

# **CASE STUDIES OF INTERACTIVE RADICALISATION**

## **United Kingdom**



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**DARE: Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality**

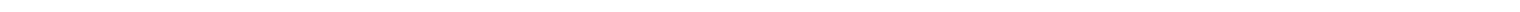
# **Case studies of interactive radicalisation United Kingdom**

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## Executive Summary

This report utilised a historical case study of the far-right demonstration ‘scene’ in the United Kingdom in order to test theories, hypothesise and assumptions about the nature of ‘cumulative extremism’ – a process which was defined by the political scientist Roger Eatwell as ‘the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms [of extremism]’. The main findings of the report confirmed previous research that has probed the nature of violent escalation, de-escalation and indeed non-escalation in this context. Utilising a dataset of over 2000 far right demonstrations combined with secondary and primary sources the headline finding of the report is that, contrary to many of the assumptions about ‘spirals’ of violence being the net result of conflict between ideologically opposed actors, in this case at least, the style and degree of violence at protest events has remained remarkably steady in the last fifty years.

Whilst there have been several distinct ‘waves’ of protest signalling an intensification of mobilisation, for instance when taken together as one long continuum, it is clear to see that the parameters of protest have remained fairly consistent. Where there have been spikes in violence these have remained just that: ‘spikes’ rather than ‘spirals’ which again confirms previous research on the topic in relation to the United Kingdom. The reports also highlight that patterns of escalation are not binary, merely involving two sets of actors. There are a range of factors at the micro, meso and macro levels which, in combination with one another, can serve to inhibit or facilitate violence or which can exacerbate the intensity of political contestation which often emanates from outside inter-group dynamics. This wider relational field shapes, and is shaped by, what amounts to a recursive feedback loop. In short even strategic decisions about whether or not a group might upscale its violence are not taken without reference to a broader array of political factors, social relationships and cultural environments.

A second conclusion that can be drawn from the report is that instances of increased violence do not automatically engender more violence – at least not over the medium to long term, which complicates the idea that cumulative extremism is a process involving ever escalating violence. The report also highlights the importance of moral, cultural and strategic ‘brakes’ on violence which are internal to the groups and individuals involved, which also play a significant role in ensuring the relative stability of action ‘repertoires’. This case study also concludes that where there were more significant escalations of violence this often took place at the intersection with other more violent conflicts – in this instance, and at different times, Northern Ireland and the Middle East. A second point to highlight in relation to the importance of ‘external’ conflict for ‘internal’ radicalisation is that this can also have a variegated effect upon the cumulative dynamics of violence. This case study demonstrates that not all groups opposing one another are mutually entrained upon one another to the same degree, which also appears to have an impact on violent outcomes, at least insofar as this case was concerned.

## 1. Introduction

Over the course of the last decade policy makers, practitioners, analysts and academics have become increasingly interested – and indeed concerned – to understand how the interactions between political movements and counter-movements can lead to an escalation of violence. As part of the DARE project’s overarching study of ‘radicalisation’ within a broader historical, spatial and political context, this report on ‘Reciprocal radicalisation in Britain’, together with the other country level reports, presents a historical case study of the interaction between rival political movements and milieus, as well as state agencies, as a means of empirically testing the concept of ‘cumulative extremism’ which has been defined as ‘the way in which one form of extremism can feed off and magnify other forms [of extremism]’ (Eatwell, 2006: 205) Several ideational variants have also emerged to describe the same broad phenomenon: ‘cumulative radicalization’ (Bartlett & Birdwell, 2013), ‘connectivity between extremisms’ (Ranstorp, 2010), ‘tit-for-tat radicalization’ (Jackson, 2011), ‘reactive co-radicalisation’ (Pratt, 2015) or ‘reciprocal radicalization’ (Bailey & Edwards, 2017)

The interactive and spiralling polarisation of actions between ideologically opposed movements (of which the state can be one such actor) has also been articulated through the concept of ‘symmetrical schismogenesis’ (Bateson, 1979: 192), through which the two parties are envisaged as being ‘at war’ with one another so that any intensification of response or ‘attack’ by one party leads to a corresponding, symmetrical, intensification of response from the other. Such a linear pathway of escalating violence recalls Jim Malone’s advice to Elliott Ness, played by Sean Connery and Kevin Costner respectively, in the Chicago gangster film *The Untouchables* (1987):

You wanna know how to get Capone? They pull a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. *That’s the Chicago way!* And that’s how you get Capone.

What the above piece of dialogue illuminates is the underlying assumption, sometimes inferred and at other times made explicit, that there is a ‘symbiotic relationship’ between ideologically opposed forms of violent extremism; a relationship that sustains actors who would otherwise struggle to exist independently of one another. For some politicians, including former Prime Minister David Cameron, this relationship was one-dimensional; Islamists and the far right were simply ‘mirror images’ of one another (Cameron, 2010) Cameron’s then deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, advanced a slightly more dynamic interpretation of this supposed symbiosis in his assertion that:

There are nationalistic or racist extremists, like the members of the English Defence League, or the BNP. There are black extremists like the Nation of Islam. There are Muslim extremists like the members of Islam 4 UK. Very often these groups have a symbiotic relationship with each other, maintained by the media: extremist Muslim groups giving birth to extremist white hate groups, and vice versa (Clegg, 2011)

As Clegg’s remarks highlight, the concept of ‘cumulative extremism’ is frequently used as a shorthand to suggest that a) it is a co-dependent process, taking place in a political, social and cultural vacuum, that simply involves a binary set of opposing extremist political actors and b) that interactions between these two groups travel only in one direction – generating a seemingly inevitable and inexorable ‘spiral of violence’. By defining ‘cumulative extremism’ in similar terms, as ‘the way in which one form of extremist could spark off a spiral’ (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2010a: 7), it has been observed that the ‘political’ rather than ‘structural’ dynamics of ‘cumulative extremism’ could be ‘more threatening to the liberal democratic order than attacks from lone wolf extreme right-wingers or even al-Qaida-inspired spectacular bombings’ (Eatwell and Goodwin 2010b: 243).

That such conclusions about the potential impact of ‘cumulative extremism’ can be drawn perhaps reflects what the word ‘*cumulative*’ implies. When subject to closer scrutiny it also often becomes apparent that those utilising the term often deploy it to describe quite different forms of relational dynamics, processes and mechanisms, ranging from quite narrow processes of interactions between individual ‘extremist’ groups to more generalised processes of deteriorating community cohesion and increased polarisation.

Bartlett and Birdwell (2013) sought to unpack what they identify as the four underlying arguments advanced under the rubric of cumulative extremism:

- 1) ‘the activities of one side will result in the increase of support for the other’;
- 2) ‘activities of one side will trigger retaliation of the other’;
- 3) ‘the process affects both sides equally’ and;
- 4) ‘tackling radicalization on one side requires also tackling radicalization on the other.’

Building on these observations, and indeed upon previous co-authored publications (Busher and Macklin, 2015; Macklin and Busher 2015), this report examines some of the relational dynamics implicit in the idea of ‘cumulative extremism’ – or whichever one of the aforementioned antonyms one chooses to use to describe it. In previous work (Busher and Macklin, 2015) outlined six proposals for enhancing our collective ‘conceptual clarity’ when discussing the phenomenon:

1. Make clearer where reference is being made to ‘extreme’ narratives and where reference is being made to ‘extreme’ forms of action;
2. Interrogate the relationship between the ‘spirals of violence’ which are posited to be at the core of cumulative extremism, and wider processes of ‘community polarization’;
3. Describe in detail the ebb and flow of interactions between opposing ‘extremist’ groups;
4. Attend to the multiple pathways of Movement-Countermovement influence;
5. Examine how the wider cultural, social, and political environment might shape the Movement-Countermovement contest;
6. Examine how the relevant movements and counter movements are coupled.

To date, whether it has been made explicit or not, much of the research on ‘cumulative extremism’ has focussed on the first of these six points: upon the polarising ‘narratives’ of extreme or radical groups rather than their ‘action’ per se. This ‘reciprocal demonization’ (Wessinger, 2000: 10), a form of radical dualism which is by no means confined to fringe groups or ideologies, has long been recognised as a key ingredient in conflict, including that surrounding the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, which had a fatal outcome. The key findings of such studies include the rhetorical ‘interplay’ between these such actors has found parallels between the goals, narratives, strategies and tactics of far-right and Islamist groups; that these groups mutually amplify each other’s narratives and mobilisation highlighting an ‘interdependence’ between them; and that this amplification of ‘meta-narratives’ occurs largely through new media eco-systems (Guhl and Ebner, 2018; Ebner, 2017) Another smaller study of the digital media reactions of a minor ‘anti-Islamist’ group (the EDL), a tiny far right group (the BNP) and a larger Islamist one (Hizb ut-Tahir) to a series of terrorist attacks that occurred during the course of 2017 came to slightly different conclusions, finding that ‘rhetorical and ideological escalation has occurred... in an asymmetric way’ (Allchorn, 2020: 37-62) though the sample upon which it was based was rather too small to draw any meaningful conclusions from.

In order to answer the central research question animating WP2, which is to analyse and explain the historical context of current patterns of ‘cumulative extremism’ over time and through comparative case studies, this report focusses in particular upon points two (“spirals of violence” and “community polarization”) and three (the ebb and flow of interactions between opposing groups) though it also takes account of the other proposed points where appropriate). It examines cumulative extremism in terms of actions rather than ideas, which is to say that this report differentiates between the ‘two pyramids’

(McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017) of radicalisation, concerning itself only with exploring processes of tactical radicalisation and not cognitive escalation since testing the individual, emotion aspects of these processes which are more likely captured by DARE's ethnographic studies, though, this is not to ignore altogether the important space that demonstrations provide for maintaining and sustaining 'collectives of emotion' within far right counter-cultures (Virchow, 2007a).

To test assumptions about 'cumulative extremism' and 'reciprocal radicalisation' across several different theoretical axes, this case study focusses upon the arena of extreme and far right demonstrations and marches (see 3.1 Data Collection) which, longitudinally, have seen myriad clashes and confrontations between far right and anti-fascist protestors both during the interwar period and from the immediate post-war period onwards. Studying this aspect of far right extra-parliamentary activity – namely the demonstration 'scene' – affords the opportunity to explore more fully one of the principal sites of violent escalation, de-escalation and non-escalation between the far right actors and their opponents – one in which political opponents physically encounter one another.

This case was chosen with a comparative case study methodology (Seawright and Gerring 2008) in mind, since ultimately it will be compared and contrasted with case studies from four other countries and its results incorporated into a cross-national synthesis report which will generate further empirical insight into the various manifestations of 'cumulative extremism' as a means of refining our theorisation of the phenomenon. By enhancing our collective scholarly apparatus, it is hoped that 'cumulative extremism' will become a sharper analytical tool for researchers seeking to understand the dynamics of interactive escalation. This is particularly important since – especially at the point at which the work package was conceived – there was a dearth of empirical work dealing with the topic (cf. Carter, 2019; Carter, 2020 forthcoming for recent additions to the literature) and fewer still cross-country comparative works (see Lygren, 2019 for a rare exception).

The focus of this country report is to understand the cumulative extremism process as a relational phenomenon, which can be located, contextualised and understood as part of a wider interactional framework. This can be linked to the 'threshold model of collective behavior' (Granovetter, 1978: 1420-1443), which argued that violent action does not arise simply as a result of isolated individual decision-making processes, but has to be understood as part of a broader social process in which violence is enacted in reaction to, and in combination with, other actors. Thus, in line with the rationale underpinning the DARE project, this approach also serves to provide a broader historical understanding of the terrain upon which young people may – or just as importantly – may not have recourse to violence or at least certain forms of political violence that cross a particular threshold. This entails moving beyond an understanding of cumulative extremism as a dualistic phenomenon confined to movements and counter-movements to include accounting for the often critical role played by local and national state actors including police, local authorities, and national government. Public order policing can be particularly prone to 'backfire' effects or, to put it another way, can be subject to the law of unintended consequences, which, through their actions, can facilitate the very outcome that it was intended to avoid. The actions of local and national government also forms part of the broader environmental context in which a demonstration takes place since the various agencies involved discharge a range of duties and functions that determine, often well in advance, not just the operational decisions taken by police on the day but the wider political and cultural context in which demonstrations take place, including the legislative context (Narr, 2006).

Even ensuring the inclusion of state actors does not do justice to the often bewilderingly fluid nature of relationships which all have a bearing upon interactive escalation. Moving away from binary models, which reduce cumulative extremism to an interaction between two opposing sides, might make the phenomenon harder to conceptualise but in the long run the benefits of this approach cannot be exaggerated. Cumulative extremism, broadly conceived, involves understanding both movement and

counter-movements as being embedded in the array of relational entanglements. These can be condensed to the following five relational ‘arenas’ (Busher & Macklin, 2018), all to a greater or lesser degree, and in an array of combinations, likely salient for understanding conflict escalation:

- 1) the *movement-political environment arena*, comprising the group’s relations with state, inter-state and non-state institutions and elites (including political parties, the media and moral authorities;
- 2) the *movement-security forces arena*, comprising the interactions between movement activities and the state security forces;
- 3) the *within-movement arena*, comprising competition for power within the movement;
- 4) the *movement-public arena*, comprising the relations between movement actors and different segments of the public;
- 5) the *movement-counter-movement arena*, comprising entrainment between movements and counter-movements.

## 2. Setting the scene

### 2.1 Historical context

Marches and demonstrations are an integral part of the action repertoire of almost every form of social protest movement imaginable. In the United Kingdom, fascist and far right groups are no exception having traditionally relied upon demonstrations as a central part of their own action repertoire both during the interwar period and contemporaneously.

In the post-war period there have been four major ‘waves’ of political mobilisation by the far right which have involved violent clashes with their opponents (Macklin and Busher, 2015)

- 1) Clashes between Mosley’s Union Movement and anti-fascist activists in the 1940s;
- 2) Clashes between the National Front and the Socialist Workers’ Party in the 1970s;
- 3) Clashes between far right-wing groups and anti-fascists in the 1980s and 1990s;
- 4) Clashes between various anti-Muslim groups and anti-fascist and Islamists in the late 2000s

The latter three ‘waves’ of movement-counter-movement contestation, which comprise the empirical focus of much of this report, can also be conceived of as one singular post-war continuum of far right anti-immigration ‘wave’ of protest which emerged during the course of the 1960s and continues to this day.

#### 2.1.1 The first ‘wave’

The National Front (NF) was formed in December 1966 from an amalgam of smaller far right *groupuscules*. The group’s subsequent prominence was in part due to the early fillip it received from Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech in 1968. Powell was the best recruiting officer the NF ever had, remarked one organiser with only a modicum of hyperbole (Macklin, 2020: 367) Thereafter, the NF would become one of the largest far right organisations in Europe, enjoying two particular peaks of electoral support during the 1970s as a result of agitation surrounding the arrival of the Ugandan Asians in 1974 and the Malawi Asians in 1976.

As the NF grew, so too did opposition to it. In the wake of the 1977 Greater London Council elections political opposition to the NF took on a new sense of urgency among many anti-fascist activists, particularly those associated with the Trotskyite International Socialists, which subsequently became the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) Many SWP activists formed themselves into ‘squads’ not just to protect



their own activities but also as a means of confronting far right activists too. These instances of violence were greatly increased by the violence that increasingly accompanied NF mobilisations which anti-fascist activists turned out to confront. There were a number of high profile confrontations during this period including, most notably, the 'Battle of Lewisham' which took place in Lewisham in south London in August 1977 and which led to some 210 arrests.

In the aftermath of Lewisham, the Anti-Nazi League (ANL) was founded in November 1977 in an effort to build a broad based popular front against the NF on the left of British politics. Undeterred, the NF continued its strategy of street demonstrations but found its political room for manoeuvre increasingly restricted both as a result of tighter police management of its protest, greater public opposition, and more responsible media reporting. The party's attempt to build electoral support faltered during the 1979 general election, and, in the wake of its poor showing, the group began to implode, splits and schisms hampering the movement's overall political efficacy for the next two decades, such was the impact of its defeat.

### 2.1.2 The second 'wave'

Faced with a fragmented and disorganised opponent, the SWP responded by dissolving the ANL in 1982. Thereafter it expelled many of the activists who had been involved in the 'squads' who were now surplus to requirements insofar as the party now wished to project a different image, though there were other factors too. Physical clashes between the far right and its political opponents began to gather momentum again after a group of skinheads attacked an open air festival organised by the Greater London Council in June 1984 (Copsey, 2000: 159) The violence led to an increasing unity of purpose amongst numerous left-wing and anarchist groups who had come together to form Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) in July 1985. AFA was a direct action group that viewed violence as a tool of 'first resort' (Birchall, 2010: 77) when confronting fascist and far right activism. Violence at public meetings and demonstrations became a regular occurrence resulting in two particularly high profile confrontations – Hyde Park in 1989 and the 'Battle of Waterloo' in 1992 during which 44 people were arrested as far right and anti-fascist activists fought a pitched battle on the concourse of Waterloo train station and its immediate environs.

The focus of far right and anti-fascist violence also began to shift during this period to a new target which reflected changing priorities and perceptions of political threat. From 1992 onwards it was the British National Party (BNP) which became the focal point for AFA's opposition. The BNP was increasingly focussed upon building an electoral base in East London through its 'Rights for Whites' campaign which was achieving a modicum of success and would result in the election of a local councillor in 1993 on the Isle of Dogs in Millwall (Copsey, 1996). Prior to this the BNP had founded Combat 18 (C18) ostensibly as a 'stewards group' to protect its activities, though the BNP leadership subsequently disavowed the group in December 1995. C18, its numerology signifying its ideological stance (1 = A. 8 = H. AH = Adolf Hitler), later lurched towards terrorism, fratricidal murder, and dissolution. Thereafter, the BNP shifted tactically away from violent street militancy altogether. It abandoned the old tactics of 'march and grow' in 1994 to embrace 'community politics' entering a new, non-violent arena into which anti-fascist activists followed, leading to an overall de-escalation of inter-group violence. From the late 1990s onwards, there was a period of relative quiet *vis-à-vis* interactive violence, partly because the BNP, having retreated from street activity, was focussed upon becoming a 'modern' electoral party rather than a street gang. Following a period of electoral success in local elections during the 2000s, the party succeeded in winning two seats in the 2009 European elections but imploded in the aftermath of the 2010 general election, following a markedly similar pattern to the NF twenty years earlier.

### 2.1.3 The third 'wave'

During this period new forms of anti-Muslim street protest, that did not carry the same political baggage as the groups like the BNP, began to emerge culminating in the advent of the English Defence League

(EDL), formed in the summer of 2009 in response to the activities of a group of Islamist activists in Luton who had heckled the homecoming parade of the Royal Anglian Regiment. Having begun life as a local counter-mobilisation these 'patriotic' groups which drew upon football 'casual' networks and utilised Facebook as an organising tool soon began a nationwide organisation. The group started a series of what ultimately became hundreds of national, regional, and local demonstrations which, at their peak, mobilised between 2000-3000 attendees. EDL marches quickly became a site of confrontation between anti-Muslim activists, local Muslim youth, and the SWP-backed Unite Against Fascism (UAF) group which staged a series of counter-mobilisations, though public disorder, which characterised early mobilisations gradually subsided due to a mixture of improved police and local authority management, less confrontational strategies by those opposing the EDL, and the efforts of EDL stewards themselves (Busher, 2016: 113).

Despite ongoing clashes with UAF activists and other anti-fascist opponents, much EDL activity was focussed upon confronting or trying to confront a third emergent countermovement actor: Islamist activists particularly those previously associated with the now banned Islamist group al-Muhajiroun (ALM – 'The Emigrants') network whose own deliberately provocative actions provided the 'catalytic event' that led to the foundation of the English Defence League (EDL) and the subsequent emergence of a new wave of anti-Muslim street activism. Following its proscription, ALM supporters formed several successor organisations, most notably Islam4UK and Muslims against Crusades (MAC), both specialising in provocative activities, including announcing that they intended to demonstrate in Wootton Bassett, the town to which the British Army repatriated its soldiers killed in action in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as publicly burning the Remembrance Day poppy, actions which led to angry confrontations with EDL activists and, ultimately, their proscription by the state too.

Serious concerns about where such clashes might lead were heightened when a group of six Islamist activists were arrested in 2012 following a failed attempt to detonate a bomb at an EDL rally in Dewsbury in West Yorkshire which, had it been successful, the prosecution at the subsequent trial speculated, would have been 'bound to draw a response in revenge from its target and those who sympathise with the EDL' and 'would most likely [have] led to a tit-for-tat spiral of violence and terror' (BBC News, 2013) The following year the brutal and very public murder of a British soldier – Fusilier Lee Rigby – by two Islamists, one of whom was linked to ALM, close to his barracks in Woolwich in south London on 22 May 2013 caused widespread outrage, including amongst the anti-Muslim street 'scene' for whom it provided a fillip at the time of declining organisational saliency and an overall stalling of momentum. However, amidst declining dynamism within the movement, combined with impending legal action, the two most prominent EDL leaders publicly resigned from the group in October 2013, administering a blow to the group from which it never recovered. Whilst the group continues to organise small scale demonstrations, it is a shadow of its former self.

With the implosion of the EDL as the centrifugal force within the anti-Muslim street scene, a range of small grouplets emerged to fill the void, many were short-lived, serving as little more than banners of convenience under which activists could organise activities to give them a sense of organisational coherence. Following several jihadist terrorist attacks which occurred between March and June 2017 a new organisation arose to fill the vacuum: the Football Lads Alliance (FLA), which sought to distance itself from some of the more overtly prejudicial aspects of the EDL. The group was initially relatively successful, compared to its predecessor. Its first march in London on 24 June mobilised an estimated 10,000 people (Emanuel, 2017) whilst a second on 7 October involved as many as 30,000 participants (Chaplain, 2017) Despite still being able to mobilise several thousand for most of its successive demonstrations the group succumbed to a split in April 2018 and a declining momentum thereafter which The Democratic Football Lads Alliance, which split from the FLA, failed to arrest. Notably there were significantly fewer arrests at these marches than has occurred at much smaller EDL demonstrations.

At the time of writing two new forms of increasingly autonomous protest have emerged. The first relates to so-called 'free speech' protests organised in central London in support of the former EDL leader Stephen Yaxley-Lennon who had attempted to continue his activism by re-inventing himself as a 'citizen journalist' but which led him to be jailed for contempt of court after his disregard for reporting restrictions led him to jeopardise a series of high profile interlocking child sexual abuse trials. His supporters have since staged a series of 'Free Tommy' protests, largely, though not exclusively in central London. Some of these protests have turned violent as supporters have clashed with police. The second contemporary form of protest to emerge as the research for this case study was being completed were the so-called 'Yellow Vest' protests which mimicked the name of the French protests against austerity albeit with none of their popularity. Despite being small scale, the Yellow Vest protests, which are not co-ordinated with the police, have been both violent and disruptive and have seen a number of its activists fined or jailed for harassing female politicians over their stance *vis-à-vis* the UK referendum to leave the European Union.

## 2.2 Locating the site of 'cumulative extremism'

This case study examines some of the assumptions about 'cumulative extremism' through the prism of far right demonstrations and opposition to them. In that sense it is not a geographically defined site but rather a nationwide practice. Demonstrations were chosen for several reasons including the fact that they are one of the primary sites through which opposing groups come into physical contact with one another. Studying the ebb and flow of violence over a prolonged period of mobilisation and counter-mobilisation, as opposed to at individual events, also moves the dial away from exploring tactical radicalisation simply as an outcome of individual psychological variables towards understanding it as a situational, relational or interactional phenomenon.

The right to demonstrate and protest is a fundamental component of democracy. Whilst often opposing democratic principles extreme right groups nonetheless utilise the freedoms democracy affords them to stage their own marches and processions. These activities form an integral part of the 'demonstration strategy' through which both extreme right and far right groups publicly propagandise, recruit and acculturate adherents enabling them to sustain themselves as a social movement whilst simultaneously sending a message to ethnic and racial enemies and political opponents (Virchow, 2007b: 295-310). Britain has a 'vibrant' far right demonstration 'scene' which has been an ingrained facet of political mobilisation for decades – and indeed centuries if one explores Britain's history of public demonstrations, marches and processions more widely.

For the researcher these public political actions provide a range of opportunities through which to subject assumptions about the nature of 'cumulative extremism' to a more rigorous empirical and analytical interrogation than has heretofore been the case. Foremost amongst these opportunities is that these activities, being public, are visible and observable. Whilst ostensibly declared as 'non-violent' activities, marches and demonstrations are frequently the site of violence, which makes them particularly useful for exploring how, why, and under what conditions, conflicts between opposing political actors can escalate, de-escalate or fail to escalate at all. Treating the three 'waves' of far right political contestation as one long 'wave' also serves to provide a wider contextualisation of these events in order to more accurately gauge the extent to which 'cumulative' patterns of political violence are indeed 'cumulative' when viewed over a longer time frame.

It is worth noting at this juncture that this case study defines a 'demonstration' simply as 'a number of people who are united in support of a particular cause and who seek to make others aware of their opinions by undertaking a procession in a public space... The demonstrators' actions may be guided by a desire to promote a cause in which they believe or to oppose a course of action to which they object'

(Joyce and Wain, 2014: 98)<sup>1</sup> This is collective form of protest that can take several forms. Generally, marches are organised in advance (in liaison with police and local authorities) and follow an agreed route. A smaller number of these are spontaneous – termed in today’s parlance as ‘flash demonstrations’ – which, whether by design or default, eschew liaison with police and are typically less orderly and more problematic from the point of view of public order policing since they are harder to contain, not least because police are unaware of them until they are actually underway.

Demonstrations and marches are often organised in conjunction with other forms of activity including their culmination with a party rally where one or more speakers address the attendees before they disperse. Included within this case study is another subset of the ‘demonstration’ activity – the ‘static protest’ which are just that: immobile protests frequently involving counter-demonstrations by political opponents. They are included in this analysis because they are frequently the scene of violence between movements and counter-movements as well as with the police who are not simply passive observers in such escalating interactions.

Studying the potential dynamics of ‘cumulative extremism’ through demonstrations can provide one piece of the puzzle insofar as it can provide a meso-level explanation of the wider contextual factors in which a milieu can move towards and away from violence. An important caveat to this study, however, is that it does not include a micro-level analysis of either the individual psychological dynamics of participants or more broadly the ‘emotional rhythms’ (Summers, 2010) of protest groups and their activities which require constant fine-tuning if momentum is to be successfully maintained. Social movements all engage in ‘emotion work’ (Schrock, Holden and Reid, 2004: 61-81) to motivate, mobilise and direct their adherents, this being an important component of all political activity. ‘This is what organizers do – use their power, resources, and creativity to turn individual grievances and emotions into collective claims and to stage opportunities to act upon these claims’ (Stekelenberg, 2017: 936-939) Not all of this ‘emotion work’ is directed, much of it is done ‘bottom up’ by the participants themselves (Pilkington, 2016: 177-2002). Demonstrations are part of this process. Such ‘emotion work’ takes place in advance of the protest, continues during it, and oftentimes provides its culmination through fiery or defiant speeches given at party rallies to mark the end of such events. However, analysing such ‘emotion work’ in depth, important though it is, would require a different set of data not to mention ethnographic research and participant observation, which is beyond the purview of this study but could be explored by triangulating data with the ethnographic studies conducted within the DARE project. Similarly, with a few notable exceptions, largely because evidence has emerged as a result of official enquiries, this case study has not sought to convey a fine-grained analysis of violence at the micro-level of individual participation (something which was beyond the scope of this report), though as Nassauer (2016) highlights, using visual data to probe changes in the emotional temperature of demonstrations, is certainly a feasible and profitable undertaking.

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<sup>1</sup> How British law defines a public procession derives, at least in part, from a court case involving Lawrence ‘Alf’ Flockhart, an organiser for the fascist Union Movement (UM) Police had charged Flockhart with organising an illegal public procession in October 1949, a period in which a ban on public marches was in effect, after he had led 150 UM activists from a paper sale in Knightsbridge through the streets to Hyde Park Corner. What constituted a ‘public procession’ was suitably vague legally, however. The 1936 Public Order Act (1936), introduced to quell an earlier period of fascist-inspired disorder, had loosely and somewhat tautologically defined it as ‘a procession in a public place’. Following his conviction Flockhart appealed, his case centring upon this imprecision. The judge defined a procession as a ‘body, of persons moving along a route.’ The court upheld the original judgement. The judge convicted Flockhart of directing a procession and *ergo* being its organiser though one judge dissented, believing that as the procession had allegedly formed spontaneously Flockhart could not have been an ‘organiser’ because to organise ‘meant something in the nature of planning or arranging.’ For more detail on the case see Iain Channing, I. (2015): 92-94.

### 3. Sources, data collection and analysis

This case study draws upon an extensive review of the extant empirical literature relating to far right-wing mobilisation in the United Kingdom as well as the growing theoretical literature related to cumulative extremism and the related topics of escalation and de-escalation of violence. Analysis of far right marches also draws upon a demonstration database that the author of this report is in the process of compiling as part of a separate project since, unlike in Germany for instance, there are no comparable datasets available to researchers relating to this topic. This demonstration database was used to help construct a chronological time line of protest events involving extreme and far right demonstrations to assist in the analysis of the longitudinal dynamics of cumulative extremism. Given the constraints of time, resources and funding, the database has a number of limitations not least of which is its comprehensiveness. Whilst the database is comprehensive with regard to national and local level anti-Muslim demonstrations since 2009 (thanks to the advent of digital media), it is less reliable with regard to the number of such events in the period preceding this, which is the subject of ongoing research outside the DARE project. There are several reasons for this lacuna in relation to data prior to 2009 not least of which is that most newspaper reports are not online and require time consuming archival research.

Whilst this database was assembled and coded manually there are a range of digital tools that allow this process to be automated including the Python Engine for Text Resolution and Related Coding Hierarchy (PETRACH2). These are being trialled by political science researchers (Dafnos, 2018) and merit investigation for their potential use in maintaining this database as an ongoing resource for research into far right mobilisation and counter-mobilisation, though they do not resolve the problem of collecting historical data.

Whilst data collection is ongoing, it can be said with a reasonable degree of confidence that the dataset has captured the majority of 'national' and 'regional' level events between 1968 and 2009. Prior to the 1990s research is more labour intensive since digital resources are largely lacking, forcing the researcher to 'backfill' events using non-digitised newspaper reports, party publications, press releases, memoirs, as well as both academic and 'grey' literature. Whilst the manual process of extracting data from such publications is time-consuming, relying upon movement publications is also not trouble free since even many major research collections lack complete, uninterrupted holdings of such literature, thereby reducing the certainty that all relevant events have been recorded, or, if they announced, that they actually took place. The problems of assembling a comprehensive demonstration dataset are compounded by the fact that party publications, aimed at a 'national' audience, do not report or announce every single 'local' party initiative, as a result of which the researcher cannot be completely certain that every single event has been captured. Local party publications are often missing from larger research collections in their entirety or are patchy in their coverage where they have been collected.

To an extent, these problems can be mitigated through triangulation with major digital newspaper databases including those maintained by Gale and Factiva, through which most national events were captured. Unfortunately, there is presently no such comprehensive equivalent for digitised news sources. Whilst the ongoing digitalisation project of the British Library Newspaper Library promises the ultimate resolution of this issue, at the time of writing this avenue for collecting data was partial since their project to digitise all local newspapers is ongoing and manually trawling the physical indexes of local British newspapers was not feasible.

These caveats aside the demonstrations database currently contains approximately 2,250 entries detailing an array of far right mobilisations and counter-mobilisations in Britain since 1967. Whilst necessarily incomplete at the time of writing, data collection outside the DARE project remains ongoing

in terms of recording current demonstrations and backfilling historic event data in order to refine its overall viability as a tool for protest event analysis.<sup>2</sup>

Each entry in this chronology of demonstrations was manually entered into an Excel spreadsheet according to a relatively simple matrix capturing (where available) the following variables of each mobilisation:

**Table 1: Variables of each mobilisation recorded in the demonstrations database**

Date	The day, month, and year in which the demonstration takes place
Town/City	The location of the demonstration
Region	The area of the country in which the demonstration takes place
Political Group	The name of the group demonstrating or protesting
Issue	The reason for the demonstration
Number	The number of participants
Number	The number of counter-demonstrators
Arrests	The number of arrests made as a result of the demonstration
Source	Source(s) of the information

Here again it is necessary to issue several caveats in relation to the data. Information collected regarding the date, location, groups and issues around which demonstrators are mobilising, is comprehensive. It is less so with regard to the number of participants, largely because this is often unreported or vaguely estimated. There are several reliable methods for estimating demonstration size including ‘The Jacobs Method,’ which can more or less accurately estimate the size of densely packed crowds (Smallwood, 2014; Yip, 2010) However, as this is a desk-based, historical study such methods were deemed inapplicable to this study.

The study relied therefore upon contemporary newspaper reports in order to estimate the relative size of each demonstration. Newspaper reports have one major drawback insofar as they often do not give, or, if they do, may only provide an approximate number of participants. These may contrast, sometimes significantly, with figures given by other newspaper sources. Figures given in the aftermath by organisers, opponents and indeed the police (where these are obtainable) are often wildly at variance with one another too. In line with the data collected by projects like the database on right-wing rallies maintained by FORENA/Research Unit on Right-Wing Extremism at the University of Applied Sciences in Dusseldorf, Germany, this dataset gives a source for each estimation of the size of a demonstration. Almost impossible to ascertain with any degree of precision from media reports, is data relating to the size of the counter-mobilisation. The data is rather more certain with regards to the number of arrests at each mobilisation<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Caiani et al. (2012: 34) observe that protest event analysis, despite limitations, ‘has been considered one of the few instruments that can be used to build up systematic, long-term databases on protest. With precaution and many interpretative caveats, press based protest event analysis allows for controlling, if not the real amount and forms of protest, at least the associations among specific characteristics of protest repertoires, as well as very general trends.’

<sup>3</sup> It can, however, take considerable effort to disentangle the number of arrests reported since these often do not differentiate between demonstrators or counter-demonstrators or sometimes report on the type of offence alleged to have been committed (i.e. do the arrests relate to violence, failure to comply with demonstration regulations or involve other offences including the possession of drugs).

from which one might seek to observe how this can alter the dynamic of subsequent political mobilisations (i.e. through the removal of key figures from the demonstration ‘scene’ or making an organisation less or more likely to demonstrate as a result of legal action).

It is notoriously difficult to gain accurate figures on the numbers involved in past mobilisations and counter-mobilisations. However, attempting to achieve an approximate estimation, despite often incomplete or conflicting information, remains important. When analysed alongside other information related to these protest events, these estimates can give a measure of the group’s dynamism or more broadly a movement’s capacity for action at a point in time (as well as that of their adversaries). That said, the frequency of marches should not automatically be assumed to represent a proxy for the strength or vibrancy of an organisation since a declining number of marches can indicate, not just declining momentum and organisational saliency within the ‘scene’, but also a strategic choice highlighting, for example, that a group is in the process of institutionalising (through elections etc.) as was the case for the BNP from 1994 onwards. A group’s decision to move *away* from the demonstration ‘scene’ might therefore be welcomed by those involved with public order policing since it removes this actor from the immediate arena in which violent contestation can take place but such shifts might also serve to displace threats to community cohesion into new arenas that are ultimately more challenging for local and national democratic institutions to manage.

As Virchow (2017) observed of monitoring right-wing rallies, far right demonstrations are about more than how many people march on a particular date. Whilst the aforementioned dataset (relating to UK mobilisations) is currently too rudimentary to capture the full gamut of phenomena, related to demonstrations, it is possible to state that these events are complex social interactions that encompass:

- The run-up and the follow-up to a particular event;
- More or less visible dimensions (depending on belonging);
- The interaction of the demonstrators with the police, local administrators, the media, bystanders, and counter-demonstrators;
- The interaction between speakers and their audience(s);
- Media coverage;
- Framing of the action by the different actors involved;
- Identifying the role of a particular rally in a social movement’s narrative e.g. reference to other historical events in the past (Virchow, 2017).

Whilst some of these factors are better considered within macro or micro analysis of demonstrations some of them are clearly important in relation to efforts to observe the ebb and flow of interactions between opposing ‘extremist’ groups across time.

In an effort to situate this tranche of demonstrations within their broader political context the dataset inserted a number of colour-coded ‘markers’ at the appropriate historical junctures in order to enhance the analysis of the extent to which certain external events (i.e. pieces of legislation, march bans, terrorist attacks and so on and so forth) inhibited or facilitated further demonstrations. These included ‘newsworthy’ events such as major terrorist attacks (Irish Republican, Jihadist and far right) and other acts of political violence in order to ascertain whether demonstrations taking place in their aftermath were more frequent or more intense (leading to greater attendance or more arrests for instance). The introduction of new government legislation, whether intended explicitly to curb public order problems, or, more broadly, legislation such as immigration acts, which spoke to the core issues around which far right demonstrators were agitating, were also inputted both for wider context but also to see if such restrictive measures had any observable impact upon the demonstration ‘scene’ – ameliorative or otherwise. The dataset also recorded changes to policing strategies which may also have exerted an influence upon mobilisation and *ergo* the dynamics of cumulative extremism. Where they could be

ascertained, instances of the Home Secretary officially banning marches and demonstrations were also included as a proxy measure indicative of the authorities' concerns over the potential for greater violence and which may, or may not, have exerted a dampening effect, highlighting again that 'cumulative extremism' is not simply a binary process.

In the round, this dataset was used in conjunction with other primary and secondary sources to assist in a longitudinal analysis (with all the aforementioned caveats about the limitations of the data taken into account) of past patterns of escalation, de-escalation and non-escalation within the far right demonstration 'scene' in the United Kingdom.

## 4. Key Findings

Perhaps the most readily apparent observation from the dataset on demonstrations is that patterns of violence within the far right demonstration 'scene' have been relatively stable in terms of both style and degree. This confirms the findings of previous studies (Macklin and Busher 2015). Looking beyond the three 'waves' of mobilisation that have characterised the period from 1968 onwards there has not been, despite periods of intensification, any broader 'spiral' of violence between groups at a wider level. Demonstrations and protests have remained just that; demonstrations and protests. Violent encounters between demonstrators and counter-demonstrators, though frequent, have not at any point escalated to the point at which either clandestine action or lethal forms of violence have been adopted or employed during demonstrations. During the course of over two thousand demonstrations over the last half century or so there have only been two deaths – Kevin Gately at Red Lion Square, London, in 1974 and Blair Peach at Southall in 1979. Both of these resulted from police action against anti-fascist demonstrators rather than violent clashes with the far right, however. Kevin Gately was the first person to have been killed during a demonstration in Britain since 1919.<sup>4</sup>

The deaths also highlight that the police are not simply passive bystanders at demonstrations. Their interventions can serve to radically alter the dimensions of protest or can antagonise demonstrators, entrenching their sense of injustice (Busher, 2016). Crucially, however, neither of these twin tragedies caused anti-fascist militants to re-orientate their political strategies towards confronting a 'fascist' state as was the case in West Germany and Italy, where the authorities came to be perceived as the 'enemy' – more so in fact than their political rivals. One further contextual factor that appears to have kept protests within democratic parameters in the United Kingdom relates to the implementation of protest policing. Numerous examples of police bias, both real and imagined, can be detected with regards to protest policing but, by-and-large, and particularly in comparative context with other countries, the right to protest has been upheld by the authorities with a relatively even hand.

The overarching reason that demonstrations have not resulted in a 'spiral' of violence relates to the fact that demonstrations themselves are an established and ingrained part of the 'repertoire' (Tilly 1978) for demonstrators and indeed their opponents. In that sense they represent an institutionalised practice. Whilst demonstrations have occurred with metronomic regularity, acts of extreme violence have been rare, even during periods of intense conflict between far right and anti-fascist militants. There are several likely factors inhibiting escalation beyond the pre-established and embedded demonstration repertoire. Regular participants in demonstrations can anticipate with a relative degree of certainty the degree and style of violence that might occur based on past experience. As the former NF youth organiser observed, low-level political street violence was an 'endemic' part of political activism, 'woven into the very fabric

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<sup>4</sup> On the far right, militants have repeatedly stated Albert Marriner was a casualty of such violence, alleging that he died several days after being struck on the head with a brick at a meeting in 1983.





of life for active members of the NF' (Pearce, 2013, pp. 54-55). Since a certain level of violence might be considered 'routine' it was also arguably embedded within a group's daily practice as a result of which the overwhelming majority of activists, understanding that the parameters of violence were rarely exceeded, probably attended events expecting or indeed relishing a 'punch-up' but did not go anticipating murder and mayhem to ensue. Therefore, investing in the capabilities and means of committing greater acts of violence was considered strategically superfluous since, above and beyond any moral inhibitions that activists may have had, they could achieve their objectives (such as confronting opponents or stopping a march) without recourse to lethal violence, the use of which would be both excessive in relation to their aims and politically counterproductive.

Allied to this is the importance of group identities – even for violent groups – since there will be degrees and styles of violence which are considered acceptable and those that are not, targets that are considered morally justifiable and those that are not, as well as basic questions about 'who we are' as a group and 'what do we do'. As Randall Collins (2008) observes, most human beings do not find violence easy and so the ability or indeed desire to transgress such identities should not be taken as assumed. Indeed, those who might be minded to move beyond established repertoires have to contend with the fact that a group's early choices are often critical, becoming ingrained at the initial stages of group formation and hard to overcome (Blee, 2012). From a rational choice point of view those activists who do wish to shift the dial towards escalating a given conflict have to contend with the fact that expanding a protest 'repertoire' to include more 'extreme' tactics might bestow the benefit of greater publicity and new recruits but, conversely, these tactics can also compromise group identity and cohesion, alienate the wider support base, and the intended audience, as well as discrediting the cause itself. It may also open up the possibility for state repression, causing more followers to de-identify with the group and its new methods, increasing its isolation and marginalisation (Feinberg, Willer and Kovacheff, 2017). This also highlights that demonstrators are beholden to – at least in the abstract – nominal publics or perceived support bases which condition their choices and responses above and beyond a blind 'tit-for-tat' response to violence from their opponents.

The prospect of escalating one's own violence can also often run counter to the strategy that a group is pursuing through demonstration and protest in the first place. The NF is a case in point. The authorities came to understand that its policy of regularly staging provocative anti-immigration demonstrations served a wider strategic purpose that required its own activists to eschew violence whilst encouraging its opponents to engage in order to influence the opinion of the police (but also the wider public) to intervene against their opponents. Noting the NF's evolving demonstration strategy, the Home Office observed:

Since that time [the early 1970s] the NF has sought publicity not by attacking its opponents but by staging well-disciplined demonstrations and marches in areas of high immigration, designed to provoke the coloured population and the extreme left. *Its aim now is to remain just within the law while encouraging its opponents to step outside it* [my emphasis]. So far the NF has always co-operated with the police over demonstrations. In this way it tries both to secure protection for its members and to present itself as a party of law and order ('National Front', 7 February 1978 in PREM 16/2084).

This is not to argue that no instances of tactical escalation occurred, indeed the strategy itself was designed to provoke a counter-response which guaranteed some form of escalation, but it does highlight that many instances of tactical escalation were more regulated than might at first be assumed. In response to escalating street violence activists often formed groups within their organisations to defend or channel political violence. The NF for instance established an 'Honour Guard' of militants to protect its leaders from violence in the wake of a spike in mobilisation following the Red Lion protest in 1974 (Walker, 1977: 163). For its part, in response to sustained attack on their activities by NF militants, SWP activists formed 'squads' in the late 1970s to defend themselves. These subsequently mutated into a more pugnacious

form of direct action, the legacy of which could be seen in the formation of AFA in 1985. This cycle would continue with the BNP responding to AFA's protracted campaign against their activities with the formation of a new 'stewards group' to defend far right events from anti-fascist assault. Their communities under attack from far right activists and racist attacks, ethnic minorities also responded to events from the 1970s onwards with 'community defence' organisations (e.g. the Asian Youth Movement) which were essentially reactive and, it should be noted in deference to their defensive intent, did not respond to racist murders, for example, with counter-murders, which also highlights that violence does not automatically engender more violence, a point which is elaborated upon below.

However, rather than necessarily reflecting a simple escalation of violence, as the names of such groups suggest (i.e. 'squads') these capabilities represented an effort, particularly on the part of groups like AFA, to manage and modulate violence, to rationalise and regulate its use. Nor did the development of such capacities entail a tactical escalation across the entire movement. This was a largely self-selecting cadre, containing militants comfortable with administering a certain degree of violence if required. Stewards also formed part of a wider environment through which public protest is (self)-regulated in concert with the police and local authority in order to ensure that they remain orderly affairs. During marches 'stewards' were answerable to a 'Chief Steward', who in turn was answerable to the group and party's leadership. Those who assumed such positions were seemingly a self-selecting cadre of experienced militants who came to the fore through 'voluntary' participation in street activism (Hann and Tilzey, 2003: 240-241).

On the far right most groups had some form of activist handbook setting down the guidelines for personal conduct, which individual members are supposed to adhere to. Beyond such written codes, which were often breached without sanction, activists also have their own moral codes and norms, which, though unlikely verbalised or codified, also serve to inhibit the adoption of greater forms of violence during the course of 'normal' violent contestation. Internalised by activists, either in terms of personal morality or wider group culture, these 'norms' serve to condition behaviour before, during, and after, violent encounters. Norms governed aspects of behaviour including who is considered a legitimate target, the types of weapons, if any, selected and the level of violence deemed necessary or justifiable. As Simi and Windisch (2018) observe, the prevailing moral norms and principles within the far right with regard to interpersonal violence are not dissimilar to those governing bar room brawling (Copes et al., 2003) or fighting on football terraces, both of which extreme right activists may be familiar with.

The broader impact of such 'codes' for violence at demonstrations or during other proximate confrontations can be inferred from activist memoirs narrating involvement in fighting. Recording his involvement in football violence, one extreme right activist recalled 'At one point, I was fighting two Millwall blokes when one of our mob stuck a screwdriver into the cheek of one of them. F\*\*k that; I didn't mind having a punch-up, but this was over the top' (Portinari, 2016: 25-26). It was often in the aftermath of such acts that transgressed these perceived permission parameters of violence, that individuals or organisations re-assert the 'internal brakes' (Busher et al., 2019a and 2019b) on violence rather than choosing to escalate it further. This is evident both with regard to debates about violence taking place in the aftermath of terrorist attacks by extreme right actors, and the actions which are taken, which includes shutting down organisations to which such terrorists had been involved, whether voluntarily or through proscription. On a personal level, the emotional responses, including but not limited to, shame, guilt, and remorse, that can be generated by involvement in violence against targets that are perceived as illegitimate (i.e. against women) or which is deemed excessive, can damage an activist's perception of both themselves and their cause leading to their exit from violence altogether (Collins, 2011: 51, 55, 75, 151, 155 and 175-176). Evidence of participation in other forms of transgressive protest causing activists to question their involvement in such activities can also be found amongst Islamist activists (Kenny, 2019: 83).

However, despite highlighting intra-group efforts to control demonstrations through stewarding mechanisms or cordial liaison with the authorities, as Nassauer (2016) observes, unless violence is premeditated (i.e. there is a concerted, prearranged effort to attack a demonstration by opponents), the extent to which the group organising the event can prevent unwanted violence erupting at such events depends on how they can control the micro-situational patterns and emotional dynamics of any given protest. Whilst such analysis is beyond the scope of this report, it is of importance to note her observations, obtained through video data analysis of demonstrations and micro-causal process tracing, that where violence does emerge, a prior situational pattern is ‘systematically visible’. Utilising Randall Collins’ (2008) concept of ‘forward panic’ – the moments in which fear and tension accumulate, control is lost and panic sets in, that can lead demonstration participants, and indeed the police, to try and re-establish ‘emotional dominance’ by releasing this tension through violence – Nassauer highlights ‘specific triggering moments’ that prompt the outbreak of violence (i.e. demonstration lines/police lines breaking down, activists falling down or being cornered by other activists). Collins’ concept is also a likely explanation for why chance encounters ‘in back-streets, well away from the police’, and therefore the management of public protest, were amongst the ‘most dangerous’ for activists (Hann & Tilzey, 2003: 223).

Discussions about cumulative extremism often rather uncritically accept the idea that violence automatically begets greater violence or even further violence yet, as far as far right demonstrations are concerned there appears little support for this assumption. During the course of this intensification of political contestation between far right militants and anti-fascist activists, there are a number of instances of tactical radicalisation within the wider scene – for instance a letter bomb campaign against left-wing targets in 1978 when ANL militancy was at its height – as well as numerous instances involving crude letter bombs being sent to AFA or to individual activists and several instances of arson against left wing premises. On occasion far right activists were attacked in their own homes – as were anti-fascist activists – but in the broader context such events remained relatively isolated and did not give rise to more sustained campaigns of violence involving larger numbers of activists. Contemporaneously one might point to the jihadist killing of Lee Rigby which led to a sharp rise in mobilisation, which was by no means confined to the far right, but this protest, which helped momentarily to revitalise the EDL, was peaceful rather than retaliatory (though, predictably, there were numerous incidents involving racist abuse, graffiti, assault and arson, in the immediate aftermath of the murder which, whilst indicating wider societal polarisation cannot be directly be linked to the demonstration ‘scene’).

These acts of more extreme violence aside, nor can it be said that escalating violence within the demonstration ‘scene’ necessarily begat a ‘cumulative’ impact. Taking the second demonstration ‘wave’ as an example, it can be seen that increased violence on the part of anti-fascist groups actually led to far right groups removing themselves from the arena altogether, thereby leading to a wider *de-escalation* of violence rather than an increase. During the 1990s, when conflict between the far right and anti-fascist groups was arguably at its most intense, the BNP concluded that it could not compete with the sustained campaign of anti-fascist ‘direct action’ which was taking a toll on the movement and its activities. This was not the only factor determining its decisions. The party had been heartened by a series of promising electoral results that had accrued from its ‘Rights for Whites’ campaign since 1990, their belief in the efficacy of this strategy cemented following the party’s victory in the Isle of Dogs in 1993, where it secured its first council seat (Copsey, 1996).

Seeking to safeguard such gains, the party had prioritised electoral activity over street activity which – in the midst of violent confrontations with their opponents – ultimately put the group on a pathway *away* from rather than *towards* greater violence. This new ‘hearts and minds’ strategy was unveiled in January 1994, highlighting the belief of party organisers that the violent conflicts engendered by a ‘march and grow’ strategy were counterproductive to its wider electoral ambitions. There were to be ‘no more

marches, meetings, punch-ups' announced party officials (Birchall, 2010: 355). This highlights the relational aspect of cumulative extremism – a group is never simply entrained by its political opponents but responds to a range of different 'publics' both nominal and real (Busher, Holbrook and Macklin, 2019b). The decision to withdraw from the immediate 'street' arena led ultimately to a de-escalation of violence as anti-fascist activists were forced to confront the BNP in the electoral arena instead (Copsey, 2011).

There were episodes within this timeframe that would indicate that violent escalation was occurring. The formation of C18 being a case in point. However, viewed more closely, the dynamics are more complicated. Whilst C18 was initially set up to protect BNP activities from anti-fascists, the group soon took on a life of its own, to the detriment of the BNP, whereupon it became a group in its own right. The establishment of C18 – some of whose militants were later involved in an attempted letter bombing campaign – certainly indicates a tactical evolution towards violence. However, upon closer inspection much of its violence was directed internally to opponents within the movement rather than externally. It is also possible to exaggerate its role. Anti-fascists also noted that they only had occasion to confront the group a handful of times (Birchall, 2010), compared to the countless 'call outs' against other far right groups, indicating that its contribution to an overall cumulative escalation of street violence was limited (which is not the same as saying its activities had a limited effect on racial harassment or community polarisation).

Furthermore, the fact that the BNP proscribed the group, though this was more often honoured in the breach than in the observance by activists themselves, also served to decelerate violence between the BNP and anti-fascists since those more militantly-minded activists left the party after proscription and were no longer involved in its activities. Indeed, on one occasion when the BNP were being assailed by AFA, an activist appealed to C18 militants drinking in a nearby pub for assistance. "The BNP can go and f\*\*k themselves,' came the reply, to laughter. 'They said that they didn't need us, well that's fine by us. F\*\*k off and tell them that'" (Lowles, 2014: 54).

Further intra-group dynamics within the movement also highlighted the extent to which decisions to increase or decrease violence were not uniform across the 'scene'. When Tyndall publicly censured C18 in September 1995, thereby restating his disavowal of its strategies, the announcement was met with approbation by some BNP members forcing him to clarify his stance so as not to alienate more radically-inclined activists. Anecdotally at least, this indicates that decisions to move away from violence can embed amongst followers and across a movement at different speeds and at different levels (Jasko and LaFree, 2019), often requiring leaders to walk something of a tightrope if they are to sustain group cohesion. Regional activist subcultures are also important too with regards to the impact that violent contestation can have since they are by no means uniform nationwide. Certain regions – for instance West Yorkshire – had a more militant subculture that was arguably out-of-step with national party priorities whose activists sometimes transgressed unwritten 'codes' about not targeting rivals at home, though in London anti-fascist activists also breached these supposed norms too. That said this kind of escalation does not seem to have elicited a like-for-like counter-escalation, at least insofar as the gathered data reveals.

The far right counter-culture is saturated with violent stratagems but this does not mean that just because they are available to activists that they will automatically and unquestioningly be adopted (Dobratz and Waldner, 2012: 49-66). Such ideas were certainly debated within far right magazines by its leading political figures during the 1980s. However, BNP chairman John Tyndall for instance was quite explicit in arguing that, although he agreed with those advocates of violent resistance who claimed that the door to electoral success was indeed closed during the 1980s, he argued that the required response was not terrorist violence but a strategy that concentrated upon building the movement's resources until such a time as the political climate became more conducive to electoral success (*Spearhead*, August 1983).

At the outset, this report questioned the extent to which processes of ‘cumulative extremism’ automatically lead to a ‘spiral’ of violence. ‘And any new jihadi terrorist attacks could set off a Weimar-esque spiral of violence and radicalisation. (Jihadis and the far right feed off each other),’ stated a recent report on the impact of radical right populism (Kuper, 2019). There are indeed indications that terrorist atrocities have had a reciprocal effect upon the far right milieu, albeit not of the ‘Weimar-esque’ scale anticipated above. Indeed the former Independent Reviewer of Terrorist Legislation, stated in one recent report (Hill, 2018) that ‘in my clear view it [extreme right terrorism] has grown in reaction to the [jihadist] terrorist atrocities on Westminster Bridge, London Bridge and at Manchester arena’ which, between March and June 2017, claimed 36 lives and injured over 200.

When examined over a longer time frame, it becomes more apparent that supposed spirals of violence are more often spikes. Moreover, these spikes are truncated – lasting for only a comparatively short time. A case in point are the clashes between the SWP/ANL and the NF. Anti-fascist activism developed a sense of urgency following the results of the Greater London Council election in 1977 in which the NF had polled 119,060 votes, provoking fears the party had reached a ‘take off’ point and thereafter would be ‘unstoppable’ (Taylor, 1989: 131). For the SWP, violence was conceived of as a necessary defensive measure to forestall greater fascist violence at a later date. ‘We do not engage in this sort of activity because we like violence or because the NF are reactionary,’ they argued. ‘There are many reactionary organisations around, for instance the Tory Party, which we do not attempt to smash up. The National Front differs from the Tories because their aims are precisely to control the streets, to build a mass fighting movement. In this, they need the marches and rallies’ (Sparks, 1978: 41). However, once it became clear that the NF had failed to build up a ‘mass fighting movement’ there was no longer any need for direct action against a group, particularly after it began to implode after the general election the following year. This was reflected in the fact that the SWP disbanded its ‘squads’ in 1982 as it refocused upon other more pressing political priorities than anti-fascism. As SWP recalibrated politically, the ‘squads’ became a ‘political embarrassment’ that threatened to undermine the political direction it now wished to undertake (Hann and Tilzey, 2003: 87-89). Thus even though it might appear otherwise, if viewed in isolation, over a longer time frame even relatively long periods of intensified conflict still resemble spikes rather than spirals of violence.

Whilst the decision to disband the squads also highlights the importance of the ‘control’ of violence at a strategic level, another likely reason violence does not ‘spiral’ has to do with a group’s willingness, or otherwise, to invest in violent capabilities in the first place. When stripped of their rhetoric and self-mythologizing, which is often heightened through media amplification, many ostensibly violent groups do not end up professionalising their violence – for want of a better term – to the point at which they could outmatch their rivals, or indeed state agencies.<sup>5</sup> Far right groups during the 1990s for instance lacked the ‘fastidious attention to detail’ (Birchall, 2010: 277) that AFA displayed when planning for ‘direct action’. As one former NF activist recalled: ‘We didn’t have the cunning or precision planning and execution of the red hit-squads, who seemed to emerge from the shadows like magicians with large smiles and iron bars’ (Collins 2011: 42). As noted elsewhere, this is likely a result of differing cultures within the milieu from which they have emerged, particularly with regard to drinking which served to inhibit the capacity for the meticulous planning and execution of political violence. ‘We never had spotters, the Reds did but we didn’t,’ observed one C18 leader. ‘We always lagged behind in things like intelligence. The Reds were always better at that sort of thing. More to the point, no-one wanted to be out of the pub. Who wants to

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<sup>5</sup> One might also note that whilst some elements of the anti-fascist scene have been accused of *machismo* and ‘adventurism’ for undertaking ‘direct action’ against the far right, broader anti-fascist identities did not involve valorising violence (in the same way that the far right have done) largely, it is suggested, because, drawing upon history, many activists have framed violence as necessarily ‘defensive’.

stand around on a street corner looking for Reds when you could be beering it up.’ (Lowles, 2014: 17). Alcohol is often a facilitating factor in opportunistic acts of racist violence (Sivarajasingam *et al.*, 2017) – but, as Simi and Windisch (2018: 10-11) observe within the North American ‘scene’, such consumption and/or dependencies can also hinder possible transitions from street violence towards mass casualty terrorism.

In cases such as the evolution of C18, which do lead to escalating violence, it is also pertinent to note that the targets of violence can also shift. Initially founded to combat anti-fascist ‘direct action’, C18 soon became involved in a process of trying to violently ‘outbid’ its internal rivals within the ‘scene’ in order to establish its own political dominance. This highlights the role intra-group violence perhaps served to decelerate wider potential episodes of cumulative extremism as violence begins to become directed internally, rather than projected externally. Indeed, the fixation of the C18 leadership with settling scores against opponents within the movement saw violence funnelling into narrower, personalised disputes that culminated in fratricidal squabbling and the group’s own dissolution in 1997. Thus, whilst C18 became more violent, notably in its final year, embarking upon a letter bomb campaign, its targets were largely internal rather than external political opponents. The group itself had become marginal to the wider demonstration scene (Lowles, 2014).

Beyond a disinclination to invest in capacities that would facilitate greater violence such as acquiring guns or other munitions, be they cultural, social or political, Carter (2017: 37-51) illuminates a broader environmental contextual factor that likely prevented street violence between far right and anti-fascist groups becoming a ‘spiral’ into broader communal conflict. In Northern Ireland Catholic and Protestant paramilitary groups were able to escalate their conflicts and polarise communities through the simple expedient of sectarian murders, which polarised communities and dramatically intensified a wider reciprocal radicalisation. For far right and anti-fascist activists in Britain, such a strategy was never considered an option for the simple reason that both groups saw themselves as the champions of the same constituency, the working class. Whether seen through a racial or a class prism, it made no sense to escalate the conflict by attacking working class communities themselves since to do so would, in effect, represent an attack on one’s own perceived base of support.

The broader impact of communal polarisation (on which see Abbas, 2020a & 2020b), of which the recent wave of anti-Muslim politicking is perhaps a symptom rather than a cause, can be seen perhaps at its most extreme through short case study of the successive wave of demonstrations that have bedevilled the South Yorkshire town of Rotherham. The town became the focal point for successive far right mobilisations after appalling revelations about the extent to which the local authority and the police had failed to protect approximately 1,400 children and young people from child sexual exploitation by both individuals and gangs between 1997 and 2013. Belatedly, there have been a series of successful criminal prosecutions. Since October 2012, South Yorkshire Police have policed 20 protests across the county, fourteen of which have been in Rotherham (largely involving activists from outside the local area highlighting that a ‘local’ protest is often better considered trans-local). Eleven of these fourteen protests took place *after* the publication of Professor Jay’s inquiry into the scandal in August 2014.<sup>6</sup> The campaign theme, which remained relatively consistent, was ‘Justice for the 1400’. Similarly, disturbing instances of CSE occurred in other British towns and cities too – as did far right demonstrations – but none received the sustained focus from demonstrators that Rotherham has. Rotherham subsequently became emblematic of national debate about CSE in the same way that Blackburn, Lancashire, became a lightning rod for national debates about ethnic segregation and Luton, Bedfordshire, came to symbolise the problem of Islamist radicalisation, to the detriment of its reputation.

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<sup>6</sup> Since completing research for this report the total number of marches has reached seventeen.

Whilst police were largely successful in containing the marches and counter-protests from becoming sites of escalating contestation, the subsequent policing review highlighted one of the broader perils of cumulative extremism; the cost to community relations which has been deleterious, drawing into the conflict a wider spectrum of society than the principal antagonists. As a report by the Advisory Panel on Policing Protests noted with regard to this spate of marches in Rotherham, ‘most local people had held back when the far right came to march, perhaps to avoid being seen as defending the perceived perpetrators of CSE. The police encouraged this non-involved approach, understandably, because activism would make policing the march more difficult.’ This dynamic changed after an attack on an elderly Muslim man on 10 August 2015, who died eleven days later. ‘As a result of the murder, other violent incidents and incidents of low-level racist abuse,’ noted the report, ‘many Muslims became increasingly worried and leading members of BMJ [British Muslim Youth] decided to ‘mobilise’ in support of a counter-protest on 5 September’ organised against a march by Britain First, both of which attracted much larger numbers than preceding events (Lockley and Ismail, 2018). These protests have also been a significant drain on police funds, costing over £4 million to date. However, the Home Office rejected a request in 2017 to ban the demonstrations on grounds of frequency, cost and community impact (BBC, 2017). At the time of writing these protests themselves appear to have lost momentum, confirming the central point about the truncation of ‘spirals’ of violence, though demonstrators will undoubtedly return to the town at some juncture.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst it is impossible to gainsay the longer term impact that such protests have had on community relations, there is evidence that the Rotherham CSE scandal (and other similarly appalling cases that have come to light) has had a wider and more violent resonance unconnected to the demonstration ‘scene’ itself. Whilst the numerous ‘grooming’ scandals have helped to entrench anti-Muslim ‘grievance’ narratives including those of lone actor terrorists who have used these scandals to justify their own acts of violence. Between March and June 2017, a series of jihadist terrorist attacks were perpetrated in Westminster Bridge, London Bridge and at the Manchester Arena which claimed the lives of 36 people and injured over 200. This was followed on 19 June by another terrorist attack this time by a far right lone actor who used a van to kill a worshipper outside a north London mosque. Whilst the perpetrator, Darren Osbourne, appears to have been animated to seek revenge for these acts of jihadi terrorism, a note, recovered from the dashboard of his van in the aftermath, made clear that he harboured a range of anti-Muslim grievances beyond these events including, notably, the Rotherham CSE scandal. Devices seized by police and testimony from his partner, also highlighted that in the weeks before the attack, the perpetrator had also become ‘obsessed’ with Muslims after watching the BBC drama *Three Girls* about another CSE scandal, this time in the town of Rochdale. Thereafter, he immersed himself in anti-Muslim media produced by Britain First and the former EDL leader (Macklin, 2019a). Whilst not a mono-causal explanation of his actions it is also notable that Rotherham featured in Brenton Tarrant’s terrorist attack on two mosques in Christchurch New Zealand in March 2019, during which he murdered 51 people and injured 49; an atrocity he livestreamed on the Internet. Tarrant had scrawled the words ‘For Rotherham’ on one of the firearms used to commit his massacre (Macklin, 2019b).

The demonstration dataset and other sources also confirm another aspect of previous theorising (Macklin and Busher 2015) which relates to conflict escalating at the intersection with other more violent conflicts. This is nowhere more apparent than in the case of Northern Ireland, which had significant symbolic value both for the far right, who championed the Loyalist cause, and for a section of the left-wing that was broadly supportive of Irish Republicanism, if not its methods. During the period in which both demonstrations and street conflict between far right and anti-fascist groups was at its peak in the early 1990s, several activists were jailed for terrorism-related offences related to the wider conflict in Northern

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<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Britain First returned to the town in January 2020, distributing leaflets at mosques, taxi ranks and hotels (Halliday, 2020)

Ireland. Two AFA activists and two far right activists were jailed for their involvement with the activities of Northern Irish paramilitary groups. The salient point vis-à-vis these arrests is that whilst the offences involved both bombing campaigns and gun running there does not appear to have been any attempt by these activists to use such weaponry in the 'domestic' sphere and against their political opponents, thereby escalating violence well beyond established norms.

Contest escalation was also notable in the case of far right interactions with militant Islamists aligned to the ALM network around which much policy interest in 'cumulative extremism' was first generated in policy circles. Indeed, it was the actions of an ALM aligned group that served as the catalytic event for the foundation of the EDL in 2009 and the third wave of demonstrations that arose therefrom. That said, despite occasional confrontations (Islamists protesting returning soldiers in Barking and Dagenham, MAC burning poppies on Remembrance Day and several 'flash' demonstrations outside the home of Islamist cleric Abu Qatada), there was actually surprisingly little sustained engagement between militant Islamist activists and the EDL. Partly this was because such ALM aligned activists rarely organised the sort of events that EDL activists might mobilise against. Likely the event promising the greatest seed of violent confrontation was never allowed to take place. In 2010 Islam4UK announced that it would demonstrate in Royal Wootton Bassett, the Wiltshire market town through which the repatriated bodies of British servicemen and women killed in action in Afghanistan and Iraq passed on their journey from a nearby RAF base to their last resting place, the event was cancelled by its organisers at the last minute because they believed their actions had 'successfully highlighted the plight of Muslims in Afghanistan' and so 'no more could be achieved even if a procession were to take place' (Staff and agencies, 2010). The government proscribed the group shortly thereafter (Travis, 2010).

But, beyond some of the aforementioned reasons relating to group cultures and identities outlined above, there was a broader reason that no tactical escalation occurred, perhaps the most salient being internal to ALM itself insofar as the group was focussed not on the domestic sphere but upon its more 'revolutionary' agenda which included, most recently, travelling to Syria to fight. In social movement parlance, there was thus an 'asymmetrical coupling' (Busher and Macklin 2015: 896-899) between the two groups. In short, whilst the EDL and other parts of the 'counter-jihad' movement were completely entrained by the threat posed by 'Islam' and 'Muslims' to the West, their presumed opponents were not particularly interested in them. The focus of ALM aligned militants was more upon waging an existential struggle against both the 'far enemy' of Western secular democracy and 'near enemy' of Middle Eastern regimes they deemed 'apostate' – particularly those led by Shi'a Muslims. It is likely that the potential escalation between the two groups was also decelerated by the loss of momentum experienced by the EDL after 2011, which happened to coincide with the beginnings of the civil war in Syria. Many British ALM followers subsequently travelled to Syria to fight which may have depressed prospects for domestic 'cumulative extremism' since potential antagonists were now missing.

This is not to suggest that there have not been acts of escalating violence attached to this contest. In 2012 a group of Islamists attempted to bomb an EDL rally in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, but arrived too late to do so and were arrested on their way home as a result of a traffic violation. Although the consequences of a successful attack are unknowable, it is also notable that whilst the EDL were the target a note discovered by the police highlighted that this group had a broader set of targets too, including 'the enemies of Allah and his messenger' as well as the Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the Queen, highlighting that their animus was not necessarily stimulated by the cumulative impact of street conflict but may have lain elsewhere. For their part there was no reciprocal response from EDL activists.



## 5. Conclusions

The main conclusions of this report confirm past hypotheses and previous empirical research about the nature of ‘cumulative extremism’ in Britain involving far right mobilisation and anti-fascist counter-mobilisations. When viewed in the round, across over two thousand demonstrations during the course of nearly half a century, the style and degree of violence at protest events has remained remarkably steady. Whilst each of the three ‘waves’ of protest mentioned at the outset might be considered to signal an intensification of protest in and of itself, the ‘repertoires’ employed by opposing groups during these periods can be said – with certain key exceptions – to have remained within a steady set of parameters. Where there have been spikes in violence, these have remained just that: ‘spikes’ rather than ‘spirals’, which again confirms previous research on the topic in relation to the United Kingdom. This is not simply the result of good fortune or the fruit of tried and tested public order policing or indeed of legislation. For instance, legislation further restricting immigration, does not appear to have done much to quell the basic appetite to protest and demonstrate, though this is not to dismiss the importance of these factors in shaping the wider environment in which contestation takes place. Patterns of escalation, de-escalation and non-escalation have at all times been shaped by the interaction between activists and the organisations to which they belong, the memory of past demonstrations helping to shape future ones. In short, even strategic decisions about whether or not a group might upscale its violence are not taken without reference to a broader array of political factors, social relationships and cultural environments.

A second conclusion that can be drawn from the report is that instances of increased violence do not automatically engender more violence – at least not over the medium to long term. One consequence of increased violence by one actor in this case study, was to force their opponent out of the violent arena altogether thereby causing a de-escalation of violence within the ‘scene’ resulting in – at least until the third ‘wave’ of (anti-Muslim) protest arrived during the course of 2009 – nearly a decade of non-escalation. Whilst activists, even within violence prone milieus or larger social movements might be acculturated to a certain level of violence, which may even have become habituated, there are a range of factors, moral, cultural and strategic to name but three, which may serve as disincentives to escalating violence. These ‘brakes’ on violence emanating from *within* movements themselves need to be considered in debates and discussions about the potential impacts of cumulative extremism. Perhaps examining why there is not *more* violence is as pertinent a question to ask.

Another salient point to consider is the extent to which contest escalation has occurred at the intersection with other more violent contests in Northern Ireland and the Middle East, which animated activists within the milieu. However, two further points should be considered in relation to this resulting rise in violence. Firstly, while certain activists were drawn from support to active participation in these causes, they rarely sought to transfer the use of guns and bombs back into a ‘domestic’ setting, for reasons that are not readily apparent at this juncture. Further research might seek a more historically nuanced account for such a trajectories. The second point to bring forth is that whilst recognising the importance of external conflict for internal radicalisation this study also highlighted the fact that this can have a differential effect upon the cumulative dynamics of violence, or at least in this British case study. This was brought out in relation to the idea of ‘asymmetric coupling’ (Busher and Macklin, 2015), through which one can highlight that not all political opponents are mutually entrained by one another. Whilst the EDL were fixated with the progeny of ALM, the same could not be said for the Islamists, who were infinitely more interested in events occurring outside Britain. The same might also be said for activities during the 1970s. Whilst it would appear at first glance that far right and left wing militants were mutually entrained by one another, in reality, for left-wing activists, ‘anti-fascist’ activities were just one of an entire gamut of social protests in which they were involved.

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