. For example, in March 2021, Palestine Action hosted Far Left rapper Lowkey at a planning meeting.⁶⁸⁵ Lowkey music was criticised by the Independent Reviewer of Prevent as “lyrics promoting what I regard to be an antisemitic conspiracy theory about the ‘Zionist lobby’”.⁶⁸⁶ I agree with this assessment. Furthermore, I believe his lyrics, on occasion, contain an apology for terrorism, including by

⁶⁷⁷ Palestine Action homepage states “take direct action against Israel’s arms trade in Britain”. See www.palestineaction.org. Archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240507232031/https://palestineaction.org/> Its FAQs state: ‘Should I talk to the police? The short and straight forward answer to this question is NO. The police work alongside Elbit Systems and their priority is to protect Israel’s arms industry’. See <https://www.palestineaction.org/siege/> archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20231120064457/https://www.palestineaction.org/siege/>.

See also ‘#NoComment’, Palestine Action, Twitter, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1527429276466921489.

⁶⁷⁸ In its FAQs Palestine Action states “JUST TURN UP! Don’t have time to join a local group or just want to turn up with your own affinity group? Well, you’re more than welcome to do that! See <https://www.palestineaction.org/siege/> archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20231120064457/https://www.palestineaction.org/siege/>.

⁶⁷⁹ Shawn Ewald, ‘Affinity Groups’, The Anarchist Library, 2008, <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/shawn-ewald-affinity-groups>.

⁶⁸⁰ ‘Four Sentenced to Prison After Dismantling an American Weapons Factory in Wales’, Palestine Action, 26 June 2023, <https://www.palestineaction.org/teledyne-sentence/> archived at:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20240308132036/https://www.palestineaction.org/teledyne-sentence/>.

⁶⁸¹ For example, during the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza in May 2021, members of Palestine Action occupied the roof of an Elbit UK factory in Leicester for six days. ‘Leicester pro-Palestinian drone factory protest ends after six days’, BBC News, 25 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-57243045>.

⁶⁸² ‘Terror charges and life sentences: The 6 Palestinians who escaped Gilboa Prison’, *The Times of Israel*, 6 September 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/terror-charges-and-life-sentences-the-6-palestinians-who-escaped-gilboa-prison/>.

⁶⁸³ David Rose & JC Investigations Team, ‘Unmasked: British anti-Israel activists plotting mayhem across UK’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/unmasked-british-anti-israel-activists-plotting-mayhem-across-uk-5lg8v2zFfC9aRJ1N1m1f3k>.

⁶⁸⁴ Louis Burg and Abul Taher, ‘EXCLUSIVE: Hardline pro-Palestine protest group with ties to Extinction Rebellion urges supporters to join a campaign of violence and vandalism against 50 UK firms backing Israel’, *Daily Mail*, 28 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12683401/pro-palestine-protest-group-extinction-rebellion-campaign-violence-uk-firms-supporting-israel.html>.

⁶⁸⁵ ‘Join Palestine Action and Rapper Lowkey to hear: How to Shut Down an Israeli’, Friends Meeting House, 9 March 2022, ‘Inside a secret meeting of the notorious Palestine Action Group’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/inside-a-secret-meeting-of-the-notorious-palestine-action-group-5f54XX7WJwb3qYtxPj4lx3>.

⁶⁸⁶ For example, the lyrics include:

“Every coin is a bullet, if you’re Marks and Spencer,
And when your sipping Coca-Cola,
That’s another pistol in the holster of the soulless soldiers,
You say you know about the Zionist lobby,
But you put money in their pocket when you’re buying their coffee,
Talking about revolution, sitting in Starbucks...”

See ‘National Demo for Palestine’, Karimia Institute, YouTube, 22 May 2021, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WmglX6DQkQM>.

For the Independent Reviewer’s assessment, see William Shawcross CVO, ‘Independent Review of Prevent’, February 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, para 3.89

drawing a false equivalence between global defence forms and suicide bombings and by recasting terrorism as resistance to colonialism.⁶⁸⁷

3.168 Finally, there are examples of Palestine Action cooperating with other Far Left social movements. Palestine Action and Extinction Rebellion have joined forces previously, sharing personnel and participating in each other's activism.

3.169 For example, Palestine Action co-founder Richard Barnard was arrested in 2020 as part of an Extinction Rebellion protest that involved activists climbing onto the roof of a commuter train in London's Docklands.⁶⁸⁸ Senior Palestine Action figure Sara Wilkinson is also allegedly a leader of Extinction Rebellion North,⁶⁸⁹ and the groups carried out a joint 'action' against Elbit UK in Oldham in February 2021.⁶⁹⁰ One of the protests against Elbit UK's London office was carried out by members of Extinction Rebellion Youth, in what was described by the sympathetic YouTube channel Real Media, as "marking a new cross-campaign collaboration and connecting the issues of climate change with imperialism and militarisation".⁶⁹¹ Palestine Action also campaigned with the Islamist advocacy group CAGE to encourage demonstrations outside of the trial of the so-called Elbit Eight in December 2023,⁶⁹² while Doone Zoe Stormonth-Darling, acquitted of conspiracy to damage property after spraying Elbit UK's London headquarters with paint,⁶⁹³ is now a caseworker at CAGE.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁸⁷ For example, the lyrics include:

"Tell me what's the bigger threat to human society?
B.A.E. systems or homemade I.ED's
Remote control drone's; killing off human lives
Or man with homemade bomb committing suicide"
[...]

"Call you terrorists if you don't wanna be a colony
Refuse to bow down to a policy of robbery"
[...]

"It's like the definition didn't ever exist
I guess it's all just dependent who your nemesis is
Irrelevant how eloquent the rhetoric peddler is
They're tellin' fibs now you tell us who the terrorist is"

See LOWKEY - TERRORIST? (OFFICIAL MUSIC VIDEO), Global Faction, YouTube, 11 September 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmBnvajSfWU>.

⁶⁸⁸ David Rose & JC Investigations Team, 'Unmasked: British anti-Israel activists plotting mayhem across UK', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/unmasked-british-anti-israel-activists-plotting-mayhem-across-uk-5lg8v2zFfC9aRJ1NIm1f3k>

⁶⁸⁹ David Rose & JC Investigations Team, 'Unmasked: British anti-Israel activists plotting mayhem across UK', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/unmasked-british-anti-israel-activists-plotting-mayhem-across-uk-5lg8v2zFfC9aRJ1NIm1f3k>.

⁶⁹⁰ 'XR North & Palestine Action shut down Israeli arms factory', Palestine Action, 1 February 2021, <https://www.palestineaction.org/xr-north-elbit-shut/> Archived here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240425084505/https://www.palestineaction.org/xr-north-elbit-shut/>.

⁶⁹¹ 'Elbit London HQ shut down by XR Youth in support of Palestine Action', Real Media, YouTube, 20 April 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwWfN_OpCII.

⁶⁹² 'Attend court tomorrow and show your support for the #ElbitEight!', CAGE International, Facebook, 30 November 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=365778792645106&set=pb.100076389647361.-2207520000&type=3>.

⁶⁹³ Laura Brick, 'Aristocrat cleared over protest at Israeli arms firm', *The Times*, 24 November 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/aristocrat-cleared-over-protest-at-israeli-arms-firm-8hx0zxs7d>.

⁶⁹⁴ 'HOW TO RESIST EUROPEAN STATE LED CRACKDOWN ON PRO PALESTINIAN SOLIDARITY', CAGE, 12 December 2023, <https://event.cage.ngo/how-to-resist-european-state-led-crackdown-on-pro-palestinian-solidarity1702044858765/>;

Alhamdulillah unanimously Jury supports Palestine', CAGE International, Facebook, 23 November 2022, https://m.facebook.com/watch/?v=639459417926512&paipv=0&eav=AfbQy8xzwEVPRXTq1CkZtStHxiTmY48UI4CIBNsqwuzKGA51JbwyDI nTErVspdC_WA&_rdr; 'We also express our support to our colleague who is one of the #Kingsway5 standing trial.' CAGE International, Twitter, 17 November 2022, <https://twitter.com/CAGEintl/status/1593356085682966528>.

- 3.170 Since the submission of this report, a new UK-based protest group identifying itself as Energy Embargo for Palestine forced the British Museum to close.⁶⁹⁵ Its leadership published a statement on the leftwing Jacobin website demanding the museum sever ties with BP after Israel granted the company gas exploration licences off the coast of Gaza.⁶⁹⁶ A banner displayed by the group read ‘Sponsored by BP=Sponsored by Colonial Genocide’.⁶⁹⁷
- 3.171 Palestine Action activists are involved with other environmentalist groups. Jailed Palestine Action activist Mike Lynch White, for example, is also a co-founder of Science Rebellion, a group of scientists involved in climate activism,⁶⁹⁸ and an activist with Extinction Rebellion, Roger Hallam’s political party Burning Pink, and Heathrow Pause, Hallam’s breakaway group that attempted to fly drones inside the Heathrow exclusion zone in 2019.⁶⁹⁹ At the time of sentencing for criminal damage in the name of Palestine Action in May 2023, White was also facing charges in relation to activism with both Burning Pink and Heathrow Pause.⁷⁰⁰
- 3.172 Beyond Palestine Action, the wider anti-Israel social movement within the British Far Left has too often featured both violence and antisemitic incitement. During fighting between the Israeli military and Hamas in Gaza in May 2021, anti-Israel demonstrators in London clashed with police outside the Israeli embassy, throwing objects and hitting police with sticks from placards, leading to injuries among nine police officers, and protesters being arrested.⁷⁰¹ The overt nature of the antisemitism on display in the imagery and slogans on placards during this and subsequent demonstrations in London drew condemnation, in particular with regards to a horned, hook-nosed, and bloodshot inflatable figure paraded by demonstrators on Whitehall, London.⁷⁰²
- 3.173 The Jewish community group the Community Security Trust (CST) criticised the police for seemingly taking little action despite witnessing examples of

⁶⁹⁵ Heather Stewart, ‘British Museum closes to visitors as Energy Embargo for Palestine group gathers outside’, *The Guardian*, 24 March 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2024/mar/24/british-museum-closes-to-visitors-as-energy-embargo-for-palestine-group-gathers-outside>.

⁶⁹⁶ ‘Why We Occupied the British Museum’, *Jacobin*, 15 February 2024, <https://jacobin.com/2024/02/british-museum-israel-bp-gaza>.

⁶⁹⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2024/mar/24/british-museum-closes-to-visitors-as-energy-embargo-for-palestine-group-gathers-outside>.

⁶⁹⁸ ‘FAQ’, *Scientist Rebellion*, <https://scientistrebellion.org/about-us/faq/>.

⁶⁹⁹ Mike Lynch-White, *Rebels in Prison*, <https://rebelsinprison.uk/rebels/mike-lynch-white/>.

⁷⁰⁰ Steve Topple, ‘Activist jailed for over two years for protesting over arms companies supporting Israel’s apartheid’, *The Canary*, 17 May 2023, <https://www.thecanary.co/uk/2023/05/17/activist-jailed-for-over-two-years-for-protesting-over-arms-companies-supporting-israels-apartheid/>.

⁷⁰¹ Emer Scully and Chris Jewers, ‘Nine police officers are injured amid violent clashes with pro-Palestine protesters in London as 13 people are arrested after thousands marched on the Israeli embassy and activists burned Israeli flags’, *Mail Online*, 15 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9581879/Thousands-protesters-march-Hyde-Park-solidarity-people-Palestine.html>.

⁷⁰² The inflatable was present on at least two occasions, during protests on 15th May and 13th June 2021 ‘Roseanne Barr claims ‘world cannot handle satire’ after saying ‘6 million Jews should die’’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 11 July 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/world/roseanne-barr-claims-world-cannot-handle-satire-after-saying-6-million-jews-should-die-2ge4RsdBnftUwmm4cMkj9k>; Jemma Carr and Emer Scully, ‘Pro-Palestine mob brandish anti-Semitic banners comparing Israel to Nazis at London rally’ *Mail Online*, 13 June 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9680751/Pro-Palestine-mob-brandish-antisemitic-banners-comparing-Israel-Nazis.html>.

antisemitic incitement.⁷⁰³ For example, a video from May 2021 shows police officers walking alongside activists while an individual openly shouted, “we’ll find some Jews” and, “we want the Zionists, we want their blood”.⁷⁰⁴ In another incident from that day, Mohammed Hijab, a prominent Islamist figure countering a pro-Israel rally, was recorded telling a police officer that he would kill the dogs belonging to some “Zionists” present were they to return.⁷⁰⁵ Hijab further appeared to promote martyrdom, telling counter demonstrators: “We are with the brothers and sisters of Palestine. We will get our vengeance in this life and the afterlife!” and “the difference between us and them is that for them they think that life begins, for us we believe that death begins. We believe that life begins at death. We don’t care about death. We love death”.⁷⁰⁶

3.174 The following day saw a car convoy from Bradford driving through an area of London with a large Jewish community, during which an individual used a loudspeaker to shout misogynistic and antisemitic incitement. Footage from that incident shows the speaker declaring, “Fuck the Jews, Fuck all of them. Fuck their mothers, fuck their daughters, and show your support for Palestine. Rape their daughters, and we have to send a message like that.”⁷⁰⁷ Four men were arrested following this incident, but charges were subsequently dropped.⁷⁰⁸ While the incident was condemned by one of the organisers the demonstration the day beforehand,⁷⁰⁹ it raises question about the potentially galvanising effect on radical individuals of seeing demonstrators incite antisemitic hatred with apparent impunity.

3.175 The demonstrations were organised jointly by Together for Palestine – formed of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Friends of al-Aqsa, Palestinian Forum in Britain, Stop the War Coalition, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, and the Muslim Association of Britain⁷¹⁰ – a coalition that demonstrates the alliances between the British Far Left and Islamist organisations. Research on the

⁷⁰³ On 16 May 2023, the Jewish Chronicle newspaper reported that CST CEO Mark Gardner had tweeted: ““Yesterday (for 3rd time in week) swastikas and Jihadi anti-Jew chants unchallenged by “anti-racist” left on anti-Israel demonstrations”. ‘Nine police officers injured as police disperse crowds outside Israeli embassy’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 16 May 2021, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/nine-police-officers-injured-as-police-disperse-crowds-outside-israeli-embassy-1.516773>.

⁷⁰⁴ ““We’ll find some Jews...We want the zionists, we want their blood”. They are literally hunting for Jews in London. The Left’s sick Islamist alliance bearing fruit.’, Rita Panahi, Twitter, 25 May 2021, <https://twitter.com/ritapanahi/status/1396967596759478275>.

⁷⁰⁵ ‘Fight at Pro Israeli March – what really happened’, Ali Dawah, YouTube, 29 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqOXT7YcLtg>. [see 07:50]

⁷⁰⁶ ‘An ugly group of haters went to counter the pro-Israel demonstration in London on Sunday. Here’s one of the scenes.’, Habibi, Twitter, 24 May 2021, https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1396865989527183372.

⁷⁰⁷ Rachel Bunyan and Crystal Jones, ‘Boris Johnson slams ‘shameful racism’ as rabbi is attacked in Essex and police arrest four after convoy of cars drives through Jewish community in Finchley yelling ‘f*** their mothers, f*** their daughters’ while flying Palestinian flags’, *Mail Online*, 16 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9584909/Outrage-convoy-cars-driven-Jewish-community-Finchley-yelling-f-mothers.html>; ‘Four arrested over ‘antisemitic abuse shouted from car’ in London’, Sky News, YouTube, 16 May 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LRTY6XdTno>.

⁷⁰⁸ Francesca Gillett, Chris Bell & Dulcie Lee, ‘Four men arrested in anti-Semitism video investigation’, BBC News, 16 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57137151>; ‘Pro-Palestine rally: Racial hatred charges dropped for two more men’, BBC News, 21 November 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-63707451>.

⁷⁰⁹ Francesca Gillett, Chris Bell & Dulcie Lee, ‘Four men arrested in anti-Semitism video investigation’, BBC News, 16 May 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57137151>.

⁷¹⁰ ‘Help fund the national demonstration for Palestine’, Together for Palestine, Crowdfunder, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/demo-for-palestine>.

British Far Left ecosystem commissioned for this review concluded that these relationships, which are now deeply entrenched, are founded in an understanding of 'imperialism' and 'the state' as common enemies. Beyond anti-Israel activism, the British Far Left and Islamists make common cause on related issues such as opposition to British foreign policy (opposition to the Iraq War was formative in building these alliances) and counter terrorism measures, including the Prevent strategy.⁷¹¹

3.176 The Stop the War Coalition, for example, has played an integral part in organising anti-Israel demonstrations, and leading figures in that movement, as well as some of its protests, have sided with groups and governments unfriendly to Britain and British interests. In 2006, the Stop the War Coalition demonstrations reportedly featured banners stating, "We are all Hizbullah now", referring to the Lebanese terrorist organisation.⁷¹² The group's External Security Organisation was proscribed in the UK at the time, and since its formation has been known to be an Iranian backed militia.⁷¹³ Yet leading figures in the Stop the War Coalition have met with and spoken favourably about terrorist groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah.⁷¹⁴

3.177 Towards the end of this review, the Together for Palestine coalition came together again in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on Israel perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023. The groups organised a series of national and local protests which, at the time of submission, were ongoing. These protests featured incidents of gross public antisemitism, aggressive and intimidating chanting,⁷¹⁵ and suspected instances of support for a proscribed terrorist organisation (namely Hamas),⁷¹⁶ an offence under the Terrorism Act 2000. The marches were accompanied by celebration of Hamas, often euphemistically called the "Palestinian resistance",⁷¹⁷ both online and in sermons in several mosques across the UK,⁷¹⁸ and by a disturbing rise in

⁷¹¹ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 4

⁷¹² Harold Evans, "We are all Hizbullah now.' Really?'," *The Guardian*, 8 August 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/aug/08/weareallhizbullahnowreall>.

⁷¹³ Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations, Gov.UK, 26 November 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>; Proscription of Hezbollah, Hansard Volume 635, 25 January 2018, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-01-25/debates/DB6D525D-BFD3-479E-8E78-94CDB2E2F28F/ProscriptionOfHezbollah>.

⁷¹⁴ 'Labour: Jeremy Corbyn's friends in far places', *The Times*, 6 November 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/labour-jeremy-corbyns-friends-in-far-places-7km6d8dr7>; archived here: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230919144737/https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/labour-jeremy-corbyns-friends-in-far-places-7km6d8dr7>.

⁷¹⁵ Thomas Mackintosh & Victoria Bourne, 'Pro-Palestinian protest in London sees thousands call for bombing to stop', BBC News, 29 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-67246847>; Robin Simcox, 'Hate marches in Britain are a wake-up call to all decent people', *The Times*, 19 October 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hate-march-is-a-wake-up-call-to-the-west-xrn9nm8l>; 'Every time conflict arises in the Middle East, antisemitic chants are heard at anti-Israel demonstrations across the UK. One such example is 'Khaybar Khaybar Ya Yahud'.', CST, Twitter, 13 December 2023, https://twitter.com/CST_UK/status/1734995327558570243.

⁷¹⁶ Vikram Dodd, 'Two women charged over paraglider pictures at pro-Palestinian march in London', *The Guardian*, 3 November 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/nov/03/two-women-charged-over-paraglider-pictures-at-pro-palestinian-march-in-london>.

⁷¹⁷ Robin Simcox, 'Hate marches in Britain are a wake-up call to all decent people', *The Times*, 19 October 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hate-march-is-a-wake-up-call-to-the-west-xrn9nm8l>.

⁷¹⁸ Ewan Somerville, 'Charity Commission 'examines' British mosques that hosted pro-Hamas hate preachers', *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/03/charity-commission-examines-mosques-after-pro-hamas-sermons/>.

antisemitism. According to the CST, 1,890 antisemitic incidents were reported in the UK in the 8 weeks following Hamas's attacks, a higher number than recorded over the whole of 2022.⁷¹⁹ The 2023 anti-Israel marches and the public debates about the adequacy of government and police responses is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

- **Like radical animal rights groups in the 1990s and 2000s, pro-Palestinian activists sabotaging Israeli-linked businesses with whom they disagree – such as the group Palestine Action – creates an unacceptable climate of intimidation for companies and their staff, has a detrimental effect on local economies, and risks copycat attacks or escalation.**
- **High-profile acquittals in such cases raise questions about the politicisation of protest trials. Those who break the law as part of political protest must be met with the same response, no matter the cause on whose behalf they claim to be acting. The Court of Appeal ruling in relation to the 'Colston Four' acquittals is welcome in this regard.**
- **The anti-Israel social movement within the British Far Left has all too often featured antisemitism, accusing Israel of exceptional imperialism, colonialism, and oppression, while engaging in anti-capitalist and antisemitic conspiracy theories, such as the trope of Jewish bankers controlling the globe.**
- **Protests have sometimes been accompanied by violence and antisemitic incitement with little police action, which raises question about the potentially galvanising effect on radical individuals of seeking to incite antisemitic hatred with apparent impunity.**

Anti-Fascism

3.178 Peaceful counter demonstrations are a way for people to register publicly their objection to something, typically the beliefs or demands of the protestors they have gathered to oppose. In this regard, they are an important part of civic life. However, the phenomenon of opposing groups seeking to engage in violence with one another is not.

3.179 Non-state opposition to perceived fascism is known as anti-fascism. The UK has a hundred-year history of people and groups mobilising against the Far Right.⁷²⁰ The 1936 battle of Cable Street famously saw London Jews, Irish dockworkers, and trade unionists block Oswald Mosley's British Union of

⁷¹⁹ 'Levels of antisemitism in the UK remain at an unprecedented high. CST continues to protect our Jewish community, as we always have done.', CST, Twitter, 10 December 2023, https://twitter.com/CST_UK/status/1733834324892434433.

⁷²⁰ '100 Years of fighting fascism', Hope not Hate, <https://hopenothate.org.uk/100years/>.

Fascists from marching through the East End,⁷²¹ while the 1977 so-called battle of Lewisham saw local groups and community leaders disrupt a National Front march in south London.⁷²²

- 3.180 In modern Britain, anti-fascism is a broad social movement that encompasses both non-violent actors and those who embrace violence as integral to their 'fight'. Non-violent actors range from mainstream civil society groups, like the campaign group HOPE not hate,⁷²³ to Far Left anti-fascist groups, such as Unite Against Fascism (UAF) and Stand up to Racism (SUTR), two linked organisations which both share personnel and have their origins in the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party (SWP).⁷²⁴
- 3.181 Militant anti-fascists typically operate in small de-centralised, non-hierarchical collectives and engage in violent and non-violent activities – usually at a local level – against perceived fascism and other forms of Far Right mobilisation.⁷²⁵ While non-violent anti-fascism is usually left-leaning or Far Left politically, militant anti-fascism – commonly known as Antifa in the US and in Europe – is predominantly anti-authoritarian in outlook and, according to one recent study, consists largely of “anarchists; anarcho-communists; left-libertarians; and radical socialists”.⁷²⁶
- 3.182 Across the mainstream–Far Left–militant spectrum, anti-fascists are united in the perception of fascism as a unique evil that must be countered. It is also likely that they share the view that the authorities – such as the government and the police – are ineffective or unwilling to challenge the Far Right.⁷²⁷ While there are some similarities between mainstream and militant groups' activism, for example their goal of excluding the Far Right from public debate, they

⁷²¹ Audrey Gillan, 'Day the East End said 'No pasaran' to Blackshirts', *The Guardian*, 30 September 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/sep/30/thefarright.past>.

⁷²² Mark Townsend, 'How the battle of Lewisham helped to halt the rise of Britain's far right', *The Guardian*, 13 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/aug/13/battle-of-lewisham-national-front-1977-far-right-london-police>; 'What was the 'Battle of Lewisham'?', Goldsmiths University of London, <https://www.gold.ac.uk/history/research/battle-of-lewisham/what-was-the-battle-of-lewisham/>.

⁷²³ HOPE not hate describes itself as an “anti-fascism campaign group. Hope not Hate, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/hopenothate?lang=en>. HOPE Not Hate could be said to have its origins in the UAF through the anti-racism campaign Searchlight to which it used to belong. In 2005, Searchlight broke from UAF after some in that campaign accused Searchlight of being racists and “Zionists” and, in 2011, HOPE Not Hate then became an independent organisation. See Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 90

⁷²⁴ Unite Against Fascism was formed in 2003 as a united front for two strands of anti-racism activism in the UK and brought together the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), founded by the SWP in 1992 (having previously run from 1977 to 1982), and the National Assembly Against Racism (NAAR), founded in 1995 by activists from the small Trotskyist group Socialist Action, best known for its close relationship with former London Mayor Ken Livingstone. These two groups, the ANL and NAAR, were reflected in UAF's leadership: the national organiser of the ANL, Weyman Bennett – who was also a member of the SWP Central Committee at the time - became the Joint Secretary of UAF; and the second Joint Secretary was Sabby Dhalu, who joined from the NAAR. SUTR was established in 2013 and its two co-convenors are the two Joint Secretaries of the UAF, Bennett and Dhalu. See Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), pp. 15, 90-91.

⁷²⁵ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, 'Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>; pp.9-10.

⁷²⁶ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, 'Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, p. 4.

⁷²⁷ 'Left-wing, Anarchist and Single-issue Extremism in the UK' EAU – JTAC SA002-20, 22 April 2020.

diverge most noticeably on the acceptability of cooperation with the authorities and of the use of violence.

3.183 Militant anti-fascists are committed to the principles of ‘No Platform’, by which they mean those whose views they consider fascist should be prevented from speaking publicly, by whatever means necessary, and direct action,⁷²⁸ meaning they take action to achieve an end directly, rather than appeal to established authorities or processes.⁷²⁹ This commitment is explained by the London Anti-Fascist Assembly.

3.184 We [organise against fascism] by establishing certain ideas and practices such as No Platform – where we agree and enforce that people or groups attempting to spread fascist or supremacist views shouldn’t have a natural right to speak freely and should be militantly challenged where they try.⁷³⁰

3.185 Militant anti-fascists also engage in protest, cultural or counter-cultural activities (anti-fascism in Europe has a long publishing history, for example⁷³¹), and increasingly, online activism.⁷³² One common form of digital direct action is doxing, the publishing of personally identifiable information about perceived Far Right actors – either collating open-source information or publishing previously private information – in the hope that this will generate negative consequences or a hostile environment for the individual.⁷³³ Or, as the London Anti-Fascist Assembly puts it, “sharing fascists personal information online can be a very effective method of deterring the far right from showing their faces in public”.⁷³⁴

3.186 Doxing can be done on an individual basis. For example, in June 2016 the hacktivist group Anonymous and militant anti-fascists “demasked” the social media administrator for the Pie and Mash Squad, a Far Right group with links to football hooliganism and the EDL,⁷³⁵ and published personal information online, including her address, social media pages, and the model and colour

⁷²⁸ Direct action is understood by this review as a term usually used by political activists to refer to activities that seek to achieve an end directly, bypassing established political, economic, or social processes such as parliamentary democracy. The term encompasses both nonviolent and violent activities that typically target individuals, groups, and property to bring about a change in behaviour or disrupt perceived wrongdoing by institutions, businesses, or governments. See glossary for examples of activities.

⁷²⁹ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, ‘Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, pp. 4-5.

⁷³⁰ ‘What, Why and How Antifascism’, London Anti-Fascist Assembly, 23 May 2023, <https://network23.org/lafa/2023/05/23/what-why-and-how-antifascism/>.

⁷³¹ ‘CBCP 2023 conference: Publishing Anti-fascism’, Centre for Book Cultures & Publishing, University of Reading, 10 November 2022, <https://research.reading.ac.uk/centre-for-book-cultures-and-publishing/cbcp-2023-conference-publishing-anti-fascism/>.

⁷³² Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, ‘Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, p. 7.

⁷³³ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, ‘Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, pp. 4-5.

⁷³⁴ ‘What, Why and How Antifascism’, London Anti-Fascist Assembly, 23 May 2023, <https://network23.org/lafa/2023/05/23/what-why-and-how-antifascism/>.

⁷³⁵ Formerly known as Casuals United. James Poulter, ‘The English Far-Right’s War On Anti-Fascist Football Ultras’, *Vice*, 13 February 2015, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/4wm3jb/is-english-far-right-hooligans-war-on-left-wing-football-ultras-spreading-to-the-premier-league-181>; Russell Jenkins, ‘Former football hooligans regroup in far Right Casuals United’, *The Times*, 13 August 2009, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/former-football-hooligans-regroup-in-far-right-casuals-united-gm0w2b3n7hs>.

of car she drove.⁷³⁶ This was shared on Facebook by local branches of the militant anti-fascist group HS161.⁷³⁷ Doxing can also be done at scale, such as in May 2013 when Anonymous published the addresses and phone numbers of 200 alleged EDL members and donors.⁷³⁸ According to one US Antifa member, “A dox is a digital brick through a window”.⁷³⁹ In the UK, doxing is a legally grey area and some activity may constitute an offence under UK laws.⁷⁴⁰

3.187 Analogous activism by mainstream antifascist civil society groups is research, investigations and campaigns on the Far Right which seek to strengthen the ways in which society responds to fascism. Unlike militant antifascists, however, mainstream groups are prepared to call on the authorities to act against the Far Right. Examples include HOPE not hate’s 2013 campaign successfully calling on the Home Secretary to exclude anti-Muslim US bloggers Pamela Geller and Robert Spencer from the UK ahead of their scheduled participation in an EDL Armed Forces Day march,⁷⁴¹ and the group’s 2021 campaign to get Worthing councillor Tim Wills expelled from the Conservative Party after ‘unmasking’ him as an active participant of a private Telegram chat group for Patriotic Alternative.⁷⁴²

3.188 The distinguishing feature, however, between mainstream or Far Left and militant antifascists is the latter’s belief that physical confrontation with their opponents is, as one study puts it, “necessary, effective and justified”.⁷⁴³ Direct opposition is seen as necessary, in part, because anti-fascists believe that the exceptionally violent nature of the threat from fascism warrants an exceptional response.⁷⁴⁴ The London Anti-Fascist Assembly explains:

3.189 Above anything [militant challenge] is just from learning from history, fascists don’t play fair, where they speak they aren’t “arguing in the marketplace of ideas” they’re inciting violence and often using their publicity to enable their

⁷³⁶ ‘Pie and Mash Squad Exposed’, Indy Media UK, 29 June 2016, <https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2016/06/525711.html>.

⁷³⁷ See, for example, HS161 Eastbourne and HS161 Wales, ‘PIE AND MASH SQUAD ADMIN EXPOSED AS NEO NAZI GROUP ORGANISER JADE GRIFFITHS’, HS161 Eastbourne, Facebook, 28 June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/EastbourneAntifascists/posts/pie-and-mash-squad-admin-exposed-as-neo-nazi-group-organiser-jade-griffithshttp/1258520884167927/>; ‘pie and mash you have been exposed’, HS161 Wales – Official, Facebook, 27 June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/hs161welshbranch/posts/1305665186129255>.

⁷³⁸ ‘Hackers publish ‘EDL members’ details’, Channel 4 News, 29 May 2013, <https://www.channel4.com/news/edl-hackers-publish-member-details-woolwich>.

⁷³⁹ Decca Muldowney, ‘Info Wars: Inside the Left’s Online Efforts to Out White Supremacists’, Propublica, 30 October 2017, <https://www.propublica.org/article/inside-the-lefts-online-efforts-to-out-white-supremacists>.

⁷⁴⁰ For example, doxing can amount to harassment, malicious communications, and computer misuse or data protection offences. ‘Doxing – what is it?’, Safeguarding Hub, <https://safeguardinghub.co.uk/doxing-what-is-it/>.

⁷⁴¹ ‘US bloggers banned from entering UK’, BBC News, 26 June 2013, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-23064355>.

⁷⁴² ‘We’ve unmasked Worthing Tory Cllr Tim Wills as a secret supporter of white nationalist and far right organisation Patriotic Alternative.’, Hope Not Hate, Facebook, 6 October 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=311417194119499>.

⁷⁴³ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, ‘Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, p. 7.

⁷⁴⁴ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, ‘Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, p. 4.

groups to be in a better position to crush opposition tomorrow. Simply – you don't debate fascists, you smash them.⁷⁴⁵

3.190 There have been cases of extreme anti-fascist violence in the UK. Research commissioned for this review uses the academic concepts of 'cumulative extremism' and 'competitive escalation' to show how Far Left aggression has increased, at times, as a response to perceptions of Far-Right aggression or as part of a vicious cycle of violent reprisals. For example, in the late 1970s and 1980s the Far-Left Socialist Worker Party (SWP) formed small fighting units, known as 'squads', which physically fought National Front street gangs and,⁷⁴⁶ in the late 1980s, some ex-squad members joined the militant Anti-Fascist Action group, which in turn took on the BNP into the 1990s.⁷⁴⁷ The violence described in memoirs of anti-fascism at that time written by militants and their supporters is extreme and includes, for example, a BNP member being "beaten with hammers".⁷⁴⁸ These memoirs valorise the violence meted out by militant anti-fascists, with one anarchist publisher noting that "the reader is drawn into an outlaw world of back street idealism, paramilitary style violence and heroic self-sacrifice".⁷⁴⁹ In my view, such reverence of violence – whatever the cause – is unhelpful.

3.191 The corollary to the violent tactics of anti-fascist militants is their refusal to cooperate with the authorities. By contrast, the largest contemporary Far Left anti-fascist groups such as UAF and, more recently, SUTR – neither of which could be described as pro-police – have typically cooperated with local authorities and the police when organising counter protests.⁷⁵⁰ With the Far Left and militants often opposing the same Far Right protest, it is not uncommon for there to be three protests happening at the same time: the original protest; the authorised counter-protest; and a smaller renegade counter-protest. One militant anti-fascist activist arrested during the EDL's 2013 march in Tower Hamlets has described the situation as follows:

- *Let me quickly explain the standard dynamic of fascist demos in the UK: fascist group announces demonstration; Unite Against Fascism*

⁷⁴⁵ 'What, Why and How Antifascism', London Anti-Fascist Assembly, 23 May 2023, <https://network23.org/lafa/2023/05/23/what-why-and-how-antifascism/>.

⁷⁴⁶ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 45

⁷⁴⁷ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 53

⁷⁴⁸ Sean Birchall, *Beating the Fascists: The Untold Story of Anti-Fascist Action* (London: Freedom

Press, 2010), pp. 239-240, in Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 53.

⁷⁴⁹ *Beating the Fascists: The Untold Story of Anti-fascist Action*, Sean Birchall, https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Beating_the_Fascists.html?id=gnNaKQEACAAJ&redir_esc=y.

⁷⁵⁰ See, for example, UAF, Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, 'Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, p. 54, and SUTR; Joel Busher, Gareth Harris, Julia Ebner, Zsafia Hacsek and Graham Macklin, 'The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During 'Hot Periods' Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 15 February 2022, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/>, pp. 35 & 38

*organises rally in a park with local community groups; militant anti-fascists mobilise to confront said fascist group, the aim being to pose a physical block to their plans, vetoing or out-voting their right to intimidate and attack locals and seeking the symbolic victory of sending them home as early as possible.*⁷⁵¹

3.192 The difference between the two types of anti-fascist responses is, for some, a matter of principle. The Merseyside Anti-Fascist Network – best known for its successful direct confrontation with National Action’s ‘White Man March’ in Liverpool in August 2015 – has explained that they oppose cooperation with the police because it leads to them being separated from the Far Right which prevents “working class direct action”.⁷⁵² They also caricature Far Left anti-fascists as waving placards and shouting “Nazi scum” at people whom they describe as being “members of a community who have been neglected by political parties for years.. and who are very unlikely to be actual nazi scum”.⁷⁵³ I share the concern that, at times, anti-fascist campaigners have applied the term ‘Nazi’ too widely and that this can be counter-productive and alienate people.

3.193 The difference is also, in part, about numbers. UAF-style rallies provide an authorised venue for people, often in large numbers, to express their opposition to Far Right organising and narratives in relative safety, whereas militant anti-fascist protests are not authorised and attract a smaller, more radical crowd.

3.194 However, these differences are arguably less distinct on the ground. On one side, while the UAF is committed to non-violence, some of its counter protests have resulted in violence against protestors and the police. One striking example is the clashes between the EDL and UAF in Bolton in March 2010 when the groups broke out of their designated areas in the town square resulting in violent confrontations and injuries to police officers and two members of the public. Of the 74 arrests, 55 were for UAF members, including three senior leaders arrested on suspicion of conspiracy to commit

⁷⁵¹ Arthur Blair, ‘UK police and (anti) fascist protests - a bad joke’, Open Democracy, 11 September 2013, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/uk-police-and-anti-fascist-protests-bad-joke/>.

⁷⁵² ‘The most affective anti-fascist action in Liverpool has come when working class scousers do not allow themselves to be kettled away from fascists or even, as has happened, marched away completely from where the fascists are. We believe in working class direct action..’, Merseyside AFN, Twitter, 18 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/MerseysideAfn/status/1129818789405761538>.

⁷⁵³ ‘3/ agreeing an "official counter protest" allows the Police to section you off away from fascists, leaving you only able to shout and wave placards and in a worst case scenario shouting "nazi scum" at members of a community who have been neglected by political parties for years..’, Merseyside AFN, Twitter, 18 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/MerseysideAfn/status/112981837148112576>; ‘4/ and who are very unlikely to be actual nazi scum. We do not believe this is effective anti-fascist action, in fact we think it's pointless, not in the interests of our class and as in the worst case scenario, counter productive.’, Merseyside AFN, Twitter, 18 May 2019, <https://twitter.com/MerseysideAfn/status/1129818430935314432>.

violent disorder.⁷⁵⁴ However, the Crown Prosecution Service later advised that no further action should be taken in relation to the three.⁷⁵⁵

3.195 On the other side, militant anti-fascists have, at time, shown themselves willing to work with non-violent groups. According to one academic study, this attitude was evident in anti-fascists' preparations for their response to the return to Dover of a coalition of Far Right groups protesting the migrant crisis on 30 January 2016. One local activist interviewed described a 'dual strategy', whereby groups like the UAF and the local SUTR would organise a 'refugees welcome' demonstration in the town square ahead of the Far Right march, after which those favouring a more militant approach would stay on to "block the road".⁷⁵⁶ The authors assess this was a deliberate 'mixed approach' by some in the national militant group the Anti-Fascist Network to capitalise on the weakening of the UAF following high profile sexual assault allegations against a leading member of the SWP.⁷⁵⁷ Nonetheless, the day itself was marked by some of the most extreme mass violence between the Far Right and anti-fascists since the 1990s.⁷⁵⁸ Video footage shows protestors from both sides surging police lines, throwing projectiles and physically clashing with one another.⁷⁵⁹ A two-year police investigation resulted in 64 convictions and a total of 85 years' jail sentences (some suspended).⁷⁶⁰

3.196 More recently, the violent street clashes in central London on 13 June 2020 – a week after the first mass BLM protests in the capital – were, in my view, among the most serious occurrences of political violence between the Far Right and counter protesters in years.

3.197 BLM London had called off a planned protest in Hyde Park amid concerns about potentially violent confrontations with Far Right actors gathering in

⁷⁵⁴ 'Scores arrested as English Defence League and anti-fascists clash in violent street protests', *Daily Mail*, 21 March 2010, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1259409/Police-attack-right-wing-group-anti-fascists-clash-violent-street-protests.html>;

⁷⁵⁵ In addition, no further action was taken against 42 people arrested at the demonstration, six admitted minor offences and were ordered to pay fines, fifteen were issued with fixed penalty notices, three were given cautions, and two others were charged with offences but found not guilty. 'Anti-fascist protesters to avoid charges after EDL clash', *Manchester Evening News*, 19 November 2010, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/anti-fascist-protesters-to-avoid-charges-after-903400>.

⁷⁵⁶ Joel Busher, Gareth Harris, Julia Ebner, Zsafia Hacsek and Graham Macklin, 'The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During 'Hot Periods' Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 15 February 2022, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/>, p. 35.

⁷⁵⁷ Joel Busher, Gareth Harris, Julia Ebner, Zsafia Hacsek and Graham Macklin, 'The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During 'Hot Periods' Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 15 February 2022, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/>, p. 23.

⁷⁵⁸ Joel Busher, Gareth Harris, Julia Ebner, Zsafia Hacsek and Graham Macklin, 'The Dynamics Of Violence Escalation And Inhibition During 'Hot Periods' Of Anti-Minority And Far-Right Activism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 15 February 2022, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/the-dynamics-of-violence-escalation-and-inhibition-during-hot-periods-of-anti-minority-and-far-right-activism/>, p. 15.

⁷⁵⁹ 'Fascist and anti-fascist protesters clash in Dover – video', *The Guardian*, 30 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2016/jan/30/fascist-and-anti-fascist-protesters-clash-in-dover-video>.

⁷⁶⁰ Sam Lennon, 'Police conclude investigation on Dover riots of January 30, 2016 after 64 convictions', *Kent Online*, 14 June 2018, <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/dover/news/dover-riots-case-closed-184605/>.

London as part of the DFLA-led Defend our Memorials protests.⁷⁶¹ Despite this, two demonstrations went ahead invoking the BLM slogan: UAF and SUTR organised a 'Solidarity with #BlackLivesMatter - no to fascist Tommy Robinson' rally in Hyde Park;⁷⁶² while the Malcolm X Movement (MXM) and London Black Revolutionaries organised a demonstration in central London demanding an end to deaths in police custody.⁷⁶³ There was significant public disorder throughout the day, with violent clashes between Far Right actors, counter protestors and police officers. In all, there were reports of 15 people treated for injuries, two of these being police officers, and six members of the public were taken to hospital.⁷⁶⁴

3.198 The UAF-SUTR rally in Hyde Park and march to Marble Arch went ahead peacefully,⁷⁶⁵ although it is not clear whether and to what extent supporters were involved in the later violence in and around Trafalgar Square. However, it was the MXM-London Black Revolutionaries event that was the locus of violent counter protest, with both groups' social media accounts sharing photos and videos of the violence on the day and celebrating their own activists' involvement in the fighting.⁷⁶⁶ According to these accounts, counter protestors were involved in clashes with the Far Right in Trafalgar Square, but then also pursued demonstrators as police attempted to escort them to Waterloo station, where they then engaged in further fighting with both the protestors and the police.⁷⁶⁷ MXM later posted on Twitter a video of young black counter protestors wearing face-coverings knocking out white Far Right protestors with the comment, "June 13th 2020 a historic victory over racists,

⁷⁶¹ Dan Sabbagh and Vikram Dodd, 'BLM organisers call off London event to avoid clashes with far right', *The Guardian*, 11 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/11/blm-organisers-call-off-london-event-to-avoid-clashes-with-far-right>.

⁷⁶² 'Solidarity with #BlackLivesMatter – no to fascist Tommy Robinson', Event by Stand Up To Racism and Unite Against Fascism, Facebook, 13 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/events/976665512752267>.

⁷⁶³ 'Emergency National Demonstration - Black Lives Matter - End Deaths in Police Custody', Event by Malcolm X Movement and London Black Revs, 13 June 2020, <https://fb.me/e/1u15WiknZ>.

⁷⁶⁴ 'London protests: Demonstrators clash with police', BBC News, 13 June 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53031072>.

⁷⁶⁵ Damien Gayle, 'Boris Johnson condemns 'racist thuggery' of rightwing protesters in London', *The Guardian*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/13/rightwing-protesters-clash-with-police-in-central-london>; 'PRESS RELEASE: Nazi salutes, violence and brutal attack on young black teenager at fascist demonstration', Stand Up To Racism, 13 June 2020, <https://standuptoracism.org.uk/press-release-nazi-salutes-violence-and-brutal-attack-on-young-black-teenager-at-fascist-demonstration/>.

⁷⁶⁶ See tweet thread '#thread #BlackPower #BlackRevolution #BlackYouth History was made today in Ldn: Militant independent black working class youth-led history, in the face of an formidable array of forces railed against them from the govt, to the fascist, from left /#BLMUK to wellknown celebrities.', Malcolm X Movement, Twitter, 13 June 2020, <https://twitter.com/mxmovement/status/1271876097572036610>; see also 'Following the weekends successful resistance by 100-200 hard-core black working class drillas and crews, which was then joined by over a 1000 brothers and sisters responding asap and coming to central to back us.', London Black Revs, Facebook, 16 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs/posts/pfbid0331Agbn48gYmXbtRteqw4pyzBHFrgJg6wdqWVRNaxwVs5D7WHDkSfiqK5LvDmFjmutl>; 'Summary of the day coming later...', London Black Revs, Facebook, 13 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs/posts/pfbid0YeaER2QBoEVUxuv1RWH3B4vKnZFTozm7xZ4R6fft4Rpp7SNsdN8xP6Tm6sSYXXmel>; 'Trafalgar Square is ours its safe to come from the North side', London Black Revs, Facebook, 13 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs/posts/pfbid02Yr3G95kMr3cVXEh1QN38giNMbVM5V4UEpzooLuq19fxaadtcRwfGsBT0HZpkz3ENI>.

⁷⁶⁷ 'June 13th 2020 a historic victory over racists, fascists and the sellouts was achieved by an independent grassroots Black resistance in which we and @LondonBlackRevs part of. This was the first victory of the grassroots for decades. #June13thMovement', Malcolm X Movement, Facebook, 22 May 2021, <https://twitter.com/mxmovement/status/1396008444415590402>.

fascists and the sellouts was achieved by an independent grassroots Black resistance”.⁷⁶⁸

3.199 These counter-demonstrations were notable for the absence of the militant anti-fascists who had been regularly organising against the Far Right at that time.⁷⁶⁹ A so-called callout for antifascists to support the BLM protest by anti-fascists, anti-capitalists, eco-activists, and the Labour pressure group Momentum was cancelled late the night before.⁷⁷⁰ The London Anti-Fascist Assembly later insinuated that they had been disrupted by “political policing and targeted actions by our opponents in authority”,⁷⁷¹ while the London Black Revolutionaries claimed the day beforehand that there had been “several pre-emptive arrests on AF organisers group across London”.⁷⁷² The militant black grassroots groups’ accounts of the day also revealed a scepticism of the organised “white left”. Ahead of the protest, one group contrasted the perceived negative consequences for “black and asian [sic] activists” of mass arrests compared to “white comrades”,⁷⁷³ while on the day the other included “the left” alongside the government and the Far Right in a “formidable array of forces railed against them”.⁷⁷⁴

3.200 As well as anti-fascist violence in the streets, it is also endorsed online. The government identifies militant anti-fascist groups such as HS161 and the Anti-Fascist Network as administering social media pages endorsing low levels of violence against targets they deemed to be engaged in or supportive of fascism or representatives of the state.⁷⁷⁵ I have seen open-source evidence that supports this assessment.

⁷⁶⁸ ‘June 13th 2020 a historic victory over racists, fascists and the sellouts was achieved by an independent grassroots Black resistance in which we and @LondonBlackRevs part of. This was the first victory of the grassroots for decades. #June13thMovement’, Malcolm X Movement, Facebook, 22 May 2021, <https://twitter.com/mxmovement/status/1396008444415590402>

⁷⁶⁹ The Guardian reported: “The London Antifascist Assembly (Lafa), which has opposed nearly every rightwing rally in London, late on Friday tweeted that it was rescinding its callout.” Damien Gayle, ‘Boris Johnson condemns ‘racist thuggery’ of rightwing protesters in London’, *The Guardian*, 13 June 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jun/13/rightwing-protesters-clash-with-police-in-central-london>.

⁷⁷⁰ The coalition included London Anti-Fascist Assembly, No Fixed Abode Anti Fascists, Green Anti-Capitalist Media and the Labour pressure group Momentum, Anti-fascists out to support Black Lives Matter, Event by No Fixed Abode Anti Fascists, Green Anti-Capitalist Media and 11 others, Facebook, 13 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/events/s/antifascists-out-to-support-bl/560474474668687/?ti=icl>. Lafa announced that it had been cancelled the day before at 9:30pm. “***TOMORROW’S (SAT) PROTEST IS OFF*** We encourage you all to go to the ongoing BLM protests, particularly in local neighbourhoods. Developments over the last few days have meant that we will not be pursuing the previous plan. Support your local demo. Solidarity to our comrades!’, London Anti-Fascist Assembly, Twitter, 12 June 2020, https://twitter.com/London_AFA/status/1271540917460230144?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw.

⁷⁷¹ “‘Rivers of piss...’ – a report from Saturday 13th’s BLM protest’, London Anti-Fascist Assembly, 22 June 2020, <https://network23.org/lafa/2020/06/22/blm-protest-on-13th-june-2020/>.

⁷⁷² ‘OFB “Original farm boys” in Tottenham put 100k down on Tommy Robinson’s head.’, London Black Revs, Facebook, 12 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs/posts/pfbid02Ff4T5h8gvFqmRM6pi7ttV44hMor9fTBspMmW9vPhXGJ1X3x2VzGwxyVszEPxZDdql>.

⁷⁷³ ‘Advice for everyone going out this weekend.’, London Black Revs, Facebook, 6 June 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/LondonBlackRevs/posts/pfbid038GJNio9Li8GSskiReLLSkPBEYJt3JLTdu8DJoBvUXuigTXtTtWpemZNHBFha5Cynl>.

⁷⁷⁴ ‘#thread #BlackPower #BlackRevolution #BlackYouth History was made today in Ldn: Militant independent black working class youth-led history, in the face of an formidable array of forces railed against them from the govt, to the fascist, from left /#BLMUK to wellknown celebrities.’, Malcolm X Movement, Twitter, 13 June 2020, <https://twitter.com/mxmovement/status/1271876097572036610>.

⁷⁷⁵ ‘Left-wing, Anarchist and Single-issue Extremism in the UK’ EAU – JTAC SA002-20, 22 April 2020.

3.201 For example, during the protest in London on 13 June 2020, the Merseyside Anti-Fascist Network, part of the nationwide Anti-Fascist Network,⁷⁷⁶ posted tweets appearing to applaud images of an apparent Defend our Memorials demonstrator having been badly beaten in clashes with counter protestors, commenting “bashing the fash”⁷⁷⁷, “Make racists afraid again” and “This is London, not Merseyside. We're just fans”.⁷⁷⁸ In June 2016, the Welsh branch of HS161 posted images on Facebook of a Home Office-branded immigration enforcement vehicle graffitied with the phrases ‘Racist Van ’and ‘Idiots! ’and of the view through a smashed van window with a brick on the passenger seat, commenting “imagination [sic] got whats coming”.⁷⁷⁹ The images were originally posted on Twitter by the Anti Raids Network,⁷⁸⁰ which describes itself as a “loose network of local groups working to build the resistance to immigration raids”.⁷⁸¹

3.202 I share the authorities’ concern that anti-fascist content on mainstream social media platforms which endorses violence may encourage violent behaviour. Of particular concern is content that dehumanises the Far Right and valorises or makes the moral case for violence against its perceived supporters, a combination which could inspire people to take part in militant anti-fascist violence or, at worst, to use lethal violence in a lone attack. Of concern also, is content that makes light of violence against the Far Right, thereby minimising the perceived legal risk to potential users of such tactics.

3.203 Finally, British anti-fascists embrace a range of causes they see as revolutionary or linked to their struggle. Alongside British anti-fascists’ ‘solidarity ’with refugee groups and the Black Lives Matters movement in the examples above, they have shown support for Kurdish militia groups and, increasingly, for trans activism. On the Kurds for example, in 2016 the Anti-Fascist Network published a sympathetic interview with one of its members who had gone to the autonomous Kurdish region in northern Syria, Rojava, “to join the Kurdish fight for self-determination”, while on social media the group has shared a message from “an anarchist comrade” there which ends with a call for “all anarchists, anti-authoritarians, revolutionary Marxists and

⁷⁷⁶ For a list of AFN groups see ‘Taxi for Yaxley!: The Far-Right Fucked it’, Anti-Fascist Network, 13 November 2023, <https://antifascistnetwork.org/>.

⁷⁷⁷ ‘Bash the Fash’ is a catchphrase associated with antifascist and anarchist movements that can be understood as advocating for violence to stop the spread of fascism.

⁷⁷⁸ ‘Lad's bashing the fash and still holding his spliff’, Merseyside AFN, Twitter, 13 June, 2020, <https://twitter.com/MerseysideAfn/status/1271899648735809537>.

⁷⁷⁹ ‘imagination got whats coming’, HS161 Wales – Official, Facebook, 15 June 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/hs161welshbranch/posts/pfbid031ZQHgdFh7979koCscppEnCRhE164p55VMN2twuWnVyKdesUQduedmUBy7uhDkpdML>.

⁷⁸⁰ ‘#Deptford uprising. Stay tuned...’, Anti Raids Network, Twitter, 14 June 2016, <https://twitter.com/AntiRaids/status/742625061983682560>; ‘A brick a day keeps UKBA away.’, Anti Raids Network, Twitter, 14 June 2016, <https://twitter.com/AntiRaids/status/742624891309043712>.

⁷⁸¹ About, Anti-Raids Network, <http://antiraid.net/about/>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20231222081043/http://antiraid.net/about/>.

democratic confederalists [...] to support us”.⁷⁸² On trans issues, both the SWP and SUTR mass produce placards with pro-trans rights slogans.⁷⁸³

3.204 In 2023, the London Anti-Fascist Assembly and Bright Anti-Fascists (the latter part of the Anti-Fascist Network) joined trans activists' counter protests against monthly Far Right anti-drag protests outside a pub hosting Drag Queen Story Hour.⁷⁸⁴ Most recently, the transgender activist Sarah Jane Baker, who was charged with a public order offence after telling crowds at a Trans Pride event in Trafalgar Square on 8 July 2023, “if you see a TERF, punch them in the fucking face”, was filmed waving the red and black Antifa flag at the time.⁷⁸⁵ Originally an acronym for trans-exclusionary radical feminist, TERF has, for some, become a derogatory term for women who disagree with trans activism and Baker's comment echoes the anti-fascist 'punch a Nazi' slogan.

3.205 It is clear to me that anti-fascism, despite its singular aim, is not a coherent movement in the UK. Elements of the movement engage in useful mainstream advocacy and activism against the Far Right. Elsewhere, large parts of the movement are part of the Far Left subculture yet disagree strongly on how best to achieve their goals. In groups like the UAF and SUTF, I have observed the crossover between the traditional Marxist-Leninist Far Left in the UK and anti-fascism, rebooted as anti-racism. While militant anti-fascists have cooperated with these groups, they remain sceptical of the 'organised left'⁷⁸⁶ and share much in terms of internal organisation and political outlook with anarchists.⁷⁸⁷

⁷⁸² 'Urgent message from an anarchist comrade in Afrin:', Anti-Fascist Network, Twitter, 22 January 2018, <https://twitter.com/AntiFascistNetw/status/955564668772409345>.

⁷⁸³ The SWP placard says, “Trans rights now”, while the SUTR placards says ““Don't let the far right divide us. Defend LGBT+ communities” ‘Trans rights now A3 poster’, Socialist Worker, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/product/trans-rights-now-a3-poster/>; Siba Jackson, ‘Tate Britain: Protesters clash over drag queen story time at London art gallery’, Sky News, 12 February 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/tate-britain-protesters-clash-over-drag-queen-story-time-at-london-art-gallery-12808361>.

⁷⁸⁴ See ‘Over the last few days people have got in touch with pics of posters they've seen being put up across South London - as the posters say, Join us on Saturday at 9am outside the Honor Oak pub to show the far-right how unwelcome they are in Lewisham.’, South London Love, Twitter, 21 June 2023, <https://twitter.com/SELondonLove/status/1671471121613422592>; Joe Glenton, ‘South London community faces vicious far-right attack on Drag Queen Story Hour’, The Canary, 29 June 2023, <https://www.thecanary.co/uk/analysis/2023/06/29/south-london-community-faces-vicious-far-right-attack-on-drag-queen-story-hour/>; ‘On Saturday antifascists took a stand against far-right attempts to shut down a Drag storytelling event for kids in the Honor Oak pub in South London’, BrightonAntifascists, Twitter, 26 June 2023, <https://twitter.com/brightonanti/status/1673277907408506881>.

⁷⁸⁵ The flag depicts a black anarchist flag overlaying a socialist red flag. Tom Cotterill, ‘Transgender activist Sarah Jane Baker who spent 30 years in jail for kidnap and attempted murder is recalled to men's prison for 'calling on people to punch a TERF' at London Pride rally’, *Mail Online*, 17 July 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12307299/transgender-activist-sarah-jane-baker-recalled-prison.html>.

⁷⁸⁶ ‘Black Lives Matter’, London Anti-Fascist Assembly, 3 June 2020, <https://network23.org/lafa/2020/06/03/black-lives-matter/>.

⁷⁸⁷ For example, Brighton Antifascists regularly publishes content that is supportive of anarchism. See ‘Solidarity against barbarism: The fight against coronavirus and the far-right in the USA’, Brighton Anti-Fascists, 4 May, <https://brightonantifascists.com/2020/05/04/solidarity-against-barbarism-the-fight-against-coronavirus-and-the-far-right-in-the-usa/>; “‘The vessel, named Louise Michel after a French feminist anarchist, set off in secrecy on 18 August’”, BrightonAntifascists, Twitter, 27 August 2020, <https://twitter.com/brightonanti/status/1299078237243551746>; ‘Today starts the global week of solidarity with anarchist prisoners.’, BrightonAntifascists, Twitter, 24 August 2020, <https://twitter.com/brightonanti/status/1297857185515540480>; “Hêlîn was a revolutionary. Hêlîn was an anarchist. But, above all, she was a free woman.”, BrightonAntifascists, Twitter, 4 March 2020, <https://twitter.com/brightonanti/status/1235153468207378433>; ‘#Solidarity with @BrightonABC and @BrightonSolFed for an excellent, militant support demo for imprisoned #Spanish #Anarchists last night!’, BrightonAntifascists, Twitter, 13 April 2015, <https://twitter.com/brightonanti/status/587615274683203584>. The Anti-Fascist Network has also attended and promoted anarchist activities See ‘An anti-fascist weekend in London’, Anti-Fascist Network, 20 October

- **Modern anti-fascism encompasses mainstream civil society groups, Far Left anti-fascist groups, and militant collectives. With the Far Left and militants often opposing the same Far Right protest, it is not uncommon for there to be three protests happening at the same time, which presents significant policing challenges.**
- **Militant anti-fascists' commitment to 'No Platform' and direct action - meaning they believe the Far Right should be prevented from speaking publicly by any means necessary including violence – has led in recent years to some of the worst instances of violent clashes with Far Right actors and the police since the 1990s.**
- **Anti-fascist content on mainstream social media platforms that endorses violence – such as content that dehumanises the Far Right and valorises violence against its perceived supporters – risks encouraging violent behaviour.**
- **British anti-fascists embrace a range of causes they see as revolutionary or linked to their struggle. In recent years, this has included pro-refugee groups, the Black Lives Matter movement, Kurdish militia groups and, increasingly, pro-trans activism.**

Single-Issue Protest

3.206 During my review, some protest movements that went beyond decent political discourse and descended into violence, disruption and law breaking defied traditional political lines, attracting support from across the spectrum. The most vocal of these was the disparate movement that developed across the country to protest the ways in which the Government was responding to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Anti-Lockdown and Anti-Vaccination Protest

3.207 I am aware that 'anti-lockdown' is an imperfect descriptor of this phenomenon, as few people were pro-lockdown in any meaningful sense. Nonetheless, during the Covid-19 pandemic the anti-lockdown movement became primarily focused on opposing the restrictions introduced by the Government to try to control the transmission of the illness, as well as often opposing the national vaccination campaign that followed.⁷⁸⁸ Of particular concern, is the ways in which the demonstrations and activism that, undertaken by the anti-lockdown movement, quickly involved mass law breaking and, increasingly, violence

2014, <https://antifascistnetwork.org/2014/10/20/an-anti-fascist-weekend-in-london/>; The Acorn – 28, 20 October 2016, <https://winteroak.org.uk/2016/10/20/the-acorn-28/#5>.

⁷⁸⁸ 'Fighting back: the struggle with anti-vaxxers', British Medical Association, 17 September 2021, <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/fighting-back-the-struggle-with-anti-vaxxers>.

against the police and incitement towards NHS workers. The likely radicalising role played by conspiracy theories is also an important factor.

3.208 The anti-lockdown movement was a diverse coalition of groups and activists that included the Far Right, the Far Left, and adherents to conspiracy theories that cannot be easily placed on the political spectrum. By May 2020, Far Right actors were involved in promoting some of the early protests. Flyers for demonstrations in 60 cities across the UK had been produced by a group called The UK Freedom Movement, for example. There was evidence suggesting that Jayda Fransen, a former deputy leader of the Far-Right Britain First party, was involved in this group, as well as anti-lockdown social media campaigns.⁷⁸⁹ Across the political spectrum, anti-lockdown protests also attracted longstanding activists like Far Left climate change denier Piers Corbyn,⁷⁹⁰ leading 5G conspiracy theorist Mark Steele,⁷⁹¹ and notorious antisemitic conspiracy theorist David Icke.⁷⁹² The movement also attracted significant numbers of people who had never previously been involved in extremist activism. New national campaign groups that formed at this time include Save Our Rights UK,⁷⁹³ Save Lives,⁷⁹⁴ Event 202,⁷⁹⁵ Stand Up X,⁷⁹⁶ and Resistance GB.⁷⁹⁷

3.209 The promotion of conspiracy theories is one of the few common threads that brought many of the components of this movement together. While it is beyond the scope of this review to consider the details of these conspiracy theories, there is little doubt, that during the heights of the pandemic, they risked damaging public trust and the willingness of some to come forward to be vaccinated.⁷⁹⁸ While there was no clear unifying ideology behind the anti-lockdown movement, I judge it likely that the extreme nature of these

⁷⁸⁹ Dan Sabbagh, 'Police vow to break up planned anti-lockdown protests in UK cities', *The Guardian*, 14 May 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/may/14/police-vow-to-break-up-planned-anti-lockdown-protests-in-uk-cities>.

⁷⁹⁰ Owen Bowcott, 'Piers Corbyn found guilty of breaching regulations at lockdown protest', *The Guardian*, 2 December 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/02/piers-corbyn-found-guilty-of-breaching-regulations-with-lockdown-protest>; 'The anti-lockdown movement is still going strong', *The Economist*, 3 July 2021, <https://www.economist.com/britain/2021/07/03/the-anti-lockdown-movement-is-still-going-strong>.

Sam Baker, "I started 2020 as a lefty socialist and finished as a conservative": 2023 in the People's Republic of South Yorkshire, *Now Then Magazine*, 22 February 2023, <https://nowthenmagazine.com/articles/i-started-2020-as-a-lefty-socialist-and-finished-as-a-conservative-2023-in-the-peoples-republic-of-south-yorkshire>; Gabriel Pogrand, 'How Piers Corbyn became Britain's most active antivaxer', *The Sunday Times*, 1 January 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-piers-corbyn-became-britains-most-active-antivaxer-zfgdngm0h>.

⁷⁹¹ Ben Quinn and Archie Bland, 'Facebook removes Save Our Rights UK Covid denial videos', *The Guardian*, 28 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/28/coronavirus-denial-videos-are-removed-from-facebook>.

⁷⁹² Lee Harpin, 'Icke antisemitic conspiracies viewed over 30 million times, new research shows', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 1 May 2020, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/icke-antisemitic-conspiracies-viewed-over-30-million-times-new-research-shows-1.499368>.

⁷⁹³ Save Our Rights UK - A Real Democracy, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/saveourrightskuk>.

⁷⁹⁴ Ben Quinn and Archie Bland, 'Facebook removes Save Our Rights UK Covid denial videos', *The Guardian*, 28 January 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jan/28/coronavirus-denial-videos-are-removed-from-facebook>

⁷⁹⁵ Simon Murphy, 'Revealed: Covid conspiracy theories spread on Spotify, Apple and YouTube amid Joe Rogan backlash', *Independent*, 2 February 2022, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/joe-rogan-spotify-covid-conspiracy-piers-corbyn-podcast-b2005397.html>.

⁷⁹⁶ Stand Up UK, <https://www.standupx.info/>

⁷⁹⁷ Resistance GB, Odysee, <https://odysee.com/@ResistanceGB:f>; Resistance GB, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/c/ResistanceGB/videos>.

⁷⁹⁸ Daisy Lester, 'Belief in Covid conspiracies linked to low vaccine uptake, new study suggests', *Independent*, 31 January 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/health/coronavirus-vaccine-conspiracy-theories-study-b1795355.html>.

conspiracy theories inspired some activists to break the law and engage in violence and/or incitement.

- 3.210 Early in the pandemic the demonstrations were small and, at times, echoed the civil disobedience tactics used by other protest movements. In April 2020, for example, two men were arrested for staging a sit-in on the roof of Shrewsbury College, holding a banner saying, 'No more lockdown'. – They were believed to be from a local Facebook group calling itself Shropshire Corona Resilience Network, which had around 500 members at the time.⁷⁹⁹
- 3.211 On 16 May 2020, around 50 people assembled at Hyde Park's Speakers Corner.⁸⁰⁰ Police issued 10 on-the-spot fines to individuals for breaching social distancing rules and made 19 arrests,⁸⁰¹ including Piers Corbyn, who reportedly told protestors the pandemic "a pack of lies" being used to keep them in order.⁸⁰²
- 3.212 Over that summer, anti-lockdown demonstrations grew both in size and forcefulness. Leaders and supporters began engaging in various forms of incitement. In one of the most widely condemned examples, during a rally in Trafalgar Square in London in July 2021, former nurse Kate Shemirani compared NHS doctors and nurses to the Nazis tried at Nuremburg, telling the large audience gathered, "at the Nuremberg trials, the doctors and nurses stood trial and they hung".⁸⁰³
- 3.213 By September 2020, London saw a number of large anti-lockdown demonstrations where protestors clashed violently with police.⁸⁰⁴ On 19 September 2020, over a thousand people gathered in Trafalgar Square for a 'We do not consent' demonstration; some clashed with the police leading to over 30 people being arrested.⁸⁰⁵ The following week police intervened to disperse another demonstration in Trafalgar Square, this time associated with

⁷⁹⁹ Harry Leather, 'Two arrested after anti-lockdown protesters in stand-off with police on roof of Shrewsbury College', *Shropshire Star*, 20 April 2020, <https://www.shropshirestar.com/news/health/coronavirus-covid19/2020/04/20/anti-lockdown-protesters-in-stand-off-with-police-on-roof-of-shrewsbury-college/>.

⁸⁰⁰ Lizzie Dearden, 'Coronavirus: Inside the UK's biggest anti-lockdown protest', *Independent*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-lockdown-protests-uk-london-hyde-park-5g-conspiracy-theories-a9518506.html>.

⁸⁰¹ 'Coronavirus: Corbyn's brother among arrests as lockdown protesters denounce 'fake' virus', Sky News, 17 May 2020, <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-arrests-in-hyde-park-as-lockdown-protesters-denounce-fake-virus-11989409#>.

⁸⁰² Lizzie Dearden, 'Coronavirus: Inside the UK's biggest anti-lockdown protest', *Independent*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-lockdown-protests-uk-london-hyde-park-5g-conspiracy-theories-a9518506.html>

⁸⁰³ 'Covid vaccine: Speech comparing NHS medics to Nazis condemned', BBC News, 25 July 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57962675>.

⁸⁰⁴ 'Violent scenes at anti-vaccination and anti-lockdown protest in London | Covid-19', *The Daily Telegraph*, YouTube, 20 September 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7Hw-ZQl87s>; 'Coronavirus: Anti-lockdown protesters clash with police in London's Trafalgar Square', *Global News*, YouTube, 26 September 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gf-cJ5n8JvY>.

⁸⁰⁵ Aaron Walawalkar and Damien Gayle, 'More than 30 arrested during coronavirus protests in London', *The Guardian*, 19 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/sep/19/coronavirus-protesters-in-london-may-get-arrested-police-warn>.

Save Our Rights UK and StandupX.⁸⁰⁶ Demonstrators clashed violently with police, nine police officers were injured, and 16 people were arrested.⁸⁰⁷

3.214 There were further anti-lockdown demonstrations in the autumn of 2020, with police showing an increased willingness to arrest those breaching the temporary laws prohibiting public gatherings. Several thousand people gathered in central London for a Save Our Rights UK demonstration connected,⁸⁰⁸ during which three police officers were injured and 18 people were arrested.⁸⁰⁹

3.215 Far larger numbers were arrested after a second national lockdown came into force in England on 5 November 2020. 190 people were arrested after protestors gathered for the annual anti-establishment and anarchist-linked Million Mask March in Parliament Square on the first day of new restrictions.⁸¹⁰ Later that month, 155 people were arrested at anti-lockdown demonstrations in central London organised by Stand Up X, during which there were once again scuffles with police and assaults on officers.⁸¹¹

3.216 Protests in March 2021 saw thousands march in central London, and 30 arrested amidst clashes with police and reports of officers being pelted with bottles.⁸¹² At a demonstration in Hyde Park on 24 April 2021 involving around 10,000 people, some protestors threw bottles and other objects at the police, leading to eight officers being injured, while members of the public were reportedly harassed by some demonstrators for wearing masks.⁸¹³ At a demonstration in June 2021 the Metropolitan Police described how anti-lockdown protesters were becoming "obstructive and hostile", with police officers being injured, an emergency services worker assaulted, and 14 people arrested.⁸¹⁴ At another that month three officers were injured, and three

⁸⁰⁶ Damien Gayle, Mattha Busby and Ben Quinn, 'Coronavirus: police break up anti-lockdown protest in London', *The Guardian*, 26 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/26/london-lockdown-protesters-urged-to-follow-covid-rules>.

⁸⁰⁷ Damien Gayle, Mattha Busby and Ben Quinn, 'Coronavirus: police break up anti-lockdown protest in London', *The Guardian*, 26 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/26/london-lockdown-protesters-urged-to-follow-covid-rules>.

⁸⁰⁸ Damien Gayle, 'Thousands march in London in fourth anti-lockdown protest', *The Guardian*, 24 October 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/24/london-braces-for-fourth-protest-against-covid-19-restrictions>.

⁸⁰⁹ 'Coronavirus: Arrests as police officers injured at anti-lockdown protests in central London', Sky News, 24 October 2020, <https://news.sky.com/story/coronavirus-arrests-as-police-officers-injured-at-anti-lockdown-protests-in-central-london-12113588>; 'Covid-19: Arrests at London anti-lockdown protest', BBC News, 24 October 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-54678374>.

⁸¹⁰ 'Covid: London anti-lockdown protest leads to 190 arrests', BBC News, 6 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-54842605>; Damien Gayle, 'Nearly 200 arrested after Million Mask March in London', *The Guardian*, 6 November 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/nov/06/more-than-100-arrested-after-million-mask-march-in-london>.

⁸¹¹ Damien Gayle and Mattha Busby, 'Police arrest 155 anti-lockdown protesters in London', *The Guardian*, 28 November 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/28/met-police-anti-lockdown-protest-london>; 'COVID-19: More than 150 arrests as anti-lockdown protesters clash with police in London', Sky News, YouTube, 28 November 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Dt36h4jqdE>.

⁸¹² Mattha Busby and agencies, 'Dozens of arrests as thousands march in London against Covid lockdown', *The Guardian*, 20 March 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/mar/20/unacceptable-to-let-police-criminalise-protesters-say-mps-and-peers>; 'Aerial footage of scuffles between anti-lockdown protesters and police in London', The Daily Telegraph, YouTube, 20 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9944EX2GuM>.

⁸¹³ Nadeem Badshah and agencies, 'Eight officers injured policing anti-lockdown protest in London', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/24/eight-officers-injured-policing-anti-lockdown-protest-in-london>.

⁸¹⁴ 'Anti-lockdown Westminster protest: Police officers hurt and 14 arrested', BBC News, 21 June 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57560664>.

protestors were arrested, as demonstrators pelted Parliament with hundreds of tennis balls.⁸¹⁵

3.217 The anti-vaccination element within this movement became more pronounced as the vaccine rollout got underway through the spring of 2021.

Demonstrations that June and July indicated that elements of the anti-lockdown and so-called anti-vaxx movement had radicalised, with some of the rhetoric from leading activists becoming more extreme in nature and, increasingly, threatening towards NHS workers, politicians, and the media.⁸¹⁶ A BBC investigation recorded some of those attending these demonstrations making claims that senior politicians and medical experts would be hung for treason, that vaccines were part of a global genocide to depopulate the world, that the media and its reporting was complicit in crimes against humanity, that the pandemic was part of a larger plan by elites to take more wealth and power, and that vaccines might contain microchips that in some way control people.⁸¹⁷

3.218 The proliferation of such beliefs, both at demonstrations and on social media,⁸¹⁸ likely played a radicalising role for supporters of the anti-vaxx movement. Some activists began targeting test and trace centres. In August 2021, anti-vaxx activists stormed a testing centre in Manchester.⁸¹⁹ In December 2021, protestors at a “freedom rally” in Milton Keynes attacked a testing centre, apparently believing it to be a vaccine dispensing site,⁸²⁰ abused NHS staff, and stole medical items.⁸²¹ In January 2022, a small group of activists forced their way into a vaccine centre in Ealing, West London, demanding its closure and a police investigation into alleged crimes against humanity and genocide by NHS staff.⁸²²

3.219 This radicalisation paralleled the amount of force that some anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx protesters were willing to use. December 2021 saw some particularly violent scenes on Whitehall, such as when demonstrators attempted to pull down the barrier outside Downing Street and clashed with

⁸¹⁵ Miranda Bryant, ‘Three arrested and three officers injured at anti-lockdown protests in London’, *The Guardian*, 26 June 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/26/three-arrested-and-three-officers-injured-at-anti-lockdown-protests-in-london>.

⁸¹⁶ ‘Covid vaccine: Speech comparing NHS medics to Nazis condemned’, BBC News, 25 July 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-57962675>.

⁸¹⁷ ‘Covid: Where is the anti-lockdown movement headed? - BBC Newsnight’, BBC News, YouTube, 30 June 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EqYfTw90sBU>.

⁸¹⁸ Emma Yeomans, Anna Lombardi and Ali Mitib, ‘Kill health workers, antivax campaigners demand in Telegram chats’, *The Times*, 10 January 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kill-health-workers-antivax-campaigners-demand-in-telegram-chats-mk87kpcsd>

⁸¹⁹ ‘Anti-vaxxer mob STORM Covid testing centre during lockdown protests in Manchester’, *The Sun*, YouTube, 15 August 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=041Q1ZVsQwo>.

⁸²⁰ Léonie Chao-Fong, ‘Anti-vaxxers storm Covid testing centre during ‘freedom’ rally in Milton Keynes’, *The Guardian*, 29 December 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/29/anti-vaxxers-denounce-covid-testing-centre-in-freedom-march-through-milton-keynes>.

⁸²¹ Sam Hancock, ‘Anti-vaxxers storm Covid testing centre and trash equipment in ‘disgraceful’ protest’, *Independent*, 30 December 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/anti-vax-protest-milton-keynes-corbyn-b1984158.html>.

⁸²² Josh Bolton, ‘Anti-vaxxers storm Ealing vaccine centre accusing NHS staff of ‘genocide’’, *My London News*, 27 January 2022, <https://www.mylondon.news/news/west-london-news/anti-vaxxers-storm-ealing-vaccine-22894148>.

riot police, attacking them with placards and bottles.⁸²³ Anti-vaxxers also began organising physical training sessions, in an apparent attempt to ready themselves for confrontations with the authorities. In January 2022, it was reported that counter-terrorism officials were monitoring the emergence of anti-vaxx groups organising martial arts and combat training.⁸²⁴ An online group calling itself Alpha Men Assemble, reported to have a Telegram following of close to 6,000, released footage of their members holding training drills on a beach, with further training sessions being organised.⁸²⁵

3.220 The easing of restrictions, and the failure of the more outlandish claims about vaccines to come true, has seen much of this movement evaporate in the UK.

- **The speed with which anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx demonstrations and activism quickly involved widespread law breaking and, increasingly, violence against the police and incitement towards NHS workers and members of the public complying with regulations is a worrying phenomenon.**
- **The anti-lockdown movement was notable for attracting significant numbers of people who had never previously been involved in extremist activism.**
- **While there was no clear unifying ideology behind the anti-lockdown movement, it is likely that conspiracy theories played a radicalising role in encouraging activists to break the law and engage in violence and/or incitement.**

⁸²³ Ella Glover, 'Anti-lockdown protests turn violent as police officers sustain 'minor' injuries', *Independent*, 18 December 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/antilockdown-protest-london-police-b1978716.html>; 'Police officer smashed in face with glass bottle as 'anti Covid protest' turns ugly in London', *The Sun*, YouTube, 18 December 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih_WFwk_C5g.

⁸²⁴ Mark Townsend, 'Concern for UK security as anti-vaxxer groups evolve towards US-style militias', *The Observer*, 15 January 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/jan/15/concern-for-uk-security-as-anti-vaxxer-groups-evolve-towards-us-style-militias>

⁸²⁵ Tom Ball, 'Antivaxers threaten 'radical action' after boxing drills on beach', *The Times*, 1 January 2022, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/antivaxers-threaten-radical-action-after-boxing-drills-on-beach-h3rf9khkq>; Jacob Thorburn, 'Anti-vaxxers take part in boxing drills and combat training as thousands join secret group threatening 'direct action' later this month', *Mail Online*, 1 January 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10360603/Anti-vax-conspiracy-theorists-video-fighting-combat-training-strategy-meetings.html>.

4. Chapter Two: Attacks on People in Public Life

- 4.1 This review has found that activists associated with radical protest movements or ideological causes have harassed and intimidated people performing a public duty or public service.⁸²⁶ Politicians have been targeted for abuse, as have journalists, academics, and educators.
- 4.2 In recent years, there has been a noticeable hardening of public discourse, with the demeaning of political opponents and opposing viewpoints becoming more commonplace.⁸²⁷ Politicians, particularly members of parliament (MPs), have been harassed for their political positions and political allegiances, targeted because they are viewed as holding the wrong opinions or belonging to the wrong faction. Journalists too have been threatened for reporting in a way protestors take issue with, while academics and educators have been subject to hostility as they do their jobs.
- 4.3 This chapter will outline the ways in which people serving in key pillars of our democracy have been threatened. From what I have seen, for some radical activists it is no longer enough to disagree with one's political opponents; instead, it has become necessary to delegitimise them, even to dehumanise them. In my view, this form of intimidatory behaviour is unacceptable and risks not only the safety of those targeted but also eroding the democratic norms in this country.

Targeting Politicians

- 4.4 One of the most direct ways in which extreme political activists have sought to disrupt our democracy has been by harassing and intimidating elected representatives to parliament. Primarily, this manifests in a risk or threat of violence to an individual and, in the very worst instances, MPs have lost their lives – as have those tasked with protecting them. But by deterring participation in both public debate and public life, it also has a chilling effect on the vibrancy of our political culture.

Terrorism

Targeting MPs at Westminster

- 4.5 Terrorists seeking to attack politicians have targeted the Palace of Westminster and the surrounding area. In the past, these attacks were typically perpetrated by Irish Republican groups, such as the fatal car

⁸²⁶ Harassment, abuse, and intimidation are terms which have various legal and social meanings. The Local Government Association defines public intimidation as “‘words and/or behaviour intended or likely to block, influence or deter participation in public debate or causing alarm or distress which could lead to an individual wanting to withdraw from public life’”. <https://www.local.gov.uk/definition-harassment-abuse-and-intimidation>

⁸²⁷ In February 2018, Theresa May MP, Prime Minister at the time, gave a speech on standards in public life in which she warned: “I worry that our public debate today is coarsening. That for some it is becoming harder to disagree, without also demeaning opposing viewpoints in the process.” ‘PM speech on standards in public life’, HMG, (February 2018), <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-standards-in-public-life-6-february-2018>

bombing in 1979 of the Shadow Northern Ireland Secretary, Airy Neave MP, in the Palace of Westminster carpark, and the 1991 mortar attack on 10 Downing Street targeting the Prime Minister John Major and his war cabinet, who were meeting to discuss the Gulf War.⁸²⁸

- 4.6 In recent years, Westminster has been subject to predominantly Islamist-inspired plots and attacks.
- 4.7 August 2018: Salih Khater (29) deliberately drove at civilians in Parliament Square and police officers guarding an entrance to the Palace of Westminster and was later sentenced to life imprisonment for attempted murder. While the judge and the Counter Terrorism Police accepted that his attack had a terrorist purpose, his ideological motive was not confirmed.⁸²⁹
- 4.8 November 2017: Naa'imur Zakariyah Rahman (20) was arrested and later sentenced to life imprisonment for preparing an Islamist terrorist attack on Downing Street with the intention of killing the Prime Minister at the time, Theresa May MP. Rahman had told his Islamic State handlers (who were in fact law enforcement operatives) that his aim was: "Nothing less than the death of the leaders of parliament" and had conducted reconnaissance of the area in person and online.⁸³⁰
- 4.9 April 2017: Khalid Omar Ali (27)⁸³¹ was arrested in Westminster while carrying three knives and later sentenced to life imprisonment for preparing an Islamist terrorist attack on MPs or police. Ali, who had previously spent five years in Afghanistan making Taliban bombs, had conducted reconnaissance of Parliament and Whitehall, with the prosecution arguing that he had intended a "deadly terror attack at the very heart of this country's democracy by killing a police officer, a member of the military or even a parliamentarian".⁸³²
- 4.10 March 2017: Khalid Masood (52)⁸³³ deliberately drove into pedestrians on Westminster Bridge, killing five people and seriously injuring a further 29 in an Islamist attack, before entering the Parliamentary estate armed with two

⁸²⁸ '1979: Car bomb kills Airey Neave', *BBC News*, 30 March 1979,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/30/newsid_2783000/2783877.stm; 'History 10 Downing Street', HMG, Gov.UK, <https://www.gov.uk/government/history/10-downing-street>

⁸²⁹ 'Westminster car crash driver Salih Khater jailed for life', *BBC News*, 14 October 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-50044250>; 'Man who drove car into police at UK parliament jailed for life', *Reuters*, 14 October 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-security-parliament-idUSKBN1WT1UH>; 'Regina v Salih Khater: Sentencing Remarks', Judiciary of England and Wales, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Sentencing-Remarks-Khater-14.10.19-002-1.pdf>

⁸³⁰ 'Regina v Naa'imur Zakariyah Rahman: Sentencing Remarks of the Hon. Mr Justice Haddon-Cave', Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (July 2018), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/r-v-rahman-sentencing.doc.pdf>, pp. 2-4

⁸³¹ Lizzie Dearden, 'Whitehall incident: Khalid Mohamed Omar Ali, 27, arrested on suspicion of attempting London terror attack', *the Independent*, 28 April 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/whitehall-terror-incident-mohammed-khalid-omar-ali-arrest-british-westminster-attack-london-plot-met-police-a7707491.html>

⁸³² 'Khalid Ali: British Taliban bomber guilty of Westminster plot', *BBC News*, 26 June 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-44613587>

⁸³³ 'Westminster attack: 75-year-old man becomes fourth victim – as it happened', *the Guardian*, 24 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/live/2017/mar/23/westminster-attack-parliament-resumes-tributes-keith-palmer-live>

knives. Masood then murdered unarmed police officer PC Keith Palmer, before being shot by a close protection officer.⁸³⁴

Targeting MPs At Their Homes and Constituencies

4.11 Terrorists have also targeted MPs at their homes and in their constituencies, locations with less security or law enforcement than Westminster.

- In October 2021, Ali Harbi Ali murdered Conservative MP Sir David Amess at a constituency surgery in Leigh-on-Sea in an Islamist terrorist attack. Ali wanted to kill MPs who voted for bombings in Syria and conducted reconnaissance of the Houses of Parliament before deciding that an attack there would be difficult because of the presence of armed police.⁸³⁵
- In July 2017, Extreme Right Wing terrorist Jack Renshaw prepared to murder Rosie Cooper MP at a constituency social event because, as a member of the Labour Party, he held her responsible for mass immigration. According to the sentencing judge at the subsequent trial, Renshaw had described Cooper as someone who was easy to get to, as she was an attentive constituency MP and therefore a “logistical target”.⁸³⁶
- In June 2016, Thomas Mair murdered Labour MP Jo Cox on her way to a constituency surgery in Birstall in an Extreme Right Wing terrorist attack.⁸³⁷
- In 2010, Roshonara Choudhry attempted to murder Labour MP Stephen Timms at a constituency surgery in Newham in an Islamist terrorist attack.⁸³⁸
- In 1990, Conservative MP Ian Gow was killed by an IRA car bomb outside his home in East Sussex.⁸³⁹
- In 1981, Ulster Unionist MP Robert Bradford was killed by an IRA gunman while carrying out a constituency surgery in south Belfast.⁸⁴⁰

4.12 Both Ali and Mair murdered serving MPs performing a public duty and did so for the purpose of advancing a religious or ideological cause. Reflecting the

⁸³⁴ ‘Inquests Arising from the Deaths in the Westminster Terror Attack of 22 March 2017’, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (2018), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Westminster-Terror-Attack-2018-0304.pdf>, pp. 2-3, paras 7-8

⁸³⁵ ‘The Queen v Ali Harbi Ali: Sentencing Remarks’, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (April 2022), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/R-v-Ali-sentencing-remarks-130422-2.pdf>

⁸³⁶ ‘Regina v Jack Renshaw: Sentencing Remarks of Mrs Justice McGowan’, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (May 2019), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/r-v-renshaw-sentence17.5.19.pdf>

⁸³⁷ ‘R v Thomas Mair: Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Wilkie’, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (November 2016), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/sentencing-remarks-r-v-thomas-mair.pdf>

⁸³⁸ ‘Woman jailed for life for attack on MP Stephen Timms’, *BBC News*, 3 November 2010, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-11682732>

⁸³⁹ Dan Sabbagh, Jo Cox, Ian Gow and the UK politicians who have been killed in service, *the Guardian*, 15 October 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/15/other-politicians-who-have-been-killed-in-service>

⁸⁴⁰ Dan Sabbagh, Jo Cox, Ian Gow and the UK politicians who have been killed in service, *the Guardian*, 15 October 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/15/other-politicians-who-have-been-killed-in-service>

rare and exceptionally high seriousness of such a crime,⁸⁴¹ they were sentenced to life imprisonment with a whole life order meaning they will never be released from prison.⁸⁴² In my view, this is an appropriate use of such punishment. Sentencing Renshaw for plotting to kill a serving MP, the judge told him: “To kill a Member of Parliament because of their political allegiance is an attempt to damage our entire system of democracy”.⁸⁴³ I agree.

- 4.13 There is one high profile instance of politicians being targeted at Party conferences. The IRA targeted former Prime Minister and her cabinet at the Conservative party conference in 1983. Five people were killed in a bomb attack, including Sir Anthony Berry, MP for Enfield South.⁸⁴⁴
- 4.14 In August 2023, the Government rated the likelihood of an assassination of a public figure as above 25%, the highest score in its updated National Risk Register meaning that it is among the most likely risks facing the country. The register assessed that such an attack would have “symbolic value” and result in “large psychological impact” and “public outrage”.⁸⁴⁵ The Cabinet Secretary Oliver Dowden MP confirmed in an interview with the BBC that the scenario referred to politicians.⁸⁴⁶
- 4.15 Increasing instances of intimidatory protests at MP’s homes has a potential chilling effect on democracy. Since the submission of my report, there have been multiple incidents where extra police protection under Operation Bridger have been put into effect including a pro-Palestinian demonstration outside the home of MP for Bournemouth East, Tobias Ellwood on 13 February 2024.

Public Intimidation

Harassing and intimidating MPs at Westminster

- 4.16 Activists associated with radical protest movements have threatened or intimidated politicians in the streets around the Palace of Westminster.

⁸⁴¹ As of 31 December 2022, there were 66 whole-life prisoners, including murderers Rosemary West, Levi Bellfield, and Wayne Couzens. See <https://www.sentencingcouncil.org.uk/sentencing-and-the-council/types-of-sentence/life-sentences/>

⁸⁴² ‘The Queen v Ali Harbi Ali: Sentencing Remarks’, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (April 2022), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/R-v-Ali-sentencing-remarks-130422.pdf>; ‘R v Thomas Mair: Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Wilkie’, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (November 2016), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/sentencing-remarks-r-v-thomas-mair.pdf>

⁸⁴³ ‘Regina v Jack Renshaw: Sentencing Remarks of Mrs Justice McGowan’, Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, (May 2019), <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/r-v-renshaw-sentence17.5.19.pdf>

⁸⁴⁴ Dan Sabbagh, Jo Cox, Ian Gow and the UK politicians who have been killed in service, the Guardian, 15 October 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/oct/15/other-politicians-who-have-been-killed-in-service>

⁸⁴⁵ ‘National Risk Register 2023 Edition’, HMG, (August 2023), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1175834/2023_NATIONAL_RISK_REGISTER_NRR.pdf, p. 15 & 41.

⁸⁴⁶ Nicholas Cecil, ‘UK needs to guard against more assassination attempts on MPs, warns Cabinet minister Oliver Dowden’, *the Evening Standard*, 3 August 2023, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/politics/mps-assassination-attempts-britain-risks-pandemic-climate-change-b1098391.html>

Protestors from the anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx movement, for example, are among those who have harassed MPs in Westminster.

- 4.17 In February 2022, demonstrators surrounded the Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer MP in the street outside the Palace of Westminster, shouting “traitor” and criticising him for supporting Covid 19 vaccinations. Police escorted Starmer to a police vehicle and arrested two people for throwing a traffic cone at an officer.⁸⁴⁷
- 4.18 In October 2021, demonstrators gathered for an anti-lockdown protest surrounded Michael Gove MP, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities at the time, on the street, swearing and shouting abuse at him and jostling with police officers who had assembled to escort him to safety.⁸⁴⁸
- 4.19 In October 2021, anti-vaxx demonstrators placed gallows and a noose in Parliament Square. Labour MP Peter Kyle reported that one demonstrator had shouted “this is what we do with traitors” as he walked past them.⁸⁴⁹ Police arrested one man for a public order offence and dismantled the gallows.⁸⁵⁰
- 4.20 The period between the June 2016 Brexit referendum and the UK leaving the European Union in January 2020 was another particularly fraught time, with protesters maintaining a near permanent presence around Parliament Square and College Green and, at times, harassing MPs.
- 4.21 In October 2019, Brexit demonstrators from both sides harassed at least three senior MPs in Westminster as they convened for a key weekend vote with all three requiring police escorts. Anti-Brexit protesters pursued Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, Leader of the House of Commons at the time, and his 12-year-old son shouting “traitor” and “shame on you”.⁸⁵¹ Andrea Leadsom MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy at the time, thanked the police for escorting her home, tweeting “why do the so called ‘People’s Vote’ protesters think it’s ok to abuse, intimidate and scream in the face of someone they don’t agree with?”⁸⁵² Meanwhile, Diane Abbott MP, shadow Home

⁸⁴⁷ ‘Keir Starmer: Two arrested after protesters surround Labour leader’, *BBC News*, 8 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-60294483>

⁸⁴⁸ Daniel Keane, ‘Police rush to protect Michael Gove as protesters swarm in Westminster’, *the Evening Standard*, 19 October 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/michael-gove-swarmed-anti-vax-protesters-westminster-b961317.html>, ‘Michael Gove MP Grilled On His Criminal Complicity (full & uncen)’, Resistance GB, Odysee, 20 October 2021, <https://odysee.com/@ResistanceGB:f/Gove-MP-Grilled:e>

⁸⁴⁹ Tom Batchelor, ‘Protesters erect gallows and noose outside parliament “to be used against MPs”’, *the Independent*, 20 October 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/parliament-gallows-mps-death-threats-b1942124.html>

⁸⁵⁰ ‘Arrest after mock gallows erected outside Houses of Parliament’, *BBC News*, 20 October 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-58987040>

⁸⁵¹ Chris Caulfield, ‘Jacob Rees-Mogg and Diane Abbott among MPs harassed during Super Saturday’, *the Metro*, 20 October 2019, <https://metro.co.uk/2019/10/20/jacob-rees-mogg-and-diane-abbott-among-mps-harassed-during-super-saturday-10949640/>

⁸⁵² Andrea Leadsom MP, Twitter, 19 October 2019, <https://twitter.com/andrealeadsom/status/1185572672538849281/>

Secretary at the time, was harassed by pro-Brexit demonstrators after she addressed an anti-Brexit rally, with one Far Right activist Daniel Thomas telling her to “go on a long holiday with Jeremy Corbyn and stay there”.⁸⁵³

- 4.22 In December 2018, pro-Brexit supporters wearing yellow vests, modelled on the French *gilet jaunes* movement, surrounded pro-Remain Conservative MP Anne Soubry outside Parliament shouting that she was a traitor and “on the side of Adolf Hitler”.⁸⁵⁴ Two men – including Stephen Yaxley-Lennon supporter James Goddard – were convicted of causing Soubry alarm and distress using threatening or abusive language and given suspended sentences and restraining orders banning them from entering certain areas of London including the area around the Palace of Westminster for five years.⁸⁵⁵
- 4.23 In February 2018, the Conservative MP David Davies reported that he had been “physically threatened and verbally abused” outside Parliament by members of the Stand of Defiance European Movement, which organised daily anti-Brexit protests outside Parliament. The protesters denied this had been the case.⁸⁵⁶
- 4.24 I am concerned by the potential scale of intimidation. For example, in January 2019, 55 MPs wrote to the head of the Metropolitan Police to express concerns about the safety of MPs around Parliament, after protestors chanting “Soubry is a Nazi” could be heard during a live television interview outside Parliament. While such harassment does not bring the same kind of fear and devastation as terrorist attacks, I am concerned that over time it cumulatively threatens to erode normal democratic life in and around Parliament.

'Scale of the threat towards MPs'

We do not know the scale of the threat against MPs. The 2021 Joint Committee on Human Rights enquiry into threats to MPs found that this lack of information was most likely due to underreporting (for a range of reasons) and because no-one was responsible for gathering information on serious threats and criminal acts against MPs and recording it centrally.⁸⁵⁷ (In response, the Government committed to improving data collection to reduce the risk to MPs.⁸⁵⁸) Nonetheless, respondents to

⁸⁵³ Chris Caulfield, 'Jacob Rees-Mogg and Diane Abbott among MPs harassed during Super Saturday', *the Metro*, 20 October 2019, <https://metro.co.uk/2019/10/20/jacob-rees-mogg-and-diane-abbott-among-mps-harassed-during-super-saturday-10949640/>

⁸⁵⁴ Peter Walker, "'You're on the side of Hitler': Anna Soubry accosted by pro-Brexit supporters", *the Guardian*, 20 December 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/20/anna-soubry-accosted-pro-brexit-supporters-hitler>

⁸⁵⁵ James Goddard: Protester who harassed MP Anna Soubry given suspended sentence', *Sky News*, 22 July 2019, <https://news.sky.com/story/man-who-harassed-mp-anna-soubry-given-suspended-sentence-11768319>

⁸⁵⁶ 'Tory MP Davies reports anti-Brexit protesters to police', *BBC News*, 6 February 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-42965629>

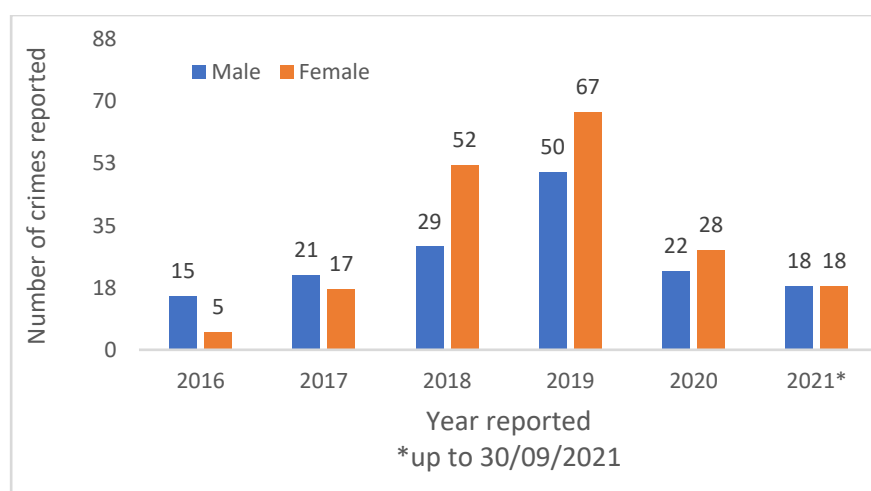
⁸⁵⁷ 'Democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of association: Threats to MPs', Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, 18 October 2019, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201919/jtselect/jtrights/37/3706.htm#_idTextAnchor037, para. 58.

⁸⁵⁸ 'Democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of association: Threats to MPs: Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2019', Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, 17 March 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5160/documents/51000/default/>, p. 4.

the enquiry generally agreed that abuse and intimidation towards MPs had increased in recent years.⁸⁵⁹

One Metropolitan Police dataset, however, provides some insight into the scale of the threat by detailing crimes against MPs reported to the force's Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team, which was set up in August 2016 after the murder of Jo Cox MP.⁸⁶⁰ A total of 343 crimes against MPs were reported to the team between August 2016 and September 2021, the overwhelming majority of which (94%) were recorded as 'Violence Against the Person e.g. Malicious Communications'.⁸⁶¹ There was a visible spike in crimes occurring in both 2018 and 2019, with 58% of the total crimes being recorded in these two years. In addition, both female and non-white MPs reported a disproportionate number of crimes, suggesting that they are targeted for such crimes.

Figure 2.1: Crimes against MPs by victim sex, August 2016–September 2021



Fifty-five per cent of overall crimes against MPs reported between 2016 and 2021 were perpetrated against female MPs. By contrast, female MPs accounted for between 29% and 34% of total MPs over the same time,⁸⁶² meaning that the proportion of female MP victims was higher than the background MP population.

⁸⁵⁹ 'Democracy, freedom of expression and freedom of association: Threats to MPs', Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, 18 October 2019, https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201919/jtselect/jtrights/37/3705.htm#_idTextAnchor017, para. 27.

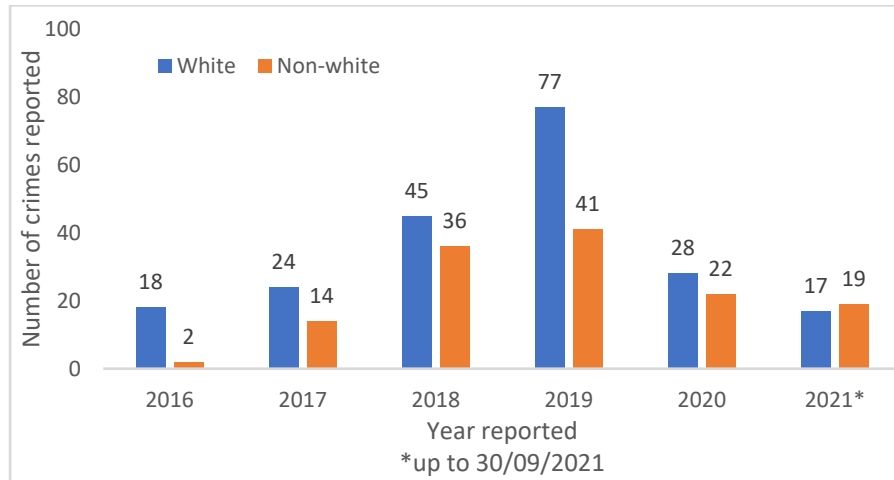
⁸⁶⁰ 'Home Secretary's update to Parliament on MP security', Home Office, 20 October 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretarys-update-to-parliament-on-mp-security>

⁸⁶¹ Malicious communication relates to the sending of indecent, offensive, or threatening letters, electronic communication, or articles with the intent to cause the recipient distress or anxiety. Other categories recorded Arson and Criminal Damage, Public Order Offences, Theft and Burglary.

⁸⁶² Twenty-nine percent of MPs elected in 2015 were female, rising to 32% in 2017 and 34% in 2019. See 'General Election 2015: women MPs and candidates', House of Commons Library, 9 May 2015, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/general-election-2015-women-mps-and-candidates/>; 'Women in the General Election 2017', House of Commons Library, 22 June 2017, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/women-in-the-general-election-2017/>; 'General Election 2019: How many women were elected?', House of Commons Library, 15 January 2020, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/general-election-2019-how-many-women-were-elected/>

This is a worrying trend and one that is echoed by other published information about abuse of MPs.⁸⁶³

Figure 2.2: Crimes against MPs by victim ethnicity, August 2016–September 2021



Thirty-nine per cent of overall crimes against MPs reported between 2016 and 2021 were perpetrated against non-white MPs.⁸⁶⁴ By contrast, ethnic minority MPs accounted for between 6% and 10% of total MPs over the same time.⁸⁶⁵ In other words, the proportion of ethnic minority MP victims was four times higher than the background MP population. This racial targeting is also evident in other published information.⁸⁶⁶ It is clearly unacceptable.

However, this review also found significant variation in open-source information about crimes against MPs. Some of this is explained by the difference between ‘incidents’, i.e. allegations which did not reach the criminal threshold, and ‘crimes’, i.e. incidents assessed to reach the criminal threshold that were logged separately.⁸⁶⁷

⁸⁶³ For example, Amnesty International provided evidence to the 2017 Committee for Standards in Public Life enquiry into intimidation in public life that no single female MP active on Twitter had been free from online intimidation. See ‘Intimidation in Public Life A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life’, Committee on Standards in Public Life, (December 2017), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666927/6.3637_CO_v6_061217_We b3.1__2_.pdf, p. 27.

⁸⁶⁴ Ethnicity was recorded as White, Black, Asian, or Unknown.

⁸⁶⁵ Six percent of MPs elected in 2015 were non-white, rising to 8% in 2017 and 10% in 2019. See ‘The class of 2015 enter Britain’s most diverse ever parliament’, British Future, 8 May 2015, <https://www.britishfuture.org/class-of-2015-most-diverse-parliament/>; ‘Election 2019: Britain’s most diverse Parliament’, *BBC News*, 17 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50808536>; ‘Election 2019: Britain’s most diverse Parliament’, *BBC News*, 17 December 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50808536>.

⁸⁶⁶ For example, Amnesty International told the 2017 Committee for Standards in Public Life enquiry into intimidation in public life that black and Asian women MPs received 35% more abusive tweets than white women MPs. See ‘Intimidation in Public Life A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life’, Committee on Standards in Public Life, (December 2017), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666927/6.3637_CO_v6_061217_We b3.1__2_.pdf, p. 27.

⁸⁶⁷ One freedom of information response record over 600 incidents in both 2020 and 2021, while two separate freedom of information responses from the Metropolitan Police show annual reported crimes of between 20 and 150. See ‘Incidents reported to the Police Parliamentary Liaison and Investigations Team from 2016 to 2021’, Metropolitan Police, March 2022, <https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/d/march-2022/incidents-reported-police-parliamentary-liaison-and-investigations-team-2016-2021/>; ‘Crimes against MPs reported to the MPS’s Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team from January 2016 to September 2021’, Metropolitan Police, February 2022, <https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/d/february-2022/crimes-against-mps-reported-mpss->

In other cases, however, the reasons for the apparent discrepancy are not always clear.⁸⁶⁸ The Metropolitan Police has noted user error in flagging data and the fact that crimes may be transferred to another force e.g., crimes of malicious communications are recorded as taking place where the person sends the message from rather than the location of the victim.⁸⁶⁹ Regardless, it ought to be possible for the police to record and retrieve accurate and consistent information on the scale of crimes against MPs. Without data collection of this sort, it is not possible for trends to be identified.

Harassing and Intimidating MPs At Their Homes and Constituencies

- 4.25 Activists from across the political spectrum and motivated by varied causes have also, on occasion, crossed the line of acceptable protest by harassing MPs and, at times, their families, outside their homes and in their constituencies.
- 4.26 In December 2021, Piers Corbyn encouraged protestors gathered for an anti-lockdown rally to burn down the offices of MPs who had voted for lockdown measures, adding “hammer to death those scum who have decided to go ahead with introducing new fascism”. He was arrested on suspicion of encouragement to commit arson after footage of his speech emerged online.⁸⁷⁰
- 4.27 In August 2019, the Twitter account for Bath's Constituency Labour Party encouraged followers to join a demonstration against the suspension of Parliament outside the constituency home of Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, Leader of the House of Commons at the time, saying that Labour's Parliamentary candidate for the area would attend.⁸⁷¹

parliamentary-liaison-and-investigation-team-january2016-september2021/; 'Information from PLAIT - Crimes against MPs from January 2016 to March 2022', Metropolitan Police, May 2022, <https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/d/may-2022/information-from-plait-crimes-against-mps-january2016-march2022/>.

⁸⁶⁸ Two freedom of information responses from the Metropolitan Police contain very different figures for annual reported crimes against MPs for the time periods where the figures crossover. For example, one release records 144 alleged crimes against MPs reported to PLAiT in 2020, while another records 50 crimes against MPs report to PLAiT in the same year. See 'Crimes against MPs reported to the MPS's Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team from January 2016 to September 2021', Metropolitan Police, February 2022, <https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/d/february-2022/crimes-against-mps-reported-mpss-parliamentary-liaison-and-investigation-team-january2016-september2021/>; 'Information from PLAIT - Crimes against MPs from January 2016 to March 2022', Metropolitan Police, May 2022, <https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/d/may-2022/information-from-plait-crimes-against-mps-january2016-march2022/>.

⁸⁶⁹ 'Information from PLAIT - Crimes against MPs from January 2016 to March 2022', Metropolitan Police, May 2022,

<https://www.met.police.uk/foi-ai/metropolitan-police/d/may-2022/information-from-plait-crimes-against-mps-january2016-march2022/>
⁸⁷⁰ Maya Wolfe-Robinson, 'Piers Corbyn arrested on suspicion of calling for MPs' offices to be burned down', *the Guardian*, 19 December 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/dec/19/piers-corbyn-arrested-on-suspicion-of-calling-for-mps-offices-to-be-burned-down?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

⁸⁷¹ Mark Wallace, Twitter, 29 August 2019, <https://twitter.com/wallaceme/status/1167158117337096192>

- 4.28 In April 2019, four Extinction Rebellion protesters glued their hands together and chained themselves to a fence outside the North London home of Jeremy Corbyn MP, leader of the Labour Party at the time.⁸⁷²
- 4.29 In September 2018, the anarchist group Class War organised a protest outside the London home Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, alleging that the Conservative backbencher at the time did not pay his nanny the London Living Wage.⁸⁷³ The group posted on Facebook a video of activists heckling members of the family, with one making disparaging remarks about the MP to his children.⁸⁷⁴
- 4.30 I am concerned by the coordinated nature of some of these campaigns against MPs. For example, an investigation by Sky News following the murder of Sir David Amess in October 2021 uncovered multiple Telegram groups being used by anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx activists to share both tips on finding MPs' homes and constituency offices as well as photos and videos of followers confronting Labour and Conservative MPs in person.⁸⁷⁵
- 4.31 Intimidation in British politics not only impacts people in public office but may also put off candidates who want to serve their communities from standing. A report by the Committee for Standards in Public Life on the intimidation of Parliamentary candidates in the 2017 general election argued that the uptick in "scale and intensity" of such abuse posed a "threat to the very nature of representative democracy". It noted "persistent, vile and shocking abuse" towards candidates campaigning in their constituencies, driven significantly by the widespread use of social media.⁸⁷⁶
- 4.32 Finally, there is a risk of protests escalating, which may be exacerbated by an inability – or unwillingness – of organisers to deter extreme behaviour. For example, speaking ahead of anti-Brexit protests against the suspension of Parliament in August 2019, one organiser and Momentum activist Michael Chessum said he was "encouraging civil disobedience, in whatever form that

⁸⁷² Matthew Taylor and Damien Gayle, 'Protesters target Jeremy Corbyn on day three of Extinction Rebellion', *the Guardian*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/17/extinction-rebellion-halt-london-docklands-trains-carriage>

⁸⁷³ In 'About' on Facebook, Class War states: "Started in 1982, CLASS WAR was first a combative, funny, populist anarchist newspaper then mutated into a similar political organisation". See 'About Class War', Class War, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/ClassWarOfficial/about_details. For posts advertising the protest see Class War, Facebook, 10 September 2018,

<https://www.facebook.com/ClassWarOfficial/posts/pfbid0f4tAaWCi7sf9hmVDUZZjxeA9gcJuuLxNvmx88Htfz3W5zc9nhG79u22CHX6y6QcBl> ; Class War, Facebook, 7 September 2018,

<https://www.facebook.com/ClassWarOfficial/posts/pfbid0gtGdYqt89wbmT2AmG5RN3zq4Ls2b51tXHTH8qjuF9jg1pxGym6XF6YXiUXveiqV>

⁸⁷⁴ 'Outside Jacob Rees-Mogg's house right now', Class War, Facebook, 11 September 2018,

https://www.facebook.com/ClassWarOfficial/videos/1913008985444738?locale=en_GB

⁸⁷⁵ Sanya Burgess, 'COVID-19: Online groups attempt to confront MPs over their "evil actions"', *Sky News*, 22 October 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/how-do-i-find-where-he-lives-how-online-groups-plot-confrontations-with-mps-over-covid-rules-12440222>

⁸⁷⁶ 'Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life', the Committee on Standards in Public Life, (December 2017),

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666927/6.3637_CO_v6_061217_Web3.1__2_.pdf, pp. 7 & 13.

takes”. He further warned: “These protests will be unpredictable. We will organise the rallies but then what people do is anybody’s guess. There are a lot of passionate and angry people, and we cannot just persuade Boris Johnson nicely that what he is doing is wrong”.⁸⁷⁷ In my view, such rhetoric is both reckless and a tacit approval of law breaking.

- 4.33 Acts of criminal vandalism directed at MPs have increased since the submission of this report with the conflict in Gaza as a pretext.
- 4.34 Mike Freer, Conservative MP for Finchley and Golders Green has announced that he will not stand again following multiple threat incidents culminating in an arson attack on his constituency office.

Political Party Headquarters and Conferences

- 4.35 Radical activists have also targeted the headquarters of political parties, and, on occasion, this has also escalated into vandalism.⁸⁷⁸
- 4.36 In August 2020, activists from Extinction Rebellion co-founder Roger Hallam’s campaign group Burning Pink sprayed pink paint over the headquarters of the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat and Green parties.⁸⁷⁹ Afterwards the Burning Pink homepage featured a picture of activists outside the vandalised Conservative Party headquarters in central London holding a banner with the words “treason, treason, treason”.⁸⁸⁰ In February 2023, nine activists were acquitted of conspiracy to damage property in relation to the incident.⁸⁸¹ (The circumstances of their acquittal, specifically their reliance on the defence of lawful excuse, is discussed in chapter four).

⁸⁷⁷ Ben Ellery, ‘Anti-Brexit protesters plan to target Jacob Rees-Mogg’s home at start of weekend of demonstrations’, *the Times*, 29 August 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/anti-brexit-protesters-plan-to-target-jacob-rees-moggs-home-at-start-of-weekend-of-demonstrations-3mxd2pf9z>

⁸⁷⁸ Samuel Osborne, ‘Extinction Rebellion begin hunger strike outside Tory and Labour offices demanding urgent climate change action’, *the Independent*, 18 November 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/extinction-rebellion-hunger-strike-conservative-labour-party-climate-change-a9207886.html>, Lib Dem HQ Vandalised by Eco-Extremists, Guido Fawkes, 13 August 2020, <https://order-order.com/2020/08/13/exclusive-lib-dem-hq-vandalised-be-eco-extremists/>

⁸⁷⁹ Burning Pink was previously known as Beyond Politics, per contemporaneous accounts of the incident, while media accounts of the subsequent trial describe the activists as from Burning Pink. See “Seven arrested after paint attacks on party HQs”, *BBC News*, 13 August 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-53770794> and ‘Climate activists cleared of one charge after pink paint protest in London’, *the Guardian*, 20 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/20/climate-activists-cleared-of-one-charge-after-pink-paint-protest-in-london>. Burning Pink registered as a political party in October 2020 under the leadership of Roger Hallam. See ‘The Burning Pink Party’, The Electoral Commission, <https://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/Registrations/PP12527>. A crowd funding appeal for the activists ‘legal costs states that Burning Pink was previously known as Beyond Politics. See ‘Legal costs for Burning Pink trial’, Beyond Politics Trial Support, Crowdfunder, <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/p/legal-costs-for-burning-pink-trial>. In addition, the Burning Pink website was updated in 2021 to say that that Burning Pink was the trading name for Burning Pink Party Ltd when it had previously been the trading name for Beyond Politics Ltd. See ‘Terms & Conditions’, Burning Pink, 17 June 2020, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20201030040457/https://burningpink.org/terms> and ‘Terms & Conditions’, Burning Pink, 17 June 2020, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210512161336/https://burningpink.earth/terms/>. Finally, Burning Pink social media accounts still use the name Beyond Politics. See ‘Beyond Politics’, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/bespokepanic?lang=en> and ‘beyond_politics_party’, Instagram, https://www.instagram.com/beyond_politics_party/.

⁸⁸⁰ ‘Burning Pink Earth’, <https://burningpink.earth/> The website is no longer active, see ‘Burning Pink Earth’, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210120170233/https://burningpink.earth/>

⁸⁸¹ ‘Climate activists cleared of one charge after pink paint protest in London’, *the Guardian*, 20 February 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/feb/20/climate-activists-cleared-of-one-charge-after-pink-paint-protest-in-london>

- 4.37 The rhetoric in this case parallels the accusations of treachery or betrayal heard by Far-Right groups over Brexit, or anti-lockdown and anti-vaccination activists. In my view, the labelling of political opponents as traitors is a particularly unwelcome feature of our current public discourse.
- 4.38 Extreme political activists have also targeted both major political parties' conferences in an unacceptable manner. In recent years, Conservative Party conference attendees have been subjected to intimidatory behaviour by protesters, some from the extreme Far Left.
- 4.39 In 2021, Sir Ian Duncan Smith MP was assaulted while walking between venues in Manchester city centre. During the subsequent trial, he said he "got a traffic cone slammed on to my head" and that it felt "threatening", while his wife described being followed by protestors who "used the C-word, the F-word, they called us scum, Tory scum".⁸⁸² (The defendants were acquitted of harassing the former Conservative Party leader with threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour after the chief magistrate determined that while "both insulting and pejorative" it would be disproportionate to criminalise their words.⁸⁸³)
- 4.40 In 2019, unidentified protestors hung a banner from Salford bridge, Manchester, that read, "130,000 killed under Tory rule. Time to level the playing field", accompanied by two effigies hanging from the bridge by their necks.⁸⁸⁴ The Manchester branch of the Labour pressure group Momentum tweeted a picture of the banner accompanied by the words, "Good morning @Conservatives. Welcome to Manchester". The tweet was later deleted.⁸⁸⁵
- 4.41 In 2017, anti-Conservative Party protests attracted both the Far-Left Socialist Workers Party and the Communist Party as well as masked anarchists carrying flares, red flags, and the red and black Antifa flag. While the protest was largely peaceful, one banner showed an image of Jacob Rees-Mogg MP with an arrow through his head alongside the words "Tory Scum Out" and, the day before, unidentified protestors hung a banner on a bridge in Manchester that read, "Hang the Tories", painted in red letters accompanied by two hanging effigies.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁸² 'Traffic cone was slammed on my head, Duncan Smith tells court', *BBC News*, 14 November 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-63624285>

⁸⁸³ Charles Hymas, 'Judge who cleared Iain Duncan Smith protester was rebuked for "supporting Palestine"', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 November 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/11/16/judge-who-cleared-iain-duncan-smith-protester-rebuked-supporting/>

⁸⁸⁴ 'Police investigating anti-Tory banner with hanging effigies', *ITV News*, <https://www.itv.com/news/2019-09-29/utterly-vile-anti-tory-banner-condemned-by-labour-mayor>

⁸⁸⁵ The national Momentum group said: "Manchester Momentum weren't behind the banner, they tweeted about it and then deleted the tweet because they realised it was inappropriate". See 'Police investigate 'utterly vile' banner calling for Tory deaths', *ITV News*, 30 September 2019, <https://news.sky.com/story/utterly-vile-banner-calling-for-tory-deaths-condemned-by-labour-mayor-11822793>

⁸⁸⁶ Kieran Southern and Kate Ferguson, 'Masked protesters chanting 'oh Jeremy Corbyn' hurl smoke bombs outside Tory party conference as police helicopter circles above', *Daily Mail*, 1 October 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4938472/Masked-protesters-clash-police-Manchester.html>

- 4.42 In 2015, anti-austerity protestors gathered in Manchester abused delegates and journalists going into the conference, with activists chanting “Tory scum”, pelting a young attendee with an egg, and spitting at two journalists.⁸⁸⁷ In one instance, the police were forced to intervene to escort journalists away from demonstrators.⁸⁸⁸ Nineteen people were arrested in relation to these incidents.⁸⁸⁹ A local Conservative councillor reported that friends had been threatened with rape and violence by protestors outside the conference.⁸⁹⁰ Footage online also appeared to show a small group of protestors, some masked, dressed in black and displaying anarchist symbols on flags and clothing, attempting to access the conference.⁸⁹¹
- 4.43 I am concerned by the vitriolic nature of protests, such as references to hangings and physical effigies, which come very close to endorsing violence towards ones 'political opponents.
- 4.44 Labour Party conference attendees have also been subjected to intimidatory behaviour by protestors, including from the extreme Far Left, on several occasions.
- 4.45 In 2021, Rosie Duffield, Labour MP for Canterbury, decided not to attend her party's conference in Brighton because of the threats and abuse she had received from transgender campaigners for her gender critical views on trans women and which she said had left her feeling “exhausted” and “frightened”.⁸⁹²
- 4.46 In 2018, the Mail on Sunday reported that a Labour MP whom the paper declined to name was set to receive an armed guard to attend conference after receiving specific death threats. The paper described the proposed police protection as unprecedented for a backbench MP and reported that the abuse on social media the MP had received was for criticising Jeremy Corbyn MP, Labour Party leader at the time.⁸⁹³ At the conference, Luciana Berger,

⁸⁸⁷ Louise Ridley, 'HuffPost UK Journalist Owen Bennett Spat On At Conservative Party Conference', *Huffington Post*, 5 October 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/10/04/owen-bennet-spat-conservative-conference_n_8240458.html

⁸⁸⁸ 'Political Reporter Spat At By Protesters At Conservative Conference', *Sky News*, YouTube, 5 October 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0TIJDG8bCI>

⁸⁸⁹ Todd Fitzgerald, 'Conservative Party conference: Council leader slams thugs who abused and spat at delegates', *Manchester Evening News*, 8 October 2015, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/conservative-party-conference-council-leader-10221136>

⁸⁹⁰ Todd Fitzgerald, 'Conservative Party conference: Friends were threatened with rape by demonstrators, says Salford Tory', *Manchester Evening News*, 8 October 2015, <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/conservative-party-conference-friends-were-10214514>

⁸⁹¹ 'Protesters met with dogs at Tory party conference in Manchester', *Steve Spy*, YouTube, 4 October 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-zuVml5Zq4>

⁸⁹² Duffield told the Sunday Times: "I mainly took the decision not because I really thought I was going to be attacked, but because I did not want to be the centre of attention. We have had Labour MPs who have had to have security at conference over the past few years, and I didn't want that sort of attention or to become the story. I just thought it was better for everyone if I quietly stayed away". Greg Heffer, 'Labour MP Rosie Duffield to skip party's conference "due to threats" amid calls for end to "factionalism" and "intolerance"', *Sky News*, 19 September 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/labour-mp-rosie-duffield-to-skip-partys-conference-due-to-threats-amid-calls-for-end-to-factionalism-and-intolerance-12412356>

⁸⁹³ Glen Owen and Brendan Carlin, 'Corbyn critic MP is set to receive pioneering 24-hour armed guard after receiving 'chilling' death threats for speaking out against Labour leader', *Daily Mail*, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6197263/Corbyn-critic-MP-armed-guard-receiving-death-threats-criticising-Labour-leader.html>

Labour MP for Liverpool Wavertree at the time, was accompanied by police. Addressing a Jewish Labour Movement fringe event, Berger said: “[T]his year more than ever we have experienced attacks from the left, from people who claim to share our party values.”⁸⁹⁴

- 4.47 In 2017, Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC Political Editor at the time, attended the Labour conference in Brighton with a bodyguard after receiving a large amount of abuse online from elements of the Far Left who were critical of her coverage of the Labour Party and its leadership.⁸⁹⁵ (She was also seen with her bodyguard at the Conservative Party conference in Manchester the following week.⁸⁹⁶)
- 4.48 In 2016, Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent at the time Ruth Smeeth (now Baroness Anderson)⁸⁹⁷ decided to bring security to the Labour Party conference following an upsurge of antisemitic abuse, including an antisemitic death threat posted on Facebook two months earlier that also expressed support for the Labour leader at the time Jeremy Corbyn MP.⁸⁹⁸
- 4.49 I am concerned that such intimidatory behaviour – directed repeatedly towards women and Jewish people, in particular – should be taken seriously as a wider phenomenon, rather than as a series of isolated incidents, that cumulatively risks amounting to a form of incitement.

Abuse of Local Government Representatives

- 4.50 Politicians serving in local government have also been the targets of harassment and abuse. A 2022 national census of councillors led by the Local Government Association (LGA) found that seven in ten councillors reporting having been abused or felt intimidated within the previous 12 months, with one in ten experiencing abuses frequently.⁸⁹⁹
- 4.51 Much of the abuse local politicians have faced is straightforwardly sexist and racist in nature. For example, in 2020, Londonderry deputy mayor Cara Hunter spoke about the sexually violent and threatening abuse she had received online and by phone, while in 2021, the mayor of London Sadiq

⁸⁹⁴ Oliver Milne, ‘Jewish MP Luciana Berger flanked by police protection at Labour conference after months of antisemitic threats’, *the Mirror*, 24 September 2018, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/jewish-mp-luciana-berger-flanked-13298354>

⁸⁹⁵ Peter Walker, ‘BBC political editor given bodyguard for Labour conference’, *the Guardian*, 24 September 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/sep/24/bbc-political-editor-given-bodyguard-for-labour-conference>

⁸⁹⁶ James Tapsfield, ‘Now BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg brings bodyguard to Tory conference amid claims corporation is trying to show ‘impartiality’ despite abuse coming from left-wing activists’, *Daily Mail*, 1 October 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4938226/Now-BBC-s-Kuenssberg-brings-bodyguard-Tory-conference.html>

⁸⁹⁷ ‘Baroness Anderson of Stoke-on-Trent’, UK Parliament, <https://members.parliament.uk/member/4508/career>.

⁸⁹⁸ ‘Jewish lawmaker will bring bodyguard to UK Labour Party conference’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 23 September 2016, <https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/jewish-lawmaker-will-bring-bodyguard-to-uk-labour-party-conference-468523>; Nick Cohen, ‘Good and brave Labour MPs need to be defended’, *The Observer*, 1 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/01/good-and-brave-labour-mps-should-be-defended>.

⁸⁹⁹ ‘LGA: Stamping out abuse of councillors’, Local Government Association, 30 November 2022, <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/news/lga-stamping-out-abuse-councillors>.

Khan spoke about the racist and anti-Muslim threats and abuse he had received “because of the colour of his skin and the god he worships”.⁹⁰⁰ A 2021 investigation by the London Evening Standard reported that 60% of the city’s councillors had been subjected to misogynistic abuse, including rape and death threats, online harassment and physical intimidation.⁹⁰¹

- 4.52 At times, however, the abuse has come from radical political activists. In February 2019, for example, the Guardian reported that Labour councillor for the Wavertree ward in Liverpool, Cllr Clare McIntyre, “dreaded going to party meetings” because she had “fallen foul” of Momentum for questioning why Labour leader at the time Jeremy Corbyn MP had not done more to support the then Wavertree MP Luciana Berger against antisemitic attacks.⁹⁰² McIntyre told the paper that Momentum dominated the Wavertree constituency Labour party (CLP), describing it in Liverpool as a “mask” for Militant,⁹⁰³ the late twentieth century Trotskyist group in the Labour Party.⁹⁰⁴ In October 2019, the Wavertree CLP attempted to trigger her deselection.⁹⁰⁵ While she was reselected in January 2020, McIntyre felt forced to request police protection at the meeting because she feared for her safety following sustained social media abuse.⁹⁰⁶
- 4.53 Local government is a bedrock of democracy and councillors should not be subjected to abuse – of any kind – for performing a public service.

Key findings

- **Extreme political activists have intimidated and even fatally attacked politicians in recent years. The threat is such that assassination of a public figure is now among the most likely risks facing this country,**

⁹⁰⁰ Geraldine Scott, ‘Sadiq Khan needs 24/7 protection ‘due to colour of his skin and god he worships’’, *The Standard*, 28 September 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/sadiq-khan-london-battersea-park-brighton-mayor-b957726.html>.

⁹⁰¹ Ghazal Abbasi and Geeta Wedderburn, ‘Exposed: vile tide of misogyny and abuse against female councillors in London’, *The Standard*, 25 November 2021, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/misogyny-abuse-rape-threats-female-councillors-london-councils-b968263.html>.

⁹⁰² Andrew Anthony, ‘Anger, denial and prejudice fester on the streets of Liverpool Wavertree’, *The Guardian*, 23 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/feb/23/liverpool-wavertree-labour-constituency-antisemitism-luciana-berger-derek-hatton>.

⁹⁰³ Andrew Anthony, ‘Anger, denial and prejudice fester on the streets of Liverpool Wavertree’, *The Guardian*, 23 February 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/feb/23/liverpool-wavertree-labour-constituency-antisemitism-luciana-berger-derek-hatton>.

⁹⁰⁴ Martin Plaut, ‘The Militant Tendency and the 1970s and 80s’, *Young Fabians*, 6 May 2020, https://www.youngfabians.org.uk/the_militant_tendency; Nick Thomas-Symonds, ‘A history of Militant entryism in the Labour Party’, *Labour List*, 17 August 2016, <https://labourlist.org/2016/08/a-history-of-militant-entryism-in-the-labour-party/>.

⁹⁰⁵ Liam Thorp, ‘Community slams ‘insane’ decision as Labour moves to oust popular city councillor’, *Liverpool Echo*, 24 October 2019, <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/community-slams-insane-decision-labour-17137508>.

⁹⁰⁶ Liam Thorp, ‘Councillor requests police protection after online abuse as she wins Labour vote’, *Liverpool Echo*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/councillor-requests-police-protection-after-17604679>. Previously, in 2018, Labour Party officials had found that McIntyre had been subjected to an “unacceptable level of harassment” following a Facebook row with a local Labour campaigner whom she had unintentionally offended, with one supporter of the campaigner citing “fundamental political differences”. Joe Thomas and Liam Thorp, ‘Labour councillor subjected to ‘unacceptable level of harassment’ after Facebook row’, *Liverpool Echo*, 29 April 2018, <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/labour-councillor-subjected-unacceptable-level-14589701>.

while police data on crimes against MPs suggests that female and non-white MPs have been targeted for such crimes.

- **There is a risk of protests escalating to violence. This is exacerbated by rhetoric that implies politicians deserve what is coming. The labelling of political opponents as traitors is a particularly unwelcome feature of our current public discourse, and in particular references to hangings and physical effigies come very close to endorsing violence.**
- **Public intimidation of politicians by extreme protestors cumulatively threatens to erode normal democratic life in and around Parliament – and among wider society. Intimidation in British politics not only impacts people in public office but may also put off candidates who want to serve their communities from standing.**

Targeting Journalists and the Media

- 4.54 A vibrant free press is a fundamental pillar of our democracy, fulfilling an essential role in informing the electorate and holding those they elect to account. In recent years, however, extreme political activists have sought to delegitimise mainstream media or even interfere with the free press by physically disrupting print and broadcast media. In some cases, they have taken direct action against journalists to prevent them from doing their job. Just as intimidation by the state is seen a threat to free democracies, so too ought the targeting of journalists by radical activists be taken seriously as an assault on the proper functioning of democracy in this country.

Delegitimising Mainstream Media

- 4.55 In recent years, radical political activists have attempted to delegitimise established news sources. This has included activists claiming that the media is untrustworthy, alleging that journalists are pushing a particular agenda, usually on behalf of ‘the establishment’, and labelling established outlets as ‘mainstream media’, often disparagingly abbreviated to ‘MSM’. Fringe activists, particularly those who promote conspiracy theories, have also accused the media of pushing so-called fake news to mislead the public intentionally and systematically.
- 4.56 Such anti-media rhetoric was an observable feature of the conspiracy theory narratives that emerged among the anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx movement during the time of the coronavirus pandemic. For example, activists questioned the existence of Covid-19 and began to refer instead to the media as a virus.

- 4.57 In February 2022, footage posted online by a group called GB Resistance showed a protestor in Parliament Square holding a banner that read, “the media is the virus”.⁹⁰⁷ GB Resistance presents itself as an alternative to the mainstream media towards which it is overtly hostile.⁹⁰⁸
- 4.58 In September 2020, anti-lockdown protests had swelled to around 1000 people and pictures showed one protestor holding a placard that read “You’ll be safer: media distancing than social distancing”.⁹⁰⁹
- 4.59 In May 2020, the largest anti-lockdown protest at the time saw around 100 protestors gathered in Hyde Park, with several using the phrase “fake news” and one holding a placard that called the BBC, ITV, CNN, and Sky “deadly viruses”.⁹¹⁰
- 4.60 Throughout the pandemic, anti-lockdown commentators on social media also routinely accused the mainstream media of being complicit in assisting the Government in manipulating the public to comply with lockdown restrictions, including by using fear to do so.⁹¹¹
- 4.61 In December 2021, the Twitter account British Press Corruption, which claims to expose media corruption and propaganda,⁹¹² tweeted: “Why did not a single journalist [sic] in the press conference ask anything about the fascist discriminatory vaccine passports? Mainstream Media are complicit and essentially enabling the great fascist reset”⁹¹³
- 4.62 In November 2021, former UKIP Member of the European Parliament (MEP) for Yorkshire and the Humber Godfrey Bloom tweeted, “The entire

⁹⁰⁷ #LIVE Covid Injections Approved for Over-5s | Parliament Square, London, England’, Resistance GB, Odysee, 17 February 2022, <https://odysee.com/@ResistanceGB:f/Jbsunder5:b>.

⁹⁰⁸ In its online FAQs, GB Resistance states: “What do you mean by ‘independent’ journalism or philosophy? We are independent in a variety of ways. Firstly, we’re not controlled by the state or corporate shareholders and have full editorial control. We refuse to fund or participate in the state sponsored media cartel of the ‘UKPCA’ [UK Press Card Authority] which regularly censors journalists and which utilises police to thuggishly attack those who dissent from the mainstream narrative. We also refuse to blindly conform to the establishment narrative, and we put the truth above personal interest. Further, we refuse to censor which questions we ask of politicians.” ‘FAQ’, Resistance GB, <https://www.resistancegb.org/faq/>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20211201175907/https://www.resistancegb.org/faq/>

⁹⁰⁹ Aaron Walawalkar and Damien Gayle, ‘More than 30 arrested during coronavirus protests in London’, *The Guardian*, 19 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/sep/19/coronavirus-protesters-in-london-may-get-arrested-police-warn>.

⁹¹⁰ Lizzie Dearden, ‘Coronavirus: Inside the UK’s biggest anti-lockdown protest’, *Independent*, 16 May 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-lockdown-protests-uk-london-hyde-park-5g-conspiracy-theories-a9518506.html>.

⁹¹¹ For example, ‘One day mainstream media will be brought to book for not doing their job mid crisis. They’re complicit in terrifying us with exaggerated figures. In particular they’re not exploring the official figures & separating real covid deaths from all the others misleadingly presented.’, Mike Yardley, Twitter, 23 November 2020, <https://twitter.com/YardleyShooting/status/1330839628518133761>; ‘Why did not a single journalists in the press conference ask anything about the fascist discriminatory vaccine passports? Mainstream Media are complicit and essentially enabling the great fascist reset’, British Press Corruption, Twitter, 9 December 2021, <https://twitter.com/PressBritish/status/1468843303550529536>; ‘The entire government campaign has been based on fear. Easy to do with a complicit MSM, a suppression of relevant data (non comorbidity deaths instead of case counting) & a gullible electorate most of which have not had the benefit of a traditional education.’, Godfrey Bloom, Twitter, 30 November 2021, <https://twitter.com/goddersbloom/status/1465587350315089928>

⁹¹² British Press Corruption, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/PressBritish>.

⁹¹³ ‘Why did not a single journalists in the press conference ask anything about the fascist discriminatory vaccine passports? Mainstream Media are complicit and essentially enabling the great fascist reset’, British Press Corruption, Twitter, 9 December 2021, <https://twitter.com/PressBritish/status/1468843303550529536>.

government campaign has been based on fear Easy to do with a complicit MSM [...]”.⁹¹⁴

- 4.63 There are parallels between the claims of the anti-lockdown protestors and how elements of the Far-Left subculture in the UK attacked the so-called mainstream media, accusing it of undermining the former Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn MP, and even, at times, blaming it for his lack of electoral success.⁹¹⁵
- 4.64 In January 2021, the left-wing news website The Skwawkbox tweeted a video of the launch of Corbyn’s Project for Peace and Justice with the comment, “Shout-out for Skwawkbox, @SocialistTelly,⁹¹⁶ @TheCanaryUK and new left media on Corbyn’s #PeaceAndJusticeProject launch - and their importance vs 'msm' bias and corruption.”⁹¹⁷
- 4.65 In September 2020, in response to new leader Keir Starmer’s comment that the Labour party had deserved to lose the general election, the Twitter account Media Lens, which claims to expose corporate media bias,⁹¹⁸ tweeted: “‘Deserved’ to lose an election in which party figures obstructed Corbyn’s efforts to become PM? And following a propaganda blitz by the ‘MSM’ to crush him?”⁹¹⁹
- 4.66 In February 2020, replying to a tweet from Corbyn critic Margaret Hodge MP calling on Labour members “to be brutally honest about why we failed”, Unite member Steve Billingham,⁹²⁰ tweeted: “We failed because Jeremy Corbyn was undermined. Labour’s real efforts to win an election foundered as a result of relentless attacks from the MSM, Israel and MPs such as you”.⁹²¹

⁹¹⁴ ‘The entire government campaign has been based on fear. Easy to do with a complicit MSM, a suppression of relevant data (non comorbidity deaths instead of case counting) & a gullible electorate most of which have not had the benefit of a traditional education.’, Godfrey Bloom, Twitter, 30 November 2021, <https://twitter.com/goddersbloom/status/1465587350315089928>.

⁹¹⁵ ‘‘Deserved’ to lose an election in which party figures obstructed Corbyn’s efforts to become PM? And following a propaganda blitz by the ‘MSM’ to crush him?’, Media Lens, Twitter, 22 September 2020, <https://twitter.com/medialens/status/1308360573088923654>; ‘It’s highly unlikely the MSM or establishment will do this, because they won’t risk upending capitalism- even facing the gravity of this situation. They only fight culture wars against the Left, as seen with the war on Corbyn. Labour has also been recaptured and neutered.’, Kerry-Anne Mendoza, Twitter, 26 May 2020, <https://twitter.com/TheMendozaWoman/status/1265230021339340801>; <https://web.archive.org/web/20230927162143/https://twitter.com/pete3291/status/1507063136670695428>; ‘Yaaaasss Please watch & retweet. You won’t see on MSM #BBCBias. Tory voters switching to Corbyn / Labour in marginal seats’, Jerry Hicks, Twitter, 18 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/JerryHicksUnite/status/1196394458843144192>; ‘We failed because Jeremy Corbyn was undermined. Labour’s real efforts to win an election foundered as a result of relentless attacks from the MSM, Israel and MPs such as you.’, Steve Billingham, Twitter, 3 February 2020, <https://twitter.com/SteveBillingha2/status/1224265583018926081>.

⁹¹⁶ Socialist Telly describes itself as “the place where socialists come to have their voice heard”. Socialist Telly, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/SocialistTelly>.

⁹¹⁷ ‘Shout-out for Skwawkbox, @SocialistTelly, @TheCanaryUK and new left media on Corbyn’s #PeaceAndJusticeProject launch - and their importance vs 'msm' bias and corruption. Give them a follow and support if you can do so without hardship...Full story: <http://bit.ly/PJPNewMedia>’, The Skwawkbox, Twitter, 17 January 2021, <https://twitter.com/skwawkbox/status/1350859182375903233>.

⁹¹⁸ ‘What is Media Lens’, Media Lens, <https://www.medialens.org/frequently-asked-questions/#whatis>.

⁹¹⁹ ‘‘Deserved’ to lose an election in which party figures obstructed Corbyn’s efforts to become PM? And following a propaganda blitz by the ‘MSM’ to crush him?’, Media Lens, Twitter, 22 September 2020, <https://twitter.com/medialens/status/1308360573088923654>.

⁹²⁰ In Billingham’s Profile picture he is wearing a pro-Palestine T-shirt and holding up a Socialist Party placard calling for a “Jeremy Corbyn-led government with socialist policies”. Steve Billingham, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/SteveBillingha2>.

⁹²¹ ‘We failed because Jeremy Corbyn was undermined. Labour’s real efforts to win an election foundered as a result of relentless attacks from the MSM, Israel and MPs such as you.’, Steve Billingham, Twitter, 3 February 2020, <https://twitter.com/SteveBillingha2/status/1224265583018926081>.

- 4.67 During the 2019 general election campaign, former radical candidate for General Secretary of the Unite union, Jerry Hicks,⁹²² tweeted footage of voters in Wolverhampton telling a reporter they were considering voting for Corbyn with the comment, “Yaaaasssss Please watch & retweet You won't see on MSM #BBCBias Tory voters switching to Corbyn / Labour in marginal seats”.⁹²³
- 4.68 In August 2016, editor-in-chief of left-wing news website The Canary at the time, Kerry-Anne Mendoza,⁹²⁴ tweeted: “The MSM publishes criticism of Corbyn = ‘credible analysis’ New media publishes criticism of the MSM = ‘AGH! It’s a pitchfork brigade!’”⁹²⁵
- 4.69 I welcome alternative news sources as part of a pluralistic democracy. The fact that some alternative platforms are created by those seeking to promote disinformation and extreme narratives is not grounds for invalidating all alternative media. However, the suggestion that only alternative news sources are truly independent or that the more established media outlets are all compromised and are being coordinated for the purposes of manipulating public opinion, is itself a conspiracy theory.
- 4.70 Furthermore, delegitimising established news reporting risks contributing to an atmosphere in which normal democratic discourse starts to break down. This is because one effect of encouraging mistrust in the media is a lack of consensus on any fundamental facts in which to ground reasonable public debate. If previously trusted news sources are reduced to ‘fake news’ then alternative media platforms, such as those run by fringe domestic political activists or directed by anti-democratic foreign powers, are effectively raised to an equal level with established media. In some cases, these alternative media platforms may be held up as *more* credible, simply by virtue of not being part of the so-called mainstream. This is an unhealthy and unwelcome development in our media landscape.

Interfering with a Free Press

- 4.71 Radical protest groups have deployed tactics such as disruption, intimidation, trespass, and vandalism to protest print and broadcast media with which they disagree and, at times, to try to stop it from reaching its audiences.

⁹²² Jerry Hicks, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/JerryHicksUnite>; ‘Support Jerry Hicks for Unite General Secretary’, Social Resistance, 19 February 2013, <https://socialistresistance.org/support-jerry-hicks-for-unite-general-secretary/4775>.

⁹²³ ‘Yaaaasssss Please watch & retweet. You won't see on MSM #BBCBias’, Jerry Hicks, Twitter, 18 November 2019, <https://twitter.com/JerryHicksUnite/status/1196394458843144192>.

⁹²⁴ ‘The Canary’, Beyond the MSM, <https://www.beyondthems.com.uk/the-canary>.

⁹²⁵ ‘It’s highly unlikely the MSM or establishment will do this, because they won’t risk upending capitalism- even facing the gravity of this situation. They only fight culture wars against the Left, as seen with the war on Corbyn. Labour has also been recaptured and neutered.’, Kerry-Anne Mendoza, Twitter, 26 May 2020, <https://twitter.com/TheMendozaWoman/status/1265230021339340801>. [Twitter account limited, screenshot available on request]

- 4.72 In August 2021, anti-vaxx demonstrators unlawfully entered the ITN headquarters in central London which houses ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5. They were physically aggressive towards police officers and shouted abuse at Channel 4 news anchor at the time Jon Snow.⁹²⁶
- 4.73 In August 2021, anti-vaxxers attempted to storm what they wrongly believed to be the BBC headquarters chanting “shame on you”. They criticised the BBC’s coverage of the coronavirus, with some describing the media as “the virus”, a common anti-vaxx trope, and Piers Corbyn was recorded saying “we’ve got to take over these bastards”.⁹²⁷
- 4.74 In May 2021, an activist with Roger Hallam’s political party Burning Pink, Ramon Salgado-Touzou, vandalised the offices of the Guardian newspaper, spraying the exterior of the building with neon pink paint. Salgado-Touzou was also working as campaign manager for the Burning Pink Party’s candidate for London mayor Valerie Brown at the time, and both were angry at the newspaper for allegedly breaking its climate pledge and for failing to cover Burning Pink’s campaign.⁹²⁸ A video of the stunt was posted on Burning Pink’s Facebook page.⁹²⁹
- 4.75 In September 2020, Extinction Rebellion activists blockaded three printing presses owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation leading to four national newspapers being missing from 1,100 retailers the following morning. Protestors used vehicles to physically block roads to the printing plants and activists hung banners with slogans such as “Free the truth” and “5 crooks control our news”.⁹³⁰ While the group said the disruption was designed to expose the papers’ inaccurate coverage of climate change and corruption,⁹³¹ it was widely condemned across the political spectrum for interfering with a free press.⁹³² Eighty people were arrested.⁹³³ At the time of writing, at least eleven

⁹²⁶ ‘Anti-vaccine protesters storm ITN building in London’, The Daily Telegraph, YouTube, 23 August 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UiO3bZijWMk>.

⁹²⁷ Jim Waterson, ‘Anti-vaccine protesters storm BBC HQ – years after it moved out’, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/09/confused-anti-vaccine-protesters-storm-bbc-hq-years-after-moved-out>.

⁹²⁸ ‘The Guardian – your carbon friendly newspaper’, Real Media, 7 May 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210617224140/https://realmedia.press/the-carbon-friendly-guardian/>.

⁹²⁹ Bronwen Weatherby, ‘Guardian offices attacked with pink paint’, *Camden New Journal*, 7 May 2021, <https://www.camdennewjournal.co.uk/article/guardian-offices-attacked-with-pink-paint>.

⁹³⁰ Nosheen Iqbal, ‘Climate activists accused of ‘attacking free press’ by blockading print works’, *The Guardian*, 5 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/05/climate-activists-accused-of-attacking-free-press-by-blockading-print-works>; Liz Hull, ‘Five Extinction Rebellion protesters are convicted over printing press blockade that stopped millions of newspapers being delivered’, *Daily Mail*, 17 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9585963/Five-Extinction-Rebellion-protesters-convicted-printing-press-blockade.html>.

⁹³¹ ‘BREAKING: Extinction Rebellion blocks News Corps Printworks and demands they ‘Free the Truth’’, Extinction Rebellion, 4 September 2020, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2020/09/04/breaking-extinction-rebellion-blocks-news-corps-printworks-and-demands-they-free-the-truth/>.

⁹³² Nosheen Iqbal, ‘Climate activists accused of ‘attacking free press’ by blockading print works’, *The Observer*, 5 September 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/05/climate-activists-accused-of-attacking-free-press-by-blockading-print-works>.

⁹³³ ‘Extinction Rebellion protesters block newspaper printing presses’, BBC News, 5 September 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-54038591>.

people had been given a conditional discharge and/or a fine for obstructing a highway.⁹³⁴

- 4.76 In October 2019, Extinction Rebellion activists blocked access to the BBC headquarters in central London, alleging that the public service broadcaster had been “silent” on climate change.⁹³⁵
- 4.77 In June 2017, Extinction Rebellion’s anarchist parent group Rising Up! vandalised Rupert Murdoch’s News International headquarters in central London. Activists sprayed the building with slogans such as “Lies, Lies” and “Toxic Media” and filmed themselves in front of the graffiti holding a banner that read “Murdoch propaganda #fake democracy”.⁹³⁶

Taking Direct Action Against Journalists

- 4.78 Some activists on the political extremes have targeted journalists personally. This has tended to manifest in protestors accosting journalists in the street and harassing them but has also included specific threats sent to the homes of journalists and even physical assault.
- 4.79 In February 2022, BBC journalist Sarah Smith spoke about the abuse she received as the corporation’s Scotland editor. She described how when setting up for live television people would shout at her from passing cars, “What f***ing lies you're going to be telling on TV tonight, you f***ing lying b*tch”, with such “vitriolic attention” happening “most of the time”. She believed that she had been particularly targeted by Scottish nationalists because of her father’s legacy as a prominent critic of Scottish independence. Smith reported that she had “pretty much stopped tweeting” in response.⁹³⁷
- 4.80 In October 2021, anti-vaxxers filmed themselves delivering what they called a letter of liability to the home of prominent BBC journalist Jeremy Vine for his role covering the Covid-19 vaccine.⁹³⁸ The activist who filmed the incident and shared it on Telegram said it was part of a wider campaign, adding “we know where every single one of these TV presenters ... we’re going to go to their houses and they’re going to get served”. Other users across the groups the

⁹³⁴ Liz Hull, ‘Five Extinction Rebellion protesters are convicted over printing press blockade that stopped millions of newspapers being delivered’, Daily Mail, 17 May 2021, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9585963/Five-Extinction-Rebellion-protesters-convicted-printing-press-blockade.html>; Helen Pidd and agencies, ‘Six Extinction Rebellion protesters found guilty of blocking news printers’, *The Guardian*, 16 July 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/jul/16/six-extinction-rebellion-protesters-found-guilty-of-blocking-news-printers>.

⁹³⁵ “No one in, no one out: Extinction Rebellion block BBC headquarters’, Sky News, 12 October 2019, <https://news.sky.com/story/extinction-rebellion-bbc-staff-unable-to-get-in-or-out-as-climate-protesters-block-hq-11832769>.

⁹³⁶ ‘Rising Up! activists visit Murdoch’s/News International HQ to say no to Toxic Media’, Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK, YouTube, 7 June 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DnBBENyPp8>.

⁹³⁷ Rhys Evans, ‘Making news in multinational states’, Journalist Fellowship Paper, Reuters Institute and University of Oxford, https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2022-02/RISJ%20Paper_Rhys%20Evans_MT21_FINAL.docx_.pdf; pp. 27-28.

⁹³⁸ ‘COVID-19: Jeremy Vine threatened on Telegram as anti-vaxxers target frontline workers’, Sky News, 13 October 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/covid-19-jeremy-vine-threatened-on-telegram-as-anti-vaxxers-target-frontline-workers-12431566>.

video was shared in (including one with 25,000 followers) subsequently posted threats against Vine, including one who commented, “wait ’til we come with the noose Jeremy”.⁹³⁹

- 4.81 In August 2021, BBC Look North journalist Philip Norton described being surrounded by a group of protesters who threatened to hang him and his crew while filming an anti-vaxx march in Scarborough. Norton posted footage on Twitter that shows one protestor using a megaphone to tell him that the “Nuremberg trials” were coming, that they would “all be hanged [...] and so will the despicable MPs that you are supporting”, and that “the nooses are ready”. Identifying Norton as a local reporter, he further threatened: “you ain’t gonna be able to walk the streets”. Two police officers were filmed observing the threats but were not shown to intervene.⁹⁴⁰ Norton said that such incidents were “happening more and more” and that it had “almost become ‘part of the job’ to get abuse in the streets.”⁹⁴¹
- 4.82 In June 2021, anti-lockdown activists gathered for a protest in Westminster accosted the political editor of BBC Newsnight, Nicholas Watt, in the street, chasing and shouting abuse at him. Footage shows protesters repeatedly calling Watt a “traitor” and “scum” and accusing him of lying about lockdowns.⁹⁴² Footage posted online by GB Resistance shows Watt leaving Whitehall pursued by several activists before running back behind the police line at the gates of Downing Street.⁹⁴³ Watt’s harassment was condemned across the political spectrum and by the Metropolitan Police.⁹⁴⁴ In August 2022, five men and one woman were convicted of using threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour with the intention of causing distress in relation to the incident.⁹⁴⁵ The judge gave them community orders or a suspended sentence and issued an arrest warrant for one who did not attend the hearing.⁹⁴⁶
- 4.83 In August 2019, Guardian commentator Owen Jones was physically assaulted outside a London pub. The court ruled that the attack had been aggravated because Jones was targeted for his left-wing and pro-LGBT political views.

⁹³⁹ Lizzie Dearden, “No one is safe’: Anti-vaxxers who targeted Jeremy Vine threaten to visit homes across country’, *Independent*, 11 October 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/jeremy-vine-antivaxxers-home-dr-hilary-b1936369.html>.

⁹⁴⁰ Aditi Rane, ‘BBC Look North’s Phillip Norton ambushed by protesters who threaten to ‘hang him on a noose’, *Hull Live*, 29 August 2021, <https://www.hulldailymail.co.uk/news/hull-east-yorkshire-news/bbc-look-norths-phillip-norton-5846120>.

⁹⁴¹ ‘This is what we were subjected to in our roles as #journalists today. Ambushed and cornered by protesters, death threats, labelled as paedophiles and murderers. We’re all ok and well supported, but sadly this is happening more and more as we try to do our jobs. @NUJofficial’, Phillip Norton, Twitter, 28 August 2021, <https://twitter.com/phillipnorton/status/1431710439327547398>.

⁹⁴² Izzy Lyons, ‘BBC journalist Nicholas Watt chased through streets by anti-lockdown protesters’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 June 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/15/bbc-journalist-nicholas-watt-chased-streets-anti-lockdown-protesters/>.

⁹⁴³ Ali Mitib and Tom Ball, ‘Man charged after BBC journalist Nick Watt chased into Downing Street by lockdown protesters’, *The Times*, 16 June 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bbc-journalist-chased-into-downing-st-by-lockdown-protesters-tg593wt9d>; ‘Top BBC Stooge Chased Out Of Anti-lockdown Protest’, Resistance GB, Odysee, 15 June 2021, <https://odysee.com/@ResistanceGB:f/top-bbc-stooge-chased-out-of-anti:4>.

⁹⁴⁴ ‘Boris Johnson condemns ‘disgraceful hounding’ of BBC journalist’, BBC News, 15 June 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-57486222>.

⁹⁴⁵ ‘Nicholas Watt: Second man charged after BBC reporter chased’, BBC News, 22 June 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57556198>.

⁹⁴⁶ Henry Vaughan, PA, ‘Anti-lockdown protesters who ‘intimidated’ BBC journalist sentenced’, *Belfast Telegraph*, 30 August 2022, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/entertainment/film-tv/news/anti-lockdown-protesters-who-intimidated-bbc-journalist-sentenced/41947028.html>.

One of the attackers, whom the judge described one as holding “extreme rightwing opinions”, was sentenced to two years and eight months, while two other men were sentenced to eight months for the attack.⁹⁴⁷

- 4.84 There are similarities between the dehumanising of the police that I observed in the anti-government Kill the Bill protests, and the ways in which some Far Left and anarchist groups have dehumanised journalists. I have seen radical activists deploying the phrase ‘All Journalists are Bastards’, or AJAB, itself adapted from the American political slogan “All Cops are Bastards”, or ACAB. For example, the third edition of the Squatters of London Action Paper, an anarchist newsletter for squatters in London,⁹⁴⁸ featured a segment titled ‘All Journalists are Bastards’ which alleged that journalists have “told a million lies about squatting”, are “cosy” with “class enemies”, and that their “videos have sent our friends to prison and their writing has grown the culture of criminalisation”.⁹⁴⁹ I am concerned that such rhetoric risks promoting incitement against journalists. For example, in January 2022, the London chapter of the anti-fascist Youth Liberation Front retweeted a tweet that read “AJAB forever” with the comment “smash cameras, fight journos, love your comrades”.⁹⁵⁰
- 4.85 The UK is not alone in suffering attacks on journalists and the media. Journalists in Europe have been targeted by terrorists. The Netherlands, for example, witnessed the Islamist assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in a street in Amsterdam in 2004, while Islamist gunmen killed twelve people in an attack on the satirical French magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris in 2015. In both cases, the attackers claimed revenge for perceived blasphemy.⁹⁵¹ Other countries have suffered non-fatal attacks from extreme political groups. Greece, for example, has witnessed the targeting of media premises and the homes of journalists, typically by anarchist groups,⁹⁵² leading the advocacy group Reporters Without Borders to call on the authorities to speed up

⁹⁴⁷ Dan Sabbagh, ‘Far-right Chelsea fan jailed for attack on Guardian’s Owen Jones’, *The Guardian*, 24 July 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/24/chelsea-fan-jailed-for-attack-on-guardian-journalist-owen-jones>.

⁹⁴⁸ ‘London: New squatters’ newspaper SLAP released – Interview’, SquatInet, 3 February 2016, <https://en.squat.net/2016/02/03/london-new-squatters-newspaper-slap-released-interview/>.

⁹⁴⁹ ‘Squatters of London Action Paper – Issue 3’, <https://files.libcom.org/files/SLAP-Issue-3.pdf>.

⁹⁵⁰ ‘smash cameras, fight journos, love your comrades’, YLF London, Twitter, 6 January 2022, <https://twitter.com/YLFLondon/status/1479173105230700546>.

⁹⁵¹ Edecio Martinez, ‘Murdered for Insulting Islam: 5th Anniversary of Filmmaker Theo Van Gogh’s Last Day on Earth’, CBS News, 3 November 2009, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/murdered-for-insulting-islam-5th-anniversary-of-filmmaker-theo-van-goghs-last-day-on-earth/>; Tangi Salaün, ‘Charlie Hebdo attackers killed to avenge Prophet Mohammad, French court hears’, Reuters, 2 September 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-france-charliehebdo-trial-idUKKBN25S6B1>.

⁹⁵² In 2020, for example, anarchists firebombed the Athens offices one of the largest media groups in the country which they accused of misleading the public over the Covid-19 pandemic on behalf of the state. ‘Greek media group offices targeted in firebomb attack by anarchist group, partly due to COVID-19 coverage’, International Press Institute, 18 April 2020, <https://ipi.media/alerts/greek-media-group-offices-targeted-in-firebomb-attack-by-anarchist-group-partly-due-to-covid-19-coverage/>. A year earlier, an anarchist and anti-establishment group vandalised the headquarters of the Athens Voice newspaper in response to a comment posted on its website that they deemed as mocking the death of an Armenian migrant while fleeing the police. ‘Greece: newsroom vandalised by anarchist group in Athens’, European Federation of Journalists, 9 July 2019, <https://europeanjournalists.org/blog/2019/07/09/greece-newsroom-vandalised-by-anarchist-group-in-athens/>. The group issued a statement of responsibility here: <https://athens.indymedia.org/post/1598894/>. In 2013, Greek anarchists placed homemade explosive devices outside the homes of journalists whom they accused of taking a pro-Government line on the country’s financial crisis. Roy Greenslade, ‘Anarchists target Greek journalists’, *The Guardian*, 15 January 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2013/jan/15/journalist-safety-greece>.

investigations and to do more to protect the country's journalists and the media.⁹⁵³

Key findings

- **Radical political activists have attempted to delegitimise established news sources, alleging that journalists are pushing an establishment agenda and so-called fake news. Such anti-media rhetoric damages normal democratic discourse because it takes away agreed facts from which to start reasonable debate.**
- **Radical protest groups have increasingly used disruption, intimidation, trespass, vandalism, and blockades to stop print and broadcast media reaching its audiences. Efforts to interfere in a free press ought to be taken seriously as an assault on the proper functioning of democracy in this country.**
- **Journalists have increasingly reported been accosted in the street and harassed while reporting on contentious issues. The accompanying dehumanising of journalists among radical protest movements – epitomised by the slogan 'All Journalists are Bastards' – risks promoting incitement against the profession.**

Targeting Education Settings and Academics

- 4.86 Radical activists and protesters have harassed people working in or visiting universities and schools across the country. In recent years, academics, visiting speakers, teachers and even pupils have faced abuse, either on account of their political positions or for opinions and intent ascribed to them by protestors, typically on ideological grounds. For some protestors it is no longer enough to disagree with academics or teachers; instead, students and pupils must be protected from their (allegedly immoral or dangerous) views.

Universities

- 4.87 Freedom of speech in universities is fundamental to our democracy. It should be a point of worry that activists have sought to unduly interfere with academic inquiry and debate on our campuses.
- 4.88 Higher education providers in the UK are bound by a long-standing statutory duty to ensure freedom of speech at their institutions.⁹⁵⁴ This was recently

⁹⁵³ 'Increasingly frequent violence against media in Greece must not go unpunished', Reporters without Borders, 25 July 2022, <https://rsf.org/en/increasingly-frequent-violence-against-media-greece-must-not-go-unpunished>.

⁹⁵⁴ Section 43, Education Act 1986, Education (No. 2) Act 1986, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/61>.

strengthened by the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, which also introduced new duties to protect ‘academic freedom’, defined as freedom “to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions”, and to promote the importance of freedom of speech.⁹⁵⁵

- 4.89 The extent to which freedom of speech in universities is under threat has been a point of political contention. In a February 2021 policy paper, the Secretary of State for Education at the time, Gavin Williamson MP, made the case for change, citing reports and polling by King’s College London and the think tank Policy Exchange to evidence “an emerging culture of intolerance of freedom of expression amongst a significant and vocal minority on university campuses”.⁹⁵⁶ On the other hand, during the passage of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act, Shadow Education Secretary at the time, Kate Green MP, questioned whether the legislation was needed on the grounds that very few external speakers in previous years had been cancelled.⁹⁵⁷
- 4.90 During my review, however, I have seen evidence of radical activists harassing academics and visiting speakers. Typically, this has taken the form of activists disrupting events and intimidating visiting speakers rather than the events being cancelled, but it has also involved campaigns of harassment within universities against specific academic staff.

Academics

- 4.91 In recent years, several academics have found themselves subject to campaigns against them on campus, most commonly on account of their opinions which their critics have characterised as regressive or even harmful. Gender critical feminists have been particularly targeted, but academics have also been accused of Islamophobia and colonialism. While this activism has involved students at the universities in question, there is also evidence that academic staff have been involved.
- In October 2020, Bristol University's Islamic Society lodged a formal complaint against Professor Steven Greer, alleging Islamophobia in his Islam, China, and the Far East module, part of the university’s Human

⁹⁵⁵ Sections A1-A3, Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/16/enacted>.

⁹⁵⁶ ‘Higher education: free speech and academic freedom’, Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education, February 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/961537/Higher_education_free_speech_and_academic_freedom__web_version_.pdf; para. 43

⁹⁵⁷ ‘Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill Volume 699: debated on Monday 12 July 2021’, Hansard, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-07-12/debates/3E5A48AD-72E6-420A-910A-9F1863983743/HigherEducation\(FreedomOfSpeech\)Bill#](https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-07-12/debates/3E5A48AD-72E6-420A-910A-9F1863983743/HigherEducation(FreedomOfSpeech)Bill#)

Rights in Law, Politics and Society course.⁹⁵⁸ The allegations related to a teaching slide that mentioned the 2015 terrorist attack on the French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, lectures on women and non-Muslims in Muslim-majority countries, and other material.⁹⁵⁹ In July 2021, an internal inquiry exonerated Prof Greer, a decision unanimously upheld at appeal in October of that year; and an independent KC also found Prof Greer was not guilty of harassment.⁹⁶⁰ However, in February 2021, despite an on-going and confidential investigation at that time, the student group launched an online petition and social media campaign against Prof Greer accusing him publicly of Islamophobia. Within days he received threatening emails and felt forced into hiding.⁹⁶¹ Despite his exoneration, he was not allocated teaching responsibilities until his retirement in September 2022.⁹⁶²

- In January 2020, Selina Todd, Professor of Modern History at the University of Oxford, was provided with security guards in her lectures following threats on social media.⁹⁶³ Todd reported feeling “vulnerable” having previously experienced hostility from some academics and students on account of her gender critical views.⁹⁶⁴
- In January 2020, Essex University overrode assurances previously given to Professor Rosa Freedman that she would be invited to participate in a Holocaust Memorial Week event because concerns had been raised about Prof Freedman’s gender critical views on sex and gender identity.⁹⁶⁵ After she gave an interview about the incident to the Sunday Times an Essex

⁹⁵⁸ Chris Matthews, ‘University professor who was ‘cancelled’ after being wrongly accused of Islamophobia fears he will be killed by Muslim extremists as he blasts ‘woke’ students for putting the lives of academics at risk’, *Mail Online*, 13 February 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11744423/University-Professor-wrongly-cancelled-fears-death-Muslim-extremists-slams-woke-students.html>.

⁹⁵⁹ Emma Yeomans, ‘Professor claims ‘illiberal’ students forced him into hiding’, *The Times*, 13 February 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/Professor-claims-illiberal-students-forced-him-into-hiding-j3v5h0sq9>.

⁹⁶⁰ Chris Matthews, ‘University professor who was ‘cancelled’ after being wrongly accused of Islamophobia fears he will be killed by Muslim extremists as he blasts ‘woke’ students for putting the lives of academics at risk’, *Mail Online*, 13 February 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11744423/University-Professor-wrongly-cancelled-fears-death-Muslim-extremists-slams-woke-students.html>.

⁹⁶¹ Fariha Karim, ‘Cleared professor Steven Greer fears for academic freedom’, *The Times*, 17 February 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/cleared-professor-steven-greer-fears-for-academic-freedom-6cw7xdrz7>; Chris Matthews, ‘University professor who was ‘cancelled’ after being wrongly accused of Islamophobia fears he will be killed by Muslim extremists as he blasts ‘woke’ students for putting the lives of academics at risk’, *Mail Online*, 13 February 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11744423/University-Professor-wrongly-cancelled-fears-death-Muslim-extremists-slams-woke-students.html>.

⁹⁶² Chris Matthews, ‘University professor who was ‘cancelled’ after being wrongly accused of Islamophobia fears he will be killed by Muslim extremists as he blasts ‘woke’ students for putting the lives of academics at risk’, *Mail Online*, 13 February 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11744423/University-Professor-wrongly-cancelled-fears-death-Muslim-extremists-slams-woke-students.html>.

⁹⁶³ Camilla Turner and Ewan Somerville, ‘Oxford University professor given security guards for lectures after threats from transgender activists’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 January 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/01/23/oxford-university-professor-given-security-guards-lectures-threats/>.

⁹⁶⁴ ‘Oxford professor given protection following threats from trans activists’, *BBC News*, 25 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-51248684>.

⁹⁶⁵ ‘Review of the circumstances resulting in and arising from the cancellation of the Centre for Criminology seminar on Trans Rights, Imprisonment and the Criminal Justice System, scheduled to take place on 5 December 2019, and the arrangements for speaker invitations to the Holocaust Memorial Week event on the State of Antisemitism Today, scheduled for 30 January 2020’, University of Essex, 16 September 2021 Publication version of the report, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/review/events-review-report-university-of-essex-september-2021.pdf>, p. 2.

academic tweeted comparing her views to holocaust denial.⁹⁶⁶ While the university subsequently invited her to the event, an independent investigation by employment and discrimination specialist Akua Reindorf KC nonetheless recommended that Prof Freedman be offered an open apology.⁹⁶⁷ A year earlier Prof Freedman reported that she had been subjected to rape and death threats and had urine poured on her office door after she raised concerns about Scotland's official census and what she saw as the conflation of the terms sex and gender.⁹⁶⁸

- In December 2019, Essex University unlawfully cancelled a lecture on trans rights and the criminal justice system by a gender critical criminologist at the Open University Professor Jo Phoenix.⁹⁶⁹ The event was cancelled on the day due to security concerns after students threatened to barricade the event claiming Prof Phoenix was a “transphobe” and that LGBT+ staff and students would be made to feel unsafe.⁹⁷⁰ A flyer was circulated on campus with the image of a gun and the words “Shut the Fuck Up TERF”.⁹⁷¹ The university decided not to rearrange the event, as promised, and instead apologised for the hurt caused to the trans community.⁹⁷² Akua Reindorf KC's investigation found that the cancellation “amounted to a breach of Prof Phoenix's right to freedom of expression” and that the “later decision to exclude and blacklist

⁹⁶⁶ ‘Review of the circumstances resulting in and arising from the cancellation of the Centre for Criminology seminar on Trans Rights, Imprisonment and the Criminal Justice System, scheduled to take place on 5 December 2019, and the arrangements for speaker invitations to the Holocaust Memorial Week event on the State of Antisemitism Today, scheduled for 30 January 2020’, University of Essex, 16 September 2021 Publication version of the report, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/review/events-review-report-university-of-essex-september-2021.pdf>, p. 2.; Sian Griffiths, “The culture of fear on campus is real. People are afraid to speak out”, *The Times*, 21 May, 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/there-is-a-culture-of-fear-in-universities-say-criminologist-jo-phoenix-and-lawyer-rosa-freedman-cancelled-for-transphobia-c2b6zv98j>.

⁹⁶⁷ ‘Review of the circumstances resulting in and arising from the cancellation of the Centre for Criminology seminar on Trans Rights, Imprisonment and the Criminal Justice System, scheduled to take place on 5 December 2019, and the arrangements for speaker invitations to the Holocaust Memorial Week event on the State of Antisemitism Today, scheduled for 30 January 2020’, University of Essex, 16 September 2021 Publication version of the report, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/review/events-review-report-university-of-essex-september-2021.pdf>, p. 2.

⁹⁶⁸ Ahead of the 2021 census the National Records of Scotland issued guidance which regarding the question “What is your sex?” told respondents, “If you are transgender the answer you give can be different from what is on your birth certificate”. By contrast, in England and Wales, the question on sex was about respondents’ legal sex as determined by either their passport or gender recognition certificate. In both cases, there was an additional, voluntary question on gender identity. Kieran Andrews, ‘Trans lobby has sent me death threats, says Professor Rosa Freedman’, *The Times*, 6 December 2018, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/trans-lobby-has-sent-me-death-threats-says-Professor-rosa-freedman-0bl8cpcqh>. For more on the censuses see Mike Wade, ‘Gender question on Scottish census ‘harms’ data’, *The Times*, 1 September 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gender-question-on-scottish-census-harms-data-25ncgg9c0>; Nicholas Hellen and Tim Shipman, ‘Sex question back on census in blow to trans lobby’, *The Sunday Times*, 4 January 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sex-question-back-on-census-in-blow-to-trans-rights-r75fq5lgc>.

⁹⁶⁹ ‘Review of the circumstances resulting in and arising from the cancellation of the Centre for Criminology seminar on Trans Rights, Imprisonment and the Criminal Justice System, scheduled to take place on 5 December 2019, and the arrangements for speaker invitations to the Holocaust Memorial Week event on the State of Antisemitism Today, scheduled for 30 January 2020’, University of Essex, 16 September 2021 Publication version of the report, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/review/events-review-report-university-of-essex-september-2021.pdf>, p. 1.

⁹⁷⁰ Anna Fazackerley, ‘Sacked or silenced: academics say they are blocked from exploring trans issues’, *The Guardian*, 14 January 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jan/14/sacked-silenced-academics-say-they-are-blocked-from-exploring-trans-issues>.

⁹⁷¹ Sian Griffiths, “The culture of fear on campus is real. People are afraid to speak out”, *The Times*, 21 May 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/there-is-a-culture-of-fear-in-universities-say-criminologist-jo-phoenix-and-lawyer-rosa-freedman-cancelled-for-transphobia-c2b6zv98j>.

⁹⁷² ‘Review of the circumstances resulting in and arising from the cancellation of the Centre for Criminology seminar on Trans Rights, Imprisonment and the Criminal Justice System, scheduled to take place on 5 December 2019, and the arrangements for speaker invitations to the Holocaust Memorial Week event on the State of Antisemitism Today, scheduled for 30 January 2020’, University of Essex, 16 September 2021 Publication version of the report, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/review/events-review-report-university-of-essex-september-2021.pdf>, p. 1.

Prof Phoenix was also unlawful”. It further stated: “the violent flyer was wholly unacceptable and should have been the subject of a timely disciplinary investigation”.⁹⁷³ Prof Phoenix later said that the student responsibly had not been disciplined.⁹⁷⁴ Prof Phoenix has since brought an employment tribunal claim against the Open University for what she claims is a “public campaign of harassment that has made [her] working life unbearable”. The Open University was found at tribunal to have directly discriminated against Prof Phoenix.⁹⁷⁵

- In June 2019, two gender critical female academics, Sarah Honeychurch and Michele Moore, were asked to resign from editorial positions at academic journals after they signed an open letter criticising LGBT+ training in universities run by the charity Stonewall on the grounds that contested claims about sex and gender were being presented as fact.⁹⁷⁶
- In December 2017, around 60 University of Oxford academics wrote an open letter about Oxford Regius Professor of moral and pastoral theology Nigel Biggar criticising his then recent article for The Times on issues relating to histories of empire and colonialism, specifically that people can be both proud and ashamed of different aspects the British Empire, and what they referred to as “the agenda” of his research project, Ethics and Empire, which they claim is “polemical and simplistic” and reflects a “complacent, even celebratory, attitude towards [the university’s] imperial past”.⁹⁷⁷ At the time, Prof Biggar reported that the letter felt like “bullying” and “an attack” rather than genuine debate.⁹⁷⁸ In June 2021, Prof Biggar told The Times that some younger academics have told him they feel unable to speak freely on sensitive issues because their positions within the university are insecure. He concluded that the free speech issue is less about students cancelling events and much more about “the degree of fear and self-censorship on behalf of academics.”⁹⁷⁹

⁹⁷³ Review of the circumstances resulting in and arising from the cancellation of the Centre for Criminology seminar on Trans Rights, Imprisonment and the Criminal Justice System, scheduled to take place on 5 December 2019, and the arrangements for speaker invitations to the Holocaust Memorial Week event on the State of Antisemitism Today, scheduled for 30 January 2020’, University of Essex, 16 September 2021 Publication version of the report, <https://www.essex.ac.uk/-/media/documents/review/events-review-report-university-of-essex-september-2021.pdf>, p. 1.

⁹⁷⁴ Sian Griffiths, “The culture of fear on campus is real. People are afraid to speak out’ , The Times, 21 May 2021,

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/there-is-a-culture-of-fear-in-universities-say-criminologist-jo-phoenix-and-lawyer-rosa-freedman-cancelled-for-transphobia-c2b6zv98j>.

⁹⁷⁵ Prof Jo Phoenix, ‘Harassed, silenced & compared to a racist for my gender critical views’, Crowd Justice, 13 March 2024, <https://www.crowdjustice.com/case/harassed-silenced-for-my-gender-critical-views/>; ‘Prof Jo Phoenix wins gender critical discrimination case against Open University’, Leighday, 23 January 2024, <https://www.leighday.co.uk/news/news/2024-news/prof-jo-phoenix-wins-gender-critical-discrimination-case-against-open-university/>.

⁹⁷⁶ Sian Griffiths and Ewan Somerville, ‘Academic faces sack for letter to Sunday Times that criticised training on trans issues’, *The Sunday Times*, 23 June 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/academic-faces-sack-for-letter-to-sunday-times-that-criticised-trans-training-gnbr8gxgm>; Melanie Yergeau, ‘Letter to Disability & Society editorial board’, ipetitions, <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/ds>.

⁹⁷⁷ Nigel Biggar, ‘Ethics and empire: an open letter from Oxford scholars’, The Conversation, 19 December 2017, <https://theconversation.com/ethics-and-empire-an-open-letter-from-oxford-scholars-89333>.

⁹⁷⁸ Damian Whitworth, ‘Bloody new battle of British Empire as 60 dons write open letter to Nigel Biggar’, *The Times*, 23 December 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bloody-new-battle-of-british-empire-as-60-dons-write-open-letter-to-nigel-biggar-kzj8gvhx3>.

⁹⁷⁹ Jack Malvern, Matt Dathan and Henry Zeffman, ‘Queen’s birthday honours: Nigel Biggar appointed CBE after storm over his colonial views’, *The Times*, 12 June 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/queen-s-birthday-honours-nigel-biggar-appointed-cbe-after-storm-over-his-colonial-views-rzs7c9jbp>.

- In August 2017, Mary Beard, Professor of Classics at the University of Cambridge, was subjected to what she called “a torrent of aggressive insults” on social media after she defended as “pretty accurate” a BBC schools cartoon featuring a high-ranking black Roman soldier. In response to Far-Right conspiracy theorist Paul Joseph Watson tweeting that the cartoon was historically inaccurate (elsewhere he claimed it was “the left [...] trying to re-write history to pretend Britain always had mass immigration”⁹⁸⁰), Prof Beard had said, “there’s plenty of firm evidence for ethnic diversity in Roman Britain”.⁹⁸¹ After this, she was subjected to attacks on social media for, in her words, “everything from my historical competence, my elitist ivory tower viewpoint to my age, shape and gender (batty old broad, obese, etc etc)”.⁹⁸²
- In October 2015, the women’s student officer at Cardiff University started an online petition calling on her university to cancel a planned lecture by Australian writer and academic Professor Germaine Greer.⁹⁸³ More than 3,000 people signed the petition that alleged Prof Greer should be prevented from speaking because she had “demonstrated misogynistic views towards trans women, including continually misgendering trans women and denying the existence of transphobia altogether”.⁹⁸⁴ The event went ahead under high security, including uniformed police officers inside the lecture theatre,⁹⁸⁵ with a small peaceful protest organised by a local trans activist and comedian.⁹⁸⁶

Visiting Non-Academic Speakers

4.92 Along with academics, elected politicians, visiting diplomats and commentators visiting university campuses have all also faced harassment and intimidation.

- In May 2022, the radical transgender campaign group Trans Action Warwick disrupted a talk to the student Conservative Association by the

⁹⁸⁰ Paul Joseph Watson made this allegation in July 2017 in a post on InfoWars, run by American conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and described by the BBC as a “far-right conspiracy website”. For Watson’s post: Paul Joseph Watson, ‘BBC DEPICTS BLACK PEOPLE AS “TYPICAL” FAMILY IN ROMAN BRITAIN’ Infowars, 27 July 2017, <https://www.infowars.com/bbc-depicts-black-people-as-typical-family-in-roman-britain/>; link broken, archived on 9 August 20217, see: <https://web.archive.org/web/20170809211708/https://www.infowars.com/bbc-depicts-black-people-as-typical-family-in-roman-britain/>

⁹⁸¹ ‘this is indeed pretty accurate, there’s plenty of firm evidence for ethnic diversity in Roman Britain’, Mary Beard, Twitter, 25 July 2017, <https://twitter.com/wmarybeard/status/889925415032299520>; for the BBC’s description, see ‘Alt-right editor challenges journalists to visit Sweden’, BBC News, 21 February 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-39033165>.

⁹⁸² Mary Beard, ‘Roman Britain in Black and White’, TLS, <https://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/roman-britain-black-white/>.

⁹⁸³ Ben Quinn, ‘Petition urges Cardiff University to cancel Germaine Greer lecture’, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/oct/23/petition-urges-cardiff-university-to-cancel-germaine-greer-lecture>.

⁹⁸⁴ Steven Morris, ‘Germaine Greer gives university lecture despite campaign to silence her’, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/18/transgender-activists-protest-germaine-greer-lecture-cardiff-university>.

⁹⁸⁵ Steven Morris, ‘Germaine Greer gives university lecture despite campaign to silence her’, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/18/transgender-activists-protest-germaine-greer-lecture-cardiff-university>.

⁹⁸⁶ Payton Quinn, ‘Germaine Greer: Entitled to Free Speech but Not Above the Law’, *Huffington Post*, 20 November 2015, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/payton-quinn/germaine-greer-lecture_b_8602382.html.

Education Secretary at the time, Nadhim Zahawi MP.⁹⁸⁷ The group, whose Twitter logo combines the trans rights and anarchist Antifa flag,⁹⁸⁸ posted a video that showed the Minister being drowned out by music and chanting and protestors chanting “Tory scum” at audience members as they left.⁹⁸⁹ Prior to the event, Warwick Pride issued an open letter accusing him of inciting hatred because he had defined women as “adult human females” and alleging that he “plays a significant role in institutional transphobia”.⁹⁹⁰ Zahawi was escorted off campus after the event by security guards as protestors attempted to follow him.⁹⁹¹

- In November 2021, the Israeli ambassador to the UK, Tzipi Hotovely, was harassed by pro-Palestinian protestors as she left an event at the London School of Economics (LSE). Around 100 demonstrators, mostly students,⁹⁹² gathered outside the building entrance, shouting slogans such as “Israel is a terrorist state”, with footage showing several rushing towards the ambassador as she left.⁹⁹³ Hotovely’s treatment was condemned by several government ministers and opposition politicians.⁹⁹⁴ An LSE spokesperson said that the university had been “aware of some threats of violence made on social media around this event”.⁹⁹⁵ Police officers were present, but no arrests were made.⁹⁹⁶
- In February 2018, Bristol Anti-Fascists disrupted a talk by Jacob Rees-Mogg MP at the University of West England in Bristol. Six black-clad activists, some with their faces covered with scarves and dark glasses, broke into the lecture theatre and shouted abuse, calling Rees-Mogg a “bigot”, “fascist” and “racist”, and fought with audience members.⁹⁹⁷ Claiming responsibility, Bristol Anti-Fascists said: “Militant antifascists

⁹⁸⁷ Trans Action Warwick’s twitter biography states “Tranarchy, fuck the daily mail Warwick students against a gendered existence”. Tranarchy is a portmanteau, combining the words transgender and anarchy, to refer to a sociopolitical movement based on aspects of radical queer politics and anarchy. See Trans Action Warwick, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/TransWarwick> and Tranarchy, Urban Dictionary, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Tranarchy>.

⁹⁸⁸ Trans Action Warwick, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/TransWarwick/photo>

⁹⁸⁹ ‘On Friday we disrupted Nadhim Zahawi speaking at the university of Warwick. This response should be natural for students. No to transphobia, resist a gendered existence.’, Trans Action Warwick, Twitter, 1 June 2022, <https://twitter.com/TransWarwick/status/1531939156879937536>.

⁹⁹⁰ Ewan Somerville, ‘Watch: Trans activists hound Nadhim Zahawi off university campus’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/05/30/watch-trans-activists-hound-nadhim-zahawi-university-campus/>.

⁹⁹¹ Ewan Somerville, ‘Watch: Trans activists hound Nadhim Zahawi off university campus’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/05/30/watch-trans-activists-hound-nadhim-zahawi-university-campus/>.

⁹⁹² Sayf Abdeen, ‘I demonstrated against Tzipi Hotovely’s appearance at LSE. This is why’, *Independent*, 24 November 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/tzipi-hotovely-lse-protest-palestine-israel-b1963605.html>.

⁹⁹³ Holly Bancroft, ‘Israeli ambassador to UK rushed out of LSE after pro-Palestine protests’, *Independent*, 10 November 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/israeli-ambassador-to-uk-rushed-out-of-lse-after-propalestine-protests-b1954954.html>.

⁹⁹⁴ Sayf Abdeen, ‘I demonstrated against Tzipi Hotovely’s appearance at LSE. This is why’, *Independent*, 24 November 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/tzipi-hotovely-lse-protest-palestine-israel-b1963605.html>.

⁹⁹⁵ ‘Israeli ambassador protest: LSE investigating threats against Tzipi Hotovely’, *BBC News*, 10 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-59240890>.

⁹⁹⁶ ‘Israeli ambassador protest: LSE investigating threats against Tzipi Hotovely’, *BBC News*, 10 November 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-59240890>.

⁹⁹⁷ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, ‘Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism’, *Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats*, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>; p. 68.

aren't concerned with free speech so much as with self-defence, and the defence of marginalised communities from the real, physical threat of fascism".⁹⁹⁸ While Rees-Mogg said they were not "physically threatening", several opposition MPs tweeted their condemnation of the tactics used. No arrests were made.⁹⁹⁹

- In June 2019, feminist writer Julie Bindel was verbally abused and lunged at by a transgender woman following an event on women's sex-based rights at the University of Edinburgh at which she was the keynote speaker.¹⁰⁰⁰ Bindel said that protestors had tried to cancel the event and then picketed it holding placards with slogans such as "No Terfs on our turf" and chanting "Die cis scum" (cis is short for cisgender, meaning a person who is not transgender). She also described how when she left one remaining protestor ran up to her, screamed "scum", "Terf" and "bigot" before lunging at her, and had to be restrained by security guards.¹⁰⁰¹ On the evening of the event, transwoman Cathy Brennan tweeted, "Lost my shot [shit] at Bindel. She filmed me. I'm safe", before clarifying, "truth of the matter is that I did not raise a fist. I attempted to push past security so I could speak face to face with a person who has caused great harm to trans people across this country".¹⁰⁰²

4.93 I am concerned about the potential scale of both intimidation and self-censorship on campus. A 2022 report by King's College London found that three in ten student respondents were not able to agree with the statement "academics are free to express their views at my university".¹⁰⁰³ Thirty-four percent of students said free speech was very or fairly threatened in their university, and one in four (25%) reported hearing very or fairly often of incidents at their university where free speech has been inhibited – a doubling since previous polling in 2019.¹⁰⁰⁴ Research by the think tank Policy Exchange found that fewer than four in ten academics surveyed were willing to sit down to lunch with a gender critical feminist who opposes the right of transwoman

⁹⁹⁸ Nigel Copsey and Samuel Merrill, 'Understanding 21st-Century Militant Anti-Fascism', Centre for Research and Evidence on Security Threats, 14 April 2021, <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/understanding-21st-century-militant-anti-fascism/>, p. 68.

⁹⁹⁹ Rowena Mason and Damien Gayle, 'Jacob Rees-Mogg involved in scuffle during university campus protest', *The Guardian*, 3 February 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/feb/02/jacob-rees-mogg-involved-in-scuffle-at-university-campus>.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Gina Davidson, 'Feminist speaker Julie Bindel 'attacked by transgender person' at Edinburgh University after talk', *The Scotsman*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.scotsman.com/news/scottish-news/feminist-speaker-julie-bindel-attacked-by-transgender-person-at-edinburgh-university-after-talk-545841>.

¹⁰⁰¹ Julie Bindel, 'Julie Bindel: the man in a skirt called me a Nazi — then attacked', *The Sunday Times*, 9 June 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/julie-bindel-the-man-in-a-skirt-called-me-a-nazi-then-attacked-8dfwk8jft>.

¹⁰⁰² Gina Davidson, 'Feminist speaker Julie Bindel 'attacked by transgender person' at Edinburgh University after talk', *The Scotsman*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.scotsman.com/news/scottish-news/feminist-speaker-julie-bindel-attacked-by-transgender-person-at-edinburgh-university-after-talk-545841>.

¹⁰⁰³ Twelve percent disagreed and two percent strongly disagreed 'The state of free speech in UK universities: what students and the public think', The Policy Institute, Kings College London, September 2022, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/the-state-of-free-speech-in-uk-universities.pdf>, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰⁴ 'The state of free speech in UK universities: what students and the public think', The Policy Institute, Kings College London, September 2022, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/the-state-of-free-speech-in-uk-universities.pdf>, pp. 11-12.

to enter women's shelters. Over one in three academics admitted that they would discriminate against a Leave supporter when hiring.¹⁰⁰⁵

- 4.94 The situation is also acute for Jewish academics. In a 2023 report, the Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism, Lord Mann, highlighted the ways in which academic culture in UK universities can stifle and intimidate Jewish staff. Many reported self-censoring on Israel-Palestine over fears of antisemitic ramifications, while colleagues refused to work with one academic after discovering their Israeli roots. Mann identifies the contradiction between many academics' calls for boycotts, which infringe free speech, and their calls to revoke the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, or IHRA, definition of antisemitism on the grounds that it infringes on academic freedom.¹⁰⁰⁶
- 4.95 It is concerning to me that universities are becoming closed spaces where ideas are not open to discussion. I also note the exacerbating role played by social media and the anonymity it can afford protesters, and the failings by university authorities, at times, to both protect staff and discipline students (where appropriate). It is perverse to me that individual academics have been so aggressively targeted – even hounded off campus – so that people can be protected from so-called harmful ideas. Not only does this have a chilling effect on other students and academics but it is also detrimental to the purpose of higher education, to the rigour of intellectual debate in this country, and to a thriving society.

Schools

- 4.96 What is taught in schools is broadly determined by a democratically accountable government, through the Department for Education, the national curriculum (where applicable¹⁰⁰⁷), and the schools' regulator, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) (or similar¹⁰⁰⁸).

¹⁰⁰⁵ 'HIGHER EDUCATION (FREEDOM OF SPEECH) BILL', A Policy Exchange Briefing Paper, October 2022, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Higher-Education-Freedom-of-Speech-Bill-.pdf>; p. 2.

¹⁰⁰⁶ 'Understanding Jewish Experience in Higher Education', Parliamentary Taskforce on Antisemitism in Higher Education, The Office of HM Government's Independent Adviser on Antisemitism, <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/HE-Taskforce-Report.pdf>; para. 6.17-6.19.

¹⁰⁰⁷ The degree of autonomy a school has over its teaching varies depending on the type of school. Most schools that receive funding through their local authority – known as local-authority-maintained schools or community schools – must follow the national curriculum, a set of subjects and standards provided by Department for Education. 'Types of School', Gov.uk, <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school>; 'National Curriculum', gov.uk, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-curriculum>. Other state schools like academies and free schools do not have to follow the national curriculum (although many do) but must teach a "broad and balanced curriculum", which includes teaching English, maths, science, and Religious Education. Nerys Roberts, 'Briefing Paper. The school curriculum in England', House of Commons Library, 26 March 2021, <https://assets-learning.parliament.uk/uploads/2021/04/Teacher-Network-Briefing-Paper-School-Curriculum-in-England-pdf.pdf>; p. 3 & 4. Private schools are not required to follow the national curriculum but must be registered with the Department for Education, have a written policy on their curriculum, and are regularly inspected. 'Types of school', CORAM Child Law Advice, <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/types-of-school/>; 'Independent Schools', CORAM Child Law Advice, <https://childlawadvice.org.uk/information-pages/independent-schools/>.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Approximately half of private schools are regulated by Ofsted. Otherwise, the Independent Schools Inspectorate has been appointed by the Department for Education to inspect schools that are members of the associations that form the Independent Schools Council in

- 4.97 One area that has become a point of contention among some parents and led to aggressive protests outside schools has been statutory changes to schools' provision of relationships and sex education and the accompanying focus on that issue.¹⁰⁰⁹ So-called blasphemy incidents are another area which has led to campaigns targeting specific schools.
- 4.98 While it is right that schools consult parents on sensitive issues, it should never be for parents or protest groups to use harassment or intimidation to dictate what happens in the classroom. I have seen evidence of aggressive protests targeting schools, some singling out specific members of staff, and creating a hostile atmosphere for children and staff attending the school. At times, the potential for violence has also been a concern.

Anti-LGBT Protests at Birmingham Primary Schools

- 4.99 Between January and June 2019, several primary schools in Birmingham were subjected to aggressive protests by parents and other activists who opposed the schools' teaching of LGBT issues.¹⁰¹⁰ A high court judge later ruled that some of the demonstrators had, at times, gone beyond lawful limits of protest and intervened to protect the staff and students.¹⁰¹¹
- 4.100 Two schools where most pupils are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage, Parkfield Community School and Anderton Park,¹⁰¹² were particularly targeted.¹⁰¹³ In January 2019, a parent at Parkfield began an online petition against a lesson programme called No Outsiders, designed to teach pupils about groups protected under the Equalities Act 2010,¹⁰¹⁴ and this was quickly followed by protests outside the school.¹⁰¹⁵ Those protesting claimed the lessons were not age appropriate and that some elements went against

England. 'Types of School', gov.uk, <https://www.gov.uk/types-of-school/private-schools>; 'About Us', Independent Schools Inspectorate, <https://www.isi.net/about/>.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Since September 2020, all state-funded primary schools have a duty to teach relationships (and health) education and all state-funded secondary schools have a duty to teach relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education. Recognising the sensitivities around the subject matter, the government encourages schools to "work closely with parents when planning and delivering these subjects" and to consider pupils' religious backgrounds, while recognising the needs of LGBT students. Parents also have the right to withdraw their child from parts of sex education. See 'Statutory guidance. Introduction to requirements', Department for Education, 13 September 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/introduction-to-requirements>.

¹⁰¹⁰ 'Challenging Hateful Extremism', Commission for Countering Extremism, October 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf, pp. 65-69.

¹⁰¹¹ 'Birmingham City Council v Afsar & Ors', Casemine, 18 June 2019, <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5d0a28d32c94e073e4da8eaf>; paras. 72-74; 'High Court Judgement. Case No: F90BM116', 26 November 2019, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Birmingham-CC-v-Afsar-No-3-2019-EWHC-3217-QB-Final.pdf>; paras. 21 (3) & (4).

¹⁰¹² <https://web.archive.org/web/20230408165547/https://files.api.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50062382>, p. 2; 'School report. Anderton Park Primary School', Ofsted, 5-6 December 2017, <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/2749421>; p. 10.

¹⁰¹³ 'Birmingham LGBT teaching row: How did it unfold?', BBC News, 22 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-48351401>.

¹⁰¹⁴ 'Parents protest over Birmingham school's LGBT equality teaching', BBC News, 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47040451>.

¹⁰¹⁵ 'Birmingham LGBT teaching row: How did it unfold?', BBC News, 22 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-48351401>

Islam,¹⁰¹⁶ and they objected to books and teaching materials that included families with same sex couples.¹⁰¹⁷

- 4.101 The nature of the protests was intimidatory and, at times, homophobic. Initially, Parkfield reported that assistant head Andrew Moffat, author of the No Outsiders programme and who is gay,¹⁰¹⁸ had met with concerned parents until some became “personal and aggressive”.¹⁰¹⁹ Moffat said he received “nasty emails” and threats, with one warning he “wouldn't last long”,¹⁰²⁰ and had to be escorted in and out of school premises.¹⁰²¹ Moffat later said that he had “never faced open homophobia and insults” as he did during that time, including having “children taunt [him] about being gay to [his] face”.¹⁰²²
- 4.102 By March 2019, seven primary schools in Birmingham had suspended the No Outsiders programme.¹⁰²³ BBC Newsnight footage shows protestors outside Parkfield using a mobile stage and a microphone to claim victory for the suspension, claiming “we're going to have it abolished in every school in Birmingham, every school in the country”.¹⁰²⁴ One of the lead campaigners, Amir Ahmed, told the programme that children were being “condition[ed]” to believe that homosexuality was “a normal way of life”.¹⁰²⁵ Hazel Pulley, head of the trust that ran Parkfield at the time warned that staff were “distraught” and described the situation as the most challenging she had witnessed during her 27 years in education.¹⁰²⁶
- 4.103 Similar protests outside Anderton Park began in March 2019.¹⁰²⁷ Although the school does not teach No Outsiders, protestors argued that its teaching was “the same”.¹⁰²⁸ A high court judge found that protestors had gathered outside

¹⁰¹⁶ ‘Parents protest over Birmingham school's LGBT equality teaching’, BBC News, 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47040451>; Sima Kotecha, ‘Birmingham LGBT lessons row school staff 'distraught'’, BBC News, 25 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47692617>.

¹⁰¹⁷ Sima Kotecha, ‘Birmingham LGBT lessons row school staff 'distraught'’, BBC News, 25 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47692617>; ‘Sex education: The clash of LGBT and religious rights – BBC Newsnight’, BBC Newsnight, YouTube, 15 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKdzYmVSMus>. [1:40]

¹⁰¹⁸ ‘Birmingham LGBT teaching row: How did it unfold?’, BBC News, 22 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-48351401>.

¹⁰¹⁹ ‘Parents protest over Birmingham school's LGBT equality teaching’, BBC News, 29 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47040451>.

¹⁰²⁰ ‘Birmingham LGBT teaching row: How did it unfold?’, BBC News, 22 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-48351401>.

¹⁰²¹ Matt Bagwell, ‘How Protests Over Diversity Lessons In Birmingham Ended In A Win For LGBTQ+ People Everywhere’, *Huffington Post*, 28 June 2020, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/andrew-moffat-interview-parkfield-school-no-outsiders-protests-one-year-on_uk_5ef5ecadc5b612083c4c57bf.

¹⁰²² Jane Haynes, ‘School LGBT equality protests coincide with 'biggest ever' spike in homophobic hate incidents’, *Birmingham Live*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/school-lgbt-equality-protests-coincide-16700555>.

¹⁰²³ ‘Sex education: The clash of LGBT and religious rights – BBC Newsnight’, BBC News Night, YouTube, 15 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKdzYmVSMus>. [2:32]

¹⁰²⁴ ‘Sex education: The clash of LGBT and religious rights – BBC Newsnight’, BBC News Night, YouTube, 15 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKdzYmVSMus>.

¹⁰²⁵ ‘Sex education: The clash of LGBT and religious rights – BBC Newsnight’, BBC News Night, YouTube, 15 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKdzYmVSMus>. [2:08]

¹⁰²⁶ Sima Kotecha, ‘Birmingham LGBT lessons row school staff 'distraught'’, BBC News, 25 March 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-47692617>.

¹⁰²⁷ ‘Anderton Park school to close early amid protests’, BBC News, 23 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-48382358>.

¹⁰²⁸ ‘Anderton Park school to close early amid protests’, BBC News, 23 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-48382358>.

the school, shouting aggressively, and using a megaphone, using intimidating body language towards staff in the street, and blocking the way as parents took their children to school. He also found evidence of allegations against the school of paedophilia and of abusive social media messages towards staff.¹⁰²⁹ BBC Newsnight saw evidence of homophobic messages in a WhatsApp group used by the activists.¹⁰³⁰

4.104 The continuous presence of protestors created an intimidating atmosphere for staff and pupils. In May 2019, head teacher at Anderton Park, Sarah Hewitt-Clarkson, said that her pupils were “fed up” and some were “scared” having to walk past protestors “screaming down a megaphone” as they leave school every day”.¹⁰³¹ That month, as demonstrations escalated significantly, the school decided to close early ahead of half term.¹⁰³² Ian Ward, Birmingham City Council leader at the time, described the protests as “increasingly unpleasant”, while Labour MP for Birmingham Yardley Jess Phillips condemned the fact that Anderton Park had been “forced to shut because of bullies and bigots”.¹⁰³³ Data from this period indicates that there was a significant increase in homophobic hate crime in Birmingham that coincided with the school protests.¹⁰³⁴

4.105 Independent mediation between the school and the parents at Anderton Park was set up by Birmingham City Council in May 2019, however, this quickly broke down and the council was forced to make an urgent application for an interim injunction to protect the area surrounding the school,¹⁰³⁵ saying at the time that it had done so because “the risk of harm to staff, parents and children [had] become too serious to tolerate”.¹⁰³⁶ Specifically, the injunction prohibited certain individuals from entering a designated area around the

¹⁰²⁹ ‘Birmingham City Council v Afsar & Ors’, Casemine, 18 June 2019,

<https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5d0a28d32c94e073e4da8eaf>; para. 72.

¹⁰³⁰ ‘Sex education: The clash of LGBT and religious rights – BBC Newsnight’, BBC Newsnight, YouTube, 15 May 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKdzYmVSMus>. [4:40]

¹⁰³¹ ‘Birmingham LGBT lessons: MP ‘has not read the books’’, BBC News, 22 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-48370510>.

¹⁰³² ‘Anderton Park school to close early amid protests’, BBC News, 23 May 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-48382358>.

¹⁰³³ ‘Anderton Park school to close early amid protests’, BBC News, 23 May 2019 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-48382358>.

¹⁰³⁴ Data from West Midlands Police Number showed that the number of reported hate incidents based on homophobia nearly doubled since the protests began with 453 incidents in the six months from February 2019 to July 2019, up from 274 in the previous six months from August 2018 to January 2019. In Birmingham East – the area in which Anderton Park is located – there were 26 incidents in March 2019, compared to just six incidents in March 2018, meaning a rise of 333%. Jane Haynes, ‘School LGBT equality protests coincide with ‘biggest ever’ spike in homophobic hate incidents’, *Birmingham Live*, 5 August 2019, <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/school-lgbt-equality-protests-coincide-16700555>; Nazia Parveen, ‘Rise in homophobic attacks’ in Birmingham after LGBT teaching protests’, *The Guardian*, 15 October 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/oct/15/rise-in-homophobic-attacks-in-birmingham-after-lgbt-teaching-protests>.

¹⁰³⁵ ‘Challenging Hateful Extremism’, Commission for Countering Extremism, October 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf.

¹⁰³⁶ ‘Anderton Park Primary School protests: High Court awards interim injunction’, Birmingham City Council, 31 May 2019, https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/news/article/424/anderton_park_primary_school_protests_high_court_awards_interim_injunction.

school, known as an exclusion zone.¹⁰³⁷ In November 2021, the High Court ordered that the exclusion zone be made permanent and that the protestors pay 80% of the court costs.¹⁰³⁸

4.106 While some of the protestors were parents, several others were not. Only one of the three named individuals against whom Birmingham council obtained injunctions was a parent at Anderton Park; neither of the ringleaders, Shakeel Afsar nor Amir Ahmed, were a parent.¹⁰³⁹ In her 2019 report as Commissioner for Countering Extremism, Sara Khan linked the protests to the 2014 Trojan Horse affair, describing hearing from local headteachers that “the threat of Islamist agitation in the area was constant” and that the LGBT protests were just the latest manifestation.¹⁰⁴⁰ At least one of those individuals encouraging the protests was Trojan Horse ringleader Tahir Alam.¹⁰⁴¹ Khan also showed how the Birmingham protestors were also encouraged by a national anti-relationship and sex education campaign called StopRSE as well as the revolutionary Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir (proscribed in January 2024¹⁰⁴²) and the Islamist website 5Pillars.¹⁰⁴³ The protestors were also joined by London-based Charedi activist Shraga Stern who claimed the teaching was “sexualising kids”.¹⁰⁴⁴ It is clear, therefore, that some of those encouraging the protests used them as an opportunity to agitate on behalf of their extremist views.

Blasphemy Protests at Secondary Schools in Batley and Wakefield

4.107 Two incidents of anti-blasphemy protests in secondary schools in recent years stand out and they relate to anger over a cartoon of Islam’s prophet as a teaching resource and allegations that a student has disrespected Islam’s holy book, the Quran.

¹⁰³⁷ High Court Judgement, Case No: F90BM116, 26 November 2019, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Birmingham-CC-v-Afsar-No-3-2019-EWHC-3217-QB-Final.pdf>; para. 5.

¹⁰³⁸ Nazia Parveen, ‘Birmingham anti-LGBT school protesters had ‘misinterpreted’ teachings, judge says’, *The Guardian*, 26 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/nov/26/birmingham-anti-lgbt-school-protests-judge-ban-permanent>.

¹⁰³⁹ High Court Judgement, Case No: F90BM116, 26 November 2019, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Birmingham-CC-v-Afsar-No-3-2019-EWHC-3217-QB-Final.pdf>; para. 4.

¹⁰⁴⁰ ‘Challenging Hateful Extremism’, Commission for Countering Extremism, October 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf; p. 65.

¹⁰⁴¹ Neil Johnston, ‘Banned school governor Tahir Alam fights gay equality lessons’, *The Times*, 13 February 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/banned-school-governor-tahir-alam-fights-gay-lessons-qkqgwfqnq>.

¹⁰⁴² ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir proscribed as terrorist organisation’, gov.uk, 19 January 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizb-ut-tahrir-proscribed-as-terrorist-organisation>.

¹⁰⁴³ ‘Challenging Hateful Extremism’, Commission for Countering Extremism, October 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf; pp. 65 & 67.

¹⁰⁴⁴ ‘Jewish brother, Shraga Stern travelled from London to support the parents who are calling for #NoOutsiders to be scrapped’, Alum Rock Community Forum, Facebook, 4 March 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?mibextid=rS40aB7S9Ucbxw6v&v=401049733994243>; Lee Harpin and Simon Rocker, ‘Jeremy Corbyn condemned for meeting anti-LGBT education Charedi activist Shraga Stern’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 17 July 2019, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/jeremy-corbyn-condemned-for-meeting-anti-lgbt-charedi-activist-shraga-stern-1.486579>.

- 4.108 In March 2021, Batley Grammar School in Batley, West Yorkshire, became the focus of angry demonstrations and a vicious online campaign after a teacher used a cartoon of Islam’s prophet as a teaching resource during a lesson on free speech.¹⁰⁴⁵ Local activists circulated messages on social media that named the teacher and encouraged people to gather outside the school to demand that he be sacked. The messages additionally alleged that the teacher had “deliberately showed derogatory caricatures (French Cartoons) of our beloved Prophet” and urged people to turn up “to fulfil our duty of defending the honour of RasoolAllah [the prophet of Allah].¹⁰⁴⁶
- 4.109 The murder of French school teacher Samuel Paty months earlier, following a similar Islamist campaign accusing him of blasphemy, demonstrated the serious security concerns for the teacher arising from this kind of allegation.¹⁰⁴⁷ Despite this, various local actors continued to name him. Batley-based charity Purpose of Life publicised the teacher’s identity when it tweeted an image of a letter that the charity’s CEO had sent to the school’s headteacher demanding that the teacher be “permanently removed” from the school and warning that “the fallout from will be far reaching”.¹⁰⁴⁸ Adil Shahzad, imam of the Al-Hikam Institute in Bradford, also named the teacher in two online posts which can still be seen, and include an open letter to the Prime Minister.¹⁰⁴⁹ Additionally, several national Islamist organisations joined in the campaign online, repeating the allegation of blasphemy, and potentially further escalating the situation.¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁴⁵ William Shawcross CVO, Independent Review of Prevent, February 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf; para. 6.293

¹⁰⁴⁶ For tweet sharing an image of a WhatsApp message encouraging a protest on Thursday 25 March 2021. ‘URGENT #PROTEST’, Muslim Voice UK, Twitter, 24 March 2021, <https://twitter.com/MuslimVoiceUK/status/1374860660346122243?s=20>; and for a similarly worded Facebook post encouraging a second protest on Friday 26 March 2021 see Mellissa Dzinzi, ‘Second protest at Batley Grammar School ‘to defend Prophet Muhammad’s honour’ and show them ‘we won’t go away’’, *Yorkshire Live*, 25 March 2021, <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/local-news/second-protest-batley-grammar-school-20259126>.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Colin Drury, ‘Batley Grammar School: Teacher fears he will be killed amid continuing cartoon anger’, *Independent*, 30 March 2021, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/batley-grammar-school-latest-cartoon-row-protests-b1824270.html>.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Letter to Helen Stephenson CBE, Charity Commission from Toby Young, General Secretary, Free Speech Union, 25 March 2021, <https://freespeechunion.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Letter-to-CC-re.-Batley-Grammar-School-26.03.21-1.pdf>.

¹⁰⁴⁹ ‘A letter has been drafted (see below). All you need to do is copy and paste the letter onto your email, add your name at bottom of the letter and email it to the following addresses:’, Muhammad Adil Shahzad, Facebook, 27 March 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/muhammadadil.shahzad.75/posts/280151760310854>; ‘An open letter to the PM from Muslim Action Forum signed by over 120 scholars voicing their concerns on the recent incident at the Batley Grammar School.’, Muhammad Adil Shahzad, Facebook, 2 April 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/muhammadadil.shahzad.75/posts/283819226610774>.

¹⁰⁵⁰ For example, the Islamist website 5Pillars did not name the teacher but claimed to have confirmed the blasphemy allegation. See ‘Yorkshire school apologises after teacher shows blasphemous images of Prophet Muhammad’ 5Pillars, 25 March 2021, <https://5pillarsuk.com/2021/03/25/yorkshire-school-apologises-after-teacher-shows-blasphemous-images-of-prophet-muhammad/>. The Islamist-aligned group MEND also did not name the teacher but published several press releases repeating the allegations and calling for “action to be taken against the teacher” ‘MEND statement on the displaying of images of the Prophet Mohammad at Batley Grammar School’, MEND, 25 March 2021, <https://www.mend.org.uk/mend-statement-on-the-displaying-of-images-of-the-prophet-mohammad-at-batley-grammar-school/>; ‘MEND PRESS RELEASE: Use of Islamophobic caricature of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) at Batley Grammar School – 26th March 2021’, Mend, 26 March 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210326161804/https://www.mend.org.uk/mend-press-release-use-of-islamophobic-caricature-of-the-prophet-muhammad-pbuh-at-batley-grammar-school-26th-march-2021/>. Reiterated in the ‘Campaign Groups and Muslim Organisations Respond to Events at Batley Grammar School’, Policy Exchange, 1 April 2021, <https://policyexchange.org.uk/blogs/campaign-groups-and-muslim-organisations-respond-to-events-at-batley-grammar-school/>.

4.110 As well as forcing a teacher and his family to flee their home and to go into hiding, the demonstrations led to the school being forced to close for several days, with staff and teachers encouraged to stay away from this place of learning.¹⁰⁵¹ An independent inquiry subsequently determined that the teacher, who had been suspended at the time, had not intended to cause any offence when using the cartoon during a religious studies lesson and that he should be allowed to return to his post.¹⁰⁵² In March 2021, a year on from the protests, it was reported that the teacher was still in hiding and had not been able to return to his home or place of work.¹⁰⁵³ The demonstrations, and the implicit threat of violence associated with allegations of blasphemy, effectively exercised a form of veto over what is taught in British classrooms. These threats have imposed a severe penalty on a teacher and his family, who had not broken any law. Beyond providing police protection,¹⁰⁵⁴ the state appears to have proven powerless to enable an individual to continue with his ordinary life, in the face of threats and intimidation from extreme protesters.

4.111 In February 2023, Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield, West Yorkshire, faced angry allegations online that a copy of the Quran had been damaged on school premises after a group of 14-year-old male pupils had made a bet that involved one of them bringing it into school.¹⁰⁵⁵ Inaccurate reports circulated online that the book had been burnt or destroyed,¹⁰⁵⁶ including local Labour councillor Usman Ali tweeting that the Quran had been “desecrated” in what he called “a serious provocative action which needs to be dealt with urgently by all the authorities, namely the police, the school and the local authority”.¹⁰⁵⁷ Ali has since deleted the tweet. The boy in question, who has high-functioning autism, received multiple death threats.¹⁰⁵⁸

4.112 The school responded by suspending the four boys involved and meeting with leaders from the local Wakefield mosque Jamia Masjid Swafia, local Muslim

¹⁰⁵¹ Gareth Davies, ‘Batley Grammar School closes for second day as protesters gather in wake of Prophet Mohammed row’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 March 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/26/batley-grammar-school-closes-second-day-protesters-gather-wake/>.

¹⁰⁵² Charlotte Wace, ‘Batley Grammar School teacher still in hiding after threats over Prophet cartoon’, *The Times*, 19 June 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/batley-grammar-school-teacher-still-in-hiding-after-threats-over-prophet-cartoon-lqcmcxg9j>.

¹⁰⁵³ Mark Hookham, ‘Teacher who showed his pupils a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammed is still in hiding a year after fleeing his home due to death threats’, *The Mail on Sunday*, 26 March 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10655679/Teacher-30-hiding-fleeing-showing-pupils-cartoon-Prophet-Mohammed.html>.

¹⁰⁵⁴ William Shawcross CVO, ‘Independent Review of Prevent’, February 2023, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf; para. 6.293

¹⁰⁵⁵ ‘Four Wakefield pupils suspended after Quran damaged at school’, BBC News, 24 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64757799>

¹⁰⁵⁶ ‘Four Wakefield pupils suspended after Quran damaged at school’, BBC News, 24 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64757799>

¹⁰⁵⁷ Usman Ali tweet, 24 February 2023, now deleted, visible here ‘Apologies for the addendum to the addendum, but here's another local Labour councillor doing his utmost to defuse and de-escalate the situation.’, Adrian Hilton, Twitter, 27 February 2023, https://twitter.com/Adrian_Hilton/status/1630202295743918080.

¹⁰⁵⁸ ‘Police speak to child about death threats after Quran damaged at Wakefield school’, BBC News, 4 March 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64835023>.

councillor Akef Akbar, and police.¹⁰⁵⁹ After considering protesting the school, the mosque stated, “there will NOT be a protest outside the school as they have agreed to further investigate the matter and have suspended 4 students”.¹⁰⁶⁰ Instead the mosque hosted a meeting that day, led by Imam Muhammad Mateen Anwar, with representatives from the West Midland Police and the school’s head teacher on a panel. It was reported that the school had enlisted the mosque to help quell tensions spreading online.¹⁰⁶¹

4.113 Footage of the meeting, however, shows that far from calming the situation, it was an exercise in implicit threats of violence and ritual humiliation. Imam Anwar reinforced the allegations of blasphemy against the pupils, stating: “When it comes to the honour of the Quran, we will stand and defend the honour of the Quran no matter what it takes [...] The slightest bit of disrespect is not accepted and is not going to be tolerated at any point, in any city, in any country, by any Muslim”. Anwar claimed support from the school and the police: “[the head teacher has] agreed to work with me, moving forward, simultaneously, to ensure that the children are educated with regards to the honour that these aspects of Islam have with the Muslims”. Despite the Imam’s fiery rhetoric, the headteacher and chief inspector agreed that this was a “very serious matter” and thanked the mosque for having “work[ed] hard today to try to dampen down tensions” respectively.¹⁰⁶²

4.114 The mother of one of the boys also addressed the congregation. Addressing an all-male audience while wearing a makeshift hijab, the boy’s mother apologised for her “incredibly disrespectful” son. Mentioning the death threats which made him “absolutely petrified” to return to school, she added “I don’t want anybody to be prosecuted for the stupidity of my son and his friends”.¹⁰⁶³

4.115 In my view it is inappropriate for a religious institution to become involved in matters of an unrelated school. That a mother felt it necessary to plead for mercy for her son in such an intimidating and partisan setting – one that the Home Secretary at the time described as looking “more like a sharia law trial” – is highly improper, and that it was seemingly done to deter public protests is shameful for all involved.

Key findings

¹⁰⁵⁹ ‘Four Wakefield pupils suspended after Quran damaged at school’, BBC News, 24 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-64757799>; ‘QUR’AN INCIDENT AT KETTLETHORPE HIGH SCHOOL’, Jamia Masjid Swafia, Facebook, 24 February 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=896734801622268>.

¹⁰⁶⁰ ‘QUR’AN INCIDENT AT KETTLETHORPE HIGH SCHOOL’, Jamia Masjid Swafia, Facebook, 24 February 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=896734801622268>.

¹⁰⁶¹ Harry Lambert, ‘Once upon a time in Wakefield’, *New Statesman*, 25 March 2023, <https://www.newstatesman.com/the-weekend-report/2023/03/inside-wakefield-koran-incident>

¹⁰⁶² ‘Community Meeting in relation to the Qur’an incident.’, Jamia Masjid Swafia, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=220999650384772 [46:15 and 48:13 respectively]

¹⁰⁶³ ‘Community Meeting in relation to the Qur’an incident.’, Jamia Masjid Swafia, Facebook, https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=220999650384772 [54:40]

- **Radical student activists have disrupted events and academic staff have faced targeted campaigns of harassment, sometimes encouraged by other academic staff. The potential scale of intimidation and self-censorship on campus is concerning, as is the exacerbating role played by social media. The closing of our universities to free debate has a chilling effect on other students and academics and damages intellectual inquiry in this country.**
- **There is evidence of aggressive protests targeting schools. In Birmingham primary schools recently, not only were the anti-LGBT protests intimidatory and, at times, homophobic, but they should also be seen as a continuation of long-standing agitation by local Islamists.**
- **The so-called blasphemy rows in secondary schools in the north of England and the implicit threat of violence associated with such allegations exercised a form of veto over what is taught in British classrooms and inappropriately involved religious institutions into internal school issues.**

5. Chapter Three: Public Attitudes Towards Political Violence and Disruption

Understanding Public Opinion

- 5.1 Any government response must be devised and implemented in accordance with democratic consent.
- 5.2 To obtain a better understanding of public views on political protest and disruption in the UK, I commissioned the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and Kantar Public to undertake focus groups and a representative online survey (respectively).¹⁰⁶⁴
- 5.3 This quantitative and qualitative research aimed to explore attitudes towards political protest, including views on causes, ways of protesting, and the violence and disruption which can result. I wanted to understand what the public thinks about political protests in general, and about what methods people view as legitimate.
- 5.4 It also intended to find out how the public viewed specific protests around certain subjects, such as climate change, namely Extinction Rebellion; anti-racism, namely the Black Lives Matter movement; and demonstrations opposing the removal or damage of statues and monuments connected with slavery or racism, namely Defend our Memorials. I think it is important to determine whether people have a different view of what tactics are acceptable depending on the cause.

Key Findings

- 5.5 A large majority of the British public support the fundamental political rights enjoyed in a liberal democracy. According to the polling, 70% of respondents agreed that protest was an important way to raise awareness about a cause.¹⁰⁶⁵

¹⁰⁶⁴ The research comprised two strands of data collection:

- A representative survey of members of the public, comprising 21 demographic and attitudinal questions. In total, 2,012 members of the public took part, selected using random probability sampling via Kantar's 'Public Voice' panel. The survey data was weighted to ensure a nationally representative spread across key demographic characteristics including age, gender, region, and socio-economic grade. Descriptive analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS.
- Twelve online focus groups which explored views in greater depth. Participants were purposively sampled to ensure diversity across key characteristics such as region, political affiliation, political activism, age, ethnicity, and socio-economic grade. Data were managed and analysed using NatCen's case and theme-based approach.

NatCen provided a report combining data from both the focus groups and the survey, hereafter known as 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021).

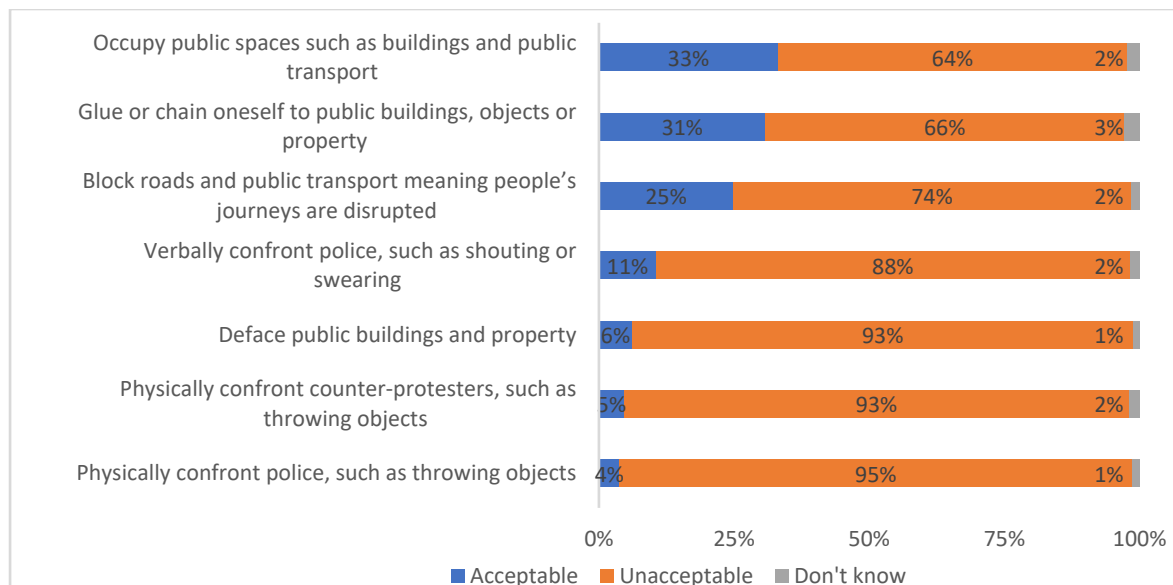
¹⁰⁶⁵ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), tables 10 & 11.

5.6 This polling showed that even more of the public are opposed to violence and the destruction of public property as part of protests: with over four in five (83%) agreeing it undermined the cause protestors claimed to support.¹⁰⁶⁶

Acceptability of Disruptive Protest Tactics

5.7 Most survey respondents (58%) believed that protests should not be allowed to disrupt the public going about their daily lives,¹⁰⁶⁷ and when presented with specific examples of disruption by protestors, respondents objected to these in greater numbers.

Figure 1: Acceptability of disruptive protest tactics.



Source: Kantar Public, Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism, March 2021, table 19.

5.8 Almost three quarters (74%) of survey respondents believed that it was unacceptable for protestors to block roads and public transport meaning people's journeys are disrupted. Nearly two thirds (64%) answered that protestors occupying public spaces such as buildings and public transport is not acceptable.

5.9 The public overwhelmingly finds violence in the name of political objectives to be unacceptable. Some 93% of survey respondents considered physical confrontations with counter protesters, while 95% thought physical confrontations with the police were unacceptable.

5.10 The public was similarly disapproving of violence towards public buildings and property, with 93% of survey respondents believing it to be unacceptable. A

¹⁰⁶⁶ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), tables 10 & 11.

¹⁰⁶⁷ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), tables 10 & 11; 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p.1.

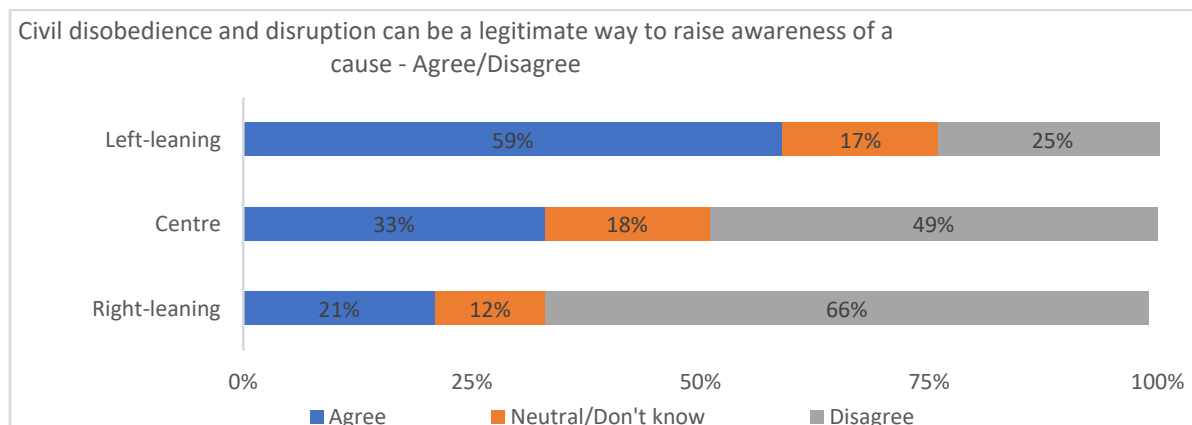
large majority (88%) also believed that verbal confrontation with the police was also unacceptable.

- 5.11 The public have strong views on the acceptability or otherwise of disruptive protest tactics, with only 3% or fewer respondents answering 'Don't know' for any of the tactics asked about.¹⁰⁶⁸
- 5.12 Focus group participants' support for protests decreased as methods become more violent. However, some felt that a level of disruption was necessary for a protest to have an impact.¹⁰⁶⁹

Views About Protest Causes

- 5.13 The polling also explored whether and how people's own political leaning impacted their view about the acceptability of tactics used in the name of a political cause.
- 5.14 On the question of whether civil disobedience and disruption is a legitimate way to raise awareness about a cause, views differed noticeably depending on respondents' political leanings.

Figure 2: Acceptability of civil disobedience and disruption by political leaning.



Source: Kantar Public, Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism, March 2021, table 17.

- 5.15 For left-leaning survey respondents, 59% agreed that civil disobedience and disruption could be a legitimate approach, as opposed to 25% who disagreed. Right-leaning respondents were more inclined to disagree with those methods – with 66% opposed and only 21% in favour. Respondents identifying with the political centre tended to take a view closer to those on the right. Only 33% of this group agreed disruptive tactics could be legitimate, whereas 49% of respondents said they were not.¹⁰⁷⁰

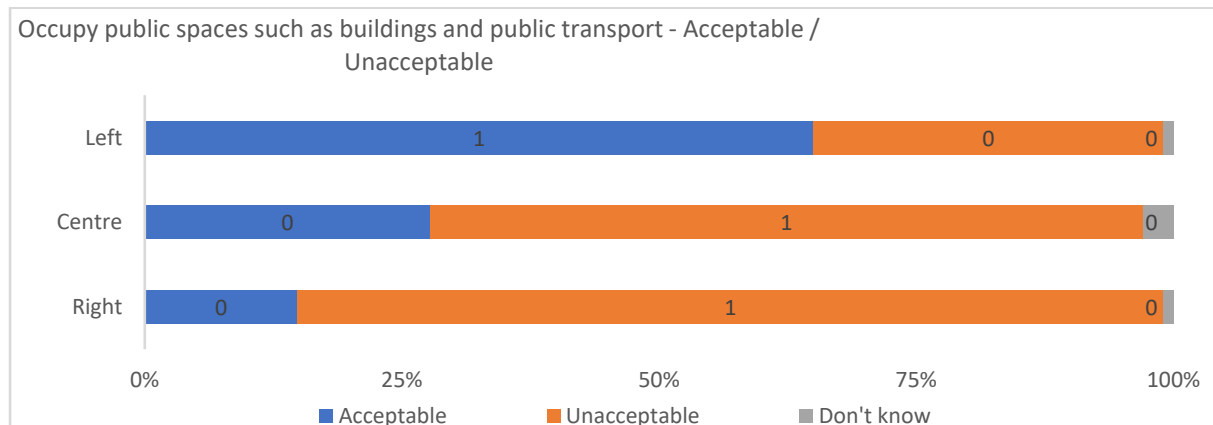
¹⁰⁶⁸ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 19.

¹⁰⁶⁹ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 1.

¹⁰⁷⁰ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 17.

5.16 The public's views on certain specific tactics – such as occupying public spaces, blocking roads, or attaching oneself to public buildings – also differed significantly depending on political leanings, with those on the left being much more inclined to support such tactics than the centre or right. When asked on specific tactics the public were also less likely to answer 'Don't know' (between 1% and 4%) than when asked about civil disobedience and disruption in a general way.

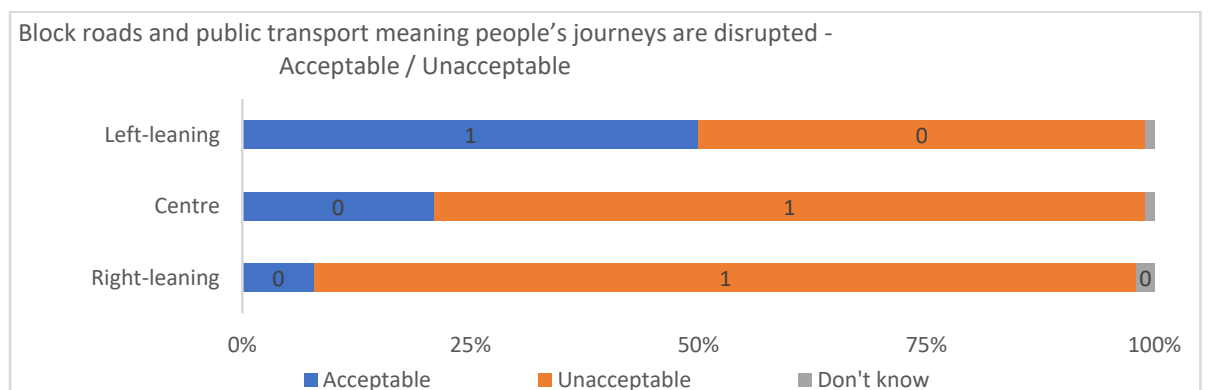
Figure 3: Acceptability of occupying public spaces such as buildings and public transport by political leaning



Source: Kantar Public, Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism, March 2021, table 22.

5.17 Almost two-thirds (65%) of left-leaning survey respondents said that occupying public spaces such as buildings and public transport was acceptable, while only minorities on the centre (28%) and right (15%) supported these tactics when protesting.¹⁰⁷¹

Figure 4: Acceptability of blocking roads and public transport meaning people's journeys are disrupted by political leaning.

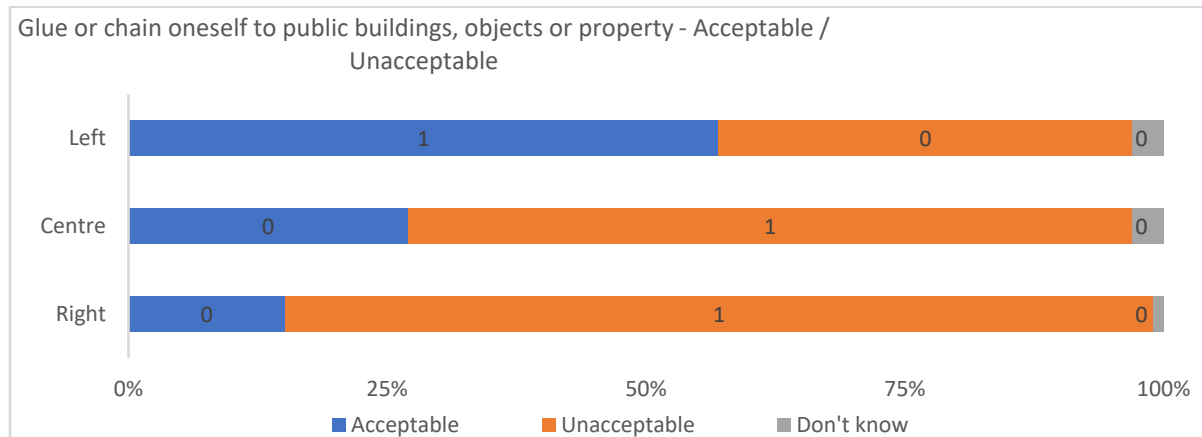


Source: Kantar Public, Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism, March 2021, table 20.

¹⁰⁷¹ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 22.

5.18 When asked whether blocking roads and public transport was acceptable, left-leaning survey respondents were evenly split, with 50% in favour and 49% opposed. On the centre, 78% objected to these methods, while 91% of right-leaning respondents thought them unacceptable.¹⁰⁷²

Figure 5 Acceptability of glueing or chaining oneself to public buildings, objects or property by political leaning



Source: Kantar Public, Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism, March 2021, table 26.

5.19 A majority (57%) of left-leaning survey respondents said that glueing or chaining oneself to public buildings, objects or property was acceptable, while only minorities on the centre (27%) and right (15%) supported these tactics when protesting.¹⁰⁷³

5.20 However, across the political spectrum, the public are united in their opposition to vandalism and the use of physical force by protestors.

5.21 The polling found 15% of left-leaning respondents thought defacing public buildings and property was acceptable when protesting, compared to 4% of those on the centre and just 2% of right-leaning respondents.¹⁰⁷⁴ There is an interesting disparity between the low level of support among left-leaning respondents for defacing public buildings compared to much higher levels of support for glueing or chaining oneself to public buildings.

5.22 Opposition to the use of physical force was also consistent across the political spectrum. Physically confronting counter-protesters, such as throwing objects, was deemed unacceptable by 92% respondents on the left, 94% from the centre and 96% from the right.¹⁰⁷⁵

¹⁰⁷² 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 20.

¹⁰⁷³ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 22.

¹⁰⁷⁴ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 21.

¹⁰⁷⁵ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 25.

5.23 Physically confronting police, such as throwing objects, was unacceptable to 91% of left-leaning respondents, 96% from the centre, and 97% from the right.¹⁰⁷⁶

Protest Specific Attitudes

5.24 To obtain a detailed and comparable picture of how the British public responded to different protests involving disruptive tactics, including law breaking, violence, or disruption, part of the research focused on three protests: Extinction Rebellion in April and October 2019, Black Lives Matter (BLM) in May-June 2020, and Defend our Memorials in June 2020.

5.25 Respondents were given a short description of each protest group and asked how much they knew about them.¹⁰⁷⁷ The levels of public awareness differed significantly between protests. Nearly nine in ten (89%) respondents reported knowing a lot, a fair amount or a little about the BLM, while almost two-thirds (64%) said the same about the Extinction Rebellion protests. For the Defend our Memorials protests, the figure was just a third (33%).¹⁰⁷⁸ Awareness of BLM and Extinction rebellion was much higher among focus group participants than that of Defend our Memorials.¹⁰⁷⁹

5.26 Respondents were then given a short description of each protest and asked a series of questions to ascertain their views about the cause, the tactics used, the response to the protest (from police, government, and media), and the impact of the protest.¹⁰⁸⁰

¹⁰⁷⁶ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 23.

¹⁰⁷⁷ The descriptions of the groups were as follows:

BLM – Black Lives Matter is a grassroots movement against police brutality towards black people, and racial inequality. Organisers say the movement's mission is to "eradicate white supremacy". Protests took place in the UK in Summer 2020.

Extinction Rebellion – Extinction Rebellion is an environmental movement that wants the government to declare a 'Climate Emergency' and take immediate action on climate change. The group says that it promotes "civil disobedience and rebellion". Major protests took place in the UK in April and October 2019.

Defend our Memorials – "Defend our Memorials" was a protest to stop certain statues in the UK being either pulled down or defaced. The protest's main organisers were the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA), whose stated mission is "opposing all forms of terrorism and extremism" and to "stand up against grooming gangs up and down the country". Protests took place in the UK in summer 2020.

¹⁰⁷⁸ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 29.

¹⁰⁷⁹ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 3.

¹⁰⁸⁰ The descriptions of the protests were as follows:

BLM – In May/June 2020, many gathered across cities in the UK to protest in support of Black Lives Matter. Some protestors damaged public statues and monuments which they believed had links to slavery and racist views. There were also reports of violent clashes with counter protest groups and physical confrontations with the police with some protestors reportedly throwing bottles, flares, and rental bicycles at them. During one Black Lives Matter protest in London, over 100 people were arrested and 35 police officers were injured. Extinction Rebellion – In October 2019, Extinction Rebellion carried out a two-week campaign of disruption across the UK to force government action to address climate change. Disruption included blocking roads, activists gluing themselves to trains and climbing onto an aeroplane, occupying Trafalgar Square and spraying fake blood at the Treasury in Westminster. Over 1,800 people were arrested and a temporary ban on Extinction Rebellion protests anywhere in London was ruled unlawful by the High Court.

Defend our Memorials – The Black Lives Matter protests of May and June 2020 led to public statues being damaged or pulled down that they believed had links to slavery and racism. This included the statues of former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the former MP, merchant and Bristol slave trader, Edward Colston. In June 2020, the Democratic Football Lads Alliance organised a Defend our Memorials protest to protect London's statues. Some Defend our Memorials protestors clashed with the police, reportedly throwing bottles, flag poles, a traffic cone and flares at them. One was photographed urinating on a memorial to a police officer outside Parliament. Six police were injured. Over 100 people were arrested.

5.27 Focus group participants were given the same overview of the groups and their protests as survey respondents.

Extinction Rebellion Protests

5.28 Earlier in the poll, some 86% of survey respondents had said tackling climate change was a worthy cause.¹⁰⁸¹ Views reported by focus group participants lay on a spectrum. Some participants saw protecting the environment for future generations as “the most important” social and political issue. Others, however, perceived climate change as posing no immediate threat to life or believed enough was already being done.

5.29 However, nearly three quarters (72%) of survey respondents considered the disruption to people’s lives caused by Extinction Rebellion protestors to be unacceptable.¹⁰⁸²

5.30 Respondents were told that Extinction Rebellion disruption included blocking roads, activists glueing themselves to trains and climbing onto an aeroplane, occupying Trafalgar Square, and spraying fake blood at the Treasury in Westminster. A majority (52%) of left-leaning respondents thought this disruption was acceptable, compared to 21% from the centre and 12% from the right.¹⁰⁸³

5.31 There appears to be even less public sympathy for some of the more extreme methods used by some Extinction Rebellion protestors. For example, 88% of those surveyed considered damage to public property as part of these protests to be unacceptable. In the case of the use of violence by some protestors, 91% said they believed this to be unacceptable.¹⁰⁸⁴

5.32 Focus group participants typically disagreed with Extinction Rebellion’s methods.¹⁰⁸⁵ All agreed they were disruptive, but views on whether they constituted violence and whether they were justified were mixed. Some regarded the disruption as justifiable and necessary to draw attention to the cause and felt that these techniques had achieved this aim where previous environmental protests had not. Others felt the disruptive methods were “over the top”, “went too far”, or that the protestors “came across as extremists”. Some felt that disruption put people at risk of harm: participants gave an example of an ambulance that had been unable to reach a hospital due to blocked roads.¹⁰⁸⁶

¹⁰⁸¹ ‘Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism’, Kantar Public (March 2021), table 4.

¹⁰⁸² ‘Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism’, Kantar Public (March 2021), table 39.

¹⁰⁸³ ‘Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism’, Kantar Public (March 2021), table 42.

¹⁰⁸⁴ ‘Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism’, Kantar Public (March 2021), table 39.

¹⁰⁸⁵ ‘Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption’, NatCen (2021), p. 2.

¹⁰⁸⁶ ‘Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption’, NatCen (2021), p. 17.

- 5.33 Few of those surveyed felt that Extinction Rebellion's protests had assisted their cause. Almost half of respondents (49%) viewed the overall outcome of the protests as negative for the cause itself, compared to only 18% who believed it was positive.¹⁰⁸⁷ Focus group participants agreed that the protests had captured widespread attention. Views on their broader impact were more mixed. Some participants felt the protests increased public awareness of climate change.¹⁰⁸⁸ Others, across the political spectrum, felt that the protests' disruptive approach had detracted attention from their cause, with a detrimental effect on public support.¹⁰⁸⁹
- 5.34 The public were more split on whether the response from the police was appropriate. More than a third (38%) of survey respondents said the police response was about right. Another 28% believed it was too lenient and only 15% thought it was too severe.¹⁰⁹⁰ In the focus groups, those who could recall how police were involved expressed a similar range of views. There was some surprise that the police response had not been firmer, particularly around acts that some participants categorised as violent, such as throwing fake blood. One view was that getting arrested was part of the Extinction Rebellion disruption strategy.¹⁰⁹¹
- 5.35 The polling and focus groups reveal a disparity between strong support for Extinction Rebellion's stated environmental cause but low levels of support for the group's disruptive methods.
- 5.36 This may also explain why the group itself has experienced comparatively little popularity. YouGov rating of charities and organisations in Britain suggests that while Extinction Rebellion is very well known by the public, the group's popularity is low. According to the most recent rating (Q1, 2024), while 77% of respondents had heard of the group, only 17% reported a positive image of the group and just under half (46%) reported disliking it.¹⁰⁹²

Black Lives Matters Protests

- 5.37 Some 86% of those polled believe achieving racial equality is a worthy cause.¹⁰⁹³ As with climate action protests, however, the public strongly opposed the use of disruption, damage to public property, and violence as part of BLM demonstrations.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Almost a third (32%) said the outcome was neither positive nor negative or said 'Don't know'. 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 48.

¹⁰⁸⁸ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 19.

¹⁰⁸⁹ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 3.

¹⁰⁹⁰ One in five (20%) said 'Don't know'. 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 54.

¹⁰⁹¹ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 18.

¹⁰⁹² 'The Most Popular Charities & Organisations (Q3 2023)', YouGov, accessed December 2023.

<https://yougov.co.uk/ratings/health/popularity/charities-organisations/all>; https://yougov.co.uk/topics/health/explore/not-for-profit/Extinction_Rebellion

¹⁰⁹³ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 4.

- 5.38 Respondents were informed that some BLM protestors had damaged public statues and monuments which they believed had links to slavery and racist views. A large majority (85%) said the damage to property caused by some BLM protestors was unacceptable.¹⁰⁹⁴
- 5.39 Two thirds of survey respondents (67%) felt that the disruption to people's lives caused by the protests was unacceptable, while some 90% were opposed to the use of violence by some BLM protestors.¹⁰⁹⁵
- 5.40 The public's views on the acceptability of these tactics, however, were significantly contingent on their political leaning. A majority (63%) of left-leaning survey respondents thought that the disruption to people's lives caused by Black Lives Matter protestors was acceptable, compared to 28% of the centre and 12% on the right.¹⁰⁹⁶
- 5.41 Two-thirds (33%) of left-leaning survey respondents thought that the damage to public property caused by some Black Lives Matter protestors was acceptable. On the centre this figure dropped to one in ten (10%) and on the right only 4%.¹⁰⁹⁷
- 5.42 Some focus group participants characterised the BLM protests as violent and disruptive overall, whereas others felt they were largely peaceful. The perceived urgency of the BLM protests legitimised its methods for some participants.¹⁰⁹⁸ Others felt that violence was always unacceptable and felt it had a detrimental effect on support for and the impact of the BLM protest.¹⁰⁹⁹
- 5.43 On how the demonstrations were policed, some 39% of survey respondents thought the response was "about right", while 27% thought it too lenient. Only 19% felt that that the police were too severe.¹¹⁰⁰
- 5.44 The public were more split on whether the BLM protests had helped achieve racial equality. While 40% of survey respondents thought the outcome of the protests was positive for the cause itself, almost as many (37%) thought it was negative.¹¹⁰¹ Focus group participants were more positive, describing awareness-raising outcomes and changes to the school curriculum as positive impacts.¹¹⁰²

¹⁰⁹⁴ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 34.

¹⁰⁹⁵ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 34.

¹⁰⁹⁶ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 37.

¹⁰⁹⁷ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 36.

¹⁰⁹⁸ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 2.

¹⁰⁹⁹ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 22.

¹¹⁰⁰ Fifteen per cent said, 'Don't know'. See 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 54.

¹¹⁰¹ Twenty-three per cent answered, 'Neither positive nor negative' or 'Don't know'. See 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 49.

¹¹⁰² 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 2.

- 5.45 Wider polling supports the finding that the overall outcome of the BLM protests is debatable and suggests that, in general, the public disapproves of protestors damaging statues.
- 5.46 Polling during Black History Month in October 2020 found that a small majority (55%) of those surveyed believed that the BLM movement had increased racial tensions in the UK, while a third (32%) said it had created unity between different ethnic communities.¹¹⁰³ Further polling from May 2021 showed that only 8% thought that race relations in Britain had got better since the protests in June 2020.¹¹⁰⁴ However, June 2020 polling of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic adults in Great Britain showed that 46% of respondents thought the protests would have a generally positive impact in Britain.¹¹⁰⁵
- 5.47 Polling carried out in July 2020 found that 71% opposed protestors damaging or pulling down statues of historic figures linked to slavery, whereas only 13% said they supported this. While low overall, support was stronger people aged 18-24 (38%) as well as among Labour (31%) and Remain (21%) voters.¹¹⁰⁶

Defend Our Memorials Protests

- 5.48 Unlike the other protests, the Defend our Memorials demonstrations also failed to command majority support for the cause. Earlier in the poll, less than half of survey respondents (43%) said it was a worthy cause to support protecting statues of “those accused of racism or with a slaving past in the UK from damage or removal”.¹¹⁰⁷ This view stands in contrast to the fact that 93% of those polled went on to say that defacing public property when protesting was unacceptable.¹¹⁰⁸
- 5.49 Awareness and support for the Defend our Memorials protest cause was also lower among focus group participants than for the other two protests. Those who were aware had watched news coverage on the television or had seen it discussed on social media (Facebook). Some acknowledged that people might support the Defend our Memorials”cause but not the protests themselves.¹¹⁰⁹
- 5.50 Survey respondents were told that some Defend our Memorials protestors clashed with the police, reportedly throwing bottles, flag poles, a traffic cone,

¹¹⁰³ ‘Black History Month – Black Lives Matter Report’, Opinion (November 2020), <https://www.opinium.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Perceptions-of-the-Black-Lives-Matter-movement-Report.pdf>, p. 3.

¹¹⁰⁴ Over a third (36%) said race relations had ‘got worse’, 41% said they had ‘stayed about the same’, and 15% said ‘Don’t know’. YouGov, (2021), <https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/wk014bvqiz/YouGov%20-%201%20year%20of%20BLM%20nat%20rep%20sample.pdf>, p. 2.

¹¹⁰⁵ ‘Internal Racism BAME’, YouGov (June 2020), <https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/6pg6w1fadp/YouGov%20Racism%20BAME%20June%202020%202.pdf>, p. 34.

¹¹⁰⁶ ‘Sun on Sunday Survey Results’, YouGov (2020), https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/wte7yyb35l/SunOnSunday_Results_200716.pdf

¹¹⁰⁷ ‘Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism’, Kantar Public (March 2021), table 4.

¹¹⁰⁸ ‘Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism’, Kantar Public (March 2021), table 19.

¹¹⁰⁹ ‘Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption’, NatCen (2021), p. 27.

and flares at them, and that one was photographed urinating on a memorial to a police officer outside Parliament.

- 5.51 There was overwhelming public objection to these protests involving illegal or disruptive methods. Some 93% of survey respondents thought violence by some Defend our Memorials protestors was unacceptable, while 92% thought the same about the damage of public property as part of these demonstrations. Some 80% also viewed disruption caused to people's lives by the Defend our Memorials protests to be unacceptable.¹¹¹⁰
- 5.52 Focus group participants thought the violence at the Defend our Memorial protests was unacceptable. Other actions taken during the protest, such as urinating on a memorial, was considered "disgusting" and "mindless". Damaging public property in this way was also seen as illogical (given the protest aim to protect memorials) as well as making the protestors look like "idiots".¹¹¹¹
- 5.53 Despite the cause being better supported earlier in the poll by those in the centre (48%) and on the right (65%) than the left (22%),¹¹¹² right-leaning respondents nonetheless took a more unfavourable view of the disruption to people's lives caused by the Defend our Memorial protests than those on the centre or left.
- 5.54 Some 25% of left-leaning survey respondents viewed this as acceptable. This compared to 16% from the centre and 13% of right-leaning respondents who thought the same.¹¹¹³
- 5.55 Some 38% of survey respondents thought the police response to the protest was about right, while 25% thought it was too lenient and just eight percent thought it was too severe.¹¹¹⁴ Awareness of police involvement in the protest was limited among focus group participants.¹¹¹⁵
- 5.56 Those polled viewed the outcome of the Defend our Memorial protests more negatively than the other demonstrations. More than half (56%) thought the outcome was negative for the cause itself while only 10% took the opposite view.¹¹¹⁶ Even among right-leaning respondents there was little sense the protests had been a good thing. Just 14% said they had been positive.¹¹¹⁷

¹¹¹⁰ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 44.

¹¹¹¹ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 29.

¹¹¹² 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 6.

¹¹¹³ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 47.

¹¹¹⁴ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 54.

¹¹¹⁵ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 29.

¹¹¹⁶ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 49.

¹¹¹⁷ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 52.

Comparing Protest Specific Attitudes

- 5.57 Despite differences in levels of support for the protests' underlying causes, views on the acceptability of damage to public property and use of violence by protestors were similar across all three protests – there was a strong sense across the survey and focus group data that violence was unacceptable and ineffective. Among survey respondents there was 85% – 93% disapproval across protests for those two tactics.¹¹¹⁸
- 5.58 While majorities of survey respondents objected to the disruption caused by the different protests, the level of disapproval varied across the protests. Four in five (80%) disapproved of the Defend our Memorials disruption, but this figure dropped to 72% for Extinction Rebellion and 67% for BLM.
- 5.59 Focus group participants also suggested that certain forms of disruption were more acceptable ways for Extinction Rebellion and BLM to achieve impact than for Defend our Memorials, where there was generally lower support for the cause. Views on justifiability of methods shifted in relation to how focus group participants felt about a cause, how urgent they perceived the issue, and the potential for impact.¹¹¹⁹
- 5.60 Right-leaning survey respondents were consistent in their disapproval of disruptive protest tactics. Across the three protests the disruption caused to people's lives was considered acceptable by minorities of 12% and 13%.¹¹²⁰
- 5.61 By contrast, left-leaning respondents' disapproval of disruption varied hugely with the different protests. A large majority (63%) thought the BLM disruption was acceptable, they were evenly split (52%) on Extinction Rebellion disruption, while only a minority (25%) supported the disruption caused by Defend our Memorials.¹¹²¹ Overall, left-leaning respondents appear to tolerate disruption more readily to people's lives more in the name of progressive causes like climate change or anti-racism.
- 5.62 Regarding responses, there was only a minority belief among the public that any of these demonstrations were being policed appropriately. For the Defend our Memorials protests, 39% thought the police response was "about right", while 38% thought this about the policing of the BLM and Extinction Rebellion protests.
- 5.63 A consistent number, however, felt that the police were too lenient in how they policed the protests, with 27% feeling this about the policing of the BLM

¹¹¹⁸ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), tables 34, 39 & 44.

¹¹¹⁹ 'Public Attitudes towards political protest and disruption', NatCen (2021), p. 4 & 32.

¹¹²⁰ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), tables 37, 42 & 47.

¹¹²¹ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), tables 37, 42 & 47.

demonstrations, 28% in the case of the Extinction Rebellion protests, and 29% for the Defend our Memorials protests.

- 5.64 Very few survey respondents saw the policing of any of these as being too severe. For BLM, 19% believed the police were too severe, 15% thought this for Extinction Rebellion and just 8% for the Defend our Memorials protest.¹¹²²
- 5.65 Despite high levels of public support for causes such as climate action and racial equality, in no case did a majority of the public think that the protest was beneficial to the cause overall. As discussed, views on the outcome of the BLM protests were split but a minority (40%) thought the outcome of the protests was positive overall. With Extinction Rebellion protests only 18% of those polled thought the protests brought a positive outcome and just 10% for the Defend our Memorial protests.¹¹²³
- 5.66 While there was more violence at the BLM protests than at Extinction Rebellion, it is possible that the widespread disruption caused by Extinction Rebellion demonstrations ultimately proved more alienating for the public.

Public Call for Evidence

- 5.67 I ran an open call for evidence between 24 March 2021 and 14 May 2021 to encourage the public to share their views and experiences of political violence and disruption.¹¹²⁴ I commissioned Kantar Public to analyse the results.¹¹²⁵
- 5.68 Respondents completed a questionnaire online, including some closed questions but largely consisting of open-ended questions on the following:
- The main challenges facing the UK in relation to political violence and disruption.
- i. How well they thought the Government balances both people's right to protest with its responsibility to protect them from political violence.
 - ii. The Far Right and Far Left and other extreme single-issue groups in this country, and the points at which the activities of such groups cross into violence, criminality, and disruption (including on people's lives and social cohesion).
 - iii. How well they thought the government, civil society and the media understand and respond to these challenges, including lessons from action taken both locally and internationally.

¹¹²² 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 54.

¹¹²³ 'Public Voice Panel Survey 9: Political Activism', Kantar Public (March 2021), table 49.

¹¹²⁴ Unless otherwise stated the evidence presented in this section comes from independent analysis of the call for evidence undertaken for the review by Kantar Public in September 2021, hereafter known as 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021).

¹¹²⁵ Kantar's analysis of the open-ended questions to the online questionnaire took an iterative approach, using both automated and manual (qualitative) methods. First the data was subjected to an automated n-gram analysis to identify the frequency of certain strings of words, which were then manually reviewed to identify prevalent themes and the ways in which these themes were expressed. See 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 10 & 82.

- iv. Their experiences of Far Right, Far Left, or single-issue political violence, criminality, or disruption online or offline.
- v. What they understood to be the causes of political violence, criminality and disruption, and the impact, if at all, of the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.69 For closed questions, percentages are provided (and exclude those who submitted evidence via email), while for open-ended questions, a sense of scale is provided (e.g., ‘most’, ‘a few’) where possible.¹¹²⁶

About The Sample

5.70 The call for evidence was open to both individuals and civil society groups. In all, there were 575 responses to the online questionnaire, largely from individuals (n=537), 21 from organisations,¹¹²⁷ and 17 from respondents who chose not to provide identifying information and so may have been from groups or individuals. In addition, six further responses were received via email (five of which were from organisations¹¹²⁸) and, while they did not always follow the structure of the questionnaire, they have been included in the qualitative analysis, where possible. As such, there were 581 responses in total.

5.71 The consultation was publicised via several channels, including Twitter (via the reviewer’s Twitter feed and the Home Office retweet); press releases to major media outlets and interviews with the reviewer in print and on the radio; on Lordwalney.uk; and internally within the Home Office.¹¹²⁹

5.72 Respondents were asked whether extracts of their submission could be used in my review. The following discussion of the call for evidence findings incorporates quotes for illustrative purposes from those who consented. Individuals are not identified but, where known, basic biographical information is provided. Organisations are identified where they have consented.

5.73 Respondents to the call for evidence are self-selecting and, as such, are not representative of the UK population. This was evident in several ways.¹¹³⁰

- More respondents identified as LGBTQ+ (around one in six compared to 2.7% of the population)¹¹³¹

¹¹²⁶ ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 8.

¹¹²⁷ Of the 21 organisations, 18 consented to be quoted and identified, two agreed to be quoted but not identified, and one asked not to be quoted or identified. The 18 organisations that agreed to be named are: Abergavenny Street Monitors, Climate Genocide Act Now, Counter Extremism Group, Countryside Alliance, Diverse Artists Network, Extinction Rebellion UK, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, Labour Women’s Declaration, Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales, Quakers in Britain, Tech Against Terrorism, The Self Help Group for Farmers, Pet Owners and Others experiencing difficulties with the RSPCA, The Traditional Britain Group, Travelers and non home owners, Unlock Democracy, Wivenhoe Bike Kitchen, XR Devon NW, and XRNI.

¹¹²⁸ They are: The Counter Extremism Project, Greenpeace, HOPE Not Hate, HMICFRS, and Liberty.

¹¹²⁹ ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 8.

¹¹³⁰ ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 11.

¹¹³¹ Comparison based on ONS data at the time of the call for evidence. See ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 9.

- Fewer identified as Christian (two in ten vs almost half – 47% in the population) and slightly more as having no religion (around half vs 42% in the population)¹¹³²
- There were roughly four times as many respondents from the South West as would be the case for the UK population overall, many of whom refer to their experience of the Kill the Bill protests in Bristol through 2020 and 2021 (covered in detail in chapter one), and fewer than average from the North, Midlands, Scotland, and Wales. (The proportions from London and the South East were in line with the UK average).
- There also appeared to be a strong political leaning towards the left and the Far Left and a tendency toward conspiracy theories among many of those who responded to the call for evidence.

Key Findings

Impact of Extreme Political Activism

- 5.74 Disruption due to political activism was defined by respondents as activities affecting daily life, such as noise, road closures, changes to public transport, and reduced access to public places, including hospitals.¹¹³³ This was acceptable for some respondents, while others felt such disruption causes harm. Largely there was a lack of consensus among respondents over when disruption shifts from being an inconvenience to constituting genuine harm.¹¹³⁴
- 5.75 Harm more generally was discussed as encompassing violence, including to the police, damage to social cohesion, disproportionate police responses to protests, and the stoking of division in the media and on social media.¹¹³⁵
- 5.76 Minorities and/or vulnerable groups were felt to be most at risk, largely from the Far Right, whom it was believed viewed these groups as easy targets or scapegoats for people's issues.¹¹³⁶ At-risk groups included black and ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees, women, LGBTQ+, people with disabilities, and religious minorities as well as the young, old, and poor.¹¹³⁷
- 5.77 By contrast, others suggested that it is the public and the police who are most at direct risk from protest activity.¹¹³⁸ Many were from the South West and referred to the then recent experiences of protests in Bristol, which included

¹¹³² Comparisons based on ONS data at the time of the call for evidence. See 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 9.

¹¹³³ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 11.

¹¹³⁴ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 11.

¹¹³⁵ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 13.

¹¹³⁶ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 17.

¹¹³⁷ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), pp.11, 16-20.

¹¹³⁸ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 20.

the June 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, resulting in the toppling of the Edward Colston statue, and the March 2021 Kill The Bill protests.¹¹³⁹

- 5.78 First-hand experience of political violence, criminality, or disruption was relevant to many of those responding, with seven in ten saying they had witnessed political violence, criminality, or disruption, and just under half saying they had been personally affected (covered in more detail below).¹¹⁴⁰

When Peaceful Protest Crosses into Unlawful Activity or Disruption

- 5.79 The key point of alignment between public opinion, as evidenced in the polling and focus groups outlined earlier, and the views of those responding to my call for evidence is that violence is not acceptable in political protest.¹¹⁴¹

- 5.80 The use of violence in protests was seen as a major problem across the responses received.

Violence is abhorrent. Peaceful protest is a necessary part of free democracy.

Male, 25-34, South East

- 5.81 For some, violence was seen primarily as targeting minority groups and coming largely from the Far Right, while others mention violence towards the police and property damage.¹¹⁴²

There is a risk of violence, as well as distress, in the incitement of racist or misogynist views, as well as anti-immigrant, or other divisive messages.

Female, 65-74, South East

Violence towards the police, vandalism of property, disruption to public and private transport

Female, 55-64, South West

- 5.82 But there was much greater disparity on the point at which disruption as part of non-violent protest either constitutes harm in and of itself or crosses over into criminal activity or even violence.
- 5.83 For some, disruption is seen as a valid form of peaceful protest, and a democratic right.¹¹⁴³

¹¹³⁹ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 10.

¹¹⁴⁰ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), pp. 20 & 24.

¹¹⁴¹ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 12.

¹¹⁴² 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 12.

¹¹⁴³ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 11.

Protests, by their very nature, are noisy. Noise is a means of expressing collective solidarity or grief and, quite literally, people making their voices heard by those in power.

Liberty, email response, para. 15

Political protests are the right of every UK citizen as a means of expressing disapproval of government actions. Civil disobedience is a valid form of political protest.

Non-binary, 35-44, East Midlands

5.84 Liberty further argued that causing disruption when protesting peacefully is not comparable to driving criminality or violence, and as such objected to the questionnaire grouping these activities together.

5.85 Similarly, a response submitted in the name of Extinction Rebellion UK criticised what it described as the conflation of violence and disruption.

Violence is about causing harm. Disruption can be inconvenient, but if it is undertaken with explanation, accountability, proportionately and peacefully, it is justified by the wider efforts to reduce harm. Extinction Rebellion (XR) exists to reduce harm and we believe that the means and ends must be in alignment.

Extinction Rebellion UK

5.86 For others, disruption understood broadly as activities inconveniencing daily life, was both a harm in and of itself and caused additional harms such as limiting access to public services, property damage, fear, and social division.¹¹⁴⁴

These politically charged groups can cause everything from minor traffic disruption by blocking a road to potentially loss of life by preventing people from getting to hospital. They have caused property damage and even to a grade listed monument. This behaviour doesn't just disrupt, it hurts the community as a whole. I now know that there are people in my community who would attack a police officer. This isn't good for society and makes everyone look bad.

Male, 20-24, South West

The disruption caused by these groups is multifaceted, but generally involves disruption to public services (especially public transport), online misinformation/disinformation campaigns (particularly over COVID-19), and (mostly for the far-right) seeks to turn communities against each other by playing identities against one another.

¹¹⁴⁴ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 12.

Male, 16-19, Greater London

Disruption to public services and the use of public space. Criminal damage is extensive,

Female, 55-64, North East

By causing disruption, costly damage, interruption to "normal" daily life, causing fear amongst the public and by putting the police into an impossible position of trying to control such activities.

Male, 75-84, South West

- 5.87 The protest group most mentioned by respondents was Extinction Rebellion. Opinions on the disruption caused by this group's protesting echo the lack of consensus overall in the call for evidence. For some, the disruption is justified by the severity of the cause; for others, they disrupt society and cause serious harm.

Extinction Rebellion cause disruption by, for example, blocking roads when they protest. The disruption they cause is utterly insignificant compared to the disruption, chaos, death and destruction that is going to happen if we don't take them seriously and address the climate crisis.

Male, 35-44, Greater London

Minor physical inconvenience. Even the earth extinction lot was only a couple of days to a week.

45-54, South West

They make parts of the city 'no go' areas during the protests. The local council and police assist the protestors by blocking streets for them. One heart breaking incident during XR protests was when a man could not get to his dying father in time due to the police having closed Bristol bridge in their support of the XR protests.

Male, 55-64, South West

*XR get a free pass to disrupt society (including access to hospitals) for as long as they like ... make your protest then pack your bags and go home and use the impact to inform debate. Police are scared stiff of intervening to bring prolonged disruption to an end. Bloke shouting "Stop Brexit!" was a pain in the backside but wasn't disrupting society (making TV filming difficult isn't "disrupting society") and should be free to protest. XR blocking hospitals *is* disrupting society and should be stopped whatever the visuals look like.*

Male, 54-54, East of England

- 5.88 Some respondents saw disruption and other harms differently depending on whether they came from the Far Right, Far Left or single-issue groups. These respondents believed that there was no equivalence between Far Right and Far Left or single-issue activities, arguing that the Far Right poses a genuine threat to people's lives,¹¹⁴⁵ whereas Far Left or single-issue activity both bring little or no threat,¹¹⁴⁶ and, where it is disruptive, the intervention is acceptable or justified because it is awareness raising rather than ideological or hateful.¹¹⁴⁷
- 5.89 On the other hand, there were respondents who made the case that Far Left or single-issue activities can spread divisiveness, intolerance of those with other beliefs, cause unacceptable disruption to people's lives, and damage to property.¹¹⁴⁸

Causes of Political Violence, Criminality, or Disruption

- 5.90 Respondents identified a range of factors which they believe are driving Far Right, Far Left and single-issue activity.
- 5.91 Some respondents thought that the Conservative government is responsible for driving recent political activism, particularly on the Far Right. For these respondents, the ways in which the government has approached issues such as Brexit, immigration and racism are seen as divisive and polarising for society.¹¹⁴⁹ Others said that the coronavirus pandemic had been used as a "smokescreen" to rush through legislation such as the then Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill to suppress the democratic right to protest.¹¹⁵⁰
- 5.92 For some, the media was a driver of Far Right political activism. Among these respondents were those who criticised the media on its own terms, as having a right-wing bias or being sensationalist. Others argued that the press was owned by a small number of wealthy individuals with links to the Conservative Party and so perceived complicity between government and the media to push an agreed narrative.¹¹⁵¹ These conspiratorial notions extended to the BBC, which was seen as biased in favour of the government and accused of inappropriately making 'false equivalences' when trying to achieve balance. A common example of this was on the issue of climate change.¹¹⁵²
- 5.93 As documented in chapter two, I observed similar criticisms of the mainstream media by some radical political activists, who claimed that the media is untrustworthy and that it is used to push an 'establishment' agenda. Such

¹¹⁴⁵ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 14.

¹¹⁴⁶ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 14.

¹¹⁴⁷ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 15.

¹¹⁴⁸ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 15.

¹¹⁴⁹ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), pp. 4 & 56-58.

¹¹⁵⁰ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 4.

¹¹⁵¹ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), pp. 4-5 & 59-60

¹¹⁵² 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), pp. 4-5

anti-media rhetoric was most evident in the anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx movement during the time of the coronavirus pandemic and elements of the Far Left subculture in the UK, including notably anarchists from Extinction Rebellion and its associated groups.

- 5.94 Other call for evidence respondents also blamed societal inequalities, both economic and social, as potential drivers of Far Right political violence and disruption.¹¹⁵³ Some respondents named Far Right groups, most commonly Britian First and the EDL, and there were references to football hooliganism as driving Far Right activity.¹¹⁵⁴
- 5.95 Regarding the drivers of Far Left and single-issue activism respondents gave far less detail or, as happened in one in ten cases, said they simply did not know. Others said the question was irrelevant because there is no threat from such activism.¹¹⁵⁵
- 5.96 Among those who offered an opinion, the government was mentioned most often as the primary driver of Far Left and single-issue activism. For many government failures to adequately tackle issues such as climate change was the cause of some of the activism in question.¹¹⁵⁶ Violence at protests was sometimes blamed on the police, with some respondents claiming officers had been heavy handed in policing otherwise peaceful protests.¹¹⁵⁷
- 5.97 However, several respondents warned about the driving role of the Far Left itself on extreme political activism. The Counter Extremism Group explained how elements on the radical left sought to affect change through tactics such as violence, intimidation, vandalism, and unauthorised street protests.
- 5.98 Extinction Rebellion was the group most mentioned in relation to driving Far Left and single-issue activism. As previously noted, respondents were split on whether the activities of the group when protesting constitutes acceptable peaceful disruption or unacceptable disruption to people's lives.¹¹⁵⁸
- 5.99 Some respondents identified Black Lives Matter, Kill the Bill, and Antifa as protest movements that engaged in anti-social and unacceptable disruption, including criminal damage.¹¹⁵⁹ As mentioned, many of these responses came from people who had experience of such protests in the South West shortly before the questionnaire opened.
- 5.100 For some, Far Left groups and activists have been able to infiltrate what might otherwise appear to be mainstream protest movements. The Counter Extremism Project cited the 'Kill the Bill' protests in Bristol as an example of

¹¹⁵³ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 58

¹¹⁵⁴ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 60

¹¹⁵⁵ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 61

¹¹⁵⁶ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 61

¹¹⁵⁷ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 13

¹¹⁵⁸ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 63.

¹¹⁵⁹ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 63.

anarchist and Antifa groups using protests to cause disorder and direct violence towards the police. The group also singled out the Socialist Workers Party for its known use of front groups.

Experiences of Political Violence, Criminality, or Disruption

5.101 Seven in ten (69%) respondents reported having witnessed political violence, criminality, or disruption either offline or online. This was higher for those responding on behalf of groups (17 out of 21).

5.102 A relatively common experience was having witnessed protest activity in Bristol, covering the removal of the Colston statue and a range of Extinction Rebellion, BLM, and Kill the Bill protests, the latter of which included rioting in the city centre. For some respondents the number and frequency of the protests was a concern (although others feel it was overstated) and a minority reported feeling unsafe, choosing to stay at home during the protests.¹¹⁶⁰

Bristol seems to be a hotbed of far left political activism lately. I find the large crowds this attracts intimidating. I found the Colston statue attack very distressing. I tend to stay indoors now when 'rent a mob' is in town and avoid these mass gatherings. This is not always possible (given the frequency of these close to where I live. I have felt intimidated when I come across these events.

Male, 55-64, South West

5.103 Several respondents from the South West reported witnessing damage to property or attacks on the police or the police station, while others reported witnessing a heavy-handed response from the police.¹¹⁶¹

5.104 Some respondents reported witnessing Extinction Rebellion or Black Lives Matter protests, although many reported that the protests, while disruptive, were peaceful and had at times been misrepresented by Far Right groups.¹¹⁶²

5.105 Others reported witnessing heavy-handed or disproportionate policing of protests. Common examples given were the Sarah Everard vigil on Clapham Common in 2021 and the HS2 protests, where violence was blamed on private security contractors.¹¹⁶³

5.106 A substantial minority mention witnessing racism, hateful content and personal abuse on social media and online activity, often Facebook and Twitter.¹¹⁶⁴

¹¹⁶⁰ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 21.

¹¹⁶¹ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 22.

¹¹⁶² 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 22.

¹¹⁶³ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 23.

¹¹⁶⁴ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), pp. 20-21.

- 5.107 Just under half (44%) of respondents reported having been personally involved with or affected by political violence, criminality, or disruption either offline or online.¹¹⁶⁵
- 5.108 Respondents reported experiencing personal abuse on social media and in person. This looked like hate speech online, verbal abuse in person, and in some cases harassment and even threats of violence. Many described the distress that the abuse caused them. Topics of abuse reported are wide ranging and include racism, trans rights, Brexit (both for and against), religion, animal rights and veganism.¹¹⁶⁶ Reports of such personal experiences were largely attributed to the Far Right.¹¹⁶⁷
- 5.109 For some, the threats and intimidation suffered came from the Far Left. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue referred to the harassment of Labour MPs caused by the institutional racism and antisemitism that occurred under former Labour Party leadership. The Counter Extremism Group described how a member of staff invited by a free speech society to address students about their research on extremism on campuses found themselves subject to a 'No Platform' protest by a coalition of left-leaning student organisations.
- 5.110 One respondent described personal abuse and physical intimidation directed towards her from the Far Left on account of her Conservative politics. She warned that intolerance of others political views has hardened in the 50 years she has been in politics and has taken on "a new and very troubling edge".

I noticed a change amongst Labour members in the 2017 General Election in my constituency of Broxtowe. The far left had control of the local Labour Party and attracted in some well-known characters from nearby Nottingham (largely former members of Militant) who manned street stalls. They were unpleasant and aggressive in a way we had not experienced before.[...] A year on I was in Nottingham city centre for our regular Peoples Vote street stall. We held back because there was a group of campaigners on the environment holding a protest [...]. It was clear from their placards they were from the extreme left. One of them "spotted me" and came over. He and his colleagues were very aggressive [...] The new "edge" was the physical intimidation and the language I was a "fucking Tory witch who should be strung up by the neck" his face hard up against mine. [...] In my 4 years as a Conservative student I never experienced anything like it, even in all the heat of the no platform debate and protests. In short, I believe the extreme left has become far more angry, violent and vicious - and it's personal.

Female, 55-64, East Midlands

¹¹⁶⁵ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 24.

¹¹⁶⁶ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 24.

¹¹⁶⁷ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 25.

5.111 Single-issue groups were mentioned, both as being subjected to abuse and as abusing others. Extinction Rebellion UK reported abuse of its members. The group claimed some members had received death threats and said comment sections and social media contained statements inciting violence against them. Other respondents reported being targeted by single-issue groups, typically animal rights, and environmentalists.

Those who are associated with hunts have been targeted by animal rights activists through an ongoing series of 'leaks' beginning on 8 January 2021. This involves the publishing of illegally obtained personal data and confidential documents ... Were another social group being targeted, we very much suspect the authorities would have been inclined to act with greater urgency, and the media more outraged at the theft of data and the threats against families.

Countryside Alliance

I am working with UK fisherman whose safety is being put at risk by vigilante action in the name of environmentalism.

Male, 45-54, East Midlands

5.112 More commonly, respondents' personal experiences of single-issue activities were disruption to their lives, notably travel to work, home or to hospital. Respondents were split between those who noted the disruption and those who felt unsafe or threatened as a result.¹¹⁶⁸

Understanding of the Challenges of Political Activism

5.113 Respondents were asked to rate understanding of the challenges of political activism by government, local government, the media, and in civil society, and were asked to do so separately for (i) the Far Right and (ii) the Far Left or other extreme single issue political activism.

5.114 Overall, respondents were more likely to rate both central and local government understanding of the challenges as "bad" rather than "well". Only one in five respondents thought central and local government understood the Far Right well and fewer still – about one in eight for both – thought they understood the Far Left or other extreme single issue political activism well.¹¹⁶⁹

5.115 One religious community group felt that the threat from the Far Right is just generally better understood, usually given historical context.

Far-right political activism is a better known and understood form of activism due to its history and prevalence, and because the threat from far-right

¹¹⁶⁸ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 26.

¹¹⁶⁹ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 43.

extremism in the UK is more acute and visible than that of extreme far-left extremism.

Anonymous group

- 5.116 Ratings for media understanding were fairly like that of government understanding. Media understanding was perceived as better for the Far Right than for the Far Left or other extreme single issue political activism, but overall, this was not considered to be high. Half felt the media understood Far Right activism badly (50%), with fewer (27%) saying “well”. Respondents were a little less positive in relation to the media’s understanding of Far Left and extreme single issues, with 56% rating it badly, and 18% well.¹¹⁷⁰ As previously discussed, some respondents were critical of a perceived right-wing bias in the press. A smaller minority mentioned left-wing bias in the press.¹¹⁷¹
- 5.117 Responses on civil society were also similar. Just under half felt that civil society understood badly each of Far Right (45%) and Far Left and other extreme single-issue activism (46%), and fewer felt they understood either issue well. Like findings for government and the media, more felt civil society understood the Far Right well (22%) compared with the Far Left and extreme single issues (15%).¹¹⁷² The need for better education of civil society was raised several times.

Balancing the Right to Protest and Protection from Political Violence and Disruption

- 5.118 Respondents were asked how well the UK government balances people’s right to protest with its responsibility to protect people from political violence and disruption. Seven in ten respondents felt that the government balanced people’s right to protest with its responsibility to protect people from political violence and disruption “badly”, with four in ten saying “very badly” and three in ten saying “quite badly”. Only one in seven (14%) said the government did it “well”.
- 5.119 For many respondents the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, which was going through parliament at the time, was cited as a cause for concern.
- 5.120 Differentiating between disruption caused by largely peaceful protesting and violence or criminal damage was a key theme.¹¹⁷³ A minority of respondents

¹¹⁷⁰ ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 47.

¹¹⁷¹ ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 49.

¹¹⁷² ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 51.

¹¹⁷³ ‘Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation’, Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 23.

felt that the Bill is necessary, and that there is a need for greater police action to deal with protests, with this more prevalent in the South West.

- 5.121 Another prevalent issue is the appropriateness of police responses to protests. While some respondents recognise the challenges for the police in maintaining a fair balance, others accuse the police of responding in a heavy-handed or disproportionate way. These are mostly likely to be criticisms relating to climate change or racism (particularly Extinction Rebellion and BLM protests) and the Sarah Everard vigil, but also include mentions of unfair treatment of protests on issues from other viewpoints, such as anti-lockdown or protecting statues. There are perceptions of unequal treatment of different protests but there is no consensus over which protests are being treated unfairly. For some, the Far Right are given more leeway, while others felt the reverse to be true.¹¹⁷⁴
- 5.122 The Counter Extremism Project argued that political leaders not speaking out against disruptive protest tactics, such as the violence and vandalism associated with some of the BLM protests during the summer of 2020, was a failure of leadership. They argued that during those demonstrations, public figures had mistakenly imported American cultural conflicts into the British context, so that British police officers were unfairly imagined to be culpable of the kind of violence seen in the US. This, it was suggested, had led to an unwillingness to properly condemn the violence and vandalism seen at those protests, as this might have been seen as condemning anti-racism protests or even the cause of anti-racism. This failure to properly condemn those responsible, it was argued, contributed to public perceptions of inconsistent policing, and did tremendous damage to public trust.

Key findings

- **The public overwhelmingly rejects the use of violence as part of political protest. Public polling, focus groups and the call for evidence were united on opposition to violence when protesting.**
- **There is a lack of consensus, however, over when disruption caused by protests shifts from being an inconvenience to constituting genuine harm. Polling showed that three quarters of the public think it is unacceptable for protestors to block roads and public transport, while two thirds object to protestors occupying public spaces. However, focus groups and the call for evidence showed that, for some, a level of disruption is inevitable, part of the right to protest or necessary for a protest to have impact.**
- **The public's views on the acceptability of certain specific tactics differ significantly according to political leaning; left-leaning survey**

¹¹⁷⁴ 'Independent review: Political violence and disruption consultation', Kantar Public (September 2021), p. 37-38.

respondents are more likely to support disruption tactics, particularly in the name of progressive causes like climate change or anti-racism, than those on the political centre or right.

- **There are mixed views on the policing of protests. Polling showed the public mostly thought responses to recent protests were about right or too lenient, but there was no majority opinion. Call for Evidence responses showed a perception of unequal treatment of different protests but no consensus on which ones. Those from the South West (who had recent experience of disruptive protest) reported seeing the police as victims of protestor violence.**
- **Despite high levels of public support for causes such as climate action and racial equality, in no case did a majority of the public think that the protests were beneficial to the cause overall. For many, the disruptive tactics used by BLM and Extinction Rebellion detracted from public support for cause. This was especially so for Extinction Rebellion.**

6. Chapter Four: Assessing the Current Response

- 6.1 During my review, I identified several important areas where the response to political violence and disruption from the government and other public bodies has not appeared to be sufficient.
- 6.2 In coming to this view, I gathered a wide range of perspectives from the public, policymakers, the police, protest groups, and businesses affected by political violence and disruption. Alongside public polling and a call for evidence, I interviewed officials from the UK intelligence community, the Home Office, the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and reviewed official documents that they provided.
- 6.3 Beyond government, I interviewed senior leaders at the Metropolitan Police, Met Intelligence, the force's intelligence function, and the National Police Coordination Centre, which provides support to police forces across the country. I also interviewed subject matter experts from academia and think tanks; I spoke to representatives from the protest group Extinction Rebellion and reviewed open-source materials from other protest groups; and I met with representatives from the business community affected by protest. I also analysed data – open-source and that provided to me by government and the police – and looked at previous reviews and assessments related to political violence and disruption.
- 6.4 This chapter includes my assessments of:
- whether the government understands political violence and disruption sufficiently well to frame the right response to the phenomenon
 - the effectiveness of police intelligence and collaboration on political violence and disruption
 - whether current legislation gives the police sufficient powers to deal effectively with political violence and disruption
 - the extent to which our democratic institutions – including the rule of law – and private businesses are protected from political violence and disruption
 - whether we are striking the right balance between protecting free speech and disrupting political violence and disruption online, and
 - what can we learn from the experiences of our international partners in responding to political violence and disruption

Understanding Political Protest, Violence, and Disruption

6.5 This section assesses the extent to which the government understands political violence and disruption sufficiently well to frame the right response to the phenomenon.

Categorisation of Terrorism and Extremism Threats

6.6 Political activism taken to its most extreme ends – violence – entails terrorism. The UK benefits from a sophisticated counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST,¹¹⁷⁵ robust anti-terrorism legislation, and relatively well joined-up ways of working between the intelligence community, Counter Terrorism Policing, and other relevant bodies. This is, in part, due to the legacy of the 7 July 2005 Islamist terrorist attacks on the London transport network, which prompted a reorganisation of the counter-terrorism machine and its operation. Since then, much independent and external scrutiny has been provided, most prominently from the joint MI5 and counter-terrorism policing Operational Improvement Review of the terrorist attacks in 2017,¹¹⁷⁶ the 2021 Fishmongers' Hall Inquests,¹¹⁷⁷ the 2023 Independent Review of Prevent,¹¹⁷⁸ and the Manchester Arena Inquiry, concluded in March 2023.¹¹⁷⁹ I do not seek to replicate the comprehensive nature of these reviews, rather I hope to add to the calls for improvement where I can.

My review found that the UK intelligence community and Counter Terrorism Policing are grappling with a substantial minority threat from Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism and a very small threat from what is referred to as Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue Terrorism (LASIT). Most of the latter activity remains focused on protest action and most issues relate to public disorder.

6.7 While the government clearly has taken steps in recent years to improve understanding of the Extreme Right – to bring it up to the level and depth of its understanding of Islamist and jihadist activities – it has not done the same with the Far Left or Single-Issue threats, violent or non-violent. It is my view that this failing is, in part, due to (1) the rigid categorisation of LASIT threats separately without interrogating the ideological overlaps that both animate and help explain them and (2) the application of a different definition of extremism

¹¹⁷⁵ 'CONTEST- The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2023', HMG,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/650b1b8d52e73c000d54dc82/CONTEST_2023_English_updated.pdf

¹¹⁷⁶ 'Fact sheet: Right-wing terrorism', HMG, <https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/09/20/fact-sheet-right-wing-terrorism/>

¹¹⁷⁷ 'Fishmongers' Hall Inquests- Prevention of future deaths report', Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, 2021

<https://www.judiciary.uk/prevention-of-future-death-reports/fishmongers-hall-inquests-prevention-of-future-deaths-report/>

¹¹⁷⁸ 'Independent Review of Prevent', William Shawcross CVO, 2023

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf

¹¹⁷⁹ 'Manchester Arena Inquiry Volume 3: Radicalisation and Preventability', 2023, HMG,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/manchester-arena-inquiry-volume-3-radicalisation-and-preventability>

– effectively a higher bar – to LASIT threats than to Islamist and Extreme Right-Wing threats.

- 6.8 As covered in chapter one, LASIT includes Left-Wing Terrorism or extremism, Anarchist Terrorism or extremism, and Single-Issue Terrorism or extremism, all of which are considered separately. For example, the government makes clear that anarchism is separated out from the Far Left as a distinct strand of LASIT because some minority schools of anarchist thought – such as Anarcho-Capitalism¹¹⁸⁰ – fall outside the Left-Wing political spectrum.¹¹⁸¹ While this is true, in my view this separation is being driven by edge cases which bear little reality to the nature of Left-Wing and Anarchist threats seen in the UK today – and are documented in chapter one – and what it misses are the revolutionary aims and Anti-Capitalist agenda shared by both ideologies. In addition, Anti-Fascist extremism is inexplicably considered a single-issue rather than Far Left threat.
- 6.9 In my view these ideologies cross over more often than they do not and would be better understood taken together. One such overlap is between the Far Left and Anti-Fascism.¹¹⁸² Research commissioned for this review showed how Marxist-Leninists traditionally saw fascism as the maintenance of capitalism (i.e., fascism as a defence against communism) meaning that, for some Anti-Fascism is primarily a working-class struggle for a socialist revolution.¹¹⁸³ Another overlap is between anarchism and Anti-Fascism, in particular the ways in which both movements see themselves as responding to an oppressive state and the rise of fascist organising.¹¹⁸⁴
- 6.10 In chapter one, I make the case that many of the Single-Issue causes that are active in the UK today take the form of progressive social movements which I consider part of a broad Far Left subculture. I identified five such movements – environmental campaigns, anti-racism, anti-government protest; anti-Israel activism, and Anti-Fascism – and showed how they have made Far Left, Anti-Capitalist, Anarchist, and Anti-Establishment ideologies an inseparable part of their worldview. I also show how some have been led by vocal anti-capitalists or anarchists, while others were targeted as channels for those on the Far Left to mobilise support.

¹¹⁸⁰ Anarcho-capitalism is a political philosophy that advocates for a society without the state in which the free market provides all public goods and services, such as law and order. It challenges other forms of anarchism by supporting private property and private institutions with significant economic power rather than offering a collectivist vision of a stateless society. ‘anarcho-capitalism’, Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/anarcho-capitalism>.

¹¹⁸¹ LASIT assessment, EAU & JTAC, 2020.

¹¹⁸² The term encompasses nonviolent activities that call on the authorities to act against fascists, such as mainstream civil society opposition to the Far-Right. However, this review is predominantly concerned with militant or radical anti-fascism, a de-centralised, non-hierarchical social movement that engages in both violent and non-violent forms of direct action against perceived fascism and other forms of the Far-Right.

¹¹⁸³ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021), p. 55.

¹¹⁸⁴ Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Samuel Hodgson and Austin Blair, ‘Behind The Black Bloc’, Federation for Defense of Democracies (June 2021), <https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2021/06/14/behind-the-black-bloc/>.

- 6.11 Of course, not all Single-Issue threats are inherently Far Left or anarchist. Advocates of single issues can be politically right leaning, for example eco-fascism, the combination of environmentalism with fascist narratives and solutions.¹¹⁸⁵ As with the Far Left, I would argue that eco-fascism is better understood through the lens of the Extreme Right than in a single-issue vacuum. I find it inconceivable that were the UK to suffer an eco-fascist terrorist attack, for example like the recent eco-fascist arson attack on a mink farm in Sweden,¹¹⁸⁶ that the authorities would not consider it an Extreme Right-Wing attack. Yet this is not the case with environmentalism that is fundamentally Far Left and anarchist in nature.
- 6.12 My review also covers extreme anti-lockdown and anti-vaxx protests which defied traditional political lines, attracting support from across the spectrum, and were largely animated by conspiracy theories. I would add to this movement the emerging anti-ULEZ (Ultra Low Emission Zone) crowd who, according to one academic, “are part of wider anti-state conspiracy movement in UK who are also focused on vaccines, 15-minute cities and cashless societies”, were mostly “radicalised during COVID”, and have been encouraging the vandalising of ULEZ cameras.¹¹⁸⁷ It is important that there is a category for such other and emerging threats.
- 6.13 Secondly, I am concerned that the threshold for LASIT extremism is higher than that for the primary threats. Prevent, the counter-radicalisation strand of CONTEST, is explicit in its inclusion of non-violent threats to our society,¹¹⁸⁸ and this is the lens through which Islamist extremism and the Extreme Right are viewed. By contrast, the government definition of LASIT extremism is the endorsement of violence or serious criminality in support of Left-Wing, anarchist, or Single-Issue goals.¹¹⁸⁹
- 6.14 In one respect this double standard reflects the reality on the ground. Islamist and Extreme Right-Wing threats that sit below the terrorism level are largely responded to via Prevent where understanding how people can be radicalised is a prerequisite for prevention. Whereas because LASIT extremism typically manifests as public disorder and criminality, it is dealt with largely by the police through the lens of “aggravated activism”.¹¹⁹⁰ However, what this largely

¹¹⁸⁵ Joshua Malloy, ‘Understanding Eco-Fascism: A Thematic Analysis of the Eco-Fascist Subculture on Telegram’, *Global Network on Extremism and Technology* (November 2022), <https://gnet-research.org/2022/11/02/understanding-eco-fascism-a-thematic-analysis-of-the-eco-fascist-subculture-on-telegram/>.

¹¹⁸⁶ Guy Weber, Martin Jonsson, Kevin Kayser, ‘No prison sentence for Luxembourg-based “eco-fascist” in Swedish court’, *RTL Lëtzebuerg*, 28 January 2021, <https://today.rtl.lu/news/luxembourg/a/1662740.html>.

¹¹⁸⁷ Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, Twitter, 18 December 2023, <https://twitter.com/amhitchens/status/1736824204857582025>.

¹¹⁸⁸ Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales, HMG (March 2024), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales-accessible#section-1-status-and-scope-of-the-prevent-duty>, paras. 17-20, 141 & 211.

¹¹⁸⁹ LASIT assessment, EAU & JTAC, 2020.

¹¹⁹⁰ The Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) Terminology and Thresholds Matrix for policing protest and public order distinguishes between (1) Lawful activism, understood as lawful activity to bring about change, (2) Low level aggravated activism, which involves unlawful or

misses is an appreciation of the ideologies driving these Extreme Left protest movements, which I believe is integral to a better understanding not only their worldview but also their internal organisation, strategy and tactics, likely alliances, and goals. It also fails to account for the non-violent threat such extreme protest groups may pose to our wider society and democratic processes.

- 6.15 **The Intelligence Services and Home Office should reclassify ‘Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue’ (LASIT) threats to provide ideological coherence to the categories and add the word ‘Extreme’ to avoid unintentionally conflating mainstream Left-Wing views with the Far Left. This means replacing LASIT with ‘Extreme Left-wing and Anarchist’ (ELA), for both terrorism and extremism threats from traditional revolutionary Far Left ideologies and new progressive protest movements of the kind detailed in this review that are part of the Far-Left subculture, and ‘Other’, for threats that have no ideological links to Islamists, the Extreme Right, or the Extreme Left.**
- 6.16 It is also my view that when threats are categorised narrowly based on the specific policy that a protest movement wants to change then wider links with extreme left and anarchist ideologies risk being overlooked. For example, my review has shown that Extinction Rebellion, understood by many as an environmentalist organisation, is also fundamentally rooted in an anarchist analysis of society and ways of organising.
- 6.17 **The government should classify both terrorism and extremism threats by ideology based on a holistic assessment of (1) the actors’ understanding of the issue around which they are seeking a change, i.e., the problem as they see it, (2) their tactics and personnel for achieving change, and (3) the nature of the intended outcome, i.e., the world they want to create. Ideology should not be determined narrowly by actors’ problem diagnosis because this can lead to wider links with Extreme Left ideologies being overlooked.**
- 6.18 As well as boosting internal understanding of the nature of the terrorism and extremism threats that the UK face, the government could take steps to improve the transparency of its reporting of the terrorism threat which would in turn improve external understanding, research, and scrutiny.
- 6.19 **MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing should explore publishing identifying information on late-stage attack plots to allow researchers, journalists and the wider public to track, report on and better**

criminal activity or activity beyond peaceful protest, (3) High level aggravated activism, i.e., criminality or activity that (i) has a significant impact on community tensions that could lead directly to violence against the community or (ii) a significant negative impact on UK businesses, and (4) terrorism. See https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, p. 82.

understand the nature and scale of the threat from failed terrorist attempts. Considerations include avoiding jeopardising potential prosecutions or libelling individuals who are later acquitted of terrorism-related charges.

- 6.20 **Serious incel-related violence in the UK should not be routinely categorised as terrorism. While the incel movement shares some features with extremist and terrorist ideologies, at present it does not have a coherent political platform that meets the definition of terrorism in the Terrorism Act 2000 and incels who chose violence rarely do so to bring about social or political change.**

Quality of Government Research Products

- 6.21 Understanding what inspires extreme political activism is a crucial part of confronting this threat to liberal and democratic political life. Yet the ideologies of Extreme Left-Wing and anarchist elements that are responsible for significant amounts of the mass disruption, criminal damage, intimidation, and violence detailed in my review, look to be going largely unexamined by government research functions. One notable exception is the research published by the Commission for Countering Extremism in 2019 reviewing the tactics and objectives of the Far Left which stands out as an example of work by a public body giving proper attention to this form of extremism.¹¹⁹¹
- 6.22 The Home Office provided me with an illustrative sample of analysis products produced mainly by the Extremism Analysis Unit (EAU¹¹⁹²) (now Homeland Security Analysis and Insight) and the Research and Information Unit (RICU), now situated within the Homeland Security Group, some with input from the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC). The products covered a range of terrorism and extremism threats, including Islamist, Extreme Right-Wing and LASIT.
- 6.23 My examination of these products reveals gaps in the analysis work being produced that, in my view, may negatively impact government understanding of and response to the threats and the way in which our response policy is being shaped and implemented.
- 6.24 A particularly notable gap is that while much of the analysis – particularly that on the Extreme Right – looked at online activities, there was little focus on the significance of street violence or protests movements or of in-person events such as rallies and marches like those documented in chapter one.

¹¹⁹¹ 'Commission for Countering Extremism selects leading academics for research papers', HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-for-countering-extremism-selects-leading-academics-for-research-papers>

¹¹⁹² Since renamed as Homeland Security Analysis and Insight (HSAI).

- 6.25 At times, the Home Office acknowledges the limitations of its research. On the role played by protests, it has assessed that extremists use public demonstrations to promote their narratives, and that extremism drives some public demonstrations. However, its own research suggested that there is limited evidence about the wider impact of such demonstrations; the scale and effects of these demonstrations, both the monetary and societal costs, were unknown.¹¹⁹³
- 6.26 On other occasions, it is my view that the conclusions reached regarding the Extreme Left do not take account of the whole threat picture. For example, Home Office research assessed that it is highly likely that elements of Extreme Left-Wing anti-fascist movements endorse violence against those they believe to be supportive of fascism, and yet it assesses the threat from Far Left extremism to be low.¹¹⁹⁴ This would seem to not sufficiently take account of the extent of physical confrontations, detailed in chapter one, between anti-fascists and the protesters they claim to be countering.
- 6.27 Of the 22 products made available to me only one was focused on LASIT extremism,¹¹⁹⁵ which appeared an oversight given the remit of my review. I am not satisfied that the assessment I saw represents a sufficient understanding of the threat from Extreme Left-Wing and anarchist protest groups and the way in which they use law breaking, disruption, incitement, and at times even violence as part of their activism.
- 6.28 Furthermore, the threshold for LASIT extremism being set at the endorsement of violence or serious criminality risks there being insufficient focus on the non-violent threat to our liberal democracy from Extreme Left-Wing and anarchist movements. I would like to have seen more on the wider societal impact these campaigns can have in a democracy, in particular how scenes of lawlessness risk harming public trust and confidence in the ability of law enforcement to properly uphold the rule of law. Nor did the analysis adequately acknowledge the way in which activists from the Extreme Left have engaged in inciting hatred, particularly against political opponents and some minorities.
- 6.29 Academic research commissioned for this review observed that Far Left criminality in the UK falls into two broad categories. The first consists of low-level violence, mostly directed towards police officers at demonstrations, along with property damage. The second are campaigns of intimidation, abuse, and threats, including threats of sexual violence or death threats. As the authors of that study note, it is important that these things not be

¹¹⁹³ Evidence Base: Extremism and Countering Extremism, Counter Extremism Insight and Analysis, Home Office Analysis and Insight, Executive Summary, p. 37.

¹¹⁹⁴ Evidence Base: Extremism and Countering Extremism, Counter Extremism Insight and Analysis, Home Office Analysis and Insight, p. 21.

¹¹⁹⁵ I was given fourteen RICU or EAU products on the Extreme Right-Wing, five on Islamist extremism, two dealing with extremism across ideologies, and only one assessment on LASI extremism.

underplayed, as even when they remain ‘only’ threats, they still undermine how those such as elected representatives fulfil their responsibilities.¹¹⁹⁶ The report describes a wide ranging far left ecosystem in the UK and draws on extensive primary and secondary evidence. It is difficult to explain why those working in this area in government and the police do not have this kind of information available to them.

6.30 Finally, I am concerned by the lack of confidence in both RICU and the EAU’s own assessments of the research products they produce. One EAU product concerning the influence that Right Wing extremists in the UK have overseas was marked with a ‘Low-Medium’ confidence statement.¹¹⁹⁷ Another joint EAU and JTAC product on LASIT extremism was marked with a ‘Low’ confidence statement.¹¹⁹⁸ Of all the products provided to the review, only one report carried a ‘Medium-High’ confidence statement, the highest grade I saw. The reason provided for a lack of confidence in these products was lack of information and available data. The government must look to close the gap here, so that it is able to provide assessments those in government can have greater confidence in.

6.31 **The government should address the gaps in knowledge within government and law enforcement agencies of the ideologies, tactics, and actors within Extreme Left-Wing and anarchist protest movements and the repercussions on democracy and British society. This means developing a plan to improve both the quality and confidence levels of research and analysis products and to address the current disparity between analysis of the Extreme Right and the Extreme Left. This should apply to products from the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), MI5 Behavioural Science Unit (BSU), Research Information and Communications Unit (RICU) and Homeland Security Analysis and Insight (HSAI) in the Home Office, Counter Terrorism Policing and the national police.**

Government Engagement With Extreme Protest Movements

6.32 One consequence of insufficient understanding of extremism threats is poor engagement. Both the Prevent Review 2023 and an earlier review in 2011 noted the poor record of successive governments of engaging with, or being advised by, Islamist groups.¹¹⁹⁹ I have observed similar mistakes being made by those in leadership positions regarding extreme protest movements.

¹¹⁹⁶ Daniel Allington and David Toube, *The British far-left: a study of a political ecosystem* (2021).

¹¹⁹⁷ EAU, *UK-Based Right-Wing Extremist Influencers’ Overseas Influence* (Issued 7/12/2020).

¹¹⁹⁸ EAU/JTAC, *Left-Wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue (LASI) Extremism in the UK* (+JTAC, 22/4/2020).

¹¹⁹⁹ ‘Independent Review of Prevent’, HMG, (February 2023) pp. 9 & 127,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf.

- 6.33 I believe it was a mistake, for example, for Environment Secretary at the time, Rt Hon Michael Gove MP, to have met publicly with Extinction Rebellion in April 2019 at a time when the group had brought large parts of central London to a standstill and disrupted the Houses of Parliament and the London Stock Exchange with their protests. Gove would have learned little from the meeting that he could not have done from reading the group's published material, whereas his meeting with the group gives them the legitimacy, by being seen as acceptable interlocutor with the government. This ought not have been the case; Extinction Rebellion's tactics at the time were based on what co-founder Roger Hallam called "civil resistance model",¹²⁰⁰ causing disruption and law breaking on a large scale to overwhelm law enforcement and the criminal justice system.¹²⁰¹
- 6.34 The question of engagement in the context of political protest is complicated by the fact that protest organisers are encouraged to liaise with the police to facilitate the protest. That is the right approach and should continue as best it can. During my review I became aware of two distinct challenges in this regard. First, protest groups do not always liaise with the police in good faith. Academic research commissioned for this review, which included interviews with senior officers who had led the policing of Extinction Rebellion protests found that despite the group having a police liaison link, it "had often provided less than full information about its plans, avoiding this stage of negotiation and taking the police by surprise". This, it was argued, together with the disruptive nature of the group's protests had "resulted in the police being overwhelmed, which itself can give rise to further risks". Second, protest groups that are anarchist in nature are often non-hierarchical and it can prove difficult for local forces to identify the organisers of upcoming protests. As discussed in chapter one, this was the case in Bristol with the 2021 anti-government 'Kill the Bill' protest,¹²⁰² although the covid regulations in place at the time also discouraged organisers from identifying themselves.¹²⁰³
- 6.35 While the police have a responsibility to engage with protest organisers to facilitate protest, I would advise them not to engage with extreme groups beyond that, for example by inviting them to participate in advisory roles as has been the case with Islamists.¹²⁰⁴

¹²⁰⁰ Roger Hallam, 'The Civil Resistance Model', in *This Is Not a Drill. An Extinction Rebellion Handbook* (Penguin Random House, 2019), pp. 99-105, p. 100.

¹²⁰¹ Ben Webster, Will Humphries, 'Police overwhelmed by Extinction Rebellion protesters plotting to clog up justice system', *The Times*, 19 April 2019 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/police-overwhelmed-by-extinction-rebellion-protesters-plotting-to-clog-up-justice-system-btmb2hz6f>.

¹²⁰² 'What Actually Happened in Bristol- And How a Narrative is Built', Anarchist Federation, <http://afed.org.uk/what-actually-happened-in-bristol-and-how-a-narrative-is-built/>.

¹²⁰³ 'Police Power and the Right to Peaceful Protest', APPG On Democracy and the Constitution (1 July 2021), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6033d6547502c200670fd98c/t/60dcb2dbca4d9050ca9fe09d/1625076444200/Clapham+and+Bristol+Inquiry+Report+-+APPROVED.pdf>, p.44.

¹²⁰⁴ 'Independent Review of Prevent', HMG (February 2023), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1134986/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, paras. 6.205-6.216.

- 6.36 I understand work is being done on how the government should engage with communities by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), which I welcome. I encourage DLUHC to consider whether protest movements who seek to bypass parliamentary democracy and impose their views on the rest of society without the democratic consent of the people are appropriate partners for government.
- 6.37 **The government should put liberal first principles at the heart of how it confronts extreme protest movements. These principles are upholding parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, defending free expression and the free press, and not supporting or advocating for hostile states and non-state actors. This means central and local government committing not to fund, work with, nor consult with groups who do not commit to legal means to secure change or who engage in or facilitate intimidation or harassment. Outside of government, elected representatives of mainstream political parties should not engage with such groups. These principles should guide government research activities, with groups that fail to adhere to these principles opening themselves up to scrutiny.**
- 6.38 **Overall, it is my view that the government could benefit from ongoing scrutiny of its response to the evolving challenges of political protest, violence, and disruption. To this end, the government should make the role of Independent Adviser on Political Violence and Disruption permanent with appropriate resourcing. The role should include monitoring extreme protest movements, political violence, and mass disruption, informing government and relevant parts of the public sector about the evolving nature of the threat, and advising on our collective response.**

Police Intelligence and Collaboration on Political Protest, Violence, and Disruption

- 6.39 This section assesses the effectiveness of police collaboration and intelligence surrounding political violence and disruption.

Police Collaboration

- 6.40 Providing the central intelligence coordination function to police forces across the country is the National Police Coordination Centre (NPoCC), which sits within the National Police Chief's Council. NPoCC is the focal point for coordinating policing of nationally significant protests, such as those involving climate change, animal rights and anti-vaxx, as their remit covers low-level

aggravated activism,¹²⁰⁵ defined as unlawful or criminal activity, or activity beyond peaceful protest.¹²⁰⁶ The NPoCC also facilitates the provision of Mutual Aid, the sharing of personnel and resources across police forces in response to, or in anticipation of, a major incident or event.¹²⁰⁷

- 6.41 The NPoCC has, by virtue of its remit, an indirect, complicated, and controversial history rooted in the inappropriate use of undercover policing by different bodies within the police tasked with understanding political protest and public order. The Undercover Policing Inquiry, set up in 2015 to scrutinise undercover policing across England and Wales since 1968,¹²⁰⁸ set out a history of problematic behaviour from the police regarding the undercover policing of political, environmental, and social groups, and trade unions. The Special Demonstration Squad, a covert unit that existed with the Metropolitan Police between 1968 and 2008, and subsequently the National Public Order Intelligence Unit active until 2011, were initially tasked with gathering intelligence on ‘domestic extremism’ (largely environmental, animal rights and Far Right groups). This was then folded into Counter Terrorism Policing’s national domestic extremism unit, and later the NPoCC was tasked with managing the intelligence capability around lawful protest.¹²⁰⁹ The Strategic Intelligence and Briefing Team, a small team that conducts this work within NPoCC, identify risk areas and engage with local forces to manage the risk on the ground.
- 6.42 While the present set-up and delineation of responsibilities regarding the management of political protests falls outside of the history as set out by the Undercover Policing Inquiry,¹²¹⁰ the shadow that history casts on the NPoCC’s work is, in my view, not insignificant.
- 6.43 While the NPoCC are confident in their assessment of public order risk, having designed a sophisticated risk assessment tool for the low-level aggravated activism that they oversee, I am concerned about the potential for inconsistencies in the relationship between the NPoCC and local police forces. Without a standardised approach it falls to the interpretation of local forces to assess which matters have national impact. This embeds the risk that stretched local forces will systematically under-prioritise public order concerns that may have substantial national significance in favour of their

¹²⁰⁵ National Police Chiefs’ Council, <https://www.npcc.police.uk/our-work/national-police-coordination-centre-npccc/>.

¹²⁰⁶ ‘Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism’, Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (13 July 2022) Counter Terrorism Policing Terminology and Thresholds Matrix (CTP TTM), available in: https://isc.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/E02710035-HCP-Extreme-Right-Wing-Terrorism_Accessible.pdf, p. 82.

¹²⁰⁷ ‘National Policing Guidelines on Charging for Police Services: Mutual Aid Cost Recovery’, National Police Chiefs’ Council April 2022 <https://www.npcc.police.uk/SysSiteAssets/media/downloads/publications/publications-log/2021/npcc-2021-22-charging-for-police-service---mutual-aid-guidelines.pdf>.

¹²⁰⁸ ‘Undercover Policing Inquiry’, <https://www.ucpi.org.uk/about-the-inquiry/>.

¹²⁰⁹ National Police Chiefs’ Council Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²¹⁰ National Police Chiefs’ Council Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

local policing priorities. As well as deprioritising information sharing, NPoCC officers have characterised local forces' response to these activities as varied. Failing to see the wider national effects of repeated low level aggravated activism will have resulted in missed opportunities for disruption.¹²¹¹

- 6.44 The lack of operational capability awarded to the NPoCC, and its reliance on local forces to act upon intelligence provided to them, has led to some notable failures to interdict protestors' criminal behaviour. One such example occurred in October 2019 when Extinction Rebellion transported a fire engine to central London and used it to spray red paint on the Treasury building.¹²¹² The NPoCC knew of the planned action by activists, were aware of where the fire engine was being stored and the insurance issues with it, and have since expressed frustration at the lack of proactive activity to seize or disrupt the vehicle before it was used to commit damage.
- 6.45 It appears imperative that there is a process by which vital intelligence on public order issues are acted upon by local forces. I am aware that a pilot project has been undertaken to try to address this gap with the creation of a small development team deployed to work with local forces and support their disruption capabilities.¹²¹³
- 6.46 **The NPoCC should commit greater resources to ensuring greater collaboration between central intelligence gathering functions and local operational capabilities in relation to political protest and public order to ensure that intelligence regarding national public order issues is acted upon by local forces. Local risk assessments should include an appreciation of the national threat picture.**

Police Intelligence

- 6.47 Beyond collaboration, other key issues have emerged regarding intelligence gathering and policing protests. Firstly, the Metropolitan Police view is protest is on a continuum and that it is increasingly challenging to delineate between low-level terrorism activity and public order offences on the one hand, and between public disorder and disruption and lawful and peaceful demonstration on the other.¹²¹⁴ One senior police officer explained that a 2009 national review of policing tactics for protests, while overall helpful had given rise to the erroneous view held by some officers that if a public demonstration is

¹²¹¹ National Police Chiefs' Council Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²¹² Katherine Lawton, 'Now Extinction Rebellion clowns who bought fire engine then used it to spray fake blood over the Treasury in eco-stunt are cleared of criminal damage', *Daily Mail*, 31 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12694229/Now-Extinction-Rebellion-clowns-bought-fire-engine-used-spray-fake-blood-Treasury-eco-stunt-cleared-criminal-damage.html>

¹²¹³ National Police Chiefs' Council Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²¹⁴ Meeting notes - MET 2 February 2021.

peaceful than it is necessarily lawful.¹²¹⁵ This, it was argued, explained the slowness by the police to understand and react to groups such as Extinction Rebellion.¹²¹⁶

- 6.48 The case was put to me by both senior leaders in the Metropolitan Police and the NPoCC team that policing public protest is challenged by the limitations of intelligence-gathering methods available, especially for low-level aggravated activism or the so-called grey areas where lawful activists are engaging in behaviours which border on low-level aggravated activism.¹²¹⁷ It was put to me that the tactics available to the Metropolitan Police to understand and anticipate Extinction Rebellion, for example, were limited to watching them on social media and using forward intelligence teams,¹²¹⁸ officers who are deployed to spontaneous or pre-planned public order and public safety events as a resource to identify and gather information on groups and individuals.¹²¹⁹ For protest organised on social media, police forces are largely limited to a ‘watch and anticipate’ method.¹²²⁰ The police were not authorised to penetrate closed systems used by Extinction Rebellion online or to deploy what are known as Covert Human Intelligence Sources or undercover officers to understand the group. This, I was told, was because the risk of harm posed by group did not meet the threshold for proportionality set out in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, known as RIPA,¹²²¹ which is designed to disproportionate use of covert techniques carried out by public authorities.¹²²²
- 6.49 I wanted to better understand whether the thresholds set by RIPA were frustrating the ability of officers to conduct proactive intelligence-gathering on people and groups committed to law breaking and disruption, including, at times, violence.¹²²³ I heard mixed views from the relevant stakeholders, with some arguing that there is a “nervousness” around undercover policing, while others argue that the kinds of groups covered in this review do not meet the threshold. The NPoCC suggested that RIPA does allow for undercover activities to prevent public disorder but that there is a lack of understanding at local level of the legislation and the full threat picture. Regarding online monitoring, it was suggested to me that requests for enhanced surveillance

¹²¹⁵ Meeting notes - MET 2 February 2021. See here for an example of an Extinction Rebellion protest in which over 400 protestors are arrested, despite minimal violence: Jamie Grierson, Damian Gayle, ‘More than 400 arrested at Extinction Rebellion protests in London’, *The Guardian*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/apr/17/300-arrested-extinction-rebellion-london-cells>

¹²¹⁶ Meeting notes - MET 2 February 2021.

¹²¹⁷ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021; Meeting notes - MET 2 February 2021.

¹²¹⁸ Meeting notes - MET 2 February 2021.

¹²¹⁹ ‘Forward Intelligence Team Officer’, College of Policing, <https://profdev.college.police.uk/professional-profile/forward-intelligence-team-officer/>.

¹²²⁰ Meeting notes - MET 2 February 2021.

¹²²¹ Meeting notes - MET 2 February 2021.

¹²²² ‘Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)’, HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulation-of-investigatory-powers-act-2000-ripa/regulation-of-investigatory-powers-act-2000-ripa>.

¹²²³ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

are not authorised because “risk appetite” to do so is absent.¹²²⁴ If managed carefully, this would be a growth opportunity allowing officers to, for example, tap into the expertise of adjacent policing teams adept at covert social media monitoring.¹²²⁵ It was also suggested to me that some of the nervousness around submitting requests for undercover policing stems from the public perception that activists from groups like Extinction Rebellion have a “decent” ideology or that criminal damage cases will be dismissed because the cause is just.¹²²⁶ However, others such as officers in the MET Public Order Intelligence Unit, are clear that their remit (non-extremism public order concerns) does not meet the threshold for various forms of covert surveillance because with low level offending they cannot demonstrate significant impact.¹²²⁷

6.50 In my view, ‘threat’ is considered almost exclusively through the lens of violence to the neglect of wider erosion to the democratic process and societal cohesion from, for example, cumulative and widespread low-level offending or the perception that those who engage in such behaviour do so with impunity. Longer term risks to public order, particularly in the absence of robust national surveillance, data mapping and intelligence-gathering capabilities, are not being examined as closely as they ought.

6.51 Data-mapping and artificial intelligence presents new opportunities for intelligence development. Particularly as officers are observing greater crossover between groups of protesters, in comparison to historic protest movements that had greater issue-based distinctions, further data and software systems are likely required to identify problem areas and gaps.¹²²⁸ Officers have stated that artificial intelligence has been used successfully in serious and organised crime, and indicated that even conservative improvements in the use of such technology to map individuals, groups and networks would have benefit.¹²²⁹ Yet issues around acquiring and sharing information, particularly legal obligations to delete data, have frustrated efforts.¹²³⁰ Some of these issues are addressed in the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill which, at the time of writing, is at the Committee stage.¹²³¹

6.52 The Home Secretary should task His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to conduct a short review on whether undercover surveillance is being used appropriately in the

¹²²⁴ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²²⁵ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²²⁶ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²²⁷ Met INTEL team, 23 December 2021.

¹²²⁸ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²²⁹ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²³⁰ Meeting notes - NPoCC 16 December 2021.

¹²³¹ ‘Data Protection and Digital Information Bill’, <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3430#timeline>.

context of public order and aggravated activism. Part of this review should include an assessment of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (2000) with a view to extending police use of covert surveillance to prevent serious disruption during protests.

Legislating to Deal with Public Disorder, Political Violence, and Disruption

- 6.53 This section assesses whether current legislation gives the police sufficient powers to deal effectively with public disorder, political violence, and disruption.
- 6.54 This review was conducted largely while the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill and the Public Order Bill were being debated by Parliament. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill received royal assent on 28 April 2022, after a difficult passage in which the government was defeated on several significant provisions relating to protest and public order. The Public Order Act gained royal assent on 2 May 2023. Elements of the legislation had also faced opposition, with the defeat of several government amendments designed to confront serious disruption from slow walking protests. The government introduced these measures with a Statutory Instrument instead.
- 6.55 A number of the measures from the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill were reintroduced in the Public Order Bill, including introducing new criminal offences of locking-on and going equipped to lock-on, of obstructing major transport works, and of interference with key national infrastructure, as well as extending stop and search powers for police to search for and seize objects (such as lock-on devices) that may be used in the commission of a protest-related offence, and introducing Serious Disruption Prevention Orders to target repeat protestors who are determined to inflict disruption on the public. Labour peer Baroness Chakrabarti successfully put forward a sensible amendment to include protections for journalists reporting on the protests as well as legal observers, academics, and bystanders.¹²³² I welcomed these measures being reintroduced on the grounds that it would afford an opportunity for public representatives to rethink their approach to the debate around the acceptable parameters of protest in the UK.
- 6.56 Alongside protecting the right to peaceful protest, there should be greater emphasis on the primacy of our democratic process and the need to protect it from an array of threats, including those determined to manipulate democracy through disruptive force, whether that be mobs intimidating democratic representatives as they go about their business or efforts to disrupt the lives

¹²³² Amendment led by Baroness Chakrabarti, <https://bills.parliament.uk/publications/49698/documents/2892> Clause 54 p.9; Charlotte Tobitt, 'Protection for journalists added into anti-protest Public Order Bill', Press Gazette, 8 February 2023, <https://pressgazette.co.uk/news/protection-for-journalists-added-into-public-order-bill/>.

of people and communities to grab attention for a particular cause, no matter how worthy.

- 6.57 In part, this rethink should be driven by the scale of the disconnect between the debate by the political class and activists, and the views of the public. Polling commissioned for this review shows that while 70% of the public accept protesting is an important way to raise awareness of a cause, there is overwhelming opposition to protestors attacking the police (95%) or counter-protestors (93%) and defacing public buildings and property (93%), and large majorities are opposed blocking roads and public transport (74%), gluing or chaining themselves to public buildings (66%), and occupying public spaces (64%).
- 6.58 In my view, the measures set out in the public order legislation passed during this review represent a serious attempt by the government to place greater protections on the democratic process. This section will recap the relevant content of this legislation before going on to ask how well it is working, focusing on its use over the Coronation, against slow walking protests and, most recently, regarding the anti-Israel protests following the terrorist attacks on Israel perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023.

Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022

- 6.59 The government announced three primary purposes of the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (PCSC Act). These were to equip police officers with the powers and tools to keep themselves and the public safe, to introduce tougher sentencing for the most dangerous offenders¹²³³ while also ending automatic halfway release from prison for those who committed serious crimes, and to improve the efficiency of the court and tribunal system by modernising existing court processes.¹²³⁴
- 6.60 The PCSC Act created a wide range of new powers and offences, many of them concerning disruption and law breaking when protesting. The government argued that it has “long been considered that the law is not sufficiently robust in this area” and pointed out that “while incidences of damage and desecration of memorials are typically of low monetary value”, they “very often carry a high sentimental and emotional impact.”¹²³⁵
- 6.61 Significantly for this review, the powers in the PCSC Act for imposing conditions on public processions and public assemblies amended Section 12

¹²³³ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill Debate, Second Reading, 15 March 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2021-03-15/debates/3F59B66E-E7A1-484B-86E3-E78E71D0FE0F/PoliceCrimeSentencingAndCourtsBill>.

¹²³⁴ ‘Overarching Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet’, HMG (August 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-overarching-factsheet>.

¹²³⁵ ‘Overarching Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet’, HMG (August 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-overarching-factsheet>.

of the Public Order Act 1986 to provide a detailed description of what constitutes significant disruption in law.¹²³⁶ The amendment here took the provision in the Public Order Act 1986 about “serious disruption to the life of the community”,¹²³⁷ and stipulated that for the purposes of the legislation, serious disruption could particularly involve a “significant delay to the delivery of a time-sensitive product to consumers of that product, or prolonged disruption of access to any essential goods or any essential service”.¹²³⁸ Here, essential goods and essential services were listed as particularly being, “(i) the supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel, (ii) a system of communication, (iii) a place of worship, (iv) a transport facility, (v) an educational institution, or (vi) a service relating to health.”¹²³⁹

6.62 As outlined by the government,¹²⁴⁰ the Act brought in the following measures designed to address disruptive protest and lawbreaking during protests.

- Increased the range of conditions police can impose on public assemblies and introduced new conditions that police can set if the level of noise generated by a protest may result in disruption to the activities of an organisation in the vicinity of the protest. These conditions matched those that police can place on a moving procession, such as setting a fixed timeframe for the protest, and setting a limit on noise levels.
- Increased the maximum penalty for wilfully obstructing a highway from a £1000 fine to an unlimited fine, or six months’ imprisonment, or both.¹²⁴¹ The measure means that the offence can also be committed when the highway has been closed by the police.
- Amended the offence on the breaching of conditions on protest to close the loophole exploited by protesters when informed of conditions.¹²⁴²
- Introduced a statutory offence of public nuisance, to cover the same conduct as the already existing common law offence. The aim was to provide clarity to the police and potential offenders on what conduct is forbidden.¹²⁴³

¹²³⁶ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/enacted>.

¹²³⁷ Public Order Act 1986, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/64/2020-12-01>.

¹²³⁸ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/enacted>.

¹²³⁹ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/enacted>.

¹²⁴⁰ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32>; ‘Overarching Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet’, HMG (August 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-overarching-factsheet>; ‘Protest powers: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet’, HMG (August 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-protest-powers-factsheet>.

¹²⁴¹ The measure means that the offence can also be committed when the highway has been closed by the police.

¹²⁴² Where previously protesters could evade prosecution for breaching conditions by tearing up written conditions, or covering their ears when told them, the Act changed the threshold for prosecution from proving where a person “knowingly fails to comply with a condition imposed”, to where a person “knows or ought to have known” that the condition has been imposed.

¹²⁴³ Moving the offence onto statute, and abolishing the common law offence, the maximum penalty reduced from an unlimited term to 10-years imprisonment.

- Prohibited the obstruction of vehicular access to the Parliamentary Estate, so that police can direct an individual to cease, or not start, obstructing the passage of a vehicle into or out of Parliament, making it an offence not to comply with such a direction. The Home Secretary can designate another area if Parliament moves location.
- Introduced expedited Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) for schools, schools, vaccination and test and trace sites (covered in more detail later in this chapter).
- Increased the sentencing powers that the criminal courts have where criminal damage is caused to a memorial. Criminal damage of property is an offence with a maximum sentence of ten years' imprisonment, however where damage value is less than £5,000, the offence attracts a maximum sentence of three months' imprisonment, or a fine of up to £2,500, or both. This measure lifts these restrictions for damage value of less than £5,000 where the offence is the damage or desecration of a memorial.

6.63 The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 featured several other measures that although not directly designed to tackle disruptive protest, could be used by authorities to address some of the matters of concern to this Review. As outlined by the government, these are the following:

- Increased the maximum penalty from 12 months to two years in prison for a person who assaults or commits an offence of battery against an emergency worker.
- Placed a statutory duty on the courts when sentencing offenders for assaults on workers providing a public service, performing a public duty, or providing a service to the public, to treat that fact as an aggravating factor.
- Introduced a serious violence duty on specified authorities in a local area to collaborate to prevent and reduce serious violence in the area.
- Strengthened police powers to tackle unauthorised encampments.

The Public Order Act

6.64 Unlike the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (PCSC Act), the Public Order Act 2023 is only concerned with tackling law breaking and disruption when protesting. This legislation went further in defining what is serious disruption in law, building on the PCSC Act's description of serious disruption at public processions and public assemblies, with a new "Meaning of serious disruption" provision.¹²⁴⁴ Here the Public Order Act 2023 defined "serious

¹²⁴⁴ Public Order Act 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/15/enacted>.

disruption” as where, through physical obstruction, individuals or an organisation are prevented, or hindered to more than a minor degree, from carrying out their day-to-day activities (particularly making a journey), construction or maintenance works, making or receiving a delivery of a time-sensitive product, or accessing any essential goods or service.¹²⁴⁵

6.65 As well as defining the meaning of serious disruption, the legislation introduced the following measures:¹²⁴⁶

- Created new offences for individuals locking-on and going equipped to lock-on to others, vehicles, or objects.
- Created a new offence for causing disruption by tunnelling.
- Created a new offence for obstructing major transport work.
- Created a new offence for interfering with key national infrastructure.
- Extended stop and search powers for police to search for and seize objects, such as lock-on devices, that may be used in the commission of an offence as part of a protest.
- Introduced serious disruption prevention orders as a court order targeting protestors who repeatedly disrupt the public.
- Amended the seniority of a police officer in London who may attach conditions to an upcoming protest or prohibit a trespassory assembly, reducing it from Assistant Commissioner Commander, to match the equivalent position in forces outside of London.
- Extended the powers to manage public assemblies to the British Transport Police and the Ministry of Defence Police.
- Enabled a Secretary of State to bring civil proceedings in relation to protest activity.
- Introduced abortion clinic safe access zones.
- Introduced a safeguard for journalists reporting on protests.

¹²⁴⁵ “Meaning of serious disruption

(1) For the purposes of this Act, the cases in which individuals or an organisation may suffer serious disruption include, in particular, where the individuals or the organisation—(a) are by way of physical obstruction prevented, or hindered to more than a minor degree, from carrying out— (i) their day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey), (ii) construction or maintenance works, or (iii) activities related to such works, (b) are prevented from making or receiving, or suffer a delay that is more than minor to the making or receiving of, a delivery of a time-sensitive product, or (c) are prevented from accessing, or suffer a disruption that is more than minor to the accessing of, any essential goods or any essential service.

(2) In this section— (a) “time-sensitive product” means a product whose value or use to its consumers may be significantly reduced by a delay in the supply of the product to them; (b) a reference to accessing essential goods or essential services includes in particular a reference to accessing— (i) the supply of money, food, water, energy or fuel, (ii) a system of communication, (iii) a place of worship, (iv) a transport facility, (v) an educational institution, or (vi) a service relating to health.”

Public Order Act 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/15/enacted#section-1-1-b>.

¹²⁴⁶ ‘Public Order Bill: factsheet’, HMG (August 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-order-bill-overarching-documents/public-order-bill-factsheet>.

- 6.66 The government argued that the measures in the Public Order Act were required by pointing to recent acts by protesters at the time that “included halting public transport networks, disrupting fuel supplies and preventing hundreds of hard-working people from getting to their jobs.”¹²⁴⁷
- 6.67 The locking-on offence had been proposed as an amendment by the government to the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Bill during its reading in the House of Lords in January 2022,¹²⁴⁸ but was defeated in the Lords.¹²⁴⁹ During the course of my review, several senior Metropolitan Police officers made the case for introducing a locking-on offence describing it as a “missed opportunity”.¹²⁵⁰ This measure has subsequently been reintroduced through the Public Order Act. In my view this is a sensible addition. The maximum penalty for locking-on is six months’ imprisonment, an unlimited fine, or both, while the maximum penalty for going equipped to lock-on is an unlimited fine.¹²⁵¹
- 6.68 For the creation of offences for disruption through tunnelling and obstructing the construction and maintenance of major transport projects, the government particularly identified these measures as reacting to disruptive protests targeting the HS2 project. Here the Government pointed to the protestors at the Euston Square tunnel where HS2 reported that a protester removed part of the shoring, causing a tunnel to collapse on a contractor.¹²⁵²

Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community Regulations 2023

- 6.69 With the new measures on public assemblies introduced by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, which could be used to confront protesters blocking roads with static protests, some activist groups, such as Insulate Britain and Just Stop Oil, adopted the strategy of slow walking protests to disrupt public highways.¹²⁵³ In an effort to tackle this specific form of disruption and to ensure that police were clear that they should intervene to stop activists doing this, the government introduced an amendment to the Public Order Bill to allow the police impose conditions on public processions where

¹²⁴⁷ ‘Public Order Bill: factsheet’, HMG (August 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-order-bill-overarching-documents/public-order-bill-factsheet>.

¹²⁴⁸ ‘Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill completes passage through parliament’, UK Parliament, 29 April 2022, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2021/september-2021/lords-debates-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-at-second-reading>.

¹²⁴⁹ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, Division 7: held on 17 January 2022, UK Parliament, <https://votes.parliament.uk/Votes/Lords/Division/2669>.

¹²⁵⁰ Meeting note, Senior Metropolitan Police representatives, 2 February 2021.

¹²⁵¹ The Public Order Act 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/15/enacted>.

¹²⁵² Public Order Bill: factsheet’, HMG (August 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/public-order-bill-overarching-documents/public-order-bill-factsheet>.

¹²⁵³ Faye Brown, ‘MPs back crackdown on slow-walk protests amid warnings over ‘fascism’’, *Sky News*, 12 June 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/mps-back-crackdown-on-slow-walk-protests-amid-warnings-over-fascism-12901303>; Jack Mendel, ‘City grinds to a halt as Just Stop Oil’s slow walk protest comes to Square Mile’, *City AM*, 30 November 2023, <https://www.cityam.com/city-grinds-to-a-halt-as-just-stop-oils-slow-walk-protest-comes-to-square-mile/>

there is serious disruption.¹²⁵⁴ However, as with the locking-on offence, the measure faced criticism on civil liberties grounds,¹²⁵⁵ and was defeated in the Lords.¹²⁵⁶

- 6.70 In April 2023, when the Public Order Act 2023 had passed, the government announced that it would reintroduce the element on slow walking protest, with a Statutory Instrument that would support the new measures already enacted by Parliament.¹²⁵⁷ In my view, the government was right to push for these measures given the significant impact of this form of protest. Press reports at the time observed the frequency of this form of the protest, with *The Times* saying in May 2023 that protesters from Just Stop Oil had been marching in central London every day for five weeks,¹²⁵⁸ and the Metropolitan Police said that it was taking 45 minutes to an hour for protesters to be removed from roads.¹²⁵⁹
- 6.71 The Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community Regulations 2023, which amended Section 12 of the Public Order Act 1986, was laid before Parliament on 27 April 2023, and despite some opposition in the Lords was signed into law on 14 June 2023.¹²⁶⁰ As described above, the Public Order Act 1986 had provided powers to police to impose conditions on a public procession where a senior police officer, “reasonably believes that — it may result in serious public disorder, serious damage to property or serious disruption to the life of the community”.¹²⁶¹ The amendment to the legislation in the PCSC Act provided a non-exhaustive list of what could be “serious disruption to the life of the community”.¹²⁶² This was an important advance in ensuring that the law can meet the challenge from extreme protesters and for policing the disruptive protest methods the UK has witnessed recently. The Regulations of the Statutory Instrument amended the list of what could constitute “serious disruption to the life of the community”, and mandated that when a senior police officer is looking at placing conditions on a public procession they must take into account disruption that could occur whether the procession does or does not go ahead, and take into account the cumulative disruption that could arise from several public processions or public assemblies in the same

¹²⁵⁴ Public Order Act 2023, Lord Sharpe of Epsom’s amendment, Before clause 15, <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3153/stages/17243/amendments/10004285>.

¹²⁵⁵ Rowena Mason, Aamna Mhdin, Emine Sinmaz, ‘Police in England and Wales to get new powers to shut down protests before disruption begins’, *The Guardian*, 15 January 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/15/police-to-get-new-powers-to-shut-down-protests-before-disruption-begins>

¹²⁵⁶ Public Order Bill, Division 2: held on 7 February 2023, <https://votes.parliament.uk/votes/lords/division/2888>.

¹²⁵⁷ ‘Government acts to stop highly disruptive slow walking tactics’, HMG (April 2023),

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-acts-to-stop-highly-disruptive-slow-walking-tactics>.

¹²⁵⁸ Matt Dathan, Fiona Hamilton, ‘Just Stop Oil: laws ‘rushed through’ to stop slow-walking protests’, *The Times*, 31 May 2023,

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/just-stop-oil-laws-rushed-through-to-stop-slow-walking-protests-Ot26xbjbl>.

¹²⁵⁹ Damian Gayle, ‘Police to get powers to ban slow walking in traffic amid Just Stop Oil protests’, *The Guardian*, 28 April 2023,

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/apr/28/police-powers-ban-slow-walking-traffic-just-stop-oil-protests>

¹²⁶⁰ Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations 2023,

<https://statutoryinstruments.parliament.uk/instrument/XSt7LT2e>.

¹²⁶¹ Public Order Act 1986, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1986/64>.

¹²⁶² Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/enacted>.

area.¹²⁶³ The Statutory Instrument defines the “community” as any group of persons that may be affected by the public procession in question, rather than only those who live or work in the area of the procession.¹²⁶⁴

How Well the New Legislation on Protest is Working

Use of police powers and protest offences at the Coronation

- 6.72 There was criticism from civil society and the media of elements of the PCSC Act and the Public Order Act at the time of the coronation of King Charles III in May 2023.¹²⁶⁵ Much of this criticism has focussed on arrests made by police on the day of the coronation, or in the period leading up to it. At the time of the coronation, the Public Order Act had only been in effect for a matter of days, so it is difficult to determine the degree to which the problems are to do with the police being not sufficiently familiar with these powers, or rather with the powers themselves.
- 6.73 First, it is important to state that of the 64 arrests that the Metropolitan Police confirmed in August 2023 as having made during the police operation for the coronation,¹²⁶⁶ many of which do not appear to have been made under powers newly created by the PCSC Act or Public Order Act. The Police confirmed that 52 of the arrests were for protest offences.¹²⁶⁷ Most of these were reportedly for conspiracy to cause a public nuisance.¹²⁶⁸ (This was true for 20 of the 21 people whose cases the police referred to the Crown Prosecution Service.¹²⁶⁹) In all, it was reported that 46 people were arrested and bailed following police detaining them on suspicion of causing a public nuisance or breach of the

¹²⁶³ The Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348247626>.

¹²⁶⁴ The Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348247626>.

¹²⁶⁵ ‘Explainer: Anti-Monarchy Protests’, Liberty, https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/advice_information/explainer-anti-monarchy-protests/; ‘Disorder in the balance: the coronation arrests and Public Order Act 2023’, UK In A Changing Europe (12 May 2023), <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-coronation-arrests-and-the-public-order-act-2023/>; George Monbiot, ‘The coronation arrests are just the start. Police can do what they want to us now.’, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/may/12/coronation-protest-arrests-police>.

¹²⁶⁶ ‘Update on arrests made by officers at the Coronation’, Metropolitan Police, 30 August 2023, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-on-arrests-made-by-officers-at-the-coronation-471492>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230830134556/https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-on-arrests-made-by-officers-at-the-coronation-471492>.

¹²⁶⁷ ‘Update on arrests made by officers at the Coronation’, Metropolitan Police, 30 August 2023, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-on-arrests-made-by-officers-at-the-coronation-471492>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230830134556/https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-on-arrests-made-by-officers-at-the-coronation-471492>.

¹²⁶⁸ ‘Explainer: Anti-Monarchy Protests’, Liberty, https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/advice_information/explainer-anti-monarchy-protests/; Reemul Balla, ‘Metropolitan Police will apologize if mistakes made over coronation arrests’, *Sky News*, 7 June 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/metropolitan-police-will-apologise-if-mistakes-made-over-coronation-arrests-12898107>.

¹²⁶⁹ ‘Update on arrests made by officers at the Coronation’, Metropolitan Police, 30 August 2023, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-on-arrests-made-by-officers-at-the-coronation-471492>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230830134556/https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-on-arrests-made-by-officers-at-the-coronation-471492>.

peace.¹²⁷⁰ Causing a public nuisance was already a common law offence,¹²⁷¹ which the PCSC Act moved into statute in 2022, and so in this sense the arrests were not down to the legislation creating a new offence. In addition, arrests for breach of the peace have sometimes been erroneously thrown in with some of the critical media coverage of the arrests at the time of the coronation.¹²⁷² However, the fact that causing a public nuisance is now part of the PCSC Act, warrants continued scrutiny of how police are using this legislation.

- 6.74 There were several incidents of arrests at the coronation where there are valid questions about how the police used their powers around protest and disruption.
- 6.75 Not all of these were connected to the new offences or powers around protest. In May 2023, the Metropolitan Police and Lincolnshire Police referred themselves to the Independent Office for Police Conduct after the forces wrongly arrested Alice Chambers, a member of the public who had come to watch the coronation, when arresting a group of Just Stop Oil activists.¹²⁷³ It was reported that the arrest was made on suspicion of “potential to cause a breach of the peace”.¹²⁷⁴ The fact that Ms Chambers was held in a police cell for 13 hours before officers determined their error,¹²⁷⁵ is particularly damaging to public trust in the policing of protest.
- 6.76 In a further incident, on the night ahead of the coronation, the Metropolitan Police arrested three volunteers of Night Stars, Westminster City Council’s night safety campaign on suspicion of conspiracy to cause a public nuisance.¹²⁷⁶ They were arrested when distributing rape alarms,¹²⁷⁷ with the police reporting that there was intelligence that activists were going to use

¹²⁷⁰ Reemul Balla, ‘Metropolitan Police will apologise if mistakes made over coronation arrests’ *Sky News*, 7 June 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/metropolitan-police-will-apologise-if-mistakes-made-over-coronation-arrests-12898107>

¹²⁷¹ ‘Simplification of the Criminal Law: Public Nuisance and Outraging Public Decency’, Law Commission, <https://www.lawcom.gov.uk/project/simplification-of-the-criminal-law-public-nuisance-and-outraging-public-decency/>.

¹²⁷² For example, Sophia Sleight, ‘This Is Not What Democracy Looks Like’: British MPs Furious Over Coronation Arrests’, *Huffington Post*, 6 May 2023, https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/mps-king-charles-coronation-arrests_uk_6456623be4b0461603128303; Daniel Boffey, Nicola Slawson, ‘Police accused of ‘alarming’ attack on protest rights after anti-monarchist leader arrested’, *The Guardian*, 7 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/may/06/head-of-uks-leading-anti-monarchy-group-arrested-at-coronation-protest>; Jasmine Andersson, ‘Coronation: Met Police had every intention of arresting protesters- Republic leader’, *BBC News*, 8 May 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65523439>; Reemul Balla, ‘Metropolitan Police will apologise if mistakes made over coronation arrests’, *Sky News*, 7 June 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/metropolitan-police-will-apologise-if-mistakes-made-over-coronation-arrests-12898107>, ‘This is a dystopian nightmare:’ Met make 52 arrests amid protests during coronation’, *ITV*, 6 May 2023, <https://www.itv.com/news/2023-05-06/footage-appears-to-show-protesters-arrested-ahead-of-coronation>.

¹²⁷³ Miriam Burrell, ‘Met refers itself to police watchdog after royal fan detained for 13 hours’, *Evening Standard*, 17 May 2023, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/king-coronation-arrest-alice-chambers-just-stop-oil-metropolitan-police-b1081703.html>.

¹²⁷⁴ Tobi Thomas, ‘Police apologise after detaining royal fan at coronation for 13 hours’, *The Guardian*, 12 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/may/12/police-apologise-after-detaining-royal-superfan-for-13-hours-coronation-just-stop-oil>.

¹²⁷⁵ Miriam Burrell, ‘Met refers itself to watchdog after royal fan detained for 13 hours’, *Evening Standard*, 17 May 2023, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/king-coronation-arrest-alice-chambers-just-stop-oil-metropolitan-police-b1081703.html>.

¹²⁷⁶ Jess Warren and PA Media, ‘Women’s safety volunteers arrested ahead of Coronation’, *BBC News*, 7 May 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-65516825>.

¹²⁷⁷ ‘Police arrested volunteers handing out rape alarms’ over coronation disruption concerns’, *Sky News*, 7 May 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/police-arrested-volunteers-handing-out-rape-alarms-over-coronation-disruption-concerns-12875150>.

rape alarms to disrupt the Coronation procession.¹²⁷⁸ The Night Stars volunteers were released without charge.¹²⁷⁹ Westminster City Council has expressed its concern and requested that the police apologise to the volunteers.¹²⁸⁰ As mentioned, that public nuisance is now part of the PCSC Act, warrants continued scrutiny of how police are using this offence.

6.77 One set of arrests at the time of the coronation that caused public concern, and which involved a newly established offence from the Public Order Act, saw the arrest of six protesters from the Anti-Monarchist campaign group Republic on the morning of the Coronation.¹²⁸¹ It was reported that they were arrested on suspicion of going equipped for locking-on,¹²⁸² however Republic claimed that police misconstrued the straps they were planning on using to hold their signs at the protest.¹²⁸³ Days after the Coronation, it was reported that no charges were being made against the six protesters, and the Metropolitan Police said in a statement: “We regret that those six people arrested were unable to join the wider group of protesters”.¹²⁸⁴ The police conceded that they were not able to demonstrate intent to lock-on and wrote that it was not their “intention to prevent protest”, however they broadly defended the actions on the grounds that there was intelligence saying “protesters were determined to disrupt the Coronation procession”, and that with “the significance of the security operation, officers had been briefed to be extremely vigilant”.¹²⁸⁵ These are important points to take into consideration. Yet the fact that one of those apprehended by the police had been engaging with police Protest Liaison Team officers ahead of the event,¹²⁸⁶ would suggest that this part of the police operation had not been handled well.

¹²⁷⁸ Jess Warren and PA Media, ‘Women’s safety volunteers arrested ahead of Coronation’, *BBC News*, 7 May 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-65516825>.

¹²⁷⁹ Alannah Francis, ‘Met Police must apologise for arrest of volunteers handing out rape alarms at coronation, council says’, *iNews*, 10 May 2023, <https://iNews.co.uk/news/met-police-arrest-volunteers-rape-alarms-coronation-council-2329917>.

¹²⁸⁰ ‘Updated Statement on Night Star volunteers’, City of Westminster Council, (May 2023), <https://www.westminster.gov.uk/news/updated-statement-night-stars-volunteers>.

¹²⁸¹ ‘Explainer: Anti-Monarchy Protests’, *Liberty* (11 May 2023), https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/advice_information/explainer-anti-monarchy-protests/.

¹²⁸² Lara Keay, ‘How have protest laws changed- and how were they used during the coronation?’, *Sky News*, 9 May 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/how-have-protest-laws-changed-and-how-were-they-used-during-the-coronation-12876845>.

¹²⁸³ Adam Durbin & Daniel Sandford, ‘Dozens of protesters arrested during Coronation’, *BBC News*, 6 May 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-65507435>.

¹²⁸⁴ Kevin Rawlinson, Nadeem Badshah, ‘Met police ‘regret’ arrest of anti-monarchy protesters at coronation’, *The Guardian*, 8 May 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/may/08/arrests-coronation-protesters-premeditated-republic-chief-police>; ‘Arrests made during policing operation for the Coronation’, Metropolitan Police, 8 May 2023, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-arrests-made-during-policing-operation-for-the-coronation-466461>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230709192011/https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-arrests-made-during-policing-operation-for-the-coronation-466461>.

¹²⁸⁵ ‘Arrests made during policing operation for the Coronation’, Metropolitan Police, 8 May 2023, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-arrests-made-during-policing-operation-for-the-coronation-466461>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230709192011/https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-arrests-made-during-policing-operation-for-the-coronation-466461>.

¹²⁸⁶ ‘Arrests made during policing operation for the Coronation’, Metropolitan Police, 8 May 2023, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-arrests-made-during-policing-operation-for-the-coronation-466461>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230709192011/https://news.met.police.uk/news/update-arrests-made-during-policing-operation-for-the-coronation-466461>.

The implementation of measures for tackling slow walking protest

- 6.78 The 2023 regulations which more comprehensively outlined what could constitute serious disruption to the life of the community commenced on 15 June 2023. This is not a long period of time during which to observe how well the measures are working. However, there is some reason to think that the measures have not been as effective as the government intended them to be. It appears that, while the powers have not deterred activists from using slow walking protests, where the police have used them, they have been able to quickly move protesters from roads and arrest those who did not comply.
- 6.79 Within weeks of the regulations becoming law, Just Stop Oil used a series of slow walking protests to disrupt parts of central London. On 5 July 2023, with Just Stop Oil activists in their eleventh week of protests, the Metropolitan Police claim that they had been able to issue Section 12 conditions, from the amended Public Order Act 1986, to “immediately” get the activists out of the road at several sites across the capital. For instance, they said they had arrived at one site at 5.22 PM, and had cleared the road at 5.26 PM.¹²⁸⁷ Similarly, on 21 July 2023, 160 Just Stop Oil activists, in 16 small groups, marched to disrupt roads in central London, with the Metropolitan Police reporting that they were able to remove the protesters and arrested four of them for breaching conditions.¹²⁸⁸ However, it is not clear from reports how promptly the police acted to remove the protesters in this case, as there were media reports of members of the public pushing activists out of the road and allegedly knocking protesters onto the ground.¹²⁸⁹
- 6.80 Where Just Stop Oil has used slow walking protests to disrupt roads outside of London, the evidence suggests that police have not always made use of the new powers. When imposing conditions on slow walking protest, proportionality is vital, so that police are balancing the right to protest with the rights of the wider community.¹²⁹⁰ That being said, the legislation provides direction on where the balance should be set, and specifies that conditions can be set on protests where there is “hindrance that is more than minor to, the carrying out of day-to-day activities (including in particular the making of a journey)”.¹²⁹¹

¹²⁸⁷ Dan Woodland, ‘You’re getting NO sympathy from anyone!': Furious motorists blast Just Stop Oil eco clowns and beg them to get off the road as they stage ANOTHER infuriating slow march’, *Daily Mail*, 5 July 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12265685/Furious-motorists-blast-Just-Stop-Oil-eco-clowns-stage-infuriating-slow-march.html>.

¹²⁸⁸ ‘Just Stop Oil protesters shoved off the road during slow march in London’, *Sky News*, 21 July 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/just-stop-oil-protesters-shoved-off-the-road-during-slow-march-in-london-12924746>.

¹²⁸⁹ ‘Just Stop Oil protesters shoved off the road during slow march in London’, *Sky News*, 21 July 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/just-stop-oil-protesters-shoved-off-the-road-during-slow-march-in-london-12924746>.

¹²⁹⁰ ‘Public Order Act 1986- Regulations 2023’, College of Policing (15 June 2023), <https://assets.college.police.uk/s3fs-public/2023-06/Public-Order-Act-1986-Regulations-2023.pdf>.

¹²⁹¹ ‘The Public Order Act 1986 (Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community) Regulations 2023’, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2023/9780348247626>.

- 6.81 On 26 August 2023, around twenty Just Stop Oil activists held a slow walking protest in Leeds city centre and on an adjacent motorway.¹²⁹² A witness to the protest reported that some 50 police officers with police vehicles attended the demonstration.¹²⁹³ Media reports from the time do not speak of any arrests or intervention from the police to remove the protest from the road. If that was the case, for it to be defensible, the police would have to be confident that the slow marching on the motorway was not hindering the public to more than a minor degree. As the protest took place at a weekend, and pictures show very little traffic,¹²⁹⁴ there could have been grounds for such a view.
- 6.82 Yet at other times, media reports portray situations where activists have used slow walking protests to cause significant disruption to the public, with police failing to use the new powers. On 9 September 2023, Just Stop Oil activists marched in front of cars in Portsmouth, so that while this demonstration was also held at a weekend, there was direct disruption caused to the public.¹²⁹⁵ A video released by Just Stop Oil shows members of the public attempting to force the activists out of the way and cars pushing into the protesters.¹²⁹⁶ Press reports do not say that any of the activists were arrested, nor that the police removed the protesters from the road, however the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary said that officers were in the area to monitor the protest and prevent crime and disorder, as well as to minimise disruption.¹²⁹⁷ In Bristol, on 23 September 2023, 50 Just Stop Oil activists held up traffic in the city centre,¹²⁹⁸ with members of the public reportedly clashing with the activists and taking their banners.¹²⁹⁹ Police were pictured at the protest and were reported to have escorted the protesters.¹³⁰⁰ At another Just Stop Oil protest in Portsmouth, held on 28 September 2023, activists held a slow walking protest in front of vehicles, with police officers redirecting cars. A police spokesperson

¹²⁹² 'Just Stop Oil stages slow march through Leeds', Just Stop Oil, 26 August 2023, <https://juststopoil.org/2023/08/26/just-stop-oil-stages-slow-march-through-leeds/>; Eirian Jane Prosser, 'Now Just Stop Oil hit the north: Eco-clowns launch slow walk through the streets of Leeds', *Daily Mail*, 26 August 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12448605/Now-Just-Stop-Oil-hit-north-Eco-clowns-launch-slow-walk-streets-Leeds.html>.

¹²⁹³ Eirian Jane Prosser, 'Now Just Stop Oil hit the north: Eco-clowns launch slow walk through the streets of Leeds', *Daily Mail*, 26 August 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12448605/Now-Just-Stop-Oil-hit-north-Eco-clowns-launch-slow-walk-streets-Leeds.html>.

¹²⁹⁴ Just Stop Oil, Twitter, 26 August 2023, https://twitter.com/JustStop_Oil/status/1695404442135192027.

¹²⁹⁵ Joe Buncie, 'Just Stop Oil: Protesters attacked and hit by cars during Portsmouth 'slow march' demonstration', *The News, Portsmouth*, 15 September 2023, <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/crime/just-stop-oil-protesters-attacked-and-hit-by-cars-during-portsmouth-slow-march-demonstration-4338348>.

¹²⁹⁶ Just Stop Oil, YouTube, 9 September 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IT7LBqTjfm0>.

¹²⁹⁷ Joe Buncie, 'Just Stop Oil: Protesters attacked and hit by cars during Portsmouth 'slow march' demonstration', *The News, Portsmouth*, 15 September 2023, <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/crime/just-stop-oil-protesters-attacked-and-hit-by-cars-during-portsmouth-slow-march-demonstration-4338348>.

¹²⁹⁸ Clara Bullock and Martin Jones, 'Just Stop Oil march brings Bristol traffic to standstill', *BBC News*, 23 September 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-bristol-66901613>.

¹²⁹⁹ James Reynolds, 'Just Stop Oil gets frosty reception in Bristol too: Locals grab eco-zealots' banners as they stage protest in the south west', *Daily Mail*, 25 September 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12552827/just-stop-oil-bristol-protest.html>.

¹³⁰⁰ James Reynolds, 'Just Stop Oil gets a frosty reception in Bristol too: Locals grab eco-zealots' banners as they stage protest in the south west', *Daily Mail*, 25 September 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12552827/just-stop-oil-bristol-protest.html>; Ellie Kendall, 'Just Stop Oil protesters slow march through Bristol city centre', *Bristol Live*, 24 September 2023, <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/just-stop-oil-protesters-slow-8775699>.

said: “Officers attended to monitor the protest, prevent crime and disorder and minimise disruption. No arrests were made.”¹³⁰¹

- 6.83 The continued slow walking protests that activists have taken part in since the Serious Disruption to the Life of the Community Regulations 2023 came into force show that the regulations have not deterred activists and suggest police forces may not always be using the new powers effectively. This looks to be particularly true outside of London. Intentional disruption of people’s everyday lives is going ahead, sometimes leading to physical confrontations with members of the public. Police are attending these protests, and sometimes redirecting traffic, however in some cases they are failing to impose conditions to force protesters to march alongside the road, rather than in the road where they are stopping the people from going about their journeys in the way described in the legislation. There should be ongoing monitoring of the situation by the government and, where required, steps taken so that police are making effective and proportionate use of new powers to stop this form of aggravated activism. This could mean the National Police Chiefs’ Council issuing updated guidance.
- 6.84 If this recent change to the law fails to stop extreme protesters from using disruptive tactics to intentionally disrupt the public from going about their business, then the government should investigate what measures would effectively deter these protesters activists. There has been understandable public anger about the impact of such disruption, including delaying people from reaching medical services and obstructing those going to places of education, childcare and other forms of social care. There is also an economic impact on local businesses, as well as tradespeople and workers seeking to earn a living.
- 6.85 When ordinary people are negatively impacted by this form of aggravated activism, there is a strong moral argument that they should be entitled to compensation. Making those who organise disruptive protest and deliberately cause serious disruption liable for damages to those who have been the victim of their actions could serve as a powerful financial disincentive. It has always been the case that large demonstrations will cause some disruption to the public and where organisers work with police to plan road closures or areas for public assemblies, a democracy will rightly set the balance towards the right to protest. However, where small groups of activists do not coordinate with police and seek to intentionally cause as much disruption as possible, such as with slow walking protests in busy roads, the public should be able to seek to be awarded damages.

¹³⁰¹ Joe Buncie, ‘Just Stop Oil: 13 pictures of climate change activists marching in front of traffic in Portsmouth’, *The News, Portsmouth*, 28 September 2023, <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/people/just-stop-oil-13-pictures-of-climate-change-activists-marching-in-front-of-traffic-in-portsmouth-4352955>

- 6.86 Since I submitted my review, the government introduced a measure which will see the introduction of a £1,000 fine for anyone climbing on a war memorial during protests.¹³⁰²
- 6.87 In this review, I considered whether the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, and the Public Order Act 2023 are functioning as intended. It undoubtedly appears that they are doing some good in places when they are being used. As they are recent pieces of legislation, it is not possible to determine definitively whether these pieces of legislation have set the balance they were intended to or whether there should be significant amendments.
- 6.88 **For this reason, the government should monitor the ongoing implementation of measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 to ensure that provisions relating to extreme protest movements are being applied proportionately and effectively.**
- 6.89 **The government should also develop a mechanism to allow individuals and businesses who can evidence significant personal harm or economic damage from illegal disruptive protest to claim damages from protest organisers.**

Whether Current Legislation Gives the Police Sufficient Powers

Policing anti-Israel protests

- 6.90 While the legislation that was passed following the emergence of coordinated and sustained mass disruption tactics being used by Extreme Left environmental groups is beginning to prove effective, the country has been faced with another form of extreme protest. After the terrorist attacks on Israel perpetrated by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the war in Gaza these attacks caused, British cities have been subject to a particular type of anti-Israel protest. The national marches, and the tone of the demonstrations held in many parts of the country are taking on an intensity that goes well beyond other anti-Israel demonstrations in the UK. The legislation recently enacted had not been written to address these forms of extreme protest, where incitement to hatred and glorifying violence and terrorism, rather than disruption, is the primary damage done to British society.
- 6.91 I therefore consider it important that both the government and the police look at ways to meet this challenge. The first set of challenges is to do with public order and hate crime and the second are to do with the encouragement of

¹³⁰² Protest Measures-Volume 745, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-08/debates/71E44C6F-BD00-48EE-B0CA-42A8FD45C4B7/ProtestMeasures#>.

terrorism, and radicalisation into terrorism. Both have become a shocking dimension of these almost weekly marches.

- 6.92 I view it as significant that the national demonstrations following the 7 October terror attacks are coordinated by six organisations, many of which are linked to antisemitism and extremism.¹³⁰³ Several leaders or founders of these groups, including some who are at the head of these marches, have alleged links to Hamas or have been accused of expressing sympathy for the group or its views.¹³⁰⁴ A number of prominent figures at these marches have been accused of celebrating and supporting the 7 October attacks on civilians.¹³⁰⁵
- 6.93 There is often antisemitism on display at these marches, including through antisemitic posters and banners. These appear so consistently that I do not believe it is any longer realistic to distinguish between these marches and the antisemitism that so often appears on them, even if it is true that many who attend the marches are not antisemitic themselves. Many of the signs displayed by protesters draw on anti-Jewish stereotypes, and particularly use Nazi imagery and drew on the Holocaust in a way that suggested that rather than the victims, Zionists and Jewish people are now Nazis.¹³⁰⁶
- 6.94 The chanting that is heard at these marches is alleged by Jewish community groups and politicians to be antisemitic and has become a source of controversy.¹³⁰⁷ The Antisemitism Policy Trust, for example, analysed the ways in which common chants, writing on placards, and speeches made during recent protests crossed the line from free speech into antisemitism, including through expressing hatred towards Jews, blaming Jews for the actions of the Israeli government, spreading conspiracy theories about Jews, and calling for violence against Jews.¹³⁰⁸ Some of the chants heard by the protesters could be open to debate. My view is that the “From the River to the

¹³⁰³ ‘The organisations leading the pro-Hamas demonstrations in Britain since the outbreak of Operation Iron Swords’, The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre (19 December 2023), <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/en/the-organizations-leading-the-pro-hamas-demonstrations-in-britain-since-the-outbreak-of-operation-iron-swords/>.

¹³⁰⁴ David Rose, ‘Leaders of groups behind London pro-Palestinian march have links to Hamas’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 19 October 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/leaders-of-groups-behind-london-pro-palestinian-march-have-links-to-hamas-ng34ql4i>; Ewan Somerville and Daniel Martin, ‘Former Hamas chief ‘behind pro-Palestine Armistice Day protests’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/06/former-hamas-chief-behind-pro-palestine-armistice-day-march/>; George Odling, Jack Hardy, Rory Tingle, ‘The five faces behind London’s Gaza protests REVEALED: Leicester optician, a ‘senior Hamas operative’, and a university professor are some of the ringleaders of groups organising pro-Palestinian rally on Armistice Day’, *Daily Mail*, 8 November 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12724169/organisers-londons-armistice-day-protests.html>.

¹³⁰⁵ Felix Pope, ‘Activist who led march alongside Corbyn glorified October 7 terror’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 14 November 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/activist-who-led-march-alongside-corbyn-glorified-october-7-terror-xzci2m8q>; Dominic Penna, ‘Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell marched with pro-Hamas activist’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/18/corbyn-mcdonnell-palestine-march-hamas-activist-hmidan/>; Habibi, Twitter, 7 October 2023, https://twitter.com/habibi_uk/status/1710608897516478739.

¹³⁰⁶ ‘Police ‘actively looking’ for individuals over antisemitic signs at pro-Palestinian march’, Sky News, 11 November 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/police-actively-looking-for-individuals-over-antisemitic-signs-at-pro-palestinian-march-13005665>

¹³⁰⁷ Charles Hymas, ‘Pro-Palestine ‘From the river to the sea’ chant is anti-semitic says Braverman’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/16/suella-braverman-rows-anti-israel-chant/>,

¹³⁰⁸ ‘Antisemitism in Pro-Palestinian/Anti-Israel Demonstrations in the UK’, Antisemitism Policy Trust (2022), <https://antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/6648-Anitsemittism-Trust-Chants-Report-v4.pdf>, p. 3.

Sea, Palestine will be Free”, on which there is dispute, is a call for the destruction of the Jewish state. Therefore it at least has some antisemitic connotations, even if not everyone using this chant properly understands those. There are other chants, however, such as a number in Arabic, that are undeniably extreme and antisemitic. Most significant here is the “Khaybar ya yahud” chant, which threatens Jews that the armies of Muhammad will come to massacre them.¹³⁰⁹

- 6.95 In April 2023, two men were charged with a hate crime for using this chant,¹³¹⁰ yet at demonstrations in London in the weeks following 7 October, several groups of protesters were recorded chanting this slogan, which I believe is incitement to violence.¹³¹¹ This included demonstrators using the chant in front of a large group of police.¹³¹² Rather than arrest these individuals at the time, the Metropolitan police appealed for the public’s help in identifying them. Yet, as of 14 November 2023, the police had not been able to identify the perpetrators and were appealing to the public for information.¹³¹³ This case, and others, suggests that the Metropolitan Police decision, at times, to record intelligence at marches with the intention of arresting individuals later, could mean that these individuals are not arrested at all. I am troubled by the impact this has on public confidence in the police, and particularly that for these marches the Jewish community will see this as a tolerance for anti-Jewish racism.
- 6.96 The large numbers of people joining these marches clearly presents the police with a difficult environment when making arrests. For officers to attempt to infiltrate large and at times angry crowds to arrest individuals inciting hatred is not easy. Police will understandably be worried about how this could lead to serious public disorder. However, if these protests are reaching the point that police cannot safely police these marches, and they fear matters getting out of hand should they attempt to uphold the law, then this raises a convincing argument from a public order perspective, and with the accumulative effect from antisemitism, that these protests should not always go ahead in the way that they currently do. Where they do happen, it is important that those who commit offences at them are properly arrested and charged.
- 6.97 As I go on to discuss, too often there are actions on these marches that, when publicised in the media, appear to the public and politicians to constitute hate crimes or support for terrorism. Yet, there is little sense that many of these people are arrested, or that they are charged and prosecuted.

¹³⁰⁹ ‘Khaybar, Khaybar ya yahud’, ADL, <https://extremismterms.adl.org/glossary/khaybar-khaybar-ya-yahud>.

¹³¹⁰ David Rose, ‘Two men charged with hate crime for ‘Khaybar’ chant at anti-Israel demo’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 20 April 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/two-men-charged-with-hate-crime-for-khaybar-chant-at-anti-israel-demo-k335lw74>.

¹³¹¹ Harry’s Place, Twitter, 14 October 2023, <https://twitter.com/hurryupharry/status/1713183002334015925>.

¹³¹² Amit Schandillia, Twitter, 15 October 2023, <https://twitter.com/Schandillia/status/1713396372043710676>.

¹³¹³ Metropolitan Police, Twitter, 14 November 2023, <https://twitter.com/metpoliceuk/status/1724511637162348664>.

- 6.98 After the submission of this report, confidence in the sentencing of offenders has been called into question. A judicial review is being considered into the lenient sentencing of three women convicted under the Terrorism Act for displaying symbols in support of Hamas having been given a 12-month conditional discharge.¹³¹⁴
- 6.99 **The government should develop a transparent mechanism to review police and Crown Prosecution Service charging decisions to ensure that public order and terrorism legislation is being appropriately implemented in respect of political protest.**
- 6.100 **The police should also communicate arrests that arise from political protests more proactively and systematically, including charging and prosecution outcomes.**
- 6.101 This would have three benefits. Public confidence in police would be upheld, those attending these rallies would know that they face arrest should they incite hatred, and politicians would be able to scrutinise how well legislation is being implemented by the police, to determine what reforms would be warranted as a correction to what happens in practice.
- 6.102 The antisemitism that has followed the 7 October attacks does not only happen on the marches. The incidents of attacks on British Jews, and not specifically Israeli locations, is further evidence of how extreme anti-Israel activism can stir up antisemitism. During one recent protest on Armistice Day, some of those protesting also targeted Jewish families walking from a synagogue, letting off flares and holding Palestinian flags.¹³¹⁵ The marches coincided with a documented increase in antisemitic hate crime. Speaking on 23 October 2023, Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, Sir Mark Rowley, said that anti-Jewish hate crime was up thirteen-fold.¹³¹⁶ Nor are these attacks only in the form of abusive comments. In December 2023, a Jewish woman in Stamford Hill, where there is a large visibly Orthodox Jewish community, was kicked to the ground and left unconscious by two other women, who declared that she was dead.¹³¹⁷ Elsewhere, in Islington and

¹³¹⁴ Ben Ellery, Jonathan Ames, Chris Smyth, 'CPS may seek judicial review after judge spared parachute image trio jail', *The Times*, 15 February 2024, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/cps-may-seek-judicial-review-after-judge-spared-parachute-image-trio-jail-j0lxb9xqz>.

¹³¹⁵ Rory Tingle, 'Police launch probe as Jewish families leaving north London synagogue 'targeted' by pro-Palestinian activists spraying green smoke and shouting from cars after Armistice Day march', *Daily Mail*, 12 November 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12738885/Police-launch-probe-Jewish-families-leaving-north-London-synagogue-targeted-pro-Palestinian-activists-spraying-green-smoke-shouting-cars-Armistice-Day-march.html>.

¹³¹⁶ 'Israel-Hamas war: Met police commissioner holds constructive meeting with Home Secretary', *Sky News*, 23 October 2023, <https://news.sky.com/video/israel-hamas-war-met-police-commissioner-holds-constructive-meeting-with-home-secretary-12990979>.

¹³¹⁷ Orlando Radice, 'London woman is 'kicked unconscious' as attackers 'laughed'', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 8 December 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/london-jewish-woman-is-kicked-unconscious-as-attackers-laughed-r1zt31uk>.

Kensal Rise, Menorahs for the Jewish Chanukah festival were destroyed.¹³¹⁸ I believe that the relentless series of protests, where open displays of antisemitism are seen throughout the marches, is contributing to a permissive atmosphere where individuals are emboldened to attack Jewish people.

6.103 It is unclear whether the strengthened public order powers allow the police to consider the cumulative harm done to a particular group by a succession of protests, such as the explosion of antisemitic hate crime currently being experienced by many Jewish people coinciding with the frequent Gaza protests. Home Office officials have told me, that in current circumstances, they believe the police can consider the cumulative impact of such protests on London's Jewish communities – but this has not been tested. After I submitted my review, the Metropolitan Police issued a statement in relation to a Palestine Solidarity Campaign protest march that said: "Since the attacks in Israel on October 7, many in our Jewish and Muslim communities have been fearful and uncertain about their safety [...] We are there to ensure protests take place lawfully, minimising disruption to the life of the wider public and in a way that gives due consideration to the cumulative impact on London's communities and those who feel most vulnerable in the current climate".¹³¹⁹ However, it is unclear whether this consideration includes the cumulative impact of such protests on antisemitic hate crime and the subsequent disruption to Jewish Londoners. To date, there have not been any instances of Gaza protests being banned on these grounds. In my view, clarification of the law is urgently required.

6.104 **The government should amend the Public Order Act 1986 to expand the grounds on which a police force can recommend a march is not permitted to go ahead on a particular date beyond the narrow grounds that it risks serious public disorder. Specifically, new triggers should be added to section 13 of the Public Order Act, allowing the police to apply to the Home Secretary to prohibit processions from going ahead, where the police reasonably believe the procession will likely result in intimidation from threatening or abusive conduct, or where there is a demonstrable cumulative impact on serious disruption. In assessing the likelihood of the threat of intimidation, the police should take account of the persistence of arrests made at processions for stirring up of hatred, causing harassment, alarm or distress, or support for terrorism. In accounting for the cumulative impact on serious disruption, officers should consider the disruption being caused by the frequency of repeated demonstrations as they seek to balance people's right to**

¹³¹⁸ Jess Warren, 'Hannukah: Two menorahs vandalised in London', *BBC News*, 14 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-67723239>.

¹³¹⁹ 'Met confirms details of protest policing operation', Metropolitan Police, 16 February 2024, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-confirms-details-of-protest-policing-operation-479635>.

protest with the negative impact that certain protests may have on communities and show that conditions imposed on previous protests have not kept disruption at an acceptable level. This would allow police forces to negotiate with organisers more effectively to vary the frequency of repeat demonstrations or vary their location to relieve cumulative strain that may be caused.

6.105 For this review, it is also important to consider that the protests also saw cabinet minister Rt Hon Michael Gove MP jostled intimidatingly by a large group of activists.¹³²⁰ The public were also interfered with by the Armistice Day protests, with poppy sellers forced to move to escape aggressive chanting,¹³²¹ while demonstrators staged sit-ins at two London train stations.¹³²² In the days ahead of the Remembrance weekend, two individuals vandalised the Cenotaph in Rochdale with the words “Free Palestine”.¹³²³ Two weeks later, at a further anti-Israel march in central London, journalists from GB News were targeted by a crowd of protesters, with a presenter reporting “it was really intimidating, I'm pretty shaken up by it, and we're filing a police report”.¹³²⁴

6.106 A significant amount of the behaviour at the protests can be extremely intimidating for members of the public who happen to be in the areas where they happen because, for example, of the widespread use of face coverings and protestors letting off flares and firecrackers. At times these have been used as projectiles targeting police officers, while the use of face coverings additionally makes it difficult identify those committing offences, including those with antisemitic signs or showing support for proscribed terror groups such as Hamas.¹³²⁵

6.107 Since I submitted my review, the government announced new powers to arrest protesters who disregard police orders to remove face coverings and a

¹³²⁰ Sophie Wingate, ‘Michael Gove mobbed by pro-Palestinian protesters’, *The Independent*, 11 November 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/michael-gove-arlene-foster-london-sadiq-khan-victoria-b2445796.html>.

¹³²¹ Danielle Sheridan, ‘Poppy sellers forced to move stand after pro-Palestinian gathering’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/12/poppy-sellers-move-stand-pro-palestinian-gathering/>; Dan Woodland, ‘Moment two poppy sellers at Victoria Station are surrounded by chanting pro-Palestinian activists and are forced to pick up and move their stall- after many volunteers were left too terrified to raise cash over protest fears’, *Daily Mail*, 12 November 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12739817/poppy-sellers-victoria-station-surrounded-pro-palestine-protestors.html>.

¹³²² Amy Sedghi, Hamish Mackay, Donna Ferguson, Clea Skopeliti, ‘London’s pro-Palestine march live:126 people arrested as police highlight ‘deeply concerning’ rightwing violence-as it happened’, *The Guardian*, 11 November 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2023/nov/11/pro-palestine-march-london-israel-hamas-war-gaza-armistice-day>.

¹³²³ ‘Teenagers charged after Rochdale cenotaph defaced with ‘Free Palestine’ slogan’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/10/teenagers-charged-free-palestine-rochdale-cenotaph/>.

¹³²⁴ GB News, Twitter, 25 November 2023, <https://twitter.com/GBNEWS/status/1728445036721815973>.

¹³²⁵ Jon Brady, ‘Four police officers are injured after pro-Palestinian protesters threw fireworks into crowd as Met arrest 29 people- including man who held placard threatening to ‘blow up House of Lords’ – during ‘Day of Action’ with thousands marching across UK’, *Daily Mail*, 4 November 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12710939/Protesters-fireworks-police-officers-London-banners-Hamas-Palestinian-Day-Action.html>; Fraser Knight, Twitter, 21 October, 2023, https://twitter.com/Fraser_Knight/status/1715748923237626065.

ban on the possession of pyrotechnics at protests.¹³²⁶ I welcome this development.

- 6.108 The government should amend regulations related to the Public Order Act 1986 to allow police to impose a blanket ban on face coverings as a condition of a protest going ahead, where there are reasonable grounds to believe such coverings may be used by protestors to conceal their identity while committing illegal acts. This would supplement the change already announced by the ministers to make it an arrestable offence to refuse to comply with a police officer's instruction to remove a face covering.**

Inciting and glorifying terrorism at protests

- 6.109 Political activism taken to its most extreme expressions manifests as terrorism. This can be direct acts of terrorism, or support for terrorism. I am particularly concerned that the recent anti-Israel protests and events may, in some circumstances, provide an arena in which terrorism and terrorists are legitimised or supported. This has the potential to serve as a channel for radicalisation and recruitment.
- 6.110 I have been alarmed by the rhetoric from some protesters on the marches following the 7 October 2023 attacks. That some of the chants and signs seen at these rallies were antisemitic is not in any doubt.¹³²⁷ Worse, there is evidence of anti-Israel activists at these marches celebrating or glorifying terrorism. The demonstrations that took place at the weekend and the days immediately after the 7 October attacks, before there had been a significant Israeli response into Gaza, appeared, in some cases, as approving of what had just happened.¹³²⁸ To me, the scenes of flares and firecrackers outside the Israeli Embassy on the 9 October 2023, 48 hours after the attacks, appeared celebratory.¹³²⁹

¹³²⁶ 'Protest Measures', 8 February 2024, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2024-02-08/debates/71E44C6F-BD00-48EE-BOCA-42A8FD45C4B7/ProtestMeasures#>; 'New protest laws on face coverings and pyrotechnics', HMG (February 2024), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-protest-laws-on-face-coverings-and-pyrotechnics>.

¹³²⁷ Patrick Sawyer, Steve Bird, Edward Malnick, 'Anti-Semitic banners at pro-Palestine march despite Met hate speech warnings', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/11/25/london-palestine-march-met-warning-hate-speech/>; Richard Percival, 'Anti-Israel demonstrators display offensive placards at London march', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 10 December 2023, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/anti-israel-demonstrators-display-offensive-placards-at-london-march-bq5o3sz7>; Rachel Hagen, 'Two women arrested on suspicion of 'race hate' crime after pro-Palestinian march', *The Daily Mirror*, 29 October 2023, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/live-two-arrested-palestinian-march-31308707>.

¹³²⁸ Michael Murphy, 'Pro-Palestine protesters launch fireworks at Israeli embassy in London', *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/10/palestine-protests-london-israel-gaza-antisemitism/>; Heidi Bachram, Twitter, 8 October 2023 <https://twitter.com/HeidiBachram/status/1711072521800360252>; Rory Tingle, 'Senior university professor tells colleagues that a student who said she was 'full of pride' at Hamas attacks is 'being supported at this difficult time' - as UK police brace for fresh clashes between pro-Palestine and Israel supporters', *Daily Mail*, 10 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12613723/british-police-israeli-palestine-tension-protest-israel-embassy-london-war.html>.

¹³²⁹ Michael Murphy, 'Pro-Palestine protesters launch fireworks at Israeli embassy in London', *The Daily Telegraph*, 10 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/10/palestine-protests-london-israel-gaza-antisemitism/>.

- 6.111 On the afternoon of the 7 October 2023 itself, the Socialist Workers Party tweeted a video promoting the demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy.¹³³⁰ In that video, a woman speaking to camera described the Hamas attack and said “we want to see the resistance go on and fight against the state of Israel” and that “in the Socialist Workers Party we say that actually Palestinians have the right to resist Israeli repression and apartheid in whatever forms they choose, whether that be in the forms of rocks or with rockets”. Saying that that they were “looking to the working classes of all regions”, the speaker insisted “we want to see the resistance spread further”, which could be understood as a call for violence beyond southern Israel and Gaza. I see this video as showing clear support for terrorism. It was still online when I submitted my review in December 2023; it has subsequently been removed but I am not aware of any police action against those who feature in it or who published it.
- 6.112 Some activists clearly stated their approval of the Hamas attacks. The day after the massacre, Hanin Barghouti addressed a Palestine Solidarity Campaign rally in Brighton,¹³³¹ during which she is alleged to have said “yesterday was a victory”, that what the “freedom fighters in Gaza” had done “was so beautiful and inspiring to see”. She allegedly told that audience that they should “celebrate these acts of resistance because this is a success” and allegedly declared that “Revolutionary violence initiated by Palestinians, it’s not terrorism.”¹³³² Barghouti was charged on 13 November 2023 with supporting a proscribed terrorist organisation.¹³³³ She denies the charge and the case is due to be tried in June 2024.¹³³⁴
- 6.113 Also on 8 October 2023, at an anti-Israel rally in Manchester, president of Manchester Friends of Palestine Dana Abuqamar, told press that people were “full of pride”, claiming that in Gaza “for the first time they are actively resisting, they are not on the defence”, and insisting “we are full of pride, we are really, really full of joy [at] what has happened.”¹³³⁵ In my view, expressing pride and joy in a terrorist attack in this way is such a clear and strong expression of approval of Hamas’s actions on 7 October 2023 that it risks indirectly encouraging others to emulate such terrorist actions.

¹³³⁰ Socialist Worker, Twitter, 7 October 2023 (5:02pm), <https://twitter.com/socialistworker/status/1710687101266587697>; tweet deleted, video saved.

¹³³¹ Rory Tingle, ‘Woman, 22, is arrested by counter terror police after student at University of Sussex gave speech calling the Hamas attacks on Israel ‘beautiful and inspiring’, *Daily Mail*, 13 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12627203/woman-arrested-student-praised-hamas-speech-brighton-university-sussex.html>.

¹³³² Heidi Bachram, Twitter, 8 October 2023, <https://twitter.com/HeidiBachram/status/1711072521800360252>.

¹³³³ ‘Woman, 22, charged after Brighton protest speech’, *BBC News*, 13 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-67410037>.

¹³³⁴ Christian Fuller and PA, ‘Woman denies supporting Hamas in protest speech’, *BBC News*, 5 April 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ck5wkg62175o>.

¹³³⁵ Rory Tingle, ‘Senior university professor tells colleagues that a student who said she was ‘full of pride’ at Hamas attacks is ‘being supported at this difficult time’ - as UK police brace for fresh clashes between pro-Palestine and Israel supporters’, *Daily Mail*, 10 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12613723/british-police-israeli-palestine-tension-protest-israel-embassy-london-war.html>.

- 6.114 In some incidents, police have arrested and charged those accused of crossing the line into showing support for a proscribed terrorist group.¹³³⁶ That activists were seen at a London anti-Israel rally wearing pictures of paragliders is especially appalling,¹³³⁷ as Hamas terrorists used paragliders to perpetrate the 7 October attacks.¹³³⁸ As noted, the activists were arrested after a police appeal for information and convicted.¹³³⁹ The Metropolitan Police have also appealed to the public for information on protesters who either dressed in a way that emulated the appearance of Hamas terrorists, or who held signs showing support for Hamas.¹³⁴⁰
- 6.115 While these incidents may be the behaviour of a minority of those attending these marches, rhetoric about “resistance”,¹³⁴¹ “Intifada”,¹³⁴² and chants of “No Justice, No Peace”, are heard widely at these events.¹³⁴³ It is my view that such language, at least for some, will be understood as synonymous with support for violence.
- 6.116 The fact that the authorities made few arrests at the marches quickly became a source of national debate, with ministers insisting that those who committed such incitement would be dealt with stringently. The Home Secretary at the time, the Rt Hon Suella Braverman, warned “all those who saw fit to promote genocide, glorify terrorism and mock the murder of Jewish people, including women and babies - the police are coming for you”.¹³⁴⁴
- 6.117 The limited action by the police on this point, quickly came to be presented in parts of the media as a sign of reluctance to take these crimes seriously. This sense was provided further credence with high profile examples of apparently pro-terrorist incitement at the protests being widely publicised. The calls for

¹³³⁶ Rory Tingle, ‘Woman, 22, is arrested by counter terror police after student at University of Sussex gave speech calling the Hamas attacks on Israel ‘beautiful and inspiring’, *Dail Mail*, 13 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12627203/woman-arrested-student-praised-hamas-speech-brighton-university-sussex.html>; Gina Kalsi, ‘Met Police arrest two women on suspicion of terrorism after pair were seen with paraglider pictures taped on their jackets at pro-Palestine protest a fortnight ago’, *Daily Mail*, 30 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12689961/Met-Police-arrest-two-women-suspicion-terrorism-pair-seen-paraglider-pictures-taped-jackets-pro-Palestine-protest-fortnight-ago.html>.

¹³³⁷ ‘Women charged over paraglider images at pro-Palestinian protest’, *BBC News*, 3 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-67315701>.

¹³³⁸ Sam Greenhill, ‘They swooped in to kill dozens at the Nova music festival. Now we reveal...How Hamas trained its murderous paraglider squadron- right under the noses of Mossad’, *Daily Mail*, 14 October 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12631357/They-swooped-kill-dozens-Nova-music-festival-reveal-Hamas-trained-murderous-paraglider-squadron-right-noses-Mossad.html>.

¹³³⁹ ‘Three women convicted of displaying paraglider stickers at London protest’, Crown Prosecution Service, 13 February 2024, <https://www.cps.gov.uk/cps/news/three-women-convicted-displaying-paraglider-stickers-london-protest>.

¹³⁴⁰ Rory Tingle, Summer Goodkind, ‘Swastika placards, activists dressed as Hamas killers, a ‘coconut’ poster and clashes between pro-Palestine and far right counter protesters: How London was blighted by a day of hate as hundreds of thousands took to the streets on Armistice Day’, *Daily Mail*, 13 November 2023, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12742531/Swastika-placards-activists-dressed-Hamas-killers-coconut-poster-clashes-pro-Palestine-far-right-counter-protesters-London-blighted-day-hate-hundreds-thousands-took-streets-Armistice-Day.html>; Vikram Dodd, ‘Police seek four people for ‘pro-Hamas’ signs at Palestine demo in London’, *The Guardian*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/27/police-seek-people-pro-hamas-signs-palestine-demo-london>.

¹³⁴¹ Harry’s Place, Twitter, 4 November 2023, <https://twitter.com/hurryupharry/status/1720807384916857218>.

¹³⁴² ‘Pro-Palestinian marchers chant ‘victory to the intifada’, *The Daily Telegraph*, YouTube, 9 December 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X24GhA7o6ik>.

¹³⁴³ Patrick Sawyer, Genvieve Holl-Allen, ‘A day full of protest marches, fury and chants against Israel’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/14/free-palestine-march-protest-israel-hamas-gaza/>.

¹³⁴⁴ Charles Hymas, ‘Braverman tells glorifiers of terrorism: ‘The police are coming for you’’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/15/police-must-use-full-force-of-law-to-combat-anti-semitism0/>.

jihād at a rally by the revolutionary Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain in central London on 21 October 2023, were seen by many, including the Home Secretary, as an example of where the police had wrongly failed to intervene.¹³⁴⁵

6.118 In my view, that official Hizb ut-Tahrir banners at the rally called on “Muslim Armies” to “rescue the people of Palestine” demonstrated that this was a call for armed jihād.¹³⁴⁶ According to interpretations popularised by proscribed groups like Hamas and Lashkar-e-Taiba, jihād in the form of military action to put an end to perceived non-Muslim rule is a religious duty (*fard*).¹³⁴⁷ As such, Hizb ut-Tahrir’s calls for jihād would likely be understood by some present at the rally as a direct exhortation of religiously sanctioned warfare.

6.119 Home Office minister at the time, Robert Jenrick MP, claimed that those chanting “jihād” on the streets of London were “inciting terrorist violence”¹³⁴⁸ And should be “tackled with the full force of the law”.¹³⁴⁹ Yet the Metropolitan Police stated at the time that specialists from the Crown Prosecution Service and officers who reviewed footage of the rally did not identify any offences being committed. The police argued that jihād “has a number of meanings”, while also acknowledging “the public will most commonly associate it with terrorism.”¹³⁵⁰

6.120 The comment from the Metropolitan Police that the public associate the word jihād with terrorism is important here. The legislation on the encouragement of terrorism, set out in the Terrorism Act 2006, establishes that the offence of encouragement can be committed if a person’s communication “is reckless as to whether members of the public will be directly or indirectly encouraged or otherwise induced by the statement to commit, prepare or instigate such acts or offences.” Moreover, an offence is committed where “members of the public could reasonably be expected to infer that what is being glorified is being glorified as conduct that should be emulated by them in existing circumstances.”¹³⁵¹ That the police appreciate that the public will likely view the approving language of the chanting to be terrorist would strengthen the case for prosecution.

¹³⁴⁵ Vikram Dodd, Peter Walker, ‘Met chief defends force for not arresting chanters of ‘jihād’ at anti-Israel protest’, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/oct/23/met-chief-defends-force-for-not-arresting-chanters-of-jihad-at-anti-israel-protest>.

¹³⁴⁶ Ewan Somerville, ‘Hizb ut-Tahrir praise of Hamas ‘heroes’ triggers UK ban call’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/22/hizb-ut-tahrir-praise-hamas-uk-ban-call/>.

¹³⁴⁷ Rashad Ali & Hannah Stuart, ‘A Guide to Refuting Jihadism’ (February 2014), <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Refuting-Jihadism.pdf>, p. 25.

¹³⁴⁸ Rowena Mason, ‘People chanting ‘jihād’ in London ‘inciting violence’ says Robert Jenrick’, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/22/people-chanting-jihad-in-london-inciting-violence-says-robert-jenrick>.

¹³⁴⁹ Rowena Mason, ‘People chanting ‘jihād’ in London ‘inciting violence’ says Robert Jenrick’, *The Guardian*, 22 October 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/22/people-chanting-jihad-in-london-inciting-violence-says-robert-jenrick>.

¹³⁵⁰ ‘Statement on the Hizb ut-Tahrir Britain protest’, Metropolitan Police, 21 October 2023, <https://news.met.police.uk/news/statement-on-the-hizb-ut-tahrir-britain-protest-474096>, archived at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20240115213539/https://news.met.police.uk/news/statement-on-the-hizb-ut-tahrir-britain-protest-474096>.

¹³⁵¹ ‘Terrorism Act 2006’, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/11>.

- 6.121 It has been argued that Hizb ut-Tahrir might say they were simply advocating military action by a Muslim-majority state in the region which would not be terrorism. I am unconvinced by this argument because Hizb ut-Tahrir's long standing strategy for revolutionary change is to infiltrate armies in Muslim-majority countries to facilitate what it calls a "bloodless coup".¹³⁵² It is these Hizb ut-Tahrir-led Muslim armies that the group imagines rescuing the Palestinian people. The fact that the rally was outside the Egyptian and Turkish embassies supports this interpretation,¹³⁵³ as does an earlier statement on the conflict by the group in which they advocated for "a political change so that the resources of Muslim countries are used to liberate and rescue the beleaguered people of Palestine".¹³⁵⁴
- 6.122 After I submitted my review, the government announced that Hizb ut-Tahrir has been added to the list of proscribed organisations. Belonging to or inviting support for the group is now a criminal offence with a potential prison sentence of 14 years which can be handed down alongside or in place of a fine.¹³⁵⁵
- 6.123 From the facts of what happened, and the way the legislation is written, I view there to be good reason for thinking that this was bold and public terrorist incitement at a protest in central London, perpetrated with a significant number of police officers looking on.
- 6.124 The decision of the police not to arrest and further investigate also raises questions about who the police consulted with when determining that they could not identify any offences. I have already warned about the difficulties caused by public authorities appointing as advisers those who have given (or have been publicly reported as having given) support for terrorist organisations or extremist ideologies. I share the concerns the government's former Independent Reviewer of Prevent, Sir William Shawcross, who in his 2023 report criticised the police engagement of advisers whom he described as "actors of extremist concern".¹³⁵⁶
- 6.125 The fact that it has been reported that both the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service appointed to advisory roles figures who have expressed support for extremist ideology or terrorist organisations (or are reasonably considered to have done so) will destroy public trust in the ability of these authorities to uphold the criminal justice system with the level of

¹³⁵² Houriya Ahmed & Hannah Stuart, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir-Ideology and Strategy', Henry Jackson Society (2009), <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/HIZB.pdf>.

¹³⁵³ Ewan Somerville, 'Hizb ut-Tahrir praise of Hamas 'heroes' triggers UK ban call', *The Daily Telegraph*, 22 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/22/hizb-ut-tahrir-praise-hamas-uk-ban-call/>.

¹³⁵⁴ A press release published by Hizb ut-Tahrir at the time confirmed the locations of the protest. Following the group's proscription in January 2024 this content has been removed.

¹³⁵⁵ 'Hizb ut-Tahrir proscribed as terrorist organisation', HMG (January 2024), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/hizb-ut-tahrir-proscribed-as-terrorist-organisation>.

¹³⁵⁶ 'Independent Review of Prevent', HMG, paras. 6.205 – 6.216,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63e26968d3bf7f17385a3421/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf

impartiality that is fitting. Attiq Malik, who chairs London Muslim Communities Forum which advises the Met, was reportedly in the police operations room during the protests in October 2023, was recorded in 2021 leading chants of “From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be free”.¹³⁵⁷ This is a chant which I, like many others, see as calling for the destruction of the state of Israel. It is also a chant that has been used by several Islamist terrorists,¹³⁵⁸ including the Hamas leadership as part of their calls to destroy Israel.¹³⁵⁹

- 6.126 Mohammed Kozbar has also been given advisory roles with both the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service.¹³⁶⁰ This is even though it has long been on public record that Kozbar has previously praised the founder of Hamas,¹³⁶¹ and was photographed meeting with Hamas leadership in Gaza in 2009.¹³⁶²
- 6.127 I am concerned that authorities, such as the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service, are not taking sufficient care, first, to avoid the risk that inappropriate advisers like Malik and Kozbar could be placed in a position of potential influence over the level of arrests and, second, to prevent the risk of harm that may be done if the public perceive their presence as police advisers as one of the reasons for the seemingly low numbers of arrests for possible offences around inciting terrorism and violence.
- 6.128 I am also sympathetic to the argument being made that the legislation on the glorification and encouragement of terrorism is not as applicable as some politicians understand it to be. Writing in the Daily Telegraph on 23 October 2023, Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Sir Mark Rowley argued that there was a significant difference between what the public expected from the police and what legislation actually says.¹³⁶³ Following a meeting with the Home Secretary that day, Rowley told the media that the police, “are absolutely ruthless in tackling anybody who puts their foot over the legal line”, and that “events of the moment are illustrating that maybe some of the lines aren’t quite in the right place”.¹³⁶⁴

¹³⁵⁷ Edward Malnick, ‘Met Police advisor lead ‘from the river to the sea’ chant’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 November 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/11/04/attiq-malik-met-police-adviser-from-river-to-the-sea-chant/>.

¹³⁵⁸ ‘The Month of Hate’, CST (2021), https://cst.org.uk/data/file/4/a/The_Month_of_Hate.1626263072.pdf.

¹³⁵⁹ Hamas’s 2017 charter states: “Hamas rejects any alternative to the full and complete liberation of Palestine, from the river to the sea”. ‘Hamas in 2017: The document in full’, *Middle East Eye*, 2 May 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hamas-2017-document-full>.

¹³⁶⁰ Edward Malnick, ‘Scotland Yard invited mosque chairman who praised Hamas founder to dinner’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 9 December 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/12/09/scotland-yard-invited-mosque-chairman-praised-hamas-dinner/>; Edward Malnick, ‘Mosque chairman who praised Hamas advises CPS on hate crime’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/28/mosque-chairman-praised-hamas-leader-advises-cps/>.

¹³⁶¹ Edward Malnick, ‘Mosque chairman who praised Hamas founder advises CPS on hate crime’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2023/10/28/mosque-chairman-praised-hamas-leader-advises-cps/>.

¹³⁶² ‘Labour and Hamas: Interpal’, Harry’s Place, 14 June 2012, <http://hurryupharry.net/2012/06/14/labour-and-hamas-interpal/>.

¹³⁶³ Sir Mark Rowley, ‘It is the law, not policing that is lacking’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/23/mark-rowley-met-police-the-law-not-policing-lacking-protest/>.

¹³⁶⁴ ‘Israel-Hamas war: Met Police commissioner holds ‘constructive’ meeting with Home Secretary’, *Sky News*, 23 October 2023, <https://news.sky.com/video/israel-hamas-war-met-police-commissioner-holds-constructive-meeting-with-home-secretary-12990979>.

- 6.129 A month later, on 23 November 2023, the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Jonathan Hall KC, published a report on the subject of terrorism legislation and protest in which he concluded that “there is no need to legislate for any amendments to terrorism legislation now, and good reason for caution”.¹³⁶⁵ Hall pointed out that cases are currently going before the courts and that these would show whether there was a case for reform.¹³⁶⁶ While Hall conceded that there could be other offences being committed at the protests, such as antisemitism, these are not something that terrorism legislation would tackle. Nevertheless, if there was not to be a change in the law, Hall had previously argued that police could use existing laws to place conditions on marches, such as prohibiting the calling for jihad or flying the shahada black flag.¹³⁶⁷ Putting such conditions would make it possible for the police to arrest those who did such things at the protests.
- 6.130 Jonathan Hall KC is right to point out that there are a few cases before the courts where those attending anti-Israel demonstrations are accused of terrorism offences. This should further inform the debate about whether current legislation has the balance right. Yet, it is my view that the relatively small number of arrests and charges, particularly for those who celebrated the 7 October attacks and showed their approval for further jihadist violence, does make the case that something is not functioning well in the justice system. Either those voicing their support for these attacks and the perpetrators are breaking the law and the police and Crown Prosecution Service are interpreting the law far too narrowly, or there is a difference between what the public and many politicians believe should be illegal and what is illegal.
- 6.131 Much of this rests on glorification of terrorism and showing support for terrorism. The legislation on glorification in the Terrorism Act 2006 is not about glorification in and of itself. Rather it criminalises the encouragement of terrorism, with glorification being one way that an offender could indirectly encourage others to commit terrorism offences. This means that to be an offence, glorification of terrorism must be in the form of a statement that could be understood as encouragement to terrorism.¹³⁶⁸
- 6.132 The difficulty may rest with what should be viewed as indirect encouragement. It is my view that any celebration of terrorist acts, or praise for terrorist groups and individuals is a form of indirect encouragement. From the debate on this point, it appears that many politicians, and much of the public, would imagine that such incitement is illegal. There is a strong argument that any celebration

¹³⁶⁵ ‘Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Report on Terrorism Legislation and Protests’, HMG (November 2023) <https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IRTL-Terrorism-and-Protests.pdf>.

¹³⁶⁶ ‘Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation, Report on Terrorism Legislation and Protests’, HMG (November 2023) <https://terrorismlegislationreviewer.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/IRTL-Terrorism-and-Protests.pdf>.

¹³⁶⁷ Charles Hymas, ‘Met chief’s proposal to ban hateful extremism ‘unlikely to work’’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 24 October 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/10/24/metropolitan-police-mark-rowley-terrorism-law-adviser/>.

¹³⁶⁸ Terrorism Act 2006, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/11>.

and glorification of terrorism risks encouraging others to support or perpetrate terrorism and, as such, should be illegal.

6.133 The police and Crown Prosecution Service should interpret and apply the law on encouraging terrorism broadly so any celebration of terrorist acts, or praise for terror groups and individuals, is viewed as a form of indirect encouragement. If courts do not support this interpretation of current legislation, the government should keep under review the introduction a summary-only terrorism offence that explicitly prohibits the celebrating, praising, glorifying, or endorsing of acts of terrorism, proscribed terrorist groups, or terrorists. This would be an offence without the condition of encouraging others to engage in the commission or preparation of terrorism.

6.134 If such a criminal offence were created, the maximum sentence for such an offence would be six months, analogous to that of the existing offence of wearing or displaying a uniform or an article in a way that indicates support for a proscribed terrorist organisation.¹³⁶⁹ It would need to be carefully drawn so as to be limited to the celebration of groups and terrorists in relation to their involvement in terrorism rather than more generally to avoid inadvertently criminalising, for example, statements calling for improved prisoner welfare of for a group to be de-proscribed. I believe such an offence would send a strong message to the public that openly celebrating acts of terrorism or terrorists will not be tolerated. The government should clearly communicate that under this offence protesters calling for jihad in certain conditions is unlawful.

6.135 To help with upholding the legal regime that is in force, the police with the Crown Prosecution Service should develop a new code of practice, or operating framework, to clarify public order and terrorism legislation in respect of political protest. The aim would be to ensure that the police appropriately and transparently balance their duty to uphold the law and deliver justice with the duty to maintain public order.

6.136 It is also important that the police with the Crown Prosecution Service publish and regularly update guidance for the public regarding statements, chants, or symbols that, in the context of a political protest, may constitute an offence. This should include guidance on protestors' chants that may disturb public order or encourage terrorism, such as those calling for jihad.

6.137 It is also important that authorities understand the way in which the symbols and imagery associated with terrorism and support for proscribed groups can be expanded, including in response to events. The paraglider imagery that

¹³⁶⁹ Terrorism Act 2000, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11>.

has appeared at protests and online following the 7 October attacks would not have indicated support for terrorism before those attacks. Now it should, in certain circumstances, be seen as an indication of support for Hamas and its attacks on Israel.

- 6.138 It is my view that what is happening at the recent protests, such as the paraglider pictures, and the wearing of headbands that create the appearance of a Hamas terrorist, shows that it is important for the authorities to know which articles, images, and symbols might show support for proscribed terrorist groups in certain contexts. The Terrorism Act 2000 makes it an offence to publish an image, or to wear, carry, or display an article, in a way or in circumstances that would “arouse reasonable suspicion that he is a member or supporter of a proscribed organisation”.¹³⁷⁰
- 6.139 The difficulty can be that authorities are not always knowledgeable of which images and articles might demonstrate support for proscribed groups. Ofcom has said that while it considered issuing guidance on what images would be an offence to publish, it was not aware of a list of these.¹³⁷¹ This is not only a problem for regulators; police officers, and Crown Prosecution Service lawyers should also be informed about what could amount to an offence.
- 6.140 **The government should ensure police officers and the Crown Prosecution Service have the knowledge they need to counter terrorism by maintaining and regularly updating an internal list of images and symbols associated with proscribed organisations. This list should be developed by the Home Office and shared with relevant authorities.**
- 6.141 Finally, the number of marches being organised around the Israel-Hamas conflict, the scale of these marches, and the behaviour of some protesters means that a great amount of police resources is being directed to these protests. It was reported that protests during the two months since the 7 October attacks cost police forces as much as £20 million, with redeployment putting a strain on frontline duties.¹³⁷² When groups run so many mass protests, the authorities should consider whether organisers should be asked to contribute to policing costs. With the repeated incitement and disorder seen at the anti-Israel marches, such as when firecrackers have been thrown at police, I believe that there is an argument that the organisers should cover some of these policing costs.
- 6.142 There is something of a precedent here with the policing of football matches, which can be a focus for disorder and even violence from some. Police forces are entitled to recover costs from football clubs when (a) the special policing

¹³⁷⁰ Terrorism Act 2000, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/11>.

¹³⁷¹ ‘Protecting people from illegal harms online | Volume 5: How to judge whether content is illegal or not? (Illegal Content Judgements Guidance), Ofcom, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0023/271148/volume-5-illegal-harms-consultation.pdf, para. 26.91.

¹³⁷² Dipesh Gadhur, ‘Palestinian protests in UK cost police up to £20m’, *The Times*, 9 December 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/palestinian-protests-uk-cost-police-20m-israel-gaza-conflict-2bkkwbh1b>.

services has been requested by the organiser and (b) the policing took place on land that was owned, leased or in the control of the club, i.e., the stadium.¹³⁷³ According to the National Police Chiefs' Council, for example, in 2019 the police were able to claim back £5.5 million out of a total cost of £48 million for policing football matches in England and Wales that year.¹³⁷⁴

6.143 The government should consider the viability of requiring protest organisers to contribute to policing costs when groups are holding a significant number of large demonstrations which cause serious disruption or significant levels of law-breaking. This could take the form of placing greater requirements on protest organisers under Section 11 of the Public Order Act to contribute to safety arrangements and resource planning and increase the level of fines for failure to comply with such requirements.

6.144 It is important that this policy not be used to stifle free expression, particularly by smaller groups, or the right to assembly. This is an error the police have made. In 2015, the Metropolitan Police told the Passion for Freedom art exhibition that it would have to pay £36,000 towards policing costs if an exhibit by the artist Mimsy was included, as it mocked Islamic State and so the police claimed there would be a greater security threat to the gallery.¹³⁷⁵ It is in the public's interest that free speech be upheld, and that police help art exhibitions that are threatened to go ahead, as much as it is in the public's interest that the police arrest and charge those who incite violence and demonstrate support for terrorism at protests.

6.145 Several other potential practical barriers to establishing an effective mechanism to recoup costs in this way have been raised with me. It is certainly true that protest groups have the capacity for a great deal more fluidity in structure than a football club. In the event of rules being introduced requiring a group that organises repeat marches to contribute towards policing costs, one could envisage activists adopting a more variegated network of overlapping protest groups, each organising their own subtly different march, and thus avoiding the threshold for reclaiming costs.

6.146 These objections have merit, but something must change or this pattern of repeat marches will directly harm the ability of already overstretched constabularies to police crime in other priority areas. As it stands, the frontline

¹³⁷³ The law was clarified in an October 2017 Court of Appeal ruling that went in favour of Ipswich Town and against Suffolk police. See 'Policing Football Costs', London Assembly, 17 October 2019, [https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/policing-football-costs#:~:text=Police%20are%20only%20able%20to,the%20control%20of%20the%20organiser; Ipswich Town FC v The Chief Constable of Suffolk Constabulary \[2017\] EWCA Civ 1484, https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/UKT_2017_10_42827286.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/policing-football-costs#:~:text=Police%20are%20only%20able%20to,the%20control%20of%20the%20organiser; Ipswich Town FC v The Chief Constable of Suffolk Constabulary [2017] EWCA Civ 1484, https://www.blackstonechambers.com/documents/UKT_2017_10_42827286.pdf)

¹³⁷⁴ 'Cost of Policing Football', 4 June 2019, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-06-04/debates/7FBCA7DA-C3B1-4CC1-8C3C-FFC9F31115E2/CostOfPolicingFootball>.

¹³⁷⁵ Claire Armistead, Jonathan Jones, 'Artwork showing Sylvania Families terrorised by Isis banned from free speech exhibition', *The Guardian*, 26 September 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/sep/26/sylvanian-families-isis-freedom-of-expression-exhibition>.

resources of the Metropolitan Police and other forces stand to be seriously depleted by the spiralling costs of policing the current Gaza marches. The system cannot run on cancelling rest days and overtime in perpetuity without a significant detrimental impact on frontline policing.

6.147 While recent legislation has enabled police forces to impose a range of conditions on protests to enable them to go ahead in an orderly fashion, there is currently no obvious way for police forces to present the depleted nature of their own resources and impact on other policing priorities as a reason to refuse a protest or insist on a reduction in their frequency. The Metropolitan Police has said it cannot legally use lack of resources or adverse impact on frontline policing as a condition to regulate a protest or recommend its refusal altogether. This urgently needs to change to give police forces this power to avert significant damage to the fight against crime in the capital and other cities.

6.148 **The government should also amend sections 12, 13 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 to allow police forces to balance the resource requirements of policing the public's right to protest with other frontline priorities. Police should be able to manage the cumulative impact on policing resource demand by setting any conditions as appear necessary on processions and assemblies, or recommend that the frequency of processions is reduced, to prevent the policing of marches disproportionately impacting other policing priorities.**

Protecting Democratic Institutions and Businesses from Public Disorder, Political Violence, and Disruption

6.149 This section assesses how well democratic institutions – including the rule of law – and private businesses are protected from political violence and disruption.

Protecting Democratic Institutions

6.150 My review found that people performing a public duty or public service – such as politicians, journalists, and educators – have been harassed and intimidated by activists associated with radical protest movements or ideological causes. At times, particularly during increased political tensions, the extent of such intimidation threatens the foundations of our democracy. In this section, I ask whether the government is doing enough in response to this challenge.

Politicians

- 6.151 A key area of concern is the targeting of politicians and journalists by terrorists and extreme protest movements, as this review has shown (see chapter two). In the worst cases, terrorists have both attacked MPs in their constituencies and targeted Parliament, and extreme activists have used intimidation and harassment against MPs, particularly close to the Palace of Westminster itself.
- 6.152 The government and partners have taken steps in recent years to improve understanding of the threats that MPs face from political violence and extreme activists, and to increase support to MPs. Following threats to MPs after the Parliamentary debates on Syria in 2015, Operation Bridger was launched as a nationwide police protection programme to provide additional security measures to all MPs, and was added to after the terrorist murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016.¹³⁷⁶ The government has also taken steps to tackle intimidation in public life, including towards local councillors and electoral candidates, following the Committee on Standards in Public Life 2017 review of the matter.¹³⁷⁷ After the terrorist murder of Sir David Amess MP in 2021, the National Police Chiefs' Council announced that the police immediately review all MPs' security arrangements.¹³⁷⁸ Finally, the most concrete legislative step to increase the physical security of MPs so far was made by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, awarding the Home Secretary greater powers to protect Parliament.
- 6.153 Overseen by the Parliamentary Security Department, Operation Bridger provides advice and technical security measures to MPs.¹³⁷⁹ The Police Crime Prevention Initiative (a police-owned not-for-profit¹³⁸⁰), in coordination with the National Counter Terrorism Security Office, has produced a security standard for the MPs in their homes and constituency offices which is regularly reviewed to ensure that they address the threat picture.¹³⁸¹ Operation Bridger

¹³⁷⁶ Question for Home Office, 1 December 2016, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2016-12-01/55828>; 'Home Secretary's update to Parliament on MPs security', HMG (October 2021), <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/home-secretarys-update-to-parliament-on-mp-security>.

¹³⁷⁷ 'Intimidation in Public Life: A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life', Committee on Standards in Public Life (December 2017), CSPL Review, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-a-review-by-the-committee-on-standards-in-public-life>; 'Intimidation in public life-a progress report', HMG (October 2018), <https://cspl.blog.gov.uk/2018/10/04/intimidation-in-public-life-a-progress-report/>; 'Update on Tackling Intimidation in Public Life', Statement made on 5 November 2019, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2019-11-05/HCWS100>; 'Intimidation in Public Life: progress report and recommendations', Committee on Standards in Public Life (17 December 2020), CSPL progress report, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/intimidation-in-public-life-progress-report-on-recommendations>; 'Update on tackling intimidation in public life, Statement made on 9 March 2021, <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-03-09/hcws833>.

¹³⁷⁸ Sophie Morris, 'Sir David Amess murder: Priti Patel says security measures to be put in place-but MPs 'cannot be cowed by any individual'', *Sky News*, 17 October 2021, <https://news.sky.com/story/david-amess-murder-priti-patel-says-right-and-proper-that-mps-accessible-to-public-following-killing-in-essex-12435151>.

¹³⁷⁹ 'Abuse of MPs and other Politicians', London Assembly, 16 May 2019, <https://www.london.gov.uk/who-we-are/what-london-assembly-does/questions-mayor/find-an-answer/abuse-mps-and-other-politicians>.

¹³⁸⁰ 'Police Crime Prevention Initiatives', <https://www.policencepi.com/about-us>.

¹³⁸¹ 'Op Bridger', Police Crime Prevention Initiatives, <https://www.policencepi.com/police-support/op-bridger>.

is well designed to adapt to changing threats and has been successfully embedded into parliamentary life, in particular for new MPs.¹³⁸² The implementation of Operation Bridger was an important step for improving the physical wellbeing of MPs in their homes and constituency offices.

6.154 As explored in greater depth of chapter two of this report, MPs also face intimidation and harassment from activists. Two key recommendations made by the Review on Intimidation in Public Life that focused on online abuse, such as shifting the liability for illegal online content to social media companies and social media companies developing better tools for removing content,¹³⁸³ were incorporated into the Online Safety Act 2023. Elsewhere, the government has acted on calls for better guidance for MPs, working with partners in developing new guidance from the Crown Prosecution Service on the laws on intimidation and new guidance for candidates in elections, published by the Electoral Commission.¹³⁸⁴ The government also published legislation to remove the requirement for candidates standing as local councillors to have their home addresses published on the ballot paper, an important step in reducing physical threats to those candidates.¹³⁸⁵

6.155 Per the review's recommendation, the government has consulted on the introduction of a new electoral offence of intimidation of candidates and campaigners during elections. They found majority support for the proposal and, in May 2019, committed to legislating for this offence when parliamentary time allows.¹³⁸⁶ The Elections Act 2022 introduced a new penalty, disqualification orders, for the offence of intimidatory behaviour towards election candidates and campaigners, which came into force in November 2023. Disqualification orders can be imposed on people convicted of existing intimidatory offences when the intimidation is directed at election candidates or campaigners during a referendum, and they disqualify the person convicted from holding elected office for five years.¹³⁸⁷ It remains to be seen whether they deter intimidatory behaviour during an election or referendum period.

6.156 In January 2019, Conservative MP Rt Hon Ken Clarke, and Labour MP Rt Hon Harriet Harman – Father and Mother of the House at the time

¹³⁸² For example, contacting the local operation Bridger contact is included in the website W4MP's guide to surviving an MP's first week in Parliament. <https://w4mp.org/surviving-your-first-week-in-the-constituency-office/>

¹³⁸³ 'Intimidation in public life- a progress report', HMG, 2018 <https://cspl.blog.gov.uk/2018/10/04/intimidation-in-public-life-a-progress-report/>

¹³⁸⁴ 'Update on tackling intimidation in public life', Cabinet Office (March 2021) <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2021-03-09/hcws833>

¹³⁸⁵ Intimidation in Public Life Review Follow Up, Recommendation Tracker, Up to date as of 17 December 2020, HMG, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6012b6f9d3bf7f05c527c147/Final_Intimidation_in_public_life_recommendation_tracker_or_3_year_follow_up_updated.docx.

¹³⁸⁶ 'Protecting the Debate: Intimidation, Influence and Information', Cabinet Office (May 2019) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/799873/Protecting-the-Debate-Government-Response-2019.05.01.pdf

¹³⁸⁷ 'Intimidation of candidates and voters', House of Commons Library Briefing (April 2024), <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9192/CBP-9192.pdf>, p. 4.

respectively – proposed a Speaker’s Conference to address the issue of what should be the response to the growing threats of abuse and violence against MPs.¹³⁸⁸ An ad hoc formal inquiry used to find cross-party agreement on a subject, there are no fixed or statutory rules governing the creation or operation of a Speaker’s Conference. Previous conferences have generally been established at the request of the Prime Minister and are chaired by the Speaker to maintain impartiality. They have been used rarely, with seven previous conferences since 1916.¹³⁸⁹

6.157 Harman revived the proposal in September 2019 following the prorogation of Parliament. For Harman, guaranteeing the ability of MPs to go about their work without threat, harassment, violence, or intimidation is vital to protecting our democracy.¹³⁹⁰ I agree. Impeding MPs from performing their duties constitutes contempt of Parliament and such an offence warrants a serious all-party response. Harman proposes bringing together stakeholders and organisations, including political parties, the police, and the Crown Prosecution Service, on the question of MPs’ security, the right to protest, and freedom of speech.¹³⁹¹

6.158 Ideas proposed for discussion include the need to keep a record of all the serious threats to and crimes committed against MPs (as I also recommend), national guidance from the police or Crown Prosecution Service about how police and prosecutors should balance the rights of protesters and demonstrators on the one hand and on the other hand the rights of MPs to get on with their work, and a review of the rules about language within the House to consider whether they need to be amended so that they are appropriate for today’s context.¹³⁹²

6.159 The Prime Minister should call on the Speaker of the House to convene a conference on protecting our democracy by guaranteeing the ability of MPs to go about their work without threat, harassment, violence, or intimidation.

6.160 It is important that the steps taken to provide physical security for MPs particularly focus on the way that activists can target and harass MPs close to parliament itself. There is a provision in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and

¹³⁸⁸ ‘Proposal for a Speaker’s Conference on threats of violence and abuse against MPs’ Harriet Harman website, 26 September 2019, https://www.harrietharman.org/proposal_for_a_speaker_s_conference_on_threats_of_violence_and_abuse_against_mps.

¹³⁸⁹ ‘Speakers’ Conferences (2 August 2023), <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn04426/>.

¹³⁹⁰ Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP, ‘A Speaker’s Conference’, (26 September 2019), https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/labourclp63/pages/2661/attachments/original/1569502738/Speaker's_conference_proposal_26.09.19.pdf?1569502738, p. 1.

¹³⁹¹ Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP, ‘A Speaker’s Conference’, (26 September 2019), https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/labourclp63/pages/2661/attachments/original/1569502738/Speaker's_conference_proposal_26.09.19.pdf?1569502738, pp. 15-16.

¹³⁹² Rt Hon Harriet Harman QC MP, ‘A Speaker’s Conference’, (26 September 2019), https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/labourclp63/pages/2661/attachments/original/1569502738/Speaker's_conference_proposal_26.09.19.pdf?1569502738, pp. 5 & 7.

Courts Act 2022 to specifically improve security for parliamentarians and the UK's democratic institutions. That legislation ensures that activists cannot interfere with the democratic process by trying to cause disruption to MPs and others getting to Parliament. The legislation amended the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act so that obstructing the passage of a vehicle of any description into or out of an entrance into or exit from the Parliamentary Estate which is within the Palace of Westminster area is now illegal.¹³⁹³ The legislation provides for the Home Secretary to designate another area (aside from the Palace of Westminster) as a controlled area under the terms of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, if that is where Parliament is sitting at the time.¹³⁹⁴ The steps outlined here are a significant step in the right direction. However, MPs face an unacceptable level of intimidation from activists at times of increased political tensions.

6.161 The Home Secretary should order a review of the balance between access and security within the area surrounding parliament. The review should report jointly to him, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and the Lord Speaker. It should have the joint aims of ensuring the public can access parliament freely, protecting the right to protest within view of parliament, and providing sufficient security to prevent parliamentarians being targeted by protestors for intimidation.

6.162 An essential element of getting this right means knowing what the problem looks like. As described in chapter two of this report, a particular challenge is not having a precise picture of the scale, or the character of the harassment and intimidation directed towards MPs by activists. Part of the problem is under reporting, as was detailed by the Joint Committee on Human Rights 2021 inquiry into threats to MPs.¹³⁹⁵ The lack of any one authority that is specifically tasked with recording and publishing this information contributes to the limited picture that exists. Accordingly, this makes it far harder to develop an effective response to the problem. This failing highlights the importance of improving knowledge about this long-running threat to democratically elected representatives in parliament.

6.163 A key step forward would be for the Metropolitan Police Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team to develop a plan to improve the recording and reporting of harassment and intimidation directed against

¹³⁹³ 'Protest powers: Police, Crime Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet', HMG (August 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-protest-powers-factsheet>.

¹³⁹⁴ 'Protest powers: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 factsheet', HMG (August 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-factsheets/police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-bill-2021-protest-powers-factsheet>.

¹³⁹⁵ 'Security at Westminster and beyond', HMG, para. 58 https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201919/jtselect/jtrights/37/3706.htm#_idTextAnchor037, para. 58.

MPs. The police should be able to record and retrieve accurate and consistent information showing the scale of crimes against MPs to identify trends and allocate resources accordingly.

Journalists

6.164 Extreme activists and protestors also target journalists, sometimes with similar mob tactics to those MPs are subjected to. The Government has recognised the issue and, in March 2021, published its first National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists,¹³⁹⁶ winning cross-party support.¹³⁹⁷ The plan set out five sensible objectives to better protect the safety of journalists in the UK,¹³⁹⁸ and was developed by the new National Committee for the Safety of Journalists, which brings together representatives from government, journalism, policing, prosecution services and civil society. The Government published an updated plan in October 2023 designed to address many of the new threats to journalists and the free press.¹³⁹⁹ I was pleased to see the plan addresses the rise in Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation (SLAPPs) being brought against journalists in efforts to prevent publication, harass and intimidate and, on this, the government has won the support of the National Union of Journalists. While it is too early to judge the new action plan, I welcome both the progress made on the original action plan and the scrutiny provided by the National Committee for the Safety of Journalists which tracks progress on delivery.

Schools

6.165 Another area of concern for me is the targeting of the public sector, such as schools and healthcare settings, by extreme protestors. In chapter one, I noted physical targeting of Covid-19 testing and/or vaccine centres by the anti-vaxx movement, while in chapter two, I explored the ways in which extreme anti-LGBT+ and anti-blasphemy protestors used harassment or intimidation to dictate what happens in British schools.

6.166 In all three cases of anti-LGBT+ and anti-blasphemy protests in schools – namely at Anderton Park in Birmingham, Batley Grammar School, and Kettlethorpe High School in Wakefield – I was disappointed to observe

¹³⁹⁶ 'National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists', HMG, 30 October 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists/national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists#table-of-interventions>.

¹³⁹⁷ 'NUJ Safety Report 2020, National Union of Journalists (2020)', <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/nuj-safety-report-2020.html>.

¹³⁹⁸ They are: increasing our understanding of the problem; enhancing the criminal justice system response in tackling crimes against journalists; supporting journalists and their employers to build the resources they need to protect personal safety; and helping online platforms to tackle the wider issue of online abuse; and, improving public recognition of the value of journalists. 'National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists', HMG, 30 October 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists/national-action-plan-for-the-safety-of-journalists#objective>.

¹³⁹⁹ 'Safety of Journalists', 8 November 2023, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2023-11-08/debates/23110845000012/SafetyOfJournalists>.

inadequate responses across the board. I am not alone in that assessment. In her 2019 report as Commissioner for Countering Extremism Dame Sara Khan noted “a widely held perception that local and central Government [had] failed to support headteachers by responding to recent protests [in Birmingham] and other issues quickly and resolutely”. Headteachers told the Commission that they felt “totally isolated” by the lack of support.¹⁴⁰⁰ The independent reviewer of Prevent, Sir William Shawcross, criticised “the lack of a co-ordinated and connected stance from senior government” to the Batley Grammar School incident.¹⁴⁰¹ As I noted in chapter two, the involvement of a mosque in adjudicating on matters in an unrelated school and the intimidating treatment of one of the pupils’ mothers was highly improper and should be a source of shame for the headteacher and local chief inspector who facilitated and attended the mosque meeting.

6.167 How to respond to an incident involving causing offence is a live issue for schools yet there is too little support from central government. YouGov polling in March 2023 of over one thousand teachers in the UK highlighted the inadequacy of support for teachers on potential blasphemy-related incidents in their schools.¹⁴⁰² Only 36% of teachers polled said that their schools have “issued guidance to avoid causing offence from teaching materials or lesson content”.¹⁴⁰³ I am similarly disappointed by the lack of national guidance from the Department for Education on managing blasphemy-related incidents,¹⁴⁰⁴ without which I fear local responses are likely to be inconsistent and risk prioritising managing local tensions over promoting freedom of expression.

6.168 Overall, the impression given is of an uncertain and disjointed response by the state to aggressive protestors targeting schools who are both assured and coordinated and, at times, should also be seen as a continuation of long-standing agitation by local Islamists.

6.169 I understand the Department for Education is considering guidance on responding to intimidation and harassment in school settings, which is welcome. In my view, such guidance ought to be statutory to give school

¹⁴⁰⁰ Challenging Hateful Extremism, Commission for Countering Extremism (October 2019), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/874101/200320_Challenging_Hateful_Extremism.pdf, p. 69.

¹⁴⁰¹ ‘Independent Review of Prevent’ (February 2023),

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63e26968d3bf7f17385a3421/Independent_Review_of_Prevent.pdf, p. 150.

¹⁴⁰² Dr Damon L. Perry, ‘Blasphemy’ in Schools, Self-Censorship and Security Fears Amongst British Teachers’, Policy Exchange (2023) <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/%E2%80%98Blasphemy-in-Schools.pdf>, p. 10.

¹⁴⁰³ Dr Damon L. Perry, ‘Blasphemy’ in Schools, Self-Censorship and Security Fears Amongst British Teachers’, Policy Exchange (2023), <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/%E2%80%98Blasphemy-in-Schools.pdf>, p. 12.

¹⁴⁰⁴ In March 2023, the Home Secretary at the time Suella Braverman committed to guidance on blasphemy for schools yet, at the time of writing the government had failed to publish any such guidance and appeared to confirm that it has no plans to do so. Suella Braverman: We do not have blasphemy laws in Great Britain’, *The Times*, 4 March 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/suella-braverman-we-do-not-have-blasphemy-laws-in-great-britain-9ps9lj8r5>; ‘Schools: Blasphemy’, Parallel Parliament (17 April 2023), <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/question/HL7123/schools-blasphemy>.

leaders the confidence to robustly and consistently tackle unacceptable behaviour.

6.170 The Government should issue statutory guidance on managing blasphemy-related incidents in schools alongside other forms of harassment and intimidation. This should include commitments to upholding teachers' freedom of expression and not automatically suspending teachers involved in such incidents or revealing their identity. While schools are required to engage with parents, on developing Relationships and Sex Education for example, the guidance should set out that schools are not required to engage with local community groups or religious institutions in managing blasphemy-related incidents or other tensions.

6.171 During my review, the Government took welcome steps to strengthen exclusion orders to protect schools and healthcare settings from persistent and unreasonable behaviour. The Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022 introduced a new category of Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs), which local authorities typically use to prevent people engaging in anti-social behaviour in public spaces by, for example, controlling the drinking of alcohol or placing requirements on dog owners.¹⁴⁰⁵ The new Expedited Public Spaces Protection Orders (E-PSPOs) are limited to public places in the vicinity of a school, NHS vaccine or test and trace site within the local authorities area and can be introduced immediately for up to six months requiring only the consents of the local chief police officer and a person authorised by the school or relevant NHS authority.¹⁴⁰⁶

6.172 E-PSPOs have been criticised by civil liberties campaigners on the grounds that councils will be less likely to hold a public consultation thereby reducing public accountability, that the conditions for introducing the orders are overly vague, and that they will suppress debate.¹⁴⁰⁷ I am unconvinced by these arguments. First, as soon as is practicable after making an E-PSPO, local authorities must consult the police, appropriate community representatives, and the owners of the land in the area.¹⁴⁰⁸ Moreover, I have not seen evidence of local authorities bypassing public consultation: in fact, Manchester City

¹⁴⁰⁵ Ed Telepneff, 'Public Spaces Protection orders- background summary and 2022 update', Local Government Lawyer, 23 September 2022, <https://www.localgovernmentlawyer.co.uk/community-safety/310-community-safety-features/51657-public-spaces-protection-orders-background-summary-and-2022-update>. See, for example, 'Public Spaces Protection Order', Newham London, <https://www.newham.gov.uk/community-parks-leisure/public-spaces-protection-order-pspo> and 'Public Spaces Protection Orders', Lewes and Eastbourne Councils, <https://www.lewes-eastbourne.gov.uk/article/1328/Public-Spaces-Protection-Orders>.

¹⁴⁰⁶ 'Circular 005/2022: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022', HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/circular-0052022-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-act-2022/circular-0052022-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-act-2022>, paras 138-139, 150.

¹⁴⁰⁷ 'Manifesto Club response to 'fast track' PSPOs', Manifesto Club, 14 January 2022, <https://manifestoclub.info/manifesto-club-response-to-fast-track-pspos/>

¹⁴⁰⁸ Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/32/part/3/crossheading/expedited-public-spaces-protection-orders/enacted>; 'Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/12/section/72B>.

Council introduced a city-wide E-PSPO in October 2022 to protect Covid-19 vaccination clinics and ran a public consultation immediately after it had been introduced.¹⁴⁰⁹ In 2023, Stockport Council consulted publicly both on an E-PSPO to protect vaccination centres in the town and on the proposal to replace the E-PSPO with a 3-year PSPO.¹⁴¹⁰ Second, the criteria for E-PSPOs is clear: “if protest activity in the public place has had, or is likely to be, having the effect of causing harassment, intimidation or impediment to those working or volunteering at, or using the services of, the school or site in question”; and the activities must be “of a persistent or continuing nature”.¹⁴¹¹

6.173 In my view, E-PSPOs are a useful addition to local authorities’ powers, allowing them to target intimidating or disruptive protest in certain areas quickly and efficiently.

6.174 The Government should extend the scope of E-PSPOs to include places vital to the functioning of democratic governance, such as MPs’ constituency offices and surgeries and council chambers. This would serve a dual function of being an additional practical measure to stop lawmakers being targeted and underline the Government’s commitment to promoting democracy.

The justice system

6.175 My review has shown the inability of our justice system to adequately meet the challenge from the rise of extreme protest and public disorder, notably where there may be widespread public support for the stated cause.

6.176 In chapter one I observed that high profile acquittals for criminal damage in the context of political protests had cast doubt on juries’ willingness to discharge their duty in morally and politically charged cases. Former Supreme Court Judge Lord Sumption publicly warned that the acquittals of those responsible for toppling the Colston statue in Bristol during a BLM rally undermined the rule of law.¹⁴¹² In a recent example, in October 2023, a jury at Southwark Crown Court acquitted five Extinction Rebellion activists of conspiracy to commit criminal damage to the Treasury in 2019 despite the individuals admitting their role in spraying it with red dye from a fire engine in

¹⁴⁰⁹ ‘City Wide Public Spaces Protection Order Consultation- Vaccination Clinics’, Manchester City Council, https://www.manchester.gov.uk/info/200024/consultations_and_surveys/8561/city_wide_public_spaces_protection_order_consultation_%E2%80%9393_vaccination_clinics.

¹⁴¹⁰ ‘Consultation to replace the Expedited Public Services Protection Order(E-PSPO) with a Public Spaces Protection Order’, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, 7 July 2023, <https://consultation.stockport.gov.uk/public-health-1/consultation-on-plans-to-extend-expedited-public-s/>

¹⁴¹¹ ‘Circular 005/2022: Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022’, HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/circular-0052022-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-act-2022/circular-0052022-police-crime-sentencing-and-courts-act-2022>, paras 139-140.

¹⁴¹² Jonathan Sumption, ‘Make no mistake, the ‘Colston Four’ verdict undermined the rule of law’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 January 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2022/01/08/make-no-mistake-colston-four-verdict-undermined-rule-law/>.

what they called a “powerfully symbolic and memorable action”.¹⁴¹³ One of the defendants argued that the Treasury would have consented to the damage had they “known the full facts [about fossil fuel projects]”¹⁴¹⁴ – a lawful excuse to most criminal damage charges.¹⁴¹⁵

6.177 As noted in chapter one, in 2022 the Court of Appeal provided guidance, at the request of the Attorney General following the trial of four protestors for allegations of criminal damage to a statue of Edward Colston, on the circumstances in which defendants accused of criminal damage could rely on a defence of lawful excuse on the grounds that a prosecution breaches their rights to freedoms of expression and assembly, protected under the European Convention on Human Rights.¹⁴¹⁶ The Court of Appeal ruled that where protest resulted in significant damage or was violent, defendants would not be able to argue that a conviction would disproportionately interfere with their right to protest.¹⁴¹⁷ While I welcome the clarity which the Colston Four ruling brings, I agree with legal commentator Joshua Rozenberg KC that “Judges and juries do seem to struggle with the concept of reasonable excuse and I hope there will be further opportunities for the Court of Appeal to clarify the law”.¹⁴¹⁸

6.178 After I submitted my review, the Court of Appeal also provided guidance, at the request of the Attorney General, on the scope of a defence of lawful excuse to someone charged with criminal damage if the person honestly believes that the property owner would have consented if aware of the damage and its circumstances.¹⁴¹⁹ This previously untested defence had become increasingly prominent in the context of political protest, in particular climate change protest. In the case in question – the spray-painting of political parties’ and NGOs’ headquarters by Burning Pink activists (see chapter two) – the defence relied on the circumstances including the nature and extent of man-made climate change.¹⁴²⁰ The Court of Appeal confirmed that this is too

¹⁴¹³ Alex Marsh, ‘XR activists acquitted over Treasury fake blood protest’, *East London Advertiser*, 8 November 2023, <https://www.eastlondonadvertiser.co.uk/news/23909887.xr-activists-acquitted-treasury-fake-blood-protest/>; ‘Jury acquits Extinction Rebellion for Treasury Fire Engine action and Crown drops remaining trials after Judge suggests ‘not in the public interest’’, *Extinction Rebellion*, 30 October 2023, <https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2023/10/30/jury-acquits-extinction-rebellion-for-treasury-fire-engine-action-and-crown-drops-remaining-trials-after-judge-suggests-not-in-public-interest/>.

¹⁴¹⁴ Alex Marsh, ‘XR activists acquitted over Treasury fake blood protest’, *East London Advertiser*, 8 November 2023, <https://www.eastlondonadvertiser.co.uk/news/23909887.xr-activists-acquitted-treasury-fake-blood-protest/>.

¹⁴¹⁵ ‘Criminal Damage, Crown Prosecution Service, (August 2023) <https://www.cps.gov.uk/legal-guidance/criminal-damage>

¹⁴¹⁶ Criminal Damage Act 1971, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1971/48/section/2>.

¹⁴¹⁷ Haroon Siddique, Damian Gayle, ‘Coulston four: protestors cannot rely on ‘human rights’ defence, top judge rules’, *The Guardian*, 28 September 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2022/sep/28/colston-four-protesters-cannot-rely-on-human-rights-defence-top-judge-rules>; ‘Attorney General’s Reference on a Point of Law’, *Judiciary*, 28 September 2022, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/AG-Ref-Colston-Four-summary-280922.pdf>.

¹⁴¹⁸ Joshua Rozenberg, ‘When is criminal damage lawful?’, *A Lawyer Writes*, 3 November 2023, <https://rozenberg.substack.com/p/when-is-criminal-damage-lawful>

¹⁴¹⁹ Attorney General’s Reference No. 1 of 2023 – Judgment, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AG-Ref-1-of-2023-judgment.pdf>; Attorney General’s Reference No. 1 of 2023 - Press Summary, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AGREF-1-of-2023-press-summary.pdf>.

¹⁴²⁰ Attorney General’s Reference No. 1 of 2023 – Judgement, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AG-Ref-1-of-2023-judgment.pdf>, para. 14. In a separate case, Palestine Action activists were acquitted of criminal damage – for squirting tomato ketchup on a statue of Arthur Balfour in Parliament – after they successfully argued their belief that the public would consent to their protest if they were aware of the history, consequence, and legacy of the Balfour Declaration. See ‘Hamish McCallum secures not guilty verdict for pro-Palestine protestors’, *Garden Court North*, 19 December 2023, <https://gcnchambers.co.uk/ketchup-statue-arthur-balfour-not-guilty/>.

broad an interpretation of the property owners' knowledge of circumstances, which should be limited to those matters directly related to the damage itself. In protest cases, this means circumstances are confined to the fact that the damage was caused as part of a protest on a particular subject (i.e., "we sprayed the paint as a climate change protest"). It does not include the underlying "merits, importance, or urgency" of the subject matter (nor the perceived need to draw attention to a cause).¹⁴²¹ As such, evidence about climate change is inadmissible in such cases as it is not relevant. I welcome the judgement and am hopeful that the defence relied upon in the Burning Pink case will be available much less commonly in similar cases in the future.

6.179 The Lord Chancellor and Lady Chief Justice should convene a process to examine the potential issue of juries acquitting defendants and judges applying laws differently when they are transgressed in the name of progressive causes like climate change and anti-racism.

6.180 Another related issue put to me is the detrimental impact of the Supreme Court's judgement in *R v Ziegler*,¹⁴²² which says that before a person can be prosecuted for obstructing the highway (under section 137 of the Highways Act 1980) the prosecution must prove that a conviction would be a proportionate (and thus justified) interference with that person's rights to freedom of expression and assembly. This allows a defence of lawful excuse – namely a general defence relying on Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention of Human Rights. In a paper for the think tank Policy Exchange Richard Ekins KC, Professor of Law and Constitutional Government in the University of Oxford, and Sir Stephen Laws KC argue that: "The Ziegler judgement has caused very real difficulties for police in dealing with (environmental) protest and for judges attempting to run trials fairly and efficiently and to instruct juries about what must be proved".¹⁴²³ I share the concern that trials relating to disruptive protest ought not to be politicised and certainly not in terms of whose cause is worthy. Relatedly, the Court of Appeal Colston ruling (above) was ambiguous on cases of relatively minor criminal damage, which leaves open questions of whether stereotypical environmentalist 'actions' like spraying paint on a building or soup over a painting are defensible under human rights law.

6.181 In the package of measures after I submitted my review, the Government announced its intention to introduce amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill to remove the defence of lawful excuse for some disruptive offences, such as

¹⁴²¹ Attorney General's Reference No. 1 of 2023 – Judgement, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/AG-Ref-1-of-2023-judgment.pdf>, paras. 49-50.

¹⁴²² 'Judgement- Director of Public Prosecutions v Ziegler and Others', <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/docs/uksc-2019-0106-judgment.pdf>

¹⁴²³ Richard Ekins, Sir Stephen Laws KCB, KC (Hon), 'Amending The Public Order Bill', Policy Exchange (January 2023), <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Amending-the-Public-Order-Bill.pdf>, pp. 2-3.

obstructing public highway, locking on, and public nuisance.¹⁴²⁴ I welcome this commitment. At the time of writing, however, the date for this (expected to be Bill report stage) has yet to be announced.

- 6.182 The Government must set out a clear and practical plan to mitigate the impact of the Ziegler judgment, including legislating (as recently announced) to remove the right to protest as a lawful excuse in relation to blocking roads and other offences if the aim of the activity in question is to interfere with the rights of others.**

Supporting Businesses against Political Violence and Disruption

6.183 Alongside the cost of policing political protest and disruption, my review has highlighted the significant cost to business of prolonged disruptive political protest.

6.184 Extreme political protest and disruption can impact business in different ways. Businesses in the immediate vicinity may suffer business interruption losses or criminal damage to property or goods, while the cumulative impact may detract from the attraction to the public of businesses. As noted in chapter one, police failure to prevent Extinction Rebellion from closing central London roads reportedly cost shopkeepers £12 million in lost takings during the April 2019 protests.¹⁴²⁵ Other examples include Animal Rebellion activists forcing some restaurants to close for the evening by occupying tables and holding faux menus detailing “environmental costs of food” or Just Stop Oil blocking the M25 disrupting retailers’ supply lines.¹⁴²⁶

6.185 There are options for businesses to claim compensation. Business insurance typically covers damage to business because of riot, civil disorder, or violent protest particularly if property is damaged while additional business interruption insurance covers loss of income. For those without (or inadequate) insurance the Riot (Damages) Act provides compensation too but only in events determined as a riot by the relevant Police and Crime Commissioner (or Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime in London).¹⁴²⁷ The cost to businesses of riots is high; while not linked to any protest movement, with the Association of British Insurers estimating that the August 2011 riots in

¹⁴²⁴ ‘New protest laws on face coverings and pyrotechnics’, Home Office (February 2024), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-protest-laws-on-face-coverings-and-pyrotechnics>; ‘Protest Measures, 8 February 2024, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2024-02-13/debates/7B35BB0A-00A6-4B8D-9623-2DB04C4B0D3B/ProtestMeasures?highlight=ziegler#>.

¹⁴²⁵ Jonathan Leake, Shanti Das, Shingi Mararike, ‘We’ll win fight with maths, vow Extinction Rebellion protesters’, *The Times*, 21 April 2019, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/well-win-fight-with-maths-vow-extinction-rebellion-protesters-hxjx29bqf>.

¹⁴²⁶ Edward Colville, Peter Mansfield, Sally Lord, ‘Protests on the rise-are you covered?’, RPC, 30 January 2023, <https://www.rpc.co.uk/perspectives/retail-therapy/protests-on-the-rise-are-you-covered/>.

¹⁴²⁷ ‘Recovering After Riots’, Association of British Insurers, <https://www.abi.org.uk/globalassets/sitecore/files/documents/publications/public/migrated/riots/recovering-after-riots-abi-guidance-for-property-owners-and-businesses.pdf>, pp. 1, 3, 4 & 6; ‘Riot Compensation Claims- Guidance for claimants’, Home Office, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c642b4040f0b676ccc863b5/Riot_Compensation__Public_Facing__Guidance_-_Final.pdf

the UK cost insurers around £200 million in respect of damage to property and interruption.¹⁴²⁸

- 6.186 In some cases, businesses have attempted to pursue those responsible for damage and disruption but with limited success or precedent. In 2015, EDF Energy dropped its £5 million civil claim against "No dash for gas" protestors who had, in 2013, pleaded guilty to charges of aggravated trespass for their week-long occupation of one of the company's power stations in 2012.¹⁴²⁹ The potential deterrence of EDF's action was not lost on the protestors or their supporters. One of the protestors had previously said "the civil case could act as a greater deterrent than criminal convictions" with success sending "a message that if you take direct action you will lose your home", while environmental charity Greenpeace said EDF's claim was an attempt to "undermine the British tradition of organised dissent".¹⁴³⁰
- 6.187 It may also be possible to sue an organisation rather than individual protestors in certain circumstances. In 2015 the Supreme Court ruled on the circumstances in which an environmental charity could be held liable for damage caused by protestors using the legal principle of joint liability. While in this case the court determined that the charity's contribution was so minimal as to not be legally relevant, the judgement is useful in outlining the principles which would make an organisation jointly liable, namely assistance in an unlawful act and that it shared "common intention".
- 6.188 The legal status of some of the extreme protest groups covered in my review, coupled with the fact they have assets and set out to deliberately disrupt businesses makes it, in my view, worth investigating how they can be pursued for damages.
- 6.189 **The Government should consider introducing a civil measure making it easier for businesses to pursue extreme protest organisers for damages. Those who suffer loss because of serious disruption from extreme and unauthorised protest deserve a right to redress from the groups who organise the action.**
- 6.190 In extreme cases, some businesses are routinely targeted for criminal damage and disruption by protest movements on ideological grounds. The long-running historic campaign of intimidation by extreme animal rights

¹⁴²⁸ '£40 Million a Day-Counting the Financial Cost of the August 2011 Riots', Association of British Insurers (May 2012), <https://www.abi.org.uk/globalassets/sitecore/files/documents/publications/public/migrated/riots/40-million-a-day-counting-the-financial-costs-of-the-august-riots-2011.pdf>, p. 5

¹⁴²⁹ 'EDF drops civil claim against gas-fired power plant protestors', Thomson Reuters Practical Law, 18 March 2013, <https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters.com/5-525-2453>.

¹⁴³⁰ David Doyle, 'EDF sues activists for £5m- an attack on peaceful protest?', Channel 4 News, 20 February 2013, <https://www.channel4.com/news/edf-sues-activists-for-5m-an-attack-on-peaceful-protest>.

activists against the research organisation Huntingdon Life Sciences was stopped by a series of successful prosecutions of the ring leaders. More recently, however, and as detailed in chapter one, prosecutions of Palestine Action activists appear to be having little impact on the group's determination to shut down defence technology company Elbit UK, which the group targets for its links to Israel.¹⁴³¹

6.191 I met with Elbit UK to better understand the nature and scale of the problems the company faces. As of November 2023, the company had logged 170 incidents of Palestine Action carrying out attacks against 37 companies since the direct-action campaign started in July 2020. Elbit UK noted that the group's targeting of other defence sector companies as well as their supply chains is now a fixed feature of the campaign.¹⁴³² Following the Hamas terrorist attacks in Israel on 7 October 2023, Palestine Action released an interactive targeting list of 50 companies encompassing 140 locations in the UK which it claimed were "facilitating the Israeli weapons industry".¹⁴³³

6.192 Elbit UK is frustrated by the policing and criminal justice response to Palestine Action's campaign. It claims that knowledge sharing, for example on the group's personnel or evolving tactics, between local police forces and with regional Crown Prosecution Service teams is poor (because it is below the level of counter-terrorism) and that police forces often lack specialist training, for example to remove protestors from roofs.¹⁴³⁴ The company highlighted that in sites in locations such as Oldham or Leicester the local employees who are disrupted are largely Muslim.¹⁴³⁵ I find it a cruel irony that the criminal activities of those who claim to be acting for the rights of Palestinian Muslims is also disproportionately impacting hard working Muslims in some of the country's poorer areas.

6.193 I agree with Elbit UK's assessment that Palestine Action's four-year criminal campaign has had a detrimental effect on the UK defence sector. The sector plays a vital role in securing the country's national security and interest and so the Government must do more to defend it from sustained ideologically motivated criminal campaigns. There is also a strong case to extend this enhanced protection to energy providers which are vulnerable to criminal sabotage and disruption from extreme environmental protestors.

6.194 The government should consider ways to ensure increased resilience of supply for defence manufacturers and energy providers whose

¹⁴³¹ Palestine Action, <https://www.palestineaction.org/>.

¹⁴³² Palestine Action campaign in the UK, Elbit, November 2023.

¹⁴³³ Palestine Action, Twitter, 9 October 2023, https://twitter.com/Pal_action/status/1711443671374086174.

¹⁴³⁴ Elbit UK meeting, November 2023.

¹⁴³⁵ Elbit UK meeting, November 2023.

operations are being disrupted by illegal protest. This could include setting a protective buffer zone around certain sites or expediting injunctions on certain protestors not to enter such a zone. There should also be a compensation scheme for workers who lose earnings because of political protests.

6.195 I have also considered calls to proscribe Palestine Action as a terrorist group. Under the Terrorism Act 2000, the Home Secretary may proscribe an organisation if they believe it is “concerned in terrorism”.¹⁴³⁶ This is a statutory test containing two components:

1. That the group’s activities meet the definition of terrorism, meaning the use or threat which: involves serious violence against a person; involves serious damage to property; endangers a person’s life; creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or section of the public; or is designed seriously to interfere with or seriously to disrupt an electronic system.
2. That the use or threat of such action by the group must be designed to influence the government or an international governmental organisation or to intimidate the public or a section of the public and be undertaken for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause.¹⁴³⁷

6.196 If the Home Secretary believes that an organisation meets this statutory test, there are other factors in considering whether to proscribe the organisation.¹⁴³⁸

6.197 As noted in chapter one, Palestine Action organises itself into affinity groups, which, according to Professor Clive Walker, are encompassed by the statutory definition of ‘organisation’ (any association or combination of persons),¹⁴³⁹ meaning the group is theoretically eligible for proscription. In addition, I believe the group is advancing an ideological cause, I described it in chapter one as an extreme left and anarchist anti-Israel movement; and the group describes its intent to influence government defence policy in its Twitter handle “The direct action network dismantling British complicity with Israeli apartheid”.¹⁴⁴⁰ Given the extreme and evolving nature of the group’s tactics,

¹⁴³⁶ For the purposes of the Act, this means that the organisation: commits or participates in acts of terrorism; prepares for terrorism; promotes or encourages terrorism (including the unlawful glorification of terrorism); or is otherwise concerned in terrorism.

¹⁴³⁷ ‘Proscribed Terrorist Organisations’, HMG,

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380939/ProscribedOrganisations.pdf

¹⁴³⁸ These are: the nature and scale of an organisation’s activities; the specific threat that it poses to the UK; the specific threat that it poses to British nationals overseas; the extent of the organisation’s presence in the UK; and the need to support other members of the international community in the global fight against terrorism.

¹⁴³⁹ Joanna Dawson, ‘Proscribed terrorist organisations’, House of Commons Library (April 2024),

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00815/SN00815.pdf>, p. 11.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Palestine Action, Twitter, https://twitter.com/Pal_action.

the Government should keep under review the question of whether Palestine Action meets the criteria for proscription as a terrorist entity.

- 6.198 The aim of proscription is threefold: deter people from terrorism; provide a legal route to tackle support for terrorist organisations; and signal a rejection by government and society of a group's legitimacy.¹⁴⁴¹ However, the consequences of proscription are severe and can entail both a lawful restriction of people's rights to free expression and association that, if not adhered to, may result in severe penalties, and financial sanctions.¹⁴⁴² The bar for proscription, therefore, is rightly very high and I do not believe that the activities of Palestine Action currently meet it.
- 6.199 However, the impact of groups that deliberately engage in prolonged criminal activities and/or and serious disruption on the public and democratic institutions – as well as on businesses – is sufficiently serious for the Government to develop a new framework for restricting their activities.
- 6.200 **The Government should introduce a mechanism to restrict the activity of organisations which have a policy of using criminal offences for which the penalty includes imprisonment (such as destruction of property) or causing serious disruption or injury to persons (either intentional or reckless as to whether that occurs) to influence government or public debate where its policy and activities make this a necessary in a democratic society to protect the rights of others. Such a mechanism would be distinct from proscription on terrorism grounds and considerations should include whether the activity is designed to interfere with the rights of others or impede the proper functioning of democratic institutions or business, whether it is of a persistent or continuing nature, and whether it was undertaken to advance a political or ideological cause. Sanctions attached to this restriction would include restricting the group's right to assembly and its ability to fundraise.**

Balancing Free Speech and Disrupting Political Violence Online

- 6.201 This section assesses the extent to which we are striking the right balance between protecting free speech and disrupting political violence and disruption online. The potential for people to be radicalised to political violence with great speed over modern communication channels, and the challenge of protecting against this, has long been a focus of debate in countering terrorism and extremism. As evidenced in chapters one and two, the internet

¹⁴⁴¹ Joanna Dawson, 'Proscribed terrorist organisations', House of Commons Library (April 2024), <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00815/SN00815.pdf>, p. 19.

¹⁴⁴² Joanna Dawson, 'Proscribed terrorist organisations', House of Commons Library (April 2024), <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN00815/SN00815.pdf>, pp. 11-12.

is also a key tool for extreme protest movements, both in terms of coordinating activities and propaganda support.

6.202 One key milestone in the Government's response to this challenge was the passage during my review of the Online Safety Act, a new set of laws designed by the Government to regulate, and hold accountable, digital platforms that publish illegal and harmful content.

'THE ONLINE SAFETY ACT'

With an emphasis on child protection, and prevention of abuse, exploitation and harassment, the Online Safety Act financially incentivises social media companies to act quickly in removing illegal content and ensuring young people are not exposed to harmful or age-inappropriate material. This includes:

- Removing illegal content and being more transparent about the safety measures to do this.
- Removing content that promotes self-harm, since criminalised under the Act, and protecting children from encountering bullying, pornography or content that promotes (encourages or provides instructions for) suicide, self-harm or eating disorders (regardless of whether a criminal threshold has been met).
 - Enforcing age limits, age-checking measures, and publishing risk assessments.
- Improving, and making accessible, the ways in which to report problems online.
- Ensuring the largest platforms proactively offer users tools, such as filtering, so that they can have greater control over the types of content they see and who they engage with online.
- Requiring social media companies to assess how their platforms could allow abusers to create anonymous profiles, tackle repeat offenders and limit the activity of new or suspicious accounts.

These measures are now regulated by Ofcom, which can fine companies up to £18 million or 10 percent of their annual global turnover (whichever is greater) should they not adhere to these stipulations. Ofcom is further tasked with (a) publishing clear guidance that outlines measures firms can take “to reduce the risk of harm to women and girls”, and (b) improving the public’s “ability to identify disinformation and evaluate trusted sources of information”, for which it must establish an advisory committee.¹⁴⁴³

6.203 The set of harms targeted by the Online Safety Act is both ambitious and contentious, as illustrated through the legislation's four-year trajectory from

¹⁴⁴³ Online Safety Act 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/enacted>; 'A guide to the Online Safety Bill', Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (August 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-guide-to-the-online-safety-bill>.

initial development (the Online Harms White Paper was published in April 2019)¹⁴⁴⁴ to ascension through Parliament, with Royal Assent finally granted in October 2023.¹⁴⁴⁵ The Act was particularly welcomed by charities that tackle child abuse and harassment against women and girls.¹⁴⁴⁶ It was, however, criticised on privacy and freedom of expression grounds. In July 2022 the Government added additional protections within the Bill to protect journalistic content.¹⁴⁴⁷ Nonetheless, large technology firms, such as Apple, WhatsApp and Signal, and freedom of expression campaigners, such as Article 19, Big Brother Watch and Liberty, maintained that the legislation undermines end-to-end encryption; erodes the right to private communications; creates a 'vulnerability' that will be exploited by hackers and hostile states; and places journalists, activists, and diplomats at risk.¹⁴⁴⁸

6.204 In my view, the aims laid out in this legislation are laudable. The harassment, intimidation and abuse that takes place, often unfettered, online is unacceptable. Participation in digital public platforms ought not to come with such a cost, and social media companies cannot be left to regulate their own platforms without oversight backed up by sanction. I was impressed by the scrutiny the legislation has been subjected to, including the rounds of amendments encompassing stakeholders' concerns. Attempting to balance the vital democratic right to free speech whilst tackling the abuse and harassment that has real world consequences is, I believe, a difficult yet necessary undertaking.

6.205 The final legislation moved away from early proposals to mandate the restriction of 'legal but harmful' content following concerns, including from the House of Commons' Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, that such content was ill-defined, subjective, and could lead to a curtailment of legal free

¹⁴⁴⁴ 'A guide to the Online Safety Bill', Department for Science, Innovation and Technology and Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (August 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-guide-to-the-online-safety-bill>.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Online Safety Act 2023, HMG, <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137/stages>.

¹⁴⁴⁶ 'Overwhelming support for Online Safety Act as rules making UK the safest place in the world to be online become law', HMG, 27 October 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/overwhelming-support-for-online-safety-act-as-rules-making-uk-the-safest-place-in-the-world-to-be-online-become-law>; 'Campaigners join architects of Online Safety Act in Parliament to celebrate ground-breaking new laws for children', NSPCC, 31 October 2023, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/news-opinion/2023/campaigners-join-architects-of-online-safety-act-in-parliament-to-celebrate-ground-breaking-new-laws-for-children/>; 'CAMPAIGN WIN! New Online Safety Bill guidance to tackle abuse of women and girls', End Violence Against Women, 30 June 2023, <https://www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk/campaign-win-new-online-safety-bill-guidance-to-tackle-abuse-of-women-and-girls/>; 'Refuge comments on Online Safety Bill amendments announced by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)', Refuge, 30 June 2023, <https://refuge.org.uk/news/refuge-comments-on-online-safety-bill-amendments-announced-by-the-department-for-science-innovation-and-technology-dsit/>.

¹⁴⁴⁷ For an overview of the 2022 amendments see 'Fact sheet on enhanced protections for journalism within the Online Safety Bill', HMG (August 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fact-sheet-on-enhanced-protections-for-journalism-within-the-online-safety-bill/fact-sheet-on-enhanced-protections-for-journalism-within-the-online-safety-bill>. The subsequent Online Safety Act places a duty on largest platforms with the most users, known as Category 1 services, to protect journalistic content, news publisher content and content of democratic importance. See Online Safety Act 2023, sections 17-19 & 95; for a summary see Garaint Lloyd-Taylor, 'The Online Safety Act', Lewis Silkin, 8 November 2023, <https://www.lewissilkin.com/en/insights/the-online-safety-bill>

¹⁴⁴⁸ Joint Second Reading Briefing on the Online Safety Bill for the House of Lords: Private Messaging, January 2023, <https://www.libertyhumanrights.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Joint-civil-society-briefing-on-private-messaging-in-the-Online-Safety-Bill-for-Second-Reading-in-the-House-of-Lords-January-2023.pdf>, para. 9; Alex Hern, 'WhatsApp and Signal unite against online safety bill amid privacy concerns', *The Guardian*, 18 April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/apr/18/whatsapp-signal-unite-against-online-safety-bill-privacy-messaging-apps-safety-security-uk>.

speech.¹⁴⁴⁹ I welcome this move. I had previously warned that, unless properly calibrated, there was a danger that social media companies would respond to legal risk by defaulting to an overly cautious approach which stifles the freedom to challenge ideas that is vital to our liberal democracy.¹⁴⁵⁰

6.206 In what I judge to be a broadly fair balance, under the Online Safety Act social media companies must instead consistently enforce their own terms and conditions so that users are in no doubt what content is and is not permitted.¹⁴⁵¹ The decision to appoint Ofcom as the regulator in the UK to enforce the Act is, in my view, a sensible expansion of its remit and expertise.¹⁴⁵² The Online Safety Act, at the time of writing, had recently obtained Royal Assent and Ofcom had only just published its first consultation on guidance and codes of practice for illegal harms,¹⁴⁵³ so it remains too early to assess the issues that may result in practice after implementation. Nonetheless, I have some concerns which I outline below.

Protecting Free Speech

6.207 I have previously cautioned against platforms defaulting to an overly cautious approach to content moderation.¹⁴⁵⁴ In this regard, I am particularly concerned about platforms terms of service regarding hate speech, the blunt nature of Automated Content Moderation, and Ofcom's relatively slow timeframe for promoting transparency.

6.208 First, the potential unintended consequences of Ofcom regulating platforms according to their own terms of service is a concern because of the risk they are misapplied towards people's lawful opinions which critics characterise as harmful or hateful. Social media companies are required to moderate illegal content which includes threatening, abusive or harassment offences (including hate¹⁴⁵⁵) but, as Ofcom has noted, many platforms have designed

¹⁴⁴⁹ 'Free for all? Freedom of expression in the digital age', House of Lords Communication and Digital Committee (July 2021), <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6878/documents/72529/default/>, paras 151-185; see also 'Freedom of expression online: Communication and Digital Committee report', House of Lords Library (October 2022), <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/freedom-of-expression-online-communications-and-digital-committee-report/>, para 2.3.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Lord Walney, Twitter, 17 March 2022, <https://twitter.com/LordWalney/status/1504376649529372672>.

¹⁴⁵¹ 'Overview of expected impact of changes to the Online Safety Bill', HMG (January 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/online-safety-bill-supporting-documents/overview-of-expected-impact-of-changes-to-the-online-safety-bill>, para 19.

¹⁴⁵² Section 1, 2(b), Online Safety Act 2023, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/50/enacted#section-95-2-a>.

¹⁴⁵³ 'Consultation: Protecting people from illegal harms online', Ofcom (February 2024), <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-1/protecting-people-from-illegal-content-online>.

¹⁴⁵⁴ Lord Walney, Twitter, 17 March 2022, <https://twitter.com/LordWalney/status/1504376649529372672>.

¹⁴⁵⁵ Ofcom's draft code of conduct states that this includes any offence under any of the following provisions of the Public Order Act 1986—

- (a) section 18 (use of words or behaviour or display of written material);
- (b) section 19 (publishing or distributing written material);
- (c) section 21 (distributing, showing or playing a recording);
- (d) section 29B (use of words or behaviour or display of written material);

their terms of service and community guidelines not only to comply with existing laws but also their own commercial needs.¹⁴⁵⁶ Since some platforms will go beyond what is required of them the scope for abuse is obvious. There are prominent examples of public figures expressing lawful opinions having been accused of hate speech by people who disagree with them on a particular political or social issue, often as part of a wider campaign of demonisation and intimidation.¹⁴⁵⁷ Consequently, I am fearful that legitimate views, such as those that are gender critical, may be (with or without malice) designated as hate speech and censored off mainstream platforms, or placed outside of a 'safe' setting that would hide controversial or sensitive content from many users.¹⁴⁵⁸

6.209 In attempting to make the internet a safe place, we must not create an online culture where companies conclude that the safest option is to avoid all controversy, thus restricting the debate over ideas that is vital in a liberal democracy.

6.210 In its Codes of Practice and guidance on the thresholds for illegal content relating to incitement to hatred or threats abuse and harassment, Ofcom must set out the importance of freedom of expression. This is particularly significant for content relating to politics, social issues, religion, and race. In a liberal democracy our sense of fairness and decency evolve through debate and controversy and so Ofcom must guard against an overly cautious approach that would lead to disproportionate takedown of vital discussion. In its Codes and guidance on terms of service and content moderation, Ofcom should also encourage platforms to apply a consistent approach across the political spectrum to avoid discrimination of dissenting views or those that challenge other orthodoxies.

6.211 Second, I note the risk of overreliance on Automated Content Moderation (ACM). Article 19, a charity that defends freedom of speech, has warned that

(e) section 29C (publishing or distributing written material);
(f) section 29E (distributing, showing or playing a recording).
An offence under any of the following provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998—

(a) section 31 (racially or religiously aggravated public order offences);

(b) section 32 (racially or religiously aggravated harassment etc).
An offence under section 50A of the Criminal Law (Consolidation) (Scotland) Act 1995 (racially aggravated harassment)

See 'Protecting people from illegal harms online | Annex 7: Illegal Content Codes of Practice for user-to-user services', https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/271165/annex-7-illegal-harms-consultation.pdf, p. 66.

¹⁴⁵⁶ 'Protecting people from illegal harms online | Volume 4: How to mitigate the risk of illegal harms – the illegal content Codes of Practice, Ofcom, https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0022/271147/volume-4-illegal-harms-consultation.pdf, para. 12.40.

¹⁴⁵⁷ Two examples include writer JK Rowling being publicly accused of transphobia and former Labour MP Rosie Duffield being accused of antisemitism (Holocaust revisionism). See Abby Gardner, 'A Complete Breakdown of the J.K. Rowling Transgender-Comments Controversy', *Glamour*, 11 April 2024, <https://www.glamour.com/story/a-complete-breakdown-of-the-jk-rowling-transgender-comments-controversy> and George Grylls, 'Labour MP Rosie Duffield investigated by party for liking anti-trans tweet', *The Times*, 27 July 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/labour-mp-rosie-duffield-under-investigation-liking-tweet-offensive-zz20fd7pw>.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Toby Young, 'The good, the bad and the ugly of the new Online Safety Bill', *The Spectator*, 29 November 2022, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/the-good-the-bad-and-the-ugly-of-the-new-online-safety-bill/>.

when “liability exposure” increases, so does the incentive to rely on automated content moderation tools which “routinely leads to over-removal of legitimate content as these technologies are unable to understand nuance and context”.¹⁴⁵⁹

6.212 In its Codes of Practice and guidance on content moderation, Ofcom should encourage companies to take steps to guard against overreliance on ACM. It should also warn them that automated processes may be inappropriate for content relating to politics, social issues, religion, and race when it also involves humour which may require nuance and context.

6.213 Lastly, I am concerned that there is a lack of clarity over the extent to which social media companies will be required to be transparent about their content moderation. In its October 2023 roadmap to implementing the Online Safety Act, Ofcom includes promoting transparency as the last of its four key outcomes.¹⁴⁶⁰ However, the regulator does not expect it will issue transparency notices until mid-2025,¹⁴⁶¹ nor will its final Codes or guidance on platforms’ transparency about their safety measures (including, for example, those designed to tackle incitement to hatred) be published until “around the end of 2025” and even that is contingent on secondary legislation being passed in 2024. While I understand the need to phase in the duties on both Ofcom and social media companies, I believe transparency is integral to the success of the Online Safety Act implementation. Ofcom itself noted that many stakeholders and users “feel that online services are opaque and their safety measures, and decision-making processes are unclear” and, without users being able to scrutinise the process, I remain wary that the digital public square will be subject to the ever-changing terms and conditions of large companies in Silicon Valley, which may take a commercially driven – or even politically partisan – approach.

6.214 The public must be able to see how Ofcom is holding firms to account, which includes data on content which is censored. As Ofcom develops its transparency notices, Codes of Practice, and guidance, it should consult widely on two key areas:

- What and how platforms disclose to individual users regarding takedowns, other enforcement actions and complaints procedures.

¹⁴⁵⁹ ‘UK: House of Lords must reject the Online Safety Bill’, Article 19, 30 January 2023, <https://www.article19.org/resources/uk-house-of-lords-must-reject-the-online-safety-bill/>.

¹⁴⁶⁰ ‘Ofcom’s approach to implementing the Online Safety Act’, Ofcom (October 2023), https://www.ofcom.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0017/270215/10-23-approach-os-implementation.pdf.

¹⁴⁶¹ Ofcom has said that transparency notices may be tailored to particular services and will detail the information and data different platforms must publish, the methodology used, and the format in which the information is gathered and published. See ‘Looking ahead to online regulation: It’s time to rethink transparency reporting’, Ofcom (January 2023), <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/news-centre/2023/looking-ahead-to-online-regulation-transparency-reporting>.

- What and how the platform reports overall transparency, especially how the platform handles hate speech and disinformation and whether reporting should include assessments of political bias. Ofcom must ensure that the data required is sufficiently detailed as to be comparable.¹⁴⁶²

6.215 It is my view that outside of content that incites violence or criminal hatred, the Government should give greater protection to the right to freedom of expression in the on-going debate on internet safety, given the critical importance of vibrant debate to the resilience of ever-evolving liberal democracies. Away from the detail of the Online Safety Act, I urge the Government to consider both the unintended consequences of high levels of regulation on mainstream platforms and of interpreting hate crime too broadly.

6.216 Whether large mainstream platforms ought to remove so-called legal but harmful content and, if so, how far they should go in doing so is a live debate. I heard a wide range of views on this issue during my review. For some, the spread of hateful and abusive behaviours online is a societal issue as much as a terrorism one. One religious leader used the example of footballers receiving racist abuse on Twitter and Facebook claiming that it would not happen if the platforms did not facilitate it: “These platforms are part of an infrastructure that facilitates hate crime that wouldn’t otherwise occur”.¹⁴⁶³ An academic of political extremism argued that driving lawful but extreme content off mainstream platforms was an effective tool in countering extremism because it makes potentially radicalising content harder to find: “If you wanted Far Right material in the 1990’s you had to visit a specialist retailer for a Neo Nazi magazine. Online now is like having everything in WHSmith’s”.¹⁴⁶⁴ By reducing harmful or extreme content on mainstream sites, the argument goes, exposure to most of the population is reduced.

6.217 Others were more circumspect. I spoke to representatives of Tech Against Terrorism, a UN initiative that develops tools and guidelines to help the global technology industry tackle the terrorist exploitation of the internet. Their strategy is to work with smaller, fringe platforms that may condone hate speech or be hostile to governments and ‘big tech’ and establish credibility in tackling the very worst i.e., illegal terrorist content. While reducing easy access to illegal content is unequivocally a good thing for them, they warned of the negative impact of other content removal and deplatforming within radical milieus. They pointed to the risk of increasing anger and frustration among users who can easily find alternative and more radical platforms, as

¹⁴⁶² I have drawn particularly on the work of Mark MacCarthy, adjunct professor at Georgetown University in the Graduate School’s Communication, Culture, & Technology Program and in the Philosophy Department, and non-resident Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at the Center for Technology Innovation at the US think tank Brookings. See, for example, Mark MacCarthy, ‘Transparency is essential for effective social media regulation’, Brookings Institution (November 2022), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/transparency-is-essential-for-effective-social-media-regulation/>

¹⁴⁶³ Far Right round table, 12 May 2021.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Far Right round table, 12 May 2021.

well as the risk of exacerbating the perception of political persecution or censorship by ‘big tech’ or the so-called liberal elite.¹⁴⁶⁵

6.218 I also heard from a prominent free speech activist who argued that pushing lawful but harmful or extreme content “into the shadows” – to smaller, fringe platforms – means that there are fewer moderate voices pushing back and far fewer (or no) interventions by the platforms themselves, such as fact-checking, sensitivity filters,¹⁴⁶⁶ or context inclusion features. Her concern was that in trying to protect people, either from hate and abuse or from potential radicalisation, we risk removing our ability to debate and to challenge dissenting and unorthodox views.¹⁴⁶⁷ I share this fear that there may be severe longer-term consequences of driving dissent further to the margins and stifling debate on mainstream platforms.¹⁴⁶⁸

6.219 Government policy must recognise the danger that high levels of regulation on acceptable speech on mainstream platforms may drive more users to less regulated platforms where there may be greater danger of radicalisation to violent intent.

6.220 Tackling criminal hatred has become a particular challenge for the police with the rise of social media. In particular, the phenomenon of non-crime hate incidents (NCHIs) have been subject to controversy. NCHIs are recorded by the police to collect information on so-called hate incidents that “could escalate into more serious harm or indicate heightened community tensions, but which do not constitute a criminal offence”.¹⁴⁶⁹ NCHIs have been criticised for their use against people who have expressed gender critical views online,¹⁴⁷⁰ against former Home Secretary Amber Rudd (for an allegedly xenophobic party conference speech on immigration),¹⁴⁷¹ and, most recently, against a schoolboy in Wakefield with high-functioning autism who was accused of damaging a Quran (see chapter two for more details).¹⁴⁷² This is

¹⁴⁶⁵ Tech Against Terrorism meeting note, 3 March 2023.

¹⁴⁶⁶ Some mainstream platforms have introduced ways for users to filter out some kinds of sensitive content. Instagram, for example, introduced Sensitive Control Content allowing users to choose to see less potentially sensitive content. However, it offers little transparency around how it defines sensitive content. ‘Updates to the Sensitive Content Control’, Instagram, 6 June 2022, <https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/updates-to-the-sensitive-content-control>.

¹⁴⁶⁷ Far Right round table, 12 May 2021.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Lord Walney, Twitter, 17 March 2022, <https://twitter.com/LordWalney/status/1504376658018639872>.

¹⁴⁶⁹ ‘Statutory guidance-Non-Crime Hate Incidents: Code of Practice on the Recording and Retention of Personal Data’, (3 June 2022), HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice-on-the-recording-and-retention-of-personal-data-accessible>, para. 7.

¹⁴⁷⁰ See here (yet note that this case of NCHI was overturned): Max Parry, ‘Teacher wins battle over ‘non-crime hate incident’ after being branded ‘transphobic’, *Daily Express*, 20 March 2023, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1748790/teacher-non-crime-hate-incident-transphobia>.

¹⁴⁷¹ ‘Police treat home secretary speech as ‘hate incident’, *BBC News*, 12 January 2017, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-38597714>

¹⁴⁷² Ben Ellery, Steven Swinford, ‘Quran damaged at school recorded as ‘hate incident’ by police’, *The Times*, 28 February 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/quran-wakefield-school-students-police-investigation-uk-2023-zrj5q75ck>; Emma Soteriou, ‘Police record ‘hate incident’ after autistic boy drops Quran in school corridor’, *LBC*, 1 March 2023, <https://www.lbc.co.uk/news/police-hate-incident-autistic-boy-quran-school/>.

clearly unacceptable, not least because NCHIs may show up on an enhanced criminal records check.¹⁴⁷³

6.221 I welcome the new code of practice on NCHIs, published in June 2023,¹⁴⁷⁴ as a good example of the Government clearly setting out a proportionate approach for police when making decisions about the recording of non-crime hate incidents and relevant personal data.¹⁴⁷⁵ The new code introduces safeguards to protect freedom of speech, ensuring parliamentary scrutiny of the processes surrounding the recording of NCHIs, and providing clarity to practitioners on when action should be taken in relation to such incidents.¹⁴⁷⁶ However, I am struck that the incident in Wakefield occurred after the old guidance was ruled incompatible with free speech and only a matter of months before the new guidance came into force, which stipulates that NCHIs should not apply to matters that occur in schools.¹⁴⁷⁷ In this case, a police inspector addressed a meeting at a local mosque and told attendees that the case was being treated as a hate incident.¹⁴⁷⁸

6.222 The Government should pay greater regard to the dangers of interpreting the parameters of hate crime too broadly, such as infringing the right to freedom of expression or unnecessarily burdening police resources.

6.223 The police must ensure that the new code of practice on NCHIs is applied consistently across police forces. They must also guard against the perception that they have been pressured into recording hate incidents or that they are doing so to quell local tensions.

¹⁴⁷³ 'Police hate crime guidance- Court of Appeal', College of Policing (March 2021), <https://www.college.police.uk/article/police-hate-crime-guidance-court-of-appeal>.

¹⁴⁷⁴ The updated guidance follows the Court of Appeal's judgement in the case of Miller v The College of Policing (2021). Miller, a former police officer, had posted and shared content on social media which was considered by a complainant to be transphobic, and it was reported to and recorded by Humberside police as a NCHI in line with the College of Policing's 2014 operational guidance. In 2020 the High Court determined that the police action was a "disproportionate interference" with his right to freedom of expression, and the Court of Appeal went further, judging that the 2014 guidance itself breached expression freedoms. See 'Ex-police officer wins appeal over force's guidance on hate incidents', *The Guardian*, 21 December 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/dec/21/ex-police-officer-wins-appeal-over-forces-guidance-on-hate-incidents>.

¹⁴⁷⁵ 'Non-Crime Hate Incidents: Code of Practice on the Recording and Retention of Personal Data', HMG (June 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice-on-the-recording-and-retention-of-personal-data-accessible>.

¹⁴⁷⁶ 'Exploratory Memorandum To The Non-Crime Hate Incidents Draft Code of Practice On The Recording and Retention of Personal Data 2023', HMG, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1141893/E02871502_Non-Crime_Hate_Incidents_EM_Web_Accessible.pdf.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Non-Crime Hate Incidents: Code of Practice on the Recording and Retention of Personal Data, HMG (June 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice/non-crime-hate-incidents-code-of-practice-on-the-recording-and-retention-of-personal-data-accessible#>.

¹⁴⁷⁸ In the Wakefield incident, Home Secretary at the time Suella Braverman was said to have been concerned about the police decision. There were media reports of pressure being put on school and the local police by local councillors and mosque representatives and Humanists UK said the school had allowed itself to be "pressured into excessive disciplinary action by a religious group". Ben Ellery, Steven Swinford, 'Qran damaged at school recorded as 'hate incident' by police', *The Times*, 28 February 2023, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/quran-wakefield-school-students-police-investigation-uk-2023-zrj5q75ck>.

Boosting National Capacity to Challenge Political Violence and Disruption Online

6.224 A significant challenge to Government is the increasing volume of disinformation (and so-called mal-information¹⁴⁷⁹) online largely generated overseas, by hostile states such as Russia and Iran, that seeks to sow societal divisions and amplify grievances at the ends of political spectrum or debate. One prominent example is the now infamous image of a Muslim woman wearing a hijab on Westminster Bridge which was falsely spun to claim she was ignoring victims of the March 2017 terrorist attack and was widely shared online by extreme right, anti-Islam blogs and Twitter accounts. The woman has since told of the abuse she suffered in the eight months before Twitter confirmed that the tweet had been created by a Russian bot account and closed the account.¹⁴⁸⁰

6.225 I was pleased to see that the Government has designated ‘foreign interference’, defined and prohibited by the National Security Act 2023,¹⁴⁸¹ as a priority offence within the Online Safety Act which requires platforms to “proactively look for and remove disinformation from foreign state actors which harms the UK”.¹⁴⁸² This should have a disarming effect on hostile states’ intent to sow discord and foment grievances through the use of fabricated, misleading or doctored content. Whether this works in practice – particularly with the inevitable adaptations that will be made to both content generation and ways to evade detection or removal – remains to be seen. One such emerging threat is AI-generated fabricated media, known as deepfakes.¹⁴⁸³

¹⁴⁷⁹ The UK government defines disinformation as the deliberate creation and spreading of false and/or manipulated information that is intended to deceive and mislead people, either for the purposes of causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain. Misinformation is the inadvertent spread of false information. The UNESCO handbook for journalism education and training (2018) created a third category, which it calls mal-information, for “information, that is based on reality, but used to inflict harm on a person, organisation or country”. It goes on to explain: “An example is a report that reveals a person’s sexual orientation without public interest justification. It is important to distinguish messages that are true from those that are false, but also those that are true (and those messages with some truth) but which are created, produced or distributed by ‘agents’ who intend to harm rather than serve the public interest. Such mal-information – like true information that violates a person’s privacy without public interest justification - goes against the standards and ethics of journalism”. See ‘Factsheet on the CDU and RRU’, Cabinet Office (June 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fact-sheet-on-the-cdu-and-rru> and ‘Journalism, fake news & disinformation: handbook for journalism education and training’, UNESCO (2018), https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/journalism_fake_news_disinformation_print_friendly_0.pdf, p. 44.

¹⁴⁸⁰ Elle Hunt and David Pegg, ‘Woman photographed in hijab on Westminster Bridge responds to online abuse’, *The Guardian*, 24 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/24/woman-hijab-westminster-bridge-attack-victim-photo-misappropriated>; Ella Willis, ‘Muslim woman pictured ‘ignoring victims of London terror attack’ was fake news Tweet created by Russians’, *Evening Standard*, 14 November 2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/world/russian-bot-account-claimed-muslim-woman-ignored-westminster-attack-victims-a3689751.html>.

¹⁴⁸¹ Foreign interference, National Security Act 2023, sections 13-15, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/32/part/1/crossheading/foreign-interference>.

¹⁴⁸² ‘Internet safety laws strengthened to fight Russian and hostile state disinformation’, HMG (July 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/internet-safety-laws-strengthened-to-fight-russian-and-hostile-state-disinformation>.

¹⁴⁸³ For example, the Leader of the Opposition Sir Keir Starmer and the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan were targeted in fake audio and media content in October and November 2023, some of which was circulated by extreme right-wing groups. Under the Online Safety Act, Ofcom’s role is to ensure social media companies are following their own policies on disinformation. Yet, at the time of writing, all three deepfakes were still available on either Facebook or Twitter. See, for example, ‘Deepfake video shows Keir Starmer promoting an investment scheme’, Full Fact, 16 November 2023, <https://fullfact.org/online/keir-starmer-deepfake-investment-scheme/>; ‘No evidence that audio clip of Keir Starmer supposedly swearing at his staff is genuine’, Full Fact, 11, October 2023, <https://fullfact.org/news/keir->

- 6.226 **In response to this challenge, the Government should explore how it can support the intelligence services and relevant teams within government¹⁴⁸⁴ in having more resources to better identify disinformation and mal-information generated by hostile states and to work with social media companies to encourage the removal of such content and consistently enforce their terms of service.**
- 6.227 Alongside platform regulation, there are other areas in which the Government could act to increase its capacity to interdict radicalising discourse in the online environment. Those in positions of political leadership have a responsibility to consider the role Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, and data sharing protocols can play in combatting extreme protest movements, political violence, and disruption.
- 6.228 **First, the Government must enable intelligence officers to make full use of fast developing artificial intelligence and machine learning tools that can integrate covert and open-source information to increase their capacity to monitor security threats.**
- 6.229 **Second, the authorities must not be inadvertently prohibited from detecting worrying trends at a macro level because of data protection, privacy, and retention regulations such as the requirement to routinely delete large amounts of meta-data.**
- 6.230 During my review, a prominent free speech activist alerted me to the lack of a “legislative framework for a digital evidence locker”, meaning as content is deleted not only will the police or civil society not be able to see what is deleted, they risk missing patterns and “the tenure of where extremist politics is going”.¹⁴⁸⁵ This concern was echoed by a Professor of the Far Right and specialist witness in terrorism trials who said some research organisations were already archiving materials so as not to lose this valuable data.¹⁴⁸⁶
- 6.231 I welcome the new reforms in the Data Protection and Digital Information (No.2) Bill that provide exemptions from the processing of personal data to national security and intelligence agencies to ensure that the law does not inhibit their ability to safeguard domestic security and defence.¹⁴⁸⁷ It is right that the exemption is limited by application on a case-by-case basis and can

starmar-audio-swearing/; ‘No evidence clip of Sadiq Khan supposedly calling for ‘Remembrance weekend ‘ to be postponed is genuine’, Full Fact, 10 November 2023, <https://fullfact.org/news/khan-audio-palestinian-remembrance/>. As of 11 December 2023, Twitter had not limited access to the content, see https://twitter.com/leo_hutz/status/1710932453362143584 and Kimmi Diamond, Twitter, 10 November 2023, <https://twitter.com/Kimmi520381244/status/1722946442891776369>. While Facebook had added a pop-up warning alerting users to “False information Checked by independent fact-checkers”, users are allowed access to the content, see Rcassvd, FaceBook, November 9 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/61551983690403/posts/352889533965384/>.

¹⁴⁸⁴ For example, Counter Disinformation Unit, which sits in Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, has been tasked with understanding disinformation (which may pose a risk to public health, public safety, or national security) and working with partners to ensure appropriate action is taken. See ‘Factsheet on the CDU and RRU’, Cabinet Office (June 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/fact-sheet-on-the-cdu-and-rru>.

¹⁴⁸⁵ Far Right round table, 12 May 2021.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Far Right round table, 12 May 2021.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, April 2024, <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3430>.

only be exercised to the extent that it is necessary.¹⁴⁸⁸ At the time of writing, the Bill is in the House of Lords, and therefore close attention should be awarded to its effects on the services' capabilities after implementation.

6.232 Third, the civil service should be host to highly skilled cyber professionals, allowing the Government to be advised by, and supported by, individuals with exceptional understanding of technological advancements in computer science.

6.233 **Doing so requires a review into the ways in which the Government can attract and retain such expertise, which should include a reconsideration of the civil service salary cap currently in effect.**

The Experiences of our International Partners

6.234 The threat of political violence and disruption is not confined to the UK. Overseas, the legislative and institutional models designed to deal with analogous political violence and disruption vary considerably. This section looks at what we can learn from the experiences of our international partners in responding to political violence and disruption.

6.235 During my review, I met with officials from the British embassies in Rome, Athens, Stockholm, and Oslo, as well as their host-country counterparts, and foreign officials from Germany, Denmark, and Iceland. I was given access to Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Diplomatic Telegrams on extremism issues and incidents across Europe, and I spoke to an academic specialising in terrorism in Greece.

6.236 As outlined in section one, within Europe it is Italy and Greece that are particularly badly affected by extreme Left Wing and anarchist political violence and extremism.

6.237 Officials from the British embassy in Rome described how various extreme Left Wing and anarchist groups remain active across central and northern Italy and primarily operate to prevent major infrastructure projects.¹⁴⁸⁹ One prominent example is opposition to the Turin Lyon high-speed railway line, the Treno ad Alta Velocità (TAV), from environmentalists and anti-globalists, which has been going on for three decades and has frequently included violence, sabotage, and arson.¹⁴⁹⁰

¹⁴⁸⁸ 'Impact Assessment, Data Protection and Digital Information (No.2)Bill: European Convention on Human Rights Memorandum', HMG, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-protection-and-digital-information-bill-impact-assessments/data-protection-and-digital-information-no-2-bill-european-convention-on-human-rights-memorandum>, paras. 28-34.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Meeting notes: briefing from British embassy in Rome, p. 2

¹⁴⁹⁰ Meeting notes: briefing from British embassy in Rome, p. 4; 'Protesters opposing Turin-Lyon high speed rail project attacked by French police', *Peoples Dispatch*, 21 June 2023, <https://peoplesdispatch.org/2023/06/21/protesters-opposing-turin-lyon-high-speed-rail-project-attacked-by-french-police/>; Stephanie Kirchgaessner, 'Italian writer faces jail time over call for sabotage of high-speed rail line', *The Guardian*, 27 January 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/27/italian-writer-erri-de-luca-sabotage-high-speed-rail-line>.

- 6.238 Three aspects of Italian counter-terrorism policing struck me as particularly notable. First, officials told me that, in Italy, Extreme Right Wing and Extreme Left Wing extremism is understood by the police as terrorism and is categorised as internal terrorism (in contrast to the Jihadist threat, most recently from Islamic State, which is categorised as international terrorism). Second, counter-terrorism was described to me as a highly attractive career, the “biggest most glamorous game in town” for Italian police, and officers who specialise in the Far Left and Far Right “pursue their whole careers in that field”.¹⁴⁹¹ Third, the experience gained in taking on Extreme Right Wing and Extreme Left Wing groups in the 1970s and 1980s forced the Italians to confront the failures of poor intelligence sharing, and, in 2003, the Counterterrorism Strategic Analysis Committee was formed, allowing the Interior Ministry, the police, prison service, and intelligence agencies to share information on threats and work together at local and regional levels.¹⁴⁹²
- 6.239 As a result, Italian counter-terrorism policing is well-placed to understand internal threats, with officers able to develop significant subject matter expertise and good working relationships within and across teams. By contrast, I am concerned that the relatively frequent movement of staff within the British civil service, including the Home Office, does not always properly allow for the accumulation of such knowledge and contacts.
- 6.240 In Greece, relatively unstructured groups of anarchists and communists organise violent campaigns aimed at overthrowing the state or capitalism, infiltrating non-violent demonstrations to provoke violent confrontations with the authorities, and more recently intimidating critics within the university system.¹⁴⁹³ The state has responded by implementing improved police training to limit the degree of force used in violent demonstrations (following media criticism of “unjustified” levels of police force) and is in the process of establishing an equivalent of the UK’s Channel programme, a multi-agency process for supporting individuals at risk of radicalisation, focussed on the country’s Extreme Left Wing.¹⁴⁹⁴
- 6.241 On the Extreme Right, the Nordic countries – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland – are host to the transnational Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM), a neo-Nazi movement founded in Sweden. The NRM uses violence and intimidation in furtherance of its goal of establishing a racially and ideologically pure ‘authoritarian state’ on the National Socialist model and its members have been convicted of killing at least three people.¹⁴⁹⁵ Finland’s Supreme

¹⁴⁹¹ Meeting notes: briefing from British embassy in Rome, p. 3. This is no surprise in the context of recent Italian history. For example, the far-left guerrilla organisation the Red Brigades (“Brigatte Rosse”), based in Northern Italy, was active from the 1970s-2000s.

¹⁴⁹² Robin Simcox, ‘Is Italy Immune from Terrorism’, The Heritage Foundation (July 2019), <https://www.heritage.org/terrorism/commentary/italy-immune-terrorism>.

¹⁴⁹³ Meeting notes: Professor Mary Bossi, pp. 1-2, 6.

¹⁴⁹⁴ Meeting notes: briefing from the British embassy in Athens, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹⁵ ‘Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM)’, Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/threat/nordic-resistance-movement-nrm>.

Court banned NRM in 2020. The Finnish police had sought to dissolve the group and the court ruled that its activities “did not enjoy freedom of expression or freedom of association, as the association’s activities by their nature entailed an abuse of these rights”.¹⁴⁹⁶ Officials told me that this was significant because constitutional protections and freedom of speech considerations make it difficult to proscribe groups in Finland. The group operates lawfully in other Nordic countries for similar constitutional reasons as well as limitations in counter-terrorism legislation,¹⁴⁹⁷ although since my meeting with representatives from the Nordic countries, Sweden has strengthened its powers to limit freedom of association for groups that engage in or support terrorism.¹⁴⁹⁸

6.242 Representatives from all the Nordic countries were keen to stress that despite the presence of NRM the perceived threat from the Extreme Right was predominantly from lone individuals and smaller groups radicalising online rather than the established organised groups.¹⁴⁹⁹ In this regard, their assessment of the primary terrorist threat from the Extreme Right is like that of the UK. In Norway, however, the relatively easy access to weapons for such individuals is a point of concern,¹⁵⁰⁰ whereas the UK has one of the lowest levels of gun crime in the world.¹⁵⁰¹

6.243 Across the Nordic countries “all the normal law enforcement tools are used” by multiple agencies in coordination with one another, including covert surveillance, police investigations and prosecutions.¹⁵⁰² There, too, there is significant interest in the UK’s Prevent programme in response to extremism: the UK has learned from the multi-agency approach which has been running in Denmark since the 1970’s and vice versa.¹⁵⁰³ A final notable lesson from the Nordic countries is the emergence of eco-fascism in Sweden in recent years, for which there were convictions for arson in 2020.¹⁵⁰⁴ While my review has focused on criminal and disruptive environmentalism motivated by Extreme Left and anarchist ideologies, the UK intelligence community is rightly alive to possibility of extreme environmentalism motivated by the Extreme Right.¹⁵⁰⁵

6.244 Germany, which faces a range of threats, some of them like the UK, has developed a sophisticated response to political violence and disruption.

¹⁴⁹⁶ ‘Finnish top court bans Finland’s main ne-Nazi group’, *Associated Press*, 22 September 2020, <https://apnews.com/general-news-959402562fc46f29ac4a7fbf21fa6615>.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Meeting notes: briefing from officials from Nordic countries, p. 5.

¹⁴⁹⁸ ‘Constitutional amendment offers greater possibilities to combat terrorism’, Government Offices of Sweden (December 2022) <https://www.government.se/press-releases/2022/12/constitutional-amendment-offers-greater-possibilities-to-combat-terrorism/>

¹⁴⁹⁹ Meeting notes: briefing from officials from Nordic countries, pp. 1, 3 & 4.

¹⁵⁰⁰ Meeting notes: briefing from officials from Nordic countries, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰¹ ‘Illegal Firearms’, National Crime Agency, <https://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/firearms>.

¹⁵⁰² Meeting notes: briefing from officials from Nordic countries, p. 8.

¹⁵⁰³ Meeting notes: briefing from officials from Nordic countries, p. 8.

¹⁵⁰⁴ Guy Weber, Martin Jonsson, Kevin Kayser, ‘No prison sentence for Luxembourg-based “eco-fascist” in Swedish court’, *RTL Today*, 28 January 2021, <https://today.rtl.lu/news/luxembourg/a/1662740.html>

¹⁵⁰⁵ JTAC & RICU briefing on LASIT

- 6.245 Founded in 1954, Germany's *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* (BfV), or Federal (and State) Office(s) for the Protection of the Constitution, is the agency chiefly responsible for countering subversive and disruptive extremism across Germany. This domestic intelligence agency has over 3,000 employees and a budget of €476.451m (2021).¹⁵⁰⁶
- 6.246 The BfV focuses upon every potential threat to the German constitutional order: Extreme Right Wing extremism, separatists, Islamists, Extreme Left Wing extremism, foreign-related extremism, counterintelligence and proliferation, economic and scientific protection, cyber defence, and secret/sabotage protection.¹⁵⁰⁷ The office issues an annual report with detailed information on each of these threats to fulfil its duty to keep the public informed of emerging threats to the democratic order.
- 6.247 While this comprehensive approach has met with some opposition from critics in Germany, there is a broad consensus across the political spectrum that counter-extremism programmes must be far-reaching and require significant funding if they are to be effective.
- 6.248 Extreme Right Wing activity is naturally a significant area of concern for the BfV. However, the office also provides detailed analyses of violent and non-violent Left Wing extremism. In its 2022 report, it stated: "The left-wing extremist scene regularly labels actual or supposed right-wing extremists as 'fascists'. This term is also applied to the state, its free and democratic constitutional system and the persons representing it. For violence-oriented left-wing extremists, crimes and violence are key elements of their 'anti-fascist struggle' [...] Through their ostensible support for the climate protest movement, left-wing extremists from various parts of the scene attempt to shift democratic discourse in order to add their own ideological positions, radicalise social protest and question the legitimacy of the state and its institutions. Left-wing extremists also use alliances, amongst other things, to attempt to influence protests".¹⁵⁰⁸ The report also highlighted the most popular targets for Extreme Left Wing violence: the police, members of the judiciary, and private business.¹⁵⁰⁹ The parallels with what is currently taking place in the UK at present are clear.
- 6.249 The precise nature of threats from political violence and disruption across Europe vary, as do the cultural, historical, and legislative**

¹⁵⁰⁶ 'Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution', Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, <https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/security/protection-of-the-constitution/protection-of-the-constitution.html>; Federal budget digital, <https://www.bundshaushalt.de/DE/Bundshaushalt-digital/bundshaushalt-digital.html>

¹⁵⁰⁷ 'Themen', Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/DE/themen/themen_node.html.

¹⁵⁰⁸ 'Brief summary 2022 Report on the Protection of the Constitution', Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/EN/reports-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution/2023-06-brief-summary-2022-report-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4, pp. 25-27.

¹⁵⁰⁹ 'Brief summary 2022 Report on the Protection of the Constitution', Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/SharedDocs/publikationen/EN/reports-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution/2023-06-brief-summary-2022-report-on-the-protection-of-the-constitution.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=4, p. 26

contexts. Nonetheless, some general themes emerged as areas of consideration for the UK. They are the value of intelligence-sharing within and between the police and other authorities (as seen in Italy); the importance of building understanding of the threats, whether through those working in the field developing subject matter expertise (for example, the Italian counter terrorism policing model) or through forensic and public examination of the threats (as in the German model); the on-going utility of preventative models (such as those in Denmark and the UK); and both the value and limitations of banning groups (per the Nordic countries experiences with NRM). These are all considerations I have taken, where relevant, into my overall recommendations.

7 Chapter Five: Grounding our Response in Democratic Principles

- 7.1 We should not be complacent: liberal democracies can certainly be destroyed. Yet, as my review has shown, there is a gap between identifying certain activities as illiberal or corrosive to our political order, and determining what can be done about those threats while acting in accordance with democratic principles.
- 7.2 Defending and preserving a free society was a recurring subject throughout my review. The idea that a liberal society of the kind we have in the UK is not neutral on the question of its own survival is itself an important presupposition. It is my view that this stance, that free societies are committed to defending the principles on which they depend, should be championed. There can often be a tendency to frame democracy as a merely procedural process, ambivalent about tipping the balance in its own favour.
- 7.3 Yet the preservation of liberal democracy is not a matter on which we should be neutral. Nor, is it a matter on which the public are neutral, as the polling, focus groups and call for evidence for this review have demonstrated. When we talk of preservation, it is not merely that if extreme movements go unchallenged then they might eventually overturn democracy. The point is that when normal democratic life cannot function as it should because – for example, when printing presses are stopped, or when teachers and academics are hounded from the places where they teach – then democracy itself is not being properly preserved.
- 7.4 We live in a political community that has boundaries. Yet we struggle to identify precisely where these boundaries are and there is a discomfort to talking about them. This may in part be because to do so can sound illiberal.
- 7.5 To help determine where these boundaries should be set and to consider what are the essential principles underpinning a democratic society, I convened two roundtable discussions for this review. These were held with leading figures from academia, law, political commentary, journalism, and the criminal justice system. Conducted in accordance with the Chatham House Rule, the discussions considered the question of defending free and liberal societies, first from a theoretical standpoint of asking what constitutes a truly free social and political order, and then with a focus on how liberal democracies can be defended in practice. The participants were drawn from across the political spectrum, with the one prerequisite being that they all ascribe to an essentially democratic point of view.

7.6 From the ideas contributed during these conversations, I have drawn a set of first principles that arguably sit at the core of the UK's democracy and political tradition. These, I argue, should inform how we respond to those who seek to challenge our democratic way of life, without compromising what it is that keeps the UK a free and tolerant society.

Rule of Law and Free Speech

7.7 One of the most important and recurring themes during these discussions was about the rule of law: as the bedrock underpinning our liberal political order; a principle that both needed to be defended but which could also be useful to facing down political extremism; as a necessary practical point of implementation with regards to challenging political violence and mass disruption.

7.8 Some argued that what the rule of law has classically always been understood to mean is ensuring that all cases (and therefore members of society) are treated the same and equally. On that basis, it was contended that the principle of the rule of law is not being properly upheld in this country, as evidenced by the differing treatment for the BLM protests, the anti-lockdown protests, and the Sarah Everard vigil (differing lockdown restrictions notwithstanding). Some participants questioned whether the law had been applied differently to different people, whether activists were being allowed to break the law depending on whether their stated objectives were perceived to be widely supported.¹⁵¹⁰ Disparity of treatment under the law, or even the perception of such disparity, is not a sign of a healthy society.

7.9 Some participants felt that the different approach to policing different protests could be explained not by what activists were campaigning about, but also on who the demonstrators were. It was suggested that Extinction Rebellion protesters were seen as 'nice and Middle Class', and therefore were treated differently to anti-lockdown protesters.¹⁵¹¹ As noted in chapter four, one senior Metropolitan Police officer acknowledged to me that his officers had initially been "too nice" to Extinction Rebellion protesters.¹⁵¹² One roundtable participant contrasted the allegedly "light-touch" policing approach to the black-led BLM protests with the "heavy-handed" treatment of those at the largely white Sarah Everard vigil.

7.10 Protecting free speech was another area where some roundtable attendees suggested that the rule of law was not being upheld consistently because of

¹⁵¹⁰ One suggested solution was that there could be a code of practice for police that would emphasise the apolitical nature of policing.

¹⁵¹¹ First Principles roundtables with political thinkers and commentators.

¹⁵¹² Meeting with senior Metropolitan Police leaders, 2 February 2021.

the apparently different responses authorities have had to occasions of free speech being infringed on by extreme activists.¹⁵¹³

- 7.11 Several of the experts and political thinkers I spoke to stressed the importance of ensuring there were tough laws around incitement. For some, this should be set at the level of terrorism and incitement to violence, but for others it should include other offences, such as hate crimes. One participant was clear that the treatment of the teacher in Batley discussed in chapter two – the public naming and aggressive blasphemy campaign against him – amounted to incitement. Considering the potentially fatal consequences of this kind of campaign, demonstrated by the terrorist murder of French teacher Samuel Paty, I agree with the characterisation of the protestors’ behaviour as incitement. The limits of incitement have become a significant issue given the racially charged placards and chanting by some of those attending the Gaza protests following the 7 October 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel.¹⁵¹⁴

Universal Human Rights

- 7.12 Another interesting theme to emerge from my review’s roundtables was the extent to which the idea of human rights laws was helpful in thinking about tackling political violence and disruption.
- 7.13 Some contributors, including several who emphasised the importance of law as a foundational principle, were sceptical. They suggested that by insisting upon the universal nature of rights, it becomes difficult to enforce the law, or uphold public order, where political extremism is concerned. As pointed out by one submission to my Call for Evidence, it is a fine balance between protecting the right to protest and stopping disorder and criminality that infringes on the rights of everyone else.
- 7.14 These competing goods were in tension in October 2019 when the Metropolitan Police used the Public Order Act 1986 to impose a ban on Extinction Rebellion “autumn uprising” protests across London. That move was overturned by the High Court on the grounds that the law was intended for a single public assembly and did not apply to the separate gatherings or events of the various Extinction Rebellion protests.¹⁵¹⁵ For some, the ruling was a welcome affirmation of the citizen’s right to protest.¹⁵¹⁶ For other

¹⁵¹³ First Principles roundtables with political thinkers and commentators.

¹⁵¹⁴ Dominic McGrath & Sami Qadri, ‘Arrests made for inciting racial hatred at pro-Palestine protest’, *Evening Standard*, 25 November 2023, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/hamas-gaza-pro-palestine-march-stop-the-war-coalition-london-keir-starmer-metropolitan-police-egypt-arrests-inciting-racial-hatred-b1122792.html/>

¹⁵¹⁵ Jones v The Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis, High Court of Justice, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Jones-Ors-v-Comm-of-Police-Approved-judgment.pdf>, para. 34, 66-72, 77.

¹⁵¹⁶ ‘Solicitors welcome High Court decision to quash police’s Extinction Rebellion protest order’, Leighday, 13 November 2019, <https://www.leighday.co.uk/news/news/2019-news/solicitors-welcome-high-court-decision-to-quash-polices-extinction-rebellion-protest-order/>.

contributors, is was indicative of the law leaning too heavily in favour of rights for protesters and failing to take account other public interests.

- 7.15 Germany was also mentioned by some roundtable participants as an example where it was claimed an understanding of universal rights prevents authorities from taking the action needed against extremists. There, as noted in chapter four, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution has powers to robustly monitor those elements that are viewed as threatening the constitution, that is, the democratic state. Yet in practice, it was claimed little happens in the way of enforcement or action taken against these elements. This raises important questions about the monitoring of extreme groups here in the UK, and whether the parameters for monitoring ought to be set around protecting liberal principles, in the absence of a British constitution.
- 7.16 One attendee argued that Extinction Rebellion has the ambition to break up the state – its protests have been deliberately designed to “take police resources to breaking point”¹⁵¹⁷ – and yet the state is not properly looking at this kind of subversive extremism that sits below terrorism. It was suggested that there is a significant gap. As discussed in chapter four, the use of undercover surveillance of extreme protest groups that are not proscribed is a sensitive area. Some oppose it on human rights grounds, which shows how certain understandings of universal rights could limit the state’s ability to monitor extreme political groups as robustly as perhaps necessary.
- 7.17 The discussion largely came down to whether the focus on rights was assisting or hindering society’s response to the extreme movements involved in political violence and mass disruption that seek to overturn the political order.
- 7.18 It may be that, properly understood, a focus on universal rights could serve to defend the rights of the public from extremists who either reject universal rights outright, or who take actions that interfere with the rights of others. In my view, a problem arises if human rights law has tilted the balance so far in the favour of extreme political activists that the democratic state is restrained from intervening for the purpose of allowing citizens to go about their daily lives, preventing crime, and maintaining public order generally.
- 7.19 A further perspective advocated by some during the roundtable discussions challenged both universalist understandings of human rights, as well as the primacy of the concept of the rule of law, which they viewed as an inflexible abstraction. This outlook instead looked to revive an understanding of common law within the bounds of parliamentary sovereignty. It was suggested

¹⁵¹⁷ Jones v The Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis, High Court of Justice, <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Jones-Ors-v-Comm-of-Police-Approved-judgment.pdf>; October Rebellion Action Design Version 1, Extinction Rebellion, 25 September 2019, cited in <https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Jones-Ors-v-Comm-of-Police-Approved-judgment.pdf>, para. 16.

that now the UK is outside of the legal structures of the European Union, both the common law, and parliamentary sovereignty could be reasserted, where it is legitimate to act to protect the political order.

- 7.20 An example of where a common law might be applicable to the subject of this review could be with regards to the effect that mass disruption has on local businesses. Common law might create the grounds for making protesters who shut down parts of city centres accountable for the financial damage done to businesses in that area.
- 7.21 From this stance, it was felt that common law was best placed to deal with extremism encroaching on free speech at universities. It was contended that rights would not resolve the atmosphere of fear and conformity in universities, but that promoting a common law understanding of liberties could. Here the four fundamental liberties within common law were described as freedom of association, religion, conscience, and expression. It was argued that these liberties are different from those conceptualised more universally by human rights.
- 7.22 One advocate for the restoration of the common law at the roundtables clarified that this restoration needed to be within the framework of the parliamentary sovereignty. From this perspective it was felt that what was vital was not simply the rule of law, but the sovereignty of parliament. In disagreement with the view of some other participants, the concept of rule of law, it was suggested, had done huge damage as it asserts that primacy is with the law, which becomes a universal and abstract, and therefore outside of normal political constraint.
- 7.23 As seen in this review, principles from common law can be useful for policing disruptive protest and forms of extreme political activism that interferes with the rights of others. These are, for example, the power for police to arrest when preventing a breach of the peace and the offence of causing a public nuisance.

Bypassing and Subverting the Democratic Process

- 7.24 The importance of parliamentary sovereignty, and the democratic process within our political system, was contrasted with those extreme elements in protest movements who seek to bypass parliamentary democracy and impose their views on the rest of society without the democratic consent of the people. This extreme political outlook limits the range of views held to be valid, to the extent that only one is taken as a basis for direct action, regardless of whether it has democratic or legal sanction.
- 7.25 The tactics of campaigns such as Extinction Rebellion and Insulate Britain were pointed to in the roundtables as examples, with one contributor objecting

to the fact that these groups' actions *de facto* impose an opinion or judgement on the rest of society. The debate over the obvious trade-offs to liberty and prosperity that need to occur when tackling climate change are suppressed. Instead, activists impose their politics on people by obstructing them in their everyday business, or even when they are trying to save the lives of family members, such as when trying to drive to hospital. Those who voice concerns about this are presented in fundamentally genocidal terms, and as actively wishing destruction upon the planet. In any liberal democracy this ought to be unconscionable.

- 7.26 It was suggested during the roundtables that what is happening here is not just a question of public order. Rather, these tactics make it impossible to use the normal methods of democratic decision making to achieve political goals or reach reasonable compromise between differing viewpoints. It was felt that this needed to be dealt with by going beyond simply controlling protest and instead explaining to the public the strategic nature of the tactics being used. As one contributor put it, what the public hate is the whiff of bullying rather than persuading.

The Willingness to Act

- 7.27 Acting in defence of the existing political order was an important theme to emerge from the roundtables, and particularly the sense that there has been a lack of willingness to act to do so.
- 7.28 There was a strong view that citizens do not have the legal right to use violence against the state. Yet it was suggested that, in practice, it now appears that they do. Attacks on police officers during political protests are one important example of this. Various instances were mentioned where it was felt that the full force of the law had not been brought to bear against those who had defied this basic principle on which our political order depends.
- 7.29 One contributor argued that there are times when an assertion of state authority is essential, rather than waiting for things to be arbitrated years later. That there is a need for a state authorised and capable of intervening when the basic order is at stake. Yet it was also felt that this is not where things are, because of the way that government either refuses to act or finds itself incapable of doing so.

Upholding First Principles

- 7.30 The roundtables considered what the key first principles are that underwrite our political system. Such principles should be those that uphold liberal democracy and represent the baseline of what we should expect from those who wish to participate in national democratic life. Our response to political

violence and disruption by extreme protest movements should be about championing and defending these first principles. When we lose clarity about what these principles are, it becomes increasingly difficult to challenge political extremists or to defend our democratic freedoms with confidence.

7.31 From the roundtables it became apparent that there are essentially four principles that together constitute our democratic political order. These, I believe, are:

- Support for Parliamentary Democracy,
- Support the Rule of Law,
- Support Freedom of Expression, and
- Acceptance that citizens should not side with those hostile states or non-state actors that threaten the above.

7.32 Each principle is required if our democracy is to function. Those who detract from them set themselves against not only the democratic consensus, but they threaten to erode the fabric of the political order that assures all of us our basic rights and freedoms.

7.33 As we determine how best to contend with activists who wrongly hold that their cause entitles them to break with democratic politics or, who intentionally seek to destroy our democracy, it is important to put liberal first principles at the heart of how the government confronts extreme protest movements.

Supporting Parliamentary Democracy

7.34 This means accepting the basic principles of the system of representative democracy through parliamentary assembly and elected government in the UK and upholding the primacy of the will of the British people as expressed in democratic elections. This allows for dissent, for example advocating for drastic reform of the electoral system, or support for greater use of referenda, or curtailing of the powers of government. Here, political legitimacy rests on whether people are seeking to influence the democratic process legitimately or seeking to coerce it by force and intimidation. Yet those who do not accept Parliament as the legitimate body for law making and advocate the wholesale replacement of parliamentary democracy by, for example, citizens' assemblies, workers' councils, rule by clerics, or any of the non-democratic forms of governance, set themselves outside the legitimate consensus of our political system. At a practical level this includes activists and protesters that try to disrupt the functioning of parliament (as well as devolved or local government) or target and harass MPs.

Supporting the Rule of Law

- 7.35 This means accepting the legitimacy of the law both in principle and in practice. Rejecting the rule of law in principle could include religious extremists who oppose 'man-made law', or those who refuse to recognise the legitimacy of the laws made in this country. It also means that if a movement advocates systematic law breaking as the means for political change, then that organisation crosses a line for what is and is not acceptable. Clearly, it also means acknowledging that violence is not a legitimate means for political change within a democracy. Governments and elected representatives should pledge only to engage with groups seeking to enact change through democratic consent, rather than through law breaking or intimidation.

Supporting Freedom of Expression

- 7.36 This means rejecting practical efforts to shut down free speech through threats and intimidation. Examples might include attempts to storm university lecture theatres to disrupt guest speakers, attempts to cause disruption outside television studios, activists trying to stop cultural events from going ahead, activists targeting cinemas when they disagree with films being shown, or blocking the deliveries from the printing presses for specific newspapers. The intimidation and targeting of teachers, academics and journalists is also relevant here.

Not Siding with Hostile States and Non-State Actors

- 7.37 This means not supporting or advocating for those authoritarian regimes and militant organisations, such as terrorist groups, that threaten our national security and engage in efforts to erode this country's democratic fabric. It is apparent that hostile non-democratic states go to lengths to undermine the political order in countries such as the UK, with a wish to destroy public trust in the democratic process and to increase division and discord in society. In the most extreme cases, directly inviting support for proscribed groups is already a crime. While lending legitimacy to hostile regimes will always be within the bounds of legal free expression, it should nevertheless set those who do so beyond the bounds of acceptability regarding engagement from the Government, public institutions, and public funding. This should operate in parallel with the Government's definition of extremism, which specifies that those who call for the killing of members of our Armed Forces are extremists, while triggering no criminal sanction. The spirit of this provision would also be to echo some of the principles entailed in a modernised Treason Law, recognising that those who join in espionage against our country, or who back overseas groups fighting our armed forces, break with the basic standards of democratic citizenry.

Recommendations

Understanding Political Protest, Violence, and Disruption

The Government should take steps to improve its understanding of extreme protest movements, political violence, and disruption.

Recommendation 1: The Intelligence Services and Home Office should reclassify 'Left-wing, Anarchist and Single-Issue' (LASI) threats to provide ideological coherence to the categories and add the word 'Extreme' to avoid unintentionally conflating mainstream left-wing views with the Far Left. This means replacing LASI with 'Extreme Left-wing and Anarchist' (ELA), for both terrorism and extremism threats from traditional revolutionary Far Left ideologies and new progressive protest movements of the kind detailed in this review that are part of the Far Left subculture, and 'Other', for threats that have no ideological links to Islamists, the Extreme Right, or the Extreme Left.

Recommendation 2: The Government should classify both terrorism and extremism threats by ideology based on a holistic assessment of 1) the actors' understanding of the issue around which they are seeking a change, i.e., the problem as they see it, 2) their tactics and personnel for achieving change, and 3) the nature of the intended outcome, i.e., the world they want to create.

Recommendation 3: MI5 and Counter Terrorism Policing should explore publishing identifying information on late-stage attack plots to allow researchers, journalists and the wider public to track, report on and better understand the nature and scale of the threat from failed terrorist attempts. Considerations include avoiding jeopardising potential prosecutions or libelling individuals who were not proven to have been involved in terrorism.

Recommendation 4: Serious incel-related violence in the UK should not be routinely categorised as terrorism. While the incel movement shares some features with extremist and terrorist ideologies, at present it does not have a coherent political platform that meets the definition of terrorism in the Terrorism Act 2000 and incels who chose violence rarely do so to bring about social or political change.

Recommendation 5: The Government should address the gaps in knowledge within government and law enforcement agencies of the ideologies, tactics, and actors within Extreme Left Wing and Anarchist protest movements and the repercussions on democracy and British society. This means developing a plan to improve both the quality and confidence levels of research and analysis products and to address the current disparity between analysis of the Extreme Right and the Extreme Left. This should apply to products from the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC), MI5 Behavioural Science Unit (BSU), Research Information and Communications Unit

(RICU) and Homeland Security Analysis and Insight (HSAI) in the Home Office, Counter Terrorism Policing (CTP) and the National Police

Recommendation 6: The Government should put liberal first principles at the heart of how it confronts extreme protest movements. These principles are upholding parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, defending free expression and the free press, and not supporting or advocating for hostile states and non-state actors:

- This means central and local government committing not to fund, work, nor consult with groups who do not commit to legal means to secure change or who engage in or facilitate intimidation or harassment. Outside of government, elected representatives of mainstream political parties should not engage with such groups.
- These principles should guide government research activities, with groups that fail to adhere to these principles opening themselves up to scrutiny.

Recommendation 7: The Government should make the role of Independent Adviser on Political Violence and Disruption permanent with appropriate resourcing. The role should include monitoring extreme protest movements, political violence, and mass disruption, informing government and relevant parts of the public sector about the evolving nature of the threat, and advising on our collective response.

Police Intelligence and Collaboration on Political Protest, Violence, and Disruption

The Government and police should take steps to improve police intelligence and collaboration on political violence and disruption.

Recommendation 8: The National Police Coordination Centre should commit resource to ensuring greater collaboration between central intelligence gathering functions and local operational capabilities in relation to political protest and public order to ensure that intelligence regarding national public order issues is acted upon by local forces. Local risk assessments should include an appreciation of the national threat picture.

Recommendation 9: The Home Secretary should task His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services to conduct a short review on whether undercover surveillance is being used appropriately in the context of public order and aggravated activism. Part of this review should include an assessment of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (2000) with a view to extending police use of covert surveillance to prevent serious disruption during protests.

Legislating to Deal with Public Disorder, Violence, and Disruption

The Government should take steps to strengthen the legislative framework for responding to political protest, political violence, and disruption.

Recommendation 10: The Government should monitor the ongoing implementation of measures in the Police, Crime, Sentencing, and Courts Act 2022 and the Public Order Act 2023 to ensure that provisions relating to extreme protest movements are being applied proportionately and effectively.

Recommendation 11: The Government should develop a mechanism to allow individuals and businesses who can evidence significant personal harm or economic damage from illegal disruptive protest to claim damages from protest organisers.

Recommendation 12: The Government should develop a transparent mechanism to review police and Crown Prosecution Service charging decisions to ensure that public order and terrorism legislation is being appropriately implemented in respect of political protest.

Recommendation 13: The police should communicate arrests that arise from political protests more proactively and systematically, including charging and prosecution outcomes.

Recommendation 14: The Government should amend the Public Order Act 1986 to expand the grounds on which a police force can recommend a march is not permitted to go ahead on a particular date beyond the narrow grounds that it risks serious public disorder. Specifically, new triggers should be added to section 13 of the Public Order Act, allowing the police to apply to the Home Secretary to prohibit processions from going ahead, where the police reasonably believe the procession will likely result in intimidation from threatening or abusive conduct, or where there is a demonstrable cumulative impact on serious disruption. In assessing the likelihood of the threat of intimidation, the police should take account of the persistence of arrests made at processions for stirring up of hatred, causing harassment, alarm or distress, or support for terrorism. In accounting for the cumulative impact on serious disruption, officers should consider the disruption being caused by the frequency of repeated demonstrations as they seek to balance people's right to protest with the negative impact that certain protests may have on communities and show that conditions imposed on previous protests have not kept disruption at an acceptable level. This would allow police forces to negotiate with organisers more effectively to vary the frequency of repeat demonstrations or vary their location to relieve cumulative strain that may be caused.

Recommendation 15: The Government should amend regulations related to the Public Order Act 1986 to allow police to impose a blanket ban on face coverings as a condition of a protest going ahead, where there are reasonable grounds to believe such coverings may be used by protestors to conceal their identity while committing illegal acts. This would supplement the change already announced by the ministers to make it an arrestable offence to refuse to comply with a police officer's instruction to remove a face covering.

Recommendation 16: The police and the Crown Prosecution Service should interpret and apply the law on encouraging terrorism broadly so any celebration of terrorist acts, or praise for terror groups and individuals, is viewed as a form of indirect encouragement. If courts do not support this interpretation of current legislation, the Government should keep under review the introduction a summary-only terrorism offence that explicitly prohibits the celebrating, praising, glorifying, or endorsing of acts of terrorism, proscribed terrorist groups, or terrorists. This would be an offence without the condition of encouraging others to engage in the commission or preparation of terrorism.

Recommendation 17: The police with the Crown Prosecution Service should develop a new code of practice, or operating framework, to clarify public order and terrorism legislation in respect of political protest. The aim would be to ensure that the police appropriately and transparently balance their duty to uphold the law and deliver justice with the duty to maintain public order.

Recommendation 18: The police with the Crown Prosecution Service should also publish and regularly update guidance for the public regarding statements, chants, or symbols that, in the context of a political protest, may constitute an offence. This should include guidance on protestors' chants that may disturb public order or encourage terrorism, such as those calling for jihad.

Recommendation 19: The Government should ensure police officers and the Crown Prosecution Service have the knowledge they need to counter terrorism by maintaining and regularly updating an internal list of images and symbols associated with proscribed organisations. This list should be developed by the Home Office and shared with relevant authorities.

Recommendation 20: The Government should consider the viability of requiring protest organisers to contribute to policing costs when groups are holding a significant number of large demonstrations which cause serious disruption or significant levels of law-breaking. This could take the form of placing greater requirements on protest organisers under Section 11 of the Public Order Act to contribute to safety arrangements and resource planning and increase the level of fines for failure to comply with such requirements.

Recommendation 21: The Government should also amend sections 12, 13 and 14 of the Public Order Act 1986 to allow police forces to balance the resource requirements of policing the public's right to protest with other frontline priorities. Police should be able to manage the cumulative impact on policing resource demand by setting any conditions as appear necessary on processions and assemblies, or recommend that the frequency of processions is reduced, to prevent the policing of marches disproportionately impacting other policing priorities.

Protecting Democratic Institutions and Businesses from Public Disorder, Political Violence, and Disruption

The Government should do more to protect the institutions that are vital to the functioning of our democracy.

Recommendation 22: The Prime Minister should call on the Speaker of the House to convene a conference on protecting our democracy by guaranteeing the ability of MPs to go about their work without threat, harassment, violence, or intimidation.

Recommendation 23: As part of this, the Home Secretary should order a review of the balance between access and security within the area surrounding parliament. The review should report jointly to him, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and the Lord Speaker. It should have the joint aims of ensuring the public can access parliament freely, protecting the right to protest within view of parliament, and providing sufficient security to prevent parliamentarians being targeted by protestors for intimidation.

Recommendation 24: The Metropolitan Police Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team should develop a plan to improve the recording and reporting of harassment and intimidation directed against MPs. The police should be able to record and retrieve accurate and consistent information showing the scale of crimes against MPs to identify trends and allocate resources accordingly.

Recommendation 25: The Government should issue statutory guidance on managing blasphemy-related incidents in schools. This should include commitments to upholding teachers' freedom of expression and not automatically suspending teachers involved in such incidents or revealing their identity. While schools are required to engage with parents, on developing Relationships and Sex Education for example, the guidance should set out that schools are not required to engage with local community groups or religious institutions in managing blasphemy-related incidents or other tensions.

Recommendation 26: The Government should extend the scope of Expedited Public Spaces Protection Orders to include places vital to the functioning of

democratic governance, such as MPs' constituency offices and surgeries and council chambers. This would serve a dual function of being an additional practical measure to stop lawmakers being targeted and underline the Government's commitment to promoting democracy.

Recommendation 27: The Lord Chancellor and Lady Chief Justice should convene a process to examine the potential issue of juries acquitting defendants and judges applying laws differently when they are transgressed in the name of progressive causes like climate change and anti-racism.

Recommendation 28: The Government must set out a clear and practical plan to mitigate the impact of the Ziegler judgment, including legislating (as recently announced) to remove the right to protest as a lawful excuse reverse in relation to blocking roads and other offences if the aim of the activity in question is to interfere with the rights of others.

The Government should take steps to help businesses defend themselves against political violence, damage, and disruption.

Recommendation 29: The Government should consider introducing a civil measure making it easier for businesses to pursue extreme protest organisers for damages. Those who suffer loss because of serious disruption from extreme and unauthorised protest deserve a right to redress from the groups who organise the action.

Recommendation 30: The Government should consider ways to ensure increased resilience of supply for defence manufacturers and energy providers whose operations are being disrupted by illegal protest. This could include setting a protective buffer zone around certain sites or expediting injunctions on certain protestors not to enter such a zone. There should also be a compensation scheme for workers who lose earnings because of political protests.

Recommendation 31: The Government should introduce a mechanism to restrict the activity of organisations which have a policy of using criminal offences for which the penalty includes imprisonment (such as destruction of property) or causing serious disruption, or injury to persons (either intentional or reckless as to whether that occurs) to influence government or public debate where its policy and activities make this a necessary in a democratic society to protect the rights of others. Such a mechanism would be distinct from proscription on terrorism grounds and considerations should include whether the activity is designed to interfere with the rights of others or impede the proper functioning of democratic institutions or business, whether it is of a persistent or continuing nature, and whether it was undertaken to advance a political or ideological cause. Sanctions attached to this restriction would include restricting the group's right to assembly and its ability to fundraise.

Balancing Free Speech and Disrupting Political Violence Online

In attempting to make the internet a safe place, we must not create an online culture where companies conclude that the safest option is to avoid all controversy, thus restricting the debate over ideas that is vital in a liberal democracy.

Recommendation 32: In its Codes of Practice and guidance on the thresholds for illegal content relating to incitement to hatred or threats abuse and harassment, Ofcom must set out the importance of freedom of expression. This is particularly significant for content relating to politics, social issues, religion, and race. In a liberal democracy our sense of fairness and decency evolve through debate and controversy and so Ofcom must guard against an overly cautious approach that would lead to disproportionate takedown of vital discussion. In its Codes of Practice and guidance on terms of service and content moderation, Ofcom should also encourage platforms to apply a consistent approach across the political spectrum to avoid discrimination of views that challenge prevailing wisdom, traditional thought, or other orthodoxies.

Recommendation 33: In its Codes of Practice and guidance on content moderation, Ofcom should encourage companies to take steps to guard against overreliance on Automated Content Moderation. It should also warn them that automated processes may be inappropriate for content relating to politics, social issues, religion, and race when it also involves humour which may require nuance and context.

Recommendation 34: The public must be able to see how Ofcom is holding firms to account, which includes data on content which is censored. As Ofcom develops its transparency notices, Codes of Practice, and guidance, it should consult widely on two key areas:

- How and what the platform discloses to individual users regarding take downs and other enforcement actions and complaints procedures.
- How the platform reports overall transparency, especially how the platform handles hate speech and disinformation and whether reporting should include assessments of political bias. Ofcom must ensure that the data required is required sufficiently detailed as to be comparable.

Outside of content that incites violence or criminal hatred, the Government should give greater protection to the right to freedom of expression in the ongoing debate on internet safety.

Recommendation 35: Government policy must recognise the danger that high levels of regulation on acceptable speech on mainstream platforms may drive more users to less regulated platforms where there may be greater danger of radicalisation to violent intent.

Recommendation 36: The Government should pay greater regard to the dangers of interpreting the parameters of hate crime too broadly, such as infringing the right to freedom of expression or unnecessarily burdening police resources.

Recommendation 37: The police must ensure that the new code of practice on non-crime hate incidents is applied consistently across police forces. They must also guard against the perception that they have been pressured into recording hate incidents or that they are doing so to quell local tensions.

The Government should seek innovative ways to boost national capacity to challenge political violence and disruption in the online and technological space.

Recommendation 38: The Government should explore ways to support the intelligence services and relevant teams within government in having more resources to better identify disinformation and mal-information generated by hostile states and to work with social media companies to encourage the removal of such content and consistently enforce their terms of service.

Recommendation 39: The Government should enable intelligence officers to use artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools to monitor the threat, so that they can better integrate the analysis of secret intelligence with open-source material.

Recommendation 40: The Government should ensure that the authorities are not inadvertently prohibited from detecting worrying trends at a macro level because of data protection, privacy, and retention regulations such as the requirement to routinely delete large amounts of meta-data.

Recommendation 41: The Government should review ways to attract and retain highly skilled cyber professionals, including reconsidering the civil service salary cap.

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